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The Sikhs Today: A Development Profile

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Foreword

Development has for long been viewed as an attractive and inevitable way forward by most countries of the Third World. As it was initially theorised, development and modernisation were multifaceted processes that were to help the "underdeveloped" economies to take-off and eventually become like "developed" nations of the West. Processes like industrialisation, urbanisation and secularisation were to inevitably go together if economic growth had to happen and the "traditional" societies to get out of their communitarian consciousness, which presumably helped in sustaining the vicious circles of poverty and deprivation. Tradition and traditional belief systems, emanating from past history or religious ideologies, were invariably "irrational" and thus needed to be changed or privatised. Developed democratic regimes were founded on the idea of a rational individual citizen and a secular public sphere.

Such evolutionist theories of social change have slowly lost their appeal. It is now widely recognised that religion and cultural traditions do not simply disappear from public life. They are also not merely sources of conservation and stability. At times they could also become forces of disruption and change. The symbolic resources of religion, for example, are available not only to those in power, but also to the weak, who sometimes deploy them in their struggles for a secure and dignified life, which in turn could subvert the traditional or establish structures of authority. Communitarian identities could be a source of security and sustenance for individuals. This change in attitude of the social sciences towards religion could also be seen in shifting trends in empirical research on the subject. Over the last two or three decades we have seen a steady shift towards treating religion as a "normal" sociological fact, without any teleological presupposition about its pasts or futures. This shift has also been reinforced by the emerging social and political trends in countries like India where issues relating to citizenship are raised by identity movements of historically deprived categories, such as the Dalits and the tribals, or the religious minorities, such as the Muslims, for a more inclusive and just development.

There has also been perceptible shift in state policy. With grass-rooting of democracy and a gradual shift in the social profile of political elite in countries like India, the old secular-communal dichotomous way of thinking seems to be increasingly becoming meaningless. Social policies

dealing with issues of marginalities and exclusions have begun to be framed using "social group" variables at the core. At global level also, much of the recent research and policy dialogue has centred on questions of citizenship and entitlements in relation to cultural and group identities. With growing movements of people, nation-states are everywhere becoming ethnically and culturally diverse and plural where religious and communitarian identities are difficult to dispense with. While questions of development and citizenship in relation to culture and religious belief or communities have become important issue in the public and political spheres, social science research on the subject is still at a nascent stage. It was in this broader perspective that the research programme on 'Religions and Development' was conceived. The research programme is funded by DFID and coordinated from the University of Birmingham. As partners in the consortium, we, at the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, have been working on various aspects regarding the subject in India. The working paper series disseminates some of these works.

This Working paper, "The Sikhs Today: A Development Profile" discusses social and economic life of Sikhs in India, with specific focus on the internal differences and dynamics of the Sikh population in different parts of the country. The paper identifies demographic characteristics of the Sikh population followed by the discussion on economic status, employment and occupational patterns, poverty and inequality. Besides discussing Sikhism and caste, the paper encapsulates some preliminary analysis of gender issues, developmental challenges in social and political life. The paper argues that the community is not homogenous and continues to be divided on caste lines. It brings to the fore the fact that the development aspects of religion continue to be blind spots in the literature on Sikhism. Much of the minority politics of Sikhs in India during the post-independence period has been identity-centric and although the movements had development dimension, indeed, their effect was not developmental. Moreover, these demands invariably reflected the aspirations of the dominant sections within the community with little concern for those at margins. Pertinent issues such as gender, environmental sustainability, health, or even caste exclusion, have not yet found a place in the mainstream community discourse of the Sikhs.

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Contents

The Sikhs Today: A Development Profile

Surinder S. Jodhka*

1. Introduction

With a population of a little less than 2 per cent of the total, the Sikhs are a rather small minority group in India.[1] Of the total Sikh population of around 20 million enumerated during the 2001 Census, nearly 76 per cent live in the state of Punjab, where they are a numerical majority, making up approximately 60 per cent of the total population. The remaining 24 per cent live in different parts of the country, with their major concentrations being in the northwestern states of Haryana, Rajasthan and Delhi. Even though relatively small in number, Sikhs have been among the most mobile communities of the subcontinent and a good number of them have migrated out of India, mostly to countries in the Western world. Though there is no exact data available on the number of Sikhs living outside India, rough estimates put it somewhere around 1.5 to 2 million. The proportion of Sikhs in the total population of the world is rather small. According to one source, Sikhs comprise around 0.38 per cent of the total world population, a slightly higher proportion than the Jews (0.23 per cent)[2]. However, the symbolic head gear worn by a majority of male Sikhs and their geographical spread makes them a very visible community. They are popularly viewed as a prosperous and enterprising people.

The Sikhs have also been a very well researched community. Beginning with the colonial administrators, who were the first to translate Sikh scriptures into English and write their history, theologians and historians of the contemporary university academy have produced a great deal of literature on the community. With growing consolidation of the diaspora community and the sharpening of Sikh identity during the 1980s and 1990s, the support for research on the community has grown considerably.[3] Their global visibility and relatively recent origins makes them an active subject of research. As Pashaura Singh has rightly pointed out, unlike some other religious traditions, the origin of Sikhism is

> "...not in a distant prehistory that can never be fully recovered, but in a period of rich historical sources. As a consequence scholars of Sikhism are able to explore issues of scriptural authority, social history, gender, diaspora, and national and religious identity from perspectives that scholars of other religions often lack." (Singh, P., 2004, p. 3)

Notwithstanding this vibrancy, the dominant narrative of scholarship in Sikh studies has been historical and theological, focused mostly around questions of interpretations of Sikh scriptural authority and the Sikh past. Occasionally, anthropologists have focused on the culture and symbolic aspects of the community. The rise of the Khalistan movement during the 1980s generated a good amount of research on the political sociology of Sikh ethnicity.[4] However, the changing nature of Sikh social and economic life, their internal dynamics and divisions, their experience of development over the last five or six decades, and the effects of globalisation and migration on the social well-being of the community have mostly remained marginal concerns amongst scholars of Sikhism. Even when subjects like caste and gender are talked about, they are either framed in purely normative language or have been studied in the regional context of Punjab. Sociologists and political scientists too have tended to look at the community in the context of the regional political mobilisations and social movements emanating from Punjab. The predominant social science image of the Sikhs has been Punjab-centric and, wittingly or unwittingly, has tended to reinforce stereotypes about the community. It is perhaps only in the diaspora that questions about the social and economic life of the community have received some attention from scholars (see Singh and Tatla, 2006; Basran and Bolaria, 2003; Verma, 2002).

Drawing from the available primary and secondary sources, in this paper, I try to deal with some aspect of the Sikh social and economic life in India, focusing specifically on the internal differences and dynamics of the Sikh population in different parts of the country. First, some demographic characteristics of the Sikh population are identified, followed in Sections 3 by a brief discussion on economic status, including employment and occupational patterns, poverty and inequality. Section 4 includes an extended discussion of Sikhism and caste, and some preliminary analysis of gender issues. The paper concludes with some comments.

2. The Dynamics of Sikh Demographics

As mentioned above, the Sikhs constitute 1.9 per cent of the total population of India. Though their population has been growing in absolute terms, the pace of growth has been slower than most other religious communities in India. In fact, between 1991 and 2001, the growth rate of the Sikh population was the lowest among all the major religious communities; while the Sikh population grew by 16.9 per cent, the numbers of Hindu, Muslim and Christian grew by 20, 29.3, and 22.1 per cent; respectively.

Perhaps the most interesting feature of Sikh demography is that, unlike most other religious groups in India, a large majority of Sikhs are concentrated in a particular region of the country, in the north-western state of Punjab. Over the years, the contemporary Indian Punjab has also come to be seen as a land of the Sikhs. Interestingly, this synonymity of the Sikhs with Punjab is not very old rather a result of recent political history of the region. As shown in Table 1, Sikhs were the smallest of the three major religious communities of the Punjab during the colonial period, making up only around 13 per cent of the population. The partition of Punjab in 1947 was accompanied by a massive movement of population across the newly drawn international borders. This happened more swiftly and violently on the western side of the newly drawn boundary-line between India and Pakistan than it did on the eastern side. Almost the entire Sikh and Hindu population of the western districts of Punjab, which were included in Pakistan, moved across to the Indian side. Muslims from the Indian side of Punjab were also forced out of their homes, leading to a near complete ethnic cleansing and population exchange between the two newly independent countries of South Asia.

Besides the violence and human tragedy that accompanied 'partition', the migrations also transformed regional demographics of the two Punjabs. While western Punjab became almost an exclusively Muslim region, Indian Punjab emerged as a Hindu majority region. The Sikh gain in demographic terms was also quite significant. However, the demographics of the region have undergone another change during the post-independence period. In an atmosphere of communal polarisation and division, the Hindu Punjabi elite chose to identify with the new nation-state of India, foregrounding its nationalist identity over its regional and cultural moorings in the Punjab.

The Muslim Punjabi elite had emerged as the dominant linguistic community of the new nation-state of Pakistan and did not lay claims based on an identity associated with the Punjabi language.

The Sikh elite of the region aspired to a political space of its own. Hitherto it had been unable to lay claim to a territorial unit because of the unviable demographics of the community but the post-partition scenario opened up a new source of hope. They demanded a new state of Punjab, which would essentially be a Sikh majority region. The influence of communal Hindu elite over the Hindu Punjabi-speaking population of Punjab and their decision to enumerate themselves as a Hindi speaking population helped the Sikh elite present their case for a separate Punjabi Suba with a linguistic base, which had already been adopted by the Indian state for reorganisation of other states. After some initial resistance from the central government, in 1966 the Indian Punjab was reorganised once again, excising the 'Hindi speaking' areas of the state. Consequently, the Sikhs emerged as a majority religious population in post-1966 Punjab.

Table 1: Changing Religious Geographies of Punjab*

Year	Sikh population (%)	Hindu population (%)	Muslim population (%)
1931	13	35	51
1951	36	61	01
1971	60	38	01

* *These figures should be considered along with the geographical shrinkage of the region as discussed in the text (for details of census figures see Brass, 1974, p. 295-300)*

Sikh identification with Punjab is much stronger than that of Muslims or Hindus for various historical and demographic reasons. Apart from their being demographically concentrated in the region, the Punjab is also their land of origin. With the exception of a few small groups (and unlike most other religious communities), almost the entire population of the Sikhs has its origin in the region comprised of contemporary Indian Punjab and western Punjab, the latter now being part of Pakistan[5]. It was here that the Sikh movement started and it was here that its leaders were able to gain a following. In fact, a large majority of the Sikhs who live outside Punjab are migrants from the region, either from western Punjab at the time of Partition, or later from the Indian Punjab.

However, despite their overall numerical majority, the Sikhs in Punjab are not a substantive majority in every sense of the term. Historically Sikhs have been in a minority in almost all the urban centres in Punjab, which continue to be overwhelmingly dominated by Hindus while Sikhs are concentrated more in the rural areas. As shown in Table 2, the proportion of Sikhs in the rural areas of Punjab in 1981 was nearly 71 per cent, compared to 33 per cent in urban areas, while the Hindu population in the rural areas and urban centres was 26 per cent and 64 per cent; respectively. This concentration of the Hindu population in urban centres was even higher in some of the most prominent districts. In Jalandhar, for example, the proportion of Hindus was as high as 76.46 per cent and in Gurdaspur it was 76 per cent. At the other extreme, Sikhs constitute 89 per cent of the rural population in Amritsar and nearly 87 per cent in Bhatinda. Though the Sikh Gurus came from the local upper castes, its emphasis on equality made it more popular among the relatively less privileged middle and lower castes. The most prominent of the caste groups that joined Sikhism during the 17th and 18th century were the peasant Jats, followed by other ritually low castes in the Hindu system of caste hierarchy (see Singh 1966; Grewal 1994).

Table 2: Rural-Urban Distribution of the Population of Different Religious Communities in Punjab in 1981 (in percentage)

	Rural				Urban			
District	**Sikhs**	**Hindus**	**Chris-tians**	**Mus-lims**	**Sikhs**	**Hindus**	**Chris-tians**	**Mus-lims**
Gurdaspur	51.42	40.21	7.67	0.66	20.11	76.72	2.65	0.47
Amritsar	91.37	6.54	1.99	0.09	43.64	54.91	0.94	0.13
Firozepur	64.19	34.70	0.97	0.10	20.60	76.92	1.92	0.21
Ludhiana	88.31	10.88	0.08	0.66	36.45	61.74	0.42	0.31
Jalandhar	53.54	45.39	0.64	0.36	23.29	75.11	0.73	0.23
Kapurthala	71.52	27.50	0.34	0.56	33.70	65.24	0.35	0.35
Ropar	41.89	56.75	0.76	0.57	22.96	75.35	0.35	0.20
Hoshiarpur	62.00	36.61	0.09	1.23	36.87	60.80	0.50	0.47
Patiala	64.69	33.34	0.16	1.74	35.14	63.64	0.14	0.62
Sangrur	80.15	15.87	0.04	3.85	34.03	50.00	0.06	14.79
Bhatinda	87.69	11.63	0.02	0.55	37.27	61.75	0.21	0.34
Faridkot	90.38	9.02	0.11	0.43	41.55	57.52	0.34	0.13
Punjab	**71.30**	**26.51**	**1.25**	**0.89**	**33.19**	**64.16**	**0.72**	**1.30**

Source: as calculated by Abbi and Singh, 1997: Appendix 1.

This has changed only marginally over the years. In 2001, for example, the proportion of the urban population who were Sikhs had increased slightly to 36.6 per cent, and their proportion in the total rural population had remained more or less the same (71.86 per cent) as during the preceding 30 years.

Thus, as a community, the Sikhs of Punjab are much more rural than other communities in the state. As shown in Table 3, of all the Sikhs in Punjab, only around 21 per cent lived in urban centres in 2001, far below the average for the state (34 per cent). Across different districts, the proportion of Sikhs living in urban areas varied from a mere 6.93 per cent in Taran Taran to 36.78 per cent in Amritsar. In contrast, nearly 55 per cent of Hindus and 44 per cent of the small Muslim population in the Indian Punjab live in urban areas. Only the small Christian population was nearly as rural as the Sikhs (72 per cent). Thus, the Sikhs of Punjab are predominantly a rural community.

Table 3: Rural-Urban Distribution of the Sikh Population in the Indian Punjab (2001)

District	Percentage of Sikhs in total population of the district	Percentage of Rural Sikh population	Percentage of Urban Sikh population
Gurdaspur	44.44	86.24	13.76
Amritsar	71.91	63.22	36.78
Taran Taran	88.66	93.07	6.93
Kapurthala	59.46	80.07	19.93
Jalandhar	37.75	68.86	31.14
Nawan Sehar	37.42	93.55	8.45
Hoshiarpur	38.82	87.84	12.16
Rupnagar	58.75	54.41	15.59
S.A.S. Nagar	54.95	71.16	28.84
Ludhiana	57.52	64.53	33.47
Firozpur	51.35	88.16	11.84
Faridkot	77.53	78.16	21.84
Mukatsar	74.11	87.60	12.40
Moga	85.80	87.12	12.88
Bathinda	74.07	83.88	16.12
Mansa	78.33	89.09	10.91
Sangrur	70.19	83.98	16.02
Barnala	69.47	82.87	17.13
Patiala	55.52	73.27	26.73
Fatehgarh Sahib	74.56	83.57	16.43
Punjab: number **%**	**14,592,387** **100,00**	**11,567,437** **79.27**	**3,024,950** **20.73**

Source: Indian Census 2001

As mentioned above, nearly a quarter of all Indian Sikhs live outside Punjab. The Sikh population is present in virtually every part of India. In addition to Punjab, 13 states and union territories of India have more than 50,000 Sikhs and there are 17 states and union territories with more than 20,000. The lowest number of Sikhs recorded during the 2001 Census was in Lakshadweep, where there were only 6 Sikhs. The Sikhs living outside Punjab are far more urbanised than those living in the state. While only 21 per cent of the Sikhs living in Punjab are urban, their number outside Punjab is as high as 45 percent. In as many as seven of the thirteen states and union territories with a Sikh population of over 50,000, the majority of Sikhs live in urban centres.

This is also reflected in differences in Sikhs' average educational status of Sikh populations living in different states. While the national average Sikh literacy rate in 2001 was 69.4 per cent, it was 67.3 per cent in Punjab and in Haryana and Rajasthan, also states with a large Sikh population. However, in fourteen states, including Delhi, it was above 90 per cent. This appears to be the direct consequence of differential levels of urbanisation. Literacy rates are higher in states where the proportion of urban population is higher.

3 Economic status

3.1 Employment and Occupations

The work participation rate among male Sikhs (53.3 per cent) is a little higher than both the national average (51.2 per cent) and the average for the Hindu majority (52.4 per cent). It is also significantly higher than amongst Muslims (47.5 per cent). However, a lower percentage of Sikh women were enumerated as regular workers (20.2 per cent, against 27.5 per cent of Hindus and 28.7 per cent of Christians). Only Muslim women (14.1) had a lower work participation rate than Sikh women.

What kinds of work or occupations do the Sikhs pursue?

Like other religious communities in India, over half of all Sikhs are engaged in agriculture (about 60 per cent in rural areas). Interestingly, despite the popular stereotype of the Sikhs being agriculturalists and their predominantly rural residence, they are not chiefly an agrarian community. As is evident from Table 4 below, only 32.41 per cent of the working Sikhs are cultivators, a similar proportion than the national average for Hindus

(33.1 per cent). In fact, a much larger proportion of Sikhs were enumerated as 'other workers' in the 2001 census (47.34 per cent against the average of 37.59 per cent for the entire population of India). This pattern is more or less the same in the state of Punjab, where the proportion of Sikhs living in rural areas is larger than the national average.

Also smaller proportion of Sikhs are agricultural labourers. About 26.5 per cent of all workers in 2001 were enumerated as agricultural labourers, but only 16.83 per cent of Sikh workers were in this category while the proportions for other religious groups were much larger (Buddhists with 37.6 per cent, Hindus 27.6 per cent, Muslims 22.1 per cent). Only Christians were closer to the Sikhs with 15.8 per cent of workers in this category.

Table 4: Proportion of the Sikh Population Engaged in Agriculture

Region	Cultivators	Agricultural workers	Household I industry worker	Other workers
All India	32.41	16.83	3.4	47.34
All India Rural	40.54	20.67	3.2	35.61
All India Urban	04.00	03.05	4.1	88.24
Punjab	32.00	18.30	3.6	46.01
Punjab Rural	37.56	21.00	3.4	37.98
Punjab Urban	05.50	05.00	4.5	84.73

Calculated from 2001 Census of India Tables.

The proportion of Sikhs in the category of 'household Industry workers' is also relatively lower. While 8.1 per cent of working Muslims are in this category, only 3.4 per cent of Sikhs are listed as household industry workers. This can perhaps be seen as a positive indicator, pointing to a greater range of employment options available for Sikhs compared with the deprived Muslim minority group. The Sikh proportion in the category is below the national average (4.2 per cent) and the average for the majority population of Hindus (3.8 per cent). The relatively high proportion of Sikhs classified as 'other workers' reflects significant occupational diversification.

3.2 Poverty and Inequality

The relative economic strength of the Sikhs is also reflected in the available data on absolute poverty across different religious groups in India. Of the

major religious communities, the incidence of poverty is the lowest among the Sikhs. As shown in Table 5, only 5 per cent of rural Sikhs and around 6 per cent of urban Sikhs were recorded as below the poverty line. This is in stark contrast not only to relatively poorer minority communities like the Buddhists and Muslims, but also to the majority community of Hindus. Another interesting aspect of incidence of poverty amongst Sikhs, as shown in the Table is that, unlike all other communities, the incidence of poverty is nearly the same for rural and urban populations.

The near absence of absolute poverty among the Sikhs of India does not mean that there are no inequalities among them. A low incidence of poverty can easily co-exist with high levels of economic inequality. Though there is no viable quantitative evidence on the subject, the available data on land holdings does point to significant inequalities among the Sikhs.

Table 5: Incidence of Poverty across Major Religious Communities in India

Religious group	Rural poverty	Urban poverty
Hindus	28.90	23.35
Muslims	29.26	41.38
Christians	16.21	12.47
Sikhs	05.00	06.08
Buddhists	40.59	28.62

Figures based on 2004-05, NSSO give in full, Consumption Expenditure Round.

As becomes evident from Table 6, the low proportion of Sikhs in the category of agricultural workers (Table 4) does not imply an absence of landlessness. On the contrary, a quarter of rural Sikh households are landless, significantly above the national average of 17 per cent or the averages for Hindus and Muslims. Only the Buddhists have a larger proportion of landless people. Why is landlessness so high among rural Sikhs? Though this is discussed in greater detail below when discussing caste among Sikhs, it is relevant to briefly mention it here. First, for various historical reasons, the ex-untouchable communities of Punjab do not own agricultural land. Fewer than 5 per cent of all the Scheduled Castes of Punjab are cultivating farmers. Second, the proportion of Scheduled Castes (including among the Sikhs) in Punjab is the highest in the country (nearly 29 per cent). In other words, most of the rural landless among the Sikhs are likely to be Dalit households.

However, a closer reading of Table 6 also suggests that, along with landlessness, many Sikhs engaged in agriculture are large land holders: a quarter have large or very large holdings, compared with 14 per cent nationally, and a much higher proportion than amongst Hindus (15 per cent), Muslims (6 per cent) and other religious groups. There is, therefore, considerable inequality with respect to access to land and holding size among the Sikhs. How could we explain this rather complicated situation? Punjab has been in the forefront of agrarian change during the post-independence period. It was here that the green revolution became successful before elsewhere. The new technology helped the big landowning farmers to consolidate their economic position further. However, it made very little difference to those who did not own land. Though wage rates for the landless labourers also increased, green revolution widened inequalities in the Punjab countryside.

Table 6: Land Holding Pattern across Religious Groups (Rural)

Religious group	Landless	Marginal	Small	Medium	Large	V.Large	Total
Hindus	16.55	32.83	20.79	14.76	9.79	5.28	100.00
Muslims	19.32	46.62	19.17	9.00	4.41	1.48	100.00
Christians	8.76	46.28	19.42	13.42	9.70	2.42	100.00
Sikhs	23.93	33.83	7.86	9.91	13.99	10.48	100.00
Buddhists	40.97	22.69	13.45	15.52	3.13	4.23	100.00
Total	**16.96**	**34.57**	**20.32**	**14.02**	**9.23**	**4.90**	**100.00**

Source: as calculated by Amit Thorat (2008) Calculated from National Sample Surveys Consumption Expenditure survey, 2004-2005.

4. Social Difference: Caste and Gender

The mainstream discourse on development for a long time was preoccupied primarily with issues of economic growth and individual or household incomes. Poverty and inequality were seen from within this economics-centric perspective. However, over the years, reflections on development has undergone major shifts. For example, from a simple notion of economic growth, development experts have evolved new parameters of 'human development' where, along with the question of income, broader indicators of social and cultural well-being are also given due credit in determining the level of development of a given population[3]. More recently, development experts have argued for the need to recognise the prevalent

social structures, which are exclusionary in nature and often lead to discriminatory practices against certain historically disadvantaged social groups and categories of people (Thorat, 2006). Caste and gender are two such dimensions that have been identified as modes of institutionalised exclusion in contemporary India.

Gender and caste have been difficult questions in the case of Sikhism. Unlike Hinduism, the Sikh faith claims to advocate equality between human beings. For adherents, Sikhism is a modern faith. Even when hierarchy was seen as the natural mode for organising social relations, the Sikh Gurus preached equality of gender and caste. However, as McMullen points out in his study of the beliefs and practices of Sikhism, it is necessary to make a distinction between "normative" and "operational" beliefs:

> "Normative beliefs and practices are those which are officially stated and prescribed or proscribed by the recognized religious authority, which can be person, organization or an official statement. Operative beliefs and practices, on the other hand, are those actually held by people." (McMullen, 1989, p. 5)

It is within this framework that the questions of caste and gender in the Sikh community are discussed.

4.1 Sikhism and the Caste Question

The institution of caste and the practice of untouchability are widely believed to be the core defining features of the 'traditional' social structure of India. Caste has been viewed as an institution that distinguished traditional India from the West. It is believed to have been around for ages, to have existed everywhere in the sub-continent and to have been practised by everyone! While in Hinduism, the caste system and untouchability had an ideological sanction, other communities also practised it, even when not legitimised by their religious philosophies. However, despite this widely held conventional worldview about the pan-Indian nature of caste, there is considerable variation in the manner in which social relations among different groups have been structured in different regions. As is widely known, there are different sets of caste groups in different regions of India and "the preoccupation with purity and pollution was not equally marked in every part of the country" (Beteille, 2000, p. 172). The specific historical trajectory, the patterns of politico-

economic change experienced during the post-independence period and the composition of different ethnic communities determine the actual caste relations in any given region.

One of the distinguishing features of the Sikh movement during the fifteenth century was its opposition to the brahmanical orthodoxy and the caste system. In contrast to the hierarchical values of brahmanical Hinduism, Guru Nanak and the later Sikh Gurus advocated equality of human beings in relation to God and the futility of caste divisions (see McLeod, 1996, pp. 85-86). For Nanak, the aim of salvation was perceived as union with God, which would transcend the cycle of birth and death. Since the divine presence is everywhere, it was considered to be available to everyone. Nanak denounced ritualism, ascetic practices, idol worship and the hermit life spent in the jungle (all associated with Hinduism, see Tomalin, 2009). An important aspect of Guru Nanak's philosophy was his emphasis on the values of everyday life, a "this worldliness". He preached that one should attain God while being part of the social world and earning one's living.

The teachings of the Sikh Gurus differed from the brahminical worldview in yet another way. Against the caste exclusivism of brahminical Hinduism, the Sikh Gurus underlined the need for sharing and communal living. The *kirtan* (corporate singing) and *langar* (the community kitchen and eating together) were among the new and important institutions introduced by the Gurus. Guru Nanak consciously rejected Sanskrit in preference for the indigenous spoken language. The second Guru standardised the Gurumukhi script, which eventually became a vehicle for the Punjabi language and identity. The fifth Guru, Guru Arjun, compiled the first canon of the faith, the Adi Granth, that eventually came to be worshipped as the eternal Guru by Sikhs after the death of the tenth and last of the living Gurus. The Sikh holy book contains writings of many Saints and Sufis of the Bhakti period, including those of some of the Saints who came from the Shudra (servant castes) such as Kabir, a weaver; Dhanna, a Jat peasant; and Namdev, a tailor) and untouchable castes (such as Ravidas, a cobbler; Sadhan, a butcher; and Sain, a barber). The Sikh holy book also contains the writings of some Muslim Sufis, such as Sheikh Farid and Bhikan. Of the 'five beloved' who were the first to be baptised as Khalsas on the day of Baisakhi in 1699 by the tenth Guru, four belonged to Shudra castes. At the empirical level also, many have reported on the relatively lesser hold of caste on social relationships among Sikhs in particular and Punjabis in general. This is

reflected in the writings of colonial administrators, as well as in social scientific studies.

Reporting on the problems of the "low castes" in the province, one of the colonial administrators viewed them more in terms of politico-economic disability than in terms of 'untouchability', as was the case in the rest of India. A colonial government report, for example, observed in the 1920s:

> It would be misleading to attach too great importance to the existence of caste in the Punjab....Not only is it the case that the Brahman has no practical pre-eminence among Hindus, but as between "caste" and "non-caste" Hindus the distinction is not so strongly marked as to create the political problem found elsewhere in India....The problem in truth, if one exists, is rather of classes socially depressed than of "out-castes" as such; while much remains to be done for the social uplift of some of these classes, they hardly present a separate political problem[4].

Another British author who contrasted Punjab with the rest of the sub-continent and compared caste in Punjab with class in Europe wrote, "nowhere else in Hindu India does caste sit so lightly or approach so nearly to the social classes of Europe" (Anderson, quoted in Nayar, 1966, p. 20). Some of the Western observers went to the extent of saying that the Punjab was a "notable exception" to the caste system in India (O'Malley, in Nayar, 1966, p. 20).

More recently, some anthropologists have made similar claims, arguing that caste inequalities in the region are much less than elsewhere in India. Comparing the discrimination experienced by the low castes in Punjab with the rest of India, Saberwal, who studied a small town in Punjab during the late 1960s, writes:

> ...even if the Brahmins were able to carve a ceremonial place at Ranjit Singh's court for themselves, there is no evidence that they acquired much land or that they were able to enforce the social circumstances that they would have required for maintaining high levels of ritual purity; and therefore the lowest castes in Punjab had to carry only a light burden of ritual impurities, much lighter, physically and socially, than the burden elsewhere in India (Saberwal, 1976, p. 7)

> Joyce Pettigrew, another anthropologist, goes to the extent of saying that the rural society of Punjab differs radically from Hindu India because of the absence of caste among the Sikhs (Pettigrew,1975, p. 4).
>
> However, not everyone who has studied Punjab agrees with this position. For example, Paul Hershman, another anthropologist, who carried out his fieldwork in a village near Jalandhar during 1970s, completely disagrees with the thesis that the ideas of purity and impurity did not exist in Punjab or that caste in the region functioned more like class[5]. Contesting Pettigrew's claims on the absence of caste in Punjab, he writes:

Pettigrew appears to argue from the premise of Sikh theology that there is no caste among the Sikhs, but this is manifestly not the case when one considers the relationships....There are most certainly many caste divisions within the Sikh fold (Hershman, 1981, p. 21).

Most other students of Punjab agree that, although the structure of hierarchy may be different when compared to other regions of India, caste divisions did exist among the Sikhs. To some extent, pollution and avoidance were also practised in the region by both Hindus and Sikhs, particularly in relation to the Scheduled Castes (Nayar, 1966; Singh, I.P., 1975; Singh, H., 1977; Saberwal, 1976).

While recognising that caste divisions existed among the Sikhs, the available literature also indicates that the changes experienced in attitudes towards caste during the later half of the 20th century has been quite significant in Punjab. Evidence for this is available from studies of individual villages or towns, as well as of social reform movements for the uplift of the 'low castes'.

I. P. Singh (1975, 1977), who did a study of a village near Amritsar during the late 1950s, provides a fairly good idea about the nature of caste relations in a Sikh village. The Sikhs living in the village were divided into two groups, the Sardars (upper castes) and the Mazhabis (lower caste scavengers). The first group included the Jats, Kambohs, Tarkhans, Kumhars, Sunars and Nais (in the Hindu caste hierarchy, they would all be treated as Shudras and, with the exception of Jats, were perhaps all included in the list of 'Other Backward Classes'). Although the agriculturalist Jats

considered themselves higher than the other groups in this category, Singh found no feeling of caste-based avoidance or prejudice among them. They visited each other's houses, inter-dined and attended marriage functions and celebrated most of the festivals together. In terms of the village settlement also, no demarcation existed between the areas in which the houses of these groups were built.

However, the Mazhabis, who constituted nearly half of the village population, were treated differently. They lived on one side of the village. They had a separate well, while all the other castes used a common well. In the village feasts, where everyone was invited, the Mazhabis sat separately. Many of them worked as labourers in the fields of the Jat landowners, so that, although the latter visited Mazhabi houses, they did so as a patronising gesture.

Nevertheless, the study also identified occasions when untouchability was either not practised or its extent was declining. For example, many Jats in the village let Mazhabis enter their houses and did not consider their touch polluting. One had also employed a Mazhabi to clean utensils in his house. In addition, untouchability was only practised minimally among the drinkers in the village, where the Mazhabis were the traditional brewers of country liquor.

> "Mazhabis and Sardars drink liquor together at the fair and occasionally in the fields. We saw them drinking from the same glass which was passed from one to the other. However, in their homes they usually drink only among their own caste members. On festivals like Lohri and Holi, when villagers indulge in heavy drinking, no caste distinctions are observed" (Singh I.P., 1977, p. 76).

The practice of untouchability was also lesser in religious affairs. There was only one *gurudwara* (the Sikh holy place) in the village, where everyone was allowed entry. People also sat together while eating food in the *gurudwara*. The priest, who himself belonged to a low caste (Cheemba, washer-man), served all the castes without any discrimination. He had performed all the marriages in the village irrespective of caste distinction. This was quite in contrast to the way a Brahmin priest functioned: although the Brahmin priest used to perform rituals for the Sikhs in the village as

well as Hindus, until they appointed their own priest for the *gurudwara*, he served only the upper caste Sikhs.

The study also showed that religious reform movements launched by the Singh Sabhas and Akalis among the Sikhs during the 1920s had had a lasting impact on the religious life of the Sikhs in the village. The insistence of Sikh reformers that the 'community' should be distanced from Hindus and the legal recognition of weddings using the Sikh rituals, the Anand Karaj, made the village Brahmin priest redundant. Unlike the Hindu priest, the Sikh priest could be from any caste and, as mentioned above, the priest in this particular village, who had been trained as a priest at the Sikh Missionary College, Amritsar, was from a lower caste. Priesthood among the Sikhs had thus become an achieved rather than ascribed status!

With the exception of Hershman's work, hardly any study of rural Punjab reports that Brahmins had superior status to the Jats (the landowning peasant caste) and the Khatris (who were mostly engaged in trade and services). Brahmins themselves tended to concede such a framework of ranking (D'Souza, 1967). Commenting on the lack of respect enjoyed by the Brahmins in Punjab, Saberwal quotes Chanana:

> In Punjabi the word *Pandat* (Pandit) denotes a Brahman and may connote some respect for the latter. But the word *Bahman* (Brahmin) almost always carries a little contempt (Saberwal, 1976, p.10).

By the time of his study of a small town of Punjab in the late 1960s, Saberwal found a considerable change in attitude towards the traditional ideology of caste. "The conjunction of pressure from above with pressure from below had produced new cultural patterns, rejecting the ideas of inherited purity and pollution" (Saberwal, 1973, p. 256).

The above mentioned empirical studies of caste relations in Punjab, though they confirm that the ideas of purity and impurity were rather weak in the region, also tend to emphasise the significant role that different reform movements have played in bringing this change about.

Despite the opposition of the Sikh gurus to caste, it survived among the Sikhs. With routinisation over a period of time, particularly after the

establishment of the Sikh kingdom under Ranjit Singh during the first half of the 19th century, the brahmanical orthodoxy is believed to have once again got entrenched in the region (Singh, I.P., 1977, p. 81). The question of caste became an important issue once again during the British rule, when during the late nineteenth- century; reform movements were initiated by the newly emergent Sikh middle class.

Along with the British rulers came Christian missionaries, with the intention of spreading the message of the church. The first in the region to find the appeal of the church attractive were the members of untouchable castes. The first conversion is reported to have taken place in 1873, when a man named Ditt was baptised in Sialkot. 'To the surprise of the missionaries, Ditt was followed by hundreds of thousands of others from the lower castes, and Punjab Christianity became a *de facto* movement (Juergensmeyer, 1988, p. 181). By 1890, there were 10,171 Christians living in 525 villages in Punjab; by 1911 their number had gone up to 1,63,994 and by 1921 to over 3,00,006. Most came from a particular untouchable caste, the Chuhras (scavengers), and from rural areas. Given the nature of the rural power structure,"conversion to Christianity for these highly vulnerable people was a very risky act of rebellion" (Webster, 1999, p. 96-7). According to Juergensmeyer, the Christian missionaries had not intentionally targeted the low castes for conversion; "It was the untouchables who had originally sought out Christianity" (1988, p. 184). They obviously saw a potential for social mobility in conversion:

> Originally, the missionaries of the Punjab had only attempted to convert the upper castes, since they regarded others as beyond the reach of the methods they preferred—intellectual argument and moral suasion. The enthusiasm of the first convert, Ditt, and the subsequent lower caste requests for conversion not only baffled the missionaries but embarrassed them: they saw no sensible or moral reason for keeping the lower castes out, yet feared that allowing them in would sully the church's reputation (Juergensmeyer, 1988, p. 184).

The fears of the missionaries were not unfounded. When a newspaper article in the *Tribune* of October 19, 1892 reported that the rate of conversions would soon turn the Punjab into a Christian region, "a tremor of fear ran through the upper caste Hindu and Sikh elite" (ibid, p. 181).

Competition among the religious communities, the Christians, Hindus and Sikhs, to win the untouchables over onto their side arose. It was around this time that the militant Hindu reformist organisation, the Arya Samaj, made its entry into the Punjab.

The colonial administrative structure had also begun to deploy new categories of social aggregation and classification. The British thought of their populace in terms of religious communities and looked at them accordingly, during the process of governance. They "encouraged the members of each community to present their case in communitarian terms" (Grewal, 1989, p. 195). The role that census enumeration played in converting the fuzzy boundaries between religious traditions into well-defined communities was perhaps most evident in Punjab. As Fox points out, these administrative discourses of the British rulers had far-reaching influence on the process of identity formation in the region (Fox, 1985). The introduction of the census thus made the 'religious communities' sensitive about numbers: "Numbers were generally equated with strength, particularly for employment under the government" (Grewal, 1994, p. 131).

The early censuses show that, while the Muslim population in the then Punjab remained stable at around 51 per cent between 1881 and 1911 and the proportion of Sikhs and Christians went up, the Hindu population showed a decline from about 41 per cent in 1881 to around 36 per cent in 1911 (Jones, 1976, p. 324). Those converted to Christianity were mostly from the low castes, most of whom had earlier been recorded as Hindus by the colonial enumerators. Upper caste Punjabi Hindus, who were already feeling marginalised by the Bengali clerks the British had brought with them from Calcutta for administrative work, viewed the decline in the Hindu population with much concern. The passing of the Land Alienation Act in 1901, which stopped the transfer of agricultural land from the agricultural castes, who were mostly Sikhs and Muslims, to the non-agricultural castes, who were mostly Hindus, was also seen by the Hindu elite as an act of discrimination against them.

The Arya Samaj movement was the first major reform movement in Punjab and it directly targeted caste. However, in its efforts to reform Hinduism it also criticised the Sikh gurus and sought to mobilise Dalit Sikhs to return to Hinduism through a process of *Shuddhi.* Reports of low caste Sikhs

being designated *Shuddhi* and their re-conversion to Hinduism were viewed with much concern by the Sikh middle class leadership. Since numbers had begun to matter and the communities in the region had become very sensitive about their size, the Sikh leadership was understandably keen to keep the low castes within the Sikh fold. The militant assertion of Hindutva identity by the Arya Samaj had already sparked off a debate on the question of Sikh identity. Sikhs began to assert that their religion was different and that they should not be included with the Hindus (Oberoi, 1994). The practice of untouchability and discrimination against the low castes among Sikhs was attributed to the continued influence of Hinduism. Thus the struggle against caste and untouchability, seen as the core Hindu values, was implicated in the movement for a separate religious identity for the Sikhs.

The Singh Sabha movement for the liberation of Sikh gurudwaras from Hindu Mahants (holy men), which was launched during the 1920s, also became a movement for de-Hinduisation of the Sikh religion. One of the main demands of the movement was "unquestioned entrance to Sikh places of worship" for all (Juergensmeyer, 1988, p. 28). Some members of the Sikh Khalsa Diwan tried to create their own "depressed class movements" to encourage Scheduled Caste support. The movement was not confined to the liberation of historic Sikh gurudwaras. Its impact went very far. I.P. Singh, in his study of a village in Amritsar district, reported that the decline of the Brahmins in the village began in 1922-26, around the time when these reform movements were launched. It was after these movements began that a low caste Sikh was appointed a priest in the local gurudwara and began to give equal treatment to members of all castes in the village (Singh, I.P., 1977, p. 81-82).

This process seems to have continued during the post-independence period. The rural Sikh elite attributed changes in the status of untouchables in Punjab to the quality of their religion. Reporting about his village I.P. Singh writes:

> ...the modern preachers of equality of castes like the Sarpanch and his young friends point it out that what the new law demands is just what the gurus had preached. It is in keeping with the percepts of Sikh religion. There lies the major difference of caste structure between a Sikh village and a Hindu village. While in a Hindu village

> caste hierarchy and differences have religious sanctions behind them, there are no such sanctions in the Sikh religion. Thus it becomes easier to propagate and instill equality of caste relations in a Sikh village (ibid, p. 79).

However, while the Sikh reformers attacked caste, the Sikh leadership, having become aware of the significance of numbers, did not deny the existence of caste among Sikhs. Neither did they deny that the low castes faced disabilities due to their birth. In practice, the Sikh leadership lobbied the national leadership vigorously to ensure that, along with Hindus, certain Sikh castes would be included in the list of the Scheduled Castes, to entitle them to special benefits and reservations. They were obviously worried that if the benefits of reservation were not extended to Sikhs, the low castes among them might declare their religion as Hinduism. While all the Hindu untouchable castes were given special privileges, only four sub-castes of untouchable Sikhs were included in the list. Nayar reports that this "concession was achieved in return for an agreement by the Sikh leaders that no further political demands would be made in the future on behalf of the Sikh community" (Nayar, 1966, p.238).The Sikh leaders' fears that other Sikh lower castes might declare themselves Hindu were realised, as Singh remarks: "The sub-castes excluded from the schedule showed little reluctance in abandoning the Khalsa (Sikh) tradition and declaring themselves Hindus in order to claim benefits" (Singh K., 1966, p. 304).

As I have tried to illustrate above, the question of caste and Sikhism has been quite complicated. Despite denial at the ideological level, Sikh leaders did not deny its existence at the empirical level. Thus, as noted above, some 'low caste' Sikhs were the only non-Hindus included in the list of the Scheduled Castes, a status that was not granted to their counterparts in the other minority communities, i.e. Muslims and Christians. Even the Budhists and Jains were not considered for such a status and it is only more recently that neo-Buddhist converts have begun to be registered as Scheduled Castes.

Today, apart from those officially identified as Scheduled Castes (SCs), Sikhs have other caste divisions and there seems to be a marked variation in the development status of different caste categories. As shown in Table 7, about 27.35 per cent of rural Sikhs are Scheduled Castes, much higher proportion than amongst the urban population, indicating a lower level of urbanisation among Dalit Sikhs when compared to Sikhs in the general category.

Table 7: Caste Groups among the Sikhs

Residence	ST	SC	OBC	Others	Total
Rural	1.00	27.35	22.95	48.70	100
Urban	0.11	15.17	18.56	66.16	100

Source: 2004-05, NSSO, Consumption Expenditure Round

As the Table shows, a very small proportion of Sikhs are listed as Scheduled Tribes (STs) (Radhakrishna, 2007). Interestingly, there is no separate list for Scheduled Tribes in the states of Punjab, Haryana and Delhi, where most Sikhs live. So these groups are all from other parts of the country, the "de-notified tribes" (those not in the official schedule any longer), such as the Sikligar Sikhs of Rajasthan. A substantial proportion of the Sikhs population is also Other Backward Castes (OBCs). In fact, Dalits and OBCs together make-up more than half of the total rural Sikh population.

Table 8: Caste Group-Wise Landownership among the Sikhs

	Landless	Marginal	Small	Medium	Large	V. Large
Rural						
SC	45.1	50.4	2.6	0.9	1.1	0.0
OBC	18.7	42.1	8.3	8.0	11.1	11.9
OTH	4.7	13.1	12.1	17.9	25.7	26.5
Urban						
SC	60.0	38.3	0.0	0.0	1.7	0.0
OBC	35.3	52.4	1.4	6.6	0.0	4.2
OTH	36.6	43.8	5.3	2.0	3.5	8.8

***Source**: Calculated from 2004-05, NSSO, Consumption Expenditure Round.*

How are caste differences reflected in economic and social status? Table 8 gives a fairly good idea of the prevailing economic differences among the different caste groups among the Sikhs. As mentioned above, the Scheduled Castes are either landless or nearly landless. The position of OBC community among the Sikhs is a little better. Large proportions are marginal landowners, but they also include a quite significant proportion of large and very large landholders. The position of 'upper castes' (the others) is certainly far better: fewer than 5 per cent are landless and more than half are large or very large landowners.

4.2 The gender question

Perhaps more than caste, the question of gender has been a serious concern in development writings on the Sikhs. As is the case with Sikh studies in general, the question of gender in Sikhism has also been mostly discussed in a historical frame (Jakobsh, 2003; Malhotra, 2002) and by scholars interested in the study of religious traditions. Only recently is some work beginning to be produced with a development perspective (Kaur, 2007). Historically speaking, there has been least acknowledgement of gender as a 'problem' within the Sikh faith tradition. The dominant attitude, as argued by Jakobsh, has been silenced (Jakobsh, 2003). This mainstream thinking within the religious orthodoxy is well represented in the following lines of Surinder Suri:

> The status of women was not an issue in Sikhism. Equality was implicit...Women are considered as an integral part of society who must not be excluded by any ritual or doctrinal consideration (Suri, 1990, p. 103).

The reality on ground has, however, always been very different. As Singh and Tatla point out, "historically Sikh society has been hyper-masculine, reflecting the character of rural Punjab, which evolved as a frontier zone. Sikh religious iconography is also very masculine" (Singh and Tatla, 2006). Today, gender receives more attention. Much of the contemporary concern for gender within the Sikh community has emerged from the growing demographic imbalance, the declining sex ratios among Sikhs revealed by the national census of 2001, according to which the sex ratio of the Sikh population was lower than for any other major religious community at 893, significantly below the national average of 933 women per 1000 men. The only other religious community with less than national average was the majority Hindu population, with a sex ratio of 931:1000. All the other religious minorities had sex ratios higher than the national average (Christians 1009; Buddhists 953; Jains 940; Muslims 936). However, there are some interesting variations across states. For example, Delhi Sikhs had the highest sex ratio among Sikh population (925), followed by Chandigarh (910). Punjab, where a large majority of the Sikh population is concentrated, had a low sex ratio of 897. In other states and union territories also, the sex ratio among the Sikh population was below 900.

Even more worrying is the trend, as shown by the age-specific sex ratios. For example, the sex ratio for children below the age of 6 is even worse.

Though this is the case for almost all the religious communities, it is lesser amongst the Sikhs, amongst whom there were only 786 girl children for 1000 male children, far below the average for Christians (964), Muslims (950) and Hindus (925). This indicates that the overall sex ratio is likely to deteriorate further in future, especially amongst the Sikhs.

Interestingly though, the low sex ratio among Sikhs does not tell us the entire story. While sex ratios are low, female literacy rates are higher than amongst other groups. As the Census analysis shows, the:

> ...female literacy scenario among Sikhs and Jains is very encouraging, as compared to other religions, wherein except one state all the other states have reported female literacy rate above 60 per cent. Twenty-nine states and union territories among the Jains, 16 states and union territories among Sikhs and 13 states and union territories among Christians are having female literacy above 80 per cent. The 2001 Census data brings out clearly a high literacy rate among the females of the Jains, Sikhs and Christians[6]

On some of the health indicators as well, Sikhs do quite well. For example, the data on immunisation shows that the proportion of Sikh women who had received immunisation during their pregnancy was higher (85.5 per cent) than for all other religious groups except the Jains (92.2 per cent)[7].

How can one make sense of this rather contradictory picture?

Historically, patriarchal values have been very strong in the northwest region of the subcontinent. Its dependence on an agrarian economy and its 'martial' tradition, which were reinforced by the colonial rulers, produced a culture of son preference. The nature of economic development in the region during the post-independence period has largely been agriculture-centric. Incomes went up, but agricultural prosperity failed to produce an urban middle class or bourgeois culture. The growing influence of the ideology of population control during the post-independence period and family planning produced smaller families but with a skewed sex ratio. The Sikhs were not only the community with low sex ratios, but they were the community with the lowest population growth rate between 1991 and 2001. The Sikh case is perhaps a good example of the kinds of contradictions that are embedded in the models of economic development India has been pursuing during the post-colonial period.

5. Concluding Comments

Notwithstanding some very obvious development deficits, economically Sikhs have done fairly well as a community. The desire for social and economic mobility is extremely strong among them. One of the central features of the Sikh self-image is the image of 'a hard-working and mobile community'. Mobility is perhaps the single most important secular value among the Sikhs. Though compared to the followers of other religious traditions in India, the number of Sikhs is quite small; they can be seen in almost every part of the country and in every sphere of economic life. They have also been a globally mobile community, being among the first from the subcontinent to explore the Western hemisphere. There are substantial number of Sikhs in countries like United Kingdom, the United States and Canada and smaller populations of Sikhs can be found in many other countries of the world. The desire to go to foreign lands for better economic opportunities continues to be strong among the Sikhs.

Though the green revolution technology was introduced in different parts of the country, it was in Punjab that it proved most effective. Scholars writing on the subject give due credit to the community culture of the Sikhs, particularly to the Jat Sikh farmers. For a long time Punjab was the richest state in India, with highest per capita income. As shown above, the incidence of poverty among the Sikhs is far less than amongst any other religious community. The available official data also shows a move away from agriculture and growing occupational diversification among Sikhs.

However, notwithstanding these achievements and the pride they take in the 'modernity' of their religious ethos, Sikhs are not a homogenous community. Apart from the economic inequalities that characterise the Sikh population, like any other religious community, Sikhs are also confronted with several other developmental challenges.

While ideologically Sikhism does not support caste-based inequality or the idea of untouchability, in social and political life, the community continues to be divided on caste lines. Even though the growing institutionalisation of democratic politics and economic development during the post-independence period have weakened the older structures of hierarchy and social inequality, caste prejudice persists. (see Jodhka, 2000, 2002, 2004). Perhaps even more important than caste is the question of gender inequality. Even though the Sikh religion provides useful

resources for fighting against gender-based discrimination, these resources have not been used effectively to 'reform' the patriarchal culture of the community. The near-obsession with mobility has also created side-effects, one of which is excessive consumerism and desperation to go abroad. While such 'ills' are often reported in the popular media, there is little empirical research on these subjects. Like other religious communities, the development aspects of religion continue to be blind spots in the literature on Sikhism.

It is not only in the social science literature that questions of development have been of marginal concern: in both internal and external social and political discourses they have remained on the periphery. Much of the minority politics of Sikhs in India during the post-independence period has been identity-centric. The movement for a Punjabi Suba, a Sikh majority province, during the 1960s, and the Khalistan movement during the 1980s and early 1990s, were both motivated by the concern for maintaining and promoting a separate Sikh identity. Though some of the demands articulated by the leadership during these movements had a development dimension, their effect was certainly not developmental. Moreover, these demands invariably reflected the aspirations of the dominant sections within the community and showed little concern for those on the margins. Questions such as gender, environmental sustainability, health, or even caste exclusion, have not yet found a place in the mainstream community discourse of the Sikhs.

End Notes

1 For Census data see http://censusindia.gov.in

2 www.sikhwomen.com/facts/population.htm October 10 2007.

3 Sikhs living in the Western hemisphere support a large number of Chairs in different universities in the United States and elsewhere for research on the community and its religious traditions. Over the last 20 years a global community of scholars specializing in Sikh studies has emerged. Apart from researching on different aspects of Sikh religion and history, this community organizes conferences at frequent intervals and publishes academic journals. Currently two journals, *The Journal of Punjab Studies* and *The Sikh Formations* are being published from the United States of America.

4 Khalistan Movement was a political movement for a separate Sikh state and lasted for nearly 15 years beginning in early 1980s.

5 Some Sikh communities have emerged outside Punjab, in the regions where the Sikh Gurus lived, such as Bihar and Maharashtra in India. In some Western countries, a very small proportion of the native white population has been converted to Sikhism by Sikh preachers like Harbhajan Singh Yogi.

6 See, for example, Human Development Reports of the UNDP

7 Great Britain Indian Statutory Commission, *Memorandum Submitted by the Government of Punjab (1930),* quoted in Nayar, 1966, p. 20.

8 It may be relevant to mention here that the village where Paul Hershman did his field work was not a typical village of Punjab. As mentioned above, the rural population of the state is largely Sikh, while his study village had a majority population of Hindu households: as many as 40 Brahmin households and also almost all the Scheduled Caste households are reported to be Hindu.

9 See Webster, 1999, p.96 and Grewal, 1994, p.130.

10 Census of India, Brief Analysis, p. 6. http://www.educationforallinindia.com/analysisofreligiondata.pdf October 7 2008

11 National Family Health Survey report as processed by Amit Thorat, 2008 p.20

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Appendix 1:

Sikh Population in Different States of India (2001)

State	Sikh population	Rural	Urban
India	**1,92,15,730 (1.9)**	**1,41,06,481 (73.41)**	**5,109,249 (26.59)**
Punjab	1,45,92,387 (59.90)	1,15,67,437 (79.27)	30,24,950 (20.73)
Haryana	11,70,662 (5.53)	8,84,969 (75.59)	2,85,693 (24.41)
Rajasthan	8,18,420 (1.44)	6,70,754 (81.95)	1,47,666 18.05
Uttar Pradesh	6,78,059 (0.40)	4,60,605 (67.92)	2,17,454 (32.08)
Delhi	5,55,602 (4.01)	22,174 (3.99)	5,33,428 (96.0)
Maharashtra	2,15,337 (0.22)	29,611 (13.75)	1,85,726 (86.25)
Uttaranchal	2,12,025 (2.49)	1,58,090 (74.56)	53,935 (25.44)
Jammu & Kashmir	2,07,154 (2.04)	1,11,603 (53.87)	95,551 (46.13)
Madhya Pradesh	1,50,772 (0.24)	57,061 (37.84)	93,711 (62.16)
Chandigarh	1,45,175 (16.11)	18,076 (12.45)	1,27,099 (87.55)
Jharkhand	83,358 (0.30)	11,544 (13.84)	71,814 (86.16)
Himachal Pradesh	72,355 (1.2)	51,338 (70.97)	21,017 (29.13)
Chhattisgarh	69,621 (0.33)	10,420 (14.96)	59,201 (85.04)
West Bengal	66,391 (0.08)	10,758 (16.20)	55,633 (83.80)
Gujarat	45,587 (0.08)	5,941 (13.03)	39,646 (86.97)
Andhra Pradesh	30,998 (0.04)	5,413 (17.46)	25,585 (82.54)
Assam	22,519 (0.08)	7,634 (33.90)	14,885 (66.10)
Bihar	20,780 (0.02)	8,037 (38.67)	12,743 (61.33)
Orissa	17,492 (0.04)	2,092 (11.95)	15,400 (88.05)
Karnataka	15,326 (0.02)	2,850 (18.59)	12,476 (81.41)
Tamil Nadu	9,545 (0.01)	2,338 (24.49)	7,207 (75.51)
Meghalaya	3,110 (0.13)	876 (28.16)	2,234 (71.84)
Kerala	2,762 (0.009)	1,504 (54.45)	1,258 (45.55)
Arunachal Pradesh	1,865 (0.16)	864 (46.32)	1,001 (53.68)
Manipur	1,653 (0.07)	843 (50.99)	810 (49.01)
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	1,587 (0.44)	825 (51.98)	762 (48.02)
Tripura	1,182 (0.03)	613 (51.86)	569 (48.14)
Sikkim	1,176 (0.21)	1,084 (92.17)	92 (7.83)
Nagaland	1,152 (0.05)	615 (53.38)	537 (46.62)
Goa	970 (0.07)	156 (16.08)	814 (83.92)
Mizoram	326 (0.03)	192 (58.89)	134 (41.11)
Daman & Diu	145 (0.09)	78 (53.79)	67 (46.21)
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	123 (0.05)	66 (53.65)	57 (46.35)
Pondicherry	108 (0.01)	20 (18.51)	88 (81.49)
Lakshadweep	6		6 (100.0)

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