

THE SIKHS AND CASTE

A Study of the Sikh Community in Leeds and Bradford.

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the persistence of caste among the Sikh community in Leeds and, to some extent, in the neighbouring city of Bradford. The notion that the Sikhs are a casteless brotherhood is challenged in the context of a brief discussion of the Indian caste system, the function of caste in Punjabi society, and a comprehensive review of the writings by Sikh and non-Sikh authors concerning caste practices among the Sikhs. The data for this study were collected by means of participant observation during the years 1980-1984. Their analysis demonstrates that caste continues to exist among Sikh migrants despite its rejection by the Sikh Gurus. The Sikh community in Leeds and Bradford is found to be comprised of several caste groups such as Jats, Ramgarhias, Bhatras, Jhirs, Julahas and others.

The significance of the arrival of Sikh families and children from India and East Africa is examined in order to understand the rapid development of caste-based gurdwaras and associations in Britain. A detailed study of two Sikh castes, i.e. the Ramgarhias and the Ravidasis, highlights that members of these caste groups take great pride in their caste identity manifested in the establishment of their own biradari institutions in Britain.

The practice of caste endogamy and exogamy by the Sikhs is examined by analysing what role arranged marriage plays in perpetuating caste consciousness and caste solidarity. The capacity of caste for adaptation is demonstrated through the powers of the institution of biradari to modify traditional rules of got exogamy for the smooth functioning of the institution of arranged marriage in Britain. Analysis of the life-cycle rituals provides new insights into the workings of caste, religion and the kinship system among the Sikhs. The role of the Sikh holy men is discussed to understand the quest for a living guru among the Sikhs. Comments are made on the role played by the gurdwaras in perpetuating Punjabi cultural traditions among Sikh migrants, including the teaching of Punjabi to Sikh children.

A detailed examination of the existence and practices of caste institutions among the Sikhs in Leeds and Bradford leads to the conclusion that caste differences will persist in the internal organisation of the Sikhs in Britain.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	5
Note on transliteration	6
GENERAL INTRODUCTION AND OBSERVATIONS ON METHODOLOGY	7

PART ONE

<u>CASTE AMONG THE SIKHS: AN OVERVIEW</u>	31
1 <u>THE STUDY OF CASTE AMONG SIKHS</u>	32
1.1 Caste in Indian society	32
1.2 Caste among Sikhs as discussed by Sikh authors	48
1.3 Caste among Sikhs as discussed by non-Sikh authors	61
2 <u>CASTE IN SIKH TEACHING AND PRACTICE</u>	72
2.1 The <u>Gurus</u> on caste	72
2.2 The function of caste in Punjabi society	84
2.3 Caste among Sikh migrants overseas	94

PART TWO

<u>THE SIKH COMMUNITY IN LEEDS AND BRADFORD</u>	106
3 <u>GENERAL PROFILE OF THE SIKH COMMUNITY IN LEEDS AND BRADFORD</u>	107
3.1 History and settlement pattern of the Sikhs in Leeds	107
3.2 Different <sup>religious</sup> groups in the Sikh community	115
3.2.1 Nāmdhari Sangat	116

3.2.2	Radhasoami Satsang	129
3.2.3	Guru Nanak Nishkam Sevak Jatha	138
3.2.4	Sant Nirankari Mandal	141
4	<u>SPECIFIC CASTE GROUPS AMONG THE SIKHS IN LEEDS</u>	149
4.1	Jat Sikhs	150
4.2	Bhatra Sikhs	159
4.3	Jhir Sikhs	164
4.4	Julaha Sikhs	171
4.5	Khatri Sikhs	173
4.6	Chamar Sikhs	174
4.7	Nai Sikhs	174
5	<u>CASTE AND THE RAMGARHIA SIKHS IN LEEDS</u>	177
6	<u>CASTE AND THE RAVIDASI SIKHS IN BRADFORD</u>	214
7	<u>CASTE AS REFLECTED IN SIKH RELIGIOUS RITES</u>	249
8	<u>THE IMPORTANCE OF "HOLY MEN" AMONG SIKHS IN LEEDS AND BRADFORD</u>	277
	CONCLUSION	304
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	313
	GLOSSARY	345
	APPENDIX	367

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION.

In this thesis terms from Punjabi and Sanskrit have been represented by Roman characters. Diacritical marks have not been used, but a recognised English spelling of these words has been given except for Punjabi words which are spelt differently from Sanskrit, i.e. jat (caste) instead of jati, dharm instead of dharma and got instead of gotra. No capital letters have been used for transcribing Punjabi words except for the Sikh scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib, the ten Gurus, the name of groups ( i.e. Chamars, Ramgarhias and Jats) and the Sikh Khalsa and Panth. For the full understanding of all Punjabi and Sanskrit terms a simplified glossary has been provided at the end of the thesis in both Roman and Gurmukhi scripts which the reader is advised to consult. A bibliography of books, articles and theses in English as well as of publications in Punjabi (Gurmukhi script) is also found at the end of the thesis.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION AND OBSERVATIONS ON METHODOLOGY.

My research focuses on the significance of caste among the Sikh community in Leeds and, to some extent, in the neighbouring city of Bradford. It shows that the existence of caste and its continuity in a new non-Indian environment is fundamental for understanding the emergence of religious and social institutions of immigrant Sikhs, as the dynamics of caste exhibit several features directly related to the maintenance of Sikh traditional culture. The thesis is also an investigation into the development of an immigrant community within an alien culture, a community which has displayed an enormous capacity for restructuring its religious and cultural traditions which contain rich resources for its continuing vigour and creativity. In order to analyse the process of cultural continuity, the institutions of biradari (caste) and arranged marriage are investigated as most significant.

This study, I hope, will contribute towards a more sophisticated understanding of a rich and dynamic religious tradition. As Mark Juergensmeyer has said "Studies of the Sikh tradition and community are valuable in their own right, specially considering the paucity of such studies among Western scholars" (1979:23). Studies of the Sikh tradition in general and the development of Sikh communities overseas in particular are the most neglected area of academic discipline both in India and abroad (Juergensmeyer 1979:13; Raminder Singh 1978:1). Whenever Sikhism is

discussed, it is usually added on to so called "South Asian Studies" or "World Religions" courses.

Since the second world war British society has become more religiously and culturally plural than before. The Asian communities from the Indian sub-continent and East Africa have brought Hindu, Muslim and Sikh traditions to British cities. Their presence has strongly influenced the nature of teacher training courses. It is generally accepted that the religious traditions of immigrant communities are fascinating examples of different aspects of living faiths which should be taught in all schools and colleges as part of the preparation for living in a multi-religious and multi-cultural society.

The present study examines the historical development of Sikh tradition in Leeds which began with the shabad-kirtan (religious singing) sessions by a small group of pioneer male Sikh migrants in their homes in the early 1950's. They were mainly clean-shaven Sikhs. The first most significant step which they took was the celebration of baisakhi (founding of the Khalsa day) at the Leeds Civic Theatre in 1957. The sociological significance of this gurpurb (religious festival) lies in the fact that it was one particular aspect of the Sikh tradition which became the main focus of Sikh corporate group identity in Leeds. Moreover, it also laid the foundation for the establishment of the first gurdwara in 1958. A gurdwara is one of the fundamental institutions of the Sikhs which plays a central role in the life of the Sikh community.

There is a long tradition of building gurdwaras among the Sikhs which is regarded as seva (voluntary service). As soon as there is a small number of Sikh residents in a town, they will start taking steps to establish a gurdwara which becomes the central meeting point for them. For example, the first gurdwara in Canada was established in 1908 in British Columbia (Juergensmeyer 1979:178), and the Sikhs in California built their first gurdwara in 1912 in Stockton - this gurdwara was deeply involved in the Indian nationalist movement against the British which was organised by the Ghadar Party in America (Jacoby 1979:168). Examination of the history of the first gurdwara in Leeds highlights the significance of the concepts of seva (voluntary service), daswandh (one tenth of one's earnings donated to the guru) and daan (charitable gifts of money to religious and social institutions) within the Sikh tradition which are genuine acts of creativity. In the early years of settlement all Sikhs (Akalis, supporters of the religious party of the Sikhs in the Punjab, Namdharis, Radhasoamis, Dhimans-Hindu carpenters, Ravidasis) worked together for the establishment of their first gurdwara. Religious tradition was their main source of inspiration around which they began to organise community institutions like shabad-kirtan, gurpurbs and the gurdwara.

I shall examine the process of change during the 1960's and 1970's when Sikh women and children from India and East Africa arrived in this country and the life style of Sikh migrants became increasingly adapted to more traditional values. Prior to the arrival of families, Sikhs belonging to all caste groups lived together in all-male households (Ballard and Ballard 1977:31; Helweg 1979:39). The presence of family units enhanced the celebration of life-cycle rituals which required the participation of wider

kinship group and members of one's hiradari (caste). It resulted in the reinforcement of traditional values and promotion of caste consciousness among the Sikhs.

The role of the East African Sikhs is investigated in order to analyse the emergence of caste-based gurdwaras and caste associations. Issues concerning the fusion of religious and caste identity among the Sikhs are analysed in the context of the presence of caste-based institutions. The Leeds Sikh community is found to be comprised of several caste groups. The role of these caste groups is examined in the context of traditional Punjabi society to demonstrate that the Sikhs are not a homogeneous group. In this study I attempt to answer questions like why and how caste is practised by the Sikhs despite its rejection by the Sikh Gurus. How does the fusion of religion with social values affect the character of Sikh practices and organisations? These issues are examined by looking at the teachings of the Sikh Gurus on the rejection of caste and their promotion of the ideal of a casteless society. The data collected on arranged marriages and observation of caste endogamy by the Sikhs in Leeds clearly suggests the primacy of the institution of arranged marriage which perpetuates caste solidarity among the Sikhs. The study of the pre-marriage, marriage and mourning rituals highlights the interweaving of social and religious traditions among the Sikhs.

The concept of religion as a social vision (Juergensmeyer 1982) is employed to study the historical background of the Ravidas Sabha and the establishment of the Ravidas Bhawan by the Chamar Sikhs in Bradford. I attempt to develop an answer to the question whether the Chamars (leather

workers and unskilled landless labourers) are Sikhs or Hindus. These issues are investigated by examining the nature of their diwans (religious services), the celebration of gurpurbs (anniversaries of Sikh Gurus, their biradari guru, Ravidas and Sant Sarwan Das) and the study of the constitution and literature produced by the Ravidas Sabha. The concept of structural visibility is used to understand the nature of Ravidasi, Namdhari and Radhisoami diwans. A comparative study of the ardas recited by the Namdharis, Ravidasis and other Sikhs is undertaken in order to highlight the significance of special reverence given to the religious leaders born in the Ramgarhia and Ravidasi caste groups, and also to understand the status of caste holy men as perceived by respective caste groups within the Sikh community.

The problem of defining a Sikh person is examined for understanding the position of various caste and religious groups among the Sikh community. I examine the terms amritdhari, kesdhari and sabejdhari to describe the actual situation which pertains within Sikh society and which shows that the definition of a Sikh person prescribed by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandhak Committee (committee responsible to the Indian government for Sikh affairs in the Punjab) is inadequate for describing all the Sikhs, including those who claim to have faith in a living guru. I have used the term dharm to describe the notion of religion as it is used by the Sikhs themselves. This encompasses the teachings of the Gurus and the way of life prescribed by them as well as by other holy men.

My thesis examines social and religious issues which pertain to the domain of the sociology of religion, the study of caste, and the discipline of the

history of religion as understood in the West. It will, I hope, interest both historians of religion and social scientists concerned with the study of overseas Indian communities and their cultural traditions.

The data for this study were collected over a four year period from 1980-1984. The methods employed fall into three categories: participant observation, unstructured interviews and examination of documentary material. Participant observation was the main technique without which the facts collected by other methods could not have been interpreted objectively. The need to declare methods both used and discarded, and one's background and research motivation is cogently argued by Khan, "chance circumstances, luck, and personality of the researcher, the particular circumstances and timing of the project...are all important in determining the final project" (Khan 1974:749).

Data collected from participant observation made it possible to identify major caste and religious groups based on loyalty to a living guru and local holy men. The actual social situation of the Sikhs is one of complex plurality which contradicts the professed ideal of a casteless brotherhood of the Sikhs. The technique of participant observation supplied data with which personal disputes could be related to public issues in which the dominant role was played by the institution of biradari (caste) among the Sikhs.

In classical anthropological studies, the anthropologist uses participant observation by living among the people, observing them and taking part in their social activities. The participant observer gathers data by taking

part in the daily life of the group he or she studies and shares in the life activities and sentiments of people in face-to-face relationships. In his description of the technique of participant observation Charles Cooley writes:

The human mind participates in social processes in a way that it does not in any other process. It is itself a sample, a phase of those processes and is capable, under favourable circumstances, of so far identifying itself with the general movement of a group as to achieve a remarkably just anticipation of what the group will do. Prediction of this sort is largely intuitive rather than intellectual...(1930:308).

The observer who decides to study his own community is constantly drawing on his personal background of experience as a basis of knowledge.

Participant observation enables the researcher to secure his data within the medium, symbols and experiential words which have meaning to his respondents and to prevent imposing alien meanings upon the actions of the subjects. He/she has the advantage that the communication is in same the language and within the same symbolic system. As a Sikh who has lived among the Sikh community in Leeds for more than twenty years, I did have such advantage.

Direct participation by the reseacher can bear fruit only if the investigator shares the linguistic and cultural traditions which enable him/her to understand the meanings of linguistic terminology used by the members of the community during the performance of various rituals. For example, at the reception of the Namdhari guru at the Leeds gurdwara in 1967, local Namdhari leaders addressed him as satguru (true guru) while other Sikh leaders used the term Babaji (literally meaning grandfather, but also used for holy men). By using the term Babaji they distinguished

themselves as non-Namdhari Sikhs who did not believe in the tradition of a living guru. It was a skilful use of the Punjabi language for distancing oneself from a Namdhari tradition without appearing to be rude.

Although the data for this study were collected between 1980 and 1984, my contact with the Leeds Sikh community goes back to February 1965 when I came to live in Leeds after migrating from Kenya where I had stayed for only four months after leaving the Punjab. In Leeds I found work in a building construction firm as a joiner under my cousin who was in charge of Asian joiners. They were all kesdhari Sikhs (who wear long and uncut hair) belonging to the Ramgarhia caste whose traditional occupation was carpentry. My first visit to the Leeds gurdwara left me with a sense of amazement. There were more kesdhari Sikhs than mon<sup>e</sup>n<sub>c</sub> Sikhs (clean-shaven) in the congreg<sup>e</sup>ation. I learnt that the overwhelming majority of kesdhari Sikhs had come from East Africa and belonged to the Ramgarhia caste.

Participation in Sunday diwans (worship) at the gurdwara was my most important engagement, as it was the main centre of social and religious activities for the Sikhs. I was introduced to the officers of the gurdwara by my cousin. He told them that I was a qualified and trained solicitor from India currently working as a joiner under him. He enjoyed these comments and reminded me of the uselessness of my educational qualifications. But my educational background enhanced my status among the members of the Sikh community. I began to be consulted on various matters such as the completion of income-tax returns, renewal of passports and sponsorship applications. In 1965, on baisakhi day (founding of the

Khalsa) celebration, I was asked to address the congregation. This incident helped me for building contacts with the leaders and the ordinary members of the Sikh community.

In 1966, at the annual general meeting of the gurdwara, I was elected deputy general secretary in spite of the fact that I was a clean-shaven Sikh. In the mid-60's nearly one third of the members of the executive committee used to be clean-shaven, including one member of the board of trustees. There were no restrictions on clean-shaven Sikhs holding official positions on the gurdwara management committee until the amendments to the constitution made in 1976. As deputy general secretary of the gurdwara I participated in the monthly meetings of the executive committee. Also, I was able to study the documents, including the record of minutes of the meetings, which provided valuable information about the development of the Sikh tradition in Leeds and Bradford. Studying the record of the past meetings I learnt that the original name of the gurdwara had been the United Sikh Association, Yorkshire. I also learnt that the Sikhs of Leeds and Bradford used to celebrate their religious festivals jointly and that the executive committee was composed of members from both towns. Thus the intentions of the Sikhs of both towns were manifested in the original name of their organisation. From the study of these records I further learnt that the first deputy chairman of the executive committee was a Punjabi Hindu Brahman. It is interesting to note that the first constitution of the gurdwara permitted all persons, irrespective of their caste, creed, colour, religion or nationality, to take membership of the gurdwara.

It is crucial for a participant observer to master the language of the community he/she is going to study. Srinivas in The Remembered Village discusses the significance of the language factor in undertaking fieldwork.

He says:

... I could have worked in a village in any large area in South India, but I had the utmost facility in Kannada which was the language of my street and school, though not of my home. I would have no need for interpreters, and I would also be able to study such original documents as existed and did not need any one's help to copy and decipher them (1962:4-5).

Communication within the Sikh community takes place in the Punjabi language, and the main documents including the literature produced by the gurdwara are also in Punjabi written in the Gurmukhi script. The minutes of the executive committee and general meetings are recorded in Gurmukhi. As I have an honours degree in Punjabi from Punjab University, I did not have any problems studying the documentary material. It is my considered opinion that even if problems of rapport and acceptance can be overcome, a researcher inexperienced in the language is bound to fail to understand the subtleties of meaning which may be of considerable importance in relation to his/her conclusions.

Direct observation is obviously the core technique used in participant observation. The participant observer draws his strength from the fact that he observes the community and witnesses the behaviour of local residents in a variety of situations. I have participated in numerous diwans at the gurdwaras. At the time of the Namdhari guru's visit, most Namdhari Sikhs would start wearing sidhi (Namdhari style, meaning straight) turbans and would also leave their beards flowing. This

behaviour is indicative of showing reverence to their guru. But after their guru's departure they would go back to their previous style.

Mills (1959) highlights the importance of the technique of participant observation for collecting data on personal disputes which could be related to public issues. In 1974, a fight took place between members of a Ramgarhia Sikh family and a Jhir (water-carrier caste) Sikh family. The Ramgarhia Sikh family approached their caste organisation for support. A general meeting of the Ramgarhia caste organisation called Ramgarhia Board was called to discuss the matter. As a member of the executive committee I participated in that meeting. The personal dispute between the two Sikh families was perceived as a challenge to the honour of the Ramgarhia biradari (caste). A resolution for support of the members of the Ramgarhia family was approved. Those members who argued against the resolution were warned that caste loyalty and solidarity demanded the closing of ranks. During the debate in the meeting the ideal of Sikh brotherhood seemed to have lost its hold while the defence of biradari honour had become the dominant concern. The impact of this resolution was clearly reflected at the annual general elections of the gurdwara in 1975. Leaders of the Ramgarhia Board supported their candidates and won the elections defeating all prominent members of the Jhir Sikh biradari. My social position in various organisations such as the gurdwara and Ramgarhia Board was an asset in obtaining first hand information on issues like caste loyalty. I also observed and collected data on how leaders and their followers in most caste groups attempted to influence decision-makers in relation to matters like local authority grants. In April 1983, the Ramgarhia Board

sent a letter to all councillors of Leeds City Council disputing their decision of allocating a grant to the gurdwara by the City Council.

In the early 1970's the Ramgarhia Board decided to call a national conference of all Ramgarhia institutions to discuss the restrictions on the entry of male fiancés into Britain and also to set up a national organisation of Ramghias in this country. At that time I was general secretary of the Ramgarhia Board. Representatives of twenty organisations took part in the meeting which was held at the Ramgarhia Board in Leeds. An organising committee was set up to draft a constitution and also to call a second national conference. I was elected general secretary of the organising committee. The second national conference of the Ramghias was held at the Ramgarhia Sabha Gurdwara in Southall. It was attended by representatives of twenty-two Ramgarhia institutions including the Namdhari Sangat of United Kingdom. A number of delegates questioned the presence and participation of the representatives of the Namdhari Sangat on the grounds that the membership of their organisation was open to all castes and was not restricted to members of Ramgarhia biradari only. It was pointed out that the founder members of the Ramgarhia Board in Leeds were the Namdhari Sikhs. After a very heated debate a compromise was struck. It was agreed to grant membership to the Namdhari Sangat provided their representatives belonged to the Ramgarhia caste. Members of the Namdhari Sangat were delighted with the terms of the new arrangement which in fact reflected the supremacy of caste within the Sikh community.

At the national conference it was also decided that Jassa Singh Ramgarhia Day should be celebrated annually in the form of a national gathering of

Ramgarhia Sikhs, to propagate the history and contribution of Ramgarhia Sikhs in the struggle for the Sikh rule in the Punjab during the 18th century. Jassa Singh was leader of one of the twelve misls (armed bands) of the Sikhs. Being general secretary of the national council of Ramgarhias, I organised conferences and attended quarterly meetings of its executive committee. At the appointment of Zail Singh as President of India in 1982, telegrams of congratulations were sent to him by the Ramgarhia Council. This was a demonstration of the primacy of caste identity as Zail Singh is a Ramgarhia Sikh. In 1970 I was elected general secretary of the gurdwara. Some members objected to my nomination on the grounds that I was a clean-shaven Sikh. The Ramgarhias had the overwhelming majority on the executive committee and supported my nomination on the basis of caste solidarity. In the 1970's I organised three "Sikh Christmas Dinners" inviting M.P.'s, Councillors and head teachers. On one occasion Dr. Coggan, the Archbishop of York, was our chief guest. My main aim was to facilitate the process of integration of the Sikh community into the multifaith British society. In these celebrations, I was not only a participant observer, but also instrumental in experimenting with new ideas.

I have participated in engagement and wedding ceremonies which particularly highlight the fusion of religious and social traditions among the Sikhs. They also provide insight into the roles played by close kin and members of the biradari which are paramount for the cultural continuity among the Sikhs. I have also participated in the ceremony of pagri (literally, tying of a turban which symbolises the transfer of paternal authority to the eldest son in the presence of biradari members).

Most Sikh families conduct this ceremony at the gurdwara after bhog (culmination of the reading of Guru Granth Sahib). The ritual of pagri promotes caste consciousness and solidarity as the participation in the ceremony is restricted to the relatives and members of the biradari only.

Participation in the funeral and mourning rites has provided valuable material on the role of the biradari and religious beliefs. Personal differences are forgotten at the time of mourning. Even those relatives who are not invited to weddings attend mourning sittings and funerals. Together with my wife I have participated in the funerals and mourning rites of Ramgarhia Sikhs, Jhir Sikhs, Julaha Sikhs and Jat Sikhs in Leeds. Mourning sittings take place at the house of the deceased. Men and women mourn separately in different rooms. As soon as one enters the room, one would express one's sympathy and then ask about the circumstances of death. The knowledge of Punjabi language and culture is vital for understanding the meaning of communications shared at these sittings.

Through participating in the funeral and mourning rites of the Sikhs I have observed a fundamental change in their traditional rituals. In Britain, the Sikhs do not perform dhamalak bhanana (breaking of an earthen pot full of water which symbolises the release of the deceased's soul) ritual. Carrying the dead body in a coffin and the acceptance of the cremation arrangements are important indicators of the process of change and adaptation. In India, it is the duty of the eldest son to light the pyre. In England, as soon as the coffin is moved to the cremation room, half a dozen close male relatives led by the son, who is the chief mourner, walk to the room to witness the burning of the body which is symbolic of

the son's last duty of lighting the pyre. All women wear white chunian (long scarf) at the funerals and mourning sittings. At the bhog ceremony the deceased's family donates clothes and bedding to the granthi (custodian of the gurdwara) who accepts the gift by declaring during the recital of ardas that the offering of clothes and bedding are made for the peace of the deceased's soul.

At the Ravidas Bhawan I observed and participated in the celebration of birth anniversaries of the Sikh Gurus, of Ravidas, of a local holy man Sant Sarwan Das, and of Dr. Ambedkar. I also attended a couple of wedding ceremonies. The few occasions when I was asked to address the congregation helped me to develop relationships with community leaders and the community at large. I also collected literature produced by their national organisation, including posters printed for the birth anniversaries and a copy of the constitution of the Ravidas Sabha. I interviewed Ravidasi informants at their homes and also talked to the people at Ravidas Bhawan. Visits to Sikh homes provided me with an opportunity to observe interaction within families, and I learnt about the differences between different individuals and generations, and about the mixing of Indian and British customs. I have attended children's birthday parties to which the children had invited their school friends. It was a fascinating experience to observe the presence of birthday cakes and candles alongside Punjabi food (pakoraa, samosas and curried chick-pies). Women and children mostly enjoy soft drinks while men are served beer and whisky in a separate room. Children receive presents and birthday cards including some cash from their relatives - giving and receiving cash is a Punjabi custom. This behaviour reflects the capacity of a minority group to

absorb the dominant culture while maintaining a traditional flavour in their festivities.

On these occasions, I observed the presence of relatives and friends belonging to the family's caste group. The only outsiders would be the children's school friends who would stay for an hour or so. Relatives and friends, however, would stay for a lavish Punjabi meal after the party. This situation afforded the opportunity of talking to the members of the family and their relatives on many issues including their commitment to caste institutions, local and Punjabi politics. These visits helped me to collect valuable material for this study including the names of prospective interviewees.

One Sunday after the diwan the chairman of the Ravidas Bhawan invited me and my wife for a cup of tea at his house. There were many pictures of Radhasoami gurus in his lounge. When I asked about these pictures, I learnt that his wife came from a devout Radhasoami family. During the conversation I also learnt that some Ravidasi families in Bradford had joined the Radhasoami Satsang and Nirankari Mandal. Commenting on this trend our host said that all these families had continued to support the Ravidas Bhawan. My network of contacts through the gurdwara was further extended through contacts with the members of the Ravidasi community.

At the house of a Bhatra Sikh family I was once shown a photograph of the members of the first executive committee of the gurdwara. The head of the family told me that their family owned the only copy of the Guru Granth Sahib in Leeds in the early 1950's. They donated that copy to the Sikh

community on the occasion of the setting up of the first gurdwara. His father was one of the members of the first board of trustees. This account was confirmed by other informants who were also founder members of the gurdwara. During this conversation I gathered useful information about the size of the Bhatra community in Leeds. I also learnt that the Bhatra Sikhs were a close-knit community who strictly follow the rules of caste endogamy, and marriages of their children are arranged fairly early. I collected valuable data on their biradari organisation and social centre. I was told that the membership of these institutions was restricted to the male members of the Bhatra community only.

During the last twenty years of active participation in the affairs of the Sikh community in Leeds I have observed that biradari (caste) relationships continue to be the dominant factor in all fields of social interaction. To collect data about the role of biradari in social, political, and religious matters and to relate these to wider community situations, different techniques were needed. It was therefore decided that participant observation would be supplemented by unstructured in-depth interviews followed by a system of cross-checks with different informants. By using this technique combined with personal observation I was able to collect a wide range of valuable data for my study.

In the research undertaken for their study The Bhatra Sikh Community in Cardiff Thomas and Ghuman employed the technique of semi-structured interviews, but they found themselves constrained by the demands of the Sikh leaders as mentioned in the following passage:

... A meeting of the gurdwara committee was called and it was decided that they would co-operate

with us in answering questions about religious matters but not social matters....We were, therefore, to a significant degree constrained by the artificiality of interview procedure, due to the lack of probing induced by the accepted questionnaire and the uniformity of the replies; partly explained by the nature of the questionnaire, partly by the presence of the group figure of authority - the president of the sangat (1976:5).

Another researcher, Eleanor Nesbitt, also found that "Many Nottingham Sikhs feel similarly inhibited by formal interviewing" (1980). Mohammad Anwar in his study of the Pakistani community in Rochdale also experienced the inappropriateness of structured interviews (1979:228). I also found structured interviews unsuitable for the collection of data for my study. Therefore I proceeded as follows. Firstly, I drew up a list of fifty prospective informants. The original list was based on my personal experience of participation in religious, caste-based and secular organisations of the Sikhs in Leeds. These informants were divided into three categories: a) the leaders; b) the activists and c) the ordinary members of the community. In the category of leaders I included those people who either held or presently hold official position on executive committees of various Sikh organisations, i.e. chairman, deputy chairman, general secretary, treasurer and trustees. In this category, most informants are founder members of the first gurdwara and had arrived in Britain in the 1950's. It is interesting to note that the majority of these leaders had come directly from India. The category of activists is comprised of those people who had served on the executive committees of these institutions. Category 'c' consists of ordinary members of the Sikh community who subscribe to these institutions in a variety of ways. Category 'b' is predominantly made up of East African Ramgarhia Sikhs.

All Ramgarhia Sikh informants in category 'a' had held important positions on the executive committees of both institutions - the gurdwara and the Ramgarhia Board simultaneously, which is an indication of the dominant status of Ramgarhias within the Sikh community in Leeds. This situation was strongly objected to by members of other caste groups. During the interview one prominent Jat Sikh informant commented that "The leaders of the Ramgarhia Board hold important positions on the gurdwara committee - they treat our dharmak isthan (religious place) as their biradari property. They collect donations from Ramgarhia families on engagement and wedding ceremonies held at the gurdwara."

I also drew up a list of social, religious and caste-based organisations which had emerged within the Sikh community since the arrival of pioneers in this country. I have used the term organisation rather liberally as some groups function without formal rules and regulations, but are very active and popular i.e. the Raja Sahib da Jatha (followers of Raja Sahib who was a local holy man in the district of Jullundar, Punjab) which has no formal membership. Its leader is Baba Khem Singh, an elderly retired civil servant from India.

Interviews were conducted at the homes of my informants by mutual arrangement on the telephone. I was always accompanied by my wife who is known to the community for her shabad-kirtan (religious singing). Her presence at the interviews made the situation very informal and relaxed; it also encouraged the women to participate if they wished. Most interviews lasted for two or three hours. On most occasions we ate with the families of my informants and this helped to create a situation of

trust. Commenting on the tradition of hospitality among Punjabis in relation to his research in New Zealand, McLeod has observed that "There can be few forms of research as enjoyable as personal contact with Sikh families. The tradition of hospitality, so much a part of Punjabi scene, has not been abandoned in New Zealand" (1979:152).

Many ethical questions are implicit in such research, as has been discussed by Khan (1976). Is it right to publish what is confidential and private? Informants may be identifiable and how far does one explain the research to the members of the community under investigation? On all occasions I explained that I was making a study of the Sikh community in Leeds. To retain anonymity and safeguard the identity of my informants, I have not used any personal names.

During the interviews the informants were encouraged to talk freely about whatever they wanted to discuss. It was essential not to prevent anyone from raising questions on matters which they felt were relevant. This also helped me to get a comprehensive view of the issues under study. Without a set of formal questions I encouraged my informants to talk about their personal contribution and role in different organisations. This was essential for establishing a rapport and creating a more relaxed atmosphere. My personal experience of working with most of my informants in different organisations helped me to create a situation of trust. However, it does not mean that the information collected was arbitrary. I always used an interview guide, which helped me to remember the most important questions to be asked. Before going to see a particular informant, I would go through the previous notes and relevant questions.

At no time did I take the interview guide with me either for reference or to tick off questions, when they were answered by the informants. This was done in order to keep the conversation at a very informal level so that the informants did not feel inhibited by the use of a note book or by note taking. Some informants were visited more than once for clarification on new issues raised or mentioned at the interviews of other informants.

My informants, especially those in the category of leaders, were most helpful in providing documentary material, i.e. the constitutions of their organisations, minute books, photographs, newspaper cuttings, posters and leaflets printed by their organisations in the early years. They were also instrumental in providing contacts which proved most helpful for collecting data for this study.

All interviews were conducted in Punjabi. The use of tape-recorders was discarded as it can introduce a restrained self-consciousness. Moreover, the informants were encouraged to comment on wider aspects of their involvement in biradari and religious institutions. Some informants volunteered information, for example regarding their financial contribution towards the building of their caste institutions. I recorded the conversations immediately after coming home and tried to write down the actual words used by the informants as spoken in Punjabi. To check the reliability of information, similar questions were asked of other informants. Many informants were visited more than once which also facilitated the process of checking relevant facts.

I took every opportunity to participate in social and religious functions organised by various groups and individual families. They include akhand path (unbroken reading of the Granth Sahib), sadharan/sahej path (reading of the Granth Sahib conducted to celebrate life-cycle rites etc.), nam-simran (meditation upon God's name) of Namdhari Sangat, birthday celebrations of Raja Sahib, Ravidas, Namdhari guru, Ram Singh and Radhesoami gurus, morning diwan of asa di var, especially during Namdhari guru's visits, birthday parties, weddings, engagements and funerals.

Participation in functions at which holy men were present provided insight into the religious behaviour of their followers and highlighted the significance of the personal bond between the chela (disciple) and the guru. I also observed the preparation of amrit (nectar/holy water prepared for the initiation ceremony) by Namdhari Sikhs, and Namdhari group-weddings conducted by their guru.

My fieldwork has provided me with important insights into the dynamics of caste and kinship among the Sikhs in Leeds. The principal methods adopted during the fieldwork have been participant observation and informal interviews. Without participating in diwans and life-cycle rituals, it would have been impossible to understand the overlapping boundaries between religious and caste practices which <sup>have</sup> resulted in the development of an identity shaped by both religion and caste among the Sikhs, a definite identity not only of being Sikhs, but being Ramgarhia Sikhs, Jat Sikhs and Bhatra Sikhs. However, it should not be assumed that the boundaries between religious and caste identities remain static. During the times of crisis such as the army action in Amritsar in 1984, Sikhs

belonging to all caste groups participated in the protest demonstrations which took place in London. At that time their general "Sikh" identity was more significant than their specific, separate caste identities. By the use of participant observation, valuable information has also been gained regarding the mechanism of vartan bhaji (gift exchange) among the Sikhs. It has been found that biradari relationships continue to be the dominant factor in all fields of social interaction within the Sikh community.

This thesis falls into two parts. The first provides an overview of the existence of caste among Sikhs in general, whereas the second part is a detailed study of the different caste groups and their practices among Sikhs in Leeds and, to some extent, in the neighbouring city of Bradford, based on fieldwork undertaken between 1980-84. Chapter 1 briefly discusses the phenomenon of caste in the context of Indian society and examines the work done on caste among Sikhs by both Sikh and non-Sikh authors. Chapter 2 describes the rejection of caste by the Sikh Gurus, the function of caste in Punjabi society and the persistence of caste among Sikh migrants overseas. Chapter 3 briefly discusses the history and settlement pattern of the Sikhs in Leeds. It also identifies the presence of various religious groups within the Leeds Sikh community. Chapter 4 examines the presence of specific caste groups among the Leeds Sikh community whereas chapter 5 concentrates on a detailed analysis of the Ramgarhia Sikhs, including the development of Ramgarhia Sikh identity. In chapter 6, I examine the phenomenon of caste and the Ravidasi Sikhs by analysing the historical development of their biradari institutions.

Chapter 7 examines the process of caste as reflected in Sikh rites, i.e. engagement, marriage, funeral and post-funeral customs. In chapter 8, I discuss the role of Sikh holy men in satisfying the quest for a living guru still a strongly perceived need among Sikhs. In the conclusion I summarize the <sup>s</sup>discussion and analysis of the persistence of caste among the Sikhs. The conclusion also provides a recapitulation of the major points of the thesis including comments on the future of the Sikh tradition in Britain. It also indicates some areas for further research, such as the attitude of future Sikh generations towards the nature of Sikh worship, caste endogamy, intercaste and inter-religion marriages.

PART ONE

CASTE AMONG SIKHS: AN OVERVIEW

## CHAPTER 1

### THE STUDY OF CASTE AMONG SIKHS

#### 1.1 Caste in Indian society.

One of the main concerns of this study is to examine and analyse the presence and persistence of caste in the Leeds Sikh community. It is my contention that caste exists among the Sikhs despite its rejection by the Sikh Gurus. In order to understand the nature and presence of caste among the Sikhs, it is necessary to begin with a brief analysis of caste in Indian society in general.

In India the notion of caste in its widest sense is important in everyday life because it provides a general ideology by which members of various vertically ranked groups of Indian society organise their behaviour in relation to each other. In Indian society, caste status is denoted by the word jati which also refers to one's traditional occupation. Social scientists have used the term 'caste', which is not an indigenous word, for describing the social structure of Indian society. However, Indians themselves apply the term zat-pat for the caste system where the word zat, jat or jati is reserved for the individual caste groups. The word caste was first used by the

Portugese to mean "breed" or "type" for the endogamous groups found in India.

Defining caste is problematic. Cohn says that "there is no generally accepted single definition of the caste system, but there is widespread agreement on its attributes" (1971:124). Leach agrees with Cohn when he says that "Definitions of Indian caste have usually taken the form of a list of cultural traits which are supposed to form a syndrome". <sup>Hutton</sup> holds that normally caste conforms to the following criteria:

1. A caste is endogamous.
2. There are restrictions on commensality between members of different castes.
3. There is a hierarchical grading of castes, the best recognised position being that of the Brahman at the top.
4. In the various kinds of context, especially those concerned with food, sex and ritual, a member of a "high caste" is liable to be "polluted" by either direct or indirect contact with a member of a "low caste".
5. Castes are very commonly associated with traditional occupations.
6. A man's caste status is finally determined by the circumstances of his birth, unless he comes to be expelled from his caste for some ritual offence.
7. The system as a whole is always focused around the

prestige accorded to Brahmans (1946:49).

There is a general tendency among social scientists to minimise the significance of economic relationships within the caste system. Dumont in Religion, Politics and History (1970) writes that "From 1945 to about 1960, in the literature on caste there is little reference to the jajmani system" (1970:153). Srinivas defined caste as a "hereditary, endogamous, usually localised group, having a traditional association with an occupation, and a particular position in the local hierarchy of caste. Relations between castes are governed, among other things, by the concept of pollution and purity; and generally maximum commensality occurs within the caste" (1962:3). Berreman provides a comprehensive definition of caste by identifying differential evaluation, rewards and association as significant factors. He says that "... a caste system occurs where a society is made of birth-ascribed groups which are hierarchically ordered and culturally distinct. The hierarchy entails differential evaluation, rewards, and association" (1968:48). Kathleen Gough in her article "Caste in a Tanjore Village" is one of the few writers who rightly emphasised the significance of economic relationships which perpetuate the caste system. She says that "Because the highest caste controlled all the land, the most important economic relationships consisted of the rendering of goods and services by low-caste households, in return for food, clothing and shelter" (1971:27).

A caste hierarchy is mainly based on interactional relationships closely tied to a traditional village economy. In a village, the

landowning dominant caste is at the centre of most exchanges that can be seen as acting out social relations. The dominant caste exchanges a share of crop grown on their land for goods and services provided by artisan and other low caste groups through a mode of exchange which is called jaimani system (patron-client relationships). The jaimani system is not merely a means of distributing goods and services in exchange of share in the crop, but has a ritual component as well. The ritual component of the jaimani system can be seen in the operation at life-cycle rites like weddings. A carpenter provides a patri (wooden stand) on which the ritual of mayian (the rubbing of paste made of flour, turmeric and mustard oil - the paste is used in the preparation for the wedding) is performed for which he receives ritual payment of cooked food and some cash. Besides cutting hair, it is the traditional occupation of a village barber to act as a messenger at life-cycle rites, for which he receives ritual payment of cooked food. These are permanent and hereditary relationships which indicate one's jati status within the caste hierarchy.

At a village level, caste can be seen as an extension of the kinship system. The basic unit of the caste system within a village is the household which has a traditional occupation, i.e. carpenters, leather workers, water-carriers, barbers, sweepers and weavers. All households belonging to one occupational group are collectively known as a biradari (band of brothers). The size of a biradari within a village is enumerated in terms of the number of households belonging to one particular occupational group. A biradari includes all members who can trace their relationship to a common male ancestor, no matter

how remote. All members of the biradari are represented at life-cycle rites. The heads of the various households making up the biradari are represented at meetings known as panchayats (councils) to adjudicate or regulate behaviour of its members.

The biradaris are endogamous units, larger than the kinship groups and the biradari level of an individual is the only clearly defined unit in the caste system. The next point of reference can be differentiated as the regional jati level, the group into which members of the biradari marry. The link between the biradari and the jati levels in the caste system is through marriage or through one's mother's family. The jati in a structural sense is a system of actual or potential networks of affine and cognate kinship ties. Commenting on the significance of the principle of endogamy, Leach wrote that "The endogamy of English social classes is a tendency only and the groups so formed are ill-defined and unnamed; in India, on the other hand, endogamy is a basic principle. This has the consequence that all members of 'my sub-caste' (jati) are my kinsmen and, vice versa, all my kinsmen are members of my sub-caste. The sub-caste groups thus formed are clearly defined. Each individual is born into a particular named group which is the same as that of both his parents and he or she remains a member of that group throughout life" (1968:9).

The principle of endogamy strictly restricts the universe from which a person can choose his or her spouse, and the primary consideration is that he/she must marry within his/her jati. As a result utmost care is taken to see that appropriate persons marry each other. The

norms of endogamy provide a framework that helps to achieve this goal. Values, norms and attitudes concerning caste solidarity are best expressed in relation to marital practices. It is the duty of the biradari panchayat (caste council) to uphold caste dharma (moral and religious obligations) which means regulating the behaviour of caste members. In the case of violation of caste dharma, biradari panchayats have the power to apply the sanction of ex-communication (huqa-pani band which means social boycott). Describing the authority of the biradari over its members, Verity Khan says that "Biradari elders are respected and have power to ensure the cohesion of the group by reprimanding deviants and so maintaining the prestige (izzat) of the group" (1977:61). Kathleen Gough also examined the powers of caste councils. She wrote that "Early in the century, the assembly (panchayat) had the power to ex-communicate from caste Brahmans detected in grave offences against religious law such as fornication with Adi Dravidas, adultery within the caste, or interdining with lower-caste persons, the last case occurred twenty five years ago when a Brahman was forced to leave the village after having sex with a Pollan woman" (1971:37).

The membership in a jati is determined by birth, which means that an individual is assigned his life-long and unalterable status according to his parentage. Intensive and status-equal interaction is limited to the jati which suggests that there is no social mobility within the caste system. Between jatis any kind of interaction which defies the rules of hierarchy is forbidden as it is seen as a challenge to the rank order.

In post-independence India, the struggle for upward mobility and equal rights by the low-caste groups was generated with the promulgation of the new constitution which is based on parliamentary democracy and universal franchise. This dynamic process of change within the social, economic and political structure of Indian society has been described by social scientists as Sanskritization. Defining the process of Sanskritization in Social Change in Modern India (1966), Srinivas wrote that "Sanskritization is the process by which a 'low' Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology, and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently, 'twice-born' caste" (1966:6). Owen Lynch in The Politics of Untouchability questioned the usefulness of the term Sanskritization for explaining the social mobility movements in India. He also examined the alternative strategies followed by the lower castes to achieve a fair share of the valued statuses and economic resources of Indian society. Lynch writes that "My thesis is that political participation for some castes, such as the Jatavs, is replacing and is a functional alternative to Sanskritization and Westernization. This thesis is based on the fact that the political and to some extent the economic and social environment in which Indian castes interact has changed" (1969:7). It is evident from Srinivas's definition of Sanskritization that this strategy is not available to the untouchable caste groups.

The constitution of India rejects the caste system. It has declared the practice of untouchability as a criminal offence. The declaration of universal franchise strikes at the roots of the caste system.

Instead of accepting Sanskritization which is an affirmation of the caste system, the low castes are adopting alternative strategies for social mobility which reject the caste system. For example, the Jatavs (Chamars) of Agra and Mahars (a scheduled caste group) of Maharashtra turned in two directions in their fight for equality, i.e. political participation and conversion to Buddhism, which meant the adoption of an ideology that rejects the caste system.

Theoretically conversion from Hinduism to other religions implies the rejection of the doctrine of varnashramadharm. The practice and presence of caste among the Sikhs, Muslims and Christians of India poses a complex sociological problem. Commenting on this situation, Srinivas wrote that "Caste is an integral part of the traditional Hindu social order. Successive religions and reform movements in India have attacked the caste system, attracting chiefly members of the lowest castes who hoped to move up the social scale. In turn Jains, Sikhs, Muslims and Christians have segmented into caste groups" (1962:103).

The caste system is a living environment to those who comprise it. Caste is people, and especially people interacting and thinking in characteristic ways. Moreover, the caste system is a pattern of relationships, and it is also a state of mind. The force of custom and the hold of caste on the minds of Indians is exceptionally strong. In his article "Changing Legal Conceptions of Caste", Marc <sup>a</sup> Glanter examined the force of custom among Indian communities. Discussing its impact on Hindu converts to Christianity, <sup>a</sup> Glanter says

that "... The effect of this conception of overarching Hindu order is revealed clearly in the case of Michael Pillai v. Barthe. Here a group of Roman Catholic Pillais and Mudalis sued for an injunction to require the Bishop of Trichinopoly to re-erect a wall separating their part of the church from that entered by 'low-caste Christians' and to declare plaintiff's exclusive right to perform services at the altar" (1968:306). Commenting on the attitudes and policies of Anglo-Saxon Protestant missions in India, Duncan Forrester in Caste and Christianity (1980) writes:

Para-churches such as the movement around K. Subba Rao, or the 'anonymous Christians' of Sivakasi, sprang up, composed of people who were believers in Jesus Christ but for a variety of reasons rejected the 'official' church and refused baptism. Their reasons normally included reluctance to belong to a church which was overwhelmingly composed of people from the lowest castes, and refusal to renounce caste. In other cases Christians of a particular caste found the churches' refusal to recognise caste distinctions so offensive that they seceded and established a caste church (1980:200).

The question of the presence of caste among the Indian Muslims has been shrouded in controversy. Those who deny the presence of caste among the Indian Muslims have advanced arguments mainly based on Quranic laws. Imtiaz Ahmad in Family, Kinship and Marriage among Muslims in India (1976) argues against the assumption that there is no caste among the Muslims in India and that caste and kinship are mutually exclusive principles of social organisation. His observations are based on the study of a Muslim village in the state of Uttar Pradesh in India. He states that among the Muslims "The caste (zats) are broadly similar groups, possessing a set of attributes which are closely identical to the ones commonly

associated with caste in India" (1976:326). Nirmal Kumar Bose in his article "Some Aspects of Caste in Bengal" (1959) noted that "The pattern of production associated with caste seems to have been so successful at one time that some Muslims of rural India followed the rule of ranking of occupations, and even of endogamy, in clear contravention of the dictates of Islam" (1959:201). Commenting on the impact of conversion of low caste people to Islam and Christianity, Srinivas observed that "... the converts found that it was not at all easy to shake off their caste and that, in fact, they carried it with them to their new faith or sect" (1968:194). Duncan Forrester also observed the presence of caste among Indian Muslims. He says that "A not dissimilar situation has been noted among Muslims. Indian Muslims are divided into a number of caste-like groups, and these groups are generally indeed regarded as castes by their Hindu neighbours, and allocated a recognised place in the local hierarchy" (1980:12).

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who was chairman of the drafting committee of the Indian constitution and Minister of Law in the Government of India, organised a political party of the scheduled castes known as 'All India Scheduled Castes Federation'. Under his leadership the Mahars (a scheduled caste group) of Maharashtra and Jatavs (Chamars) of Agra converted to Buddhism. Identification with the Scheduled Caste Federation meant joining in the battle for abolishing the caste system. But in practice it promoted caste solidarity and enhanced caste consciousness among the scheduled castes. Under the constitution of India only members of the scheduled castes are eligible to contest the "reserved" seats in parliament and state

legislative assemblies. Consequently, with the introduction of electoral politics, caste organisations have emerged as a new political force. During the general elections, all political parties including the Akali Party (political party of the Sikhs) contest the "reserved" seats by enlisting scheduled caste members. They not only sponsor caste candidates but also organise their election <sup>or</sup> campaigns by appealing for the support of their caste fellows, which has resulted in the enhancement of caste consciousness among the Indian people.

Membership of a caste organisation has acquired a new dimension - it is perceived as an assertion of equal status with other caste groups. The caste organisations have established educational institutions, and they also offer scholarships to their members. Many caste organisations publish journals which concentrate on the intra-caste activities including the publication of matrimonial advertisements for the benefit of their caste members. Increased participation in the political arena and articulation of group interests through the caste organisations indicate the capacity of caste for adaptation and its hold on the social institutions within Indian society. G.N.Ramu in Family and Caste in Urban India (1977) studied the emergence of caste associations in the town of Kolar Gold Fields. Reflecting on the role of caste associations, Ramu notes that "Each of the caste associations maintains an up-to-date list of its members and their families. Officers meet with these individuals or their families with a view to keeping contacts as active as possible. Such occasions may range from consolidating votes for a particular candidate to

generating support for a person in his efforts to gain promotion to a higher post" (1977:163).

The ranking of castes in a village and its local area is the most significant characteristic of the caste system. As caste behaviour is situational, rules about ranking and ritual purity are strictly observed in daily interaction. There is little interdining among members of different castes in a village. High status is symbolised by being able to give food rather than to receive food from other caste groups. For most purposes the highest caste in a village is the landowning group. The notion of ritual purity and pollution is markedly expressed through the residential segregation of the scheduled castes in rural India. Mostly their houses are built on land belonging to the landowning caste, who keep them as bonded agricultural workers. They are excluded from using the common cremation grounds. Sachchi<sup>da</sup>nanda in The Harijan Elite (1977) reported that "Chamars have been beaten for dressing like Rajputs and riding a horse by the untouchable bridegroom for his bridal procession led to the boycott of the caste in question by high caste neighbours" (1977:4). Commenting on the scale of residential segregation in India, Dalip Hiro in his article "Untouchables - even in Britain" wrote that "A recent survey in the state of Maharashtra showed that 90 per cent of the untouchable families lived outside of the village boundaries. Almost all of the present day outcaste residents in Southall who come from India were born in a Harijan (scheduled caste) colony" (The Sunday Observer Magazine, 25th November 1976, p.45).

Usually the Indians living abroad deny the presence of caste among them. And yet one must ask: Why is it that there are no cafés and restaurants owned by scheduled caste families in Britain? Dalip Hiro was amazed to find that "... none of the many Indian cafés and restaurants in Southall is owned by an outcaste" (ibid). It is evident that the negative stereotype of low castes on the part of high castes has a denigrating effect on the low caste groups, even when they live abroad under completely different social and economic conditions. In running cafés and restaurants one is involved in cooking and serving food. In interactional spheres rules of commensality and social distance are strictly observed. Who cooks the food and who is served by whom symbolises caste ranking for Indians. Discussing the impact of caste ranking order on the behaviour of scheduled caste groups, Sachchi<sup>da</sup>nanda wrote that "The groups (scheduled castes) are not equal in social status. They are arranged in strictly hierarchical order as caste sub-units and they practice untouchability among themselves. They would not eat together or accept water from the hands of other 'untouchables', nor do they allow intermarriage among different groups... The 'untouchables' of U.P. consider the 'untouchables' of Punjab lower than themselves" (1977:5).

Values, norms and attitudes concerning caste are best expressed in relation to marital practices. The practice of endogamy ensures that the boundaries of caste remain clearly marked. Discussing the significance of the institution of marriage for the Jatav community of Agra, Lynch says that "It (marriage) is the event which is most

ritually elaborate and, since Jatav society is endogamous, it is the rite and event which most symbolizes and re-inforces the internal unity of the caste on the one hand and its external separateness from other castes on the other" (1969:175).

Attitudes towards inter-caste marriages clearly reflect the significance of caste status within the Indian social structure. As castes are the most extensive kin groups, so they are the maximal limit of the <sup>a</sup> marriage network. Marriage and sex relations are the most strictly regulated area of behaviour in the caste system, because caste membership is determined by birth. If one marries inappropriately, one threatens the status of all future members of one's caste by introducing unacceptable ancestry into the group. Marriage between persons of different caste statuses is not considered legitimate and thus it is not socially recognised. When asked to comment on the marriage of his daughter to a son of an untouchable, Dalip Hiro's Brahman informant in Southall denied altogether that he had a daughter. Expressing his feelings about inter-caste marriages, he said that "I do not support the idea of untouchability; but marriage between a Hindu and an outcaste is something reprehensible" (The Sunday Observer Magazine, 25th November 1976, p.45).

The process of industrialization and urbanization has brought about significant changes in the social and economic structure of India, particularly in the post-independence period. A large number of people from rural areas have moved into industrial jobs and got

themselves released from the strangle-hold of the jaimani system. Workers belonging to different caste groups work together in new factories. This has minimised the effect of caste ranking, at least on the factory floor. The process of industrialization has generated forces of change and effected modernization of certain facets of traditional culture. In industrial towns new residential colonies provide accommodation for residents belonging to different caste groups. Increased use of modern transport, educational institutions and opportunities in the industrial and professional occupations have also contributed towards modernising the traditional value system in certain spheres of social interaction. S.K. Kuthiala in From Tadtion to Modernity (1973) studied the impact of industrial jobs on workers from the rural areas. He observed that "When a Harijan (scheduled caste person) comes to the factory where he is relatively unknown, he enters another status in which his caste position is almost ignored. However, in social rituals he remains bound to the rules of caste, such as those in regard to marriage, eating and drinking habits, and relationships with men of his caste" (1973:53).

Despite the changes brought about by industrialization and the ideology of political democracy and positive discrimination, the persistence of traditional cultural values clearly indicates the emergence of resilience in the caste system. This is also revealed by the increased involvement of caste associations in the management of educational and other cultural resources and the opportunities offered by the contemporary changes in the political sphere. In urban areas modern media of communication are being used for the

propagation of traditional culture. The process of urbanization not only has a modernising impact on social life in India, but it also tends to reinforce tradition. Sachchidananda notes that "...in towns it is difficult for even well-to-do members of the scheduled castes to get a house in a decent residential locality" (1977:162). In modern professions the high caste members show resentment towards the entry of scheduled caste people into their ranks. Listing the causes of this resentment Sachchidananda states that "This resentment stems from three causes viz. deep seated hatred towards the scheduled castes, increased competition, and jealousy on account of protective discrimination in their favour" (1977:166).

Hereditary identification which is based on one's ascriptive status still scores much higher than achieved status. In the matter of religious practices most high caste Hindus discriminate against the scheduled caste members on the basis of ritual purity. Although there are no restrictions on the entry of scheduled caste members into Hindu temples, the hostility against them is shown in other forms. Sachchidananda reported the case of a scheduled caste member of the state legislative assembly who told him that "Once I went to offer parshad (ritual food) in a temple of Lord Mahabir. At the time of returning the parshad the priest came to know my caste. As a result the priest dropped the parshad on the floor of the temple, instead of handing it to me. I wanted to know the reasons of it. The priest told me that the Harjans are not entitled to get such privileges in this temple. This was quite irritating. In anger, I threw the parshad near

the priest and filed a suit against him. Later on, when he apologised for his behaviour, I dropped the case" (1977:64).

Caste as an important aspect of Indian culture has not only increased in strength, but also assumed new functions in contemporary India. The use of the caste idiom is widespread, though the notion of hierarchy is being challenged by the low castes. At a micro-level caste is seen as an extension of the kinship system, and the joint family is the most crucial institution in the perpetuation of caste culture. Caste has shown great potential for adaptation to new developments such as universal franchise, industrialization and urbanisation. It is still one of the significant institutions by which many groups enter the electoral system in India. Caste organisations mobilize caste sentiments and thus tend to enhance one's caste consciousness. The practice of endogamy ensures that the boundaries of caste and ritual hierarchy are properly maintained.

The major features of the caste system are also present among the Sikhs. We shall now discuss the existing literature on caste among Sikhs based on research undertaken by both Sikh and non-Sikh authors.

#### 1.2 Caste among Sikhs as discussed by Sikh authors.

There exists a vast literature on normative Sikhism written by Sikh scholars and it is generally believed that the Sikhs are a casteless brotherhood based on the Khalsa discipline, initiated by their tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, and the teachings of their ten Gurus. On closer

investigation one finds, however, that instead of a single Sikh community, there is a situation of complex plurality. The Leeds Sikh community, for example, consists of several separate caste groups, i.e. the Jats, Ramgarhias, Bhatras, Jhirs, Julahas, Khattris, and Chamars which will be discussed in detail in a later chapter.

At present, there are very few studies which critically examine the social structure of the Sikh community, whether in India or abroad. A survey of the existing studies is vital for our research regarding questions of methodology, the presence of caste groups and the emergence of caste-based institutions among the Sikhs in India and overseas. Raminder Singh in his study The Sikh Community in Bradford (1978) examines three aspects of the presence of Sikhs in Bradford. His main concerns are to give some account of the socio-economic position of the Sikhs in Bradford, to comment on the internal organisation, politics and leadership of the community, and to study the intra-community relationships and reaction of the Sikhs to their social and economic environment. With regard to methodology Singh writes that "The writer has lived within the community in Bradford for the last twelve years and has participated in the organisation of that community. It is, therefore, natural to have chosen the 'participant observer' method of research for this study" (1978:1). Singh also gives a useful account of the size of the Sikh population in Bradford which was based on a count of 700 Sikh households from the electoral register of the city for the year 1977-78. The total population of the Sikhs in Bradford was estimated to be just under 5,000 in 1978. Singh further notes that male Sikhs can be recognised

by their turbans, beards and the surname 'Singh', and Sikh women by their universal surname 'Kaur'. By using these criteria Singh seems to have excluded Chamar Sikhs from his survey as the overwhelming majority of Chamars do not use 'Singh' or 'Kaur' as a surname. The size of the Ravidasi (Chamar) community estimated by our informants, the leaders of the Ravidas Sabha, was just under 500, comprising 65-70 households in Bradford. Commenting on the existence of caste-based groups among the Sikhs in Bradford, Singh writes that "Although Sikhism officially deprecates the Hindu caste system, and preaches the equality of all men before God, it has not in practice stopped the organisation of families in caste-like occupational groups. These caste-groups are significant only in terms of social relationships affecting for instance, marriages within the community groups (1978:26).

Singh identifies three main Sikh caste groups in Bradford: a) Jat-Sikhs - members of the rural peasantry and the farming community, who are rural overlords of the lower castes; b) Rangarhia-Sikhs - the village artisans, Tarkhans, (carpenters) and Lohars (blacksmiths) who have come to Britain either directly from the Punjab or from East African countries; c) Ad-dharmi Sikhs - mainly Chamars, who were the landless agricultural labourers or shoemakers in the villages or small wage earners in towns. These separate caste groups remain and function as caste-knit social units in Bradford because of the kinship ties or village fellow-feelings between these groups (ibid:26). Singh also acknowledges the perceived dominant status of the Jat Sikhs within the Sikh community in Bradford and in the

Punjab. He says that "Even in Bradford, as is the case in the Punjab, whatever the socio-economic status of a Jat Sikh in the eyes of others, he still aggressively believes himself to be a Jat" (ibid:27). Discussing community organisation, politics and leadership within the Sikh community in Bradford, Singh notes that "At present the management committee of the Guru Gobind Singh Gurdwara is dominated by Jat-Sikhs and Ramgarhia-Sikhs have the major influence on the management of Guru Nanak Gurdwara" (ibid:28). It is also confirmed by my own findings that Ravidasi Sikhs in Bradford had no influence on the managing committees of these gurdwaras.

Singh provides useful information regarding the existence of caste organisations of the Ramgarhia Sikhs and Ravidasi Sikhs in Bradford. Commenting on their activities, he says that "The Ramgarhia Board, a national organisation of Ramgarhia Sikhs, has a local branch in Bradford. The membership is very limited and its activities are confined to this caste group. There is a similar organisation of Ad-dharmi Sikhs called Ravidas Sabha. The activities of this organisation are limited to the celebration of the birth of Bhagat Ravidas, who was a Chamar by caste and whose writings are included in the Guru Granth Sahib" (ibid:29). Since the publication of Singh's study in 1978 these organisations have established their own gurdwaras based on caste affiliation: one is called Ramgarhia Sikh Temple and the other is Ravidas Bhawan. The emergence of these institutions along caste lines indicates the primacy of caste among the Sikhs. Commenting on the development of caste consciousness among the Sikh community in Bradford, Singh writes that "The situation also

appears to be leading to a kind of animosity between Ramgarhia Sikhs, particularly from East Africa, and Jat Sikhs from the sub-continent, which has been observed in Southall, Birmingham and some other cities, where they have established separate gurdwaras" (ibid:27).

Singh makes interesting comments on the nature of the sangat (religious congregation). He says that "the sangat is a democratic religious institution in Sikhism where each individual has the right to express his views freely" (ibid:28). I have found that there is not one sangat in Bradford or in Leeds, but many sangats, some of which are based on caste loyalties. The managing committee of the Ramgarhia Sikh Temple and Ravidas Bhawan are elected by the members of these organisations who happen to be their caste fellows. Moreover, these institutions promote the welfare of their caste members and thus function as vehicles <sup>for</sup> strengthening caste solidarity. The membership of these institutions, according to their constitutions, is restricted to members of one caste only. These facts contradict Singh's assertion of the nature of sangat as a democratic institution for all, irrespective of caste. On the question of the system of arranged marriage Singh's findings that "90 per cent of the Sikh parents and 60 per cent of the young people favour the idea" (ibid:45) are an indication of the intentions of the Sikh community to make use of their traditional institutions. The strength of the feelings about the usefulness of the institution of arranged marriage implicitly demonstrate the primacy of loyalty to their caste groups.

Thomas's and Ghuman's study A Survey of Social and Religious Attitudes among Sikhs in Cardiff (1976) is also relevant to the issues examined in this study. It not only raises important questions of methodology but its special significance lies in the fact that it was conducted by a team of two researchers, a non-Sikh and a Sikh. Writing about the usefulness of this partnership Terry Thomas, in the preface, says that "We feel that to give this information is necessary because of our belief that useful research in this area is best accomplished through the team work of researchers, one of whom is part of the host culture but has a sympathetic understanding of in this case Punjabi culture and one of whom has been brought up and educated in the culture to be studied and therefore knows it from inside - besides, of course, speaking the language. This is a very problematic area of research, because of people's natural reticence, suspicion and prejudices and we believe that in combining our two perspectives we might give a more valid picture of the life style of the Bhatra group" (Thomas and Ghuman 1976).

In spite of the fact that the team had a Sikh member, they were not able to gain the complete trust of the community which is evident from the replies of their informants. Thomas and Ghuman admit that "there are features of the group which are extremely difficult for an outsider to penetrate, even for another Sikh" (ibid:6). The Sikh researcher was a member of the Jat Sikh caste who originated from Doaba (district Jullundar and Hoshiarpur), which is not the traditional homeland of Bhatra Sikhs in the Punjab. The importance of knowing the Punjabi language has been rightly emphasised in Thomas

and Ghuman's study. Almost all interviews were conducted in Punjabi by one member of the team. Thomas's and Ghuman's observations on the interior of Bhatra homes is most useful as it is an indication of Bhatra perceptions of their religious tradition. They note that "The walls, however, were hung with an abundance of brilliantly coloured pictures of Sikh Gurus and Hindu deities, co-existing happily with coloured posters of Indian film stars (ibid:29). I also witnessed the same pattern in most Sikh homes in Leeds and Bradford. It suggests that most Sikhs have faith in the great tradition of India and do not see anything wrong in having pictures of Sikh Gurus, Hindu deities and their local holy men in the same room. It is a reflection of their daily beliefs and practices which are often far removed from the normative religion.

Thomas's and Ghuman's findings on the control of the gurdwara by Bhatra Sikhs are also significant. They were informed that many gurdwaras were originally exclusively Bhatra, but as later immigrants moved in, control became shared, and it was eventually lost completely. Hence the subsequent decision in Cardiff to ensure that only Bhatras were eligible for membership of the gurdwara which resulted in complete control of the gurdwara by Bhatras. My informants who have come from East Africa put forward the same arguments when they began to organise the Ramgarhia Board in Leeds. Their argument was that "we built the gurdwaras in East Africa, but in the end they were taken over by the Jat Sikhs. Then we decided to build our own biradari (caste) gurdwaras to ensure that the control remained in the hands of our biradari members".

Thomas's and Ghuman's statement about the composition of the Sikh community in Britain is misleading, however, when they claim that "the Sikhs in this country are from three groups based on caste divisions, Jats, Rangarhias and Bhatras" (ibid:11). To take the example of Leeds and Bradford alone, I have identified eight caste groups within the Sikh community here. Commenting on the role of the kinship group among the Bhatra Sikhs, Thomas and Ghuman write that "The kinship group is perpetuated by marriage, which is usually within the group. ...And the wedding party is an important statement of kinship ties: the kinship group is reinforced by the carefully drawn up list of invitations" (ibid:32). I have also found that almost all Sikh marriages in Leeds have been arranged according to the rules of caste endogamy. Moreover, pre-wedding and wedding rituals are meticulously observed in which participation by the members of the kinship group is a vital factor, which automatically consolidates caste ties.

Thomas and Ghuman also comment on the role of the national organisation of Bhatra Sikhs when they note that "the dowry system has not been allowed to get out of control - a U.K. conference of Bhatras some years ago laid down the guidelines for the amount of dowry to be given" (ibid:32). In Leeds, too, I have found that the national Council of Rangarhias approved a similar resolution modifying the rules of got avoidance, the amount of dowry given as well as the number of members of a barat (wedding party). The Jhir Sikhs formed their national organisation called Kashyap Rajput Sabha, to reform the social customs of their biradari (caste group). The

Ravidas Sabha of U.K. is a national organisation of the Chamar Sikhs which co-ordinates the activities of local branches. These national organisations are institutions of social control which perpetuate caste solidarity. Discussing the significance of the role of the biradari among Bhatra Sikhs, Thomas and Ghuman write that "...But even in such severe cases (rift between husband and wife) of disharmony, the influence of the kinship group is such that reconciliation is usually (practically always) effected without recourse to law, which is, in fact, considered to be a source of deep shame and a terrible blow to the good name of the family" (ibid:33).

Thomas and Ghuman found that "Membership of the gurdwara is restricted strictly to members of the Bhatra biradari (brotherhood) and safeguarded by the terms of the trust deed" (ibid:44). My examination of the constitutions of the Ramgarhia Board, Ravidas Bhawan and Indian Farmers Welfare Society confirm these findings which are significant for understanding the role of biradari organisations among the Sikhs.

Avtar Brah's article "South Asian teenagers in Southall: their perceptions of marriage, family and ethnic identity" (1978) deals with the attitudes of 15-16 year-old Asians towards the institutions of joint family and arranged marriage. Brah says that "Marriages are typically arranged with a view to cementing ties between families of similar status. Among the Hindus and the Sikhs, caste endogamy ...is practised" (1978:197).

Harjinder Singh in Authority and Influence in Two Sikh Villages (1976) examined the social and economic structure of the Sikh communities in two Punjabi villages. He identifies the presence of several caste groups including the Jat Sikhs who are the principal landowners in these villages. He also provides useful information concerning the jaimani relationships and residential segregation of the low caste Sikhs. Commenting on the caste structure in the village of Rupalon, Harjinder Singh says that "The Jats in the village are Sikhs by religion. Being the principal landowners, the Jats enjoy very high social position (izzat) in the village community...Mazhbi Sikhs are Chuhra (sweeper) converts to Sikhism...Mazhbi Sikhs worship Balmik on the one hand and all Sikh Gurus on the other. Being a scheduled caste and landless class, they are accorded the lowest social position in the village" (1976:45-49).

Inder P. Singh's article "A Sikh Village" (1959) examined the social and economic structure of the village of Daleke which is situated at a distance of twenty mile from Amritsar. Describing the caste hierarchy in this village, Inder P. Singh writes that "All the families belonging to castes like Jat, Kamboh, Kumhar, Tarkhan, Cimba and Nai profess faith in Sikhism; all the Mazhbis are also Sikhs" (1959:273). Khushwant Singh in The History of the Sikhs (1963) gives a brief account of the social structure of Punjabi villages. He writes that "... Every Jat village was a small republic made up of people of kindred blood who were as conscious of absolute equality between themselves as they were of their superiority over men of other castes who earned their livelihood as weavers, potters,

cobblers, or scavengers" (1963:15). Commenting on the practice of caste endogamy by the Sikhs, Khushwant Singh in The Sikhs (1953) says that "Sikhism has not broken the caste system successfully, since prohibitions on intermarriage between the castes continue even after the Sikhs convert from different Hindu castes" (1953:45-46).

J.S.Grewal in his article "The Sikh Movement - A Historical Note" (1977) examined the social structure of Punjabi society during Sikh political rule. He says that "...if we look at the Sikh social order of the Sikh times we find the return of the kind of stratification which Guru Nanak had witnessed in his own times. There was the royalty at the top, followed by Sardars (chiefs) and rich Jagirdars (landlords), peasantry and trading communities, artisans and craftsmen, and even landless labourers and domestic servants. An eighteenth century Sikh writer, expounding an ideal Sikh social order, even visualized slavery in the future Sikh State" (1977:162). Jagjit Singh in Perspectives on Sikh Studies (1985) examined the historical development of the Sikh movement. He refutes the view that the militarization of the Sikh movement was initiated and reinforced by the influx of a large number of Jats. Commenting on the social interaction between Sikh caste groups, he admits that "...Sikhs derived from all castes, excepting Mazhbis, interdine. Therefore, the Sikhs from artisan and menial categories face no social discrimination excepting that they find reluctance on the part of Jat, Khatri, Arora and Rangarhia Sikhs to intermarry with them (1985:71).

Parminder Bhachu's study Twice Migrants: East African Sikh Settlers In Britain (1985) provides an ethnographic account of one Sikh artisan caste group, the Ramgarhias. Her study is of direct relevance to my thesis, as most Ramgarhia Sikhs in Leeds have come from East Africa. They are the largest caste group among the Sikh community in Leeds. Bhachu gives a comprehensive analysis of the social structure of the Sikh community in East Africa, including the development of biradari institutions, i.e. the Ramgarhia associations, Ramgarhia gurdwaras and Ramgarhia Sikh schools. Discussing the significance of caste identity for the Ramgarhia Sikhs, Bhachu says that "The greater emphasis on maintaining external symbols, and the religiosity of the East Africans, runs parallel to the positive perpetuation of their Ramgarhia identity, especially obvious in Southall. On the whole, only Ramgarhias attend Ramgarhia temples; thus their caste status is clearly represented" (1985:51). Commenting on the practice of caste endogamy by the Ramgarhia Sikhs, Bhachu notes that "...they had been able to maintain their community intact through traditionally-arranged endogamous marriages. This helped group formation, and the development of the community on caste lines, and also led to the perpetuation of the traditional values with which they migrated" (1985:6-7).

G.S. Reehal in his book History of the Ramgarhias (1979) deals with the emergence of the Ramgarhia Sikh identity among the Hindu Tarkhans (carpenters) in the Punjab. He traces the entry of the Ramgarhias into the Sikh Panth (society) since the first meeting of Guru Nanak with Bhai Lalo (carpenter disciple of Guru Nanak). He also examines

the reasons for establishing Ramgarhia gurdwaras and Ramgarhia Sabhas (associations) both in India and abroad (1979:239-254). P.S. Kapur's study Jassa Singh Ramgarhia (19<sup>72</sup>) is a biographical account of one of the leaders of twelve Sikh mils (armed groups) who were responsible for the establishment of Sikh rule in the Punjab in the late eighteenth century. He provides valuable information concerning the origin of the title of Ramgarhia and of the contribution made by the Tarkhan Sikhs to the development of Sikh tradition.

Hindbalraj Singh studied the Bhatra Sikh community in Bristol. He gives an interesting account of the origin of the name Bhatra and the entry of Bhatras into Sikh society. He also examines the settlement of Bhatra Sikhs in Britain (1977). Sharan-Jeet Shan in her autobiography In My Own Name (1985) provides valuable insight into traditional Punjabi culture. She examines the link between the institution of arranged marriage and the family izzat (honour) among the Sikhs. Commenting on the gap between normative and operative Sikhism, Shan writes: "Sikhism has been conceived as the embodiment of the best of Islam and Hinduism, and equality and the brotherhood of man was preached most frequently. Yet my friends and playmates came under my father's scrutiny constantly. He would not let me play with the children of our mehry, the woman who collected the rubbish and cleaned the toilets" (1985:9). Cole and Sambhi in The Sikhs: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices (1978) make a brief comment on the presence of caste among the Sikhs. They write that "The place of caste in Sikhism is a matter of dispute. In Britain there are gurdwaras under the effective control of particular groups - Jat,

Ramgarhia, or Bhatra...It is in marriage relationships that caste is seen to be most important, especially in Britain, but doubtless in many Indian villages community politics is dominated by the majority caste group" (1978:166). N.S. Mahi in The Teachings of Guru Ravidas (no date) examines the teachings of Ravidas and the caste system of India. He writes that "Guru Ravidas Ji never felt ashamed to tell the world, who he was and faced the Brahmans without any fear of caste. He told them that the spiritual greatness can be achieved through a loving devotion to the ever true God. He boldly proclaimed: nagar jana meri jat bikhiat Chamaran (everyone knows I am a cobbler by trade and tanner by caste)" (p.11).

It is evident from the literature surveyed here that there are few studies by Sikh scholars which critically examine the problem of caste observance by the Sikhs. In order to gain a fuller understanding of the persistence of caste among Sikhs, further studies by non-Sikh scholars will be surveyed in the following section.

### 1.3 Caste among Sikhs as discussed by non-Sikh authors.

The fact that Sikhs actually possess castes has received relatively little attention in the literature, as most Sikh and non-Sikh scholars tend to either deny or simply ignore the existence of caste among the Sikhs. Commenting on the attitude of Sikh scholars on Sikhism, Niharranjan Ray in his book The Sikh Gurus and the Sikh Society (1975) observes that "Most writers and scholars of our time,

who belong to the Sikh persuasion<sup>S</sup>, have expressed themselves more as apologists of the faith and the society they belong to, than as objective and knowledgeable interpreters of them" (1975:124). Joyce Pettigrew in her study Robber Noblemen (1975) writes that "In the Punjab, however, the Sikh community officially and in its system of religious belief repudiates the concept of caste. It also shows no recognition of hierarchy as such" (1975:45). But in her discussion of social interaction between the Jat Sikhs and their labourers, Pettigrew admits that "The only custom in which any solidarity was expressed among the Jats on a caste basis was that in the village they did not visit the houses of Mazhbis, take food from them or intermarry with them" (1975:44). Commenting on the discussion of caste among Sikhs by Marian Smith, Ethne Marenco in her book The Transformation of Sikh Society (1976) notes that "Marian Smith in her various publications, describes the denial of the Hindu principle of caste among the Sikhs, along with the existence of features of caste, one of which is functional specialization" (1976:1).

Studies of the social structure of Punjabi society undertaken by British administrators are a valuable source of published information on detailed descriptions of castes and local customs.. Of these the most comprehensive are Denzil Ibbetson's Census Report for the Punjab (1883), and <sup>H.A.</sup><sub>L</sub> Rose's A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province (1914). Henry Prinsep's work on the Origin of the Sikh Power in Punjab and the Political Life of Muha-raja Ranjeet Singh (1834) provides a detailed account of the manners, rules and customs of the Sikhs in the appendix written by

Captain W. Murray. Commenting on the rules of caste endogamy, Murray writes that "Intermarriages between the Jat Sikh chiefs, and the Ahluwalia and Rangarhia families, do not obtain, the latter being Kalals and Thokas (mace-bearers and carpenters" (1834:164). Malcolm Darling's study The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt (1925) is a rich source of information on the social history of Punjab. It examines the role of traditional occupations of the various caste groups in Punjabi society. He also provides a wealth of detail concerning different castes encountered on his travels as Registrar of co-operative societies.

Hew McLeod's book The Evolution of the Sikh Community (1976) consists of five essays on the evolution of the Sikh community. In the fifth essay, McLeod provides a critical analysis of caste in the Sikh Panth (society). Commenting on the presence of caste in Sikh society, McLeod says that "Inevitably the stress in this essay has been placed upon caste diversity of the Panth and on the fact that notions of status based on caste are by no means extinct within it" (1976:104). In his earlier study "Ahluwalias and Rangarhias: Two Sikh Castes" (1974) McLeod examines the contribution of two Sikh artisan castes in the establishment of Sikh rule in the Punjab. Ray in his study The Sikh Gurus and the Sikh Society (1975) presents a social analysis of the factors and forces concerning the origin and evolution of Sikh society. Commenting on the social structure of Sikh society, Ray writes that "... when one goes today to, and scans an average Sikh village one finds what one may characterize as a clear picture of jati hierarchy, not very much unlike what one sees in a so-called

Hindu village" (1975:22). Marengo's study The Transformation of Sikh Society (1976) is an inquiry into the social stratification of the Sikhs, with special reference to the existence of caste. Marengo argues that "The Sikh social structure has never been clearly analysed in relation to caste, since the religious dogma of the Sikhs was brought into existence to do away with the Hindu caste system" (1976:1). Marengo's description of the Ramgarhias as a sub-caste of the Tarkhan Sikhs is misleading. She writes that "The Ramgarhias were at first a sub-caste, and later a caste by themselves" (1976:37). In fact the terms Ramgarhia Sikhs and Tarkhan Sikhs are used for one and the same Sikh caste of artisans in the Punjab. In daily social interaction people prefer the title of Ramgarhia which is genuinely regarded as more respectable than that of Tarkhan Sikh because the latter refers directly to an occupation (carpenter).

Mark Juergensmeyer in his article "Cultures of Deprivation: Three Case Studies in Punjab" (1979) deals with the social status of low caste Sikhs in Punjabi villages. Describing the religious identity of the Chamars, Juergensmeyer writes that "The Chamars are regarded as Sikh by the upper castes, since the Chamars wear the turban and keep the other customary observances of Sikhs. But the Chamars have double, even triple, religious affiliations. In addition to their Sikh identities, the Chamars claim to be Ad Dharm, recalling the name of a Punjab Scheduled Caste religious movement earlier in the century and they use the term 'Ad Dharm' as their caste name" (1979:259). Schermerhorn in Ethnic Plurality in India (1978) studied the Sikh community as one of the mobilized groups in India. Discussing the

presence of caste among the Sikhs, he writes that "...With the passage of time, caste eventually became embedded to a greater degree in the structure of the Sikh community, though to a lesser degree than occurred among the Jains" (1978:136). Izmirlian's study Structure and Strategy in Sikh Society (1979) deals with the political alliances and caste in a Sikh village. Commenting on the private and public worlds of a village politician, Izmirlian writes that "Master Gurdial Singh was born a Ramgarhia in 1915. The reality of this caste identification surrounds him like a shroud because Ramgarhias are carpenters and viewed as menials by Jat-Sikh agriculturists" (1979:72). Describing the practice of caste endogamy by the residents of the village of Nelli, he notes that "Rules of marriage are endogamous with respect to caste and exogamous with respect to the village in which one is born and the clan to which one belongs" (1979:107).

Paul Hershman's study Punjabi Kinship and Marriage (1981) provides a detailed analysis of caste categorisation in the village of Randhawa. His findings reject the notion of a casteless brotherhood among the Sikhs. Hershman also makes important comments on issues concerning methodology. He asserts that an anthropologist's best information comes from entering into a privileged position within close groups inside a particular society. But he warns against the limitations imposed by such relationship. Describing his experience in the village of Randhawa, Hershman writes that "...throughout my fieldwork, I lived in a household of a single Brahman family. I battled to enter closed groups of other castes, especially Tanners

and Jats but I think that ultimately I lost this battle because of my personal commitment to the Brahman family with whom I lived. The defeat, however, taught many important lessons about the nature of caste and the meaning of Punjabi kinship relations" (1981:8).

Arthur Helweg in his book Sikhs in England (1979) gives a historical profile of the Jat Sikh community in Gravesend. Commenting on the caste hierarchy in Punjabi villages, Helweg writes that "These Sikhs originate from a small-scale peasant society where resources and self-esteem stem from birth, land and kinsmen. Initially, their concerns were limited to their villages, where the society was divided into groups with specialized functions determined by birth. The dominant high caste Jats, a proud people, have always controlled the land, economic resources, and political activities in their villages. Being a landowner has always been a symbol of 'Jatness' and royalty" (1979:ix). Helweg's terminology for the poor and rich families of Jandiali village is misleading. He says that "Although more research needs to be done in this realm, as a general rule, elderly people from prestigious families are not as likely to emigrate as the elders of relatively low izzat families" (1979:33). Helweg does not properly comprehend the cultural meanings of the phrase 'low izzat' (low honour), which has nothing to do with economic status. In Punjabi society, a family is regarded as having 'low izzat' if they marry their daughters into low caste families, and accept brides from lower castes or deal in the sale of daughters.

Tom Kessinger in his study Vilyatpur 1848-1968: Social and Economic Change in a North Indian Village (1974) discusses the social and economic history of a Sikh village situated in the district of Jullundar. Kessinger provides valuable information concerning the caste structure and jaimani relationships in Vilyatpur. Commenting on the caste hierarchy in Punjabi villages, Kessinger writes that "The settlement and organisation of villages in the Punjab is so much the product of caste structure, that an account of Vilyatpur's origin must start with a description of the caste which settled it" (1974:34). Describing the ritual aspect of jaimani system, Kessinger notes that "...The supply of goods and services was not the only aspect of the patron-client relationship, nor did the sepidar's earnings through the performance of a defined range of tasks represent their only income...They played a role in the rituals conducted at celebrations in a patron's house. At a marriage, for instance, the Barber in particular, but also the Water-carrier, Chamar and Sweeper, had specific duties for which they were rewarded" (1974:57).

Satish Saberwal in his book Mobile Men: Limits to Social Change in Urban Punjab (1976) focuses on the patterns of social, economic and political mobility among three caste groups in an industrial town of Punjab. Saberwal provides a detailed account of the emergence of Ramgarhia Sikh identity and the marriage arrangements between the Ramgarhias and Dhimans (Hindu carpenters). Commenting on the significance of Ramgarhia identity, Saberwal writes that "The Ramgarhia achievements in recent decades, however, make membership in

this category a matter of some pride to most Ramgarhias, but this identity finds expression in other ways also. Most marriages are within the caste: one's kindred is part of one's caste, and therefore at a marriage or a death one's castemates inevitably loom large" (1976:109). Describing the caste status of the Ramgarhia Sikhs, Saberwal says that "Sharing the pattern common to North India, the late 19th-century status system in a Punjabi village would have ranked the artisans (Lohar, Tarkhan) above the 'polluted' menials (Chuhra, Chamar), but clearly below the landowners (Jat, Raiput, etc.)" (1976:86).

Bruce LaBrack in his article "Sikhs Real and Ideal" (1979) comments on the studies in which Punjabi Sikhs and Sikhism have been discussed. He puts the authors of these studies into two categories: lumpers and splitters. Commenting on the position of the lumpers, LaBrack writes that "Lumpers emphasise the undeniable presence of a caste system (ideology notwithstanding) including prescriptive and proscriptive marriage rules, arranged marriage, and colour consciousness. They point to the residual purity-pollution concerns, jajmani relationships, and a tendency towards eclecticism in the practice of village or 'Little Tradition' Sikhism as proof that Sikhs and Sikhism are but one, albeit major, variant on the 'Hindu' pattern" (1979:129). Whilst describing the position of the splitters, LaBrack notes that "They maximize social, linguistic, and regional differences, emphasise the considerable achievements of the Sikhs, inadvertently or deliberately mythologize Sikh history, and even attribute 'innate' talents to Sikhs as a corporate body...all the

while marveling at their energy and adaptability. This view is often quite close to the British stereotype of the 'martial races'. A large number of Sikh historians are found in this group, some of them non-Sikh themselves" (ibid:130). Roger and Catherine Ballard in their article "The Sikhs: The Development of South Asian Settlement in Britain" (1977) comment briefly on the presence of caste among the Sikhs. Referring to the social structure of Punjabi society, they write that "In most villages at least half of the population are owner-cultivators, typically of the Jat caste, and they are normally members of a single patrilineage, the bhaichara, or brotherhood...Secondly, there are the medium ranking craftsmen and service castes, about 15 percent of the population, of whom the largest group are the Rangarhias" (1977:26).

Marie M. de Lepervanche in her study Indians in a White Australia (1984) also briefly examines the social structure of Indian society. Commenting on the significance of caste and kinship relationships, de Lepervanche writes that "The topic of caste is relevant to any discussion of Indian kinship and marriage. Even though the Sikh religion refuses to uphold the distinctions of caste, Sikhism has not succeeded in breaking the system" (1984:143). Commenting on the caste hierarchy within Punjabi villages, she notes that "...among Sikhs, Jat landowners form the dominating caste of Punjabi society and consider themselves superior to the Khatris and Aroras (middlemen, shopkeepers and businessmen) and to the scheduled castes or Mazhbis, which include the Chamars who work in lowly occupations with leather or as hired labour for farms" (1984:145). Bharati in his article

"Ideology and Content of Caste among Indians in East Africa" (1967) discussed the importance of caste endogamy for the Indian communities in East Africa. He states that "Within the Sikh society in East Africa, there was no intermarriage between the Ramgarhias and Jats" (1967:316).

Thompson in his article "The Second Generation - Punjabi or English?" (1974) discusses the position of second-generation Jat Sikh Punjabis in Coventry. Commenting on the practice of caste endogamy among the Jat Sikhs, Thompson writes that "As in the Punjab, marriage continues to be an alliance between families as much as a union of men and women, and continues to involve the whole family's reputation and status, the family izzat. All the values of Punjabi village society are epitomized in the marriage ceremonies" (1974:245). Nesbitt in her study Aspects of the Sikh Tradition in Nottingham (1980) examines caste as one of the most significant factors determining<sup>w</sup> cultural continuity among the Sikhs and rejects the notion that the Sikhs are a casteless brotherhood. Commenting on the presence of caste among the Sikhs, Nesbitt writes that "Study of the Sikh community necessitates considering many variables which dictate or influence the diverse attitudes and patterns of adaptation observable in individuals and families. Caste is one such variable. It would therefore be theoretically unsound for the researcher to accept that caste has disappeared" (1980:50). Rajiv Kapur in his book Sikh Separatism: The Politics of Faith (1986) examines the evolution of Sikh identity. Describing the caste hierarchy within Sikh society, Kapur states that "The Sikh Gurus were all Hindu khatris by caste,

but since its inception the Sikh community contained a large proportion of Sikhs of the Jat caste" (1986:5). Rose in his book Colour and Citizenship (1969) points out that "Caste does survive amongst the Sikhs in the Punjab in a residual form. It represents relics of an occupational hierarchy and a remnant of the Hindu caste system retained by some groups after conversion to the Sikh religion" (1969:55).

This chapter has reviewed the literature which deals with the study of caste among Sikhs or at least refers to the existence of caste among the Sikhs in India and Britain. Although relatively few in number, these studies provide much empirical evidence to refute the view that the Sikhs are a casteless brotherhood as, according to their teachings, they profess to be. It is also clear that an analysis of the social and economic structure of Sikh society is vital for understanding the operation of the caste system in the sense that endogamous groups organise their relationships with one another through idioms of ritual purity and avoidance behaviour. This will become evident in the following chapter where I discuss caste in Sikh teachings and its existence in practice.

## CHAPTER 2

### CASTE IN SIKH TEACHING AND PRACTICE

#### 2.1 The Gurus on caste.

In order to understand the presence and persistence of caste among the Sikhs, it is important to locate the Sikh tradition within Punjabi society where it first developed. The origins of the Sikh movement have to be traced to the first Sikh Guru, Nanak Dev, and to his reaction to the religious, social and political environment of the fifteenth and sixteenth century Punjab. Guru Nanak challenged the traditional value system of the Hindus as well as the dogmatic practices of Muslim mullas (religious preachers) who had the moral and political support of the Muslim rulers in India. In The Sikh Gurus and the Sikh Society (1975) Niharranjan Ray says of Guru Nanak that "...He was a man of deep and sharp socio-political consciousness, wide awake to what was happening in the world around him, and constantly applying his mind to the facts, situations and problems of the time and place he belonged to" (1975:50).

Guru Nanak was born into a caste-ridden society in which individual status was ascribed on the basis of one's birth in a particular jat (caste). For Guru Nanak the supreme purpose of human existence was

salvation, that is, deliverance from the chain of death and re-birth. This salvation was the birthright of all mankind, irrespective of caste, creed or sex. Guru Nanak enunciated his attitude towards caste status in a well-known couplet:

phakar jati phakar nau  
sabhna jia ika chhau  
(Worthless is caste and worthless an  
exalted name,  
For all mankind there is but a single  
refuge). (Guru Granth Sahib p.83)

Guru Nanak and his successors emphasised that the way to salvation was through holy living, not through any accident of birth nor through the observation of any external ritual. Guru Nanak said:

jawo jote nan puchho jati  
agey jat nan rahey  
(Try to see the light within and ask  
nobody's caste. For the caste is of  
no avail hereafter). (Guru Granth Sahib p.349)

The religious teaching of Sikhism is against the caste system. Nanak rejected all divisions created on the basis of religion, caste and social status. He preached the oneness of God and the brotherhood of mankind. He declared:

sabh teri kuderat toon Kadar  
karta paki naayi pak  
(The whole creation is yours, O, Lord,  
Thou art the Creator, Purest of the Pure).  
(Guru Granth Sahib p.464)

Guru Nanak identified caste as one of the five evils in the way of proper understanding the true message of God. He said:

raj maal roop jat joban  
panjay thug  
Kingdoms, riches, form, beauty and caste,

all the five are great cheats).

(Guru Granth Sahib p.1288)

But Guru Nanak did not merely denounce and condemn. As a result of his teachings there emerged a new religious community. His followers used to offer congregational worship and dine together in the community kitchen called langar. To this day every gurdwara has a dining room in which meals are served to everyone present. The tradition of langar symbolises the equality of all before God and helps towards breaking down social barriers. It also strikes at the heart of the caste system by rejecting the notion of ritual purity and pollution. Rejecting the doctrine of varnashramadharma, Guru Nanak said:

sarb jote teri pasar rehi  
ieh ieh dekhian teh nar hari

(O, Lord, Thy Light pervades all,  
Where ever I see, I see Thee alone).

(Guru Granth Sahib p.876)

Kabir too, like the Sikh Gurus, rejected the notion of inherent superiority claimed by members of high caste groups. He challenged the Brahmans for claiming high caste status and is quoted to have said:

garbhwas meh kul nahin jati  
brahambind tey sab utpati  
kuah rey pandit bahman kab sey hoye  
bahman keh keh janam mat khoye  
iey toon brahman brahmani jaya  
tau aan baat kahey nahin aaya

(There is no clan or caste while dwelling  
in the womb. Everything is created from the  
seed of God. Tell me Pandit, when were the  
Brahmans created? Do not waist  
your life by proclaiming the Brahmanhood.  
If you are a Brahman, born of a  
Brahman woman, why have you not

come through another way?

(Guru Granth Sahib p.324)

Guru Nanak spoke of low caste not in relation to birth, but in relation to one's attitude to God:

khasam visarey tey kamlat

Nanak nawai bajh sanaat

(They are of low caste who have forgotten God).

(Guru Granth Sahib p.10)

Guru Gobind Singh in the hymn of Jap Sahib described the characteristic of God saying:

chakar chehan er barn jat

er pat nahan jeh

(O' God, you have no human characteristics like lines on hands. You are without colour, caste and lineage).

(Jap Sahib p.1)

The Adi Granth or Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book of the Sikhs, was compiled by the fifth Guru, Arjun Dev, in 1603-4. Apart from the writings of the Sikh Gurus, it contains a selection of compositions of Muslim and Hindu saints, including some from an untouchable background. Inclusion of the writings of low caste saints clearly demonstrates that the Sikh Gurus rejected caste as a symbol of social status for, as Khushwant Singh has said that "The Granth reflected the faith of Nanak in its entirety" (1963:58). Under the first four successors of Guru Nanak, the number of followers of the Sikh movement increased considerably. The social composition of the Sikhs in the early seventeenth century consisted mainly of trading communities, particularly the Khatris (mercantile group),

agriculturists, who were mainly the Jats, and skilled craftsmen such as carpenters, blacksmiths and bricklayers. During the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, numerical predominance of the Jats among the Sikh community greatly increased their influence.

In 1699, the 10th Guru, Gobind Singh founded the Khalsa brotherhood. He introduced the Khalsa discipline by initiating pani-piyare<sup>y</sup> (five beloved ones) who belonged to low and high castes. They drank amrit (nectar) from one bowl to signify their initiation into the casteless fraternity of the Khalsa. The ritual of amrit rejects the principle of exclusive commensality based on the doctrine of ritual purity and pollution. The pani-piyaras were given one family name Singh. Singh is derived from the Sanskrit word simba, meaning lion. It is commonly used as a surname by the Rajputs (warrior caste) in India. The ritual of amrit symbolised a rebirth by which the initiated were considered as having renounced their previous traditional occupation and caste status. Five emblems were prescribed for the newly initiated Khalsa. They were to wear their long hair and beard unshorn; they were to carry a comb in their hair to keep it tidy; they were always to wear a knee-length pair of breeches worn by soldiers of the time; they were to carry a steel bracelet on their right wrist; and they were to be armed with a sword. These emblems are collectively called pani-kakar (five k's), because the name of each symbol begins with letter kaka of the Gurmukhi alphabet.

At the end of the Sikh initiation rite the neophyte takes three vows which emphasise a new birth into a casteless brotherhood of the

Khalsa. These three vows are: that his/her father is Guru Gobind Singh, and that his/her mother is Mata (mother) Sahib Kaur (wife of Guru Gobind Singh), and that he/she was born at Anandpur Sahib. A Sikh woman takes the surname of Kaur (princess) on initiation. The ritual of amrit is qualitatively different from the traditional Hindu ritual of janeu (giving of the sacred thread at the upanayana ceremony). Amrit is available to all irrespective of their caste or sex, while janeu is the privilege of twice-born Hindu men only. Guru Nanak spoke up for the equal treatment of women when he asked:

so kiyoon manda aakhiyai  
jit jamey rajan  
(Why call them inferior - they give  
birth to the kings).

(Guru Granth Sahib p.473)

The tradition of guruship has begun by Guru Nanak when he appointed Angad Dev, a Khatri, as his successor. For Guru Nanak, the guru was a teacher and a guide. By nominating a Khatri as his successor, Guru Nanak as a matter of fact conferred the traditional role of Brahmans on the members of other castes, and thus rejected the notion of privileged status in the caste system. Not only this, Guru Nanak entrusted Bhai Buddha, a Jat, with the authority to perform the ceremony of guru-gaddi dena (transfer of guruship). Khushwant Singh in A History of the Sikhs (1963) says that "Long before his death he (Nanak) had one of his chief disciples, Bhai Buddha, daub Angad's forehead with saffron and proclaim him as the second Guru" (1963:49). In traditional India, the ceremony of tilak (daubing the forehead with saffron on royal investiture) was performed by the Brahmans only. But by appointing a Jat who belonged to the Shudra category,

Guru Nanak rejected the traditional Hindu rank order. According to the Sikh tradition, Guru Nanak on his first udasi (journey) chose to stay with Lalo, who was a low-caste carpenter. Guru Nanak's behaviour was strongly disapproved of by the high caste Hindus who called him kurahia (misguided). Commenting on this episode, Harbans Singh in Guru Nanak and Origins of Sikh Faith (1969) writes that "...But by putting up in his house he was transgressing the bounds of custom. News soon spread through the Hindu families that a high-born Kshatriya was staying with the low-caste Lalo and went with a Muslim as his partner" (1969:106).

In 1604, the 5th Guru, Arjun Dev, installed the Guru Granth Sahib in Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple, Amritsar), and he appointed Bhai Buddha as the first granthi (custodian or reader). This action also challenged the traditional role of Brahman priests who had maintained a strict monopoly over the teaching of Hindu scriptures. Bhai Buddha was also responsible for installing Hargobind as the sixth Guru with two swords girded around his waist, one to symbolise spiritual power and the other temporal power. The important position allocated to Bhai Buddha within the Sikh tradition manifestly clarifies the attitude of the Sikh Gurus towards the caste system. The Sikh Gurus rejected the doctrine of varnashramadharma, in which the scheme of four ashramas (stages) culminates in the final stage of sannyasa (renunciation). They upheld the grihasthashrama (house-holder) as the only way to mukti/moksha (salvation). All Sikh Gurus were married men. They strongly disapproved of ascetic isolation and preached the supremacy of grihasthashrama in terms of raji mein jog (to achieve

enlightenment in civic life). Guru Nanak strongly criticised the behaviour of sannyasis (renouncers), who, having renounced grihastha, would go begging at the householder's door.

After 1699, the composition of the Sikh community had undergone a radical change. Until that time the leadership had remained in the hands of non-militant urban Khatris. The bulk of the new converts were Jat peasants of the central districts of the Punjab who ranked low in the traditional Hindu caste hierarchy. McLeod says that "The growth of militancy within the Panth (Sikh society) must be traced to the impact of Jat cultural patterns and the economic problems which prompted a militant response" (1976:12-13). According to Khushwant Singh "The rise of militant Sikhism became the rise of Jat power in the Punjab" (1963:89). It is important to notice that Khuswant Singh, a Sikh scholar, chose the caste idiom "Jat power" for the rise of militant Sikhism in the Punjab. Sikh society under the leadership of Sikh Gurus had undergone a qualitative change. The emergence of the Sikh community as a political and social force challenged many aspects of caste within Punjabi society. In the late eighteenth century, the Sikhs under the leadership of Ranjit Singh, a Jat Sikh, established their rule in the Punjab. J.S.Grewal, who examined the impact of the Sikh rule on Punjabi society, writes that "Indeed, if we look at the Sikh social order of the Sikh times we find the return of the kind of stratification which Guru Nanak had witnessed in his own times. There was the royalty at the top, followed by sardars (chiefs) and rich jagirdars (landlords), peasantry and trading communities, artisans and craftsmen, and even landless labourers and

domestic servants. An eighteenth century Sikh writer, expounding an ideal Sikh social order, even visualized slavery in the future Sikh State" (1977:162).

Guru Nanak conceived of equality primarily in religious terms. His ideal of equality did have its social implications and it was partially translated into social equality through the institutions of langar and amrit. However, Guru Nanak did not attack the socio-economic structure directly, so that it persisted even when the followers of the Sikh Gurus were wielding political power. Without a clear break with the given socio-economic structure which was fundamentally based on feudal relationships, the Sikh movement, like many other religious movements in pre-industrial societies, could move only in a recurring cycle.

It is difficult to assess the exact caste composition of the Sikh community in the seventeenth and eighteenth century as there exist neither statistics nor detailed references for the entire period preceding the 1881 Census. With the appearance of the 1881 Census a clearer picture begins to emerge. A total of 1,706,909 persons were returned as Sikhs in this Census. The caste analysis of this figure produced a pronounced majority in favour of the Jats (more than 66 per cent of the total community). The second largest constituent is that of the Tarkhans (carpenters) with 6.5 per cent. Other constituents in excess of two per cent were two outcaste groups of Chamar<sup>S</sup> (5.6 per cent) and Chuhra<sup>S</sup> (2.6 per cent), Aroras (2.3 per cent) and the Khatris (2.2 per cent) (Ibbetson 1881:139).

Caste persisted among the Sikhs despite their religious teachings which are antagonistic to the caste system. Ethne Marengo in The Transformation of Sikh Society (1976) examined the presence of caste among the Sikhs by comparing those features of the system which are parallel to the Hindu caste system. Commenting on the practice of caste endogamy among the Sikhs, Marengo writes that "The endogamy of caste was weaker, and there was some intermarriage between castes" (1976:2). The overall comparison of the two caste systems provided by Ethne Marengo is useful in general terms, but it is difficult to accept her contention that the endogamy of castes among the Sikhs was weaker, and that there was some inter-marriage between castes. She does not offer any evidence in support of her assertion. The practice of endogamy is fundamental to the continuation of the caste system. The principle of endogamy strictly restricts the universe from which a person can choose his/her partner and primary consideration is that he/she must marry within his/her caste.

Most Sikh scholars and preachers deny the existence of caste among the Sikhs. They describe the ideal but not the actual practice when discussing caste in Sikh religion. S.S.Kohli in Sikh Ethics (1975) argues that "In Sikh society, the caste system has been done away with, therefore, there is no bar in the arrangement of marital ties in Sikhism" (1975:54). Gurmit Singh in A Critique of Sikhism (1967) examined the significance of the Khalsa brotherhood. He writes that "By condemning the prevalent caste system and by emphasising the equality and brotherhood of men, the Sikh Gurus laid the foundation of a classless and democratic society in which all lived honourably,

and sat together, prayed together and worked together without having any regard to the caste, creed and position" (1967:71). Pritam Singh Gill in Trinity of Sikhism (1973) also propagates the ideal view of Sikhism. He says that "Inequality established by the caste system could not be tolerated by the great humanitarian Guru Nanak. He vigorously protested against it and condemned it unequivocally. He supplied a doctrinal basis to society. Sikh society is based on equality which is the product of our religious concepts" (1973:222). Discussion concerning the practice of caste endogamy by the Sikh Gurus is a taboo subject within Sikh society.

Perceptions of outsiders on the non-existence of caste seem to be based on a normative ideal derived from the study of Sikh theology, participation in diwans (religious services) and langar, including the outward appearance of the Sikhs and their gurdwaras, e.g. all gurdwaras have nishan sahibs (religious flags) of saffron colour with a Sikh emblem. The baisakhi procession in Bradford on 13th April, 1987 was a classic example of the projection of the image of a single Sikh community. More than 2,000 Sikh men, women and children marched through the streets of Bradford carrying religious banners and flags and a copy of the Guru Granth Sahib placed on an open truck. The procession was organised by five gurdwaras in Bradford, two of which are caste-based (Ramgarhia Sikh Temple and Ravidas Bhawan). The procession started from the Leeds Road gurdwara and visited all gurdwaras on the way, and it finally dispersed again at the Leeds Road gurdwara. Addressing the procession at the Ramgarhia Sikh Gurdwara, their General Secretary said that "We are all followers of

the ten Sikh Gurus, only the names of the Sikh Temples are different, but it is not of great importance". This short speech was clearly addressed to outsiders. The agreed route of the procession, the posters and the participation by the representatives of the caste gurdwaras clearly demonstrate the existence of caste divisions which are sometimes difficult for outsiders to note.

In Leeds, the festival of baisakhi is celebrated separately by the Bhatra Sikhs at their biradari gurdwara, called Gurdwara Shri Kalgidhar-Bhatra Sangat, while the Ramgarhias celebrate baisakhi at their biradari gurdwara called Ramgarhia Sikh Temple. Following the tradition of baisakhi festival, new nishan sahibs (religious flags) are hoisted on both gurdwaras. Both caste groups pledge to be the true followers of the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, who rejected caste. This behaviour is another manifestation of their ambivalent attitude towards the teachings of Sikh Gurus. These institutions are the visible symbols of caste divisions within the Sikh community. Addressing the congregation at the Ramgarhia Sikh Temple their President said that "Baisakhi is an important day for all Sikhs. It was on this day Guru Gobind Singh Ji created Khalsa. This year here in Leeds this day has another significance, it marks the laying of the foundation stone for the new Ramgarhia Sikh Sports Centre building. This magnificent centre, at a prominent location, will bring pride, honour, and joy to every member of the Sikh community including the city of Leeds, and is a permanent reminder of Ramgarhia Sikh community's achievement" (Ramgarhia Sikh Bulletin, 13th April 1984, No. 1, Vol. 1).

In this section I have briefly examined the teachings of the Sikh Gurus and their attitude towards the caste system, and I have shown that the Sikh community is not a homogenous group. As the Sikh tradition originated and developed in the Punjab, a brief examination of the fundamental institutions of Punjabi society follows in the next section as this helps to explain the continuing presence of caste among the Sikhs.

## 2.2 The function of caste in Punjabi society.

For understanding the function of caste in Punjabi society it is useful to clarify the meaning of caste as expressed within interactional contexts. In Punjabi usage the term most commonly employed is jat or zat while at an all India level the term used is jati. The term jat also denotes one's traditional occupation in Punjabi society. In another sense jat connotes the larger endogamous unit and only within this group are marriages permitted. At village level the term biradari is applied to the members of the same jat. The term biradari is derived from the word biradar meaning brother. Each jat has a biradari council called panchayat which enforces caste discipline. It is the dispersed jat within a region which comprises the endogamous unit. A jat is comprised of many dispersed clans or gots. In Punjabi society the term got has significance when it is used in the context of a particular jat. Most Sikhs use their got as a surname i.e. Mr. Sandhu, Mr. Sambhi, Mr. Kalsi etc. Knowledge of gots helps to identify caste status within the community.

The significance of one's got identification becomes vital when a marriage alliance is negotiated. It is the prime duty of the marriage match-maker to collect and provide accurate information about four-gots requirement to both families. Jat identification is primary for members of different castes while got identification is relevant for members of one particular jat. In the Punjab, the Sikhs strictly observe the custom of village exogamy by marrying out of their own village as well as outside the mother's village. They also observe the rule of four-got exogamy which means that they avoid the gots of their father, mother, mother's mother and father's mother in choosing a marriage partner. The practice of caste endogamy and exogamy ensures the perpetuation of caste solidarity.

All Rangarhias are members of the Tarkhan (carpenter) jat or biradari which is comprised of a number of gots (exogamous units). Within the Rangarhia biradari, identification by got has significance, but for other Sikhs it is the biradari identity which matters. Eleanor Nesbitt is wrong when she claims that "when Nottingham Sikhs speak about caste it is chiefly with reference to got. This is the lineage, indicated by a surname, e.g. Purewal, Swali... Sometimes the word got is used loosely by informants to mean caste or sub-caste" (1980:52). Her lack of understanding of the differentiation of jat and got is evident when she says that "...the early Gurus were nominated with no regard to caste" (ibid:53). As a matter of fact, all Sikh Gurus belonged to the Khatri jat. Guru Nanak's got was Bedi, Guru Angad's was Trehan and the third Guru, Amar Das, belonged to Bhalla got. Guru

Ram Das who succeeded his father-in-law belonged to Sodhi got and his successors were all Sodhis.

Hershman in Punjabi Kinship and Marriage (1981) studied the social structure of the Punjabi village Randhawa, in the district of Jullundar. He provides a caste analysis of the village population in table 1 which illustrates the diversity of castes existing in one village.

Village Randhawa Massandan, 1972 (population 2,683: Households 286).

Caste	Population	House hold	Hindu	Sikh	Men working outside village	Men working in village
Brahman	243	40	40	0	46	15
Jat	887	165	0	165	72	123
(Banya)	5	1	1	0	0	1
(Arora)	20	3	0	3	3	2
(Khatri)	16	2	2	0	0	3
Carpenter	149	28	0	28	31	11
Water-carrier	76	15	4	11	12	9
Goldsmith	28	6	2	4	3	0
Tailor	70	10	0	10	16	4
Barber	7	2	2	0	1	2
(Sahni)	5	1	0	5	0	1
Tanner	1,098	197	191	6	228	70
Sweeper	79	15	10	5	13	5
(Bhaya)	5	1	1	0	0	1
Total	2,688	486	253	237	427	247

Note: The castes in brackets are recent arrivals in the village. (Hershman 1981:11) Table 1.

This analysis provides an insight into the caste composition of Sikh society in the Punjab. In Punjabi villages social and economic relationships are determined according to the jaimani system. A caste hierarchy manifestly exists in which the land-owning Jat Sikhs are at the top. It is the Jat farmers who, in almost every village, occupy the role of jaiman (patron) and stand at the centre of a complex of

economic and ritual relationships with other castes. As they control land and its use, they are the focal point of village economic life. Each Jat household has its own set of kammis (servants or clients), i.e. carpenter, water-carrier, barber, chamar, sweeper etc. who provide services in return for a bi-annual payment in kind.

Belief in the notion of ritual purity and pollution is evident from the daily social interaction between the caste groups. Mazhbi Sikhs (sweepers) and Chamars (leather workers and land-less labourers) live in segregated colonies called chamardlis, and they have separate wells for drawing water. Segregation is not restricted to residential areas only, but low-caste groups have their separate cremation grounds called sivey and separate gurdwaras. Harjinder Singh in Authority and Influence in Two Sikh Villages (1976) says that "The cremation ground for Hindu castes and Sikhs lies to the east of the village, while the one for the Mazhbi Sikhs (sweeper and scavengers) is on the western side" (1976:44). Hershman (1981) and I.P.Singh (1959) provide ample evidence pointing to a similar pattern of social segregation of low caste groups in Sikh villages.

Despite their conversion to Sikhism Mazhbi Sikhs are treated as untouchables by other 'clean' castes. The form of worship at Sikh gurdwaras reflects the notion of equality preached by the Sikh Gurus. But the existence of separate gurdwaras for the Mazhbi Sikhs and the attitude of high caste Sikhs towards low-caste Sikhs at the gurdwaras demonstrate<sup>s</sup> that the belief in ritual purity is still very strong among the Sikhs. I.P.Singh observes that "Mazhbi and other Sikhs have

a common gurdwara in village Daleke. They assemble together and sit there intermixed. Those high caste Sikhs, especially women, who do not allow Mazhbis to enter their houses, usually sit away from the place where Mazhbis are sitting" (1959:280).

Tom Kessinger in: Vilyatpur 1848-1969 : Social and Economic Change in a North Indian Village (1974) examined the social structure of another Punjabi village. Commenting on the caste composition of Vilyatpur, Kessinger says that "The settlement and organisation in Punjab is so much the product of caste structure that an account of Vilyatpur's origins must start with a description of the caste which settled it. Vilyatpur's founders were members of Sahota got (clan or sub-caste) of the Jat zat (tribe or caste). The Jats have been an important element of Punjab's population in its recent history and they have been the predominant caste since the decline of Moghal authority in the eighteenth century. Under both the misls and Maharaja Ranjit Singh, they dominated Punjab politics, forming the backbone of the Sikh army and administration" (1974:34).

Marriage and sex relations are among the most stringently regulated areas of behaviour in the caste system. Therefore observation of the norms of caste endogamy is a paramount requirement for the smooth functioning of the caste system. Analysing the marriage arrangements of the Sikhs in the village of Daleke (Punjab), I.P.Singh writes that "Intermarriage by caste is one of the important tests as to abolition of caste system, but in Daleke no single case of intermarriage has occurred in its history. Marriages have taken place strictly within

the caste" (1959:281). Inter-caste marriages are strongly disapproved of by the Sikhs both in India and Britain. Apart from the dishonour that arises from a breach of established rules, inappropriate marriages are objected to because the relationships between the families cannot be established on an equal basis. Caste consciousness is perpetuated through the meticulous observation of marriage rituals in which kinsmen and biradari participation is assured.

Concepts of separation, inequality and hereditary specialization with the ranking of behaviour along the purity and pollution continuum are present in Punjabi society. The Sikh bond with Hindu tradition has never been severed in spite of the Sikh Gurus' rejection of caste. Joyce Pettigrew in her study Robber Noblemen : A study of the political system of the Sikh Jats (1975) rejects the view that caste exists in Sikh society. She writes that "The social organisation and value system, especially of the rural Punjab, differ from that of India. The prevailing form of social co-operation and the type of political solidarity bear no reference to 'caste' and to rules of purity and pollution, but rather to family unit, namely honour, pride and equality, reputation, shame and insult" (1975:4). Whilst agreeing with Pettigrew about the nature of family honour among Punjabis, it is difficult to come to terms with her contention that there is no such thing as "caste" in Punjabi society. It is quite clear, even in those areas where almost the whole population is Sikh, that there is most certainly a caste system in operation in the sense that endogamous groups organise their social relationships with one another through idioms of ritual purity and avoidance behaviour.

Pettigrew seems to argue from the premise of Sikh theology that there is no caste among the Sikhs. But the presence of caste is evident when one considers the social interaction between the Jat Sikhs, Tarkhan Sikhs, Jhir Sikhs, Chamars and Mazhbi Sikhs. (Harjinder Singh, 1976; I.P.Singh, 1959; Kessinger, 1974; Helweg, 1979; Marenco, 1976 and Hershman, 1981). Pettigrew contradicts herself on the fundamental question of the existence of caste in Punjabi society when she admits that "The only customs in which any solidarity was expressed among the Jats on a caste basis was that in the village they did not visit the houses of Mazhbis, take food from them, eat with them or inter-marry with them" (1975:44). In fact, the observation of rules of status in a caste society is essential because behaviour in inter-group contexts is the idiom in which caste status is expressed. Moreover the rules of social and spatial distance ensure that all important boundaries are maintained and the power relations kept intact. Some of the most characteristic features of caste cultures are the prescription and proscription on interaction among castes.

The Jat Sikhs dominate numerically, politically and economically in Punjabi villages. They carry an element of superiority about them. Their Jat consciousness is the reflection of their dominant status. Being a landowner has been a symbol of authority in village society, and residential segregation of the low castes in chamardlis (colonies) is a marker of their inferior caste status. Emphasising the dominant status of the Jat Sikhs, Raminder Singh says that "Jat Sikhs are members of the rural peasantry and the farming community

who are rural overlords of the lower castes" (1978:26). Thus, it is evident that the traditional attitudes concerning high and low caste status continue to persist among the Sikhs in Punjab.

The dominance of Jat Sikhs in rural Punjab is also reflected in the form of sexual exploitation of low caste women. Analysing the patterns of allegiance in Punjabi villages, Pettigrew says that "Jats dominated relationships between themselves and the Mazhbis through control of the economic resource of the village and the panchayat (council) system. Jats misused Mazhbi women when they got the opportunity, and they have been known to beat their Mazhbi labourers though this was not a common occurrence" (1975:44). Mark Juergensmeyer also provides evidence of sexual exploitation of low caste women by the Jat Sikhs in his article "Cultures of Deprivation". It is a case study of the village of Bimla. There are two main scheduled caste groups, the Mazhbis and Chamars, in the village. The landlords are Jat Sikhs. Commenting on the complete dominance of the Jat Sikhs in the village, Juergensmeyer writes that "...Perhaps the most onerous obligations are the demands which some men in landlord families make upon the scheduled caste women. The youngest brother in one landlord family claims, with some pride, that he has totally eradicated virginity among the daughters of his father's labour families" (Economic and Political Weekly, Annual Number, February 1979, page 257).

I have shown that the presence of caste among the Sikhs is closely linked with the productive system and that the jaimani (patron-

client) relationships are fundam<sup>e</sup>ntal models on which patterns of behavior are based in Punjabi society. Discussing the nature of the caste system in India, Nihharranjan Ray writes that "...Jati was thus not merely a socio-religious system, but also a system of production and hence an economic system; indeed, it was a very complex system into which was woven a pattern of social, religious and economic relationships in a vertically graded hierarchical order based on birth...The jati system thus regulated and conditioned the economic order of the society as well, a fact which is often missed by historians and sociologists...The main economic prop of Sikhism and Sikh society was, as in Hinduism and Hindu society as well as Indo-Muslim society, land and agriculture. The productive system was never attempted to be disturbed and transformed, not even questioned with any seriousness...No wonder therefore that the Sikh society too, could not escape the inexorable laws of social economy of the given time and space. It follows that only with the advent of a genuinely alternative productive system is there any opportunity to break with the jati system" (1975:78-9).

In the pre-independence and post-independence period, modern means of communication, transport, industrialization and urbanization have provided more opportunities for the perpetuation of caste consciousness and solidarity. Caste associations began to emerge at regional level, claiming to protect the rights and interests of their caste members. They employ modern means of organisation such as drafting constitutions, fixing a membership fee and voting procedure. Many caste associations publish their own journals which help to

reach a maximum number of caste members scattered all over the country. Caste journals publish matrimonial advertisements for the benefit of their caste members to find suitable partners for their children. These caste journals play an important role for the enhancement of caste solidarity. This is not only true in India, but also in Britain.

In 1900, the Punjab government passed the Land Alienation Act which declared all non-Jat caste groups as non-agriculturists and deprived them from buying agricultural land. The response of the Tarkhan (carpenter) biradari was to organise their own caste association for campaigning against this discriminatory legislation. They also organised their first provincial Ramgarhia conference in Gujranwala, Punjab (Saberwal 1976:92). Instead of perceiving it as a national issue based on government policy of "divide and rule", the Tarkhans saw the new legislation as a Jat versus Tarkhan conflict. In 1902, the Ramgarhias began to publish their caste journal called 'Ramgarhia Patrika' from Lahore. I shall examine the role of Ramgarhia institutions in greater detail in a later chapter on the Ramgarhias (see chapter 5).

In Punjab, most caste associations have established their educational institutions which are affiliated to the University of Punjab, for example the Ramgarhias founded the Ramgarhia Engineering High School, Ramgarhia College and Ramgarhia Polytechnic in Phagwara. Although students of all caste groups attend these institutions, the management of these institutions is in the hands of a caste

association - it assists the promotion of caste solidarity and pride in caste identity. In Punjabi towns the Balmikis (sweepers) and Chamars have organised their own caste associations which operate like grand panchayats (caste councils). At election times caste associations collectively decide to vote for particular candidates and political parties. In this way they demonstrate their caste solidarity and promote caste consciousness among their members.

After examining the function of caste in Punjabi society and its capacity for adaptation to the changing urban-industrial environment and democratic electoral system in India, I will now proceed to examine the presence of caste among Sikh migrants overseas. This will provide the necessary background and context for analysing the existence and dynamics of caste interaction among Sikhs in Leeds and Bradford which form the main part of this study.

### 2.3. Caste among Sikh migrants overseas.

The Sikhs are the most mobile people in the whole of the Indian population. In the last hundred years they have gone to seek work in many different countries around the world. The Sikhs thus have a long tradition of migration. They constitute four-fifths<sup>S</sup><sub>K</sub> of the Indians who have migrated to Britain, although they comprise only two per cent of the total population of India (Rose 1969:52). The overwhelming majority of Sikh migrants come from the Jat land-owning farmers who had the capacity to raise cash for their passage by selling or mortgaging a piece of land owned by their families. Describing the

pattern of migration of the Jat Sikhs from Vilyatpur, Kessinger writes that "The first group movement occurred in the 1890's when forty-one men left in two groups of about equal size for the canal colonies in western Punjab and for Australia" (1974:90). Kessinger also examined the reasons for the migration of Jat Sikhs. He <sup>c</sup>concludes <sub>k</sub> that "As landowners, the Sahotas (Jat Sikhs) were in a better position to muster the resources necessary for overseas travel. This factor explains why they always accounted for 95 per cent of overseas migrants" (1974:155).

The most significant factor about the migration of Sikhs is that it was primarily determined and organised through the kinship system. The migration of a member was seen as an investment by the family, because the initial object in migrating was not to settle permanently overseas, but to add to one's family's joint resources by sending regular remittances back to India. Examining the motives of migration of South Asians, Roger and Catherine Ballard say that "To the South Asian villager, the maintenance and enhancement of his family honour, izzat, is perhaps the most important goal and it is the quest for greater izzat that often lies at the root of the decision to migrate" (1977:33).

The cultural notion of family izzat (honour) greatly influences the Sikh migrant's behaviour and perceptions of his experiences abroad. One of the most significant features of the joint family structure is that the interests of the family take precedence over the interests of the individual (Rose, 1969; Kessinger, 1974; Jeffery, 1976;

Ballard and Ballard, 1977; Khan, 1977 and Brah, 1979). Describing the significance of the joint family system for the Sikhs, Rose says that "It is the joint family that determined the pattern of Sikh migration and enabled sons and in some cases the father, to leave their wives and children to the shelter and security of the family home" (1969:54). All members of a joint family are bound by mutual rights and obligations and subscribe to a hierarchy of authority among themselves.

Obligation to call other members of the family and relatives accelerated the process of chain migration which ensured that most migrants were surrounded by a wide range of kinsmen. Raminder Singh views the future of the joint family in terms of "obligations and the degree of strength in their relationship". Analysing the household structure in the Sikh community in Bradford, he says that "Even if none of the elements of jointness, for example property, hearth, and dwelling are present, Sikh families in Bradford are joint in terms of obligations and the degree of strength in their relationship. Thus the functioning of the family and its position in relation to the network of social contacts are determined by traditional pattern" (1978:10). The notion of family izzat has been found equally strong among the second generation South Asians. Reflecting on the perceptions of South Asian teenagers of a joint family system, Brah says that "...while the South Asian teenagers growing up here may not share the depth of their parent's commitment to the norms of the extended family system, their identification with the family prestige (izzat) remains strong" (1979:200).

Throughout the 1960's the arrival of wives and children changed the all-male household which had previously been the most common form of residence among the Sikh migrants. It transformed the nature of the Sikh community and enhanced the process of recreating fundamental institutions of Punjabi society. The most important prestige-generating rituals of the family life-cycle are a series of ceremonies which begin with marriage and continue through the birth and marriage of every child. Each occasion demands an elaborate gift exchange among close relatives and kinsmen. In the early stage of migration, marriages were arranged largely through the joint family in the Punjab. As the size of the Sikh community increased, more and more arrangements are increasingly made in Britain.

The development of the Sikh community in East Africa closely followed the traditional kinship system. The whole Indian community of East Africa was compartmentalised into religious, sectional and caste groups. Commenting on the significance of caste for the Indians in East Africa, Morris notes that "...the need for caste exclusiveness was so strong that in spite of an environment almost wholly unfavourable to it, it was one of the most important structural principles in organising Indian social life in East Africa" (Morris 1967:276). In East Africa, the Ramgarhia Sikhs, like other Indian communities, established their caste associations and Ramgarhia gurdwaras. They arranged the marriages of their children according to the rules of caste endogamy and village exogamy by bringing spouses of the right category from India. Caste endogamy was the most important factor in the organisation of the Sikh community in East

Africa. Reflecting on the observation of the rules of caste endogamy by the Indian communities in East Africa, Bharati says that "...endogamy was so complete and its working was so unchanged from those in the Indian sister communities in South Asia that it remains the only criterion for caste among East African Asians" (Bharati 1967:284).

Caste began to emerge as an important factor within the Sikh community in Britain because, while the majority of those who came direct from India were Jat Sikhs, almost all of those who came from East Africa were Ramgarhia Sikhs. Describing the significance of caste for East African Sikhs in Southall, Bhachu observed that "The Ramgarhianess and East Africanness of the East African Sikhs is particularly projected in Southall where the Ramgarhia movement initially gained momentum. It is here that they first came into contact with other Sikhs, predominantly Jats, who had migrated directly from India and Malaysia, and who formed the majority Sikh population. The people now active in running all the Ramgarhia Associations and indeed many other temples are, in fact, East African Sikhs" (1985:50). Marie M. de Lepervanche in Indians in White Australia (1984) studied the Sikh community settled in a small town of Woolgoolga in Australia. Commenting on the social structure of the Sikh community in Woolgoolga, she says that "Although the Sikh religion rejects caste distinctions, and in day-to-day life in Australia caste affiliation is irrelevant, in Australia as in India people marry within their caste. The significance of caste endogamy emerges most clearly in an immigrant's relationships with Punjabi

society in India. A man who marries outside his caste or who weds an Australian may endanger his relations with kin in India; he may even find himself outcaste if he and his wife return to India" (M. de Lepervanche 1984:156).

Marcus Thompson in his article "The Second Generation - Punjabi or English?" (1974) studied second generation Punjabis who were mainly Jat Sikhs. He examined the role of chain migration and the pattern of settlement of South Asian immigrants in Britain. He writes that "Chain migration leads to a localisation of emigration and selective migration, i.e. only from Doaba. It also leads to the establishment in the immigrant situation of regional settlements consisting of many of those emigrants who can thus recreate the village universe with which they were familiar at home. This has happened in Coventry" (1974:243). Commenting on the changing nature of the joint family system in an urban environment, Thompson notes that "In the Punjab living jointly means common labour on the farm with no wages paid and the income not divided. In England it means the handing-over of the son's wage packet, very often unopened, to his mother or father with whom he is living" (1974:224). Thompson makes a logical connection between joint family culture and the system of arranged marriage. He says that "...as the joint family survives in England, so too does the system of selection of its members by marriage. For the second generation loyalty to the joint family includes the selection of suitable spouses for them by their senior members" (1974:245).

Helweg also highlights the importance of Punjabi culture and its traditional institutions like the joint family and biradari for the Sikhs in their new environment. He writes that "...An individual's izzat is especially vulnerable as it is considered largely in the context of group membership...Therefore personal prestige is subordinated to the communal evaluation of his group, whether it be family, or biradari or other unit" (1979:11). Catherine Ballard in her article "Arranged Marriages in <sup>the</sup> British Context" (1978) examines the impact of the arrival of families on the Sikh community in Leeds. She notes that "the establishment in Britain of wide networks of kinsmen, the reunion of families, the rapid growth in the number of Sikhs reaching marriageable age and the increasing organisation, confidence and affluence of the Sikh settlement has created a social arena within which there is both scope and pressure for the elaboration of marriage ceremonies" (1978:192). Discussing the significance of the rules of village exogamy for the Sikhs of Woolgoolga, M. de Lepervanche notes that "The inter-village links that marriages initiate may persist over generations, and for the north-coast immigrants the relevant villages for negotiations are still those in India" (1984:157).

The immigrants in New Zealand, Australia and Fiji all practise caste endogamy. Their links with the Punjab are still strong and are regularly renewed by bringing spouses for their children from the Punjab.

McLeod in his article "Sikhs of the South Pacific" (1979) highlights the problems faced by the Sikhs settled in the countries of the South Pacific. He notes that "Prominent among those are issues

arising from the persistence of caste observation, significantly weakened in the area of commensality but doggedly retained in marital prescription" (1979:147). A perusal of the matrimonial section in the Punjabi Weekly Desh Pardesh, published in Southall, clearly demonstrates the importance of caste for Sikh immigrants, for in this newspaper many Sikh families from Canada, America and England advertise for suitable spouses for their children, always stating details about their caste and got identification.

The cultural norms brought from the Punjab do not disappear when numerous members of the Sikh community move to other societies. The continuing commitment to the joint family system and to the home country ensures the survival of traditional cultural features. For example, in the early years of migration to Britain when the number of migrants was low, male Jat Sikhs, Chamars and Rangarhias used to live together in one household without any regard to their caste identity. Relationships were organised on the basis of Punjabi norms governing friendship and mutual support (Ballard and Ballard 1977; Helweg 1979; Khan 1977; Anwar 1979).

Raminder Singh, who studied the social composition of the Sikh community in Bradford, identified the presence of three main caste groups in that city, i.e. the Jat Sikhs, the Rangarhia Sikhs and the Ad-dharmi/Chamar Sikhs. Discussing the nature and role of these caste groups, Raminder Singh states that "These separate caste groups remain and function as close-knit social units in Bradford because of the kinship ties or village fellow feelings between members of these

groups. At present there are no signs of caste distinctions disappearing" (1978:26-27). Commenting on the influence of the kinship group within the Bhatra Sikh community, Thomas and Ghuman write that "The influence of the kinship group extends even wider than providing this emotional and social support, covering financial matters too and providing financial help whenever its members need it. Rather than get a bank-loan, most people would prefer to ask a member of the family for money when buying a house or a car, setting up a business or if big expenses are incurred on a marriage ceremony and party" (1976:33).

Caste began to emerge as an important factor within the Sikh community with the arrival of East African Sikhs in the mid-1960's. They generated the process of organising caste associations and caste-based gurdwaras in Britain. Unlike earlier migrants, they came mostly not as single males but in family units which is one of the factors for the rapid establishment of family and biradari culture. The first Ramgarhia gurdwara was established in 1968 in Southall. The trend to establish gurdwaras on the basis of caste loyalty can be observed at the national level. Most cities in Britain have gurdwaras based on caste membership and under the complete control of caste groups such as the Ramgarhia Sikh Temples, Ravidas Bhawans and Bhatra Sikh Temples. Since the publication of Sikh Temples in the U.K. by H.S. Janjua in 1976, the number of gurdwaras in general and of caste-based gurdwaras in particular has increased. In 1976 there was only one gurdwara in Leeds, and two gurdwaras in Bradford. By 1987, the number of gurdwaras in Leeds had gone up to six and in Bradford it

had also risen to six. Two gurdwaras in Leeds are caste-based, one has been established by the Rangarhia Sikhs and the other belongs to the Bhatra Sikh biradari. Bradford also has two caste-based gurdwaras, the first was set up by the Ravidasi community and the second was established by the Rangarhia Sikhs. The presence and founding of caste institutions by the Sikhs clearly demonstrate that caste loyalty takes precedence over the teachings of the Gurus, and that instead of caste becoming a weaker variable, it is gaining strength and respectability.

Caste-based gurdwaras provide situations where members exchange information about suitable spouses for their children. They also enable the flow of information through communication networks which means that caste members can no longer remain stranger<sup>S</sup> to one another. Important life-cycle rituals, i.e. weddings, engagements, birthday celebrations and bhog ceremony for the dead, are organised at the gurdwaras and the attendance of the wider kinship network is obligatory at these functions. People travel hundreds of miles to participate in these functions. The death of B.S. Birdi, President of the Rangarhia Board, Leeds, was reported in the Rangarhia Sikh Bulletin which said that "...The funeral service was held at Lawnswood cemetery on the 20th January, 1984, and was attended by nearly 2000 people. Dignitaries from all over the U.K. arrived" (Rangarhia Sikh Buletin, 13th April, 1984, vol. 1, n0. 1). Participation in the life-cycle rituals thus enhances caste consciousness and promotes caste solidarity.

Besides celebrating the gurpurbs (anniversaries) of the Sikh Gurus, the caste-based gurdwaras have become the centres for celebrating birth anniversaries of holy men and political leaders belonging to their biradaris. For example, in Bradford the gurpurb of Ravidas is celebrated jointly by Ravidasis from other towns in Britain. They hoist their religious flag on that day after the culmination of akhand path. Members of the Ravidasi community from other towns come to Bradford to participate in the celebrations. The Ramgarhia Sikhs celebrate the birthday of their caste hero Jassa Singh, both locally and at the national level. The Dhimans (Hindu carpenters) celebrate the birthday of their craft holy man, Baba Vishwakarma at the Ramgarhia Sikh Centre, which is also attended by the Ramgarhia Sikhs. The Chamars of Canada have organised their biradari association called Ravidas Sabha. On the gurpurb celebration of Ravidas they invite musicians and religious preachers from England and India who, during their stay, perform at the local biradari centres and attract large audiences. Moreover, caste associations publish their own journals and booklets to promote caste culture. The use of modern means of communications has enabled them to develop and maintain contacts at international level.

The management committees of caste-based gurdwaras appoint granthis (custodians or readers of the Guru Granth Sahib) and ragis (religious musicians) who are members of their biradaris. They are presumed to have a special knowledge of the history and cultural traditions of their caste. At the caste-based gurdwaras special emphasis is placed on the contribution made by their caste members to the development of

Sikh tradition, i.e. at the Ravidas Bhawan, bani (compositions in the Guru Granth Sahib) of Ravidas get special prominence whereas at the Namdhari Sikh diwans, the names of Namdhari gurus are recited alongside the Sikh Gurus during ardas (prayer). In addition to the regular attendance at the caste-based gurdwara and to taking membership of caste association, another custom sustaining visible identity is the use of one's got as a surname<sup>a</sup> i.e. Joginder Singh Sambhi, Gurmit Singh Purewal and Resham Singh Sandhu etc. In everyday interaction most Sikhs use caste names for identifying businesses owned by Sikh families i.e. Ghumaran di factory (factory owned by the potter Sikhs), Jhiran di factory (factory owned by the water-carrier Sikhs) and Bhatrian di shop (shop owned by a Bhatra Sikh family).

Although the social content of certain ties of caste and kinship weaken in a foreign land where productive relations differ from those traditional to the Punjab, other caste and kinship links continue to survive within the overseas Sikh settlements. The presence of various castes and religious groups within the Leeds Sikh community, a brief history of their settlement pattern, and the emergence of the Ramgarhia and Ravidasi identities will now be examined in more detail in the following chapters of Part 2 of the thesis.

PART 2

THE SIKH COMMUNITY IN LEEDS AND BRADFORD

### CHAPTER 3

#### GENERAL PROFILE OF THE SIKH COMMUNITY IN LEEDS AND BRADFORD

##### 3.1 History and settlement pattern of the Sikhs in Leeds.

I will attempt to locate the presence of the Sikh community in Leeds by examining their pattern of migration and settlement. From the outside the Sikhs are generally seen as a homogeneous group, yet there are clear differences among them of caste, class and experience of migration from the Indian sub-continent. All these factors have played a determinant role in their orientation and settlement in Britain. For the purpose of understanding their pattern of migration and settlement the Sikh community can be divided into two main groups: the direct migrants from the Indian sub-continent and those who came from East Africa in the 1960's. East African Sikhs are experienced migrants who had developed considerable community and technical skills prior to migration which they have been able to reproduce in Britain. For the direct migrants from the Indian sub-continent migration to Britain has been their first move from rural to urban industrialised areas.

East African Sikhs predominantly belong to the artisan caste of carpenters, blacksmiths and bricklayers who are popularly known as

the Rangarias. By contrast, the direct migrants from the Punjab belong to the following caste groups:

1. Jat Sikhs, land-owning agriculturists;
2. Chamars, landless agricultural labourers and leather workers;
3. Jalahas, weavers;
4. Jhirs, water-carriers;
5. Bhatras, astrologers and palm readers;
6. Nais, barbers and messengers;
7. Khatrias, mercantile group mainly resident in urban areas.

Direct migration of the Sikh migrants from the Punjab began in the 1950's while the East African Sikhs came in the 1960's mainly influenced by the policy of Africanization in the newly independent colonies of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. The overall percentage of East African Asians who came from each colony to England is as follows:

Kenya	49 per cent
Uganda	26 per cent
Tanzania	8 per cent

(Smith 1976:29).

One of the striking features of the migration of the South Asians from the Indian sub-continent is the limited extent of the areas from which they originated. The most important of these areas are the Punjab and Gujarat. David Smith in The Facts of Racial Disadvantage (1976) says that "49 per cent of those classified as Indians came from the Indian part of the Punjab" (1976:28). The Sikhs who

constitute 43 per cent of all Indian migrants to Britain came mainly from the districts of Jullundar and Hoshiarpur in the state of Punjab. There has been a strong tradition of emigration from these two districts (Rose et al 1969; Ballard and Ballard, 1977; Kessinger, 197<sup>4</sup>; Helweg, 1979). The main reasons for the migration from these two districts were pressure on land and scarcity of industrial employment. As there is no system of primogeniture among the Sikhs, the land becomes fragmented through inheritance. Jullundar district, where one quarter of land-holdings are less than one acre, has the highest percentage of uneconomic land owners and also the highest population density in the Punjab.

After the consolidation of British rule in the Punjab in 1850, many Sikhs were recruited into the British army. They were mainly drawn from the dominant caste of peasant farmers called the Jats. They contributed nearly one quarter of the Indian armed forces, although they represent less than two per cent of the total population of India. Rajiv Kapur in Sikh Separatism: The Politics of Faith (1986) says that "At the turn of the century Sikhs provided some 10,867 men in the army out of a total contingent of 42,560 from the Punjab" (1986:25). In the late 19th century many Sikh soldiers, after serving in the British army overseas, went to Singapore, Hong Kong and Malaya to serve as guards and night watchmen. Some went to Australia, Fiji, California and Canada. Tom Kessinger in Vilayatpur 1848-1968: Social Change in a North Indian Village (1974) writes that "The biggest source of new wealth was income from overseas migration from the villages of Doaba, Jullundar and Hoshiarpore districts" (1974:155).

Migration to East Africa followed a different pattern. When the construction of the railway in East Africa began, large number<sup>S</sup> of Sikh craftsmen were recruited from the Punjab to work on it and other civil engineering projects. Parminder Bhachu in Twice Migrants: East African Settlers in Britain (1985) gives a detailed account of the early migration of the Sikh craftsmen to East Africa. She notes that "Recruitment of labour from the Punjab in particular started in 1897. This carried on till 1901, during which period 32,000 Indian workers were recruited" (1985:21).

Migration of the Sikh craftsmen to East Africa continued until 1950 without any immigration restrictions. The public works department, railway workshops and private construction firms were mainly dependent on Sikh craftsmen. By the 1960's when the East African colonies became independent, the Asian labour force provided highly skilled personnel, middle-level administrators and professionals. The growth of substantial Indian communities in East Africa during this period accounted for the emergence of Indian social and cultural institutions based on caste loyalties. The Sikh artisans established their caste-based gurdwaras, associations, schools and clinics for the welfare of their caste members. The important consequence of this development was that when the East African Asians migrated to Britain, they transfer<sup>Y</sup><sub>K</sub>ed their experience of setting up caste-based institutions to their new environment.

Most of the earliest Sikh migrants to Britain were the Bhatras whose traditional occupation was hawking and peddling. They began to arrive

in Britain in the 1920's. The first Bhatra Sikh came to Leeds in 1947 and the first Rangarhia Sikh arrived in Bradford in 1938 and moved to Leeds in the early 1940's. Although he was a skilled artisan, he, like other immigrants, began to work as a pedlar. He had kept his external Sikh symbols intact all his life and was later one of the founding members of the first gurdwara in Leeds.

Large scale migration of the South Asians began in the 1950's. As the British economy began to boom after the second world war and the traditional sources of unskilled labour were almost exhausted, a large number of South Asian workers were recruited to fill unskilled jobs. The migrants were also instrumental in sponsoring the passage of other kinsmen to Britain to work in British factories as unskilled workers. This pattern of migration automatically helped the settlement of caste and village groups among the South Asians in British cities.

In Leeds the Sikh migrants settled in Chapeltown and Harehills. They subsequently attracted their relatives and friends to live in these two districts. The concentration of Sikhs in these two areas was the most influential factor for establishing the first Sikh gurdwara in 1958 at 3 Saville Place, Chapeltown, Leeds 7. Commenting on the reasons for choosing this area, the migrant informants said that the houses in this part of the city were cheap to buy and it was easy to go to work and into town - moreover they were living among their own people. In the early 1950's most Sikh migrants used to work in the Catton foundry in Leeds 10. More Sikh migrants arrived in Leeds in

the 1960's. Soon the building of the first gurdwara was no longer big enough to accommodate the needs of the growing Sikh community. In 1960, the Sikhs sold their first gurdwara building and bought a disused church at 281a Chapeltown Road, Leeds 7, for £2,700.

According to the membership register of the gurdwara for 1967-68 there were 181 members whose residential distribution in Leeds was as follows:

Leeds 7	102
Leeds 8	48
Leeds 6	20
Leeds 11	4
Other districts	7

Kim Knott in Hinduism in Leeds (1986) writes that "...Gujarati settlement in Leeds is concentrated in Leeds 4 and Leeds 6, Burley and South Headingley, while Punjabi settlement is concentrated in Leeds 7 and Leeds 8, Chapeltown and Harehills" (1986:22). It is not surprising that the main religious and social institutions of the Sikhs are located in Leeds 7 and Leeds 8 within one square mile because of the settlement of most Sikhs in this area.

Besides this main area there is also some Sikh settlement in Leeds 12, Leeds 11, Leeds 17 and Leeds 6. The Sikh community in the Armley district established their gurdwara "Guru Nanak Sikh Temple" in 1979. This building was a Methodist church which was bought for £15,000. One part of the building has been converted into a "Sikh Community Centre" since 1984. The Sikh settlement in Leeds 11, Beeston, is larger than the one in Leeds 12. It is mainly composed of the Ramgarhia Sikhs. In 1986, there was a split within the Ramgarhia Sikh

community. A group called the Guru Nanak Nishkam Sevak Jatha left the Ramgarhia Board. They bought their present premises on Lady Pit Lane, Leeds 11, in December, 1986 for £80,000 and established their own independent gurdwara called Guru Nanak Nishkam Sevak Jatha.

Gurdwaras and Sikh Community Centres in Leeds



1. First Gurdwara in Leeds  
3 Saville Road, Leeds 7, established in 1958 - it was sold in 1961.
2. The Sikh Temple  
281a Chapeltown Road, Leeds 7, established in 1961.
3. Ramgarhia Board, Leeds  
138 Chapeltown Road, Leeds 7, established in 1968 - it was

- sold to the Bhatra Sikh community in 1986.
4. Bhatra Sikh Community Centre  
6 Grange Terrace, Chapeltown, Leeds 7, established in 1968.
  5. The Sikh Centre  
opposite the Sikh Temple, Chapeltown Road, Leeds 7, officially opened in November, 1985.
  6. Ramgarhia Sikh Sports Centre and Ramgarhia Gurdwara  
8-10 Chapeltown Road, Leeds 7, officially opened on 6th May, 1987.
  7. Namdhari Sangat Gurdwara  
61 Louis Street, Chapeltown, Leeds 7, officially opened on 21st July, 1987.
  8. Gurdwara Kalgidhar Sahib, Bhatra Sangat  
138 Chapeltown Road, Leeds 7, (bought from the Ramgharias officially opened on 19th October, 1986.
  9. Elmhurst Middle School (Main Hall)  
used by the Radhasoami Sikhs for their weekly diwan and Punjabi classes.
  10. Guru Nanak Sikh Temple  
62 Tong Road, Leeds 12, opened in 1979.
  11. Guru Nanak Nishkam Sevak Jatha  
Lady Pit Lane, Leeds 11, December, 1986.

One of the major developments in the late 1970's was the appointment of a professional ragi (religious musician) at the first gurdwara at 281a Chapeltown Road, Leeds 7. As the Ramgharias dominated the management committee at that time, they appointed a Ramgarhia ragi who was provided living accomodation within the building. At present all gurdwaras employ professional ragis except the Radhasoamis and the Namdharis. The appointment of full-time ragis has a special significance for the development of Sikh tradition in Leeds. Now the gurdwaras remain open throughout the week. Many religious activities are organised by the ragis during the week, especially in the evenings.

Most rituals which had become more or less redundant in the early years of settlement are being revived by the ragis. They are also

responsible for the religious education of the Sikh children. The ragis hold shabad-kirtan (religious music) classes. The presence of the ragis has facilitated the organisation of pani pyarian noon parshad chcakauna (ritual feeding of five male Sikhs to fulfil a vow). Before 1976, an ordinary Sikh would perform the ritual of antam-ardas (last prayer recited before the funeral) himself. Nowadays the ritual of antam-ardas and bhog ceremony are performed by the professional ragis who also receive donations of bedding, clothes and utensils from the deceased's family. Mostly the ragis get together to perform the ceremony of akhand-path (unbroken reading of the Granth Sahib) for which they as a group receive a fixed amount of £125, turbans and food. Usually four or five pathis (readers of the Granth Sahib) take part in the ritual of akhand-path.

The presence of the professional full-time ragis has a marked influence on the development of Sikh tradition in Leeds in many respects, i.e. all important posts on the management committees are now held by the kesdhari Sikhs (a Sikh with unshorn hair and beard). Many Sikhs have begun to keep their external symbols intact which is a sign of renewed pride in the Khalsa discipline. The ragis are performing a major role in transmitting traditional values - they wear traditional Punjabi clothes and keep their beards flowing. They are perceived as the custodians of Sikh traditions by the members of the Sikh community.

### 3.2 Different religious groups in the Sikh community.

There is a widely held view that a Sikh male person can be recognised by his turban. Thus it gives the impression that the Sikhs are a homogeneous group. However, the presence of various religious groups like the Namdharis, Radhasoamis, Mirankaris and Nihkam<sup>s</sup> Sevak Jatha<sub>k</sub> within the Leeds Sikh community contradicts the ideal of the Khalsa brotherhood. In this section I will briefly discuss the Sikh tradition as practised and interpreted by these groups.

### 3.2.1. Namdhari Sangat

There are about twenty Namdhari households in Leeds. They are all Ramgarhia Sikhs except one Punjabi Brahman household whose male members are "clean-shaven". All Namdhari Sikhs have come from East Africa except one Brahman family - the head of this family came to Britain in 1948. The leader of the local Namdhari Sangat arrived in Leeds from Uganda in 1963. The Namdhari Sikhs began to hold their weekly nam-simran (meditation upon God's name) gatherings in 1966. Literally Namdhari means one who upholds the name of God. This group is called the Namdharis from the insistence which their founder guru Ram Singh placed <sup>U</sup> upon the practice of nam-japna (recital or meditation on the name of God). They are also known as Kukas, because their acts of worship often resulted in states of ecstasy in which they would dance and shriek. According to the Punjabi Dictionary of Bhai Maya Singh (18<sub>k</sub><sup>95</sup>) "Kuka means a sect of Sikh followers of Bhai Ram Singh so called because they used to shriek or dance at their meetings". Ram Singh was born on 3rd February, 1816 at the village of Bhaini in the district of Ludhiana in Punjab. He was born in a

Rangachia Sikh family - his father Jassa Singh was a religious person who followed the traditional occupation of Tarkhans (carpenters) making agricultural implements for the Jat Sikh patrons.

Ram Singh grew up in the period when Maharaja Ranjit Singh was the ruler of the Punjab. At the age of twentyone he joined the army of Ranjit Singh. In 1841 his regiment was sent to Peshawar where he learnt about Baba Balak Singh. According to Namdhari tradition the 10th Guru, Gobind Singh, did not die at Nander in 1708, but continued his mission under the name of Ajapal Singh and installed Balak Singh of Hazro as his successor. The village of Hazro is at a short distance from the town of Peshawar. Ram Singh went to meet Balak Singh at his dera (religious headquarters). According to the Namdhari tradition, Balak Singh appointed Ram Singh as his successor. He is regarded as the 12th guru of the Sikhs by the Namdharis.

In 1857 Ram Singh initiated five Sikhs in the khalsa-panth at his village and announced his manifesto. For a long time it was believed that Ram Singh stood for a social and religious reform of Punjabi society. He strongly rejected the custom of purda (veil), female infanticide, child marriage and supported the right of widows to remarry. He encouraged the use of a white woollen mala (rosary) at the time of meditation. In the time of Guru Gobind Singh, religion was the basis for struggling against the political and doctrinal oppression of Moghul emperor Aurangzeb. Under Ram Singh, religion was again the corner-stone of the fight against British rule. By making freedom from foreign rule an essential part of his dharm (true

religion), Ram Singh was not only giving a new form to the message of Guru Gobind Singh, but he was also acting as a forerunner of other patriots of India who thought that patriotism was no less a religion (Ahluwalia 1965:136).

Writing about the Namdhari movement Cole and Sambhi (1978) observe that "A strong and important reform movement, it eventually acquired a political characteristic, by accident rather than design" (1978:157). But Ahluwalia rejects this claim and says that "many historians and leaders in the Punjab held the opinion that there was in the beginning no political motive or ideal before Kukas, but recent researches and a more intense study of the subject has revealed a different picture" (1965:135). In 1872, a batch of one hundred and twentyfive Namdhari Sikhs attacked a slaughter house at the town of Malerkotla in the Punjab. Most of them were arrested for taking part in this incident and sixty five Namdharis were blown to pieces by being tied to the mouth of cannons. As a result of the founding of the Namdhari movement Ram Singh was deported to Rangoon in 1872 where according to the records of the British government, he died in 1885. But Namdhari Sikhs believe that Ram Singh is alive and one day he will reappear. According to Namdhari tradition Ram Singh nominated his brother Hari Singh to lead the movement before his deportation to Rangoon in Burma.

Hari Singh nominated his nephew, Partap Singh as leader of the movement before his death, who in 1959 nominated his son, the present Namdhari guru, Jagatjit Singh as leader of the Namdhari Sikhs. At the

end of their ardas (prayer) Namdhari Sikhs recite "deh didar satguru Ram Singh nam chardi kala, tere bhane sarbat da bhala" (bless us with a sight of yourself satguru Ram Singh, may the glory of your name increase, and may the whole world be blessed by your name). In the Khalsa Diary (1975-76) printed in Punjabi by the Shromani Parbandhak Committee, a picture of Ram Singh is printed opposite to page 36. The following words are written under this photograph: "Baba Ram Singh (1815-1885 AD), who raised the flag of national liberation movement and revolted against British Raj, for which he was exiled in Burma in 1872". Thus it has been acknowledged by the supreme body of the Sikhs that Ram Singh's main mission was the liberation of India from the British. It was not just accidental, as claimed by Cole and Sambhi (1978), but it was a properly thought-out and carefully planned strategy of action by the Namdhari guru Ram Singh.

Namdhari Sikhs are strict vegetarians - one of their religious aims is to fight against the slaughter of cows. The Namdhari initiation ceremony is called nam-laina (taking or receiving the guru's word called gurmantar). According to Namdhari belief the ritual of nam-laina is the same tradition as practised by the Gurus over the centuries. First the person's commitment to the faith is established through recommendation by the local Namdhari Sangat. Once the neophyte is considered fit to be enrolled, the guru's representative gives him diksha (spiritual gift) of a sacred word whispered in his/her ear. The gurumant<sup>ar</sup> is the secret bond between guru and chela (disciple) which must never be divulged. The devotee must thereafter meditate in absolute silence.

There are a number of Namdhari Sikhs who have been appointed by their guru to perform the nam-dena ritual - they are called subas (in charge of an area). A person who has received nam is called a sodhi (one who follows the code of discipline of Namdharis) - Namdharis eat food cooked by a sodhi only. At the time of nam-simran, Namdhari Sikhs hold woollen rosaries (mala) in their hands. During nam-simran sessions the presence of the Granth Sahib is not obligatory. Before the establishment of their gurdwara in 1987, the Namdhari Sikhs used to hold weekly nam-simran diwans at the homes of their members or sympathisers. My wife and I attended a nam-simran diwan at the house of a trustee of the Ramgarhia Board. A large picture of Namdhari guru Ram Singh was placed on a table - people entering the room would go in front of the picture and after bowing would place money on the table. My wife and I did the same - we were not expected to use the rosaries as they knew that we were not Namdhari Sikhs. At the end of nam-simran all people were requested to stand for the ardas. Namdhari ardas is different from the main-stream Sikh ardas. Namdhari Sikhs recite the names of their gurus after the ten Sikh Gurus. They do not cut parshad with a dagger before it is distributed to the congregation. Instead a parshad of dried fruit is usually distributed at the end of Namdhari diwans.

Namdhari Sikhs believe in the system of arranged marriages. They prefer to marry their children into Namdhari families of the same caste - rules of caste endogamy and exogamy are strictly observed by them. The Namdhari wedding is a combination of the tradition of vedi (a Hindu custom - the bride and the bridegroom sit in front of the

holy fire, called havan, under a canopy - a Brahman priest chants vedic hymns) and the Sikh tradition of anand-karai (reading of four hymns from Granth Sahib). Before the wedding ceremony, five Namdhari Sikhs prepare amrit (nectar) for the bride and the bridegroom. Preparation of Namdhari amrit is conducted according to the prescribed rules recorded in their prayer book called Namdhari Nitname at page 118.

A bedi (wooden canopy) is fixed in the hall and a holy fire called havan is prepared in a large vessel made of steel - the Granth Sahib is installed in the same room. The wedding ceremony begins with an ardas. After the hukamnama (reading of one hymn from the Guru Granth Sahib - it is regarded as an order of the day for the congregation) the bride's father performs the ceremony of palla phrauna (handing one edge of a scarf worn by the bridegroom to the bride). Four hymns called lawan from the Granth Sahib are recited while the couple take four rounds simultaneously around the holy fire. They wear white clothes - the bride does not cover her face. The wedding ceremony is completed with a reading of the hymn of anand sahib from the Guru Granth Sahib and the ardas.

Answering questions about the Namdhari wedding ceremony, the late Namdhari guru Partap Singh in one of his sermons said that "First of all we Namdharis are accused of being Hindus because the Namdhari wedding is solemnised according to the custom of vedi. Let me tell you that all Sikh Gurus including satguru Ram Singh were married according to the tradion<sup>ti</sup> of vedi - and the lawan (four hymns) were<sub>k</sub>

read out by a Brahman priest from the shashtras (Hindu scriptures). The havan (holy fire) is our witness at the time of wedding, and marriage is a sacrament, thus a special spiritual bond created in the presence of holy fire cannot be dissolved by a human act. It ends only when the partner dies and is cremated (agni-bhaint). The Namdharis are also accused of not cutting the parshad (kirpan baint karna) with a dagger. We, Namdharis believe in the living guru whose approval is sought by us. We use a dagger when we cook parshad" (from a tape-recorded sermon of late satguru Partap Singh).

Namdhari Sikhs claim that they are the true followers of the 10th Guru, Gobind Singh, and their code of discipline (rehat-nama) is based on the traditions of takhat (royal seat) Hazoor Sahib in Nander. Apart from celebrating Sikh gurpurbs (anniversaries of Sikh Gurus) the Namdharis celebrate the festival of basant panchmi (beginning of spring season - birth anniversary of Namdhari guru Ram Singh), and the festival of hola which was started by the 10th Guru, Gobind Singh, who used to organise mock battles between his soldiers. The festival of hola was also famous for the training of new recruits who would display their skills of martial arts in public. According to Namdhari tradition, Ram Singh revived the celebration of the festival of hola at Anandpur Sahib which had lapsed after the 10th Guru's departure from Anandpur. Most East African Sikhs remember the celebration of hola in East Africa in 1958 - the late Namdhari guru Partap Singh participated in the celebrations.

In 1984, the festival of hola was celebrated by the Namdhari Sikhs in Birmingham. Their guru Jagatjit Singh came from India to grace the occasion with his presence. Special posters and invitation cards were printed to mark the celebration of hola in this country - it was designated "International <sup>a</sup>Hola Purb". Namdhari Sikhs from Canada, America and East Africa came to take part in the celebrations which continued for a week. Special sessions of poetry reading (kavi-darbar) and musical performance by artists from abroad were presided over by the Namdhari guru. To commemorate the "International Hola Purb" the Namdhari Hola committee published a book called "A Panoramic View on Namdhari Movement". It contains pictures of Guru Gobind Singh and Namdhari gurus. A picture of Namdhari guru Ram Singh is printed on the front page and the picture of the Namdhari flag is printed on the back page with the following words written underneath:

To uproot the rule of British Raj in India,  
this flag which is the symbol of first  
organised movement for national liberation,  
was installed by satguru Ram Singh  
at Bhaini Sahib in the district of Ludiana  
on 12-13 April 1857.

At the hola festival food was cooked according to Namdhari tradition - only ghee (clarified butter) is used for cooking in the Namdhari langar. There were no tables and chairs in the hall - food was served in pangats (sitting in rows on the floor), the whole atmosphere had a genuinely Punjabi flavour. After the meals everyone had plenty of chahta (Namdhari drink made with Indian herbs boiled in water and mixed with plenty of milk and sugar). Namdhari Sikhs do not use tea leaves or coffee in their hot drinks. At the time of preparing food

Namdharis strictly observe the rules of "sucham" (ritual purity) - the kitchen is ritually cleaned by using "sodh da pani" (clean water drawn from a well or a stream). The cook and his/her assistants must be "sodhis" (confirmed Namdharis), other Sikhs are not allowed to participate in the preparation or distribution of food. The Namdhari guru is always accompanied by his personal cook from India.

Namdhari Sikhs regularly save money for their guru's golak (a money box - it is also called daswand-kadhna, keeping one tenth of one's earnings as a reserve for guru's share). On his visits the guru collects daswand. Commenting on the importance of daswand, one Namdhari informant said that "We are three earning members in our family - we always put aside daswand for our guru ji - this time it was more than £900. We all have been blessed with gurumantar."  
Namdhari Sikhs read their monthly magazine Satyug which is printed and published at the Namdhari headquarters in India. On different festive occasions Namdhari Sikhs also send greeting cards with the pictures of the Namdhari gurus.

Namdharis pay great respect to the Guru Granth Sahib although they do not believe it to be their guru. At their life-cycle rites the presence and reading of the Granth Sahib is mandatory. For the Namdhari Sikhs akhand-path marks happy occasions such as the birth of a child. The sadharan/sahej-paths (complete but not continuous reading of Granth Sahib) are organised on gurpurb (birth anniversaries of the Sikh gurus including Namdhari gurus) celebrations. At the time of death, a bhog ceremony is conducted with

the ritual of sadharan/sahej-path. But the distinction is always made by them between the guru and the Granth Sahib, which distinguishes them from other Sikhs who dogmatically quote the scriptural verse, "bani guru, guru hai bani" (the spoken word is the guru, and the guru is the scripture).

According to Namdharis the significance of the Granth Sahib lies in the fact that it contains the spoken words of Sikh Gurus and other saints. They argue that the creation of these writings was only possible through the intervention of human Gurus. Discussing the concept of "guru hai bani" in Guru Parnali wih Gupt Khed, Namdhari scholar Teja Singh writes:

The words 'bani guru, guru hai bani' were written by the 4th Guru Ramdas, who nominated his son Arjan Dev as the 5th Guru. Moreover, after the 4th Guru altogether six Gurus in human form continued the tradition initiated by Guru Nanak. Had the guru bani (the spoken word) been accepted as Guru, the line of Gurus should have finished on the death of the 4th Guru. It is therefore evident that the continuity of the tradition of living guru is part and parcel of the Sikh faith (no date - page 15-16).

It is important to observe the behaviour of Namdhari Sikhs for understanding the distinction between the living guru and the Granth Sahib. They always go first in front of their guru and perform the ritual of matha-takna (form of respect paid by touching feet), only then will they go in front of the Granth Sahib to pay their respect. It shows that their guru takes precedence over the Granth Sahib. The personal attendant of the Namdhari guru keeps on waving a ritual fan

called chauri over the head of their guru. In 1978, the management committee of the Leeds Sikh Temple did not allow Namdhari Sikhs to hold a diwan in the congrega<sup>g</sup>tion hall on the grounds that they wave a ritual fan over their guru in the presence of the Granth Sahib.

Namdhari Sikhs have formed their own national organisation called Namdhari Sangat, U.K. All officers of the sangat are nominated by their guru. According to Section 15 of their constitution "No proposal to alter, add or amend the constitution of the sangat shall be deemed to have been adopted unless passed at a general meeting and approved by Sri Satguru Ji". It is further stated that "His Holiness Satguru Jagatjit Singh Ji, the Supreme Head of Namdhari Sangat or his successors shall have the supreme power to dissolve the very existence of the sangat, and in all matters of disputes Sri Satguru Ji's decision shall be final". Their belief in the continuity of the tradition of a living guru is expressed in Section 3 which states that the main mission of the Namdhari Sikhs is to spread the message of Sikh Gurus with particular emphasis on the contribution of the Namdhari guru Ram Singh.

At the akhand-path ceremony Namdharis place pictures of guru Ram Singh and guru Jagatjit Singh in front of the Granth Sahib. Apart from the pathis (readers of Granth Sahib) a group of Namdhari Sikhs is responsible to read "Japji" (hymn from Granth Sahib - composed by Guru Nanak) from a "pothi" (small book of hymns from Granth Sahib). Namdhari Sikhs also keep the incense burning throughout the reading of the Granth Sahib. A traditional lamp called "jote" is prepared in

which clarified butter burns, using a cotton wick. It continues burning for three days as a symbol of divine life. The mainstream Sikhs do not approve the tradition of 'jote' as they regard it as an imitation of Brahmanical customs. Namdharis claim that the ritual of akhand-path was started by their guru, Ram Singh. According to their tradition all pathis must be sodhis (confirmed Namdharis) and each pathi should have a complete bath and change into clean clothes before reading the Granth Sahib. At the beginning of akhand-path five Namdhari Sikhs prepare amrit - all participants in the reading of the Granth Sahib and pothi go through the amrit (Sikh initiation) ceremony.

One of the most important rituals of the Namdhari Sikhs is the barni da path (ritual reserved for most important occasions). Commenting on its significance, a local Namdhari leader said that "The ritual of barni is most auspicious tradition - it is conducted for the attainment of a very special wish. It culminates at the completion of 2,700 rosary nam-simrans. Ten or fifteen Namdhari Sikhs may take part in the ceremony. They go through amrit ceremony before participating in the ritual of barni. Once a participant has joined in the ritual he is not permitted to leave until bhog (culmination of barni)". Commenting on the merit of the ritual of barni one local Namdhari informant described his personal experience and said that "A few years ago I went to India. In my absence my son had an accident and was blinded in one eye. I learnt about the accident when I was at Bhaini Sahib (headquarters of the Namdhari movement) where I had gone for our guruji's darshan. I told guruji that I had to return to

England to look after my son. In my absence our guru ji organised the barni da path for the recovery of my son. The eyesight of my son is restored - it is all due to guruji's mehr (grace)".

In Leeds Namdhari Sikhs of the village of Gunachaur, district of Jullundar, revere a local holy man called Raja Sahib. Every year they celebrate the birth anniversary of Raja Sahib at the Sikh Temple, Chapeltown Road, beginning with the ritual of akhand-path. They prepare food (langar) for the sangat for three days. We will discuss the teachings of Raja Sahib in Chapter 8.

Namdharis are most prominent among the founder members of the Ramgarhia Board in Leeds. They provided the financial support, organisational skills and ideological justification for setting up their caste institution. The opening ceremony of the Ramgarhia Board was performed by the leader of the Namdhari Sangat who was also a member of the board of trustees. After his death, the Ramgarhia community decided to hang his photograph in the main hall as a symbol of respect for his services to the biradari.

Most of the Namdhari literature is produced in Punjabi. Local Namdhari sangats are encouraged to organise Punjabi classes for their children. The Leeds Namdhari Sangat has a good collection of books on Namdhari tradition. Most Namdhari Sikhs subscribe to a monthly magazine called Waryam (Brave) which is printed and published in Jullundar City, Punjab. It contains articles on the history of the

Namdhari movement, biographical accounts of Namdhari gurus and general information concerning Namdhari Sikh communities abroad.

### 3.2.2 Radhasoami Satsang

Radhasoami tradition began in Leeds with the arrival of Ramgarhia Sikh families from East Africa. The leader of the local Radhasoami Satsang came to Leeds in 1960; more Radhasoami Sikh families arrived in Leeds in the 1960's. They were all Ramgarhias. They are keshdhari Sikhs and none of them cut their hair in the early period of settlement - most of them were skilled artisans who found jobs in the building industry. According to the leader of the Radhasoami Satsang there are now thirty five families of Radhasoamis in Leeds. All but two families are Ramgarhia Sikhs. These two families have come from India - one family belongs to the Jat Sikh caste and the other belongs to the Nai caste. Radhasoamis do not believe in outward symbols, so naturally they do not wear any special type of external symbols which would distinguish them from other Sikhs such as the Namdharis who wear sidhi (Namdhari style) turbans. Their main emphasis is on the attainment of spiritual unity with God through nam-simran (meditation on God's name). When questioned about the significance of religious rituals, the local leader of the Radhasoami Satsang said that "We do not believe in religious rituals - the secret of nam-simran can only be obtained from a true guru."

According to Radhasoami beliefs, the satguru (true teacher) is the giver of light. He is the instrument whereby the supreme ruler, the

ultimate, comes into contact with the realm of humanity. A satguru has been brought into human existence to give nam (God's word) to lead properly prepared persons back to their true home called sach-khand (true home). They believe that one of the fundamental gun (attributes) of a true guru is that he accepts the normal responsibilities of a human being. Explaining the doctrine of the 'Timeless Path' the present Radhasoami guru Charan Singh writes:

Three principles epitomise the philosophy behind the 'Timeless Path'; (1) Word or sound current, without which there can be no escape from this vale of tragedy and tear<sup>s</sup> nor release from the circle of birth and re-birth; (2) Master, without whom the secret of word can not be obtained; (3) Divine Grace, without which Master can not be contacted. Such in essence is the Path that the Messengers of God unfold (Charan Singh, 1976:10).

The satguru (true teacher) in human form is the central focus of the Radhasoami movement. He personifies God on earth and God can only be found through his teachings which come in the form of nam or shabad. The term Radhasoami is composed of two words: Radha (wife or soul) and Soami (husband or lord) which means the Lord of the soul. The tradition of initiating the neophyte through a secret ritual is the climax of one's attainment in the Radhasoami faith. The neophyte earns this highest status only by the guru's grace. Commenting on the nature of God, Radhasoami guru Charan Singh says:

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Nobody has seen gods and goddesses. Nor does anybody know the form of God. Unless a man who is like ourselves teaches us, we can not understand anything about the Word. When the Word takes the form of a man that man becomes a living Master (Charan Singh 1976:79).

Like other Sikhs Radhasoamis believe in the doctrine of the grace of God. They also believe in the circle of birth and rebirth and preach the ultimate goal of mukti/moksha (release from the circle of birth

and rebirth, finally mingling with the supreme spirit). Developing the concept of satguru, one Radhasoami leader said "In fact, when God wishes to free us from the chains of birth and rebirth, He comes in the form of a perfect Master and by joining our consciousness with the shabad and thus merges us back into Himself."

The Leeds Radhasoami Satsang hold their weekly sangat (congregation) at Elmhurst Middle School in Chapeltown on Sunday afternoons. Their sangat begins with the shabad-kirtan sung by the ladies who do not sit in front facing the congregation, but sing from their seats. During their diwan Radhasoamis sit on chairs and not on a carpet; as is the Indian custom women occupy the left hand side of the hall while men sit on the right hand side. There are no restrictions on the covering of heads or removing shoes outside the hall. Usually eighty to <sup>a</sup> hundred people including children gather for Sunday sangat. After the shabad-kirtan their local leader goes in front of the congregation to deliver his sermon. When questioned about his status he said "I am very fortunate that I have been chosen for sangat-laina (authority to address the congregation) by our guruji. He has delegated his authority to a few chosen people to take this role."

The Radhasoamis do not display any pictures in the congregation hall, and they do not place any religious book on the platform as in the Sikh gurdwaras. There is no tradition of matha-takana (bowing in front of the deity) among the Radhasoamis. When their leader begins the sermon, he stands still near the platform with folded hands for a few seconds - then he bows before the congregation before taking his

place again in the congregation. He utters the slogan "Radhasoami", to which the congregation responds by repeating "Radhasoami" after him. He develops his sermons by quoting hymns composed by Guru Nanak, Kabir, Dadu and other sants (saints belonging to the sant tradition of Northern India). The Radhasoami diwan always culminates in the sermon. No ardas (prayer) is said and no hukamnama (order of the day) is read out to the congregation. The distribution of parshad (offerings of sweets) is reserved for special occasions only.

On the birth anniversary of their guru, Radhasoamis prepared a special karah-parshad which was served in dishes - members of the congregation ate karah-parshad with spoons. It was an extraordinary experience to receive karah-par<sup>S</sup>had which contained nuts since according to Sikh tradition the use of nuts and sultanas in karah-parshad is strictly forbidden. Commenting on the significance of the parshad a Radhasoami leader said "Well the true parshad is satguru's nazar (glance). On the birth anniversary of our satguru ji at Beas, parshad is cooked and placed in a special room - then our satguru ji goes in the room for darishiti-bakhshana (blesses parshad with his glances). He does not eat from the main pan. In England once the parshad is cooked, we mix a spoonful of dry parshad brought from our dera (religious headquarters) in Beas."

In 1983, the Radhasoami Satsang of Leeds celebrated the birth anniversary of their satguru at Elmhurst Middle School. There were more than two hundred people including children in the hall. We watched a film of the Radhasoami guru preaching in London some years

ago. His disciples were sitting on chairs while he sat on a raised platform especially erected for the occasion. He stood near the platform for a few seconds with folded hands before sitting on the platform. The Radhasoami guru is a Jat Sikh of Grewal got - he is a keshdhari Sikh. In the film he was wearing traditional Punjabi clothes, a kurta (loose garment like a shirt reaching to the knees) and chooridar pyjama (pair of tight trousers). He was also wearing a kara (steel bracelet), one of the five symbols of the Sikhs. He had a long, uncut beard and was wearing a white turban. On the platform he was joined by a clean-shaven Radhasoami who read hymns from a book which was placed on a low book-rest. The book contained compositions of Guru Nanak and other sants in which the significance of the need of a guru has been strongly emphasised. The Radhasoami guru also preached the importance of vegetarianism for achieving salvation.

The Radhasoami Sikhs of Leeds do not prepare langar (ritual food) for the congregation every week. But at their headquarters in the Punjab langar is prepared for everybody and is served only to the poor free of charge, whilst elsewhere in Sikh gurdwaras it is served free of charge to everybody. At the Punjab headquarters of the Radhasoamis, however, people can also buy food at a very reduced rate. Many years ago a separate dining hall was maintained for the untouchables at the Radhasoami headquarters. A local Radhasoami leader explained the significance of parshad and said that "Our satguru ji does not believe in chamatkar (miracles). But on special occasions he does perform miracles to demonstrate the sanctity of parshad. Once a Radhasoami lady took some parshad home and gave it to her sister who

was not a confirmed Radhasoami. After some time she became very ill - before her death she told other members of her family that satguru had blessed her with darshan (appearance). A few months after the death of her sister, the Radhasoami lady went to our dera and related the experience of her sister to satguru ji. Then our satguru ji reminded her that she had given a portion of parshad to her sister for which she was given darshan. This is the real value of parshad but ordinary people do not understand its true significance."

There are two categories of Radhasoamis - confirmed Radhasoamis who have gone through the nam-laina (initiation) ritual and others who are preparing themselves for that status. The ritual of initiation is the most important act within the Radhasoami movement. The authority to perform this act is delegated to a very few persons who are personally chosen by their satguru. A local Radhasoami informant told me that "Mrs. Wood who lives in London, is the only person in the U.K. who has the authority to perform the ritual of initiation - she has been appointed personally by our satguru ji."

In theory Radhasoami women are equal to men - they can address the sangat. But Radhasoami women sit separately in the hall. At the time of shabad-kirtan (religious singing) they do not sit on the raised platform in front of the congregation but remain seated in their places. Most women cover their heads which is a symbol of showing respect to their elders. When questioned about the status of Radhasoami women, their local leader said "Well men and women are equal in our sangat - everybody has to earn the special status

through nam-simran. We do not believe in the Indian tradition where a woman is expected to regard her husband as a god. A woman who has achieved the status of sacha (true) Radhasoami can participate in the management of our sangat. But unfortunately there is not a single Sikh woman who has earned this highest status."

The Radhasoamis have not built their own satsang garh (place for holding congregations) in this country because their guru has not granted permission to do so. The spiritual and physical centre of Radhasoamis continues to be at their dera in Beas. Everything within the Radhsdami movement centres around the living guru, and since the dera at Beas is his home, it has become the place of pilgrimage for the Radhasoamis. One Radhasoami informant told me "After performing all funeral rites of my father I went to Beas. I was amazed to see the construction of a huge hospital. Hundreds of people were working voluntarily - the land for this project was donated by a local landlord and most of the money is coming from Radhasoamis of America. Many American doctors are working in that hospital without any fee. Retired civil servants, army officers <sup>w</sup> and judges are respons<sup>i</sup>ble for the management of our dera. Radhasoamis do not work for any financial award - they strive to be blessed by guru's grace."

The Radhasoamis have a formal organisation in Britain. The national secretary of the Radhasoami Satsang is appointed by their satguru. Local secretaries are responsible for looking after the affairs of local sat sangs. Their app<sup>i</sup>ointments are also made by the satguru. Local secretaries are appointed for a period of two years but they

can be asked to serve the sangat for a longer period if they have proved to be dedicated and trustworthy. Local Radhasoami Satsangs are encouraged to put forward names for consideration by their satguru. Meetings of local secretaries are called by the national secretary to discuss matters concerning the Radhasoamis in this country. Mrs. Wood from London, the only member empowered to give initiation, participates in all meetings.

Family culture plays an important part in the recruitment of followers of the Radhasoami Satsang. When questioned about the size of their sangat in Leeds one Radhasoami informant said "There are more than thirty five Radhasoami households in Leeds. When the Ramgarhias decided to build a Ramgarhia gurdwara in Leeds, they invited Ramgarhias of all religious affiliations, and they promised that the Radhasoami and Namdhari families will be able to use the new premises as they were part and parcel of the Ramgarhia biradari." Marriages in Radhasoami families are arranged according to the rules of caste endogamy, and they perform all traditional ceremonies and life-cycle rituals. Mostly their wedding ceremonies and other life-cycle rites take place at a Sikh gurdwara in Leeds. Expressing his concern about the setting up of the Ramgarhia gurdwara in Leeds, the deputy chairman of the Ramgarhia Board said "I am a confirmed Radhasoami, but I am also deputy chairman of the Ramgarhia Board. As far as the question of biradari solidarity is concerned, I will always support my biradari. I have donated one hundred pounds for the building fund of the Ramgarhia gurdwara."

All Radhasoami gurus connected with the dera at Beas were born in Jat Sikh families and their funeral rites were performed according to Sikh traditions. Radhasoamis believe that when the guru feels that his end is near, he nominates his successor, as one lamp lights another lamp. The person chosen is usually the closest disciple. But when money or property is involved, it is not uncommon for the father to name his son or a close relative as his successor and keep the guruship and the property within the family. Before his death Radhasoami satguru Sawan Singh made the following will:

I, Sawan Singh, son of Sardar Kabul Singh, caste Grewal Jat, Gaddi Nasheen (present Master at the spiritual centre) of Dera Baba Jaimal Singh, in the Tehsil and District of Amritsar, do hereby make the following will: before this, wills concerning my private properties and that of satsangs properties, have been made by me, but up to this time I had not nominated any person to succeed me as the gaddi nashin of the Dera. So now, in my full senses and with my free will, I do hereby appoint Sardar Jagat Singh, M.A.; Retired Professor, Agricultural College, Lyall Pur, as my successor at Dera Baba Jaimal Singh and all the satsangs connected with it. After me he will perform all the acts and duties that I have been performing so far. In witness thereof, I make this will to be of use when needed. (Kapur 1972:239)

Other Radhasoami gurus made similar wills which clearly demonstrates their attitude towards the institution of caste.

Radhasoami diwans are peaceful and well disciplined. The person who addresses the sangat receives full co-operation from the congregation. Social and political issues are not discussed at their sangats as they are at the Sikh gurdwaras. But Radhasoamis are permitted to participate in social and political activities in their individual capacity. In Leeds, Radhasoamis belonging to the Ramgarhia caste whole-heartedly supported the building of the Ramgarhia Sikh

Sports Centre and the Ramgarhia gurdwara. They also hold important positions on the management committees of these institutions.

The Radhasoamis of Leeds hold classes for teaching Punjabi to their children every Sunday before their weekly diwan. The children do not only learn the Punjabi language, but they also learn the teachings of the Radhasoami gurus. Radhasoamis also run their own library which is very well organised. Literature on the Radhasoami movement is produced in English and Punjabi. Special booklets are produced to propagate the teachings of Radhasoami gurus which are distributed free of charge. Sermons of Radhasoami gurus are also available on tape cassettes which can be both borrowed and bought. Radhasoamis keep pictures of their gurus at home. But they also hang up pictures of the other Sikh Gurus. They do not take their shoes off when entering rooms in which the pictures of Radhasoami and Sikh Gurus are hung.

### 3.2.3 Guru Nanak Nishkam Sevak Jatha

Another group of Sikhs is called Guru Nanak Nishkam Sevak Jatha with a considerable following, but difficult to estimate in number. Their leader was Baba Purañ Singh Karichowala. He was a Ramgarhia Sikh who migrated to East Africa in the 1930's where he began preaching the message of Sikh Gurus and the importance of vegetarianism. One East African Sikh informant told us "We used to live in the same street in Karicho - I know Baba Purañ Singh - before he began to preach sikhi (teachings of the Sikh Gurus) he used to drink a lot of alcohol. In

East Africa he gathered a large number<sup>S</sup> of followers who were mostly Ramgarhia Sikhs." Baba Puran Singh came to Britain in the early 1970's. He attracted a large number of sevaks (followers) in the Midlands - they set up their first gurdwara in Birmingham which is called 'Guru Nanak Nishkam Sevak Jatha'.

Most Sikh migrants from India had cut their hair on arrival in this country. They were the pioneers who set up gurdwaras in Britain in the 1950's and 1960's. Naturally they held important positions on the management committees of these gurdwaras. Baba Puran Singh's main emphasis was on amrit chhako te singh sajo (take amrit and keep external Sikh symbols). The overwhelming majority of his followers are East African Sikhs who are kesdharis (those who do not cut hair and beards). Their main activities are to organise akhand-paths, sadharan/sahej-paths and nam-simran sessions at the gurdwaras and also at the homes of their followers. On the gurpurb of baisakhi (founding of the Khalsa anniversary) they organise amrit (Sikh initiation) sessions. They have been very successful in bringing back large number of monein (clean-shaven) Sikhs to the fold.

Followers of Baba Puran Singh observe the Khalsa code of discipline very strictly. They do not allow non-amritdhari Sikhs to participate in the reading of the Granth Sahib at akhand-path and sadharan/sahej-path ceremonies. On these occasions they insist that food must be cooked by their own members who are amritdhari Sikhs. One Sikh informant who is a founder member of the gurdwara on Chapeltown Road said "One day I was waving the chauri (ritual fan) over the Granth

Sahib - a member of the Nishkam Sevak Jatha told me to stop because I had cut my hair. I was deeply hurt but could not do anything." At the time of gurpurbs members of the Nishkam Sevak Jatha wear white clothes. They would touch the feet of Baba Puran Singh when present in the congregation hall.

Members of the Nishkam Sevak Jatha took a leading part within the Sikh movement against the government of India. On 29th May 1983, Baba Puran Singh led a demonstration of 50,000 Sikhs in London against the anti-Sikh policies of Indian Government.

Baba Puran Singh died in June 1983. At his funeral more than ten thousand people participated and walked behind his body which was carried in an open truck. The funeral procession was led by five Sikhs who wore traditional clothes of saffron colour - they had nishan sahibs (Sikh flags) in their hands. This honour is reserved for the Granth Sahib only when it is carried in a procession at the time of gurpurbs (anniversaries of Sikh Gurus). At the second anniversary of Baba Puran Singh's death five akhand-paths were organised at their gurdwara in Birmingham. This signifies the status of Baba Puran Singh. Usually one akhand-path is organised on gurpurbs of the Sikh Gurus. The London branch of Nishkam Sevak Jatha published a one page advertisement in the Punjabi Weekly Desh-Pardesh on 20th May 1985 in which the spiritual qualities of Baba Puran Singh were noted as follows:

He was a person who performed nam-simran all his life. He was endowed with supernatural power; by virtue of these powers he brought many misguided Sikhs back to sikhi and gave them new life through

amrit (Sikh initiation) ceremony and changed them into true followers of the 10th Guru, Gobind Singh. In the memory of this super human being, we are organising five akhand-paths starting from 30th May to 9th June 1985.

The followers of Baba Puran Singh proudly declare that they received amrit from their spiritual teacher Baba Puran Singh.

In 1986, members of the Nishkam Sevak Jatha left the Ramgarhia Board and bought their present premises on Lady Pit Lane, Leeds 11.

Commenting on the enthusiasm of their members, one of the leaders of Nishkam Sevak Jatha said "We bought this building for £80,000. We have not collected any money from ordinary Sikhs. The whole amount has been donated by the sevaks (followers) of Baba Puran Singh. We organised a special nam-simran session which was attended by our Baba Ji from Birmingham who made an appeal for the funds. Our members donated £33,000 in that meeting, and a cheque of ten thousand pounds was donated by Baba Ji. We do not issue any receipts for the money received - our people have a great trust in the Nishkam Sevak Jatha. We do not have an elected management committee. The leaders of our Jatha are appointed by our Baba Ji."

#### 3.2.4 Sant Nirankari Mandal.

There are only six Sikh households in Leeds who follow the teachings of Nirankari Baba Avtar Singh. They hold their weekly diwans at the homes of their members - their diwan is called sangat. Baba Dayal (1783-1857) was the founder of the Nirankari movement in India. The Nirankaris strongly reject idolatry and ritualistic practices. They

believe in the teachings of the Sikh Gurus, but they do not regard the Granth Sahib as their guru, which is the main cause of tension between the Nirankaris and the Akalis (members of the religious and political party of the Sikhs in the Punjab). When questioned about the controversy regarding the status of the Granth Sahib, one Nirankari informant said "We pay respect to the Granth Sahib and follow the teachings of the Sikh Gurus, but we do not regard Granth Sahib as our guru - it contains the bani (compositions) of our Gurus. We used to install the Granth Sahib in our sangats, but the Akalis objected to this practice. Our satguru Baba Avtar Singh stopped the practice of installing Granth Sahib in the Nirankari sangats, because we do not believe in hurting the feelings of other Sikhs."

The Nirankaris nominate an elderly person to conduct their weekly sangat. He is asked to sit on the platform, a white scarf is put around his neck which is a symbol of respect and authority. After that everybody goes in front of that person and performs matha-takna (bow down), leaving some money on the plat form. They sing shabads (hymns) from the Granth Sahib and Avtar Bani (compositions of Nirankari guru Avtar Singh). They also recite poems which elaborate the meanings of the teachings of the leaders of the Nirankari movement. Members of the congregation sit on chairs, and there are no restrictions on covering heads or leaving shoes outside the congregation hall. The Nirankaris do not recite ardas at the end of their diwan, and they do not distribute any parshad either. Usually they prepare langar (food) for the congregation which is served to men and women in the same hall.

There is no particular initiation ceremony, but the Nirankaris whisper their secret nam in the ears of new followers. The Nirankaris are allowed to eat meat and drink alcohol, and they do not preach vegetarianism, but they do not cook meat at their bhawans (gurdwaras). The Nirankaris greet each other with the slogan dhan-nirankar (great is the formless God), and also touch each other's feet, which is regarded as a symbol of equality within the group. Commenting on the practice of touching feet, one Nirankari informant said "In our movement the touching of each other's feet helps to break the hold of the caste system. We do not believe in the caste system; thus a Brahman Nirankari accepts a Chamar (leather worker) Nirankari as his equal by touching his feet. A Nirankari from an untouchable caste is eligible to lead the congregation. There is no distinction on the basis of caste or sex in our movement."

Commenting on the rapid growth of the Nirankari movement amongst the Ravidasi community in Bradford, one Ravidasi informant said "Many members of the Ravidasi community have joined the Nirankari Mandal because they do not believe in the caste system. One of the leading members of our community is in charge of the local Nirankari Mandal in Bradford. At their weekly diwans he sits on the platform and conducts the sangats - all Nirankaris perform the matha-takna ceremony in front of this person who is regarded as the representative of the Nirankari guru at that time."

The Nirankaris call satguru Avtar Singh "shahan shah" (king of the kings). After his death, his son satguru Gurbachan Singh became the

leader of the Nirankari movement. In 1980, he was assassinated and his son Gurdev Singh took over the leadership and sat on the gaddi (literally a throne). After accepting the responsibility of the Nirankari guru, Baba Gurdev Singh addressed his followers and said "Holy saints - on this occasion we have gathered here to pay homage to satguru Gurbachan Singh who dedicated all his life for the good and welfare of mankind. Today we feel that he has been murdered . In fact, it is the murder of the teachings and the ideology of the great saints and prophets who lived up to the ideal: 'tere bhany sarbat da bhala' (let all prosper with your grace)." ( Truth Eternal, Nirankari Mandal, Delhi 1980).

The main bhawan of Sant Nirankari Mandal is in Delhi - their guru lives at the headquarters, which has become a place of pilgrimage for the followers of the Nirankari movement. The Nirankaris have built a residential area called Nirankari colony in Delhi. They have their own publishing house located in the Nirankari colony. The Nirankaris publish literature in many languages for distribution to the public and their followers in other countries. The writings of their satguru Avtar Singh are printed in Punjabi. A monthly magazine called Sant Nirankari is published from their headquarters in Delhi. It is published in Punjabi, which shows that it is particularly aimed to reach a Sikh audience. They also publish leaflets in Punjabi, Urdu and English for the benefit of a wider general public.

In one of their publications, Nirankari Baba and His Mission, a brief account of their beliefs is given. Under the sub-heading "True Master

Amidst You" it says "The Divine mentor, Nirankari Baba, is the embodiment of humility, peace, love and light. In all humility, he does not make any tall claim of being the spiritual leader, but he surely has the entire Divine treasure and his sacred mission is to reveal God to every human being who earnestly asks for it. Nirankari Baba does not merely show the track to the seekers, but straight away escorts them to the Kingdom of God. He does not prescribe any ritual or meditation to reach God whom he reveals in a moment. Without the satguru (True Master) it is impossible to realise God. Nirankari satguru tells that there is no need to renounce the world."

There is no prescribed time, place and other obligations like having a complete bath before nam-simran in the Nirankari movement. One Nirankari informant said "nam-simran is to remember the formless God called Nirankar who is the creator of all sansar (world). So we are free to remember Him through nam-simran all the time. Our satguru Gurbachan Singh has said that Nirankar (God) lives in every person - we must strive to understand ourselves and duniya de sarey dharam theek han ( all religions are good). We should learn to love and respect each other."

During the 1970's, Nirankari guru Gurbachan Singh paid two visits to his followers in Leeds. They held their public diwans at the Jubilee Hall and Leeds Town Hall. At the end of the diwans many Sikhs sought nam from the Nirankari guru who held special sessions for the nam-dena ceremony. Explaining the rules of nam-dena (whispering the secret word in the ears of the neophyte), one Nirankari leader said

"At the time of nam-dena ceremony our satguru ji asks<sup>US</sup> to take the following vows:

- a. That you will not refuse food cooked by members of other sects;
- b. That you will not practise and believe in the caste system;
- c. That you will have faith in Nirankar (the formless God) only;
- d. That you will not divulge the secret nam to any one without the permission of your guru;
- e. That you will not worship any shrines or tombs of any persons."

However, marriages among the Nirankaris are arranged according to the rules of caste endogamy. Nirankari Sikhs solemnize weddings according to the anand-karaj ceremony by reading the hymns of lawan from the Granth Sahib. Although the Nirankari satguru encourages inter-caste marriages, most Nirankari followers strongly believe in traditional customs. There are a few examples of inter-caste marriages among the Nirankaris. Commenting on the question of inter-caste marriages, one Nirankari informant said "Well, some families have opted for inter-caste marriages, but they feel isolated when they see the majority of Nirankaris conducting marriages within their jat. At the time of weddings biradari identity becomes the most important factor."

The major centre of the Nirankari movement in Britain is in Birmingham. The Nirankari Sangat of London have bought a large building near Heathrow Airport a few years ago. In 1973, the Nirankari Sangat of Leicester bought a large building for £25,000 to set up their bhawan. One Nirankari informant told me "Now we have

bought our own place in Bradford, previously we used to hire a room for our weekly diwans."

The Sant Nirankari Mandal, U.K. was formally constituted in 1969. Its constitution was prepared and printed in <sup>Delhi</sup> L with the approval of the Nirankari guru who also nominated the officers of the Nirankari Mandal. The vice-chairman of the Nirankari Mandal told me "The first Nirankari Sangats were established in Birmingham and Leicester. In 1967, our satguru Gurbachan Singh came to Britain on his first tour and he stayed for two months in this country. Anyone can invite our satguru ji for charan-pauna (inviting to one's house) and for a meal. We do not believe in ritual purity - our satguru ji preaches clean and simple living. Nirankari women can conduct our sangats but they do not come forward because of our traditional customs."

The Sant Nirankari Mandal, U.K. has printed their emblem on their letterhead. It is a picture of the globe supported by two hands - on the top is printed the slogan 'Too Hi Nirankar' (you are the formless God), and under the globe is printed 'Universal Brotherhood'.

The Nirankari emblem.

**TOO HI NIRANKAR**



**(UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD)**

This chapter has described the history and settlement pattern of Sikhs in Leeds. It highlights the religious diversity of the Leeds Sikh community and thereby shows that the Sikhs are not a homogeneous group. Having looked at four religious groups which to some extent transcend caste barriers, I shall now discuss specific caste groups and their significance among Sikhs in Leeds.

CHAPTER 4

SPECIFIC CASTE GROUPS AMONG THE SIKHS IN LEEDS.

The Sikh community in Leeds shows great internal diversity and comprises the following caste groups:

- a. Jat Sikhs, landowning agriculturist group;
- b. Bhatra Sikhs, traditional occupation of hand-reading and granthis (readers of the Granth Sahib);
- c. Jhir Sikhs, water-carriers;
- d. Julaha Sikhs, popularly known as Ramdasia or Khalsa-biradar, weavers;
- e. Khatri Sikhs, urban mercantile group, business and civil service;
- f. Chamar Sikhs, leather worker and landless labourers popularly called Ad-Dharmis and Ravidasis;
- g. Nai Sikhs, barbers, match-makers and messengers;
- h. Tarkhan Sikhs, popularly known as Ramgarhias, village artisans (carpenters, blacksmiths and bricklayers).

Each of these groups will be briefly discussed by indicating its background and composition, but due to the special importance and size of the Ramgarhias in Leeds, a special chapter (Chapter 5) will be devoted to them as well as to the Ravidasis (chapter 6) who are particularly found in the neighbouring city of Bradford.

#### 4.1. Jat Sikhs.

There are approximately one hundred and fifty Jat Sikh households in Leeds according to the estimate provided by the chairman of the Indian Farmers Welfare Society, Leeds which is an <sup>C</sup>exclusively Jat organisation. The overwhelming majority of immigrants from the Punjab to Britain are Jat Sikhs (Rose, 1969; Ballard and Ballard, 1977; Smith, 1977; Raminder Singh, 1978; Helweg, 1979). Most Sikh migrants in Leeds have come from Doaba (Jullundar and Hoshiar Pur districts) which is one of the most densely populated parts of Punjab. As there is no system of primogeniture among the Sikhs, the land becomes fragmented through divisions. Pressure on land is one of the main reasons of migration of the Jat Sikhs from the Punjab. A small number of Jat Sikhs arrived in Leeds in the early 1950's, mainly attracted by the boom in the British economy. The pattern of settlement of South Asians in Britain reflects the impact of chain migration. The newcomers were sponsored by kinsmen who had already established themselves in Britain. It accelerated the process of re-establishment of caste and village groups in the U.K. Describing the experience of early years of migration, one Jat Sikh informant said that "I came to Leeds in 1951 to stay with my relatives. There were about twenty Indians in Leeds at that time, and only two were kesdhari Sikhs (one who keeps the Sikh symbols intact). Almost all Jat Sikhs shaved their beards and cut their hair on arrival in this country. We used to live in all-male households. Jats, Tarkhans and Julahas all lived together. No one would talk about jat the way it is done these days. In 1954/55 I bought my own house near the university - my friends

lent me money without interest. We began to hold shabad-kirtan (recital of hymns from the Granth Sahib) at my house. I had a picture of Guru Nanak which we would place on a table while all of us sit on chairs. One Ramgarhia Sikh used to sing with an harmonium which he had brought with him from India. In the late 1950's more Sikhs arrived in Leeds from East Africa."

The first gurpurb (religious festival) in Yorkshire was celebrated jointly by the Sikhs of Leeds and Bradford at Leeds Civic Theatre in 1957. Commenting on the proceedings of the gurpurb, one Sikh informant said that "We decided to celebrate baisakhi gurpurb at Leeds Civic Theatre. We borrowed a copy of the Guru Granth Sahib from a Bhatra Sikh. The Granth Sahib was placed on the raised platform while we sat on chairs with our shoes on. We had invited one Sikh preacher from London who objected to the seating arrangements which were contrary to the Sikh maryada (tradition). After the celebration we decided to buy our own place to set up a proper gurdwara."

In 1958, the first gurdwara in Yorkshire was established in Leeds. Its first president was a Ramgarhia Sikh who was a kesdhari. A Punjabi Brahman was elected vice-president and a Julaha Sikh, who was also a kesdhari, was appointed general secretary. A board of four trustees consisting of a Ramgarhia Sikh, Bhatra Sikh, Julaha Sikh and Jat Sikh was nominated. The Julaha and the Jat Sikh trustees were clean-shaven. In 1960, a clean-shaven Jat Sikh from Bradford became president of the gurdwara. In the 1960's more Ramgarhia Sikhs arrived in Leeds from East Africa. Almost all Ramgarhia Sikhs were kesdhari.

and skilled artisans who found work as joiners and bricklayers in the building industry while Jat Sikhs were concentrated in unskilled jobs. Ramgarhia Sikhs also had the experience of organising community institutions in East Africa, which helped them to dominate the affairs at the gurdwara including their representation on the management committee. The representation of Ramgarhia Sikhs on the management committee reflects their numerical domination among the Sikhs in Leeds since 1960's. According to the annual report of the general secretary for 1973/74, the representation of Sikh caste groups on the management committee was then as follows:

<u>Ramgarhia</u> Sikhs	18
<u>Jhir</u> Sikhs	5
<u>Jat</u> Sikhs	4
Total	27

Out of 18 Ramgarhia Sikh members, 14 were direct migrants from East Africa and they were all kesdharis.

In 1966, Ramgarhia Sikhs organised their biradari association in order to promote the welfare of their caste members. They bought a large detached house to set up a community centre in 1968 which became their main focus of activities. Prominent leaders of the Ramgarhia association kept on holding important positions on the management committee of the gurdwara which was strongly resented by other Sikhs. A large number of East African Sikhs were followers of Puran Singh Karichowale (a Ramgarhia Sikh holy man from East Africa) who organised their association called the Nishkam Sevak Jatha in 1970 (see chapter 3, section 2.3 above). They believe in the strict

observation of the Khalsa discipline. They began to organise amrit (Sikh initiation) sessions at the gurdwara - their main slogan was 'amrit chhako tey pakey Sikh bang' (take amrit and become confirmed Sikhs). It was a strategy of winning back those members of the Sikh community who had ab<sup>a</sup>andoned the outwardly Sikh symbols. Their message mainly attracted the Ramgarhia Sikhs. As a result of their religious activities members of the Nishkam Sevak Jatha emerged as the dominant group on the management committee. In 1975, out of 27 members of the management committee only two were non-Ramgarhia Sikhs - one was a Bhatra Sikh while the other was a Jat Sikh who enjoyed the support of Nishkam Sevak Jatha.

In order to strengthen their hold on the gurdwara management, the Nishkam Sevak Jatha amended the constitution of the gurdwara to the effect that only kesdhari Sikhs could become members of the management committee. Reflecting on these developments one prominent Jat Sikh informant said that "That amendment to the constitution of the gurdwara was a clever move to keep the Jats out of the management structure. Tarkhans (Ramgarhia Sikhs) know that our people are mostly monein (clean-shaven) who will not be eligible to become members of the management committee". The Jat Sikhs strongly disapproved of the behaviour of Ramgarhia Sikhs who introduced orthodox rules in order to keep their hold on the gurdwara. Describing the sense of frustration, one Jat Sikh informant said that "I am a founder member of the gurdwara. The shabad kirtan (religious singing sessions) started from my house. Since then I have been making my contribution to the gurdwara building fund. I am a mona (clean-shaven) Sikh, but I

always wear a turban when I go to the gurdwara. One Sunday, when I began to wave the chauri (ritual fan) over Guru Granth Sahib, as I used to do in the past, a member of the Nishkam Sevak Jatha approached me and took the chauri off my hands saying that I could not do that seva (service) because I was not a kesdhari Sikh. I became furious but controlled my temper and sat down."

The management committee which was controlled by the members of Nishkam Sevak Jatha made a rule that only amritdhari (a kesdhari Sikh who has been initiated through the ritual of amrit) Sikhs will be allowed to participate in the ceremony of akhand-path (continuous reading of Granth Sahib) and in the preparation and distribution of langar at the gurdwara. These restrictions infuriated the Jat Sikhs who felt completely ignored and helpless. Jat Sikhs tried to raise objections at the general meetings, but being in a minority they had to accept humiliation at the hands of Ramgarhia Sikhs who virtually controlled the gurdwara. The situation became so serious that, in 1978, a group of Jat Sikhs decided to organise their own biradari. Their first meeting was attended by representatives of thirtyfive Jat Sikh households. They discussed many issues concerning the status of their biradari at the gurdwara including the setting up of their biradari association and a community centre. They decided to call another meeting inviting more representatives of Jat families. More than fifty representatives attended the second meeting which unanimously approved the formation of a Jat Sikh association called the "Indian Farmers Welfare Society, Leeds". It was decided to raise funds for setting up their biradari community centre. It was agreed

that all working male members in a Jat household should contribute at least £ 51 each (ikwanja paund ik jee pichhey jehra kalak launda).

Working women were given the option to make donations if they wished.

The formation of the Jat Sikh association was greatly hailed by the members of the Jat biradari in Leeds. When questioned about the aims and objectives of the Indian Farmers Welfare Society, their general secretary said that "There are 250 paid-up members of our organisation - we have more than £12,000 in our bank account. A fund-raising committee was constituted to approach all Jat Sikh families for donations and general support. Our society is registered with the Charity Commission. In our constitution, the rights and duties of members are defined as follows:

- a. Membership is restricted to permanent residents of Leeds;
- b. who are of Indian origin;
- c. who have a farming background;
- d. who are 18 years of age or over;
- e. and who have paid the appropriate membership fee.

One of the aims of our society is to provide the teaching of Punjabi language and culture to our children." The organisation of the Jat Sikhs into a biradari association was an important indicator of the polarisation of the Sikh community on caste lines. Caste divisions within the Sikh community now came into the open - biradari izzat (honour) became more important than the egalitarian concept of the brotherhood of the Khalsa. Commenting on the significance of this development, one leading member of the Indian Farmers Welfare Society said that "The formation of the Indian Farmers Welfare Society has put new josh (vigour) into our people. We feel organised and strong - our people have been very generous with money and general support. We

began to take part in the affairs of the gurdwara as a solid force. Most Jat Sikhs were clean-shaven, so we gave them the call "Sikh bano" (Let us become kesdharis). The response was unbelievable - the political situation in the Punjab also helped our cause."

The Jat Sikhs employed the strategy of becoming kesdhari Sikhs very successfully. In 1982, six out of 27 members of the management committee of the gurdwara were Jat Sikhs and a Jat Sikh replaced a Ramgarhia Sikh as chairman of the building sub-committee of the gurdwara. Commenting on their success, one leading member of the Jat Sikh biradari said that "Although we have smashed the dominance of the Tarkhans, they still conduct the gurdwara affairs in such a manner as if they owned the place. Last week a Jat Sikh family asked for some pans and thalian (serving plates made of steel). They were not allowed to use the utensils on the pretext that meat dishes would be cooked and served in them. Well, we are working hard to defeat them at the coming annual elections. We are conscious of our minority status, but now we are organised. We mobilise our members to attend general meetings in large numbers in order to demonstrate our power." By 1983, the Jat Sikhs gained complete control of the gurdwara from the Ramgarhia Sikhs. A Jat Sikh was elected chairman of the management committee. A purpose-built Sikh Sport Centre has been completed with the assistance from Leeds City Council. A full-time manager, who is a Jat Sikh, has been appointed to supervise the main activities at the Sikh Sport Centre, which was officially opened on Guru Nanak's gurpurb in 1985.

Many Jat Sikhs actively participate in the activities of the International Sikh Youth Federation which <sup>a</sup> campaigns for the formation of Khalistan in the Punjab. A local branch of the Shiromani Akali Dal (political party of the Sikhs in Punjab) has been active in Leeds - it is mainly a Jat dominated organisation. In 1985, the first female member of the management committee was elected, who is a Jat Sikh. The first Sikh J.P. appointed in Leeds is also a Jat Sikh who is a leading member of the Indian Farmers Welfare Society. His appointment as a J.P. was celebrated at the Trades Hall, Leeds. More than two hundred Sikhs attended the function, most of them were Jat Sikhs. A Jat Sikh who is a professional wrestler of international fame presented a sword to the Sikh J.P. The atmosphere at the function was a clear demonstration of the superiority of Jats among the Sikhs in Leeds.

The dominance of the Jat Sikhs at the gurdwara is reflected in the activities of the members of the International Sikh Youth Federation who hold important positions on the management committee. A large picture of their leader, Sant Jarnail Singh Bhinderanwale (the former leader of militant Sikhs who was killed in army action on the Golden Temple in 1984), is still hanging in the main entrance of the gurdwara. Every Sunday, members of the International Sikh Youth Federation hold a book stall at the gurdwara, mainly selling literature of the Khalistan movement. They wear saffron turbans and keep their beards flowing. One of their members wears a traditional uniform of a Sikh soldier prescribed by the 10th Guru, Gobind Singh. When questioned about the main beliefs of the Jat Sikhs, the chairman

of the Indian Farmers Welfare Society said that "We Jats are pacca (committed Sikhs) - we do not believe in a dehdhari (living) guru - it is all pakhand (farce). No Jat Sikh is a Namdhari (follower of Ram Singh who believed in a living guru- he was a Tarkhan Sikh). There are only two Jat Sikh families in Leeds who follow the Radhasoami Satsang, but they have become members of the Indian Farmers Welfare Society."

Although many Jat Sikhs are unskilled workers, some families have moved into small scale businesses, particularly grocery and clothing. One Jat household owns a very successful clothing manufacturing business based in a modern purpose-built factory. They employ more than fifty workers who are mostly Asian women, but they also employ non-Asian staff, especially in the office. The head of the family enjoys high status among the Jat Sikhs, being a founder member of their biradari association. He is a clean-shaven Sikh. He arranged the marriages of his children following the norms of caste endogamy and exogamy. Three Jat Sikh households own automobile workshops - one family has a sale and renting car section attached to its business. There is a strong trend of moving out to the suburbs of Leeds among the Jat Sikhs. Many Jat Sikh families have relatives settled in Canada, U.S.A. and Australia. A study of the matrimonial sections of the Punjabi press in this country highlights the problem of finding appropriate spouses in Canada and America. It also suggests that Jat Sikhs are gradually becoming an international community. There is not a single case of inter-caste marriage among the Jat Sikhs in Leeds. One Jat Sikh informant said that "When my brother married a gori

(white girl), my father could not face our biradari, so we left that town and moved to Leeds. But my father died soon after because of the shame brought by my brother upon our family izzat (honour)." Family honour and the consolidation of biradari solidarity are the most important factors in promoting Jat Sikh identity.

#### 4.2. Bhatra Sikhs.

There are approximately 45 Bhatra Sikh households in Leeds. It is a close-knit community mainly settled in and around the Chapeltown area. When questioned about the origin of the Bhatras, a Bhatra Sikh, who is employed as a granthi (reader of Granth Sahib at the Guru Nanak Sikh Temple, <sup>Tong</sup> Road, Leeds 12, said that "We are descendants of the Bhats, the religious musicians, who were especially appointed by the Sikh Gurus for shabad-kirtan (religious singing) in their diwans. There are a number of hymns in the Guru Granth Sahib written by the Bhat ragis (musicians). We have been assigned the job of looking after the gurdwaras by the Gurus themselves." In India, the Bhatra community was mainly concentrated in the districts of Sialkot, now in Pakistan. They moved to India in 1947 after the partition. Their traditional occupation is hand-reading. Nesbitt (1980) gives a detailed account of the origin of the Bhatra caste and their association with the Sikh tradition. There has been a tradition of overseas migration among the Bhatra Sikhs. Migration of Bhatra Sikhs to Britain began in the 1920's (Ballard and Ballard, 1977:28; Nesbitt 1980:56) and they earned their living by hawking suitcases of clothing from door to door.

Bhatra Sikhs strictly observe the Khalsa discipline. Almost all Bhatra Sikhs in Leeds are kesdhari. The first Bhatra Sikh arrived in Leeds in 1947. His son, a leading member of Leeds Bhatra community, told us: "My father came to England in 1920. He used to live at Shepherd's Bush gurdwara in London. When Udham Singh, an Indian revolutionary who shot General Dyer, came to England, he stayed at the same gurdwara. This is my father's photograph with Udham Singh. Then my father went back to India and returned in 1947. I and my mother joined him in 1954 in Leeds. My father was one of the founding members of the gurdwara in Leeds. He was member of the board of trustees. In this photograph he is sitting with other officers and trustees of the gurdwara - this photograph was taken in 1959. My father was a very religious person - he kept the Sikh symbols intact. He brought a copy of the Guru Granth Sahib from India which he used to keep in our prayer room. My father donated a copy of the Guru Granth Sahib to the Sikh community when the first gurdwara was established in Leeds."

Bhatra Sikhs established their biradari community centre in 1967 at 6 Grange Terrace, Chapeltown, Leeds 7. The property was bought for £1,300. Their organisation is called Bhatra Nirman Jatha. There are one hundred and thirtyfive members of their association according to the information supplied by their president. The community centre is mainly used for entertaining wedding guests and other social functions. If there is a death in a Bhatra family, mourning gatherings take place at the biradari centre. Collection for the running of the centre is undertaken on a family basis. The family is

the most important unit within the Bhatra Sikh biradari. Explaining the aims of their biradari association, one Bhatra Sikh informant said that "The main aim of our sabha (association) is to resolve inter and intra-family disputes. Many difficulties arise after the weddings which are resolved by the biradari. We strongly disapprove of our biradari members going to the courts."

Marriages are arranged by the parents who receive a great deal of assistance from a wide kinship network living in other towns in Britain. Bhatra Sikhs organised their national association in order to resolve the growing problems of restrictions on the entry of male fiancés from India. The first national conference of the Bhatra Sikhs was held in 1969 in Manchester which has the largest Bhatra community in Britain. Reporting on the significance of the national conference of the Bhatra Sikh biradari, Thomas and Ghuman write that "In 1969 a British conference of Bhatras was held in Manchester, when rules for the giving of dowry were laid down. It was agreed, among other things, that no cash should be given, the amount of gold should be limited to 2 grams and a limit of 20 suits to the boy and his family. Limits were also agreed regarding kitchen utensils and other domestic furniture" (1976:66). Commenting on the role of their national conference, one Bhatra Sikh informant said that "At our first national conference, the four-got rule was modified. It was agreed that the main gots (father's got and mother's got) should be avoided to establish marriage alliances in this country. Only the biradari could have changed these centuries old customs, one or two families have no power to go against purani maryada (old traditions)."

Bhatra Sikhs strictly observe the tradition of celebrating gurpurbs (religious festivals including birth anniversaries of the Sikh Gurus). They hold diwans on the same day as shown in the jantris (Indian calendar) - it is called din dey din manauna. Usually the gurpurbs are celebrated on Sundays at most gurdwaras. A Rangarhia Sikh who is one of the founders of the gurdwara in Leeds greatly admired the Bhatra Sikhs for upholding the Sikh tradition in Leeds. He said that "I attended the first baisakhi diwan at a Bhatra Sikh house in 1957. There was a proper shabad-kirtan and langar - they had a special prayer room in which Guru Granth Sahib was installed."

In 1986, Bhatra Sikhs bought larger premises for their biradari. It is the former building of the Rangarhia Board, 38 Chapeltown Road, Leeds 7, for which Bhatras have paid £35,000. Each Bhatra household paid a minimum amount agreed by the biradari towards the building-fund. One Bhatra Sikh informant said that "Many families were not in a position to pay the fixed amount straight away, but they promised to pay in instalments. We are very proud to have our own biradari gurdwara". The opening ceremony of the Bhatra Sikh gurdwara was held on 19th October, 1986. On the baisakhi festival, 13th April, 1987, they hoisted a new nishan sahib (Sikh flag) outside the building followed by the baisakhi diwan. Members of the Bhatra Sikh community attended the celebration in large numbers. A new sign board which reads Gurdwara Sri Kalgidhar Sahib Ji - Bhatra Sangat, Leeds, has been fixed outside the building. Regular diwans are held at their gurdwara and are mainly attended by Bhatra Sikh families only.

Most Bhatra Sikh families are concentrated in and around Chapeltown where their grocery businesses are located. Their children go to schools in this area which has a high concentration of members of the West Indian community. Pakistani families are now moving into this area while Rangarhia and Jat Sikh families are moving out. Most Bhatra Sikh women work in their family shops. They are not encouraged to seek work outside. When questioned about the education of Bhatra Sikh girls, one Bhatra Sikh informant said that "We like our girls to be married off when they are young. Mostly they are withdrawn from school at the age of sixteen. They help running family shops or work at home. Boys are encouraged to get higher education. Some of them are studying at universities. Before they go to universities, parents usually arrange their marriages. My son and my nephew are both married - they are studying at the universities."

Some Bhatra Sikh women observe purdah when they are in the company of male elders from their husband's family. Wedding rituals are meticulously observed by the Bhatra Sikhs. Many early Sikh migrants remember a Bhatra wedding when the groom rode a mare and a brass band was hired for the ghori-chardna (riding a mare) ritual, which shows that their commitment to the traditional customs is much stronger than the other Sikhs. Nesbitt's observation (1980:66) that "In the Bhatra community boys are preferred to girls" is misleading as they are not the only community to do so. Preference for boys is part of traditional Indian culture which affects all sections of Punjabi society. The Bhatra Sikh biradari is strictly male-dominated. The decisions of the biradari are abided by all Bhatra Sikhs and are

taken by the panchayat (council) of biradari men. Bhatra Sikh women do not participate in the running of their biradari organisation. Commenting on the decisions taken by the biradari panchayat, one Bhatra Sikh informant said that "Two years ago a new board of trustees was appointed at the gurdwara. The management committee of the gurdwara proposed my name to represent the Bhatra Sikhs. But our biradari rejected their choice and decided to nominate another Bhatra Sikh. I informed the management committee of the gurdwara about the decision of our biradari because I could not go against the wishes of my biradari."

Interaction between Bhatras and other Sikh groups is very minimal. Apart from meeting at the gurdwara it is virtually non-existent. Most Sikhs regard Bhatras as a low caste group, but admire their commitment to the Sikh tradition. They are viewed as people with a gentle temperament who refrain from indulging in gurdwara politics. In Leeds, no Bhatra household belongs to either the Namdhari Sangat or Radhasoami Satsang. Members of two Bhatra families take active part in the International Sikh Youth Federation. Most Bhatra women wear colourful clothes which distinguish them from other Sikh women who regard their style as more peindu (traditional).

#### 4.3. Jhir Sikhs.

Jhirs (water-carriers) occupy a low status in Punjabi society. Like other village artisans they are called kammis (servants or clients). Their traditional occupation is to supply water to their jaimans

(patrons) for which they receive payment in kind twice a year. At the time of harvest they supply water to the Jat farmers in the fields and receive traditional payment. A Jhir woman would roast wheat or corn for the villagers at her bhathi (special oven with an open pan in which sand is heated to roast corn in the afternoon). Jhir men and women perform their traditional roles at life-cycle rituals in the families of their jaimans. Their main job is to participate in the preparation of food and to wash up dishes for which they receive ritual payment of food and some cash. A Jhir woman is responsible for performing the ritual of kumbh (pouring coins into a jug full of water carried by a Jhir woman) on auspicious occasions like weddings and engagements. The money poured in the jug is her traditional reward called lag. With the introduction of hand-pumps, the traditional occupation of supplying water has more or less become redundant in Punjabi villages. But their participation in the life-cycle rituals of their patrons remains one of the most significant functions for them.

Most Jhir Sikhs came to Britain in the late 1950's and early 1960's as unskilled labourers. According to the leaders of the Jhir biradari, fortyfive Jhir families live in Leeds, and they are all related to each other. Only one household had the experience of double migration - they had come from East Africa. Jhir Sikhs are a very close-knit community which reflects the impact of the process of chain migration. Describing the impact of chain migration on their biradari, one Jhir Sikh informant said that "I came to Leeds in 1963 to join my uncle who used to live in the Chapeltown area. I got a job

in a textile weaving factory in Harrogate. There was an acute shortage of unskilled labour in the textile industry because the wages were very low. I <sup>e</sup>persuaded the manager of my firm to get work permits for my father, brother and four maternal uncles. We used to live in one house. After a short time we brought over our families from India. Now there are twenty households which belong to my immediate family - they all live in Leeds. When there is a wedding or a birthday party in our khandan (extended family), we usually book a hall in order to accommodate all members."

Jhir Sikhs trace their association with the Sikh Panth from the time of the 10th Guru, Gobind Singh. According to tradition, one of the panj pyaras (first five Sikhs initiated by the 10th Guru at the time of formation of the Khalsa) was a Jhir Sikh. Bhai Ghanayia is another Jhir Sikh who is very popular among the Sikhs because of his association with the 10th Guru. Jhir Sikhs also feel proud of the contribution made by one Mota Singh (a Jhir) in the struggle for national independence. He was a prominent leader of the Indian National Congress in the Punjab.

Most Jhirs are clean-shaven, though there is a strong trend of growing hair and beards among the men of some families. Many Jhirs have Hindu names but they claim to be Sikhs and enrol as members of the gurdwara by paying membership fees. There are a few Jhir households in which some members have Hindu names while others have Sikh names. But none of the Jhir households attend the Hindu Temple for worship. In the Punjab, the Jhirs worship the water-god Khawaja

as well. Every year they celebrate Khawaja festival by sailing a miniature bark in a local canal or a village tank. This ceremony is called bera tarna (sailing a bark) - the village Jhir community cooks sweet dalia (porridge) which is given to the people present at the bera tarna ritual. They also worship Guga (cobra god). When questioned about the worship of Guga, one Jhir informant said that "The custom of Guga worship is losing its significance among the young generation - more people are getting education in the Punjab and they are not so keen on participating in traditio<sup>na</sup>l customs which they regard as degrading."

Jhir weddings are arranged by the parents, and wedding ceremonies are conducted at the gurdwaras according to the Sikh tradition. Jhir Sikhs play an important role in the affairs <sup>in</sup> <sup>of the</sup> two gurdwaras in Leeds. In the 1970's they held very important positions on the management committee of the gurdwara on Chapeltown Road. There were five Jhir Sikhs on the management committee in 1973/74. Two Jhir Sikhs held the positions of president and general secretray of the gurdwara. Three Jhir Sikhs are professional akhand-pathis (readers of Granth Sahib). There is a strong tradition of keeping the external Sikh symbols in some Jhir families. Members of one Jhir household take an active part in the Guru Nanak Sikh Temple, <sup>Tong</sup> Road. In 1980/81, a Jhir Sikh was elected president of the Guru Manak Sikh Temple.

Most Jhir Sikhs are unskilled workers. Many Jhir women go out to work; they mainly have jobs in the clothing manufacturing industry.

One Jhir Sikh family owns a clothing manufacturing business and they employ more than twenty female workers who are mainly Asians. Female members of this household also work in the factory. Nine Jhir Sikh households are engaged in grocery businesses, and one family owns a very successful restaurant near the university. Seven Jhir families have moved into large houses in the suburbs of Leeds. Three families organised the ceremony of akhand-path at their new houses and invited their relatives and friends. Pictures of Sikh Gurus and Hindu deities are found in many Jhir houses.

Marriages among the Jhir Sikhs are arranged by the parents, and the rules of endogamy and exogamy are strictly followed. There has been a strong trend to bring fiancés from India. In 1970, Jhir Sikhs in Leeds organised their caste association called Kashap Rajput Welfare Association (Kashap Rajput is a respectful term used for the Jhirs). When questioned about the aims of their association, one Jhir informant said that "We are Sikhs and we reject the caste system - we actively participate in the affairs of the gurdwara. But the establishment of marriage alliances is a different matter. Prior to the restrictions on the entry of male fiances we did not face any problems. But now we have difficulty finding suitable spouses from our biradari in this country. So we established our biradari association in order to assist Jhir families. A national conference of our biradari was held in Birmingham a few years ago. We were shocked to learn that one Jhir girl married a Punjabi Muslim in Leeds. Another girl wanted to marry outside our biradari, but her

parents approached our biradari association and we were able to find a suitable partner."

Most Jhir Sikhs avoid the use of gots with their names. They prefer to use the name of their village as a surname, (Chahal and Dandi, for example) which is an indication of their self-perception of low caste status. Jhir Sikhs encourage their child<sup>ren</sup> to go into higher education. Education is perceived as a symbol of social status within the biradari and the Sikh community. Jhir Sikhs actively participate in the Leeds Community Relations Council, one Jhir Sikh being one of its founder members. Jhir Sikhs do not participate in the activities of either the Nandhari Sangat or Radhasoami Satsang. A couple of Jhir Sikh families follow the sect of Raja Sahib which is led by a prominent local holy man. One Jhir Sikh is a professional cook of Indian food. He is very popular in the Sikh community for preparing excellent dishes at weddings. He has a very successful business which is closely associated with the traditional occupation of Jhirs. Most Jhirs, however, disapprove of cooking food as an occupation because it is viewed as menial work by them. Commenting on the occupation of cooking food, one prominent Jhir Sikh said that "There is nothing wrong with the work as such. But when it is done by members of our biradari, the people tend to regard us as their lagis (servants)."

Jhir women do not perform their traditional role in life-cycle rituals in Jat Sikh or Rangarhia Sikh households in Britain. The ritual of kumbh is performed by a female member of the family and the coins poured in the jug are donated to a gurdwara. There is a marked

change in the behaviour of the Sikhs towards the ritual duties of low caste groups in this country. They do not expect low caste groups to perform their ritual duties because they are aware of their relationships with each other which are no longer based on the jaimani system. Moreover, high caste Sikhs cannot force the Jhir Sikhs to perform their ritual functions in this country.

Although many Jhirs have retained their Hindu names, they do not practise traditional rituals. In 1984, my wife and I were invited to a mundan (cutting the first hair) ceremony by one of our Jhir friends. The wife comes from a Jhir Sikh family while the husband has a Hindu name and is clean-shaven. Their marriage was arranged by the parents following the norms of endogamy - it was solemnised according to the Sikh tradition of anand-karaj. On the fifth birthday of their son, they decided to have the mundan ceremony and invited their relatives and friends. The ritual was performed by a professional female hair-dresser instead of a Nai (Indian barber). The boy and his mother received gifts from the relatives and friends. When questioned about the ritual of mundan in a Sikh family, the brother of the wife said that "We are all Sikhs but my brother-in-law believes in the Hindu traditions. Mundan is against the Sikh traditions, but we could not force him to ab<sup>o</sup>ndon the ceremony. Moreover, we could not ignore and refuse to attend a birthday celebration. That would have been tantamount to rejecting our own sister." Some Jhir Sikh families organise the celebration of birthday parties at the gurdwara by cooking langar for the sangat.

Jhir Sikhs do not go to the Rangarhia gurdwara. Bhatra Sikh gurdwara or Nishkam Sevak Jatha gurdwara in Leeds. They attend the Chapeltown Road gurdwara and Guru Nanak Sikh Temple in Leeds 12. At a life-cycle celebration in Jhir families almost all Jhir households in Leeds are present. This enhances caste consciousness and strengthens caste solidarity.

#### 4.4. Julaha Sikhs.

There are twentyseven Julaha Sikh households in Leeds. Julaha literally means a weaver. In Sikh society, Julaha Sikhs are known by two names: Khalsa biradar (brother of the Khalsa) and Randasia Sikhs. These are respectful titles, but Julaha Sikhs prefer to be called Sikhs only. In Punjabi villages their houses are located next to the chamardlis (colonies of Chamars). Commenting on the contribution of the Julaha Sikhs to the British armed forces, Satish Saberwal says that "The Randasia Sikhs - traditionally weavers or leather workers, another low caste - have also been drawn into the army, especially in times of active fighting, as in 1857 and during World War Two, and were discharged afterwards" (Saberwal 1976:12). A leading member of the Ravi Das Sabha explained the distinction between the terms Julaha and Chamar. He said that "We are all Chamars (landless labourers and leather workers) - some families chose to take up weaving, they were known as Julahas. My ancestors were weavers, but they reverted to shoe-making during the war. We have common gots and our houses are located on one side of the villages."

The status of Julaha Sikhs within Punjabi social structure is lower than other village artisans, but higher than that of Chamars and Mazhbi Sikhs. They pride themselves to be the followers of the 10th Guru, Gobind Singh, and observe the Khalsa discipline very strictly. Julaha Sikhs are categorised as members of the scheduled castes and they receive privileged treatment under the constitution of India. In Leeds, Julaha Sikhs have been closely associated with the establishment of the first gurdwara. The first general secretary of the management committee was a Julaha Sikh who is a kesdhari. One Julaha Sikh was a member of the first board of trustees - he was a mona (clean-shaven) Sikh and used to work in a coal mine. There is a strong tradition of religious education and learning among the Julaha Sikhs.

Julaha Sikhs take an active part in two gurdwaras where they hold important positions on the management committees. Many Julaha families actively support the Khalistan movement. They feel proud that one of the assailants of Indira Gandhi was a Julaha Sikh. The local branch of the International Sikh Youth Federation has a strong representation of Julaha Sikhs.

The tradition of arranged marriages is very strong among the Julaha Sikhs. Most spouses were brought from the Punjab. Rules of caste endogamy are strictly observed by them. There is no formal caste association of the Julaha Sikhs in Leeds. Almost all Julaha Sikh families participate in life-cycle celebrations among their members. They are a very close-knit community. There is not a single case of

inter-caste marriage among the Julaha Sikhs. One Julaha young man from Leeds married a Gujarati Hindu girl some years ago. His parents felt so ashamed of this arrangement that they did not organise a Sikh wedding ceremony because of the disapproval of the relationship by the members of their biradari.

Julaha Sikhs are not engaged in their traditional occupation of weaving. Two Julaha households own clothing manufacturing businesses. One Julaha family has a successful business of Indian cooked-food. A couple of Julaha households own grocery shops. Many Julaha women work in the clothing industry. Most Julaha Sikhs are popular for being professional pathis (readers of Guru Granth Sahib). In Leeds, there are a dozen Julaha Sikhs, both men and women, who take part in akhand-paths and sadharan/sahej-paths. Julaha Sikhs take a leading part in organising amrit (Sikh initiation) sessions. There is not a single Julaha Sikh member of either the Nandhari Sangat or Radhasoami Satsang in Leeds. Only one Julaha Sikh has joined the Nishkam Sevak Jatha in Leeds - he is a professional pathi. Many Julaha Sikhs have moved to the suburbs of Leeds.

#### 4.5. Khatri Sikhs.

There is only one Khatri Sikh household in Leeds. They run a post-office which is managed by the head of the family. They have two children who work in the civil service. All members of the household observe the Khalsa discipline very strictly. There is another household in which the husband comes from a Jat Sikh family while the

wife belongs to the Khatri Sikh household. They both work in the civil service. They have kept their Sikh symbols intact, but they do not take an active part in the affairs of the Sikh community.

#### 4.6. Chamar Sikhs.

There are only five Chamar Sikh households in Leeds, but far more in Bradford as will be explained in Chapter 6. In Leeds the Chamars live in the Chapeltown area. They go to the Chapeltown Road gurdwara. Members of one Chamar household are kesdhari and have Sikh names. One Chamar household belongs to the Birdi got which is also found among the Ramgarhia Sikhs.

#### 4.7 Nai Sikhs.

There are two Nai households in Leeds. The head of one household was a kesdhari Sikh. Members of Nai (barber) households do not follow their traditional occupation. Most of them have Hindu names, but they do not go to the Hindu Temple for worship. Mostly they go to the Chapeltown Road gurdwara. They are not asked to perform their traditional role of cutting hair or taking messages on life-cycle rituals celebrated by members of other caste groups. Members of one Nai household attend the Radhasoami Satsang in Leeds.

The existence of these various distinct caste groups among Sikhs in Leeds shows that caste exists in the Sikh community as a structural reality running counter to the teachings of the Sikh Gurus. In

Punjabi society, social relationships are based on the jainani system which regulates economic and political life in the villages. Caste hierarchy is organised on the principle of patron-client relationships. In the Punjab, Jat Sikhs are the principal land-owners and the dominant caste group. Marriages are arranged according to the rules of caste endogamy and exogamy. Meaningful social interaction takes place only within individual caste groups. Interaction between different castes is based on the rules of ritual purity and pollution which is evident from the existence of segregated colonies (chamrdlis), separate wells and cremation grounds for the low caste Sikhs.

In the migrant situation many attributes of the caste system have become redundant. Traditional occupations have been abandoned and therefore, can no longer be an indicator of one's caste status. This suggests that inter-caste relations are not based on the jainani system any more. The dominance of Jat Sikhs, whose power has traditionally been based on their ownership of land, has no relevance for the Sikhs in Britain. Now it is in the practice of caste endogamy which has become the fundamental criterion of caste among the Sikhs in Britain. Family and biradari izzat (honour) are more important than the egalitarian principles of the brotherhood of the Khalsa. After the pioneer period of settlement when caste rules were largely ignored, the arrival of families from India and East Africa led again to the enhancement of the practice of traditional culture. The establishment of caste associations and caste-based gurdwaras replaced the traditional functions of the caste panchayats.

(councils). These different associations and gurdwaras have now become the main institutions for the promotion of caste consciousness and caste solidarity among Sikhs in Britain. They have also been instrumental in modifying the rules of four-got exogamy which has ensured the smooth functioning of the system of arranged marriages. Participation in wedding rituals not only promotes caste consciousness, but also helps the survival and continuity of traditional values. In the next chapter I shall look in detail at the largest caste group in Leeds, the Rangarhias.

CHAPTER 5

CASTE AND THE RAMGARHIA SIKHS IN LEEDS.

The Ramgarhias form the largest group among the Sikhs in Leeds. The general secretary of the Ramgarhia Board estimates that there are more than four hundred Ramgarhia Sikh households in Leeds including the Dhimans (Hindu carpenters). We will first examine the origin of the title "Ramgarhia" and its adoption as a corporate name by the members of the Punjabi Tarkhan (carpenter) caste. Social interaction in Punjabi villages follows the pattern of patron-client relationship. Traditional occupation is a primary indicator of a person's identity and status. A Jat Sikh is referred to as sirdar (chief) or zimindar (landlord), while a Tarkhan Sikh is referred to as mistry (skilled artisan). Members of the Tarkhan caste are called kammis (servants) in the village because they work for the Jats on the basis of jaimani system.

Issues concerning the status of Ramgarhia Sikhs and the process of upward mobility within Sikh society are linked with the entry of the Tarkhans into the Sikh Panth (society). Some social scientists have described the Ramgarhia's commitment to the Khalsa discipline as "religious orthodoxy" and a strategy to elevate their kammin (low caste and servant) status by emulating the Jat Sikhs. Discussing the

caste factors in the Sikh community in Britain, Ballard and Ballard say that "...Since they traditionally ranked lower than the Jats, the Rangarhias have long sought to improve their status by following the rules of religious orthodoxy both in East Africa and Britain" (1977:38). McLeod took the same position when he discussed the methods used by depressed groups to raise their status within Sikh society. He writes that "In the case of Tarkhans (carpenters) the pursuit of this ambition has taken an unusually interesting form. It can be assumed that many Tarkhans must have entered the Panth in imitation of the Jat landowners whom they traditionally served in a client relationship" (1976:102).

I suggest that the patterns of behaviour which provided models of imitation for the Punjabi Tarkhans are mainly the Khalsa discipline, political leadership provided by Banda Bahadur (he was nominated by the 10th Guru, Gobind Singh to lead the Sikhs after his death in 1708) and the leadership of Jassa Singh Rangarhia (he was one of the leaders of twelve Sikh misls or armies operating in the Punjab in the 18th century). The fundamental criterion of religious orthodoxy of the Sikhs is the observation of the Khalsa discipline which means the wearing of Sikh symbols popularly known as the five K's and a turban. Adoption of the Khalsa discipline also means in principle the rejection of caste and acquisition of new and equal status of membership into the Khalsa brotherhood. After the Sikh initiation the neophyte takes on the new name "Singh". He is declared as son of Guru Gobind Singh and his wife Sahib Kaur, belonging to the village Anandpur. The pani pyarey (first five) initiated by the 10th Guru

belonged to low castes. According to tradition, Guru Gobind Singh received amrit from the panj pyaras after their initiation and declared "Khalsa mero rup hai khas (I have created the Khalsa in my own image). The Sikh Gurus were all Khatris by caste - a mercantile jat claiming the rank of kshatrya and commanding high status in Punjabi society. According to Sikh tradition many thousands of all castes received amrit on the baisakhi day in 1699 (McLeod 1976:15). It is evident that all who took amrit on that day were not imitating the Jats. They were inspired by the message imparted through the amrit ceremony which bestowed a new status upon them.

The entry of the Tarkhans into the Sikh Panth can be traced to Bhai Lalo, a carpenter of the village Aimmabad, now in Pakistan. On his first travels (udasi) Guru Nanak stayed with Bhai Lalo where he composed his celebrated hymn enunciating his mission. He addressed this hymn to Bhai Lalo, condemning the mass slaughter by the army of Baber, the first Mogul emperor of India. Commenting on the status of Bhai Lalo within the Sikh Panth, McLeod says that "Even higher in the traditional estimation stands the figure of Bhai Lalo, a carpenter who plays a central part in one of the most popular of all janam-sakhi (biography) stories about Guru Nanak" (1974:86). Gurdial Singh Reehal in Ramgarhia Itihas (History of the Ramgarhias) (1979) notes the names of seventytwo distinguished Punjabi carpenters who worked closely with the Sikh Gurus and made valuable contributions to the development of Sikh tradition. He says that "Bhai Rupa, a prominent Tarkhan Sikh officiated at the wedding of the 10th Guru, Gobind Singh. His descendants known as Bagrian-wale (belonging to the

village of Bagrian) were the royal priests of the Sikh rulers of Phulkian states. They administered the royal tilak (coronation ceremony) and officiated on royal weddings" (Reehal 1979:162). It seems plausible that the entry of Tarkhans into the Sikh Panth took place under the leadership of distinguished Tarkhan Sikhs over a long period.

In the form of the Khalsa a powerful brotherhood was established to fight against the mighty power of the Moguls. Guru Gobind Singh armed his followers who were known as sant-sepahis (saint soldiers). God, for Guru Gobind Singh, was personified by steel and worshipped in the form of the sword (McLeod 1976:13). Most prominent among the followers of Guru Gobind Singh were two Tarkhan Sikhs, Hardas Singh Bhanwra and his son, Bhagwan Singh, who fought battles under his command. After his death in 1708, both leaders joined forces under Banda Bahadur to lead the Sikh Panth. Commenting on the position of Bhagwan Singh Bhanwra within the Sikh Panth, Gurdial Singh Reehal says that "Bhagwan Singh was appointed governor of Doaba (Jullundar and Hoshiarpur districts) by Banda Singh Bahadur" (1976:209). Jassa Singh Ramgarhia was the eldest son of Bhagwan Singh. He inherited the skills of his father and grandfather and became the leader of Ramgarhia misl (armed band). Jassa Singh built the fort of Ramgarh (this means literally the fort of God) to defend the Golden Temple, Amritsar. McLeod notes that "In 1749, however, he (Jassa Singh) played a critical role in relieving the besieged fort of Ram Rauni outside Amritsar. The fort was subsequently entrusted to his charge, rebuilt and renamed Ramgarh, and it was as governor of the fort that

he came to be known as Jassa Singh Ramgarhia" (1974:79). The title of Ramgarhia was bestowed on Jassa Singh by the leaders of the Sikh misls. According to the Dictionary of Punjabi Language (18<sup>95</sup>), the word "Ramgarrya" means a title of respect applied to a Sikh carpenter. Describing the position held by Jassa Singh among the leaders of Sikh misls, Saberwal in Mobile Men says that "We have noted the part played by Jassa Singh Ramgarhia in the 18th century; though a Tarkhan, by virtue of his military stature he sometimes emerged as a spokesman for all twelve Sikh misls in relation to other centres of power" (1976:99).

The Ramgarhia identity symbolises the military genius of Jassa Singh Ramgarhia, his family's close association with Banda Bahadur who established the first Sikh state in 1710, and with the 10th Guru, Gobind Singh. Jassa Singh Ramgarhia is perceived as a true follower of Guru Gobind Singh by the Sikhs who played a key role in the destruction of Mogul power and facilitated the establishment of Sikh rule under Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The Ramgarhia Sikhs take great pride in the family history of Jassa Singh Ramgarhia. In Britain, the Ramgarhia Council, U.K. celebrates the "Jassa Singh Ramgarhia Day" every year. Speaking at the national celebration of "Jassa Singh Ramgarhia Day" in Birmingham in 1981, Jaswant Singh Bhanwra, General Secretary of the Ramgarhia Council, said that "We are proud to be the sons of Maharaja Jassa Singh Ramgarhia whose grandfather was initiated into the Khalsa Panth by the 10th Guru, Gobind Singh, in 1699". Saberwal describes the sentiments about the pride in the Ramgarhia identity as expressed by Sunder Singh, great-great-grandson of one of

the brothers of Jassa Singh Ramgarhia, who said that "As a rule all Sikhs who belong to the same caste or clan as the Ramgarhia family call themselves Ramgarhias and I am proud to note that generally they are the most orthodox disciples of the Guru. In respect of martial qualities also they are second to none in the Punjab. In their veins runs the blood of their mighty forefathers and martyrs, their frames possess the indomitable spirit of Jassa Singh Ramgarhia, one of the greatest generals that the soil of the Punjab has ever produced" (Saberwal 1976:88).

The Ramgarhias are also proud to be associated with the Namdhari movement led by Baba Ram Singh who was a Tarkhan Sikh. He organised the first political opposition to the British rule after the annexation of Punjab in 1850. In 1857, on baisakhi day, he declared his manifesto and a programme of action for the liberation of India. In 1872, he was exiled to Burma where he died in 1885. Many Namdhari activists were sent to the gallows during the British Raj. Namdhari Sikhs believe in the continuation of the tradition of dehdhari (living) gurus. They claim to follow the Khalsa discipline as enunciated by the 10th Guru, Gobind Singh, and they are strict vegetarians. Baba Ram Singh's successors continued the struggle for independence by joining forces with the Indian National Congress. Through the Namdhari connection, the Ramgarhia Sikhs perceive themselves to be part of the national movement for the independence of India. In 1982, Giani Zail Singh, a Ramgarhia Sikh, was elected president of India as a nominee of the Indian National Congress Party. The Ramgarhia Sikhs celebrated his appointment as a symbol of

Ramgarhia victory. Telegrams of congratulations were sent by the Ramgarhia Council, U.K. and other local Ramgarhia associations. Pictures of Giani Zail Singh are found in most Ramgarhia community centres in Britain.

I have stated that the Tarkhans did not enter the Sikh Panth in imitation of the Jat Sikh landowners whom they served as sepidars (menials). On the contrary, their overt model was the Khalsa discipline coupled with the association of distinguished Tarkhan leaders with the Sikh Gurus and their contribution towards the establishment of Sikh rule in the Punjab. Moreover, the attitude of the Jat Sikhs towards the external symbols of Sikhism is markedly different from that of the Ramgarhia Sikhs. Commenting on the attitude of the Jat Sikhs in the Punjab towards the external symbols of Sikhism, McLeod says that "Finally we must note the distinctively Jat attitude towards the Panth. Since the migration of 1947 the Jats of Majha, Malva, and Doaba have virtually all been Sikhs. Not all, however, are visibly Sikh as the Jat Sikh commonly assumes a considerable freedom with regard to observation of the Khalsa discipline (rahat). In his own eyes and those of other Jats he remains a Sikh even if he cuts his beard or smokes tobacco" (1976:98). Their lax attitude towards the Khalsa discipline is evident from their behaviour in a migrant situation. The overwhelming majority of Sikh migrants are Jat Sikhs who ab<sup>o</sup>ndon<sup>h</sup>ed their external symbols of Sikhism on arrival in Britain. Raminder Singh says that "Many Sikhs dispensed with their beards and turbans for practical reasons: convenience at work; lack of time to tie a turban and press

a beard before going to work; and lack of bathing facilities in the houses" (1978:23). But these difficulties did not deter the Ramgarhia Sikhs from their commitment to the Khalsa discipline. Commenting on the attitude of Ramgarhia Sikhs towards the Khalsa discipline, Ballard and Ballard note that "The turban has always been quite as much a social as a religious symbol and its retention by East Africans (Ramgarhias), along with its readoption by established residents was a public assertion of their pride in themselves" (1977:37-8). Bhachu also says that "The greater emphasis on maintaining external Sikh symbols, and the religiosity of the East Africans, runs parallel to the positive perpetuation of their Ramgarhia identity" (1985:51).

In Leeds the Jat Sikhs realised the significance of a kesdhari Sikh when they were struggling to gain respectable position<sup>s</sup> on the management committee of the gurdwara. A leading member of the Indian Farmers Welfare Society said that "Most Jat Sikhs were clean-shaven, so we gave the call 'Sikh banao' (Let us become kesdharis)". It seems illogical to suggest that the Jat Sikhs provided the ideal model of a kesdhari Sikh for their Tarkhan sepidars (serving caste) and other low-caste Sikhs. The commitment of Tarkhan Sikhs to the Khalsa discipline remained unchanged when they released themselves from the jaimani system by moving to towns and to East Africa.

In order to understand the emergence of Ramgarhia identity, we must locate the processes which have enabled them to move in large numbers from jaimani relationships in the village to urban-industrial

entrepreneurship both within India and East Africa. The extension of British rule to the Punjab opened up enormous opportunities for the Punjabi Tarkhans. They channelled their energy and resources into going abroad in search of wealth and towards participating in the urban-industrial growth in India. Their technical skills were harnessed to build railways, canals and administrative towns both in India and East Africa. The Ramgarhias were the majority Sikh group, approximately 90 per cent of the whole Sikh population in East Africa (Bhachu 1985:14; McLeod 1974:87). In East Africa, they established their social and religious institutions like the Ramgarhia associations, Ramgarhia gurdwaras and clubs. By the 1960's, the Ramgarhias had moved from being skilled artisans, indentured to build the railways, to successful entrepreneurs, middle and high-level administrators and technicians. Bhachu argues that "Support structures developed during their stay in East Africa have not only helped manufacture their 'East Africanness' but have also aided the perpetuation of their identity as 'staunch Sikhs' in the South Asian diaspora, independent of the original country of origin" (1985:13). In East Africa, the Ramgarhias demonstrated a remarkable capacity for maintaining the external symbols of Sikhism, which is a clear indication of their commitment to the Khalsa discipline.

The Ramgarhias achieved a noticeable measure of economic success in the urban-industrial sector, both in India and in East Africa. They were able to discard the low status of a village Tarkhan by transforming themselves into wealthy contractors and skilled artisans employed in railway workshops and other industries. In cities they

were associated with the Khatri Sikhs, the mercantile group in urban Punjabi society. In the Punjab, the distinctive feature has been the concentration of Ramgarhia Sikhs in particular towns i.e. Phagwara, Kartarpur, Batala, and Goraya. These towns are known for car parts industries, furniture, foundries and agricultural machinery owned by the Ramgarhia Sikhs. This newly achieved economic status was one of the factors which encouraged them to build religious, social and educational institutions belonging to their biradari. In the town of Phagwara, they have built an educational complex which includes a degree college, a teacher training college, a polytechnic, an industrial training institute and several schools. Writing about the significance of these institutions, Gurdial Singh Reehal says that "In 1978, there were 5,300 full-time students and 337 staff at these institutions. Approximately 240,000 rupees are paid in monthly salaries. This is one example of public services rendered by the Ramgarhia community" (1979:253).

In the late 19th century, most Tarkhan Sikhs who were concentrated in urban areas began to organise themselves on a biradari basis. They emulated the descendants of Jassa Singh who liked to be known as Ramgarhia Sikhs. Saberwal notes the following references to the word Ramgarhia before the end of the 19th century:

1883-84: a Ramgarhia Jatha (group) in Simla, presumably active in the politics of the local gurdwara;

1893: a Ramgarhia Sabha (association) established in Lahore;

1893: a Ramgarhia social club in Simla which ran for three or four years (1976:91).

Another important factor in the development of Ramgarhia identity was the Punjab Land Alienation Act, passed in 1900, which declared the Ramgarhias and other castes as non-agriculturists, thus depriving them of buying agricultural land in the Punjab. The Ramgarhias found this barrier to the ownership of agricultural land frustrating, as it reinforced their low caste status in the Punjabi society. In order to remove these restrictions, mobilisation of the whole biradari was seen as an important task. To achieve this objective, the Ramgarhias employed modern means of communication - they organised biradari conferences, caste journals began to appear and caste welfare associations emerged in the towns of Punjab - all using the name Ramgarhia.

The Ramgarhias persistently attacked their classification as non-agriculturists and this was opposed by all Jats - Sikh, Muslim and Hindu. It is with the Jat Sikhs that the Ramgarhias interact in numerous social, jaimani and religious contexts. Consequently, the Jat Sikhs were seen as the main blockage in their struggle to gain the right to buy agricultural land which was the symbol of status and upward mobility. Discussing the impact of the Punjab Land Alienation Act on the Ramgarhia biradari, Gurdial Singh Reehal notes that "In December 1901 the first Ramgarhia conference was held at Gujranwala, now in Pakistan, under the presidentship of Sardar Ram Singh Thekedar (contractor). The main objective of this conference was to oppose the Punjab Land Alienation Act" (1979:245). The struggle against the Punjab Land Alienation Act provided a political platform which helped the consolidation of Ramgarhia identity among the Punjabi Tarkhans.

As a result, the name of Vish<sup>va</sup> karma Vansh Sudhar Sabha (Vishavkarma Brotherhood Reform Society) formed in 1908, was changed to Ramgarhia Sabha in 1911. In 1931, the Ramgarhia Sikhs built a memorial gurdwara at the village Tattlewali where Bhai Lalo, associate of Guru Nanak, had lived and died in his old age. The Ramgarhia Sikhs of East Africa gave substantial aid to build this gurdwara (Reehal 1979:61). In addition to their Sikh affiliation, Tarkhan Sikhs achieved a notable degree of corporate cohesion through engagement in biradari activities which facilitated the consolidation of their Ramgarhia identity.

It is my contention that the Khalsa brotherhood did not provide the basic model for social interaction between Sikh caste groups. On the contrary, in Punjabi villages it is the jajmani relationships which mould the pattern of behaviour. The jajmani relationships are asymmetrical - all sepidars (clients) i.e. Tarkhans (carpenters), Jhirs (water-carriers), Nais (barbers) and Chamars (leather workers and landless labourers) are dependent on the Jat landowners for payment in kind for the exchange of their services. They also provide services at life-cycle celebrations in their jajman's house for which they receive ritual payment of food. Jajmani relationships are the <sup>a</sup>m/nifestation of a caste hierarchy. I will attempt to examine the social interaction within Sikh society by applying the theory of 'reference group' as originally developed by Merton (1957) and used by Owen Lynch in The Politics of Untouchability (1969). These writers identify three types of reference groups. Lynch says that "First, there is a reference group of imitation whose ways of behaviour are

accepted as right and proper or as useful and therefore to be imitated by the group making the reference. Second, there is a reference group of identification to which an individual refers when identifying himself. He may do this when he is actually a member of that group or when he merely claims membership in such a group. The latter alternative is of distinctive concern in reference group theory. Finally, there is a negative reference group which stands as one's enemy or as the denier of the claims of one's own group" (Lynch 1969:9).

The Ramgarhia Sikhs identify themselves with the Sikh Panth. However, they imitate the Khalsa discipline introduced by the 10th Guru, Gobind Singh. Their negative reference group is the Jat Sikhs who deny them equal status within the Panth. The Jat Sikhs are perceived as a negative group by the sepidars (clients) in the Punjab because they control the land and its use which is the main source of their dominant status. Commenting on the inter-caste relationships within the Sikh Panth, R.A. Schermerhorn in Ethnic Plurality in India (1978) writes that "It should also be mentioned that the Scheduled Castes Sikhs have steadfastly opposed the Akali Dal (political party of the Sikhs dominated by the Jat Sikhs), particularly in its demand for Punjabi Suba (state). These outcaste groups have felt that to subject themselves to the rule of the Jats in a Sikh state would alter the power balance decidedly against them: they have therefore voted with other parties in opposition to the Akalis" (Schermerhorn 1978:147). Mark Juergensmeyer also provides evidence in support of the view that the Jat Sikhs are perceived as a negative reference group by the low

caste Sikhs. Describing the implications of political and economic dominance of the Jat Sikhs in Punjabi village, he writes that "In recent elections most of the village supported the Akali Party, but there was a suspicious 25 per cent Congress vote - exactly matching the number of Scheduled Caste voters. After the elections, the landlords for some weeks denied the Scheduled Castes daily access to their fields, an act which was tantamount to blocking access to the Scheduled Caste's bathrooms; the ensuing sanitation problem in the village finally <sup>e</sup>persuaded the landlords to relent" (Juergensmeyer 1979:257).

I do not subscribe to the view that "Since they traditionally ranked lower than the Jats, the Ramgarhias have long sought to improve their status by following the rules of religious orthodoxy more closely, and they have continued this strategy both in East Africa and in Britain" (Ballad and Ballard 1977:38). Wearing the external symbols of Sikhism, participation in diwans (religious services) and the building of gurdwaras are not necessarily signs of religious orthodoxy, but simply the following of traditional culture. On the contrary, the Sikhs associate these characteristics with the concept of seva (service) and membership of the Sikh Panth. It is important to note the distinction between kesdhari and amritdhari Sikhs. For example, all amritdharis must be kesdharis whereas the kesdharis do not have to be amritdharis. Lynch argues that "'Visibility' is that characteristic of a status which makes it known through the operation of status cues or attributes" (1969:15). Thus, wearing Sikh symbols means for those who can see and know the meaning of these clues that

a person is a member of the Sikh community. Building gurdwaras is an established tradition among the Sikhs. The Punjabi migrants in Canada who were mainly Jat Sikhs built their first gurdwara in British Columbia in 1908 (Juergensmeyer 1979:179). In 1958, the first gurdwara in Leeds was established by the pioneer Sikhs who belonged to various caste groups.

The traditionalism of East African Ramgarhias has not been sufficiently explained by writers on Sikhism. In East Africa, the Ramgarhias formed the overwhelming majority among the Sikh community. They had moved from being skilled artisans to successful entrepreneurs, middle and high level administrators, doctors, lawyers, teachers and technicians. They were the trend setters in East Africa and were thus imitated by other Sikhs. It is not surprising to note that non-Ramgarhia Sikhs in East Africa were also kesdharis and experienced in the affairs of building and running gurdwaras and other organisations. Bhachu says that "Since they (Ramgarhias) themselves were the majority Sikh group in East Africa, there being 90 per cent Ramgarhia Sikhs, their caste position was not a defining marker of their ethnicity because their status as Sikhs assumed much more importance" (1985:14). In East Africa, inter-caste relationships were not based on the jaimani system. The low caste status of being a village Tarkhan had become redundant. For the East African Ramgarhias ownership of land in Punjabi villages had lost its significance as a status symbol. On the contrary, the acquisition of higher technical and professional qualifications had become the salient feature of one's standing in the Sikh community. The new

generation of East African-born Ramgarhias was exposed to a system of education modelled on the British pattern and to a higher standard of living. Moreover, they had no experience of working as village sepidars for the Jat Sikh landlords. Therefore they did not perceive their Ramgarhia identity in terms of a low caste village Tarkhan. Their pride in the Ramgarhia identity runs parallel to their greater emphasis on maintaining external Sikh symbols which signify their commitment to the Khalsa discipline.

The Ramgarhia Sikhs do not perceive any contradiction between their "Ramgarhia" and "Sikh" identities. In Leeds, they were at the forefront when the first gurdwara was built in 1958. By maintaining their external Sikh symbols, they represented the Sikh tradition to outsiders. In his letter addressed to "All Councillors, Leeds City Council" dated 28th April, 1983, Mr. S.S. Sambhi, Hon<sup>o</sup>rary General Secretary of the Ramgarhia Board, Leeds writes that "It is probably coincidence that led to the majority of the original Sikhs to settle in Leeds being Ramgarhias and as a result it was they who were responsible for the foundation of the present Sikh Temple on Chapeltown Road, Leeds." There are two questions which are basic to the definition of a socially mobile group like the Ramgarhias. These are: (a) who are we? or who do we claim to be?, and (b) How do we behave in order to validate who we are? or claim to be? The Punjabi Tarkhans claim to be the members of the Sikh Panth, which is demonstrated through their Ramgarhia identity. The answers to these claims are evident from their behavior. In the "President's Message" Mr. Bansal, President of the Ramgarhia Board, Leeds, writes that the

"Ramgarhia Board is a very active Sikh society, founded in 1966 in the city of Leeds. The main aim of the society has been to promote Sikh religion and provide means of religious, social, cultural and educational teachings of the Sikh community through religious services and various other social functions. Baisakhi is an important day for all Sikhs. It was on this day that Guru Gobind Singh Ji created the Khalsa. This year here in Leeds this day has another significance, it marks the laying of the foundation stone for the new Ramgarhia Sikh Sports Centre building" (Ramgarhia Sikh Bulletin, 13th April, 1984).

Formation of the Nishkam Sevak Jatha by the Ramgarhia Sikhs was a clear indication of their claim to the membership of the Sikh Panth. The main aim of the Jatha was to organise amrit (Sikh initiation) sessions. All members of this organisation were amritdhari Sikhs. They are followers of Baba Puran Singh Karichowale (a Ramgarhia Sikh holy man from East Africa). They used to hold regular nam-simran (meditation on God's name) sessions at the gurdwara. They had the experience of conducting religious ceremonies like sadharan/sahej-path (reading of Guru Granth Sahib) and akhand-path (unbroken reading of Guru Granth Sahib). They preached strict observation of the Khalsa discipline and vegetarianism. By 1975, they had taken over the control of the management committee of the gurdwara. Leaders of the Nishkam Sevak Jatha projected their Khalsa identity through the religious activities conducted at the gurdwara. Their Ramgarhia identity is activated by their membership of the Ramgarhia Board. Significance of this bond is acknowledged by the leaders of the

Ramgarhia Board. Writing in their special brochure published on the opening ceremony of the Ramgarhia Sikh Sports Centre on 6th May, 1987, Mr. Chana, Chairman of the Building Committee said that "On acquiring a piece of land in Sheepscar, Sant Baba Puran Singh Ji Karichowale graced the occasion by coming to the site to offer his blessings." Emphasising the close relationship between the two organisations, Mr. Bansal, President of the Ramgarhia Board, writes that "the Nishkam Sevak Jatha of Leeds has always worked together with Ramgarhia Board in organising and arranging religious functions" (Ramgarhia Sikh Bulletin, April, 1985).

The Ramgarhias have blended their "Sikh" and "Ramgarhia" identities into the design for the name of their new Sports Centre, which reads:



(on the left are the Sikh symbols)

The Ramgarhia Sikhs display a remarkable capacity for the demonstration of their "Sikh" identity by participating in processions and demonstrations jointly organised by other Sikhs. In 1984, they went to London to take part in the national demonstration against the attack on the Golden Temple by the Indian army. The demonstration was organised by the Sikh community in Britain.

By 1972, the Ramgarhia Sikhs had established their biradari institutions in many towns in Britain. The Ramgarhia Board of Leeds called a meeting of the representatives of all Ramgarhia organisations in Britain to find solutions to the problems faced by the biradari. The meeting was held at the headquarters of the Leeds Ramgarhia Board. The delegates approved a proposal to form a national organisation of Ramgarhia biradari. A working party was appointed to draft a constitution and also to call a national conference. In 1973, the national conference of Ramgarhia organisations was held at the Ramgarhia Sabha Gurdwara, Southall. It was attended by delegates representing twentytwo Ramgarhia associations and gurdwaras. The delegates approved the constitution and the formation of the Ramgarhia Council, United Kingdom. Leaders of the Ramgarhia Board of Leeds played a leading role in the formation of the national organisation of their biradari. The first President and General Secretary of the Ramgarhia Council were the leaders of the Leeds Ramgarhia Board. The main aims and objectives of the national organisation were as follows:

1. to organise the Ramgarhia biradari resident in Britain;
2. to reform the social customs (vihar-sudhar);
3. to establish a national register with full details about the members of Ramgarhia families in Britain;
4. to promote research and study of the history of Ramgarhia community;
5. to advise the local Ramgarhia organisations and to work for enforcing the decisions taken by the Ramgarhia Council;
6. to find solutions to the problems arisen through the

interaction between Western and Sikh traditions.

These aims clearly reflect the intentions of the Ramgarhia Sikhs to perpetuate caste consciousness and promote caste solidarity. The conference modified the rules of got exogamy. The four-got rule was made optional by the conference which acted like a grand caste panchayat (council). Individual members or local caste groups have no authority to change customary rules. They would face ex-communication for violating caste dharma (duty). The Ramgarhia Council celebrates Jassa Singh Ramgarhia Day at the national level every year.

Participation in the national celebrations reinforces their pride in Ramgarhia identity. National gatherings also provide a situation where information is exchanged and new contacts are established for arranging marriage alliances.

Leaders of the Ramgarhia Council are invited to participate in the celebrations organised by local Ramgarhia associations. Their presence is a symbol of caste solidarity. Members of the Ramgarhia Council took part in the opening ceremony of the Ramgarhia Sikh Sports Centre, Leeds, on 6th May, 1987. Many Ramgarhia organisations from India, East Africa and Canada sent messages of congratulations to the Ramgarhia biradari of Leeds on this occasion. In his message, the President of the Ramgarhia Educational Council, Phagwara, (India) wrote that "I, as president of Ramgarhia Educational Council, Phagwara, feel honoured and privileged in offering felicitations on this happy occasion of the royal opening of the Ramgarhia Sikh Sports Centre, Leeds....All the members of the Ramgarhia Educational Council, Phagwara, join with me in extending heartiest

congratulations on this historic enterprise. It will surely go into the history of the Ramgarhia community as a landmark in the development of human activities..." (Special brochure published on the opening ceremony of the Ramgarhia Sikh Sports Centre, p.11). Mr. Hunjan, President of the Sikh Temple, Nanyuki, Kenya, wrote that "In July 1986 when I visited Leeds, I had the opportunity to see the Ramgarhia Sikh Sports Centre, being built at that time. I am very pleased to learn that this magnificent building is now complete...It is my pleasure to convey heartiest congratulations from the Sikh, Hindu, Muslim and African residents of Nanyuki to the Ramgarhia Sikh Sangat on completion of this wonderful project and best wishes to Ramgarhia Board on the royal opening" (Special Brochure, p.72).

The opening ceremony of the Ramgarhia Sikh Sports Centre was performed by the Duke of Gloucester and was reported in the Yorkshire Evening Post, dated 7th May, 1987. It was mentioned that "The purpose built centre in Chapeltown Road, Sheepscar, cost £650,000 with £250,000 coming from the Sikh community in Leeds, other British cities and abroad." The completion of the Ramgarhia Sikh Sports Centre has been hailed as a symbol of honour and achievement of the Ramgarhia Sikh community by members of the same caste all over the world. In his message of congratulations, Mr. Juss, General Secretary, Ramgarhia Board, Wolverhampton, wrote that "...The name of the Ramgarhia Sikhs is associated with technical skills. But they have also built up a prominent place for themselves in the professions as doctors, lawyers, engineers, architects and civil servants. I am consequently immensely proud of the achievements of

our community...I congratulate all those who have been instrumental towards and have worked for the construction of the Ramgarhia Sikh Sports Centre..." (Special Brochure, p.56). Reflecting on the opening ceremony of the Ramgarhia Sikh Sports Centre, a trustee of the Ramgarhia Board said that "More than 2,000 people were present at the opening ceremony - Ramgarhia leaders from all towns in Britain were also present. It was a special day in the life of our biradari - we have proved that we are the master craftsmen."

I have shown that the Ramgarhia identity is mainly associated with the Sikh tradition. Their emphasis on the external symbols of Sikhism, the adoption of the name "Singh" and their mode of worship separate the Ramgarhias from the Hindu Tarkhans who are known as Dhimans. In Leeds, there are twelve Tarkhan households who claim to be Dhimans. It is interesting to note that two Dhiman households have Sikh names while others have retained their Hindu names. All Dhimans have common gots with the Ramgarhias which indicates their common ancestry. In Punjabi villages Hindu and Sikh Tarkhans jointly celebrate the festival of Bhai-Dooj, which falls on the day following the festival of diwali. On Bhai-Dooj day, the carpenters, blacksmiths and bricklayers wash and clean their tools in the morning, which are then placed in a corner of their workshops. This ritual is called "sand raj baithey han" (Tools are resting on the royal seat). It is regarded a pap (sin) to use tools on Bhai-Dooj day. On the following day, a special prayer is recited which is called Babey Vish<sup>va</sup> / karmey di ardas (prayer of Lord Vish<sup>va</sup> / karma), and a parshad (offering of sweets) is distributed among the members of the family after the

ritual of chhita-dena (sprinkling of water on tools) - it is the ritual of waking up the tools. Stella Kramrisch says that "In many parts of India to this day, the craftsmen worship their tools at the Dasahra festival on the day of Vish<sup>va</sup> karma Puja. From the day of the Sutras on, both the materials and the tools of a craft are known as sacred, for they are the seat of particular powers" (Kramrisch 1959:20).

Dhimans marry within the Tarkhan caste - they strictly observe the rules of caste endogamy and got exogamy. They prefer to establish marriage alliances with Dhiman families. In Leeds, marriages between the Dhiman (Hindu carpenters) and the Ramgarhia Sikhs are becoming a common occurrence which suggests that caste identity takes precedence over religious beliefs. One Ramgarhia Sikh informant who is married to a Dhiman woman told us that "Before finalising the relationship my father-in-law laid down the condition that the wedding will be solemnized according to the Hindu rites of vedi at the Hindu Mandir (temple) in Nairobi. My uncle who is a kesdhari Sikh, agreed to the demand of my father-in-law." In Leeds, most Dhiman marriages are solemnized at the gurdwara according to the Sikh ceremony of anand-karaj, which is a significant change in the attitude of the Dhimans.

Members of the Dhiman households actively participate in the affairs of the Ramgarhia Board. Most of them are paid-up members of the Ramgarhia Board who have also made financial contribution towards the building fund of the Ramgarhia Sikh Sports Centre. Co-operation between the two groups is based on their common ancestry, which is

perceived as being "Babey Vish<sup>va</sup> karma di aulad" (descendants of Lord Vish<sup>va</sup> karma). It is also linked with their traditional occupation. Saberwal says that "The caste solidarity, despite religious variation, had been expressed for example, in the Vish<sup>va</sup> karma Mandir (Temple) located on the outskirts of Modelpur: apart from an image of Lord Vish<sup>va</sup> karma, it had housed a Granth Sahib..." (1976:93). Gurdial Singh Reehal provides another example of the co-operation between the two groups which is an expression of their caste loyalty. He says that "In 1909, a meeting of prominent members of the Tarkhan biradari was held at the residence of Bhai Arjun Singh. At the meeting they established Vish<sup>va</sup> karma Vans Sudhar Sabha, Punjab (Vish<sup>va</sup> karma Brotherhood Reform Society, Punjab). Rai Bahadur Doctor Bhagwan Das and Baba Tahel Singh Naru were elected Chairman and General Secretary respectively. In 1911, the name of this organisation was changed to Ramgarhia Sabha, Punjab. Hindu and Sikh Tarkhans worked jointly to oppose the Punjab Land Alienation Act in order to restore their status of agriculturists" (1979:245).

The position of Dhimans and Ramgarhia Sikhs has a parallel in the situation of Hindu Khatris and Sikh Khatris. Marriages between Hindu and Sikh Khatris are not uncommon in the Punjab; they are viewed as correct alliances as far as the rules of caste endogamy are concerned. Caste identity always takes precedence over religious beliefs. The Dhimans not only participate in the activities of the Ramgarhia Board, but they also attend diwans (religious services) at the Ramgarhia gurdwara as well as other gurdwaras in Leeds. Every year they celebra te Baba Vish<sup>va</sup> karma Day in Leeds which is attended

by their relatives and friends who are Ramgarhia Sikhs. One Ramgarhia Sikh informant gave a vivid account of the Vish<sup>va</sup>/karma Day celebrations in Leeds. He said that "In July 1984, I attended Baba Vish<sup>va</sup>/karma Day celebrations at the Hindu Mandir, Leeds. It was organised by the Dhiman families in Leeds. There were more than two hundred people including women and children at the function. The celebration began by lighting a stick of incense in front of a large picture of Baba Vish<sup>va</sup>/karma which was placed on a raised platform. Everybody bowed in front of the picture - the congregation sang traditional songs dedicated to Baba Vish<sup>va</sup>/karma. At the end, a traditional ardas (prayer) of Baba Vish<sup>va</sup>/karma was recited and parshad (offerings) of sweets was distributed. Organisers had prepared langar (food) which was served at the end of the function. All the participants belonged to the Leeds Ramgarhia biradari." When questioned about his religious beliefs, the same informant said that "I am a Sikh - I have served on the management committee of the gurdwara. Now I take part in the activities of the Ramgarhia Board. My spiritual guru is Nanak Dev and my trade guru is Baba Vish<sup>va</sup>/karma. Many Ramgarhias feel ashamed to be associated with our trade deity."

The Dhiman identity is associated with the traditional occupation of Tarkhans and the Hindu god, Baba Vish<sup>va</sup>/karma. Writing about the Tarkhan households, Harjinder Singh in Authority and Influence in Two Sikh Villages (1976) says that "Tarkhans are traditionally carpenters...none of the Tarkhan households own land...Tarkhans are Sikhs, they also worship Vish<sup>va</sup>/karma" (1976:55). The Dhiman identity represents a centuries old tradition by which one inherits the status

of a craftsman. The craftsman was trained in the workshop of the master whose son or younger brother or apprentice he was. There he learnt the technique and caste dharma by participating in the ritual of sand raj bathana and Vish<sup>va</sup> karma puja. The status of a Tarkhan carries a stigma of being a sepidar (client - servant) to the landowning Jats. His entry into the Sikh Panth did not free a Tarkhan from this low status because it was based on economic relationships which remained unchanged. The emergence and development of Ramgarhia identity is closely linked with his release from the jaimani system when he became part of an urban-industrial structure within India and abroad. Examining the factors for the development of "Ramgarhia" consciousness among the East African Sikhs, Bhachu says that "...Thus, although the word "Ramgarhia" gained currency in Africa, 'Ramgarhianess' was not thought of in derogatory terms because it was not related to a caste hierarchy in which Ramgarhias ranked lower than the Jats, but was propagated positively in terms of achievements and wealth" (1985:52).

East African Ramgarhia Sikhs take great pride in their Ramgarhia identity and they hate to be referred to as Tarkhans. The term Tarkhan is perceived as a permanent reminder of a low status. When a group of Ramgarhia Sikhs proposed that the Ramgarhia Board should celebrate Vish<sup>va</sup> karma Day, they were strongly opposed by the East African Ramgarhias who dominate the management committee. The issue of Ramgarhia and Tarkhan identity remains a major cause of tension within the Ramgarhia community in Leeds. The question of the interpretation of "Ramgarhianess" became very important for different

interest groups within the Ramgarhia community. The main leadership of the Ramgarhia Board was provided by the Nishkam Sevak Jatha who were all amritdhari Sikhs. They preach and insist upon strict observation of the Khalsa discipline. In 1986, members of the Nishkam Sevak Jatha left the Ramgarhia Board and established their own gurdwara in Leeds 11. One trustee of the Ramgarhia Board listed the following incidents which were the main cause of the split:

a. In 1983, when the Namdhari guru visited Leeds, the local Namdhari Sangat approached the leaders of the Ramgarhia Board for the use of their premises to hold a diwan. Their request was turned down on the ground<sup>S</sup> that the Namdharis follow the tradition of a dehdhari (living) guru which was against the Sikh tradition.

b. In 1985, a Namdhari Ramgarhia Sikh died in Leeds. The deceased family made arrangements to take the body to the Ramgarhia Board gurdwara for final ardas (prayer) and diwan after the funeral. The leaders of the Nishkam Sevak Jatha rejected their request on the grounds that Namdhari ardas is different from the Sikh ardas. It caused a great deal of bitterness between the Namdhari Sikhs and the leaders of the Ramgarhia Board.

c. Some leaders of the Ramgarhia Board agreed to display publicity material about tobacco on the fence of the Ramgarhia Sikh Sports Centre for which the tobacco firm promised to pay a substantial amount of money. This issue was debated in the executive committee meeting - members of the Nishkam Sevak Jatha won the argument and the objectionable material was removed. But the relationships between different groups within the Ramgarhia Board

remained tense. Eventually the members of the Nishkam Sevak Jatha decided to quit the Ramgarhia Board.

It is most significant to compare the present situation with that of 1967 when the tension between the Namdharis and other Sikhs emerged as a symbol of honour of the Ramgarhias. In 1967, the Namdhari guru, Jagatjit Singh, came to England. He was invited by the local Namdhari Sangat to visit Leeds. The Namdharis approached the gurdwara committee for permission to hold diwans at the gurdwara. A special meeting of the management committee was convened to consider their request. The management committee consisted of twentyseven members out of which twentyone were Ramgarhia Sikhs. The chairman of the management committee was a Ramgarhia Sikh - he and one Jat Sikh member opposed the request on the grounds that the Namdharis believe in a dehdhari (living) guru and that they wave a chauri (ritual fan) over their guru in diwans. The motion was put to the vote. All Ramgarhia Sikhs voted in favour of the Namdharis. Their request to hold diwans had changed into the question of the honour of the Ramgarhia biradari. At that time the Ramgarhia identity became the symbol of identification with the Namdhari guru who was a Ramgarhia Sikh. How people perceive their situation and relationship to other groups affects their behaviour. Although all Ramgarhia members of the management committee were not Namdhari Sikhs, they supported this request as if it was a biradari matter. But when the Namdharis asked for permission to hold a diwan at the Ramgarhia Board, their request was turned down on the grounds that they do not observe proper Sikh maryada (traditions). In this situation, it was not the biradari

honour which was at stake. The crucial issue was now in contrast to the earlier example, that of the interpretation of Sikh tradition, which was decided upon by the members of the Nishkam Sevak Jatha who dominated the Ramgarhia Board.

Intra-caste relationships within the Ramgarhia community raise important questions about the nature of Ramgarhia identity. Marriages between Ramgarhia Sikhs and the Dhimans are not uncommon and are viewed as correct alliances. All Tarkhans are eligible for the membership of the Ramgarhia Board. The primary condition for membership is birth into the Tarkhan biradari and not the affiliation to any particular religious sect. The split between the Nishkam Sevak Jatha and the Ramgarhia Board seems to be based on the interpretation of Ramgarhia identity by the leaders of both organisations. In January 1987, the Dhimans obtained permission to celebrate Vish<sup>va</sup> karma Day at the Ramgarhia Sikh Sports Centre. They invited all Ramgarhia families, including the leaders of the Ramgarhia Board. More than three hundred people attended the celebrations. Prominent leaders of the Ramgarhia Board addressed the gathering - they stressed the traditional identity of Ramgarhias and their association with Baba Vish<sup>va</sup> karma. They also acknowledged the contribution made by the Dhimans towards the building of the Ramgarhia Sikh Sports Centre. The celebration concluded with a special ardas (prayer) of Baba Vish<sup>va</sup> karma and the distribution of parshad. The Dhimans left a large picture of Baba Vish<sup>va</sup> karma hanging in the hall as a gift to the Ramgarhia Board. Some leaders of the Ramgarhia Board objected to the presence of the picture in the hall. After a bitter argument they

agreed to move the picture to the office of the Ramgarhia Board. Their behaviour reflects the tension caused by the conflict between their Tarkhan and Ramgarhia identity. Commenting on intra-caste relationships within the Ramgarhia community, Saberwal says that "During the past decades the relationships between the Dhimans and the Ramgarhias have responded to the changing political environment of the Punjab, with the political ascendancy therein of the Sikhs. Whereas the organisers of the Vishaykarma celebration are always careful to feature eminent Ramgarhias in key roles, the annual celebration at the Ramgarhia institutions - held simultaneously - is thoroughly Sikh in idiom, with no suggestion of a link with the Dhimans" (1976:112).

The development of the Leeds Ramgarhia community can be divided into three main phases. The pattern of migration and settlement of the Ramgarhias in Leeds is a crucial factor for locating the direction and the type of strategies adopted by them in order to maintain their dominant position within the Leeds Sikh community. Arrival of the East African Ramgarhias in Leeds, in complete family units, had an enormous effect on the cultural consolidation of the Sikh community. Their contribution towards the maintenance and enhancement of the Sikh tradition in Leeds is closely linked with their emphasis on maintaining the external symbols of Sikhism.

In the pioneer phase of 1950's, the Ramgarhias began to hold diwans in Sikh homes. They were also instrumental in the establishment of the first gurdwara in Leeds. The first custodian of the gurdwara was

an East African Ramgarhia Sikh - on Sundays, shabad-kirtan (religious singing) was performed by a group of Ramgarhia Sikh sevadars (volunteers) who had also come from East Africa. During this period, the significance of their Sikh identity is evident from the first constitution of the gurdwara which in Section 3 describes the membership as follows:

Any person irrespective of caste, creed, colour, religion or nationality can become a member of the society (The United Sikh Association, Yorkshire).

Thus, it provided membership to non-Sikhs as well. It is significant to note that the first deputy chairman of the United Sikh Association was a Punjabi Brahman. The implications of the definition of a Sikh person provided in the constitution became obvious when one Punjabi Hindu family asked for permission to celebrate the ritual of mundan (cutting the first hair of a child) at the gurdwara. Their request was turned down and this refusal resulted in the resignation of the deputy chairman.

By the mid-1960's more East African Ramgarhia families had arrived in Leeds. Their presence was reflected in their involvement in the activities of the gurdwara. The first registrar of marriages appointed for the gurdwara was a Nandhari Ramgarhia Sikh who had come from Uganda. The Ramgarhia Sikhs dominated the management committee every year. By 1966, they had begun to assert their Ramgarhia identity and were ready to establish their biradari organisation. It was the first indication of their intention to transplant the East African model of the Ramgarhia Sikh community to Leeds. In 1968, the

Ramgarhias bought their own premises to set up a community centre. Originally the Ramgarhia Board was established as a social centre to entertain wedding guests. There were no restrictions on the use of alcohol and meat. Moreover, there was no ban on smoking in the Ramgarhia hall. The building was bought for £5,000 - some alterations were made to meet the needs of the community. The whole amount was contributed by the Ramgarhia families residing in Leeds. According to their membership register for 1970-71 there were 387 paid-up members. There were no restrictions on women to join the Ramgarhia Board.

By the 1970's, the leadership of the Ramgarhia Board had passed into the hands of the Nishkam Sevak Jatha. They began to assert their authority by restricting the use of meat and alcohol at the Ramgarhia Board - they had the support of the Nandharis and the Radhasoami Sikhs, who shared the tradition of vegetarianism with them. By 1975, the Nishkam Sevak Jatha had taken over the management of the gurdwara as well. In order to secure their hold, they amended the original constitution of the gurdwara. The membership clause under Section 3 was amended in such a way that it stated emphatically:

That any Sikh who believes in the teachings of ten Gurus and Guru Granth Sahib as his/her spiritual Guru can become member of the Sikh Temple.

It was also approved that only kesdhari Sikhs would be eligible for the membership of the management committee and the board of trustees. These amendments virtually excluded all non-Ramgarhia Sikhs from the power structure of the gurdwara, as most of them were clean-shaven.

According to a Jat Sikh informant, the gurdwara had become an extension of the Ramgarhia Board. All important positions on the management committee were held by the Ramgarhia Sikhs who were also members of the Nishkam Sevak Jatha. They would not allow clean-shaven Sikhs to participate in the reading of Guru Granth Sahib and the preparation and distribution of ritual food. Up till 1982, the Ramgarhias exercised complete authority at the gurdwara. From 1958 to 1982, eight out of eleven presidents of the gurdwara were Ramgarhia Sikhs. In his letter dated 28th April 1983, addressed to the Leeds City Councillors, the General Secretary of the Ramgarhia Board claimed that "Ramgarhias represent 80 per cent of the total Sikh population in Leeds."

Pride in their Ramgarhia identity was publically demonstrated and justified on the basis of their majority status which was linked with their contribution to the development of Sikh tradition in Leeds. But their dominance at the gurdwara was bitterly resented by other Sikhs. Commenting on this situation one Jat Sikh informant said that "The Ramgarhias behave at the gurdwara as if it were their biradari organisation. At the Sunday diwans, donations to the Ramgarhia Board are publically received and announcements of the activities of the Ramgarhia Board are also made in the diwan". The 1980's have been a period of consolidation of Ramgarhia identity in Leeds. The Ramgarhias originally began to hold diwans at the meeting place of the Ramgarhia Board which was subsequently converted into a gurdwara by installing a copy of Guru Granth Sahib and the nishan sahib (Sikh flag). This was the symbol and assertion of their separate "Ramgarhia

Sikh" identity. Now they were ready to concentrate their energies on the building of their "Ramgarhia" institutions. Their capacity to forge two distinct identities, i.e. caste and religious identities into one "Ramgarhia Sikh" identity is clearly manifested in the design of their letterhead:

ੴ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਵਾਹਿਗੁਰੂ ਜੀ ਕੀ ਫਤਹਿ॥



*Ramgarhia Board, Leeds.*

138 CHAPELTOWN ROAD, LEEDS 7. TEL: 625427.

Incorporating

RAMGARHIA SIKH TEMPLE RAMGARHIA SIKH SPORTS CLUB RAMGARHIA SIKH LADIES CIRCLE

On the left are the Sikh symbols; at the top, on the right is printed the Sikh slogan in Punjabi "ek onkar sri waheguru ji ki fateh" (God is one - victory to the great Lord), under which the names of the Ramgarhia institutions are printed in English. Sikh symbols and the Sikh slogan represent the egalitarian traditions of the Khalsa Panth while the names of the society and its incorporating bodies indicate caste identity. The design of their letterhead is the manifestation of their ambivalent attitude towards the Khalsa tradition. The Ramgarhias claim to be members of the Khalsa Panth which rejects caste, yet at the same time they feel proud of their "Ramgarhia-ness" which indicates a caste status. The Ramgarhias seem to be conscious of this situation as they often make special pleas to clarify their contradictory position. This is expressed by their General Secretary when he says that "We are aware that there has been some misguided

criticism because our constitution provides that membership is restricted to Ramgarhia Sikhs. Although this is presently so, this does not mean that the facilities that we offer are restricted to Ramgarhia Sikhs" (Letter to the Leeds City Councillors dated 28th April, 1983). Commenting on the significance of the Ramgarhia Sikh Sports Centre for the Sikh community, a leading member of the Ramgarhia Board said that "We Ramgarhias are proud of our past - we kept the sikhi (Sikh tradition) alive in East Africa and now we are making it more strong in this country."

In 1984, the Ramgarhias celebrated the first baisakhi festival (founding of the Khalsa day) on the plot of land acquired for building the Ramgarhia Sikh Sports Centre. The celebrations began with the akhand-path (unbroken reading of the Guru Granth Sahib) and hoisting the nishan sahib (Sikh flag). The first edition of their publication, "Ramgarhia Sikh Bulletin", was printed to honour this occasion - it had a picture of the 10th Guru, Gobind Singh on the front page. The Ramgarhia Sikh Bulletin is one of the most effective channels of communications among the Ramgarhia community; it promotes caste consciousness and reinforces pride in caste identity. It also helps to organise different Ramgarhia groups such as the Ramgarhia Sikh Ladies Circle, and the Ramgarhia Sikh Sports Club, whose activities also enhance caste solidarity. The organised set of social and religious activities are instrumental in forging a new sense of purpose and unity among the Ramgarhias. They do not hide their caste identity any more; on the contrary it is idealised as a symbol of honour. Mr. Rattan, secretary of the Ramgarhia Badminton Club, writes

"...I am proud to say that we at the Ramgarhia Board have members who have put a lot of effort and work in to make sure that Sikhs in Leeds can hold their heads high with pride and with your blessings and co-operation we can build a bright future for our young generation" (Ramgarhia Sikh Bulletin, 13th April, 1984). The leaders of the Ramgarhia Board have no doubts about the role of their journal. The General Secretary of the Ramgarhia Board says that "the Ramgarhia Bulletin is designed to encourage enthusiasm among younger members and is aimed at promoting our social, cultural, religious and sports activities" (Ramgarhia Sikh Bulletin, 13th April, 1984). A detailed list of daily events organised at the Ramgarhia Board, published in the Ramgarhia Sikh Bulletin highlights their commitment to the Sikh tradition.

I have shown that the Ramgarhias have developed into a distinct Sikh community with their activities and institutions set apart from other members of the Sikh community. They take great pride in their "Ramgarhia" identity and have become more conscious of their "Ramgarhia-ness". Their process of institution-building was completed with the opening ceremony of the Ramgarhia Sikh Sports Centre on 6th May, 1987. In Leeds, the Ramgarhia institutions have become the main focus for the promotion of caste sentiments among the members of the Ramgarhia biradari over and above their loyalties to Sikhism and in distinction from other castes with their own identity which remains separate and distinct. It is evident from the emergence of these distinct institutions among one specific group of Sikhs in Leeds that caste remains an important criterion of identity within the Sikh

Panth. The importance of caste is further highlighted by the existence of low caste groups, the Chamars, and the position assigned to them by other Sikhs, as will be shown in the following chapter where I examine the situation in Bradford.

CHAPTER 6

CASTE AND THE RAVIDASIS SIKHS IN BRADFORD.

Among Sikhs in Leeds only a few low caste Sikhs are found, perhaps not more than four or five families, whilst the neighbouring city of Bradford counts a considerable number of Chamars who are discussed here in order to provide as comprehensive a picture as possible of different caste groups among Sikhs in the region. There are two main reasons for including the study of the Bradford Chamar community here. First, in the 1950's the Sikhs of Leeds and Bradford joined together to form the "United Sikh Association, Yorkshire" and together established the first gurdwara in Leeds. The Sikh communities of both towns continued celebrating the gurpurbs (anniversaries of the Sikh Gurus) jointly until the establishment of a separate gurdwara in Bradford in 1964. Secondly, the Bradford Chamars have developed into a separate Sikh community and have established their own biradari and religious institutions.

According to the President of the Ravidas Bhawan there were approximately seventy Chamar households in Bradford in 1983. In order to understand the full significance of this group, the present chapter will examine the social and religious status of the Chamars (leather-workers and landless labourers), also known as Ravidasis,

within the Sikh Panth (society). To determine the religious identity of the Chamars, we have to consider the definition of who is a Sikh person. Significant aspects of the religious identity of the Chamars will be analysed by looking at the nature of worship and other religious and social rituals performed at the Chamar gurdwara in Bradford called Shri Guru Ravidas Bhawan.

The Chamars are one of the ancient castes within the social structure of Indian society. Nowadays they are known as members of the scheduled castes of India. According to Sachchidananda, in contemporary India the scheduled castes number nearly eighty million and account for 14.6 percent of the Indian population (1977:3). However, the distribution of scheduled castes in India varies from state to state as is evident from figures included in Dalip Hiro's article "The Untouchables of India" (1975). According to the varna (layer or colour) classification, Indian society is divided into five categories which are hierarchically arranged. They are the Brahmans (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (merchants), Shudras (agriculturists and artisans) and the untouchables (Chamars and sweepers). A number of terms have been used by social scientists to describe the biradari of Chamars, i.e. members of the scheduled castes, Chamar, Ad-Dharmi, Harijan, Achhut, and Ravidasi or Ramdasi. The category of "scheduled castes" was originally created by the British in 1935. Castes were placed in this category on the basis of an all-India set of criteria which included exclusion from entry into Hindu mandirs (temples); exclusion from the services of Brahmans; exclusion from the services of the same barbers and tailors used by

higher castes and limited access to public facilities such as wells, and schools. (Lynch 1969:23).

Prominent among the scheduled castes are the Chamars who form the largest group in the category of scheduled castes. The word Chamar is derived from the Sanskrit charam-kara, which means leather worker. Commenting on the significance of the traditional occupation of Chamars, George Briggs in The Chamars (1920) writes that "In earliest times, the leather worker does not seem to have been the object of opprobrium and, indeed, his services were of utmost importance to the warriors of those days. In the ancient Indian epic Maha Bharata, the Chamar was the maker of shields, breast plates and body armour, as well as of drums and various parts of chariots" (1920:13). The chamars deal with hides and skins and are traditionally concerned with making and repairing shoes. Their occupation makes it necessary for them to come into contact with dead animals. Therefore, according to the notion of ritual purity, their occupation is regarded as polluting. On the basis of this criterion their status within Indian society is very low. In the villages they live in segregated colonies called chamardlis and they have their own separate wells and cremation grounds. Describing the duties of the Chamars in Punjabi villages, Tom Kessinger in Vilyatpur 1848-1968 (1974) writes that "All Chamars supplied their jaimans (patrons) with shoes for everyone in the household, a leather whip and, in return for a token payment, a leather bucket for the well. In addition a few worked in the fields throughout the year, but generally they helped only during peak seasons - or while gur (raw sugar) was being made...The sepidars

(clients) were about seventeen per cent of the men in the village" (1974:57).

The term Ad-Dharmi is also derived from Sanskrit. It is a combination of two words; Ad meaning original and Dharm meaning religion. This compound term became popular in the Punjab in the mid 1920's and the Chamars adopted the title "Ad-Dharmi" as it is considered more respectable by other caste groups in the Punjab. In the report of Ad-Dharm Mandal, 1926-1931, the description of this term is explained and justified on the grounds that Ad-Dharmis are descendants of the original people of India. Describing the history of the Ad-Dharm Mandal, the report says that "...So in the beginning of 1925, a society was formed with the name of Ad-Dharm: Rishi Balmiki, Ravidas, Kabir and Namdev were named as founders" (Report of Ad-Dharm Mandal, 1926-31, p.10). Their strategy to refer to the names of Ravidas, Kabir, Namdev and Balmik as symbols helped the movement to emphasise the separate religious tradition of the lower castes. Another significant factor was that Kabir, Ravidas and Namdev had been associated with the Sikh tradition in the Punjab. Their compositions are included in the Guru Granth Sahib. Out of the total number of 5,893 hymns in the Guru Granth Sahib, Kabir, Ravidas and Namdev contributed 541, 41 and 60 hymns respectively (Cole and Sambhi 1978:189).

The ideology of the Ad-Dharm movement was based on the belief in the equality of human beings and the rejection of the caste system. The social status of the Adi people is explained in the report which says

that "In the beginning, when Nature created human beings, there was no discrimination. There were no differences and no quarrels. In particular, there were no such concepts as high or low caste. God (Ishwar) was meditating; all was in harmony. Everyone believed in one dharm which nature had given them through intellect and knowledge; this dharm was Ad-Dharm" (Report of the Ad-Dharm Mandal, 1926-31:6). The Ad-Dharm movement gave meaningful shape to the situation in which the untouchables lived. The movement promoted three main symbols: wearing red colours, the sacred phrase soham (literally, I am It, a vedantic phrase referring to the primacy of the soul), and the special greetings Jai Guru Dev (victory to the great God). The adoption of these symbols helped the Ad-Dharm movement to demonstrate its characteristic as a separate religious community. It also promoted the sense of strength and pride in their new Ad-Dharmi identity.

In Punjabi villages, the Chamars are nowadays referred to as Ad-Dharmis which is a respectable title. However, members of the scheduled castes are also known as Harijans (people of God), a term first applied by Mahatma Gandhi. Yet many scheduled caste leaders objected to the use of this term because they perceived it as offensive. Sachchidananda in The Harijan Elite (1977) says that "The word Harijan has been wrongly translated as children of God. Some people regarded it as a term of abuse meaning a person whose father is unknown" (1977:3). Members of the scheduled castes are also referred to as achhut which literally means untouchables. The word achhut is derived from the verb chhuna (to touch). The term achhut is

mainly used in literature; it is regarded very offensive to use it in everyday interaction. Sometimes the Chamars are called Mihtars which is also a respectful title. Bhai Maha Singh in The Punjabi Dictionary describes Mihtar as an honorific title of sweepers and shoemakers (1895:749). In the Punjab, the Chamar Sikhs are also called Ramdasias. Harjinder Singh, in Authority and Influence in Two Sikh Villages (1976), notes that "Ramdasias are actually Chamars, the word which derives its origin from a Sanskrit word chamkar which means a worker in hides and skins. Ramdasias of these villages follow both Sikh and Hindu religions though they have greater leanings towards the former than the latter. They specially worship the Saint Ravidas besides making offerings to Sikh Gurus and Hindu deities. They enjoy a very low social position in the villages" (1976:49).

The Julaha Sikhs are also called Ramdasias. In Punjabi villages their homes are located next to the chamardlis. Explaining the distinction between the terms Julaha and Chamar, a leading member of the Ravidas Bhawan said that "We are all Chamars - some families chose to take up weaving - they were known as Julahas. My ancestors were weavers, but they reverted to shoe-making during the war. We have common gots and our houses are located on one side of the villages." Commenting on this controversy, Saberwal says that "The Punjabis had coped with the problem once before in their history: Chuhra Sikhs (sweepers) have long been known as Mazhbis (religious ones) and Chamars and Julaha Sikhs as Ramdasias" (1976:23). The Julaha Sikhs are also referred to as Khalsa-biradar which literally means brother of the Khalsa. But within the Sikh Panth, the title of Khalsa-biradar is seen as an

indicator of one's low caste status. The Julaha Sikhs strongly object to being referred to as Ramdasiyas or Khalsa-biradar. Their entry into the Khalsa Panth failed to accord them an equal status.

The development of a new "Ravidasi" identity is closely linked with the heritage of Sant Ravidas. A contemporary of Kabir, he was a Chamar who came to be revered as one of the greatest north Indian saints. The Chamar Sikhs trace their entry into the Sikh Panth through the bani (compositions) of Ravidas which are contained in the Guru Granth Sahib. The heritage of Ravidas is associated with two traditions: the Sikh tradition which is Punjabi, and the bhakti tradition of the whole of northern India. It has provided the Chamars with an identity which is distinctive yet related to both the Hindu and the Sikh traditions. The "Ravidasi" identity is manifested through their symbolic behaviour, i.e. the nature of their worship, the interior decoration of their gurdwara, their nishan sahib (flag), their personal names, the names of their gurdwara and their constitution.

As already mentioned, the settlement pattern of the South Asian communities in Britain has been greatly influenced by the process of chain migration, which is quite visible from the presence of a large number of Chamar households in Bradford. The first Chamar Sikh came to Bradford in the late 1950's. He was a revenue officer in the Punjab, and he had a Sikh name. He sponsored his relatives who came to Bradford in the late 1950's and early 1960's. Most of them worked in the textile industry. In 1964, the first gurdwara was established

in Bradford in an old carpet warehouse in Garnet Street, off Leeds Road. The building was bought for £3,500. Commenting on the contribution of their biradari towards the establishment of the first gurdwara in Bradford, one leading member of the Ravidas Sabha said that "Our biradari members actively participated in raising funds for the gurdwara building. One member of our biradari became a trustee of the gurdwara. He was a mona (clean shaven) Sikh - most Sikhs were clean shaven in those days. The management committee was dominated by the Jat Sikhs."

By 1968, more than thirtyfive Chamar families had settled in Bradford. They would use the gurdwara facilities for cooking food on social occasions. One day when the Chamars were cooking food in the gurdwara kitchen, they had an argument with a group of Jat Sikhs about their right to use the gurdwara facilities. Describing this incident, one officer of the Ravidas Sabha said that "When we were cooking food in the kitchen, a group of Jat Sikhs walked in. They began to shout 'Chamaro chuk lao apnian karahian asin eithey parshad banauna' (Oh you Chamars, remove your cooking pans from the kitchen - we are going to cook parshad here). The members of our biradari felt deeply insulted. A meeting of the elders of our biradari was called and they took the decision to organise our biradari association."

The attitude of the Jat Sikhs towards the Chamars did not change in Britain but has remained mainly like that associated with the traditional patron-client relationships in India. As Raminder Singh says "Even in Bradford, as is the case in the Punjab, whatever the

socio-economic status of the Jat Sikh in the eyes of others, he still aggressively believes himself to be a Jat" (1978:27). When questioned on the caste feeling and prejudice against the untouchables among the Indians in Southall, Dalip Hiro's informant A.S. Nagra, an outcaste from the Punjab, said "Yes, to the extent that when a quarrel breaks out between a caste Hindu or Sikh, the lowly origin is the first thing to be hurled at the outcaste" (Dalip Hiro: "Untouchables - even in Britain", Sunday Observer Magazine 25th November 1976, p. 45). Even, when members of the low caste groups like the Chamars achieve success in the financial or political field, their lowly status remains the primary indicator of their status in the eyes of the Jat Sikhs. Helweg, in describing the following situation in Gravesend, reveals the resurfacing of caste attitudes in Britain:

Davinder, a Chamar, gained political prominence in Gravesindia among the young adults. Although they accepted his modern ideas like the abolition of the caste system and existing discrimination, he was still a Chamar and of low caste to the village Jats. Generally, when Dev entered a Jat home, the head of the house became nervous, and uneasy whispers went through the house, 'the Chamar is here' (1979:54).

The attitudes of caste superiority and inferiority are based on the notion of ritual purity and pollution. They are manifested mainly in the situations where social interaction is very intimate. The Chamar Sikhs are discouraged from taking part in the preparation and distribution of langar and parshad (ritual food). Even in the diwans, the Chamar women faced the offensive behaviour of high caste Sikh women who would say parey ho ke baith (sit away from me). Inder P. Singh, in his article "A Sikh Village" (1959) provides evidence to

show that the high caste Sikhs discriminate against the Mazhbi (sweepers) Sikhs in the Punjab. He says that "The Mazhbis have a separate well while all other castes use the same well...Mazhbis and Sikhs have a common gurdwara. They assemble together and sit there intermixed. The high caste Sikhs, especially women who do not allow Mazhbis to enter their houses, usually sit away from the place where Mazhbis are sitting" (1959:280). Social interaction is inherently symbolic and rank is expressed and validated in interaction between persons. Commenting on the relationships between the Jat Sikhs and the Mazhbi Sikhs, Pettigrew in Robber Noblemen says that "...The only customs in which any solidarity was expressed among the Jat Sikhs on a caste basis was that in the village they did not visit the houses of Mazhbis, take food from them, eat with them or intermarry with them" (1975:44). A leading member of the Ravidas Sabha strongly criticised the practice of ritual purity among the amritdharis (initiated Sikhs) in Bradford and commented on the attitude of the amritdhari Sikhs towards the Chamars in the following words:

In Bradford, the amritdharis have opened their own gurdwara on Nelson Street. They are mainly the Jats of Sandhu got. A few days ago one of my relatives asked them to perform the sadharan/sahej-path (reading of Guru Granth Sahib) ritual at their house. During the reading sessions, the amritdharis prepared their own food and would not touch any food prepared by my relatives. On the bhog day (culmination of the reading of Guru Granth Sahib) all members of my family and other relatives went to participate in the celebrations. The langar was prepared by the members of the amritdhari gurdwara. After the bhog ceremony, the amritdharis ate their langar separately - they did not sit with anybody else. When I insisted to eat with them, the amritdharis refused to let me join them. I felt deeply hurt and insulted - and left my relative's house without having any langar.

At the gurdwara the Chamars did not enjoy equal status but always received differential treatment. Apart from one wealthy Chamar member of the board of trustees, there was no representative of the Chamars on the management committee of the gurdwara. They always felt ignored and thus frustrated. One leading member of the Ravidas Sabha expressed the feelings of the Chamars when he described the incidents of differential treatment at the Bradford gurdwara:

On two marriages of our biradari members we asked the leaders of the gurdwara to allow our own pathi (reader of Guru Granth Sahib) to recite the layan (marriage hymns). Our request was turned down on the pretext that our pathi was a mona (clean shaven) Sikh. We pointed out that most members of the management committee were clean shaven Sikhs. They just ignored our protestations. The second incident relates to the visits of prominent leaders from Punjab. It is a common practice that when political or religious leaders visit England, they address the congregations at the gurdwaras. Once a leading member of our biradari from the Punjab came to Bradford - we took him to the gurdwara to address the congregation. But the gurdwara management did not allow him to speak at the gurdwara. We felt insulted and helpless.

In 1968, the Chamars began to organise their own biradari. They called a meeting of the representatives of all Chamar households in Bradford at which they decided to form their own association called the Ravidas Sabha. They also agreed to collect funds for setting up their own biradari gurdwara. They bought a set of large cooking pans, serving dishes and plates for the exclusive use of their biradari members. It was the first step towards asserting their separate "Ravidasi" identity. In the same year they celebrated the gurpurb (birth anniversary) of their guru Ravidas at the Queens Hall for the first time. Similar developments were taking place within the Chamar community in other towns. Mark Juergensmeyer in Religion as Social

Vision reports that "In 1956 the Ad Dharm Chamars made the first move towards proving to the British Sikhs that they were a qaum (community) of equal status and heritage by organising associations of Ravidas Sabhas in Birmingham and Wolverhampton" (1982:248). The Ravidas movement reached a high point with the opening of the first Ravidas gurdwara in Wolverhampton in 1968. This became the symbol of pride and source of inspiration for all Chamars in Britain. In 1969, the Ravidas Sabha of Bradford hired St. Georges Hall in the city to celebrate the gurpurb of their guru, Ravidas. Members of the Chamar community from other towns participated in this celebration which enhanced their common caste solidarity. By 1982, the Chamars of Bradford were ready to establish their own gurdwara. They bought a four-storey building , which used to be a textile factory, for £27,000. Explaining the methods of raising funds for the gurdwara building, their finance secretary said:

At our biradari meeting, it was decided that each working member in the Chamar household would contribute one hundred pounds. Our monthly instalment was £375. Thirty five members of the Ravidas Sabha agreed to contribute two pounds per week to pay the bank loan. On 5th July 1983, our chairman reported to the congregation that only the sum of eleven hundred pounds remained to be paid. Members of our fund-raising sub-committee regularly visited the Chamar families resident in other towns. There is a large Chamar community in Birmingham - we collected more than ten thousand pounds from the Chamars of Birmingham and Wolverhampton. Our biradari members were very generous - we were overwhelmed to experience the sense of pride among the members of our biradari.

The Bradford gurdwara, called Ravidas Bhawan, was officially opened for worship on 6th June, 1982. The opening ceremony was conducted by celebrating the birth anniversary of guru Ravidas. The celebrations

began with the ritual of nishan sahib (hoisting the flag). All members of the congregation were gathered at the main gate, their heads properly covered. Their granthi (reader of Guru Granth Sahib) recited the ardas (Sikh prayer). Members of the congregation joined in to wash the flag pole with a mixture of water and milk and then dried it with new towels. During this operation the congregation kept on singing shabads (hymns and religious songs) illuminating the significance of the nishan sahib. As soon as the new covering was put on the flag pole the congregation began to shout Sikh slogans:

bole so nirbhai guru Ravidas ki jai

(one who says victory to guru Ravidas, is fearless).

bole so nihai sat sri akal

(one who says God is immortal, is a happy person).

There are two distinctive features of the nishan sahib ceremony among the Ravidasis. First, the symbol of Sikh insignia has been replaced with the word soham which is the sacred-word of the Ad-Dharm movement; secondly, at the culmination of ardas two slogans are recited - one symbolises their "Ravidasi" identity whilst the other indicates their membership of the Sikh Panth.

The top floor of Ravidas Bhawan has been converted into a consecrated hall where diwan and marriage ceremonies are conducted. The hall is fifty feet wide and one hundred and twenty feet long and fully carpeted. At the top end of the hall a fifteen inches high platform is erected on which a beautiful wooden palki (palanquin) is placed for the Guru Granth Sahib (see Appendix). The decorations on the palki makes it very distinctive. It is decorated with miniature

pictures of Ravidas - usually a palki in a gurdwara would have bani (hymn from the Guru Granth Sahib) written on it. There is a small room on the platform which is reserved for keeping copies of the Guru Granth Sahib, romaley (coverings) and the chauri sahib (ritual fan). The focal point in the hall is the Guru Granth Sahib placed underneath the palki. The walls are decorated with pictures of Sikh Gurus, Ravidas, Sant Sarwan Das (their local holy man) and Dr. Ambedkar. A large wall covering with pictures of Guru Nanak, Guru Gobind Singh and the Golden Temple, Amritsar, is hanging alongside the pictures of Ravidas, Sant Sarwan Das and Dr. Ambedkar, around the palki. There are twelve pictures of Ravidas in the hall including an original oil painting in which a king is shown bowing in front of Ravidas. Ravidas is always depicted bare-headed. Their interior decorations manifest the intentions of the Chamars to assert their "Ravidasi" identity and their perception of the Sikh tradition and emphasise their religious identity as Sikhs.

Defining the beliefs and practices of the Sikhs has been a complex and difficult task for Sikh leaders for a long time. The problem of trying to enunciate authentic criteria for the definition of a Sikh person raises more questions than it solves, as much depends on who is describing whom and in what context. Commenting on the problem of defining person as a Sikh, Cole and Sambhi write:

"The Gurdwara Act of 1925 placed the <sup>a</sup>management of Sikh shrines in the hands of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). As a result it found itself in the position of having to define belief and practice, as there has been no uniformity in these matters for 200 years, during which many Hindu rituals had crept into Sikh worship....On 3 February 1945 the 'Rehat Maryada' was approved by SGPC. The result strongly reflects the

influence of the Singh Sabha and Akali movements of the early twentieth century (1978:168).

In the introduction to the Rehat Maryada (a guide to a Sikh way of life), the definition of a Sikh is given as follows:

A Sikh is a person whose faith is in one God, the ten Gurus and their teaching and the Adi Granth. In addition he or she must believe in the necessity and importance of amrit (initiation) and must not adhere to any other religion". (Quoted in Cole and Sambhi 1978:169).

According to Cole and Sambhi, the committee for drawing up the Rehat Maryada was set up in 1931 by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee. It took nearly fifteen years to draw up the present Rehat Maryada, which clearly indicates the complex nature of the task. The definition of a Sikh person in the Rehat Maryada is extremely narrow. It does not take into account the developmental aspect of the Sikh tradition. It mainly symbolises the Khalsa tradition as interpreted by the leadership of the Sikh Panth in the early 20th century, which was then dominated by the Jat Sikhs. However, the beliefs and practices of many Sikhs in Punjabi villages do not conform to this definition given by the Rehat Maryada. Inder P. Singh in his article "The Sikh Village" (1959) provides interesting insights into the life of the people of the village of Daleke, about 20 miles from Amritsar, the centre of Sikhism, and 5 miles from Tarn Taran, where the fifth Guru, Arjun Dev, established a second centre of the Sikh faith. He writes that "All the families belonging to castes Jat, Kamboh, Tarkhan, Cimba and Nai profess faith in Sikhism; all the Mazhbis (sweepers) are also Sikhs... Sikhs as well as Hindus worship tombs of Muslim Saints and make promises to offer clothes or food if a certain wish is fulfilled" (1959:273). The religious behaviour of the Sikhs

of the village of Daleke conforms to the overall pattern of Punjabi village culture, which has survived in spite of the purificatory endeavours of the Singh Sabha and the Akali movements.

The Chamars have been participating in Sikh affairs since their settlement in Bradford, although most of them are clean-shaven and have Hindu names. When the first gurdwara was established in Bradford, one Chamar Sikh was appointed as a member of the board of trustees, irrespective of the fact that he was a clean-shaven Sikh. The religious identity of the Chamars has become very clear by their corporate participation and association with the concerns and aspirations of the Sikhs in Bradford. The Ravidas Bhawan is affiliated with the "Federation of Bradford Sikhs", a new umbrella <sup>Organisations</sup> organisation of all Bradford Sikhs, founded in 1984 <sup>R.</sup> (Singh 1984:25). The historic baisakhi procession of 13th April, 1987 was jointly organised by all gurdwaras in Bradford and the representatives of the Ravidas Bhawan marched in the procession alongside the leaders of other gurdwaras.

In order to establish the position of the Ravidasi community within the Sikh Panth, we will examine the nature of worship at the Ravidas Bhawan. First we must ask, whether the Ravidas Bhawan <sup>is</sup> a gurdwara? Describing the nature of worship at a gurdwara, Cole and Sambhi write that "...when a Sikh enters a gurdwara, he believes he is entering the presence of the Guru. 'Gurdwara' means the home or abode of the Guru; wherever the Guru Granth Sahib is installed there is a gurdwara" (1978:62). I have mentioned that the third floor of the

Ravidas Bhawan has been converted into a consecrated hall where diwan and marriage ceremonies are conducted. The focal point in the hall is the Guru Granth Sahib placed underneath the palki. The second floor underneath is converted into a langar (community kitchen). The first floor and ground floor are currently used for other purposes and may be developed for further activities in the future. A full-time granthi (reader of Guru Granth Sahib) has been appointed to conduct services and other religious ceremonies. He is a kesdhari Sikh and belongs to the Ravidasi biradari. His predecessor was a clean-shaven Sikh, but he always wore a turban.

Every Sunday morning diwan at the Ravidas Bhawan begins with the recital of asa di var (long hymn from the Guru Granth Sahib which is recited in the morning), sung by a group of musicians. After the asa di var, they usually sing a couple of hymns composed by guru Ravidas. Entering the hall everybody approaches the dais upon which the Guru Granth Sahib is placed, prostrates fully and make an offering of money. Most women take milk, sugar and butter as an offering. Many families make offerings of romala sahib (coverings for the Guru Granth Sahib). Men and women sit separately, just like in other gurdwaras. The granthi prepares the ritual food (parshad) in the kitchen. When it is ready, it is brought into the hall by being carried on the head by a male member of the congregation, followed by another Sikh who sprinkles water on the floor during this ritual which indicates the religious nature of the ritual food. The morning diwan ends with the main ardas. One member of the congregation stands near the parshad, placed on a stool near the Guru Granth Sahib and at

the right moment he touches the parshad with a small kirpan (sword). The ardas is followed by the hukamnama (order of the day) by reading out one hymn to the congregation. At this stage volunteers distribute portions of parshad to the members of the congregation. This description shows that the morning worship at the Ravidas Bhawan follows the general pattern of Sikh worship except for one additional feature, namely, the end of the ardas (prayer) where the name of Ravidas is added after that of the first Sikh Guru, Nanak Dev. This symbolically indicates the equal status accorded to Ravidas who is regarded as a guru by the Chamars. Ravidas is always referred to as Shri Guru Ravidas at the Ravidas Bhawan, whereas in the main Sikh tradition the title of Guru is always reserved for the ten Sikh Gurus and the Guru Granth Sahib only. Other holy men are addressed by using such titles as Sant, Baba or Bhagat.

In most gurdwaras, pictures of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh are placed in front of the palki. But at the Ravidas Bhawan, members have instead placed two pictures of Ravidas, wearing a tilak (mark on the forehead to signify purity, usually worn by Brahmans) and a janeu (sacred thread worn by the 'twice-born' caste Hindus).

Representations of Ravidas with a tilak and a janeu symbolise an attitude of rebellion against the caste system on the part of the Chamars. Ravidas rejected the notion that the wearing of tilak and janeu was the privilege of caste Hindus only. In accordance with the sant tradition, he emphasised the significance of earning one's living by kirt (working) and not by living on dan (offerings) like the Brahmans. In his compositions, Ravidas takes great pride in being

a Chamar. He preached the establishment of begumpura (a casteless society in which everyone enjoys life without worries). The concept of begumpura was further developed by Guru Nanak in his celebrated hymn "sabhey sanjhiwal sadayan koi na disey bahra jeo" which expresses the powerful idea that everyone will enjoy equal status and nobody will be regarded as an outsider.

The gurpurb (birth anniversary) of Ravidas is the most important annual celebration held at the Ravidas Bhawan. The hoisting of the nishan sahib (religious flag) takes place on this day rather than on baisakhi (founding of the Khalsa day). The Chamars from other towns, including representatives of their national association, take part in the celebrations. Posters in Punjabi are printed to honour the occasion. The design of these posters demonstrates the intentions of the Chamars who depict Ravidas as a guru. At the top of the poster a picture of Ravidas is printed with a couplet from the Guru Granth Sahib, followed by "wadhai Shri Guru Ravi Das janam utsav" (congratulations on the birth anniversary of guru Ravidas). The posters highlight the achievement of Ravi Das by proclaiming in Punjabi the following message, translated here into English:

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Sat guru Ravidas c/ampaigned against  
caste-ridden society of fifteenth century India.  
He preached for the establishment of a socialistic society  
based on the principles of justice and equality. Let us  
learn from the teachings of our great guru the  
way to fight against caste and colour discrimination.

The celebrations begin with the hoisting of nishan sahib and the recital of asa di var, followed by the contributions from the

religious musicians and representatives of the Ravidas Sabha, U.K. The dominant theme developed by the musicians and public speakers revolves around the divine powers of Ravidas and his onslaught on the caste system of India. In 1983, one Ravidasi musician from Birmingham, speaking at the gurpurb of Ravidas in Bradford, said:

Guru Ravidas was born in a Chamar family - he used to wear a tilak and janeu, the symbols of a Brahman. But he earned his living by making shoes and not by begging. His bani (compositions) is included in the Guru Granth Sahib because he was a sacha bhagat (true saint). Mira Bai, the daughter of a local king received amrit from him; zat-pat (caste system) was created by the Brahmans who had the power to put people into the category of Churey-Chamar (sweepers and leather workers). You all remember the story of Guru Gobind Singh who made everybody equal by performing the amrit ceremony. But before this, Mira Bai had received amrit from guru Ravidas.

At the end he sang one shabad (hymn) of Ravidas from the Guru Granth Sahib signifying the status of their biradari guru. The origin of amrit and the story of Mira Bai depict the divine powers of Ravidas. The gurpurb celebrations help to promote among the Chamars a distinct and separate "Ravidasi" identity which is, however, shown as closely linked to the Sikh tradition.

The Chamars claim to be the true followers of Sikhism, which is perceived by them as the continuation of the sant tradition developed by Kabir, Ravidas and Guru Nanak. They strongly condemn the presence of caste among the Sikhs, particularly the attitude of the Jat Sikhs towards the low caste members of the Sikh Panth. Their claim to the membership of the Sikh tradition is demonstratively evident from a conversation between one officer of Bradford City Council and the chairman of the Ravidas Bhawan which took place during my fieldwork.

The officer had gone to verify an application for an inner-city grant. The meeting was mainly conducted in question and answer form in English:

Officer: What is your religion?

Chairman: We are all Sikhs - we follow the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib, but we do not wear turbans. And we do not insist on keeping the external Sikh symbols.

Officer: Your name is not a Sikh name, why?

Chairman: Well, all our Gurus had Hindu names except the 10th Guru, Gobind Singh. At the beginning of the Sikh dharm (religious tradition) everybody could join the Sikh Panth without any discrimination. But now the Sikh dharm is controlled by the bare-log (high caste people) who insist on wearing Sikh symbols.

Officer: I understand that the Sikhs do not believe in the caste system, but the name of your organisation is based on your caste. Could you explain that, please?

Chairman: Yes, there is no caste system among the Sikhs in theory but in reality all Sikhs practise caste in one form or another. We are called Harjians, and other Sikhs regard us inferior to them. Moreover, all Sikhs marry in their own caste groups.

Officer: Can other Sikhs become members of your organisation?

Chairman: Yes, our membership is open to all the Sikhs. But they do not join our association because they regard us as untouchables. And by joining our organisation they do not want to get the stigma of belonging to a Chamar association. It is their problem and not ours. We did not want to set up our own gurdwara, but we were forced to take up this step. Other Sikhs treat us like second class Sikhs which we are not prepared to accept any more. We were not allowed to participate fully in the affairs of the main gurdwara. Most Sikhs still believe in chhut-chat (ritual purity). They do not permit the Chamars to do seva (voluntary service) in the langar.

Officer: Can I see your main religious hall, please?

Chairman: Yes, let us go upstairs. We will have to take our shoes off outside the main door. And secondly, we will have to cover our heads.

Officer: Well, your place is exactly like other Sikh temples, You have your holy book and the pictures of your Gurus. (Pointing towards the picture of Ravidas), but who is this?

Chairman: He is guru Ravidas. His writings are included

in the Guru Granth Sahib. He was born before Guru Nanak and his parents were Chamars (leather workers). We respect him like other Gurus. He fought against the caste system and preached that all human beings are equal. That is why his bani (religious compositions) was included in the Guru Granth Sahib.

The emergence of a "Ravidasi" gurdwara is an important phenomenon which provides new insights into the aspirations of a low caste group, attempting to define its identity for itself and others within the framework of the sant tradition. One needs to develop new perspectives for the comprehensive analysis of "Ravidasi" identity. One way of looking at this development would be to see it as a process of Sanskritization, a term used by Srinivas to describe the process whereby low caste members emulate the Sanskrit-defined customs of high caste groups in order to achieve higher status. In a later essay Srinivas developed his earlier insights and amended the view that it was not only the Brahmans who were imitated through Sanskritization, but also the dominant caste of a region. Describing the attributes of a dominant caste, Srinivas writes that "For a caste to be dominant, it should own a sizable amount of arable land locally available, and occupy a high place in the local hierarchy" (1966:10).

However, I reject the usefulness of the concept of Sanskritization for describing the situation of the Ravidasis on two grounds. One, whilst this process of imitation is found among lower castes, it has never worked for untouchables who are below the ritual barrier of pollution. As Srinivas himself says "movement has always been ...in the middle regions of the hierarchy" (1965:30). Two, the process of

Sanskritization can only be an explanation used within the context of the caste system, a framework which the Chamar Sikhs categorically reject. The Chamar Sikhs are definitely not seeking higher Hindu caste status; they are struggling to achieve equal status within the Sikh Panth. Their efforts are directed towards the propagation of the egalitarian principles of the Sikh tradition. They do not subscribe to the sectarian definition of a Sikh person as provided in Rehat Maryada approved by the Shiromani Gurdwaa Parbandhak Committee. The nature of worship at the Ravidas Bhawan is based on fundamental principles of sant tradition. The overwhelming majority of the Chamars are clean-shaven Sikhs who have retained their Hindu names. But they do not perceive any contradiction between their Sikh identity and the retention of Hindu names. They prefer to be called "sahaidharis" (one who has not been initiated through the ritual of amrit). They also do not insist on observing the naming ceremony at the Ravidas Bhawan. When questioned about the significance of the naming ceremony, the chairman of the Ravidas Bhawan said:

Well, we do not believe in ritualism. At the birth of a child parents make generous offerings of money to the Bhawan, but they choose the name of their child themselves. Moreover, we do not organise amrit (Sikh initiation) sessions at our gurdwara. We believe that the people should follow the teachings of our Gurus instead of engaging in false demonstration of wearing religious symbols. Nine Sikh Gurus had Hindu names.

The constitution of the Ravidas Sabha provides additional insights to understand the question of religious identity among the Chamars. The aims and objectives of the association are explained under Section 2 of their constitution, which reads:

The objectives of the Sabha are advancement of the Hindu religion in accordance with the teachings and principles of Shri Guru Ravidas Ji... (p. 1).

It is evident that the members of the Ravidas Sabha do not believe in the traditional religion of the Hindus. Their interpretation of the Hindu religion is based on the teachings of Ravidas who rejected the caste system. Their perception of Hinduism is based on the rejection of the doctrine of varnashramadharma and the notion of ritual purity. In identifying with the sant tradition and the Sikh tradition through their biradari guru Ravidas, they have created a "Ravidasi" identity for themselves and the wider society. I reject the view put forward by A.D.W. Leivesley that "They (Ravidasis) are not Sikh but they are within the 'Sikh universe'" (Sikh Bulletin number 3: 1986, p. 37). Leivesley seems to have based his argument on the veneration of Ravidas and the practice of arranged marriages. He writes that "...They have created a distinct religious identity that is not Sikh nor Hindu. They follow the teachings of Ravidas which they perceive as a belief in one God and equality of man. They arrange marriages, however, within the Ravidasi community which also implies observance of caste rules" (ibid:37-38). I have argued throughout this thesis that caste still remains an important indicator of identity within the Sikh Panth. Describing the marriage arrangements in his article "A Sikh Village" (1959), I.P. Singh says that "Intermarriage by caste is one of the important tests as to the abolition of the caste system, but in Daleke no single case of intermarriage has occurred in its history. Marriages have taken place strictly within the caste" (1959:281).

Caste within the Sikh community is manifested through the establishment of different caste institutions such as the Ramgarhia Board, Ramgarhia Sikh Centre, Bhatra Nirman Jatha, Indian Farmers Welfare Society, Ravidas Sabha and Ravidas Bhawan etc. Caste endogamy is strictly observed by all caste groups within the Sikh Panth. We can compare the situation of the Chamars with that of the Ramgarhias. The Chamars' claim to Sikhism is based on the Guru Granth Sahib which contains compositions of their biradari guru, Ravidas. Ravidas represents both the sant and the Sikh traditions; his role parallels for them that of the Sikh Gurus. Ravidas is their caste hero and the central focus of their "Ravidasi" identity. The sangat at the Ravidas Bhawan is mainly comprised of the Chamars. Although there are no restrictions on the members of the Sikh community to attend diwans at the Ravidas Bhawan, the membership of the Ravidas Sabha is limited to Chamars only. Section 3 of their constitution states especially that "Membership is open to all persons belonging to the Ravidasi or Ad-Dharmi community." Membership of the Ramgarhia Board and the Bhatra Nirman Sevak Jatha is also limited to their biradari members only.

Apart from the regular weekly diwans, the celebration of gurpurbs of Ravidas, Guru Nanak Dev and Sant Sarwan Das are the most significant events celebrated at the Ravidas Bhawan. On these occasions posters are printed and distributed among members and biradari associations in other towns. Local and national groups of musicians are invited to take part in the celebrations. These celebrations follow the pattern of gurpurbs held at other gurdwaras. Commenting on the form of

worship at the Ravidas Temple in Birmingham, Juergensmeyer in Religion as Social Vision writes:

...The worship follows the form of Sikh religious gatherings. First there are songs - verses from Ravidas's poems and Punjabi folk tunes, all of which are held to be 'songs associated with our qaum'. Then come readings from Ravidas and Guru Nanak, the latter being revered as a general religious figure of the Punjab rather than a Sikh (1982:251).

Juergensmeyer's observation as to the perception of Guru Nanak does not apply among the Chamars in Bradford, for they celebrate Guru Nanak's gurburb with great enthusiasm. Posters are printed in Punjabi containing a picture of Guru Nanak and a couplet from the Guru Granth Sahib. Guru Nanak is depicted as the hero of the poor and the neglected sections of the Indian society. He is referred to as the "Jagat Guru" (guru of the world). The significance of Guru Nanak's role is associated with his bani (compositions) in the Guru Granth Sahib. Within the structure of Sikh worship the Guru Granth Sahib is central in much more than a physical form. All forms of Sikh worship relate directly to it, and practically the entire content of worship is drawn from it. The Chamars have a special regard for the Guru Granth Sahib as it contains the compositions of their biradari guru Ravidas as well. The religious behaviour of the Chamars in Bradford clearly demonstrate their perception of the Sikh tradition. They have no doubts about the status of Guru Nanak and other Sikh Gurus. However, they insist on regarding Ravidas also as an additional guru

whose compositions are also included in the Guru Granth Sahib and who is of greatest importance for them. When the Indian government issued a postage stamp honouring "Sant Ravidas", the Ravi Das Sabha protested against the omission of the title Guru before his name (Juergensmeyer 1982:252).

The Chamars celebrate the death anniversary of Sant Sarwan Das in the month of June. This celebration begins with the ritual of akhand-path (unbroken reading of Guru Granth Sahib). Sant Sarwan Das was a Chamar holy man who was also the custodian of the Ravidas Dera (religious centre) at the village of Ballan in the Punjab until his death on 11th June 1972. Sarwan Das always wore the external symbols of Sikhism. For this celebration a poster in Punjabi is printed which publicises the achievements of Sarwan Das and indicates the strategies employed by the Chamars to challenge the traditional Indian social structure and to promote the "Ravidasi" identity. The layout of the poster is as follows:

There is a picture of Sant Sarwan Das in the middle - three slogans are printed at the top of the poster. On the left hand corner is printed 'Jai guru Ravidas Ji' (victory to guru Ravidas), on the right hand 'Jai Rishi Balmik Ji' (victory to Sage Balmik) and in the middle is the Sikh slogan 'ek onkar sat gur parshad' (God is one - one can meet Him with Guru's grace).

Ravidas represents the sant tradition, Balmik (guru of the sweepers), the author of the Ramayana, stands for the Hindu tradition, while the Sikh slogan symbolises the egalitarian tradition of Sikhism. Sarwan Das is thus depicted as the representative of three main traditions of India. The poster begins by addressing the audience briefly "satkar yog sadh sangat jio" (respected members of the congregation). This is a traditional phrase used in addressing the congregation at the gurdwaras. Thus the audience at the Ravidas Bhawan is perceived as the Sikhs. The main message is communicated by listing the personal qualities of Sarwan Das:

1. that he was a preacher of the gurbani (compositions in the Guru Granth Sahib);
2. that he preached the mission of Guru Nanak and Ravidas;
3. that he promoted the education of ordinary people;
4. that he was a tireless servant of the Chamar biradari;
5. that he built an important centre at Benaras called Guru Ravidas Dera.

One finds the figure of Sarwan Das prominently displayed throughout the Ravidas Bhawan in Bradford. When questioned about the contribution of Sarwan Das, the chairman of the Ravidas Bhawan said:

Many Chamar families in Bradford have come from the village of Ballan. They are sachey sevak (true disciples) of Baba Sarwan Das. They believe that Baba Ji possessed spiritual and divine powers and was sent by Bhagwan (God) to guide the ordinary people. Some of them claim to have seen the limbs of Baba Ji scattered all over the place on their way to his dera (religious centre) at the village of Ballan. But on reaching the dera they would meet him in one piece. It was all due to his miraculous powers. Baba Ji had healing powers. Many sick people visit his dera for his blessings of "deh arogtta" (getting well). His disciples donate large sums of money for the building of various projects started by Baba Ji whom they call sacha avtar (true incarnation of God).

At the anniversary celebrations of Sarwan Das in 1983, a group of Chamar musicians from Birmingham entertained the congregation.

Addressing the congregation, the leader of the group said:

We have just come back from Canada where we performed at the gurburb of Guru Ravidas which was organised by the Ravidas Sabha of Canada. Today we feel proud that we are celebrating the anniversary of Baba Sarwan Das at our own gurdwara in Bradford. There was a time when we were not permitted to enter the mandirs (temples) and gurdwaras and not allowed to listen to the gurbani (compositions in the Granth Sahib). Guru Nanak raised his voice against the inhuman behaviour of the high caste people. Today we are celebrating the anniversary of Baba Sarwan Das in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib. Now, we will sing two hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib. Our association, the Ravidas Sabha of Birmingham, has donated £6,000 towards the building fund of Dera Guru Ravidas at Benaras, in India.

At the end they recited the hymn of arti from the Guru Granth Sahib.

The celebrations culminated with the recital of ardas and the hukamnama (order of the day) from the Guru Granth Sahib. These celebrations provide one of the major occasions for promoting pride in "Ravidasi" identity.

The Chamars in Bradford have also begun to celebrate the birth anniversary of Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar who was the national leader of the scheduled castes in India. His pictures are permanently displayed in the congregation hall alongside the pictures of Ravidas, Sarwan Das, Guru Nanak and other Sikh Gurus. In May 1987, the Ravidas Sabha printed a poster in Punjabi and English to celebrate the anniversary of Dr. Ambedkar at the Ravidas Bhawan in Bradford. It shows a picture of Dr. Ambedkar and two slogans: "Jai Bhim" (victory to Ambedkar) and

"Jai Bharat" (victory to India). A short passage from the writings of Dr. Ambedkar is printed both in English and Punjabi. It reads:

You must have firm belief in the sacredness of your goal. Noble in your aim and sublime and glorious in your mission. Blessed are those who are awakened to their duty to those among whom they are born. Glory to those who devote their time, talents and their all to the amelioration of slavery. Glory to those who would keep on their struggle for the liberation of the enslaved in spite of heavy odds, carping, humiliation, storms and dangers till the downtrodden secure their Human Rights.

The celebrations began with the bhog (culmination of the reading of Guru Granth Sahib) followed by the recital of asa di var by the local musicians. There was a large picture of Dr. Ambedkar placed in front of the Guru Granth Sahib. Many members of the Chamar community from other towns came to participate in the celebrations. The Lord Mayor of Wolverhampton, who in 1987 was a Punjabi Chamar, came in the official limousine wearing his chain of office. His presence at the celebrations was a symbol of "Ravidasi" identity and solidarity. Dr. Gurcharn Singh, President of the Punjab Unit, Republican Party of India, was also present. The Ravidas Sabha and the Ambedkar Mission Society had set up their bookstalls in one corner of the congrega<sup>e</sup>tion hall. Addressing the congregation, the Lord Mayor of Wolverhampton said:

We must propagate the mission of Dr. Ambedkar. He was the second Manu of India. The first Manu was a Brahman who wrote the rules of the caste system. The second Manu was a Chamar who wrote the constitution of modern India which abolished untouchability.

One musician from Birmingham sang songs about the glorious struggles led by Dr. Ambedkar to improve the social and economic status of the

scheduled castes in India. He emphasised the significance of the position of the Chamars within Sikh society and deplored the presence of caste among the Sikhs. The celebrations culminated in the recital of ardas and the distribution of parshad (ritual food). The members of the congregation enjoyed their langar before leaving the Ravidas Bhawan.

Commenting on the contribution of Dr. Ambedkar, one Chamar informant said that "Our main objective is to fight against the caste system. We constantly remind our people that a Chamar does not achieve higher caste status by changing his religion. We must have pride in our caste identity and strive for the formation of a casteless society. When you become a bodhi (Buddhist) everybody knows that you are a Chamar". In 1956, Dr. Ambedkar became a Buddhist in order to find a solution to the question of religious equality for the scheduled castes. His intention was to join an egalitarian tradition which would embrace the whole of Indian society. Dr. Ambedkar had expressed interest in Sikhism, and he explored this idea with Sikh leaders in 1936. Juergensmeyer reports that "Ambedkar sent his son, Jaswant Rao, and fifteen other Mahars to Amritsar for negotiations which were apparently encouraged by the Sikhs" (1982:163). However, the negotiations seemed to have broken down on the issue of roti-beti di sanjh (no restrictions on commensality and intercaste marriages).

Some Chamar families in Bradford have also joined the Nirankari Mandal and the Radhasoami Satsang and keep pictures of Radhsami and Nirankari gurus in their homes. Reflecting on the trend among the

Chamars to join other religious groups, the chairman of the Ravidas Bhawan said:

Although some Chamar families have joined other groups, they strongly support the Ravidas Sabha. Everybody knows that we have to marry our children in our own biradari. Nobody is going to accept a Chamar girl. Moreover, members of other castes are not going to give their daughters to the Chamar boys. My sister's family have become Nirankaris. Her daughter is married to a Chamar who lives in Birmingham. Her wedding ceremony was held at the Ravidas Bhawan according to the Sikh traditions.

The Chamars arrange marriages by following the rules of caste endogamy and got exogamy. In Bradford, their marriages are solemnised at the Ravidas Bhawan. The pattern of a Chamar marriage is mainly the one which is followed by other Sikhs. It begins with the ritual of milni (meeting of the heads of the families), followed by the ritual of anand-karaj (Sikh wedding ceremony) which are discussed in more detail in Chapter 7 below. According to the social secretary of the Ravi Das Sabha, there are fifteen gots (patrilineal exogamous clans) among the Chamars in Bradford: 1. Mehto; 2. Mahi; 3. Chaukariya; 4. Dadral; 5. Bangar; 6. Bagga; 7. Mehmi; 8. Chauhan; 9. Soan; 10. Suman; 11. Malh; 12. Mangloo; 13. Heer; 14. Jassal; 15. Kaukdhar. Some of the gots are common with the gots among other caste groups. For example, Reehal states that "There are many Ramgarhia Sikh families who have Chauhan got" (1979:18). The restrictions on the entry of male fiancés has made it hard to operate the four-got rule which states that the marriage into the clan of one's mother, father's mother, mother's mother and father is prohibited. In order to assist the Chamar families in Britain, their national association issued a policy statement stating that "...We should adopt a liberal

approach towards the implementation of the four-got rule in this country" (Shri Guru Ravidas Ank 1982, p. 5, published by the Ravidas Sabha, U.K.).

At the time of a death in a Chamar household, a sadharan/sahej-path (reading of the Guru Granth Sahib over the period of ten to fifteen days) is organised at the house of the deceased. The bhog (culmination of the reading of the Guru Granth Sahib) takes place at the Ravidas Bhawan after the funeral. In the case of a death of an elderly person the ritual of akath (feast for the members of the biradari and relatives) takes place after the bhog ceremony. The main feature of the akath ceremony is the ritual of pagri (tying a turban) which signifies the transfer of parental authority to the eldest son in the presence of the biradari members. At the bhog ceremony the family of the deceased donates a complete set of bedding, a suit, a shirt, a turban and six bhandey (plates, saucers and a glass made of steel) to the granthi (reader of the Guru Granth Sahib). Most Chamar families, like other Sikhs, go to India to perform the asth-pauna ritual (immersion of ashes in the river Ganges at Haridwar) a common practice widely followed among Sikhs in Britain. However, there is now a noticeable change in the attitude of the British Sikh community towards asth-pauna as many families choose to perform this ritual by immersing ashes in a river or in the sea in this country. Yet in spite of this change in venue, the commitment to traditional values remains very strong.

The Ravidas Sabha also runs Punjabi classes for their children at the Ravidas Bhawan. These classes are held on Sundays. The girls are taught separately from the boys by a female teacher. All teachers are volunteers and members of the Ravidas Sabha. In these classes children learn the basic skills of reading and writing Punjabi - they read books on the teachings of Ravidas. These books are especially produced for the young people by the national association of Chamars. Commenting on the significance of the Punjabi classes, one teacher said that "It is important that our children learn Punjabi so that they are able to read gurbani (compositions in the Guru Granth Sahib) and the teachings of guru Ravidas. We want them to learn about our heritage. We are hoping to start music classes so that our girls can take part in the shabad-kirtan (singing of hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib)."

Participation in the weekly diwans, anniversary celebrations of their leaders and attending Punjabi classes help to promote the pride of young people in their Ravidasi identity. At the Ravidas Bhawan, the Chamar children learn about the teachings of Ravidas, their association with the Sikh tradition and their cultural heritage as members of the Chamar caste. These are important channels for conveying the essentials of their cultural past which enhance their caste solidarity. One of the objectives enunciated in the policy statement of the Ravidas Sabha states that "We salute all our martyrs who laid down their lives fighting against untouchability according to the teachings of guru Ravidas" (Shri Guru Ravidas Ank 1982, page 6). Section 10 of the constitution of the Ravidas Sabha, Bradford,

stipulates that in the event of winding up the Sabha, its property will be transferred to the Guru Ravidas Temple at Goverdhan Puri, Kashi (Benaras), India. It clearly indicates that the primary loyalty of the members of the Ravidas Sabha is to their national biradari institution in India rather than to other Sikhs in Britain.

In this chapter I have shown that the Chamars in Bradford perceive themselves to be members of the Sikh tradition. Their claim is based on the writings of their biradari guru, Ravidas, which are incorporated in the Guru Granth Sahib. The process of the emergence and development of Ravidasi identity demonstrates once again the presence of caste within the Sikh community. I have attempted to discard the view that Chamars are not Sikhs by analysing the nature of their worship performed at the Ravidas Bhawan. The formation of the Ravidas Sabha and the establishment of the Ravidas Bhawan highlight the tensions and divisions within the Sikh community which are mainly based on the persistence of caste, but they also demonstrate the capacity of the Chamars to assert their Sikh identity and their equal status within the larger Sikh community in Britain. We will now proceed to discuss caste as reflected in Sikh religious rites relating to engagement, marriage, and post-funeral customs.

CHAPTER 7.

CASTE AS REFLECTED IN SIKH RELIGIOUS RITES.

I shall now examine the institution of marriage and its role in perpetuating caste consciousness among the Sikhs. Pre-wedding and wedding rituals will be discussed to show the dominant status of the family and biradari in Punjabi/Sikh society, which is shared by other Punjabis who are non-Sikhs. A detailed analysis of the rites of kurmai/mangni (engagement) and lavan (wedding) will be made by looking at the hymns of kurmai and lavan in the Guru Granth Sahib in order to demonstrate the inter-relatedness of social customs and religious beliefs in the Sikh community.

A Sikh marriage has far greater significance than the simple unification of man and woman in the matrimonial state. It is looked upon as an alliance between two families. The wedding is both a social and religious occasion. Through the rituals of a Sikh marriage insight can be gained into the complex network of kinship ties, the entanglement of religion with the social structure, and the functioning of caste and the cohesiveness of the joint family. The concept of saniog (pre-ordained relationship) plays an important role in the establishment of a marriage alliance which is perceived as ithey saniog likhya, othey hi viah hona (marriage is a pre-ordained

relationship). The Sikh scriptures consider marriage to be a spiritual bond rather than a contract which unites two people. At the time of a wedding ceremony the officiant utters the following words addressed particularly to the couple - they highlight the significance of a Sikh wedding:

The Sikh Gurus had a very high regard for the state of marriage. They insisted that marriage is not merely a civil or social contract, but that its highest and most ideal purpose is to fuse two souls into one so that they may become spiritually inseparable... (The Sikh Marriage Ceremony, Publication No. 15, The Sikh Missionary Society, U.K. (no date).

The main message of the marital relationship is based on the teachings of the Sikh Gurus which is evident from the couplet from the Guru Granth Sahib:

sat gur datey kaaj rachaya apni mehr  
karree,  
data karaj aap sawarey ih usdi wadyai  
(The auspicious occasion has been created by the Great Guru (God), and with His blessings the ceremony will be completed).

Guru Nanak wanted his followers to lead a worldly life, the normal life of householders recognising their duties to parents, wife and children as much as to the wider society. He emphatically rejected all kinds of penances and austerities, but especially asceticism and celibacy. He strongly disapproved of the life-style of sanyasis (ascetics) by saying that "Having renounced grihasthashrama, why go begging at the householder's door?". Commenting on the significance of the status of a householder as reflected in the symbolic meaning of the five K's, J.P. Singh Uberoi writes:

...Finally, the kachh, a garment for the

loin and thighs, the last of the five k's, is also to be understood as an agent of constraint like the comb and the bracelet, though the subject of its control is not overtly stated. Obviously it is a sartorial symbol signifying manly reserve in commitment to the procreative world as against renouncing it altogether. At the amrit (Sikh initiation ritual), a Sikh takes no logi or sanyasi vow to renounce his procreative power by not marrying, instead he dons the kachh of continence (1975:508).

The high position accorded to the status of a householder by the Sikh Gurus is demonstrated by their practical example of being married men. At a Sikh wedding the recital of layan, a hymn which was composed by the 4th Guru, Ram Das for his daughter's wedding, is mandatory. The four verses of the hymn of layan provide the couple with advice by placing their new status within the context of union with God. The concept of ik jot doye murti (fusion of two souls into one) is strongly emphasised through various hymns which are recited at the wedding, i.e.:

The bride should know no other man except her husband, so the Guru ordains. She alone is of a good family, she alone shines with light who is adorned with the love of her husband. There is only one way to the heart of the beloved, to be humble and true and to do his bidding. Only thus is true union attained. They are not man and wife who have physical contact only. Only they are truly wedded who have one spirit in two bodies.

(Guru Granth Sahib, p. 788)

According to the Hindu dharmastras the cardinal function of marriage is to perpetuate one's kul (lineage). By conforming to this expectation, an individual fulfills his social obligation (dharma). The continuity of one's kul through one's progeny is not intended to involve only simple biological replacement. If it did, there would be

little justification for the rigorous maintenance of norms and values of endogamy, because biological replacement could effectively occur even through mixed marriages. The restrictive principles underlying mate selection clearly point to the fact that continuity of one's kul is most important at the cultural level. Thus a marriage involves recruitment not only for the purpose of biological reproduction, but also for the maintenance of an orderly replacement of family culture. That is why utmost care is taken to see that appropriate persons marry and norms of caste endogamy provide a framework which help to achieve this end.

Punjabi/Sikh society is patriarchal in authority and all inheritance is through the male line which ensures the continuity of one's kul. The birth of a son is celebrated with great enthusiasm while the arrival of a daughter remains a comparatively less significant affair. The birth of a son is depicted as putin gandh pavey sansar (relationship with society is established through sons) in the teachings of Sikh Gurus. Property is held in common by the head of the household. Daughters move to their husbands' house after marriage, and they had no right to inherit property till the passing of the Hindu Succession Act in 1956. Men are recruited into the descent group by the principle of patriarchal descent and marriage. A man remains a member of his father's descent group throughout his life while a woman makes a gradual transition from membership of the descent group of her father to that of her husband. It is the wives who supply the heirs of the husbands' descent group. Therefore the

choice of prospective wives is made most carefully, following the rules of caste endogamy.

The question of caste endogamy has been discussed by many authors writing about the Sikhs. For example, Bhachu says that "The aspect of the caste system that I particularly want to stress, since it relates to the subjects of marriage and dowry, is that all the Sikh castes are endogamous" (1985:180). Commenting on the continuity of caste among the Sikhs, Khushwant Singh states:

Sikhism did not succeed in breaking the caste system. If inter-caste marriage is considered to be the test of equality, there was very little of it between Sikhs converted from different Hindu castes. The untouchable who converted to Sikhism remained an outcaste for the purposes of matrimonial alliances. Thus, marriages have always been arranged along conventional lines. The Jats married the Jats, the Khatris married the Khatris, just as the Gurus had themselves done, and the Ramgarhias married the Ramgarhias. On the one hand, there are egalitarian traditions inherited from the teachings of the Gurus, on the other, the insistent regard for some caste restrictions (1953:45).

In Punjabi society roles are precisely and clearly defined into an interlocking pattern of mutual interdependence and individual subordination to the group. Marriage is set within the context of the joint family and there is not great emphasis on the exclusive relationship of the married couple. Discussing the perceptions of marriage among South Asian teenagers in Southall, Avtar Brah says that "...while the Asian adolescents growing up here may not share the depth of their parents' commitment to the norms of the extended family system, their identification with the family prestige (izzat)

remains strong. Since the rejection of an arranged marriage would bring disrepute on the family, most Asian teenagers tend to accept an arranged marriage" (1978:200). As long as obligations to a wide kinship group are maintained and marriage remains a contract between two families rather than between two individuals, kinsmen will be deeply involved in making the choice. The most important area in which a child's parent holds complete control over his/her life is the selection of the child's spouse.

The factors considered vital in the selection of spouses are the rules of endogamy, got exogamy and village exogamy. Caste endogamy is a basic criterion of marriage arrangement among the Sikhs in the U.K., as it was in the Punjab and East Africa. According to the norms of caste endogamy, "correct" marriage partners can only be found in one's own caste group, i.e. Jat Sikhs marry Jat Sikhs, and Ramgarhia Sikhs marry Ramgarhia Sikhs only. The second rule of spouse selection is that of four-got exogamy. In North India, marriage is prohibited with close cognates and agnates. Discussing the origin and the social significance of the institution of got, or gotra, D.D. Kosambi in The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India (1970) writes:

The word gotra, literally "cowpen", also means exogamous clan unit. It is known that the cattle of a gotra had some special mark, brand or ear notch to distinguish them from the others. The form of property imposed its name upon the social unit that owned it, and has left us a rule in later canon law to the effect that the property of a man who dies without immediate heirs passes to the gotra (1970:86).

The term got refers to a group of people within a jati who claim descent from a common ancestor. It is the got system which is the

organising and regulating mechanism between the family and the jati. Hershman in Punjabi Kinship and Marriage (1981) applies the term clan for got. He writes:

A man is affiliated bilaterally to his parents' caste but patrilineally to the got of his father. The got is a named exogamous unit whose membership is commonly widely spread throughout Punjab and sometimes outside it. The localised segments of a got are what I have referred to as the localized clan (Hershman 1981:85-86).

Got considerations set norms of exogamy within a caste. In view of their common ancestry, marriage between members of the same got is viewed as incestuous. In North India, caste is a non-localised endogamous unit comprised of numerous gots. In the Punjab, all Ramgarhia Sikhs belong to the Tarkhan (carpenter) caste which has many gots, - Kalsi, Sambhi, Virdee, Sondh, Panesar, Matharu, Bhogal, Bahra, Sahota and Phul, for example. Members of each got consider themselves to be brothers and sisters; thus the rules of got exogamy prohibit marriages between members of the same got. Sexual connections between them are seen as immoral and scandalous. Intra-got marriages are extremely rare. My informants could not recollect a single case of intra-got marriage. Bhachu came across only one case of an intra-got "love" marriage which was "considered socially unacceptable and was talked about frequently within the Ramgarhia community". Bhachu says that "This marriage did not take place in a temple because the granthis (priests) would not agree to such a union, considering it to be almost incestuous and far more shocking than marriage outside the community" (1985:77). The rule of four-got

exogamy states that marriage into the clan of one's father, mother, father's mother and mother's mother is prohibited.

Besides caste endogamy and got exogamy, a third rule governing marriage is that of village exogamy which is typical of North India. In the Punjab, a village is regarded to be a single social unit or family for the purposes of marriage, and all the children in the village are viewed as brothers and sisters. Thus to marry within it is tantamount to incest. A village is called pind in the Punjab, and girls born in different families in the village are referred to as "pind diyan dhiyan" (daughters of the village). A public demonstration of these sentiments is expressed through the custom of "dhiyanian mananiyan" (honouring the married daughters of one's village by making a ritual gift of some cash to them by the father of the bridegroom accompanied by his kinsmen, after the wedding of his son). In fact, the rule of village exogamy operates as an extension of the rule of got exogamy. The Punjabi clan is a named exogamous unit to which members are recruited by the principles of patrilineal descent. Some sections of a clan may hive off and form new localized groups in other villages, but they never lose their original clan affiliation and the total dispersed clan remains one exogamous unit. The significance of the rule of village exogamy can be traced by examining the original settlement of Punjabi villages. Mitakshra, the Hindu customary law of inheritance forbids female members to inherit family property, and the rule of patrilocal residence demands that after marriage girls leave their natal village to join their husbands' families. Thus, in practice, the rule of village exogamy is

also instrumental in the working of the customary law of inheritance in Punjabi villages.

In the U.K., all Sikhs strictly observe the rules of got and village exogamy as they did in East Africa and Punjab. Strong links with the parent community in India <sup>are</sup> a critical factor in determining the behaviour of the Sikhs in this country. The four-got rule was easy to observe during the 1950's and 1960's. Marriages were traditionally arranged because spouses of the right category could be brought over from India. In the 1970's, restrictions on the entry of male fiancés began to affect the marriage arrangements of the South Asian communities. The new immigration rules greatly restricted the range of appropriate families for the choice of "correct" spouses as the size of the Sikh community was much smaller in Britain than in the Punjab.

In the early 1970's, national associations of most Sikh caste groups decided to modify the requirements of four-got exogamy in order to enlarge the range of families for the purposes of "correct" marriages. The fundamental change in the rule of four-got exogamy was to the effect that marriage must be avoided with the gots of father and mother while less attention could be paid to the gots of the mother's mother and father's mother. Almost all Sikh marriages in Leeds were arranged by the parents of the couple concerned. It is evident that the institution of arranged marriage shows no signs of disappearing in Britain. Marcus Thompson confirms my own findings when he says about Coventry that "To my knowledge, no second

generation boy in Coventry has married a native girl, nor has married a non-Punjabi Indian girl, nor even a Punjabi girl of a different sub-caste or from an inappropriate clan or village" (Thompson 1974:245). The same situation was observed by Thomas and Ghuman (1976), among the Bhatra Sikhs in Cardiff, namely that "The kinship group is perpetuated by marriage, which is usually within the group" (1976:32). But their observation that "However, it is, surprisingly, quite permissible for a Bhatra boy to marry a Hindu girl, but in practice its occurrence is rare" (1976:32) is misleading. My Bhatra informants told me that a small number of Bhatra families follow Hinduism and have Hindu names like Khatri, Tarkhan, Jhir and Chamar caste groups. Marriages between Hindu and Sikh Khatris, Hindu and Sikh Jhirs, and Hindu and Sikh Tarkhans are not uncommon. Ursula Sharma's informant said:

The fact that my husband's household are Hindus whilst my father is a Sikh did not matter. In our part of India, Sikhs and Hindus do intermarry sometimes: caste is a stronger consideration than religion. In our district people won't marry their daughters to boys of the same religion if they are of different castes. Well, my father is a Khatri by caste and my husband is a Khatri also, and therefore the difference of religion was not considered important (1971:133).

Since the institution of marriage plays an important role in maintaining boundaries between caste groups, inter-caste marriages are strongly disapproved of by the Sikhs. These alliances are against caste dharma and bring the family's izzat (honour) into disrepute. Reflecting on the inter-caste marriages in Southall, Bhachu indicated that "...there was severe opposition to a marriage between a Jat bride and a Ramgarhia groom. The bride's kin threatened to kill the

groom since this was a hypogamous marriage" (1985:75). In his article "Untouchable - even in Britain" Dalip Hiro examined the persistence of caste among the Indians in Southall. He wrote:

...Yet there is an area where its (Indian community) attitudes remain as rigid as those of the more obscurantist; inter-caste marriage between a caste Hindu (or Sikh) and an outcaste. Not surprisingly such an event arouses more hostility from among the caste members of the community than the outcastes, and the higher the caste the more intense the hostility. When asked to comment on the marriage of his daughter to a son of an outcaste, a Brahman father in Southall denied altogether that he had a daughter. (Sunday Observer Magazine 25th November 1976, p.45)

I have come across only two cases of inter-caste marriage in Leeds. A Ramgarhia Sikh boy married a Chamar Sikh girl without the consent of their parents who rejected this relationship as being totally against caste dharma. The girl's parents removed her to India and forced her to marry someone from their own caste. The second incident is more complicated. When I questioned the father of a Ramgarhia Sikh girl who arranged his daughter's marriage with a Jat Sikh from India, he said:

I have arranged the marriage of my daughter to a Jat Sikh, but my relatives and my biradari do not approve this rishta (arrangement). And they have warned me that I will have serious problems finding spouses for my other children from my own biradari.

During my fieldwork I learnt that fifteen Sikhs in Leeds married Muslim, Jewish or English spouses. In most cases Sikh boys and girls had to leave home to marry outside their caste and religion, and consequently were rejected by their families and biradari. Commenting

on his brother's marriage to an English girl, one Jat Sikh informant said:

After the wedding of my brother our family moved to Leeds because my father could not face our biradari in our town. And soon after that my father died as he could not bear the shock of his son marrying a gori (English girl).

The father of a Julaha Sikh who married a Gujarati Hindu girl told me:

We did not invite our relatives as it was not a proper wedding, we went to the registrar's office for a legal formality. My daughter-in-law is a Gujarati Hindu. Her parents disapproved of this arrangement and no one came to the registrar's office. We could not have a proper Sikh wedding ceremony at the gurdwara as it was too shameful. We had to agree to our son's wish, but our biradari disapproves of this arrangement. They always gossip about it and call my daughter-in-law a Gujaratan, meaning that she is not one of us.

In one Sikh family all three children married English spouses. Their parents performed all wedding rituals meticulously according to the Sikh tradition including anand-karaj (wedding ceremony) which took place at one of the gurdwaras in Leeds. Commenting on these weddings, one officer of the gurdwara said:

Well, we agreed to the performance of anand-karaj at our gurdwara very reluctantly, and we insisted that the wedding ceremony should take place on any day but Sunday. We do not want to encourage such arrangements.

One of the close relatives who was present at the wedding told me:

My niece is marrying a gora (white man). I have come to the wedding to fulfil my family obligations. I am not going to invite the couple to the weddings of my children. What is the meaning of having anand-karaj if one is marrying a gora (white man).

Inter-caste and inter-religious marriages are frowned upon by Sikhs as they go against the norms of family culture. The partners in these

relationships are treated as outsiders and a stigma on the family izzat. Since the rejection of an arranged marriage would bring disrepute on the family, most Sikh children tend to accept this arrangement. Avtar Brah says:

It is generally believed that since the Asian young person is persistently exposed to an alternative western model based on individual choice, he/she may wish to emulate this model. It was found that the influence of the western model was apparent at the level of ideology rather than envisaged practice (1978:200).

I have found that almost all Sikh marriages in Leeds were arranged by the parents which is an indication of the second-generation Sikhs' commitment to the norms of family culture. Bhachu's observation on the future of arranged marriages amongst East African Sikhs in Britain confirms my findings. She says that "Although trends are emerging within East African Sikh marriages which will assume more importance in future, further influencing the structure of the community, at present the traditional criteria of spouse selection and kinship organisation follow much the same pattern as that of North Indians" (1985:74).

Having explained the endogamous and exogamous norms governing the choice of marriage partners within one's caste, I will now examine the rituals of marriage and their significance for transmitting traditional values among the Sikhs in Britain. The formal beginning of the rites and ceremonies is the transition between a couple's kurmai/mangni (engagement) and their anand-karaj (marriage). These ceremonies highlight the spiritual unity of the couple and the status

of their kinsmen who are present on these occasions. The performance of kurmai and anand-karai in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib indicates their intention to seek divine blessings as well as the demonstration of their social and cultural identity and solidarity. As J.P. Singh Uberoi says, "The obligatory and often-repeated social performance of a body of rites serves to give definitive expression and form to the people's collective life and ideas" (1975:503). The roles of kinsmen and biradari are determined by the relationship each share with the marrying couple. Ritual performance clearly marks the hierarchy of the persons involved and the controversies about the ranking may lead to dissension and prolonged ill-feelings.

The process of arranging a daughter's or son's marriage begins when the parents inform their relatives to look for a suitable match. Attendance at different weddings always provides opportunities for exchanging useful information about prospective partners. In the Punjab parents look for someone who is known to them through a previous family tie and it is very common for spouses to be distant relatives. A married daughter would arrange the rishta (relationship) of her sister to one of the male relatives of her husband. A person who performs the role of arranging a match is called bichola (match-maker). He/she is responsible for providing information about gots, including particulars of would-be bride and groom, and the general status and reputation of the families concerned. The marriage negotiations are conducted in complete secrecy to avoid any embarrassment to the parties. Once the families have satisfied themselves about gots and other particulars, the girl's parents ask

the match-maker to arrange a meeting with the boy's parents in order to "see" (munda dekhna) the boy. Nowadays both the girl and boy are "seen" by the respective families. If the parties approve the relationship, a date is fixed for the ceremony of kurmai (engagement). In England, a new custom is emerging which is called thaka (reservation of a boy). It is a type of promising which precedes the engagement ceremony. Unlike the engagement ceremony, thaka is a quiet family affair which is performed in the presence of family members only at the boy's house. Usually the boy receives gifts of cash from the relatives of the girl.

An engagement ceremony also takes place at the would-be groom's home. A party of five or seven kinsmen of the girl, usually her father, father's brothers and maternal uncles go to the boy's village or town taking gifts of mathiyai (Indian sweets) and fruit. The party is received by male relatives of the boy. Before they enter the house, the boy's mother performs the ritual of tel-chona (pouring mustard oil on the threshold). The ritual of tel-chona symbolises the warding off evil spirits on auspicious occasions which has been practised by the Hindus and Sikhs over the centuries. The ceremony of mangni is performed in the presence of male relatives only and it begins with ardas (Sikh prayer). Afterwards the girl's father puts seven handfuls of dried fruit in the boy's jholi (lap made of a pink scarf) and then he puts one chuhara (dried date) in the boy's mouth. This is called sagan-dena (ritually auspicious gift), and it confirms that the new alliance has been accepted by the boy's family in the presence of biradari members. The boy also receives gifts of a

gold ring or a bracelet, including some cash which is usually £11 or £21. Following the engagement ceremony, the boy's family send gifts of clothes and sweets for the would-be bride. This ritual is called chuni-bhejna (sending a scarf). The sweets are distributed among close relatives and members of the biradari as an announcement of the newly established relationship.

The date of the wedding is usually fixed by mutual consultations. Tuesdays and Thursdays are avoided as they are believed to be inauspicious days. It is customary for the girl's parents to send a sahey-chithi (invitation letter) to the boy's family inviting them for the solemnisation of marriage on an appointed day. The sahey-chithi is prepared in the presence of members of the biradari, and it is sprinkled with saffron. This custom has a ritual significance since red is the symbol of the renewal of life (Bhattacharyya 1975:121). In the Punjab it is the customary duty of the family Nai (barber) to deliver sahey-chithi for which he receives a traditional gift of some cash and clothes. In Britain the letter is delivered by the match-maker. The invitation card sent out to relatives and friends in Britain is prepared in English and Punjabi. It bears miniature imprints of the Sikh emblem on the top. The first part of the card is devoted to the invocation of God by printing a couplet from the Guru Granth Sahib in Punjabi which reads:

satgur datey kai rachaya, apni mehr karayi  
data karaj aap swarey, ih usdi wadyai.

(Great God ordained this auspicious occasion, and  
He will see it successfully concluded - in it lies  
His greatness).

The second part is made up of the programme of the main rites of marriage and includes the names of male relatives of the bride or groom. The wording of the invitation letter reinforces the religious aspect of a Sikh wedding.

Two days before the wedding, the ritual of mayian is performed at the respective homes. The prospective bride or groom is seated on a wooden plank called patri (traditionally it is provided by the family Tarkhan who receives a customary gift of food) and above is held a red cloth by four female relatives, while married women of the biradari led by the mother rub paste of turmeric, flour and mustard oil on his/her face, arms and legs. During this ritual they sing traditional songs - ghoriyan (songs sung in the groom's family) at a boy's mayian and sohag (songs of a married woman) at a girl's mayian. At the end of mayian women receive a ritual gift of gogley (Punjabi sweet specially cooked on weddings). On the day prior to the marriage the ritual of saant-krauni is performed when the bride's maternal uncle makes a gift of clothes and some jewellery (nankey-shak) including chura (a row of red ivory bangles which is symbolic of a married woman). He puts the bangles on his niece while the women sing traditional songs describing the role of a maternal uncle. The bride wears clothes provided by her maternal uncle during the wedding ceremony. The bridegroom also receives jora-jama (set of clothes) from his maternal uncle which he wears at the wedding ceremony. Nankey-shak signifies the importance of the role of the mother's family at pre-wedding and wedding rituals. Her children get married wearing clothes provided by her natal family which reinforces the

alliance established at her own wedding. Her brother plays the second most important role at the wedding rituals next to her husband.

The ceremony of vag-pharayi or injerdi in which the groom's sisters and cousins hold on to his scarf, symbolising the bridle of a horse, takes place when the barat (wedding party) leaves for the bride's village or town. The bridegroom makes gifts of money to his sisters and cousins who sing songs of ghoriyan wishing him a safe return with his wife. The ritual of vag-pharayi highlights the traditional image of the groom as that of a knight riding at the head of a party of armed men who go to claim his beloved. It is his scarf through which his bride will be joined to him by his father-in-law at the wedding ceremony.

The marriage party is received by the kinsmen of the bride, usually at a gurdwara or a community centre (janigarh) where the ceremony of milni (ritual meeting of the heads of both families) is performed in the presence of the biradari. It begins with ardas recited by the granthi (religious preacher) who prays for God's blessing for the alliance of the bride and groom's families. Then the first milni of kurman (bride's father and groom's father) takes place when the bride's father makes a ritual gift to the groom's father which is usually a turban and some cash. It is followed by the milni of mamein (maternal uncles of bride and groom) - the bride's maternal uncle makes a ritual gift of a turban and some cash to the groom's maternal uncle. The ritual of milni is greeted by the kinsmen of bride and groom with the chanting of a Sikh slogan "boley so nibal - sat sri

akal (Great God is immortal). Usually a list of important relatives is prepared by the groom's family for the ritual of milni which varies from ten to twenty who receive a ritual gift of one turban and £1. The ritual of milni is restricted to those kinsmen who are related to the father through blood or marriage that is, the father's brother, uncles or father's father, father's sister's husband and daughter's husband. Friends of the groom's family do not receive any gifts which signifies the nature of the ritual of milni as involving direct kin relationship.

Before the wedding party enters the reception hall for breakfast, the bride's mother performs the ritual of tel-chona and kumbh (whilst the groom's father puts some coins in a jug full of water held by the bride's female relative). In the Punjab, a family Jheeri (water-carrier woman) carries the jug and she receives the money as her customary gift. The ritual of kumbh symbolises the worship of the water-god khawaja. The main pattern of Sikh marriages in Leeds is anand-karaj (Sikh marriage ceremony) coupled with the legal requirement of registering the marriage at the registrar's office or at the gurdwara after the wedding ceremony. The ceremony of anand-karaj does not last more than one hour. The bride and groom sit in front of the Guru Granth Sahib. The ceremony begins with ardas seeking God's agiya (permission), followed by the ritual of palla-pharana (joining the couple together with the scarf worn by the groom) by the bride's father. The ritual is very emotional when a father gives away his daughter - it is called kanya-dan (gift of a virgin). Giving a kanya's hand or dan (gift) is considered among the

holiest acts in the life of a parent (Gupta 1974:91). In the absence of the father, either the elder brother or paternal uncle performs this ritual. The ragis (religious singers) sing the hymn of paley taindey lagi from the Guru Granth Sahib which stresses the permanence of the marital bond. The main message in the hymn is the pledge by the bride saying:

Praise and blame I foresake both. I hold the  
edge of your garment. All else I let pass.  
All relationships I have found false. I cling  
to Thee, my Lord. (Granth Sahib, p. 963)

In a short sermon before lavan, the priest explains the concept of Sikh marriage and the couple's obligations towards each other. It is emphasised that the Sikh marriage is not a social contract, but a fusion of two souls into one (ek jote doye murti). The hymn of lavan has four verses. The first verse is read out and then sung by the ragis while the couple walk around the Guru Granth Sahib in a clockwise direction - the bridegroom leading. They return to their place and sit down while the second verse is read out and sung. The circumambulation is repeated four times. The anand-karaj ceremony concludes with the recital of the hymn of anand sahib and ardas. The couple remains seated in front of the Guru Granth Sahib until the ritual of sagan (ritual gift) is performed by the bride's mother who carries a thal (plate made of steel) full of laddoos (Indian sweets) and a coconut. She puts a piece of laddoo in the mouth of the bridegroom and the bride - afterwards she puts all the sweets and the coconut in the bridegroom's jholi (lap/scarf) including some cash. The gift of a coconut symbolises belief in fertility. The bride's

mother is followed by her husband and the groom's father. At this stage the groom's father performs the ritual of bori-varna - he carries a bag made of red material which is full of coins. He passes this bag over the heads of his son and daughter-in-law a couple of times and leaves the bag as an offering before the Guru Granth Sahib. In the Punjab, the coins are thrown over the couple by the groom's father at the time of doli (bride leaving her natal home) and the coins are collected by the village poor. The ritual of bori-varna signifies the public demonstration of the father-in-law gaining a daughter-in-law.

At the wedding ceremony the bride wears red clothes and the groom wears a pink or red turban with other clothes provided by their respective maternal uncles. Most brides cover their faces as a symbol of respect shown to the husband's kinsmen. But Namdhari Sikhs wear white and a Namdhari bride does not cover her face during anand-karaj. A Namdhari wedding is different in many respects from the traditional Sikh marriage. The bride and groom circumambulate around the havan (Holy fire) instead of the Guru Granth Sahib. The hymn of lavan is read out from the Guru Granth Sahib which is placed at a distance of few yards from the havan. The havan is placed under a canopy called yedi. The bride and groom sit in front of the havan during the ceremony of anand-karaj. Another distinctive feature of a Namdhari wedding is the requirement of amrit (Sikh initiation ceremony) by the bride and groom immediately before anand-karaj. At the conclusion of the wedding ceremony a simple vegetarian meal is served to the guests. When questioned about the wedding rituals of

Radhasoami Sikhs, one of their leaders told me that "We follow the traditional Sikh customs and arrange marriages following the rules of caste endogamy and got exogamy. Usually the marriage ceremony takes place at a gurdwara. Our guru says that we must follow the customs and <sup>or</sup> traditions of our biradari."

Marriages between Radhasoami and Namdhari Sikhs are not uncommon, provided they belong to the same caste group. One Namdhari informant told me:

My daughter is married to a Radhasoami Ramgarhia Sikh. The wedding ceremony was performed according to Sikh tradition. We did not insist on having a Namdhari wedding, but the rules of got exogamy were strictly observed by us.

At the conclusion of a wedding ceremony the families of bride and groom make donations (dan - ritual gift) to social, religious and educational institutions both in India and Britain. Most Ramgarhia families make donations to their biradari organisations in Britain and to the Ramgarhia Educational Council in Phagwara, Punjab. This reinforces caste identity and enhances solidarity among Ramgarhia Sikhs.

After the wedding ceremony the barat (wedding party) is invited for lunch. As soon as the guests take their seats, food is placed on the tables. Before they start eating food, the ritual of thali-kadhna is performed. A plate full of food is brought before the groom's father who covers it with a large handkerchief and leaves some cash over it which is usually £11 or £21. Then the plate is taken to members of the biradari (kinsmen of the bride) for approval. They retain one

pound for the cook while the rest of the money is returned to the groom's father. The food on the plate is meant for the bride who sits in a different room. Only after the performance of the thali-kadhna ritual do the guests start eating lunch. The ritual signifies the bride's new status of becoming a member of her husband's family who have literally paid for her food.

The doli-torna ceremony takes place after lunch when the groom accompanied by his father and some kinsmen go to the bride's house. They receive all items of dowry which are usually displayed in one room for their approval and formal acceptance. The bridegroom is taken to a separate room where he meets his wife's sisters and cousins who ask him teasing questions. The boys are usually suitably prepared for this sort of confrontation by their families. Most boys enjoy the teasing session which also serves the purpose of formal introduction to the bride's female relations. Soon after, the bride joins the groom, and the couple receive leaving gifts of cash from the bride's relatives. Before the bride leaves her natal home with her husband, she changes into clothes given by her husband's family which is called bari da soot. This ritual symbolises the change in her status from daughter of her father's descent group to wife of her husband's descent group. The bridegroom leads his wife out of her natal home whilst she holds on to his palla (shoulder cloth). Her female relatives sing songs describing the separation of a daughter from her parents. As soon as the couple sit in a decorated car, the bride's brothers give a gentle push for a few yards. When questioned about the significance of this ritual, one elderly Sikh said that "In

the old days, a bride would be carried in a palki (sedan) by her brothers for a short distance as a symbol of brotherly affection. Nowadays brothers push the car as a symbolic gesture."

The barat (wedding party) returns to their home town where the groom's mother and other <sup>e</sup> female relatives receive the couple. They are made to wait outside the main door for the pani-varna ritual, the groom's mother carries a jug full of kachi-lassi (mixture of milk and water) which she passes over the heads of her son and daughter-in-law seven times, taking a sip each time. At the end she performs sagan-dena (auspicious gift) by putting a piece of laddoo (Indian sweet) in the mouths of her son and daughter-in-law. It is a big moment in a woman's life when she becomes the mother of a married son in the village, a mother-in-law in her own right. After a few days the ritual of got-kanala is performed at the groom's house. In the Punjab, newly married women of the biradari are invited for a meal to eat with the new bride; they all sit around a large dish of food and communally eat from it. This ritual of sharing food is called got-kanala which signifies the new bride's membership of her husband's got, but it has become redundant in Britain.

The most important post-wedding ritual is called muklawā (change of residence and consummation of the marriage). In the Punjab, there used to be a gap of a few years between the marriage and muklawā. Nowadays, marriage and muklawā occur within a few days of one another. In Britain, it usually takes place a day after the wedding when the bride returns to her natal home after spending one night

with her husband's family. She is accompanied by her husband, his parents and some close relatives who will stay at her parent's place for lunch and return the same day taking the bride with them. After the acceptance of more dowry and gifts for members of her husband's family, there is the now-permanent departure of the daughter from her natal home. A marriage is supposed to be consummated after the ritual of mukhawa. Most Sikh brides observe the vart of karva chauth (fast which Hindu married women keep for their husbands' good health and long life). The vart of karva chauth is more popular in the early years of marriage among the Sikhs. The bride's parents take gifts of jewellery, clothes and sweets for their daughter and her husband's family. The vart of karva chauth is a symbol of their belief in the concepts of sahagan (happily married woman) and pativarta (complete dedication to one's husband).

A Sikh woman, like a Hindu woman, dreads the state of losing her husband either through divorce or death. The divorced woman is called chhadi-hoyi (discarded), she is considered to be of a very low status and is a stigma on her natal family's izzat (honour). She usually lives with her parents until re-marriage or death. A widow is called vidhwa or randi (without a husband - this is also a Punjabi swear word). In 1987, there were twenty-five Sikh widows in Leeds; two widows were in their early twenties and eventually got remarried. According to Indian tradition, the remarriage of a widow and a divorced woman was considered to be against dharma. Nilakshi Sengupta in Evolution of Hindu Marriage (1965) writes that "Manu disapproves of niyoga (widow remarriage) and says that to appoint a wife of a

twice-born man to another means the violation of the eternal law and mentions the name of the wicked king Vena, in whose time this institution was in practice" (1965:140). Commenting on the attitude of divorced women concerning remarriage, Rama Mehta in Divorced Hindu Women (1975) notes:

Seventeen of the respondents regarded remarriage as immoral. It was completely rejected by them as an unethical proposition. Marriage for them signified a life-long commitment that was made only once. That they were not at fault in the break-up of their marriage did not diminish their commitment to fidelity...Whereas the majority of the women agreed that they had a right to live in honour and dignity, they wholly rejected the idea that they had a right to sexual satisfaction which was considered moral only in marriage. Marriage was a sacrament not to be entered into but once (1975:20-21).

In the Punjab, Sikhs traditionally practised widow remarriage which usually takes the form of kareva/chadar-pauna (literally to place a bed sheet). In this ceremony the groom marries a widow simply by placing a chadar (bed sheet) over her head in the presence of relatives and the members of the biradari. In most cases a young widow remarries her husband's un-married younger brother. This custom is called garh di garh wich rakh layi (widow remains member of her husband's family). The ceremony of kareva is a very quiet affair. A widow is not entitled to the ceremony of anand-karaj which is conducted only for the marriage of a kuari (unmarried girl). But on the contrary, a Sikh widower can marry according to the tradition of anand-karaj.

At the death of her husband a Sikh widow remains in mourning for thirteen days. The period of mourning ends with the ritual of bura-pauna (ending of mourning). The widow's parents take new clothes and some jewellery for her. She takes a complete bath, discards her old clothes which are associated with the death of her husband, and wears new clothes and jewellery provided by her parents. The discarded clothes are received as a ritual gift by the family chuhri (sweeper's wife). The ritual of bura-pauna takes place in the presence of elderly women representing the families of her husband and father. This ritual signifies the role of her natal family who provide clothes and jewellery for the ceremony. When a Sikh woman dies, her kaphan (shroud) is provided by her father's family which signifies the important links with her natal family.

I have shown that caste endogamy persists as a dominant feature of the Sikh marriages that take place in Leeds. Marriage rituals provide an insight into the workings of caste, religion and the kinship system as fundamental institutions for the transmission of traditional culture. It is evident from the rites described that the institution of biradari plays a dominant role in the life-cycle rituals and thus occupies the central position within the social structure of the Leeds Sikh community. Moreover, the capacity of caste for modernising its traditional values is evident from the change in the four-got rule and the emergence of biradari associations at local and national level.

The persistence of caste is not only evident in Sikh religious rites, but its dynamics can also be observed in the following which individual Sikh holy men attract. Whilst their preaching, especially with regard to attaining mukti/moksha, has a universal dimension transcending caste, in actual practice many of their activities rely on the network of existing caste groups. This will be shown in the next chapter with which my study of Sikh groups in Leeds and Bradford will be concluded.

CHAPTER 8.

THE IMPORTANCE OF "HOLY MEN" AMONG SIKHS IN LEEDS AND BRADFORD.

The functionaries of gurdwaras (ragis) have regular ritual tasks which are distinct from the spiritual guidance provided by Sikh religious leaders known by different titles, i.e. Sant, Baba Ji and Guru Ji, simply translated into English as "holy men". Despite the official view that the Guru Granth Sahib has taken the place of the living Guru, the Sikh holy men occupy a central place among the Sikhs both in India and abroad. Their adherents believe that they possess and reveal the ultimate knowledge about God, and that they represent the sant tradition of North India; this belief has resulted in a special reverence for the holy men.

During the period of my fieldwork I was able to identify several groups among the Sikhs in Leeds and Bradford who follow the teachings of Sikh holy men. Although most holy men attract followers from all caste groups, a few are closely associated with specific caste groups. For example, Sant Sarwan Das and his successor Sant Garib Das are revered by the Chamars only, while the overwhelming majority of the followers of Sant Puran Singh Karichowale are members of the Ramgarhia biradari. It is significant to note that the caste identity of holy men provides a determining factor in attracting shardhalus

(followers) within the Sikh community. Sant Sarwan Das and Sant Garib Das were born into Chamar families. The Ravidasi community invite Sant Garib Das to hold diwans at the Ravidasi gurdwaras in Britain. Similarly the followers of Sant Puran Singh Karichowale organised the Nishkam Sevak Jatha in Leeds, and they were the main leaders to establish the Ramgarhia gurdwara in Leeds. Commenting on the role of Sant Puran Singh Karichowale, Mr. Chana, Chairman of the building sub-committee of the Ramgarhia Sikh Sports Centre says that "On acquiring a piece of land in Sheepscar, Sant Baba Puran Singh Karichowale graced the occasion by coming to the site to offer his blessings."

The contribution of Sikh holy men provides a paradoxical situation. Although they strongly disapprove of the caste practices among the Sikhs, as such behaviour is against the teachings of the Sikh Gurus and the Guru Granth Sahib (it also includes the writings of Ravidas, Kabir and Farid), their arena of religious activities and influence remains in practice restricted to specific caste groups only. The Chamar Sikh holy men claim to have a special bond with Ravidas based on their caste identity. This gives them authenticity through being part of the sant tradition in general and the Sikh tradition in particular.

The concept of guruship is fundamental within the Sikh tradition. The significance of the role of a guru in the life of a Sikh person is evident from the Mool Mantra (which introduces each section of the

Guru Granth Sahib and is said to have been composed by Guru Nanak).

It reads:

There is one God, Eternal Truth is his  
name. Creator of all things, and the  
all prevailing spirit. Fearless and  
without hatred, Timeless and formless.  
Beyond birth and death, self enlightened.  
By the grace of Guru He is known.

(Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1)

A Sikh must work towards earning guru's grace without which he/she can not know or realise God. The couplet Guru bin ghore andhar hai, sab bolo bhai (The whole world is like great darkness without the guru, let us recite together) is very enthusiastically sung at gurdwaras in India and abroad. The need of guru's grace for the attainment of mukti/moksha has been clearly stated in the Guru Granth Sahib, which reads:

He who, with guru's help, meditates  
on nam finds liberation (mukti/moksha).

(Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1127)

The importance of the guru's grace for the Sikh is emphasised in another verse which reads:

Stubborn self torture only wears out the  
body, fasting and penance does not soften  
the soul, nothing is as efficacious as the  
Lord's name; serve the Guru my soul,  
and keep the company of the servants of God.

(Guru Granth Sahib, p. 905)

In India, the term guru has been used in many contexts, but in the main it denotes a relationship of authority and submission. A guru owes his authority to the faith of his devotees. In some ways he has acquired a reputation as a person who confers spiritual enlightenment and peace of soul as well as having the ability to cure sickness. His

home becomes a gathering place for people who will wait for hours for darshan (a glimpse of his person).

In traditional India the learning of a trade and a skill required that a young man was placed under the supervision of a teacher of his craft, a guru who was responsible for his training throughout this stage. A special ritual called guru-dharna (adoption of a teacher) is performed before the young man is entrusted to his guru. A certain amount of dakshna (offering) is made on behalf of the chela (student) by his family. The establishment of this new relationship is celebrated by distributing parshad (Indian sweets) among the members of their biradari. In Punjabi tradition this relationship between teacher and pupil is also known as dharm-pita (religious father). It used to be a common practice among artisan families to place their sons in the custody of an elderly trained person as apprentices for a number of years. A Ramgarhia Sikh informant described to me the ceremony of guru-dharna as follows:

The ceremony of guru-dharna takes place in the presence of the panchayat (caste council). The young man would present to his would-be teacher a turban and one rupee and perform the ritual of matha-takna (to touch the feet of one's guru with the forehead). The teacher would place his right hand on the head of his shagird (student) which signifies his acceptance of the new relationship. From that day onwards the young man would go to his workshop early in the morning, assist him repairing and making agricultural tools. His lunch would be provided by his guru. Apart from learning the craft, one would do all sorts of jobs for the family of his guru. By the age of seventeen I had learnt the trade. One day my ustad (teacher) told me that I could work independently and start taking my earnings to my family. Soon after that I went to East Africa. Whenever I returned from East Africa, I would call at my guru's house before going

to my parents - he always treated me like his own son.

It is significant to note that the ritual of guru-dharna is practised in the presence of caste members only. It is evident that the traditional occupational skills are taught only to the members of one's caste. Outsiders are not permitted to learn the trade as they cannot become caste members. As the membership in the caste is ascriptive, birth in the caste is a necessary condition. It is against the caste dharna to teach one's craft to outsiders, for if one did, the punishment of ex-communication<sup>o</sup> is prescribed. The qualities of a craft guru are expressed in terms of his knowledge, experience and status in the community. Learned people are seen as endowed with special power which gives them a unique position to acquire the role of a guru. They are always sought by many families to teach their sons. It is considered a privilege to be trained by someone who is famous in the community. In the Punjab, if a person is an expert karigar (craftsman), people would ask him "tera ustad kaun hai?" (who is your guru?). But on the other hand, if someone is not a good craftsman, people would remark "oyei tera koyi guru nahin" (you do not seem to have learnt the craft from a guru). It is also assumed that one cannot be perfect without the guidance of a guru. This notion applies to spiritual matters as well - a person without a guru is called be-gura (without a guru). The significance of the need for a guru is expressed in a Punjabi proverb "guru bina gat nahin (there is no release of the soul if one dies without a guru).

There are local gurus or sants who operate within local communities in the Punjab and in Britain. They do not enlist any formal members into a sect, but have a large number of devotees through their personal qualities. Their disciples will say: "oh bari karni wale han" (he possesses divine power)", "onhan bari kamai kiti hoi hai" (he has earned divine power through long and sustained meditation on God), "oh yati sati han" (he is a celibate) and "inhan noon maya di bhukh nahin" (he is not a seeker of wealth) and so on. A person is regarded as a holy man if he claims to possess healing powers and perform miracles. At the birth of a boy in a Sikh family, the elders will say "Guru di kirpa hoi, sadey munda hoya hai" (with Guru's grace we have been blessed with a son). A local Rangarhia Sikh informant became a disciple of Baba Bhikhowale a few years ago. He told me:

I was married in 1960, but we did not get any children for twenty years. In 1978, I married a second time with the consent of my first wife. But we were still unfortunate in not getting any children. To our good luck Baba Bhikhowale came to Leeds. We went to have his darshan. He was gracious and advised me to stop eating meat and drinking alcohol. After a few months I went to see him at his dera (headquarters) in India. I donated some cash towards the building of a langar. By Baba Ji's grace we have a son now. We organised akhand-path and invited Baba Ji to grace the occasion.

It is most common for people to visit holy men for advice on spiritual and worldly matters. Men may ask them about business affairs, barren women for blessings of motherhood and sick people for charms against sickness. Sometimes holy men advise people to visit the tombs and shrines of sants and faqirs (Muslim saints) for the

fulfilment of their wishes. Describing the life in the village of Daleke, Inder P. Singh notes:

Sikhs as well as Hindus worship the tombs of Muslim saints and make promises to offer clothes or food if a certain wish of theirs is fulfilled... The Muslim faqirs worshipped are considered to possess some supernatural powers by virtue of which they can bestow sons, cure some chronic disease or even cure the cattle of their ailment. The strong faith of these villagers in the powers of these faqirs is evident from the fact that they have not demolished these shrines, although no mosques are to be seen (1959:282).

One Sikh informant who is seventy years old described the importance of a local shrine near his village. He said:

There is a shrine of sain (saint) Abdulla Shah near our village - my father had seen him. When he died the residents of neighbouring villages built a tomb and some other buildings on the site. He was famous for his spiritual powers. Every year a fair is held for seven days at his shrine - musicians from all over India come to perform at the shrine free of charge. Members of our village community worship him and offer niyaz (sweet rice) when their wishes are fulfilled. People of the neighbouring villages take their newly wed sons and daughters-in-law to the shrine for matha-tekna (to pay homage) ritual - food and money is given as offerings to the custodian of the shrine.

The urge to have children, particularly sons, is very strong among Indians. One Namdhari Sikh informant in Leeds described an incident which occurred during the recent visit of their guru. He said that "After the culmination of our diwan we went to see off our guru ji at Leeds railway station. One Namdhari Sikh woman rushed into the compartment where guru ji was sitting. She touched guru ji's feet and asked for the blessing of a son." The quest for guru-darshan is very intense among the Sikhs. A holy man is perceived as a mediator, guide and perfect master, whilst the holy men claim a humble status of

being guru garh da kookar (servant of Guru) whose main aim is to do seva (public service). They claim to be the humble sevadars (servants) who have been given the task of spreading God's message. Their disciples call them iani-ian (who knows everything, possessing divine powers). On gurpurbs (anniversaries of Sikh gurus) folk songs and poems are recited which express the desire for guru-darshan. On Guru Nanak's gurpurb a phrase like "Nanak pyarey aa ja" (Dear Nanak bless us with your darshan) is recited in poems and folk songs. At the Ravidas Bhawan in Bradford devotees usually sing "Ravi Das pyarey aa ja, sangtan udikdian" (Dear Ravi Das give us darshan, we have been waiting for a long time). At the end of their ardas, Namdhari Sikhs recite "deh didar satguru Ram Singh nam chardi kala tere bhaney sarbat da bhala" (bless us with your darshan satguru Ram Singh, may the glory of your name increase and may the whole world be blessed by your name). In the hymn of sukhmani sahib, the fifth Guru, Arjan Dev, emphasised the significance of the company of sants (holy men) for his followers. He said:

sant earn jo jan parey, so jan udhran har  
sant ki ninda Nanka, bohar bohar avtar.  
(One who submits before the sants, he/she is able to be saved. To slander a sant puts people in the circle of birth and death, O, Nanak).

The following groups among the Sikhs in Leeds and Bradford follow the teachings of sants:

1. Nishkam Sevak Jatha;
2. Namdhari Sangat;
3. Radhasoami Satsang;
4. Nirankari Mandal;

5. Ravidas Sabha;
6. Raja Sahib da Jatha;
7. Baba Charan Singh Bhikhowalian dey sevak;
8. Sant Man Singh dey sevak;
9. Sant Harbans Singh Domeliwalian dey sevak;
10. Baba Ait Singh dey sevak.
11. Baba Darshan Das - Nanak Dham.

Some of these groups are organised nationally and have local branches in many towns. They are regularly visited by their living gurus who reside at their deras (religious headquarters) in India. Most groups operate locally - though some of the holy men have established their deras in this country. I have already discussed groups 1 to 5 in the preceding chapters (see Chapters 4, 5 and 6) and shall here only deal with groups 6-11 listed above.

#### Raja Sahib da Jatha

Baba Khem Singh is the leader of Raja Sahib da Jatha in Leeds. Raja Sahib was a Punjabi holy man born in the village of Mananhana, district of Hoshiarpur. His first name was Bhagwan Das. He joined a group of wandering sadhus (holy men) when he was very young. Commenting on his early experiences Baba Khem Singh said that "Raja Sahib met one Jawahar Singh, a Rangarhia Sikh in the village of Jhingran in the district of Jullundar. Jawahar Singh was endowed with shakti (divine powers) and he whispered the secret nam (God's message) in his ears and appointed him to preach God's mission to the residents of village Jhingran." Raja Sahib remained a yati (celibate)

all his life. He was very popular among the people of neighbouring villages for his divine powers. Baba Khem Singh is the disciple of Raja Sahib. He was born in the village of Gunachaur which is located a couple of miles from the village of Jhingran. He was born in a family of Julaha (weavers) Sikhs who not only weaved but began to sew clothes. By virtue of this additional skill they claimed a higher status in the caste hierarchy. Here is Baba Khem Singh's account of his association with Raja Sahib and of his religious activities in Leeds:

I was born in 1907 - after my primary education in the village I was sent to a High School in Jullundar City, which was a boarding school. My father had to borrow twelve hundred rupees for my education. It was a lot of money and my father did not know how to repay the loan. In those days Raja Sahib used to live in the village Mazara, a few miles from our village. My father went to see him and became his disciple. One day my father told his problem to Raja Sahib who advised him to open a shop in Jullundar and said 'fiqar na kar waheyguru sab kush sawar devey ga (do not worry, God will help you). My father saved more than twelve hundred rupees in one year and he was able to pay his debt. It was all due to Raja Sahib's mehr (grace). In 1925, I got married and went to Bombay to join the civil service. After eleven years service, Raja Sahib commanded me to return to my village. After a short time I began to feel that I had made a mistake by leaving my job. But Raja Sahib knew all about it, he was jan-ijan (one who knows every thing and possesses divine powers). In 1936, I went to join the Sikh Missionary College at Tarn Tarn for which I received a scholarship which was all due to Raja Sahib's mehr. Tarn Tarn is at a distance of 13 miles from Amritsar. Every Saturday I would walk to Amritsar to have ishnan (ritual bath) at Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple). At Darbar Sahib shabad-kirtan (religious singing) begins at 3 o'clock in the morning - and at 5 o'clock the Granth Sahib is installed. After the bhog of asa di var I would walk back to Tarn Tarn. In 1939, Raja Sahib passed away - a few months later Raja Sahib gave me darshan and commanded me to go back to my work. I must tell you that ordinary people

cannot see the ponhchey hoye santan noon (saints who have achieved oneness with God) - there are special eyes behind our eyes and we see these sants with those eyes only if they daya karan (with their grace). In 1942, I went to Delhi to work at the head office of my previous department. I met Sant Sujan Singh at Bangla Sahib gurdwara - he was a renowned religious singer and preacher and was very popular in Delhi. He told me about Baba Nand Singh who was Sujan Singh's guru.

I bought a copy of the Guru Granth Sahib to install in my new house. There was a small store room in which I installed the Guru Granth Sahib. One day Raja Sahib appeared and told me to pay proper respect to the Guru Granth Sahib. I prepared one of the big rooms, bought a proper new bed for the Guru Granth Sahib and laid down two asans (woollen rugs) on the floor - one for Raja Sahib and one for Baba Nand Singh Ji. During the day, when I was at work they (Raja Sahib and Nand Singh) would visit the room in which the Guru Granth Sahib had been installed. One day we found "Raja Sahib written on one rug - ih ohnan dey apney kautak han (it is his own miracle).

In 1947, Raja Sahib appeared in our house and blessed us with his darshan, and he told me to go to the village Mazara to celebrate his 8th death anniversary. I organised three akhand-paths to commemorate the occasion. One akhand-path was organised in the field which was offered to Raja Sahib by a Muslim landlord. I must tell you the story of this field. The owner of this field was a Muslim landlord who had three wives, but no children. One day Raja Sahib asked him to donate this field for a tank for the use of the village community. After sometime he and his young wife visited Raja Sahib and begged for the blessing of a child. Two strangers happened to pass that way - they were coming from the town of Banga. One of them had fresh mangoes in his bag. Raja Sahib took one mango and gave it to the wife of the landlord - after sometime she gave birth to a son. Well, Raja Sahib had rabbi shakti (divine power). At the time of these miracles Guru Nanak was always present.

In 1957, I became very ill and was taken to a hospital. When a team of doctors came to examine me, I saw Baba Nand Singh standing among them. Baba Nand Singh whispered, "Do not worry now your true doctor has arrived - I have been sent by Raja Sahib from heaven". I began to get well day by day and was sent home after a few weeks. One day Raja Sahib blessed me with his darshan and commanded me to go out in the world and spread the mission of the Sikh Gurus through shabad-kirtan.

I came to England in 1967 and went to Nottingham - one of

Raja Sahib's disciples had died in Nottingham. Then I moved to Leeds, as most Ramgarhia families from my village reside in Leeds. I was given a room at the gurdwara where I began to perform shabad-kirtan and katha (exposition of gurbani). I was appointed the deputy registrar of marriages for the gurdwara. I also started a Punjabi class for our children. In 1975, I left the gurdwara because the followers of Sant Puran Singh objected to my style of preaching. Every year we celebrate the anniversary of Raja Sahib in the first week of September. We organise akhand-path at Chapeltown Road gurdwara. All expenses are met by donations from the shardhalus of Raja Sahib.

Baba Khem Singh lives with a Ramgarhia Sikh family in Leeds 11. He described the details of his regular religious activities which are as follows:

1. On the last Sunday of each month, shabad-kirtan in Nottingham.
2. On the second Sunday of the month shabad-kirtan at the new centre of Raja Sahib in Leicester.
3. On Tuesdays and Thursdays from 8 p.m. to 9 p.m. katha of Suraj Parkash at 32 Rowland Road, Leeds 11.
4. On Fridays from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. shabad-kirtan and arti at Bibi Bachni's shop, in Leeds 7.
5. On Wednesdays from 6.30 p.m. to 7.30 p.m. Punjabi teaching at Chapeltown Road gurdwara.
6. On Mondays from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. shabad-kirtan at the shop/house of Ajit Singh Bansal, in Leeds 6.
7. On Sundays from 12 to 2 p.m. Punjabi class and from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. shabad-kirtan and katha at Chapeltown Road gurdwara.

Baba Khem Singh is very popular among the Sikhs in Leeds. It is evident from his biographical account that he is totally dedicated to Raja Sahib. According to Baba Khem Singh, Raja Sahib was endowed with spiritual and divine powers, and Raja Sahib had sent his personal messenger from heaven to cure him. He claims to have a special bond with Raja Sahib. He has translated the teachings of Raja Sahib in a book called Bhagwan Bilas, which was printed in 1969. In the foreword he writes: "Sri Nabh Kanwal Raja Sahib, you are the highest among the

supreme beings, and Lord of the whole world. I salute you by placing my head on your feet."

Baba Khem Singh has become a folk hero of the Raja Sahib movement in Leeds. His followers perceive him as a person who has divine powers because he has met Raja Sahib and has been blessed with special eyes with which one can see the spirits of the sants. Commenting on the activities of Baba Khem Singh, one ex-president of the gurdwara said:

Baba Khem Singh studied the Sikh scriptures at the Sikh missionary college and he is a very learned person. He claims that Raja Sahib is his guru. During his shabad-kirtan sessions at the gurdwara he does not make any distinction between the Sikh Gurus and Raja Sahib. He has many followers in Leeds who touch his feet in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib. He performs nam-simran and kirtan at the homes of his followers.

Many Sikh families have photog<sup>o</sup>r<sup>o</sup>aphs of Baba Khem Singh displ<sup>o</sup>yed along-side the pictures of the main Sikh Gurus and other holy men. There is a large size advertisement in the second edition of the Ramgarhia Sikh Bulletin published in December 1984, which has on the top pictures of Baba Khem Singh and Baba Charan Singh Bhikhowal. Underneath, the main message is printed in Punjabi - "dhan (great) Baba Khem Singh Leeds wale and dhan Baba Charan Singh Bhikhowal wale, with their blessings and grace, we have achieved success and made progress in our business. Virdee family will remain indebted for ever to these mahan purkh (super beings)". In the middle of the page the Sikh emblem is printed with "best wishes to the Ramgarhia Board, Leeds". We witness the merging of three traditions in this

advertisement: the Sant, the Khalsa and the caste. The Sikh emblem symbolises the Khalsa tradition. The advertisement also manifests the belief that the members of Virdee Fancy Cloth House are not Radhasoamis or Namdharis. Caste identification has been highlighted by the use of their caste got as well as by extending best wishes to the Rangarhia Board.

Baba Khem Singh has trained a group of religious musicians who are popularly known as Raja Sahib da Jatha. They perform shabad-kirtan at most gurdwaras in Leeds as well as at the homes of Baba Ji's shardhalus (followers). Baba Khem Singh recited ardas at the laying of the foundation ceremony of the Sikh Centre, opposite to the Chapeltown Road gurdwara. Most Sikh families ask him to recite the antam-ardas (last prayer) before a funeral. His residence has become a true dera (religious centre) where people go to seek Baba Ji's blessing.

Baba Charan Singh Bhikhowalian dey sevak

Baba Charan Singh is a Jat Sikh from the village Bhikhowal in the district of Hoshiarpur who regularly visits England. He has a large following in his village as well as in the neighbouring villages. He lives with his wife and children and earns his living by cultivating his land. A large gurdwara has been built in the village by his followers who celebrate the gurpurbs of the Sikh Gurus with great enthusiasm. The gurpurb of Guru Nanak which falls on the puran-mashi (full moon) in the month of November, is the most important religious

event in the village. Baba Charan Singh began his tours of England in 1970 when a Rangarhia Sikh family first invited him to Leeds. The head of this family described his experience as follows:

My grandson had been ill for a long time with a kidney problem - there was no hope of his survival. When I was in India, I learnt about Baba Ji and went to the village Bhikhowal for his darshan. Baba Ji gave me a few golian (tablets) and also recited a special ardas for the recovery of my grandson. After a short time a kidney transplant was done and my grandson has fully recovered - it is all due to Baba Ji's blessings and the power in his ardas.

This Rangarhia family spread the news of the recovery of their boy among their relatives and friends who became eager to have Baba Ji's darshan. Baba Charan Singh has a very simple life style. He is a strict vegetarian and does not address large gatherings. He does not hold diwans at the gurdwaras. His style is unique: he sits on a sofa in the house of one of his followers. All visitors enter the room with folded hands. After bowing before Baba Ji, they sit on the carpet. Baba Ji asks questions about their problems and sometimes he describes a past incident which may have occurred in that particular family. This technique appeals to his followers who feel a special bond and relationship with Baba Ji. They can talk to him directly without any inhibitions and there is no need of a mediator. Baba Ji does not make unrealistic promises. He claims to be a humble servant of Guru Nanak. Describing the mission of Baba Charan Singh, one of his followers said that "Baba Ji is leading us to the path of Guru Nanak - he is cementing the bond between a Sikh and the gurugarh (guru's house)." The concept of joining a Sikh with the gurugarh plays an important part in the mission of Sikh holy men. Their

followers do not perceive any contradiction between the role of their local sants and their traditional faith. Thus Baba Ji is seen as a chosen person who has the divine power to fix the bond between a Sikh and his gurugarh.

Baba Charan Singh is a very skilful communicator. He uses simple language with his followers when discussing<sup>s</sup> their problems. One of his followers commented that "Although Baba Ji is an illiterate person, he has earned spiritual powers through bhagti (meditation). You can understand what he says - he is not like so many other learned preachers where you feel lost listening to them." His approach to the sikhi-sevki (dealings with one's disciples) is unique. Whilst he does not offer any gur-mantar (secret word) to his followers, he claims to join them with the gurugarh and Guru Nanak. His meetings are like family gatherings where a chela (disciple) and his guru talk to each other as if discussing family matters. There is no shabad-kirtan, ardas or the distribution of parshad at his gatherings. His followers feel extremely relaxed. Moreover, he does not accept any offerings of money during these sessions, and this has greatly enhanced his status among his followers. His followers experience this as a new phenomenon and compare it with other traditions. They call him a sacha-sant (true holy man). But when he goes to perform the charn-pauna at his followers' homes, they offer him some cash and a turban. According to his sevaks (followers), all the money given to Baba Ji goes to the gurdwara at Bhikhowal.

Baba Charan Singh's emphasis on vegetarianism has a double appeal for women. Following his advice, many husbands have stopped drinking alcohol and spend more time with their families, taking greater interest in family affairs. Baba Charan Singh and Baba Khem Singh met in Leeds and became good friends. Talking about the divine powers of Baba Charan Singh, Baba Khem Singh said that "I live with a Ramgarhia Sikh family. The head of the family used to drink alcohol in large quantity - most of the time he would come home drunk. But with the mehr (grace) of Baba Bhikhowal he stopped drinking alcohol and became Baba Ji's shardhalu (follower)." Another Ramgarhia Sikh invited Baba Ji and his wife to England at the birth of their first son. He organised akhand-path and invited his relatives and friends for chhati (ritual of big feast at the birth of a son). The invitation card was printed in Punjabi and expressed their gratitude to Baba Charan Singh for his blessings. It reads:

ek onkar satgur parshad (God is one -  
He can be found with guru's grace).  
With the blessings of Shri Sant Baba  
Charan Singh Ji, Bhikhowal Wale, Mr. and Mrs....  
request the pleasure of the company...  
shriman (Great) Baba Ji will  
be present on the occasion...

After the bhog ceremony Baba Charan Singh addressed the gathering. He remained seated on the carpet during his sermon. He said:

I am an ordinary, uneducated person. Guru Nanak instructs me to spread his mission - my duty is to join you with the gurugarch and Granth Sahib. Faith in Guru Nanak's bani (compositions) is a great gift. I get up early in the morning and recite Guru Nanak's bani and Guru Nanak

blesses me with his darshan. Guru Nanak has blessed this family with the gift of a son. I am just an agent of Guru Nanak who used my voice to bless this parwar (family).

He explained his relationship with Guru Nanak in very simple language. His followers were impressed to learn about his spiritual powers. Commenting on his shakti one of his followers said:

I suffer from asthma. I went to Baba Ji for advice. Baba Ji told me to visit Bhikhowal in the month of November on Guru Nanak's gurpurb. On that night Guru Nanak blesses Baba Ji with his darshan. The medicine received by people on that night has miraculous healing power.

Baba Charan Singh's followers regard him as a mahan-pursh (super being) who has spiritual and divine powers. His disciples are not required to go through a particular initiation ceremony and do not have to wear any outward symbols. His emphasis is on simple and clean living which has a great effect on his followers. People admire his life style because he does not deliver long sermons, but he talks to them in very simple language. His healing power is associated with the grace of Guru Nanak. His village has become a place of pilgrimage for his followers. Whenever they go to India, they make special efforts to visit Bhikhowal for Baba Charan Singh's darshan and blessings. His followers have pictures of Baba Ji in their homes. At the life-cycle rituals they donate money to the gurdwara at the village Bhikhowal which is a proof of their shardha (faith) in Baba Charan Singh.

Sant Man Singh dey sevak

Sant Man Singh has his dera (religious headquarters) in the village of Wanglan in district of Hoshiarpur. He visits his shardhalus (those who have faith) in Leeds almost once a year. He wears a yellow chola (a long, loose shirt) made of silk and a yellow turban. He always wears a kachha (pair of breeches worn by amritdhari Sikhs) and carries a three feet long sword. He preaches the mission of Guru Gobind Singh and insists on amrit (Sikh initiation) for his followers. In Leeds one Sikh woman who is his most devout shardhalu pays for his air ticket every time he comes over from India. Sant Man Singh holds his diwans at Chapeltown Road gurdwara. He is very popular for his katha (exposition of gurbani). He holds his diwans in the evenings during the week and they are always attended by a large number of people. Commenting on his katha sessions one Sikh informant said;

Baba Man Singh is very learned and knowledgeable in gurbani. Everybody enjoys his katha because he elaborates his discourse by quoting many historical events from the lives of Sikh Gurus. He preaches pure gurbani. Baba Man Singh does not accept money during his katha. The money donated by people is given to the gurdwara by him. He does not come to England to collect money. His main aim is to bless us with his darshan.

At the end of his katha sessions he is honoured by the management committee of the gurdwara. The president offers him a saropa (turban) and some cash which he accepts gladly. During his stay in Leeds he also holds diwans at the shop of his female shardhalu and these are very popular, especially with Sikh women. He does not conduct any initiation ceremonies for his followers. He rejects the ritual of

secret nam-dena (whispering God's name in the ears of disciples). When people ask for his blessings, he instructs them to nam japo te amrit chhako (to meditate on nam and to take amrit). In 1982, a leading Sikh invited him to his house for the akhand-path ceremony - a special asan (woollen rug) was spread for him near the Guru Granth Sahib. As soon as he entered the room, all people stood up as a mark of respect. He addressed the congregation for a short time and explained the significance of hukamama (order of the day) for the Sikhs. He said:

Today's hukamama was composed by the 3rd Guru, Amar Das. Now I am going to tell you the story of the way he earned gurgaddi (guruship) from the second Guru. Every morning he used to get up at 3 a.m. and would go to the river to fetch water for the ishnan (complete bath) of his Guru. After leaving his guru's house he would walk backwards to the river as a symbol of respect to his Guru - oh Guru val pith nahin si kardey (he would never turn his back towards his Guru). Every year he used to receive a saropa (turban) from his Guru which he would tie on his head. He served his Guru for twelve years and had received twelve saropas which he tied on top of each other. At the time of gurgaddi (transfer of guruship) when he took his turban off, his hair also came off - it is kept in a glass case at Govindwal gurdwara.

Baba Man Singh skilfully described this episode to emphasise the significance of the concept of sachi-seva (true service) and the special relationship between a chela (disciple) and his guru. In order to highlight the spiritual powers of the 3rd Guru, Amar Das, he told another story:

The only son of a widow who used to live at the village Govindwal died. She kept on crying all night. Guru Amar Das asked his sevaks about the person who had been crying in the early hours of the morning. His disciples told him about the death of the widow's son. Guru Ji went to her house where he found her sitting before the dead body of her son and crying helplessly.

Guru Ji asked for a glass of water and sprinkled it over the dead body. Within a few seconds the young man became alive and got up. Guru Ji had earned these powers through sachi-seva only.

Baba Man Singh is a yati (celibate). His followers admire his self-control and total dedication to the mission of the 10th Guru, Gobind Singh. He is regarded as a tyagi (renouncer of wealth). These qualities are viewed as the most important characteristics in the personality of a holy man. They are also perceived as the source of his spiritual powers. Commenting on the significance of the bond between the guru and his chela, one leading member of the gurdwara said that "Every year, on the gurpurb of Maghi, one female Sikh disciple of Baba Ji goes to the Punjab to organise akhand-path at her village. It is conducted by Baba Ji and his sevaks from his dera." Baba Man Singh does not allow people to touch his feet in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib. During his katha sessions he reinforces the significance of vegetarianism by repeating his popular phrase "sharab-mas ton bacho" (refrain from meat and alcohol).

#### Sant Harbans Singh Domeliwalian dey sevak

Sant Harbans Singh has his dera at the village of Domeli in the district of Jullundar. He was crippled at a very young age and is unable to walk. He learnt shabad-kirtan and hakimi (traditional method of healing) from his guru. He has a large following in the Punjab in the sub-division of Phagwara. Many Sikh migrants know of

Sant Harbans Singh and have visited his dera in the Punjab. He is very renowned among the Sikhs for his healing powers which are described as "onhan dey hath wich shafa hai" (he has been endowed with healing powers). He was born in a Jhir (water-carrier) Sikh family. Members of the Leeds Jhir Sikh community show special reverence when he visits Leeds which happens at least once a year when he comes in a wheel chair. In the 1960's he was invited for the first time by his followers to visit them in England. He preaches the mission of the Sikh Gurus and claims to have been given the job of spreading the message of sikhi (Sikh dharma) by Guru Nanak. A leading member of the Jhir Sikh community said:

Baba Ji is very popular among the Sikhs in England for his shabad-kirtan and healing powers; it is all Guru Nanak's mehr (grace). He does not charge any fee or even the cost of medicine. Once he told me that Guru Nanak has commanded him to distribute medicine free of charge and if he began accepting money he would lose the divine gift of healing ordinary people.

His style of preaching sikhi is very appealing to ordinary people. He has organised his own group of religious musicians who perform shabad-kirtan while he concentrates on katha (exposition of gurbani). He also organises akhand-paths and sadharan/sahej-paths at the homes of his shardhalus (faithful). Many Sikh families invite him to perform the ceremony of anand-karaj (wedding ceremony) which is regarded as a great privilege for a couple. He is also invited to perform shabad-kirtan for a week or two at the gurdwaras. These shabad-kirtan sessions are very popular and are usually held in the evenings. Baba Harbans Singh has a large following in the Midlands. He has

established his own dera in Britain in the form of a gurdwara in Birmingham. He now spends more time in England than in India collecting donations for building schools, hospitals and gurdwaras in the Punjab. Particulars of these projects are regularly advertised in the Punjabi newspapers printed and published in London. His main emphasis is on the concept of pun-dan (charity given to obtain merit), particularly for janam-safra karna (release from the cycle of birth and death). He claims to be a gurugarh da gola (servant of the Sikh Gurus). He proclaims that "mera nishana tohanu gurugarh nal jodna hai" (my mission is to join you with the guru's house). He always wears white clothes.

#### Baba Ajit Singh dey sevak

Baba Ajit Singh is a retired bank manager from India. He is a Rangarhia Sikh who was born in the village of Kote Grewal in the Jullundar district. There is a tradition of fortune telling in his family. His father and grandfather were well known in the surrounding villages for their shakti (spiritual power). Baba Ajit Singh claims to have inherited the family dat (divine gift). He began to hold gaddi-launa sessions in India (sitting on the seat of ancestors to tell fortunes). He first attracted a large following in Delhi. As he had many relatives who had gone to East Africa, most of whom had migrated to Britain by the 1960's. He began to visit his relatives in England and became known to other Sikh families through them.

Baba Ajit Singh wears western clothes. He is not a religious musician. He holds his sessions at the homes of his relatives. When people visit him for puchh-poani (fortune telling), they are politely told to come on Saturdays. It is on Saturdays only when he is visited by the spirit of his ancestors which is the source of his shakti. The visitors perform matha-tekna ritual and leave some cash before Baba Ajit Singh and then wait for their turn to be called by him. Commenting on the shakti of Baba Ajit Singh, a Ramgarhia Sikh informant said:

I know the family of Baba Ajit Singh - his father and grandfather had shakti to tell fortune. They used to receive hawa (spiritual power) on Saturdays. They were visited by hundreds of people on that day. Baba Ajit Singh has the same power. He is a very humble person - he does not tell you to worship at a shrine or perform particular rituals. He is a gursikh (follower of the Sikh Gurus) and he is doing seva of the people.

Baba Ajit Singh's followers receive up to date information about his visits through his relatives and some of the Sikhs here have visited him in India.

#### Baba Darshan Das - Nanak Dham

During my fieldwork I have seen pictures of Baba Darshan Das at some Sikh homes, hanging alongside the pictures of Sikh Gurus. When questioned about the picture of Baba Darshan Das, a leading member of the Guru Nanak Sikh Temple, Leeds 12, said:

Baba Darshan Das is a sacha (true) sant. He has been blessed with healing powers by Guru Nanak. He has established his dera in Birmingham. Everyday people go there for free langar from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. Baba Ji sits on a raised

platform and people stand in a line to have his darshan. Most visitors are ill and alcoholics. After the matha-tekna ritual they are given a bottle of amrit to drink regularly. Baba Ji advises them to stop taking any medicine and also to stop drinking alcohol. It is a great miracle that people get well with amrit. Baba Ji has divine powers. He is not greedy, it is not his mission to collect money. He is simply following the commands of Guru Nanak. I became very ill. I learnt about Baba Ji from a relative in Birmingham and went to Nanak Dham (headquarters of Baba Darshan Das) in Birmingham. I was deeply impressed to watch the miracles happening. I also received a bottle of amrit and within a week I began to recover. Now I visit Nanak Dham regularly once a month.

On the festival of sangrand (first day of the month of the Indian calendar) the main diwan is held at Nanak Dham in Birmingham presided by Baba Darshan Das. He claims that one day he saw Guru Nanak who commanded him to spread his mission in the world and help people achieve mukti/moksha (release from the circle of births and deaths). Soon after this kautak (miracle) he left home and began to preach Guru Nanak's mission. He calls his movement by the name of Nanak Dham which literally means Nanak's home. His disciples wear white clothes (kurta pyjama) and keep their beards flowing. They put a tilak (red spot) on their foreheads which they call the "third eye". Commenting on the significance of the "third eye", one Sikh informant said that "Baba Ji does not whisper a secret word in the ears of his disciples. He preaches the mission of Guru Nanak. Baba Ji says that with the help of the 'third eye' one is able to have Guru Nanak's darshan. Baba Ji is janijan (who has spiritual powers)."

In one room of the Nanak Dham at Birmingham a copy of Guru Granth Sahib is installed. The followers of Baba Darshan Das claim that the cover of this copy is made of pure gold with money donated by his shardhalus (faithful). When the disciples of Baba Darshan Das meet, they greet each other with the slogan "Nanak nam chardi tala terey bhaney sarbat da bhala" (Through Nanak may the glory of His name increase and may the whole world be blessed by His grace). A large majority of his followers are in the Midlands. His insistence on vegetarianism and nam-simran has attracted many Sikh women. Many men have stopped drinking alcohol and they have begun to lead a normal life for which their wives are thankful to Baba Ji. Most women do a lot of seva (service) in the kitchen at Nanak Dham. Information about Nanak Dham and the miraculous powers of its leader is passed to other members of the Sikh community elsewhere in Britain by regular visitors. Their recovery from an illness, and in many cases becoming vegetarians, are convincing examples of the healing powers of Baba Darshan Das.

The examination of diverse religious leaders and their followers shows clearly that Sikh holy men play a very significant role within the Sikh community, both in India and abroad. They provide situations which satisfy the quest for a living guru so strongly perceived by the Sikhs. Most Sikhs visit holy men at one time or another because these men are believed to possess spiritual power. They are perceived as rab dey bandey (God's people) who are endowed with healing powers as well as the mission of leading the way to mukti/moksha by joining people with the gurugarh. Many Sikhs feel they have established a

special bond with particular holy men; this helps them to acquire self-discipline and restraint from bad karm (deeds or habits). Donations made to holy men and seva performed at their deras are regarded as changey karman da phal (reward of good deeds done in a previous life). People usually refrain from santan di ninda (slander of holy men) which is always regarded as a pap (sin). Most Sikhs feel proud to have received amrit from a renowned holy man. For example, one might say that "main Baba Puran Singh ton amrit chhakiya hai" (I received amrit from Baba Puran Singh) or "main satgur Partap Singh ton bhajan liya hai" (I received nam from satguru Partap Singh). There is a strong tradition of inviting holy men for special meals. This is called "santan noon parshada chhakauna" (feeding the holy men). After the meal a holy man recites ardas for the well-being of the family for which he receives a ritual bhaint (offering) of a turban and some cash.

It is also evident that the caste identity of holy men is a determining factor for attracting shardhalus within the Sikh community. A Ramgarhia Sikh holy man is usually more popular among the Ramgarhias. The overwhelming majority of the followers of Baba Puran Singh Karichowale are members of the Ramgarhia biradari while Baba Sarwan Das, who was a Chamar, is revered by the Chamars only. A few holy men attract followers from all caste groups, such as the Radhasoami guru and the Nirankari guru, but both these holy men belong to high caste groups and their higher status enables them to transcend traditional caste barriers more easily than holy men from low caste groups would be able to do.

CONCLUSION.

The preceding chapters have shown in much detail how caste remains an integral part of the social structure of Sikh society in both India and Britain. The data collected for this study highlight in particular the many ways in which caste continues to persist among Sikh migrants in Leeds and Bradford. They show that the arrival of Sikh families and children from India and East Africa has led to the rapid development of caste/biradari associations and caste-based gurdwaras in Britain. The discussion of the life-cycle rituals provides new insights into the workings of caste, religion and the kinship system among Sikhs. A detailed study of two Sikh castes, the Ramgarhias and the Ravidasis, furnishes evidence of the development of these two caste groups into distinct, but not separate Sikh communities. Moreover, members of these caste groups take great pride in their caste identity, manifested in the establishment of their own biradari gurdwaras and associations. This development clearly shows that caste differences will persist in the internal organisation of the Sikh community in Britain.

The notion that the Sikhs are a casteless brotherhood has been challenged in the context of a brief discussion of the Indian caste system. For a critical analysis of caste practices among the Sikhs, a comprehensive review of the writings of Sikh and non-Sikh authors,

discussion of caste in the teachings of the Sikh Gurus, the function of caste in the Punjabi society and the persistence of caste among Sikh migrants overseas was undertaken. I also analysed the migration and settlement pattern of the Sikhs in Leeds. Although "push" and "pull" factors played an important role in the process of migration of the Sikhs, the tradition of migration from Doaba (districts of Jullundar and Hoshiarpur) has been identified as the most significant factor since the annexation of the Punjab by the British in 1850. In the same chapter I have also identified the presence of various religious groups within the Leeds Sikh community, i.e. the Namdharis, Radhasoamis, Niranakaris and Nishkam Sevak Jatha. A detailed study of the nature of their diwans has shown that all Sikhs do not subscribe to the tradition of the Khalsa within the Sikh panth.

I identified various caste groups among the Sikhs in Leeds including an estimate of their size and a brief discussion of their traditional role which has become redundant in overseas settlements. It has been shown that a meaningful social interaction among Sikhs takes place within caste groups only. The view that the entry of Ramgarhia Sikhs into the Sikh Panth was an act of emulation of the Jat Sikhs has been challenged. It has been demonstrated that the Ramgarhias developed close relationships with the Sikh Gurus since Guru Nanak's first udasi (missionary journey). The Ramgarhias are the largest group among the Sikhs in Leeds. The consequences of their dominant position have been examined to understand the development of biradari institutions and the perpetuation of caste consciousness among the Leeds Sikhs. The East African Sikhs regard themselves as settlers in

Britain. Their perception of being settlers in Britain had a qualitative impact on their settlement pattern. For example, a large number of East African Sikh families moved into the suburbs of Leeds much earlier than other Sikhs - their shift to the suburbs is an interesting parallel with the experience of the Jewish community in Leeds.

The Ramgarhias have shown a remarkable capacity to build a whole complex of their biradari institutions, including the publication of their journal "Ramgarhia Sikh Bulletin". The number of activities held at the Ramgarhia Sikh Centre shows a certain orientation towards western culture while maintaining their Ramgarhia identity. It is reflected in the role of Ramgarhia Sikh women who are represented on the management committee of the Ramgarhia institutions. I have also examined the tension between Ramgarhia Sikhs and the Dhimans (Hindu carpenters) regarding the celebration of the anniversary of their caste deity, Baba Vishwakarma. It has been shown that despite religious differences marriage alliances are established between the two groups which indicates the primacy of caste over religious loyalties.

Examination of the historical background of the Ravidas Sabha and the establishment of Ravidas Bhawan by the Chamar Sikhs in Bradford demonstrate the development of Ravidasi identity and the entry of Chamars into the Sikh Panth as perceived by them. Distinctive features of Ravidasi diwans, the interior decoration of their gurdwara, design of their palki (sedan where the Guru Granth Sahib is

placed), nishan sahib (Sikh flag), hoisting of the nishan sahib on the gurpurb of Ravidas instead of the Baisakhi Day, special reverence paid to their biradari guru Ravidas in the ardas, celebration of the gurpurb of Sant Sarwan Das who was their biradari holy man, have been examined to understand Ravidasi perceptions of the Sikh tradition. It has also been shown that the naming system of Ravidasi Sikhs reflects their attachment to the pre-Khalsa Sikh tradition. Ravidasi Sikhs do not regard external Sikh symbols and amrit (Sikh initiation) as significant factors for expressing their belonging to the Sikh Panth. Similar to the gurdwaras of other groups, the Ravidas Bhawan plays a central role in the life of the Ravidasi community in Bradford. Although Ravidasi Sikhs reject the caste system, the establishment of the Ravidasi gurdwara has in fact reinforced caste consciousness and caste solidarity.

I analysed the role of the institution of arranged marriage in perpetuating caste consciousness as well as promoting caste solidarity among the Sikhs. Pre-wedding and wedding rituals have been examined to demonstrate the dominance of the institution of biradari and its significance in the process of cultural continuity. The analysis of these data shows clearly that caste endogamy is strictly observed by Sikh migrants. A major change, however, has been the acceptance of mixing traditional and western values in receptions after the wedding ceremony, for example cutting the wedding cake. Most Sikhs engage Punjabi musical groups to entertain wedding guests which relates to former Punjabi tradition of engaging singing girls to entertain the wedding party - this custom was traditionally

regarded as a symbol of status by the groom's family. I have also discussed the powers of the institution of biradari to modify the rules of got exogamy for the smooth functioning of arranged marriages in Britain. Analysis of matrimonial advertisements shows that Bhatra Sikhs do not advertise for the search of partners in newspapers either in India or abroad because they are a very close-knit community in which marriage alliances are established through a wider kinship group. My analysis shows that the institution of arranged marriage is the bedrock of the caste system.

The importance of holy men in the Sikh community has been examined to demonstrate that the Sikh holy men represent the continuity of the sant tradition. I have discussed the role of visiting holy men from India and the nature of their diwans for understanding the quest for a living guru among the Sikhs. This quest transcends caste barriers, yet while the boundaries among disciples may obliterate caste allegiances, in actual practice many holy men find most support among members of their own caste.

The gurdwaras play the most significant role in perpetuating Punjabi cultural traditions among Sikh migrants. Almost all Sikh women wear Punjabi traditional dress (shalwar and kameez) at the gurdwaras. Many Sikh women offer uncooked food (sugar, milk and butter) on Sunday diwans. Almost all gurdwaras have organised Punjabi classes for Sikh children. Sikh parents are becoming more concerned about the understanding of Punjabi by their children. Most Sikh children find the Sikh service incomprehensible as it is conducted in Punjabi, and

this has resulted in their lack of interest in gurdwara activities. In Leeds the leaders of gurdwaras asked for the provision of teaching Punjabi to Sikh children in local authority schools. In the 1960' and 70's most Sikh children were regarded as learners of English as a second language. At present the situation is completely reversed. Most Sikh children have only a functional knowledge of Punjabi, and they speak Punjabi with a Yorkshire accent. As a matter of fact, Punjabi has become their second language. At the gurdwara schools most children ask questions in English when they need help in learning new words and phrases in Punjabi. Sikh children use more English words when they speak Punjabi. The bilingualism of Sikh children should interest socio-linguists to assess the changing nature of Punjabi and its implications for the Sikh tradition in Britain.

Since the mid 1970's, there has been a major shift in the management structure of the gurdwaras. All gurdwaras have appointed full-time ragis (religious musicians) who conduct all services and ceremonies, whereas these services used to be conducted by the sevadars (Sikh volunteers). The number of religious functions held at the gurdwaras has increased many times as a result of the presence of full-time ragis. These ragis have been brought over from the Punjab. Most ragis are proficient in Punjabi only and they transmit Sikh values by using episodes selected from Sikh history. Sikh children find their shabad-kirtan sessions incomprehensible and boring. As there is no tradition of conducting Sikh services in English, the present situation is going to present a serious challenge to the future development of the

Sikh tradition in Britain. The Sikh community will have to adopt a new approach in order to make the Sikh tradition relevant for their future generations in Britain. The gurdwaras will have to take practical steps to produce religious literature in English for their children and young people. Moreover, the Sikhs will have to consider seriously the question of conducting some parts of their diwans in English so that Sikh youngsters are able to participate in them. They will have to organise the training of professional ragis here in Britain so that they are capable of conducting services both in Punjabi and English.

Historically the Sikh tradition has been closely associated with Punjabi culture and has been confined to Punjabi Sikhs both in India and abroad. Although some overseas communities are now more than ninety years old, there has never been a serious attempt to attract non-Punjabis to the Sikh tradition. Recently, the development of the "Happy, Healthy, Holy" movement in the U.S.A. has created interest as well as anxiety about the question of Sikh identity. Although Sikhs admire the observation of the Khalsa discipline by the white American Sikhs, they do not regard them as "real" Sikhs. Punjabi ancestry is still perceived to be the fundamental criterion of Sikh identity by the Sikhs themselves.

More Sikh youngsters are marrying English spouses now when compared to the 60's and 70's. In most cases Sikh parents have accepted these arrangements reluctantly without organising a Sikh wedding ceremony. In the Sikh community it is generally said that when a Sikh girl

marries a Muslim or a Jewish boy, she changes her religion, and she is considered to be a kamjat (without a caste). Sikh boys who marry English girls have not been found to convert their spouses to Sikhism. But children from such marriages are regarded as Sikhs as long as the parents continue their links with the family and the community. The question of the religious identity of these children will depend on their attendance at the gurdwaras and their involvement in Sikh affairs which is further linked with the use of English in diwans. However, the stigma of someone marrying a gora or gori (English boy or girl) is still very strong within the Sikh community.

Sikh women sing traditional Punjabi songs at the wedding rituals. These songs are a rich resource of Punjabi culture in this country. They are not written down and, surprisingly, most Sikh women remember them by heart. The songs reveal the emotions and family relationships within Punjabi culture, for example the role of the bride's mother's brother in marriage rituals. It is important that these songs are collected and properly recorded for future generations of Sikh migrants. Their detailed study is an important factor for the fuller understanding of cultural traditions and their transmission among the Sikhs.

This study has focused on the persistence of caste among Sikhs in Leeds and to some extent in Bradford. The notion that the Sikhs are a casteless brotherhood has been challenged by examining the constitutions and nature of membership of caste-based gurdwaras and

biradari associations. The impact of the political situation in the Punjab on Sikhs in Leeds has also been mentioned. For example, the Chapeltown Road gurdwara is controlled by the members of the International Sikh Youth Federation who are amritdharis. Before the annual elections of the management committee for 1988/89 the constitution was amended. Now only the amritdhari Sikhs are eligible to become members of the management committee and the board of trustees. It is clear that the movement of Khalistan has serious implications for defining Sikh identity because Sikh groups other than the Jats perceive the political struggle for a separate Khalistan as a predominantly Jat Sikh demand rather than one supported by all Sikhs. This shows that the persistence of caste among Sikhs has important political implications in addition to the many religious and cultural dimensions discussed in this thesis.

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GLOSSARY

(The transcription of terms follows the customary Punjabi spelling).

ADI GRANTH	ਆਦਿ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ	sacred scripture of the Sikhs, also called <u>Guru Granth Sahib</u> .
AKAL	ਅਕਾਲ	timeless, a term used to describe God.
AKALI	ਅਕਾਲੀ	a member of the Sikh political party in the Punjab.
AKHAND-PATH	ਅਖੰਡ ਪਾਠ	continu <sup>o</sup> s reading of the <u>Guru Granth Sahib</u> taking forty-eight hours.
AMRIT	ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ	nectar, solution of water and sugar used at the Sikh initiation.
AMRITDHARI	ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਧਾਰੀ	an initiated Sikh.
ANAND-KARAJ	ਅਨੰਦਕਾਰਜ	Sikh marriage ceremony.

ARDAS	ਅਰਦਾਸ਼	Sikh prayer recited at the conclusion of a service.
ARTI	ਆਰਤੀ	ritual in which lighted lamps are used for worship.
ARYA SAMAJ	ਆਰੀਆ ਸਮਾਜ	North Indian Hindu reform movement founded in the late nineteenth century by Dayanand Saraswati.
ASA DI VAR	ਆਸਾ ਦੀ ਵਾਰ	morning hymn composed by <u>Guru Nanak</u> .
ASSAN	ਆਸਣ	woollen rug - also a term used by <u>Nandhari</u> Sikhs to describe the rug of their current <u>Satguru</u> as distinguished from the seat of their earlier <u>guru</u> , Ram Singh.
BABA	ਬਾਬਾ	literally grandfather - a term of respect applied to holy men.
BAISAKHI	ਬਸਾਖੀ	first month of the Indian year. One of the important Sikh festivals.

BANI	ਬਾਣੀ	speech - a term collectively used for the compositions of the <u>Gurus</u> and the <u>sants</u> included in the <u>Guru Granth Sahib</u> .
BARAT/JANET	ਬਾਰਤ/ ਜਨੇਤ	the groom's marriage party.
BARI	ਬਰੀ	gifts to the bride from the groom's father.
BARNI	ਬਰਨੀ	<u>Nandhari</u> ritual reserved for most important occasions.
BHAGAT	ਭਗਤ	a devotee - a term used for the Hindu and Muslim saints whose compositions are included in the <u>Guru Granth Sahib</u> .
BHAI	ਭਾਈ	brother - a term used to describe men of outstanding piety and learning, i.e. <u>Bhai Buddha</u> , <u>Bhai Gurdas</u> - also used for the custodian of a <u>gurdwara</u> .
BHAINT	ਭੈਂਟ	a voluntary amount of cash given to a <u>guru</u> or a priest.

BHAKTI	ਭਗਤੀ	religious devotion or worship.
BHATRA	ਭਾਟੜਾ	a Sikh caste group.
BIAH/VIAH	ਬਿਆਹ/ਵਿਆਹ	the marriage ceremony.
BICHOLA	ਬਿਚੋਲਾ	match-maker.
BIRADARI	ਬਿਰਾਦਰੀ	refers both to brotherhood and the caste group; the term is used by Sikhs, Muslims and Punjabi Hindus.
BOLIAN	ਬੋਲੀਆਂ	folk songs and tales.
BURA PAUNA	ਬੁਰਾ ਪੈਣਾ	a post-funeral rite performed after thirteen days of the death of husband - widow receives ritual gifts from her parents.
CHAMAR	ਚਮਾਰ	a leather worker - a term also used for the <u>Chamar</u> caste.
CHAMARDLI	ਚਮਾਰੜੀ	residential area reserved for the <u>Chamars</u> .

CHANINI

ਚਾਨਣੀ

fringed awning placed over the  
Granth Sahib

CHARAN PAUHAL

ਚਰਨ ਪਹੁਲ

foot initiation. The foot of the  
Guru is placed in water  
which is used for initiation. The  
Sikh method of initiation until  
it was replaced by amrit  
by the 10th Guru.

CHARAN PAUNA

ਚਰਨ ਪੈਣਾ

literally placing a foot in the  
house of one's follower - a term  
used on the occasion when a  
guru or a holy man goes  
to his disciple's house.

CHAURI

ਚੌਰੀ

ritual fan made of yak hair or  
peacock feather waved over the  
Guru Granth Sahib: symbol  
of authority - Namdharis wave  
chauri over their living gurus.

CHELA

ਚੇਲਾ

disciple of a guru.

CHHATI

ਛਟੀ

ritual feast at the birth of a  
son.

CHUHRA	ਚੂੜਾ	male member of the sweeper caste.
CHUHRI	ਚੂੜੀ	female member of the sweeper caste.
CHURA	ਚੂੜਾ	a set of bangles given to the bride by her mother's brother before the wedding at the <u>chura</u> ceremony in which female members of the <u>biradari</u> participate.
DAAJ	ਦਾਜ	dowry.
DAAN	ਦਾਨ	charitable gifts of money and objects of food for which no return is expected.
DARSHAN	ਦਰਸ਼ਨ	view or the glimpse of the <u>guru</u> .
DARSHAN BHAIAT	ਦਰਸ਼ਨ ਭੇਟ	voluntary amount of cash given to one's <u>guru</u> .
DASAM GRANTH	ਦਸਮ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ	collection of writings attributed to the 10th <u>Guru</u> .
DEG	ਦੇਗ	cooking pot - also a term used for ritual food ( <u>karah parshad</u> ).

DEVI	ਦੇਵੀ	goddess - also used for a pious woman.
DEVTA	ਦੇਵਤਾ	incarnation of God - also used for a pious person.
DHAMALAK BHANANA	ਧਮਾਲਕ ਭੰਨਣਾ	breaking of an earthen pot full of water which symbolises the release of the deceased's soul.
DHARM	ਧਰਮ	social and religious obligations - Punjabi term for religion.
DHARM ISTHAN	ਧਰਮ ਟਿਸਥਾਨ	religious place.
DHARMSHALA	ਧਰਮਸ਼ਾਲਾ	commonly a term for a building used for devotional singing and prayer - in the early Sikh period it was used to describe a place where Sikhs assembled for worship.
DHIMAN	ਧੀਮਾਣ	Hindu carpenters, blacksmiths and masons - member of <u>Tarkhan</u> caste.
DIWALI	ਦੀਵਾਲੀ	festival of lights celebrated by Hindus and Sikhs in the month of

October-November.

DIWAN	ਦੀਵਾਨ	a term used for a Sikh act of worship i.e. Sunday <u>diwan</u> .
DOABA	ਡੋਆਬਾ	the plain tract of central Punjab bounded by the Beas and Sutlej rivers.
DOLI	ਡੋਲੀ	departure of the wedding party.
EK ONKAR	ੴ	One God - used as a Sikh emblem.
GADDI	ਗੱਦੀ	seat or throne of a <u>guru</u> .
GHORIAN	ਘੋੜੀਆਂ	songs sung by female relatives of the bridegroom.
GIANI/GYANI	ਗਿਆਨੀ	a person well-read in the Sikh scriptures.
GORA/GORI	ਗੋਗ/ ਗੋਰੀ	term used for an English boy/girl.
GOT/GOTRA	ਗੋਤ/ ਗੋਤਾ	exogamous caste grouping within the exogamous clan.
GOT-KANALA	ਗੋਤਕਨਾਲਾ	literally mixing of <u>gots</u> -

		ceremony for newly married bride.
GRANTH	ਗ੍ਰੰਥ	book, a collection.
GRANTHI	ਗ੍ਰੰਥੀ	one who looks after the <u>Granth Sahib</u> - a reader of the <u>Granth Sahib</u> - may also be a custodian of <u>gurdwara</u> .
GRIHSTH	ਗ੍ਰਿਹਸਥ	householder - a term used for the second stage of life in Hinduism.
GURDWARA	ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਾ	literally the house of the <u>guru</u> - a Sikh temple.
GURMUKHI	ਗੁਰਮੁਖੀ	script used for writing Punjabi
GURPURB	ਗੁਰਪੁਰਬ	anniversary of the birth or death of Sikh <u>Gurus</u> .
GURU	ਗੁਰੂ	religious teacher or a preceptor - one who delivers a person from ignorance.
HAVAN	ਯਜੁਨ	fire worship - popular among <u>Namadhari</u> Sikhs.

HOLA	ਹੋਲਾ	Sikh festival held at Anandpur.
HOLI	ਹੋਲੀ	Hindu festival held at the full moon in February-March.
HUKAMNAMA	ਹੁਕਮਨਾਮਾ	a hymn read out from the <u>Guru Granth Sahib</u> at the culmination of service.
IZZAT	ਇਜ਼ਤ	family honour.
JAJMAN	ਜਜਮਾਨ	patron.
JANEU	ਜਨੇਊ	sacred thread worn by twice-born Hindus.
JANJGARH	ਜੰਜਘਰ	communal house for receiving marriage parties.
JORA JAMA	ਜੋੜਾ ਜਾਮਾ	wedding clothes provided for the groom by his mother's brother.
JAT	ਜੱਟ	a peasant caste dominant in the Punjab.
JAT/JATI	ਜਾਤ/ਜਾਤਿ	caste.

JATHA	ਜਥਾ	military detachment - also used for their local branches by the Sikhs.
JHIR	ਝੀਰ	male person belonging to the water-carrier caste.
JHIRI	ਝੀਰੀ	female person belonging to the water-carrier caste.
JULAHA	ਜੁਲਾਹਾ	male person belonging to the weaver caste.
KACHCHA	ਕੱਚਾ	loose fitting under-wear - one of the <u>five k's</u> .
KAMEEZ	ਕਮੀਜ਼	tunic - long shirt.
KANMI	ਕੱਮੀ	an artisan working in a patron-client relationship.
KANGHA	ਕੰਘਾ	comb - one of the <u>five k's</u> .
KANYADAN	ਕਨਿਆਦਾਨ	gift of a virgin.
KARAH PARSHAD	ਕਰਾਹ ਪ੍ਰਸ਼ਾਦਿ	sacramental food shared at the end of Sikh services.

KAREVA/CHADAR PAUNA	ਕੇਵਾ	widow remarriage.
KATH	ਕੱਠ	a funeral feast for the relatives and members of one's <u>biradari</u>
KAUR	ਕੌਰ	name assumed by all female Sikhs - literally it means princess.
KES	ਕੇਸ	uncut hair - one of the <u>five k's</u> .
KESDHARI	ਕੇਸਧਾਰੀ	one who wears the hair long or uncut.
KESI ISHNAN	ਕੇਸੀ ਇਸ਼ਨਾਨ	complete bath.
KHALSA	ਖਾਲਸਾ	the Sikh order, brotherhood, instituted by the 10th <u>Guru</u> in 1699; also the pure ones.
KHANDA	ਖੰਡਾ	double-edged sword - one of the emblems of Sikhism.
KHATRI	ਖੱਤ੍ਰੀ	a mercantile caste, particularly important in the Punjab - also a male person belonging to <u>Khatri</u> caste.

KHAWAJA	ਖੁਆਜ਼ਾ	water-god.
KIRPAN	ਕਿਰਪਾਨ	sword - one of the <u>five k's</u> .
KIRTAN	ਕੀਰਤਨ	religious singing.
KSHATRI	ਕਸ਼ਤ੍ਰੀ	second <u>varna</u> of the Hindu caste system - the warrior caste.
KUKA	ਕੂਕਾ	nickname given to <u>Nandhari</u> Sikhs.
KUMBH	ਕੁੰਭ	ritual performed on auspicious occasions symbolising the worship of <sup>the</sup> water-god.
KURMAI	ਕੁੜਮਾਈ	engagement ceremony.
LADOO	ਲਾਡੂ	Indian sweet like round orange balls - distributed on auspicious occasions.
LAG	ਲਾਗ	ritual payment received by members of the serving castes at weddings.
LAGI	ਲਾਗੀ	a member of the serving castes.

LANGAR	ਲੰਗਰ	kitchen attached to every <u>gurdwara</u> from which food is served to all regardless of caste - also used for food prepared and served at <u>gurdwaras</u> .
LARA	ਲਾੜਾ	bridegroom.
LAVAN	ਲਾਵਾਂ	hymn read out from the <u>Guru Granth Sahib</u> at the wedding ceremony - also sung when circling the <u>Guru Granth Sahib</u> , the groom leading the bride.
LOHAR	ਲੁਹਾਰ	a blacksmith.
MALA	ਮਾਲਾ	rosary or woollen cord used by <u>Namdhari Sikhs</u> .
MATHA TEKNA	ਮੱਥਾ ਟੇਕਣਾ	form of respect paid by touching feet - also used for bowing before the <u>Guru Granth Sahib</u> .
MAYIAN/MAIAN	ਮਾਈਆਂ	a pre-wedding ceremony - bride and the groom are rubbed with a paste

		of flour, mustard oil and turmeric at their respective homes.
MEHNDI	ਮਹਿੰਦੀ	henna used in marriage ceremonies by Indian women to decorate hands and feet.
MILNI	ਮਿਲਣੀ	ritual meeting of the heads of families before the wedding ceremony.
MONA/MONEIN	ਮੋਨਾ/ਮੋਨੇ	clean-shaven.
MUKLAWA	ਮੁਕਲਾਵਾ	post-wedding ceremony before the consummation of marriage.
MUKTI/MOKSHA	ਮੁਕਤੀ/ਮੋਕਸ਼ਾ	salvation, deliverance.
NAI	ਨਾਈ	member of the barber caste.
NAINDA	ਨੇਂਦਾ	customary presentations between close kin at a rite of passage.
NANDHARI	ਨਾਮਧਾਰੀ	a Sikh movement following <u>Baba Ram Singh</u> - <u>Nandharis</u> believe in a living <u>guru</u> .

NAM SIMRAN	ਨਾਮ ਸਿਮ੍ਰਨ	meditation on God's name.
NANKI SHAK	ਨਾਨਕੀ ਸ਼ੱਕ	marriage gifts to the bride/groom and their families given by the mother's brother and family.
NIHANG	ਨਿਹੰਗ	a sect among the Sikhs - its members wear traditional uniform of Sikh soldiers.
NIRANKARI	ਨਿਰੰਕਾਰੀ	worshipper of the formless - also a member of <u>Sant Nirankari Mandal</u> - <u>Nirankaris</u> believe in a living <u>guru</u> .
NISHAN SAHIB	ਨਿਸ਼ਾਨ ਸਾਹਿਬ	Sikh flag.
PAGRI	ਪਗੜੀ	a turban - also a term used for the ceremony performed at the end of mourning period in the presence of <u>biradari</u> members, symbolising the transfer of paternal authority to the eldest son.
PAKORA	ਪਕੌੜਾ	savoury snack made of gram flour and fried in oil.

PALLA	ਪੱਲਾ	long scarf worn by the groom - it is used by bride's father to join the bride and groom at the marriage ceremony.
PANCHAYAT	ਪੰਚਾਇਤ	council of caste elders.
PANI VARNA	ਪਾਣੀ ਵਾਰਨਾ	ritual performed by groom's mother when she receives her daughter-in-law after the wedding.
PANJ KAKE	ਪੰਜ ਕੱਕੇ	<u>five k's.</u>
PANJ PYAREY	ਪੰਜ ਪਿਆਰੇ	the original <u>Khalsa</u> members - literally five beloved ones.
PANTH	ਪੰਥ	a term used for Sikh society.
PARDA	ਪਰਦਾ	veiling, avoidance behaviour of married women.
RAGI	ਰਾਗੀ	a term used for Sikh religious musicians.
RAJ	ਰਾਜ	literally rule - also used for bricklayers and masons.

RAKHARI	ਰਖੜੀ	festival day on which sisters tie cord around the wrists of their brothers and receive ritual gifts.
RANDASIA	ਰਾਮਦਾਸੀਆ	a Sikh belonging to the <u>Julaha</u> caste.
RANGARHIA	ਰਾਮਗੜੀਆ	a Sikh artisan caste comprising of carpenters, blacksmiths and masons.
REHATNAMA	ਰਹਿਤ ਨਾਮਾ	a recorded version of the <u>Khalsa</u> code of discipline.
ROKNA	ਰੋਕਣਾ	reservation of prospective groom by the bride's family.
SABHA	ਸਭਾ	association or an organisation.
SADHARAN/SAHEJ PATH	ਸਧਾਰਨ/ਸਹਿਜ ਪਾਠ	a non-continuous reading of the <u>Granth Sahib</u> .
SAH <sup>E</sup> <sub>1</sub> JDHARI	ਸਹਿਜਯਾਰੀ	a Sikh who neither accepts <u>amrit</u> nor observes the <u>Khalsa</u> discipline. Also a term used for clean-shaven Sikhs.

SAGAN	ਸਗਾਨ	auspicious gift or act.
SAHEY-CHITHI	ਸਾਹੇ ਚਿੱਠੀ	invitation letter sent to groom's family.
SALWAR	ਸਲਵਾਰ	loose trousers worn by Punjabi women and Muslim men.
SANGAT	ਸੰਗਤ	religious congregation.
SANT	ਸੰਤ	in the context of Sikhism a member of the north Indian tradition to which Kabir, Ravi Das and Nanak belonged. Also used for saintly persons.
SANYASI	ਸਨਿਆਸੀ	Hindu renunciant.
SARADH	ਸਰਾਧ	ritual feastings to propitiate the ancestral dead.
SARDAR	ਸ਼ਰਦਾਰ	a leader - a respectful term used to address a male Sikh.
SAT GURU	ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ	God - also a term used by Namdhari Sikhs for Ram Singh and their guru.

SAT SRI AKAL	ਸਤਿ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ	Sikh greeting.
SEPIDARS	ਸੇਖੀਦਾਰ	members of the serving castes who provide goods and services to the landlord patron in return for a share of bi-annual harvest as part of a hereditary relationship.
SEVADAR	ਸੇਵਦਾਰ	a Sikh volunteer.
SHARAB	ਸ਼ਰਾਬ	alcohol.
SINGH	ਸਿੰਘ	literally lion - the name assumed by <sup>male</sup> members of the <u>Khalsa</u> .
SODHI	ਸੋਧੀ	a <u>Namdhari</u> Sikh who has been initiated according to the code of discipline of the <u>Namdharis</u> .
SOHAG	ਸੁਹਾਗ	songs of married women.
SOHILLA	ਸੁਹਿਲਾ	a group of hymns forming the evening prayer of the Sikhs - also recited at the funeral of a Sikh person.

SUDAR	ਸੁਦਰ	members of the <u>Chamar</u> and <u>Chubra</u> castes.
TARKHAN	ਤੁਕਾਣ	a carpenter - also used for the carpenter caste.
TEL CHONA	ਤੇਲ ਚੋਣਾ	traditional ritual of pouring mustard oil on the threshold - performed on auspicious occasions to ward off evil spirits.
TIRATH	ਤੀਰਥ	place of pilgrimage.
UDASI	ਉਦਾਸੀ	preaching tours associated with <u>Guru Nanak</u> .
VAG-PHARAYI/INJERDI	ਵਾਗ ਫੜਾਈ/ ਇੰਜੜੀ	ceremony of holding groom's scarf by his sisters and cousins - symbolising the bridle of a horse.
VARNASHRAMADHARMA	ਵਰਨ ਆਸ਼ਰਮ ਧਰਮ	Hindu code of conduct laid down in the <u>shastras</u> .
VARTAN BHAI	ਵਰਤਨ ਭਾਈ	reciprocal gift giving between

kin.

WAHEGURU

ਵਾਹਿਗੁਰੂ

wonderful Lord.

YATI

ਯਤੀ

a celibate.

ZAT

ਜ਼ਾਤਿ

Urdu version of the term jat - an endogamous caste grouping.

ZAT-PAT

ਜ਼ਾਤਿ ਪਾਤ

Indian term used for the caste system.

APPENDIX.

Photograph of the wooden palki (palanquin/sedan) for the Guru Granth Sahib at the Ravidas Bhawan in Bradford.



The distinctive feature of this palki is that it is decorated with miniature pictures of Ravidas - usually a palki in a gurdwara would have bani (hymn from the Guru Granth Sahib) written on it. Two pictures of Ravidas are placed in front of the palki. Ravidas is always depicted bare-headed.