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

van der Linden, B.

Citation for published version (APA):
van der Linden, B. (2004). Tradition, rationality and social consciousness: the Singh Sabha, Arya Samaj and Ahmadiyah moral languages from colonial Punjab
1. The emergence of a comparative moral consciousness

In pre-colonial Punjab, traditions frequently conflicted with each other. Predominantly this concerned the control of buildings and land, though festivals regularly also were accompanied by violence. However, while conflict seemed accidental and implicit in pre-colonial society, particularly since the 1880s, traditional identities received more ‘loyalty’ than ever before, especially among urban Punjabis. Moreover, activities that in the past incidentally had resulted in violence, now consciously were practised and showed off in public. In 1882, for example, one could often find Arya Samajists of the Arya Updekh Mandali (Aryan Missionary Circle) marching like the Salvation Army (though without uniforms) to Lahore’s famous Anarkali bazaar during the evening to preach against Christianity, while singing hymns and prayers on the way. Otherwise, Swami Dayanand Saraswati’s Satyarth Prakash, wherein he violently attacked adversary traditions and sects, represents not a solitary peak but, on the contrary, a large and crowded plateau.

Generally, strife grew within a polemical atmosphere, as members of different groups sought to project their own truths against that of others, both within their own tradition in rivalry for internal leadership and beyond. It seems as if polemics satisfied those involved. In most writings one feels an element of enjoying the position of being unique, of being misunderstood, of being wronged by the whole world but knowing what is morally right and superior. Propaganda surely played a part in arousing militancy. It incited people to action on behalf of one or the other community, depicting with approval those who took violent steps against one’s own tradition and other communities. Lay leaders themselves often gave the example, if not always through their own militant behaviour in public speech and print. They too incited their followers to militant behaviour through provocation: disruption of meetings that did not preach ‘truth’, ceremonies, processions, personal abuse of other communities’ members, and attacks on their persons and property. Perhaps the fast changing conditions played a role here. For even when belonging to a minority, one at least now had the ‘right’ to differ in public while ‘officially’ the government gave indiscriminate protection by law. Accordingly, appeals often were made in terms of narrowly defined ‘numerical’ strength while ideals and values generally were seen within a limited scope, serving the well-being of the community and those trying to break away from existing societal norms.

Besides, what should be more often stressed is that increasingly reformers ‘rationally’ took a comparative moral stand. A crucial feature of the colonial interaction remains the fixation of some kind of standpoint in regard to Christianity, its ‘moralism’ towards Indian society in particular. Sayyid Ahmad Khan for example was the first Muslim anywhere to write a Bible commentary, Tabyin al-Kalam (1862), wherein, interestingly, as Wilfred

---

2 Metcalf, Islamic revival in British India, 357. Ironically, while the art of manazara (polemics) was developed and taught at Deoband to confront Christian missionaries, it was used as much by Muslims against Muslims.

3 Though a fragmentary piece of work, it remains the first attempt to take seriously the claims of Christianity and as such, if only in terms of the ‘colonial interaction’, it may be viewed as a follow up to Ram Mohan Roy’s The precept of Jesus (1820) written as a contribution to the theology of Christian Unitarianism.
Cantwell Smith put it: ‘he arrived at the key unit concept of “religion” itself, as that which is common to all, a practical morality’. Yet, while Ahmad Khan’s commentary was not negative towards the Bible, other reformers denied the supremacy of Christian doctrines in their writings and speeches (indeed, not so much working practices or moralism, on the contrary). Arya Samajists were at the vanguard and many of their arguments were drawn from the *Satyarth Prakash* wherein Dayanand discussed Christianity and its errors (partly in response to Christian missionaries who had rejected his form of Vedic Hinduism, though he also had read the Bible in Sanskrit and Hindi translations). Many concepts were unknown to the Swami, like for example the creation of the universe (*srishti*); God’s creation of man in his own image; and the concepts of inherited sin and immaculate conception. No doubt one of the most repugnant Biblical customs to Saraswati and upper caste Hindus in general, however, remained the eating of meat (the Cain and Abel story). Often Dayanand responded with a degree of practicality as well as condemnation to these unfamiliar ideas (indeed a practice all communities, including Christian missionaries, followed towards each other). Hence a description of circumcision again demonstrated to him that the Christian God lacked foresight. Why otherwise would he first create foreskins and afterwards declare them unnecessary and to be removed? Also Saraswati could not understand why Christians depended on such a powerless figure as Jesus Christ who failed to protect himself or others and accordingly the Last Supper (*prabhubhohjan*) was most repugnant to him: disciples do not eat their Gurus!

---

5 Still the pages on Christianity in the *Satyarth Prakash* remain the definitive source for criticism of Christianity for Arya Samajists. Interestingly, while Dayanand approached the Bible with a mind more familiar with Islam, he overall attacked Christians for practices which at the same time were hallmarks of Muslim differences with Hindus: eating of meat, animal sacrifice, circumcision and the burial of the dead.
A typical Dayanand polemic was held at the 1877 Chandapur mela. There, the Swami took part in a shastrarth (religious public discussion) together with two Christian Reverends and some Muslim maulvis. For two days they discussed topics like the creation of the universe and salvation. As so often Saraswati’s main method of attack existed of a simplistic literal interpretation of Biblical passages (indeed in sheer contrast with the ‘rules of interpretation’ he suggested in the introduction of the Satyarth Prakash). Here, for instance, a part of the discussion between Reverend T.J. Scott and the Swami about man as a free agent on the way to liberation, starting with the former:

_Pandit-ji_ has defined _mukti_ as emancipation from pain. But I hold it to consist in avoiding sin and attaining heaven. God created Adam immaculate, but Satan tempted him to commit sin. By his fall all his descendants have become corrupt. As the watchmaker does not interfere with the working of a watch, but allows it to go on with its work without imposing upon it any restraint, so has God made man a free agent, and he commits sin of his own accord. He cannot, by his own exertions, attain salvation or escape pain in any way. Salvation is, therefore, impossible without faith in Lord Jesus Christ. The Hindus say that _Kaliyuga_ is an era of sin and corruption and that men cannot, in this age, obtain salvation. But, I say, they can, if they will only put their faith in Jesus.7

Naturally Saraswati had heard the key Christian doctrine of redemption (‘faith’ in Christ as the only means of securing salvation) earlier and criticized it in turn, especially because of the for him unacceptable idea of sin through the temptations of Satan:

---

7 Singh, _Mela Chandapur_, 30-31.
The illustration of the 'watch' is correct, for all are free agents, but carrying out the Will of God is synonymous with the performance of the noble acts and with avoiding doing evil ones. The statement that the attainment of heaven is salvation, and that men are unable to shake themselves free from sin owing to the temptations of Satan, is unfounded; for every men is free to act, and Satan is a myth. You can, by shaking yourself free from the hold of sin and by the grace of God, attain salvation. Adam ate wheat - the only sin he committed, and was driven away in consequence from paradise. I ask, when the mere eating of wheat involved Adam in sin, and resulted in his expulsion from heaven, will you, who long for the attainment of heaven, abstain from the use of these things in that place? If not, won't you be sinners and driven away from paradise, in consequence?8

Similarly, Saraswati could not cope with the idea of Satan as the tempter:

If Satan is everybody's tempter, who was Satan's tempter? If you reply, that he was tempted by himself, then I say that the same could be said with equal force in respect of human beings. In such case, it is useless to believe in Satan as the tempter.9

Furthermore, Saraswati asked, if Satan was tempted by someone else (i.e. God), then who would be the saviour? Such a thing is 'against the divine nature, for God is just and true, and his actions are always just, and he can never be a tempter'.10 As part of the newly emerging modes of 'communication', polemics like these were crucial to the making of 'moral languages'. One experimented with ideas, which afterwards, while being sharpened, often

8 Ibid., 34.
9 Ibid., 33.
10 Ibid.
were put into print and, what should be stressed more often, ‘read’ in public. In this way, reformers not only consciously defined themselves and others but also created specific forms of ‘rationality’, if only while being constrained by both thinking through the vernaculars and traditional morality. Indeed, more often than not, ‘communication’ means firmly making a point (i.e. to be biased but strong instead of open and amenable), not to communicate but to gain authority and influence. Perhaps because of the cultural unfamiliarity between Indians and the British during the nineteenth century, nonetheless, it seems all this came out more straightforward than before in public on both sides (for no doubt especially Christian missionaries knew what they stood for and wanted for the ‘improvement’ of South Asia).

Interestingly, while Christianity and Islam had a long history of polemics, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad not only used many of the arguments against Christianity as put forward by Dayanand Saraswati in the *Satyarth Prakash*, but for his reinterpretation of Islam went one step further than other Muslim polemicists by accepting and revising parts of the Christian tradition. Probably the best example here remains the one about the death of Jesus in Kashmir (in connection to the ‘second coming’ of Christ and Ghulam Ahmad’s claim to be the Promised Messiah). Ahmad argued that Jesus did not die on the cross, rose from the death and ascended to heaven. According to him the Gospels were corrupt: Jesus was taken down from the cross seemingly dead but in reality in a swoon, recovered from his wounds and after a long journey ended up in Kashmir (India: where else!), where he led a normal life until his death. To prove all this, the Mirza identified the tomb of Yus Asaf in Srinagar as the place where Jesus was buried.11 Otherwise, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad kept himself to discussions characteristic of the times. In *How to get rid of the bondage of sin*, for example, he straightforwardly bashed on Christian Europe:

11 Ahmad, *Jesus in India*. One can still visit the place today. In fact, one could do it while going to the famous Hazrat bal Mosque outside Srinagar on the same day. It is said, the Mosque possesses hair (bal) of the Prophet Muhammad, which has been stolen a few times but always was returned afterwards.
Nineteen hundred years have elapsed since the blood of Jesus was first introduced into the world as a patent sin-healing remedy, but instead of doing any good it has proved harmful to society and intensified the evil which it affected to mitigate. Are we still to believe that faith in the blood of Jesus delivers man from the bondage of sin... The two great vices in which grow up all carnal passions are drinking and prostitution, and it is in Christian nations that we find their worst development. The majority of the inhabitants of Europe are involved in these two vices, and there is no exaggeration in the assertion that in drunkenness Europe beats all the vastly populated countries of Asia, and a single city of Europe has a larger number of public-houses than the total number of shops of all sorts in an Asiatic town.\(^{12}\)

All in all, Ghulam Ahmad continues, it is about time for Christians to grow up and leave behind their archaic doctrines:

The true salvation of mankind has no relation to the crucifixion of Jesus, and even if a thousand Messiahs be crucified that object can ever be attained. Only a perfect love of God can deliver man from the bondage of sin. As to the death of Jesus upon the cross, it is not a true statement in the first place and has, moreover, no connection with the assuaging of sin. It is an obscure assertion with no foundation and no results. Evidence does not support it, nor does experience bear it out. The suicide of a Messiah has no conceivable relation to the remission of another man’s sins.\(^{13}\)

---


\(^{13}\) Ibid., 49-50.
Compared to the Arya Samajists and Ahmadiyahs, Singh Sahaites developed a much better relationship with Christian missionaries. Sikhs were rewarded for their 'loyalty' during the Mutiny, crucial to the British Indian Army and overall praised by the British for being very hard workers. Likewise, because the first Christian missions in the region specifically focused on the (then still ruling) Sikhs, a close relationship between Sikhs and Christian missionaries existed already before the firm establishment of British rule. Most members of the Amritsar Singh Sabha (for whom Anglo-vernacular education was a matter of principle), for example, were educated at the local Church Mission School. Afterwards Singh Sahaites and missionaries often also worked closely together in the reinterpretation of the Sikh tradition. Because of this close relationship with both the government and the missionaries, Singh Sahaites were not much involved in polemics against Christianity and instead focused more on defining the tradition in opposition to Punjabi popular culture and Hinduism (read: Arya Samaj). All the same, however, in the earlier mentioned novels of Bhai Vir Singh, the Sikh tradition is always portrayed as superior to other faiths and Christians, Hindus and Muslims inevitably ended up embracing the Sikh faith.

In addition to that of the Christian missionaries, the presence of the Arya Samaj accelerated the emergence of a 'comparative moral consciousness'. Their polemics against Islam led to much Hindu-Muslim antagonism, while an increase in rioting often brought Hindus and Sikhs together and widened the gulf between them and Muslims. Between 1883 and 1891, for instance, there were about fifteen major riots, for which the foundation in many towns of societies for the protection of cows (Gauraksha Sabhas) by Aryas and other Hindus were partly responsible.\textsuperscript{14} Increasingly the slaughtering of cows became a burning issue often accompanied by violence, particularly as there were three years (1885-1887) in which the celebration of the Hindu Ramlila coincided with the solemn Muslim Muharram. Riots

\textsuperscript{14} The cow protection movement in fact started in the Punjab.
followed after Muslim and Hindu parades met each other in the streets or Hindus came to know about the slaughtering of cattle, while the fact that through the new modes of ‘communication’ news and rumours circulated fast, only drew more people in.\textsuperscript{15}

Although the main targets of Swami Dayanand Saraswati were orthodox Hindu practices and Christianity, he dedicated more space in his \textit{Satyarth Prakash} to attack Islam than any other tradition. He further contributed to anti-Islamic agitation when he published his famous statement on cow protection, \textit{Gokarunanidhi} (1880), interestingly based on economic rather than spiritual grounds.\textsuperscript{16} Like Christianity, Dayanand argued, Islam knew a greater God, sin, judgement, salvation and miracles and both therefore were superstitious faiths unfit for modern man. Unlike later Arya Samajists and Hindu nationalists, however, Dayanand did not mention the historic confrontation between Islam and Hinduism in negative terms but characteristically limited himself to the literal interpretation of the scriptures. In turn, importantly, large portions of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad’s \textit{Barahin-i-Ahmadiyah} argued systematically against the statements of the Arya Samaj, especially as proclaimed by Dayanand in the \textit{Satyarth Prakash}. In fact, he even wrote a letter to Saraswati offering him to send a copy of the \textit{Barahin-i-Ahmadiyah} to debate over the truth of Islam and its superiority over Hinduism. Dayanand however did not respond and some time later Ghulam Ahmad reported a dream (as he regularly did) in which he saw Dayanand dying (as happened soon afterwards). Before that time, nonetheless, Ahmadiyahs already were considered major enemies of Punjabi Aryas, resulting in the fierce polemic relationship between Pandit Lekh Ram and Mirza Ghulam Ahmad.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{15} Barrier, The Punjab government, 528-529.

\textsuperscript{16} Cf. The forty verses on cow protection, \textit{Gopukar Chalisi} (1893) by Dinadayal. Also interesting because of the Hindi written in Urdu script.

\textsuperscript{17} On this polemic relationship: Jones, \textit{Arya dharm}, 145-153, Lavan, \textit{The Ahmadiyah movement}, 76-87 and the numerous articles in the \textit{Selections from the Punjab Vernacular Press}. 
In 1885 Lekh Ram first wrote to Ahmad from Amritsar that he would like to come to Qadiyan to see Ahmad perform heavenly signs. Afterwards a polemic relationship started between the two, ending in the murder of one of them twelve years later. Though born as a Brahman in the Jhelum district, Lekh Ram was educated in Urdu and Persian by Muslims and subsequently used his knowledge of these languages and Islam to condemn everything Islamic. Lekh Ram became an important Arya Samaj spokesman and he wrote numerous books and pamphlets on such issues as cow-protection, the need of niyog, salvation and the promotion of Hindi. Yet his real struggle was with Islam and Ghulam Ahmad in particular. In 1887 he attacked the latter for the first time in Takzib-i-Burahin-i-Ahmadiyah or Refutation of Ahmadiyah arguments with the provocative subtitle A Gunfire to break the flanks and tyranny of Mohammad's Islam. Subsequently a tract warfare followed between the two reformers in which each subsequent tract led to a counter attack.

Lekh Ram’s most famous polemic tract nonetheless was against Islam in general: Risala-i-jihad yani din-i-Muhammadi ki bunyad (Jihad or the basis of Muslim religion), published in Lahore in 1892. In it, he drew on paragraphs of the Satyarth Prakash charging Islam with violence, slaughter, and a love of loot. Unlike Dayanand, Lekh Ram also turned to ‘history’ for ammunition, blaming all India’s ills on the devastation of the early Muslim invader, Mahmud of Ghazni. While the Pandit’s controversies with Ghulam Ahmad had only limited effects outside Ahmadiyah circles, his Risala-i-jihad irritated a wide section of the Muslim community. Overall Lekh Ram’s activities contributed greatly to the growth of polemics in the Punjab and soon he was attacked in Muslim, Sikh and Christian newspapers. Finally it was violence that brought an end to his career when he was assassinated on the 6th of March 1897. Immediately a debate followed between the different communities, as Aryas celebrated him as a shahid or martyr whose crusade had to be continued. Ghulam Ahmad put some coal on the fire by thanking God for the fulfilment of his prophecy ten years earlier that Lekh Ram
would die a violent death. Several newspapers angrily suggested Ghulam Ahmad’s
complicity in the event because of his prophecy and the rumour spread that he had asked the
government (instead of God) for protection because he feared an Arya plot against his life.
Riots followed as throughout the province it was said that all leading Aryas would be assas-
sinated, Muslims were conspiring to kill Sikh and Hindu leaders and the latter would seek
revenge in return. Within three months, nonetheless, life returned to its normal pace, though
controversy between the Ahmadiyahs and the Arya Samaj continued during the lifetime of
Ghulam Ahmad and after.

Compared to Christianity and Islam, Dayanand Saraswati was much less interested in
Sikhism and accordingly in a few pages of the Satyarth Prakash dismissed the tradition as
being just one of the many Hindu cults. Even so, not all Aryas thought as easily about
Sikhism as Dayanand. Instead, they saw the tradition in comparative terms as paralleling the
Samaj in its aim to purify the Hindu tradition from idolatry, caste and the evils of
Brahmanical dominance. Alternatively, partly perhaps while Muslims were the traditional
enemies of the Sikhs, some young educated Sikhs reacted to the Samaj with interest, until in
1887 Aryas started to interfere directly in internal Sikh affairs and boundaries were drawn
between the communities. By then Arya Samajists not only wanted to have a voice in the
location of Khalsa College but also started to convert Sikhs (often in public ceremonies
which included cutting hair) and generally unleashed a campaign of criticism (questioning the
validity of the Granth Sahib and spreading abuses on the Gurus). The whole process was
boosted by the critical speech Pandit Gurudatta gave on Sikhism to the assembly at the
Lahore Arya Samaj anniversary celebration on November 25, 1888. Afterwards, Sikhs who
earlier had been sympathetic to the Arya Samaj turned their back on the movement and
joined the Lahore Singh Sabha, becoming fanatic defenders of the Tat Khalsa. Singh

Sabhaite led a large protest meeting, condemning the Aryas and specifically Pandit Gurudatta and soon the Arya-Sikh controversy moved to the press, where Sikh and non-Sikh papers denounced the Samaj for its habit of aggressively condemning other traditional leaders and doctrines.19

In sum, Singh Sabhaites, Arya Samajists and Ahmadiyahs increasingly asserted themselves in public, creating and stressing stereotypes of 'the other' at the same time. Indeed, the fact that reformers more and more said what they found necessary, once more makes clear the significance of voluntarism to the modern public sphere in South Asia. Alternately, it might be that, because the Raj exercised such tight control over access to state institutions (through educational requirements for example), perhaps elitist Indians concentrated instead on demonstrating their prestige in public arenas through voluntary activities involving polemic discussions about sacred space, conduct and rite. Also it might be that the law protection 'officially' given by the state played a role. Whatever the full case, decisive here remain the activities and polemics of Christian missionaries, boosted by those of the Arya Samaj. Once again, Punjab evangelicalism was provocative and disruptive. Under the banner of the 'civilizing mission', local traditions were to be attacked and the Christian word to be spread. This had profound consequences, as Punjabi reformers (with Arya Samajists in the vanguard) polemically reacted in turn.

Undoubtedly the emergence of a 'comparative moral consciousness' was heated up by 'print culture' and the growing tendency to 'rationality'. In general, one knew more about each other, as more information became available and 'officially' was made public. Nonetheless, at the same time, the growth and style of polemics showed communities becoming more inward looking. In many instances open books indeed led to closed minds.

Overall scriptures of other traditions were read literally, as one had no wish to discover positive qualities in them nor to discuss points of mutual concern or elements of similarity. For how could the other be right, if oneself clearly possessed the truth? Indeed surprising in relation to this adherence to scriptural literalism, remains the fact that it never occurred to polemicists that ‘those most thoroughly committed to their faith would be the least likely to abandon it’. Otherwise the question remains to what extent the creation of a public sphere backed by the Anglo-Indian colonial state played a role to this atmosphere of growing fervour, impatience, militancy and turbulence. For undeniably when one ‘rationally’ played the ‘politics of difference’ well, perhaps there would be government reward at the expense of ‘the other’ in terms of ‘representation’ or acts of positive discrimination. All of course only if the game was played fairly and for that purpose ‘loyalty’ to the British obviously was favourable.

2. Loyalty to the government and beyond

How did the British gain the ‘loyalty’ of Indian subjects? In government like in many other spheres of life ‘possession is nine-tenths of the law’ (as lawyers say) and hence many Indians barely thought about the legitimacy of British rule. They were accepted because they were there and apparently successful, while the Mughals had lost credibility as they lost power. The reverence for the Mughal ruler was transferred to Queen Victoria when she became Empress of India, Kaisar-i-Hind, and in a sense replaced the Mughal at the apex of the existing hierarchical social structure in which Indians lived. Especially also because from the

20 Cox, Imperial fault lines, 60.
21 In Kaisar-i-Hind, Lahore 1876, G.W. Leitner argued in relation to Queen Victoria’s position in India against the use of the title ‘Empress’. Instead he lobbied, while he himself assumed he knew the native mind, for the Arabic term Kaisar-i-Hind, which Muslims earlier exclusively used in relation to the Roman Empire (Caesar).
very beginning, the British had been sensitive to the problem of their public image, of the visible demonstration of authority, with their insistence on status (izzat), meticulous attention to rank and precedence and its public display (as described by Bernard Cohn for the 1877 Delhi darbar and Douglas Haynes for public rituals in Surat). Furthermore, while prominent local men participated within the Anglo-Indian colonial state’s hierarchical system of authority, the British could assume that the clients and social inferiors of such men would follow suit.

By and large, the British received ‘loyalty’ from their Indian subjects in two crucial ways. First, rather unconsciously, through participation in the public sphere and, second, more significantly and consciously, through politics structured on ‘representation’. For now that the Anglo-Indian colonial state had made political arrangements that gave subjects a voice, one had to step forward and claim the ‘rights’ of the community in order to be authoritative and influential. In result, Indians often accepted the liberal democratic uniform and bureaucratically useful categories of ‘difference’ as defined by the British: one either belonged to a number of Hindus, Muslims or Sikhs and had to be ‘loyal’ both to the community and to the political structures created by the state. Liberal democratic politics thus automatically helped to solve the problem of how the Anglo-Indian colonial state could acquire legitimacy in the eyes of its subjects, even if these were disaffected. Over time, importantly, because tradition and patriotism often found each other in a moral attitude, Indian nationalist forces (more able to mobilize people) increasingly competed for the ‘loyalty’ of which the state claimed to be the only legitimate repository.

22 Cohn, Representing authority in Victorian India in An anthropologist and Haynes, Rhetoric and ritual, 126-137.
23 In relation to this John Stuart Mill in his Considerations on representative government (1861) not merely defined the nation by its possession of national sentiment but added that its subjects ‘may be said to constitute a nationality if they are united among themselves by common sympathies which did not exist between them and any others—which make them co-operate with each other more willingly than with other people, desire to be under the same government, and desire that it should be government by themselves or a portion of themselves exclusively’. As cited in Utilitarianism, On Liberty and Considerations on representative government, London Everyman edition 1910, repr. 1993, 391.
During the period of 'social reform', however, the political spirit in South Asia still was very much that of 'loyalty' to the British. The general idea among elitist Indians was that the colonial state provided security and justice, and guaranteed equal access to education, eliminating the inequalities of the caste system for example. The ‘civilizing mission’ was particularly accepted in the idea that it was education that fostered a true community spirit, guaranteed ‘improvement’. Equally this resulted into a dominant ‘social consciousness’ of being independent, strengthening of will as individual and community. Illustrative here is the case of the famous literary figure of the Aligarh movement, Kwaja Altaf Husain of Panipat (1837-1914), better known as ‘Hali’, his pen name or takhallus and meaning ‘modern’ or ‘up to date’.24 In his most famous work, Musaddas (1879),25 Hali straightforwardly evokes the blessings of British rule:

The government has given you all kinds of freedom. It has completely opened up the roads to progress. From every direction these cries are coming, “From prince to peasant, all men prosper”. Peace and security hold sway in all the lands. No caravan has its way blocked.26

Moreover, according to Hali, there could be nothing worse than being a burden upon the state, whatever might be the generosity of the rulers:

24 Interestingly, it replaced the earlier takhallus ‘Khasta’ or the ‘exhausted’, ‘distressed’ or ‘heartbroken’ and, hence, this change in pen name can be taken as symbolically imperative to the change in South Asian ‘social consciousness’ under colonial rule.
25 Subtitled The flow and ebb of Islam, the Musaddas exemplified the Aligarh movement in its consciousness of the glories of the Islamic past, its awareness of the decay of the present and its certainty that Western reason must be embraced for the ‘improvement’ of society. So great was its impact that it became a kind of Muslim anthem, parts of it usually being recited to inaugurate sessions of Muslim voluntary organizations.
26 Shackie and Majeed (eds.), Hali's Musaddas, 18.
Even though the Empire is entirely benevolent, itself aiding the training of its subjects, yet there is no condition worse than the community becoming as complete burden upon the Empire, and its subjects being in its hands like a corpse in the grasp of a body-washer.\(^{27}\)

Much of the moral polemic of the *Musaddas* indeed stresses those very virtues which promulgated the contemporary spirit of the ‘civilizing mission’. While the *shariat* and *hadith* are seen to prefigure significant aspects of the European liberal rhetoric of ‘improvement’, likewise values such as ‘self-help’ are seen to be foreshadowed by the morality of the Prophet’s message, i.e. ‘legitimized and re-deployed in the figure of the Prophet’.\(^{28}\) At least in this case, therefore, the *Musaddas* appears to be rebutting the stereotypes of Orientals lacking the individual and community virtue of self-discipline, which the British so much prided themselves on, by re-inscribing that virtue as part of the Prophet’s original message. The final message of the poem, nonetheless, remains that the ultimate solutions to the community’s problems lay not so much in education and industrious self-help as in a renewal of the Islamic faith through passionate devotion to the Prophet.\(^{29}\) Yet, in practice, in line with the British ‘civilizing mission’ in general and the newly defined ‘moral languages’ in particular, Indian reformers increasingly stressed the idea that ‘one should not be content with one’s own welfare alone, but should look for one’s own welfare in the welfare of all’. Many devoted themselves cheerfully to the service of their community (called *seva* by Hindus and Sikhs), conscious that the community also was serving and supporting them. Likewise, social work became a competitive exercise, as such practices as orphan and famine relief always

\(^{27}\) Ibid., 23  
\(^{28}\) Ibid., 76.  
\(^{29}\) Ibid., 25.
were connected with the compulsive desire to contest conversion and activities of other communities, especially Christian.

All these activities have to be seen in the context of a liberal democratic public sphere that epitomized values such as 'self-discipline' and 'duty' and above all also became dominated by 'rationality', as to be found for example in the ever-increasing adherence to numbers. In relation to the latter, the Census operations done under authority of the Anglo-Indian colonial state in the Punjab since 1853 obviously were crucial. While a normal function of any modern government, mostly to make taxation more effective, what needs to be stressed is that the Indian Census was dominated by the category 'religion'. This was not the case in Europe for example, where 'language' was the focus. Accordingly, the decennial Census became a crucial reference point for Indian reformers, as it recorded and showed the progress or decline of each community, and was eagerly awaited, closely read and cited. In fact, Indians not only used these British defined categories but indeed also played a central role in the further definition and spread of them. Gurukul Arya Samajists like Pandit Lekh Ram, for example, rejected the name 'Hindu', feeling that it was a derogative label given to them by the followers of Islam. Instead they wished to be known as 'Aryas' and hence instructed their followers to write 'Arya' instead of 'Hindu' in the 1891 Census questionnaires. In the same way, after the 1891 Census reported the numbers of Ahl-i-hadiths and Wahabis for the Punjab but did not mention the Ahmadiyahs in spite of their de-

31 As such, there are no accurate statistics about the South Asian diaspora as still today no question about 'religion' is included in for example the Censuses of Great Britain and the United States.
32 In 1867 the Indian Legislative Council passed the Act for the regulation of printing presses and newspapers, which required publishers to submit editorial information and copies of their papers to the government. These materials plus information gathered by the police department served as raw materials for the Selections from the Punjab Vernacular Press, which contain numerous interesting comments from Punjabi newspapers before and after each decennial Census.
33 Lek Ram, Arya aur namaste.
scription in the Gurdaspur district Gazetteer, Ghulam Ahmad wanted his followers to be enumerated separately (as happened) under the category of ‘Ahmadiyah’ in the next Census. Otherwise changes in Census definitions often also boosted animosity. Until the 1901 Census, for example, in line with the Tat Khalsa ideology only Khalsa Sikhs were defined as ‘Sikhs’. Hence, when the government expanded this definition with the 1911 Census, it not only led to a considerable expansion of the number of ‘Sikhs’ at the expense of ‘Hindus’ but, more importantly, vehement reactions from Hindus (under Arya Samaj leadership) as well.

Concerning political ‘representation’, the Punjab bureaucracy became a focus of antagonism during the 1880s. Anglo-vernacular education was crucial for the stringent requirements for admission to government services (indeed comparable to the Civil Service Examination system dominating South Asian university life still today). Yet, as each community increasingly offered Anglo-vernacular education in its own environment to provide the necessary skills, it not only strengthened awareness of ‘difference’ but, importantly, also contributed to an oversupply of candidates for government employment. Clearly Muslims lagged behind in the race for education and employment and accordingly they hoped that the 1881 Sir William Hunter Education Commission would lead to scholarships and other favours on behalf of their community. The reaction of the ‘neutral’ government nonetheless was the same as always: every Punjabi had equal opportunities and if Muslims could not compete they must ‘go to the wall’. As riots heated up the situation, some Punjab officers suggested that more ‘qualified’ Muslims be brought into the administration to prevent total Hindu domination, reduce Muslim militancy and instead create circumstances in which Hindus and Muslims could constantly observe and check each other’s

34 During Census operations, the Lahore Singh Sabha worked together with the British and, importantly, in its claim to Sikh leadership, afterwards brought out the correspondence between them into the open. As stated in Barrier, The Sikhs and their literature, xl.
35 As cited in Ibid., The Punjab government, 532.
actions. Accordingly in 1899 a programme was secured to raise the number of Muslims in several government posts until it equalled that of Hindus.

Gradually the Punjab government furthered political ‘representation’ through the introduction of ‘separate electorates’: first in the municipal committees and in 1909 in the Punjab Legislative Council (the scope of which was extended by the 1919 and 1935 Government of India Acts). In fact, with the Indian Councils Act of 1909, better known as the Morley-Minto reforms, the government openly declared that it was determined to help Muslims. Accordingly, the latter expected favouritism and protection up to Partition, while Hindus became increasingly embittered by official efforts to maintain equal ‘representation’.

Interestingly, in the Punjab the British always rejected the introduction of ‘separate electorates’ for the rural district boards, while stability of the rural areas from where recruits for the British Indian army were drawn was too important. This refers to the rural politics of ‘mediation’ mentioned in Chapter One: the protection by the British of ‘tribal’ identities and interests. As such, the 1900 Alienation of Land Act ‘formed the basis for a rural political hierarchy in which religious solidarity was relegated to a secondary role’.

Moreover, following the 1935 Government of India Act the borders of the constituencies in the countryside were redrawn ‘so that they coincided with tehsils strengthening the importance of the ‘tribal’ idiom of politics’.

Indeed, though the creation of ‘separate electorates’ has been discussed much, the fact that they were vital to the relationship between the seemingly discordant idioms of ‘moral languages’ and identity politics of ‘belonging’ (i.e. commonly put under such labels as ‘patriotism’ or ‘religious nationalism’) remains understudied. As David Gilmartin put it: ‘The

---

36 These Acts also provided ‘separate electorates’ for Sikhs and Christians. As such, importantly, as Jeffrey Cox put it: ‘Indian Christians had rights of representation, and missionaries and Indian Christians were in a state of permanent negotiations over the allocation of those resources, and over the definition of a new phenomenon: a multiracial Indian Christian Church’. In Imperial fault lines, 103.
37 Talbot, State, society and identity, 14.
38 Ibid., 18.
election process was, in fact, critical to the re-conceptualization of community that made the merging of religious and national visions of community possible'.

Not only they were important as a straightforward political act but particularly also for their ritual and ceremonial aspects. As a result, communities came to see each other in liberal democratic terms as ‘majority’ and ‘minority’. A process to which undoubtedly the presence of Muslims as a ‘minority’ community in the subcontinent was crucial. Furthermore, divisive overtones gained strength when ‘electorates’ increasingly appealed to a transcendent idea of community and gave the idea that the community’s highest principles were at stake. While ‘rationally’ reaching out for the transcendent, members of the community not only had to be ‘loyal’ but increasingly also confront the other in public. Most probably the idea of Pakistan, for which the 1946 elections laid the foundations, remains the best example here.

Accordingly, there emerged a distinctive image of the relationship between the individual and community in terms of ‘loyalty’, ‘duty’ and ‘sacrifice’. At the same time, importantly, this ‘moral’ appeal, as in such cases as the Hindu Gauraksha Sabhas, the Sikh Akali movement (see paragraph on the Sikhs below) and Muslim Khilafat movement (featuring Indian Muslims’ pan-Islamic sympathies for the Ottoman Khalifah following the defeat of Turkey during the First World War) opposed the ‘objective morality’ propagated by the British through state institutions.

40 In relation to this Eric Hobsbawm concluded: ‘It is by no means evident that Pakistan was the product of a national movement among the Muslims of the then Indian Empire, though it may well be regarded as a reaction against an all-Indian national movement which failed to give adequate recognition to the special feelings or requirements of Muslims, and though, in an era of the modern nation-state, territorial partition seemed to be the only available formula, it is far from clear that a separate territorial state is what even the Muslim League had in mind until very late, or would have insisted on but for the intransigence of Jinnah (who was indeed something like a Muslim nationalist, for he was certainly not a religious believer). And it is quite certain that the bulk of ordinary Muslims thought in communal and not in national terms, and would not have understood the concept of national self-determination as something which could apply to belief in Allah and His Prophet’ in Nations and Nationalism, 70.
Overall the British authorities faced an increasing stream of petitions for arbitration from the different communities.\textsuperscript{41} These ranged from issues such as ‘representation’ and ‘rights’, the establishment and management of educational, publishing and other institutions, procession routes, killing of cows, playing of music anywhere at any time (Hindus in front of the mosque on a sacred Islamic day for example) and language to be used in school. Though the Punjab government ‘officially’ remained ‘neutral’, it obviously became involved after taking decisions on all these kind of issues. In the eyes of the government the most constant danger to ‘law and order’ over time however did not come from the Indian National Congress, as its members did their best to co-operate on liberal democratic terms, but instead from communal controversies which often led to ‘irrational’ riots (repeatedly called ‘disorders’ or ‘disturbances’ at the time) and had to be controlled. As such also most ‘banned’ literature in the Punjab was related to ‘religion’, while a considerable amount of Congress writings circulated freely in the region.\textsuperscript{42} All in all, voluntary movements that participated in the public sphere and kept themselves to ‘law and order’ could expect to be protected under the policy of religious ‘neutrality’ declared in the earlier mentioned Queen’s Proclamation of 1858, while those that did not and questioned British authority were suspect and subject to ‘official’ control.

Compared to the Hindu and Muslim communities, the British did not have much trouble with the Sikhs. Ever since the establishment of the Amritsar Singh Sabha, Sikh schools and Colleges were founded with the support of the British who valued the ‘loyalty’ of the Sikhs. Supportive to the Tat Khalsa leadership, the British harnessed the Sikh ‘martial’ tradition to service in the British Indian army by insisting that all Sikh soldiers should be \textit{kesh-dari} (i.e.

\textsuperscript{41} Undoubtedly petitions were crucial to the routinization of the liberal democratic public sphere in South Asia. Through them one could be critical of the government, as long as the language was polite and ‘loyal’. Moreover, by petitioning one accepted ‘justice’ from the government, while correspondence reached a wider audience when published in newspapers.

\textsuperscript{42} Significant here remains the fact that the Punjab never became a bastion for the Indian National Congress, for which at least at a later stage the success of the Punjab Unionist Party was responsible.
having long hair and beard). While further every army division had its own granthi (scripture reader) and gurdwara attendance was made obligatory. Nonetheless, this mutual loyalty between the Chief Khalsa Diwan and the British was threatened after some Sikhs wanted more intensive reform. Accordingly, when the latter succeeded in removing Hindu statues from the precincts of the Golden Temple in 1905, there emerged two important political streams within the Sikh community. The First World War temporarily pushed this polarity to the background but in 1920 a proclamation was made from the Golden Temple that a committee was to be set up to manage all Sikh shrines, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). Hence Sikhs organized themselves into a volunteer brigade, the Akali Dal (Army of immortals), dedicated to tussling gurdwaras away from their custodians. The Akalis clashed with the British Indian Army and were declared illegal. Yet in 1925 the Sikh Gurdwara Act was passed which placed gurdwaras in the custody of the SGPC. Subsequently the Akali movement more or less became a political party, while the SGPC (though dominated by members of the Akali party) confined itself to religious and educational matters.

Unlike their stand towards the Sikhs, the British were suspicious of the Arya Samaj from the very beginning. Officially Aryas maintained that the movement was in no way political but both their domination of the Punjab Congress (from 1898 until 1907) and their militancy in general made that they were closely watched by the government. On the whole,

43 Yet, one should not overstate, like Richard Fox in *Lions of the Punjab: culture in the making*, Berkeley 1985, the role of the British in the creation of the modern Sikh identity. As if there was no internal dynamic and continuity in terms of dominant traditions and identities and one was free to select whatever 'symbol' one wanted.

44 Though the Chief Khalsa Diwan continuously proclaimed to be loyal, the British nonetheless kept an eye upon some of its members and as such judged Bhai Vir Singh: 'as disloyal to the core... He is reported to be making overtures to the Head granthi of the Golden Temple with a view to bringing that institution under the control of the neo-Sikh party... At present, he has complete control of the Khalsa tract society. He is a member of the council of the Khalsa College... Though Vir Singh was originally a man of no position, he seems to have acquired for himself the position of a Guru... He may safely be regarded as a zealous neo-Sikh and thoroughly anti-British'. In D. Petrie, C.I.D. Memorandum on recent developments in Sikh politics (1911) as reprinted in *Punjab Past and Present*, 4, 1970, 354.

importantly, the Arya Samaj shaped the political attitudes of Punjabi Hindus by giving them an interpretation of India’s past, providing a vision of and pride in the Hindu nation (Arya varta) and suggesting remedies for India’s miserable economic conditions. This influence was particularly evident in the intellectual development of leading Arya Samajist, Lala Lajpat Rai (1865-1928). Though an important member of the Indian National Congress, Rai said he was first a Hindu and then an Indian. Moreover, he argued opposed to many forward looking Congress members that to create Arya varta, Indians had to stop mimicking the West and rely upon their own traditions instead. In many of his writings Lajpat Rai reinterpreted the Hindu tradition to make it suitable to the times. In The message of the Bhagavad Gita (1908), for example, he argued that a nation’s prosperity and success depended ‘upon wisdom like that of Krishna and on bravery like that of Arjuna’ and accordingly that Indians would find salvation in the disinterested performance of their ‘duty’, without attachments to its fruits, at any cost and any risk: ‘if ever any nation stood in need of a message like that of Krishna, it is the Indians of today’ and so ‘let them invoke his aid by acting up to his message’.46 Interesting to mention here is that for this tract Lajpat Rai made use of the English translation of the Bhagavad Gita by the well-known Theosophist Annie Besant (1847-1933). Once again, an example of Christian influence upon the reinterpretation of ‘tradition’. This not only because of the translation of Sanskrit words into those of ‘duty’ and ‘sin’ but also because of the continuous contextualization through comparisons with (besides the Bible) literary writings such as those by Coleridge, Dante, Keats, Wordsworth.

Despite the fact that, similar to Mahatma Gandhi, Arya Samajists like Lala Lajpat Rai made available patriotic terminology to a wider public, the relationship between the Punjab

46 Lajpat Rai, The message, 55-56. The Bhagavad Gita (Song of the Lord) contains Krishna’s teaching and revelation to the warrior Arjuna. It is the sixth book of the Mahabharat, which might be the longest epic in the world. Dating back to the first millennium BC, it always was orally transmitted but extensively printed during the nineteenth century, after which it became one of the key texts of Hindu nationalism (often cited by Mahatma Gandhi for example).
Congress and the Arya Samaj remained uneasy. Particularly because the Arya Samaj increasingly favoured communal politics rather than those of Hindu-Muslim co-operation and national unity. Overall the Congress met with little success in the Punjab and was mostly supported by the handful Bengalis and Brahma Samajists around the Lahore Indian Association and the Tribune newspaper. Arya Samajists solely but dominantly participated within the Congress during a short period when communal tension was at low ebb, partly while they believed this ‘do-nothing’ organization could be converted into a vehicle for ‘improvement’ on the basis of native industries and the spread of mass education. Like in many other places in the colonial world, Japan’s victory over Russia in 1904 (being the first time an Asian country defeated a Western one) led to a wave of patriotism in India. Afterwards, Aryas held sympathy meetings for Japan, introduced the Japanese language into their college curriculum and even sent a few students to Tokyo. Also Aryas started the publication of the Punjabee, an English newspaper in which they criticized the British and generally aimed to spark off nationalist politics among educated Punjabis.

Comparatively the relationship between the Ahmadiyahs and the British was not a difficult one. Throughout his life Mirza Ghulam Ahmad professed ‘loyalty’ to the Crown, as he did for example at a meeting of nearly 1500 of his followers on the 27th of December 1906:

> Almighty God has placed us under a government which has granted religious liberty to all its subjects. It is due to the liberty granted by this government and to its justice that our opponents cannot give a practical turn to their hostility against us. If it had been in their power, they would have annihilated us, but on account of their inability

---

to do so, they only grind their teeth in wrath and despair, for they see what kind-hearted government God has sent to protect us from such persecution, my heart overflows with thanks to the almighty for his unbounded grace and kindness towards us.48

Obviously, Ahmadiyahs had more problems with the traditional (Muslim) authorities than with the British. A closely knitted organization which had a strong corporate enthusiasm, they did not belong to the mainstream of Islam and other Muslims often blamed them for undermining Islamic solidarity and providing assistance to British rule. Enough reason for Ghulam Ahmad therefore to urge his followers to avoid political agitation and anti-British activity. Crucial to the attitude of the British government to the Ahmadiyahs was Ghulam Ahmad’s interpretation of the Islamic doctrine of *jihad*. The centrality of it within Ahmadiyah thought was related to the Mirza’s involvement in polemics against the Christian missionaries and members of the Arya Samaj, who both used the idea of *jihad* to describe Islam in an unfavourable, aggressive light. In many writings Ghulam Ahmad countered this idea by tracing the concept linguistically and in the early history of Islam, not just to restore *jihad* to its ‘original’ meaning but also to make clear that, now that the Promised Messiah had arrived, it was the ‘duty’ of every true Muslim to hold back from *jihad*.49

After Ghulam Ahmad’s dead and especially the 1914 split, however, also the Ahmadiyahs became increasingly entangled with the political issues of the day: the growing concern in India with self-government and the problem of Hindu-Muslim relations. Increasingly, self-conscious criticism of the British government became an element in Ahmadiyah policy, while

48  *Review of Religions*, January 1907, 33.
49  See for example Mirza Ghulam Ahmad’s *Sitarah* and *Gauarnment*. 
otherwise for example the earlier mentioned Zafrullah Khan in 1931 stepped forward as president of the Muslim League Conference. Yet the most volatile political issue in Ahmadiyah history likely remains the declaring of non-Ahmadiyahs to be *kafirs*. Following *Khalifah* Mahmud Ahmad early statement, it not only proved to be crucial to the split between the Qadianis and Lahoris but, moreover, negatively affected the community’s relationship with the wider world of Islam ever since.

All in all, the Singh Sabha, Arya Samaj and Ahmadiyah movements more or less were trying to win the British title of ‘loyal’ and concomitant patronage despite their increasing divisive overtones and transcendent yearnings: for though the need for change was not disputed, there was growing resistance, especially when the measures taken by the Anglo-Indian colonial state interfered too much in society. Often if actions of individuals threatened this loyal image, meetings were held and resolutions passed denouncing co-members and pledging support for the Raj. Naturally I do not see any importance here of an analysis in terms of ‘collaboration’, my point solely is to stress the continuity in the acceptance of the terminology propagated by the British in the public sphere. By being ‘loyal’, Punjabis accepted the supposedly progressive liberal democratic idiom in terms of political representation, elections, constitutional reform or otherwise. Pragmatically, patronage, social status and political participation were taken as crucial by all, particularly after the British gradually had to give in on the terms through which they had defined Indian society themselves. Moreover, while declaring themselves ‘loyal’ to the Crown, reformers often stressed that their movements solely were ‘religious’ and not involved in ‘politics’, that their institutions and practices were pure, transcendent and uncorrupted. In this way, importantly, they adopted the Western notion of ‘religion’ as separated from the ‘secular’.

Crucial to mention also remains the fact that British policy advanced divisions and militancy among communities, if only because the Raj’s structures generally encouraged a
competitive style of politics. The militancy of the Arya Samaj, through their participation in the Congress or otherwise, encouraged the British to see them as 'disloyal' and drew economic sanctions against them. When Muslim politicians then also began to picture Aryas as enemies of the government, Arya Samajists struck out at their Muslim accusers. Stung by the persistent charges of sedition and hence removal from their government posts, they described the latter not only as greedy job seekers who called Hindus seditious in order to secure posts which under normal conditions they could never have, but accused them also of being 'disloyal' to the British by definition, as the Quran demanded that Muslims would fight their *jihad*. While communities thus increasingly opposed each other, support for the Punjab Congress declined and, instead, Hindu Sabhas, mostly led by Arya Samajists, moved into the public sphere (partly to counter similar organizations among Muslims such as the Punjab Muslim League). As such, by 1908 each district in the Punjab had a Hindu Sabha affiliated with the Punjab Hindu Sabha in Lahore (the All-India Hindu Sabha was formed in 1909) and identity politics indeed increasingly came to the fore.

3. On identity politics and conversion

Generally, one’s identity is determined by the group(s) one identifies with or, maybe better, one cannot be ‘disloyal’ to and still like oneself. Moreover, what makes you ‘loyal’ to a smaller group may give you reason to co-operate in constructing a larger one, a group to which you may in time become equally or perhaps even more ‘loyal’. I mention this because it remains crucial in relation to the broader political mobilization in the South Asian public sphere since the late nineteenth century. In fact, this often happened in a pugnacious manner,

---

for to interest people you must provide a fight so that they get excited, take sides, become emotional, feel suspense and charge their 'moral' convictions. Though British policy and the new modes of 'communication' (newspapers especially) often worked as a catalyst in the process, reformers increasingly started to use sacred 'symbols' to mobilize the group, to defend its interest and to compete with other groups. Creating a powerful 'moral' imperative, these 'symbols' gave a sense of self-respect and pride to the community as if it were an individual.

What happened in terms of identity formation in South Asia since the nineteenth century in the context of a liberal democratic public sphere, therefore does not differ much from the identity politics the modern world (obsessed with emancipation since the Enlightenment) has been familiar with. Interestingly, some sacred 'symbols' made their appearance in the public sphere in a dramatic way at one time or another and then disappeared for long periods, most probably because it was in no one's interest to bring them forward. Such has been the case with the earlier mentioned cow protection associations. They occupied the center of the stage at different times in modern South Asian history. In between there was no loss of Hindu reverence for the cow and its symbolic uses did not cease, but there was no great mobilization launched in its defense. Perhaps more crucial to modern identity politics than these sacred 'symbols', however, remains the act of 'conversion'. Within the wider configuration of change in a public sphere under state supervision, it became directly related to (numerical) competition between communities, while generally it more or less stood for a triumph of the 'civilizing mission' (i.e. leading to the earlier mentioned processes of Sanskritization and Ashrafization). Conversion thus remains a core activity, bringing together, for example, competition, adherence to numbers, social work, education of missionaries and polemics.
By and large, conversion can be seen both in a spiritual sense of being a change of consciousness and experience, as well as, in terms of social practice, of ‘moving camps out of one community to another’ or of ‘shifting camps’.\footnote{G.A. Oddie (ed.), \textit{Religion in South Asia}, 4.} For the discussion of history, however, it is more convenient to assume that conversion rarely involved an immediate spiritual experience and transformation, but instead more meant ‘a change of fellowship than conduct of inner life’, though the latter over time could occur. The convert joined a new social group that largely defined its identity on the basis of the limits on marriage, inter-dining and ritual observances, thus leaving his old associates but not necessarily his old ways behind him.\footnote{Hardy, \textit{The Muslims of British India}, 8.}

Conversion to Christianity followed an earlier pattern taken in the Punjab. Elitist (high caste) converts often wanted modern education in English, to increase their status, to qualify for government services or legal, medical, engineering or teaching professions. Although they were few in number, they were responsible for far more public attention and reaction to Christian conversion than the numerically superior successes among the oppressed out and lower castes.

The close linkage between conversion and caste indeed remains significant. The egalitarian and individualistic notions of the Protestant evangelicals imbued them with a strong hostility to the institution of caste, which they regarded as integral to Hinduism (and to a much lesser extent Islam and Sikhism) and a hindrance to civilization. Converts therefore were expected to have a total break with their old social milieus, whereas alternatively missionaries hoped in downward filtration of the ‘civilizing mission’. Christian missionaries were particularly successful among the out caste groups of 	extit{Chamars} and 	extit{Chuhras} (particularly the latter), who earlier had converted to Islam and Sikhism and now responded to Christian proselytism. Adopting the Christian faith for Punjabi out castes
indeed was not problematic. For as contemporary missionary, R.W. Winter, for example, put it in relation to the Chamars:

They looked on Christianity merely as what they called a *panth*, and *panth* of religion, and not as a brotherhood. They have many of these non-Christian *panths* as followers of Kabir or Ram Dass or Nanak, the founder of the Sikhs; these they can follow without bringing women and children, they can believe in them without being outcast, and their faith in no way interferes with domestic and social customs connected with idolatry.\(^{53}\)

To their amazement, missionaries discovered that caste links could help rather than hinder evangelicalism. In a society where an individual counted very little outside his group, conversion inevitably tended to assume a collective form, especially among the occupational groups. The group converts were often found to preserve family and kinship ties, which not only provided much needed support and protection but were also extremely important for social intercourse and marriage among them. Kinship ties provided traditional avenues of communication and contact which were of considerable importance in the spread of the conversion movement. Yet, though conversion sometimes offered a degree of social mobility within the caste structure, involving changes in customs, ritual, ideology and way of life in the direction of more higher cultural norms, at the same time, collective action among the depressed was undermined by their lack of 'horizontal group solidarity' and 'unusually fragmented character'.\(^{54}\) In fact, subsequently upwardly mobile out and lower caste groups

\(^{53}\) As cited in Cox, *Imperial fault lines*, 138.

became fiercely competitive among each other and on their way often impeded other comparable groups, driving indeed the latter occasionally to Christian channels.

Otherwise, importantly, as part of the ‘civilizing mission’, the freedom of conversion and the protection of the rights of converts was a logical corollary to the British’ rhetoric of religious ‘neutrality’. In South Asia, the breaking of caste rules and apostasy were serious crimes to be punished by, for example, excommunication, the loss of property or the loss of the right to inheritance. Obviously it was the ‘duty’ of the British to protect the victims and, hence, despite many protests and petitions, since the mid-nineteenth century, reforming measures ‘officially’ guaranteed converts the possession of property and the right to inherit government. ⁵⁵ All the same, however, as Gauri Viswanathan argued, Anglo-Indian law in many cases insisted on Indian ‘difference’:

Even when Hindus or Muslims were converting to Christianity, the decisions made by the civil courts denied that such conscious change occurred, and the Christian convert was treated as essentially someone who had not converted. ⁵⁶

Similarly, the ‘official’ term to describe Christian converts became ‘Native Christian’ which at least in terms of identity by law left converted Indians ‘floating in a nebulous space’, neither Hindu, Muslim, Sikh nor Christian. ⁵⁷

As mentioned in Chapter Three, the Singh Sabhas, Arya Samaj and Ahmadiyahs did create conversion rituals with concise statements of belief and began educating missionaries. Modes of missionary language emerged which were accompanied by numerous writings (manuals for rites de passage, crucial paragraphs from the ‘scriptures’, polemic tracts and so

---

⁵⁵ Brush, Protestant in the Punjab, 142-143.
⁵⁶ Viswanathan, Outside the fold, 14.
⁵⁷ Ibid., 81.
on). Since the introduction of the decennial Census (1871) it became clear that the number of Hindus was falling in proportion to those of other communities. After the death of Gurudatta in 1890, Gurukul Aryas under the leadership of Munshi Ram and Lekh Ram created a plan for educating professional missionaries and afterwards, while Christian success in converting the out and lower castes furthered Hindu fears, developed their own ritual of conversion (shuddhi). Most significant about this ritual remains the fact that Arya Samajists (and to a lesser extent Singh Sabhaiites) used it to purify and readmit Hindus who had converted to Islam and Christianity earlier on the basis of some remembered identity. Census operations again were crucial here. Through them a large majority of Muslims was recognized as being converted Hindus who in terms of their practices continued to belong to the larger ‘original’ (read: Hindu) tradition. Through shuddhi, Arya Samajists more or less transformed Hinduism into a tradition of conversion, equal to its competitors: the prophetic faiths of Islam and Christianity as well as the Guru bounded Sikhs. Importantly, this transformation meant far more than merely the adoption of the necessary ceremonies, while at the same time it meant a shift from a social world based on birth to one founded on voluntary association.\(^58\) Undoubtedly Arya Samajists felt comfortable in this world for they were successful, particularly in villages, persuading people of low caste in developing a pride in the Hindu heritage.

Interestingly, some elitist Sikhs initially offered assistance to Arya attempts to contain the tide of Christian and Islamic conversion and together with Arya allies founded the shuddhi sabha (purification society).\(^59\) By the early 1890s three groups, the Arya Samaj, the Singh Sabhas and the shuddhi sabhas, sometimes in alliance, otherwise independently, performed purifications with increasing frequency. The official division of the Arya Samaj in

\(^{58}\) Jones, *Arya dharm*, 129-130.

1893 led to estrangement among supporters of shuddhi. The shuddhi sabhas under the leadership of radical Sikhs instituted a ‘pork test’ for converts from Islam. If the eating of beef could transform a Hindu into a Muslim, alternately the eating of pork would signify the return of a Muslim to Hinduism or Sikhism. As a result, Gurukul Aryas with their rigid insistence on vegetarianism withdrew all support from the shuddhi sabhas and condemned them instead for their adhering to a degenerated form of Hinduism. Afterwards, purifications continued but now were sponsored independently by two competing groups, the shuddhi sabhas with their College Arya supporters and Gurukul Arya Samajists. An important transformation however took place with the extension of the shuddhi concept to group conversion. For partly in response to Christian missionary successes among the out and lower castes, this was not strictly about re-conversion but, unacceptable in the Indian tradition, the admittance of outcastes to caste privileges. Otherwise, importantly, being used to numbers by now, many Sikhs also came to see Aryan re-conversion as a direct threat, potentially as dangerous as Christian or Islamic conversion. Increasingly the question ‘Are Sikhs Hindus?’ was raised and a public debate followed generating books, pamphlets and letters supporting a wide variety of opinions on Sikh-Hindu relations. It was by this time, however, that Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha (1867-1938) wrote his famous tract, Ham Hindu nahin or We are not Hindus (1897) and Singh Sabhaites already were much on their way redefining the community as ‘different’ from Hindus and accordingly Sikhs started their own shuddhi movement.

60 Crucial here remains the death in 1898 of Sardar Dyal Singh Majithia: the famous Lahori Sikh aristocrat and philanthropist who became Brahma Samajist and founded a school, college, library and the Tribune newspaper. He left his vast wealth to the Dyal Singh Trust but his widow and her cousin contested the will, claiming that the Hindu law of inheritance under which he had given his property in trust did not apply because he was a Sikh and not a Hindu. As a result, the Punjabi High Court found itself faced with the question of determining whether Sikhs were or were not Hindus. When they finally decided that the man was a Hindu the issue was heavily debated in public meetings and the press for three years. Ibid., 467.

61 More than Bhai Vir Singh, Kahn Singh Sabha became the chief intellectual protagonist of the Tat Khalsa ideology, preparing studies which were to have an enduring influence on the Panth. Since 1885 he developed a close relationship with Macauliffe and helped him in preparing his The Sikh religion. He remains best remembered however as the compiler of four-volume encyclopedia, Gurushabad Ratanakar Mahan Kosh (1930).
In 1889, Ghulam Ahmad made clear the ten conditions on which he would grant baiat to his disciples and afterwards started a *jamat-i-tabligh* or missionary association. Though a timely response to the widespread missionary activities by Christians and *shuddhi* efforts of Arya Samajists and Sikhs, Ahmadiyah missionaries altogether moved around in a different world than the former because their converts mostly came from orthodox Islam. Initially, Ahmadiyah members voluntarily went on preaching tours when requested but soon missionaries were specifically educated and ever since make up the core of the movement. Especially during the six years of Khalifah Nur al-Din’s leadership the Ahmadiyahs greatly expanded their missionary activities. First in the subcontinent, where converts were most numerous outside Punjab, in parts of Bengal, the Deccan and Malabar, and later especially overseas. More interesting, however, remain the Ahmadiyah converts from other traditions. Obviously there were not many of them, but at least they would create polemics. Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, for example, ridiculed Arya Samajists for their idea that the change of faith of Hindus who converted to Ahmadiyah Islam was not sincere as they ought to have studied the four Vedas in Sanskrit as well as the sacred literature of Islam:

The objection could be said to have at least been honestly raised if the objectors themselves had first given some proof of their own erudition in the four Vedas.... Not long ago all those who now fill the ranks of the Arya Samaj adhered to the old form of Hindu belief, in which they looked upon Rama and Krishna and other sages as deities and stuck to idol-worship as the true teachings of the Vedas, and above all according to the principles of the *Vedanta*, they considered themselves as having been brought into existence by God. But with their conversion to Arya Samaj all these ideas underwent a complete revolution. Instead of regarding themselves anymore as creatures of God, they looked upon themselves as co-eternal with God and uncreated
by His hands and thus arrogantly assumed the position of co-equality with the Lord of
the universe... I am willing to pay a thousand Rupees to the Arya Samajists if they can
prove that even five per cent of their total number are well-versed in the four Vedas in
Sanskrit. And if they cannot, they must confess the absurdity of their objection against
the converts to Islam.62

Afterwards, in the same article, Ghulam Ahmad sets out to answer the question 'to what
extent is research necessary for a change of religion'?63 In reply, he comes up with three
criteria to distinguish a ‘true’ religion from a false one. My point, however, is that discussions
such as these clearly fit within the earlier discussed idea of a ‘comparative moral
consciousness’ and in this case specifically the idea of individuals making their own
‘rational’ judgements.

All in all, besides rallying around such a sacred ‘symbol’ as the cow, ‘conversion’
definitely remains crucial to the Singh Sabha, Arya Samaj and Ahmadiyah ‘moral languages’
stirring the public mind. Particularly because it focused on expansion and as such indeed
directly featured the public side of ‘moral languages’. Converts had to be lured into the fold
by missionary talks. They had to undergo initiation rites, moral educational programs and,
alternatively, in the successful cases, contribute their part to further the community. The latter
could be voluntary work of all sorts but, importantly, generally took place in an institutional
context: schools, hospitals, orphanages or the local mandir, gurdwara or mosque. Through
conversion, Punjabi converts thus increasingly became involved in identity politics and,
indeed, often went for higher cultural norms to which alternatively ‘language’ and ‘history’
increasingly became crucial as symbolic community markers.

62 Ahmad, Religious conversion and the respective merits of Islam, Christianity and Arya Samaj in Review of
Religions, March 1903, 89-91.
63 Ibid.
4. Strengthening identity through language and history

Indian reformers followed the Christian missionaries in stressing the importance of vernacular education and accordingly often used missionary study and reference materials. The modern development of the vernaculars, therefore, is directly related to the creation of ‘moral languages’, as the choice of a vernacular and the cultural meanings embedded in that choice became themes in the writings of reform. While reformers articulated and disseminated new textual standards of tradition through the vernaculars among a growing audience, ‘the use of one specific vernacular became a claim to the legitimacy of that language for a particular group at the expense of other languages’. Best-known probably remains the Hindi-Urdu controversy. A surprising one at the same time, while ordinary Muslims and Hindus largely spoke the same language more or less from Lahore to Delhi. Moreover, despite the many registers in use, Hindus, Muslims and often Sikhs generally also used the Persian-Arabic Nastaliq script and thus did not perceive clear boundaries between Hindi and Urdu because of the Nastaliq and Devanagari scripts.

As literacy, education and employment became increasingly important to the newly emerging public sphere, ‘language’ became a matter of great consequence. Again the role of the British was crucial, while they patronized Urdu as the language for the administration. Though Hindus increasingly began to claim recognition for Hindi and gradually induced the British to repeal Urdu’s privileged status, the latter continued to favour ‘Hindustani’ (i.e. simplified Urdu) as the language into which government recruits fresh from England were immediately pitched (John Platts’ Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi and English, 1884, is a
reflection of this preference which continues to be illustrated in the bias of most later dictionaries).

65 The Hindi-Urdu divide remains all the more surprising as, before the coming of the colonial public education system, ‘Urdu was not used in its written form as a medium of instruction in traditional Islamic schools’. 66 Traditionally, Muslim children were taught Persian and Arabic, while north Indian Muslim elites generally condemned Urdu. It was only when the latter and the British decided that, in relation to Hindus, ‘Muslims were backward in education’ and therefore should be encouraged to attend government schools, that it was felt necessary to offer Urdu in Nastaliq as a carrot to Muslims to attend schools. 67

After more and more government schools were set up, Hindi and Urdu spokesmen increasingly insisted that Hindus had the right to be taught through Devanagari and Muslims through Nastaliq. Subsequently they set out to separate the two ‘languages’ by referring to Sanskrit or Persian as distinct sources from the past and for the future, emphasizing linguistic differences instead of commonalities. Much less an issue during former times, the rivalry between Hindi and Urdu centred on its most obvious and graphic manifestation, that of script. Whereby it should be stressed that because of the difference in difficulty of the scripts:

The adoption of the Devanagri script presented only a slight difficulty for Muslims, whereas the maintenance of Urdu in Persian-Arabic script raised much greater difficulties for Hindus. 68

65 Sayyid Ahmad Khan was most cynical about the claims for increased British recognition of Hindi and accordingly gave a dig to the Allahabad Association, which lobbied for Hindi recognition, while stating that he could converse in Urdu while travelling all the way from Allahabad to Bombay. In Musafiran, 184.
66 Brass, Elite groups, 49.
67 Ibid.
68 Ibid, 50.
One of the main themes of the controversy between Hindi and Urdu speakers as expressed by the supporters of Hindi, was that Urdu and the Nastaliq script promoted fraud, deceit and other vices, while Hindi and the Devanagari script enhanced truth, honesty and similar virtues. Ironically, much of the polemic with which the Hindi-Urdu debate was fought ‘was heavily influenced by English in its syntax and its rhetoric’. An impact which continues to be visible through ‘Indian English’ on modern Hindi and Urdu.

So how do the Singh Sabha, Arya Samaj and Ahmadiyah movements fit in all this? Again the Arya Samaj was at the vanguard with putting Hindi forward as symbolic identity markers and, in this way, once more functioned as a catalyst. After his visit to Calcutta, Swami Dayanand replaced Sanskrit with Hindi to spread his teachings among a wider audience and afterwards he encouraged Aryas to use Hindi in Devanagri as Arya bhasa, i.e. the heavily Sanskritized form of Hindi that the Samaj came to cherish but which few but themselves could understand. In fact, the Swami was the first to translate the Vedas into Hindi and in the accompanying commentary he often criticized Max Muller (and as such opened the field for Pandit Gurudatta Vidyarthi, whose vehement attacks on the German scholar were discussed in the previous Chapter). More important steps, however, were taken after Dayanand’s death, when Hindi was made obligatory in the movement’s educational institutions and Arya Samajists also stated its importance in public. In one 1882 tract written in reply to the Hunter Education Commission, for example, Lala Dwarka Das stressed the superiority of the Devanagri script in comparison with those of Nastaliq and Gurmukhi, if only because it would take less space in writing and printing. Moreover, he argued, Hindi types were much more durable:

69 Christopher Shackle and Rupert Snell, Hindi and Urdu since 1800. A common reader, London 1990, 44.
70 The so-called sarkari Hindi or government Hindi finally adopted by the Congress led government of independent India is also clearly Sanskrit biased and in fact very close to the ideal of Arya bhasa.
Everybody who has seen Urdu types must have perceived that their fine points wear off very soon. Moreover, Hindi printing is much more beautiful than Urdu printing. In this respect there is no difference between Hindi and English. Urdu letters are not adapted to printing, and hence they are more illegible when printed than when lithographed.\textsuperscript{71}

Even so, Hindi was not so important in the Punjab. Urdu was the dominant language in the press and slowly also replaced Persian as a literary language.\textsuperscript{72} Moreover, the language was used by the Punjab Education department for official notices and for major translations from Arabic, Persian and English. And yet, though Urdu (using the Prophet’s script) subsequently perhaps became a ‘symbol’ of Muslim identity second only to Islam itself, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad definitely was not one of its champions. Being the son of a well-to-do Punjabi landowner, he knew Arabic and Persian well. His Urdu writings however were not of a high literary standard and difficult to follow even for the native speaker, partly because his texts often were interspersed with revelatory passages in Arabic, Persian and English terms written in Nastaliq. In accordance with the times, nonetheless, he stressed Urdu was as capable as Arabic for a sound understanding of the Quran (which like the Bible by that time already was translated, by Nazir Ahmad for example, several times into Urdu). Furthermore, he claimed to receive his revelations in Urdu rather than in Arabic! On the whole, the fact that most Ahmadiyyah writings came to be written in Urdu undoubtedly had more to do with the lay focus of the movement and with fast changing political circumstances. This focus was

\textsuperscript{71} Dass, \textit{Hindi versus Urdu}, 11. From the very start Lala Dwarka Das was member of the Arya Samaj managing committee and closely related to Lala Hans Raj.

\textsuperscript{72} The fact that Persian gave way to the ‘lay language’ of Urdu explains the absence of periodicals in the former language, while on the whole ‘print culture’ further encouraged the dissemination of Urdu (as generally still today, by lithographic reproduction of calligraphic originals rather than by typesetting). Otherwise, though the Muslim elite turned to the cultivation of Urdu as a worthy successor to Persian poetry, the shift was somewhat lurchingly realized in prose instead of poetry.
further strengthened after the Partition of British India when the movement’s headquarters moved to a country where Urdu was the national language and, until declared non-Muslims in 1975 and persecuted afterwards, many Ahmadiyahs had high jobs in the government and the army.

The fact that the British privileged Urdu (over Persian) as the language of administration and Muslims furthermore made it in one of the main symbols of identification, obviously led to a less important role for Punjabi. As such, for example, while earlier Muslim poets contributed much to Punjabi literature, the famous Punjabi poet, Muhammad Iqbal (1876-1938), never wrote in his mother tongue. Punjabi was the language of rural Punjab, used almost exclusively in verse for more popular literature like qissas, bazaar songs, folk legends and works related to Pir worship and shrine rituals. Linguistically, Punjabi was not as developed as both Hindi and Urdu but according to Baba Buddh Singh (1878-1931) this was not something to worry about, as the language solely was in a formative stage and eventually would be like any other language. More interestingly, Buddh Singh argued that the development of the language had to be seen as a contribution to the Punjab as a whole and that its association with religion would be its doom.73 By that time, however, Singh Sabhaite already had turned Punjabi written in Gurmukhi into the sacred language of the Sikhs instead of that of the region and had become its most zealous crusaders. A process which ultimately resulted in the standardization of the Granth Sahib, i.e. page-length, numbering and the use of Gurmukhi irrespective of whether the original hymn was composed

---

73 Born in Lahore, Baba Buddh Singh studied at both the Lahore Mission High school and College. Afterwards he graduated in 1902 at the Roorki College and worked at the Punjab Public Work Department. In his spare time he was a prolific writer, passionately devoted to the cause of Punjabi literature. At his own expense, he wrote books which included essays and several full length plays, besides collections of translated and original verse. In fact, Buddh Singh was the author of the first ‘moral’ drama in Punjabi, Chandar Hari (1909). Though like many plays written in Indian languages at the time, it owed more, as Christopher Shackle put it, ‘to a perceived need to match up to the Shakespearean profile of the English literary canon than to any living local theatrical tradition’. In Making Punjabi literary history, 114.
74 Grewal, The emergence of Punjabi drama, 6-8. In 1851, American Presbyterian, John Newton, published the first Punjabi grammar.
in medieval Hindi, Punjabi or some other language. Otherwise, while stressing the relevance of drawing the value and ideal of Sikh life from the Granth Sahib in his writings, Bhai Vir Singh from the very beginning recognized the necessity of doing all this in simple Punjabi. Yet, while Baba Buddh Singh wrote for the people of the Punjab des or country, Bhai Vir Singh stressed he always wrote for the Sikh qaum or community (original Arabic: ‘a people who stand together’), while India was his country.75

Some reformers also stressed the importance of writing in the colloquial vernacular. One of the most interesting cases here remains that of the earlier mentioned Altaf Husain Hali. In Lahore, he had worked in the Punjab Government book depot, revising the style of textbooks that had been translated from English into Urdu for the Education department. Hence, without knowing English, he became familiar with a wide range of English literature and its ‘rational’ mode of writing. Particularly important as an example of colloquial writing remains Hali’s Majalis-un-nissa or Assemblies of women (1874). Written in the form of conversations between elitist Muslim women it is an excellent piece of social history, while it includes descriptions of women’s daily life, their education and training in the household management, child-rearing practices, customs and beliefs. All written indeed as a pedagogical work to reform Muslim women in the dialect of Urdu spoken by them, begamati zaban. Though the very earthy and colloquial dialect, with very few Persian and Arabic loan words, was often regarded as low status, the Director of Public Instruction, Colonel W.R.M. Holroyd, nonetheless recommended Majalis-un-nissa for a literary prize and Viceroy Lord Northbrooke awarded Hali 400 rupees. Afterwards the work was adopted as a textbook for girls’ schools in the Punjab.76

75 Ibid., 15. Like most of Bhai Vir Singh’s writings, however, Buddh Singh’s Chandar Hari also became part of the curriculum for the education of Sikh scholars (gianis).
76 Interesting to mention here remains the fact that S.W. Falcon’s A new Hindustani-English dictionary, London 1879, included as part of the colloquial vernacular, the vocabulary of women (here called rekht or zanani bolī). For according to Falcon, ‘the seclusion of native females in India has been the asylum of the true vernaculars, as pure and simple as it is unaffected by the pedantries of word-makers’.
More crucial in terms of literary history, however, remains the fact that Altaf Husain Hali (like the earlier mentioned Muhammad Husain Azad) advocated 'natural' (*necharal*) style as the only possible medium for serious and relevant poetry.\textsuperscript{77} In a most important piece of literary criticism in Urdu, *Muqaddama-e-si’r-o-satri* or Introduction to poetry and poetics (1893), he ‘mercilessly criticized the traditional poets because he felt that neither high-soaring mystical dreams nor complicated rhetorical devices could help Muslims face their basic duties and lead them to towards a more glorious future’.\textsuperscript{78} Indeed, importantly, through developments like these Urdu heavily influenced modern Hindi and Punjabi literary history. As R.S. McGregor for example put it in relation to the case of Hindi:

Factors retarding the progress of Hindi were the relative infancy and consequent restricted range of the new style, its continuing dependence into the twentieth century on Urdu for models and also for some of its authors in the field of prose, and the natural difficulties in the way of a wholesale exchange of one set of language habits for another.\textsuperscript{79}

Similarly, since a knowledge of Urdu was so widely disseminated by the Punjab educational system, Christopher Shackle recently argued how the early attempts of constructing modern Punjabi literary history were much indebted to both Muhammad Husain Azad’s *Ab-e Hayat* (1880) and Hali’s *Muqaddama*.\textsuperscript{80} As Baba Buddh Singh put it in *Koil Ku* (1916), in which he

\textsuperscript{77} As Frances Pritchett argued, Hali got much of the inspiration for the ‘natural’ style from his understanding of English poetics, mostly those articulated by Wordsworth. In *Nets of awareness*, 166-167. Like Azad, Hali gave presentations at the *Mushairah*—meetings (mentioned in Chapter Two) organized by the Anjuman-i-Punjab in Lahore and addressed in English by Colonel W.R.M. Holroyd.

\textsuperscript{78} Schimmel, *Islam in the Indian subcontinent*, 200.


\textsuperscript{80} Shackle, *Making Punjabi literary history*, 102.
treats the *qissa* poets of the Mughal period and subsequently offers an elementary theory of poetry:

These verses are stuffed full of Persian images, and the custom started by these masters has continued down to the present. Even the poetry of today simply clings to the example of Fazl Shah. Those same Persian images which infuriated Azad and Hali and to which they said 'Enough!' have today found a home in Punjabi poetry... But they are after all quite alien, and hardly pleasing to the Punjabi ear.\(^{81}\)

Partly because of the introduction of ‘print culture’, the colonial interaction also had decisive consequences for the formal organization of the vernaculars. Not only several editions of a work were brought out on the market, but these often also came out with revisions (as in the cases of Dayanand Saraswati’s *Satyarth Prakash* and Altaf Husain Hali’s *Musaddas*). Likewise, works increasingly had Prefaces and/or Introductions, in which authors ‘rationally’ explained the message they wanted to spread. In the Preface to the *Bride’s mirror*, for example, Nazir Ahmad, states his satisfaction about the fact that his ‘moral’ tale proved to be useful for women, as ‘they took the greatest interest in reading it or hearing it read’,\(^{82}\) while Bhai Vir Singh states he wrote the biography of tenth Guru Gobind Singh, *Sri Kalgidhar Chamatkara* (1925), ‘as a guide to the reader to regulate his own life on a practical path’.\(^{83}\) In the same way, (sub-)headings lead the separate parts of a work more smoothly into each other and generally made the organization of the work more ‘rational’ and thus better for spreading the message. Interestingly, while making no concessions to formerly expected elegant forms of rhyme, ‘rational’ headings often make clear the newly emerged ‘social

\(^{81}\) As cited in Ibid., 113.
\(^{82}\) Ahmad, *The Bride’s mirror*, 186.
conscience’. Probably one of the best examples is Dayanand’s *Satyarth Prakash*, where one finds such subject headings as: ‘On education’, ‘An examination of the different religions prevailing in *Arya varta*’ and ‘An examination of the doctrines of Christianity’. Moreover, as discussed earlier, in their urge to counter Western knowledge while reviving the tradition (but nonetheless accepting the authority of science), Punjabis began citing Western authorities on the subject and to refer to them in footnotes, carefully organized by number and content. Otherwise, Arya Samajists, Singh Sabhaite s and Ahmadiyahs also kept close watch on what was written about their and other traditions, referred to them, and hence their re-interpretations and writings often came to be embedded in and entangled with the wider world of Western Orientalism.

In Chapter two, I already referred to the complications involved in learning English in nineteenth century South Asia as well as the ‘interpretation’ of the ever-growing amount of texts. Likewise, undoubtedly, ‘translation’ from one vernacular into another and especially from English was crucial to what concerned Indian ‘social consciousness’ under colonial rule. In relation to this also I mentioned some vernacular terms throughout this study: *unnati, seva, dharmachar, ‘aql, Arya varta, Arya bhasa, des, qaum, swadeshi, niyog and yaugika*. Naturally most of these words existed earlier but the point is that they were presented as part of a new powerful and authoritative ‘rational’ language in the public sphere and therefore attained a different ‘meaning’. In the same way, though few of them knew English well, authors often retained English words they felt were impossible to translate but nonetheless crucial to be maintained.84 Hence, English words such as ‘civilization’, ‘science’, ‘society’, ‘liberal’, ‘public’, ‘moral’, ‘natural philosophy’, ‘political’ often crop up in careful transliteration and, in this way, these words complete, as it were, the full circle which started

84 Fortunately, English words were transliterated through South Asian sound systems and hence the Western translator regularly is confronted with amusing findings that make this tiresome work somewhat more bearable (*maijik lenturm, necharal filasaf*). Similarly, because of the peculiar combination of consonants in English, one can often recognize transliterated English words beforehand in vernacular texts.
with Bharatendu Harishchandra’s Ballia speech mentioned in the Introduction. Many of these terms were incorporated by reformers in the definition of their ‘moral languages’ and, after feeling comfortable with them in one way or the other, they increasingly started to use them as authoritative ‘reference’ words.

Overall Indian elites increasingly took care of their ‘language’ in practice. In fact, in hindsight, all new literary forms (i.e. novel, drama, poems and so on) had a strong ‘moral’ content and as such they were definitely part of the dominant ‘social consciousness’ at the time. While creating niches for themselves and the group(s) they identified with, Indians wrestled with contemporary ‘colonial culture’ and redefined their ‘traditions’ at the same time. Equally crucial in terms of ‘moral’ strengthening of these newly emerging identities then remains the modern scientific discipline of ‘history’. The latter not only made it possible to define ‘moral languages’ in time and space, it particularly was excellent for polemic use as well. Being continuously confronted with Western missionary and historical writings moulded by the ever recurring theme of Indians being ‘uncivilized’ and backward compared to the West, reformers set out on countering these sources. For indeed, how could it be that the British would know more about South Asian history than Indians themselves? Moreover, though belonging to the world of science, the writing of history was different from the experiments held in the laboratories and could easily suit a ‘moral’ purpose.

During the second half of the eighteenth century the British had started with the writing of South Asian history and soon translations into the vernaculars were made. Elitist Indians became fascinated with the discipline and started to historicize their traditions in time: if only to counter earlier made historical claims. As such, as still today, the search for history became one for legitimacy, especially because the Anglo-Indian colonial state often acknowledged

---

85 I am referring here to texts by such authors as Altaf Husain Hali, Muhammad Husain Azad, Nazir Ahmad, Bhai Vir Singh and Pandit Gurudatta Vidyarthi. Those at the vanguard in terms late nineteenth century ‘social consciousness’, as it were, for obviously one finds these terms not so much in the writings of for example Mirza Ghulam Ahmad or Dayanand Saraswati, if only because their lack of (first hand) knowledge of English.
the so-called ‘facts’ brought forward or even gave authority to them in the first place (like stressing Muslims as being the foreign element in South Asian society). A growing number of historical works were written (involving consulting original sources, asking different kinds of questions, collecting different kinds of information and coming to new kinds of conclusions) which heavily influenced the redefinition of traditions. Yet, like in Europe, the great question was whether the study of history could affect the meaning of ‘religion’ by probing the moments of ‘time’ associated with it. In Europe, for instance, Ernest Renan’s biographical study on the Life of Jesus (1863), not only excluded the supernatural but at the same time was written for the general reader who wanted an understandable Christ without simultaneously having to accept magical stories.\(^8^6\) Now much in the same way Indians began to redefine their traditions by using history as a new form of ‘rational’ knowledge introducing clockwork into ‘time’.

Understandably, the first biographies on Muhammad written by Christian missionaries outraged pious Muslims. For while the latter, at least, ‘could claim to have always paid due respect to Jesus the prophet and his virgin mother, they were horrified to see how the picture of their prophet was distorted in Western publications’\(^8^7\). As a reaction, literature about the Prophet grew much after 1880. Like in the case of Jesus, Muhammad more than before was taken as the true guide, equally indeed for both men and women. Reformers like Sayyid Ahmad Khan ‘helped to unshroud him from the mist of legends that had enveloped him over the centuries’\(^8^8\). According to the reformers, to know more about Muhammad and to see him as the model not only for details of ritual but rather for the whole approach to life was the ‘duty’ of Muslims. Undoubtedly, this strong reverence of the Prophet of Islam paralleled and

\(^8^6\) Chadwick, The secularization of the European mind, Chapter Eight.
\(^8^7\) Schimmel, Islam in the Indian subcontinent, 206.
\(^8^8\) Ibid.
was a response to the nineteenth century Protestant emphasis on the Life of Jesus rather than on the mystery of Christ.

An early landmark in South Asian history writing was Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s *Asbab-e-baghavat-e-Hind* (1859) in which he tried to explain the ‘Causes of the Indian Mutiny’ by laying the blame upon both sides: the government had ignored the conditions of its subjects, while Indians misunderstood British rule. While finding mutual misunderstanding at the root of the tragedy, Ahmad Khan began to strive for means to bring about a re-approachement. Convinced that Muslims ought to know more about the religion of their rulers, he came up in 1862 with his Bible commentary, *Tabyin-al-Kalam*. Alternatively, in the case of the Punjab, the history texts prepared (by Dr. Leitner among others) for the Punjab Education Department were seminal in the transition to and the evolution and dispersal of the earliest Indian works indebted to Western historiography. Also there was a sudden and voluminous production in the 1880s of short eulogistic accounts of historical charismatic figures (besides that of the Prophet Muhammad), to set a ‘moral’ example and generally to create pride in the tradition. Though these were mostly uncritical accounts, through them nonetheless one slowly but surely adopted a new way of writing about individuals in history. While until that time in the Indian tradition ‘biographies’ generally focused on the sublimation of individuals (kings and other heroes) to broader historical forces, these new works were more about the development of personality and the unique place of individuals in history. Probably the best example here remains Altaf Husain Hali’s *Hayat-i-Jawed* (1901) which, despite its adulatory tone (for Altaf Husain perhaps was Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s most devoted disciple), still is the best available biography on the famous Muslim reformer.

Perhaps because of their close relationship with missionaries and the British in general, Singh Sabhaites in particular exhibited much interest in the Sikh past. By the end of the century at least two societies sponsored historical research: the Gurmat Granth Pracharak
Sasha of Amritsar and the Gurmat Granth Sudharak Committee of Lahore. Besides examining sources, one important aim of these societies was to prevent the publication of what they perceived as writings untrue to the Sikh tradition. Scholars such as Professor Gurmukh Singh (1849-1898) and Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha toured the Punjab in search of old texts. They discovered, for example, a number of previously unknown traditional biographies of Guru Nanak (janam sakhis), which generated a debate on the nature and reliability of sources.\textsuperscript{89} The work of Ernest Trumpp remains crucial here because of its negative conclusions about the historicity of Bhai Bala (a cherished figure in the tradition at the time) which today are widely accepted and elaborated upon among historians.\textsuperscript{90} Overall publication of glossaries and studies of the Granth Sahib intensified concern with historical problems, while alternatively individuals such as Bhai Ditt Singh and Bhai Vir Singh reflected on the tradition in numerous writings, ranging from historical novels to short biographies on the lives of the Gurus (who indeed for many Sikhs came to be ‘moral’ examples). Another interesting example is the case of the Raja Rasalu cycle. Being one of the most famous folk tales collected in the Punjab by Richard Temple among others, Baba Buddh Singh became extremely interested in proving the historical existence of Raja Rasalu. Accordingly, he published his Raja Rasalu in 1931, which, believe it or not, was a transliteration into Gurmukhi of Richard Temple’s Orientalist romanized recordings of Punjabi oral texts.\textsuperscript{91}

Interesting in terms of comparative history remain the parallels drawn by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad between Jesus Christ and himself to prove the rightful cause of their missions (on earth at least). According to him: Indians under British rule were in very much the same ‘corrupt’ situation as the Jews under the Romans and were in need of similar divinely

\textsuperscript{89} Barrier, The Sikhs and their literature, xxi.
\textsuperscript{90} Trumpp based his conclusions on the oldest then extant janam sakhis which are part of the so-called Colebrooke manuscript now in the British Library, London. Critical to contemporary historical studies of the Sikh tradition then remains W.H. McLeod’s Guru Nanak and the Sikh religion, Oxford 1968. In it, McLeod subjected the janam sakhis to historical scrutiny and so boosted all subsequent studies on the Sikh tradition.
\textsuperscript{91} Shackle, Making Punjabi literary history, 114.
appointed mediators. Otherwise the Ahmadiyah periodical, *Review of Religions*, excellently fits the idea of a ‘comparative moral consciousness’. Besides, being an outlet for Ahmadiyah propaganda writings, it featured many articles discussing the different faiths in a ‘scientific’ manner, with ‘history’ often used to legitimate the ‘truth’. Likewise, while for Muslims the life of the Prophet always set the ‘moral’ example, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, whose teachings identified him as simultaneously Muhammad, Krishna and Jesus, became the guiding light for many Ahmadiyahs and, while he was still alive, a biased biography was published in English (Abdur Rahman Dard, *Life of Ahmad*). Soon also the Ahmadiyahs appointed an historian to give the ‘official’ account of the movement in time and space.92

Arya Samajists started early with the writing of the history of their movement. Perhaps the earliest attempt was Radha Kishan Metha’s *Tarikh-i-Arya Samaj* (1903), but much more important were Lala Lajpat Raj’s *History of the Arya Samaj* (1914) and, the work published by the then headmaster of the Gurukul Kangri, Ramdev, *Bharatvars ka itihas* (three volumes 1910-1933). The latter work became one of the most widely distributed publications by the Gurukul and was used as history textbook in that same institution until the 1970s. Moreover, as Harald Fischer-Tine put it:

The book was a corrective to Western representations of Indian history, hence its aggressively assertive character throughout. Almost every page contains a quotation from or a reference to the statements of historians and indologists like W. Jones, H.H. Wilson, J. Todd, F.M. Muller, V.A. Smith et al. which are subsequently debunked.93

92 The job still exists and hence in 1996 I was kindly received in Rabwah by Mr. Dost Muhammad Shahid, historian of the Ahmadiyah community and author/editor of the *Tarikh-i-Ahmadiyah*, 9 volumes, Rabwah n.d.
93 Fischer-Tine, *The only hope for fallen India*, 287.
Then, despite the scarcity of sources, not only the lives of important Arya Samajists were described as ‘moral’ example in numerous biographies, but soon also Aryas specialized in shahid or martyrdom writings. Both the assassinations of Pandit Lekh Ram and later of Swami Shraddhanand led to series of biographies and eulogic poetry. More significant, however, compared to the Singh Sabhas and Ahmadiyahs (and indeed perhaps most other reform movements), Aryas extensively used ‘facts’ of history in their polemics to legitimize their positions (like against Islam in the earlier mentioned case of Lekh Ram’s Risala-i-jihad).

All in all, the discipline of ‘history’ always proved politically powerful, especially when authorized by the Anglo-Indian colonial state. Besides, if the British could choose the ancient Greeks as their ancestors rather than the less philosophically engaged people of the British Isles, were Indians not equally right to reveal, for example, that they were incontrovertible descendants of the writers of the Vedas? Of course, they were. The point however is that by doing so they engaged in a dialogue with such Orientalist works as James Mill’s History of British India and H.M. Eliot’s The history of India as told by its own historians (1867-77). Particularly in these two works ancient India was condemned as a despotic and immoral civilization, fortunately conquered by the slightly more civilized Muslims followed by the far superior British. Significantly, such an interpretation not only laid the foundation for a communal interpretation of Indian history but also led for example to Arya Samajists defending the Golden Age of the Vedas. All the same, whatever the ideology, in the end one always referred to the authority science, even though often morally in the name of truth.

---

94 In fact, during the same period, Singh Sabhaites redefined the meaning of the term shahid from ‘one who dies for his faith’ to ‘the Sikh who in dying contributes to the overthrow of oppression and in its place the establishment of justice and righteousness for all peoples’. In McLeod, Sikhs of the Khalsa, 239.
95 The latter work was compiled by Henry Elliot but edited and published (in eight volumes between 1867 and 1877) after his death by John Dowson. All together the volumes include translated extracts from over 150 works, mostly in Persian, from between the ninth and the eighteenth centuries.
Increasingly the ‘facts’ of history counted in debates, to defeat opponents or convince the government to bring in support.

Earlier, Chapter Three discussed how the Arya Samaj, Singh Sabha and Ahmadiyah movements institutionalized themselves in time and place and how its lay members redefined their traditions into ‘moral languages’. This Chapter focused on how these ‘moral languages’ stirred the Punjabi public mind. Undoubtedly, the role of Christian missionaries proved to be decisive throughout. The way they criticized indigenous society and especially aimed at reform, made Punjabi reformers position themselves against Christianity and on the whole start all sorts of modern disciplinary institutions and practices. Because of their grammars, dictionaries and teaching materials in general, missionaries also were crucial to the creation of modern Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi, while alternately the growing importance of these vernaculars, besides its centrality in conveying ‘moral’ meaning in terms of reform, can be compared with what happened during the Reformation in Europe, i.e. the translation of the word of God into the vernaculars. Yet, despite their critical stance against the missionaries (though adopting their methods), most Punjabi reformers remained ‘loyal’ to the state and, in fact, while propagating ‘improvement’ through their ‘moral languages’, played a crucial role in the spread of the ‘civilizing mission’. By and large, the redefinition of the self, as discussed in Chapter Three, came out assertively in public. ‘Rational’ knowledge was crucial to ‘moral’ communities stirring the public mind, sometimes in favour, sometimes against the state, but generally against other communities. While repeatedly invoking the authority of science, reformers countered the knowledge of each others traditions and, importantly, at the same time often referred to the Orientalist knowledge about their society as dominantly put forward by the Anglo-Indian colonial state, in order to gain, often at the basis of numbers, access to all sorts of institutions and favours.
The focus of this study was the period of 'social reform' and hence I solely ended up with some remarks in terms of 'rationality' in practice between 'moral languages' and modern identity politics. To connect 'moral languages' further towards 'religious nationalism' seems to be another option, albeit much more difficult to comprehend, if not teleological. For what would make nationalism specifically religious? In terms of 'moral languages', continuity of 'tradition' not only seems logical but also definable to begin with. Moreover, the term 'religious nationalism' remains too anthropological in the sense of trying to render the familiar strange, while 'nationalism' solely concerns a modern liberal democratic political process. The very act of turning subjects into public men and women tends to produce a 'social consciousness' which often is hard to distinguish from nationalism or whatever the label given to what are often continuities of tradition in terms of identity politics of 'belonging'. In the end though, the major political changes which turned a potential receptivity to the latter appeals into actual reception, in particular were democratic politics (rule by numbers: electorates!) and the creation of the modern administrative Anglo-Indian colonial state in an overall mass mobilizing and influencing public sphere.

---

96 van der Veer, Religious nationalism.