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Van Dusenbery

Punjabi Sikhs and Gora Sikhs: Conflicting Assertions of Sikh Identity in North America

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Introduction

Sikhs claim that theirs is the youngest major "world religion" and that the teachings of the Sikh Gurus (preceptors) are universal in their truth and applicability. Yet, until recently, Sikhism remained essentially a regional faith, one found among thirteen to sixteen million Punjabis living in India and in scattered Punjabi communities abroad. Over the past five centuries, as the Sikh community in Punjab grew in size and strength, it drew members from the indigenous Punjabi Hindu and, to a lesser extent, Punjabi Muslim communities. But despite more than a century of Sikh migration to other parts of the world, the community has remained an insular one. And norms of endogamy and non-proselytization have ensured that heretofore there has been no significant move on the part of non-Punjabis to embrace the Sikh religion. During the past fifteen years, however, several thousand young North Americans have made unprecedented claims to Sikh identity and have sought to have their "conversion" to the Sikh *dharma* ("religion," "moral duty," "way of life") recognized by both Punjabi Sikhs and the world at large.¹

In the Punjab, the reaction to these *gora* ("white") Sikhs, as the Western converts are commonly called by Punjabi Sikhs, was, at least initially, quite

1. This paper draws on fieldwork conducted in 1978-79 in Vancouver, British Columbia, with Punjabi Sikhs and Gora Sikhs and on fieldwork conducted in 1972 and 1974 in the western United States and Canada with the Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization (3HO). It benefits from continuing archival research and from ongoing conversations with Sikhs throughout North America. This is an extensively revised and expanded version of a paper first presented in a symposium entitled "The Assertion of Group Identity: Symbolic Approaches" at the 56th Annual Meeting of the Central States Anthropological Society, Ann Arbor, Michigan, April 9-12, 1980. I would like to thank the other members of that symposium and members of the seminar on South Asian ethnosociology at the University of Chicago (winter 1983) for their helpful comments. I would particularly like to thank McKim Marriott and W.H. McLeod for their constructive criticisms of earlier drafts. The paper's flaws remain mine.

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positive.² Sikh leaders commented favorably on the apparent devotion and ritual piety of the converts and held them up as evidence to Punjabi Sikh youth and to non-Sikhs of Sikhism's appeal and relevance to the modern world. In North America, however, the response of Punjabi Sikhs was, from the start, considerably more restrained. Punjabi Sikhs in North America—including the growing number of second- and third-generation Canadians and Americans of Punjabi Sikh descent—had previously had a virtual free hand in defining for themselves and for the wider public what it meant to be a Sikh. Now this exclusivity was being challenged, and many Punjabi Sikhs thought it prudent to wait and see how the Gora Sikhs would assert their new-found Sikh identity before endorsing their claims and embracing the converts as fellow Sikhs.

This paper explores one aspect of the relationship between the small, but well-organized and highly vocal, group of North American Sikh converts—almost all of whom are members or former members of the Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization (or 3HO) and its religious arm, Sikh Dharma³—and the larger, but more diffuse and diverse, population of North Americans of Punjabi Sikh ancestry. The paper suggests that certain of the differences that have arisen between the Gora Sikhs and the Punjabi Sikhs over the assertion of a Sikh identity can be understood as deriving from differing cultural presuppositions about the nature of persons and groups. It argues that contrasting, culturally informed interpretations of Sikh teaching and practices have led the two groups to apply different standards in evaluating each other's assertions of Sikh identity. And it concludes that half a world of difference lies between the "radical egalitarianism" of North American converts and the "unity in diversity" perspective of Punjabi Sikhs, approaches that have led the converts to regard most Punjabi Sikhs in North America as no longer Sikhs and most Punjabi Sikhs in North America to regard Gora Sikhs as, at best, Sikhs of a very different kind.

Sikh Egalitarianism and Social Diversity

Sikh informants and Sikh apologists have commonly emphasized for Western audiences the degree to which Sikh doctrine constitutes a radical

2. We italicize *gora* as a non-English word when it appears as a term, but capitalize it without italics when it functions as a proper name referring to a particular group, like Khatri or Mazhbi Sikhs. —Editors' note.

3. Admittedly, there have been isolated instances of other Westerners of non-Punjabi ancestry becoming Sikh through intermarriage or individual conversion. Perhaps the most notable of these converts is the Englishwoman, Manjeet Kaur (a.k.a. Mrs. Pamela M. Wylam), the co-editor of the *Sikh Courier* of Gravesend, England. The members of Sikh Dharma are, however, the most numerous, visible, and organized of the *gora* ("white") Sikhs. There are currently some three thousand or more members of Sikh Dharma, including approximately five hundred minor children. They can be distinguished by their distinctive white *bana* (uniform of the Khalsa) and by their turbans for women. All are *keshdhari* ("hair-bearing") Sikhs, and a vast majority of the adults have undergone the *amrit pahul* (initiation into the Khalsa). Most Sikh Dharma members live in or near one of the approximately one hundred 3HO ashrams located throughout North America and in several overseas cities. Membership has held steady over the past decade, which suggests that new converts and children born to members balance those lost to the group by death or departure. Of those who have left the group, an unknown percentage have remained Sikhs; while others, including some of the past leadership, not only have left the organization, Sikh Dharma, but also have totally dissociated themselves from the Panth.

departure from Hindu ideology. Thus, they have pointed to the anti-caste pronouncements of the Sikh Gurus and to Guru Gobind Singh's formation in 1699 of the Khalsa Panth ("Brotherhood of the Pure")⁴ as evidence of the Sikh obliteration of caste hierarchy. True, some have noted that the institution of inter-caste commensality and consociation in Sikh worship did not lead to inter-caste marriages, even among the Gurus, and that dropping Hindu caste and clan names in favor of the Sikh name-titles, "Singh" (lion) for males and "Kaur" (princess) for females, did not push awareness of one's caste affiliation from public consciousness. However, at least in the South Asian context, Sikh teachings and ritual practices have stuck out as radically egalitarian;⁵ and the differences in Sikh and Hindu ideology, rather than similarities in social organization, have been emphasized in giving substance to the claim that Sikhism is not only a unique and separate religion but one significantly free of caste distinctions.

Whether in deference to Sikh sensibilities or for lack of familiarity with Sikh social practices, South Asianists have by and large given only passing attention to the question of caste in the Sikh Panth.⁶ We are indebted, therefore, to the historian W.H. McLeod for two articles that address directly the persistence of caste observances among Sikhs. It is McLeod's contention that what the Sikh Gurus meant by their teachings and demonstrated through their actions was that "whereas they were vigorously opposed to the vertical distinctions of caste they were content to accept it in terms of its horizontal linkages." Thus, he argues, what they were concerned to deny were (1) the "soteriological significance of caste" and (2) the "justice of privilege or deprivation based upon notions of status and hierarchy," while continuing to

accept the "socially beneficial pattern of horizontal connections."⁷ McLeod does not deny hierarchical overtones in the ranking of local Sikh caste groups but argues that the Sikh Panth is and always has been of "heterogeneous constituency," being composed of various largely endogamous groups (Punjabi, *zat*; Hindi, *jati*) whose social interaction and status have taken different forms at different times and in different places, yet who continue to assert their own and confirm one another's common membership in the Sikh Panth.

McLeod's formulation, however foreign its solid geometric imagery may be to describing the fluid realities supposed by South Asians, strongly suggests that Punjabi Sikhs do not find it problematic to assert their similarities as Sikhs while simultaneously maintaining other diversities and dissimilarities among themselves as Punjabi persons. Such diversity among those calling themselves Sikhs is not only a matter of the different *zat* groupings to which Punjabi persons continue to belong; it is also a matter of different ritual practices which Punjabi Sikhs follow. For instance, two groups which might in the West be considered "orthodox" and "heterodox" Sikhs, i.e., long-haired *keshdhari* Sikhs and clean-shaven *sahajdhari* Sikhs, are generally regarded by Punjabis as simply different kinds or degrees of Sikhs. In light of prevailing Western conceptions, the persistence of caste observances in the face of Sikh "egalitarian" teachings and a tolerance of diverse—including what appear to be "unorthodox"—practices by those calling themselves Sikhs may be considered problematic issues by Western observers.⁸ But given the radically different cultural conceptions of persons and social identities they hold, there is no reason to expect these to be problematic issues for Punjabis. Indeed, this paper suggests that the conflicting assertions of Sikh identity and mutual misunderstandings arising in North America between Punjabi Sikhs and Gora Sikhs follow from the radically different cultural assumptions each brings to the interaction.

Punjabi Persons and Sikh Practices⁹

The Punjabi term *zat* (like its Hindi cognate and synonym, *jati*), is commonly rendered as "caste," since it refers, among other things, to certain named, loosely ranked, hereditary, primarily endogamous, occupational groupings in Punjabi society that Western-oriented social scientists wish to assimilate to their notion of "caste." But as McKim Marriott and Ronald Inden have convincingly argued,¹⁰ the terms *zat* and *jati* can refer to "all sorts of categories of things" (e.g., male beings as differentiated from female beings; human beings as distinct from animals or divinities) and to a "whole range of earthly populations" (e.g., regional groupings, religious communities,

4. Guru Gobind Singh's use of "Khalsa" seems to have connoted initially that the band of dedicated followers was his "own" or "special" community. Secondly, the connotation of "pure" has come to be associated with the name Khalsa. Panth, literally "path," refers to the band of community of Sikhs. —Editors' note.

5. See, e.g., Cole and Sambhi 1978, p. 144; J. Singh 1981.

6. Louis Dumont, for one, is conspicuous in his silence on the issue of caste among the Sikhs. Indeed it is unclear whether he considers the Sikhs to be a renunciatory Hindu sect or a non-Hindu group, although we may infer from what he says of both renunciatory sects and non-Hindu religions in South Asia that he assumes the Sikhs to "have at the very least something of caste despite modifications in their ideas and values" (1980, p. 277, emphasis in the original) since "a sect cannot survive on Indian soil if it denies caste" (1980, p. 269). Presenting a contrasting model, Veena Das, building on the work of J.P. Singh Uberoi (1967), argues that the essence of the heterodoxy of rebel sects—including the Sikhs—is their "negation of the conceptual order of Hinduism" (1980, p. 55); but, she argues, the thrust of the negation is not an attack on the caste system itself but on "the special position of Brahmins as holders of inherent ritual merit within the conceptual scheme of Hinduism" (1980, p. 87, emphasis in the original). As if to give substance to this latter interpretation, Satish Saberwal attributes the slackened caste observances in the Punjab to the undermining of the religious supremacy and socio-political influence of the Brahmins (1976, pp. 1-13) but suggests that the egalitarian ideology of Punjabi Sikhs, Muslims, Christians and Arya Samajists has been used selectively "to knock the Brahmin down but to try, if possible, not to concede much opportunity to the lower castes readily" (1976, p. 30, emphasis in the original). Cf. Marriott and Inden 1974, 1977, for an analysis of caste without recourse to religious/sociopolitical orthodox/heterodox, or ideology/practice dualisms. According to Marriott and Inden: "The Sikhs believe that through initiation they incorporate their teachers, who are believed to be perfect and divine, even though human...[and] that they attain liberation while still belonging to their many original castes" (1974, p. 988).

7. McLeod 1974; 1976, pp. 88-91, emphasis in the original.

8. See, e.g., Juergensmeyer and Barrier 1979, pp. 2-3.

9. This section owes much to the "South Asian ethnosociology" of McKim Marriott, Ronald Inden, Ralph Nicholas and their students (e.g., Inden 1976; Inden and Nicholas 1977; Kurin 1974; Marriott 1980; Marriott and Inden 1974, 1977). For a more elaborated presentation of the analysis herein, see Dusenbery (forthcoming).

10. Marriott and Inden 1977, p. 230.

occupational categories, ethnic groups) for which the term "genus" and its plural, "genera," seem the most appropriate gloss. Since South Asian genera are ordered paradigmatically, not just taxonomically, each person belongs simultaneously to several kinds of genera. They are intersecting classes. The common Christian-style translation is "apostate") Sikhs are those who once having accepted the *amrit* no longer follow the Khalsa *rahit* (discipline). As their name implies, they are considered to have fallen in purity and rank and thus to be no longer able to induct others into the Panth.

For Punjabi Sikhs, the most important distinctions of persons within Punjabi society are those based on religion (between Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims, etc.), those based on occupation (between agriculturalist Jats, mercantile Khatri and Aroras, artisan Ramgarhias and Ahluwalias, service Mazhbis and Ramdasias, etc.) and those based on regional origins (between peoples of the regions of the Punjab called Majha, Doaba, and Malwa). These different kinds of persons—by marriage practices. In keeping with the Guru's injunctions, Sikhs by and large ancestry members of different human genera—are understood to possess different natural substances and moral codes deriving from, respectively and simultaneously, their objects of worship, their means of subsistence and their territory. Persons' generic substances and codes for conduct of persons are therefore not immutable. New substances and new moral codes—altered modes of worship, subsistence, and territory—may transform persons over time.

Being a Sikh, for a Punjabi, implies having one of these kinds of generic features through having incorporated into one's person the natural substance and moral code for conduct of the Sikh Guru (preceptor). Receipt of the Guru's coded substances makes those who bear them partly alike in their person.

natures and, without making them alike in other ways, makes of them recognizably distinct worship genus, the Sikh Panth. But different categories of persons may be recognized within the Sikh Panth based on the kind and degree of Sikh worship substances they have incorporated into their total persons. Minimally, those who incorporate the natural sacred sound (*gurbani kirtan*), the visual emanations (*gurdarshan*), and the edible "benefits" (*karah parshad*) of the Guru and who mix with other Sikhs in the communality of the *sanga* (congregation) and the commensality of the *pangat* (communal dining hall) may be considered *sahajdhari* (lit. "one who bears a light-weight [burden]") Sikhs. At the other extreme, those who incorporate the *amrit* (a "nectar of immortality" including sugar, water, steel and the Guru's word), shared in the course of the *amrit pahul* (initiation) ceremony, become *amritdhari* (lit. "nectar-bearing"; the common Christian-style translation is "baptized") Sikhs and members of the Khalsa Panth.

These *amritdhari* Sikhs, having achieved a higher state of Sikh regeneration through being further united with the Guru's substance and following a stricter moral code appropriate to the Khalsa, are thought capable of uniting others into the Panth by administering the *amrit* to initiates. Standing between the light-burdened *sahajdhari* Sikhs and the more heavily burdened *amritdhari* Sikhs are the *keshdhari* (lit. "one who bears hair [or a lion's mane]") Sikhs, who maintain the outward Khalsa form (including the uncut hair and other visible markings) without benefit of having incorporated the *amrit* and without the corresponding obligation and prestige of observing the full Khalsa *rahit maryada* (lit. "prestigious code of discipline"). Finally, *patit* (lit. "fallen"

If Punjabi persons are constituted as members of the Sikh Panth (worship genus) through their incorporation and manipulation of Sikh worship substances, they nevertheless continue to belong to their occupational, territorial, and other human genera. Nowhere is this composite nature of the Punjabi Sikh person more clearly illustrated than in the matchings of persons which characterize marriage practices. In keeping with the Guru's injunctions, Sikhs by and large marry other Sikhs; but they marry Sikhs who are relatively more or less like themselves, that is, those with whom they share not only the same worship substances and code of conduct but also the same occupational and territorial coded substances. The fact that endogamy within the Sikh Panth co-exists with an overwhelming preference for "caste" endogamous marriages and, to a slightly lesser extent, regionally endogamous marriages suggests not that there is some problematic contradiction between Sikh teachings and practices, but rather that Sikh ritual transactions, while making Punjabi persons partially alike as Sikhs, do not constitute them as completely identical persons.

Thus, it should not be surprising to find, as McLeod's work makes clear, that persons of different genera may assert their Sikh identity in different ways. For instance, the numerically dominant and influential Jats, though derived from what is sometimes considered a middling Hindu caste, have risen to an elevated rank, especially within rural Punjabi society; and, as McLeod notes, "the Jat Sikh commonly assumes a considerable freedom with regard to observance of the Khalsa discipline....In his own eyes and those of other Jats he remains a Sikh even if he cuts his beard or smokes tobacco."¹¹ This does not necessarily hold true for other *zat* groups. Though traditionally over-represented in the *sahajdhari* category, once having accepted the visible Sikh markings of a *keshdhari*, the urban Khatri and Aroras have generally maintained the outward form strictly, for "if a Khatri [or Arora] shaves he is regarded as a Hindu by others and soon comes to regard himself as one."¹²

The case of what traditionally have been regarded in Punjabi society as lower-caste and outcaste groups is particularly illuminating. As a vehicle of upward mobility, membership in the unpartitioned Khalsa has held considerable appeal. The full, public assertion of Sikh identity entailed in Khalsa membership—or, at the very least, the maintenance of *keshdhari* markings—visibly distinguishes the lower-caste Sikh from his Hindu caste-mates and is essential to the acceptance by others of his claim to being a Sikh. Writing of two such groups, McLeod notes that they have never "observed to any significant degree the practice of calling themselves Sikhs without observing the outward forms of

11. McLeod 1976, p. 98.

12. Ibid.

the Khalsa. For them this would destroy any social advantage implicit in the title of Sikh. Indeed, the title would not have been accepted as valid.¹³ Such group's transformed nature generally leads its members to take up new occupations and to avoid undertaking marriages with Hindu or Muslim castemates. And these actions eventually have led most such groups to be given corporate names distinct from those of their former castemates. But despite impressive gains in wealth and reputation made by some of these groups,¹⁴ their partial transformations are rarely acted upon as outweighing other differences included in the group's original nature; and Sikhs of other, more highly reputed, castes generally maintain a policy of non-marriage with them.

It is in light of this understanding of Punjabi persons and Sikh practices that the Punjabi Sikh experience in North America and the conflicting assertions of Sikh identity made in North America by Punjabi Sikhs and Gora Sikhs begin to make sense.

From the Dominance of Jats to a Diversity of Zats

The first substantial Punjabi migration to North America occurred during the first decade of the twentieth century. From that point until the mid-to-late 1960's, the overwhelming majority of Sikhs in North America were Jats from Doaba (the plains area of Punjab between the Beas and Sutlej rivers). The original Sikh immigrants were predominantly laborers and farmers who had served in the Indian army. Most came to North America as sojourners, intent on making their fortune and returning home to the Punjab to retire in comfort on the family farm. The vast majority of these early immigrants eventually settled in British Columbia, where they became concentrated in lumber and lumber-related industries, or in California, where they pursued the traditional Jat occupation as agriculturalists. When, after long and arduous struggle, they were finally permitted to sponsor as immigrants their families left behind in the Punjab, it was their Jat Sikh wives, children and relatives who came to join them. And it was these original immigrants, plus an intermittent flow of legal and illegal immigrants, and their offspring, who kept alive a Punjabi Sikh presence in North America in the face of significant isolation from the homeland and alternately hostile and indifferent treatment from the host societies.

Individual non-Jats apparently mixed freely with their fellow Punjabi Sikhs and suffered little obvious social impairment on account of caste. In California, the first "East Indian" elected to the U.S. Congress, Dalip Singh Saund, was a Ramgarhia Sikh. In British Columbia, Mayo Singh, a Mahton Sikh, became a millionaire mill-owner and pillar of the Sikh community. Nevertheless, it was Doabi Jat Sikh practices that largely defined the Sikh identity as it developed in North America. One aspect of this Jat dominance was spreading indifference to the maintenance of the Khalsa *rahit*. In time, a majority of male Sikhs in North

America were clean-shaven and turbanless. And eventually most Sikh institutions, including the *gurdwaras* (temples), came to be dominated by clean-shaven Sikhs. New immigrants were urged to shave before or upon arrival in North America so as to facilitate their social and economic adaptation. Administration of the *amrit pahul*, and thus initiation into the Khalsa Panth, virtually ceased. Most Jats in North America designated themselves and their families as Sikh by virtue of their birth and upbringing; and, unless they did something actively to refute the assumption (e.g., convert to Christianity or marry a *gora*), that designation was generally not challenged by their fellow Jats.

Whereas British policies in India—especially the requirement that Sikh troops maintain Khalsa *rahit*—had helped to reinforce Khalsa discipline among Sikhs,¹⁵ Canadian and American policies and attitudes worked against the maintenance of the outward Sikh forms. Punjabi Sikhs in North America perceived their beards and turbans to be an impediment in their dealings with non-Sikhs, and most felt obliged to give them up. While this may have made them more acceptable to the non-Sikh public, it did little to change their identities in North America. In their own eyes they remained, for the most part, Doabi Jat Sikhs. And to the wider North American public, clean-shaven or turbaned, Jat or non-Jat, they were (with individual exceptions) regarded as "Hindoos" or "East Indians," Canadians and Americans being by and large insensitive to confessional or caste differences within the broader ethnic category.

Naming practices were also affected by North American customs and attitudes. The importance attached to surnames in North American culture and the convention of patronymical inheritance produced a number of onomastic anomalies for Punjabi Sikhs living in North America. Whereas in rural Punjabi society, "X Singh" could be further identified as "X Singh of Y village" or "X Singh, son of Z Singh," and "A Kaur" could be further identified as "A Kaur, wife of Y Singh" or "A Kaur, daughter of Z Singh," North American conventions led not only to a proliferation of "Mr. Singh" but to the creation of "Mrs. Singh" and "Miss Singh" as well. Pressure from the wider public for a differentiation of "Singhs" and the Sikhs' own discomfort with the effects of Western naming customs led to modifications in Sikh naming practices. Some Sikhs began to use their family's village name in Punjab as a last name, but by the 1950's it became conventional to use the name of one's *got* ("clan"; exogamous grouping within the *zat*) as a last name, reserving "Singh" and "Kaur" for use as middle names. Since *got* names are usually indicative of *zat* as well, Jat identities came to be strongly signaled.

If such accommodation was furthered by the homogeneity which prevailed in North America's Sikh population, that homogeneity did not altogether suppress the development of factional splits for which Punjabis—and Jat Sikhs

13. McLeod 1974, p. 83.

14. See, e.g., Marengo 1974; McLeod 1974; Saberwal 1976; K. Singh 1977, p. 120.

15. See Barrier 1970, p. xl.

in particular¹⁶—are well known. The homogeneity of the community and the chain migration did, however, allow most new immigrants to be incorporated into established social networks (*biradari* or *baradari*, “brotherhood”) of fellow Jat Sikhs who were often kinsmen or village-mates. As a result, the established residents were able to guide the newcomer’s adaptation to the new social environment, providing initial housing and job contacts and alerting the newcomer to appropriate local social convention. Of equal importance to the Sikhs, and helping to explain the practice of seeking spouses from India, the newcomer was one who renewed substantive ties to the homeland and provided a conservative counterbalance to any too radical deviation from Punjabi Sikh practices.

The Sikh population in North America began to change rapidly in the late 1960’s, and once again the changes were in part the consequence of social policies over which the Sikhs themselves had little control. In the mid-1960’s in response to accusations that their immigration policies were implicitly racist and the Canadian and American governments liberalized their immigration regulations, making it considerably easier for unsponsored individuals of non-European backgrounds to gain residence. As a result, immigration of Punjabi Sikhs increased dramatically, not only from India but from the United Kingdom, East Africa, East and Southeast Asia and Fiji as well. During the past two decades, a number of new Punjabi Sikh communities have emerged in North America, especially in the larger metropolitan areas where Sikh professionals have found employment. In the long-established communities of British Columbia and California, old-timers and their descendants have been confronted by newcomers beholden to the old-timers for sponsorship, not necessarily having common *zat* membership and often pushing a visible Khalsa Sikh identity which most old-timers and their offspring had come to regard as an unnecessary encumbrance. Thus, changes in the character of the Sikh population in North America have been profound. Distinctions came to be felt not only between long-time residents and recent immigrants, between “traditionalists” and “modernists,” and between India-born and North America-born, but also among those of different national origins or country of last residence, family regional origins in the Punjab, caste, class and—with the emergence of Gora Sikhs—ethnic or “racial” origins.

To the extent that their fellow Punjabi Sikhs in various countries have constituted their “significant others,” Punjabi Sikhs in North America have remained sensitive to Punjabi differentiations of persons and human genera. The Jat Sikh population had been aware of *zat* relations, and by and large followed Punjabi endo-marital convention, although Jats had traditionally been somewhat “looser” (i.e., more hypergamous) in this regard than other Punjabis.¹⁷ But

most spouses were sought in India and most of one’s fellow Sikhs in North America were also Doabi Jats, caste and regional identity had been a relatively infrequent consideration in Sikh social life in North America. The North America-born were raised with far greater concern for the negative consequences for family honor (*izzat*) that would follow from marrying a *gora* (white male) or *gori* (white female) than from marrying the “wrong” kind of Punjabi Sikh. Indeed, the reputed differences in personal natures of Punjabis of different occupational, territorial or worship genera paled in comparison to the contrasts that parents drew between Punjabi and Western culture and character.

However, with the increase in non-Jat and non-Doabi immigration during the past two decades has come a greater emphasis on the supposed differences in character and temperament of different kinds of Punjabi Sikhs and increased concern that care also be taken to avoid “improper” (i.e., caste or regionally exogamous) marriages with Sikhs of different kinds. The use of *got* names as last names has conveniently made one’s *zat* affiliation public knowledge and those who for whatever reason refuse to use a *got* name are often suspected of trying to obscure low-caste or out-caste origins. To foreclose any suggestion that their personal natures have degenerated as a consequence of transactions undertaken in North America, Punjabi Sikhs of all kinds continue to value traditions which serve to “nourish and sustain”¹⁸ ancestral occupational, territorial and worship genera. This has led them to minimize certain transactions with alien others (particularly with *gora* society, but also with other “kinds” of Sikhs) and to maximize transactions with persons of one’s own kind. Such concern is manifest not only in formation of factions, in socialization of children and in arrangement of marriages, but increasingly also in the differentiation of Sikh practices of members.¹⁹

It is into an increasingly diverse Punjabi Sikh population in North America that the Gora Sikhs have recently interjected themselves full-force. The reception they have received from Punjabi Sikhs in North America has been shaped in important ways by the Punjabi Sikhs’ response to their own internal diversity and by Punjabi Sikh understandings of persons and human genera.

acknowledges, “the Mexican-Hindu community in California was a transitory one” (LaBrack and Leonard 1984, p. 535), and the offspring of these liaisons were neither socialized into Punjabi culture nor particularly welcomed in California’s nascent Sikh communities.

18. Marriott and Inden 1977, p. 231.

19. In 1980, for instance, Vancouver, British Columbia, had three main gurdwaras. One was predominantly Malwai, while the other two were predominantly Doabi. The local Ramgarhia Society, founded in 1972, has talked seriously of Ramgarhias building and maintaining their own Sikh gurdwara, as the numerically and proportionally larger Ramgarhia communities have done in the U.K. and East Africa. Followers of Sant Meehan Singh, a product of the Nanaksar movement, have recently opened their own gurdwara. And even the local Naxalites have their own “Desh Bhagat Temple.” Diversity of persons is increasingly reflected in diversity of institutions.

16. See Pettigrew 1975.

17. McLeod 1976, p. 84. See the work of Karen Leonard (1982) on what she calls “Mexican-Hindu” marriages, i.e., some 380 liaisons contracted in California between Punjabi immigrants and Mexican and Mexican-American women in the period from the late 1920’s to 1950. As Leonard

American and Canadian Sikhs of 3HO/Sikh Dharma²⁰

In 1968 Harbhajan Singh Puri, a Khatri Sikh whose family had resettled in New Delhi during the post-partition exodus from Pakistani Punjab, quit his job as a customs official at Delhi International Airport at Palam and left for Canada to take a job as a yoga instructor. Upon reaching Toronto, he found that the promised job had fallen through, but with the aid of a Punjabi Sikh benefactor and sponsor, he was able to settle in Los Angeles, where he began teaching yoga courses at the East-West Cultural Center. Now calling himself "Yogi Bhajan," Puri proved to be a compelling teacher. Having found a receptive core of students, he soon established an *ashram* (spiritual commune) for them. There he taught his "Kundalini Yoga: The Yoga of Awareness," offered occasional "Tantric Yoga Intensives," and imposed upon his followers the structure and discipline of what he called "the healthy, happy, holy way of life." In 1969, the Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization (or 3HO) was formally incorporated as a tax-exempt educational organization. Puri was now sending his newly-trained "student teachers" to other cities in North America to teach Kundalini Yoga classes and to establish additional 3HO *ashrams*. During the early 1970's, the primary orientation of the organization was towards recruiting new members through the yoga classes and establishing new *ashrams* where, Puri now claims, members were being purified and prepared to accept their calling as Sikhs. At this point, however, Puri "continued to teach about Sikh Dharma in an indirect way."²¹ 3HO members, most of whom were young white, middle-class American and Canadian refugees from the counter-culture, tended to regard themselves not as Sikhs but as "yogis" and "yoginis" or, in Puri's terminology, "shaktimen" and "shaktis."

Puri had, however, slowly begun to disclose his own Sikh background and to introduce Sikh teachings to his closest followers. In 1971, he took eighty-four members of 3HO to India, where they visited the Golden Temple and surrounding shrines. At the Akal Takht ("throne of the Timeless One," the highest seat of Sikh religious-cum-temporal authority) the group was cordially received and Puri was honored for his missionary work. Returning home with what he represented to be the mandate to spread the message of Sikhism in the West, Puri began to supplement and supplant his primarily yogic explanation of the "the healthy, happy, holy, way of life" with a more explicitly Sikh account. Puri now also began to use the title "Siri Singh Sahib," a title which he claimed had been given him by the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (the organization which is legally empowered to control historic and other Sikh gurdwaras in the Punjab) and which he rendered, liberally, as "Chief Administrative and Religious Authority for the Sikh Dharma in the Western Hemisphere." In 1973 he was successful in having the Sikh Dharma Brotherhood (later recast in non-gender-specific language as, simply, "Sikh Dharma") officially registered as a tax-

exempt religious organization legally empowered to ordain Sikh ministers, who would have the authority to perform marriages, provide the last rites and administer the *amrit pahul* ceremony.

Puri's own transformation from "Yogi Bhajan" to the "Siri Singh Sahib" corresponded roughly with a change from a primarily yogic to a primarily Sikh identity on the part of 3HO members. The change did not happen overnight; but Puri was convinced by Puri that what he was calling the "healthy, happy, holy way of life" was that of an orthodox Sikh, most 3HO members did not hesitate to make a formal commitment to their new religion. And Puri provided unprecedented opportunities for 3HO members to express their commitment, introducing Sikh initiations and minister ordinations in addition to holding the more traditional *amrit pahul* ceremony. The resultant change from a yogic to Sikh identity on the part of 3HO members also corresponded to a change of emphasis within the organization from the aims of recruiting new members and establishing additional *ashrams* to those of maintaining the established group, raising a second generation and establishing credibility as upholders of Sikh orthodoxy in North America. With respect to the latter task, the new American and Canadian Sikhs, as they called themselves, exhibited all the fervor and self-assurance one might expect from new converts to any faith.

Whereas most Punjabi Sikhs in North America had been content to keep a low profile, often regarding their visibility as a handicap and sometimes sacrificing their beards and turbans as a necessary adaptation to the demands of life in North America, the new American and Canadian Sikhs of 3HO have asserted their right to a full public expression of their version of Sikh orthopraxy and have sought aggressively to have their "religious rights" recognized by the North American public. In these efforts, they have made effective use of the media and of administrative and legal channels. 3HO has actively courted publicity and their "exoticness" (e.g., white clothing, beards, turbans, *ashrams*, mass marriages and strange "Indian" names) and their "good works" (e.g., drug rehabilitation programs, free kitchens) have made them "good copy." More significantly, with rare exception,²² what media exposure they have received has been uncritical in accepting the converts' claim to represent orthodox Sikhism in North America. And such claims have been further reinforced by rulings of human-rights officials and the courts. In a number of cases successfully brought by 3HO members (e.g., for seeking exemption from hard-hat and dress-code requirements), North American officials have found the petitioner, as a Khalsa Sikh and a member of Sikh Dharma, to be a Sikh in good standing exercising a legitimate right to the practice of the Sikh religion. All of this activity has made the converts known beyond what their numbers might otherwise warrant. Punjabi Sikhs in North America, in particular, have been made well aware of the existence of the Gora Sikhs, even if they have personally had little or no interaction with them.

20. For greater detail on the development of 3HO, see Dusenbery 1973, 1975.

21. Khalsa and Khalsa 1979, p. 119.

22. See "Yogi Bhajan's Synthetic Sikhism," *Time*, Sept. 5, 1977.

Gora Sikhs: Persons of a Deviant Sect or a Different Genus?

It would be inaccurate to suggest that so diverse a population as that of North American Sikhs of Punjabi ancestry has responded uniformly to the assertion of Sikh identity by Gora Sikhs. While few would deny the theoretical right of non-Punjabis to become Sikhs, fewer still accept the idea that Puri and the Gora Sikhs have the authority to speak for all the Sikhs of North America. Beyond that, however, the category "Gora Sikh" is such a new and in many ways anomalous one that it has taken time to sort out reactions. Early accounts of Gora Sikh-Punjabi Sikh interaction in the Los Angeles area²³ and in northern California²⁴ reported that initial receptivity to the converts' involvement with the established Sikh gurdwaras gave way to increasing discomfort on the part of Punjabi Sikhs. Agehananda Bharati discusses some of the reasons for the mixed feelings: "Punjabis candidly admire the strict Sikh ritual discipline of the 3HO, and grudgingly their totalitarian ways. [But] they do not approve of the uniformization of the 3HO, especially the 3HO women; and they resent the superior ways the 3HO displays towards them."²⁵ In many of their practices, Gora Sikhs seem insensitive to the meanings their actions may have for Punjabi Sikhs. They insist, for instance, that all-white clothing (a mourning color in Punjab associated with widows), turbans for women (almost unheard of among Punjabis, for whom a turban is a male symbol par excellence), vegetarianism (not a general Sikh—and particularly not Jat Sikh—practice) and yoga (varieties of which were said by the Sikh Gurus to be incompatible with the life of a householder enjoined upon Sikhs) are all orthodox Sikh practices. Yet, at the same time, most 3HO members lack fluency in Punjabi language beyond the memorization of a few *shabads* (hymns), even though for Punjabi Sikhs the Punjabi language and Gurmukhi script are intimately bound up with Sikh worship. Furthermore, the assertiveness of 3HO women and familiarity between the sexes, although restrained by North American standards, seem excessive to many Punjabis. And finally, the veneration of Puri by 3HO members verges on what Punjabi Sikhs regard as Hindu-like idolatry. Some of the insensitivity on the part of 3HO members may grow out of naïveté and reflect unfamiliarity with Punjabi culture, but some is based on a principled decision that Sikh "religious" norms—as understood by Gora Sikhs through Puri's presentation of them—must supersede parochial "ethnic" (i.e., Punjabi) custom.

The Goras' assertion of their Sikh identity has tended to provoke one of two responses from Punjabi Sikhs in North America. Some would deny altogether the claims of 3HO members to be Sikh. They maintain that despite the superficial appearance of adhering to Khalsa *rahit*, the Goras have not incorporated Sikh worship substances comparable to those maintained by other persons of the Sikh Panth. Among 3HO practices that are commonly cited as

consistent and incompatible with the Sikh *dharma* are: inclusion of Kundalini and Tantric yoga practices as a form of Sikh mysticism; distortions of *gurbani* and misquotations and mistranslations from the *Adi Granth* (the Sikh holy book, which is itself considered to be the reigning Guru); questionable legitimacy and efficacy of *amrit pahal* ceremonies conducted for and by 3HO members; veneration and reverence accorded Puri over and above that appropriately reserved for the Sikh Gurus, the *Adi Granth*, and the seats of Sikh spiritual authority; and, finally, formation of organizational structures and an ecclesiastical hierarchy independent of, inconsistent with, and at cross purposes to, the traditional Panthic organization.²⁶ Together, such considerations lead many Punjabi Sikhs in North America to regard 3HO as a deviant sect or cult with Puri as its "false guru."²⁷

A number of parallels have been drawn between 3HO/Sikh Dharma and (a) other North American religious cults and (b) schismatic or breakaway sects in India claiming to be Sikh. Punjabi Sikhs note that young North Americans seem unusually susceptible to religious cults and to brainwashing at the hands of authoritarian cult leaders. Some cynically admire Puri for living the easy life off his gullible North American followers; but most express concern that 3HO members' willingness to take Puri's idiosyncratic teachings as Sikh orthodoxy means that they will accept anything Puri tells them and that their loyalty to Puri will come before their loyalty to the Panth. In the wake of the mass suicide-murder at the People's Temple in Jonestown, Guyana, Punjabi Sikhs asked whether 3HO members might not be capable of the same or a similar act of blind fanaticism. And in the context of the current Punjab crisis they ask: if Puri were to take issue with a ruling (*hukumnama*, *gurmata*) normally considered binding on the entire Panth, would his followers respect Puri's dictates or the collective decision of the Panth?

26. Sikhism has generally been free of an elaborate hierarchy of religious functionaries. Any good Sikh can serve as a *granthi* (reader of the *Adi Granth*); and the title *giani* (learned one), a term of respect used in reference and address for Sikh "priests," does not require formal certification. Since the death of Guru Gobind Singh in 1708, the eternal Sikh Guru has been said to reside jointly in the Panth and the Granth. Decisions in the name of the Guru Panth may in theory be made by any five good Sikhs in consultation with the Guru Granth Sahib. In practice, the *jathedars* (lit., "commanders"; commonly, "high priests") of the five historic *takhats* ("thrones") constitute an exalted *panj pyare* ("five beloved"). *Hukumnamas* (decrees) issued on their behalf from the Akal Takht are considered authoritative. The functionary appointed by the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee who serves in the role of *jathedar* of one of the *takhats* is respectfully addressed as "Singh Sahib" ("Lord Singh"). The title attaches to the role, not to the person. Puri's appropriation of the title "Siri Singh Sahib" (lit. "Exalted Lord Singh") is seen by many Punjabi Sikhs in North America as suggesting that he considers himself superior even to the *jathedars* of the *takhats*. Most refuse to acknowledge either his use of the title or his right to it. Equally infuriating to many Punjabi Sikhs has been Puri's liberal bestowal of the titles "Mukhia Singh (Sardarni) Sahib" and "Singh (Sardarni) Sahib" on, respectively, his newly-created "regional ministers" and "ministers" of Sikh Dharma.

27. The Punjabi Sikh writer, Trilochan Singh, following a visit to North America to investigate the phenomenon of Western Sikh converts, came to share the views of many Punjabi Sikhs in North America who have been critical of Puri, 3HO and Sikh Dharma. His work (1977) criticizes the group for deviations from mainstream Sikh practices and characterizes the group as a "Tantric Yoga cult."

23. Fleuret 1974.

24. LaBrack 1974, 1979; Bharati 1980.

25. Bharati 1980, p. 249.

Recent events in the Punjab also awaken Punjabi Sikh concerns for what can happen if deviant sects which claim to be Sikh are not repudiated at an early stage in their development. Standing out in the minds of many Punjabi Sikhs in North America are the clashes that have taken place in recent years in the Punjab between Sikhs and members of the Sant Nirankari Mandal. This is a group which claims descent from a nineteenth-century Sikh reformist movement and whose leaders maintain an outward Sikh form and use the Adi Granth in public ceremonies. But it is a group that the main body of Sikhs accuses of slandering the Sikh Gurus, misinterpreting and mistreating the Granth, elevating its own leader to the status of Guru and mocking Sikhism in its practices.²⁸ Several years of clashes between Sikhs and members of the Sant Nirankari Mandal culminated in a fatal encounter in Amritsar on April 13, 1978, and the subsequent assassination of the Sant Nirankari leader in 1980. The provocative actions of the Mandal, and frustrations with the Congress (I) government for allegedly aiding and abetting the provocations, eventually led to a *hukumnama* (decree) issued from the Akal Takht repudiating "pseudo-Nirankari" claims to being Sikh and ordering Sikhs to cease interaction with members of the Mandal. Some Punjabi Sikhs in North America argue that a similar repudiation should be made of Puri and his *gora* followers. In fact, resolutions that would declare Gora Sikhs of 3HO to be non-Sikhs and would bar them from participating in Punjabi Sikh institutions have been introduced for consideration by local Sikh societies in North America.

The fact that such resolutions have not been passed should be one indication that this negative view of the Gora Sikhs as a deviant sect is, for the present, a minority one. Indeed, it is more common to hear the Gora Sikhs referred to as "good Sikhs" than as "non-Sikhs." The majority of North American Sikhs of Punjabi ancestry seem willing to look past the Gora Sikhs' idiosyncrasies to note their visible Khalsa form and apparent adherence to Khalsa discipline. This is not to imply that most Punjabi Sikhs in North America are in full accord with the Gora Sikhs' representation of Sikh orthodoxy. Although there are areas of substantive agreement (e.g., the significant support given the Gora Sikh efforts to establish a Sikh "religious right" to maintain the beard, turban and other Sikh symbols), there is much about the Gora Sikhs' assertion of their identity that Punjabi Sikhs find alien. What I suggest has happened is that, given the Punjabi notion of the person that underlies the "unity in diversity" of the Sikh Panth, the majority of Punjabi Sikhs acknowledge the converts' claims to being Sikh but nevertheless regard them as persons of a very different—and lower—"kind."

It is not altogether surprising that Punjabi Sikhs should model their relations with Gora Sikhs along the lines of relations between Punjabi Sikhs of different kinds. When asked to explain to non-Punjabis and to their own North America-born youngsters the persistence of *zat* consciousness and *zat* endogamy

in North America, Punjabi Sikhs commonly explain that people of different Punjabi ancestral occupational, territorial and worship communities are known to have different tastes, temperaments and ways of doing things which bind them to others of their own "kind" (*zat*) but which make them difficult to mix with—and unthinkable as recipients of one's daughter in marriage. In short, there are among Punjabi Sikhs many different "kinds" (*zat*) of people. Such a generic explanation, while doubtless understating Punjabi notions of purity and honor, could easily be applied to make sense of the otherwise anomalous category Gora Sikh."

It is important to realize that most Punjabi Sikhs regard North America not only as alien territory but as a land which all too easily can lead those who inhabit it to undertake indiscriminate and dharmically inappropriate actions that might lower their personal natures. The Western culture of North America is, thus, suspect; and *gora* is a term with pejorative overtones. To be too *gora*-like (esp., to marry a *gora/gori* or to convert to Christianity) is to risk bringing into question the reputation or honor (*izzat*) of the collectives (e.g., family, *got*, *zat*) of which one is a part and to face possible social, if not physical, death. Indeed, before its application to Western converts to Sikhism, the term "Gora Sikh" was applied censoriously to any Punjabi Sikh whose personal nature was thought to have degenerated as a consequence of improper, "Western" behavior. Thus, the new Gora Sikhs of 3HO/Sikh Dharma, even when recognized by Punjabi Sikhs as "good Khalsa Sikhs," are persons who bear the alienating stigma of being *gora*. And this, in turn, affects the way that Punjabi Sikhs interact with them.

Understanding the Gora Sikhs to be Sikhs of a very different "kind" allows Punjabi Sikhs to excuse the many idiosyncrasies and insensitivities they detect in Gora Sikh actions. In fact, every idiosyncrasy or apparent insensitivity to Punjabi Sikh cultural conventions is further confirmation of the *goras'* alien nature. Thus, even when accepting as appropriate Gora Sikh participation in gurdwara functions and other activities of the Sikh Panth, most Punjabi Sikhs in North America remain circumspect in their interactions with Gora Sikhs. While they might be willing to honor publicly a Gora Sikh for *seva* (service) rendered to the Panth, few would go as far as to give their daughters in marriage to persons of what is, in effect, a very different "ethnic" genus.

In accepting Gora Sikhs as partially transformed *goras* who share a common membership in the Sikh Panth but who in other ways remain alien persons, Punjabi Sikhs are responding much as they have to conversions of low-caste and outcaste Punjabis. From a Punjabi perspective, "conversion" to Sikhism consists of partial inclusion, intersection, or union into the Sikh Panth and depends on recognized transformations in one's personal nature. Those whose ancestral substance has not been marked previously or marked consistently with Sikh worship substances have generally found initiation into the Khalsa Panth (or, at the very least, attainment of *keshdhari* markings and conduct) crucial to public acceptance of their transformed nature. Thus, like Punjabi converts from low-caste and outcaste groups, Gora Sikhs have found it

28. See, e.g., Guru Nanak Dev Mission, n.d.

crucial to their assertion of Sikh identity that they maintain Khalsa *rahit*. And like such Punjabi converts, Gora Sikhs have found that, while entrance into the Panth has resulted in improved markings in the eyes of other Sikhs, it has not removed all differences associated with the converts' original natures. Despite the fact that they, like such Punjabi converts, have avoided undertaking marriage with former "caste-mates" (i.e., non-Sikh *goras*), Gora Sikhs have not yet been accorded by other Sikhs a corporate name which would de-emphasize their *gora* origins. In light of the policy of non-marriage (or, at best, hypergamous marriage) which Sikhs of highly reputed castes maintain with low-caste and outcaste Punjabi converts, it is not surprising to find that Punjabi Sikhs of all kinds maintain a policy of non-marriage with Gora Sikhs. Gora Sikhs are after all the most recent and most alien of all converts, and their transformed nature is still untested.

Punjabi Sikhs in North America: Apostate or Retrograde Persons?

If it has served the purpose of a majority of Punjabi Sikhs in North America to treat the Gora Sikhs as Sikhs of a different—and somewhat dangerous and originally inferior—human genus, it has hardly satisfied the Gora Sikhs to be so treated. The source of the converts' discontent goes straight to their interpretation of Sikh teachings, and to the radical egalitarianism they find in Sikhism. It is their understanding of Sikh egalitarianism that leads them to assert a version of Sikh orthodoxy which Punjabi Sikhs in North America find either deviant or different. And it is the same principle that, in turn, leads the Gora Sikh to repudiate many practices of North Americans of Punjabi Sikh ancestry.

The Gora Sikhs make some crucial—and, I would argue, typically North American—assumptions about religion and about persons. They believe that persons are whole and impartible social units, i.e., that the "individual" is a non-divisible entity, and that common personal identity implies full equality. They hold that religious identity is essentially spiritual and personal, achieved through a full and conscious doctrinal choice (e.g., through spiritual rebirth, confirmation, conversion) rather than ascribed as a fact of natural birth. And they regard religious norms as universal, absolute and inviolable, entailing faithful adherence to some moral code of conduct equally enjoined on all believers and protected as a "religious right." This contrasts with the assumptions they hold about forms of social identity, which they associate with the facts of one's origins and biological descent, e.g., race, gender, national origin, ethnicity, and caste. These are regarded as essentially communal and non-volitional forms of social identity, and the associated norms of social action are understood to be arbitrary, ephemeral and legitimately adaptable in different social settings. In short, the Gora Sikhs are religious absolutists and cultural relativists, arguing that universal religious "codes for conduct" can be distinguished from and take precedence over particularistic cultural conventions. They thus distinguish that which they identify as a uniquely Sikh duty from that

which they regard as mere Punjabi or North American custom. And they hold it incumbent on all would-be Sikhs in all places and at all times consistently to manifest their Sikh identity by maintaining identical Sikh religious practices.²⁹

The Gora Sikhs take the creation of the Khalsa in 1699 by Guru Gobind Singh, the last living, human Guru, as a crucial event in the evolution of a distinctive Sikh identity. And they regard undergoing the *amrit* ceremony as crucial in the personal assertion of Sikh identity. They argue that Guru Gobind Singh's intention in setting forth the Khalsa *rahit* was (a) to provide the uniform standards by which to distinguish his Sikhs from other members of society (i.e., to give them a unique and distinct identity) and (b) to establish in concrete terms the total (not partial) equality of all those who would assert that identity. Such an interpretation is hardly extraordinary in the context of contemporary Western ideology, where "the fusion of equality and identity has become established at the level of common sense."³⁰ However, set against the understanding given these events by most Punjabi Sikhs, the implications of the Gora Sikh interpretations are radical indeed.

For one thing, because of the central place they give to the Khalsa *rahit* and to the distinctive visible form that Guru Gobind Singh gave his followers, the Gora Sikhs argue that one is not truly a Sikh without wearing the so-called "five Sikh symbols" or "five k's": the *kes*, unshorn hair (covered by a turban); the *kanga*, a wooden comb; the *kirpan*, a sword; the *kara*, a steel bracelet; and the *kach*, a loin-and-thigh undergarment. In fact, the Gora Sikhs take these observable aspects of the Khalsa *rahit* as a necessary index of Sikh identity. This leads them to reject the notion that there might be different kinds of Sikhs following different codes of conduct and having incorporated varying degrees and kinds of Sikh worship substances. Such a reaction is, of course, culturally informed. As Louis Dumont has cogently noted, "[South Asians] will apply a rank where we in the West would approve or exclude."³¹ Arguing that terms like "hereditary Sikh" and "clean-shaven Sikh" are contradictions in terms and that *sahajdhari* Sikhs are "not yet fully Sikh" and *patits* (as "apostates") are "no longer Sikhs," the Gora Sikhs have tried to exclude such people from participation as equals in Sikh affairs and have challenged their right to call themselves Sikhs. To explain why there should be so many of precisely these persons within the Punjabi Sikh communities of North America, the Gora Sikhs suggest that such people have "sold out" their religious principles to achieve the easy life in North America.³²

If such a position has effectively alienated the Gora Sikhs from those who for many decades constituted perhaps the majority of all Sikhs in North America, it has not led them in the long run to take any less critical a view of those who have maintained the visible Sikh symbols. While the former are

29. Dusenbery (1981) discusses the radical differentiation of religion and ethnicity in North America (a differentiation of domains not found in Punjabi culture) and explores the implications of this differentiation for Sikh identity and institutional development in Vancouver.

30. Dumont 1980, p. 16.

31. Dumont 1980, p. 191.

32. See, e.g., Premka Kaur 1973, 1975.

considered "too North American to be good Sikhs," the latter are often found to be "too Punjabi to be good Sikhs." In particular, the Gora Sikhs are sensitive to signs of "caste consciousness" (a term used broadly to refer to any form of distinction or discrimination of persons among Sikhs), "subordination of women" (a term used broadly to refer to any form of sex-role differentiation in Sikh practices) and any other evidence of hierarchical or parochial behavior that the Gora Sikhs regard as inconsistent with Sikh "egalitarian" teachings.

This conviction leads the Gora Sikhs to take strong stands against a number of established conventions within the Punjabi Sikh communities of North America. As might be expected, they object on principle to caste or regional or ethnic endogamy among Sikhs, arguing that for Sikhs the only legitimate requirement for marriage should be that both partners be good Sikhs. While somewhat skeptical about the present feasibility of marriages between themselves and Punjabi Sikhs (since, they argue, it is so hard to find a North American of Punjabi heritage who is a good Sikh), they have no objection in principle to such marriages. In fact, some were obviously disappointed that Puri gave his own daughter in marriage to another Khatri Sikh rather than to one of his *gora* followers.

In yet another stand against what they regard as retrograde "caste consciousness," Gora Sikhs raise objections to the use of *got* names by Punjabi Sikhs in North America, arguing that Guru Gobind Singh intended the equality of all Sikhs to be indicated by their common name-titles as well as by their identical external form. As part of their own assertion of their new Sikh identities, Gora Sikhs have been given Sikh names, originally using "Singh" and "Kaur" as last names but more recently adopting "Khalsa" as a non-gender-specifying last name. Ironically, while their intent has been to assert the equality of all Khalsa Sikhs, the fact that they have been virtually alone among Sikhs in adopting this convention means that the last name "Khalsa" now indexes their membership in the Gora Sikh *biradari* (i.e., in Sikh Dharma) in almost precisely the same manner as the use of *got* names indexes the *zat* membership of Punjabi Sikhs.

One final example should suffice to make clear the way in which the Gora Sikhs' version of Sikh orthodoxy has served to separate them from the Punjabi Sikhs of North America. The Gora Sikhs interpret the Gurus' teachings on the equality of men and women not simply as testifying to their equality in the eyes of God and in their ability to accept the coded substances of the Guru but as mandating their equal place in every other aspect of Sikh religious life. Thus, the Gora Sikhs object to what they regard as the "subordination of women" in Sikh affairs and have pushed for an expanded role for women in the Sikh gurdwaras (e.g., as officiants and participants in Sikh services and as members of the management committees of the temple societies). And it is this same insistence on the equality of Sikh males and females that has led the Gora Sikhs

to interpret the Khalsa *rahit* as requiring turbans for women as well as men.³³ As with so many of the Gora Sikh efforts to push their brand of radical egalitarianism, the attempts to get Punjabi Sikh women in North America to don turbans and take a more public—and to Punjabi Sikhs a more "male"—role in gurdwara affairs have been remarkably unsuccessful.³⁴ The net effect has been merely to reinforce the Punjabi Sikh impression of the *goras'* alien natures and to increase the Gora Sikh frustration at the failure of the Punjabis to live up to what the North American converts take to be essentials of the Sikh religion.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the conflicting assertions of Sikh identity on the part of Gora Sikhs and Punjabi Sikhs in North America follow from significantly different assumptions about the nature of persons and social identities. It has suggested that the "radical egalitarianism" of the Gora Sikhs (i.e., the insistence that a common identity as Sikhs mandates a uniform and unitary set of beliefs and practices for all Sikhs) is significantly informed by the understandings of individual persons and totalizing social identities common in Western cultures. And it has suggested that the "unity in diversity" of the Punjabi Sikhs (i.e., the acceptance of multiple *zat* ties among Punjabi persons and varying degrees or levels of incorporation within the Sikh Panth) is significantly informed by understandings of composite persons and partially shared identities common in South Asian cultures.

As North Americans who could be expected to assert their Sikh identity in a way intelligible to the wider North American public, it is not surprising that the Gora Sikhs have had notable success in convincing the North American media and courts of their orthodoxy. In such situations, they address themselves to an audience which shares with them the same cultural assumptions. On the other hand, to the extent that Punjabi Sikhs in North America look to other Punjabi Sikhs as their significant others, they too can find continuing support for their assertion of Sikh identity. Punjabi Sikhs elsewhere with whom they share the same cultural assumptions do not consider most Punjabi Sikhs in North America to be degenerate and non-Sikh, but continue to match their children in marriage to them as persons of the same kind. Thus, to the extent that they look,

33. As Paul Hershman notes, in Punjabi Sikh culture "a woman...wearing a top-knot becomes as a man" (1974, p. 290). Hershman here mentions specifically the male role adopted by some Sikh widows in village Punjab. The only turban-wearing Punjabi Sikh women in North America whom I encountered in the late 1970's were those from families influenced by Bhai Sahib Randhir Singh's *jatha* (quasi-military "detachment"). Bhai Randhir Singh was a product of the Bhasaur Singh Sabha and the reformist ideology of Babu Teja Singh Overseer, whose "almost fanatical alterations" in Sikh practice included "that women be given equality in all ceremonies and wear the five k's" (Barrier 1970, pp. xxvi-xxvii, xxiii-xxiv).

34. These positions grow out of radical egalitarian assumptions rather than out of radical feminist ideology. 3HO's own "Grace of God Movement for the Women of the World" is explicitly opposed to the North American "women's liberation" movement. 3HO pushes the complementarity of male and female sex roles. Nevertheless, women have from the first taken an active and public role in 3HO and Sikh Dharma; and they seem unwilling to relinquish their public role in dealings with Punjabi Sikhs.

respectively, to non-Sikh North Americans and to non-North American Sikhs, each group continues to be reinforced in its assertion of Sikh identity. The conflicts arise most clearly in confronting one another.

But mutual misunderstanding need not be the inevitable and final result of this cross-cultural interaction. As I have suggested elsewhere,³⁵ there are indications that second- and third-generation North Americans of Punjabi Sikh ancestry may increasingly share current Western cultural assumptions about persons. With the Gora Sikhs having begun to send some of their children to India for schooling, second-generation Gora Sikhs may come to appreciate Punjabi cultural assumptions better than their convert parents have. If, in the face of current misunderstandings and conflicts, a true cross-cultural dialogue can be initiated, then it is possible that ongoing interaction, discussion, negotiation and debate will generate better mutual translations of the distinctive definitions of Sikh identity maintained by Gora Sikhs and Punjabi Sikhs in North America.

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35. Dusenbery 1981, pp. 110-11.

Sikh Identity in England: Its Changing Nature

Arthur W. Helweg

For people who want to understand migrant identity formation, the Sikh community in England is an excellent group to study. Mobility is a prominent theme in Sikh history, and there is a wealth of information on Sikh society. In the eighteenth century many Sikhs formed adaptable bands to survive persecution.¹ Under the British Raj, they scattered to various parts of the Empire, so that by the end of the Second World War, Sikh communities were prominent in Australia, Burma, Canada, Cambodia, China, East Africa, Fiji, Kenya, Malaya, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, the United States and Uganda.² In the last three decades, Sikhs have entered Britain, Canada and the United States in considerable numbers.³ Now, 10% of the approximately fifteen million world Sikh population live outside of India,⁴ and many of those living in India reside outside Punjab. Sikhs in England have been the focus of many studies which vary from literature and language to culture and social organization.⁵ The data for this paper are based both on the author's field work and on literature concerning Sikhs in England.

To understand migrant Sikh identity of the present day, one is required to focus on a community that has been unusually mobile over the last three decades. Rapid transportation, telegraph, telephone and postal services have facilitated communication. People travel from one side of the globe to the other within two days and make an instant phone call or send a telegram which can reach many remote areas within hours. Money is transmitted across national boundaries with electronic rapidity. These facilities enable an expatriate to remain closely involved with his or her home community while residing

1. Harbans Singh 1985; Khushwant Singh 1963.

2. Helweg 1979.

3. Barber 1986; Buchignani and Indra 1985; Chadney 1984; de Lepervanche 1974, 1984; Helweg 1986a.

4. Iqbal Singh 1986.

5. Tatla and Nesbitt 1987.

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