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Tradition, rationality and social consciousness: the Singh Sabha, Arya Samaj and Ahmadiyah moral languages from colonial Punjab
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INTRODUCTION -
TRADITION, RATIONALITY AND SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

In 1859, two years after the Mutiny, John Beames (1837-1902) became District Officer of one of the smallest districts of colonial Punjab, Gujrat. For two years he remained in the region (he was stationed in the districts of Ambala and Ludhiana also) and in his memoirs he wrote vividly about the times when the colonial administration still was frail:

I looked out and found myself in a tumble-down building of red-brick -not plastered as houses in India mostly are- the British administration in the Panjab was then still so newly established that there had been no time for refinements and luxuries such as plaster. Buildings were hastily run up to serve the emergencies of the moment, and if they tumbled down again as hastily, it did not matter -they were professedly only temporary.  

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1 Some may know John Beames as the one who intensely despised Richard Temple (whom he brutalized by imitating him at a dinner party, when the latter visited Cuttack in 1874 as the new Lieutenant-Governor, and which Beames himself always believed to be the real cause of his ill success during the later part of his career), but he is probably best remembered as one of those influential nineteenth century comparative linguists of the new Indo-Aryan languages (author for instance of A comparative grammar of the Modern Aryan languages of India, 3 vols., London 1872-79), whose dated works today are more frequently cited in South Asia than in the West.

2 Beames, Memoirs, 96.
The European part of Gujrat was small and thence could not yet be called Civil nor Military Lines:

In the European station there were only five houses and a few public buildings. The society was correspondingly small, consisting of Major Adams, the Deputy Commissioner and his wife and child, Major Terence O'Brien, a jolly little fat, round Irishman with a strong Cork brogue (he called his native place 'Cyark') and his wife, a sickly half-caste, and child, and my humble self. There were also two half-caste clerks and their families. For doctor we had a Bengali who spoke English well.3

As far as famous first Lieutenant-Governo r of the Punjab, John Lawrence, was concerned,4 the ideal district officer was 'a hard, active man in boots and breeches, who almost lived in the saddle, worked all day and nearly all night, ate and drank when and where he could, had no family ties, no wife or children to hamper him, and whose whole establishment consisted of a camp bed, an odd table and chair or so and a small box of clothes such as could be slung on a camel'.5 Therefore it is not surprising that one of Beames' Haileybury comrades,6 the Deputy Commissioner of Ludhiana, suffered a great deal under John Lawrence's command:

Elmslie imprudently brought a piano to the Punjab with him. Such a refinement was unpardonable, and poor Elmslie was moved five times from one end of the Punjab to

3 Ibid., 100.
4 Lawrence (1811-1879) was to become Governor-General and Viceroy of India (1864-69) and a sort of popular hero but intensely disliked by those who served under him.
5 Beames, Memoirs, 102.
6 In 1806, the East India Company opened a training college at Hertford castle in Hertfordshire north of London. It was moved in 1808 to Haileybury in the same area and lasted until 1857. See further: F.C. Danvers and others (eds.), Memorials of old Haileybury College, London 1894.
the other in the course of two years. "I'll smash his piano for him", John Lawrence was reported to have said, when he first heard of such a degradation as a Punjab officer having a piano.7

Yet at the same time it should be clear that John Lawrence (who was a staunch Protestant evangelical) was influential but not typical among the British all over India. On the contrary, British civilians, who had been accustomed to the more civilized conditions of the older and more settled provinces, objected strongly to being turned into homeless, vagrant governing-machines' by this rough and coarse man, who believed that 'personal government was the only form of rule which the rude and simple Punjabis could understand'.8

Almost three decades later, Lieutenant-Governor Charles Aitchison unveiled a massive bronze statue of John Lawrence on the Mall road in Lahore, holding a sword in one hand, a pen in the other and carrying the inscription: “Will you be governed by pen or by sword? Choose!”. By then, however, already much had changed. Now the colonial administration was mostly manned by Punjabis and reached deep into rural society, while Lahore not only had become the ever-growing Imperial headquarter of an important economic and strategic region but, indeed, also the place where since 1884 pianos could be ordered from C. Steiert & Co.9 Unquestionably the establishment of the colonial administration heavily influenced Punjabi minds. The specific aim of this study is to learn how 'tradition' changed during the

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7 Beames, Memoirs, 103.
8 Ibid., 103.
9 Undoubtedly the piano (like the organ and harmonium) remains crucial to the transformation of music in the non-Western world, as it made some of the local elites familiar with Western tonal harmony (though the Western system of music notation might have been even more important here). Hence, as part of Imperial music history one should look also at the contemporary brass-bands playing all over the non-western world at weddings, funerals and military ceremonies (like 'Beating of the Retreat' at India's Republic Day, which includes both the playing of bagpipes and the Christian hymn 'Abide with me'). Moreover, as Jeffrey Cox recently made clear, at the development of popular Christian hymnody, which was crucial to the emergence of indigenous Christianity in the Punjab. In Imperial fault lines, 146-152.
colonial interaction in late nineteenth century Punjab. Though in general the ideas and values assertively propagated by British civil servants and army men were crucial, I will argue that in particular Protestant missionary activities influenced the making of modern Punjabi identities. Within a few decades, Islamic, Sikh and Hindu traditions were redefined by numerous reform movements, following Christian missionaries, through modern disciplinary institutions and practices, morally justified by reference to some transcendent authority. Because the Sikh tradition originated and both Hindu practices and Islam had their own specific histories in the region, this remains an unparalleled opportunity for a comparative historical study about the making of modern South Asian identities. I limit myself however to three reform movements: the Singh Sabha (Sikh), Arya Samaj (Hindu) and Ahmadiyah (Muslim). Surprisingly, these movements have not been discussed comparatively as resembling products of the same regional 'colonial culture', albeit coming from within three by that time often overlapping Punjabi greater traditions.

From 1873 onwards (the year that the Amritsar Singh Sabha was established), Singh Sabhaites, Arya Samajists and Ahmadiyahs started to define themselves through what I call ‘moral languages’. Being minor groups, they created (often with support of the British) bodies of moral knowledge, which were supposed to be eternal. By doing this, they often rejected identities existing in Punjabi popular culture at the same time. For undeniably the ideas propagated by the Singh Sabhaites, Arya Samajists and Ahmadiyahs did not mesh well with those existing within the larger traditions, which on the whole were polytheistic and covered a wide spectrum of beliefs and ritual practices. Instead the elitist reformers favoured more

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10 Important to mention remains the heterodox character of the Ahmadiyahs. From the beginning the movement was rejected by orthodox Islam, which could not accept the claim of its founder Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1839-1908) to be a prophet following Muhammad, since the traditional belief is that Muhammad was the last manifestation of God. In fact, in 1975 Ahmadiyahs were declared as non-Islamic in Mecca.
uniformity and homogeneity and to achieve their goal organized themselves into voluntary movements, opened up educational and other institutions and appropriated modern modes of ‘communication’. What is more, these newly created identities increasingly also became crucial in the struggle for authority and status in a fast changing society. Following rivalry between elites for jobs in the administration and urban professions during the 1880s, they provided a useful means of elbowing out adversaries and as such became ‘a means for individuals and groups to control others or resist such control, for changing society or for blocking change, for affirming or suppressing cultural identities’.11

On the whole, I will investigate the dynamics of the Singh Sabha, Arya Samaj and Ahmadiyah ‘moral languages’ not only ‘in a utilitarian way, as the creation of technical terms for precise practical purposes’, but especially also ‘in a symbolic way, as the expression of a growing group self-consciousness and of a growing sense of distance from the rest of society’.12 Identities depend on stereotypes of the self and the other, exaggerating whatever makes one community distinct from others and forging solidarity in the course of conflict with others. The Singh Sabha, Arya Samaj and Ahmadiyah ‘moral languages’ form no exception to this. Most reformers saw the world in black and white and hence public meetings often ended up in downright polemics, if not in violence. Most essential to these ‘moral languages’ remains the dialogue with Western reason which overall led to a stress on ‘rationality’ in language used for moral, literary, political or other purposes. Underwriting the Singh Sabha, Arya Samaj and Ahmadiyah ‘moral languages’ was the fundamental process of strengthening doctrine, conduct and rite through a dialogic process in which readings of the traditional literature (often as interpreted by European scholars like Max Muller, Monier

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12 Ibid., 25.
Monier-Williams, Ernest Trumpp and Max Arthur Macauliffe) were combined with an understanding of Western reason, while often invoking the authority of science at the same time. Also there was a growing tendency to treat some sacred texts 'literally' in a scripture-like manner. Hence the Granth Sahib, Vedas and Quran followed a shift from a 'transcendent' to a 'rational' meaning and, after the Bible, entered world-history as 'scriptures'.

Furthermore, I will examine the Singh Sabha, Arya Samaj and Ahmadiyah self-definitions in the context of a newly emerging 'public sphere' to which, I will argue the hierarchical system of authority set up by the 'Anglo-Indian colonial state' provided the backbone. Hence, importantly, as part of a tentative search for a narrative for the study of modern South Asian identities, some assumptions about 'state' and 'public sphere' are questioned. By using the label, 'Anglo-Indian colonial state', I follow the idea that South Asian history should neither be seen as an enclave existing on its own nor as a derivative clone of the British state and its Victorian ideology. Instead, as an heuristic device, it is assumed that nineteenth century South Asia found itself in a complicated flux dominated by an interaction between two dynamic civilizations: the regional one and the British imported version of European civilization. On the one hand, the British unleashed different policies, following changes happening in South Asia, Great Britain and the rest of the world (of Empire), which had effects they never knew beforehand nor intended. While, on the other hand, a complex process of responses generated actions of all kinds and influenced the policies of the British in turn (both in England and within the Empire). In this way, the two civilizations constantly reconstituted each other and hence, as David Washbrook put it, 'were involved in establishing

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the structures of oppression and exploitation in both India and Great Britain at the same time'.

Closely related, I will argue that the creation of an Anglo-Indian colonial state, at the same time was accompanied by the emergence of a ‘public sphere’, as part of a larger configuration of socio-economic change. By doing so, I take the formation of both ‘state’ and ‘public sphere’ as inter-related and, consequently, query the notion of a ‘neutral’, not participating, state in Indian society. As Sandria Freitag put it:

Through the institutions of the state, the British Raj established a structure of rule that interfered, even though it would not participate, in an extraordinary range of activities related to the public arena. Yet where earlier the ruler had fully participated in public arena activity to establish his legitimacy, the imperial state had now withdrawn. In its place it had deputed certain local power-holders to act as it intermediaries.

Or Gyan Pandey more bluntly:

To take another obvious point, the significance of which is often lost, one may note the radically altered nature of the state - and not just of policies, or even politics as a whole- under colonialism. This state is not only far more modern, powerful, centralized and interventionist than any state that had existed before in the subcontinent. It is also far more self-consciously 'neutral' standing above society, and

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not really part of it - than any previous state, a position that no previous state had especially claimed or desired.16

Undoubtedly the Anglo-Indian colonial state was something new in the subcontinent. Officially ruled from London, as the centerpiece of the British Empire and backed up by modern disciplinary power, the centralized colonial state claimed absolute authority but even so could not execute its policies without interacting with (i.e. being part of) South Asian society. Like European states, it functioned through intermediaries, was more bureaucratic and therefore perhaps could be called more impersonal than any of the earlier states, but that does not mean it was 'neutral' and above it all. On the contrary, state institutions and actions often were at the heart of what happened in modern South Asia. Otherwise, the position taken by the authors mentioned above remains in line with the ‘official’ rhetoric of British colonial policy as put forward in Queen Victoria’s 1858 Proclamation (which will be further dealt with in Chapter Two). Moreover, with the earlier mentioned idea of ‘secularism’ as propagated since 1947 by the Indian independent state. In fact, the idea of a ‘neutral’ Anglo-Indian colonial state generally fits in with a long existing mode of thinking that views states in terms of transcendent rule (sovereign without limits) instead of concrete military, law, educational and bureaucratic institutions and practices acted out in the ‘public sphere’.17 Yet, the Anglo-Indian colonial state functioned through human agency, often with pre-planned

17 Hence also I disagree with the idea that ‘history is the grand narrative of the modern nation-state’ as put forward by Peter van der Veer in Writing violence, 250 (and afterwards repeated by David Gilmartin in Partition, Pakistan, 1070). For it is exactly this teleological view of history that keeps us from learning what really happened in South Asia, ruling out all social forms that the West did not viewed as belonging to the realm of the state. Cf. Ranajit Guha, History at the limit of world-history, New York 2002, especially Chapter Three and Kolff, Indië en de wereldgeschiedenis, 6.
results but, importantly, many times also with unintended consequences. The latter in particular should always be kept in mind when aiming to write history without drawing to easy conclusions in hindsight. A much better option therefore seems a narrative wherein the process of state formation takes place simultaneously with the emergence of a ‘public sphere’ as part of a larger configuration of fast changing socio-economic circumstances. An option that at the same time, questions the idea of the ‘public sphere’ as corollary to the ‘state’, as put forward by for example Sandria Freitag. In the newly emerging ‘public sphere’ dominant state institutions and practices continually interacted, competed and often overlapped with voluntary ones. In chorus, however, they constituted a modern hierarchical ‘colonial culture’, wherein through law, education, military service and other forms of state involvement the British propagated their ‘civilizing mission’ which in liberal democratic terms dominated South Asian society ever since.

The British ‘civilizing mission’ was to introduce ‘The Law’ as Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) put it. This was a hard and thankless task, a burden shouldered by a small and dedicated band of British servants who ‘devoted themselves completely to their tasks in almost unbearable conditions, hoping for no reward beyond their pay, and no recognition for endless patience and un-wearying self-sacrifice’. Kipling admired these men who did the real work and whose laureate he became. Their justification was their work, to be performed in obedience to a government of order and control, based not upon whim or personal preference. Civilization and ‘The Law’, then, were virtually synonymous. Civilization was

18 Freitag, Public arenas, 177. Following Michel Foucault and in many ways similar to Freitag, Peter van der Veer takes the state as ‘totalizing and individualizing at the same time’ and ‘to be analyzed as a structural effect’: ‘The boundaries of the state are notoriously difficult to define. The state appears to be a sovereign authority above and outside society, but Foucault has pointed out that the modern state works internally through disciplinary power not by constraining individuals and their actions but by producing them. The individual, civil political subject is produced in churches, schools, and factories’. In Imperial encounters, 32-33.

possible only if one played the game according to the rules laid down by time, history, precedent, all of which amounted to 'The Law'. For the British, civilization was a question of 'objective morality', of external form, of behaviour rather than sentiment, of 'duty' rather than whim. Though, according to John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), nationalism could be a necessary basis of political organization at a certain period of human history, civilization undoubtedly was better:

Consider the savage: he has bodily strength, he has courage, enterprise, and is often not without intelligence; what makes all savage communities poor and feeble? The same cause which prevented the lions and tigers from long ago extirpating the race of men —incapacity of co-operation. It is only civilized beings who can combine. All combination is compromise: it is the sacrifice of some portion of individual will for a common purpose. The savage cannot bear to sacrifice, for any purpose, the satisfaction of his individual will... It is not difficult to see why this incapacity of organized combination characterizes savages, and disappears with the growth of civilization. Co-operation, like other difficult things, can be learnt only by practice: and to be capable of it in great things, a people must be gradually trained to it in small.

20 Ibid., 72.

21 John Stuart Mill, Civilization (1836) in J.M. Robson (ed.), The collected works of John Stuart Mill, vol. 18, 122-123. According to authoritarian liberals like James Fitzjames Stephen, who wrote Liberty, Equality and Fraternity (1872) in reply to John Stuart Mill's On Liberty (1859), the latter had a too naïve faith in civilization. For Stephen society not only rested upon a consensus of shared opinions but also upon authority, a large measure of mere acceptance by a crowd incapable of conscious decision, of what a trustworthy and responsible 'gifted few' said. Mill's theory, on the contrary, however destroyed all faith in authority. See further: Chadwick, The secularization of the European mind, Chapter Two (On liberalism).
Since the beginning of the nineteenth century the British thus were dedicated to the elevation of mankind. Raised to the summit of the world by their own ‘improvement’, they believed in progress and thought they held its keys. The idea of ‘duty’ was paramount to the muscular Christian morality propagated by those trained with such precision by the public schools and ancient universities (Oxford and Cambridge in particular). Undoubtedly, the British desire to do good was a true energy, but at the same time it was the ‘duty’ of masters belonging overwhelmingly to the Churches of England, Scotland and Ireland ruling an Empire of multifarious beliefs. Sometimes, especially in the middle of the nineteenth century, their ‘duty’ was powerfully Old Testament in style: soldiers stormed with Bibles in their hands, administrators sat like bearded prophets at their desks. By the 1890s it was more subdued, but still devoted to the principle that the British were some sort of Chosen People, touched on the shoulder by the Great Being and commissioned to do His will in a world where decency, fortitude, grit, civilization, Christianity, commerce, all blended into one.

Most significant to this study is the fact that, more or less throughout the colonial world, indigenous voluntary movements tended to incorporate parts of the ‘civilizing mission’ in their ‘moral languages’.22 The words spoken by Bharatendu Harishchandra (1850-1885) during his celebrated 1878 Ballia speech, Bharatvårś ki unnati kaise ho sakte hai? (How can India progress?), are a pointer in this direction. Unequivocally advocating social reform as a prerequisite of progress (unnati), the following excerpt definitely sums up what happened in the South Asian mind during the nineteenth century. Especially when keeping in mind that Harishchandra not only was crucial to the development of modern Hindi but also a tireless critic of British rule:

22 Cf. Haynes, *Rhetoric and ritual*, which stresses the pervasive liberalism (read: propagation of ‘improvement’) of the discourse of Indian nationalism. Something which too a lesser degree I like to extent to modern traditions in the subcontinent. See further also the mentioned article by Ranajit Guha in footnote 16.
Take your chance during these times of British rule and great progress to reform yourselves, otherwise stay as you are. And that reform should also be such that there will be progress in all cases. In religion, in the household, in work outside the home, in one's daily work, in courtesy, in conduct, in physical power, in intellect, in society, in the child, in youths, in the old, among women and men, among rich and poor, throughout Indian society, within every caste and in all regions, let there be progress. Get rid of all practices that hinder you on this path, even if people call you worthless or shameless, a Christian or corrupt. Only look at the suffering conditions of your country and do not listen to their words.23

During the colonial interaction, elitist Indian reformers and intellectuals thus more or less became conscious of some kind of past, effectual in the present and determined for the future. The point, however, is that, as Sudhir Chandra put it, 'the West became a persistent factor for the colonized within their attempt to recover their tradition and selfhood'.24 The earlier autonomy of Indian thought was no longer possible, as individuals now were either resigned or enthusiastic vis-à-vis the 'civilizing mission'. In modern India, the final framework of validation came from the West: 'Faith in colonialism despite an understanding of its exploitativeness –this was the paradox of educated consciousness in colonial India'.25 Moreover, the 'oppressive present' of the colonial interaction also initiated a momentous epistemological change by creating the idea of a 'traditional' India in South Asian minds:

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23 Harishchandra, Bharatvāraś ki unnatī, 1011.
24 Chandra, The oppressive present, 71.
25 Ibid., 46.
At the plane of collective cultural life, time was fractured into past, present and future; and tradition, plucked out of this continuum, was created selectively out of different points in time past. Alienation from tradition—from one’s own culture—lay in a consciousness of the need to belong to this newly constructed tradition.26

Otherwise, importantly, in perceiving the reality of British rule, elitist Indians adopted an idealized view of the Anglo-Indian colonial state, without making any difference between an alien and a native government. Many accepted and even welcomed British rule as ‘divine dispensation’. This way of thinking arose not out of any personal profit from ‘collaboration’ but generally out of a belief in the instrumentality of British rule in bringing ‘improvement’.27

In addition to Western science and technology, elitist Indians particularly were attracted to the supposed superiority of Western humanitarianism and liberalism as propagated especially by Christian evangelicals. Simultaneously, however, a different perception of the nature of British rule developed. Beginning as a vague sense of ‘patriotism’ and as abstract discussion on the disadvantages of colonial rule, it culminated during the first decades of the twentieth century in a definite version of a future free from British domination. What needs to be stressed, however, is that in the crystallization of this dominant ‘social consciousness’, elitist Indians not only heavily drew from Western reason as argued by authors like Ashis Nandy, Partha Chatterjee and Gyan Prakash,28 but that the moral re-armament of the Indian self and community especially also was influenced by Christian morality. As C.A. Bayly put it:

26 Ibid., 5.
28 One paragraph by Ashis Nandy on what he labeled the ‘second colonization’ remains crucial here: ‘Modern colonialism won its great victories not so much through its military and technological prowess as through its ability to create secular hierarchies incompatible with the traditional order. These hierarchies opened up new vistas for many, particularly for those exploited or cornered within the traditional order. To them the new order looked like—and here lay its psychological pull—the first step towards a more just and equal world. That was why some of the finest critical minds in Europe—and in the East—were to feel that colonialism, by introducing modern
The debate between Partha Chatterjee, who insists that Gandhi was part of the post-Enlightenment rational episteme and Ashis Nandy, who sees him as an essential Indian figure, surely misses the point. It was Christian moralizing which informed Gandhi’s encounter with the West, not the West’s rational episteme. In fact, that secular post-Enlightenment rationality has been greatly exaggerated in recent writings on the British Empire.29

Obviously conversions to Christianity were few, yet the impact of missionary criticisms towards Indian society, the dominance by Christians of ‘print culture’, schools, hospitals and orphanages were profoundly unsettling for the established South Asian order. Moreover, the ‘civilizing mission’, to which elitist Indians often were attracted, was saturated with Christian moralism, being the values of nineteenth century liberal Europe.

Though I clearly take the confrontation between indigenous traditions and Western reason and Christianity as most crucial to modern South Asian history, following the historian’s vocation, I also see much ‘continuity’ within the disruptive historical flux. Of course there were great social and intellectual changes through which Indian localities became incorporated into the wider world (of Empire). Yet, these often happened on South Asian terms, not just because the British Raj really was a limited one but especially also because

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structures into the Barbaric world, would open up the non-West to the modern critical-analytic spirit. Like the ‘hideous heathen god who refused to drink nectar except from the skulls of murdered men’, Karl Marx felt, history would produce out of oppression, violence and cultural dislocation not merely new technological and social forces but also a new social consciousness in Asia and Africa. It would be critical in the sense in which the Western tradition of social criticism -from Vico to Marx- had been critical and it would be rational in the sense in which post-Cartesian Europe had been rational. It is thus that the a-historical primitives would one day, the expectation went, learn to see themselves as masters of nature and, hence, as masters of their own fate in The intimate enemy. Loss and recovery of the self under colonialism, New Delhi 1983, ix (emphasis added). Cf. Chatterjee, Nationalist thought and the colonial world. A derivative discourse?, London 1986; Ibid., The nation and its fragments; and Prakash, Another Reason.
Indians in the twentieth century increasingly became familiar with the fast changing circumstances. Hence particularly significant to this study remains the continuity in terms of ‘language’ drawn from the Indian past in communicating contemporary understandings. For it should be clear that, although I will use the word ‘language’ and related ones like ‘polemic’, ‘rhetoric’, ‘symbol’ and ‘meaning’ extensively, Indians (like the British) never were free to manipulate words and symbols out of the blue. On the contrary, for they were obviously bounded (if not prisoners) by the values they traditionally knew and subsequently came to know after interacting with the British.

By and large, I aim to close in ‘from below’ (i.e. flat and rural Punjab!) on the field of study closed in earlier ‘from above’ by Peter van der Veer’s Religious nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India (1994) in particular and Imperial encounters: Religion and modernity in India and Britain (2001) in general. By focusing on the Singh Sabha, Arya Samaj and Ahmadiyah ‘moral languages’, I will try to make clear how these reform movements made certain ‘rational’ forms of ‘tradition’ available through modern disciplinary institutions and practices for the ‘communication’ of modern identity politics. Obviously, my focus on leadership in the Punjabi context differs from van der Veer’s approach because I mostly concentrate on the period of ‘social reform’, when the customs and institutions of a ‘traditional’ society were ‘secularized’, the political spirit was still very much that of ‘loyalty’ to the British and the route taken not necessarily was leading to (religious) nationalism.

31 Instead of ‘nationalism’, the term ‘identity politics’ is used to avoid the implication of ‘nationalism’ that an individual’s loyalty to one or more political group(s) leads to the formation of an independent state. As Malcolm Yapp put it: ‘Political identities may be realized in this way but they may be and are accommodated in many other fashions’ in Language, religion and political identity: a general framework in David Taylor and Malcolm Yapp (eds.), Political identity in South Asia, London 1979, 1.
Specifically in relation to the process of redefinition of ‘tradition’, the period remains the most crucial one in modern South Asian history. It was then, during ‘high colonialism’, that East and West encountered each other most openly and set the pace and pattern for the ‘secularization’ of the subcontinent. All the same, the term ‘religious nationalism’ solely reinserts the dichotomy between ‘modernity’ and ‘tradition’ in a different manner, as if ‘religion’ made the difference. Instead, while assuming that the history of South Asia is part of world history (as it should, particularly nowadays when it is so easy to have a wider look at the globe), I situate the Singh Sabha, Arya Samaj and Ahmadiyah ‘moral languages’ squarely within the complex world of opportunities, constraints and motivations they shared in different degrees with those others within non-Western ‘secularizing’ traditions.

Fundamental to this study and the nature of intellectual history in general remains the relationship between social and intellectual change. Was the creation of the Singh Sabha, Arya Samaj and Ahmadiyah ‘moral languages’ the result of new forms of ‘rational’ knowledge or fast changing social circumstances? What social changes lay under the willingness of Punjabis to abandon notions that previously were conceived as necessary to their very existence or, more specifically, moral authority? Although the study is divided into ‘The social process’ and ‘The intellectual texture’, the two parts definitely should be taken together as part of one complicated configuration of change. In the end, however, I assume that in the dialectic between ideas and society ‘there are times when ideas are not just legitimizers of action taken for other reasons but also a prime force in directing the deeds of men’. For that reason, it was never my idea to take the day-to-day struggles for authority and status (read: power) literally as the most significant engines of change in late nineteenth

32 On purpose I do not use the term ‘modernity’ in this study as to me it seems futile to argue over the elements going into the making of ‘modernity’, while it is always in flux, always subject to changing definitions in order to keep up with the times.
century Punjab. On the contrary, by treating Punjabi reformers as expressions of a dominant 'social consciousness', I always tried to stick to an alternative idea of intellectual history, albeit the sweeping metaphysical implications. For as Clive Dewey put it in his masterly *Anglo-Indian attitudes: the mind of the Indian civil service* (1993):

> It implies that vested ideas, rather than vested interests, are the great determinants of human behaviour; it denies that men can see complex things -societies, economies, polities- 'as they really are', without invoking elaborate theories to explain their chaotic impressions; and it dismisses 'common-sense', the last refuge of the pragmatist, as low-grade ideology: a rag bag of rules of thumb, culled from forgotten thinkers.34

Accordingly, I hope the narrative proposes rather than imposes and, since I too remain one of its readers, reads as a collection of arguments organized musically around a continuous line of thought, with themes recurring in different keys that eventually orchestrate a particular point of view.

As stated above, the study is divided into two parts. The first describes the social process of the making of a public sphere under the Pax Brittanica. Anglo-Indian colonial state formation is especially treated. In the Punjab, the colonial state reached to the bottom of rural society, creating profound changes in its structure and the minds of its inhabitants. Above all, Christian missionary activity set an example and pace in terms of modern disciplinary institutions and practices in general and propagated values of liberal humanitarianism dominant in nineteenth century Europe in particular. They made elitist Punjabis sensitive to

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33 Robinson, Islam and Muslim separatism, 81.
the ‘civilizing mission’ and induced them to focus on programs of reform and revitalization through the publication of tracts, propagation of their ideals through meetings among each other and participation in debates with opponents. In the second part, then, the focus shifts to the redefinition of ‘traditions’ through the Singh Sabha, Arya Samaj and Ahmadiyah ‘moral languages’, revealing how reformers criticized tradition and society and ‘rationally’ defined themselves through ‘moral languages’ that invoked the authority of Western science and increasingly stirred the public mind. Finally, the epilogue will attempt to make clear how in terms of ‘moral languages’ despite the massive changes in the material world the structure of ‘social consciousness’ since the nineteenth century ‘has not undergone anything like the same rapid transformation’ and ‘shown an amazing persistence’.35

35 Chandra, The oppressive present, 15.