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*Canadian Ideology and Public Policy: The Impact on Vancouver Sikh Ethnic and Religious Adaptation**

ABSTRACT RESUME

The article seeks to account for a relatively recent and ever-increasing proliferation and diversification of institutions within Vancouver's Sikh community. Focusing on the development of the dominant ethnic-political organizations, the paper argues that the emergence of these organizations must be understood in terms of an apparently more general differentiation of Vancouver Sikh ethnic and religious identities, organizations, activities, and leaders—a differentiation not inherent in Punjabi Sikh culture but one consistent with Canadian ideology and public policy.

Le but du présent article est de mettre en valeur la récente et croissante prolifération de diverses institutions au sein de la communauté Sikh de Vancouver. Mettant l'accent sur le développement des organisations dominantes politico-ethniques, l'auteur démontre que la prolifération de ces organismes doit être considérée comme faisant partie d'une plus grande diversité de l'ethnie Sikh de Vancouver, des religions, des organisations, des activités et des chefs, diversité qui n'est pas inhérente à la culture Sikh du Pendjab mais qui est due à l'idéologie et à la politique du Canada.

Vancouver's Sikh community is the oldest, most heterogeneous, and perhaps still the largest and most influential Sikh community in Canada.¹ For seventy-five years, despite periods of relative isolation from the Indian sub-continent and alternately hostile and indifferent treatment from the wider Canadian society, the community has persisted. During the past ten years, the community has experienced considerable growth and internal diversification brought on, in part, by a tremendous upsurge in Sikh and non-Sikh "East Indian" immigration from South Asia, Britain, East Africa, East and S.E. Asia, Fiji, and the Caribbean;² the coming of age of a sizeable Canadian-born and raised generation of Punjabi Sikh immigrant offspring; and the emergence of an organized and vocal group of gora (white) Canadian and American Sikh converts.

Prior anthropological accounts (Smith, 1944; Mayar, 1959; Ames & Inglis, 1973; Srivastava, 1974; Chadney, 1976, 1977a, b) seem to support James Chadney's assessment that—at least through the time of Chadney's fieldwork in the early 1970s—that Vancouver Sikh community was undergoing a process of

"ethnic adaptation," i.e., "accommodating the larger Canadian society by foregoing some aspects of traditional Punjabi culture" (Chadney, 1977a: 5912-A). Nevertheless, these accounts suggest that this adaptation did not involve widespread behavioral, structural, or marital assimilation into white Canadian society. Rather, taking into account the often conflicting social and cultural pressures emanating from the host and sending societies, these analyses stressed changes internal to a community which continued to differentiate itself from the wider Canadian society.

One area of adaptation little noticed in previous accounts has been that of institutional adaptation.³ For most of the community's seventy-five years, the original *gurdwara* (temple) society fulfilled the traditional role of institutional center for the various activities of the Sikh community. Increasingly, however, new institutions have arisen to take on significant responsibility for these activities. Thus, today, one finds active Sikh participation in a number of ethnic organizations with explicitly political, cultural, social, and social service objectives.⁴ *Gurdwaras*, in the meantime, flourish, but with more narrowly religious concerns.

Demographic and social changes, in and of themselves, are not sufficient to account for the new institutional makeup of the community. Nor can factional and interpersonal disputes within the community be entirely responsible for the proliferation and diversification of institutions. Instead, I will argue, institutional developments within the community—and especially a differentiation of ethnic and religious identities, institutions, activities, and leaders—can best be understood as reflecting the increasing impact of Canadian ideology and public policy.⁵

'Religion' and 'Ethnicity' in Canadian Ideology and Public Policy

As befits its New World ethos, religion in Canadian ideology is conceived in terms of notions of pluralism (i.e., many religions and religious denominations coexist harmoniously), voluntarism (i.e., the individual is free to belong to and participate in the activities of the religious group of his or her choice), and freedom (i.e., the state neither endorses one particular religion nor allows limitations to be placed on the individual's legitimate religious expression; and, at the same time, the state bestows certain special statuses on all recognized religious organizations). This Canadian ideology with respect to religion is reflected in Canadian governmental policies in the form of the legal protection of individuals' rights of religious affiliation and expression (e.g., as set forth in the Canadian Bill of Rights (1960), the Canadian Human Rights Act (1978a), and the various provincial and municipal human rights statutes) and in such advantages as the tax-exempt status accorded the property of religious organizations when such property is used for religious purposes (e.g., see the B.C. Religious Institutions Act (1960) and the Vancouver Charter (Chpt. 55, Sec. 396(c)iv)).

The Canadian ideology with respect to ethnicity is reflected in the commonly-accepted image of Canadian society as a "mosaic"—a pluralistic society in which, unlike the American "melting pot," the constituent elements are discrete "ethno-cultural" groups which retain their unique ethnic identity and cultural integrity despite social interaction. The most explicit statement of this ideology in the area of public policy is, of course, in the federal policy of "multiculturalism within a

bilingual framework," first enunciated by the Liberal government in 1971 (Canada, 1971). Here, the government does not simply guarantee certain human rights to individuals of all races, colors, ancestries, national origins, etc. (for these, see the Bill of Rights, the Human Rights Act, and the provincial and municipal human rights statutes), but takes positive steps to ensure the recognition and vitality of ethno-cultural organizations and their activities.⁶

There is much to notice about the representation of religion and ethnicity in Canadian ideology beyond their common pluralism. While social scientific definitions of "ethnicity" commonly list "religion" as one of the bases of ethnic identity and solidarity (see, e.g., Isajiw's (1974) review article), it appears that in Canadian ideology, religion and ethnicity are viewed as generally separable and potentially cross-cutting sources of social identity and social solidarity and relatively distinct generators of social norms. Furthermore, not only can religious and ethnic identities, groups, and norms be distinguished according to Canadian ideology, they can also be seen to contrast. Thus, whereas religious identity is viewed as essentially voluntary and individualistic (membership being achievable through the symbolic action of re-birth, confirmation, and conversion), ethnic identity—like the even more extreme racial identity—is viewed as essentially communal and non-volitional (membership being ascribed on the basis of common ties of origin and descent).⁷ Furthermore, as a corollary of the preceding, whereas religious norms are seen as absolute and inviolable (generally involving faithful adherence to some "code for conduct" enjoined on all believers and protected as "religious rights"), ethnic norms are seen as relatively loose and non-specific (generally involving the retention of only a few "cultural markers" sufficient to index one's membership in a particular ethnic category).⁸ Finally, implicit in the ideology and crucial to its public-policy implementation is a separation of sacred and secular domains such that religious institutions (e.g., churches, temples, mosques, and other "houses of worship") which benefit from certain taxation and incorporation policies can be distinguished from the ethnic institutions (e.g., ethnic-political, ethnic-cultural, ethnic-social, and ethnic-social service organizations) which are the intended beneficiaries of multiculturalism programs and other forms of public funding.⁹

Traditional Sikh Ideology and Institutional Structures

It would be a serious mistake to assume that traditional Sikh ideology corresponds to Canadian ideology with respect to the differentiation of religion and ethnicity.¹⁰ Since Sikhism has heretofore been essentially a regional faith, the Sikh and Punjabi identities of its adherents have been largely conjoined. And even when Sikhs have settled abroad, their insularity—reflected in norms of endogamy and non-proselytization—has meant that they have gone virtually unchallenged in defining as they please the meaning of the term "Sikh." It is not surprising to find, therefore, that it is commonly asserted of and by Punjabi Sikhs that the Sikhs constitute a distinct religious-cum-social-cum-political-cum-cultural community and that it is either impossible, unwarranted, or ill-advised to attempt to delineate components of this unique Sikh identity. Chadney pinpoints this traditional Sikh ideology when he asserts:

It is this constant blending of sacred and secular identities, goals, structures, and functions, which, at the emic level, helps explain the important continuance of Sikhism in Vancouver For it is

not simply a religious identity, it is an identity of *Sikh* which is an identity incapable of being categorically isolated into disparate and separate sacred and secular identities (Chadney, 1976: 195; emphasis in original).

Rich symbolic support for this ideological unity of the sacred and secular domains is to be found in Punjabi Sikh culture in the *miri/piri* and *deg/tegh/fateh* concepts. According to traditional Sikh hagiography, the sixth Sikh Guru (teacher), Hargobind, was invested with two swords at his installation as Guru, one representing spiritual power (*piri*: from the Persian word, *pir*, used to denote a religious teacher) and the other representing temporal power (*miri*: from another Islamically-introduced word, *amir*, meaning commander of the faithful). Besides encapsulating the long-standing Sikh notion of worldly involvement coexisting with spiritual enlightenment, the pairing of *miri* and *piri* reflects the ideal of Sikh religious and socio-political unity and sovereignty. A more recent symbolic development, first popularized at the time of the ninth and tenth Gurus (i.e., in the late 17th century), was the pairing of the terms *deg* (cooking pot) and *tegh* (sword) to emphasize that "the use of arms is an extension of the giving of alms" (Cole & Sambhi, 1978: 30) and their conjunction with *fateh* (victory) in reference to the temporal and spiritual victory of God and God's Khalsa Panth (the orthodox Sikh community).

Historically, one could enumerate numerous examples of the continued blending of what from the perspective of contemporary Western ideology would be distinguished as "religious" and "non-religious." Institutionally, one can observe this in the jointly political and religious aspirations of the Sikh communal party, the Akali Dal, which has periodically agitated for a separate Sikh homeland and against incorporation into a secular Indian state; in the political as well as religious activities of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (the organization legally empowered to run the affairs of the historical *gurdwaras* in the Punjab); and in the often parallel leadership of these most dominant of Punjabi Sikh organizations.

However, the institutional framework wherein the difference in ideologies is best observed is in the scope and function of the Sikh *gurdwaras*, the central Sikh institution at the local level. It is conventional in English to translate *gurdwara* (literally, "the Guru's door") as "temple." This is unfortunate, since, as virtually every Sikh scholar has pointed out, Sikh *gurdwaras* traditionally have been—and in most cases continue to be—more than simply "houses of worship," as religious buildings in the West are commonly considered. If we wish to apply our conventional Western understandings to an explanation of the traditional role of the *gurdwaras* in Sikh social life, it would be more appropriate to speak of them as religious, social, political, cultural, and social service centers for the local community.¹¹

Institutional Developments Within the Vancouver Sikh Community: 1907–1947

Given this place of the *gurdwara* in Punjabi Sikh society, it is not surprising that a *gurdwara* was formed in Vancouver in 1908 following the arrival of some five thousand Sikh immigrants and that from the very beginning it served a multiplicity of apparently religious and non-religious purposes. In its early years, the Khalsa Diwan Society's *gurdwara* on West Second Avenue was truly a religious, social, political, cultural, and social service center for the entire South-

Asian immigrant population of the lower mainland. In this building, regular readings from the *Siri Guru Granth Sahib* (the collected Sikh Scriptures regarded as the reigning Sikh Guru) were conducted; the traditional *langar* (free kitchen) operated; and shelter was provided for the homeless. In addition, the *gurdwara* was a place where the overwhelmingly working-class, male population came together to socialize, discuss issues, air conflicts, and reach decisions affecting the community.¹² *Gurdwaras* subsequently built in other areas of Sikh settlement in British Columbia became legally affiliated branches of the Vancouver Khalsa Diwan Society. Thus, during this period, the Vancouver Khalsa Diwan Society could legitimately claim to speak on behalf of all the Sikhs—and thus the overwhelming majority of all South-Asian immigrants—in British Columbia.

It was not inconsistent with Sikh ideology for a "temple" organization such as the Khalsa Diwan Society (hereafter, KDS) to engage in political activities, and the KDS quickly took the lead in fighting against the exclusionary Canadian immigration policies and for the extension of full civil rights to all South-Asian immigrants in British Columbia. Having played a central role in the community's rejection of a governmental proposal which would have seen South Asians relocated to British Honduras, the KDS found itself deeply involved in seeking a redress of the community's many grievances against the British, Canadian and British Columbian authorities. Causes championed by the KDS in the period from 1909 to 1947 included sending delegations to Ottawa and London to argue for the lifting of the "Orders-in-Council" which effectively barred further immigration from the Indian sub-continent, supporting court challenges to the legality of Canadian immigration policies, offering material and legal support to the passengers and would-be immigrants of the ill-fated *Komagata Maru*, and assisting individual immigrants facing deportation orders. In addition, the KDS worked to bring about favorable decisions from Canadian officials which eventually allowed South-Asian immigrants to sponsor for immigration their wives and dependent children and extended domiciliary rights to illegal immigrants who had been successfully established in the country for a certain period of time.¹³ Finally, the KDS was the institutional voice for the community in its ultimately successful efforts to achieve the federal, provincial and municipal franchise, an important victory which allowed South Asian-Canadians in British Columbia not only the right to vote but also the right to enter certain professions (notably, law and medicine) otherwise closed to them.¹⁴

During the community's first decades in Canada, sporadic attempts had been made to found what could be regarded as separate ethnic-political organizations (see Lal, 1976; Buchigniani, 1979). For the most part, these organizations failed to attract sufficient support from the community to sustain their activities.¹⁵ Political successes which could be claimed, most notably on the part of the United India League, had to be shared with the KDS. As Norman Buchigniani points out, the Sikhs did not lack in political organization during their first decades in Canada even if they did lack in explicitly ethnic-political organizations.¹⁶ It was simply the case that so long as the South-Asian immigrant population remained small, overwhelmingly Sikh and relatively united (if only in respect to the perceived intransigence of government authorities), the KDS and its *gurdwara* were regarded by community members as the logical institutional center for meeting the community's varied needs. And so long as the various levels of government regarded the KDS as speaking on behalf of South-Asian Canadians, the KDS was able to sustain an active political role.

Institutional Developments Within the Vancouver Sikh Community: 1948–1969

By 1947, the South-Asian immigrant population in the lower mainland—still almost exclusively Sikh—had shrunk to little over one-thousand persons. However, following changes in Canadian immigration and citizenship policies, the community slowly began to expand after decades of contraction and retrenchment. Ironically, the KDS, which had worked to bring about these changes, was itself significantly affected by them. An influx of newcomers helped stir up incipient factional conflict between what other anthropologists have termed the “modernist” and “traditionalist” segments of the Sikh community. In 1952, a dispute arose over requirements for election to the KDS executive committee, with the “traditionalists” arguing unsuccessfully for the exclusion of clean-shaven and turbanless Sikhs from KDS leadership positions. Following their defeat, a group of “traditionalists” broke with the KDS to found a second Vancouver *gurdwara* and a second society, the Akali Singh Sikh Society. Shortly thereafter, a parallel split occurred in Victoria, where a “traditionalist” minority there broke away from the KDS *gurdwara* to form yet another independent *gurdwara* society. With the unity of the province’s Sikh *gurdwaras* under the umbrella of the KDS now broken, the affiliated KDS *gurdwaras* themselves began to seek independence from the Vancouver KDS. And these developments, together with an increase in non Sikh South-Asian immigration, effectively undermined the credibility of the Vancouver KDS as the sole organization speaking to the wider Canadian society on behalf of the entire South-Asian immigrant community.¹⁷

Out of this newly unsettled situation emerged what could be regarded as an ethnic-political organization—the East Indian Canadian Citizens’ Welfare Association. Though dominated by the sizeable Sikh population and sharing some leadership with the KDS, this was an overtly non-religious organization, formally independent of any *gurdwara*. By setting its objectives as working for the benefit of the entire “East Indian” population throughout the country, it implicitly accepted the Canadian view of social reality—viz., that there exists a distinct “East Indian” ethno-cultural group sharing certain unique interests and activities. Thus it was at this juncture that the Welfare Association—as it came to be called by community members—began to take on some of the more political functions (e.g., pressing the government for increased immigration quotas for India) previously undertaken by the KDS.¹⁸

During the 1950s and early 1960s, the community gradually grew in number on the strength of sponsored relatives, small quotas of independent immigrants, and Canadian-born offspring. For the most part, evidence from this period points to continuing accommodation to certain Canadian norms. While the influx of newcomers—and especially the practice of seeking spouses in India—served to counteract assimilative tendencies, the new immigrants generally deferred to the established immigrants—often their relatives and fellow villagers—for direction in adapting to Canadian customs. Thus, to give but one example, most male Sikhs took the job-hunting advice of earlier immigrants and were clean-shaven and turbanless upon or shortly after their arrival in Canada.

As the 1960s drew to a close and the KDS prepared to move into its impressive new *gurdwara* overlooking the Fraser River, leadership of the KDS and the Welfare Association was in the hands of those “modernists” who largely counseled accommodation and who had themselves succeeded in Western

terms.¹⁹ With the community prospering, suffering little overt hostility and anticipating more open immigration, the Welfare Association had become less politically active. Meanwhile the *gurdwaras*, as the social centers for the Sikh community, were now more than ever functioning like Western-style “houses of worship,” opening their doors primarily for weddings, funerals, and Sunday services. However, certain events had been set in motion or were about to be set in motion, which in the course of the past decade have significantly changed the community makeup and altered both the organizational structures and leadership patterns.

Institutional Developments Within the Vancouver Sikh Community: 1970–1980

First of all, changes in Canadian immigration policies in 1962 and especially in 1967 (and lasting until modified in 1973 and 1974) significantly liberalized regulations affecting the immigration of South Asians. Increased immigration and increases resulting from a significant excess of births over deaths within the Sikh community help explain the perhaps four-fold increase in the Sikh population of the lower mainland to current estimates of upwards of forty thousand persons. At the same time, the makeup of the “East-Indian” population as a whole (now including Islamis, Pakistanis, Fijians, and others of South-Asian ancestry) has gone from overwhelmingly Sikh to a point where Sikhs represent only one-half to two-thirds of all “East Indians” in the lower mainland. Furthermore, rapid growth and increasing diversity within the Sikh community itself (resulting from Sikh immigration not only from India but from Britain, East Africa, Fiji, and other Commonwealth countries) has meant some attenuation of the influence of the old family and village ties which had served to integrate new immigrants into the community, and which had served as power bases for certain community leaders. While such ties continue to be important generators of solidarity within the community, no one person’s ties are by themselves sufficient to ensure power and position within the Sikh community. At the same time that diversification and internal growth in the Sikh community has worked against the continued dominance of the old Sikh leaders, similar factors conspire to challenge any assumption of continued Sikh dominance—either locally or nationally—within the collective “East Indian” ethnic category.²⁰

The past decade has also seen the introduction of the federal multiculturalism programs and the passage of human rights legislation at the federal and provincial levels. One effect of these policies has been to make clear that in the Canadian context “East Indians” are seen as constituting a distinct ethno-cultural group and that the Canadian government would prefer to deal with pan-“East-Indian” ethnic organizations. At the same time, while Canadians generally remain insensitive to confessional and conventional differences among South Asians and persist in lumping all those of South-Asian ancestry in a single category, the term “Hindu” which was once applied indiscriminantly—and largely inaccurately—to those of South-Asian ancestry in Canada has for the most part been replaced by “East Indian” as the common ethnic label.

While other Canadians may assume that “East Indians” share common ethno-cultural traits and common socio-political interests, Canadians of South-Asian ancestry are themselves aware of the increasing diversity of backgrounds and interests among those considered “East Indians.” Thus it is not surprising that, as

John Wood (1978) makes clear, "East-Indian" participation in the process leading to the new Immigration Act of 1976 was marked by disparate and often conflicting presentations. By the mid-1970s, there was no organization, either local or national, which could accurately be said to represent the interests of a united "East-Indian" community. In Vancouver, the Welfare Association was only sporadically active and had been stricken from the Provincial Register of Societies, the KDS was increasingly immobilized by internal struggles for control of the executive and the Akali Singh Sikh Society continued its generally quietistic ways. The only organization presuming to represent the entire community was the soon-discredited East Indian Defence Committee, a Maoist group (now affiliated with the Albanian-leaning Communist Part of Canada-Marxist-Leninist (CPC-ML)) which had organized vigilante actions to defend "East Indians" in Vancouver from physical and verbal harassment by whites.²¹

To fill this void in ethnic-political organizational solidarity exposed by the immigration policy review, an all-Canada "East-Indian" umbrella organization was formed in 1975-76. Drawing its leadership and support largely from the Indo-Canadian elite (i.e., the Western-educated, English-speaking professionals, bureaucrats and business people) and, at the local level, from those with prior experience in dealing with Canadian governmental bureaucracy (e.g., through private or government employment and/or leadership of the KDS or Welfare Association during their activist phases), the organization called itself the National Association of Canadians of Origins in India (NACOI) and set as its aims and objectives:

1. To encourage Canadians of origins in India to fully participate in Canadian Society.
2. To provide a national voice to Canadians of origins in India.
3. To provide a forum for exchange of ideas, issues and common concerns.
4. To facilitate communication within and with other organizations.
5. To assist in the orientation and adaptation of Canadians of origins in India to the Canadian milieu and bring about a better understanding of Canada and other Canadians.
7. To formulate guidelines for improving the collective image of Canadians of origins in India.
8. To assure due recognition of the contributions of Canadians of origins in India to Canada (NACOI, 1977)

While at the local level, NACOI's British Columbia Chapter has been dominated by the Vancouver Sikh elite (and suffers, says its detractors, from élitism), it would be unwarranted to assume that the Sikh community in Vancouver has been united in accepting the wisdom or necessity of participation in a pan-"East-Indian" ethnic-political organization. Given the traditional Sikh ideology of religious-cum-ethnic distinctiveness, it is not surprising that there should be residual support for the position, most vocally enunciated by the local Shiromani Akali Dal of Canada, that Sikhs are a "separate people" who should be known not as "East Indians" or "Canadian of origins in India" but as "Canadian Sikhs" and whose political interests should be looked after by the *gurdwara* societies or other representatives of the Sikh Panth (community). In general, however, local Sikh participation in the "establishment" ethnic-political organizations (e.g. NACOI, the revived and revitalized East Indian Canadian

Citizens' Welfare Association, and the fledgling Fraser Valley East Indian Canadian Welfare Association) as well as the "leftist" alternatives (e.g., the aforementioned East Indian Defence Committee, the rival Indian Peoples' Association of North America and the recently-founded East Indian Workers' Association) suggests a significant acceptance of the position that to compete for funds and recognition in the wider Canadian society it may be necessary to organize into what are at least in theory pan-"East-Indian" ethnic-political organizations.²²

As suggested earlier, the rise in ethnic-political organizations has gone hand-in-hand with a proliferation of ethnic institutions of various sorts. Thus, with the establishment of groups such as the Punjabi Cultural Association, the Punjabi Literary Association, and of independent Punjabi schools, one finds that ethnic-cultural activities are no longer the exclusive province of the *gurdwaras*. Likewise, groups like the India Club of Vancouver, the International Punjabi Society, the India Mahilla (Women's) Association, and various sporting clubs function as ethno-social organizations independent of the *gurdwaras*. Finally, ethnic-social services, once almost exclusively the institutional province of the *gurdwaras*, have now largely been taken over by governmental agencies or semi-governmental organizations like the Immigrant Services Centre or the local Neighborhood Houses which increasingly employ "East Indians" to deliver services to largely "East-Indian" clients.²³

One might suspect that this proliferation of ethnic organizations taking over what were once the multiple responsibilities of the *gurdwaras* might leave the *gurdwaras* themselves deserted and lifeless. This has not been the case. *Gurdwaras* continue to enjoy high attendance and tremendous material support from the Sikh community. Several new *gurdwaras* have been built, are being built, or are being planned in the lower mainland. Indeed, the past ten years have seen something of a religious revival within the Vancouver Sikh community. Calls for greater religious orthopraxy have resulted in increasing ritual elaboration in the established services as well as the reintroduction of Sikh ceremonies and *gurdwara* protocol which had nearly died out in Vancouver. The election for the 1979 term and subsequent re-election of an "orthodox"-dominated executive committee of the KDS has been seen by many as a consolidation of "orthodox" control over *gurdwara* affairs and a repudiation of lapses in religious orthopraxy perpetrated over the years in the interests of social accommodation.²⁴

The present leadership of both the KDS and the Akali Singh Sikh Society appear to view their mandates primarily in terms of promoting a return to religious orthopraxy and not as necessitating political activism. Thus, they have concentrated their energies on maintaining the *gurdwaras* as a context for the practice of what they regard as appropriate Sikh religious activities and have involved the Societies only indirectly in ethnic-political activities.²⁵ For the old-guard KDS leadership, the loss of power in a *gurdwara* which was built under their leadership and which practices a brand of Sikhism with which they felt comfortable has been a blow.²⁶ On the other hand, as they have withdrawn from *gurdwara* society affairs, many of these people have become increasingly involved in the ethnic organizations, finding them to be a more rewarding forum for their interests and expertise. In light of these changes in orientation and leadership of the community's institutions, it is not surprising to find that many of the qualities which Chadhey (1976: 154-168) had earlier identified as crucial to KDS leadership (e.g. professional or business background, political

Canada, "modernity" and bilingualism) are now important for leadership of the ethnic-political organizations but of lesser importance today as criteria for election to the executive committees of the *gurdwara* societies.

Sikh Support for the Differentiation of 'Religion' and 'Ethnicity'

The proliferation and diversification of religious and ethnic institutions, activities and leaders within the Vancouver Sikh community is a fact of life. To what extent it represents a fundamental, irreversible, conscious acceptance of Canadian ideology with respect to religion and ethnicity remains to be seen. It should be noted, however, that support for the differentiation of 'religion' and 'ethnicity' can be found among those two categories of persons within the Sikh collectivity who, having been born and reared in Canadian society, would be most likely to interpret social action and social identity in terms of the prevailing Canadian ideology. These two groups are the now sizeable and maturing second and third generation of Canadians of Punjabi-Sikh ancestry, and the small but vocal and visible group of non-"East-Indian" Canadian and American Sikh converts. While the two groups tend to define themselves in vastly different ways with respect to the Vancouver Sikh community as a whole, their very existence speaks to the separability of religion and ethnicity in the Canadian context.

What is striking about the second- and third-generation Canadians of Punjabi-Sikh ancestry is their strong ethnic identity. Second- and third-generation Canadians of Punjabi-Sikh ancestry have largely avoided transgressing the implicit norms (e.g., by marrying out or converting out) which govern inclusion in "our community." Pressures both from within and without have reinforced the norm of Sikh endogamy, so that intermarriage with Canadians of other ethnic backgrounds—and thus any question of conflicting ethnic allegiances—is still uncommon. Moreover, during the past decade, the ethnic consciousness of many of these people has been significantly politicized. The increase in overt anti-"East-Indian" hostility on the part of other Canadians, though largely directed at the new immigrants, has been sufficiently generalized so as to affect the second and third generation as well. And these people, sensitive to an injustice being done to all "East Indians," have regarded the ethnic-political organizations as the appropriate institutions for mounting a response.²⁷

On the other hand, many of these same people express estrangement from the recent Sikh religious revivalism, regarding it as an unfortunate return to aspects of life in "village India" with little relevant to, or positive implications for, the community's situation in Canada. To such people, the issue of religious orthopraxy should rightfully be an individual one, distinct from and subordinate to the community's efforts to better their position as "East Indians" in Canadian society. Thus, for many of these people, the orientation of the ethnic-political institutions and the challenge they provide in bridging the gap between the ethnic community and the wider Canadian society is more compelling than the activities of religious organizations from which they feel largely estranged. It is from these people that one gets the clearest statement that it may be possible to be 'ethnically' Sikh (or Punjabi or "East Indian") without being 'religiously' Sikh.²⁸

One receives just the converse message from the *gora* (white) Sikh converts.²⁹ For them, solidarity with Vancouver's "East Indian" Sikhs is based not on a shared Punjabi heritage but on common adherence to a universal Sikh *dharma* (variously translated as "religion," "way of life," "duty"). The converts make a

clear ideological distinction between religious accommodation (e.g., the giving up of beards, turbans, and other Sikh "religious symbols") which they consider neither necessary nor excusable, and ethnic adaptation (e.g., an end to residual Punjabi "caste consciousness" and the "subjugation of women") which they accept and would encourage.³⁰ The converts' major contention vis-à-vis the "East-Indian" Sikh community in Vancouver is that in the process of accommodation to Canadian norms those Canadians of Punjabi-Sikh ancestry who have violated what the converts take to be inviolable religious norms are *pait* (literally, "fallen;" the converts' translation is "apostate") and thus "East-Indians" (or "Punjabis") but no longer "real Sikhs."³¹

Since they define themselves in religious terms, the converts have viewed the *gurdwaras*—their own as well as those which are predominantly Punjabi Sikh—as the appropriate institutions for their religious involvement with "East-Indian" Sikhs. In the *gurdwaras*, they have generally aligned themselves with "orthodox" elements, helped sponsor visits by Sikh "missionaries" from India, performed *gurbani Kirtan* ("hymns of the Gurus") at services, and (at the Akali Singh *gurdwara*) introduced "Sunday school" classes for the children. Furthermore, since they hold such an unequivocal notion of their own identity as 'religiously' but not 'ethnically' Sikh, the converts are able to draw a sharp distinction between "religious" discrimination and discrimination based on "race," "ethnicity," or "national origins." Thus the converts, as individual litigants or as co-counsel through the Sikh Youth Federation of Canada, have been particularly aggressive in seeking to secure and expand Sikh "religious rights" in Canada. Basing their arguments on the principle that religious codes for conduct are privileged and inviolable, they have enjoyed notable success in appealing instances of perceived religious discrimination to the courts, Human Rights boards and other public bodies. They have ensured, for example, that "orthodox" Sikhs can retain their beards, turbans, swords and other religious symbols without fear of discrimination and with full understanding that such religious symbols are being retained on religious principle and are not merely a perpetuation of bizarre "East-Indian" ethnic customs.³²

Conclusion

It is somewhat ironic that while the ethnic-political organizations serving the Sikh community are often castigated for their impotence in defining and defending ethnic interests, it is once again an explicitly-religious organization and individuals acting in the name of religion who have brought about some small—but, to many Sikhs, significant—changes in Canadian policies affecting them. This should serve as a reminder not to overlook channels of power which may be open to ethnic groups aside from the expressly political. However, this should not obscure the main point of this analysis, which has been to account for the proliferation and diversification of institutions within Vancouver's Sikh community. In this regard, it seems appropriate to conclude that the *de facto* differentiation of religious and ethnic-political institutions, activities and leaders within the Vancouver Sikh community represents a significant departure from traditional Punjabi-Sikh ideology and social structure. This departure can also be seen as constituting adaptation to Canadian ideology and public policy.

If so, what more general implications are there in these developments within the Sikh community? Are these developments peculiar to the Sikh situation in Canada, deriving from the unique interaction of Punjabi and Canadian

ologies and institutional forms? Or are the developments noted here for the Vancouver Sikhs common to other "ethno-religious" groups in Canadian society—for example, to Canadian Doukhobors, Mennonites, Hutterites, Orthodox, Old Believers, Jews? I would suggest that in responding to Canadian ideology and public policy each "ethno-religious" group is likely to have a somewhat different experience reflecting (1) the unique intersection of Canadian and the group's traditional ideology and institutional structures, and (2) the nature and extent of interaction between the group and the wider society. But if, as has been suggested, a distinction between 'religion' and 'ethnicity' is a commonplace of Canadian ideology, then it should not be surprising to find an increasing differentiation of religious and ethnic identities, organizations, activities and leaders taking place within these "ethno-religious" communities over time. And if political power is a secular rather than religious prerogative in Canadian ideology, one might also expect to observe over time the emergence of ethnic-political organizations serving these communities and a corresponding de-politization of their religious institutions. If this is so, we need to know more about the institutional developments within these "ethno-religious" communities, for the outlines of a general theory await further substantiation by others.

*A version of this paper was first presented at the Biennial Canadian Ethnic Studies Association Meetings in Vancouver, B.C., October 12, 1979. The paper is based on archival research and on fieldwork conducted in 1978-79 with the Vancouver Sikh community. The research builds on previous research conducted in 1972 and 1974 with the Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization (3HO), whose members are now known more widely as Canadian and American Sikh converts. Funding for the latter research was provided by the U.S. National Endowment for the Humanities (Youthgrant #AY-20553-74-398). I would like to thank Brenda Beck, Norm Buchignani, Elizabeth Coville, Gary Downey, Rich Handler, and John Wood for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

FOOTNOTES

1. I use the term "Sikh community" in a broad sense to include all those living in greater Vancouver who consider themselves to be Sikhs. Unfortunately, accurate statistical information on the Sikh population in Canada is hard to obtain, not least because "Sikh" is not a category of enumeration (either religious or ethnic) in Canadian census data. While Toronto's and Vancouver's Sikh populations are by far the largest in Canada, it remains an open question as to whether Toronto's has yet to surpass Vancouver's as the largest.
2. I put quotation marks around "East Indian" because while it is the conventional categorical label for all those of South Asian ancestry in Canada, many persons so labeled find it misleading and derogatory and would prefer another general label (e.g., "Indo-Canadian" or "Canadian or origins in India") or a more specific one (e.g., "Canadian Sikh" or "Fijian Canadian") or none at all.
3. "Institutional adaptation" should not be confused with "structural assimilation." While the latter refers to the "large-scale entrance of immigrant group members into the cliques, clubs, and institutions of the host society on a primary group level" (Gordon, 1964: 71), the former refers to changes of institutional structures *within* the immigrant community with respect to institutional forms sanctioned by the host and sending societies.
4. By "ethnic-political" organizations, I mean those institutions whose primary activities involve lobbying for the interests of a particular ethnic community and mediating between the ethnic community and the social institutions—and particularly the political institutions—of the wider society. By "ethnic-cultural," I refer to organizations primarily concerned with promoting the folk arts, history and language of the ethnic group's "traditional culture." "Ethnic-social" organizations are those providing social and recreational opportunities for members of the ethnic community. "Ethnic-social service"

organizations are those delivering social services to the ethnic community. These are, in a sense, ideal-type institutions. Organizations can be and often are involved in more than one type of activity. Nevertheless, I feel justified in my characterization of various organizations within Vancouver's Sikh community on the basis of their dominant orientation.

5. Like "adaptation," the term "ideology" is a theoretically loaded one which deserves careful definition. Following one common anthropological usage (see Nicholas, 1973: 75-80; Geertz, 1973: 193-233; Schneider, 1976: 220), I regard ideology as the natives' social theory. Understood in this way, ideology is a non-evaluative theoretical concept—that is, one expressing actors' ideas about ideals for their society.
- While ideologies build upon and draw their authoritativeness from pervasive and persuasive cultural symbols, the natives' social analysis (1) is "prey to the same problems of coherence and authority as are other cultural systems" (Nicholas, 1973: 76), and (2) "is not the same as the analyst's theoretically constructed view of the native culture" (Schneider, 1976: 220). Given this definition of ideology, it becomes apparent that one can hold "ethno-cultural pluralism" to be the prevailing Canadian ideology without thereby endorsing it as one's own social scientific analysis of Canadian society and culture. Understanding this, it is possible to agree with John Porter's conclusion that "(i)f not its one distinctive value, that of the mosaic is Canada's most cherished" (1965: 558) without disputing those who present evidence of ethnic hierarchy or fluid ethnic boundaries or a widespread adoption of common cultural premises across ethnic boundaries.
6. The Canadian ideology with respect to ethnicity and the government's policy of multiculturalism have been variously criticized by social scientists for inaccurately portraying the structural realities of Canadian society (Porter, 1975), for confusing the analytic notions of "ethnicity" and "culture" (Burnet, 1976), and for coopting the legitimate human rights concerns of immigrant groups by focusing on their "folk" activities (Schroeter, 1978), or by creating "career ethnics" with vested interests in perpetuating current multiculturalism programs (Frideres & Goldenberg, 1977). Nevertheless, reiteration of their commitment to the multiculturalism policy by recent Liberal and Conservative governments and the support the policy has received from all three major political parties suggests that the ideology persists and that the policy is likely to be continued.
7. The Canadian ideology with respect to "ethnicity" appears to share much in common with the ideology with respect to "race." The major difference appears to be the greater degree to which the "facts" of racial identity are taken to be innate and encoded in one's substance (e.g., in "blood" and "color"). It may be most appropriate, therefore, to regard "East Indian"—like "Black" and "Native Indian"—as a racial-ethnic category label (though, in fact, many Canadians of Punjabi-Sikh ancestry could easily "pass" as white Canadians if color were the only index).
8. This point deserves further elaboration. Parsons (1975: 65), quoting David Schneider, points out that in North America, "ethnic status is conspicuously devoid of social content" and "the markers of [ethnic] identity are in a very important sense 'empty symbols.'" In other words, in North America, so long as a few general "cultural markers" are retained, considerable "cultural adaptation" can take place without bringing into question one's "ethnic identity."
9. While the separation of church and state is not as absolute in Canada as in the United States (and thus, e.g., independent religious schools are eligible for public funds in British Columbia), multiculturalism funding is apparently not intended to support overtly-religious activities. Where religious institutions do receive public funds, it is usually specified as support for what are taken to be ancillary ethnic-cultural or ethnic-social service activities. Thus, in the early 1970s the KDS was briefly given a grant by the city of Vancouver to run an "information center" for new immigrants. The Vancouver *gurdwaras* have not sought further funds, even though the KDS Punjabi School might be eligible for funding from the Secretary of State (Multiculturalism) for its Punjabi language classes. KDS leaders give as a reason for not seeking such funding the fear of loss of autonomy. Since the Punjabi language and, especially, the Gurmukhi script are so intimately connected with the Sikh religion, it is hard to imagine the authorities being able to enforce the teaching of religiously-neutral Punjabi language classes at the *gurdwaras*.
10. In his comparative study of South Asia and the modern West, the French anthropologist Louis Dumont (1970) has admonished us to fully recognize and respect the contrasting

- ologies of the two regions. Among other things, he has suggested that one significant contrast between South-Asian and modern Western ideologies is in the latter's differentiation of social action and identity into a multitude of separate and distinct "domains." Inden & Nicholas (1977: xiv) even go so far as to suggest that the conventional distinction made in the modern West between the sacred and secular domains may not be present in South-Asian cultures.
11. See Mayar (1959: 8-9) for one discussion of the multiplicity of functions of the traditional Sikh *gurdwara*.
 12. See Singh (1977: 174-175) and Das (1923: 88) for accounts of some of the early activities of the Vancouver KDS.
 13. For a detailed account of the KDS's efforts to achieve domiciliary rights for illegal South-Asian immigrants in British Columbia, see KDS, 1947a.
 14. For a detailed account of the KDS's efforts to achieve the federal, provincial and municipal franchise for all "Hindoos," see KDS, 1947b.
 15. Lal (1976) contrasts the background of early would-be ethnic-political leaders (often highly-educated, non-Sikhs with considerable prior experience dealing with Westerners) with those of the masses (largely working-class Sikhs). Many of these political activists left Vancouver during the community's early years and found more receptive audiences elsewhere.
 16. The Ghadr (Revolution) Party was active in Vancouver at this time. I have not considered it an ethnic-political institution of the Vancouver Sikh community, however, because (1) its primary orientation was towards the political situation in India rather than the situation of the community in Canada, and (2) while active in Vancouver, its organizational center was in the United States.
 17. All of the *gurdwaras* which were once the legal affiliates of the Vancouver KDS have now achieved their independence. At present, the Western Sikh Samachar Society, publisher of the monthly *Sikh Samachar* journal, aspires to be an umbrella organization for all the B.C. *gurdwara* societies.
 18. The aims and objectives of the East Indian Canadian Citizens' Welfare Association as set out in its original Constitution and By-laws are:
 - (a) To work for the social, economic, political and cultural advancement of the Canadian citizens of East Indian origin in Canada.
 - (b) To act as an effective medium of cooperation between the members of the Indian Community in Canada and other Canadian citizens.
 - (c) To interpret India, the people, traditions and culture, to the people of Canada.
 - (d) To inculcate among the Canadian citizens of Indian origin, the responsibilities, duties and rights of Canadian citizenship.
 - (e) To promote better understanding and friendship between Canada and India by the exchange of mutual information.
 - (f) To establish centres for the purpose of cultural, recreational, social and other community activities.
 - (g) To purchase, sell, take on lease, hire, mortgage, or otherwise acquire or deal in or foreclose property, land and buildings, or any interest therein, for the purposes of the Association.
 - (h) To erect buildings on such lands, or any of them, to further the purposes of the Association.
 - (i) To buy, sell, deal in, hire, make or provide or maintain all necessary real or personal property or equipment for carrying out the objectives of the Association.
 - (j) To publish periodicals, books, pamphlets and such literature as may be deemed necessary to promote the above-mentioned aims and objectives.
 - (k) To promote all other ancillary objects for the advancement of the above-mentioned aims (East Indian Canadian Citizens' Welfare Association, 1954).
 19. See Chadney (1976: 154-168) for an account of the factors crucial to KDS leadership at the time of his study.
 20. Sikhs from Vancouver continue to be well-represented, however, on the national NACOI executive committee.
 21. The East Indian Defence Committee represents an interesting case study since it is a group which apparently would like to take advantage of both Canadian and traditional Sikh ideologies of religion and ethnicity. Recognizing the importance of the *gurdwaras* to the Sikh community, the Defence Committee unsuccessfully sought control of the Vancouver *gurdwaras* during the mid-1970s. One of the arguments raised against Defence Committee involvement in *gurdwara* affairs was that as a "political" organization and, as an affiliate of the Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist), an apparently "anti-religious" organization, its participation in the affairs of a religious organization would be inappropriate. Having been rebuffed in efforts to secure a base in the *gurdwaras*, the Defence Committee sought to build a "Memorial Hall" which would serve as a meeting hall and community center commemorating the early martyrs of the Vancouver "East-Indian" community, the Indian Freedom Fighters, and recent Indian Naxilite activists. They found, however, that by installing a copy of the *Siri Guru Granth Sahib* and allowing the building to be used for weddings, they could call it the Desh Bhagat Temple and thus (1) take advantage of the fact that "houses of worship" are considered non-threatening by most Canadians and are granted tax-exempt status under local statutes, and (2) keep open the channels of communication with those Sikhs who have need of a place to perform functions and do not object to this particular blending of religion and politics.
 22. The Indian Peoples' Association of North America (IPANA) is affiliated with the Canadian Communist League-Marxist-Leninist (CCL-ML). The conflicts between the Defence Committee and IPANA (and between the CPC-ML and the CCL-ML) derive from splits in the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) during the 1960s. The East Indian Workers' Association (EIWA) is modeled after the effective Indian Workers Association (IWA) in Britain.
 23. It is interesting to note that there are no ethnic social-service organizations as such operated from within the "East-Indian" community. Traditionally, Sikhs have looked after their own either informally (e.g., through family and village connections) or through the *gurdwaras*. Only recently in Vancouver has the long-standing resistance to turning to outside agencies for counseling or assistance begun to dissolve, this being both cause and effect of the breakdown of established patron client and brokered relationships in a rapidly growing and diversifying Sikh population.
 24. There is special irony in the election of the 1979 KDS executive committee. This was the first KDS election contested under new election procedures (membership fees, closed membership rolls, secret ballots) which had been pushed by "modernists" as necessary to ensure fair elections but had been opposed by "traditionalists" as a deviation from established electoral traditions (a show of hands by those present at the *gurdwara* on election day). The 1979 election was a hard-fought affair with the incumbent KDS leadership (which had strongly pushed the new procedures) and the "orthodox" challengers (many of whom had opposed the new procedures) seeking to enroll as many new members as possible and to ensure that their supporters made it to the polls. Pre-election arithmetic forecast a close election which would probably be won by the incumbent group. Instead, the "orthodox" group emerged with a clear majority of seats—and all major positions—on the new executive. The new election procedures appear to have backfired on the old-guard KDS leadership who, given the privacy of the voting booth, could no longer ensure the loyalty of those (e.g., family members, village-mates, employees, clients) whom they had counted as their supporters.
 25. The term "orthodox" (with its specifically-religious overtones) seems more appropriate in describing the present *gurdwara* leadership than the term "traditionalist" (which speaks to a conservatism in a broad range of ethnic concerns). Whereas Sikh "traditionalists" (represented at the organizational level in Vancouver by the Shiromani Akali Dal of Canada) would insist on maintaining the *gurdwara*'s traditional multi-functional role, the "orthodox" leadership seems wary of mixing religion and politics. For instance, during recent provincial and federal elections, candidates who asked to address the *sangat* (congregation) at the KDS *gurdwara* (a traditional forum for courting the Sikh vote) were allowed to do so only after considerable debate on the part of the executive as to its propriety, and were instructed to speak only to the highly-charged issue of whether Sikhs should be exempted from hard-hat safety regulations on grounds that hard-hat requirements conflict with the Sikhs' religious duty and thus religious right to wear their turbans.

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- Some of these people argue that in this religiously-pluralistic society, "modernist" and "orthodox" branches of the Sikh religion should be allowed to co-exist institutionally in the same way that reformed/conservative/orthodox congregations exist within Judaism or the way denominational differences exist within Christianity. These people argue that there are other *gurdwaras* in the Vancouver area that the "orthodox" could attend without taking over the KDS.
27. "East-Indian" students at the local colleges and universities appear to be extraordinarily active not only in their own "East-Indian" organizations but in campus politics generally. And there seems to be some carry-over between this activism and subsequent involvement with the community's ethnic-political organizations and the political parties of the wider society.
 28. Along with marrying a *gora*, formal conversion to Christianity remains one of the surest ways to find oneself cut off from one's family and others in the Punjabi-Sikh community. Few of these people have taken such a drastic step. Rather, many regard themselves as "non-religious" (one of the options available in religiously-pluralistic Canada).
 29. Most Canadian and American Sikh converts are members of the Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization (3HO), a group founded in 1969 in Los Angeles by a Sikh immigrant, Harbhajan Singh Puri (a/k/a/, Yogi Bhajan; a/k/a/, Siri Singh Sahib Bhai Sahib Harbhajan Singh Khalsa Yogi). The group was originally recruited on the basis of Puri's Kundalini and Tantric Yoga teachings and had a basically yogic identity (see Dusenbery, 1973), but it has evolved over the course of the past decade into a small but dedicated group of people who regard themselves as upholders of Sikh orthopraxy in the West (see Dusenbery, 1975). At present, perhaps as many as three to five thousand—but nowhere near the 250,000 claimed—Sikh converts live in over one hundred 3HO *ashrams* ("spiritual communes") throughout North America and in several cities abroad.
In Vancouver, an *ashram* has existed since 1972. The orientation of the Vancouver *ashram* is split between involvement with the local "East-Indian" Sikh community and with the "alternative-lifestyles" subculture. Relationships between 3HO and North Americans with Punjabi-Sikh ancestries have often been strained, but the dozen or so members of the Vancouver 3HO *ashram* have been involved with Vancouver's Punjabi Sikhs both through the *gurdwaras* and through the Sikh Youth Federation of Canada (a joint *gora* Sikh-Punjabi Sikh venture inspired and advised by Puri).
 30. The converts regard "caste consciousness" and the "subjugation of women" as inconsistent with Sikh religious teachings. For a fuller discussion of North American and Punjabi perspectives on Sikh egalitarianism, see Dusenbery, 1980.
 31. In support of this idea that Sikhism is a religion with certain religious norms not legitimately subject to modification in any social setting, the converts point to the *rehat marvada*, which they term a Sikh "code of conduct for living." Formulated by a select group of distinguished Sikh historians and religious leaders as part of a general codification of Sikh religious principles earlier in this century, the *rehat* has been circulated by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee. While the converts and some "orthodox" leaders regard it as a definitive statement of Sikh religious norms, most Punjabi Sikhs in North America are unfamiliar with its details and would in any case consider them irrelevant to their assertion of Sikh identity.
 32. Recent decisions confirming these "religious rights" include: (1) the decision of the Crown to drop charges in the case of REGINA vs. Khamba (1975) in which a Sikh had been charged with carrying a concealed weapon for wearing his *kirpan* (sword); the decision to drop charges was followed by a directive to all provincial police departments in B.C. not to treat the *kirpan* as a weapon unless used as such; (2) a settlement agreement before the Human Rights Board of B.C. wherein Pinkerton's of Canada Ltd. agreed to rehire a Sikh employee and allow him to "in the course of his employment continue to follow his religious beliefs and in particular . . . wear a beard, turban and carry a Kirpan" (Aujila vs. Pinkerton's, 1978); (3) on the basis of a challenge from one of the *gora* Sikhs, the Canadian armed forces announced changes in recruitment and dress policies which will allow Sikhs entering the Canadian forces to retain their beards and turbans (Canadian Human Rights Bulletin, March 1979). Finally, at the time of this writing, the problematic issue of whether a Sikh's religious duty to wear a turban should exempt him from safety regulations requiring the wearing of a hardhat awaits resolution.
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