

Issues of Sikh Identity: Sanatanist-Sikh Debate

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In the wake of growing awareness about identities and relative numerical proportions towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Sanatanist Hindus started asserting that the Sikhs were Hindus. The protagonists of the Lahore Singh Sabha insisted in response that the Sikhs had a distinct religious identity of their own. In 1897, Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha wrote his *Ham Hindu Nahin* in Hindi, to be followed by the Gurmukhi version, to question the Sanatanist contention and to explain how Sikhs were distinct from Hindus. By the time he brought out the fifth revised and enlarged edition of this work in Gurmukhi in 1920, the Sikh position seemed clearly articulated and established. However, this debate had been sharpened meanwhile by the legal contest over Sardar Dyal Singh Majithia's Will, removal of idols from the precincts of the Golden Temple, and the Anand Marriage Act. The Sanatanists persisted in their assertion that the Sikhs were Hindu, refusing to enter into any serious dialogue and merely explaining away 'Sikh separatism'.

It has been pointed out recently that the 'Hindu' participant in the debate about Sikh identity in Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha's *Hum Hindu Nahin* is a Sanatanist and not an Arya.¹ This raises the question: what did the Sanatanists who constituted an overwhelming majority among Punjabi Hindus think of Sikh identity? The question is important because, generally it has been assumed or asserted that the debate on whether the Sikhs were Hindus was conducted by the *tat-khalsa* and the Arya Samajists.² This paper focuses on the view of Sanatanist Hindus towards Sikh identity and their attitude towards issues involving Sikh identity.

I

The earliest known leader of the Sanatan Dharm movement in the Punjab, Pandit Shardha Ram Phillauri (1837-1881), did not show much concern with Hindu-Sikh identity in his *Sikhan de Raj di Vithya* (The Story of Sikh Rule) published in 1865.³ The Bharat Dharm Mahamandal did not show any interest in the issue of the identity of the Sikhs in its first report of 1889.⁴ In 1897, however, in a large public meeting at Lahore the Sanatanist Hindus passed a resolution that the Sikhs were a part of the Hindu community.⁵

The question of Sikh identity became a legal issue when Sardar Dyal Singh Majithia died in September 1898 and his widow contested his Will, claiming that the Hindu law of inheritance under which he had given his

property in trust did not apply to a Sikh. The Chief Court of the Punjab ruled that Dyal Singh was, in fact, a Hindu. The Bharat Dharm Mahamandal took notice of this issue and passed a resolution in a meeting at Delhi, asserting that the ten Gurus of the Sikhs from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh were Hindus. Furthermore, Baba Khem Singh Bedi, a descendant of Guru Nanak, and Bawa Sumer Singh (Bhalla), a descendant of Guru Amar Das, subscribed to the view that Sikhs were Hindu.⁶

The *Akhbar-i Am* blamed certain members of the Managing Committee of the Khalsa College at Amritsar for the unsatisfactory condition of that premier institution because their assertion that Sikhs were not Hindus had alienated the sympathies of seven-eighth of the Sikh population.⁷ The *Sanatan Dharm Gazette* praised the Maharaja of Patiala for declaring that it was a mistake to suppose that the Hindus and Sikhs constituted separate 'nations' because the Khalsa always sacrificed their lives for the protection of the Hindu religion. The Sanatanists hoped that the Maharaja of Patiala would emulate his Gurus and his predecessors and support the cause of the Hindu religion in every possible way.⁸ Lala Hari Chand, a Collector in the Kapurthala state, argued in the *Akhbar-i Am* that Sikhism was 'an offshoot of the Hindu religion'.⁹ The *Akhbar-i Am* denounced the radical Sikh reformers for throwing away a *Shivling* installed in a temple situated in the circumambulatory passage (*parikrama*) of the Golden Temple. Similarly, a painting in another temple showing Guru Gobind Singh standing with folded hands before the Goddess was 'obliterated' with ink.¹⁰

The *Sanatan Dharm Gazette* quoted verses from the *Guru Granth Sahib* to show that Guru Nanak and his successors had accepted the authority of the Vedas and that the Sikhs believed in incarnation.¹¹ Similarly, in the *Akhbar-i-Am*, a *pandit* quoted the *Guru Granth Sahib* to support the idea that Sikhs were Hindus. He also referred to the Census of 1891. Guru Gobind Singh transformed the Sikh community from a purely religious into a political association, and what was previously a quietist sect of the Hindus, now expanded to such an extent that strangers and even the people of the Punjab began to look upon the Sikhs as constituting a separate religion.¹² They had no right to be called a separate religious body as they did not possess a code of law or a scripture of their own.¹³

The removal of idols from the precincts of the Golden Temple in May 1905 raised a controversy about Sikh identity. The manager (*sarbarah*) of the Golden Temple, Sardar Arur Singh, issued orders on 1 May 1905, prohibiting the Brahmans from sitting in the *parikrama* with the idols for worship and also forbade them from washing their clothes in the tank, besides spitting and rinsing their mouth in it. However, they could bathe, do *puja* and apply *tilak*.¹⁴ While complying grudgingly with this order, the Sanatanists declared in a public notice (*ishtihar*) that Guru Nanak and the other Sikh Gurus were Hindus. A meeting of the Hindus of Amritsar was held on 4 May 1905. It was resolved in the meeting that the manager of the Golden Temple had offended the feelings of Hindus by his unlawful interference with their right to conduct idol worship (*thakur puja*) around the sacred tank. The Golden Temple, which

was founded by Guru Ram Das, was especially held in veneration by all classes of Hindus of whom the 'Sanatan dharmis' formed the majority. They claimed that they had been performing their religious rites such as bathing, meditation, worshipping idols, singing hymns, and delivering sermons in accordance with the orthodox beliefs of their own religion 'from ancient times' at the Golden Temple.¹⁵ They contended that the manager's arbitrary order (*Aurangzebi hukum*) wounded the feelings of all the Sahajdhari Sikhs who were more numerous than the Keshdhari Sikhs who were said to belong to the 'sect' of Guru Gobind Singh alone, and whose temples were situated only in Abchnagar (Nanded) and Patna. Guru Ram Das was Ram Das (i.e. not a Singh), and being a leader of the Hindus, was also a leader of the Keshdhari Sikhs.¹⁶

On 6 May 1905 the Brahmans returned with the idols to the Golden Temple. The matter was reported to the police by the manager and another order was issued by him on 7 May which was finally complied with.¹⁷ But the Sanatanists continued to appeal to the government for over a year, and memorials were sent to the Lieutenant Governor. Seth Radha Krishan of Amritsar presented a petition, signed by 13,000 Hindus and Sikhs of Amritsar, asserting that only a small minority of the 'reformed' or 'heretical' Sikhs, who called themselves *tat-khalsa* ('neo-Sikhs'), held that the Sikh doctrines did not allow idols to be displayed in their temples. There was no reason to offend the majority of the 'Sanatanist Sikhs' even if it was admitted for the sake of argument that Sikhism in its purist form was opposed to idolatry.¹⁸ The memorialists warned the authorities that 'the unprecedented step taken by the manager would create endless dissensions, disputes and sectarian animosity'.¹⁹

An important concern of the Singh reformers was the Anand Marriage Bill that was introduced by Tikka Ripudaman Singh of Nabha in the Imperial Legislative Council in 1908 to give legal recognition to the Sikh ceremony of marriage. Not only the Arya Samaj but also many conservative Sikhs were opposed to the Bill, including the *granthis* of the Golden Temple. The Anand marriage was regarded as an innovation of the Singh reformers by the opponents of the Bill. Hundreds of communications were sent to the government for and against the Bill.²⁰ H. Erle Richards, Member of the Governor General's Council pointed out in his letter to Sir Harvey Adamson, Home Member, that other than the Arya Samajists, the Hindus declined 'to recognize that the Sikhs are a distinct community from the Hindus'.²¹ In October 1909 the Bill was passed.

The Sanatanist papers and periodicals took notice of the *tat-khalsa* who were probably irritated by the Sanatanist assertions about Sikh identity. The *Sanatan Dharm Gazette* alleged that the *tat-khalsa* insulted Hindu gods and goddesses in the lectures they delivered in Gurdwaras.²² The *Sanatan Dharm Parcharak* in 1912 reported that in the religious debate held at the Sanatan Dharm Debating Club at Amritsar between the Hindus and the *tat-khalsa* in 1912, the latter conducted themselves in an 'unbecoming manner' and stooped low enough to 'abuse'. The *Parcharak* asserted that the Sikh Gurus had laid down their lives in defence of the Hindu community and religion when

Aurangzeb unsheathed his sword against Hindus. It was further asserted that the Hindus and the Sikhs belonged to the same stock because the Sikhs, their Gurus, and the parents of all the ten Gurus were Hindus.²³ The *Sanatan Dharm Patrika* accused a Sikh named Arjan Singh of wounding the religious sentiments of the Sanatanists in a Punjabi poem in which he refers to Krishna as his brother-in-law (*behnoi*).²⁴

In the arguments put forth by the Sanatanists it is contended that the Sikh claim to distinct identity was something new as it was espoused by a small minority, that is the *tat-khalsa*. The Sikh Gurus were Hindus; they accepted the authority of the Vedas, and subscribed to the belief in incarnations; they had no law code or scripture of their own; and they had not rejected idol worship nor any of the Brahmanical rites of passage. The Sanatanists stood opposed to the *tat-khalsa* in all those situations in which the latter acted on the basis of a distinct faith and a distinct identity, like the removal of idols from the Golden Temple and the Anand Marriage Act. The Sanatanists blamed the *tat-khalsa* for alienating the Hindus and Sikhs by their innovations, and the *tat-khalsa* were irritated by the Sanatanists' insistence on 'Hindu' identity of the Sikhs.

II

The Singh Sabha at Lahore had been founded in 1879. Its leaders played a crucial role in sharpening the consciousness of a distinct Sikh identity. The most important among them were Professor Gurmukh Singh (1849-1898), Bhai Ditt Singh (1853-1901) and Bhai Kahn Singh (1867-1938).²⁵

Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha wrote his *Ham Hindu Nahin* ('We are not Hindus') in response to the ongoing debate on the issue of Sikh identity in 1897. To address the Hindus, however, this book was first published in Devanagari script. A year later, its Gurmukhi version came out under the same title. Several revised editions were published subsequently. The fifth and the final edition was brought out in 1920.²⁶ It is in the form of a dialogue between a Hindu and a Sikh. All possible arguments in support of the proposition that Sikhs were Hindus come from the Hindu participant, while the arguments in support of the proposition that Sikhs have an identity distinct from Hindus come from the Sikh participant.

The most important argument put forth by the Hindu protagonist in *Ham Hindu Nahin* was that the authority and sanctity of the Vedas was acknowledged by the Sikh Gurus. They are also said to have referred to the Shastras, Smritis and Puranas with approval. There was a reference to the six schools of philosophy too. Thus, it is asserted that the Brahmanical scriptures were not rejected in the *Adi Granth*. Another line of argument was that since Guru Nanak belonged to the Bedi subcaste, his ancestors at one time must have been known for their knowledge of the Vedas and adherence to the Vedic *dharma*. Here, the *Bachittar Natak* attributed to Guru Gobind Singh was quoted: 'They who mastered the Veda came to be known as Bedi; they propagated actions based on *dharam*'.²⁷ It was contended further that writings in the *Dasam Granth* make it clear that Guru Gobind Singh believed in

incarnations (*avtars*). A verse carried the import that one could be freed from transmigration by worshipping Krishna. The *Chandi Charittar* composed by the tenth Guru in praise of the Goddess was also cited by the Hindu participant who pointed to the invocation of *Bhagauti* (a name of the Goddess) in the Sikh prayer (*ardas*).²⁸

On the related point of idol worship, a cardinal feature of Brahmanical Hinduism, a reference is made to the *Granth Sahib* depicting Namdev attaining to God through the worship of an idol and Dhanna finding God in a piece of stone. The references to Dhanna and Namdev in the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas which expound the *Granth Sahib* were taken to mean that the Sikhs had no objection to idol worship. The Sikhs regarded the *Granth Sahib* as the physical form of the Guru, offering *karah* by way of *bhog* (sanctified food). This, it was asserted, was an expression of idol worship.²⁹

It was further maintained that certain other practices were shared by the Sikhs with Hindus. For example, Guru Nanak is believed to have observed his father's *shradh* a couple of days before his own death. The Sikh Gurus were known to visit the Brahmanical places of pilgrimage. In a composition of Guru Amar Das there are clear instructions regarding what was to be done after his death, including the *katha* of the *Garud Puran* by Keso Gopal. This verse refers also to *pind*, *pattal*, *kriya*, *diwa*, and *phull*, the essential features of the Brahmanical mortuary rite. This showed that these practices were observed by both Hindus and Sikhs. It was asserted that no injunction of the Gurus forbade the Sikhs to perform their rites in accordance with the *Shastras*, and there was no injunction to have separate Sikh rites (*gurmaryada*). As regards the compositions called the *Ghorian* and *Lavan*, recited by the Sikhs at the time of marriage, it was maintained that these were not meant to be taken literally for the actual practice (*vivhar*); it was asserted that they were supposed to be metaphors. Furthermore, even if it was conceded that Sikhs had their own rites, the symbols like the *kesh* and *kachh* were seen as temporary measures adopted in a situation of armed conflict, and were no longer necessary. Rather, had it been necessary to keep the hair uncut, the first nine Gurus too would have done that.³⁰

The Sikh position that they did not subscribe to the *varnashrama* ideal was contested with reference to Guru Nanak's supposed regret about the obliteration of *varnamaryada* in his days. In his compositions, he castigates the Khatri for discarding his *dharam* and adopting the language of the *mlechch*: 'the whole world has become one caste, and there is no *dharam* left'. In the *Janamsakhi* of Bhai Bala, Lalo, a Tarkhan, and therefore a Shudra, presumed that Guru Nanak would not eat the food cooked by him, and suggested that the Guru might prepare his own food. The issue of the sacred thread had a bearing on the question of *varnamaryada*. A composition by Guru Nanak was cited to confirm that he himself used to wear the sacred thread. In the *Sukhmani* by Guru Arjan the Sikhs are said to have been instructed to revere the Pandit who understood the Vedas, Smritis and Puranas. The *Bachittar Natak* states that Guru Tegh Bahadur sacrificed his life to save the *tilak* (sacred mark on the forehead) and *janeo* (sacred thread) of the Hindus. Guru Gobind Singh wrote

the *Savvayye* in praise of Brahmans and instructed his followers to give charity (*dan*) to them.³¹

Continuing in this vein the Hindu raises three more points. The first relates to the basic principles of Hindu *dharma*, which he maintained were acceptable to the Sikhs. They regarded the Vedas as true, and believed in God, good and evil, heaven and hell. The Sikhs also believed in liberation (*mukti*) as release from transmigration, *varnashrama* as the ideal social order, cremation of the dead, and protection of the cow, and they upheld the ideas of purity and pollution. Moreover, even if Sikh *dharam*, Sikh principles and Sikh rites and ceremonies were taken to be different from those of the Hindus, the Sikhs were governed by the Hindu Law. Thirdly, and on an altogether a different plane, it is suggested that it is not really politic on the part of the Sikhs to 'separate' themselves from the Hindus as all such attempts would increase mutual hostility. In view of their small numbers, the Sikhs were bound to suffer great loss through separation from the Hindus. Thus, by aligning themselves with the Hindus, who had become important under the British, the Sikhs could enhance their own importance.³²

Some more arguments were added in support of the Hindu position. The Sikhs were Hindus because they had emerged from amongst the Hindus; they ate food with Hindus; they entered into matrimony with Hindus; and they lived in 'Hindustan'.³³ The phrase, '*Hindu salahi salahan*' in the *Granth Sahib* showed that Hindu beliefs and practices were approved by the Gurus. The *Chhakke Chhands* attributed to Guru Gobind Singh are quoted to the effect that the Khalsa Panth was meant to spread Hindu *dharma*. Therefore, the Sikh *mat* was a Hindu *panth*, like the *bairagi* and *sanyasi panths*. Furthermore, the Sikhs who equated the Sikh Panth with *qaum* (community) did not realize that it was necessary to have large numbers to be a *qaum* whereas the Sikhs counted merely in *lakhs*. Saying that the innumerable *sakhis* proved that Sikhs were Hindu, it was asserted that Guru Tegh Bahadur sacrificed his life for the sake of Hindus because he was himself a Hindu.³⁴

Bhai Kahn Singh, thus, provides a whole range of arguments used by the Hindu participant in the debate, mainly that the Sikhs upheld the sanctity of the Vedas, Puranas and the Dharmshastras; believed in incarnation; practised idol worship, *kriya*, *shradh*, pilgrimage, and fasts; and subscribed to the *varnashrama* ideal, and protection of the cow. Bhai Kahn Singh then refutes all the arguments of the Hindu protagonist on the basis of Sikh literature. The most important aspect of his book was the thesis that a distinctive Sikh identity was not a new thing. He invokes Sikh literature that was not only pre-colonial but also voluminous and wide-ranging, in support of this thesis.³⁵

According to the Sikh protagonist in the debate, the Sikhs have their own scripture in the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Other religious books of the Sikhs are judged as authentic to the extent they accord with the *Granth*. Justification for this exclusive status for the *Granth Sahib* is found in the compositions of the Gurus and in other Sikh literature. Guru Amar Das emphasized the superiority of the *bani* of the Gurus over the compositions which are looked upon as 'unripe' (*kachchi bani*). According to Guru Ram Das, *Gur-shabad* is above

everything else. The Sikhs of the Guru regard it as true: the Creator himself made the Guru utter it. What the Gurus say about other scriptures should be seen in conjunction with the indispensability of the true *bani* underlined by the Gurus. Twenty quotations from the *Adi Granth*, the *Bachittar Natak*, the *Ram Avtar*, the *Thirty Three Savvaye* and the works of Bhai Gurdas underline the inefficacy of the Vedas, Smritis and Shastras. Bhai Gurdas includes the Puranas, the Epics and the *Gita* in the list of religious books which should be rejected in comparison with Gurbani. The entire message of Gurbani is meant for all human beings. The Sikh conception of *karma*, *upasana* and *gian* is totally different from what these mean among the Hindus. The lines and phrases quoted by the Hindu participant are refuted by the Sikh participant either by providing the full context to explain the correct meaning or by quoting other passages for clarifying the meaning, or by doing both. The final conclusion drawn on the point of scriptures is that the only valid religious book for the Sikhs is the *Guru Granth Sahib*, and no other scripture.³⁶

On the issue of the *varna* system, the Sikh participant quotes the passage from Manu and other authorities which exalt the position of the Brahman and his rights and privileges, and which underline the disabilities and deprivation of the Shudra. The message of the Gurus, on the other hand, is meant for the four *varnas* and even for the outcastes (*chandals*). The path is open to all because the whole of mankind is believed to have been created from the same light (*nur*). Guru Nanak castigated those Khatri who had abandoned their faith. Had he believed that Persian was a *mlechch bhasha* he would not have composed in Persian, and Guru Gobind Singh would not have written his *Zafarnama* in Persian. The idea of equality in the Sikh Panth is underlined at many places in the *Adi Granth* and in the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas. More than a score of quotations on this point are cited from these and other sources like the *Akal Ustat*, the *Gurpartap Suriya* and the *Rahitnamas* of Bhai Chaupa Singh and Bhai Daya Singh. The *Sakhi* of Lalo Tarkhan demonstrates that Guru Nanak ate food cooked by a Shudra. For this reason alone, the point about the sacred thread loses its significance. The line quoted from the *Adi Granth* by the Hindu participant, placed in its proper context, also shows that Guru Nanak discarded the distinctions of caste. In the *Bachittar Natak* quoted by the Hindu participant, *tilak* and *janeo* were clearly the sacred mark and sacred thread of the Brahman who had approached Guru Tegh Bahadur for help. An incident narrated in the *Dabistan-i Mazahib* indicates that the Sikhs attached no sanctity to the sacred thread even before the Khalsa was instituted. Furthermore, the Gurus wanted their Sikhs to give charity not to Brahmans but to Sikhs. The *Savvayye* of Guru Gobind Singh were not in praise of the Brahman but in favour of the Khalsa who were to receive all kinds of gifts. In the *Sukhmani*, Guru Arjan emphasizes the qualities which make any person a true Brahman (and not the Brahman of the *varnashrama*). The *pandit* of the Hindu social order is denounced by Guru Nanak and his successors. Appropriate quotations are given from the compositions of Guru Nanak and Guru Amar Das on the point.³⁷

The idea of incarnation stands discarded in Sikh *dharam*: God is never born; He never dies; He does not take any form. The so-called *avatars* are God's creatures, and they too search for emancipation. In support of this view, quotations are cited from the *Adi Granth*, the *Shabad Hazarey*, the *Thirty Three Savvayye* and the works of Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Nand Lal. If Krishan is mentioned in the *Krishan Avatar*, it must be remembered that this work was meant to be a free version of a received account, and the ideas it contained could not be taken as the views of Guru Gobind Singh. In *Maru Solhe*, Guru Arjan refers to beliefs prevalent among other people; his own view is expressed in the last line, indicating his preference for the True Name. The use of epithets for God derived from the names of *avatars* did not mean that God of the Sikh *dharam* becomes equated with them. Rather, a new meaning is given to those epithets.³⁸

As God's creatures, gods and goddess stand bracketed with *avatars*. They were all part of *maya*. Like the other creatures of God, they too seek emancipation. Neither Brahma, nor Vishnu nor Mahesh can be equated with God. They all serve God who alone is to be worshipped. These ideas find support in the *Adi Granth*, the *Akal Ustat*, the *Thirty Three Savvayye*, the *Jap-Sahib*, the *Sabad Hazare*, the *Rahitnama* of Bhai Daya Singh, and the works of Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Nand Lal. The use of the term Kalika in the *Chandi di Var* is for Akal Purakh and not for the Goddess. Durga in the same composition is mentioned as created by God. Since the *Chandi di Var* was a popular version of *Durga Saptashati*, every idea mentioned in the composition could not be ascribed to Guru Gobind Singh. In his *Bachittar Natak* Guru Gobind Singh explicitly asserts that none other than God is to be worshipped. To argue that ritualistic purification was hygienic was a futile rationalization because the ritual itself was based on superstition. Similarly, the practice of plastering the ground with cow-dung and drawing a circle (*chaunka karna*) which, among other things, was insisted upon by Manu, was denounced by the Gurus. Bhai Chaupa Singh in his *Rahitnama* forbids the use of cow-dung in the *langar*. The author of the *Gurpartap Suriya* asserts that the Sikh sacred food (*deg*) was meant for all the four *varnas*. The author of the *Dabistan-i Mazahib* also conveys the impression that there was no restriction on food among the Sikhs. The only criterion was that it should not be harmful for the body.³⁹

Quotations from the *Adi Granth*, the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas, the *Rahitnama* of Bhai Daya Singh, and the *Gurpartap Suriya* support the view that fasting on days like Janamastami, Ram Naomi and Ekadasi was rejected by the Gurus and their followers. Observing fasts was a sign of ignorance (*agian*). So was the notion of auspicious and inauspicious days and times. Verses from the *Adi Granth*, the works of Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Nand Lal and the *Gurbilas Patshahi Chhevin* show that the notions of *mahurat*, *tith*, *var*, and *sagan* were discarded by the Gurus and their followers. The idea of the efficacy of *mantras*, *tantras*, and *jantras* in enhancing the spiritual and physical prowess of individuals, giving them supernatural powers or longevity or sexual virility, stood discarded in Gurmat. The performance of *hom* and *yagya* was also

discarded. Quotations from the *Adi Granth*, the works of Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Nand Lal and the *Dabistan-i Mazahib* support these views.⁴⁰

The rites of *kriya*, *shradh* and *tirath* are taken up together as related to death. The statement from the *Janamsakhi* that Guru Nanak observed *shradh* for his father only two days before his own death, is not based on authentic information, contends the Sikh protagonist. The *Sadd* of Guru Amar Das in *Rag Ramkali*, which is supposed to prescribe *kriya* after his own death, is not properly understood. It is written with reference to a hymn of Guru Nanak in which the word 'Keso' refers to God. Therefore, the Keso Gopal of *Sadd* is no other than God. Furthermore, at several places in his compositions, Guru Amar Das himself denounces the *pandit* and what he does. Mourning with loud lamentations are denounced by Guru Nanak himself. He prepared *karah parshad* after Mardana's death, according to a *Janamsakhi*. According to the *Gian Ratnavali*, *kriya* was replaced by *ardas*, *kirtan*, and *karah parshad*. The ceremony of *bhaddan* (tonsure) was not to be observed, according to the *Gursobha* and Bhai Chaupa Singh. The Gurus went to the places of Hindu pilgrimage not as pilgrims, but to preach their own message to the people assembled there.⁴¹

The *gurmaryada* regarding birth, initiation and marriage had nothing to do with Hindu *mat*. Guru Amar Das uttered the *Anand* at the birth of his grandson and instructed the Sikhs to recite this composition at the birth of a child. Guru Arjan did this, as referred to in one of his hymns, at the birth of his son Hargobind. Guru Ram Das composed *Chhants*, *Ghorian*, and *Lavan* for the occasion of marriage. A close scrutiny of these compositions makes one realize that they were meant to be used on the occasion of marriage. Bhai Daya Singh in his *Rahitnama* insists that Sikhs should not adopt any ceremony of marriage other than the *Anand*. For initiation Guru Nanak introduced the practice of *charan-pahul*, which was followed by all his successors before Guru Gobind Singh introduced *khande ka amrit*. He also instructed the Sikhs to observe *rahit* and adopt certain symbols like *kachh* and *kara*. Bhai Kahn Singh points out that the Sikh Gurus used to keep uncut hair (*kes*). There was no evidence to suggest that Khalsa symbols were meant to be a temporary measure for the time of war. There was no certainty that wars had ended for all times to come.⁴²

Responding to the seven 'universal' principles mentioned by his Hindu counterpart, the Sikh participant denies that the Vedas are the basis of Sikh *dharam*. Belief in God, *punn* and *paap*, or reward and punishment, were not confined to Hindus and Sikhs. Similarly, belief in transmigration was not confined to Hindus or Sikhs in the history of mankind. The Sikhs did not subscribe to the ideal of *varnashrama*. Cremation was not the only practice among either Hindus or Sikhs. While *jal-parwah* (immersion) was known to both Hindus and Sikhs, there were Hindus who practised burial rather than cremation. Cow protection was rationally desirable, but the Sikhs did not have the same kind of attitude towards the cow as the Hindus. Finally, the Sikhs do not subscribe to the idea of pollution. Thus, the basic principles which the Hindu participant maintained were common to Hindus and Sikhs are denied by

the Sikh participant either because of their absence among the Sikhs or because of their presence among others too. He goes on to add, that like the Hindu gods, the principles to be found among Hindus, were innumerable. Consequently, the census report failed to clarify who was a Hindu. That there was no acceptable definition was not surprising, because the word 'Hindu' did not occur in the sacred books of the Hindus. They were the only people in the world to have accepted a name given to them by outsiders.⁴³

On the question of Hindu law being applicable to the Sikhs, the Sikh participant maintains that the law operative in the country was no longer Hindu. It was mostly customary law that was operative among the Sikhs. There were no legal codes based entirely on religious books. So far as the Sikhs were concerned, the basic principles had been enunciated in Gurbani and the *Rahitnamas*. The Anand Marriage Act had also been passed. Thus, the possibility of preparing a Sikh code of law had been created. Sir Lepel Griffin is quoted to the effect that the Sikhs had 'abandoned the Hindu faith and with it the system of laws which is the basis of that faith and for fifty years the Sikh chiefs had followed laws of succession which were altogether different. To invoke the legal authority of Manu and the Shastras by Hindu converts to Sikhism would have been unreasonable as to invoke the *Shariat* by Muslim converts to the Sikh faith'.⁴⁴

Whether or not they were Hindu, was it politic on the part of Sikhs to insist that they must be treated as a separate people? The answer is clear. No progress (*unnati*) was possible without independence (*sutantarta*). To be a branch (*shakh*) of another *qaum* is to remain in subordination (*ghulami*). The Sikhs loved their neighbours and looked upon their tribulation as their own, but they could not be treated as a part of another people in terms of religious and social principles. They had already suffered for becoming one (*ikk-mikk*) with the Hindus. The Sikhs lost in numbers; their wealth went into the hands of Brahmans through *dan* and *dakshina*. Vested interests among Hindus made every possible effort to dissuade Sikhs from retaining their religious symbols. Many Sikh families reverted to the Hindu fold and many others entered into matrimony with Hindus. While Sikhs were told that Sikhism did not lie in the *kes* or the *kachhi*, no one told the Hindus that their *dharma* did not lie in the *janeo* or the *bodi* (top-knot). If mutual hostility was increasing it was due to the hostile attitude of some Hindus towards the Sikh faith. Aggression came precisely from those Hindus whose vested interests were bound to be hit if Sikhs were treated as a separate *qaum*. They were keen to own the Sikhs in self-interest. They were joined by the self-styled *gurus* among the Sikhs who published books and articles to show that the Sikhs were Hindus.⁴⁵

III

Bhai Kahn Singh's arguments made no difference to the Sanatanists. At the meeting of the Hindu Mahasabha at Hardwar in 1921, Pandit Din Dayalu Sharma proposed a new and broad definition: a 'Hindu' belonged to a religion born in India; cherished its pilgrimage centres and culture; subscribed to the

principle of rebirth; accepted Sanskrit as the language of the sacred scripture; and venerated the cow. This definition was deliberately inclusive so that the Sanatan Dharmis, Aryas, Brahmos, Jains, Sikhs and Buddhists were all covered. The Arya 'Vedutva' was replaced by the Sanatanist 'Hindutva' to broaden the base of Hindus. All non-Muslim and non-Christian 'Indians' were brought under the umbrella of evolving Hinduism.⁴⁶

However, the Sanatanists had no appreciation for the Akalis who had been trying to reform the Gurdwara for some time now. The debate assumed political undertones. The *Sanatan Dharm Patrika* suggested that all the Gurdwaras 'in the possession of the Akalis should be boycotted and new temples of their own should be established'. The Hindus were urged also to seek legal help to obtain rights in temples and properties attached to the Gurdwaras, which were built with their hard earned money.⁴⁷ Pandit Gopi Nath, a former editor of the *Akhbar-i Am*, asserted that the 'action of the Akalis in reforming the Gurdwaras by force, in utter disregard of law and the religious rights of other sections, is neither proper nor lawful'. If the Akalis did not mend their ways the government would have to take notice of their 'revolutionary activities' and the whole Akali movement might be held to be 'seditious'. Furthermore, if the present state of affairs was allowed to continue the rights of no section of Punjabis would be safe in the hands of the Akalis.⁴⁸ At the Brahman Conference held at Lahore in 1923, it was pointed out that the Akalis were harassing Brahmans and other Hindus in the villages. At places where only a few Brahmans and Khatris lived, the Akalis asked them to embrace Sikhism. Indeed, the Akalis 'surpassed even (what was done in) the times of the Muhammadans'. They demolished certain Hindu temples.⁴⁹ Opposing the Gurdwara Act of 1925, the *Sanatan Dharm Parcharak* maintained that the erstwhile Udasi custodians of the Gurdwaras should have the Gurdwara Act repealed by instituting regular proceedings regarding those shrines which had been taken away under the Act. The Sanatanists also urged the Punjab Government to 'compensate' the Udasis for the 'wrongs' done to them under the Act.⁵⁰

Pandit Mulraj Sharma, a Sanatanist ideologue, condemned the *tat-khalsa* for having sought to legalize the Anand marriage ceremony of the Sikhs. In his view, the Sanatanist marriage ceremony was the oldest and the most appropriate and the earlier generations of Sikhs had followed that ceremony. If the traditional Hindu ceremony was declared unlawful then the marriages of ancestors and their progeny too would become unlawful. Mulraj did not relish the obvious implication of the Anand marriage ceremony: it dispensed with the services of the Brahman priest. Mulraj maintained that the Sikh Panth had emerged from within the Sanatan Dharm as its branch, and he contended that no *samskars* (sacraments) and rituals were formulated by the Gurus.⁵¹

Sant Mangal Singh, a preacher of the Sanatan Dharm Pratinidhi Sabha of the Punjab, reiterated in 1928 that the ten Gurus were Sanatan Dharmis and delivered the sermon of Sanatan Dharm in the Darbar Sahib. Banda Singh Bahadur was claimed to be a Hindu and the day of Shiromani Banda Vairagi's sacrifice was celebrated with great fervour. The report of the Pratinidhi Sabha

denounced the Akalis for stealing and breaking the image of Sri Satya Narayan at Loralai in the north-west and the image of Radhikaji at Garh Fateh Shah in Lyallpur. They had forcibly occupied a Panchayati *dharmshala* and converted it into a Gurdwara in *muhalla* Gawal Mandi in Rawalpindi. The Akalis had forcibly occupied a *dharmshala* in Daska and renamed it as the Gurdwara of Waryam Singh. The Akalis were condemned for disrupting the programme of *prachar* of the Sanatan Dharm Pratinidhi Sabha at Talagang, Rawalpindi, Kohat and Peshawar.⁵²

In a work entitled, *The Hindu Problem in the Punjab*, Professor Gulshan Rai argued that the Sikh movement was in itself a result of the great Vaishnava movement which had started in the Ganges valley in the fifteenth century. Guru Nanak and his nine successors established in the north-west a spiritual empire in the hearts of the Hindus. It could not be denied that the Sikh Gurus re-awakened the Hindus to 'the past glories of the Aryan race'. The result was that a new spirit was aroused and the followers of the Gurus eventually succeeded in weakening the empire of the Mughals and rescued the country from the grasp of Ahmad Shah Abdali. For Gulshan Rai, the Sikhs were a 'reforming body within the Hindu community'. Under Hinduism, each individual was free to worship a separate god of his own. He further added that in a family one member may be an orthodox Hindu, another may be a Sikh, and still another may be an Arya Samajist or a Brahmo Samajist or a follower of the Radha Swami sect. Gulshan Rai assumed that the Sikhs formed a part of the Hindu community when the Punjab was annexed to the British empire in India in 1849, just as the Arya Samaj, Brahmo Samaj and Dev Samaj formed a part of the Hindu community in his own time. But, gradually, during the last fifty years, certain forces brought about a cleavage between the Hindus and the Sikhs. Referring to the Arya Samaj, Gulshan Rai remarked that a protestant section of the people among the Hindus began publicly to ridicule and abuse the Sikh Gurus and offend the Sikh community. These differences between the Hindus and the Sikhs were fully exploited by the Europeans who tried to interpret the sacred books of the Sikhs in such a manner as to induce them to believe that they were not a reforming body within Hinduism, but an altogether a separate community. As a result, the Sikh community, an overwhelming majority of whom were Jats, a military caste, had gone out of the Hindu fold. From the military point of view it had been a great blow to the Hindus says Gulshan Rai.⁵³

In 1936, Pandit Sukhlal, a preacher (*updeshak*) of the Punjab Sanatan Dharm Pratinidhi Sabha published his *Guru Sahibon ka Dharm*, written in Devanagiri script and dedicated to Goswami Ganesh Dutt, the General Secretary of the Pratinidhi Sabha. The professed purpose in writing this tract was to protect all those Sikhs from sin who believed that Sikhs were distinct from Hindus. This comprehensive statement of the Sanatanist assertion subsumes the arguments of the earlier writers on the subject. To capture its essence it has been given in entirety.

With 500 examples, Sukhlal sought to prove that the Gurus and the *Granth Sahib* approved of Hindu scriptures and incarnations, the practices of

idol worship and *shraddh*, marriage and death rites, pilgrimages and fasts, cow protection, the caste system, the sacred thread, the supremacy of the Brahmans and their right to receive charity. To prove his point, the writer provided a list of works of Sikh literature that he used: *Janamsakhi Bhai Bale Wali*, *Adi Granth*, *Dasam Granth*, *Bani of Bhai Gurdas*, *Bani of Bhai Mani Singh*, *Mukammal Sausakhi*, *Gurbilas Pathshahi Chhevin*, *Gurbilas Pathshahi Das*, *Surya Prakash*, *Panth Prakash* and *Khalsa Tawarikh*.⁵⁴ In addition, Pandit Sukhlal used his own arguments to underline that culturally and socially the Hindus and Sikhs stood bracketed against the Muslims. Without referring to Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha, he tries to provide a comprehensive support for 'Hindu' identity of the Sikhs.

According to Sukhlal, the Sikhs were Hindus because Guru Nanak Dev and Guru Arjan Dev referred to only two religions, Hinduism and Islam in the *Granth Sahib*. Therefore, the Sikh Gurus did not regard the Sikh faith as being distinct from the Hindu religion. Verses from the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas, the *Dasam Granth*, the *Sausakhi* and the *Bhagat Ratnavali* were quoted in support of the argument.⁵⁵ It was asserted that the Gurus accepted the authority of the Vedas and quoted the *Bachittar Natak*, the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas and the *Panth Prakash* in support of this argument.⁵⁶ It is maintained that the Gurus listened to the recitation of the Puranas. The *Gurbilas Patshahi Chhevin* is quoted to assert that Guru Hargobind listened to the *katha* of *Shrimat Bhagvat* from Pandit Nityanand of Batala at Amrtisar. Similarly, Guru Arjan Dev is said to have listened to the discourse on *Brahma Puran* by Pandit Gulab Rai. The *Granth Sahib* is quoted to the effect that Guru Amar Das recommended *katha* of the Purans by Pandit Keso Gopal. The *Khalsa Tawarikh* is quoted to the effect that Guru Amar Das listened to the discourses on the Upanishads.⁵⁷ Several verses from the *Granth Sahib* are quoted in support of the contention that the Gurus believed in rebirth by saying that one has to go through eighty four lakh births to get a human life.⁵⁸

The *Granth Sahib* is quoted to the effect that Guru Nanak Dev, Guru Amar Das, Guru Ram Das and Guru Arjan Dev subscribed to the worship of Narsingh *avatar*. Similarly, Guru Gobind Singh in his *Dasam Granth* sanctions the worship of Narsingh *avatar*. Quotations are given from the *Granth Sahib*, the *Dasam Granth* and the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas to contend that the Gurus had faith in fifty-two incarnations. It was due to the grace of Ram whose name is repeated 2432 times in the *Granth Sahib*, that Guru Arjan Dev was able to give life to a dead person. Evidence from the *Adi Granth*, the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas and the *Dasam Granth* is given in support of the worship of Krishan. Referring to a conversation of Guru Hargobind with Kaula in the *Gurbilas Patshahi Chhevin*, and of Guru Gobind Singh with Roop Kaur in the *Dasam Granth*, it is contended that the Gurus did not regard Lord Krishana to be adulterous and did not condemn him. The *Granth Sahib* is quoted to assert that Guru Arjan Dev praises Krishan and does not criticize Janamashtami.⁵⁹

Evidence from the *Mukammal Sausakhi*, the *Panth Prakash* and the *Bhagat Ratnavali* is given to maintain that the worship of Ganesh was acceptable to the Gurus. The *Surya Prakash* is quoted to contend that Ganesh

was worshipped in the marriage ceremonies of Guru Nanak, Guru Hargobind, Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh. The Sikh rulers also had faith in the worship of Ganesh. Maharaja Ranjit Singh had the idol of Ganesh installed at the entrance of a *bunga* near the Golden Temple at Amritsar. Similarly, in accordance with his wishes the image of Ganesh was placed at the entrance of his memorial (*samadhi*) at Lahore. But this image was not visible as the Akalis had placed a signboard over it.⁶⁰ Sukhlal asserted that the Sikhs worshipped the Goddess. There is a reference to Parvati in *Japuji* in the *Granth Sahib*. Twenty verses from the *Dasam Granth* are quoted to maintain that Guru Gobind Singh worshipped the Goddess. Furthermore, the *Chandi Charittar* of Guru Gobind Singh, in praise of the Goddess, is cited as evidence. In the Sikh prayer (*ardas*), the Goddess (*Bhagauti*) is invoked in the first sentence.⁶¹

It was contended further that the Sikhs were idol worshippers. The *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas are quoted in reference to Dhanna and Namdev to prove that there is no objection to idol worship by the Sikh Gurus. The *Adi Granth* and the *Dasam Granth* sanction the worship of the Linga. The Sikhs also bow to Tahli Sahib, Kotha Sahib and Beri Sahib. It was also claimed that two images of Guru Nanak, one white and one black are kept at Gurdwara Har Sahai in the Ferozepur district. These images are displayed during the fairs of Baisakhi and Maghi. Above all, the Sikhs regard the *Granth Sahib* as the physical image of the Guru and worship it, which is after all only paper. They offer *karah* (offering) in a dish as *bhog* to the *Granth Sahib*.⁶²

To assert that Guru Nanak had observed his father's *shradh* the *Surya Prakash* is quoted. Similarly, the *Chakra Charu Chandrika* is quoted to the effect that Guru Gobind Singh observed his father's *shradh* according to Hindu rites. Guru Amar Das in *Rag Ramkali* instructs that Pandit Keso Gopal should conduct the *katha* of Puran after his death. As mentioned earlier, in the same verse there are references to rites associated with death like *pind*, *pattal*, *kriya*, *diwa* and *phull*. In support of this contention, quotations are given also from the *Bhagat Ratnavali*, the *Gurbilas Patshahi Chhevin*, the *Sausakhi*, and 'Bhagat Bani'.⁶³

Quotations from the *Granth Sahib* are given to maintain that the Gurus instructed that marriage should be performed by Hindu rites and by the *pandit*. The *Surya Prakash* is cited to say that Guru Nanak Dev, Guru Hargobind, Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh were married according to the 'Hindu' rites and ceremonies: engagement, *karadhi chadhna*, *batana lagana*, *kangana bandhna*, *grihashanti*, *barat chadhna*, *bakher*, *phere*, *kanyadan*, and dowry.⁶⁴

Sukhlal maintained that the Gurus believed in pilgrimages. The *Granth Sahib* is quoted to the effect that going to pilgrimages attains the grace of God and it is the duty of the Guru and his followers to bathe at places of pilgrimage. The *Sausakhi* is quoted to maintain that a bath in the Ganges washes away sins and salvation is attained by drinking the water of the Ganges. Verses in support of pilgrimages are also given from the *Bachittar Natak* and the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas. Among other sacred spots are Kurukshetra, Brindaban, Hardwar, the temple at Jwala Mukhi and the river Jamuna. It is emphasized that a

pilgrimage to the Ganges is far superior than the pilgrimage centres of the Sikhs like the tanks at Amritsar and Tarn Taran, the *baoli* at Goindwal and the wells at Gangsar and Chheherta.⁶⁵ The *Granth Sahib* and the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas are cited to contend that the Sikhs are instructed to observe fasts as well.⁶⁶

In support of the idea that the Gurus stood for cow protection, quotations are given from the *Granth Sahib*, the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas, *Chhakkey Chhand* of the *Dasam Granth*, the *Bhagat Ratnavali*, and the *Gurbilas Patshahi Chhevin*. An incident is narrated from Baba Narain Singh Vakil's *Sikh Hindu Hain* to suggest that a Sikh could never be the cause of a cow's death. During the rule of Ranjit Singh, a complaint was made that a Sikh had killed a cow. The *kardar* refused to accept this complaint and said that the killer of a cow could never be the son of a Sikh. When the mother of the killer was questioned she confessed that the father of her son was a Chuhra (scavenger by caste).⁶⁷ A quotation from the *Granth Sahib* is cited to the effect that by eating meat and drinking alcohol the merit earned by pilgrimage, fast and *nam simran* will go waste.⁶⁸ Sukhlal maintained that the Sikhs revered ascetics and saints. Quotations are given from the *Granth Sahib* and the *Dasam Granth* to the effect that it was the duty of the Sikhs to serve and protect the ascetics and saints.⁶⁹

Sukhlal asserted that the Sikh Gurus religiously followed the caste system and instructed others to follow it. Guru Nanak Dev in the *Adi Granth* criticizes the Khatri who had left his *dharma* and adopted a *mlechch* language (*bhasha*). The other works cited in support of this statement are the *Dasam Granth*, the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas, the *Gurbilas Patshahi Chhevin*, the *Tawarikh Gurdwariyan* and the *Tirath Sangrah*. The last work says that the sons and daughters and grandsons and granddaughters of all the Gurus who were high caste Khatri, were married into Hindu Khatri families. The families were Kumrav, Rikhirav, Sudhi, Marwahe, Khosle, Dhuse, Chondh, Lamba, and Sekhdhi.⁷⁰ The *Granth Sahib* was invoked to assert that Guru Nanak wore a sacred thread which led to salvation. The *Bachittar Natak* is quoted to the effect that Guru Tegh Bahadur sacrificed his life for the protection of the *tilak* and the sacred thread, and his son also protected the sacred thread. Among the other works cited are the *Surya Prakash*, *Bhai Bala Janamsakhi*, *Gurbilas Patshahi Dasvin*, *Panth Prakash*, *Gurmat Nirnay Sagar* and *Sikh Hindu Hain*.⁷¹

On the issue of charity (*dan*) to Brahmans, Sukhlal quoted *Savviyey* from *Bhagat Ratnavali* to the effect that Guru Gobind Singh instructed his followers to give charity to Brahmans. Quotations in support were also cited from the *Granth Sahib*, the *Dasam Granth*, the *Gurbilas Patshahi Dasvin* and the *Sausakhi*. The Akalis should be ashamed of themselves as according to their interpretation of the *Savviyey*, charity should be given to the Sikhs. Sukhlal argued that there was no reference to the Sikhs in the *Savviyey* and also that there were no Sikhs when the *Savviyey* were written. The *Tawarikh Gurdwariyan* interprets the *Savviyey* to the effect that it is a sin for the Khalsa to accept charity. Many quotations from the *Granth Sahib*, the *Vars* of Bhai

Gurdas, the *Sausakhi*, the *Panth Prakash* and the *Gurbilas Patshahi Dasvin* are given to assert that the Sikhs were not permitted to accept charity and if they did they would go to hell (*narak*).⁷²

Sukhlal contended that the Brahmans had done great service for the Sikhs for which they should be grateful. According to the *Janamsakhi Bhai Balewali*, Guru Nanak received his early education from a *pandit*. According to the *Gurbilas Patshahi Chhevin*, Pandit Keso Gopal recited the Veda, Shastra and Purana for Guru Amar Das. The *Bachittar Natak* is cited to assert that it was with the help of Dayaram, a Brahman, that Guru Gobind Singh won the battle of Bhangani and gave him the title of Dronacharya.⁷³ The *Gurbilas Patshahi Chhevin*, the *Panth Prakash* and the *Zafarnama* are cited to refute the allegation that the four sons of Guru Gobind Singh were killed due to the Brahmans. In the *Zafarnama*, Guru Gobind Singh clearly blames Aurangzeb for murdering his four sons.⁷⁴

Sukhlal used his own arguments to emphasize the similarities between the Hindus and the Sikhs vis-à-vis Muslims. While chanting their religious verses the Muslims went into a trance and their rosary had one hundred and one beads, whereas the Sikhs, like the Hindus, prayed sitting down with their hands folded and their rosary had one hundred and eight beads. In the mosques, prayers were not accompanied by music, but in the Gurdwara, as in a Hindu temple, prayers were offered to the tune of music. The *Qur'an* was not worshipped in a literal sense, whereas the *Granth Sahib*, like the Vedas and the Puranas, was offered *prasad* (offering), flowers and clothes. The Muslim law (*shari'at*) regarded the use of music as a sin. On the other hand, the Sikhs like the Hindus sang their religious hymns to the accompaniment of instrumental music. The *Guru Granth Sahib*, in fact, begins with *Shri Rag* based on *Rag Hanumant* of the Hindus. Unlike the Muslims, the Sikhs and the Hindus have faith in the theory of rebirth based on actions (*karma*). The festivals of Diwali and Holi had no meaning for the Muslims, whereas the Sikhs, like the Hindus, celebrated both the festivals with fervour at Harmandir Sahib and Anandpur.⁷⁵

Continuing in this vein, Sukhlal says that unlike the Muslims, the Sikhs and the Hindus did not perform the ritual of circumcision. The Muslims shaved their heads and the Hindus maintained a tuft of hair on their heads. As the Sikhs maintained long hair, they were 'double Hindus'. From birth to death the Hindus and the Sikhs shared common rituals. The Hindus did not inter-dine with the Muslims, whereas, commensality between the Hindus and the Sikhs was permissible. Unlike the Muslims, who bathed in the nude, the Sikhs and the Hindus wore clothes while bathing. Even the attire of the Sikhs and Hindus was the same, as both wore underpants like Hanuman. The Muslims on the other hand wore only a cloth wrapped around their waist (*tamba*) or pajamas. The names of the Muslims were always different from those of the Hindus. The surname Singh used by the Sikhs was also used by the Rajputs since ancient times. Therefore, the Sikhs (Singhs) were Hindu.⁷⁶ The Muslims had different names for the days of the week and months in a year. The Sikhs and the Hindus had the same names for the days of the week and months. Unlike the Muslims, the Sikhs and the Hindus celebrated the first day of the month

(*sankranti*). Calculations by the Muslims were done from the right to the left whereas the Sikhs like the Hindus wrote figures from the left to the right. The Urdu alphabets were different from the Devanagri alphabets. The alphabets used by the Sikhs were similar to the Devanagri. Unlike the Muslims, it was not a sin for the Sikhs and the Hindus to accept interest on money advanced as loan.⁷⁷

The changing political context of the last decade of colonial rule had a bearing on this debate. In the 1940s, the Sikhs and the Sanatanists were united in their opposition to the demand for Pakistan. However, the issue of identity was rekindled with the announcement of the Azad Punjab scheme for a province to be created through reorganization of territory to ensure a balanced communal proportion, with about 40 per cent Muslims, 40 per cent Hindus and 20 per cent Sikhs.⁷⁸ For Gulshan Rai, this scheme was based on 'rank communalism',⁷⁹ presumably because it talked of three religious communities. Lala Shiv Ram Sewak, leader of the Punjab Mahabir Dal, came up with a 'trenchant criticism' of the scheme at the Punjab and Frontier Akhand Hindustan Conference in Rawalpindi in 1943. He challenged the Akali leaders that even the Sikhs would not accept the scheme.⁸⁰ At the Akhand Hindustan Conference at Chakwal he contended that the Azad Punjab scheme was 'anti-national'. It appeared to support division. Shiv Ram denounced the Akalis also for cooperating with the Unionists through the Sikandar-Baldev Singh Pact.⁸¹

IV

The first thing that strikes us in retrospect is that there was no dialogue between the leaders of the Singh Sabha movement and the Sanatanists. Both sides stuck to their ground. Bhai Kahn Singh's view that the Sikh identity was not new because the Sikhs were conscious of their distinct identity before the advent of colonial rule, was not taken seriously even though he had adduced evidence from the pre-colonial Sikh literature starting with the *Granth Sahib*. Instead of meeting his arguments, the Sanatanists rejected his interpretation of Sikh scriptural literature and continued to interpret it in their own way in support of their position.

The Sanatanists were keen to defend their position because the issue of Sikh identity was not merely an academic or theological question. It had practical implications – legal, cultural, social and political. This was why the Will of Sardar Dyal Singh Majithia, the removal of idols from the precincts of the Golden Temple, and the Anand Marriage Act became politically important in the early twentieth century. The growing political concern of the Sanatanists is reflected in their all-inclusive definition of the term 'Hindu'. Indeed, the decennial census played an important role in the situation. In the Census of 1881 the percentage of Hindus (covered under the 'General' category) in the total population of the Punjab was nearly 43; it got reduced to 41.7 in 1901, and further to 36.2 in 1911; by 1931, it had become 26. Meanwhile, the number of Sikhs had been increasing. In 1881, the number of Sikhs in the

region was 2,000,000, and it rose to 4,000,000 in 1931. Sikh percentage in the total population thus rose from less than 8 in 1881 to over 13 in 1931.⁸²

The success of the Singh Sabha movement in winning converts and purging the Sikh way of life of Brahmanical accretions hardened the attitude of the Sanatanists towards the issue of Sikh identity. In fact, based on the idea of a distinct Sikh identity, the politics of the Akalis could never be appreciated by the Sanatanists. However, though generally opposed to their politics, the Sanatanists could share platform with the Akalis on issues of common interest, like opposition to the idea of Pakistan. This bivalent relationship would remain relevant for the Akali-Sanatanist relations after independence.

Notes

1. J.S.Grewal, 'An Argument for Sikh Nationality: Nabha's *Hum Hindu Nahin*', in Grewal, *History, Literature, and Identity: Four Centuries of Sikh Tradition*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 280.
2. Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 323-24. Harjot Oberoi states that among the opponents of the 'Tat Khalsa position', who favoured retention of idols in the precincts of the Golden Temple, the 'Arya Samaj protagonists occupied the front ranks'.
3. Shardha Ram Phillauri, *Sikhan de Raj di Vithya* (1865) (Punjabi), ed., Pritam Singh, (Jullundur: Hind Publishing Limited, 1956). For the biography and ideas of Pandit Shardha Ram Phillauri (1837-1881), see, Sheena Pall, 'Bhagyawati: The First Hindi Novel of the Punjab', in Reeta Grewal & Sheena Pall, eds., *Precolonial and Colonial Punjab: Society, Economy, Politics and Culture* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2005), pp. 340, 341.
4. *Report of the Bharat Dharm Mahamandal*, 1889 (Mathura: Lala Hari Prasad Press, 1889). The Bharat Dharm Mahamandal was the most important pan-Indian coordinating body of the Sanatanists.
5. Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, p. 395.
6. Harihar Swaroop Sharma, *Vyakhyan Wachaspati Pandit Din Dayal Sharma: Smarak Granth* (Hindi), (New Delhi: Dev Publishing House, 1985), p. 160.
7. *Akhbar-i Am*, 19 May 1899, *Selections from the Vernacular Newspapers published in the Punjab*, 1899, vol. XII, p. 295.
8. *Sanatan Dharm Gazette*, 15 January 1899, *Selections from the Vernacular Newspapers published in the Punjab*, 1899, vol. XII, p. 97.

9. *Akhbar-i Am*, 26 February and 5 May 1900, *Selections from the Vernacular Newspapers published in the Punjab*, 1900, vol. XIII, pp. 108, 231.

10. *Akhbar-i Am*, 10 April 1900, in *ibid.*, p. 200.

11. *Sanatan Dharm Gazette*, 5 May 1900, in *ibid.*, p. 231. *Sanatan Dharm Gazette*, 4 March 1901, *Selections from the Native Newspapers published in the Punjab*, 1901, vol. XIV, p. 153.

12. E.D. Maclagan, compl., *Census of India: 1891, The Punjab and its Feudatories*, vol. XIX, part I, Calcutta: 1892, p. 164.

13. *Akhbar-i-Am*, 26 February 1900, *Selections from the Vernacular Newspapers published in the Punjab*, 1900, vol. XIII, p. 108.

14. Punjab State Archives, Chandigarh, *Home General, Confidential*, file no. 3/51, 1906, Reg: Idols in the Amritsar Golden Temple, pp. 229, 230. There is evidence to show that even in the past similar orders were issued. An order dated 29 January 1878 was passed by Sardar Mangal Singh, the then Manager, which stated that the 'worship of idols in the Darbar Sahib is opposed to custom and the ancient rule' and in the 'Darbar Sahib only Sri Guru Granth Sahib is worshipped'. *Ibid.*, p. 242.

15. PSA, Chandigarh, file no. 3/51, 1906, Reg: Idols in the Amritsar Golden Temple, pp. 21, 22. The Hindus of Amritsar were supported by the Hindus of Hoshiarpur who conducted a meeting in the premises of the Sanatan Dharm Sabha in Hoshiarpur to protest against the actions of Sardar Arur Singh. *Ibid.*, pp. 77-78.

16. PSA, Chandigarh, file no. 3/51, 1906, Reg: Idols in the Amritsar Golden Temple, pp. 51-53.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 233-36.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 262.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 265.

20. J.S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, *The New Cambridge History of India* II.3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 151.

21. I am grateful to Professor Indu Banga for drawing my attention to this particular file: National Archives of India, *Home Judicial*, progs no. 106-B, January 1910, Anand Marriage Act VIII of 1909, p. 2, para 4.

22. *Sanatan Dharm Gazette*, 28 February 1906, *Selections from the Native Newspapers published in the Punjab*, 1906, vol. XIX, p. 63.

23. *Sanatan Dharm Parcharak*, 24 June 1912, *Selections from the Native Newspapers published in the Punjab*, 1912, vol. XXV, p. 544. *Sanatan Dharm Parcharak*, 1 May 1912, in *ibid.*, p. 384. *Sanatan Dharm Parcharak*, 16 January and 8 February 1917, *Selections from the Indian Newspapers published in the Punjab*, 1917, vol. XXX, nos. 5 and 8, pp. 86, 141.

24. *Sanatan Dharm Patrika*, 20 Jan 1918, *Selections from the Indian Newspapers published in the Punjab*, 1918, vol. XXXI, pp. 57, 126.

25. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, p. 145. *Idem*, *History, Literature, and Identity: Four Centuries of Sikh Tradition*, p. 295.

26. Bhai Kahn Singh, *Ham Hindu Nahin* (Punjabi) (Amritsar: Singh Sabha Shatabdi Committee, 1973) [reprint of the 5th edition of 1920]. In spite of Bhai Kahn Singh's *Ham Hindu Nahin*, the Sanatanists persisted in their assertions to the contrary, throughout the remainder of the colonial period. In 1899 itself, two tracts in Punjabi, entitled, *Sikh Hindu Hain*, by Bawa Narain Singh and Lala Thakar Das, countered the arguments of Bhai Kahn Singh. N. Gerald Barrier, *The Sikhs and Their Literature* (Delhi: Manohar Book Service, 1970), pp. 28, 39.

27. The original text of *Hum Hindu Nahin* has been seen and the following references are to this article. J. S. Grewal, 'Nabha's *Ham Hindu Nahin*: A Declaration of Sikh Ethnicity', in Pashaura Singh and N. Gerald Barrier, eds., *Sikh Identity: Continuity and Change* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2001), pp. 234-35.

28. Grewal, 'Nabha's *Ham Hindu Nahin*: A Declaration of Sikh Ethnicity', p. 235.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 235-36.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 236.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 235.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 236.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 232.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 233-34.

35. Ibid., pp. 233-34, 237-43. The *Adi Granth* which was compiled in 1604-5; the works of Bhai Gurdas, written mostly in the early decades of the seventeenth century; the compositions of Guru Gobind Singh and others in the *Dasam Granth* which were written mostly before the end of the seventeenth century; the works of Bhai Nand Lal as a contemporary of Guru Gobind Singh; the *Gursobha* which was composed during the first decade of the eighteenth century ; the *Rahitnamas* which were composed largely in the eighteenth century; the *Gurbilas Patshahi Dasvin* by Sukha Singh which was written towards the end of the century; and the *Gurbilas Patshahi Chhevin* and the works of Bhai Santokh Singh which were composed in the early nineteenth century. At a few places, the evidence of *Janamsakhis*, which were compiled in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, is also invoked.

36. Grewal, 'Nabha's *Ham Hindu Nahin*: A Declaration of Sikh Ethnicity', p. 237.

37. Ibid., pp. 237-38.

38. Ibid., p. 238.

39. Ibid., p. 239.

40. Ibid., pp. 239-40.

41. Ibid., p. 240.

42. Ibid., pp. 240-41.

43. Ibid., p. 241.

44. Ibid., pp. 241-42.

45. Ibid., p. 242.

46. Sharma, *Vyakhyan Wachaspati Pandit Din Dayal Sharma: Smarak Granth* pp. 327-28. For the biography and ideas of Pandit Din Dayalu Sharma, see Sheena Pall, 'Din Dayalu Sharma: The Formative Phase of the Sanatana Dharma Movement in late Nineteenth Century North India', *Indian History Congress Proceedings*, 63rd Session (Kolkata: Kolkata University, 2003), pp. 1012-20.

47. *Sanatan Dharm Patrika*, 29 May 1921, *Punjab Press Abstracts*, 1921, vol. XXXIV, p. 273.

48. *Akhbar-i Am*, 29 November and 6 December 1922, *Punjab Press Abstracts*, 1922, vol. XXXV, pp. 610, 624.

49. *Bharat*, 20 June 1923, *Punjab Press Abstracts*, 1923, vol. XXXVI, p. 342.

50. *Sanatan Dharm Parcharak*, 16 January 1926, *Report on Newspapers and Periodicals in the Punjab*, 1926, pp. 44-45.

51. Pandit Mulraj Sharma Nagar, *Hindu Dharm Darpanam* (Hindi), (Lahore: Vidhya Prakash Press, 1922), vol. II, pp. 40, 207-8, 226-27.

52. *Annual Report of the Shri Sanatan Dharm Pratinidhi Sabha Punjab* (Hindi), (Lahore: Goswami Ganesh Dutt, 1928), pp. 23, 26, 79-81.

53. Gulshan Rai, *The Hindu Problem in the Punjab* (Lahore: Sanatan Dharm Collage, 1934), pp. 16-17, 22, 26, 45.

54. Pandit Sukhlal, *Guru Sahibon ka Dharm* (Hindi), (Lahore: Basant Printing Press, 1936), p. iii. At the end of this work there is an advertisement that lists other works of Sukhlal in Hindi and Punjabi. The works in Hindi are: *Tat-Khalsa ki Pol*, *Sikho ki Bajbul Arz*, *Navin Singh Shiksha*, *Khalsa Kuriti Nivaran*, *Shri Gurughar mein Durga Pujan*, *Shri Gurughar mein Dan Vidhi* and *Anand Nirnay*. A few have been translated into Punjabi. The work in Punjabi is *Jehi Ruh tehe Farishte*. Many of the works were reprinted. For the biography and ideas of Goswami Ganesh Dutt, see Sheena Pall, 'Goswami Ganesh Dutt: The Sanatan Dharm Movement in the Colonial Punjab', *Journal of Regional History*, vol. XV, 2009 (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 2009), pp. 69-81.

55. Pandit Sukhlal, *Guru Sahibon ka Dharm*, pp. 7-10.

56. *Ibid.*, pp. 31-34.

57. *Ibid.*, pp. 35-38.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

59. *Ibid.*, pp. 100-36.

60. *Ibid.*, pp. 1-7.

61. *Ibid.*, pp. 137-47.

62. *Ibid.*, pp. 148-54.

63. *Ibid.*, pp. 58-76.

64. Ibid., pp. 39-45.
65. Ibid., pp. 53-57.
66. Ibid., pp. 155-56.
67. Ibid., pp. 48-52.
68. Ibid., p. 55.
69. Ibid., pp. 155-56.
70. Ibid., pp. 27-30.
71. Ibid., pp. 19-25.
72. Ibid., pp. 77-81, 82-86.
73. Ibid., pp. 94-98.
74. Ibid., pp. 87-94.
75. Ibid., pp. 12-17.
76. Ibid., pp. 11-12, 17-19.
77. Ibid., pp. 13-15, 17.
78. Indu Banga, 'The Crisis of Sikh Politics, (1940-1947)', in Joseph T.O'Connell et al, eds., *Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1990), p. 242. It was essentially a reiteration of the demand for 'territorial rearrangement' of the province made by the Sikhs in 1931 at the Second Round Table Conference. Ibid., pp. 243 n72, n73.
79. *The Tribune*, 5 January 1943, pp. 4, 10.
80. N.N. Mitra, *Indian Annual Register*, vol. 2, July-December, 1943, pp. 306-7. For the Punjab Mahabir Dal, see Sheena Pall, 'Emergence and Programme of the Punjab Mahabir Dal under Colonial Rule', *Punjab History Conference*, 44th Session, 2012 (Patiala: Punjabi University, 2012), pp. 341-48.
81. N.N. Mitra, *Indian Annual Register*, vol. 2, July-December, 1943, pp. 302-3. According to Indu Banga, the Sikander-Baldev Singh Pact was an attempt at a limited cooperation between the Akalis and the Unionist and at mitigating what were seen as the adverse effects of 'Muslim domination'. It

covered nearly all those issues that had been agitating the minds of the Sikhs before the League's resolution in 1940, such as legislation on religious matters, the share of the Sikhs in services, teaching of Punjabi in Gurmukhi and facilities for *jhatka* meat. 'The Crisis of Sikh Politics (1940-47)', p. 241.

82. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, p.137. Denzil Charles Ibbetson, compl., *Census of India: 1881, Punjab*, London: 1883, vol. II, Appendix A, Table III, Religion. Pandit Hari Kishan Kaul, compl., *Census of India: 1911, Punjab*, Report, Lahore: 1912, vol. XIV, part I, p. 97. Ahmad Hasan Khan, compl., *Census of India: 1931, Punjab*, Report, Lahore: 1933, vol. XVII, part I, p. 317. *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Provincial Series, Punjab, 1908 (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers rpt., 1991), vol. I, pp. 39, 53.