Tradition, rationality and social consciousness: the Singh Sabha, Arya Samaj and Ahmadiyah moral languages from colonial Punjab

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1. A fertile region at the Afghan border

Most probably the Punjab remains the best ‘regional’ example of how the colonial interaction shaped and transformed virtually every aspect of life in South Asia, including the indigenous inhabitants’ intellectual horizons (only the ‘cities’ of Calcutta and Bombay are comparable examples). Indeed, the region changed so much during a relatively short period, that in order to see what happened during ‘high colonialism’, it is extremely valid to choose the Punjab as area of research. Its proximity to Afghanistan, where the British and the Russians played their Great Game of Imperialism and its fertile heartland influenced the region’s development under colonial

1 Colonial Greater Punjab was divided in five divisions (Lahore, Jullunder, Rawalpindi, Delhi and Multan), each subordinate to a Commissioner. These were further grouped in twenty-nine districts where a Deputy Commissioner was in charge. The five frontier districts were separated in 1901 to form the North-West Frontier Province and Delhi district one decade later, when the government of British India moved its capital from Calcutta to New Delhi. The province also knew forty-three Native States, where British law was not applied and overall the colonial interaction was of a different kind.
rule remarkably. The former was the main factor in the British Indian army's decision taken after the Mutiny of 1857 (when the Punjab remained loyal to the British) to concentrate its recruiting activities in the province. As a result, although the Punjab comprised only around one-tenth of British India and its population, its significance as a strategic and wealthy border province was disproportionate.

Situated in the northwest corner of the subcontinent, the Punjab was geographically clearly defined, with the Himalayas in the north, the Great Indian Thar Desert in the south, the Jamuna in the east and the Indus in the west. The literal meaning of the Persian term *Panj-ab* or 'five rivers' was meant to signify the land through which the Beas, Ravi, Sutlej, Chenab and Jhelum rivers flowed. In fact, Punjab was a land of six rivers but by name the Indus was not included. It was Mughal Emperor Akbar who named the tracts of land between these rivers, respectively, from east to west, the Bist-Jullunder, Bari, Rechna, Jech and Sindh-Sagar *doabs*. The alluvial soil of these tracts—additionally irrigated by wells and canals—formed the productive heartland of the region, where capricious weather nonetheless regularly led to a shortage of rainfall in the growing season, resulting in lower crops yields, crop failures and ultimately famine. Partly because of the latter problem, the British decided that the Punjab was an ideal area for the construction of a system of irrigation canals.

After annexation, work first began on restoring and extending the Punjab's canal-system as developed under Mughal and Sikh rule (the Bari *doab* canal, for example, was extended for some 400 kilometers). By the 1880s, canal-construction had reached a high point, as several canals,

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2 Rudyard Kipling has described the exciting atmosphere of the Great Game beautifully in *Kim* (1901). Kipling worked as a journalist in the Punjab, first for the *Civil and Military Gazette* and later the *Pioneer*. His first stories came out of that experience and were published locally. See also Edward Said's interesting introductory essay to *Kim*, Harmondsworth 1987 edition.
including the western Jamuna, the lower Chenab, and many smaller ones, were either all built, modified or extended. Most areas adjacent to the canals were neatly laid out in plots of land, with market places, towns and villages spaced at regular intervals along the roads and railways that developed rapidly during the same period. These 'canal-colonies' indeed represented a new environment and way of living, as Prakash Tandon put it in his very readable autobiography, comparing his birthplace Gujrat with a newly created colony town that during the first decades of this century would develop into perhaps the largest wheat market in the world:

Sarghoda was a much cleaner and healthier city than Gujrat. It was planned, well laid out and had plenty of light and air. It's streets and lanes were wide and straight. Somehow the clean, hygienic, impersonal layout seemed to mould the population into the pattern that the settlement officer of the late Victorian period must have had in mind. There was more social and political awakening in Sarghoda; its municipal affairs were better run; its communities had started new schools. The singing and dancing girls were moved out of the city, first near the canal bank, and then still further away. It was typical of the new spirit of Sarghoda that its biradaris (brotherhoods) tried to stop wasteful expenditure at weddings by banning fireworks, and had they got away with this they would probably have stopped music and entertainment as well. But with all this Sarghoda was drab and had none of the colour of Gujrat, neither the city nor its people.3

Meanwhile, one million Punjabis from the central districts around Amritsar and Lahore (two cities which expanded remarkably during colonial rule) emigrated to these canal-colonies. These emigrants regularly sent money 'home', while alternatively agricultural products of the home-regions found a ready market in the canal-colonies -where farmers specialized in cultivating a small variety of cash-crops such as tobacco, sugar-cane, cotton and, of course, wheat (which became the region's main export commodity). While the extension of the total cultivated area of the province outstripped the rate of population growth, many (although indeed far from all) Punjabis -in the old as well as the new regions- experienced an unprecedented rise in their standard of living.

Closely inter-linked with the construction of a system of canal-irrigation and colonies, the impact of army recruitment on the Punjab's economic, social and political life was considerable too. Soon the region replaced the older military recruitment areas of north Hindustan and by 1914 three-fifths of the troops came from the Punjab. This process occurred not only because the region's loyalty during the 1857 Revolt but generally because it was believed there already existed a 'martial' tradition in the area, as generations had been forced to fight in order to survive at the one and only existing overland Gateway to India. Even so, more crucial seems to have been the fact that the region was situated next to British India's main theatre of war at that time: Afghanistan. On the way from Lahore to Kabul, Rawalpindi was the centre of military activity with the biggest cantonment in South Asia (in fact, it still is the headquarters of the Pakistani

4 Adjustment to the Western presence in Lahore also meant the incorporation of the potato into the diet of Punjabis. Soon after annexation considerable quantities of potatoes were produced in the tracts around the city. See Kerr, Urbanization and colonial rule, 223.

5 In Some consequences of military expenditure, Clive Dewey shows in detail how defense spending in the Punjab galvanized the economies and flattened the societies of the areas on which it was concentrated.
Because of the comparable terrain and climate, recruits especially from west Punjab not only were more suitable but, in particular, also cheaper, as soldiers serving on the Frontier from other parts of the subcontinent had to be paid extra ‘foreign service’ allowances. The increased prosperity which irrigation partly had brought to the Punjab further also meant that far fewer volunteers for army service were turned away on medical grounds. While at the same time, the vast increase in land available for agriculture enabled the British to set large areas apart solely for the purpose of breeding horses and cattle for the army.

Yet though army recruitment in the Punjab was mostly based on pragmatic policies, it nonetheless became enshrined in the mythology of India's 'martial races'. It was all about inbred martial skill wrote G.F. MacMunn at the beginning of the twentieth century in a classic Orientalist study about the armies of British India:

> It is one of the essential differences between the East and the West, that in the East, with certain exceptions, only certain clans and classes can bear arms; the others have not the physical courage necessary for the warrior. In Europe, as we know, every able-bodied man, given food and arms, is a fighting man of some sort, some better, some worse, but still as capable of bearing arms as any other of his nationality.

In the same way, after thirty-five years of service in the Punjab, Lieutenant-Governor James Douie wrote about one such a 'martial' caste:

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7 Ibid., *Punjab and the Raj*, Chapter Two.

The *Jat* is a typical son of the soil, strong and sturdy, hardworking and brave, a fine soldier and an excellent farmer, but slow-witted and grasping. The Sikh *Jat* finds an honourable outlet for his overflowing energy in the army and in the service of the Crown beyond the bounds of India. When he misses that he sometimes takes to dacoity. Unfortunately he is often given to strong drink, and, when his passions or his greed are aroused, can be exceedingly brutal.9

Anyhow, whatever the mythology, of more significance remains: first, that the close relationship between the British Indian army and the Punjab increased the rural population's prosperity (as soldiers sent money home to their villages) and, second, that servicemen and their retired comrades (while investing their savings or being granted pension, land or government office as a reward for their loyalty) over time came to exert as ‘martial lobby’ powerful political influence within the restricted electorate, particularly through the cross-communal Punjab Unionist Party which would dominate Punjabi politics during the decades preceding Partition.10

Although road and railway construction primarily served British strategic needs: linking military outposts, cantonments and major cities (the last part of the Grand Trunk road from Lahore to Peshawar at the Khyber pass was completed in 1863-64), Punjabis obviously benefited from the improved communications as well.11 On the whole, the Punjab became part of British India's internal and external trade system. Faster circulation of agricultural products at a cheaper


11 Generally railway-tracks demarcated British Civil and Military lines from the Indian ‘old city’ areas in major cities. In Lahore, in fact, the station itself was designed as a fort in which the British could take refuge in case of revolt.
rate, greater equalization of prices and market integration followed, while the total cultivated area expanded. Throughout the province the trend was to substitute inferior crops by more commercial ones, especially wheat, cotton and sugarcane. Control of credit, carts, storage facilities and agricultural capital brought opportunities to rural entrepreneurs. Again mostly as a benefit of the military presence, the British also took the initiative in the development of the region’s natural resources (to be found mostly in the Himalayan foothills). Large borax deposits along with iron ore and coal were discovered and exploited, while in 1903-1904 British investors set up 35 refineries to process saltpetre (used in explosives and in leather tanning) in the Punjab.¹²

Now divided between India and Pakistan, the Punjab still is the most prosperous region of each country. Though the British were largely responsible for many of the changes in the Punjab’s economic structure, it has to be stressed that many Indian entrepreneurs (contractors mainly) were involved, who like entrepreneurs everywhere mostly sought higher profits. Hence, during extreme famine conditions in the second half of the nineteenth century, Indian entrepreneurs continued the export of grain (from the Punjab ‘granary’ in particular) to the much more profitable European market, not only diminishing the availability of grain in the subcontinent, but driving prices higher as well. All in all, probably more important than these general socio-economic changes following canal irrigation and army recruitment to the process of state formation and simultaneous creation of a ‘public sphere’ in the Punjab, remains the fact that the British created an hierarchic system of authority which brought its inhabitants into close contact with their rulers.

¹² Imperial Gazetteer of India, Provincial Series: Punjab, vol. 1, Calcutta 1908, 76.
2. Authority reaching to the bottom of rural society

In 1803, when the Mughal Emperor accepted British protection and the Marathas remained the only obstacle to British supremacy, the East India Company had become the strongest force within South Asia. During the following fifty years it emerged as the paramount power and with the conquest of the Sikh kingdom of the Punjab, British territorial expansion became coterminous with the subcontinent’s natural frontiers in the northwest. After the 1857 Revolt, the Company was dissolved and India placed under the Crown instead. Never before had such a vast area in South Asia been ‘officially’ ruled by one central government, holding (being indeed a fundamental characteristic of any colonial state) the monopoly on international relations. Undoubtedly, the Anglo-Indian colonial state was more powerful, centralized and interventionist than any other former Indian state, claiming absolute authority. Yet what made it most peculiar, in comparison to other colonial states, was the fact that it focused, as Dirk Kolff rightly stressed, mostly on the management of the internal markets and, continuously, on inland government rule.13 British India convincingly was an atypical colony. Until the twentieth century, foreign trade never was more than a few percent of the colonial state’s gross national product. Unlike in Dutch Indonesia, the fiscal basis of the state therefore could not be based on taxation of commodities meant for the world market nor on the imposing of duties in harbours (as was the case in Indonesia at least for one hundred years after the introduction of the so-called ‘cultuurstelsel’ in 1830, to deal with the financial problems of the Dutch state). Instead, in British

India only the land revenue could be the sufficient source to finance the maintenance of the colonial state. Like it had been the foundation of the Mughal state, throughout the later nineteenth century land revenue was crucial to the colonial state, producing over 40 per cent of its revenue.14 Importantly, unlike the Mughals, the British constructed a hierarchic system of authority reaching to the bottom of Indian agrarian society for its collection.15

Indispensable to this process of 'going native' (and again, though in different degrees, characteristic to the whole colonial world) was the creation of a body of 'scientific' knowledge of South Asian society.16 A vast amount of empirical knowledge of what the British thought to be the structure and functioning of Indian society was collected, mostly for the cadastral record. Investigations into the nature of land tenure were made: who did or who should own the land? What did the land produce? How much revenue could one collect? What were the past procedures? With whom should the collection be arranged? These and other questions were crucial to the Anglo-Indian colonial state, whose income largely depended on the land revenue, and to which colonial knowledge had to provide the answers. In turn, importantly, the colonial state's quest for revenue deeply influenced the lives of ordinary people, making them more conscious of the presence and character of colonial rule and indeed often generating discontent.

What is more, while 'going native', trigonometrical and topographic surveys were held, maps

14 Brown, Modern India, 124.
15 Most Empire builders probably thought that India was worth to be governed well, as this atypical colony increasingly became the Jewel in the Crown of the British Empire. Nearly half of all Indian government revenues were directly spent on the maintenance of the British Indian army. At no cost to the British tax payer, these 'English barracks in the Oriental seas' could be widely launched -from Abyssinia to Hong Kong- to protect Imperial trade and communications between Europe and Australasia (during the Second World War two-and-a-half million Indians -the largest 'unrewarded' volunteer force that ever existed- fought to defend the interests of the British Empire). Moreover, almost as important as the British Indian army for the functioning of the Empire were the crucial movements during 'high colonialism' of Indians with administrative skills and expertise -who ran subordinate state bureaucracies and professions in the colonial territories from Malaysia to the Persian Gulf and East Africa-, Indian controlled capital and indentured labour system.
were drawn and pre-existing records -containing social and economic information, appraisals of population, land area, agricultural and craft production, and discussions of history and government- were summarized. Subsequently, all this knowledge was formalized in series of district Gazetteers, and, since 1871, in the decennial Census, on which the Gazetteers in later years depended for most of the their statistical data. In the long-term, the 'formal' categories produced through this process of 'inclusion by definition' undeniably influenced the course of modern South Asian history, while being used by the independent Indian and Pakistani governments as well. Yet, not only the knowledge of Indian intermediaries (scholars, teachers, priests, lawyers, merchants and bankers), who had worked together with the British since the late eighteenth century, was incorporated in this body of colonial knowledge but indeed they themselves also became part of the colonial state's hierarchic system of authority, taking care of the day-to-day administration. As such, the colonial state started to patronize the holders of what they found to be the Indian tradition -those related to indigenous religious, educational, law or other institutions. In this way, a political and cultural framework was created, which embodied the Anglo-Indian colonial state's imperative to control the lives of Indians without necessarily sharing their values.

In fact, most probably more than elsewhere in South Asia, principles of authority also were articulated in the Punjab:

16 Seminal here have been the essays by Bernard S. Cohn as collected in An anthropologist and Colonialism.
Every section of society, from the handful of great landlords to the mass of peasant proprietors, co-operated with the district officers; and their collaboration enormously enhanced the power of the state for every public purpose.17

After annexation and in the spirit of the north Indian 'patronage bureaucracy', the longing to create and retain a stable rural base through respect to indigenous 'village communities', 'tribes' and 'customs' lay at the heart of the 'Punjab tradition' of administration.18 From now on the colonial state came into close contact with village life, though often to the great surprise of Punjabi villagers themselves, for as one contemporary put it:

The villagers were, to begin with, frightened of the new conquerors. Women would hide their children. But fear soon gave way to curiosity and then to controversy. What were these *angrez log* (Englishmen) up to? Their ideas were quite unlike those of rulers in the past. They began by doing the oddest things, like consulting each peasant about the land he possessed and giving him a permanent title to it, with a fixed revenue which was remitted in years when crops were bad. The officers moved about freely unguarded and without pomp and show. The visiting officials pitched their tents outside the villages, and held their office under a tree where anyone could approach them. Accompanied by just one or two persons they would ride on horseback for hours, inspecting and talking to the people. Most of them had learned Punjabi well, and some quite fluently.19

Subsequently, during the 1860s and 1870s, the British defined a specific 'tribal system' on the basis of which, they said, the Punjabi 'village communities' were organized. By linking up with 'native institutions' like these, they believed, 'they could not only present themselves as legitimate indigenous rulers, presiding over an unaltered 'traditional' society, but they could also harness the Punjab's distinctive social forms, above all in the settlement of canal-colonies, to the creation of a prosperous land'.

At the same time, a system of 'customary law' was developed. The idea behind the 1872 Punjab Laws Act was to use 'custom' as the foundation for a system of 'personal' law that was the equivalent of traditional law, to be incorporated into the overall system of law enforced by the colonial state. Anglo-Indian law thus rested on two contradictory principles with different social involvements. Whereas the 'public' side encouraged the emergence of free market relations, 'personal' law invented 'tradition'. Or to put it differently, on the one hand, the colonial state was the agent of an expanding commercial society which brought India into the world market, while on the other, the state depended for purposes of control on the maintenance of a 'traditional' base. As such, British policy overall had the effect of drying up the pragmatism and natural flexibility of South Asian traditions, creating much more rigid and bureaucratic versions of them in the process.

Now on the basis of these colonial constructions of the 'village communities', 'tribal system' and 'customary law', the British constructed a hierarchic system of authority. The five Punjab divisions were divided into districts and these again into tehsils. They contained around 150 villages each and were under the control of tehsildars, who held revenue and judicial powers. At the lower end of the administrative hierarchy, there were the zails, consisting of between ten to

19 Tandon, Punjabi century, 12.
20 Metcalf, Ideologies, 129.
thirty 'village communities' and forming the key units of the system. Control rested with the zaildar, who supervised the village headmen, lambardars, and also acted as head of police. These zaildars generally were the leaders of local dominant 'tribes' and often also zamindars (landowners). Subsequently, selection of zaildars produced families of local influence, who used their position to claim the leadership of the zail's dominant 'tribes'. The administrative influence of the zaildars guaranteed that the positions, though initially not hereditary, usually passed from father to son. Thus by and large, at the turn of the century, British policy had produced a class of rural leaders, tied closely to the administration and exercising their authority in a 'tribal' idiom.

The further framework for this structuring of rural Punjabi politics took place with the creation of the category of 'agricultural tribes' in the 1901 Alienation of Land Act. Already for some time, the British worried (and not only in the Punjab) about the large-scale sale of land for debts owed to moneylenders. They perceived the latter as intruders in the Punjabi 'village communities' and therefore banned the sale of land to anyone other than a member of a registered 'agricultural tribe'. Yet, as B.R. Tomlinson rightly put it:

> The picture of a commercially innocent, self-sufficient peasantry falling victim to the capitalist wiles of usurious moneylenders and urban bankers, painted by the colonial government and its nationalist critics alike at the end of the nineteenth century, is a largely inaccurate depiction of the political economy of exchange and production in Indian agriculture in the last century.23

21 Gilmartin, Empire and Islam, 13-14.
22 This as result of the fact that the British wanted their revenue in cash and introduced the usual assessment based on long-term averages rather then sharing the risk of each harvest with the peasantry.
In reality, agricultural enterprise was largely financed by rurally based investors, who secured their capital from those who had profited from the export-led expansion of cash-crop farming. As a result, a large section of the middle peasantry consolidated itself, overall leading to an egalitarian pattern of landownership right up to the end of British rule. Afterwards, the protection of 'agricultural tribes' through the 1901 Act, made it even easier for this class (as well as the region's landowners) to dominate the supply of credit and the power that accompanied it.

As part of the same project of ordering society, the Punjab's influential high-ranking individuals and groups were set into the Anglo-Indian colonial state's hierarchic system of authority as well. With the 1857 Mutiny the Punjab's 'natural leaders' proved to be loyal and hence the British rewarded them afterwards, as Lieutenant-Governor Robert Montgomery (1809-1887) made clear at the 1862 Educational durbar, held to enlist the co-operation of the chiefs and notables of the Punjab, stating the government's overall goal:

> It is very gratifying to me, as I feel it is to you all, to see before us 150 of the aristocracy preparing themselves for their future important spheres. It is working through the higher classes that we must look for the rapid advancement and prosperity of the people. It is our special duty to educate the higher classes and then the education of the mass will follow. I want to see them take a high place in the administration of the country, and fill important offices in the state. The experiment already made of investing the chiefs and citizens with extensive powers, far exceeds all that I had anticipated.24

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24 The Lahore Chronicle, February 18, 1863 in Robert Montgomery papers (British Library, Oriental and India Office Collections: MSS EUR.D.1019/5), item 92.
Princes, chiefs, landowners and families of note were made zaildar, honorary magistrate, member of one of the darbars held in the province or tied to the British system of rule in other ways (for example, through Punjabization of the British Indian army from the 1880s onwards and the education of the Punjab's young elites at Aitchison Chiefs' College in Lahore). In the countryside most of these 'natural leaders' were 'tribal' chiefs, landowners or both, while in the towns and cities they usually owned considerable residential parts, commanded credit or controlled broad urban factions. Only after they had been properly ranked and labeled, and frozen into place, so the British believed, Punjab's 'natural leaders' could exercise their 'traditional' authority. Similarly, the colonial state also patronized Punjabi religious and educational institutions. Ian Kerr, for instance, has described the close relationship between the colonial state and the most holy Sikh shrine, the Golden Temple, in Amritsar.25 While David Gilmartin, in the same way, has showed how the British, after linking their rule to ideas of local 'tribal' authority, came to participate in the functioning of many rural shrines of Sufi Pirs, by establishing close links with the local sajjada nishins (those embodying the barakat at the shrine and usually being lineal descendants of a particular saint).26

Still, the functioning of this hierarchic system of authority through which the colonial state patronized Punjabi society was increasingly undermined. Subjects to be discussed in the next Chapters such as Punjab evangelicalism, Anglo-vernacular education, new modes of 'communication', urbanization and the way the British perceived and defined society (particularly in

25 Ian Kerr, British relationships with the Golden temple, 1849-90 in Indian Economic and Social History Review, 2, 1984, 320-342.
26 Gilmartin, Empire and Islam, Chapter Two.
assessing what were legitimate interests meriting ‘representation’) proved to be crucial to Punjabi responses to the newly created order. Increasingly they would see in the categories used by the British, something they could use profitably. Broader identities emerged, which transformed the character of Punjabi politics. Subsequently, two contrasting political traditions developed in the Punjab under colonial rule, the urban politics of ‘faith’ and the rural politics of ‘mediation’. Obviously, the Singh Sabhas, Arya Samaj and Ahmadiyahs belonged to the first political tradition of religious ‘lay leaders’ and ultimately also it was this tradition which triumphed with the 1947 Partition of British India into India and Pakistan. But before we come to this, let me first give a general description of the traditional world in the Punjab and, in particular, how besides the colonial state’s hierarchic system of authority, indigenous voluntary movements increasingly started to interfere in three greater traditions and their shared popular culture.

3. Three greater traditions and Punjabi popular culture

Before that bloody 1947 Partition, the Punjab offered an unparalleled opportunity for a comparative historical study about the making of modern South Asian religious identities within one specific region. Only here one could compare the three greater traditions of Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism with long specific histories in the region.27 First of all of course because the Punjab remains the homeland of the Sikhs. Yet, to make the comparison even more appealing, what is often forgotten is that Islam and Hinduism in the region showed characteristics that differed

27 To stress once again, Islam is a tradition, Sikhism was moulded into one but because of the multiplicity of Hindu practices ‘Hinduism’ remains a non-definable term in the Indian context.
remarkably from other parts in South Asia. From the Indus civilization onwards, the Punjab underwent five millenia of human history. Many invaders followed the Aryans through the one and only overland Gateway on their way to the fertile doab of the Jamuna and Ganges rivers. Since the twelfth century the Punjab also has been a region of Indo-Islamic interaction. It formed a frontier province of respectively, the Ghaznavid Empire, the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughals after the battle of Panipat in 1526. Lahore experienced its high noon after that, when Mughal Emperors held their courts there. While there is no general explanation for the collapse of Mughal power within the Punjab, the Sikhs at least profited from it, while alternatively their emergence as a powerful community, was crucial to its further decline.

Except for the so-called Nirguna sants, Guru Nanak (1469-1539) did not find anything commendable in all major forms of contemporary belief and practice, whether Hindu or Muslim. Something new was needed and, following his moral fervour, Nanak created an ideology and started a movement, which under his nine successors evolved into the Sikh Panth. In 1603-1604 fifth Guru Arjan compiled the Guru Granth Sahib and in 1699 tenth Guru Gobind Singh established the institution of the Khalsa of initiated (amrit-dhari) Sikhs and hence introduced the concept of the saint-soldier. Under the leadership of the 'one-eyed lion', Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1781-1839), a Sikh Empire was established in 1799 that ruled the Punjab and Kashmir until British annexation in 1849. Though central Punjab -which contained the most prosperous tracts

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28 The word 'Sikh' comes from the Punjabi verb sikh, to learn. Basically therefore a Sikh is one who learns and follows the path of liberation taught by Guru Nanak and his nine successors. In 1699, the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, formed the Khalsa at Anandpur. Thereafter all who had undergone the initiation ceremony (amrit sanskar), retained their hair uncut and carried weapons were (amrit-dhari) Khalsa Sikhs and called themselves Singh (lion). Ever since, amrit-dhari Sikhs of the Khalsa are distinct from kesh-dhari Sikhs, who are uninitiated but do not cut their hair (and often wear a turban), and the also uninitiated saja-dhari Sikhs, who even less keep themselves to outward Sikh forms and code of belief and discipline (Rahit). See for further explanation about the complicated state of affairs of modern Sikh identity: McLeod, Who is a Sikh?, Chapter Seven.
of the region—was the stronghold of the Sikhs, Muslims outnumbered both Hindus and Sikhs together in that same area. During the decade after annexation, around a quarter of the population was Sikh in the Amritsar, Ludhiana and Ferozepore districts. Loss of political power initially had led to large-scale re-conversion to Hinduism but gradually the Sikhs got back their strength and self-confidence. In fact, by the beginning of the twentieth century, Sikhs had arrived at a political influence relatively too large compared to their numbers, mostly because of their eminent roles both in the Punjab’s agriculture and the British Indian army.

The emergence of the Sikh faith alongside Islam and Hinduism and the constant invasions in the region however did not lead to a weakening of the ‘caste system’ in the Punjab. Undoubtedly, ‘twice-born’ castes did not dominate the Hindu social hierarchy and indeed the status of the Brahman was so depressing that some even took to the plough in the eastern part of the province. On the whole, the latter’s low status position (except in the Himalayan foothills) resulted not only from the fact that they had to compete with Muslim and Sikh leaders, but especially also because they lacked the economic power which temples in Hindu dominated areas elsewhere in South Asia provided. Much more powerful within the Hindu community were the commercial castes: the Khatis in particular, followed by Aroras (western Punjab) and Banias (eastern Punjab). According to S.S. Thorburn, these commercial castes undeservingly profited most from the hard labour of the Punjabi peasant:

In some sense we govern India chiefly to their advantage, and are thereby jeopardizing the stability of our hold on the affections of the people, that is, on rural India, and thus helping petty shop-keepers and money-lenders to exploit the country for their own benefit. Throughout the Punjab, if not throughout India, with the exception of that serio-
comic phenomenon -the educated Bengali of the 'young Bengal' school- they emphatically derive most profit from our rule, whilst contributing little to its expenses, and nothing to its strength.29

Under colonial rule, however, their position was increasingly challenged by Rajputs and Jats, who had become rich peasants or found jobs in the British Indian army.

The majority of the Punjab's population, nonetheless, was not Sikh or Hindu but Muslim (and, as opposed to what is generally thought, the Punjab army therefore mostly existed of west Punjabi Muslim recruits instead of Sikhs). They were organized, as the British rightly observed, on a tribal basis of which the largest were again the Jats and Rajputs (being those Hindus who had embraced Islam mostly between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries). Other important tribes (besides the traditional Sayyid and Sheikh elites) were the Pathans, Awans, Biluches and Gujars. These tribes mostly were to be found in the western Punjab (being in fact nearly two-thirds of the region), where there also were large Muslim landowners. Yet, at the same time, it has to be stressed that particularly in rural Punjab, religious boundaries were extremely fluid. People did not see themselves simply as Sikhs, Hindus or Muslims, on the contrary, these categories often overlapped. Accordingly also when the leading ethnographer and administrator of the Punjab, Denzil Ibbetson, directed the 1881 Punjab Census, he noted on the difficulties while recording religious statistics:

29 S.S. Thorburn, Musalmans and moneylenders in the Punjab, 1886; repr. Lahore, 35.
Yet, with the single exception of caste, no other one of the details which we have recorded is so difficult to fix with exactness (as religion), or needs so much explanation and limitation before the real value of figures can be appreciated.30

The widespread influence of Sufism (the label given to Islamic mysticism) therefore remains a most interesting aspect of Islam in the Punjab. Especially in the countryside, all communities regarded Sufi Pir as sacred without distinction. Almost every village in central Punjab contained a shrine dedicated to Pir Sakhi Sarvar (who was believed to be a patron of young children). In the same way, Punjabi (generally written in the Persian-Arabic Nastaliq script), in which such Sufi poets like Bullhe Shah (1680-1758), Sultan Bahu (1631-1691) and Shah Husain (1539-1593) composed, was both a literary and spoken language transcending religious boundaries. Members of all communities shared in many of each others' celebrations, coming together, for example, at the urs (festivals reminiscing the death of a Sufi saint) of Baba Farid (1173-1265) of Pakpattan and Hazrat Datta Ganj Bakhsh (1009-1072) -whose recently renovated dargah remains the largest and most popular Sufi shrine in Lahore up to today. In addition, songs, proverbs and folk tales provide further evidence of this shared popular culture. At the end of the nineteenth century, Richard Temple collected many of these among illiterate Punjabis, hearing numerous versions of the same stories in different villages.31 A more famous genre than these folk-tales were the qissas or tragic love tales of Hir and Ranjha, Sassi and Punnu and Sohni and Mahival. All in all, rural Punjab and in particular the central areas shared an overall popular culture through which

the majority of Punjabis lived and envisaged the reality around them. Standards of behaviour, categories of thought, conceptions of time, notions of purity and impurity and of the sacred and the profane were not marked by great differences. Besides honouring Sufi Pirs and taking part in each others' celebrations, many Punjabis followed common beliefs bordering on animism and fetishism and concerning, for example, different spirits, witchcraft, divine intercession, the need to pay attention to omens and the merit to be gained through pilgrimage. These beliefs had been there for many centuries and were older than all formal theologies.32

Still, the three greater Punjabi traditions and shared popular culture were stirred not only by the Anglo-Indian colonial state's hierarchic system of authority but also by indigenous voluntary movements (which after having more or less settled in Lahore, Amritsar or other towns, increasingly turned towards the countryside). The Arya Samaj obviously remains the best known within the Hindu community and beyond, but will be extensively dealt with later. Most influential among Muslims was the Anjuman-i-Islamia. It was founded in 1866 in Lahore by followers of the famous reformer, Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898), who had established the Aligarh movement and in 1884 visited the Punjab to collect funds for this project and to deliver speeches.33 It opened schools with an Anglo-vernacular curriculum (of which Islamia College in Lahore remains the best known), emphasized female education, loyalty to the British and subsequently opposed the Indian National Congress. Another two important modern Muslim reform movements active in the Punjab were the Deobandi and Ahl-i-hadith (people of the tradition,

31 Richard Temple, The legends of the Punjab, 3 vols., 1886; repr. Patiala. The original handwritings of the munshis (scribes) employed by Temple to write down The Legends in the Punjab villages now are part of the Richard Temple papers (British Library, Oriental and India Office Collections: MSS Eur. F. 98/4).
32 See further: Oberoi, The construction, Chapter Three (An enchanted universe).
who declared to follow authentic prophetic traditions in preference to the four law schools). The former followed the ideas of the reformist ulama associated with a theological academy founded in the town of Deoband (in what was until 1902 called the North Western Provinces) in 1867.34 The Ahl-i-hadith descended from the Wahabis of Sayyid Ahmad Shahid (1782-1831) and had fought against the Sikhs during the 1820s. They were strict Muslims and opposed anyone (but particularly Ahmadiyahs) indulging in taqlid or accepting religious authority from sources not found in the Quran and the hadith. Indeed, compared to Muslim groups like these, Ahmadiyah membership was small but the movement is worthy of study because of its very active propaganda in both the spoken and the written word and, closely related, particularly also its later importance as Islamic missionary movement.

Undeniably, the Singh Sabhas were the most important reform movement within Sikh history. Yet, already there had been some religious ferment among the Sikhs after annexation with the Nirankari and Namdhari movements,35 who both established some influence in the countryside. Though these were two minor movements, they exist still today and therefore have to be mentioned, especially also because they got their inspiration towards purification and the past from Babas, who were raised to the position of Gurus by their followers. As such both movements produced distinct successions of Gurus afterwards and thus clearly opposed the subsequent Singh Sabha emphasis upon the Ten Gurus (as stressed in the 1925 Gurdwara Act for example). Otherwise interesting remains the fact that Baba Dayal Das (1783-1853), founder of the Nirankaris, like the Singh Sabhaites later, believed that the Granth Sahib should be the only visible focus for the Sikhs. Also he rejected the militant Khalsa ideal as conflicting with the

34 On the Deoband movement: Metcalf, Islamic revival in British India.
spiritual teachings of Guru Nanak and, as such, threatened the Sikh tradition as propagated by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The millenarian Kukas were similar to the Nirankaris but unlike the latter often used physical force and so the colonial government closely watched them. Their leader, Baba Ram Singh (1816-1884), opposed the British at least for their killing of kine for beef and, subsequently, when in 1872 some Namdharis attacked Muslim slaughter houses and butchers’ shops, more than fifty protestors were blown from the gun. Though Baba Ram Singh himself was not involved, he was exiled to Rangoon afterwards.  

The history of socio-religious reform in the Punjab started before the Arya Samaj, Singh Sabha and Ahmadiyah movements, nonetheless, what makes the latter particularly interesting for a comparative historical study into the making of modern South Asian identities, is the fact that these three movements from within three different greater traditions participated in a public sphere as it emerged in one regional context. The next Chapter will describe how this public sphere was formed in the Punjab, while afterwards Part II will focus in detail how the Arya Samaj, Singh Sabhas and Ahmadiyahs stirred it up in turn. Previous to that, however, I want to return once more to some wider processes, to place the later enquiry in the context of the establishment of the Pax Britannica, during which nature and communities were shaped and the ‘civilizing mission’ reached great heights.

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35 The 1891 Punjab Census counted 10,500 Namdharis, who are also known as Kukas (shouters) because their acts of worship often resulted in states of ecstasy in which they would dance and cry out (kuka).

36 The foundation and development of both the Nirankaris and Namdharis was significantly affected by caste. The Nirankaris comprised mainly Khatris and Aroras. The Namdharis were either Ramgarhias or ‘poor Jats’. Today they are almost all Ramgarhias.
4. Shaping nature and communities

Throughout history, the drive to dominate nature has been synonymous with human civilizations worldwide. Nature always has been both an objective ecological condition and a field of subjective experience for human beings. Or as Dietmar Rothermund put it:

Nature sets limits, man transgresses them with his tools and his vision. Man progressively creates a specific environment and makes history. In this process it is not only the limits set by nature which are transgressed but also the limits of human experience and cognition. From the elementary adaptation to the natural environment to the establishment of great civilizations, the horizon of experience and the regional extension of human relations constantly expand.37

Compared to what happened in other parts of the world, however, man's domination over nature took a far-reaching different route in European history. First of all, the complex sixteenth century process commonly labeled the Reformation meant a crucial turning-point in man's understanding of its relationship with the natural environment, while (as part of a long-term attempt to Christianize the masses) the Church tried to police popular belief in the enchanted natural world.38 During the so-called age of Enlightenment (read: salvation through reason), early modern scientists then began to proclaim that it was the destiny of man (who after all was not an animal) to dominate nature. For them the natural world was governed by a limited number of

38 Scribner, The German Reformation, 8-10.
universal laws that could and should be seized and rationally directed to serve man's needs. Afterwards, nature became nothing more than a quantitative and mechanistic mass; a resource to be exploited and its utility to be maximized through science and productive labour. Despite the fact that by the end of the eighteenth century, as Keith Thomas brilliantly described in the case of England, 'a growing number of people had come to find man's ascendancy over nature increasingly abhorrent to their moral and aesthetic sensibilities',39 earlier Reformist and Enlightened ideas already had become part of a wider ideology promoting 'improvement'. From now onwards, the level of control over nature through scientific investigation, the level of efficiency in using natural resources and the application of machine power, for most Westerners defined the status of societies worldwide.

Significantly, in the colonial context all this meant that most British began to look at their own 'vastly superior understanding of the workings of nature' as the crucial justification for 'their monopolization of leadership and managerial roles in colonized societies'.40 Hence the Anglo-Indian colonial state underscored its power over nature and, importantly, as in the case of the Punjabi 'tribe', over the customary communities of South Asian society (which after all belonged to the natural environment as well). Like the Punjab rivers, these communities had to be 'controlled and guided, led and regulated' by scientific administration, 'rather than as allies of government in a common project of rational environmental domination'.41 So while the Anglo-Indian colonial state was backed up by modern disciplinary force (army and police), both the recognition and protection of a society composed of numerous 'traditional' communities was crucial to

40 Adas, Machines as the measure of men, 205.
its hierarchic system of authority. Moreover, it played a fundamental role in shaping the introduction of democratic institutions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For, whatever may have been starting principle, the introduction of electoral ‘representation’ surely represented one means by which ‘traditional’ communities were lured into the public sphere, if not the Anglo-Indian colonial state’s hierarchic system of authority. Penetrating deeply into South Asian society to collect the land revenue, the Raj introduced local and provincial elections to legitimize its position and maintain support among local elites. Though obviously this partly also represented a response to pressure from educated Indians, the central concern of the British nonetheless was the maintenance of the underlying structure of the Anglo-Indian colonial state. In liberal democratic terms, therefore, the growth of electoral ‘representation’ did not emerge, as in Europe, in the context of a developing bourgeois public sphere but instead (and this is essential) as a mechanism by which the British sought to bring about a public sphere existing of innumerable ‘traditional’ communities.42

Like in Europe, the public sphere in South Asia increasingly became dedicated to an ideology of ‘improvement’: a program promoting the material and moral progress to which the British, consciously or not, were committed as part of the White Man's Burden. From the beginning of the nineteenth century, the British (utilitarian variety in particular) assumed ‘rule by law’ as pivotal to any lasting change ‘for the better’. In fact, by 1882, India’s commercial, criminal and procedural law was completely codified, while, ironically, England still awaited a criminal code and the vast majority of English law remained non-codified, in the form of statute or common law. Indeed, the British often were able to do in South Asia what they were unable to do back

42 Ibid., Democracy, nationalism, 124-125.
home. All in all, the Benthamite and utilitarian desire for unity, precision and simplicity in law reached great heights in the subcontinent, making Anglo-Indian law far superior in order, clarity and system to its English counterpart. But what did this mean for Indian society? As said earlier, the Anglo-Indian colonial state primarily focused on inland government rule and, hence, the lasting influence of utilitarianism in South Asia is to be found in the colonial state's hierarchic system of authority, of which the size and activities in the 1870s proved to be the nearest realization in English experience of Bentham's vision of the administrative state of law and order.43

Not that all this meant a complete transplantation of Western ideas to Indian ground. On the contrary, the British undoubtedly were influenced by the different working circumstances in South Asia.44 For example, as utilitarian theory primarily touched Indian ground through the land-revenue while 'going native', they invented 'tradition' through Anglo-Indian law. As such, the British sought to preserve a conception of South Asian society as they first saw it, enforcing values as seen rooted in religion from antiquity and placing the family and community above the individual. In this way, Anglo-Indian law accommodated both the assimilative ideals of liberalism (with its optimistic assumption that South Asia could be transformed on an European model) and the 'excluding' insistence upon Indian 'difference' in a personal law defined by membership of a 'traditional' community.45 What is more, instead of sharing a religious faith


44 See, for example, on the Punjab factor in the shaping of the Irish Land Legislation Act of 1870, to which John Stuart Mill's England and Ireland (1868) proved to be seminal: Cook, Imperial affinities.

45 Metcalf, Ideologies, 35-38.
with its subjects, the Anglo-Indian colonial state found its legitimacy in a 'moralization of law'.

To complete the 'civilizing mission', as James Fitzjames Stephen put it firmly:

The establishment of a system of law which regulates the most important parts of the daily life of the people constitutes in itself a moral conquest more striking, more durable, and far more solid, than the physical conquest which rendered it possible. It exercises an influence over the minds of the people in many ways comparable to that of a new religion... Our law is in fact the sum and substance of what we have to teach them. It is, so to speak, a compulsory gospel which admits of no dissent and no disobedience.46

Fitzjames Stephen replaced Henry Summer Maine (1822-1888) as legal member of the Viceroy's council in 1869 and it was partly because of his experiences in India that he wrote *Liberty, Equality and Fraternity* in reply to John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* as mentioned in the Introduction. More importantly, he probably was the most outspoken exponent of the authoritarian liberalism (India was to be ruled by a 'gifted few') that became the dominant ideology during the period of 'high colonialism' and paralleled the growing racism of late Victorian Britain. Yet while utilitarians held that human nature was the same throughout the world over, other views had come up afterwards, which proved to be crucial to the invention of 'tradition' through Anglo-Indian law. Evolutionary theorists, like Henry Maine, 'repudiated the utilitarian vision of an infinitely manageable human nature' and argued instead that societies were 'different' but 'comparative' and had followed distinct historical paths (though progressively

went through 'a movement from status to contract'). What remains relevant to the colonial context, however, is that these 'comparative' and 'historicist' social theories of Maine and his contemporaries were converted into moral and political ones and came to underlie the Anglo-Indian colonial state's hierarchical system of authority and policies towards 'improvement'. The fact that afterwards Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) and other Indian nationalists propagated the idea of the 'village community' (to give but one example) solely shows the adoption and influence of these social theories in the public sphere.

Like that of law reform, the creation of a public education system was surrounded by many of the same difficulties and contradictions. Obviously the colonial government could not introduce the teaching of Christianity directly into the schools it sponsored and instead therefore introduced English literature as the central element of the school curriculum to boost the 'moral'. A remarkable situation indeed, as early Victorian humanistic study in English schools centred on classical literatures -Greek and Latin- instead of English. As a result, as Gauri Viswanathan argued, cultural value was handed over in the emerging South Asian public sphere, 'from belief and dogma to language, experience and history'. Though the public education system (which will be more extensively treated in the next Chapter) only reached a small part of the population, I nonetheless want to stress that many of the 'moral' ideas introduced through this system reached a much wider circle afterwards through the educational activities (in both English and the vernaculars) of indigenous voluntary movements, which not only increasingly became active in the public sphere as part of the earlier mentioned urban competitive politics of 'faith' but later also penetrated the countryside. These indigenous voluntary movements were part of a process in

47 Ibid., 68.
48 Viswanathan, Masks of conquest, 117.
which the establishment of the Pax Britanica in the Punjab stood for the growth of a more stable, settled and hierarchical society at the expense of the unsettled, the popular and the fluid.

For undoubtedly the Punjab had been part of the larger Central Asian world of trade and nomadism for centuries and now, partly to counter the advent of the Russians in the region, the British attempted to encourage, sustain and control this network. Passes were opened, trading posts established, banditry was controlled and the frontier tribes were pacified. Though nomadism continued, particularly in west Punjab many tribal traditions were uprooted. In the same way, British policies also changed the lives of the people living in the northern Himalayan parts of the province. By the 1880s, the Gaddis (shepherds) and Gujars (cowherds) of Chamba and Kangra found that forests and 'wastes' had become state property. From now on, their rights were defined, the rhythms of their movements controlled and their spatial mobility restricted. Throughout the province, animals were enumerated, registered and branded, while in 1903 the Punjab Military Transport Act was passed, legalizing government rights over all transport animals. In the end, few Punjabis continued their earlier pastoral activities and most turned to more settled modes of life. Some nomads took to wage labour (earning small sums by digging canals or building roads); some became part-time peasants or expanded their cultivation to supplement a declining income, while others concentrated on trading activities. As was to be expected, particularly the construction of a system of canal irrigation and colonies in central and southwest Punjab changed much of the earlier existing pastoral economy. Here pastorals were expropriated on a grand scale and for a prolonged period the janglis (uncouth folks) carried on a battle with the early peasant migrants. Yet they also would live in a Punjabi 'village community'...

afterwards. The days 'when no one thought of wearing anything but a lungi (skirt) and pagri (turban)' were gone and from now onwards one would dress more civilized. Similarly, thatched huts which could be left behind, or moved, with every change of encampment were replaced by clean mud plastered houses, while the lambardar often would have a verandah supported on masonry pillars, to make clear his newly acquired position in society.50

Though, like what happened in the Western tradition, pastoral life was romantically immortalized in the Punjabi qissas, in many colonial writings pastorals were objects of contempt: lazy, improvident and wretched as cultivators, lawless, wild and generally cowards. The lazy pastoral especially was defined in opposition to the sturdy and industrious Sikh peasant, cultivating his field with care and yielding revenue to the state. Indeed, it is here again that European ideas about man and nature come to the front: notions about work and leisure, good and evil, order and beauty. Or as Malcolm Darling put it:

In the western Punjab conditions are dominated by a relentless nature. In the great canal colonies..., we feel everywhere the beneficial hand of man. In the former, life is the immemorial life of India, primitive, isolated, and fatalistic: in the latter, it is the new life brought in by the Pax Britannica, prosperous, progressive, and modern. And not more than thirty years ago the two tracts would have been indistinguishable.51

Undoubtedly, earlier mentioned late nineteenth century evolutionist ideas had strengthened this association between the pastoral nomad and the primitive. The evolutionist scheme saw the

50 Darling, The Punjab peasant, 123-124. In his Introduction to the 1978 reprint, Clive Dewey called this work 'simply the best book on peasant indebtedness ever written'. 
movement from savagery to civilization as an evolution from tribe to state, where family, property and territory were established at different stages of this linear movement.

Throughout the Punjab, the Anglo-Indian colonial state opposed nomads, pedlars and pastorals and attempted to discipline and settle them. Watched, hounded, harassed and frequently prosecuted by the police, nomads lived a life of endless persecution, particularly after the Criminal Tribes Acts of 1871 and 1911 gave legal sanction to official actions against 'wanderers'. Again seen as a group phenomenon, 'tribes' stigmatized as 'habitual wanderers' were expected to stay confined to their 'village communities'. Licences of leave were to be issued, but only to those who pursued an 'honest livelihood'. By 1881, the Census counted 16.039 individuals, belonging to seven criminal tribes (when India gained independence it inherited, as a legacy of the colonial period, 3.5 million individuals belonging to 128 criminal tribes). Interestingly, the 1871 Act included eunuchs as well. According to James Fitzjames Stephen (who as law member drafted the Act), there existed 'an organized system of sodomitical prostitution, of which these wretches are the managers', and that no measure to force them to adopt 'honest pursuits' would be too severe. During the discussions preceding the Act, many resented the eunuchs' alleged kidnapping and castration of children, yet what disturbed the participants as much as criminal behaviour (and what the Act hence forbade), was the practice of eunuchs appearing in public dressed in female clothes. For once and for all, one should not only live long and happily in some village, often under the supervision of the Salvation Army, but at the same time stick to one's sexual nature as

51 Ibid., 111.
well. While for most Victorians (and increasingly elitist Indians) sexual ambiguity and a life of 'wandering without leave' were as disgusting and intolerable.52

During the establishment of the Pax Britannica, the 'civilizing mission' in a sense reached a climax with the emergence of reformatory settlements in the Punjab, where people would be taught the virtues of discipline, hard work and cleanliness. The most incorrigible characters were placed in a central prison like reformatory, the reasonably well behaving in industrial settlements and the best behaving in new agricultural settlements in the canal-colonies. Significantly, besides the Salvation Army, indigenous voluntary movements like the Arya Samaj, Singh Sabhas and Anjuman-i-Islamia responded positively to the government's invitation to become involved in these reformatory settlements to produce 'moral' peasants. By the end of 1919, more than half of the agricultural and industrial settlements, were more or less administered by indigenous associations with government assistance. Though one should note that these movements did not spend anything more than the amount of the government grant and primarily were concerned with making converts and therefore particularly focused on the appointment of teachers and establishment of mosques, gurdwaras and mandirs.53

Alternatively, the softer side of the 'civilizing mission' was to be found in the museums opened and exhibitions held by the British. In museums Indians were confronted with the scientific order of things as perceived by Europeans (who after all knew more about South Asia). As such, they saw themselves represented as 'tribes and castes' living close to the soil and following archaic and chaotic forms of knowledge. Though the famous Lahore museum remained the 'wonder house' (ajaib ghar) for Punjabi common folk, those who had followed

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Anglo-vernacular education undoubtedly were heavily influenced by the museum's orderly world and indeed often rejected the notion of their country as an ethnographic museum. Sayyid Ahmad Khan, for instance, when in the London India Office in 1869 and shown the photographs in The People of India, was horrified to see his countrymen portrayed as the 'equals of animals'.

Also the Lahore museum took its educational function very serious: apart from housing the Science Institute and allowing the Society for Promoting Scientific Knowledge to use its lecture hall, it instituted a series of Magic Lantern lectures. The best attended and historically more interesting lectures, however, took place frequently during the 1910-20s: the zanana lectures reserved for purdah clad women not only concerned science but travel and, indeed, the education of women too. Much in the same way, exhibitions instructed Punjabis how to improve agricultural production. At these exhibitions, indigenous products and knowledge were scientifically classified and organized in order to make clear their utilitarian value, while in turn the latest gadgets from the West were displayed so that Punjabis would know where they would be going if they did their best (in fact, the Lahore museum originally was hastily constructed for the Punjab exhibition of 1864).

Having said all this, however, I want to stress that the establishment of the Pax Britannica was a multifaceted process, riven with contradictions. Overall the 'limited Raj' often was forced to compromise as it worked in the context of Punjabi social classes and conditions. It was closely related to struggles inside society for status, privilege and power. Competing forces were not

53 Major, State and criminal tribes in colonial Punjab.
54 G.F.I. Graham, The life and work of Syed Ahmad Khan, 1885; repr. Karachi 1974, 129. In 1868 the Government of India published The People of India, an eight volume work of 468 photographs, each of which was accompanied by a brief account of what was supposed to be that group's essential character.
established solely by the British and hence simply to be put under the label of 'Divide and Rule' (which is politics anyway) nor were they controlled by them. On the contrary, the British increasingly became busy trying to contain Punjabi forces and in the twentieth century became more reactionaries than initiators, when the niches within the public sphere inhabited by certain groups and interests (cutting into and contradicting the policies of the colonial state) had become too large. Indeed, many aspects of pre-nineteenth century Punjabi civilization continued to exist, albeit as part of a new cultural configuration. Through simultaneous processes of acceptance, accommodation, adaptation and rejection, Punjabis ‘rationally’ redefined their traditions, while incorporating European thought at the same time.

Within this new cultural configuration then there were three dominant interrelated continuities. First, the formation of the Anglo-Indian colonial state that provided the spine to the emerging public sphere. Second, the idea that a ‘rational’ mode of knowledge authorized by Western science came to dictate Punjabi society through modern disciplinary institutions and practices. And third, the tendency among leading Punjabis to organize themselves into newly self-identifying voluntary groups. Indeed, perhaps the fast changes in society, alternatively, made Punjabis anxious for the re-imposition of some ‘moral’ order. This at least would partly explain both the popularity of indigenous voluntary reform movements and the British Indian army as ‘the only kinds of order with which the villagers were familiar, above the level of the family; and the only kinds of order which were compatible with the patriarchal authority pervading the average villager’s day-to-day life’.57 In order to understand the activities explored by Punjabi

55 These lectures were important meeting grounds for Protestant evangelicals, who built up libraries of slides and lent them out (with suitable scripts) to anyone willing to make use of them.
56 Prakash, Another reason, Chapter Two.
57 Dewey, Some consequences of military expenditure, 154.
voluntary reform movements such as the Arya Samaj, Singh Sabhas and Ahmadiyahs, however, further investigation into the creation of a Punjab public sphere remains crucial.