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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Shared Reverence Post-1947: Observations on the Sikh Case

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Abstract

Through a discussion of three recent episodes – the Kartarpur Sahib Corridor linking Gurdwara Darbar Sahib Kartarpur in Pakistan and Dera Baba Nanak in India, author Haroon Khalid's book *Walking With Nanak*, and a recent dispute involving the Sindhi community's religious practices in Indore, India – this article comments on the present-day experiences and expressions of shared reverence post-1947 with a particular focus on the Sikh community.

Keywords: Sikh; gurdwara; Kartarpur Sahib Corridor; Sindhi; Partition

Introduction

This article considers three recent examples (of events and writings) regarding the Sikh tradition and shrines that shed light on existing local relations and practices as expressions of shared reverence. The examples used here include: the opening of the Kartarpur Sahib Corridor in 2019, which linked Gurdwara Darbar Sahib Kartarpur in Pakistan and Dera Baba Nanak in India; the issue of gurdwaras in Pakistan as discussed in the book *Walking With Nanak,* published in 2016; and the 2023 Sindhi dispute around their religious practices in India.[1] While these events may appear unrelated, it is worth considering them together, as these are recent events and the Sikh context is the common thread running through them. Additionally, when seen together, these events reveal a range of relationships, from international associations and state-level concerns to competing interests among and within social groups, which have implications for how we understand religious traditions and, specifically, how we think about shared reverence in contemporary, post-1947 India and Pakistan. The article begins with a brief discussion of the most influential ways shared religious cultures have been discussed, with reference to the Sikh tradition (and in the region

[1] Sindhis here refers to Sindhi Hindus who migrated to India after Partition of British India in 1947.

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of Punjab), followed by a detailed examination of the three examples mentioned above. My use of the term "shared reverence" is general and non-technical – a point elaborated at the end of this section. In conclusion, the article argues for considering contemporary examples of shared reverence as a meaningful way of life for its adherents, rooted in specific historical and present-day relationships, instead of being seen as a mixture of distinct religious traditions and remnants of the past to be either celebrated or reformed.

Historically, Punjab has been shaped by the presence of Islam, Sikhism, Hinduism, and (to a small extent) Christianity. A number of scholars have highlighted the veneration of Sufis, *pir*s, *sant*s, and their *dargah*s as a prominent feature of religious life in the Punjab (here I am referring to both East and West Punjab).[2] Along with this is the common understanding that our present-day perceptions of Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu as distinct, demarcated, exclusive identities did not always exist; a range of religious beliefs and practices were common among Punjabis. This shared religious tradition has been studied and explained in various ways. One of the most well-known works in this field is that of Harjot Oberoi, who notes that pre-colonial South Asian communities found it hard to define their religion or choose labels such as "Hindu," "Muslim," or "Sikh." Punjabi communities, including Sikhs, participated in a diverse set of religious practices that today may be identified as exclusively belonging to one religious category. Oberoi specifically describes a Sanatan tradition of Sikhism, which included worship of saints such as Sakhi Sarwar, Gugga Pir, Khwaja Khizr, the *devi*s (Sitala, Mansa, Durga, and Naina), and pilgrimages to their tombs and temples.[3] There was, according to Oberoi, "a vast terrain from which to choose rites, rituals and beliefs."[4]

The impact of Sufism – its saints, literature, and shrines – on Punjab is also well recognized by scholars. Singh and Gaur, for example, argue that Punjabi culture, politics, and language were historically "vernacularized in the form of Sufism" – a locally rooted, non-conformist Islamic mysticism.[5] This vernacularized Sufism did not recognize communal boundaries and offered a critique of existing social and religious orthodoxies. According to Singh and Gaur, this ethos is best exemplified in the Punjabi Sufi poetry traced from Baba Farid (1173–1265) in the 12th century up to Waris Shah (d. 1798) in the 18th century.[6]

Punjabi *qisse* such as Hir Ranjha, Sohni Mahiwal, and Sassi Pannu offer an additional picture of Punjabi society with elements of shared reverence.[7] Through a

[2] *Pir* and *sant* (also, *baba*) are revered, holy people; *dargah* is the shrine or tomb of a revered saint, most commonly within the Islamic tradition.

[3] Sakhi Sarwar, Gugga Pir, and Khwaja Khizr were popular saints in the Punjab region. Sakhi Sarwar (d. 1174) is also known as Sultan (king), Nigaha Pir (saint of Nigaha), and Lakhdata (the giver of millions). Gugga Pir is particularly revered for his healing powers. Khwaja Khizr is associated with rivers, streams, and wells. The *devi*s are forms of feminine deities in Hinduism.

[4] Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 255.

[5] Surinder Singh and Ishwar Dayal Gaur, eds., "Introduction," in *Sufism in Punjab: Mystics, Literature and Shrines* (New Delhi: Aakar Books, 2009), 19.

[6] Baba Farid or Sheikh Fariduddin Ganjshakar is a prominent saint of the Chishti order in South Asia. Waris Shah was a Punjabi poet most famous for his love ballad "Hir."

[7] *Qisse* are popular stories or ballads, which were traditionally sung in the Punjab, but are now also available in print.

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study of Hir Ranjha texts, Mir highlights "shared notions of pious behavior [among Punjabis] irrespective of their affiliations to different religions" in colonial Punjab. As Mir states:

> These texts present a vision of later nineteenth-century sociality and religiosity in which religious community, be it Hindu, Muslim, Sikh or Christian, was not of paramount importance. Their literary representations do not map comfortably onto contemporary notions of discrete religious communities, yet neither do the practices represented exclude these notions. These texts point to the multiplicity of religious practices in which Punjabis participated while also delineating the importance of shared devotional practices.[8]

According to Mir, while Sufi values were an important aspect of this common culture, they were not the only ones. She points out that saint veneration and associated notions of piety were shared among Punjabis and took the form of "personal devotion to religious observance," which included notions of duty and moral conduct.[9] Mir thus also considers "syncretism" a limited explanation of this behavior, as she emphasizes "locally specific relationships, local social and religious values [that] allow one to consider what is being constructed and affirmed in such practices not in terms of their relation to Islam, Hinduism or Sikhism, but rather on their own terms."[10]

An organized effort for religious reform emerged among Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs under British colonial rule. These movements sought to identify pure forms of respective religions and remove elements considered alien, superstitious, or backward. In the Sikh case, the Singh Sabha reform movement's influence proved decisive in weaning people away from saint veneration and shrine pilgrimages towards the eventual emergence of a clearly defined Khalsa Sikh identity, distinct from Hinduism.[11] This is not to say that religious distinctions did not exist in pre-colonial times; they did, but not in the same way as we understand them now, as demonstrated by the above-mentioned works. Colonial rule and, finally, Partition of the subcontinent led to an unprecedented hardening of religious identities. The demand for and subsequent creation of Pakistan and India was rooted in logic that saw Muslims and Hindus as two incompatible religious and political identities. As such, physical demarcation was ostensibly done to separate Muslim-majority areas from Hindu-majority ones.

The division of the subcontinent along religious lines also divided its shared legacy. As Singh and Gaur point out, the sacred spaces shared by Punjabis were now no longer available to them, and the language that expressed this shared culture was divided into Shahmukhi for Muslim Punjabis, with their Islamic mystic poetry (*Sufi-kav*), and Gurmukhi for Sikh Punjabis, with *Gurmat-kav* or Sikh mystic poetry.[12] Post-Partition

[8] Farina Mir, *The Social Space of Language: Vernacular Culture in British Colonial Punjab* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 151.

[9] Ibid., 175.

[10] Ibid., 177.

[11] Oberoi, *Construction of Religious*.

[12] Singh and Gaur, "Introduction," 20–21.

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Punjabi politics sharpened these distinctions.[13] As a result, post-1947 India has seen its religious identities as monolithic and exclusive, uninfluenced by each other, and traced these defined boundaries back in time.

To an extent, these connections of shared religious culture are still maintained in the realm of popular culture. There is a tremendous amount of printed images and audio-visual material available and consumed within Punjab featuring the *pir*s, *baba*s, *sant*s, and their *dargah*s or *dera*s.[14] These, as Snehi argues, are significant in a postcolonial and post-Partition context to maintaining the links (geographical, cultural, and religious) that were severely ruptured in 1947. The circulation and consumption of these pictures constitute "a network of popular *wilayat* (landscape) of saint veneration in Punjab."[15] The region has a dense concentration of Sufi shrines and with Partition, many of the shrines frequented by people were left on the other side of the border. Additionally, the demography of Punjab changed to make West Punjab Muslim dominated and East Punjab Hindu and Sikh dominated. Over time, "memorial shrines" emerged and older ones changed with new caretakers. Popular visual culture has been an important medium for maintaining religious and cultural networks within this sacred landscape, which now is geographically inaccessible. The shrines of Baba Haji Rattan in Bathinda, Haider Shaikh in Malerkotla, Bhikam Shah at Ghadam Sharif (Patiala), and Baba Ali Ahmed Shah Qadiri at Mandhali, to name a few, and the annual fairs – for example, that of Baba Lakhdata and Khwaja Khizr in Amritsar – even today see cross-caste and cross-religion participation. Snehi points out that post-independence scholarship has considered these shrines as centers of "syncretism, harmony, brotherhood and shared centres of veneration in modern India," which he finds to be an inadequate explanation of ongoing social processes.[16] Sufi shrines and popular veneration in Punjab (and religious traditions in post-1947 India), Snehi argues, can be better understood "in the making" and through their "embeddedness with social and political landscape of the region."[17] For Snehi, these sites and this approach offer a "corrective to the willful forgetting [of shared religious heritage] in the dominant memory [of independent India]."[18]

In 1947, there was a massive forced migration of people across the border and associated communal violence: Hindus and Sikhs from West Pakistan migrated towards India and occupied the houses, land, and properties that had belonged to Muslims who migrated to Pakistan, while Muslims occupied properties left behind by

[13] Ibid., 31.

[14] *Dera* is usually a community center or gathering place of a religious community. It is a commonly used word in Punjab.

[15] Yogesh Snehi, "Replicating Memory, Creating Images: Pirs and Dargahs in Popular Art and Media of Contemporary East Punjab," in *Visual Pilgrim: Mapping Popular Visuality and Devotional Media at Sufi Shrines and Other Islamic Institutions in South Asia*, eds. Yousuf Saeed and Christiane Brosius (Heidelberg: Cluster of Excellence: Asia and Europe in Global Context, 2013), http://www.tasveerghar.net/vp/essay/18.html.

[16] Yogesh Snehi, "Situating Popular Veneration," *NMML Occasional Paper* 68 (2015): 42; Yogesh Snehi, "Spatiality, Memory and Street Shrines of Amritsar," *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* (2018), https://doi.org/10.4000/samaj.4559.

[17] Snehi, "Situating Popular," 42. Snehi's argument is close to that of Mir: both emphasize examining local relationships and critique the idea of syncretism for assuming that authentic, pure religious categories had existed without reference to each other.

[18] Yogesh Snehi, "Religious Encounters and Sufi Saint Shrines in the Longue Duree of Punjab," *Prof. S.C. Misra Memorial Lecture, Indian History Congress*, 83rd Session, Punjabi University, Patiala (2024).

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those who migrated to India. In this process, some shrines were destroyed or abandoned. Some of those abandoned were reoccupied and modified into residences, while others gradually transformed into new shrines. India also has several examples of village mosques converted into gurdwaras after Partition. Across the border, there are few shrines that have been maintained by local residents, with or without government support, and a few under dispute – the most prominent case being that of Gurdwara Shahidganj in Lahore.[19] New shrines (referred to as "memorial shrines" by Snehi) came up to commemorate the shrines left behind.[20]

This background helps contextualize the episodes discussed in this article, which focuses on the evidence and expression of shared reverence post-1947, particularly with reference to the Sikh tradition. I use the term "shared reverence" in a general way, to express a sensibility of shared religious ideas or the quality of being religious among groups that both self-recognize and are perceived as distinct in postcolonial South Asia. This shared reverence may be expressed, either or both, in the form of current religious practices or as past memories. I do not use the term in a technical sense. Each of the three examples involve Sikh shrines (with or without the presence of the holy book, *Guru Granth Sahib*) and reflections on their value as sites of shared reverence in the context of their specific political, social, and economic processes.

Shrines in Pakistan

With the Partition of Punjab, a number of gurdwaras ended up in Pakistan. Iqbal Qaiser's well-known work, *Historical Sikh Shrines in Pakistan*, lists over 170 sites associated with the Sikh Gurus.[21] These include large and small gurdwaras, *dharamsala*s (rest houses), *baoli*s (stepwells), and wells, residences, tombs, and *samadh*s (funerary monuments) of the Gurus' followers and associates. The volume also lists the *samadh*s of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's family and members of court. A news report, quoting Qaiser, highlighted that there are 300 gurdwaras across Pakistan, 135 of which are directly associated with the Sikh Gurus, including 80 related to Guru Nanak alone.[22] After Partition, Sikhs in India acutely felt the loss of these sites, as expressed in their religious practices and popular culture. "Baba Tera Nankana," a hugely popular Punjabi song by Amar Singh Chamkila (d. 1988), speaks of the loss of Punjabi culture as a result of Partition. The first two stanzas of the song are as follows:

. . . Jabar julam di zalima ne hadh mukai

Hoye pyase khoon de bai bhai bhai

Kiti ilaat firrangiya ki varteya bhana

[19] In this case, the dispute dates back to colonial times and continued post-1947.

[20] Snehi, "Situating Popular Veneration"; Snehi, "Spatiality, Memory."

[21] Iqbal Qaiser, *Historical Sikh Shrines in Pakistan* (Lahore: Punjabi History Board, 1998).

[22] Y. Rana, "ETBP Contradicts the Number of Historical Sikh Shrines in Pakistan," *Times of India*, February 20, 2021, https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/etpb-contradicts-the-number-of-historical-sikh-shrines-in-pakistan/articleshow/80789764.cms.

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Satho baba kho leya tera Nankana

Tu Hindu te Musalman si hik nal launda

Eko Ram Rahim ne gal beh samjhonda

Raste vakho vakhre par ik tikana

Satho baba kho leya tera Nankana . . .

The oppressor unleashed limitless violence

Brothers bayed for each others' blood

British mischief unfolded his unfortunate episode

Baba, your Nankana has been separated from us.

You kept both Hindu and Muslim close to your heart

Told us that Ram and Rahim are one

Different paths leading to one destination

Baba, your Nankana has been separated from us.[23]

In this song, Amar Singh addresses Baba Nanak, lamenting the loss of Nankana, referring to the loss of not only the place where Nanak was born (and where stands Gurdwara Nankana Sahib), but also symbolically the land and culture where Nanak resides in people's lives. The idea of shared reverence is invoked here.

The Sikh daily prayer, the "Ardas," refers to the loss of sacred sites due to Partition:

Sri Nankana Sahib te hor gurdwarian

gurdhama de jinna ton panth nu vichhodiya giya hai

khulle darshan didaar te sewa sambhal da daan

Khalsa ji nu bakhsho

Sri Nankana Sahib and other gurdwaras and places associated with the Gurus,

Which have been separated from the Panth,

[23] Saregama Punjabi, "Baba Tera Nankana | Amar Singh Chamkila," YouTube video, September 8, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O9XfPHvGk1M. The song was released as an LP sometime in the late 1980s. English translation by author.

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> Bless the Khalsa with open and unhindered access, sight, and opportunity to serve them.[24]

The prayer mentions Nankana Sahib and seeks the blessing of unhindered *darshan* (*khulle darshan didar*), access to it and other places of importance to Sikhs, and the opportunity to serve them. These lines were added to the "Ardas" in 1952 and, according to Singh and Fair, marked the post-Partition canonization of the sacred Sikh space.[25] While the gurdwaras in West Punjab had always been important, recording their loss in the daily prayer instilled it into the community's psyche even more significantly.

This issue has gained traction in several instances over the last two decades. In 2005, for example, the Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (PSGPC) hosted the first meeting of its International Advisory Committee in which Indian representatives also participated, including representatives of Takht Hazur Sahib, Patna, and the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC). Upon their return from Pakistan, the Jathedar (Iqbal Singh) and Deputy Jathedar of Patna Sahib and Deputy Jathedar of Takht Hazur Sahib (Nanded) announced that the phrase "easy access" (*khulle darshan didaar*) to Sikh shrines would be deleted from Patna Sahib Takht's daily prayer. According to a news report, the Government of Pakistan allowing Sikh *baba*s to carry out *kar seva* (voluntary service) at Sikh shrines in Pakistan, and then permitting multiple-entry visas to visit Pakistan anytime, was the reason for this deletion. Jathedar Iqbal Singh was quoted as saying that Pakistan had done a lot to support the gurdwaras in India with the help of the DSGMC.[26] The then Jathedar of the Akal Takht, Joginder Singh Vedanti, who did not participate in the meeting, rejected this statement by Patna Takht members, reminding them that such decisions could only be taken by the Akal Takht alone.[27] It was reported that Ganga Singh Dhillon of the Nankana Sahib Foundation and Dr. Pritpal Singh of the American Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee also attended the meeting.[28]

In 2015, the Akal Takht decided to observe August 14 as the "Ardas Diwas," directing all Sikhs to pray for the community's easy access to gurdwaras that had become part of Pakistan after 1947.[29] The Jathedar of Akal Takht said that, even after

[24] English translation by author.

[25] G. Singh and C. C. Fair, "The Partition of Punjab: Its Impact Upon Sikh Sacred and Cultural Space," in *Region and Partition: Bengal, Punjab and the Partition of the Subcontinent*, eds. I. Talbot and G. Singh (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 256.

[26] V. Walia, "Decision Unacceptable to Panth: Vedanti," *The Tribune*, November 17, 2005, https://www.tribuneindia.com/2005/20051118/punjab1.htm#3.

[27] The Akal Takht (located in the Golden Temple, Amritsar) is the highest religious and temporal authority in Sikhism. It is relevant to note here that Gurdwara Patna Sahib Takht (and the Sikhs in Bihar) has several elements in its religious practice considered "un-Sikh" by Punjabi Sikhs. For example, the performance of *arti* (ritual with lighted lamps, commonly associated with Hinduism) and the presence of two texts, the Dasam Granth and Guru Granth Sahib, in the main shrine. See Himadri Banerjee, *Beyond Punjab: Sikhs in East and Northeast India* (London, New York: Routledge, 2023).

[28] I comment on the role of diaspora Sikhs is the following section.

[29] The choice of date is interesting. Pakistan celebrates its independence on August 14 and India celebrates on August 15. Choosing the latter date would thus bring the Sikh decision in direct conflict with the celebration of Indian independence, potentially opening Sikhs up to accusations of separatism and anti-nationalism.

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Figure 1. Darbar Sahib Kartarpur, 2023.
Source: **Author's photo.**

several decades, Sikhs remembered their loss and this "separation" had become part of their psyche. The quest for easy access was an ongoing one, he implied.[30]

The Kartarpur Sahib Corridor

A recent and significant step in this direction was the opening of the Kartarpur Sahib Corridor in 2019, which links the town of Dera Baba Nanak in India to Gurdwara Darbar Sahib Kartarpur in Pakistan (Figure 1). Kartarpur falls in Pakistan's Narowal district and is the place where Guru Nanak, the first Sikh Guru, settled down, established a community of followers, and spent the last two decades of his life. This was also the place of his death. Dera Baba Nanak, a town in Gurdaspur district in Indian Punjab, has several shrines associated with the life of Guru Nanak and also houses the revered Chola Sahib, a robe-like garment said to have been worn by Guru Nanak. These two neighboring sites stand across from each other on the river Ravi. The corridor (strip of land or passage), which is about 4.5 kilometers long, now links the two sites and enables people to access Darbar Sahib Kartarpur from the Indian side. Before the opening of the corridor, pilgrims on the Indian side could only view this specific gurdwara through binoculars installed at Dera Baba Nanak.

The opening of the corridor was a very welcome move for Sikhs in India, who had long been unable to visit this important site. In the days leading up Partition, Sikhs had tried to negotiate the inclusion of a few important shrines in India, notably

[30] H. Singh, "Akal Takht asks Sikhs to observe August 14 as 'ardas divas'," *Hindustan Times*, August 6, 2015, https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/akal-takht-asks-sikhs-to-observe-august-14-as-ardas-divas/story-yYDn3i4CsDNHD0HLCCK5fJ.html.

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Nankana Sahib and Darbar Sahib Kartarpur.[31] However, these ended up in Pakistan when the borders were drawn. Since 1947, hostile relations between India and Pakistan seriously curtailed cross-border exchanges. The logic of Partition itself entailed the fundamental incompatibility between Muslims and Hindus, and therefore between Pakistan and India, and the violence and loss experienced during Partition sowed the seeds of discord, which continued in the subsequent decades. There have been wars, disputes over territory, and the issue of Kashmir—all of which have had serious negative consequences for cross-border connections. There have been a few attempts to initiate cross-border movement using special trains, pilgrim groups with special permission, and a bus service, but such initiatives were dogged by the countries' strained relations. The opening of the corridor was, therefore, most welcome, as it enabled visa-free travel to Darbar Sahib Kartarpur from India.[32] The corridor has been hailed a "corridor of peace" and an initiative in the right direction, with the potential to pave the way for better relations between the two countries and towards Sikhs' long-cherished desire to see and serve its shrines in Pakistan.[33]

At the same time, there existed serious security concerns in India and for the government of Punjab (in India), particularly with regard to Pakistan's support for Khalistani militants and the possibility that the corridor might be used to create disturbances in India. Moreover, it is well known that that many projects related to gurdwaras in Pakistan have been actively supported by Sikhs in the diaspora, who are sympathetic to the Khalistani cause.[34] While the corridor was billed as a gesture of "friendship," the proposal was treated with great suspicion by the Indian state.[35]

Both Gurharpal Singh and T.S. Bainiwal regard the opening of the Kartarpur Sahib Corridor as significant, but with limited possibilities for either better relations between the two countries or the fulfilment of Sikh access to and control over gurdwaras in Pakistan.[36] Singh studies the Indian and Pakistani states' approaches to the issue of gurdwaras in the years leading up to Partition and the subsequent

[31] Gurharpal Singh, "The control of sacred spaces: Sikh shrines in Pakistan from the Partition to the Kartarpur Corridor," *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture, Theory* 16 no. 3 (2019): 209–226, https://doi.org/10.1080/17448727.2019.1593305.

[32] Before the opening of the corridor, Sikh pilgrims in India had to apply for visas at specific times in the year. See Iqbal Singh Sevea, "The Kartarpur Corridor: Symbolism, Politics and Impact on India–Pakistan Relations," *ISAS Insights*, no. 525 (2018), https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/ISAS-Insights-No.-525-The-Kartarpur-Corridor.pdf.

[33] Kamaldeep Singh Brar, "Kartarpur Corridor: A Glimmer of Peace in a Time of Friction," *The Indian Express*, January 1, 2020, https://indianexpress.com/article/india/kartarpur-corridor-a-glimmer-of-peace-in-a-time-of-friction-6194270/; NDTV, "Kartarpur Corridor Inauguration Live Updates: Amarinder Singh hopes Kartarpur Will Become 'Corridor of Peace'," NDTV. November 9, 2019, https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/kartarpur-corridor-inauguration-live-updates-pm-narendra-modi-to-flag-off-550-sikh-pilgrims-travelli-2129715; Surjit Singh, "Kartarpur Corridor: 5 yrs on Key Promises Remain Unfulfilled," *Hindustan Times*, November 8, 2024, https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/chandigarh-news/kartarpur-corridor-5-yrs-on-key-promises-remain-unfulfilled-101731008119644.html.

[34] Haroon Khalid, "From Khalistan to Tourism Dollars: Pakistan's Love-Hate Ties With Its Sikhs," *Al Jazeera*, November 25, 2023, https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/11/25/khalistan-to-tourism-dollars-pakistans-love-hate-ties-with-its-sikhs.

[35] Brar, "Kartarpur Corridor: A Glimmer of Peace."

[36] Gurharpal Singh, "Control of Sacred Spaces"; T.S. Bainiwal, "Religious and political dimensions of the Kartarpur Corridor: Exploring the global politics behind the lost heritage of the Darbar Sahib," *Religions* 11, no. 560 (2020), https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11110560.

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decades, considering the corridor's opening as one in a chain of similar events in which both the states "seek to exercise control over Sikh sacred shrines as means of managing the Sikh community."[37] Both nation-states, according to Singh, take this approach because the Sikh "conception of religious and political sovereignty disrupts the narratives of nation formation that led to 1947."[38] As such, the Sikh narrative does not fit into the two-nation theory of exclusive religious identities with incompatible interests: a Muslim Pakistan and a Hindu India. Pakistani and Indian nationalisms need to control and regulate Sikh shrines for their respective preservation, argues Singh, and these controls are visible as visa and passport requirements and security clearances; a deliberate and clear violation of the Sikh desire for unhindered and open travel.[39] This argument is based on the idea of shared reverence and its (largely negative) relationship with the logic and post-Partition existence of the two nation-states of India and Pakistan. The Hindu-majority Indian state's strategy, Singh maintains, denies religious minorities any political space, restricting them to a cultural sphere and compelling them to "frame their demands in the idiom of the dominant discourses of majoritarianism."[40] Further, the Pakistani state considers "Sikh issues as a religious one . . . [which] denudes them of their shared political and cultural importance that contradicts the official narrative of the two-nation theory."[41]

For Bainiwal, the opening of the corridor was also an important but momentary victory. He highlights the role of diaspora Sikhs in bringing this link between Darbar Sahib Kartarpur and Dera Baba Nanak to fruition, arguing that such efforts are the primary reason for all the initiatives aimed at gaining access to Pakistani gurdwaras, as both states have been reluctant at best. Bainiwal discusses diaspora Sikh initiatives such as the Sri Nankana Sahib Foundation, the Guru Nanak Shrine Fellowship, publications and documentaries on gurdwaras in Pakistan, and investments by businessmen to promote Sikh tourism in Pakistan. Bainiwal argues that it was diaspora Sikhs – such as Ganga Singh Dhillon (the founder of the Sri Nankana Sahib Foundation) and Dr. Gurcharanjit Singh Attariwala – who established close relationships with Pakistani administrators and government officials and pushed for the maintenance of and access to Sikh shrines on Pakistani soil.[42] This happened over several decades after 1947. Diaspora Sikhs have pledged substantial investments to preserve, maintain, and improve infrastructure around gurdwaras in Pakistan, providing a big boost to religious tourism to and the economy of the country. In these efforts, Pakistan has largely been an ally, while India has wavered between reluctance

[37] Singh, "Control of Sacred Spaces," 2.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Singh notes that unhindered cross-border access upends the underlying logic of Partition and the two states it created based on exclusive religious identities. This is true for both Punjab and Kashmir. Singh, "Control of Sacred Spaces," 11.

[40] Singh, "Control of Sacred Spaces," 12.

[41] Ibid. Singh also notes an Indian Sikh leader's 2019 objection to Pakistan's initial proposal of restricting access to Kartarpur Sahib only to Sikhs, calling it a narrow interpretation of Sikh identity.

[42] Ganga Singh Dhillon (d. 2014) was based in the US. See Inderjit Badhwar, "I Don't Need Zia or the CIA to tell me to do what I must do: Ganga Singh Dhillon," *India Today*, November 30, 1981, https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/international/story/19811130-i-am-an-agent-of-guru-nanak-ganga-singh-dhillon-773466-2013-10-25. Gurchanranjit S. Attariwala (b. 1932) is a Canada-based ophthalmologist.

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and hostility. Still, Bainiwal maintains, Sikh religious and political interests remain subordinated to the political interests of both countries.[43]

A news report from *The Tribune* dated 19 June 2022 noted that the corridor did not have enough traffic post-Covid, observing that the project had "failed to take off," as the number of daily visitors was only 200–250 people, not even half of the targeted 500 per day.[44] The report argued that this deficit was due to bureaucratic hurdles – such as a passport mandate and fee – and, significantly, fear among young Indians that setting foot in Pakistan would make it impossible for them to immigrate to Western countries. Giving their details to security and immigration agencies in Pakistan would expose them to harassment by the Indian security agencies, who may accuse them of having received training in Pakistan (*training lekar aaye hain*), and jeopardize any immigration plans, so "Why set foot on Pakistani soil?"[45] Another report from 2024 pegged daily visitors at 400 per day, much lower than the Indian expectation of 5,000 pilgrims daily and 10,000 on special days.[46] These numbers contrast with the anticipated rekindling of shared ties between the people, the evidence of shared reverence in popular culture (for example, in songs, films, and visual culture), and of the long-cherished desire of obtaining the *darshan* of gurdwaras in Pakistan. While the Sikh community is pleased with the corridor, Sikh youth are reluctant to use it for the above-stated reasons. There is diversity of political, social, and economic interests within the community, articulated in issues such as Sikh youth reluctance to use the corridor and the tussle between the Patna/Delhi and Amritsar gurdwara managements on the issue of the gurdwaras in Pakistan. To say that the issue of access to gurdwaras "supersedes all matters of politics and economics" for the entire Sikh community provides us with only a partial picture.[47]

Walking With Nanak

The second example is an anecdote that appears in Haroon Khalid's book, *Walking With Nanak*, published in 2016.[48] Khalid is a Pakistani writer whose works focus on non-Islamic religious traditions in Pakistan. His previous works include: *A White Trail: A Journey into the Heart of Pakistan's Religious Minorities* (2013) and *In Search of Shiva: A Study of Folk Religious Practices in Pakistan* (2015). *Walking With Nanak* is Khalid's quest to understand Guru Nanak as a poet, householder, traveler, and philosopher. It is part travelogue and part fiction. Khalid visits the places in Pakistan associated with Nanak, imagining and recreating the Guru's life, experiences, and interactions with contemporaries. Khalid travels with a guide and mentor, Iqbal Qaiser, whose work, *Historical Sikh Shrines in Pakistan*, was previously mentioned. Together, they cover several sites – some abandoned and on the verge of being lost, and others that are still

[43] Bainiwal, "Religious and Political," 12.

[44] R. Dhaliwal, "Post-Covid, Kartarpur Sahib Corridor Fails to Enthuse Devotees," *The Tribune*, June 20, 2022, https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/post-covid-kartarpur-corridor-fails-to-enthuse-devotees-405302.

[45] *Training lekar aaye hain* was noted by a Sikh woman in a personal communication, February 2, 2022. Dhaliwal, "Post-Covid."

[46] Singh, "Kartarpur Corridor: 5 Yrs on Key Promises."

[47] Bainiwal, "Religious and Political," 15.

[48] Haroon Khalid, *Walking With Nanak* (New Delhi: Tranquebar Press, 2016).

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being maintained by locals, both Sikhs and Muslims. On their visits, the duo interacts with the locals, learning about each site and its history, present life, and surrounding community. It is worthwhile to consider Khalid's work here, as it presents a recent documentation of Sikh shrines in Pakistan and also a non-Sikh, yet Punjabi and Pakistani, perspective on the notion of shared reverence.

In one instance, Khalid and Qaiser visit Sachkhand and Sacha Sauda, two gurdwaras in Farooqabad (formerly Chuhrkhana), the place of Guru Nanak's youth, which also feature in the Janam Sakhis, stories from the life of Nanak.[49] These two gurdwaras are associated with a well-known story from Nanak's youth that is popularly retold with many variations. In summary, Nanak shows little interest in worldly affairs as a young man, and his father, Mehta Kalu, becomes exasperated in all attempts to train Nanak in a profession. Once, Kalu gives Nanak some money to buy goods to resell in the market at a profit. While on his way to the market, Nanak meets a group of yogis (ascetics) who had not eaten anything for days. Without a second thought, Nanak buys food with the money and feeds the yogis, clinching a "true bargain" (*sacha sauda*). Wary of being scolded by his father, Nanak does not immediately return home, instead sitting on a mound nearby. When Mehta Kalu comes looking for Nanak and enquires about the goods he was asked to purchase, Nanak points to his sacks, which he had filled with mud, and says that he traded in sugar and jaggery. When the sacks are opened, the mud had indeed turned into sugar and jaggery. Today, Sachkhand and Sacha Sauda gurdwaras stand in commemoration of this story.

Gurdwara Sachkhand, as Khalid and Qaiser find it, was a white building, on its way to being transformed into the shrine of a *pir*. The word "Allah" was written on one of its walls and the interior had pictures of the *pir* and the Ka'aba alongside a few Islamic inscriptions. Khalid and Qaiser also see the grave of a Muslim saint outside the building, which, according to Qaiser, was a relatively recent development and had not existed the last time he visited the site. In his account, Khalid notes the visiting duo's interactions with the locals at the shrine and how the they remember its history. The local Muslims remember that this gurdwara was associated with Nanak and narrate the Janam Sakhi story of Sacha Sauda and Sachkhand. They speak of Nanak with great respect, as a "true devotee of God," informing the visitors that they had heard the Janam Sakhi stories as children, from their elders, and that Muslim and Sikh families lived together before Partition and shared these stories.[50] As the duo returns from the visit to Gurdwara Sachkhand, Qaiser expresses concern over the site's transformation. Khalid is surprised at Qaiser's anxiety, countering that it was remarkable and worth appreciating that Muslims of this area remember the stories of Nanak. Khalid further observes that here, even if the shrine had changed, the tradition still survived, comparing it to the situation of Nankana Sahib, where Muslims did not express such positive sentiments of shared legacy. Qaiser's response is worth quoting in full:

> That's true. That's because the Muslims of this area [Sachkhand] are those who were the inhabitants of this place before Partition. Therefore they had a relationship with the Sikhs and also associated with the legend of Guru Nanak. The majority of the Muslims in Nankana Sahib are those who migrated from

[49] Ibid., 54–58.
[50] Ibid., 57.

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> the other side of the border following Partition. They lost their homes and family members at the hands of Hindus and Sikhs. Their attitudes are therefore shaped by those experiences. The Muslims in this village were responsible for all those atrocities on Hindus and Sikhs.[51]

This conversation provides insight into the relationship of shared reverence, how it can be shaped by past and current local relationships (including of power and violence). In this case, those who retain and express the memory of a shared reverence are those who likely perpetrated violence against the very community with whom they shared this sensibility in the past and no longer live together with. Those who do not appear to be nostalgic about this shared past were the victims of violence at the hands of those with whom they shared a religious sensibility. To an onlooker, the locals invoking Nanak may seem admirable, evidence of a shared religious sensibility to be celebrated today (as it did to Khalid), but digging deeper exposes the relationships that shaped these memories. It also raises important questions: who invokes a shared legacy of reverence, why, and what might be its value today?[52]

Sindhis and the Guru Granth Sahib

The third episode under consideration is a 2023 event involving the Sindhi community, which unfolded as this article was being written. According to news reports, a group of men dressed as Nihangs (an armed sub-group in the Sikh community) and claiming to be from Amritsar entered a Sindhi *darbar* in Indore, Madhya Pradesh, India.[53] The group consisted of about ten armed people who threatened and argued with members of the Sindhi community. The Nihangs objected to the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib in a place that housed idols, claiming that this was *be-adbi* (disrespect) of the Guru and against the Sikh *maryada* (code of conduct). The Sindhis were told to either remove the idols or return the Guru Granth

[51] Ibid., 58.

[52] An example from India that can act as a parallel to this episode is the representation of a mosque-turned-gurdwara in a recently released Punjabi movie, *Sufna* (lit. dream). This shrine actually exists in Village Mohalla 12, Sri Ganganagar district, Rajasthan, and is one of several existing examples in India of mosques that were abandoned by fleeing villagers and later reused as gurdwaras. The opening of the song "Jaan Deyan Ge" from this film shows a conversation between the lead actors, playing the roles of a Sikh man and Muslim woman in a romantic relationship. The man explains the history of the gurdwara to the woman: as the Muslim residents of the village were leaving in 1947, they requested that the Sikhs not demolish the mosque. Honoring their request, the new Sikh residents of the village housed their "Baba" (the Guru Granth Sahib) within the same building. The man goes on to say, "after all, our God is one (shared, common)" (*Dona da sanjha hi hai rab*), invoking the Punjabi sense of shared reverence. Speed Records, "Jaan Deyan Ge | Sufna," YouTube video, January 20, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZHUYpZFT8gY. For more on the gurdwara, see Border Village Kisan, "Purani Maszid Bna Gurudwara | Border Village Kissan | Sufna film shooting," YouTube Video, December 16, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nuF37uwMnFY. This popular representation of shared reverence may be examined in multiple ways, including in the context of the representation of independent India as a secular and tolerant country and the depiction of a romantic relationship between a Hindu or Sikh man and a Muslim woman (rarely a Muslim man with a Hindu/Sikh woman) in movies (especially Bollywood). This discussion, however, is outside the scope of this paper.

[53] A *darbar* is a Sindhi–Sikh shrine that houses the Guru Granth Sahib along with images and idols of the Hindu gods.

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Sahib to a gurdwara. As reported in the BBC, nearly ninety copies of the Guru Granth Sahib were given up by local Sindhi families.[54] The gurdwara representatives in Indore claimed that Sindhi homes and temples had several such manuscripts in poor condition, which needed to be treated as per the *maryada* established by the Akal Takht. As such, these representatives argued that the Sindhis should *return* the Guru Granth Sahib in their possession, but conceded that the Sindhi community had been associated with Guru Nanak for several centuries and it was possible that this *be-adbi* was done out of ignorance rather than deliberate disrespect. Still, they insisted that it was important to maintain the sanctity of the Guru Granth Sahib as determined by the Akal Takht. Along similar lines, a former president of the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC) was reported as saying that Sindhis needed to be educated in proper conduct and etiquette towards the Guru Granth Sahib, ceasing their "un-Sikh" behavior (such as the presence of idols), and that this should be done in a polite manner rather than the violent way of the Nihangs.[55] A delegation of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) representatives from Amritsar soon visited Indore to discuss the matter with the Sindhis.[56]

As expected, this episode created both fear and resentment in the Sindhi community. Sindhis pointed out that they had always revered Guru Nanak and the Guru Granth Sahib, and that their *tikana*s (Sindhi–Hindu shrines) and *darbar*s (Sindhi–Sikh shrines) in Pakistan still continued to have copies of the Guru Granth Sahib. A fall out of the event was not only that the manuscripts were given up, but also that Sindhi leaders were now urging their community to follow only Hindu practices and give up all "Sikh" ones. As per a report, the Mahamandaleshwar (a title used by spiritual or religious heads) of Shri Panchayati Bada Udasin Akhara Prayagraj, Swami Hansraj, directed all Hindu Sindhis to give up all copies of the Guru Granth Sahib to the gurdwaras, urging them to follow only the "Sanatani" way of the Vedas, Upanishad, and the Gita, which he claimed had existed even before the Guru Granth Sahib came into being. The Nihangs' forced entry into the *darbar* was seen as an insult to the Hindu gods kept there and, in light of the disrespect shown by Sikhs to the gods, he exhorted the Sindhi community to unite against other religionists.[57]

The use of the word "returned" in news reports and debates on this issue is noteworthy, as it implied that Sindhis were giving up something they had borrowed

[54] S. Ravi, "Sindhi Samaj ke Log Kyun Lauta Rahe Hain Guru Granth Sahib ki Pratiyan," *BBC*, January 28, 2023, https://www.bbc.com/hindi/international-64316235.

[55] M.S. Khalsa, "Jago Party Expressed Concern Over the Return of Guru Granth Sahib Ji from Sindhi Locations," *Pipa News*, January 17, 2023, https://pipanews.com/jago-party-expressed-concern-over-the-return-of-guru-granth-sahib-ji-from-sindhi-locations-punjab-news-pipa-news/.

[56] J.S. Lamba, "Indore: Shiromani Kameti da Vafad Sindhi Samaj de Numaindiyan nu Miliya," *Punjabi Tribune*, January 30, 2023, 4. Both the DSGMC and SGPC are religious bodies that manage historic gurdwaras in Delhi and Punjab respectively. They are extremely influential in regulating the community's affairs and intimately involved in its politics.

[57] Staff Writer, "Sindhi Hindus to Adhere Only To Sanatani Practices And Return All The Copies of the Guru Granth Sahib Back to Sikhs: Top Udasi seer," *OpIndia*, January 27, 2023, https://www.opindia.com/2023/01/sindhi-hindus-to-adhere-to-sanatani-practises-return-all-copies-of-the-guru-granth-sahib-back-to-sikhs-top-udasi-seer/.

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from others, not something that had originally belonged to them. Additionally, the Sikh clergy and administrators of the gurdwaras were operating under the belief that Sindhis needed to be taught the correct way of conducting reverence; a way only Punjabi Sikhs could determine. This is based on the premise that the Guru Granth Sahib exclusively belongs to Sikhs, and that no other community or group can claim it. Even when there is a small acknowledgement of shared reverence, it is based on the belief that Sikhs are the real and original owners of the tradition and the Sindhi-Sikh path is a deviation from "Sikh" behavior. As Kothari's work has demonstrated, Sindhis' religious behavior was "fairly eclectic," influenced by both Sufi and Sikh traditions. Therefore, Sindhis (both Hindu and Muslim) worshipped *pir*s, showed reverence to the Guru Granth Sahib, and practiced a very non-textualized, porous religion.[58] Kothari quotes Motiram Ramwani, a noted Sindhi writer: "the Hindu of Sindh ceased to be a Hindu, and the Muslim ceased to be a Muslim. Islam came to Sindh in the form of Sufism, Guru Nanak's Sikhism came without its Khalsa element, all forms of religious thought changed their nature in Sindh."[59] Further, the Guru Granth Sahib and its readings were part of the daily life of Sindhi Hindus and a *tikana* would often have photos of Guru Nanak, the Guru Granth Sahib, and gods from the Hindu pantheon.[60] Colonial rule leading up to Partition, Kothari shows, brought about a gradual but definite change, with a decline in this character and a shift towards more definite and exclusive religious identities. Specifically, the strong religious affinities and social ties between Sindhi Hindus and Sindhi Sikhs were redefined after Partition, with migration away from Sindh into mainland India. As a result, many Sindhi Hindus gradually gravitated towards a rightwing understanding of Hinduism. Simultaneously, Sindhi Sikhs found themselves juggling between their Sindhi and Sikh identities in post-1947 India, where Sikhism was/is commonly and officially understood to be "Punjabi" and completely distinct from Hinduism.[61] Some Sindhis gave up speaking the Sindhi language and began speaking Punjabi, and there is a tendency to incorporate Punjabi elements (such as songs and greetings) into daily life to maintain and demonstrate their identity as Sikhs.[62]

Conclusion

The scholarship on religious traditions in Punjab recognises that the processes of colonialism and Partition consolidated exclusive religious identities and the logic of their incompatibility. Within this larger historical process, the existence of a shared tradition in pre-colonial Punjab has been variously highlighted by a number of scholars (as discussed in the first section of this article). In recent writings, there is

[58] Rita Kothari, "Sindhis: Hardening of Identities after Partition," *Economic and Political Weekly* 39, no. 35 (2004): 3885–3888. Also see, Steven W. Ramey, *Hindu, Sufi, or Sikh: Contested Practices and Identifications of Sindhi Hindus in India and Beyond* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

[59] Kothari, "Sindhis: Hardening," 3886.

[60] Rita Kothari and J. Thadani, "Sindhi Sikhs in India: The Missing People," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 39, no. 4 (2016): 873–890, https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2016.1233716. P. 6.

[61] Kothari and Thadani, "Sindhi Sikhs in India."

[62] Ibid., 17.

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greater recognition of the existence of shared reverence in post-Partition Punjab, including and particularly at popular shrines and through popular culture.[63]

The three episodes discussed here are recent (all occurring within the past decade) and demonstrate the existence of shared reverence in multiple sites and its expression in post-Partition India and Pakistan, with specific reference to the Sikh tradition. Additionally, these episodes also highlight the range of factors that shape the memory of shared reverence and its current expression. These range from the history of international relations and manoeuvring between the two post-Partition states to the interactions among communities within these independent nation-states and contemporary local factors, such as competing sections within a community.

A few specific observations can be made here. At the level of the nation-state, we see that the political mood in India determines its approach to Pakistan and its attitude towards the Kartarpur Sahib Corridor and Sikh shrines across the border. The Sikh diaspora's relationship with the Pakistani state and the ambitions of Punjabi youth in India are also factors affecting the way these shrines are considered by the Indian state on the one hand and the Indian population on the other. Popular expressions (such as, Punjabi songs) lament the loss of these shrines together with the loss of a shared tradition of religiosity. At the "official" or formal level of Sikh religious authority in India, the loss of gurdwaras is remembered as part of the community's daily ritual. At the same time, there are differences (even sharp conflicts) between the gurdwara authorities in Punjab and those in other states of India, influencing the Sikh stance towards shrines in Pakistan. These differences arise not only from current and local political tussles but, more importantly, from differences within Sikh communities themselves, as there are variations in the beliefs and practices of Sikhism between the dominant Khalsa tradition in Punjab and Sikh communities in other regions.[64] For instance, Banerjee points out that Bihari Sikh practices include celebrating Bihari "Hindu" festivals such as Chhath and the installation of two holy texts, the Guru Granth Sahib and the Dasam Granth, in the Takht Patna Sahib. Sikhs outside Punjab also "neither replicate the *rahit* nor are unaware of the five Ks."[65] Further, there are several instances in contemporary India, including in the recent past, in which dominant Sikh religious authorities in Punjab (most notably, the SPGC) have exerted tremendous pressure on "other Sikhs" to conform to the official version propagated by the former. This includes regulating the latter's language, daily rituals, major festivals, and determining who can possess and show reverence to the Guru Granth Sahib, as well as where and how.[66] This has

[63] Snehi, "Replicating Memory"; Snehi, "Situating Popular Veneration." Also see, Joginder Singh, *Religious Pluralism in Punjab: A Contemporary Account of Sikh Sants, Babas, Gurus and Satgurus* (Oxon, New York: Routledge, 2018).

[64] See Himadri Banerjee, *The Other Sikhs: A View from Eastern India* (Delhi: Manohar, 2003); Banerjee, *Beyond Punjab.* In these, Banerjee writes about Sikh communities outside Punjab and how their history, current beliefs, and practices are rooted in the local context and do not fit comfortably with the dominant Khalsa Sikhism of Punjab. Also see n. 33.

[65] Banerjee, *Beyond Punjab,* xx. *Rahit* denotes the Sikh code of conduct, and can also be written as *rahit maryada.*

[66] One can also note that, in 2016, Sehajdhari Sikhs (those who do not maintain the appearance of Khalsa Sikhs or do not undergo baptism, and may, for example, cut their hair) were denied voting rights in the SGPC through an amendment to the 1925 Sikh Gurdwaras Act. The justification behind this move

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implications for the idea and practice of shared reverence, which comes to fore most starkly in the case of the Sindhi–Sikh *darbar*s in Indore and, indeed, in the response of Sindhis there. The Sikh desire for access to and control over shrines (both within and outside India) is, in fact, based on an exclusive claim that limits the possibilities of the existence of shared traditions.[67]

Each of the episodes in this article can be understood as demonstrating and actively invoking shared reverence (and not complying with the logic of Partition or even the dominant post-Partition Sikh narrative). It becomes clear that shared traditions exist outside the dominant frameworks of nation-state and religion, and there are a range of pressures that bear upon them. In such a scenario, when shared reverence is seen as an anomaly or remnant of the past, there is strong pressure for it to be attached, dissolved, reformed, or even removed by the more dominant forces, pushing social groups towards homogeneity.

The local relationships that shape shared reverence also offer a cautionary note on the tendency to uncritically celebrate shared traditions. In the case of the Sachkhand and Sacha Sauda gurdwaras in Pakistan, while shared reverence is expressed by the local Muslim population, the memory and transformation of this shared tradition between local Pakistani Muslims and Sikhs appears intimately related to past violence and, perhaps, even the present-day absence of Sikhs at the gurdwara. This reminds us that shared reverence coexists and may even mask complicated relationships, interests, and claims, including that of violence, and these examples cannot be fully understood without unearthing these relationships (in the past or the present).

This article consciously moves away from categorizing shared reverence as syncretic, plural, or tolerant. Here, I draw on Mir's and Snehi's critique of terms such as syncretism and their emphasis on examining forms and sites of shared religiosity in colonial and post-Partition Punjab independently, without reference to "the centrality of Hindu, Muslim, or any other preexisting religious identity . . . [and with reference to] locally specific relationships, and local social and religious values."[68] The examples discussed in this article do not consider shared reverence as a mixture of two or more distinct traditions, but instead understand this phenomenon as a meaningful way of living for its adherents, in the context of both historical and contemporary relations (whether at the international, national, or local levels). In this sense, shared reverence is not so much a tradition to be reclaimed or rediscovered but a site of active contestation, whose significance can be determined by the wider

was that there was no concept of Sehajdhari in Sikhism and "non-Sikhs" should not be allowed to participate or vote in "Sikh" institutions.

[67] Scholars have used the term "territoriality" to describe the process of the creation and existence of boundaries not only in a physical sense but also as defining the limits of religious identity and spiritual domains. An examination of this process is considered important to the study of Punjab's religious traditions. See Yogesh Snehi, "Territorialising Shrines in the Sacred Landscape of Punjab," in *Punjabi Centuries: Tracing Histories of Punjab*, ed. Anshu Malhotra (Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan, 2023). Moreover, while one may argue that the Sikh conception of religious and political sovereignty and desire for unhindered cross-border movement ruptures the divisive logic of Partition (as done by Gurharpal Singh), it is evident that the idea of Sikh sovereignty is rooted in the Khalsa/Punjab version of Sikhism as the exclusive and dominant Sikh identity. This claim has emerged over a period of time, through a process that predates the creation of India and Pakistan.

[68] Mir, *Social Space of Language*, 177.

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context, participants, factors informing the practice and expression, and its results. A discussion of shared reverence, therefore, is not and must not be an appeal to return to a glorious or celebrated past. Rather, it is an invitation to critically examine the practice and value of present-day religious traditions. In the Sikh case, shared reverence becomes a tool offering possibilities to critically re-examine the community's understanding of its tradition, contemporary relationships, and aspirations.

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