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

van der Linden, B.

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CHAPTER THREE

1. Lay leaders criticizing tradition and society

Though comparability does not mean sameness, a comparative term like ‘moral languages’ clearly cannot do full justice to the Singh Sabha, Arya Samaj, Ahmadiyah or any other nineteenth century reform movement, as each must be understood in terms of its own context, ideas and actions.1 Yet, while I acknowledge many differences at the surface, I think the underlying historical parallels in terms of the colonial interaction are much more interesting. To criticize contemporary society obviously remains an attitude common to all times. Just like during the European Reformation, Indian reformers wanted clarity in thought and behaviour. Singh Sabhaites, Arya Samajists and Ahmadiyahs argued that the state of their respective traditions had degenerated and society in general was corrupt. In the name of truth, the distortions of

1 So far the movements more or less have been discussed separately in Jones, *Arya dharm*; Lavan, *The Ahmadiyah movement* and Oberoi, *The construction*, but little in comparative terms, stressing the importance of the nineteenth century colonial interaction in relation to the making of modern Punjabi identities.
contemporary religion had to be purified in order to have something worth living for as individual or community. While arguing like this, the reformers not only referred to a pure past that was lost and needed to be revived (the so-called Golden Age) but, somewhat contradictorily, also sought to construct a ‘tradition’ in terms that would make sense to the late nineteenth century Punjabi. Critical here then remains the fact that reformers not so much stressed change in ‘theology’ but in practical moral behaviour. On the basis of ‘rationally’ redefined traditions, their message was individualistic and aimed at adaptation to the changes in society through voluntary community practices. Alternately, these identities then have to be seen in the context of the ‘civilizing mission’ with its ideology of ‘improvement’ as dominantly propagated by the British in the public sphere.

Of the three movements discussed, only the Arya Samaj did not originate in the Punjab but was established in Bombay (1875). Yet, because of being at the right time and place, it was very successful in the region and during its early Punjabi decades went through some of its most important ideological and institutional developments, providing (just like the Christian missionaries and the Brahma Samaj) a blueprint for subsequent reform movements. Influenced by blind Guru Virjanand Saraswati, the founder of the Arya Samaj, Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883), ‘rationally’ challenged contemporary Hindu practices, especially the caste system and Brahmanical authority. He preached monotheism and rejected the justification of caste by birth, which instead should depend on a person's qualities and qualifications. His inspiration mainly came from the Vedas, which according to him contained the ‘pure’ religion to be revived. This

2 An interesting linguistic spin-off of Protestant missions: in vernacular Arya literature Brahmins are denounced with the English word ‘pope’ as supposed mediators between God and men.

3 Jordens, Dayananda Sarasvati, 63.
gave broad scope for social reformation as all beliefs and customs could be abandoned if they were solely sanctioned by later 'degenerate' texts.

Moreover, while believing in the total separation between God and the human soul, the Swami placed great emphasis on the freedom of human will and continuously the moral responsibility of man. He put the full burden of man's destiny on the shoulders of man alone and as such his repeated attacks on Advaitavedanta (as he knew it) were motivated by the view that it tended to draw man away from action and the world. Punjabi elites found this core message of activism and involvement most attractive. At the 1877 Delhi darbar, Dayanand was invited by Sikh and Hindu leaders (primarily Brahmo Samajists). In the Punjab, he preached and gave specific lectures on Islam, the Brahm o Samaj, the Sikhs and, indeed for the very first time, on Christianity, which altogether led to passionate reactions from the different communities. Saraswati crisscrossed the province for more than one year and was very successful in the region. In Lahore he attracted a group of dedicated disciples (most of whom were students and graduates of the local Colleges), who established the Lahore Arya Samaj on 24 June 1877 and afterwards rewrote the earlier long and detailed 28-point Bombay creed into the ten simple principles which were followed ever since.

5 Peter van der Veer has argued that the Arya Samaj was so successful in the Punjab because 'the attack on image worship fell on fertile soil, prepared by centuries of Sikh traditions of imageless devotion' in Religious nationalism, 66 (and again in Imperial encounters, 51). Here, however, he overlooks the importance of Punjabi popular culture as described in Chapter One. Sikh gurdwaras, for example, were often run by Hindu priests and more often than not contained images and not only in the countryside, for also anyone walking around the Golden Temple in Amritsar at the time would come across miscellaneous idols near the steps of the sacred tank, representing non-Sikh deities. Hence also one of the main programs of the Singh Sabhaites (as van der Veer also states himself on p. 74 of Religious nationalism) was to get rid of these images.
The establishment of the first Singh Sabha in Amritsar (1873) was partly the result of both Hindu and Christian missionary activities in the Punjab. While re-absorption into 'Hinduism' had always been a perceived threat to many Sikhs, they saw Christian evangelicalism in the Punjab as yet another danger. Though the elitist Amritsar Singh Sabha remained at ease with portraying Sikhism solely as an Hindu reformist element, later lower caste and professional Singh Sahabaites led by the Lahore Singh Sabha (1879) were more active and radical in restoring the Sikh tradition to its supposed original purity, free from Hindu influences. This vision of the Sikhism came to be known as Tat Khalsa: the word 'Tat' stands for the unalloyed elements out of which the universe is created and 'Khalsa' in popular usage signifies 'pure'. Tat Khalsa followers fiercely started to attack Punjabi popular culture, preaching an end to the caste system (according to them, untouchables could enter the gurdwara any time) and worship of saints (Sufi Pirs) or descendents of the Ten Gurus. While penetrating the Punjabi countryside more than other reformers, they were often banned from meeting in local gurdwaras (especially those dominated by Hindu priests) and subsequently erected gurdwaras served by Sikhs who accepted the Tat Khalsa ideology.

In 1880, the founder of the Ahmadiyah movement, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835-1908), began the publication of his major work, Barahin-i-Ahmadiyah (Proofs of Ahmadiyah). In it, he stressed what he called the 'true' principles of Islam and the duties of all good Muslims. The work was well-received by Muslims who felt harassed by both Christian missionaries and (Arya Samaj) Hindus. Like other Muslim reformers, Ghulam Ahmad was convinced that Islam had fallen in his times to unprecedented depths. Agitated by the lethargy of the ulema and the continuous Christian missionary criticism of the Prophet and Islam, he argued that the situation had reached such proportions that only a divinely inspired leader could obstruct the process of
decline and restore Islam to its supposed pristine purity. He himself of course was the (super)man called upon to perform this task and soon afterwards the Mirza claimed he received divine revelations telling him he was a *mujaddid* (renewer of faith), *masih mauwud* (Promised messiah) and *mahdi* (rightly guided one). Obviously, these claims were not accepted by the orthodox *ulema* and hence Mirza Ghulam Ahmad became involved in many polemics with them.\(^7\)

As Yohanan Friedmann argued persuasively, these concepts were adopted from medieval Islam but transcended their earlier meaning through Ghulam Ahmad’s interpretations.\(^8\) The Mirza’s most moderate claim was to be the *mujaddid* (renewer of Islam). Numerous Muslim leaders earlier had claimed or were awarded the title and now Ghulam Ahmad claimed the title for himself. He pointed out that the *hadith* predicted the appearance of the centennial *mujaddid* and they indeed appeared at the expected times. While the *mujaddid* had appeared regularly since the emergence of Islam, nobody claimed the title on the eve of the fourteenth century A.H. (which started on November 12, 1882). His most controversial modification of the classical concept, however, was his idea that there was an affinity between the *mujaddid* and the Prophet.\(^9\)

Much more central to Ghulam Ahmad’s world remains the idea of *masih mauwud* (Promised Messiah). Both the Christian and Islamic traditions followed the idea that Jesus had been alive in heaven since his mission on earth had ended and would descend for another (final?) performance at the end of time. While the comparison between the living Jesus and the deceased Muhammad

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\(^7\) See further on these polemics: Lavan, Polemics and conflict.

\(^8\) Friedmann, *Prophecy continues*.

\(^9\) In a similar way, Ghulam Ahmad treated the less conventional claim to be a *muhaddath*, a person spoken to by Allah or an angel. The classical *hadith* was the authority that provided legitimacy for Ghulam Ahmad’s use of the title but, like with his treatment of the concept of *mujaddid*, he transformed a personality of limited importance in
had been used in Christian polemics against Islam since medieval times, Ghulam Ahmad turned it all around (as he regularly did) to counter Christian arguments. Accordingly nearly the whole of his apologetic is built up with the object of proving himself to be the fulfillment of the ‘second coming’ of Christ. As such, he undermined the Christian view of Jesus and introduced substantial changes into some prevalent Muslim beliefs concerning him, like claiming to possess Jesus’ spirit and power and to be the Promised Messiah for both Christians and Muslims. Moreover, Ghulam Ahmad reconciled the idea of resembling the Christian Messiah with that character of violence and blood, the mahdi, by declaring that traditions speaking of the mahdi as a man of violence were all forgeries and the ‘rightly guided one’ was to be a man of peace.10

What remains crucial in this criticism from pious lay leaders towards the state of contemporary Punjabi society is the fact that reformers came to echo many of the missionaries’ criticisms of South Asian society (like for example, idol worship, priestly domination, child marriages, purdah and the degradation of widows). Furthermore, that they for the first time organized themselves into voluntary movements. Goals were stated in purposive rather than terms of creed. Reformers became preoccupied with technical and financial questions and rules were created to bring order into the patterns of behaviour for community members in- and outside their modern disciplinary institutions. Like for the Christian missionaries, ‘education’ became the keyword and accordingly Punjabi reformers established educational institutions wherein they could prepare their brethren for the future and make them aware of their past. Individuals

10 And yet Ghulam Ahmad was not satisfied with the role he saw for himself in the world, for towards the end of his life he also claimed to be an incarnation (avatar) of Vishnu, Krishna. The claim, however, was found so offensive even to his closest followers that they quietly dropped it. Also he had argued earlier that Sikh Guru Nanak
(including women) were encouraged in speech and countless 'how to behave' manuals to cultivate personalities based on moderation and relentless self-control. Undoubtedly all this was boosted through the rapidly emerging 'print culture'. Most Punjabi reformers set up their own printing presses which not only made possible the cheap production of texts but also furthered 'standardization', while the wider availability of both indigenous and European texts encouraged the development of new intellectual combinations.

After the death of Dayanand Saraswati, the Arya Samaj went through some of its most important institutional developments. Arya Samajists sought to honour their departed teacher through the foundation of a school that would impart his Vedic Hinduism. Plans were drafted for its establishment, the Anglo-Vedic trust and management society was set up to raise funds and in 1886 the (first) Dayanand Anglo-Vedic school was opened in Lahore with Lala Hans Raj (1864-1938) as headmaster. The school became a college affiliated to the Punjab University, where a curriculum was taught similar to the government schools but without government support or the participation of Englishmen on the faculty. But as the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic college was a Muslim saint on the basis of a cloak (embroidered with the Muslim creed and the opening chapter of the Quran) found in a village in Gurdaspur village and which supposedly belonged to the Guru.

11 Still in 1886 Indian headmasters were few. The headmaster of the Anglo-Oriental Muslim school in Aligarh for example was British, even though the avowed intention of the institution was to reconcile Muslims to the study of English and Western science. Hence the College was, as Wilfred Cantwell Smith put it, 'distinguishable from a Christian missionary college only by the substitution of Islam for Christianity as the religious extra' in Modern Islam, 14. Lala Hans Raj, nonetheless, was the first Indian to assume the headmastership of a high school under purely Indian management.

12 See Lal Chand, Rules and bye-laws for the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic college society and managing committee and the rules and regulations for the management of the boarding house attached to the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic high school, Lahore 1888. In fact, the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic trust and management society not only was the first centralizing organization within the Samaj but also gained control of a significant pool of capital well before the development of Punjabi banking. Though this body of power, wealth and prestige included representatives from many branch Samajes, it remained dominated by Lahori Arya Samajists and the subsequent foundation of a
progressed from a set of ideals to their concrete expression, earlier organizational developments were followed (as common to most reform movements) by internal tensions and by 1893 the Arya Samaj was formally divided. Pandit Gurudatta (1826-1890) led one party and for him the movement first of all was a religious experience, i.e. Dayanand a rishi and his *Satyarth Prakash* (Light of truth) a text that had to be taken literally and could not be questioned. Hence he wanted the college to focus on the study of Sanskrit and the Vedic scriptures. When this proved to be impossible, he and others such as Pandit Lekh Ram (1858-1897) and Lala Munshi Ram (1856-1926) gained control over most of the local Arya Samajes, the Punjab Arya Pratinidhi Sabha and, importantly, started to emphasize proselytism and preaching. The other group of Arya Samajists, who solely saw Dayanand as a great reformer, concentrated on the managing committee and the college. They established rival local organizations and in 1903 founded the Arya Pradeshi Pratinidhi Sabha as their own provincial representative body. Overall, Anglo-vernacular education, safe from non-Hindu influence, but still relevant to government careers, remained their primary cause. Not that Gurudatta’s Aryas did neglect education, on the contrary, in the 1890s they founded an educational institution strictly for girls: the Kanya Mahavidyalay. Moreover, Gurudatta’s dream of a school system modeled after the ancient Hindu Universities survived his death and in 1902 the Gurukul Kangri opened in Haridwar as a school where students would follow a life of celibacy, discipline, and Vedic learning (with Munshi Ram as its manager and moral guide).13 By 1912, the two wings of the Arya Samaj had founded one

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college, eight Gurukuls, sixteen high schools and a large number of middle and primary schools. Already for some time then also Arya Samajists were influential partners of Hindus and Sikhs in public institutions such as the Punjab National Bank and the Bharat Insurance Company.

From the beginning, the Amritsar Singh Sabha clearly was a modern voluntary association. It had a constitution, a managing committee and arranged regular elections. As it expanded, different kinds of functionaries were appointed. The Sabha came together regularly and produced income- and expenditure-records as well as annual reports. To provide a central organization for all Singh Sabhas, the Amritsar Khalsa Diwan was established in 1883. It included around thirty-six different Singh Sabhas, including the Lahore association. Yet also this effort at unity did not last long. In 1886 the Lahore Singh Sabha created its own Khalsa Diwan. Only the Sabhas of Faridkot, Amritsar, and Rawalpindi allied with the original Diwan, the rest turned to the more fanatic Lahori lay leaders. However, despite the differences in membership, ideology and programs between the two Diwans, they did cooperate (supported by the colonial government) in establishing a Sikh College. Meetings were organized telling Sikhs that the Arya Samaj had its institutions to teach Sanskrit and the Vedas; the Muslims had made the provision for the teaching of Arabic and the Quran in Aligarh; but the Sikhs had no institution for the study of Gurmukhi and the Granth Sahib. A decision was issued from the Golden Temple, requesting each Sikh to give a tenth of his income for the College project and in 1899 Khalsa College was established in Amritsar (which is still impressive today, being built, like many official buildings at that time, in
Indo-Saracenic architectural style). By 1900 there were almost a hundred Singh Sabhas and related societies scattered across the Punjab most of them allied to the Lahore Diwan.¹⁴

Meanwhile leadership shifted and Sikh leaders once again attempted to unite the diverse organizations through the foundation of the Amritsar Chief Khalsa Diwan in 1902. Only twenty-nine of the then existing 150 Singh Sabhas agreed to join this organization, which nonetheless became the major spokesman for the Sikhs. It mobilized financial and human resources and founded institutions. According to its ideology, Sikhism was a separate tradition with its own rituals and history. The Sikh identity was defined stricter than ever before, as only *amrit-dhari* Sikhs could become members. The Chief Khalsa Diwan further promised to cultivate loyalty to the Crown, to safeguard Sikh rights vis-à-vis other communities and to fight for adequate representation of Sikhs in governmental services. Between 1890 and 1910, about a dozen Singh Sabha allied associations were founded like the Gurmat Granth Pracharak Sabha of Amritsar (publishing society), Gurmat Granth Sudharak Sabha of Lahore (reformist association), Khalsa Tract Society, Central Khalsa Orphanage, Punjab and Sind Bank, Khalsa Pracharak Vidyalay (missionary college) and, most importantly, from 1908 onwards, the Sikh Education Conference, which came together every year to take stock of the progress of literacy in the community and collect money to build schools.

Though in reality each Arya Samaj and Singh Sabha tended to mirror the concerns and personalities of local lay leaders, at least in theory each regarded itself as the representative of the respective communities. What (in spite of rivalries) held these essentially different groups and institutions together, was a developing sense of a distinct identity, including an image of the past.

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¹⁴ The Bhasaur Singh Sabha led by Teja Singh was the most fanatic in propagating the Tat Khalsa ideals. See further: McLeod, *Sikhs of the Khalsa*, 173-177.
and a vision of the future. Moreover, as to be expected, voluntary movements like these were characterized by enthusiast participation, especially from those who joined them straight from the colleges and were extremely willing and without any inquiries.15 Yet at the same time all this was part of the newly emerging modes of 'communication', expressing 'moral' indignation on behalf of ideas that often remained misty. As such, for example, both Arya Samajists and Singh Sabhaites declared caste either wrong, or of no consequence, for both caste mattered. In the case of the Singh Sabhaites Khatris and Aroras heavily influenced a Panth consisting largely of Jats. The Arya Samaj then consisted largely of Khatris and to a lesser degree Aroras. Otherwise, in general, one followed strategies of compromise and flexibility, as propagating specific rules or defending precise answers to controversial questions would have alienated both financial support and manpower. Accordingly also there were limits on the interpretation of the Hindu and Sikh traditions as serious questioning of certain texts, rituals or values could mean ostracism, personal attacks and, moreover, an end to British patronage. For without doubt there was a shared view among Punjabi reformers of how personal or institutional struggles related to British authority. Accepting the official view of the government as the ma-bap, the parental source of justice and patronage, reformers emphasized 'their own loyalty and attachment to the Raj, while simultaneously tarring opponents as “seditious” or “trouble-making”.'16 Supposedly, British

15 Hence also it did not come as a surprise when over time these voluntary movements confronted the British and later governments in South Asia. For as Owen Chadwick put it: ‘Though religion is important to government, it does not value excess of religion. It is happy with general morality, reasonable and moderate, but is uncomfortable with too much enthusiasm’ in The secularization of the European mind, 117.

16 Barrier, Sikh politics, 169.
allies would be protected and given aid (land, financial support, quotas and so on), ‘whereas opponents would be injured by government fiat’. 17

Compared to the Arya Samaj and Singh Sabhas, the Ahmadiyah movement was much smaller and, initially, more locally based in the birthplace of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the little town of Qadian in rural Gurdaspur. 18 Nonetheless it clearly showed the features of a modern voluntary association. Soon after its establishment a middle school was established in Qadian but education especially was vigorously pushed forward later through the Anglo-vernacular high school: it contained about four hundred students in all grades and was affiliated to the Punjab University. Qadiyan also had a madrassah for the study of Arabic and the Quran, which turned out missionaries (like was done after Partition, until the Pakistan government forbade them to do so, at the madrassah in Rabwah). Subsequently, primary schools were opened in other districts and to propagate their version of Islam further a-field, the movement started to publish its first periodicals: the Urdu weeklies al-Hakam (1897) and Badr (1902), and the Review of Religions (since 1902 in English and Urdu). Particularly important to the movement was Ghulam Ahmad’s al-Wasiyah or The Will (1906) in which he made clear how the movement was to be organized after his death. Hence, for example, the institution of the Khalifah as elected spiritual successor to the

17 Ibid.
18 Though Qadian was looted and sacked after Partition, a few hundred Ahmadiyahs remained there to take care of the former headquarters (now reduced to a small part of town). After Partition, many Ahmadiyahs settled down in Rabwah near Chiniot in Pakistani Punjab. Initially the influence of most famous Ahmadiyah Zafurrullah Khan (who later would be president of the International Court of Justice in The Hague in the Netherlands) postponed persecution of Ahmadiyahs there, but after the 1975 declaration in Mecca of Ahmadiyahs being non-Islamic, the Pakistani government started to persecute them. Subsequently, not only many Ahmadiyahs drifted back to Qadian but, more importantly, the Khalifah moved to London which can be taken as the movement’s headquarters ever since.
founder was agreed upon, while the initiation ceremony or baiat was decentralized and thus no longer the exclusive prerogative of the leader. 19

To finance the goals of the movement heavy taxes were imposed on Ahmadiyah members, who cheerfully paid ever since. As such, for example, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad made it obligatory for members of the community to donate a part of their income to the movement. In al-Wasiyah, Ahmad also had pleaded for the establishment of a behishti maqbara (celestial cemetery) in Qadiyan. Those who wanted to be buried there had to pay contribution and leave at least one tenth of their property to a specific anjuman, turning the graveyard into an instrument for long-term funding (it is still there, though financially the larger cemetery in Rabwah is more important now). The money collected then was to be spent:

On the propagation of Islam, on spreading knowledge of the Holy Quran and other religious scriptures, and on preachers appointed to administer to the spiritual needs of the movement and mankind in general... In these funds there shall also be a share for the orphans, the needy, and the new converts who may not have adequate means of livelihood while they are members of the movement. And it shall be permissible that the funds should be strengthened by investing them in some profitable enterprise. 20

19 When Ghulam Ahmad decided to accept baiat in 1889 he meant it in the way it was done to a Khalifah in Sunni Islam. Although Ahmad received revelations and won followers through his charismatic preaching and writing, he never claimed, as one perhaps would expect in the Punjab case, to be a Sufi Pir.
20 Ahmad, The Will, 40-43.
To take care of community dealings, two crucial anjumans were founded over time (the first by Ghulam Ahmad and the second by the first Khalifah Nur al-Din, who was one of Ahmad’s earliest supporters and confidents). A central committee, the Sadr Anjuman-i-Ahmadiyah (with members appointed for life), looked after the executive and educational necessities of the community, while the Society for the advancement of Islam, the Anjuman Taraqqi Islam, took care mainly of missionary activities.

Though based in rural Qadiyan, the Ahmadiyah movement did not differ much from the Arya Samaj and Singh Sabhas in terms of lay leadership. Like the other two movements, the Ahmadiyah community had a bipolar character from the beginning. Roughly the teachings of Ghulam Ahmad first appealed to affluent Muslims but especially later also attracted people among the illiterate poor. Among the literates were doctors, attorneys, landowners and businessmen, who generally remained somewhat aloof from the growing number of poor rural members. Again comparable to what happened to both the Arya Samaj and Singh Sabha movements, after the death of Nur al-Din, the Ahmadiyah movement was divided into two factions in 1914: the Qadiyani and the Lahori. The most crucial issues for this split were about the institution of the Khalifah as community leader and the fact that Lahori Ahmadiyahs took themselves as not so different as the Qadiyani faction from mainstream Sunni Islam. Undoubtedly of great importance here was article published a few years earlier by the second Khalifah, Mahmud Ahmad, in which he declared that all non-Ahmadiyah Muslims were kafirs (heathens).21

Criticisim of tradition and society propagated through modern disciplinary institutions and practices were the distinct characteristics of Punjabi lay leaders in the emerging public sphere.

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Not that these lay leaders took over traditional leadership overnight, on the contrary, that never happened and especially the early histories of Singh Sabhas, Arya Samaj and Ahmadiyahs remain full of negotiations and confrontations between the old and new spokesmen. It is interesting, for example, that the Arya Samaj managed to achieve in barely fifteen months on several fronts (including a new ideology, organization and membership) what the Amritsar Singh Sabha had failed to attain in six years. The explanation for this then is that the men behind the Amritsar Singh Sabha were part of the traditional elite, while the Arya Samaj attracted both Hindus and Sikhs who already felt much more comfortable in the public sphere. Otherwise the success and growth of the Arya Samaj in the Punjab obviously was the result of the specific ‘colonial culture’ with its ever-growing subculture of public men. All in all, the fast changing circumstances made clear to Punjabi lay leaders that ‘rational’ choices were to be made. Criticizing contemporary tradition and society much in the same way as Christian missionaries, they spoke of going back to and revive the Golden Age when their tradition still was ‘pure’. Also reformers organized themselves into voluntary movements, registered with the colonial government and began all sorts of modern disciplinary institutions and practices. By doing this, importantly, they tacitly accepted some essential assumptions of the ‘civilizing mission’, whatever the anti-colonial rhetoric later. Again like the Christian missionaries, reformers increasingly stressed the importance of ‘education’ as a cure for all diseases and that the masses of society needed moral and physical ‘improvement’. Likewise, importantly, Arya Samajists, Singh Sabhaites and Ahmadiyahs retreated into their respective communities to redefine doctrine, conduct and rite, creating ‘moral languages’ stressing employment of human will in disciplining mind and body on the way.
2. Defining doctrine, conduct and rite

Although the understanding of 'faith' as popularized since the Protestant Reformation through the idea of Sola Fide always has been a starting point within the Christian tradition, this notion never was essential to non-Western traditions. Instead, 'conduct' in accordance with traditional law and ritual made up the most crucial aspect of, for example, the greater traditions of Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism. What is more, opposed to the Reformatory tradition of Sola Scriptura, this 'conduct' not necessarily had to be traceable in some scripture. Nonetheless, many things changed in the non-Western world following the interaction with Western (Christian) ideas, opening up new 'rational' ways of looking at one's own tradition and, continuously, transforming the texture of 'tradition' in society. Increasingly, leading Singh Sabhaites, Swami Dayanand Saraswati and Mirza Ghulam Ahmad appealed to tradition in a Reformatory way, by picking out concepts and changing their meanings into new contextual terminology. Sacred works were central to the project: the Granth Sahib for the Singh Sabhaites, the Vedas for Dayanand and the Quran for Ghulam Ahmad. For indeed something new happened during the nineteenth century in terms of 'rationality', as an increasing amount of lay leaders claimed their public 'right' to study and comment upon these works. While scriptural commentary earlier was regarded (much like what nowadays is called post-modern) as an esoteric venture and intellectual subtlety, for the reformers conceptual clarity seemed to be the ultimate goal.

Following the establishment of the Amritsar Singh Sabha, some elitist Sikhs began to perceive their tradition anew and, consequently, the codification of morality, which earlier had no
definite shape, attained fixed form. They ‘rationally’ construed the rahit-namas (manuals of Rahit principles) within a far narrower framework, eliminating Hindu elements and ‘superstition’.\footnote{The word Rahit derives from rahana, to live, and remains a crucial word within the Sikh tradition meaning the code of belief and discipline to be obeyed by Khalsa members. Since the eighteenth century Sikhs often attempted to write down the Khalsa way of life in manuals called rahit-namas. See further: McLeod, Sikhs of the Khalsa.} The goal of the Singh Sabha reformers was to write down for once and for all the right way of conduct, supposedly restoring the Rahit to its ‘pure’ form as delivered to the Panth by Guru Gobind Singh. Obviously this was a complicated process but, ultimately, Sikh leaders agreed in 1945 upon one version, the Sikh Rahit Maryada, published in 1950 under the patronage of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). Moreover, Singh Sahaites turned towards the important task of reinterpreting the Granth Sahib. It was argued that the latter contained the Sikh way of life and as such was authoritative. Hence, in hindsight, the Sikh tradition started with a human Guru, continued during a period of duality in which there were human Gurus and a collection of sacred writings and ever since the Singh Sabha movement a situation wherein the Granth Sahib is authoritative. Influenced by the studies of European (missionary) scholars, commentaries on the scripture came up for the first time in the Sikh tradition. Singh Sahaites aimed to establish the strict moral meaning of scriptural word or phrase in terms that were principally Tat Khalsa. Especially it was stressed that these meanings were independent of Hindu learning.

While in theory (but not in practice) Singh Sahaites rejected the caste system and rituals performed simply for the sake of spiritual purification, they produced a vast amount of polemical literature arguing that ritualism originated from Hinduism and was untrue to the Tat Khalsa.
Liberation could not be reached merely through ceremonial acts. Instead, they argued that the Granth Sahib could perform all the functions not only of traditional religious experts but also of exorcists and other popular healers. Hence, when in emergency, an individual was to turn to this sacred repository, while each verse was endowed (like a mantra or incantation) with special power. This changing perception of the Granth is reflected for example also in one novel by leading Singh Sabhaite and most well-known Sikh author, Bhai Vir Singh (1872-1957). In *Baba Naudh Singh* (first serialized from 1917 to 1921 and subtitled A study in moral and spiritual awakening), a reading from the Sikh scripture leads to the desired objective of stopping incessant rainfall. In fact, Vir Singh's novels *Sundri* (1898), *Bijay Singh* (1900), *Satwant Kaur* (1900) and *Baba Naudh Singh* generally propagated Tat Khalsa ideals. They were very popular during the first decades of the twentieth century and in them Sikhs could read about the right Sikh code of conduct. Accordingly also the repeated emphasis on the initiation rite and the five K's in these novels and the Singh Sabha literature in general succeeded in turning initiation into the most salient of the Sikh rites de passage. Something more or less similar took place among the Arya Samajists and Ahmadiyahs through the introduction of respectively the Ten principles and the *baiat*. Indeed, importantly, opposed to what is commonly thought, it was only with the Singh Sabha reformation that the five K's became part of the *Rahit*:

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23 Bhai Vir Singh went to the Church Mission high school in Amritsar. He started his career with the Khalsa Tract Society, which propagated Singh Sabha ideas, acquired a majority share in the publishing house Wazir-i-Hind (which published all his novels) and managed the journal, *Khalsa Samachar*.


25 Oberoi, *The construction*, 332-333. The five K's are *Kesh* (uncut hair), *Kangha* (comb), *Kara* (steel bangle), *Kirpan* (sword or dagger) and *Kach* (breeches).
Guru Gobind Singh did not include them in his instructions at the founding of the Khalsa; they do not appear during the following century and three quarters; and they make their appearance only when Singh Sabha reformers were convinced that the Guru must have introduced them.26

On the whole, an all out campaign was launched to abolish the so-called Hindu customs and replace them with strictly defined Tat Khalsa rites de passage. Between 1884 and 1915 at least twenty-four manuals were produced to decide what sort of life cycle rituals (most of them on marriage) should be performed.27 In order to encourage the acceptance of these changed rituals, they were published in the leading Sikh newspapers. What initially were changes introduced by a small minority thus gradually came to be accepted by the Sikh public at large. The controversy generated over the passage of the Anand Marriage Act remains crucial to the process. At the turn of the century a growing number of Sikhs performed their marriage ceremony according to the newly defined Singh Sabha norm. Yet it suddenly became clear to the Singh Sabhaites that this mode of marriage had no legal recognition, as until then Sikhs officially were supposed to have Hindu weddings. This led to endless problems over the status of children, distribution of wealth and inheritance. The government, however, was so much impressed by the support that was given by the Sikh community to the Singh Sabhaites that in 1909 the Anand Marriage Act was passed in the Imperial Legislative Council.28 It states that all Sikh marriages conducted according to the Anand marriage ceremony (requiring couples to walk round the Guru Granth Sahib instead

26 McLeod, Sikhs of the Khalsa, 204.
27 Oberoi, The construction, 339.
of a Hindu sacred fire) should be recognized as valid from the day of their solemnization as well as giving it legal status for the future.\(^9\)

In 1925 the Tat Khalsa ideology gained somewhat more ground when the Gurdwara Act placed the management of Sikh shrines in the hands of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). Then in 1931 a meeting was held at the Golden Temple where it was decided to draw up a code to regulate individual and community life. Singh Sabha laymen like Teja Singh, Bhai Vir Singh, Jodh Singh and Bhai Kahn Singh (who assisted Max Arthur Macauliffe in his study of the Sikh tradition and unlike most Singh Sabhaites was a *Jat*) were present and influential. Subsequently in 1945 the *Rehat Maryada* (a guide to the Sikh way of life) was approved by the SGPC, being a crucial landmark within the whole process of defining the Sikh tradition since the establishment of the Amritsar Singh Sabha. In it, a Sikh was strictly defined. How one should behave as individual and community member; what and where one should study and sing; what one should not say about the tradition in the *gurdwara*; which rites de passage should be followed; and (indeed like within the Arya Samaj and Ahmadiyah communities) what kind of community service should be performed.

Much more ardently than the Singh Sabhaites, Dayanand Saraswati opposed contemporary Hindu practices from within. His thinking took a crucial turn after his visit to Calcutta in 1872 when he gave up the dress of a mendicant and started to speak in Hindi instead of Sanskrit to reach a wider audience. Calcutta had confronted him with the world of reform. There he saw how the Brahmo Samajists propagated their ideas to the public through institutions, public speeches, numerous writings and how they compared Hindu practices with those of other traditions as well.

\(^9\) Ibid., *From ritual*, 152-153.
as Western reason and Christianity. His main ideas were published for the first time in 1875 in the *Satyarth Prakash* and it has been argued these ideas were very similar to those propagated in *Brahmo dharm* by Debendranath Tagore.30 In the *Satyarth Prakash*, Dayanand worked out his concept of true Vedic Hinduism and condemned all that he thought to be false, i.e. all non-Vedic versions of Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. He further argued (indeed like Europeans since the eighteenth century) that Sanskrit was the mother of all languages and generally stressed the importance of education.

Looking at his ideas, however, the Swami (like the Singh Sahaites) clearly was not a great ‘theologian’. His personal life reflected that he was more interested in the struggles of man than in the mysteries of God. Initially he was devoted to reaching *moksha* but later he devoted his life to the regeneration of *Arya varta* (Aryan land).31 In fact, the Swami (probably partly because of his *Shaivite* background) had imprinted on his mind the idea of a personal God, which after discussions with Christian missionaries and his stay in Calcutta developed into a clear doctrine of monotheism. Crucial also remain Dayanand’s ideas about the Vedas and their relation to God. He adopted the view that ‘true’ religion must come directly from God in the definite form of a book and combined this with the dogma of the superiority of Vedic Hinduism. He believed that God revealed ‘truth’ in the Vedas, which therefore constituted the only real divine revelation. All other sacred Hindu books as well as the ‘scriptures’ of other traditions merely were man’s imperfect efforts. It was the first time in Hindu tradition that this concept of revelation was found.

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29 Earlier, the founder of the Nirankaris, Baba Dayal Das, revived the practice of marrying in the presence of the Granth Sahib.
30 Jordens, *Dayananda Sarasvati*, 79-81. Interestingly, the Punjab government temporarily banned the work because of the offensive reference to the Prophet Muhammad.
31 Ibid., 278.
Dayanand's limited concept of 'true' religion as one of the final word, undoubtedly was inspired by the way Protestants viewed the Bible (and probably too a lesser extent, Muslims the Quran). Even so, he went further than any Christian fundamentalist probably would dare, by claiming that the Vedas contained the totality of all knowledge: spiritual, moral, social, political and scientific!

As said earlier, while he believed in the total separation of God and the human soul, Dayanand greatly emphasized the moral stature and responsibility of man, whose salvation was to be achieved by nothing else than his own works. Action through reason was the basic duty of anyone reaching out for moksha and, accordingly, Aryas stressed personal virtue and the performance of good works. All this then was to be regulated by the law of karma, an inexorably just law that man never escaped from, not even in moksha! Although this law was to be executed by God, he never interfered with the laws of nature, for both these laws were perfect from the beginning. For Dayanand, freedom, activity and involvement in the world constituted the basic pursuit of man and in relation to this he stated in the Satyarth Prakash:

He is called a free-agent who has the body, the vital forces, the senses and the mind subordinate to his will. If the soul were not a free-agent it would not reap the fruits of its deeds -good or bad... In other words, the soul is a free-agent in so far as the performance of deeds is concerned but it has to submit to divine laws in the matter of suffering pain and misery for its sins.34

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32 Ibid., 279-280.
33 Ibid., 282.
No other Hindu ‘theologian’ had elevated human will to such a rank in the scale of human effort, far above the powers of ritualism, the raptures of mysticism or the effectiveness of devotional love as common for example in the bhakti tradition. Parallel to his ideas on the freedom of human will, Dayanand developed the concept of dharm or the duties man has to perform to achieve his worldly fulfillment. He elevated man to a position of complete freedom and responsibility. Stressing moral action (dharmachar), every individual had to live a morally good life, self-controlled, always active and in search of knowledge, governed by reason and duly assessed by the law of divine justice and reward. Although he argued that the state had to be the guardian of dharm, the state’s effectiveness depended on the righteousness of all its members, from the ruler to the common man. Compared to earlier interpretations, this earthly exposition of dharm no doubt brought Dayanand into confrontation with the caste system.

To affirm their position within the larger Hindu tradition, Arya Samajists (like their Sikh counterparts) created their own rites de passage. To preach change meant little when no birth, death or marriage ceremony could be performed outside the world of orthodoxy. Accordingly, Saraswati’s Sanskar Vidhi (1877) provided Aryas with the five principal sacred practices to be observed everyday and sixteen life cycle rituals, beginning with conception and ending with cremation. Arya replacement of life cycle ceremonies not only threatened existing beliefs, yet at the same time struck at the economic position of the Brahmans, as Arya ceremonies did not employ them but were conducted by Arya pandits or even, though not often, Samaj laymen instead. Generally Arya rituals were practical and could be performed without having to spend

34 Saraswati, Light of truth, 221.
35 Jordens, Dayananda Sarasvati, 282.
too much money, while emphasizing the ‘pure’ and simple Vedic rites, without elaborate rituals common in the Hindu tradition or the fireworks and dancing girls found at more popular meetings.\textsuperscript{37} 

By definition a good prophet is a bad ‘theologian’, as he speaks in inspiration and rapture without putting his ideas together in a clear system. Yet, though most of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad’s ideas concern prophetology, he also had some thoughts on conduct or \textit{adab}. This is crucial since in Islam ‘conduct’ in accordance with the body of rules of the \textit{shariat} (worked out through the discipline of \textit{fiqh}) remains a sine qua non of salvation.\textsuperscript{38} However, instead of following interpretations of the \textit{hadith}, Ghulam Ahmad (resembling Singh Sabhaites and Dayanand Saraswati) argued that this ‘conduct’ had to be strictly traceable in the Quran:

The movements of our soul depend upon those of our body and if the body is drawn in any direction the soul must follow... The Holy Quran has, therefore, applied itself abundantly to the reformation of the physical state of man’s life. It gives us the most valuable and minute directions on all matters of importance with which man is concerned. All his movements, the manner of the satisfaction of all his requirements, his family, social and general connections, health and sickness, are all regulated by rules and it is shown how external order and purity have their effect upon the spiritual state of man.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 284.
\textsuperscript{37} Jones, \textit{Arya dharm}, 94–103.
\textsuperscript{38} Baljon, \textit{Modern Muslim Koran interpretation}, 83.
\textsuperscript{39} Ahmad, \textit{The philosophy of Islam}, 13. It was first read in December 1896 as a paper entitled The sources of divine knowledge by one of Ghulam Ahmad’s followers at the Conference of religions in Lahore and later often
Throughout the history of Islam, the Quran of course had proclaimed its moral authority on the basis of its being the very word of God (for in Islam God revealed himself not in any historical personage but in a book). Yet what Ghulam Ahmad did was following a specific mode of thinking which would be increasingly common within modern Quran interpretation. As J.M.S. Baljon put it:

In the writings of the modern Quran expositors one meets sundry objections against the classic interpreters, serving as favoured grounds for justification for adding one more commentary to the hundreds existing. First and foremost we find the postulate of the Reformation that everybody is allowed to reflect on the purparts of the Holy book.40

Hence, as an example of how Mirza Ghulam Ahmad interpreted the moral values contained in the Quran, more than half of his Islami usul ki falasafi (1905) is devoted to religious 'conduct'. In it, Ghulam Ahmad stressed that:

Faith without deeds is useless, and good deeds not actuated by faith are mere show. The Islamic paradise is a true representation of the faith and good deeds of this world. Every man's paradise is an image of what he has done here below. It does not come from without but grows from within a man himself. It is his own faith and his own good deeds

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reprinted in English under the above title and The teachings of Islam (subtitled A solution of five fundamental religious problems from the Muslim point of view).

40 Baljon, Modern Muslim Koran interpretation, 16.
that make the form of a paradise for him to live in and its delight is tasted in this very life.41

Accordingly also he advocated the importance of knowledge through experience:

We are told that our morals are not actually formed unless they are proved by sufferings and trials which stand to them in the relation of practice to knowledge... Knowledge which is at its best in practice is a source of blessings, but that which never passes into the domain of the practical has no value.42

No doubt these ideas were central to the world of nineteenth century reform, both within Islamic and other traditions, but Ghulam Ahmad's ideas especially have to be seen in the wider context of modern Muslim Koran interpretation. The noun 'aql, for example, was used with growing frequency in the sense of 'rationality' in many places within the nineteenth century Islamic world.43

Undoubtedly, as a result of the confrontation with the West, it referred to what came to be known as the 'greater' jihad or the 'unceasing effort to discriminate the boundaries made clear in the Quran and relentless self-control in eschewing excess and living within them'.44

All in all, Singh Sabhaites, Arya Samajists and Ahmadiyahs defined themselves as followers of the Granth Sahib, Vedas and Quran. Crucial here of course remains the inclination to

41 Ahmad, The philosophy of Islam, 8-9.
42 Ibid., 188.
43 Baljon, Modern Muslim Koran interpretation, 21. This very same stress on 'aql or 'rationality' one for example also finds in contemporary works such as Altaf Husain Hali's Musaddas, Nazir Ahmad's 'moral' tales and Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi's Bihisti Zewar, all of which will be dealt with later.
44 Metcalf, (ed.), Moral conduct, 10.
‘rationality’ and the increasing number of commentaries by ‘lay leaders’ on these works. As a result, importantly, these ‘scriptures’ became eternal referents of transcendence and as such the colonial interaction (and that with Protestant evangelicals in particular) caused them to loose their implicit normative functions. On the basis of their ‘scriptures’, reformers explicitly made clear, what one had to do, where one was coming from and was heading for. Nothing exceeded their ideas and experiences, for they were utterly sovereign subjects who could define themselves while absorbing ‘the other’, even if this meant a denial of transcendence. For indeed, often not even God escaped the ‘rationality’ of the reformers, while the ‘moral imperative’ they followed existed less because God commanded it than because they ‘willed’ it,\(^\text{45}\) integrating, as Jan Heesterman put it, ‘the mundane and the transcendent into one explosive reality’.

Personal standards in ethics and worship were ‘rationally’ enjoined, so that religious life became more congruent with a more mobile and urbanized society. Complex customary observations of funerals and marriages tied to specific times and places were de-emphasized and instead an internalized religion of individual responsibility was propagated.\(^\text{47}\) Hence, similar to the ‘this-worldly-asceticism’ of the European Reformation as argued by Max Weber, Singh Sabhaites, Arya Samajists and Ahmadiyahs sought to control the flux of the contemporary world with Puritanism and restraint. The ultimate cause of the present was attributed to one’s own individual moral corruption and therefore salvation was a personal and internal struggle, a feat of will.\(^\text{48}\)

Alternatively, the fact that more and more people claimed the ‘right’ to participate in the

\(^{45}\) Robinson, Islam and Muslim separatism, 99.


\(^{48}\) Robinson, Islam and Muslim separatism, 99.
redefinition of tradition, brings us to the relationship between ‘rationality’ and the growing authority of Western science.

3. The authority of Western science

Over centuries the Vedas were transmitted first orally and, subsequently, both in terms of archive as well as in language used, on the basis of some unorganized manuscripts. Hence when Europeans in eighteenth century South Asia found themselves wondering whether the Vedas really existed since no one seemed ever to have seen or known a copy of them, they were often told by Brahmins: ‘Veda is whatever pertains to religion; Veda is not books’. The case of the Sikhs was somewhat more organized. They considered the Granth Sahib as their sacred work. Yet when in 1859 the Punjab government instituted a program to preserve and translate an authentic version of it, finding copies was difficult: ‘the original copy was in the possession of one family, but after intense negotiations, that Granth was copied, and the manuscript shipped to the India Office’. Much indeed changed when Europeans started to translate and comment upon Indian sacred works. Their Protestant notion of scripture, as it were, set a precedent in replacing the scripture-tradition pair (Quran-Sunnah, Sruti-Smṛti, Granth Sahib-Gurus) with a Sola Scriptura proposal that was more or less followed by many since Ram Mohan Roy, including as discussed above the Singh Sabhaites, Arya Samajists and Ahmadiyahs. Crucial to the process was the body of Western Orientalist knowledge of Indian traditions, while in general Western

49 Barrier, In search of identity, 4.
science increasingly became authoritative and often worked as a catalyst in the process of redefinition.

Overall the acceptance of the authority of Western science and technology rested upon its functionalism: it worked, both mind and machine. The valid conclusions of science, the sphere of the empirically demonstrable, finally enforced its claims of acceptance, regardless of cultural origins. Science and technology indeed posed few problems for traditional Indian thinkers: ‘If all truth rested in the scriptures or in the teachings of an inspired master, and if science was itself true, then no contradiction could possibly exist’. Compared to the church in the West it seems Indian traditions were much more able to incorporate science, especially also while the remaining ‘moral’ problem was easy to overcome. For one just incorporated ‘the other’: in the case of the Arya Samaj, for example, through belief in the Hindu origin of science. Accordingly, ‘rational’ polemics emerged through which Indians tried to counter Western scholarship but, ironically, simultaneously, often cited Western works to authorize their points. Or as, leading Arya Samajist and Professor of Physical science at Lahore’s government college, Pandit Gurudatta, described this tension in one of his texts:

If we have purposely avoided mentioning ancient eastern authorities on the subject, it is for the plain reason that that India of the present day derives its intellectual activity, faith, belief and conviction mainly from civilized occidental England. Had we, in the very beginning, culled evidence from the ancient Sanskrit authors just to prove even these very positions literally, there is no doubt that these remarks would have been unhesitatingly
pronounced as superstitions, whimsical, unscientific and old-grown; although, even after
the best evidence from Western authors on the subject has been collected, there is not to
be found that systematic, exhaustive enumeration of evidence which is the characteristic
of a settled or decided opinion.51

Moreover, though ‘rationality’ was taken as syntax for reform to establish firm identities and
‘science’ increasingly became a catchword on the way, in the colonial context the universal
claims of science first had to be represented, imposed and, difficult enough, translated into
vernacular terms.52

Punjabi traditions were described and explained by the British first in travelogues and later
especially in the numerous ethnological descriptions formalized in the District Gazetteers and
Census Reports. As far as the Sikh tradition is concerned, Joseph David Cunningham’s *A history
of the Sikhs* (1849) marks the beginning of the writing of Sikh history. More relevant, however,
were two other works published afterwards: one by German missionary and linguist, Ernest
Trumpp and, more importantly, one by Max Arthur Macauliffe. Trumpp was entrusted by the
India Office with translating the sacred scripture of the Sikhs into English (published in 1877 as
*The Adi Granth or The Holy scripture of the Sikhs*).53 According to him, Sikhism was a sect
whose separation from Hinduism occurred in the post-Guru period and generally was not of
much interest:

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50 Jones, *Socio-religious reform*, 212.
52 Prakash, *Another reason*, Chapter One.
53 Ernest Trumpp was born in 1828. He received a degree in language and linguistics in Tubingen (Germany) and
afterwards passed theological exams. In 1854 he went to Karachi, where he did research sponsored by the Church
The greatest part of the Granth contains a sort of devotional hymn, rather poor in conception, clumsy in style, and wearisome to read... The writings of the old Hindu bhagats (or devotees) are on the whole far superior to those of the Sikh Gurus themselves as regards contents and style, especially those of Kabir from whom Nanak and his successors have borrowed all they know and preach. In fact so much is clearly seen from the Granth itself that the Sikh Gurus taught nothing new whatever, and if a separate religion and a partially new nationality was in course of time sprung from it, this was not owing in any way to the doctrine taught by them, but to their financial and political organizations which they gave their disciples.54

Obviously Trumpp did not endear himself to the Sikhs by insulting remarks like these and others prefacing his translation of the Granth Sahib: ‘With an egotism reflecting his missionary background and rigorous training in linguistics, Trumpp felt he knew more about the meaning of the Sikh scriptures than those who revered them’.55 Hence also he did not work together with Sikhs themselves but instead prepared his translations with the help of Hindu informants and sporadic advice from members of the Anjuman-i-Punjab. Yet, the point is that Trumpp's translation led to responses from the Sikh community and others (like the Arya Samaj) and hence

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Missionary Society and learned several languages. When the India Office contacted him he was lecturing Oriental languages at Tubingen.
54 Trumpp to the Secretary of State for India, January 13, 1874. As cited in: Barrier, *The Sikhs and their literature*, xx.
55 Ibid., *In search of identity*, 5.
opened up the modern discussion about the Sikh tradition. In the wake of his translation, Sikh scholarship took upon itself the task of interpreting the Granth Sahib with vigour and devotion and as such established the foundations of today's Granth Sahib studies. An early key work, later criticized by Singh Sabhaites, was the *Sri Granth Sahib ji Adi Satik* (better known as the Farid-kot Tika). In 1877, Raja Bikram Singh, ruler of the Princely State of Faridkot, commissioned a full-scale commentary on the Granth Sahib in Punjabi. The Faridkot Tika certainly marks a turning point in the history of the delineation of the Sikh tradition, not only as a rebuttal of Trumpp's work but particularly also because through its publication earlier interpretations of the Sikh scripture were categorically superseded.

Opposed to Trumpp, Max Arthur Macauliffe thought it was not right to translate Sikh scriptures without asking the assistance of Sikhs themselves. Macauliffe worked on a translation of the Adi Granth with the help of Sikh scholars from 1893 to 1909 and completed it to the satisfaction of many. Completed sections were circulated for comments and eventually sent to a committee formed by the Amritsar Singh Sabha. Thus, in essence, his work reflected the Tat Khalsa ideology, arguing that Sikhism had been distinct from Hinduism since the time of Guru Nanak. Yet, to conservative Sikhs an English translation was an act of desecration, as it would be carried around like any other book and treated without respect. As a result, Macauliffe had to be satisfied with publishing his monumental *The Sikh religion: It's Gurus, Sacred writings and authors* (1909) instead. By that time, however, the Sikhs already had moved beyond trying to

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56 Indeed, what is often forgotten is that at the time 'many Sikhs agreed with Trumpp's conclusions'. As cited in *Ibid.*, 7.
58 Bhai Hazara Singh was one of the Sikh scholars who helped Macauliffe. He was the maternal grandfather of Bhai Vir Singh, belonged to an illustrious lineage of Amritsar gianis and was a founding-member of the Amritsar Singh Sabha. More importantly, he wrote the Granth Sahib dictionary Macauliffe used and further was
demonstrate the distinctiveness of their tradition through reference to doctrine, conduct and rite and, instead, were far more busy facing the troublesome task of defining the implications of being a Sikh in particular ways and in specific institutional settings.

Though Dayanand Saraswati had been traditionally educated, he often confronted Western reason and Christianity during his life. In fact, the first *Rg-Veda* he ever saw was a copy edited by Max Muller (1823-1910) and in the possession of Reverend J. Robson in Ajmer (1866), while until that time he knew only the *Yajur-Veda*. He often met Christian missionaries, who gave him a copy of the Bible, and he also ordered books from Germany. In Calcutta, he came to know many Brahmo Samajists, visited the Royal Asiatic Society and generally became familiar with modern disciplinary institutions and practices. On his way from Calcutta to Bombay, Dayanand met some British officials in Farrukhabad and Sayyid Ahmad Khan in Aligarh. In Bombay he had many discussions: both with the local elite, which led to the establishment of the Bombay Arya Samaj, and some European scholars. It was shortly hereafter that he started to learn English from a Bengali scholar in order to read Max Muller's translation of the Vedas but he soon gave up. Especially while in the Punjab, Dayanand did his best to keep abreast of what European scholars were publishing and hence most contemporary European (Vedic) scholars are mentioned in his writings during this period.

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Commissioned by the colonial government to translate school textbooks from Urdu into Punjabi. See further: Oberoi, *The construction*, 250-251 and Macauliffe, *The Sikh religion*.

Max Muller, who never went to India and still is much (more than ever in Europe) referred to in South Asia, was a German-born philologist and Orientalist. Commissioned by the East India Company he examined and edited the MSS of the *Rg-Veda* in London for publication, his most important work. Afterwards he was appointed Taylorian Professor of Modern language at Oxford (1854) and Professor of Comparative philology (1868), a subject he did more than anyone else to promote in Britain.

However, probably the best example of an Arya Samajist interacting with Western science during the early decades of the movement remains the earlier mentioned Pandit Gurudatta Vidyarthi. According to him, interpretations of the Vedas by European scholars were false:

It is this want of Vedic scholarship among European scholars, this utter ignorance of the Vedic language and philosophy that is the cause of so much misimpression and prejudice even in our own country. We are, indeed, so often authoritatively told by our fellow-brethren who have received the highest English education, but are themselves entirely ignorant of Sanskrit, that the Vedas are books that teach idol-worship or element-worship, that they contain no philosophical, moral or scientific truths of any great consequence, unless they be the commonest truisms of the kitchen.61

Gurudatta was especially irritated by the respect shown to Max Muller. When in 1895, for example, a debate was held in a north Indian town between Arya Samajists and an orthodox Pandit on the rationality and legitimacy of shraddha (the ritual of ancestor worship) and the two sides could not come to an agreement, they forwarded their argument to Max Muller for arbitration.62

Generally, Vidyarthi argued, European Orientalists misunderstood Vedic Sanskrit grammar. According to Max Muller, for example, certain terms mentioned in the Vedas still were in a fluid state: 'they never appear as appellations nor yet as proper names; they are organic, not yet broken

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61 Vidyarthi, Terminology, 2.
62 Anonymous, Controversy between the Arya Samaj of Wazirabad and Pandit Ganesh, Shastri, on the Shraddha ceremony, with the opinion of F. Max Mueller, Lahore 1896.
or smoothed down'. This made the Pandit furious and once more he made clear the difference between the East and the West by stating that terms occurring in the Vedas could not be taken as nouns as they were yaugika. That is rich in synonyms and conveying a derivative meaning consisting of a reference to 'its root together with the modifications effected by the affixes'. Accordingly, Gurudatta replaced parts of Western translations of the Vedas with his own, which of course were completely different. Whether his translations provided the real meanings of the Sanskrit terms remains irrelevant; the point is that the Vedas were infused with the authority of Western science (though filtered through the vernacular idioms). In the same way, when the Boden Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford's Balliol College and fanatic evangelical, Monier Monier-Williams, was degrading the hymns of the Vedas (like Ernest Trumpp did with the Sikh scripture) as being 'too often marked by tedious repetitions, redundant epithets and far-fetched conceits'. Gurudatta's reply remains typical of how many contemporary Indians approached Western civilization when confronted with its knowledge and achievements:

In Sanskrit there is not to be found that coldness and severe simplicity which characterizes an Englishman's writings. He lives in a climate too cold to admit of Oriental warmth of style. He is surrounded by too severe and simple a civilization in England to admit of the gentle but complex civilization of India. The standard of judgement set upon India differs very much from that set upon England.

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64 Ibid.
65 Ibid., *Fragments*, 1.
66 Ibid.
Characteristic to the emerging mode of 'rational' argumentation also remains the refuting and ridiculing of opponents, in the case of Pandit Gurudatta Vidyarthi to prove the supremacy of the Vedic tradition. When Monier-Williams, for example, argued that the Vedas were 'unwritten' knowledge, as opposed to the revealed 'written knowledge' of the Bible and the Quran, Gurudatta, like other Aryas, emphasized the revealed and infallible nature of the Vedas. Moreover, he started to attack the Western Professor by questioning the overall possibility of 'written' knowledge, while any revelation always involves somebody and thus by definition is 'unwritten' knowledge:

Thus, then, the Bible revelation is also an unwritten knowledge, and Professor Williams cannot in any way free himself from the dilemma that either Bible revelation itself is an unwritten knowledge and in that case does not differ in any way from the revelation of the Vedas which is also unwritten knowledge, or that the Bible is a mere record not felt in consciousness but made to descend just as the Quran descended to Mohammed, Mohammed himself became illiterate, not understanding it but only being specially directed and empowered by God to commit it to writing for the spread of the faith. In this case, the Bible is no more a revelation. It is a mere dead-letter book sent miraculously through people who themselves did not understand it. Can Professor Williams get rid of this difficulty?67

67 Ibid., 7-8.
Obviously, today these are difficult discussions to read and understand. Nonetheless, their importance lies in the fact that they show us how Indian reformers defied Western scholarship, while ‘rationally’ reviving their own tradition at the same time.

Compared to early Singh Sabhaites and Arya Samajists not so much is known about Mirza Ghulam Ahmad’s interactions with Western thought. His stay in Sialkot, however, seems to be the starting-point. There he worked at the law court, most probably learned some English, met Christian missionaries and became acquainted with the ideas of Sayyid Ahmad Khan. Afterwards, Ghulam Ahmad refuted the pro-Western Aligarh position. Not only because of its adherence to natural philosophy (*nacheral filasafi*) but particularly because of its apologetic attitude: 'as if there were anything in Islam that could not hold its own in the face of modern knowledge and science'.68 The other way around, however, Ahmad Khan found the Mirza a fraud. When, for instance, he was told that someone wanted to write a treatise against Ghulam Ahmad, the Sayyid replied:

How did you get the fatal idea to wish to write a treatise against Mirza Ghulam Ahmad?

There’s nothing in this preposterous movement and I shall never take the trouble to write something about the re-appearance of the Messiah which is based on merely forged stories.69

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Also crucial in terms of interaction with Western thought were the Mirza’s meetings with Brahmo and Arya Samajists, which (more than the Christian missionaries) made clear to him the advantages of being organized as a voluntary association, the possibilities of modern printing techniques (though his Barahin-i-Ahmadiyah was published by a Christian press in Amritsar), public lecturing and educational institutions. Into the bargain, Ghulam Ahmad learned of course how tradition could be ‘rationally’ reinterpreted and revived without succumbing completely, like Sayyid Ahmad Khan, to Western reason.

Increasingly, the Mirza presented himself to Punjabi society through his lectures and writings. He not only criticized the ulama, Christianity and Hinduism, but in particular the Arya Samaj. In one of his major works dealing with the Arya Samaj, Surma-chashm-i-Arya (1886), Ghulam Ahmad employed the authority of science to validate an otherwise fundamentalist approach to the Quran. Indeed much in the spirit of what was happening in both nineteenth century South Asia and Europe. In Europe for example, as Owen Chadwick put it:

> Historians of the later Enlightenment made themselves ridiculous by explaining wonder, by unquenchable prosiness, by “rationalizing” the “sandwiches” of five thousand or the walking on the water; reaching peak in the “scientific” corrections of earlier hymns, as with the editor who was shocked by the hymn of Gerhardt “Now all the woods are sleeping” and to correspond with truth, amended it to the line “Now half the woods are sleeping”.  

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70 Chadwick, *The secularization of the European mind*, 190.
Similarly, Mirza Ahmad devoted most of *Surma-chashm-i-Arya* to show that such a miracle as the rending of the moon in the Quran presented no real conflict with science as 'no one has yet exhausted the knowledge of the working of nature'. Otherwise, while reacting to Dayanand Saraswati's abusive writings on Sikhism (which surely echoed those of Trump and to which Sikhs themselves did not reply), Ghulam Ahmad wrote his *Sat Bachan* (1901) to protect the honour of Guru Nanak. For, as said earlier, Ghulam Ahmad believed that the latter was a Muslim saint and so now he only had to convince Sikhs that for them he was the Promised Messiah as well. Whatever the Mirza wanted, the point is that to state his case he used the works of Trump and Macauliffe.

In the end, it has to be stressed that early reformers, while thinking through the vernaculars or their interpretation of English, most probably did not see much difference between the traditional concepts of 'rationality' and Western reason. No doubt, in the emerging forms of 'rationality', traditional concepts were imbued with Western reason to invoke the authority of science, yet it remains unlikely that reformers conceived of these new forms of knowledge as an alternative truth arrived at through verification. To many Arya Samajists, for example, it remained unthinkable that science might produce a truth superior to Vedic revelation. On the contrary, it seems much more plausible that the entire thrust of Dayanand Saraswati's reaction to Western science and technology was to capture and incorporate it, not to refute it. Nonetheless, since the British started their 'civilizing mission', science gained cultural authority. Hence, the more

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72 Many references to Western works as 'historical evidence' also are made in one of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad's most important tracts, *Masih Hindustan Mem* or Jesus in India (1899), about which more will be said in the next Chapter.
indigenous voluntary reformers became active in the newly emerged public sphere, the more they interacted with ‘the authority and application of science as universal reason’.

Alternatively, while Indian reformers became aware of Western Orientalist studies and afterwards regularly cited them as authoritative sources, though often to counter the claims of science, it is here also that one should position the importance of the so-called Orientalist discourse in the making of modern South Asian traditions.

4. Directing the ideal Punjabi woman

I then tried to find some kind of book -well stored of course with moral instruction, and which should improve their ideas and correct their habits in respect of those affairs which a woman encounters in her daily life, -and in which, by reason of their romantic notions, or through ignorance or perseverance, so many women are overtaken by disaster and sorrow -and yet which should be in a form sufficiently attractive to prevent their being discouraged or dismayed by its perusal. But though I searched and searched for such a book through a whole library of volumes, not a trace of one could I find.

Nazir Ahmad in Mir'at-ul-urus (1869).

Traditionally, women were prohibited from being introduced to bookish learning in South Asia. In fact, far from being privileged carriers of sacred traditions, Indian women generally were not even allowed to hear the sacred texts in public. Yet during the nineteenth century the education and hence supposedly moral growth of women became a crucial focus of reform movements

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73 Prakash, Another reason, 3-4.
74 Ahmad, The bride's mirror, 186.
throughout the subcontinent. Women became central to the newly defined 'moral languages' as guardians of morality against a supposedly encroaching and dangerous outside world. In the Punjab, the British (strongly in favour of educating and unveiling Indian women) opened several girls' schools as early as 1855 but except for the central districts female education hardly took root during the next few decades. As one Punjabi schoolmaster stated:

Some progress has, of course, been made by the department instituting female schools, and the instruction given in them is the same as in the schools for boys. This kind of instruction, however, is not suited to female schools; there should not be any Persian in them and not so much of arithmetic. Female education in this country is purely and simply a forced thing, and almost a farce, because girls cannot stay long on account of early marriage; because some instruction in their own religion is of necessity to be given them in the school hours, otherwise they would not attend; and because efficient teachers (females) cannot be readily had for them.  

Clearly the majority of women still were taught (if at all) an almost exclusively religious education privately at home. Indeed, the tradition of purdah (seclusion) also kept most women out of reach from Christian preaching until it was decided about 1870 to send zanana missionaries to Punjabi women in the seclusion of their homes. Visiting during the day when men (who overall resented the zanana missionaries for tampering with their womenfolk) were in

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the fields, missionaries gained access to a small but important number of secluded women, discussing health, education and sanitation.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Punjabi reformers established the first girls' schools but the lack of qualified women teachers remained a great obstacle for the coming time. Central to the whole process was the development of educative literature and teaching materials in the vernaculars. Reformers argued that through education women got a chance to stand on their own feet, an invitation which was received with enthusiasm at least among some elitist Punjabi women. Female education was meant to inculcate in women the partly traditional and thus pseudo-Victorian virtues of orderliness, thrift, cleanliness and a personal sense of responsibility, the practical skills of literacy, accounting, hygiene and the ability to run the household efficiently. In this way, however, the bodies and activities of women came to be directed through the 'moral languages' newly defined by male reformers as part of the larger 'civilizing mission'. This patriarchy combined coercive authority with the subtle force of persuasion, expressed most generally in the inverted ideological form of the relation of power between the sexes. Indeed, much like in the Indian tradition through the toadyism of woman as goddess or as mother.76

Nazir Ahmad published his first three 'novels' (including the first ever written in Urdu) between 1869 and 1874 as a syllabus for the instruction of women, which were influential in spreading the reformist message among a wider public. Generally appreciative towards British culture, the three novels earned rewards from the government, partly because the 'new patron of learning' had earlier declared, that books suitable for the women of India particularly would be

76 Chatterjee, The nation and its fragments, Chapter Six.
accepted and rewarded. Moreover, importantly, Ahmad's books were successfully disseminated through state educational institutions as their idiomatic style made them ‘very suitable for use as textbooks for examination for the examinations in Urdu taken by British civil servants and military officers, for whom a number of annotated editions and translations were prepared’. Some major and indeed not so uncommon concerns in Nazir Ahmad's fiction were the uplift and problems of women, proper upbringing and the importance of the family for the 'improvement' of society. Unlike people such as Sayyid Ahmad Khan (and most European works at that time), Ahmad saw women as coequal with men in most matters. Remaining differences could be equalized by education:

Hence, except reading and writing, there is positively no method by which you can develop your intellects. Indeed, if you compare them with men, the need of education for women is even greater. For since men admittedly live an out-of-door life, they will pick up the experience they want by associating with other people. But you, who sit at home all day long -what will you do? Will you fish out a little packet of common-sense from your sewing-bag, or fetch a napkin full of experience out of the grain closet? Learn to read; and while you are seated behind the purdah you may make a tour of the whole

77 Mirat-ul-arus (1869), Banat-an-Na'sh (1872) and Taubat an Nasuh (1874). See further: C.M. Naim, Prize-winning adab: a study of five Urdu books written in response to the Allahabad Government Gazette notification in Metcalf (ed.), Moral conduct, 290-314.

78 Matthews, Shackle and Husain, Urdu literature, 104. The Director of Public Instruction, M. Kempson, personally translated Ahmad's Taubat an Nasuh or Repentance of Nasuh in 1894.
world. Get knowledge; and without going outside the house you may become acquainted
with what has happened in all ages.79

Some decades later, the famous Deobandi Maulana Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi (1863-1943), listed
Nazir Ahmad's three novels as 'harmful' books in his influential Bihisti Zewar (Heavenly Jewels)
of ten volumes.80 Unsupported by the British, Thanawi rivaled Nazir Ahmad in spreading the
reformist message among women. Though his Bihisti Zewar also treats women and men as
essentially the same, the work was solely directed towards Muslim women and, in fact, was often
given to girls as part of their dowry. First published in 1905 but still read by Muslims throughout
the world, it may be the first book of its kind in Islamic adab literature and definitely played a
significant role in disseminating modern Muslim self-consciousness in South Asia. It was written
when female education already had made some progress and Muslim women themselves
increasingly were playing an active role in that process. This is worth mentioning, as the Singh
Sabha, Arya Samaj and Ahmadiyah attitudes towards female education more or less paralleled
Thanawi's. Nazir Ahmad had followed a too cosmopolitan adab for most reformers, who were
critical of Western morality (not of science and technology) and already had turned inwardly,
glorifying their traditions through their 'moral languages'. Otherwise, though one preached the
uplift of women, the reforms advocated solely were justified in terms of women's traditional
roles. There was no talk of a Western style curriculum, higher education or of tearing down the

79 Ahmad, The bride's mirror, 200.
80 Thanawi was aware of the strong temptation facing the Muslim to ape the powerful European and was prepared
to allow a place for Western science in man's acquisitive life. He saw no danger for Islam in science's basic
intellectual assumptions as European virtues were borrowed from Islam earlier and anyway a bad Muslim was
always better than a good kafir (a heathen: one who does not believe in Islam). See further: Metcalf, Perfecting
women.
curtains of purdah. According to the newly defined 'moral languages', women had to stay at home to take care of the 'inner domain' of the community. The inclusion of women in the newly defined teachings thus simultaneously meant the constricting of cultural behaviour in formerly female domains by male standards.\textsuperscript{81} Besides, the cultural weight placed on women and the home not only fostered a shared range of texts and values for women and men but also produced a discussion on women being 'different'. Also interesting remains, as Christopher King put it, the genderization of polemics in the vernacular languages. Increasingly, in the colonial context, communities mutually reproached each other with being effeminate, turning vernaculars into symbolic women. While Queen \textit{Devanagari} was the image of the ideal Hindu woman, Begam Urdu was the unreformed and uncontrolled Muslim woman.\textsuperscript{82}

From the very start, the Arya Samaj focused on female education, setting women up as symbols of Vedic virtues to be revived. Several schools for girls were founded where one not only learned a limited curriculum in Hindi of reading and cyphering but also the 'useful' arts of sewing and knitting. Yet as female education advanced, some male Arya Samajists found themselves caught between the desire to reform women and the fear of the possible impact education might have on women and their relationship with men. One Arya Samajist for example wrote in the \textit{Tribune}:

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item\textsuperscript{81} The reforms were progressive for the times nonetheless. Generally, for example, it was not considered proper for Punjabi girls to learn how to write, since if a woman in purdah learned how to write letters, she might communicate with men beyond the permissible circle of kin.
\item\textsuperscript{82} See for example Christopher King, Images of virtue and vice: the Hindi-Urdu controversy in two nineteenth century Hindi plays in Jones (ed.), \textit{Religious controversy}, 123-148.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
I hold that the character of girls' education should be different from that of boys in many essential respects. The Hindu girl has functions of a very different nature to perform from those of a Hindu boy and I would not encourage any system which would deprive her of her national traits of character. A smattering of reading and writing, the most that can be expected for some time in many cases, would be a poor substitute. We cannot be too cautious in this matter. The education we give our girls should not unsex them.83

The Arya Samaj also published journals addressed to women and mostly directed at health, education and sanitation. One such journal was *Panchal Pandita*, which started in 1897 as a bilingual English and Hindi periodical but became an exclusively Hindi publication in 1901. It focused on diffusing modern knowledge authorized by the invocation of the Vedas and published articles on, for example, health diets, cleanliness and hygiene, the care of children and the follies of astrology. Around the same time, women societies (*stri samajes*) were established, as well as homes (*ashrams*) for widows, while increasingly female missionaries (*updeshaks*) began to travel around the Punjab.

Perhaps most important however remains the Arya Samaj's dedication to and advocating of *niyog* or widow remarriage. Controversial within the Hindu tradition, Arya Samajists wrote about it extensively and launched societies to support such marriages in practice, making it into one of the most important acts towards social reform by the movement.84 In his Chapter on married life in the *Satyarth Prakash*, Dayanand Saraswati cited passages from the Vedas to authorize his argument for the possibility of widow remarriage, to put family life in a modern context and

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83 *Tribune, April 11, 1894, 5.*
particularly as a reply to the Hindu practice of sati. As he made clear, however, there was a difference between niyog and remarriage, as the former was to be performed solely by widows and widowers and not between ‘bachelors and virgins’. Interestingly, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad attacked niyog in his tract *Radd-i-niyog* or Rejection of niyog (1895). According to Ahmad, niyog was nothing more than an excuse for transgressing exactly what the Vedas forbid, remarriage (though he was willing to offer—as he regularly did- 500 Rupees to anyone who could disprove his position).

Since 1892 the Ferozepore Singh Sabha ran the local girls' school, the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalay. The curriculum was largely made up of instruction in Gurmukhi, readings from the Granth Sahib and lessons in embroidery and cooking. All this to create the ideal Sikh woman, who could read and write, was knowledgeable about the scripture, able to perform all household duties, respectful and obedient to the wishes of her husband and able to bring up children in accordance with the Tat Khalsa ideology. The rising popularity of the school attracted students from as far as Agra and Rawalpindi (during 1908-1914, a staff of 45 persons taught a total of 1608 students) and it became a model to later schools for female education, turning out females stamped with a distinctive Tat Khalsa image. As such, male Singh Sah baites possessed a powerful resource to discipline women, whom they always considered more open to the influence of popular as well as Hindu and Muslim cultures, while with the same purpose they started two new papers focusing on female education: *Istri satsang* and *Punjabi bhain*.

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84 Interesting here remains the didactic play in Urdu on the miserable circumstances of Hindu widows: Das, *Do Hindu bewah*.
Interestingly, the main characters in Bhai Vir Singh's epic poem *Rana Surat Singh* (1905) and pseudo-historical novels *Sundri* and *Baba Naudh Singh* are strong women in search of truth. In *Sundri* for example the protagonist appeals to the men around her:

I entreat you to regard your women as equal partners and never ill-treat them. If you regard them as inferior to you, you will treat them with harshness and cruelty... In the Hindu *Shastras* (scriptures) the woman is treated as *shudra* (an outcaste). In the Guru Granth Sahib, woman has been eulogized and she has been given equal right of worship and recitation of the Holy name.87

*Sundri* was based on a popular north Indian song describing the capture of a young girl by a local Mughal ruler. Most of the incidents described in the novel were based on historical facts Vir Singh collected from (Orientalist) books or tales he had often heard from old Punjabi 'women'. In the end and for example compared to Nazir Ahmad, however, Vir Singh in his writings undoubtedly remained much more within the greater South Asian tradition, while his female protagonists in the end always find their consolation in the devotion of their male beloved.

In the *Rahit* literature it is stated that: 'Women should never be trusted. They should be regarded as inherently deceitful, and *Khalsa* Sikhs must never confide in them nor rely on them'.88 Yet, like in most (if not all) modern traditions, equality officially was never denied to Sikh women and hence the Rahit Maryada also states there are no functions that women cannot perform. Nonetheless the position of women remains problematic, as practice has rarely

88 McLeod, *Sikhs of the Khalsa*, 243.
confirmed the ideal. Most probably there never has been a female *granthi* (one who reads the Granth Sahib, though nowadays also custodian of gurdwara). On the contrary, it seems much more likely that women in the gurdwara content themselves with singing *gurbani* (hymns from the Granth Sahib) and serving in the *langar* (distribution of food).\(^89\) Similarly, as in the Hindu tradition, to this day neither the dowry system nor female infanticide (which both were condemned by the Gurus) have been completely eradicated. Generally still in Punjabi (and Hindu) culture a girl is the property of others. More than her husband, her father is responsible for her. She is never her own person but a costly expense to her parents, as a dowry will be expected, and after they have spent everything on her the benefit is enjoyed by the family she marries into. The rest of her life will be spent with them! Though today broader views are emerging, until pension schemes replace the dependence of parents upon their sons for security in old age, change is likely to be slow and limited.

In his book on the Ahmadiyah movement, Christian missionary H.A. Walter wrote that among the Ahmadiyahs ‘the status of women, on the whole, seems to be above the standard obtaining in Islam generally’.\(^90\) Mirza Ghulam Ahmad preached to change the social position of women and accordingly they were educated within the community at purdah schools. He thought that women’s inferior social status particularly was caused by their economic dependence on men and hence he argued that women should be given their dowry as a free gift and that women’s property

\(^89\) Only recently women *ragis* (hymn singers) performed daily inside Amritsar’s Golden Temple and, after many years of unsuccessfully petitioning, Sikh women seeking equal position and status in the performances of rites finally found a champion in Bibi Jagir Kaur, who became the first woman to be appointed president of the SGPC (to be deposed in November 2000). As cited from the *Sikh Review*, vol. 48, June 2000, 74 in Ibid., 253.

should not be taken out of their hands by their husbands. As such, the Ahmadiyah case clearly fitted in the pattern common throughout the Islamic world, wherein modern reformers advocated women’s ‘rights’ provided in Quranic teachings in some specific legal areas (especially property and marriage). Comparatively, however, the Ahmadiyahs, as defenders of purdah and polygamy, clearly were at the puritanical side. Also the community refused to marry its womenfolk to other Muslims outside the fold. All in all, like in the case of the Arya Samaj and Singh Sabha communities, Ahmadiyah women accepted the authority of men as propagated through ‘moral languages’ and, accordingly, had to keep themselves to purdah in the home (as well as separate female schools) as their ideal.

Though purdah generally was part of Punjabi culture (though it was followed more among Muslims than Sikhs and Hindus), during the end of the nineteenth century it became closely connected with the changing hierarchies in society. The more strictly a family confined its women, the higher its status (izzat). Hence, as a marker of the influence of ‘moral languages’, an old Punjabi captain born in 1857 told Malcolm Darling, how during his youth women enjoyed much more freedom to move around the countryside but that since then a lot had changed:

The children are better cared for, the house is better run, and needlework is done instead of cutting grass. There is modesty, too. Before they could be seen by anyone of their own tribe, but now only by those of their own village. When they go farther, they wear burqa unknown in the old days... Before we did not know the world, but we went forth serving

91 Ahmad, *The philosophy of Islam*, 34.
in the army and we saw other countries. Now we have civilization: (we do) what the Quran orders.92

Overall it seems women enjoyed less freedom but perhaps they chose this voluntarily, otherwise it remains difficult to understand how half of the population could have been confined (with many recruited men away) without their consent. Obviously, in a rural, violent and poor society like that of nineteenth century Punjab, seclusion had its attractions, as a women’s segregation from unrelated men entitled her to a much higher degree of protection from the men to whom she was related. The alternative, for example, as in the Muslim districts in the south (which produced no recruits), was to be as liberated as the most ardent feminist:

Here women could come back to their ostensible husbands after an absence of a few years, present them with a couple of strange children, and say ‘God has increased your honour’. But they could also be bought and sold; they were expected to redeem bad debts by extending their favours to moneylenders; ‘no girl was safe’ from the local landlords; and they were constantly abandoned in ill-health and old age.93

All in all, however, Malcolm Darling was told by different informants that ever since men joined the army and saw the world the position of women proved to be better. Marriages had become


93 Ibid., 152-154.
more companionable and accordingly there was less wife beating: now only 'childless wives' were beaten, while the tyranny of the mother-in-law also was coming to an end since young wives 'took their mothers-in-law by the ears' while their soldier husbands looked on.94

In fact, the notion of the ideal Punjabi woman remains much similar to that of the ideal image of the Christian wife and mother projected by Protestants, especially in terms of the Victorian cult of domesticity (except in the Cambridge mission, male missionaries in the Punjab 'were meant to be married').95 Though it is often said that by doing so, Protestants raised the status of women, it can also be said that to have narrowed the range of acceptable female identities. As such, for example, the choice of an independent and celibate vocation in which a woman might develop her own talents was removed. Instead, it was replaced by the ideal of the pastor's wife, to be executed within the patriarchal context, wherein the wife further of course had the Christian 'duty' to fulfil her husband’s demands, for otherwise he might fall into sin. Yet, interestingly, the colonial context opened up new possibilities for British women. Not only 'missionary wives carried out their own partly autonomous professional responsibilities to a far greater extent than clergymen's wives at home' but, more importantly, at the beginning of the twentieth century 'unmarried women, appointed as independent missionaries, would outnumber ordained males'.96 Indeed, all together, missionary wives, independent female missionaries and European and Indian female staff 'transformed almost every mission in the Punjab into a predominantly female organization'.97

94 Ibid.
95 Cox, Imperial fault lines, 78.
96 Ibid., 41, 48.
97 Ibid., 5, 153.
In sum, while delineating some of the characteristics of the Singh Sabha, Arya Samaj and Ahmadiyyah ‘moral languages’, one should begin by stating that the colonial encounter led to an inclination to ‘rationality’ among the Punjabi reformers. Alternatively, this fell together with criticisms towards contemporary social circumstances that, importantly, besides being common to all times and places, partly also developed under the influence of Protestant evangelical criticism of Indian society. All this was part and parcel of the wider changes in society following the emergence of modern disciplinary institutions and practices in the new public sphere under supervision of the Anglo-Indian colonial state. For the propagation of their message, reformers established their own educational, printing and other institutions and so not only became voluntary participants in the public sphere but also redefined their identities when encountering boundaries set by the dominant colonial state. Moreover, their employment of the human will in disciplining mind and body undoubtedly was part of a dominant ‘social consciousness’. Indeed, as part of the ‘civilizing mission’, comparable to the Victorian modes of orderly and disciplined behaviour in general and muscular Christianity, with its characteristic adherence to the idea of ‘duty’, in particular.

As said several times before, significant to the Singh Sabha, Arya Samaj and Ahmadiyyah ‘moral languages’ was an urge to revive the past Golden Age to cope with present conditions. Obviously, ‘rational’ criticism had been practiced in South Asia long before the coming of the British, but the point is that elitist reformers now felt impelled to reinterpret their sacred texts and cast them in the language of Western science. As such, South Asian sacred works became ‘scriptures’, while generally the reinterpretation of Indian traditions became closely connected with the Western scientific study of the subcontinent (the so-called Orientalist discourse). As
Gyan Prakash put it: "The emergence and existence of India is inseparable from the authority of science and its functioning as the name for freedom and Enlightenment". All in all, everything dealt with in this Chapter more or less concerned the making of ‘moral languages’ but equally important was the functioning of them in the public sphere through modern disciplinary practices. For though the definition of ‘moral languages’ more or less led to ‘canonization’, these undeniably were ideal types that had to adapt to competitive political circumstances and this is what concerns the next Chapter.

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98 Prakash, *Another reason*, 3.