

## **The phenomenon of possession and exorcism in north India and amongst the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton.**

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THE PHENOMENON OF POSSESSION AND EXORCISM IN NORTH  
INDIA

AND AMONGST THE PUNJABI DIASPORA IN WOLVERHAMPTON

SANDEEP SINGH CHOCHAN  
BA (HONS)

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of  
Wolverhampton for the degree of Master of Philosophy

August 2008

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## **Abstract**

### **The Phenomenon of Possession and Exorcism in north India and amongst the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton.**

Based upon two years fieldwork in Wolverhampton and Coventry, and several field trips to Punjab, this thesis focuses on the prevalence of possession and exorcism as a manifestation of Punjabi religion amongst the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton. Euro-centric scholarship and reform movements in the 1900s, in India, suppressed religious traditions that did not conform to the textual and institutionalised forms of religion.

This thesis proposes that the phenomenon of possession and exorcism observed amongst the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton is in no way novel, rather it is a diasporic reconstruction of a vital tradition found within the religious traditions from the Punjab, and on a larger scale in the Indian sub-continent. Furthermore the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton are in no way unique in the reconstruction of this religious tradition in Britain. Various forms of supernatural malaise are prevalent amongst the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton that are utilised by the community to explain the inexplicable diversities they face in daily life. These supernatural afflictions provide the Punjabi diaspora with a useful method of accepting adversity but also various methods to tackle it through the assistance of a baba or bhagat. This thesis explores the underlying cosmological discourses prevalent in the worldview of north Indian religious traditions in an attempt to analyse a relatively untouched phenomenon of religious beliefs and practices of the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton.

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## **The Phenomenon of possession and exorcism in North India and amongst the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton.**

### ***Introduction***

The phenomenon of possession and exorcism and its practice in the Indian sub-continent is well developed in academic study, however the presence of this phenomenon is woefully neglected in the academic study of religious communities in the United Kingdom. To my knowledge this is the first study that has attempted to study diaspora communities in Britain which profess a belief in supernatural possession and the healing benefits of exorcism as a remedy to this phenomenon. The communities that I have worked with have been in existence for approximately 15 years as established religious centres for healing supernatural possession. However belief in such phenomenon has been present within the diaspora communities since the re-institution of the family networks in the 1960s. Yet there is not a single study of these beliefs or practices in the academic study of diaspora communities in Britain. This study begins to fill this gap by answering the primary research questions. How has the phenomenon of possession and exorcism developed amongst the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton? How and why is this aspect of Punjabi religion so important to the Punjabi diaspora and furthermore to the academic study of religious communities in Britain.

This thesis proposes that the phenomenon of possession and exorcism observed amongst the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton is in no way novel, rather it is a diasporic reconstruction of a vital tradition found within the religious traditions from the Punjab, and on a larger scale in the Indian sub-continent. Furthermore the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton are in no way unique in the reconstruction of this religious tradition in Britain. If one were to study any substantial diaspora community I would assert that there would most certainly be an established baba adept in the phenomenon of diagnosing supernatural possession and in the practice of exorcism who would be able to assist the afflicted and their families. However, although these aspects of religion are not unique or isolated to the Punjab or to the diaspora in Wolverhampton, the

marginalising of these phenomenon has eroded their importance within academic study but also amongst members of the diaspora community. The thesis states that this is a result of firstly, the continuation of the euro-centric scholarship which has plagued the study of religions. This trend has been further solidified by the Hindu reformation and Singh Sabha movements which sought to eradicate erroneous beliefs and practices which were not found within the religious scriptures of the two traditions. Secondly within the diaspora communities the affects of migration and later the re-institution of religious centres of worship strictly based on constructed religious boundaries advanced the subjugation of other religious phenomenon abundant within the Punjab and the larger Indian sub continent.

Utilising Ballard's four dimensional approach to Punjabi religion this study will provide a detailed account of Punjabi religion amongst the Punjabi diaspora and the importance of these religious traditions for the diaspora community. The dimensions of 'Panth, Kismet Dharm te Qaum' are concerned with inspirational leadership, unfortunate incidents explained as fate or the work of the supernatural, the divine laws and the process of constructing a community respectively. Applying Ballard's four dimensional approach to Punjabi religions amongst the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton provides a unique analytical framework within which the data gathered amongst the Punjabi diaspora can be analysed. The interaction between the more rigid dimensions of dharm and qaum, and the dimensions of panth and kismet which are the focus of the study provides a unique manner in which to analyse and decipher a more accurate picture of the true religious landscape and sentiment of the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton. Preliminary analysis has shown that the dharmic and qaumic sentiments of the initial diaspora communities were accelerated by the hostilities and difficulties of migration, settlement and raising children in an alien country. In establishing places of worship for the new communities the dharmic and eventually the qaumic dimensions of religion were expounded as the only way in which religion could be perceived and practised. The panthic and kismetic dimensions were initially almost wholly neglected by the diaspora community, apart from certain beliefs which were maintained by all within their homes. For example the restriction of washing ones hair on certain days is an example of a

simple form of kismet religion found amongst the Punjabi diaspora which is not part of the dharmic dimension, but was nevertheless adhered to amongst the Punjabi diaspora. Hence the study of diaspora communities in Britain were provided with a picture of religious belief and practice within this country which was developed by the diaspora community but also as a continuation of the religious boundaries which were erected by earlier euro-centric scholarship and the reformation movements in the Indian sub-continent.

This thesis proposes that the development of the panthic and kismet dimensions of religion amongst the diaspora community was caused by a growing need to address unfortunate incidents that are readily explained in the Punjab as the work of a supernatural agent or malaise. Amongst the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton religion was wholly constructed around the dimensions of dharm. The political and religious turmoil in the Punjab during the 1980s re-enforced the qaumic dimension of religion amongst the Punjabi diaspora. The concept of panth was sporadically experienced in Wolverhampton with Sants and babas visiting the area on religious tours for a few weeks at a time. The dimension of kismet was focussed within minor rituals and beliefs observed in the homes of the diaspora community.

There are two reasons for the growth of kismet and the permanence of the panthic dimensions of Punjabi religion amongst the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton. First and foremost the Punjabi diaspora having established their religious institutions focussed on the dimensions of dharm and qaum had grown in confidence to develop their religious belief system to include the dimension of kismet within the public sphere rather than maintaining it within the home or family network. The Punjab provided and still provides a complex religious belief system within which the concepts of panth, kismet, dharm te qaum are adequately catered for. The diaspora community were used to this spectrum of religious beliefs, however these aspects had been neglected and displaced with a sanitised form of religion focussing on the dimension of dharm and qaum. This thesis asserts that the growing confidence of the diaspora community and their need to address new elements and dilemmas in this constantly changing environment necessitated the development of religious centres focussed on

kismatic elements of religion. Initially a common belief amongst the early settlers of the Punjabi diaspora in Britain was that supernatural malaise or afflictions could not afflict people outside of the Indian sub-continent. Hence practitioners of sorcery or those adept in the arts of afflicting others with supernatural malaise residing in the Indian sub-continent could not harm the diaspora abroad because of the physical distance. This thesis asserts the pivotal phase for the development of the kismatic dimension of religion amongst the Punjabi diaspora was the growth of the British born generation of the Punjabi diaspora. Scholars of various disciplines have commented on the difficulties or complexities within which the British-born generation of the diaspora contend with on a daily basis. The focus has inevitably been on the coping mechanisms used by the settled Punjabi diaspora and the British born generation in traversing this seemingly difficult minefield of living in two parallel but co-existing cultural traditions. A strategy that has been neglected in the academic study of diasporas is the role of popular religion, especially kismatic forms of religion that are unique in dealing with difficulties during this phase of the diaspora in Britain. Within the diaspora in Wolverhampton I assert that the introduction and prominence of the kismatic dimension of religion amongst the Punjabi diaspora transpired as a mechanism to cope with difficulties experienced between the British born-generation and their parents. Although this was not the only reason for the development of the kismatic dimension of Punjabi religion, I have found that this has been a major influence on its growth during the 1990s when the religious centres which this thesis focuses on were established and grew exponentially to cater for the ever increasing need of the *babas* services.

Second the increasing number of *babas* or *bhagats* available to assist with the kismatic dimension of religion accelerated the emergence of this dimension of Punjabi religion into the public sphere. In Punjab where there was an abundance of various *babas* or *bhagats* who could address the kismatic needs of the people, amongst the diaspora community these pivotal roles were initially non-existent. However as the British-born generation of the Punjabi diaspora developed the necessity of this integral part of Punjabi religion was required to confront difficulties or unexplained occurrences. Hence, the kismatic dimension was sort as an answer to these dilemmas, consequently the role of the *baba* emerged

amongst the Punjabi diaspora. The *babas* or *bhagats* who began to provide their services initially arrived in Britain in the same manner as the Punjabi diaspora and followed the normal course of migration and settlement. However as the requirements to address the kismatic dimension of religion grew the role of the *babas* as adept practitioners of healing and counselling and able to explain the complexities of the kismatic dimension of religion were constructed.

The thesis begins with a study of the development of the dharmic and qaumic dimensions of religion detailing the arrival of the south Asian diaspora in Britain. The first chapter will consider the general models utilised by scholars which have shaped the study of diaspora communities in Britain. Chapter 1 will deal with the development of the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton and the development of the dharmic and qaumic centralised religious traditions in the city.

Chapter 2 will provide a detailed account of Punjabi religion in Wolverhampton focusing on the development of the origins and development of the Peer Darbar and Ek Niwas in Wolverhampton. These religious centres are unique in that they are the first fully functional places of worship catering for the diaspora community where the focus of the religion is towards the kismatic dimension of religion. Furthermore the development of these places of worship under the guidance of a *baba* has also advanced the spread of the panthic dimension of Punjabi religion beyond the *Sants* of the Sikh tradition present in Wolverhampton.

Whereas chapter 2 provides a macrocosmic view of Punjabi religion in Wolverhampton and the historical development of these traditions in the Punjab, chapter 3 will provide a microcosmic view of the phenomenon of possession and exorcism practised amongst the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton. Case studies of individuals and families experiences of possession and exorcism that have been observed at Peer Darbar and Ek Niwas will be provided highlighting the complex phenomenon of various forms of supernatural malaise or possession that can at times afflict individuals or families. Furthermore the various procedures of removing such afflictions will be outlined from the simple wearing

of protective amulets and drinking blessed water to a the full process of an exorcism.

Subsequently chapter 4 will consider the key theological, philosophical and cosmological discourse at work in the practice of Punjabi religion amongst the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton. This discourse will clearly show the overlapping discourses of the Nath tradition of tantric yoga, the influence of the ecstatic devotionalism in the nirguna and saguna schools of bhakti, and the sufi cosmological ideas. These apparently divergent religious traditions are within the realm of Punjabi religion so densely absorbed within each other that the resulting beliefs and practices of the Punjabi diaspora are wholly unique and novel. However it is only when we begin to delve into the dimensions of kismet and panthic religion that this unique overlapping of religious discourses becomes so apparent and enlightening in providing an accurate account of religious beliefs amongst the Punjabi diaspora.

Chapter 5 is concerned with the issues of spirit possession or other supernatural malaise and the process of exorcism or healing focussing on the therapeutic effectiveness of these practices. Although these beliefs and procedures are well grounded in the discourses outlined in the previous chapter it is imperative of any study which tackles issues within the kismet realm of religion to assess the importance of these beliefs and practices and the healing impact they have for believers. With this in mind the anthropological perspectives routinely used to examine these issues will be employed to gain a fuller understanding of the curative effects of these beliefs and practices for the Punjabi diaspora. Chapter 6 will provide a examination of the major contributions to the development of 'Popular religion'. Detailing the euro-centric scholarship, which motivated this school of thought, this chapter will explore how Ballards four dimensional schema assists in the study of Punjabi religion in Wolverhampton

Finally chapter 7 will consider the validity of possession and exorcism in the modern day. Considering the strong theological, philosophical and cosmological discourses within which these beliefs and practices are so well established, this final part of the thesis will consider whether the phenomenon of possession and

exorcism are outmoded superstitious practices in the present religious landscape of the Punjabi diaspora in Britain. This chapter will draw on the discussions in earlier chapters to consider and indicate the problematic relationship between the dharmic and qaumic dimensions and the kismet and panthic elements of Punjabi religion. This will lead to conclude how the dimensions of path and kismet have been neglected not only amongst some parts of the Punjab diaspora who prefer to portray a more dharmic and qaumic orientated view of their respective religious traditions but also the western scientific and euro-centrally disposed view of these aspects of the religion amongst the Punjabi diaspora.

### ***Methodology***

In exploring the prevalence of kismet forms of religion amongst the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton I have utilised the religious studies approach whereby firstly the centrality of the possession and exorcism phenomenon in the Indian religious traditions is established, and secondly how through the processes of migration these beliefs have transported and developed amongst the diaspora community. The pre-disposition of religious studies to focus on the historical study of religions, in which, the essential and routinely doctrinal elements of religious traditions are portrayed as the norm. As a student of religious studies, the focus of this research is to explore in and amongst the Punjabi diaspora of Wolverhampton religious beliefs and practices which are evidently part of the daily lives of the Punjabi community in the city but are not mentioned in the study of diaspora communities. While acknowledging the religious studies approach taken for this research it was inevitable that other disciplines would be considered and explored, firstly because of a lack of academic literature within my own field and secondly and most importantly, to gather and provide a more comprehensive and accurate portrayal of the exorcist tradition in the Indian sub-continent. Hence the fields of anthropology, history, psychology and mental sciences have been explored in order to gain a wider understanding of exorcist practices in the Indian religious traditions, however apart from Geaves (1996b, 1998, 1999) work on the Baba Balak Nath cult in Walsall and Wolverhampton, no other work has been published on the emergence of regional religious traditions amongst the south Asian diaspora in Britain.

Three communities within Wolverhampton and Coventry have been selected as the focus of the research where the practice of exorcisms is a part of the daily religious practices within the community. The communities have been selected because of their close links with religious centres in the Punjab and their focus on the kismet elements of religion. The communities are firstly, the Peer Darbar, which is dedicated to Baba Kangar Wala a local sufi in Mehndowal village in the Punjab. The Peer Darbar displays an extremely eclectic tendency towards almost all the various deities and gurus and religious figures of Punjab. Second Ek Niwas, a universal temple dedicated essentially to Baba Balak Nath, however the baba at Ek Niwas has a universal ethos hence the placement of Guru Granth Sahib and Quran within the building. Thirdly Gurdwara Ajit Darbar in Coventry, which is dedicated to Baba Vadbhag Singh, a Sikh related to the Guru's who is revered as an exorcist and healer par excellence amongst the Punjabi's. Although this thesis focuses mainly on the development and communities that congregate at Peer Darbar and Ek Niwas, the Ajit Darbar in Coventry has been included in the thesis firstly because of the regional links to the Punjab and Baba Vadbhag Singh's esteemed position in the region. Secondly the community regards itself as a part of the Sikh tradition rather than a eclectic universal tradition, hence providing a different form of Punjabi religion amongst the diaspora. Thirdly a high number of devotees that attend Ajit Darbar in Coventry actually live in and around Wolverhampton.

Within the three primary research locations a period of approximately two years of observation have taken place. Within north Indian religion several days in the week are accorded special merit and attendance at the temples was higher on these days, usually Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday. Hence observation on these days was given prime importance and further supplemented on other days if and when required. The observations were focussed on times of peak attendance at the temple, which was usually in the early evening when the whole community performed aarti. Observations on Sundays were carried out throughout the day, as it was the busiest day in the week in terms of attendance. The period of observation over this length of time was firstly to gain the respect and trust of the communities in which I was carrying out my research. Secondly I was aware of

these communities before beginning this research and have observed certain forms of development which will be explored in the thesis, hence over the two year period I wanted to observe any other changes or developments may take place.

As I can speak Punjabi fluently, I was able to understand what was being said through the process of exorcism and gain an insight into the religious practices and beliefs of the communities under observation. This prolonged period of observation at the research locations gave me the opportunity to grasp the processes of exorcism and understand the complex belief structure in supernatural malaise, spirit, ghost and ancestral possession and the practice of sorcery. The period of observation also provided opportunities for me to familiarise myself with the community and identify possible candidates for the interview process.

As is the case with any research carried out through observation and interviews there is the problem of the researcher's influence on the outcome of the data. This problem was minimalised in this research because of my longstanding contact with the communities under observation. I was accepted within the communities even though they are aware of my academic interest in their beliefs and practices. Banks (1992) observed in his own research on the Jain community in India and Britain, that because no contact had previously been made with the communities by a academic source they were not biased against his aims as an academic studying their community. This is also true of the communities within which my research has been conducted. Although Ek Niwas gained a stint of bad publicity in April 2000 through tabloid journalism my working relationship with the groups was unhindered.

As well as the periods of observation it was necessary to conduct a series of interviews to gain a more in-depth understanding of the beliefs of devotees. Three groups were selected for the interview process keeping in mind the aims to assess the beliefs and practices in the phenomenon of possession and to ascertain the role of the baba amongst the Punjabi diaspora. In the communities selected for research the initial interviews were conducted with the *babas* of Peer Darbar and Ek Niwas. The *baba* from Ajit Darbar, Ajit Singh Chaggar, spent most of his

time between Canada and India. Although he did visit the Coventry gurdwara twice during my period of observation, I was unsuccessful in being able to interview him. Initially when I began the research I had planned on conducting semi-structured interviews and recording all the information on audiocassette. However this proved to be a hindrance in that the *baba's* and later devotees that were interviewed would become tongue tied and reluctantly accepted the use of recording equipment. I then continued my interviews in an unstructured manner and letting the informant lead the interview if necessary by focussing on the information I was receiving. As S. S. Kalsi (1989) notes during his research in the Punjabi communities of Bradford and Leeds a formal interview hindered the process and did not allow the informants to provide personal beliefs and feelings to the forefront. Hence Kalsi conducted his interviews by visiting the houses of informants and partaking of their Punjabi hospitality. By dining with his informants and making the process of data gathering a social event rather than a formal interview setting, informants were allowed to talk freely on topics that were raised and follow avenues of interest resulting in the uncovering of information that would not have been gathered through formal processes. As the bulk of my fieldwork and interviews are based in the religious centres I have also enjoyed the hospitality of these communities and have found that conversations over a cup of tea have been highly rewarding.

As well as the *babas* of the centres I have interviewed close followers or *sevadars* (servers) within the community who help in the daily running of the centres. Usually arriving early at the centres provided me with the opportunity to talk to close followers and gauge their views on certain topics. I also interviewed regular worshippers at these centres to gain a whole picture of how each community has developed in its own unique way and how the community en masse view their respective leaders. The final group of interviewees were other religious traditions from the Indian sub-continent that are present in the same towns as the three main research centres. The interviews have been conducted mainly with the leaders of other Sikh and Hindu communities in order to understand the relationship between the religious centres where exorcisms take place and the wider religious communities of the diaspora.

The original contribution to knowledge is to provide the first academic study of exorcist and healing traditions amongst the Punjabi diaspora in Britain. As outlined earlier, this area of religious practice has been neglected in the study of religions and consequently its emergence in Britain has gone relatively unnoticed or has been ignored. This study will be a basis for further research on a very important form of religious beliefs and practices, which provide and insight into the complex system of religious traditions in this country.

The Ballards' (1977) four-stage migration process has been utilised as a yardstick of migration from south Asia. This model has been used to describe the different stages of migration that have taken place from the south Asia to Britain. The Ballards' work provided a classical model that could be used and manipulated to fit other South Asian migrations and settlement in Britain. After the initial focus on the migration and settlement process of south Asians to this country scholars, based on the Ballards' model, scholars endeavoured to explore issues of ethnicity, identity and community. The University of Leeds, Community Religions Project is a prime example of the research conducted in the field of religious studies, exploring the settlement and development of South Asian communities in Britain.

The aim of the thesis is to provide an in-depth study of these religious centres where healing and exorcism take place and to explore the role kismatic dimensions of religion in general play in the lives of the Punjabis in Wolverhampton. Furthermore the importance of the *baba* or charismatic religious leader will also be explored. As yet there has been little focus on the role of holy men in this country. Barrow (1999), Kalsi (1992), Geaves (1996b, 1998, 2000) and Bowen (1988) have explored briefly the role of religious leaders in this country, but none has focussed on the role the babas that heal, exorcise and give guidance to people in places like Peer Darbar, Ek Niwas and Ajit Darbar.

The contribution to knowledge will be further enhanced by considering the theories of cultural typification, deprivation and hysteria and their applicability to the beliefs in possession and practice of exorcism and healing amongst the Punjabi diaspora in the West Midlands. The focus will be on the religious

reasons behind the affliction of possession and its treatment by the babas, however cultural or social implications will also be discussed. The centrality of the baba most salient feature of Punjabi religion especially within the Punjabi diaspora will be highlighted and explored. Parts of the thesis were published as contributions to edited compilations, for which the details are included in the bibliography.

## **Chapter One**

### **The South Asian diaspora in Britain and the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton**

The study of the South Asian diaspora in Britain was undertaken in the 1970s some twenty years after the process of migration from South Asia to Britain had begun. Works on the diaspora communities have explored the formation of distinct religious communities in different parts of Britain. Hence there are separate studies of Sikh, Hindu and Muslim communities in Britain, their development through the process of migration in the 1960s to the present-day development of second and third generations of the diaspora. In this chapter a brief summary of the South Asian diaspora in Britain will be provided exploring, the process of migration and settlement. Secondly, the impact and importance of diaspora studies in Britain will be examined, focussing on the problems that researchers have faced as a result of their own segregation of religion and as a result of the migrants' portrayals of their religious beliefs and practices. Thirdly, the development of the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton will be provided. It is inevitable that this chapter focuses on the Sikh community because the vast majority of the Punjabi diaspora community are Sikh. However I do consider the Hindu Punjabi migrants, even though they are limited in number in terms of the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton.

#### ***South Asian communities in Britain***

In 1977 Roger and Catherine Ballard identified a four-stage migration process, which traced the settlement of Sikhs in Britain. Although this model focussed on Sikh migration, it has been used as a yardstick for migration from south Asia to Britain in general. The Ballards' work provided a classical model that could be used and manipulated to fit other South Asian migrations and settlement in Britain. Hence 'Our model would seem to apply generally to all those of rural and peasant origin in South Asia...' (Ballard and Ballard, 1977: 51)

Although a Sikh organization was formed in London in 1908 and a gurdwara was also established in 1913, these were not the roots of the migration process, which accelerated in the latter half of the century. The first stage of migration witnessed the individual pioneers arriving in Britain around the 1920s and making a living through peddling door to door. This group consisted mainly of the Bhatra Sikhs who continued their occupation of peddling in Britain as they had in India.

The second stage of migration in the 1950s was a result of the post World War boom in Britain. The migration of males was a result of the need for unskilled labour in the industrial sector. This was never seen as an opportunity to settle in Britain by the migrants but was regarded as a good opportunity to make as much money as possible and return to India and live a comfortable life.

The third stage of migration in the 1960s saw the reunion of the males settled in Britain with their wives and children as a result of the restrictions being imposed by the new immigration laws in Britain. Consequently there was a mass migration of women and children to Britain before the legislation took effect. Other extended family members and kin were also sponsored to come to Britain and partake of the riches before the immigration legislation could restrict the migration process. The family unit was re-instituted in an alien and occasionally hostile environment. This situation exacerbated the need for religious organisations, beliefs and practices amongst the community. However, even at this stage it was not regarded as a long-term situation and a return to India was envisaged after earning substantial amounts of money. Nevertheless as family units had been established, religious needs began to come to the forefront. In the late 1960s and into the 1970s buildings specifically for religious worship were purchased or rented in which weekly communal worship could be held. According to Terrence Thomas (1993), between 1955 and 1959 seven *gurdwaras* were opened, by 1975 this figure had increased above fifty and in 1989 the number had grown to approximately 149 *gurdwaras* (Thomas, 1993: 216).

The fourth stage of the migration process in the 1970s continued with the one-time migrants raising families in Britain. As the family unit had been reunited in the third phase of the migration process, it was inevitable that the family group

would develop. The birth and education of young Sikhs in British schools was the fourth and final stage of the Ballards' process. Furthermore the ghetto lifestyle of the previous phases from the all male households to several families living in one terraced house moved on. With greater prosperity the migrants were able to move on from those cramped conditions into a suburban lifestyle. The family growth further intensified the feelings and need for religious practices and organisations. The concentration around a religion also served as a way to reminisce about their homeland and gather as a community on a regular basis.

After the initial focus on the migration and settlement process of South Asians to this country scholars endeavoured to explore issues of ethnicity, identity and community amongst the diaspora. Their religious beliefs, practices and traditions were prominent features of their identity or ethnicity along with association to their homeland. The University of Leeds' Community Religions Project (CRP) is a prime example of the research conducted in the field of religious studies, exploring the settlement and development of South Asian communities in Britain. Scholars such as Kim Knott, Seva Singh Kalsi and Ron Geaves have all conducted and published monographs on the developments of Hindu, Sikh and Muslim communities in major towns and cities throughout Britain.

The study of South Asian migration and their religious traditions has been an important part of academic study since the 1970s, the work of the CRP has a number of aims of which several are expressed as follows:

- (a) It aims to provide more in-depth information on particular religions by encouraging empirical research...
- (b) It aims to investigate the different stages in the reproduction of the religions of ethnic minorities in Britain and to raise questions concerning their future development.
- (c) It aims to contribute to academic debates about the relationship between religion and ethnicity...(Knott, 1992: 6-7)

Each monograph has focused on individual religious diaspora in Britain in certain cities or towns. They trace the migration, settlement and development of

the specific diaspora groups focusing on the development of their religious traditions. The monographs have followed general frameworks and have been at the forefront of South Asian diaspora studies in Britain.

It is within the present array of studies that an examination of the exorcist and healing traditions of the Indian sub-continent was undertaken, focussing on the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton. This thesis expands on the macrocosmic view of earlier diaspora studies of religious communities in Britain, and provides a microcosmic view of religions as practised by the diaspora communities in Britain. For several reasons, which will be discussed in chapter two, initial studies of the diaspora communities focussed on restrictive religious boundaries enforced by academics and the diaspora communities. However by the 1990s the macrocosmic view enforced and publicised was gradually replaced by the need for a microcosmic view of diaspora communities in Britain. This thesis contributes to this new area of study where the religious boundaries, which restricted the study of south Asian religions in Britain, are gradually removed to provide a new and more accurate view of religious beliefs and practices amongst the diaspora communities in Britain.

Ek Niwas and Mandir Peer Darbar were selected as the focus of the research because of the history of migration from the Punjab to Wolverhampton, which exemplifies the four-stage migration process. But more so the communities, which have formed around these two religious centres, provide a vivid and vital picture of the state and development of the Punjabi diaspora. Before an exploration of these centres can commence an overview of the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton will be provided. This will focus for the most on the Sikh community in Wolverhampton. Although this may seem paradoxical with the aims outlined for this thesis in focus on using the label of 'Sikh' for a specific community, the present author has elected in this instance to use this restrictive term. The reason being that the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton, which were observed and interviewed for this phase of the thesis, referred to themselves as Sikh rather than referring to the geographical location of where the diaspora community originated. Rather than geographical location, religious adherence or labelling was the primary reference point for the informants individually and for

the community as a whole. This is not to say that all Punjabis in Wolverhampton are Sikhs or vice versa. However, for the purposes of providing a brief overview of the migration process in Wolverhampton the term Sikh has been used synonymously with the Punjabi diaspora for this chapter. This also reflects that the information gathered for this chapter was collated from amongst Sikh members of the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton.

### ***The Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton***

Wolverhampton provides a student of religious studies with a truly luxurious landscape in terms of the religious traditions and faiths that are present in the city. There are over 150 places of worship in Wolverhampton, which provides a rich and diverse location in which the study of religions is at the forefront of exploring the development of different communities in Britain. In this thesis a complete overview of the various religious traditions in Wolverhampton from Punjabi origin will not be provided. In this part of thesis a brief outline of the historical background of the Sikh and to a lesser extent the Hindu communities established in Wolverhampton, will be provided exploring the early phases of establishment of the *gurdwaras* and *mandirs* in Wolverhampton. Although this is not the focus of the thesis, invaluable first hand accounts of the early phases of migration amongst the Sikh and Hindu communities were collated during my field visits and interviews with different members of the perspective communities. Although the information was focussed on gaining a better understanding of the relationship between the key research centres and other places of worship that serve the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton, background information on the early phases of migration and the subsequent establishment of the places of worship amongst the Sikhs and Hindus was also collected.

Evidently there is a problem with the limitations of the terminology within which the research was undertaken and information available via Census 2001 on the number of Punjabis living in Wolverhampton. However based on the well documented processes of migration in earlier academic studies of the South Asian diaspora it is possible to deduce that the majority of Wolverhampton's Sikh and Hindu community have migrated from the Punjab region. There is a

significant Gujarati community in Wolverhampton with a Gujarati Community centre located on Mander Street in the Pennfields area. However their presence at Ek Niwas or Mandir Peer Darbar was limited to several families attending sporadically throughout the period of the fieldwork carried out there. The majority of the Gujarati community were found to attend the Shree Krishan Mandir on Penn Road in Wolverhampton and the Sai Baba Centre on Lonsdale Road in Wolverhampton. Ek Niwas and Mandir Peer Darbar, which were the primary points of observation and research in this thesis, were hesitant to state whether there was a Gujarati presence within the *sangat*, focussing on their aims to provide centres for worship for members of all religious traditions and communities regardless of religion, caste or regionality. However, throughout my observations at both centres, only at Ek Niwas were members of the Gujarati community to be found on a very few occasions.

In order to examine the presence of the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton specifically in-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out with committee members of the Guru Nanak Gurdwara Sedgley Street/Duncan Street. The purpose of choosing this *gurdwara* to gain primary information on the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton was firstly that this is the largest *gurdwara* in Wolverhampton. Secondly, the Sedgley Street *gurdwara*, as it is popularly known amongst the diaspora community, is the first *gurdwara* to be established in Wolverhampton. Thirdly, the proximity of this *gurdwara* to Ek Niwas and the antagonised association between these centres of worship provides an invaluable insight into the views of the Sikh community towards religious practices and beliefs in supernatural malaise and its healing. Furthermore, in recent years Ek Niwas' aims at providing a place of worship for all religious traditions has proved to be an extremely contentious and at times violent issue between worshippers at Ek Niwas and the wider Sikh community.

These divisive issues amongst the Punjabi diaspora are explored in later chapters. Presently a brief overview of the establishment of the Sikh community in Wolverhampton will be provided. The Census 2001 reported

Almost a third (31 per cent) of the Sikh population lived in the West Midlands. They were particularly concentrated in the Wolverhampton and Sandwell areas: 8 per cent and 7 per cent respectively of the populations of these local authorities were Sikh. A further 31 per cent of the Sikh population lived in London.  
<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/CCI/nugget.asp?ID=956&Pos=3&ColRank=2&Rank=224>

Based on these statistics it would be fair to say that 8 per cent of the population in Wolverhampton is hence Punjabi in origin. There are two *Ramgarhia gurdwaras* in Wolverhampton. However, their formation is not linked directly to the secondary migration of East African Sikhs to Britain as a result of their expulsion by the Ugandan government. The Ramgarhia Board Sikh Temple and the Ramgarhia Sabha were formed as a result of conflicts amongst committee members in other *gurdwaras*. However, these statistics do reflect the growth of the Sikh community not only in numbers but also in their vast development in terms of modern purpose built *gurdwaras* and the provisions provided for the Sikh community. Darshan Singh Tatla (1999) rightly states that

A distinctive mark of the Sikh diaspora is the dedication with which the *gurdwaras* have been built. The location and history of *gurdwaras* are intimately connected with the settlement pattern of Sikhs (Table 3.3). *Gurdwaras* have served many functions, providing social, educational and political activities as well as being religious centres. (Tatla, 1999: 74)

Wolverhampton has been no exception to this trend. Karnail Singh Bath (1972) in his unpublished MA thesis on the distribution and spatial patterns of the Punjabi population in Wolverhampton states that there were four *gurdwaras* in Wolverhampton in the late 1960s. Today there are eleven *gurdwaras* in Wolverhampton of which four are purpose-built with a mixture of modern European and traditional Indian architecture.

Initially members of the Sikh community in Wolverhampton congregated in an old YMCA hall on Sundays to hold *divaans*. This could possibly

have been on Kennick Road in Wolverhampton, but the informants could not recollect the exact location. According to one of the informants this *gurdwara* or weekly *divaan* began in commemoration of the 1956 Punjabi Sabha Morchas (agitations) in the Punjab. The membership at the weekly *divaans* was limited, and, according to the informant, ‘only the lovers of Sikhism would get together’, in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib. However, as the community began to grow and develop the need for a permanent place of worship became imperative. Initially the old YMCA hall was purchased and became the first *gurdwara* in Wolverhampton. The informant was unable to say when the *gurdwara* was actually established but it was already functioning as a *gurdwara* when he arrived in the country in 1964. However, the building was dilapidated and in need of major structural work. Furthermore the *gurdwara* attracted a lot of resentment from the local community. The informants highlighted the teddy boys as one particular group with which the Sikh community had a number of disputes during this period. In 1965 there was a conflict amongst the members of the *gurdwara* committee resulting in the establishment of another *gurdwara* on Westbury Street in the town centre. Initially the building was rented but eventually it was purchased and the Ramgarhia Board Sikh Temple was established there.

As a result of the unsafe nature of the old YMCA hall on Kennick Road and the hostilities of the local community, two shops were brought on Cannock Road for a new *gurdwara*. These premises were later incorporated in the Wolverhampton Ring Road widening scheme and the *gurdwara* was moved to Vernon Street off Cannock Road where an old church was purchased in 1967. They stayed at the Vernon Street *gurdwara* for approximately ten years; however the *gurdwara* was moved once again when the land was required for a new housing estate. The *gurdwara* was then established at its present site, which was then an old soft drinks factory around 1977. Since then the *gurdwara* has been gradually developed and expanded by purchasing properties adjacent to the *gurdwara*. In 1987 a new purpose-built *darbar* and *langar* hall were built and currently another *darbar* and *langar* hall are under construction adjoining the 1987 extension. According to the informants as a result of the growth of the Sikh community in

Wolverhampton but more so a consequence of in-fighting amongst committee members there has been the establishment of a number of other *gurdwaras* in Wolverhampton.

The role of the *gurdwara* has also developed in a response to the needs of the second and third generation Sikh children in Wolverhampton as elsewhere in Britain. The primary focus has been on teaching Punjabi to the younger generations hence most of the *gurdwaras* in Wolverhampton run Punjabi schools throughout the week and particularly during the weekends incorporated with Sikh studies and *kirtan* classes. The Guru Nanak Gurdwara on Sedgley Street is able to provide a whole array of other amenities for the Sikh community in Wolverhampton. There are specific days in which worship sessions are arranged for women, and on another day for youth worship sessions. These weekly events are provided for specific groups so that all members of the community undertake the whole aspect of worship from attending the Guru Granth Sahib, to serving the *karah prashad* and *langar*. Especially within the youth *divaans*, emphasis is placed on younger members of the Sikh community into facing problems that they encounter on a daily basis through studying and understanding their religious traditions and history. *Katha* (discourses) are conducted by younger members of the Sikh community in English, which is a step away from the traditional Punjabi. However *kirtan*, which is still performed in the traditional *Gurmukhi* of the Guru Granth Sahib, is translated and transliterated using the [www.sikhitohemax.com](http://www.sikhitohemax.com) Guru Granth Sahib search engines and projected onto projection screens placed at the front of the *Darbar* hall. This provides members of the Sikh community who are not fluent in Punjabi to understand what is being read and sung from the Guru Granth Sahib. *Gatka*, the traditional martial arts of the Sikhs, is also taught at weekends. Within the *gurdwara* complex a nursery and day care centre have been built with funding from the local council as a part of a re-generation scheme in the Blakenhall area of Wolverhampton where the *gurdwara* is located. The needs of the older members of the community are also catered for with information clinics and other services, which could assist members of the community who have problems communicating in English. A new trend within the *gurdwaras* in general has been the arrangement of Yoga classes after the popularisation of yoga amongst the Punjabi and South Asian

diaspora in Britain by Swami Ramdev, through his yoga instruction on satellite and cable televisions Aastha TV channel.

The development of the Sikh tradition amongst the Sikhs in Wolverhampton has been similar to other parts of the country. In the 1960s and 1970s there were very few *Amritdhari* Sikhs. According to Gurharpal Singh and Darshan Singh Tatla (2006) it was *Ramgarhia* Sikhs that were mainly responsible for maintaining the image of Sikhs in the late 1960s with unshorn hair and turbans. Whereas earlier settlers had trimmed their beards and removed the turban in order to be able to gain work Kalsi and Opinderjit Kaur Takhar support Singh and Tatla who note that the

Ramgarhias were more committed Sikhs than the early settlers by virtue of their adherence to the male mark of identity, the turban and unshorn hair. Bhachu asserts that in the late 1960s the Ramgarhias led the return to the familiar Sikh dress code that triggered a religious revival within the community in locations like Southall, Birmingham and Leeds. (Singh and Tatla, 2006: 78)

As a consequence of the identity changes early migrants were forced to undertake for economic reasons, the religious traditions of the Sikh community in the early stage of development did not strictly adhere to the Sikh *rehat maryada*. Tatla (1999) reports that in Stockton in Canada, chairs were installed in the *Darbar* hall in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib instead of the traditional arrangement of sitting on the floor as is now the worldwide custom in the Sikh world. This was at some stage also true of Wolverhampton. Within my own family I came across photographic evidence of my paternal uncle's marriage ceremony performed in front of the Guru Granth Sahib while seated on chairs in 1966. However, by 1972 when my parents were married the traditional arrangement of being seated on the floor was again in vogue. Furthermore covering heads in Stockton was not seen as an essential necessity and Sikhs were allowed to enter the *Darbar* hall without doing so. These compromises by the early Sikh communities were gradually replaced by the more orthodox traditions that are represented amongst the Sikh diaspora today. The running of the

*gurdwaras* and the performance of religious ceremonies was also undertaken by clean-shaven Sikhs rather than *Amritdhari* Sikhs as prescribed in the *rehat maryada*. The informant at Sedgley Street *gurdwara* confirmed this when he said

I was clean shaven and did not consider my self worthy of being able to read the Guru Granth Sahib as a part of the Akhand Path seva that was ongoing. This was around 1967. I said to the committee that it would be a great sin for me to read from Guru Granth Sahib as I am not Amritdhari but they said that they would do Ardas for the committee to receive any sins for this act and he should assist in the performance of the Akhand Path. (Informant at Guru Nanak Gurdwara, Sedgley Street, 7 February 2005)

The role of professional *ragis* and *pathis* must also be mentioned in the return to orthodoxy of the Sikh diaspora in Britain. In the early development of the Sikh communities in Britain we have explored how orthodoxy and *rehat maryada* was compromised. The development of the Sikh community and its economic acceleration in the 1970s made it possible to hire professional *ragis* and *pathis* from the Punjab to help re-assert orthodox Sikh traditions in Britain. Although the *Ramgarhias* were instrumental in pioneering the image of the Sikhs through the unshorn hair and turban in public, the role of the *ragis* and *pathis* further intensified the movement towards a stricter adherence to the *rehat maryada*. Kalsi (1992) exploring development of the Sikh community in Leeds, highlights the role of the *ragi* in re-introducing into the British Sikh community aspects of Sikhism which were redundant until their employment in Britain. The presence of the *ragi* at the *gurdwara* allowed it to remain open throughout the day rather than just being a weekend activity. The *ragis* could arrange weekly programmes and made it possible to perform *Akhand Paths* adhering to the *rehat maryada*. The teaching of *kirtan* to the younger generations was made possible. Kalsi says

The presence of the professional full-time *ragis* has a marked influence on the development of the Sikh tradition in Leeds in many respects, i.e. all important posts on the management committees are now held by *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. (Kalsi, 1992: 65)

Although Tatla (1999) and Kalsi (1992) suggest that orthodoxy has now returned to the Sikh diaspora, it seems that the next generation of the Sikh community do not feel that orthodoxy has yet really returned and adherence to the *rehat maryada* is still too relaxed amongst the Sikh diaspora in Britain. Tatla (1999) rightly points out that the Sikh diaspora have sought clarification and guidance from the Akal Takhat on a number of issues concerning the development of the Sikh community in the diaspora, however its implementation within the Sikh tradition in Britain is constricted by one key factor. There is a growing divide between the Sikh community based on the older Sikh community that migrated in the 1960s and 1970s and their children that were born in Britain. The older members of the community which, through the elected committees of the *gurdwaras* control the role of the *gurdwara* are seen to lack in their orthodox stance and respect for the Sikh traditions by the younger Sikh community. The younger generations of Sikhs in Britain regard the committee members and the older generation of Sikhs as financially oriented lacking in their drive to adhere to the *rehat maryada*. The use of the *gurdwara* funds to build and use community centres for secular parties where meat and alcohol are served has been the cause of disharmony amongst the Sikh community in Britain. The use of *gurdwara* funds, which are generally collected from the monetary offerings Sikhs make in front of the Guru Granth Sahib have been misused, in the eyes of the younger generations, for causes which do not adhere to Sikh tradition or the *rehat maryada*. The Respect for Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji campaign (R4G) (<http://www.respect4guruji.co.uk/index.html>) has been actively involved in raising awareness amongst the Sikh community especially the younger Sikh community through various Sikh forums ([www.sikhsangat.com](http://www.sikhsangat.com); [www.tapoban.org](http://www.tapoban.org); [www.forums.waheguroo.com](http://www.forums.waheguroo.com)) to the respect they feel is required for the Guru Granth Sahib and the misdeeds of committee members in not adhering to the orthodox values of the Sikh tradition. Another similar

problem, which has been highlighted the R4G campaign, has been the use of the Guru Granth Sahib for the *Anand Karaj* in places other than the gurdwara. Following a hukamnama from the Akal Takht and adhering to the rehat maryada the

Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji (Sikh Holy Scriptures treated as the living Guru) must not be taken to a hotel, banqueting suite, club, pub, bar etc for Anand Karaj's (Sikh religious wedding ceremony) as this is direct abuse to Sikh Principles. Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji must not be present where alcohol, meat or tobacco is served or consumed. (<http://www.respect4guruji.co.uk/12.html>, 1 April 2007)

The R4G campaign has been instrumental in stopping and re-arranging a number of weddings and ensuring the respect of Guru Granth Sahib.

There is a tension amongst the Sikh community in Britain, which has been ignored by the academic world. Tatla, Kalsi, Takhar and others have focussed on the divisive issues of caste and jati within the Sikh tradition in Britain but the problems of the generational issues arising amongst the Sikh community have been neglected. Although caste, *jati* and the exploration of different groups within Sikhism is required and generational problems in terms of identity and ethnicity have been tackled, the generational problems based specifically on the religious traditions also needs to be addressed. Within Wolverhampton the R4G campaign has been prominently involved in the problems that have arisen between the Sikh community in Wolverhampton and Ek Niwas.

Although the Sikh community represents the majority of the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton the presence of the Hindu community in Wolverhampton must also be briefly assessed before we begin to explore Punjabi religion and its place within the religious landscape of Wolverhampton's Punjabi diaspora. The Shree Krishna Mandir on Penn Road in Wolverhampton is the oldest and largest Hindu *mandir* in Wolverhampton. According to the informant at the mandir before the 1970s religious activities were performed within the household rather than on a community basis. Around 1970 a number of families from East Africa arrived in

Wolverhampton who had experience in starting and maintaining *mandirs*. Initially worship was conducted on a community basis in the homes of the East African migrants. One of the families was of a priestly caste, and this provided an ideal centre for the beginning of worship. As the gatherings grew in number a larger place for meeting was required. In the early 1970s the present location was purchased from Wolverhampton council. An old building was present however the building was unsafe and in an attempt to appease their hostile neighbours a new building was erected over a period of 20 years. This was the first purpose built *mandir* in the West Midlands.

It was unclear as to the region from which the Hindu community in Wolverhampton had migrated. The informant although Punjabi and from the traditional area of migration the Jalandhar Doaba area, was reluctant to comment on the make up of the community in terms of their areas of migration. His initial response was to assert that the *mandir* was not based on regionality but on the broad emphasis of the Hindu tradition. However the informant did acknowledge that the majority of the families that migrated from East Africa to Wolverhampton were from Gujarat. Initially the Gujarati's merged with the present Hindu community, which were from the Punjab. Eventually because of differences in opinion and traditions the Gujarati community formed their own association.

In the 2001 Census 3.9 per cent of the respondents reported they belonged to the Hindu faith however it is difficult to decipher whether they are of Gujarati or Punjabi origin. Knott (1981) notes that in 1977, 75 per cent of the Hindu community in Britain was from Gujarat and only 15 per cent were from the Punjab region. It is difficult to ascertain whether this is the case in Wolverhampton. However the presence of a distinct Gujarati association would suggest that a high number of Hindus in Wolverhampton are from Gujarati origin. Yet it is imperative to note that there is a distinct Punjabi presence in the *mandir* with the *murti* of Baba Balak Nath amongst the other deities present. An interesting point made by the informant was the presence of Sikhs in attending the *mandir*, especially on Mondays. Monday is traditionally regarded as the main

day for worship towards Siva in the Punjab. Fasts are usually observed on this day and the worship of the *lingam* with milk and fruit is usual.

It is clearly evident that there is a large Punjabi presence within the diaspora community in Wolverhampton. However, although the Punjabi diaspora purport to being part of either the Hindu or Sikh community it is not as decisive as it appears on the surface or as may be reported by academics. This chapter has intentionally provided a religiously divided view of religious beliefs and practices amongst the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton. The informant at the Shree Krishna Mandir mentioned the presence of Sikhs also attending the mandir especially on Mondays to perform worship to the *lingam* in the mandir. Although this does not readily fit in with the view of religious communities that form the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton this chapter has provided this is by no means an anomaly or isolated occurrence. As we will discover in the next chapter the religious beliefs and practices of the Punjabi diaspora are much more complex than the academically disillusioned boundaries of Sikhism or Hinduism. The construction of religious boundaries has been a multi-faceted affair with contributions from academics, reformist movements and the adherents of the religious traditions in an alien environment are analysed in later chapters. Hence to remove the labels of Sikhs or Hindus in studying the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton, the following chapter provides a detailed and accurate account of religious beliefs and practices of the Punjabis in Wolverhampton. The label of Punjabi religion will replace the restrictive labels of Sikh or Hindu. Although another label, this perspective of studying the religious practices of this diaspora will be less restrictive and provide a vivid and accurate account of the Punjabi diasporas beliefs and practices.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Punjabi Religion in Wolverhampton**

In the previous chapter the South Asian migration to Britain and particularly to Wolverhampton was outlined. In this chapter the development of Punjabi religion in Wolverhampton will be presented by focussing on the establishment and development of the Peer Darbar Mandir on Bank Street and Ek Niwas Universal Temple on Dudley Road. Both places of worship provide varyingly different and unique forms of religious practices and beliefs which, until Geaves work on Baba Balak Nath worship in the diaspora, have been neglected in studies of diaspora communities in Britain. Both places of worship are unique in their existence in Britain because they do not conform to the readily stereotypical views of religious traditions that are practised by diaspora groups from South Asia. The religious boundaries, as we shall discover, in these places of worship are fluid or at times seemingly non-existent compared to the carefully choreographed images portrayed by other religious groups in Wolverhampton and by academics. The reasons for the construction of these religious boundaries amongst the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton will be explored in a later chapter. Before we continue with a detailed account of Punjabi religion in Wolverhampton a succinct explanation of the term 'Punjabi religion' will be provided to further enlighten the reason for removing other religious labels and introducing a new label.

Ballard (1999) provides a sound analytical system with which the religious practices and beliefs of the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton can be studied. In his study of panth, kismet, dharm and qaum, Ballard explores how these four religious dimensions of Punjabi religion have assisted the dynamics of polarisation in Punjab. More often than not, only political dynamics are considered in studying the polarisation of ethnic groups. However, Ballard rightly indicates that in terms of the polarisation in the Punjab, religion but particularly the concepts of panth, kismet, dharm and qaum have an inextricable role in the process of polarisation in this region. Ballard uses the term Punjabi religion to escape from the restrictive nature of religious –isms which have been

over used in the study of religions. The Punjab's geographical location has led to its centrality in the birthplace and development of most of the religious tradition present in India today. From the Indus Valley civilisation to the Mughal *empire*, to the rise of the Sikh tradition, the Punjab region has been pivotal in the spread of various religious traditions. However, academically the religious traditions of the region and their manifestations amongst the subsequent diaspora communities are still restricted to the brittle categories of Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism. Harjot Oberoi (1997) in his groundbreaking study of culture, identity and diversity in the Sikh tradition in the nineteenth century clearly defines the processes which have taken place that have produced the distinct religious categories of Hindu, Muslim or Sikh. The most intriguing aspect of Oberoi's work is the concept of fluidity of beliefs and practices that are still prevalent amongst the Punjabi diaspora. Although Oberoi's work is dealing with the political and cultural changes which led to the formalisation of a distinct Sikh image enforced by the *Tat Khalsa* ideologies, his accurate appraisal of the porous nature of religious boundaries is clearly visible amongst the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton. Oberoi states

From the 'peculiar' nature of religion in Indian society there flowed an important consequence: religious categories such as 'Hindu', 'Muslim', and 'Sikh', were ambiguous and fluid, they did not possess a pure form. Historically, it is more precise to speak in terms of simultaneity of religious identities rather than distinct, universal, religious collectives. (Oberoi, 1997: 418)

The *sangat* that congregate at Peer Darbar and Ek Niwas are an example of this 'simultaneity of religious identities' that Oberoi proposes as a more accurate account of religious beliefs and practices. It is to offset these fragile boundaries of religion that the term Punjabi religion is employed in this thesis. Although as we have seen in the earlier chapter the majority of the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton would profess to being Sikh, we will discover later in the thesis that this is a continuation of the same political and identity issues which were employed in the polarisation of the Punjab from the nineteenth century which have continued amongst diaspora communities. Punjabi religion and the

subsequent use of Ballards analytical vocabulary of panth kismet dharm and qaum will be utilised in the latter chapters to analyse the results from the fieldwork carried out in this thesis. In this chapter a full description of the development of Mandir Peer Darbar and Ek Niwas Universal divine Temple are provided, highlighting the important role the leaders of both places of worship play amongst the Punjabi diaspora.

### ***Mandir Peer Darbar***

Mandir Peer Darbar is idiosyncratic of what Ballard refers to as Punjabi religion and the term utilised throughout this thesis. The name in itself is extraordinary in that it merges the terms Mandir and Peer which further highlights the need to move away from the restrictive religious categories of Hindu, Sikh or Muslim and explore religion as it is practised by adherents rather than our own scholarly constructions. The Mandir Peer Darbar in its present location was established in January 1998, however it was in existence at a different location in Wolverhampton since 1994. Mandir Peer Darbar is dedicated to Baba Kangar Wala. Kangar is small village in the Hoshiarpur district of Punjab in which a small *khanqah* to an unknown sufi *pir* is situated. Hence followers began to refer to the *pir* by the location of his *khanqah* in the village, hence the name Baba Kangar Wala. Villagers do not know the *pirs* age, tariqa, or silsila. The *pir* is described as a young child, of small height, bright burning eyes and golden hair by believers that have had visions of him around the *khanqah* and in dreams. However before we continue with the observations of Mandir Peer Darbar in Wolverhampton, the development of Punjabi Sufism must be addressed.

Since the eighth century, there has been an Islamic presence in the Indian sub-continent that has influenced the social, cultural, and religious traditions of India. The influence of Islam in India is most apparent through the importance and popularity accorded to the Sufi tradition. The Punjab and the states of north India on a whole experienced the most fervent forms of Sufi Islam as it travelled from the north into the Indian sub-continent. However within the Punjab, Sufism did not retain its classical form as found in the various *tariqas* present in India and was affiliated to local shrines rather than major *Dargahs*.

The spread of Islam throughout the Indian sub-continent accelerated with the influence of Sufi Islam. Initially the conquest of Sind in 711-712 CE by Muhammed ibn al-Qasim is historically the first account of an Islamic influence in the Indian sub-continent. Although Muhammed ibn al-Qasim was not concerned with the conversion of the indigenous population to Islam, this was the first contact between the Islamic and Hindu traditions within the Indian sub-continent. The establishment of Sufi *khanqahs* and *dargahs* was imperative to the spread of Islam and gradually became focal points of Islam within India. Within the Hindu tradition the veneration of wandering *sadhus* and *yogis*, leading ascetic lifestyles engrossed in the path to liberation or salvation were a common feature. The presence of wandering *faqirs* and Sufi *pirs* setting up *khanqahs* was therefore unnoticed. As is customary in India the *Dargahs*, *khanqahs* or shrines of holy people are attended for the power, which they possess rather than being based on religious or cultural boundaries. Hence through contact with the wandering *faqirs* and the establishment of *khanqahs* and eventually *Dargahs* the influence of Islam, especially Sufism, spread through India.

Scholars like Titus (1970), Schimmel (1975) and Mujeeb (1967) have successfully traced and recorded the influence of Sufi Islam in the Indian sub-continent, hence it would be unadvisable to attempt any study that does not provide a new perspective. The earliest dates given for any Sufi presence in India are dated to 905 CE when al-Hallaj visited the Sind valley, according to Schimmel. However the settlement of al-Hujwairi in Lahore and the introduction of the *Kashf al-Mahjub* are seen as the firm establishment of Sufism in the Indian sub-continent cemented in the same period by the arrival of Khwaja Muinuddin Chisti in Ajmer, Rajasthan.

The Sufi Islam that is the focal point of this paper is a form of Sufism exclusive to the Punjab. Temple, Crooke and Rose from the nineteenth and early twentieth century have recorded stories and folktales of Sufis popular in the Punjab. Their work covers the religious practices and beliefs from the Punjab region and provides a vivid picture of the importance of Sufi Islam in northern India. Although the works written in this period are misleading and coloured by the

writers own background they provide an incite into the popularity of Sufism throughout the Punjab which is not apparent in later texts written on the religious practices and beliefs of north India. Apart from Harjot Oberoi's (1994) chapter on the 'Enchanted Universe' very little has been written on the importance and influence of Sufi masters and their shrines in the Punjab.

The most famous Sufi within the Punjab is Sakhi Sarvar. According to Oberoi the true extent of Sakhi Sarvars influence on Punjabi religion cannot be fully determined. In the 1911 census of India the following of Sakhi Sarvar in the Punjab was recorded as 79,085 out of 2,883,729 Sikhs. However these figures do not reflect the true number of people that venerated Sakhi Sarvar. Oberoi suggests three possible reasons why these figures are ambiguous.

1. Those who recorded their religion as Sikhism might simultaneously have worshipped Sarvar and taken part in rites, rituals, and festivals associated with him.
2. Census officers were not epistemologically equipped to handle beliefs and practices that did not mesh with the three 'great traditions' of the Punjab.
3. By the 1911 census the Singh Sabha movement had been actively campaigning to wean Sikhs away from the worship of *pirs* like Sakhi Sarvar

(Oberoi, 1996, p148)

However it is evident from the historical data that Sakhi Sarvar has played an important role in Sufism in the Punjab. Rose (1919) provides the most vivid account of Sakhi Sarvars life recording important miracles of the *pir* throughout his life. Sakhi Sarvar's real name was Sayyid Ahmad, his father Sayyid Zainulabidin migrated to India in 1126 CE where he settled. According to Rose, Sakhi Sarvar on the death of his Father in 1140 travelled to Baghdad to receive 'prophetic gifts' from three illustrious Sufis of the time. These were Abdul Qadir Jilani (Founder of the Qadiri Tariqa), Shaikh Shahab-du-Din Saharwadi and Khwaja Muinuddin Chisti (Founder of the Chisti silsila in India). After receiving

the blessings of these prominent Sufis, Sakhi Sarvar returned to India to Dhaunkwal, District GujranWala. From Dhaunkwal he went on to Multan where he married the governor's daughter. After secular studies in Lahore, Sakhi Sarvar settled in Shakot where his father had initially settled. Sakhi Sarvar performed numerous miracles recorded in the works of Temple (1991), Crooke (1994) and Rose. I have not attempted to provide an account of Sakhi Sarvars miracles, as this would divert from the emphasis of the chapter. Sakhi Sarvars family were angered and jealous of the attention gained by Sakhi Sarvar and decided to kill him. Upon learning of his families plans Sakhi Sarvar escaped towards Nagaha in *Dera Ghazi Khan* district, present day Una, Himachal Pradesh, where he was killed and his tomb is situated today.

The Sufism of Sakhi Sarvar is indeed unique and those that have visited the shrine will be witness to this. I will not continue by focussing on Sakhi Sarvar but move onto another form of Punjabi Sufism that has not been chronicled in the writings of nineteenth and twentieth century or present day scholars. Instead I shall explore a form of Punjabi Sufism, which through the processes of migration has been introduced and established in Britain.

The village shrine is a traditional *khanqah* or lodging used by Sufis. Historically the shrine is dedicated to a Sufi that lived in the *khanqah* some time ago. Villagers do not know the *pirs* age, tariqa, or silsila. The *pir* is described as a young child, of small height, bright burning eyes and golden hair by believers that have had visions of him around the *khanqah* and in dreams. The villagers simply refer to the *pir* as Baba Kangar Wala – The Baba of Kangar.

The *khanqah* in India is cared for by several families from the villages of Mehndowal and Kangar who have served at the shrine as a part of their local religious tradition. Based on their ancestral allegiance to the shrine and the *pir*, these families continue to serve at the shrine and take it in turns to prepare *niaz* (saffron, sweet rice) and any other offerings. The family who have assisted in this research and have established a worship centre in Wolverhampton are from the *nai* caste (Barbers). The family are from the village of Mehndowal situated several kilometres from the shrine.

Within the *khanqah* a large rectangular tiled platform has been erected. A *manji* (padded low stool) is the focal point with wooden sandals in front of it and to the right lamps of mustard seed oil - those who attend the shrine light *chiraghs* every Thursday. The *manji* is covered with a *bistra* green cloths (the common colour used in Sufi shrines and considered holy in Islam) and flowers. Families from the villages work on a rota basis when they must prepare the *niaz* and when required a *langar* of *Kurri* (gram flour and yogurt curry – a Punjabi dish) and rice.

On closer inspection of the shrine it seems that the tiled platform has been used to serve as a platform however the distinct shape of the tiled area is reminiscent of the traditional shape of an Islamic grave. When the community at the shrine were asked about the possibility they were unsure but were adamant that the *pirs* powers emanated from within the shrine. Hence rather than being a *khanqah* this could be a very simple dargah in which the grave of the *pir* is entombed. The placement of the *manji* and of the traditional wooden sandals inside the shrine are yet again an indication of the diverse nature of beliefs in the Punjab which are not controlled by any strict norms or procedures. The devotees focus rather on the powerful nature of Baba Kangar Wala rather than the historical development and roots of the *pir*. It is sufficient for the devotees that the *pir* is pleased with their service and they are able to continue serving at the shrine. With the steadily increasing number of devotees from Britain making annual visits to the shrine, followers in the Punjab are further invigorated in their belief of the *pirs* power and fame that it has spread beyond their villages to Britain.

Every Thursday a *bharai* is required to perform the supplicatory prayers in front of the shrine to the *pir*. Some members of the community referred to this as the *Ardas*, traditionally the term used for the Sikh prayer recited at the end of a *divaan* in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib, however some devotees referred to the supplicatory prayers as *arjoi*, which is another Punjabi term for a supplicatory prayer. Drums are beaten to alert the villages that the *ardas* has begun and the *prashad* and *langar* will be distributed. The *bharai* recites the *ardas* at approximately 4.00 pm as this has been designated as the auspicious time to pray to the Sufi on Thursdays by followers of Baba Kangar Wala. Every

November on the *jetha Birwar* (first Thursday after Sangrand – new month) a *bhandara* (large langar) is held to honour the *pir*. The community simply refer to this event as a commemoration of the *pirs* birthday, however more likely the event celebrates the *Urs* of the *pir*, which is commonly celebrated at Sufi shrines. They are also required by tradition to bring new *jande* (flag) and a new *bistra* (green cloth for the *manji*).

Traditionally Islamic beliefs do not allow pictorial representations of any living being; hence believers of the *pir* have used pictorial representations of the *khanqah* to show their devotion in their own homes. In India where the *khanqah* is physically accessible for worship all religious practices are performed near the *khanqah*; however further a field where the *khanqah* cannot be reached for the prescribed religious practices photographs of the *khanqah* are used in worship. Within homes in the village pictures of the *khanqah* are kept along with images of other Hindu gods and goddesses. As well as photographs of the *khanqah*, popular bazaar prints of Sufis are becoming more widely available and have been incorporated in the worship of the believers. The use of pictures in the processes of worship and the place they are given in the homes of believers shows the importance of the Sufi tradition within a Hindu family and also indicates the influence the popular Hindu tradition has on Sufi practices in the Indian sub-continent.

As yet no demographic data on the village setting has been collated. The majority of visitors to the shrine are drawn from the two villages of Mehndowal and Kangar. The *khanqah* and the practices of the followers that surround it are not unique and follow traditional beliefs and practices that are accustomed to Sufi shrines in the Indian sub-continent. There is a distinct lack of Islamic influence on the *khanqah* of Baba Kangar Wala because of the Hindu influence of the devotees. Hence of late an *arati* on audiocassette to various illustrious *pirs* including Sakhi Sarvar is played at the *khanqah* as well as the *Bharais* supplicatory prayers. The language used by the followers does not convey that the belief is centred on a Muslim *pir*; rather it is reminiscent of being in a Hindu shrine.

The fact that very little is known about the shrine is normality in Sufi Islam. Werth (1998) has collated work on similar small Sufi shrines in the village of Rajpur, Pakistan. Within Rajpur the villagers frequent three shrines. Of the three shrines the history of one shrine is only fully known. The other shrines are dedicated to a *fakirni* and a saint named *pir* ghaib – The *Pir* that disappeared. The villagers call the Sufi *pir* ghaib because of stories related to his disappearance when villagers insulted him. At the point the *pir* disappeared an area of six by six metres with a metre high wall is set aside. Within the compound and in the surrounding area there are several graves linked to another story of the *pir*. According to villagers a wedding party was standing outside the compound that began to ridicule the place as a result the entire wedding party disappeared and their graves are located around the shrine. Apart from the miraculous stories that surround the personage of *pir* ghaib no other details are available. Shrines and *khanqahs* of this sort are present throughout the Indian sub-continent, which, are famous within localised areas and are of importance to a small community of surrounding villages. According to Werth the importance of the shrines is based upon the personage of the *pirs* as members of the Sayyid caste – the family of the prophet. Although he states that not all Sufis are Sayyid's and not all Sayyid's are Sufis, Werth suggests that the importance of the *khanqahs*, shrines and Dargahs is generated by the importance a member of the Sayyid caste has in the local consciousness.

According to Oberoi *khanqahs* and *pirs* allowed followers of Islam in an agrarian, uneducated setting to access the greater Quranic tradition, hence the *pir* and his *khanqah* were a place of intermediation and were powerful tools of 'political authority and patronage in rural localities' (Oberoi, 1997, p155). Nevertheless the theological reasons possible for attending the *khanqah* relate to a minority of believers. As well as the importance of the Sayyid caste, *khanqahs* and shrines are also blessed with *karamat* (miracles) and *barraka* (blessings) of the *pir* that may be buried there or to whom the shrine is dedicated. Hence the *khanqah* is seen as the extension of the *pirs* powers from within his grave and are frequented for any number of pragmatic reasons. It is unlikely that the sole purpose of Muslims visiting the localised *khanqahs* and shrines is to be educated in Islamic theology. Along with Hindu and Sikh members of the community the

*khanqah* as the embodiment of the *pirs karamat* and *baraka* is a place where personal pleas are made for pragmatic reasons rather than theological quests. Followers of *pir ghaib* are a prime example of this trend where when the winter rains were late which were imperative for their crops appeals to *pir ghaib* were made. The villagers of Rajpur as a community collected money and prepared food in front of the shrine while appeals were made and the entire Quran was read aloud.

Within the local consciousness of Baba Kangar Wala's followers the situation is somewhat different. Firstly the vast majority of adherents are from a Hindu background and are simply not aware of the importance of their *pir's* caste within Islam; hence whether he belonged to the Sayyid's is unimportant. Secondly the shrine is rich in hagiography of the *pir* in terms of stories relating to his generosity and ferocious anger, which fuel the adherents to respect and believe in the *pir*. Finally followers of Baba Kangar Wala have drawn links between their *pir* and Sakhi Sarvar, which has strengthened the importance of their *khanqah* and their *pir*.

It is unclear how the link between Baba Kangar Wala and Sakhi Sarvar has been achieved but within the homes of the followers a picture of Sakhi Sarvar riding his mare was found in close proximity to the picture of the *khanqah*. No obvious similarities between the picture of Sakhi Sarvar and the descriptions of their *pir* reported by the devotees can be made. When followers are questioned of the relationship between the two *pirs* the answer was simply they are the one and the same. The difference in image was insignificant, as Sakhi Sarvar could appear in whichever form he wanted. In this manner a small shrine within a village setting has been linked to a greater Sufi tradition popular throughout the Punjab. Rose's work on Sakhi Sarvar does suggest that there are shrines throughout the Punjab dedicated to Sakhi Sarvar, hence the *khanqah* of Baba Kangar Wala could be one such shrine. Another possibility and suggestion has been that Baba Kangar Wala was a *pir* that regarded Sakhi Sarvar as his *pir* therefore links have been made between the two Sufis by followers. Although followers of Baba Kangar Wala recognise a link between their localised *pir* where no Sufi saint is seemingly

buried and Sakhi Sarvar, allegiance and prayers are still directed to Baba Kangar Wala rather than Sakhi Sarvar.

The shrine of Baba Kangar Wala, its links with Sakhi Sarvar, and the various religious beliefs and practices form a normal part of Sufism in the Punjab. Unlike the larger shrines to *pirs* within the centre of Sufi Islam, smaller localised shrines are not uniformed or unified by any organisation or hierarchal lineage of successors. Within the Indian sub-continent shrines are erected for wandering holy men whether Sufis or yogis regardless of religious lineage (example in Werth). The Punjab is a prime example of this practise. Only speculation can be cast on the true identity of Baba Kangar Wala, however outside the academic world his identity is inconsequential as the believers are only concerned with the sacredness of the shrine and the importance of the *pir* within their lives and religious belief system.

The family who have been instrumental in establishing the Mandir Peer Darbar are from the village of Mehndowal situated several kilometres from the shrine in Kangar. The family regard themselves as Hindu and are from the *nai* (barber) caste. Subash Kapoor or *baba ji* as he is fondly referred to by the *sangat* at Mandir Peer Darbar is the head of the family and *sevadar* to Baba Kangar Wala as the eldest son in the family. Baba Kangar Wala has become the focus of worship amongst the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton. Initially Kapoors father migrated to Wolverhampton as part of the post-war migrants to take up any un-skilled labouring job. Gradually the family were re-united and his family of three sons, and two daughters settled in the Whitmore Reans area of Wolverhampton. Initially the thought of maintaining their worship of Baba Kangar Wala was not maintained in this new environment. Attending the *gurdwara* was the only outwardly religious act. Although the family feel they belong to the Hindu tradition, the *gurdwara* was the main place of worship for the family. No provisions were available to make offerings to Baba Kangar Wala as the migration to a new environment had removed them from the *khanqah* that was the central focus of their devotion and worship. Religious practices and beliefs were less important in the new climate where work and financial betterment were the focus. The matriarch of the family continued her service to

the *pir* by setting up a shrine in her own home, however initially she would simply light a *chiragh* (diva) of mustard seed oil every Thursday in obeisance to Baba Kangar Wala and distribute sweets as *prashad* to her children and grandchildren. The eldest male of the family amongst followers of Baba Kangar Wala traditionally performs the lighting of the *chiragh*. Traditionally women are usually highlighted as the ones that light the *chiraghs* every Thursday and pray for the betterment of their life at the *dargahs* and *khanqahs* of Sufi *pirs*. (Ahmed, 1985; Schimmel, 1980)

The establishment of Mandir Peer Darbar in Wolverhampton focuses on the eldest son of the family who neglected the worship of their *pir* and after some years, his family began to suffer financial difficulties and ill health. By this time, Kapoor was living with his own family of a wife, two sons and three daughters. His siblings had married and moved into their own homes. After many years of facing these difficulties with bad health and unemployment the family consulted a local *baba* (Tarlochan Singh Bhoparai) who indicated that as the family had neglected their ancestral practices of serving their *pir* they had experienced his anger and were therefore faced by ill health and financial difficulties. As the eldest male within the household it was his duty to light the *chiragh*, perform *seva* for the *pir*, and pray for forgiveness. Furthermore, his family were required to abstain from eating pork especially, and eating any meat on Thursday, Sunday and Tuesday, holy days for the *pirs*, Baba Balak Nath, and the Goddess, respectively. Photographs of the *khanqah* were placed in the home in front of which the *chiragh* was lit; hence, a rudimentary shrine was established in the home to Baba Kangar Wala.

Gradually the financial problems were resolved and the service of Baba Kangar Wala became the full time occupation for Kapoor. According to Kapoor, Baba Kangar Wala was pleased with the resumption of the family service and gradually Kapoor was blessed with the *pirs hava*. The literal translation of *hava* is wind; however, within this context and generally within Punjabi religion *hava* refers to the grace a devotee receives from a god, goddess or *pir* in this instance. Within Punjabi religion, if a Sufi, god, or goddess is pleased they may bestow upon you special gifts of divination and healing which are generally referred to

as *hava*. In some cases, the person receiving *hava* is actually possessed by the deity in other cases the *hava* is a period of time in which the devotee receives messages and instructions for any supplicatory prayers he may have made on behalf of other people. *Hava* can manifest in many physical and emotive actions. Kapoor's *hava* had very distinct physical actions, which were experienced by him during the *arati* that was performed for Baba Balak Nath and *Mata* (the goddess in general, as no specific *Mata* was highlighted as a dominant force within the early days of Mandir Peer Darbar). Kapoor would clasp his hands and draw them in and out to his chest while standing in front of a picture of the *khanqah*. The pace was generally fairly relaxed when Kapoor was receiving *hava*. However at times the movements and force of the movements would be much more frenetic, which Kapoor suggests is an indication of the Baba Kangar Wala purveying a more forceful message for a supplicant or in readiness to tackle a particularly difficult exorcism. Initially Kapoor only received *hava* from Baba Kangar Wala, gradually other gods and goddesses would also bless Kapoor with their *hava*.

The initial shrine set up for Baba Kangar Wala was in the living room of Kapoors home. A photograph of Baba Kangar Wala's *khanqah* was placed on a shelf draped in green cloth along with the *chiragh* and incense sticks. Other popular lithographs of gods and goddesses surrounded the small shrine. At some stage the loft space their family home was converted into the first location for Mandir Peer Darbar. Initially Kapoor and his family were the only ones that used the *mandir*. The *mandir* was within a highly populated area where migrants from the Punjab had settled, hence gradually news of the Kapoor's *spiritual* powers spread as did the fame of the *mandir* for healing people and helping people in difficult situations. Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays as the holy days of Baba Balak Nath, the goddesses and the *pirs* but more specifically Baba Kangar Wala saw the temple filled and the living room was used as a place to serve tea and samosas to the growing *sangat*. On any of these three days, the temple was visited by up to a hundred people throughout the day and the numbers steadily grew.

The central focus was the shrine to Baba Kangar Wala which consisted of first and foremost a hand drawn picture of the *khanqah* of Baba Kangar Wala. This was hung over a small *manji* (low wooden bed) which is covered in a *bistra* (green cloth) and in front of the *manji* were placed a set of wooden sandals, traditionally worn by sadhus in India. A *chanani* (canopy) covers the whole of the major shrine area also made of green cloth. Surrounding the shrine are *chiraghs* and incense, and *jots* (divas which burn pure ghee). *Jande* (flags), again green in colour were placed in one corner of the shrine. There were two other prominent lithographs depicting the *panj pir* and Sakhi Sarvar or Lakha da Data as he is sometimes known in close vicinity to the shrine. The representation of the *panj pir* in the main shrine area is a further reinforcement of Baba Kangar Wala's place in the hierarchy of Sufism. The *panj pir* are according to William Crooke (1994) a collection of *pir*, which traditionally were the prophet and his four caliphs, but over time have been made up of any combination of five *pirs*, which are prominent within certain regions. The power of the *panj pir* is that it is an easily recognisable and highly revered part of Sufism in India, which holds immense importance for devotees of that region. According to Kapoor, Baba Kangar Wala is a member of the elite *panj pir*. Although initially the name, *tariqa* or *silsila* of Baba Kangar Wala were unknown, Kapoor believes that Baba Kangar Wala is one of the *panj pir* who are so highly revered in Punjabi Sufism.

The terminology used to describe the shrine is obviously Punjabi and hence certain terms are usually associated to the Sikh tradition. The *manji* is traditionally the name used to refer to the raised bed on which the *Guru Granth Sahib* is placed when in the darbar hall of a *gurdwara*. Similarly, the *chanani* is traditionally the canopy used in the *gurdwara* suspended over the place where the *Guru Granth Sahib* is installed. The *chanani* especially proves the importance of Baba Kangar Wala for devotees as this has predominantly been used by royalty in India and by Sikhs for the *Guru Granth Sahib* as a sign of great respect. When followers enter the shrine, they firstly do *matha tekna* in front of the main shrine to Baba Kangar Wala. *Matha tekna* is the traditional prostration performed in the Indian sub-continent where the forehead is touched to the ground while bending down on both knees. A number of devotees were observed placing their palms on the *manji* and pressing down. This was carried

out by a high number of devotees believing that Baba Kangar Wala resides on the *manji*, hence pressing the *manji* is touching and massaging the Baba's own body, hence performing *seva* for the Baba. In the same manner the wooden sandals were pressed, and hands are usually drawn over the face indicating a sign of respect and reverence that they have served their Baba and they are transferring his blessings on to themselves by wiping their faces or foreheads with their hands.

The shrines to Baba Balak Nath and the *Matas* at this early stage of Mandir Peer Darbar were simple. The shrine to Baba Balak Nath was focussed on a lithograph print of the god sitting on his *vahana*, the peacock. In front of the lithograph were placed a set of wooden sandals, a chimta and yoga danda. Directly above the shrine for Baba Balak Nath was another lithograph of Siva and Parvati. The positioning of the lithographs shows the hierarchical link to Baba Balak Nath of the *Saivite* tradition. The shrine to the *Matas* was again focussed on lithograph prints of various goddesses, including *Mata Durga*, *Mata Kali*, *Mata Ambika* and *Mata Lakshmi*. The main shrine to *Mata* which focussed on a lithograph of *Mata Durga* covered with red *chunnis* (traditional India scarves, with gold trimming), surrounded by bangles, *sindoor*, red ribbon, and other pieces of jewellery. *Jande* of a peach and red colour were part of the shrines for Baba Balak Nath and the *Mata's* respectively. There were numerous other lithographs of other gods and goddesses, which included Hanuman, Ram and Sita, Krishna, Ganesh, and Vishwakarma. Lithographs of the ten Gurus were also displayed alongside images of Sai Baba of Shirdi, Sathya Sai Baba, Namdev, Kabir, Ravidas, Baba Vadhbhag Singh and Jesus. Devotees would then continue to touch the numerous other lithographs as a sign of respect and touch their foreheads as a transferral of the deity's blessings and power. Some devotees would touch every single lithograph to receive the blessing of the numerous gods, goddesses while others would simply perform *matha tekna* at the three main shrines.

Unlike the *khanqah* in Kangar where worship was confined to a weekly occurrence, at Mandir Peer Darbar worship was a daily affair focussed on the performance of *arati* twice a day. *Arati* was not sung, as is the norm, but rather played on audiocassette. Originally the *aratis* were in praise of Baba Balak Nath

and *Mata*, however at a later stage an *arati* to *pirs* was found hence it was included in the daily worship. The *arati* which was conducted once in the morning and once early evening was also the period in which Kapoor would receive *hava* from the *pir* and the important aspects of healing and supplicatory prayers would take place. During the *arati* Kapoor stands in front of the main shrine to Baba Kangar Wala and begins to receive the *hava*, which continues throughout the duration of the *aratis*. After the *aratis* on the audiocassette were completed Kapoor would continue to receive *hava* and would then address the *sangat* in the form of a *jaikara* of *Bol Jai Baba di* (Speak, Victory to the Baba). The *Sangat* would then reply *Bol Sache Darbar ki jai* (Victory to the true court). Kapoor would then begin a new *jaikara* or refrain in which a multitude of *pirs*, gods, goddesses, gurus and bhagats were uttered and the *sangats* response was required. This would typically begin with the refrain *Jaikara Baba Kangar Wale da* (shout the victory of Baba Kangar Wala) and the *sangat* would reply, *Bol sache Darbar ki Jai* (Victory to the true court). The slogan from Kapoor requests the *sangats* reaffirmation in their beliefs of the power and truth held by the various *pirs* and deities. The *sangats* response confirms their belief in the deities and bears witness to their true power. The refrains would continue until Kapoor would bend to his knees and touch his head to the ground, and the *sangat* would follow suit. *Prashad* of fruit, mixed nuts and dried fruits, or sweets, was distributed to the *sangat*. Traditional offering of *prashad* on the three important days of the week were rot on Sundays for Baba Balak Nath, semolina *halwa* for the goddesses on Tuesday and *niaz* (saffron coloured rice) for the *pir* on Thursdays. Specifically for Baba Kangar Wala on Thursday's *churma* was offered to the *pir*, which is made of normal Indian chappatis shredded and mixed with sugar and pure ghee. The first Sunday, Tuesday or Thursday of the Indian month, the *jetha*, required that these respective forms of *prashad* are prepared and offered to the respective deities and then served to the *sangat*.

After the completion of the *arati* and the distribution of the *prashad*, the *chaunki* begins. *Chaunki*, literally means a sitting, however according to Hew McLeod (2002) the term is specifically used in relation to four *chaunkis* of *kirtan* that take place in major historical *gurdwaras*. However the use of the terminology here is somewhat different and focuses on the period in which the *baba* or *bhagat* will

meet the *sangat* and or the practice of exorcism will take place. Some regard the *chaunki* as a separate entity to the *arati* while other see an attendance to *arati* as a part of the *chaunki*. During the *chaunki kirtan*, *bhetan* and *qawali's* were played on audiocassette. The *chaunki* in Mandir Peer Darbar begins with Kapoor taking his place on the *gaddi*. A literal meaning of *gaddi* is cushion, but the term is much more significant in this context in that it refers to an elevated position granted by the *pir* to Kapoor. McLeod refers to it as a 'seat; throne; position of authority' (2002: 83). While Kapoor is seated on his *gaddi* and the *chaunki* is in session the powers of the *pir* and deities remain with him so that he may help the *sangat* that approach him. While seated on the *gaddi* and helping members of the *sangat* Kapoor may experience *hava*, however this manifests itself in a different physical action to what he experience during the *arati*. Kapoor experiences the *hava* on the *gaddi* in a side to side movement of the head for ten to thirty seconds in which time it is understood by the *sangat* that he is receiving instructions from the *pir* or other deities. However, at other times he may not show any physical movements which show he is receiving *hava* but his place on the *gaddi* signifies that he is conveying the *pirs* message or instructions. *Sangat* seeking guidance can approach Kapoor in family groups, couples or individuals. Kapoor listens to the problems and asks questions as he sees fits. Throughout the *chaunkis*, *gurbani kirtan*, *bhetan* and *qawali's* are played on audio cassette.

As the recipient of the *pirs* grace through the *hava*, Kapoor enjoyed a special position amongst the family and the *sangat* that began to congregate at Mandir Peer Darbar. Although it was evident that his own family and the *sangat* held Kapoor in high esteem, he insisted that he was a humble servant of the *pir* his main role was to serve the *sangat* in any way possible. However Kapoors humility in portraying himself as a mere *sevadar* of the deities and the *sangat* is a general characteristic that one finds amongst the various babas and bhagats found in the many facets of Punjabi religion. Kapoor and other *babas* or *bhagats* are undoubtedly the leaders of the *sangat* that have developed around their charismatic leadership as much as the *sangats* adherence and worship of popular Punjabi religious gods and goddesses. There are various ways in which the babas or bhagats elevated position in the *sangat* are detected. Firstly, Kapoors place on the *gaddi* is symbolic of his powers and the favoured position he holds with the

*pir*. After the *arati sangat* approach him in turn and explain their difficulties or reasons for attending the Mandir and appeal to Kapoor for his assistance. During these meetings Kapoor remains seated on the *gaddi* indicating that while seated there he is in the *pirs* grace. Secondly, Kapoor wears a green or peach stole during *arati* and while seated in the *sangat* to show his favoured position by the *pir*. Thirdly, after the *arati* the *sangat* would file past Kapoor who would then place his hand on their heads as an *ashirvad* (blessing). The *ashirvad* is from the *pir* but Kapoor is the link between the two worlds, and acts as a conduit for the transference of these blessings. Fourthly, gradually *sangat* began to touch Kapoors feet as a sign of respect and he would in turn place his hand on their head as an *ashirvad*. Initially Kapoor discouraged members of the *sangat* from touching his feet, however gradually this became a norm. Kapoor as the head *sevdar* (servant to Baba Kangar Wala) at Mandir Peer Darbar was obviously regarded highly. However, as the recipient of Baba Kangar Walas *hava* and in his ability to converse with the *pir* and offer supplicatory prayers, his status was elevated further. This naturally intensified when the Mandir, whilst situated in their home, was opened to other members of the local community. As the *sangat* grew in numbers at Mandir Peer Darbar, more *sevdars* were also required. Kapoors sons initially carried out these duties, gradually other members of the *sangat* were also given the position of *sevdar*.

Two *melas* (festivals) were prominent in the calendar of the temple, firstly and foremost the celebration of Baba Kangar Wala's birthday when a *bhandara* (large feast) of rice and *kurri* was prepared, the *bistra* on the *manji* were changed and new flags were hoisted within the temple. The other *mela* was held on the annual pilgrimage to Baba Balak Nath's *guffa*, the *Chet Mela*. On the *jetha* Sunday of the month of *Chet*, peach coloured *jande* are placed around Baba Balak Nath's shrine in the mandir. *Rot* is prepared and offered to the deity. The wooden sandals and *chimta* are washed and new peach coloured material is laid on the shrine. During *Navratri*, the ten days leading up to Dusshera in October, fasts are maintained in honour of the goddesses and gifts of red-*chunnis*, *bindis*, makeup and jewellery are offered to the goddess. The fast culminates with the serving of the *kanchka*, seven pre-pubescent girls representing seven goddesses are treated with great respect and adoration. They are seated, their feet and hands are

washed and dried by devotees that have maintained a fast for the nine days, they are served the traditional semolina *halva* as the personification of the goddesses and given gifts of clothing, jewellery and money.

Gradually the popularity of the *mandir* mushroomed and the *mandir* had to be moved from the loft of the family home. Eventually funds were raised through the *sangat* to purchase a derelict factory in an industrial estate, which was converted into the present *mandir*, on Bank Street in January 1998. The new *mandir* follows the same format with the focal point of attention and worship of Baba Kangar Wala. Shrines to the goddess and Baba Balak Nath are found on either side and a *Shivlingam* has been installed. *Murtis* of the deities have been installed in Mandir Peer Darbar in the main shrine area rather than lithographic prints. Deities represented by *murtis* in the Peer Darbar are Ram, Sita, Lakshman and Hanuman, Krishan-Radha, *Mata Durga*, Baba Balak Nath, Siva and Ganesh. *Arati* is still performed twice a day and are the focal point for Kapoor to sit in *chaunki* and perform exorcisms. The *arati* has taken on a more vibrant role as drums are played, conch shells blown and bells rung. Furthermore rather than playing qawali's or kirtan on audio cassette on the three main days (Sunday, Tuesday, and Thursday) *sangat* sing *kirtan* and *bhetan* themselves.

As Mandir Peer Darbar has developed from its simple beginnings in the loft of Kapoors family home to a fully functional place of worship, used by the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton on a daily basis, there have been certain changes in the practices and beliefs of Kapoor and the *sangat* at Mandir Peer Darbar. The physical design of the *mandir* is now similar to a 'normal' Hindu *mandir* with the presence of the lingam and other *murtis* in the main shrine area. If not for the presence of the main shrine to Baba Kangar Wala, the name of the *mandir* in neon lights emblazoned on the front gate of the *mandir* and the green *janda* hoisted in front of the building, this would be regarded by any observer as a normal Hindu *mandir* described in any academic work of diaspora communities in Britain. *Sevadars* perform *arati* in the normal way observed at other Hindu *mandirs* by placing *tilaks* on the foreheads of the *murtis* and honouring the deities by the circular movements of ghee divas around the images. The use of conch shells and bells is also similar to *arati* at other Hindu *mandirs*.

Furthermore Mandir Peer Darbar performs several *havans* throughout the year again aligning closely to practices at other Hindu *mandirs*. Moreover, a local *pandit* conducted the consecration ceremony for the installations of the *murtis* at Mandir Peer Darbar. The practices of exorcism and healing which are explored in detail in the next chapter have also transformed radically. Although we have not discussed the practice of exorcism or tackled the whole kismet dimension of Punjabi religion in Wolverhampton in this chapter, we will discover in later chapters that there are definite trends within the Punjabi diaspora to reform to what are regarded as more normative practices of religion accepted by the stringent concepts of religious boundaries. Hence I would argue the trend by Mandir Peer Darbar to implement the many Hindu practices as an attempt to provide a more acceptable portrayal of religious practices and beliefs. However we will now turn our attention to Ek Niwas and its development as a primary focal point of Punjabi religion in Wolverhampton.

### ***Baba Balak Nath and Ek Niwas Divine Universal Temple***

Ek Niwas Universal Divine Temple is unique in its universality of religious traditions all provided for under one roof. The *baba ji* at Ek Niwas, Tarlochan Singh Bhoparai, has created what Geaves calls a ‘*spiritual* Disneyworld’ (2007: 111) in which the concept of universality of religion is at the fore. Regardless of the universal approach emphasised at Ek Niwas, the worship of Baba Balak Nath and Mata, and the beliefs and practices are predominantly Punjabi in character. Ek Niwas is another invaluable place of worship established by the charismatic leadership of Bhoparai that has become a focal point of worship for members of the Punjabi diaspora. Furthermore the universal approach adopted by Ek Niwas has also resulted in highlighting the different dimensional approaches taken by the Punjabi diaspora in terms of their respective religious polarisations. In later chapters Punjabi religion in Wolverhampton and the schisms that have erupted in the Punjabi diaspora because of the staunch allegiance by certain sectors to panthic, kismet, dharmic or qaumic will be analysed. Before focussing on the development of Ek Niwas in Wolverhampton, the prevalence of Baba Balak Nath in Punjabi religion will be discussed. Although Ek Niwas utilises a universal rhetoric to describe its religious outlook, Baba Balak Nath is still the focal deity

in the *mandir*. The fact that Baba Balak Nath revealed the design of the temple to Bhoparai in a vision is symbolic of the importance of the deity in Ek Niwas.

Baba Balak Nath is a popular figure within the Punjabi religious tradition, whose pictures and *murtis* are found throughout the Punjab and Himachal Pradesh, where the official centre of the tradition is. Apart from Sharma (1970) and Geaves (1996b, 1998, 1999) the cult of Baba Balak Nath has not been explored within religious studies. Geaves work in particular in exploring the worship of Baba Balak Nath and the authentication of the cult in the West Midlands has provided a great insight into this popular religious figure which is highly visible throughout the Punjab and has gradually since the 1980s grown in popularity amongst the Punjabi diaspora in Britain. It is not my intention in this section to provide an in depth account of Baba Balak Nath, its origins and development. Geaves (1998) has provided a detailed account of the Baba Balak Nath tradition, however for the purposes of this thesis we will be briefly required to state the historical development of the cult and highlight the importance of Baba Balak Nath in the Punjab psyche as part of their distinct religious tradition. Initially I will focus on the accounts of Baba Balak Nath and his hagiography that are predominantly provided by followers of the tradition in the Punjab and Wolverhampton.

Baba Balak Nath is firmly entrenched in the Saivite tradition of north India for two reasons. Firstly his hagiographical details, which are readily embellished by his devotees, relate him to Siva as his eldest son and secondly through the Nath tradition with a supposed *guru-shishya* relationship between him and Goraknath, the famous Nath yogi. Baba Balak Nath in a previous incarnation was the son of Siva and Parvati, known as Kartikeya, hence his younger brother is regarded as Ganesa. Siva is said to have offered the brothers the chance of marriage and the selection of a bride first for the one that travelled the *trilok* - three worlds which consist of either the netherworld, heaven and earth or sky planets and earth (Klostermaier, 1998:187). Kartikeya who is represented as riding a peacock set of on the challenge assuring himself victory because of his superior *vahana* (animals which are traditionally represented as carrying gods) in his peacock compared to Ganes' mouse. However Ganes is reported to have circled his

mother and father thrice and declare that the *trilok* for him were his parents, and hence he was given first choice of bride and was married before Kartikeya's return. Kartikeya, on his return saw this as a deceitful act by his brother and more so by his parents. Enraged Kartikeya swore celibacy and went into deep meditation. At some stage Siva pleased at his sons penance granted a boon, in which Kartikeya was ensured worship and a principal role in guiding mankind through the *kali yuga*.

According to followers of Baba Balak Nath in Wolverhampton, Kartikeya then incarnated as Baba Balak Nath and became a goatherd for a woman landowner by the name of Mata Rattno around 700 years ago (Geaves, 1998) in a town now known as Shahtalai. Being a *sidh*, Baba Balak Nath would spend most of his time in meditation and after a period of twelve years, followers believe that Mata Rattno received complaints by local landowners that her goatherd was irresponsible and as result their crops had been destroyed by the freely roaming herd. Mata Rattno angered by Baba Balak Nath's negligence remonstrates with him and calls into question her folly in paying him so well with *roth* and *lassi*, two forms of food popular in north India. Baba Balak Nath angered by Mata Rattno's allegations, states that he never partook of the food and shows her the rot stored in a hollow tree trunk and the *lassi* at the foot of the tree.

After Baba Balak Nath's altercation with Mata Rattno, he decided to continue his meditation in the mountainous region surrounding Shahtalai. While meditating Baba Balak Nath met Gorak Nath who attempts to initiate him into his own Nath yoga tradition. However Baba Balak Nath defies all Gorak Nath's attempts at a forced conversion and enters a *guffa* (cave) on the Mountain Dhingri where he remains in *Mahasamadhi*. Followers of Baba Balak Nath believe that he still resides within the mountain, deep in meditation, and as a result is still accessible to his followers by their pilgrimage to the *guffa*. Mata Rattno attempted to find Baba Balak Nath and persuade him to return to her in Shahtalai and continue herding her cattle, however Baba Balak Nath refuses to return to her service but agrees to visit her the first Sunday of every Indian month, *jetha Aitwar* (First Sunday). *Jetha Aitwar* has become an important day within the cult which is commemorated by devotees through the lighting of a *jot* (pure ghee diva),

burning of incense and preparation of *roth*. This custom is followed on most Sundays, however *jetha Aitwar* these practices are strictly followed. *Bibhuti* (ashes) produced by the *dhunni* are sacred for devotees of Baba Balak Nath who believe in its healing powers for physical and supernatural afflictions. The *dhunni* is similar to a *havan* however no offerings are placed in the *dhunni*. Traditionally Yogis used the *dhunni* simply as a source of light and heat, but devotees believe because of the immense yogic powers of Baba Balak Nath the *dhunni* is sacred.

Bhatti and Lakhani (2001) provide a more in-depth account of Baba Balak Nath's life than that provided by his followers. According to Bhatti and Lakhani and the various websites dedicated to the god, Baba Balak Nath has taken birth in all four yugas of the Hindu tradition (<http://www.jaibabedi.com/>, <http://www.balaknath.com/>, <http://www.sidhbabaji.org/babaji.php>). In one such incarnation Baba Balak Nath became Sukhdeva, the son of Rishi Vyasa 'the arranger of the Vedas, and the compiler of the Mahabharata and all the Puranas' (Klostermaier, 1998: 207) forging a strong connection between the cult of Baba Balak Nath and the mainstream mythology of Hinduism. Rishi Vyasa plays a prominent role not just as a great sage but also within the Mahabharata. According to the accounts provided by Bhatti and Lakhani and the websites Sukhdeva was born as a result of hearing the whole *Amar Katha* that Siva was performing for Parvati upon her insistence. The *Amar Katha*, story of immortality, has great significance within Hindu mythology and is regarded as the reason for Siva's own immortal nature through the ages. Sukhdeva was a dead parrot in the cave of Amarnath on the Kailash Mountain in the Himalayas revered as the heaven of Siva. Upon hearing the whole recitation of the *Amar Katha* the dead parrot was revived, however more importantly became a great *Maha Yogi* who could take human birth at will and was *Amar* – immortal. As the *Amar Katha* was only meant to give immortality to Parvati, who had fallen asleep through its recitation, Siva was angered that some other being had reaped the benefits. Fleeing the wrath of Siva the parrot, through its yogic powers, transformed and entered the water pitcher of Rishi Vyasa's wife, who subsequently drank the water and fell pregnant with the *Maha yogi* as a her child. However still fearing the anger of Siva the *Maha Yogi* would not take birth and

remained in the womb for twelve years. Rishi Vyasa having learnt of the reason for this prolonged period of pregnancy advised his wife to appease Siva through sincere devotion and therefore be able to give birth to the *Maha Yogi*. Rishi Vyasa's wife gave birth to the Maha Yogi who was named Sukhdeva after receiving Siva's assurance that he would not harm the child and, according to the *Maha Yogis* wishes he would not be forced into the materialistic world and he would be free to continue his meditation in the jungle and mountainous regions. Hence Baba Balak Nath in a previous incarnation has been linked to Rishi Vyasa and in his incarnation in the Kali Yuga is regarded as one of the 9 siddhas and 84 nathas that were born at the same time as Sukhdeva.

In his present incarnation as Baba Balak Nath, it is believed that he was born in Gujarat and having gained his place as a *siddha* and *yogi* was from birth inclined towards meditation rather than the material world. His earthly parents attempted to immerse him in the world through marriage, however they were unsuccessful and Baba Balak Nath left home to immerse himself in meditation. Bhatti and Lakhani's account of Baba Balak Nath differs here from the accounts provided by others. According to Bhatti and Lakhani Baba Balak Nath after leaving home went to the Mansarovar Lake and sat in meditation to gain Siva's blessings. Parvati acted as intermediary and Baba Balak Nath was eventually blessed that firstly he would always remain a *balak* – child, hence the name Baba Balak Nath, and secondly

You were Amar from your birth, so you will be worshipped by several names universally, particularly in the period of Kali-yuga where you will be worshipped by millions of people and your temples will be everywhere. You will also fulfil the wishes of your worshippers. (Bhatti and Lakhani, 2001: 225)

According to the web accounts Baba Balak Nath did not meditate on the banks of the Mansarovar Lake in this birth but during his incarnation as Mahakaul in the *dwapura yuga*. Baba Balak Nath eventually meets Guru Dattatreya and is initiated by him as a disciple and then the story of Baba Balak Nath follows the same format that has already been outlined. Firstly his working for Mata Rattno,

who Bhatti and Lakhani suggest was the wife of Rishi Vyasa. Hence Baba Balak Nath served her for twelve years as a repayment for the period of time he spent in her womb. Secondly his meeting with Gorak Nath and eventual immersion into the Mountain Dhingri resulted in the establishment of the *guffa* as a centre of pilgrimage and central shrine for devotees of Baba Balak Nath.

Bhatti, who is the founder and leader of the Baba Balak Nath Mandir in Walsall, and Lakhani in their account of Baba Balak Nath's previous incarnations and present form have attempted an 'authentication of a Punjabi regional folk cult' (Geaves, 1999). Geaves argues that Bhatti, the *bhagat* of the Walsall Mandir as he prefers to be known, focuses on the Saivite tradition and his scriptural basis of the tradition on the Skanda Purana further legitimises the tradition and places it firmly within the framework of classical scriptural based Hinduism rather than the popular folk traditions. Furthermore Geaves asserts that the bhagat

produces much literature to this effect and has recently written a book on the lives of Baba Balaknath that attempts to prove the deity previously incarnated as Skanda and Sukhdeva in the dwapura and treta yugas respectively (Bhatti:n.d.). In this way the folk deity, who may have begun his historical existence as a medieval nath yogi, is authenticated by being placed within traditions that are recognisable throughout India. (Geaves, 1999: 41)

The authentication of the tradition has also been attempted on many websites maintained by devotees of Baba Balak Nath. Most the websites hold the same information and refer to the *nath siddha* tradition of Baba Balak Nath and various scriptures like the Skanda Purana and Bhagwata Purana as a legitimising of their tradition. However before we explore the reasoning behind the authentication of the tradition in Britain, we must consider its development in the Punjab and whether there have been influences of authentication from the centre of the tradition in India and its practice amongst the diaspora community.

Sharma (1970) who provided the first academic insight into the cult of Baba Balak Nath, rightly records that the forms of worship that take place at the main

shrine are simple in that there are no elaborate ceremonies distinctive to this tradition. *Arati* is performed twice a day, as is most Hindu Mandirs, with the waving of ghee divas in front of the *murti* of Baba Balak Nath in the *guffa*. The *arati* is sung in the vernacular language rather than any sanskrit mantras. The *arati* is performed by *pujaris* at the *guffa* who Sharma notes were brahmin, and the position is hereditary. The *mahant* at the shrine was not of brahmin descent and according to Sharma played a subjugated role in the ceremonies performed at the shrine. Although he is respected by pilgrims and recognised as the spiritual successor of Baba Balak Nath, it is not for his *darshan* that the devotees come to the *guffa*.

Offerings are made by devotees for which they receive in return *prashad* and *bibhuti* from the *pujaris* at the *guffa*. The offerings can range to a whole manner of things however, the offering of *roth*, a simple fried flatbread made of wheat flour and sugar, some times accompanied with *suji da halwa* (a hot pudding of semolina, ghee, water and sugar) are the most usual offerings. Geaves (1998) notes the offering of goats at the shrine for a demon by the name of Lodh who was displaced by Baba Balak Nath from the *guffa* on which the shrine and cult are now centred. The goats are not bought into the main shrine area but tied at some distance from the main area of pilgrimage. Another prevalent offering made to Baba Balak Nath is *jande* (flags) usually peach or saffron in colour, which are offered up at the *guffa* and placed in and around the main shrine. Sharma noted the intricate relationship that is forged between the devotees and Baba Balak Nath through the mutual exchange of offerings and receipt of *prashad*. Sharma suggests that this exchange enhances the reputation of the cult and the holiness of Baba Balak Nath is received by those far and wide rather than just the pilgrims who visit the shrine. The main day of worship for devotees at the shrine is Sunday, which is highlighted within Punjab as a day on which worship is particularly addressed to Baba Balak Nath. As stated earlier the *jetha aitwar* of the Indian new month draws a larger amount of pilgrims to the centre and the *Chet mela*, the main festival of the cult begins mid March and continues for the whole month until the beginning of the month of *Vaisakh*. During the *Chet Mela* devotees travel from far and wide in the Punjab and beyond including diaspora communities taking offerings to the shrine. The offering of *jande* is

mainly observed at this festival along with the traditional offering of *roth* and *halwa*.

The worship of Baba Balak Nath once outside of the shrine and in the villages, towns and cities of the Punjab is vividly different from what one encounters at the main shrine. Geaves and Sharma both note the differences in the worship and correctly state that the kismatic dimensions of religion come to the fore amongst the followers. Firstly the shrines and *mandirs* that are dedicated to Baba Balak Nath are a common occurrence in the religious landscape of the region. The numbers of these shrines do not reflect the numerous shrines that are maintained in believers homes, whether these are just simple alters with a lithograph print of the Baba or with *murtis* and other paraphernalia related to the tradition like a *janda*, peacock feathers, *chimta* or *Yoga Danda*. Sharma notes that the worship of Baba Balak Nath may be in thanksgiving for a particular happy occasion, or in order to receive some form of financial or worldly gain. As part of a promise to Baba Balak Nath a pilgrimage may be ensured if there needs are fulfilled. Geaves (1998) provides much more detail on the kismatic form of religion which is the focus of the religious practitioners in the Punjab and especially those that believe in Baba Balak Nath. Furthermore Geaves highlights the role of a devotee of Baba Balak Nath who believes he has ‘the power to channel the god’s healing power.’ (Geaves, 1998: 79) becomes instrumental in the community within the religious traditions of the Punjab. We will discuss the role of the *babas* in more detail at a later stage, however these charismatic leaders are extremely influential and essential in the narrative of the cult that has developed in the Punjab and amongst the diaspora in Wolverhampton. These satellite centres of worship operate independently from the main shrine, however all of them regard Shahtalai and the *guffa* as the epi-centre of their tradition. They will form groups for pilgrimage during the *Chet Mela* and pay obeisance at the shrine even though the baba may not be recognised outside of his own group who pay allegiance to him based on the healing powers received from Baba Balak Nath. The curative powers of Baba Balak Nath are made easily accessible to devotees through the *babas* and *bhagats* in the satellite shrines, while a firm allegiance to the deity is maintained and unwavering. As Baba Balak Nath’s intermediary and a conduit of his power the

*baba* or *bhagat* also gains a higher status within the vicinity and becomes a key figure in the development of Punjabi religion.

It is not essential, as Geaves has observed, that the *baba* is Hindu. In many cases he may be of Sikh descent and still maintain his Sikh identity but also continue his worship to Baba Balak Nath. This is also true of the vast majority of the followers of Baba Balak Nath in the Punjab and the diaspora. The boundaries of religion are most definitely not as solid as academic texts have portrayed. The boundaries, if there are any, are permeable and as a result attempting to understand the true nature of religion in these societies is all the more difficult. Sharma alludes to these problems when she states that

The social organization of popular Hinduism is notoriously difficult to study. Confronted with the mass of local cults jumbled with pan-Hindu practices, and the multiplicity and diversity of ritual practitioners, the observer may be tempted to suggest that no such organization exists...You 'belong' to a cult only as long as you care to practice it, and membership is seldom exclusive; it is generally possible to participate in more than one cult at a time, and most Hindus do so (Sharma, 1970: 137)

Although she uses the term Hindu, I would prefer to use the term Punjabi based on the locality of the tradition rather than a label that has distinct connotations of a religious tradition. Although the religious practices of the cult may centrally be Hindu in nature the makeup of the devotees is not. However Geaves (1998) correctly notes the development of the cult into the plains of the Punjab where it has infused with the 'bhakti/sant influences which is so strong in the Punjab, and to the 'enchanted universe' of popular Punjab folk religion associated with miracles, magical healing, exorcism and the aid of supernatural powers to resolve misfortune' (Geaves, 1998: 79) has influenced the cult. The relationship between the *babas and bhagats*, Baba Balak Nath and the devotees can also be confusing. The *baba* as the healer at times becomes more important than Baba Balak Nath as the devotees need for a physical relationship. The *babas* can provide instant action in the forms of rituals and advice, whether for the cure of supernatural affliction or other financial or worldly matters rather than just praying to Baba

Balak Nath. Although the deity is not displaced the *baba* is also highly revered and as his acting agent holds immense power within the group that are attracted to him. It is clear that the cult of Baba Balak Nath has not attempted any major forms of authentication in the Punjab. Apart from the websites which clearly define Baba Balak Nath within the *siddha* and *nath* tradition and see his role of in the *kali yuga* as a Sanskritised form of incarnation, other forms of development are clearly part of the larger Punjabi religious background. The authentication of the cult has clearly taken place in the diaspora, which will be explored in the later chapters.

### *Ek Niwas*

Now that a brief history of the Baba Balak Nath cult has been detailed the development of Ek Niwas in Wolverhampton is provided focussing on the role of Bhoparai as the *baba*. Bhoparai arrived in Britain in the late 1960s, again as part of the mass migration in which the family units were re-instated. According to Bhoparai, his devotion to Baba Balak Nath was a part of his childhood and has continued to this day. Although he is from a *jat* Sikh family, Bhoparai stated that the worship of Baba Balak Nath or other deities was not uncommon in his childhood or amongst other families. He does not recollect how his devotion to Baba Balak Nath began but he regards it as *kudrat* (God's grace) that he has continued on this path after immigrating and settling in Britain. According to Bhoparai, when he settled in Wolverhampton the family continued the worship of Baba Balak Nath, but there was no great emphasis in this. Rather it was just a continuation of their practices from the Punjab along with attending the *gurdwara*. However at some stage the worship of Baba Balak Nath became the main purpose in Bhoparai's life. Initially, according to Bhoparai, the worship of Baba Balak Nath was started above his business premises on Sundays where *sangat* were able to attend. Bhoparai had continued his own personal devotion to Baba Balak Nath, but in the early 1980s the weekly gathering was convened. According to Bhoparai, his own devotion and *seva* of Baba Balak Nath had given him *spiritual* growth and *shakti* to help others. *Shakti* in this instance is used by Bhoparai to refer to the religious powers he has gained through his devotion and worship of Baba Balak Nath. This is not to be confused with the *shakti* which is

usually related to the goddess in Hindu cosmology, although the term may have been borrowed from that arena. The weekly meeting became popular as a result of Bhoparai's fame for helping members of the Punjabi diaspora resolve problems of supernatural malaise in its various forms. The *shakti* that Bhoparai had gained thus gave him, like Kapoor of Mandir Peer Darbar an elevated status within the *sangat*. Similarly Bhoparai also asserted his role as a mere *sevadar* of the *sangat* and Baba Balak Nath. Of his title as '*baba ji*', Bhoparai interprets this a demonstration of the *sangats prem* (love) for him and as a term of respect, which shows the closeness he has achieved to Baba Balak Nath that it is recognised by others. At some stage in the mid to late 1980s Bhoparai established the first *mandir* which was later to become Ek Niwas on the Dudley Road in Wolverhampton in a terraced house. The whole ground floor of the property was used as the *mandir* as it was known then by the Punjabi diaspora or more popularly '*Tochi's mandir*', *Tochi* being a common nickname Bhoparai is known by amongst the Punjabis in Wolverhampton.

The universal ethos of the present Ek Niwas was not in as stark evidence in the *mandir* in the terraced house. Baba Balak Nath's links to the saivite tradition and the presence of goddess worship were much more apparent. The main shrine area, situated in the bay-window, consisted of *murtis* of Siva, Baba Balak Nath and Mata. The *murti* of Baba Balak Nath was in the middle and hence the focal point of worship. Around the *murti* were usual apparatus linked to the legends of Baba Balak Nath and found at shrines attributed to him. These include the *chimta*, peacock feathers to represent his *vahana*, wooden sandals and *yog danda*. The *murtis* of Mata and Siva were similarly adorned with their respective apparatus. Signs of the *mandir's* moves towards a universal approach were evident in the presence of large lithographs of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh being present in the *mandir*. Furthermore the presence of a free *langar*, although not exclusive to the Sikh tradition, presence at the *mandir* signalled the ethos of universalism and equality that the concept of *langar* is meant to portray. The presence of goddess worship although not peculiar, as we have seen amongst the Punjabi diaspora, was more prevalent in the *mandir*. This was enhanced by the presence of *mata ji*, who like Bhoparai has gained the honorific title by her *seva* and *puja* of the goddess. *Mata ji* plays a vital role in Ek Niwas in that her

presence enhances the siva sakti aspect of the Hindu tradition. She shares the same respect and honorific titles as Bhoparai and plays an active role in all aspects of the *puja* and *seva* at Ek Niwas.

The *puja* at the *mandir* consisted of the *arati* which was sung by Bhoparai and *mata ji*. Another *sevadar* waved the tray of *divas* in front of the *murtis*, while the *arati* was sung first to Baba Balak Nath and then to Mata. Bhoparai would then perform *jaikare*, similar to the way described earlier by Kapoor at Mandir Peer Darbar. Unlike Kapoor, Bhoparai did not show any physical signs of receiving *hava* or Baba Balak Nath's message during the performance of *arati*. It was once the *chaunki* had begun that Bhoparai began helping the *sangat* afflicted with supernatural malaise and the *shakti* granted to him by Baba Balak Nath came to the fore. Like Kapoor, Bhoparai and *mata ji* were seated on *gaddis* rather than the same levels as the *sangat*. The *gaddis* were in close proximity to the shrines and Bhoparai also held a *chimta*, like that of Baba Balak Nath during the *chaunki*. The *chimta* was used for blessing members of the *sangat* by placing it on their heads or sometimes to punish the supernatural malaise that were affecting the *sangat* that approached Bhoparai for help. During the *chaunki bhetan* were sung or the majority of the time was spent in repeating *Jai Babe di* or *Jai Mata di* (victory to the Baba, Victory to the Goddess). The full process of the *chaunki* and its elements of exorcism and healing will be dealt with in more depth in the following chapter, suffice to say here that the majority of the time at the *mandir* was spent in these practices. As is prevalent in Punjabi religion Sunday and Tuesday were considered the special days for *seva* and *puja* to Baba Balak Nath and the goddesses respectively.

As the *sangat* grew the need for a bigger building was fulfilled with the conversion of an old factory on Dudley Road into the present EK Niwas Universal Divine Temple. The opening of Ek Niwas in 1995 began with a procession from the first *mandir* Bhoparai had used on Dudley Road to the present building. This was the first instance in which a religious procession was undertaken in which the regional Punjabi religious tradition of Baba Balak Nath was celebrated, rather than the more usual *Vaisakhi nagar kirtans*, which take place annually. The procession, or *nagar kirtan* using the terminology used by

Ek Niwas at that time, was headed by Bhoparai and *mata ji*. Dhols were being played at the head of the procession and Bhoparai held aloft a *nishan sahib* (flag) of Baba Balak Nath and led the following *sangat* in singing bhajans and shouting jaikare to which the whole *sangat* responded with similar refrains. The procession was taken through a heavily populated area where a large number of the Punjabi diaspora lived. This was indeed a unique event in the history of religious traditions in Wolverhampton in that a different form of *nagar kirtan* was taking place that had not been witnessed before. The *nishan sahib* was hoisted in the front of the new building. The use of the term *nishan sahib* is interesting in that this is the traditional term for the saffron coloured flags found outside most *gurdwaras*. Whereas the *nishan sahib* in Sikh *gurdwaras* holds a *khanda* at its apex the *nishan sahib* at Ek Niwas held a *trishul* at its apex signifying links to the saivite tradition. Originally on the outside of the building symbols from the major religious traditions of the world were placed on the outer railings signifying the Universal approach of the temple, along with the name Ek Niwas Universal Divine Temple with the picture of Baba Balak Nath standing in the Himalayan mountain range. The name 'Ek Niwas' meaning one home was further representation of the universal approach which explodes into life when one enters the building itself.

Ek Niwas if not completely unique for its universal approach to religion, is unique in the design of the temple. A massive fibre-glass range of mountains and caves with artificial waterfalls provides an exceptional background in which numerous shrines to various deities are found. The fibre-glass Himalayan mountain range is intended to transport the *sangat* mentally to the dense mountainous region in which Baba Balak Nath's *guffa* is found, and hence strengthen the presence of the god at Ek Niwas also. Bhoparai was guided by a series of visions by Baba Balak Nath in how the new Temple should look and the main purpose for this new place of worship where all mankind can gather under one roof and worship God in his many forms. Subsequently a large picture of Baba Balak Nath in the fibre-glass mountains is accompanied by the legend in English 'God's voice is heard in many ways'. The main shrine to Baba Balak Nath is reminiscent of the *guffa* in that a *murti* of Baba Balak Nath is surrounded by his usual apparatus and replicating the strict orders of the *guffa* women are not

able to go up the stairs to the raised platform which houses the main shrine. They may bow at the stairs, or stand on the floor in front of the shrine and offer their prayers or do *matha tekna*. Behind the shrine large lithograph depicts several key events in the hagiography of Baba Balak Nath. A ghee *jot* and *dhoop* are kept lit at the shrine and as is the custom in normal mandirs several bells are located around the building. Within the fibre-glass mountain range *murtis* of Shirdi Sai Baba, Ram and Sita, Krishan and Radha, Siva and Ganesh are found. One cave was used for the installation of the Guru Granth Sahib and the other cave was used for a shrine to Mata Durga. Along the walls large lithographs of the goddess Kali, Guru Gobind Singh and Baba Deep Singh are found. In a separate section opposite the *langar* hall a lingam is installed and a small replica of a *khanqah* is found which is not for any one significant *pir*, but is a shrine in which any one that has a belief in *pir* can come and worship. Later *murtis* of Jesus and Buddha were also installed. The grand opening of Ek Niwas was attended by at least two thousand followers, whether these were ardent followers or the local Punjabi diaspora just attending out of sheer curiosity is difficult to answer. Bhoparai performed the first *arati* to Baba Balak Nath and Mata Durga himself and then *bhajans* and *kirtan* were conducted by Bhoparai and many other devotees and invited guests. The *Chet Mela* and the anniversary of Ek Niwas' opening are celebrated annually with great fervour.

The daily worship at Ek Niwas is conducted twice a day. In the mornings Ek Niwas is opened for followers to have *darshan* and perform *puja* to the deities, however in the evenings the main *puja* is performed in the form of *arati*, sung by Bhoparai followed by *bhajans*, *kirtan* and *simran*. *Langar* is served after the communal worship. The *chaunki* takes place after the *langar* is served in the new temple with Bhoparai seated on a chair in front of the main shrine area listening to and helping members of the *sangat* that approach him for his help and guidance. Like Kapoor, Bhoparai as the *baba ji* at Ek Niwas, holds an extremely important position. *Sangat* approach Bhoparai for his *piar* (love) in the form of him placing his hand on his head. This usually precedes a member of the *sangat* touching Bhoparai's feet with their hand and drawing up to their forehead or chest. Furthermore, Bhoparai refers to the majority of the *sangat* as *beta*, which literally means son, however the term is not gender specific in everyday Punjabi

use. However his use of this affectionate term highlights his positions as the senior in the relationship but more importantly the closeness of the relationship between the *sangat* and Bhoparai. Bhoparai's use of the *chimta* is again significant in that it is symbolic of the Baba Balak Nath cult and lends his role in Ek Niwas greater power. As discussed earlier the use of the *gaddi* is an important aspect of Punjabi religion and provides an insight into the dichotomy of the *baba jis* role as the inspirational leaders of their respective religious communities but also their self-perceived function as mere *sevadars* of the deities and the *sangat*. As already mentioned the practice of exorcism and the whole arena of Ballards kismet dimension will be explored fully in the next chapter, however now we will turn our attention to the negative publicity that brought Ek Niwas' existence to the fore in the British media and subsequent conflicts with the Sikh members of the Punjabi diaspora.

The front cover of the *Sunday Mercury* on 23 April 2000 read 'Chip shop man who became a cult leader'. The sensational title was followed by a fascinating piece of tabloid journalism in which Bhoparai – the chip shop man turned cult leader (also a butcher and business partner in a dry cleaning business) was criticised by medics and local religious groups for the practice of exorcisms and ritual slaughters. Bhoparai was criticised for his treatment of women during the process of exorcism and healing and the ill effects this had on younger members of the *sangat* at Ek Niwas. Local Sikh *gurdwaras*, the Wolverhampton Inter-Faith Group, the British Medical Association and the *bhagat* of the Walsall based Baba Balak Nath Mandir all criticised Ek Niwas and its leader for the religious practices carried out. The article in the *Sunday Mercury* was the first form of publicity that Punjabi religious traditions in the diaspora have received. Indian magazines and newspapers catering for the South Asian diaspora in Britain have numerous advertisements for various religious officiates offering solutions to marital, financial and supernatural problems. However, these regional forms of religion found in Wolverhampton do not feature in the advertisements. The article in the *Sunday Mercury* was followed by a spate of short articles nationally in *The Sun* and in local newspapers, Indian publications in this country and India.

The day the article was published, devotees demonstrated outside Ek Niwas holding placards professing their reverence and love for Bhoparai. The demonstration was more daring than it may seem. Ek Niwas has a history of conflict with the local Sikh *gurdwara*, Guru Nanak *Gurdwara* on Sedgley Street in Blakenhall. The committee members of the *gurdwara* are vociferous in their attacks on the practices at Ek Niwas in the past and in the article published in the *Sunday Mercury* in 2000 and other Punjabi publications catering for the Punjabi British diaspora. Ek Niwas universal ethos of all coming and worshipping under one roof has drawn great criticism from Sikh members of the Punjabi diaspora. Members of the *gurdwara* are unhappy with the placement of the Guru Granth Sahib in the same place as so many *murtis* and have attempted to remove the Guru Granth Sahib on a number of occasions. Events regarding the installation of the Guru Granth Sahib came to head in 2006, and these will be discussed later in the chapter. The demonstration outside Ek Niwas coincided with the *Vaisakhi nagar kirtan* and subsequent *mela* at a local park, hence large numbers of Sikhs had congregated at the *gurdwara*. Conflict ensued throughout the day with Sikhs passing by in cars and showing their displeasure.

The swiftness with which the demonstration was arranged was fascinating as it portrayed the importance and reverence the *sangat* have for their *baba ji*. Placards professed openly their love for their *baba ji* and their beliefs in his truthfulness and holiness. Libel cases were filed by Bhoparai against *Sunday Mercury*, *The Sun* and other publications which ran any similar articles. In December 2000, Bhoparai won the libel cases, apologies were printed, and damages paid. A video recording was made of Bhoparai and some close devotees after they had won the case against the *Sunday Mercury*, in which the *sangat* openly professed their support and respect for him and his importance in the community. Other members of the *sangat* that are on the recording regarded Baba Balak Nath and Bhoparai as the backbone of the community. Although Bhoparai regards himself as a mere *sevadhar* his importance in the community and to his followers is immense.

In 2006 Ek Niwas was once again at the centre of controversy when the local Sikh community led by members of the Respect for Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji

campaign (R4G) and *sangat* from the Sedgley Street *Gurdwara* in Wolverhampton demanded that Ek Niwas cease installing and using the Guru Granth Sahib in their daily worship. As stated earlier, the Guru Granth Sahib was initially installed in Ek Niwas after the grand opening in an adjacent cave to the main shrine. On the insistence of the local Sikh *sangat*, the Guru Granth Sahib's shrine was re-located to a higher place within the building separated from the main shrine area. This was in an attempt to appease the local Sikhs rejection at the placement of the Guru Granth Sahib at the same level as other deities personified in *murtis* at the same level. However later it was deemed inappropriate by the Sikh community that the Guru Granth Sahib be placed in the same building as where *murti puja* takes place. According to reports on various Sikh forums like [www.sikhsangat.com](http://www.sikhsangat.com) the *puja* performed at Ek Niwas goes against the Sikh traditions admonishment at clapping or dancing in the presence of Guru Granth sahib. At Ek Niwas during the *Chet mela* and various *jagrans* (religious events in commemoration of the goddess which continue all night) *sangat* clap along to the *bhajans* being sung and those filled with religious fervour were not opposed to dancing in front of the *sangat*. The Sikh community regarded this as a gross violation of Sikh principles and demonstrations were made outside Ek Niwas on a number of occasions in an attempt to recover the Guru Granth Sahib from a place, which Sikhs thought were responsible for deliberately disrespecting the Sikh tradition. A *sandesh* (A message which explains a *hukamnama*) was obtained from the Akal Takht concerning this issue. The police were present at the demonstration and acted as conciliators in an attempt to avert violence towards devotees at Ek Niwas. Eventually the Guru Granth Sahib was removed from Ek Niwas.

Ek Niwas Universal Divine Temple and Bhoparai have certainly faced a number of difficulties in maintaining their ethos of providing a place of worship for all humanity to gather and worship. The difficulties that Ek Niwas have faced indicate that the form of Punjabi religion that is made available their through the charismatic leadership of Bhoparai has caused discomfort not only with the British tabloid journalism but more interestingly with the local members of the Punjabi diaspora. This was not only evident in the initial article in the *Sunday Mercury*, where Bhoparai and his practices were criticised by the sensational

nature of the journalists reporting style, but also the local Sikh *gurdwara* and the Baba Balak Nath Mandir in Walsall. But the subsequent difficulties directly with the Sikh community in Wolverhampton indicate that there is a sentiment of deep resentment towards Punjabi religion in Wolverhampton. However we must consider why this polarisation is taking place in Wolverhampton? Why do certain factions of the Punjabi diaspora despise Punjabi religion? The reasons for the polarisation of the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton will be analysed in latter chapters. However before moving on to consider the belief in possession and exorcism in the next chapter, the presence of gurdwaras in honour of Vadhbhag Singh in Coventry and Wolverhampton must be addressed.

### ***Baba Vadhbhag Singh***

The Vadhbhag Singh movement has been transported to Britain through the process of migration and has developed in unique ways to accommodate changes that have occurred as a result. In 1974 a *darbar* in which the veneration of Vadhbhag Singh is vital was opened in Coventry City; a house was purchased for *sangat* to gather and worship regularly and in 1984 a larger building was purchased and was named Gurdwara Ajit Darbar, after the founder of the movement in Britain, Baba Ajit Singh Chaggar. Although the focus of this thesis has been on the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton I have chosen to include this section on Vadhbhag Singh and his followers in the West Midlands for several reasons. Firstly, most the families that attend Ajit Darbar are from the Wednesfield area of Wolverhampton. There are at least six families who regularly attend Ajit Darbar over the weekends who are from this area. Considering the small amount of *sangat* that attend Ajit Darbar these families are a substantial number of followers. Secondly in 2007 a gurdwara was opened in the Bilston area of Wolverhampton which is also dedicated to Baba Vadhbhag Singh. Although I was unable to gather any information from there, its presence in establishment and presence in Wolverhampton, justifies the inclusion of this section in this thesis. Thirdly Vadhbhag Singh's presence in the Punjabi diaspora is all the more interesting because of the strenuous efforts by his devotees to place the movement firmly within the Sikh tradition. However the qaumic and dharmic polarising forces of the Sikh tradition, which will be explored in later

chapters, regard Vadbhag Singh and his followers focus on his occultic powers with disdain. A overview of Vadbhag Singh, his hagiography and development in the Sikh tradition will be provided.

The information on Baba Vadbhag Singh and the tradition that has developed is unreliable and scarce. There are a number of publications in Punjabi, however their reliability is dubious as the work is written from a believer's standpoint. However although the sources are dubious they are informative in that they provide a basic source, which is accepted by devotees of Vadbhag Singh. A *Janam sakhi* by a Joginder Singh Viridi has been used, which seems to be the most popular amongst the pilgrims at the *dera* and was recommended by the *mahant* interviewed. The only other noteworthy reference to Baba Vadbhag Singh is by McLeod (1991) who provides a brief historical background to the tradition and its development with regards to the Sikh tradition.

### ***Who is Baba Vadbhag Singh?***

The information available on Baba Vadbhag Singh is written from an unbiased perspective; as yet there is no academic research that has been conducted on Baba Vadbhag Singh or the tradition that has developed under his patronage. Viridi has compiled the most popular account of Baba Vadbhag Singh's life, beliefs and practices of the movement thereafter. Baba Vadbhag Singh was born on 18 *Bhadon* (August/September) 1715 CE in the town of Kartarpur, Jalandhar. Baba Vadbhag Singh is a descendent of the Sodhi lineage, which can be traced back to Guru Ram Das who was a member of the Sodhi sub-caste, and hence all subsequent Gurus belonged to the same sub-caste. Baba Vadbhag Singh was a Sodhi of Kartarpur, descendants of Dhirmal, infamous for retaining the original copy of the *Adi Granth* at Kartarpur. Belonging to the sub-caste of the Sodhi's conferred a great honour on Baba Vadbhag Singh. Although Dhirmal is infamous in the Sikh tradition, Baba Vadbhag Singh is extremely popular as a warrior, devout Sikh, and an eminent exorcist for which his fame has spread throughout the Punjab and the Punjabi communities in Britain.

Very little is known of Baba Vadbhag Singh's early life apart from his honoured status as a Sodhi of Kartarpur and direct descendent of Dhirmal. Viridi begins his account of Baba Vadbhag Singh during the period in which Jehan Khan governed Lahore. Baba Vadbhag Singh is described as a devout Sikh who lived and served with his family at Gurdwara Tham Sahib in Kartarpur. The significance of Baba Vadbhag Singh's service at Tham Sahib will be examined later. The Sundar sakhi reports that the Sikhs faced a number of atrocities at the hands of the Mughal forces. A large band of Sikhs had taken refuge on the riverbank because of skirmishes with the Mughal forces. The Sundar sakhi reports that during this period the Mughal forces attempted to abduct a large group of Hindu women. When Baba Vadbhag Singh heard of this atrocity he gathered the Sikhs in hiding and mounted a fierce attack on the Mughals. The Sikh forces were successful in saving the Hindu women and scoring a win over the Mughal forces. However, Jehan Khan and Nasir Ali the administrator of Jalandhar re-assembled their troops to quell the rebellion and drafted extra troops in to re-enforce their rule. It is reported that to support and protect Baba Vadbhag Singh, Jassa Singh Alhuvalia the leader of the Alhuvalia misl sent a contingent of his army. Again it cannot be certified whether there was any support from Jassa Singh Alhuvalia as there is no indication of the time of these skirmishes with the Mughals.

Viridi's account of the abduction of the Hindu women and the battles that followed are misleading and inaccurate. Gopal Singh (1995), in his study of the history of the Sikh people, is able to provide a more detailed account of Baba Vadbhag Singh and the historical background to the battle with the Mughals. According to Singh, the women referred to by Viridi were a part of Ahmed Shah Abdali, the ruler of Afghanistan, plunders that had been collected on his fourth invasion of India. Alamgir Sani the Emperor of India and Mughlani Begum the widow of Mir Mannu, former Governor of Punjab, requested Ahmed Shah Abdali to invade India for the fourth time in 1757. The political instability of the Mughals during the invasions of Ahmed Shah Abdali also saw the increasing power and dominance of the Sikhs during the misl period. The conflict in which Baba Vadbhag Singh is mentioned is one such occasion. Based on the account of Ahmed Shah Abdali's invasion one must deduce that the abduction of women

that is attributed to the Mughals in Viridi's account was in reality the plunder that was being taken to Afghanistan. As the caravans moved through the Punjab towards Lahore, the Sikhs attacked the rear forces and rescued large numbers of captive women. It is clear that Viridi has developed the attack on Ahmed Shah Abdali's forces into the Sundar sakhi of Baba Vadbhag Singh. He may well have been involved in the rescue mission but there is no evidence to support Viridi's account.

The attack on Ahmed Shah Abdali's forces enraged the ruler who sent his forces to attack and punish the Sikhs. His forces attacked and destroyed Harimandir Sahib and polluted the sarovar (bathing pool situated in a gurdwara complex). At the same time the son of Ahmed Shah Abdali, Taimur took to chastising the Sikhs. According to Singh, Taimur, on hearing of an attack on two Afghan soldiers in the Jalandhar Doab in the vicinity of Kartarpur, ransacked and burnt down the temple at Kartarpur and severely beat 'the venerable priest, Sodhi Baba Vadbhag Singh'. Ahmed Shah Abdali and Taimur continued with the defilement of Sikh religious centres; however the Sikhs also revolted against such acts and were involved in many battles to avenge the sacrilege of their gurudwaras. Singh reports that the destruction of the Harimandir Sahib was what invoked Deep Singh to fight Atai Khan a general of Ahmed Shah Abdalis. It was in this battle that Deep Singh became a shaheed (religious martyr). Singh also mentions Baba Vadbhag Singh for his revenge on Nasir Ali who had orchestrated the sacrilege at Kartarpur; it is reported that Baba Vadbhag Singh ordered for the house of Nasir Ali to be burnt for his hand in the destruction of the gurdwaras at Kartarpur Sahib.

Apart from the confrontation with Nadir Ali and the attack on the forces of Ahmed Shah Abdali at the end of his fourth invasion, little else is known of Baba Vadbhag Singh's military activities. Within the popular oral tradition that is still vibrant amongst followers of Baba Vadbhag Singh in the Punjab and Britain, Baba Vadbhag Singh's life is placed into two distinct phases, first as a prolific warrior of his time and second as a exorcist and religious leader without par. Baba Vadbhag Singh's spiritual quest is centred around Mairhi, situated in the hills of Una District, Himachal Pradesh. Viridi states that during the conflict with

Nasir Ali, Baba Vadbhag Singh sent his family to Mairhi for their protection and arranged to meet them at a later date. After Baba Vadbhag Singh punished Nasir Ali, he made his way to Mairhi retiring from the ongoing war with the Mughals and invading Afghans of Ahmed Shah Abdali.

Viridi's account of Baba Vadbhag Singh battle with the demon Nahar Singh is much more detailed than the personal details provided. Viridi's sakhi of Baba Vadbhag Singh affirms the common beliefs and practices in the tradition and it provides a basic overview of the oral tradition that is still vibrantly used amongst believers. According to Viridi, on his way to Mairhi, Baba Vadbhag Singh was beseeched by a group of Nath Yogis to help in the expulsion of Nahar Singh Bihir, a demon who had terrorised the people of Mairhi and its surrounding regions. Dhiman states that the region of Mairhi was infamous for the presence of ghosts and spirits. The challenge was accepted by Baba Vadbhag Singh who began by drawing a line of protection around him and reciting specific verses composed by Guru Arjan from the Guru Granth Sahib to expel the demon. The sakhi continues that Nahar Singh and Baba Vadbhag Singh continued the battle until the demon was overcome and entrapped by Baba Vadbhag Singh in a cage. Some time after much pleading from Nahar Singh, Baba Vadbhag Singh released the demon on the condition that he would not harm another living creature and he would help in the expulsion of evil spirits and beings that visited the valley and mountains in which the demon resided. Hence a unique partnership was forged between Baba Vadbhag Singh and Nahar Singh in which the exorcism of evil is the main religious practice.

Very little is known of Baba Vadbhag Singh's life after the confrontation with Nahar Singh. Based on his account it is clear that Baba Vadbhag Singh spent the rest of his life in Mairhi and spent his time in meditation and the practice of exorcisms for which he is renowned in the Punjabi community. There is some controversy about Baba Vadbhag Singh's death. Viridi reports that Baba Vadbhag Singh had instructed his close followers not to disturb him for several days as he would go into a state of *samadhi* (intense meditation). Several days passed and there were no signs of life in Baba Vadbhag Singh who had locked himself in his *dera*. When Baba Vadbhag Singh's mother learnt of this she ordered that Baba

Vadbhag Singh be given food and water as no human could live so many days without these essentials. As Baba Vadbhag Singh was in a state of *samadhi*, he could not be disturbed from his meditation. Seeing no signs of life, Baba Vadbhag Singh's mother and his close followers decided to perform his final rites according to the Sikh tradition. It is reported that Baba Vadbhag Singh is reported to have returned and found that his body had been cremated. Hence followers of Baba Vadbhag Singh believe that he is present at his *dera* in Himachal Pradesh and at other shrines wherever he is venerated.

The exorcist tradition and practices that have developed around the figure of Baba Vadbhag Singh are now centralised at *Dera* Baba Vadbhag Singh, also referred to as Mairhi Sahib. The *dera* is made up of several shrines that Baba Vadbhag Singh used during his lifetime for his religious practices. The first port of call for pilgrims and visitors to Baba Vadbhag Singh's *dera* is to the *Darshani Khud* (Valley of the Vision). Dhiman reports that when Baba Vadbhag Singh first visited the valley he had a vision of the ten Gurus at the site, hence the valley is known as *Darshani Khud* and the waterfall that is the focal point of the valley is known as *Dhauri Dhar*. The first port of call for pilgrims and visitors to Baba Vadbhag Singh's *dera* is the *Darshani Khud*. Gurdwara Dam Dama Sahib directly in front of the *Dhauri Dhar* is visited by all pilgrims before *ishnan* (ritual purification) in the waters of the *Dhauri Dhar*. The *Dhauri Dhar* plays a vital role in the process of exorcisms at the *dera* and the water is also used as *amrit* (nectar). *Amrit* in the Baba Vadbhag Singh movement is used to refer to the water that flows from the *Dhauri Dhar*. The *amrit* in this case is used in the process of exorcism and for medicinal purposes. In the close vicinity of the *Dhauri Dhar* there is a simple room, under the *Nishan Sahib* in which a pure ghee *havan* (ritual fire for the purpose of sacrificial ceremonies) is kept lit constantly, all year round. Offerings of pure ghee, coconuts, sweets and *rumalas* are given to Brahmin priests who reside over the *havan* and perform prayers on the behalf of the pilgrims. The *havan* is devoted to a large array of the gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon who are represented by *chintas* (metal tong usually associated with the Saivite tradition) and *Trisuls* (trident). The *havan* is visited straight after the *ishnan* at the *Dhauri Dhar* where prayers and offerings are made.

The pilgrims move on to the mountain that overlooks the *Darshani Khud* to several important shrines. First is the *Dera* Sahib, the focal point of the complex. Within the shrine is a picture of Baba Vadbhag Singh guarded by a *mahant*. Pilgrims prostrate in front of the shrine and offer ghee, candles and incense to be lit at the shrine. *Karah Prashad* is also offered at the shrine, which is then distributed in the *sangat*. Directly in front of *Dera* Sahib is the *Beiri Sahib*, the place where Baba Vadbhag Singh defeated Nahar Singh. Prominent amidst these two shrines is the *nishan sahib* and the prominence it has at all shrines related to Baba Vadbhag Singh. The *nishan sahib* within the Baba Vadbhag Singh movement does not hold the same significance as in the Sikh tradition. Although the colour of the *nishan* is the same, in the Baba Vadbhag Singh movement believers present offerings for wishes fulfilled and successful exorcisms by tying them around the *nishan sahib*. Pilgrims circumambulate *Beiri Sahib* and the *nishan sahib* and tie their offerings to the *Nishan Sahib*, promised in advance for the fulfilment of their prayers and desires. Manji Sahib is another major shrine at the *Dera*, where Baba Vadbhag Singh is said to have rested and meditated in private.

The Baba Vadbhag Singh movement is a part of the larger kismet form of religion found in the Indian sub-continent. Within the Baba Vadbhag Singh movement procedure of the exorcism, the importance of the shrine and scriptures can be found within Hindu and Muslim exorcist traditions. However, the uniqueness of the exorcist tradition that has developed under Baba Vadbhag Singh's patronage is that it is a part of the Sikh tradition that specialises in the practice of exorcisms. Pilgrims at the *dera* in Himachal Pradesh were adamant that the movement was part of the Sikh tradition. According to the oral tradition, Baba Vadbhag Singh had been given sole permission by Guru Gobind Singh to practice exorcisms; hence Baba Vadbhag Singh would be the ultimate authority on the practice of exorcisms for all Sikhs. A physical meeting between Guru Gobind Singh and Baba Vadbhag Singh could not have taken place, as Baba Vadbhag Singh was born seven years after Guru Gobind Singh's death. However, this does not dissuade believers from attributing a metaphysical

meeting between Guru Gobind Singh and Baba Vadbhag Singh during some stage of Baba Vadbhag Singh's life.

Baba Vadbhag Singh's life sakhi's do not detail the process of exorcism and the complex belief structure in malevolent spirits, ghosts and magic. The belief and practice in this phenomenon are vividly apparent at the *dera* and in the conversations held with pilgrims and believers throughout the Punjab. The belief in the supernatural malaise of possession, witchcraft, magic and the evil eye are part of the larger systems of belief that can be found throughout the Indian sub-continent. Although there are cultural variations, beliefs in the causes of supernatural affliction are generally the same. It is not possible in this article to explore the vast array of malevolent forces that inflict pain and suffering on people; instead I shall focus on the process of exorcism, which follows a set format within the Baba Vadbhag Singh movement and its development in the Indian sub-continent and Britain.

Baba Vadbhag Singh's *dera* in Himachal Pradesh plays a very important part of the exorcist practices in the movement in India especially. Within the Baba Vadbhag Singh movement the process of the exorcism begins with the family or the individual that believe they are possessed or afflicted by supernatural malaise visiting the *mahant* and seeking his guidance in the matter. The *mahant* plays a vital role in the process of the exorcism and in the daily running of Baba Vadbhag Singh's *dera* and various localised shrines throughout the Punjab. The *mahant* holds a distinct position in the popular religious traditions of north India. Although originally the *mahants* had assumed administration and custody of the gurdwaras during the eighteenth century until 1925, when the Gurdwara Reform Act was passed and the administration was passed on to the newly formed Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandak Committee (SGPC). However, the term '*mahant*' is also used to describe religious elders who are accomplished in the practices of *riddhi siddhi* and have attained the status of *Brahamgiani* - 'One who knows Braham (God); a model of piety and good works.' (McLeod, 1995: 57). *Riddhi siddhi* form part of a complex structure of attainment targets in north Indian religious traditions. These are regarded as the lowest level of attainment in the goal of reaching the status of *Brahamgiani*. The powers of *riddhi siddhi* are

regarded as magical and part of occult practices, therefore it is frowned upon by the Sikh Khalsa discipline. According to believers within the movement, the *mahant* is firmly part of the Sikh tradition and has attained the status of *Brahamgiani*. The *mahants'* control over the powers of *riddhi siddhi* makes it possible for them to practise exorcisms and officiate at the shrines of Baba Vadbhag Singh. The *mahant* is able to practise both good and evil acts based on the requirement of supplicants and believers that approach them. *Riddhi siddhi* can be used for both good and evil, based on the wishes of the person who applies for help; however the results of the actions will be upon the supplicant rather than the *mahant*. Because the *mahant* has acquired a religious status in which he can practise *riddhi siddhi* he cannot decline people who apply for his services. A *mahant* in the Jalandhar Doab explained that once the *mahant* acquires these powers he is unable to decline his service as God gifts it to him, therefore it is up to the supplicant to consider its results as good or bad. Hence there is a dichotomy between the powers of *riddhi siddhi* and the status of *Brahamgiani* are both held by the *mahant*.

The status of *mahant* is gained through meditation on the Supreme Being; however, figures such as Baba Vadbhag Singh is seen as prime examples of people who have attained the goal. No rigid structure of *mahants* is present within the movement; however custodians at the shrines in the *dera* of Baba Vadbhag Singh and in Kartarpur are seen as the superior *mahants*. The *mahants* gather during the monthly lunar festivals of *Amavas* and *Puranmashi*. Throughout the Sikh world the nights of *Amavas* and *Puranmashi* are especially commemorated. In the Baba Vadbhag Singh movement it is at these specific times in the month that exorcisms are particularly practised. It is unclear why these occasions hold such significance. The annual festival of *Hola Mohala* is the other festival at which the *mahants* congregate at Baba Vadbhag Singh's *dera* and Kartarpur Sahib. The festival of *Hola Mohala* falls in the months of February or March, and is celebrated eight days before the *Puran-mashi* and two days after, in total a duration of ten days. On the *Puranmashi* during the festival the *nishan sahib* is de-hoisted, washed in milk, yoghurt and water and then re-hoisted with new offerings from the pilgrims present.

There is a conflict between the Khalsa Sikhs and followers of religious leaders like Baba Vadbhag Singh on the status of *Brahamgiani* and its attainment within such movements. Nevertheless, *mahants* in the Baba Vadbhag Singh movement are regarded as *Brahamgianis* and given due respect. It is based on their attainment of the powers of *riddhi siddhi* and status of *Brahamgiani* that makes it possible for them to officiate and conduct an exorcism. The first stage of the exorcism is the introduction of the *mahant* to the possessed and the family. The possession or affliction of a person by malevolent forces is seen to affect the whole family; therefore the process of exorcism will include the family being present to help and support the procedure. *Mahants* are not based solely at Baba Vadbhag Singh's *dera* and can be located throughout the Punjab at local shrines at which Baba Vadbhag Singh is venerated or in gurdwaras. The *mahants* live within the community; hence people are aware of their religious practices and beliefs, and therefore the meeting between the *mahant* and the possessed will usually take place at the *mahants* place of residence, which is also used as a place of veneration to Baba Vadbhag Singh.

There are various exorcist practices that can be taken to expel a malevolent force out of a person. The most famous procedure is based on the *dera* and the powers that are held in the *Dhauri Dhar*. However as the process of exorcism begins at the *mahant's* residence various practices are firstly utilised to save the expensive and arduous trip to the *dera*. There are a number of pre-requisites that are required before the expulsion of malevolent forces can take place. First, the *mahant* will ascertain the reasons why the person who is to be treated is perceived to be possessed or afflicted by supernatural powers. The individual can provide numerous responses to the reasons why supernatural affliction or possession is the cause of the suffering. For example, nightmares, physical sickness, constant anxiety, excessive anger and visions of affliction are cited as symptoms that may be a result of malevolent forces at work. In a high percentage of cases the normal channels of consultation with medical doctors have not produced the required results, hence the kismet form of religion is seen as an answer to the problems.

Based on the information provided by the individual and the family the *mahant* will then assess the person to determine firstly, whether the person is afflicted by malevolent powers, and secondly the type of affliction that is being suffered. At this stage the *mahant* uses his status as Braham-giani to discover the cause of the affliction. According to informants in the Punjab, the status of Braham-giani and devotion to Baba Vadbhag Singh make it possible for the *mahant* to divinate between Baba Vadbhag Singh and the supplicants. The *mahant* has a special relationship Baba Vadbhag Singh because of his devotion. Through the exorcist procedure Baba Vadbhag Singh is said to enlighten the *mahant* and guide him in the process. The divination between the *mahant* and Baba Vadbhag Singh is made possible by the *mahant's* devotion to Baba Vadbhag Singh and God, which has gained him the status of Brahman-giani.

Once the type of affliction is established by the *mahant*, a discourse between the malevolent force that has possessed the individual and the *mahant* will commence. The common procedure is to establish a contact with the malevolent force and question the reasons for possession of the individual. Based on the type of possession, the responses and discourse can take different routes. For example, if a ghost or spirit possesses the individual, the duration of the possession and the reasons for possession will be asked. If the individual is a victim of magical practices or sorcery, then the source of the affliction will be traced and the malevolent force will be asked from where it has been sent, by whom, and for what reasons. A basic form of questioning is required to assist the exorcist in understanding the nature of the affliction.

Based on the information gathered in the previous stages the *mahant* is then able to begin the procedure of exorcism. The exorcism can take a number of various forms based on the variables mentioned above. The *mahant* based on his knowledge of malevolent affliction and guidance from Baba Vadbhag Singh is able to prescribe the correct procedures. Use of specific verses of the Guru Granth Sahib is a common method of exorcism accompanied by hymns and compilations of Baba Vadbhag Singh for the specific purpose of exorcism. In Baba Vadbhag Singh's *sakhi's tawiz* (amulets) have been constructed for various ailments and afflictions, and can be worn on the body or dissolved in water to be

drunk. The duration of an exorcism can vary from several hours to months or years where an individual will visit the *mahant* on a daily or weekly basis; hence there are various exorcist practices.

A common feature during the exorcism is the unnatural physical movement of the individual as the *mahant* communicates to the malevolent force. The afflicted suffers a temporary metamorphosis during which the malevolent force takes control of the individual's physical and mental being. The general term used to describe the physical movement is *khel*, which translated means to play. The origin of the term, which describes the movement, is unclear; however the explanation given by *mahants* is that the powers of Baba Vadbhag Singh unseat the malevolent force which in turn is manifested in the physical movement of the afflicted individual. The hair of the afflicted is often clasped by the *mahant* to control the movement and the malevolent force within the individual from harming other people. The *khel* continues through the exorcism while the *mahant* communicates with the malevolent force and tries to persuade it to leave the individual. The successful completion of an exorcism is acknowledged through a promise by the malevolent force of its departure. The *mahant* discusses the situation with the individual and the family in order to answer any questions. The individual will be counselled by the *mahant* for a period of time so that there are no recurrences of the affliction, and the physical and spiritual well being of the afflicted can be monitored. As a sign of the individual's devotion and gratitude, a pilgrimage to Baba Vadbhag Singh's *dera* will be undertaken at which stage any promises of gifts made during the exorcism will be tied to the *nishan sahib*.

Another important aspect of the Baba Vadbhag Singh movement is the emphasis placed on the *dera* for the purpose of exorcism. If *mahants* are unable to exorcise an individual successfully through the methods mentioned above, a pilgrimage to the *dera* is undertaken for the sole purpose of exorcism. The *mahant* accompanies the afflicted and his or her family to the *dera* and orchestrates the exorcism. The visit takes the form of an exorcism; hence the *Dhauri Dhar* is the first shrine visited and the most important in an exorcism. The individual will be taken under the waterfall under the direct guidance of the *mahant* who will begin the exorcism in the waters. Pilgrims believe Nahar Singh is directed by Baba

Vadbhag Singh to reside in the waters of the *Dhauri Dhar*; hence because of his presence the malevolent malaise is forced to appear in the individual. Through the guidance of the *mahant*, the presence of Nahar Singh in the *Dhauri Dhar* and Baba Vadbhag Singh's grace the exorcism is completed at the shrine of the *Dhauri Dhar*. The individual will then complete the visit as a normal pilgrimage to the *dera* with offerings at the *havan* and various other shrines. If the exorcism is not successful the individual is taken to the Baba Vadbhag Singh shrine in Kartarpur where the exorcism will take place and is assured to work. A unique relationship is forged between the *dera* and Kartarpur in which a successful exorcism is guaranteed. The unique relationship between the two sites is also apparent, in that all offerings made at the *dera* are sent to Kartarpur, which handles all financial affairs.

The process of exorcism in the Baba Vadbhag Singh movement is unique in that it is conducted by *mahants* who are initiated into the Khalsa discipline and regard the practices as a part of the Sikh tradition. The use of the scriptures and the veneration of the Sikh tradition play an integral and vital part of the movement and its practices. The practices and beliefs that are involved firmly place the Baba Vadbhag Singh movement in the kismet dimension of religion. The panthic elements of the movement are also apparent in the exorcism and the role of the *mahant* where Baba Vadbhag Singh plays an indispensable role in guiding his followers through the practices. There is a very strong link between the kismet and panthic dimensions, where the panthic element-the inspirational guidance of a religious master living or deceased is required to understand and resolve problems that arise in the kismet dimension.

### ***Gurdwara Ajit Darbar***

Ajit Singh's ancestors were *mahants* of Vadbhag Singh and there was a family practice to pass on the family *gaddi* (religious seat) to the sons of the family. When Ajit Singh's grandfather, Baba Harnam Singh died in 1955, the *gaddi* was automatically passed on to Ajit Singh, as his Father had died during his childhood. However, Ajit Singh, being an educated man and holding the position of currency officer in The State Bank of India in Delhi, refused the

*gaddi* because of his status as an educated career person. The family was unsuccessful in persuading Ajit Singh to take up the *gaddi*; however, an *Elahi Hukam* (heavenly command) from Vadbhag Singh enforced the *gaddi* on him. Ajit Singh finally accepted on the proviso that he would take up the *gaddi* but not in the manner his predecessors had done. He would not wear the *chola* (religious cloak) that was worn by the majority of *mahants*, and would not practice the exorcist tradition as they had.

Gurdwara Ajit Darbar functions as a *gurdwara*. It houses the Guru Granth Sahib and it is venerated in the same way. *Kirtan* and *Nam simran* are also performed as part of the daily and weekly services. *Akhand Paths* are conducted most weekends. However, there are a number of unique features, which set the Ajit Darbar apart from other *gurdwaras*. Firstly, the *nishan sahib* is given greater prestige. The *sangat* circumambulate the *nishan sahib* bowing at the start and end. Although the *nishan sahib* is the same as the other *gurdwaras* the reverence it is paid is immense. As the *sangat* circumambulate the *nishan sahib* they utter slowly under their breaths *Dhan Guru Nanak, Dhan Guru Nanak* (Blessed Guru Nanak, Blessed Guru Nanak). This forms another important feature in the Ajit Darbar. Ajit Singh has prescribed that the *sangat* should concentrate on the formula '*Dhan Guru Nanak, Dhan Guru Nanak*'; hence, every Sunday after the completion of the *Akhand Path*, *simran* of the formula *Dhan Guru Nanak* is practised. A third feature is the prominence of Vadbhag Singh's picture and a seat that is set-aside for Vadbhag Singh to the left of the Guru Granth sahib. Ajit Singh ordered that a special place be set-aside for Vadbhag Singh as he was present when the *sangat* worshipped; therefore, a metaphysical presence of Vadbhag Singh is assumed, as is the case at his *dera* in India.

According to informants at the Ajit Darbar, the world of spirits, ghosts, jinns, and malevolent forces is around everyone. However, where *Nam simran*, *kirtan* and the Guru Granth Sahib are recited the evil does not enter. The practice of exorcisms is done through the simple formula of *Dhan Guru Nanak* and circumambulation of the *nishan sahib*. Ajit Singh has prescribed the simple formula, and the faith of the person should be enough to heal them of any spiritual or physical ailment. The individual feels no physical difficulties and no

*mahant* is required to assist the exorcism: the guidance is believed to come from Vadbhag Singh and the faith of the person involved.

It is clear that the migration of the Vadbhag Singh movement to Britain has changed the movement considerably from the way in which it is practised in India. The figure of Vadbhag Singh plays an integral role in the *sangat* in Britain; for example, his poems are sung in the form of *kirtan* and he is also mentioned in the *ardas* after the ten Gurus and Guru Granth Sahib. However, the presence of Ajit Singh as a living religious master moves the emphasis of the panthic element from Vadbhag Singh, as the *sangat* are able to talk to a living leader who has directly descended from Vadbhag Singh's lineage. The panthic element is vibrant within the Vadbhag Singh movement in Britain but the dimension of Dharm is also vividly present. Ajit Singh's directions for *Nam simran*, *kirtan* and reverence of the Guru Granth Sahib show a greater tendency towards the dharmic elements of religion in which the divine laws of the living world play an important role. In a sense the move towards the dharmic dimension is a move towards the Khalsa discipline of the Sikh tradition even though members of Ajit Darbar do not openly display the 5 Ks of the Khalsa discipline. The kismatic form of religion that is so vibrant in the Vadbhag Singh movement in India is reduced dramatically in Britain because of the emphasis on the dharmic dimension.

The Vadbhag Singh movement is a part of the Sikh tradition that has been neglected in academic research. The Vadbhag Singh movement's focus on the kismatic form of religion has made it difficult for the movement to be seen as part of the Khalsa Sikh tradition, which forbids belief and practice in kismatic forms of religion. However, my research has shown that, although the kismatic dimension is important, the Vadbhag Singh movement remains within the fold of the Sikh tradition, based on the beliefs of Vadbhag Singh's followers and their affirmations as Sikh's. The Vadbhag Singh movement is one example of a movement within the Sikh tradition in which kismatic beliefs and practices are held. Throughout the religious traditions of north India the kismatic and panthic form of religion are the most vibrant and widely practised dimensions. The influence of the kismatic dimension in religion is an extremely under-researched

area of the Indian traditions even though it plays such an important part in their worldview. The establishment of the Vadbhag Singh movement in Britain is but one example of the development and importance of kismatic religion in the Indian belief system. Further research is required to explore the importance of these beliefs with members of religious communities who practise these dimensions of religion.

The form of Punjabi religion that has been outlined in this chapter is not unique in terms of its existence in Britain, or if it were found in any other country where Punjabi diaspora communities may have established. Punjabi religion in some shape or form would very much be in evidence as in the Punjab amongst any of the diasporas. However what is unique is that this is the first study of a diaspora community in Britain where the restrictive boundaries of Hindu, Sikh or Muslim have been removed. Although inferences of the practices detailed have been drawn from these traditions, the chapter emphasises through its description of the religious practices and beliefs at Mandir Peer Darbar, Ek Niwas, and Ajit Darbar the simultaneity of religious identities preserved in the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton. To this effect the next chapter focuses solely on the most salient aspect of Punjabi religion in outlining the belief in supernatural malaise and its treatment by *baba ji's* like Bhoparai and Kapoor in the next chapter

## Chapter Three

### Supernatural affliction and Exorcism in the Punjabi Diaspora in Wolverhampton

In the previous chapters the establishment and development of the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton was outlined with a brief overview of how it was replicated throughout the British Isles with the post war mass migration from South Asia. The role and development of religions in the new diaspora communities was summarised with particular attention paid to the progress in Wolverhampton. Subsequently chapter two focussed on the development of Mandir Peer Darbar and Ek Niwas Universal Divine Temple in Wolverhampton highlighting the role of these places of worship as centres where Punjabi religion is living and growing amongst the Punjabi diaspora. The fluidity of religious traditions from South Asia is evidenced by a full description of the development of these two centres, but more importantly an appraisal of the religious beliefs and practices that members of the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton participate in. The role and importance of the *babas* is highlighted along with a detailed account of the multi-faceted dimensions of Punjabi religion.

This chapter will further enhance the already rich image of Punjabi religion in Wolverhampton by concentrating on the various supernatural malaise that are part of the cosmological view of Punjabi religion. The process of exorcism, which is the usual method of alleviating the supernatural malaise, will be described in order to allow for a full analysis of the process and its affects. In order to achieve this, case studies of *sangat* afflicted by supernatural malaise will be presented from the observations carried out at Mandir Peer Darbar and Ek Niwas. The case studies presented provide individual or in some cases groups that have suffered from some form of supernatural malaise and have attended either Mandir Peer Darbar or Ek Niwas in order to be cured of these afflictions. Although the whole area of supernatural malaise and its healing through exorcism are part of what Ballard calls the kismet dimension of Punjabi religion, no attempts have been made in this chapter to define exactly what the kismet dimension is. As in the previous chapter, Ballard's four-dimensional

approach was alluded to, but not discussed in depth. As not to distract the reader the analytical models, which will be required for an interpretation or understanding of this detailed account of Punjabi religion in Wolverhampton, will be provided later. The observations and conversations which are the foundation of this thesis are presented first so that the key themes and ideas that are flowing through the religious beliefs and practices of the Punjabi diaspora, are provided without imposing any analytical models.

In the introduction to the thesis, the methodology utilised for the observations that took place at Mandir Peer Darbar and Ek Niwas were detailed. These intense periods of observation at both places of worship provided a large and daunting task of choosing some case studies to put forward in which the whole experience of several years fieldwork can be best communicated. To this effect I have let the research lead me rather than lead the research. This resulted in an abundance of ethnographic details and studies from my observations at Mandir Peer Darbar, However, my observations of possession and exorcism at Ek Niwas were an entirely different experience. The main reason for this difference was the dimensional changes and polarisation that Ek Niwas had gone through before the research began and as the research was taking place with the negative publicity they received through the tabloid journalism. Hence the majority of the case studies presented here have been gathered from Mandir Peer Darbar because I was fortunate enough to be conducting my research before any drastic changes in beliefs and practices had occurred in the newly opened *mandir*.

The case studies will be utilised in this chapter and throughout the rest of the thesis as examples of the phenomenon of possession and exorcism amongst the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton. With this in mind the case studies will highlight key themes prevalently found within these phenomenon. Firstly, it is clearly evident from the ethnographic details collected within the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton that a multitude of problems or difficulties faced by people are due to the work of supernatural afflictions. Hence, physical or mental ailments, financial problems, family schisms and even death are viewed as having been caused by some form of supernatural malevolence. Furthermore, specific problems that have been caused by the creation of a Punjabi diaspora

community in Britain are also readily attributed to supernatural malaise of some form. Hence it was observed and will be exemplified through the case studies that the majority of the *sangat* that attend the *mandirs* in Wolverhampton will initially always complain of some worldly difficulty as described above. Secondly, the procedure of attribution of worldly difficulties to a supernatural cause is very complex and will also be examined in the case studies. Although most the *sangat* initially complain of physical or mental ailments when they ask the *babas* for help, the underlying prevalence of a supernatural cause is not far from the surface. However the procedure of diagnosing and specifically attributing these difficulties to supernatural malaise is a multifarious procedure where not only the *sangat*, but the *shakti* of the deities emanating through the *babas* is at full force. The imperative role of the *baba* as a diagnostician of supernatural malaise is highlighted. Thirdly, two main forms of supernatural malaise that are commonly experienced by members of the Punjabi diaspora are evident from the fieldwork. These are the possession of individuals by *bhuts* or *prets* (ghosts) or the use of *jadu toona* (sorcery) through the malevolent acts of a human agent. Firstly, the possession of individuals, or on occasions, homes by *bhuts* or *prets* is a common form of supernatural malaise. The two terms are usually used as one synonymous entity in Punjabi dialect which refers to ‘beings who were not able for some reason to find their way out of this world and remain bound and restless, haunting places and disturbing the living.’ (Geaves; 2008: 631) The reason for this indeterminate state could be caused by some procedural incorrectness in the funeral rites. However a violent death or suicide are the common reasons attributed to the deceased becoming a *bhut-pret*. The *bhut-pret* or the deceased in general are not considered to be *sakhe* of the family members they have left behind. *Sakhe* refers to the nature of ones relationship within the family. The closest English translation would be blood tie, however within the Punjabi context the term goes further and denotes the closeness of relationships between the living. However upon death this *sakha* nature of relationship is lost, and the will readily possess and harm their old family members. The *bhut-pret*, hence must be treated as a capricious spirit who can only do harm to the family and no good can come of this ethereal relationship. The *bhut-pret* can either possess an individual in the family or haunt the whole household, resulting in an array of misfortunes befalling the family in terms of financial losses or ill health.

Secondly, *jadu tona*, or sorcery is the most prevalent form of supernatural malaise that affects the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton requiring an exorcism. *Jadu tona* is a generic term used to refer to a host of different forms of supernatural malaise that are utilised by a sorcerer to attack an individual or in some cases entire families. Although the sorcerer is the one adept in performing *jadu tona*, he is usually not the one responsible for choosing the victim. The sorcerer is employed to cause harm to others as an act of revenge or through the *jalan* (jealousy) and animosity of the employers towards the victim. Directed by the human agent, a sorcerer, through their own spiritual powers, can cause harm to the victims to the degree that is required. The *jadu tona* can range from causing financial catastrophe, to physically aches and pains or disabilities or even death to the victim or victims. The *jadu tona* can be afflicted on the victim through the simple recitation of *mantras*, the preparation of ensorcelled food for the victim to consume, or by the control of the sorcerer over *bhut-pret* to wreak havoc in the victim's life. The role of the sorcerer is ambiguous and can be confusing in that the local *babas* and *bhagats* although adept in removing the problems of sorcery from the *sangat*, are also regarded as possible causes of these afflictions. As we shall see later the *shakti* (spiritual power) used by the *babas* and sorcerers are identical, however it is the use of these powers that differentiates them as good or bad. Both forms of supernatural malevolence are found within the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton that require the guidance and healing powers of *babas*. Hence in the following case studies we will observe how the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton utilise supernatural affliction in their cosmological worldview to explain the inexplicable.

### *Sorcery*

- I. Mohan arrived in Britain in the early 1960s as a part of the mass migration of unskilled labour workers in the industrial West Midlands. Eventually like other members of the Punjabi diaspora, Mohan settled in Wolverhampton and began a family life. Mohan was first observed attending Mandir Peer Darbar in January 1999. He was already aware that he had been the victim of *jadu toona* as he had been to other *babas* and *bhagats* in the West Midlands and in Punjab who had

confirmed this. However he had not been successful in receiving any relief from these other *babas*, hence he was attending Mandir Peer Darbar through a recommendation of his relative who had been attending the *mandir* for several years and was a regular member of the *sangat*. Mohan had been suffering with the affliction of this *jadu toona* for the past ten years, since 1991 approximately. At first he never suffered any ill health and working in the local Goodyear factory, he said he was proud that he had never taken a day of ill in his 17 years service. Suddenly in 1990 Mohan began to suffer from severe headaches, which would persist for several days at a time. Over the course of the following years the headaches persisted and grew more painful. Mohan consulted his doctor who prescribed various medications and carried out all normal medical procedures like eye examinations etc. However the pains persisted and no root cause could be found for this sudden illness.

In 1993 Mohan took a trip to his village in the Punjab to visit relatives and resolve some dispute over land ownership, which had arisen after his father's death. During his visit Mohan continued to suffer from his headaches and told his relatives of the pain he was suffering. Because medical attempts had not cured his problem, Mohan was persuaded by his family members in India to visit a local *baba* in the village that could help with physical ailments, which were caused by supernatural malaise. The *baba*, a devotee of Baba Vadhbhag Singh, was renowned in the village for his ability to diagnose and resolve supernatural afflictions. Through a process of questions and the *shakti* of the *baba*, Mohan was diagnosed as having been afflicted with *jadu toona*. More specifically Mohan was cursed by the *masan* of a snake, a particularly powerful form of *jadu toona*. The *baba* informed Mohan that the *jadu toona* was intended to cause excruciating pain as he had been experiencing which would result in the loss of earnings and financial catastrophe for his family. Mohan was advised to make a pilgrimage to the *dera* of Baba Vadhbhag Singh in Himachal Pradesh, where the cure of supernatural malaise, like that of Mohan could easily be eradicated. Mohan undertook the pilgrimage to the *dera* of Baba Vadhbhag Singh accompanied by several members of his family and the village *baba* who had initially diagnosed him. Mohan completed the pilgrimage to the *dera* as prescribed by the *baba*, who claimed that the pilgrimage had been a success and

Mohan would no longer suffer his headaches as the *masan* had been removed. The *baba* instructed Mohan begin daily worship towards Baba Vadhbhag Singh back in his home in Britain as a sign of gratitude for the healing he had received.

Upon his return to Britain, Mohan noted that his headaches although not completely cured were not as painful as before. Mohan followed the instructions of the village *baba* and began the worship of Baba Vadhbhag Singh in his home. The worship constituted of placing a lithograph of Baba Vadhbhag Singh in the home along with other lithographs of Sikh gurus, in front of which incense was lit every day and a pure *ghee jot* was lit every Sunday. However gradually the headaches returned and the pain increased. Mohan consulted with the village *baba* via telephone however the remedies prescribed by the *baba* provided only short-term relief. As a result Mohan began to consult *babas* in the West Midlands that he had heard of to alleviate this supernatural malaise. Eventually Mohan was persuaded by a relative, who had been attending Mandir Peer Darbar regularly, to ask the *baba* there for his help to remove the *jadu toona* he was suffering from.

Unlike some victims of *jadu toona* that attended the *mandir* Mohan had already been told by other *babas* that he was afflicted by a *masan*. The length of Mohan's affliction resulted in his consultation and attendance to other *babas*, to help him in removing the *jadu toona*. The *babas* he had consulted in India, according to Mohan, had always been vague or unresponsive to his requests to reveal the reasons and source of his supernatural affliction. A general reply was that a close member within his extended family was to blame for his affliction. However to reveal the source would not be beneficial for Mohan as the schisms in his social world would only worsen. The reason Mohan had been attacked and by whom were always full of conjecture by himself and his family. However the reference to a close member of his extended family being the cause and the nature of the affliction, that is to cause excruciating pain and loss of earnings, provided Mohan and his family with ample reasons to suspect a certain member of their family.

The onset of the initial illness of severe headaches in 1990 was preceded by the death of his father in India. Mohan was of the *jat* caste and his father had

accumulated a large land ownership through the financial benefits of sending one of his sons abroad to earn. The death of the patriarch had caused a rupture in the family over the percentage of landownership that was to be appropriated to Mohan and his younger brother. This is not an anomaly amongst the *jats*. On the whole they are the largest caste group in the Punjab that own land and as a result of their migratory patterns and the financial support this has afforded them, they have been able to vastly increase their landholding in the Punjab. However the separation of siblings by migration and the eventual death of the patriarch in the family usually results in some form of family schism over the land rights. The sibling who has tended the land in India advances his greater right on the land, while the sibling in diaspora usually argues his greater right based on the financial input with which the land holding has been substantially increased. Mohan and his younger brother were involved in this form of dispute after the death of their father. Eventually the land was divided equally, which led to a permanent rift between the brothers. Financially this was more devastating for the Mohan's younger brother as all financial support from Mohan ceased. Mohan and his family regard this as the sole event which has resulted in Mohan's affliction with a supernatural malaise. The nature of the malaise, which was to cause pain and financial inconvenience, and the fact that the dispute over the land immediately preceded the onset of his illness, is irrefutable evidence of the source of the *jadu toona*.

In 1999 Mohan started attending Mandir Peer Darbar, and was diagnosed by Kapoor as suffering from a *masan*. It was unclear whether Mohan had mentioned that sorcery was the cause of his physical ailments or whether Kapoor offered his diagnosis without any prior knowledge. Normally Kapoor will ask the new *sangat* that attend a series of questions to gather primary information regarding the purpose of their attendance at the *mandir*. It was rare that any *sangat* came to the *mandir* just to do *matha tekh* or perform *puja*. Although gradually the *sangat* may attend the *mandir* just to fulfil *chaunkis* or do their *matha tekh*, initially almost all the *sangat* that attend Mandir Peer darbar or Ek Niwas do so to receive help from the *babas* to resolve some sort of kismet problem. Later Mohan revealed that he told Kapoor that he had been attacked by sorcery and he had been to other places to be released from this sorcery. However all attempts had

been unsuccessful in completely removing the *masan*. Although initially there would be some improvement, as noted after the visit to Baba Vadhbhag Singh's *dera*, the pain would gradually begin to reappear and increase. Kapoor advised Mohan that the *masan* was a severe form of *jadu toona*. Mohan was asked to attend the *mandir* before the *arati* began so that Baba Kangar wala and the other deities *shakti* would be in full force and the process of *thik karna* (cure) could begin. Mohan was given a bottle of *amrit* to take home and consume. *Amrit* in Mandir Peer darbar was prepared by placing normal tap water in disused water or milk bottles which would be placed within the main shrine area without any lids. A spoonful of *raakh*, the ashes left over after burning incense, would be placed in each bottle. The lids were removed to allow the playing of the *arati* and the singing of *kirtan* and *bhetan* to infuse into the water and transform into *amrit*. The *amrit* plays a vital role in the exorcist and healing practices at Mandir Peer Darbar. In the same manner *Babe da tel* (Baba Ji's oil) is given to *sangat* that complained of any bodily aches and pains.

Mohan's exorcism will be detailed later in the chapter, however let us consider *jadu toona* from a different case study, first.

- II. Santosh arrived in Britain in the early 1970s and was married and settled into the normal family life of the Punjabi diaspora community in Wolverhampton. Initially Santosh lived within the extended family of her husband's two older brothers and parents. However gradually as the financial situation improved the extended family units dispersed and the brothers purchased their own homes. Santosh continued as a housewife raising her two children, before she trained and found work in a local sewing factory.

Santosh and her husband began attending Mandir Peer Darbar in June 2000. They decided to visit the *mandir* for advice on her continued ill health and to contend with problems they were facing with their children. Santosh had suffered from various bodily pains and aches which she could not find relief from after numerous visits to her doctor. Furthermore she always complained of a general feeling of lethargy. She explained that her pain, especially in the back and shoulders had resulted in her stopping work and some days she could not carry out any of her normal chores at home. However Santosh and her husband were

more concerned by the change in their younger sons behaviour over the last year. The younger son had performed well in GCSE's and while undertaking A levels there had been a sudden change in the sons attitude and behaviour towards the parents. Whereas initially Santosh described him as a 'good son' who listened to his parents and did not stay out all hours of the night. Lately he had began drinking and was always hostile towards his parents when they made any enquiries into his whereabouts or social life. The new tension between the parents and their son had caused a great deal of conflict in the family. At first the parents regarded this as a consequence of his attending a new college rather than continuing in sixth form at his secondary school. His new circle of friends was readily accused for the change in their sons behaviour and habits. Again this is not a strange event in any Punjabi household who all abide by the fable *Jaisi sangat, taisi rangat* meaning the company one keeps is bound to influence ones colour, that is behaviour! However his bouts of anger and gradually the physical threats he made towards his older sibling and his parents persuaded Santosh that this could possibly have been caused by something other than just some behavioural changes caused by his social life.

Santosh explained that initially she thought that she was at fault for not fulfilling her religious obligations to the *shahid jhagga*, which her in-laws had always worshipped. *Shahid* literally means martyr, and *jhaga* is place. *Shahid* worship in the Punjab is synonymous with *jathera* worship. The *shahids* or *jathera* are simply ancestors who were well known in the area and respected for their moral and spiritual character. The ancestor could possibly have been martyred, however there is usually very little knowledge or hagiographical details of the ancestor being worshipped and his merits. The pre-requisite for this form of worship is that Santosh's predecessors undertook it, hence she must continue so as not to anger the *shahid*. The worship of *shahids* in the Punjab centres around small white shrines that are found around villages and field where the ancestors of some merit are worshipped. The shrine can be a simple mound of earth which is recognised in the village as the place of the *jathera* or *shahid jhagga*, or a small white shrine within which the *jot* and *dhoop* for the *shahid* is lit. Although the shrine is evidently not present in Britain for worship, families will usually abstain from consuming meat, fish egg and alcohol on a certain day in the week

to honour the *shahid*. Although most families in the Punjabi diaspora would most probably have had some form of *shahid* or *jathera* worship back in the Punjab only a few continue their worship in Britain through the afore mentioned methods. This is usually reserved for families who know that their *shahid* is particularly *sakhat* (strict).

Although Santosh and her family professed to being *jat* Sikh and believing only in the Gurus, the worship of the *shahid jhagga* was part of their faith, and the *shahids* who were honoured were generally regarded to be of the Sikh faith although any hagiographical details of their origins are unknown. Santosh related that although initially she had maintained the abstention from meat, egg, fish and alcohol, her children and husband still consumed these items on Sunday. Her children as they entered adolescence questioned the dietary restrictions on Sundays, when these items were a normal part of their diet during the week. As Sundays are the day when normally Punjabi weddings are celebrated this proved doubly irksome for her family and eventually they relaxed the dietary restrictions. Santosh believed that this was the cause for the family's misfortunes. However what troubled Santosh was the time lapse between their relaxation of their dietary restrictions and the onset of her illness and her sons behavioural changes. Although she was adamant that their dishonour towards the *shahid* had some negative effect on the family, this could not account for the problems with her younger son that were more recently detected by the family. Hence Santosh felt that some other supernatural force may be the source, and with this in mind she began attending Mandir Peer Darbar.

Unlike Mohan, Santosh had not had any confirmation that her family problems were due to some supernatural malaise. Although she had her suspicions, this was the first time, personally Santosh had experienced difficulties of this nature which could not be solved through Western medical treatment. She visited the *mandir* because she had heard from friends that the *baba* there was very helpful and had a lot of *shakti*. She had never visited a *mandir*, before but was familiar with the concept of holy men like the *baba* at Mandir Peer Darbar being able to assist with worldly and supernatural problems. Although her husband was reluctant the continued erratic behaviour of his youngest child persuaded him to

accompany Santosh to the *mandir* as a last resort to resolving the problems. The couple attended Mandir Peer Darbar after the evening *arati* had been performed. The *chaunki* was in session and the *baba* was sat on the *gaddi* close to the main shrine area. The couple were gradually brought to Kapoor by one of the *sevadars* after *sangat* that had arrived before them had been seen. Kapoor received them with the traditional salutation *Jai Babe di* (Victory to the Baba) used by all the *sangat* at Mandir Peer Darbar. He then enquired as to their purpose for coming to the *mandir*. Santosh said she related to the *baba* the physical discomfort she was facing but more worryingly the change in their sons behaviour was conveyed to the *baba*. The diagnosis continued in Punjabi in the following way

**Kapoor:** How long has your son been behaving like this?

**Santosh:** For about a year.

**Kapoor:** How long have you been feeling lethargic and suffering pain in the back and shoulders?

**Santosh:** Approximately two years. I'm not as worried about my pains as I am about my son. Although we've lost money because I can't work with Gods grace we are still doing okay.

**Kapoor:** Are there certain times of the day when your son is angry or all the time? Are there events that precede his anger towards you?

**Santosh:** He is out most the day. When he comes home late afternoon early evening he is ok, but when we ask him where he is going out later in the evening he becomes very angry.

**Kapoor:** So he does not like you interfering or queries into his activities?

**Santosh:** Yes, but we are worried for his safety, because he drinks when he goes out.

At this stage Kapoor closed his eyes and began to receive *hava*. After receiving the *hava* for a short while, Kapoor recommenced his dialogue with Santosh and her husband, but rather than questioning them about the problems he concentrated on firstly the religious worldview of the family, and secondly, the diagnosis he had received through the *hava* from Baba Kangar Wala.

**Kapoor:** This is the first time you have come to the *mandir*, have you been to other places for help?

**Santosh:** No this is the first place we've come to. My friends told me the *Pir* could help when I told them about my problems. We go to the *gurdwara*, but only occasionally when we're invited to weddings or *akhand paths*.

**Kapoor:** By what you have told me you have been attacked by some sort of *jadu toona*. I cannot reveal who is behind this because I am not allowed to by Baba Ji. However now that you have come to them for help, they [Baba Kangar Wala] will assist you. The *jadu* was perpetrated through *jalan* (jealousy) of one of your relatives. They were envious of your life and of your son's good nature. Hence he has been directly attacked, however this has also affected you [Santosh].

**Santosh:** But why would someone want to harm us we are a normal family?

**Kapoor:** It's because you are a normal family in this *kal yug* that you have been attacked. Now the *Pir* will do their *mehar* (mercy, compassion) on you. Take *amrit* from the *sevadars*, which you should all drink everyday and sprinkle throughout the house. You must also commit to fulfilling seven *chaunkis* for the next seven Thursdays, upon which you can bring offerings for the *Pir* as per your wish. With *Baba Ji's mehar*, everything will be resolved before the seventh *chaunki*.

**Santosh:** Thank you *baba ji*, but my son will not drink the *amrit* if I give it to him?

**Kapoor:** You can give it to him in tea or any drink, as long as its not alcohol. The *jadu* will be forced to run when this *amrit* is drank. It has a lot of *shakti*. *Jai Babe di*.

We will return to Santosh's case later in the chapter when we discuss different forms of exorcism and healing. From the two cases of sorcery that have been detailed above there are a number of important themes that we must highlight for later discussion. Firstly, the victims or the babas that are undertaking the diagnosis can make the attribution of the physical ailments to some form of supernatural malevolence. For example, although Santosh suspected some form of supernatural affliction Kapoor proffered the diagnosis of *jadu toona* as the cause of the problems she was suffering. Mohan on the other hand told Kapoor that he was suffering from *jadu toona*, however he did not disclose that he was

suffering from a *masan*. Kapoor himself introduced this part of the diagnosis. However, the length and other experience of Mohan during his illness must also be taken into consideration when we consider whether he or a *baba* initially diagnosed sorcery as the root cause of his physical pains. Mohan, could not recollect whether the *baba* in India had introduced the theory of *jadu toona*. Yet Mohan chose to see a *baba* to resolve his physical ailments is significant in that it reveals he may have had some suspicion that his pain was not simply a medical matter.

Secondly, although a *jadu toona karne wala* (sorcerer) has the *shakti* to perpetrate supernatural malaise, he is mostly employed to harm people. It is rare for a sorcerer to harm people of his own accord. Furthermore the human agent who employs the sorcerer is always related or known to the victim and some form of family schism is usually a central cause for the supernatural attack. In Mohan's case the death of his father and the subsequent land right issues were a clear recent event that caused a family dispute preceding the onset of Mohan's illness. With Santosh although no particular event was identifiable, the social change in her son's life from school to college was readily correlated to the onset of her illness and the change in her son's behaviour. *Jalan* (jealousy) was provided as the motive for the sorcerous attack on Santosh's family. Yet the identity is rarely or ever revealed by the *babas* that diagnose the problem. Kapoor stated that he would not reveal who had attacked Santosh and her family with *jadu toona*. Although Kapoor proclaimed to know the identity of the attacker, he stated that he was not allowed to reveal this information by Baba Kangar Wala. Later Kapoor explained that this was to avoid creating any further conflict within the family, as the extended family or close relatives were usually to blame for attacks of *jadu toona*. Mohan, had also received similar information from the first *baba* in India to treat him.

Thirdly, the diagnosis and treatment of the victims are dependent on the form of *jadu toona* used. As *jalan* (jealousy) was the motive behind the sorcery attack on Santosh, the treatment was relatively simple. Kapoor prescribed the attendance at *chaunkis* for seven Thursdays, and the drinking of *amrit* and sprinkling it throughout the home to remove the sorcery. Kapoor did not provide specific

information as to the type of *jadu toona* involved, but he later relayed that the weakness of the motive in Santosh's case, that is *jalan*, resulted in the weak nature of sorcery which could be easily removed with Baba Kangar Wala's *mehar* and *shakti*. Mohan's treatment was much more problematic because of the severity of the sorcery that affected him, which will be discussed later. Evidently there are several key themes that are present when a sorcery attack take place which are directly linked to the Punjabi diasporas religious worldview. The attribution and causation of sorcery are highly evolved and useful to help dealing with their *kismet*. However we will revisit these themes and their place within Punjabi religion and its cosmological framework in the next chapter. Firstly let us return to other case studies of members of the Punjabi diaspora affected by possession of *bhut-pret*.

### ***Possession by bhut-pret***

III. Raji is a second generation member of the Punjabi diaspora. Her father arrived in Britain in the late 1960s, leaving his wife and eldest child in the Punjab. However he was reunited with his family within a few years. As Raji's father was invited to Britain by his older brother, Raji's *taya ji* (older paternal uncle), the families lived together until the late 1980s. Raji was born in Britain in the late 1970s and was the third of her parents five children. All five children were females, and thus the parents were regarded to have endured a great deal of bad luck in not having a son to support and help them by their relatives and friends.

Raji and her whole family began attending Mandir Peer Darbar in 2000. The main concern that worried the family initially was the financial difficulties the family were facing. Although Raji's older sisters were eligible to work, their father had forbade them working unless it was to assist him in the family market stall. Financially the family had never been secure, however in 1999 the financial situation drastically worsened and the family in their own words were in dire straits, with the risk of the family losing their regular market plot. Raji's father had a large extended family and was well known within the local Punjabi diaspora, however he had already borrowed money from them and was unable to

ask for any further assistance. Hence out of sheer necessity and fear of financial catastrophe, the family started attending Mandir Peer Darbar to ask the *baba* to help in resolving these financial dilemmas. Raji revealed in later conversations that the family were dumbfounded that they were in such a precarious financial position. She said that they were good people who had never wished harm upon anyone. She argued that they were good Sikhs who had firm faith in the Gurus; they attended the *gurdwara* every week, and their mother daily recited the *Jap ji Sahib* and *Rehras path* in the evenings. Rajis paternal side of the family as well as proclaiming to be Sikh were also devotees of Mata. Hence the family refrained from eating any meat, fish, egg or alcohol on Tuesdays. A lithograph of one of the goddesses was present in the home alongside lithographs of various Sikh Gurus, taken from previous years calendars. Not other special devotion was performed or observed for Mata in the home.

In addition to these financial difficulties the family were also worried about Raji. Before attending the *mandir*, Raji had started to experience bouts of anxiousness, where she felt her breathing was being restricted by a great weight being placed on her. Suffering from asthma since childhood, the family initially thought that it was simply a deterioration of this illness. However a change in medicine did not resolve the problem. The financial predicament was also regarded as a contributory factor in Raji's illness. However the anxiety Raji suffered was enhanced by a series of nightmares. Thus Raji accompanied her parents on their first visit to the *mandir*. They were told about the *mandir* by a relative, who came along with them on this first visit. The relative was also persuaded by the family to help them approach the *baba* to help them resolve their issues. After the *arati* had been performed Raji and her family were introduced to Kapoor by their relative. The relative briefly explained the problems the family were experiencing and beseeched Kapoor for his assistance in the matter. Kapoor received *hava* and began his diagnosis by talking directly to Raji and her parents.

**Kapoor:** How long have you been suffering financial difficulties?

**Parents:** Since last year [1999].

**Kapoor** What about before that were you well off or has it always been a struggle?

**Parents:** When we first came to Britain we did well. My brother and me worked in the factories and we made good money. However my brother passed away about ten years ago and things have never been the same.

**Kapoor:** What happened to him?

**Parents:** He committed *atam hatiya* (suicide).

**Kapoor:** Where?

**Parents:** In the house we live in. There was nothing wrong with him we were all happy living together. He had a small family and we all treated each other with love and respect. But the one-day he just did this to himself and the family were shattered. His wife and child were distraught. They stayed with us for some years but now they have brought their own place. We still love them but they feel there is now a difference in the family after my brother has passed away.

**Kapoor:** It is your brother that has caused your financial problems and is disturbing your daughter.

**Parents:** But why we have not harmed him?

**Kapoor:** His *rooh* (soul) is in anguish because suicide is a great *paap* (sin). His *rooh* was not able to pass on because of the nature of his death. He disturbs your daughter more because she was his favourite.

**Parents:** What can we do? Please *baba ji* help us we are ruined and our daughter is more troubled day by day.

**Kapoor:** I cannot do anything. Only the *shakti* and *mehar* of the Baba Ji (Baba Kangar Wala) will help in this matter. I will do *arjoi* to him when I next do *arati*. But you must start coming to the *mandir* and have *biswas* (faith) in the *Pir* [Baba Kangar Wala] and in any other *devi*, *devta* or *guru* that you believe in because they will assist you. It is good you have come here otherwise things would have got much worse but with Baba Ji's *mehar* everything will be solved. Take *amrit* from the *sevdar* and all the family must drink it and sprinkle some in your home. You must come as often as possible to the *mandir*, but Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday are mandatory, and please come before the *arati*. Your daughter must attend since your brother is afflicting her more. *Jai Babe di*.

Raji's parents later shared their experiences after their first visit to the *mandir*. They used the *amrit* as prescribed by Kapoor, but immediately Raji experienced a severe anxiety attack and found it extremely difficult to breath. Due to

Kapoor's diagnosis that the *bhut* was responsible for causing the financial problems and Raji's illness, the parents regarded the consumption of amrit as the reason for this latest attack. They rang Kapoor who assured them that this was normal because the *bhut* was now scared that he would be expelled from the house and specifically from Raji. However Kapoor advised them not to worry that he would do an *arjoi* to the Pir for their assistance and she would be fine in a little while. He advised them to come to the mandir the next evening for *arati* where they could begin to expel the *bhut*. The exorcisms that subsequently took place at the *mandir* will be detailed later in this chapter, however let us consider one further case of *bhut-pret* possession.

- IV. Simran a thirty year old second generation member of the Punjabi diaspora regularly attended Mandir Peer Darbar since 1998. Initially her parents who lived in the same area as the house *mandir* in Whitmore Reans began attending in 1997. Simran's parents were worried by her single status even though she was approaching the age of thirty. They wanted to enquire what form of restriction was restricting their daughters marriage and would could be done to improve her chances. Within the Punjabi diaspora the marriage of the second generation is a major concern to the first generation members. The parents of the British born generation of the Punjabi diaspora are obsessed with the concept of assisting in the marriage of their children at the right age, as prescribed by Punjabi culture. Hence after the age of twenty one, when a child has hopefully completed their undergraduate degree or is at least in some form of full-time employment, the concept of marriage is quickly introduced. Simran nearing the age of thirty and still not married was a constant worry for her parents. They were concerned that it could simply be that her *sanjog thandaya*. Kalsi (1992) explains that *sanjog* is the concept of preordained relationships in terms of marriage partners. In Simran's case the parents were concerned that her *sanjog* was *thanda* (cold). However they were also worried that it could be far more serious matter of some sort of supernatural affliction that was restricting the marriage of their daughter. The parents were relieved to learn from Kapoor that no form of supernatural malaise was at work and Simran's *sanjog* would be imminently arranged with the *mehar* of Baba Kangar Wala. Simran's parents began attending the *mandir*

regularly and persuaded Simran to do her *matha tekh* at the *mandir* at least once a week so that she may find a good *sanjog*.

As with other members of the *sangat* simran and her parents were given *amrit* to use at home as already described in the previous case studies. Simran continued to attend the *mandir* weekly with her parents. In 1998 Simran began to suffer from vomiting and diarrhoea all of a sudden. Although these symptoms subsided she complained of a pain in her stomach and generally her appetite reduced drastically. Her doctor treated the pains in her stomach, however she continued to suffer a dull ache. Her appetite did not improve and she still had bouts of vomiting. The sudden onset of this illness was first thought to be just a medical problem which could be cured by western medical procedures. However as the problems persisted and the parents regularly attended the *mandir* they asked Kapoor to offer a supplicatory prayer for the good health of their daughter. The parents also performed *sukh mangni*, which literally means peace asking. *Sukh mangni* is a promise undertaken by devotees to a pir, guru, dev or devta, in which the devotee promises some sort of offering for the resolution of some sort of difficulty or problem. In this case Simran's parents performed *sukh mangni* to Baba Kangar Wala. They promised to offer a *bistra* and *janda* when their daughter had completely recovered. However on Simran's next visit to the *mandir* it became clear that she was suffering from some form of spiritual malaise. On another occasion some time later she explained how she felt things changing.

When I got ill I thought it was just food poisoning or something. The doctor said it was only a mild case of food poisoning and it was nothing serious. A few weeks later I still had stomach ache so I went back to the doctor but there wasn't much of an improvement. When I think about it now it was during this time that I also stopped going to the *mandir* and drinking the *amrit*. I can't remember what exactly happened but I just kind of went of all that stuff. It's not like I was overly religious but I still went to the *mandir* and the *baba* their was nice and friendly. I didn't tell my parents but it always felt like someone was following me, especially when I was alone. It just felt like there was some kind of presence and I was really scared a few times. When my parents finally forced me to go

to the *mandir* for some reason I felt really nervous and scared at the same time. I'd been there loads of times but now everything just seemed different. When we spoke to *baba ji* he asked me how I was feeling and that's the first time I mentioned to anyone about feeling a presence around me. I can't remember why I hadn't told my parents, but as soon as he asked me how I was, I just said it. *Baba ji* started receiving *hava* when I told him this and then he told me I had been possessed by a *bhut-pret*. He told me not to worry and to start drinking *amrit* again. He asked me to come to the *arati*, because that's when all the power of the Babas and Matas is present at the *mandir*. (Simran, June 1999, Mandir Peer Darbar)

Simran's experience of healing and exorcism at Mandir Peer Darbar will be revisited later in the chapter. Several key themes emerge when we examine the details of *bhut-pret* possession. Firstly, unlike *jadu toona* which is perpetrated by a human agent, possession by a *bhut-pret* is not directed by any human agent. A possession by a capricious spirit is usually determined by place. For example the ghost of her taya ji possessed Raji because they still lived in the same house in which he committed suicide. With Simran's case we learn later through the exorcism that the main reason for her possession was based on her visit to a place where *bhut-pret* are meant to reside. Through the exorcism it is revealed that Simran place of work was close to a church cemetery, and it was while walking past the cemetery that the *bhut* possessed her. Furthermore unlike *jadu toona* which is readily provided as an answer to inexplicable events in the Punjabi diaspora, possession by a capricious spirit is less common. The predisposition of spirit possession on unclean places is less frequently encountered in Britain compared to the Indian sub continent. Crossroads, crematories, public toilets, or village pools with stagnant water are regarded as places with which people have regular contact in India, the chances of possession by a capricious spirit are higher. In Britain, although these places are present they are not as easily accessible because of the suburban environments within which the majority of the Punjabi diaspora reside.

Secondly the concept of vulnerability is central to possession by *bhut-pret*. Much is made of the fact that the majority of people requiring exorcism or healing are

women. We discuss in later chapters that this predisposition to possession for women is based largely on the theory of cultural typification or deprivation hypotheses. Both theories assert that women are more vulnerable to possession because of patriarchal dominance in the societies that they live in. Dwyer on the other hand provides a phenomenological perspective considering possession from the Hindu worldview in which his research was conducted and considers the social tendency to consider the vulnerability of women in general. These arguments will be explored in more detail later however; the concept of vulnerability has a higher merit in spirit possession amongst the Punjabi diaspora in Britain compared to the older theories of deprivation.

Thirdly like *jadu toona*, possession by *bhut-pret* can be diagnosed by the *baba* or insinuated by the victims themselves. Again the fact that they have come to a *baba* to help with problems that could not be resolved by other western medical procedures is an indication that supernatural malaise as an explanation for illness, financial crisis or other problems, is never far from the surface in the minds of the Punjabi diaspora. This highlights the centrality of supernatural malaise in the mindset of the Punjabi diaspora that assist in redefining all sorts of problems like physical illnesses, infertility, *sanjog*, and financial dilemmas into resolvable solutions.

Clearly within the Punjabi diaspora the kismatic dimension of religion exists which provides a unique view of the real beliefs and practices of diaspora communities in Britain. The concepts of *jadu toona* and *bhut pret* which have provided such rich academic material amongst the religions of south Asia, is also alive and well amongst the diaspora communities. Although the focus has been on sorcery and possession by capricious spirits, *nazar* (evil eye) and malevolence caused by the *krodh* (anger) of *devis*, *devatas*, *gurus*, *pirs* or *babas* are other forms of supernatural affliction which require the help of Kapoor and other *bhagats*. Although these do not necessitate exorcism, they are prevalent forms of affliction, requiring the help of a *baba* or *bhagat* who can avert the evil eye and appease angered deities. However the necessity for exorcism in cases of sorcery or possession amongst the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton provides further

insight and ethnographic information on the kismet dimension of Punjabi religion.

### ***Exorcism and healing practices***

Before returning to the case studies and outlining the normal procedures of exorcism, the use of the term 'exorcism' needs to be addressed. The term 'exorcism' cannot be translated into Punjabi and hold the same value the term purveys in English. In Punjabi no specific word is used which refers to the process and rituals of exorcism instead several different generic terms are used. For example the most popular term is *chij kadni* which translates to 'remove thing', hence the spiritual malaise, the *chij*, is taken out of the victim. Although it is usually a *bhut-pret* that possesses a victim, Punjabis usually use the more generic term *chija chimbaria*, 'things attached' to refer to possession by a capricious spirit. Another term is *thik karna*, which means 'to make better', hence a more generic term which is used not only to refer to exorcism but also for western medical treatments. Regardless of the generic terminology the sentiments and the importance of these practices form a central part of Punjabi religion amongst the diaspora in Wolverhampton. Furthermore it could be suggested that the everyday use of generic terms for exorcism highlight its normality within Punjabi religion and the mindset of the diaspora. No separate term is required to describe the process. The term is still utilised within the thesis because none of Punjabi terms are as useful.

In the case studies the process of diagnosis and the various outcomes to the different forms of affliction were explored. A common feature was the use of *amrit* as an aid to *thik karna* of the *sangat*. The method used to prepare the *amrit* is believed to infuse it with the *shakti* of Baba Kangar Wala and the other deities that are present in the *mandir*. By drinking the *amrit* those afflicted by supernatural malaise begin the healing process. A central concept of supernatural affliction is that the malevolent force resides within the body and uses it as a home. This is especially true of possession by a capricious spirit, however with cases of sorcery like Mohan's, the *masan* of the snake is residing within him, hence the drinking of *amrit* will suppress the sorcerous malevolent powers and help in the exorcism process that takes place at the *mandir*. Similarly sprinkling

*amrit* throughout homes and business premises is regarded as a way of warding off malevolent forces and spreading the *shakti* of the deities for protection. *Amrit* is however prescribed by Kapoor to all the *sangat* whether they suffer from supernatural malaise or not. Even those members of the *sangat* that have been attending the *mandir* since it began, still take bottles of *amrit* home to drink and sprinkle throughout the house. In addition *sangat* also began to set up small shrines in their homes where they would light incense and *jots* or *chiraghs* for the deities. The home shrines were not as elaborate as the shrines in the *mandir*, they simply consisted of lithographs of the *pir* or deities in front of which the incense and *jots* were lit. Nevertheless these shrines in the homes became focal points for the family to offer their devotion to the deities. Some members of the *sangat* said that even though they attended the *mandir* on the three important days, they also played *arati* at home in front of their shrines because it gave them peace and made them feel closer to the deities. Kapoor regarded it as a way of providing protection to the *sangat* from supernatural affliction, encouraged *sangat* to make space in their homes for small shrines. He asserted that wherever the *arati*, *jot* and incense were offered, the deities would have to be present and hence offer their protection to the *sangat*.

It is clear that only victims that suffer from sorcery or possession by capricious spirit require exorcisms. Although the *krodh* of deities and *nazar* can have similar effects, in that they cause physical illness or financial catastrophe, there is no need for an exorcism because no external supernatural power has entered the body. Although it must be noted that there have been cases where angered deities have possessed a devotee that has erred, the deity is appeased rather than exorcised from the body. The fault lies with the devotee for not following the deities' instructions or showing enough devotion, hence the possession by the deity is regarded within Punjabi religion as a just form of punishment. Kapoor who said provided the following example

A lady came to one day and said she felt like someone was stepping on her back all the time and trying to break her body. I asked Baba Ji to help her, but they told me that she was a devotee of Baba Balak Nath and only he could help. So I asked Baba Balak Nath to help this poor lady who was

in so much pain. They said that it was her own fault that she was suffering. Baba Balak Nath said ‘This girl used to do my *seva* every Sunday by lighting a *jot* and preparing *roth*. She prayed for some worldly possessions and I provided them, then she forgot me. Now she doesn’t even clean the shrine where my picture is placed in her house. I have given her the pain to remind her that devotion is necessary all the time not when you just feel like it or you need something’ What could I do but beg them to forgive her and she would recommence the *seva* with love and devotion. The deities are full of love and they agreed, hence the lady is much better now and is a true devotee of Baba Balak Nath. (Kapoor, 2000, Mandir Peer Darbar)

The removal of sorcery or capricious spirits is much more problematic because of the malevolent nature of these afflictions. The process of diagnosis has already been outlined and interestingly no exorcisms commence without the diagnosis of victims taking place. Mohan, Raji and Simarn all underwent the diagnosis by Kapoor before the actually exorcisms began. They were given *amrit* to help, but they were all asked to re-attend the *mandir* for the *arati*. The *arati* was the main period in which the exorcisms would begin, however depending on the number of people that needed exorcism or were in *khel* would prolong the exorcism into the *chaunki*. *Khel* is the term used in Punjabi to refer to the physical movements that are displayed when a afflicting spirit completely overtake the body of the victim. A literal meaning of *khel* is to play, thus the physical actions of victims are seen as the playing of the malevolent being that possess them. Whether the victim is afflicted by sorcery or possession, the *arati* and the *shakti* present in the *mandir* are believed to force the malevolent affliction to fully possess the victim. Thus the malevolence will experience the punishment of the exorcism through the *shakti* of the deities and the *baba* or *bhagat*. The physical manifestations of *khel* vary with each victim, however there are several key characteristics. Firstly, violent physical movements especially of the head, secondly, cries of pain and anguish, and thirdly, victims beat and thrash at their own bodies. Kapoor explained that the physical behaviour of victims is to be understood from the possessing forces point of view. He states that during *arati* the malevolent force completely overwhelms the victim, hence the physical behaviour is that of the

malevolent force. So the violent shaking of the head and body and the cries of pain and anguish are interpreted as the shaking of the malevolent possessing force within the victim and their cries. Due to these physical performances members of *sangat* afflicted by supernatural affliction requiring an exorcism and likely to *khel* during *arati* are asked by the *sevadars* at the *mandir* to move closer to the shrine.

The *arati* is performed as described in the previous chapter with member of *sangat* in *khel* towards the front of the *mandir*. During certain points of the *arati* the *khel* of the victims can become more accentuated. During the *jaikare* at the end of the *arati*, the *khel* reaches its peak in terms of ferocity in physical movements and screams of pain. The *sangat* is return reply to the *jaikare* with greater fervour because it is seen as hurting the malevolent forces and helping those that are afflicted. After the *jaikare* are completed the rest of the *sangat matha tekh* while Kapoor begins the process of exorcism. This takes place in front of all the *sangat* and is not a private affair. The *sangat* in *khel* are surrounded by several *sevadar* who restrain the victims from striking out at any other member of the *sangat*. Normally the hair of the victim are held, which is believed to prevent the possessing force from escaping. It is imperative that the state of *khel* is preserved because the exorcism can only take place by addressing the possessing spirit. Kapoor will deal with each individual separately beginning with victims who portray the most violent *khel*. Returning once again to Mohan, Raji and Simran, and their experiences of exorcism, key themes of the process will be highlighted in an endeavour to highlight the importance of these practices to the Punjabi diaspora. Analysis of these events will be undertaken in the following chapters.

Mohan's physical movements and behaviour were unique compared to other victims. When the *arati* began he would collapse to the ground and move his body like a snake, while making hissing noises. The whole *khel* replicated the *masan* that he was suffering from. Because Mohan wore a turban, his hair could not be held, hence Kapoor would raise his palm in a blessing motion and begin to ask the possessing force in Mohan to reveal itself and explain why it was in Mohan. On the first few occasions although Mohan was in *khel* he would not

answer Kapoor's questions. However eventually, according to Kapoor the shakti of the Pir, forced the possessing spirits to talk. The following dialogue is between Kapoor who is addressing the spirit in Mohan and the answers are regarded as those of the spirit also.

**Kapoor:** Who are you and where have you come from?

**Mohan:** I'm not going to tell you. You can't do anything. I have more power than you.

**Kapoor:** The Pir will make you speak. You know there is no escape and you will have to leave this body. Anybody that comes to this *darbar* will go away happy. You will have to leave Mohan.

**Mohan:** No one can make me leave, there is no power here.

It was interesting to note that the majority of spirits that were going through the exorcism would begin the dialogue in a defiant mood. Especially when the exorcism was performed the first time with any victim. Gradually the spirits would become more amenable and recognise the power of the deities and the *baba* expelling them. Kapoor used several methods to assert the authority and *shakti* of the deities. Firstly, he would splash the face of the victim with amrit. This usually resulted in the victims screaming and saying that the *amrit* hurt them. Secondly, he would raise his hand in *ashirvad* or place his hand on the victims head which would also result in the victim crying out in pain. Some would go into a frenzied state of *khel* to begin with but this would quickly subside while Kapoor repeated *Jai Baba di, Jai Baba di*. Thirdly, on some occasions the spirits would swear and curse the deities and Kapoor, at this Kapoor would use a *chimta* to lightly hit the victims or slap them on the back with a open palm. The *chimta* usually associated with Baba Balak Nath is seen as a powerful symbol imbued with the power of the deity that could be used to punish the capricious spirits. In the same manner as the conduit of the *shakti*, Kapoor slapping the victims is regarded as a punishment to the spirits for their insolent manner. The use of physical force in the exorcism process needs to be clarified. Kapoor and other *bhagats* and *babas* emphasise that any physical punishment meted out during the *khel* is not felt at that time by the victim but by the capricious spirit. The use of the *chimta* or slapping observed during the two

years of observation never resulted in any complaints from the victims or their families who were present at the exorcism.

Gradually when a dialogue began between Kapoor and the spirits possessing victims the first question focussed on the identity of the spirit and its origin. As we have already observed although the diagnosis takes place before the exorcism, questions are also asked of the spirits to confirm the truth of the diagnosis. Hence when Kapoor asked the spirit in Mohan it replied that it was the *masan* of a snake and it had been sent by someone from India. Note here that the previous diagnosis' received by Mohan are confirmed once again by the spirit. Kapoor would then try to convince the spirit that it was no longer possible for the spirit to remain in Mohan because he was now in the hands of the Pir. Because Mohan had come to the Pirs darbar for assistance, there was no possibility that the spirit could remain in Mohan. The spirit would complain and make assurances that it would not harm Mohan. However Kapoor would give the spirit a time frame within which to leave. Interestingly the expulsion of a spirit was never completed in one single exorcism. Depending on the nature of possession and its seriousness in the eyes of the *baba* the exorcism could take up to several months or even longer. Kapoor explained that although the Pir could expel a spirit from a victim instantly, this could result in the death of the victim. He asserted that the bodies of victims are made extremely weak by the possessing spirits, hence the symptoms of physical illness that all those that are possessed seem to portray. The spirits must first be weakened so that the body of the victim can begin to recover so when the spirit is finally expelled the victim will not feel too much pain. The use of the *amrit* and attendance at *chaunkis* is thus mandatory for the possessed to weaken the spirits.

Those afflicted by a supernatural affliction continue *khel* until the spirit is completely removed whenever the attend *arati*. Hence in subsequent exorcisms with Kapoor, which could take place several times a week, dialogues will be used to assess the strength of the spirit. More interestingly the dialogues are used by Kapoor to re-assert the power of the *mandir* and the *Pir* to the *sangat* who are watching the exorcism.

**Kapoor:** Why haven't you left this person yet? When are you going?

**Mohan:** Soon baba ji, I cannot take this punishment anymore. The pain is too much, the *Pirs shakti* is too strong for me. Please don't give me so much pain. The *amrit* is like poison for me.

Another important aspect within the dialogues is the promises made by Kapoor and the spirit regarding the destination of the expelled spirit. A major concern that arises through the dialogue is what will happen to the spirit once it has been removed from the victim's body. Basically *bhut-pret* either controlled by a sorcerer or possessing people of their own accord, do so because of their precarious position in the world, as described earlier. Kapoor suggested that those *bhut-pret* controlled by a sorcerer are sent back to him and warned that through the *shakti* of the Pir that any further attacks will result in the sorcerer being punished by the deities for his misdeeds. However gradually Kapoor began to portray through his dialogues with the possessing spirits that if they agreed to leave the victims quickly they would not be punished, instead the Pir and deities would assist them in escaping the indeterminate state they were in. Again Kapoor stated that the *shakti* and *mehar* of the Pir and deities is so immense at this *mandir*, that the *sangat* that attend are relieved of their pains, but also the *bhut-pret* are taken care of and not punished any further for their misdeeds. For example, during Raji's exorcisms the final destination of the spirit was a common theme in the dialogues with Kapoor. Possessed by the spirit of her *taya ji* who had committed suicide, the conversation between Kapoor and the spirit were always focussed on this theme.

Finally the exorcisms were completed when the spirit promised to release the body and the victim would cease to experience *khel*. There were many occasions when spirits would promise to leave the victim at the next *arati* but they would not. The spirits are regarded as having a deceitful characteristic in which they constantly lie to prolong their possession of the victim. Although they have scared and caused havoc in the victims life, the spirits are also regarded to be scared of the *shakti* that is forcing them to leave their possessed homes. Usually the spirits were asked by Kapoor to provide a signal that they were leaving the body of the victim for good. Typically a glass of water was placed in front of the

victim who was in *khel* while the exorcism was in progress. Kapoor would instruct the spirit to knock the glass of water over as a signal of his expulsion from the body. Interestingly this practice would be carried out on several occasions before the spirit through the victim would knock the glass over. To clarify when the exorcisms usually stopped the victims would usually fall to the floor and remain there for some time before returning to sit amongst the *sangat*, where they would be given *amrit* to drink. The glass of water is always placed in a position where the victim, while falling to the floor, could reach out and knock the glass over signalling the expulsion of the spirit. Hence miraculous show of the spirits powers were required to show its expulsion, the victim plays an integral part in defining the completion of the exorcism. After the completion of the exorcism the victims would fulfil any *sukha* that they had promised the deities in return for their release from the spirits.

Although the victims may have been released from the spirits, attendance at the *mandir* was still prescribed by Kapoor, because of the weakness in the victims. Moreover the family's, which were always in attendance during the exorcism and fulfilling *chaunkis* along with the victim still regularly, attend the *mandir*. As a result of the time it has taken for the exorcism to be successful the *mandir* becomes as integral part of the victim's and their family's life. Although the purpose for attending was initially for a cure to the affliction *sangat* continue to attend on the Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays to fulfil *chaunkis* even after they have been cured. Importantly although they have been released from the supernatural affliction that began their relationship with Kapoor, there is always the possibility of being attacked by another malaise. Furthermore Kapoor as a conduit to the Pir and deities at the *mandir* provides a very useful role for the *sangat* in terms of guidance. Since, the *shakti* of the deities can be harnessed and used by Kapoor his guidance is sort in numerous matters. For example Simran's parents first started attending the *mandir* because they were concerned by their daughters *sanjog* for marriage. Similarly even if there is no suspicion of some form of supernatural malaise *sangat* will still ask Kapoor for his advice and guidance because it is seen as coming straight from the deities. For example *sangat* were observed asking about which property to buy for a new business venture, whether the marriage partner that had been sought for their child would

be suitable, whether a certain illness would be cured with the medicine prescribed by the doctor and so on. Furthermore attending the *mandir* was regarded almost as a safeguard from the world of supernatural malaise that could so easily affect anyone.

Before we continue, the role of the *sangat* needs to be emphasised in Mandir Peer Darbar and the healing rituals that take place. The majority of people who attend the *mandir* initially for purposes of healing and exorcism, but as they are alleviated of their problems they continue to attend for the reasons elaborated above. Consequently, almost all the *sangat* have experienced some form of supernatural affliction or some other disaster, resulting in their attendance at the *mandir*. As a result people that are going through the same processes of exorcism and healing have a ready made support group in the *sangat* with whom they can discuss problems. The *sangat* readily provide sympathy, attention and words of support for the afflicted and their family. On a number of occasions people break down and cry because of the difficulties they are facing. The *sangat* console them and offer advice and support to help them as best they can. Although Kapoor as the *baba* is the conduit of all the *shakti* at the *mandir*, the *sangat* also benefit the victim and their family through their shared experiences and support.

This chapter has provided a comprehensive account of the phenomenon of possession and exorcism amongst the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton. Although a long description of practices and beliefs has been provided, no analysis has been attempted at this stage. Salient themes observed at Mandir Peer Darbar have been highlighted and examples of the forms of supernatural malaise that are predominant in the Punjabi diaspora have been exhibited. The complex nature of diagnosis and the process of exorcism have been presented. This abundance of material leads the researcher to the question why this aspect of Punjabi religion is so important to the Punjabi diaspora? Secondly why it has been neglected in other academic studies of diaspora communities in Britain. To answer these questions the following chapters will firstly locate these beliefs and practices in the key philosophical, theological and cosmological discourses which provide the basis for the beliefs and practices outlined. The fluidity of the

beliefs discussed in chapter two need to be explored from the religious traditions that provide such a dense foundation for the practices described in this chapter.

## Chapter Four

### Key discourses in Punjabi Religion

The Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton have established a intriguing collection of beliefs and practices which to the untrained eye are problematic. The academic rigidity of studying religion in the constructed boundaries of Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism have as already caused the study of religion in diaspora communities to be misleading. The religious practices in Wolverhampton explored in the previous two chapters are in now way unique to that particular area. Beliefs and practices described are easily found in any other diaspora community or in north India itself if the researcher is prepared to look beyond the confusing brittleness of religious isms. In the previous chapter the phenomenon of possession and exorcism in Mandir Peer Darbar in Wolverhampton was detailed, highlighting the salient themes that emerged from the diagnosis and exorcism of victims possessed by spirits. What is clear is that there is a solid conceptual discourse that underlies the beliefs of the Punjabi diaspora at the *mandir* requiring further study by placing it in the context of the discourses it is created from. Thus, this chapter will provide an examination of the major discourses, which are apparent in the beliefs, and practices of the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton. These are the Nath tradition of tantric yoga, which provides the powers not only for sorcerers but also the powers used by babas and bhagats to remove supernatural affliction. The role of the Vedas is also considered in these discourses because it provides according to Geaves (2007) and David White (1996) the vast majority of healing charms and rites that are later used by Nath yoga. Furthermore the ambiguity of the sorcerer and the exorcist are present from the Vedas into the Nath yoga tradition and nirguna bhakti. Intertwined with this is the ecstatic devotionism of nirguna bhakti which is a cornerstone in north Indian belief systems.

#### Supernatural Malaise, Exorcism and The Vedas

The Vedas and the Vedic era have long been regarded as the golden age of the Hindu tradition. Although the Hindu tradition and the Indian religious traditions in general have incorporated numerous religious beliefs and practices which are

today labelled as a part of the Hindu tradition, religious practices and rituals are still governed by the Vedas which the Brahmins use as manuals for all forms of worship. Within the complex system of the Vedas the first scriptural references to the practice of exorcism and belief in supernatural phenomenon is mentioned. Although the bhakti tradition in latter Hinduism is more commonly associated with the practice of exorcism, healing and belief in supernatural malaise, the scriptural roots of these practices and beliefs are the Vedas, which will be explored within this section of the study.

The origins and development of the Vedas have been explored in the academic world for some time. The roots of the Vedas in the Indo-European language group, influences from the Pre-historic civilisations of India and the role the Vedas have played in the Hindu tradition have all been subjected to rigorous research. However, there remains a lack of academic literature in which the Vedas and the religious rites and practices which are prescribed have been explored in detail. This is especially true of the beliefs and practice in supernatural phenomenon and exorcism. Although these particular religious practices do gain mention in the Vedas and academic literature little work has been done to explore the whole array of beliefs and practices in exorcism, possession and magic and their impact on the later Hindu tradition.

The role of the Vedas as the eternal scriptural core of the Hindu religion makes it impossible to bypass the Vedas in any exploration of practices and beliefs that have developed in the religious traditions of the Indian sub-continent. Although the Vedas are presented as mass religious scripture consisting of the Vedic samhitas, the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas, the Upanishads, the Sutras and the Vedangas, the samhitas and the Rg Veda in particular hold the most prominent place in the Hindu tradition. The Rg Veda, generally considered to be the oldest samhita in the Vedic order, has traditionally been regarded as the Brahminical manual in which all religious rites, beliefs and practices are prescribed for the Hindu tradition. Even though hymns from the Rg Veda are still used in religious rites and practices in the Hindu tradition today, the development of the Rg Veda has gradually been perceived to be of an evolutionary nature.

The exclusively naturalistic, or ritualistic, or mystic interpretation of Vedic mythology is now generally discountenanced, and an evolutionary approach is increasingly favored. (Dandekar, 1995: 215)

Hence, Dandekar and other scholars divide the evolution of the Rg Vedic mythology into three stages. In stage one Rta-Varuna, Agni and Soma are represented; at stage two Indra and other heroic gods are represented. Finally, in stage three the popular divinities of Vishnu from the Aryan pantheon and Rudra from non-Vedic pre-Aryan divinities are included into the mass of divinities found in the Vedic pantheon. The Rg Veda and the other Vedas retain an integral role in the performance of sacrifices and religious rites in the Hindu tradition even though scholars have followed the evolutionary approach.

In the same manner as the Rg Veda, the Samaveda and Yajurveda are mainly concerned with the sacrificial rites of the Hindu tradition. The Samaveda focuses on chants and hymns that are to be performed during a soma sacrifice, whereas the Yajurveda, according to Dandekar, is the first regular textbook for all the Vedic rituals and sacrifices.

Of the four Vedic samhitas, the study is particularly concerned with the Atharvaveda and its impact on the religious beliefs and practices of the Hindu tradition. The Atharvaveda holds the majority of references to the practice of exorcisms, magical spells and incantations and various other formulae for relief from supernatural affliction. There is some disagreement amongst scholars on various aspects of the Atharvaveda. It is therefore important to explore briefly, the origins and development of this particular samhita.

The Atharvaveda is generally regarded as the final collection of the four Vedic samhitas. However its status as the final samhita is dubious and has been questioned by scholars. Dandekar, B. Walker (1968) and V. W. Karambelkar (1959) refer to the first three samhitas as the trayi Veda – triad of Vedas. From the very early stages of the Vedic religion there has been a detachment from the Atharvaveda because of the contents and focus of this particular samhita on the popular and folklore religion that it encapsulates. The most striking difference

between the trayi Veda and the Atharvaveda is the emphasis that is placed in the first group on the sacerdotal forms of religion and in the Atharvaveda the magical forms of religion is focussed upon. The focus on the magical forms of religion has proved to be the most contentious part of the Atharvaveda and led to its exclusion from the canon of the Vedic religion. Walker refers to the key religious texts of the Chadogya Upanishad, the Brahmana and Jataka texts, which mention the trayi Veda, with no reference to the Atharvaveda. According to Walker, this is not to say that the Atharvaveda was not in existence at that time, but because of its division from the trayi Veda in content, it has led to its exclusion in the Vedic religion and its canon. Walker also comments on the difference between the trayi Veda and the Atharvaveda in metre and grammar as distinguishing factors, even though large amounts of the Rg Veda are to be found in the Atharvaveda. The Atharvaveda was finally added to the Vedic canon after sections of the Rg Veda were added to the samhita, therefore aligning the scripture with the trayi Veda.

The salient features of the Atharvaveda are based on the emphasis of the samhita on the magico-religious practices. Although these beliefs and practices are vital forms of the daily religious beliefs and practices of the Hindu tradition today, the Atharvaveda's almost sole emphasis on belief in popular religion during the formation of the Vedic religion did not suit the religious climate, which emphasised the soma and agni sacrifice rites as expressed in the trayi Veda. The stark difference in content of the trayi Veda to the Atharvaveda has led to different theories about the origin of the Atharvaveda and the reasons for the prominence of magic, witchcraft and sorcery in the final samhita. Furthermore, the Eurocentric and rationalised indigenous views of the Hindu tradition do not allow for the great corpus of the Vedas to focus on these lesser beliefs and practices. For the European scholar they are baseless and at the most add to the nostalgic view of India's religious traditions. For the indigenous scholar they denigrate the importance of the Vedic canon and the great efforts at expounding Hinduism as a great religious tradition and civilisation on par with the Greek civilisation.

Brockington (1981) states that the title of the Atharvaveda is taken from one of the great priestly families of the Rg Veda. The Rg Veda is divided into ten books; eight books from the Rg Veda are named after significant priestly families of that period. Brockington suggests the Atharvan family is responsible for the authorship of this particular samhita, with influences from the Angirasa family. Atharvan was most probably one of the authors of the Atharvaveda; hence the name 'Atharvaveda' was used to refer to this particular samhita. As well as Atharvan authorship, Walker states that Angirasa composed the group of verses that mention sorcery and wizardry.

Atharvan and Angirasa are both priestly families that are present in the Rg Veda. The families are named after rishi Atharvan and rishi Angirasa. Both figures are present in the mythology of the Vedic period especially in connection with the Rg Veda. In particular Angirasa is thought to have written a large number of hymns contained in the Rg Veda. The co-authorship of the Atharvaveda is difficult to substantiate, as is the authorship of the any other Vedic samhitas. However, the fact that Atharvan and Angirasa who are prominent priestly figures in the Vedic era have been linked to the Atharvaveda is worth examination. Rishi Atharvan is of the early Indo-European priestly system and is revered as the son of Brahma in early Vedic mythology. It is unclear at what stage of the development in the Indo-European priestly system Atharvan originates, however since he is mentioned in the Rg Veda, scholars have suggested that Atharvan can only be considered as a early member of the Indo-European priestly system. Nevertheless as the author of the Brahavidya, Atharvan is highly regarded in the mythology of the Vedas.

Angirasa plays a much more formal role in the Rg Veda and is also a prominent priest in the Vedic mythology. Angirasa is a member of the highly elite seven Maharishis that are found in Vedic mythology and is regarded as a 'progenitor of mankind' (Dowson, 1968, 16). The name Angirasa is a derivative of Agni – fire, hence Angirasa is also known as the lord of sacrifices, and as the purohit-priestly adviser and magician of the gods (Stutley, 1980, 4). A number of mythological stories surround the personage of Angirasa and his role in the ordinance of sacrificial rites in the Vedic system.

Walker states that it is possible that Atharvan is of an ancient indigenous priestly system, because of his characters representation as a 'black-skinned man, irascible and amorous' (Walker, 1968, 94), therefore linking him to a pre-Aryan civilisation, although this is not specifically stated. Walker also proposes that Angiarsa is of a Dravidian stock even though he plays such an important role in the Rg Veda and the Atharvaveda. In the links made between the two prominent Vedic rishis and the pre-Aryan civilisation of India, Walker implicitly implies a continuum from the Indus Valley civilisation to the Hindu tradition developed under the influence of the Aryans. However, Griffith (1985) states that both Atharvan and Angirasa are from the Indo-European priestly families and Brockington and Karambelkar support this. Although Walkers links to the Indus Valley civilisation are without base, his suggestions that the Indus Valley beliefs and practices influence the Atharvaveda and the two rishis are plausible in the light of Parpolas research on the Indus Valley religion. The gradual development theory of the Aryans into India and the slow demise and migration of people from the Indus Valley civilisation makes it possible that the Atharvaveda and its authors were influenced by the religious climate of the Indus Valley civilisation. The charms for brahmins to protect themselves and their possessions, according to Stutley, is based on the theory that as the brahmins of the Indo-European civilisation migrated into India conflicts arose with the indigenous population of the Indus Valley. Stutley reports that the people of the Indus Valley civilisation were hostile towards the migrating brahmins, hence charms and spells were used to counteract supernatural afflictions directed towards them. Although this is an account of hostile interaction, there is nevertheless some references to interaction between the two civilisations.

Although Angirasa's name relates specifically to sacrifice and Agni, Griffith links Atharvan to the fire sacrifice. The common heritage of the Aryans with Zoroastrianism, based on the development from the same language group of Indo-European, has led to insights on the religious traditions of the Aryans. Griffith reports that in the Avesta, Atharvan means priest, hence the Indian form of Avestan are fire priests. The fire people of the Avestan religion correspond to the Atharvans of India, placing the fire cult at the centre of both religious

traditions and in the history of the Atharvaveda and its authors. According to Stutley, the fire god, Agni, was regarded as the prominent exorcist amongst the pantheon of the Vedic gods as well as the vital element used in sacrificial rites. The Vedic sage Bhrgu is also generally regarded as a fire priest and is associated with Atharvan and Angirasa. Griffith reports that the Atharvaveda is also referred to as the Bhrgvangiras because there are similar mythical names in that the names are concerned with the use of fire in sacrifices. Therefore, the three names, Atharvan, Angirasa and Bhrgu are synonymous with the fire rituals and are used in different formats to refer to the Atharvaveda.

Based on the composite authorship of the Atharvaveda, scholars have suggested that a number of names have been used to describe the final samhita. The names used to describe the Atharvaveda are important in this exploration in that they represent the nature of the Veda and the beliefs and practices of that period. After the Atharvaveda the most popular name used to refer to this particular samhita is Atharvanangirasah, based on the names of the authors. The names of the authors are significant because according to Dandekar, Atharvan represents auspicious white magic, whereas Angirasa depicts sorcery and black magic. Other scholars have also commented on the distinctive nature of Atharvan and Angirasa in the use of good and bad magical practices, which are personified by the two rishis. Walker and Karambelkar state that Atharvan and Angirasa represent two specific groups of magical practice, which are found in the Atharvaveda.

Atharvan in the title of the Veda refers to the beshajani group of magical practices. The beshajani practices focus on good aspects of magic in that all practices are of a benevolent nature focussed on helping people through the natural life cycle, to assist in day-to-day work and through family life. The beshajani practices prescribed in the Atharvaveda cater for a wide variety of social, economic, cultural and religious problems that may occur in the daily life cycle of the Vedic civilisation. Within the beshajani group, medical and health problems are also treated based on the use of natural products, which were perceived to hold magical and healing qualities. Angirasa represents the hostile and malevolent forms of magical practice known as abhichara. The main

purpose of the abhichara strand of magical practices is to inflict pain and suffering on enemies and foe. Walker states that spell and incantations are found in the abhichara strand of magic to bring ill health and misfortune on enemies.

Before the beliefs and practices in magic, possession and exorcism are explored in the Vedas, the Atharvaveda is also known as the Brahmaveda. It is important to examine the use of the Brahmaveda as it sheds light on the role of the Atharvaveda in the Vedic society and the role of the brahmin. As already examined, the name 'Atharvanangirasah' that has been used to refer to this particular samhita provides an insight into the mythical origins of the Atharvaveda. The name Brahmaveda used to refer to the Atharvaveda, as it is popularly known is based on two possible theories. Firstly, Dowson and Walker state that the Atharvaveda has been referred to as the 'Brahma-veda because it served as the manual of the chief sacrificial priests, the brahmins.' (Walker, 1968, 94) The role of the brahmins plays a large part in the Atharvaveda as religious officiates for royalty and in their performance of spells and incantations from the Atharvaveda. Stutley explores several charms in the Atharvaveda focussed on the protection of the brahmins and their possessions. The brahmin resides over all sacrificial rites and hence a payment of sorts is required based on a person's income and status in the community. There are four possible payments for a brahmin: a cow, horse, clothes or gold. The brahmins were of the Aryan stock and were attacked by the indigenous population through spells and magical formulae; hence the Brahmins used charms to protect their possessions and themselves. Dandekar agrees that this specific Veda is also called Brahmaveda because of its significance for the Brahmins, but he also suggests that the incorporation of brahmans – 'magically potent formulas' in the Veda have led to the name Brahmaveda. A further possibility suggested by Dandekar is that the exclusivism of the trayi Vedic society in not accepting the Atharvaveda as a part of the Vedic canon led to the 'Atharvavedins' denouncement of the trayi Veda. The 'Atharvavedins' argued that the true essence of brahman, which is infinite, could only be found in the Atharvaveda, hence the final Vedic samhita was referred to as Brahmaveda.

### *Exorcist practices and supernatural malaise in the Vedas*

The Atharvaveda contains the majority of references to belief in supernatural malaise and exorcist practices. However, references to religious healing practices are also present in the Rg Veda. There are several ways in which the practices contained in the Atharvaveda can be classified based on the aims of the magical formulae. Scholars like Dandekar and Stutley have classified the charms, incantations and magical formulae of the Atharvaveda into firstly, belief and practice of religious healing charms to cure humans of sickness inflicted by disease demons. These also include charms for longevity and good health. Secondly, charms for royalty pertaining to social and economic harmony play an important role in the Atharvaveda and act as a commentary on the role of the royal families during the Vedic civilisation. Thirdly, a specific group of hymns concentrate on women and their relationship with their husbands, close family and other females that are a threat to their marriage. Finally, the Atharvaveda focuses on various charms and incantations to prevent the effects of sorcery, witchcraft and demonic possession which forms the basis of what is labelled as the beshajani forms of magical practice. Charms and incantations in which the aim of the practitioner and supplicant is to inflict pain and suffering on enemies represent the abhichara magical practices.

The magical formulae used in religious healing and the dual relationship between the practices of beshajani and abhichara categories is the focal point of the exploration. The practices of religious healing, beshajani and abhichara provide a comprehensive outline of the major religious practices prescribed in the Atharvaveda relevant to the development of the exorcist traditions in north India and amongst the migrant communities in Britain. The magical formulae used in the Atharvaveda for religious healing, beshajani and abhichara practices provides the first scriptural foundation and evidence of magical and exorcist practices as well as portraying the essential role of a religious conductor in such practices. Early indications of the intricate relationship between the physical well being of a person and the effects of demonic possession, sorcery and witchcraft on a victim are also present in these magical formulae.

Chants, incantations and charms pertaining to religious healing and the use of medicine in the Vedic society are found in the Atharvaveda and to a much lesser

extent in the Rg Veda. Although only several verses of the Rg Veda samhita refer to religious healing and the use of medicine, Zysk and Stutley are agreed that it is essential to explore the practice of religious healing within the context of the Vedic canon and its mythology.

The fundamental belief system upon which the complex formulae and practices of religious healing are based is the role of demonic possession, witchcraft and sorcery upon victims. The essential pre-requisite which necessitates the rituals of religious healing and the administration of medicine is that numerous kinds of ill health, sickness, physical weakness and diseases recognised in today's world of medicine is induced primarily by demonic possession. Zysk refers to these phenomena as magico-religious illness, where external forces, which are of a demonic nature, cause disease and physical illness. Within the Vedic practices and beliefs in the causes of disease and religious healing and medicine, the scripture focuses on physical illness and therefore physical attempts to repair the damage. Zysk and Stutley do not mention the possible effects of demonic possession on the human mind leading to mental illness. Within the Atharvaveda religious healing of physical illnesses is the focal point of this particular category.

Although demonic possession is responsible for the physical illness and discomfort that a victim may suffer, the stimulus of the attack could be from a number of sources. Demonic possession could possibly a result of animosity with close families and friends leading to the practice of witchcraft, sorcery and the evil eye to avenge their foes, resulting in a demonic possession of the victim. The wrath of gods and goddesses could be another possible reason for demonic possession, as a repercussion of a victim's disobedience to the deities in question. Although broken limbs and wounds were attributed to warfare or accident, Zysk suggests that other external afflictions can be 'caused by noxious insects and vermin, often thought to be demonic in character.' (Zysk, 1985, 8)

It is clear that Vedic knowledge of the body was of a rudimentary nature. The nature of religious healing and medicine requires a basic knowledge of the body and different organs that may be affected through demonic possession. Zysk and

Karambelkar agree that organs of the human body that are afflicted by demonic possession are coarsely described in the Atharvaveda by stating the position of the organ in the body. According to Zysk, the anatomical knowledge of the body in the Vedas is primarily based on the horse and human sacrifices that were offered. Through the sacrificial process, coarse names were given to external and internal parts of the body; however the later Brahmana texts provide a greater insight into the anatomy of the human body during the Vedic era. Throughout the process of demonic possession and its religious healing, the victim is to some degree placed in quarantine until the cause of the problem is identified. Victims are placed in quarantine to assess the nature of the problem based on prior knowledge of similar physical illnesses. Therefore isolation and observation were the main methods with which a victim was judged to be afflicted by demonic possession and the treatment was based on previous experiences with such illness. It is unclear to what extent the dietary routine of victims played in their analysis and treatment. Zysk suggests that a nutritious diet was an indication of a wholesome body; however there is no evidence or exploration of the beliefs in diet and its affects on those afflicted by demonic possession.

A discussion of the immense range of physical illnesses attributed to demonic possession would digress the focus of the thesis, and this area has been explored successfully by Zysk and to a lesser extent scholars like Stutley and Karambelkar. Nevertheless, it is imperative that the process of religious healing is analysed and the integral role of demonic possession, sorcery and witchcraft played in the daily religious of the Vedic civilisation.

The concept of demonic possession is based on the two mythological figures of takman and yaksma, who induce fever in victims that they afflict. Zysk's study of religious healing and medicine in the Vedas is based on the role of takman and yaksma possessing humans for the various reasons stated above. According to Zysk, the large majority of cases in which demonic possession occurs the figures of takman and yaksma are the root cause. Although there is an extensive array of names used to refer to different demonic possessions, which lead to different physical illnesses, takman and yaksma are at the centre of the demonic

possession. The religious healing requires that the form of demonic possession is successfully identified hence all diseases and illnesses are classed under takman or yaksma.

The process of religious healing begins with a period of quarantine and observation to assess the type of possession based on previous experiences of the bhisaj, who specialises in religious healing and orchestrates the process. The bhisaj is regarded as a specialist in the process of religious healing and possesses knowledge on the use of various natural vegetation's and herbs; however, this is accompanied by a sound understanding of the hymns that refer to demonic possession and their use in religious healing processes. There is no indication of the bhisaj's position in the priestly system of the Atharvaveda; yet one can assess that the bhisaj had a competent command of the language and the religious rites of the priestly division in order to perform the religious healing.

Religious healing prescribed in the Atharvaveda is an extremely complex process within which the use of natural vegetation, herbs and water are essential ingredients for the formulation of medicine. The use of natural medicines created by the bhisaj is essential for the religious healing. Zysk and Stutley provide a complex study of the various illnesses that were present in Vedic society, which were attributed to demonic possession and the medicinal prescriptions of the bhisaj which were utilised in the process. Fire and water also play a prevalent role in the process of religious healing again utilised by the bhisaj in the correct manner. Water acts, as a purifying element through the process of religious healing and especially after the healing is complete. Fire is used essentially with water; according to Stutley elements used in the sacrificial rites of the bhisaj are placed over the victim and water is poured on to carry the purifying ingredients of the sacrifice to the victim. The process of religious healing remains incomplete without the recitation of correct charms and incantations of the Atharvaveda. Zysk states of the verses used in the process of religious healing by the bhisaj that

An analysis of these verses illustrates certain apotropaic devices which included the use of sympathetic magic, of the rhetorical question, of

onomatopoeic sounds, of the identifying name, of the esoteric word or phrase which, when properly uttered focussed the demon's attention on the healer, leading to its loss of grip and power. (Zysk, 1985: 9)

The religious healing is a combination of administering specific medicines based on the form of demonic possession and the use of religious charms and incantations on the offending demon. Therefore even within the religious healing process an exorcism of the demon is essential and cannot be achieved without the bhisaj's charms and incantations. The bhisaj has the powers or means to transfer the demon from the victim to animals which can then dispel the demon or to its original source if the individual was a victim of sorcery or witchcraft. If the ill was afflicted for a sin against the gods or goddesses then religious sacrifices were offered to the offended through the demon hence nullifying the deities wrath and receiving forgiveness and good health.

The process of religious healing in the medical sense is extremely complex, as there is a vast array of demonic possessions that have different affects on the victim. However, there is a systematic approach taken in the process of religious healing which includes the use of medicine, charms and incantations. The process of religious healing and the use of medicine within the Indian religious traditions have successfully been developed into the medical system of the Ayurveda. Although medical sciences do not provide space for a belief system in demonic possession as a cause of physical illness, within the Indian society in India and Britain there remains a basic common belief that physical illnesses are still caused by demonic possession or as a result of sorcery or witchcraft. It is evident that the belief in demonic possession, sorcery and witchcraft that is present in the beliefs system of the Indian religious traditions in India and Britain has emanated from the Vedic era and remains a integral and important part of the belief system. The use of sacrificial components in the process of religious healing, the prevalence of water as a purifying component, and the use of magical languages is still used in exorcist traditions today, both in India and Britain.

The magical formulae used in beshajani and abhichara magic are similar to the powers used in the process of religious healing and the performance of exorcisms. Hence the exorcist can perform beshajani and abhichara practices despite the difference between them. Although Stutley and Walker view beshajani and abhichara magic as good and bad respectively, the conductive of the magic cannot decide whether such practices are for benevolent or malevolent purposes and must therefore perform both. The essential element in this process is the wish of the supplicant and the practitioner's duty in fulfilling the wish, regardless of the consequences. The practitioner is bound by the powers he has gained to perform magic at the bequest of a needy supplicant. Although the supplicant's intentions may not be honorable, the practitioner is not allowed a judgmental stance and must fulfil his commission. A fine line divides the practices of beshajani and abhichara as supplicants use both to improve their lifestyle, regardless of the outcome on other individuals. For example, if a wife requires abhichara magic to restrain a husband in marriage, or to harm him for having committed an adulterous act, the practitioner of the magic is bound to carry out the supplicant's wish. Another example of this is the use of the beshajani practices which can protect and thus deflect a curse, sorcery or witchcraft on to the source of the malevolent forces. Although the intention of beshajani magic is to protect supplicants, it can inadvertently harm the original offenders. If the beshajani practices used to exorcise a person in turn inflict the pain and suffering upon the source or an enemy, the practice of beshajani is no different to the abhichara practices.

The religious rites that are performed for the beshajani and abhichara practices are typically the same as the practices for the performance of religious healing and the administration of medicine. The ingredients used for the formulation of medicine are used in the practice of beshajani and abhichara although the purpose of use is inherently different. In the same manner, the use of magical language from the scriptures is present in the beshajani and abhichara categories and is utilised for the purpose of the supplicant in the manner they wish. The use of amulets is also much more prevalent in the beshajani and abhichara categories.

### *The Origins and Development of the Exorcist*

Although the forms of good and bad magic are linked to mythological figures of the Vedic era, the use of these magical practices by the priests and religious leaders of that period require analysis. The prevalence of breshajani and abhichara in the Atharvaveda suggests that the religious priesthood performed both forms of magic within society as did others who were versed in such practices. Within the mythical tradition of the Atharvaveda and the Vedic society as a whole, the priestly families of Angiras and Atharvan were the chief practitioners of magic and exorcisms. Stutley adds that the gods venerate Agni, of whom Angiras is an epithet, as the chief expeller of demons. The role of the Angiras priest was to protect the gods and their religious rites from the attacks of demons against which the hymns of the Atharvaveda could be used. The Atharvans 'were particularly adept exorcists and employed the names of the gods (because of their inherent power) for this purpose' (Stutley, 1980: 2).

The role of the brahmin (priestly caste) or other official religious leaders in the Vedic era, and their practice of exorcism, breshajani, and abhichara magic are more difficult to define. Walker states that the Atharvaveda was also called the Brahmaveda because it was the chief sacrificial manual used by the brahmins. This argument is problematic in that the trayi Veda, consisting of the Rg Veda, Yajur Veda and Sama Veda, did not initially contain or recognise the fourth Vedic samhita, the Atharvaveda. From the early stages of the Vedic religion, the Atharvaveda has been marginalised because of the contents and focus of this samhita on the popular and folk religion that it encapsulates. The most striking difference between the trayi Veda and the Atharvaveda is the emphasis that the first group place on the sacerdotal forms of religion. The Atharvaveda focuses upon magical practices and belief in the world of supernatural phenomena and malaise. Such focus has proved to be the most contentious part of the Atharvaveda and led to its exclusion from the canon of Vedic scriptures. The Atharvaveda was finally added to the Vedic canon after sections of the Rg Veda were included in the samhita, aligning the scripture with the sacerdotal forms of religion emphasised in the trayi Veda.

In examining the role of the brahmin in the Vedic era, it is important to note that the pre-conception of the brahmin as a high caste member of the varna system of Hindu society who is dutifully bound to perform religious rituals and ceremonies is false. Although the brahmin is the highest caste within the varna system, within the brahminical priesthood there are further divisions and sub-divisions which affect the role and office of the brahmin. Walker comments on how 'the term brahmin, far from being well defined, is vague and elastic in its connotation' (Walker, 1968: 170). The role of the brahmin during the Vedic period and that of the Atharvaveda is unclear. Although Stutley has argued that the brahmins used the charms and incantations to protect themselves and their possessions, no substantial evidence exists to point to their use of the Atharvanic magical practices for the purposes of exorcism. The charms and imprecations brahmins use to protect themselves and their belongings are of a malevolent nature inflicting pain on their attackers. There is little evidence to suggest the brahmins' use of the abhichara and bhesajani magic for selfish purposes or to assist supplicants. Walker mentions a lower priestly class, referred to as Ojhas, who are linked to the practice of exorcisms. The Ojhas are regarded as social inferiors within the brahmin caste because of their occupation as practitioners of the Vedic rites and rituals and other magical practices. Walker states that the Pujari who performs all forms of worship within the temple, the Jyotisha who prepares all astrological charts and dates for auspicious occasions, and the Maha Patra who presides over the funeral rites are all considered inferior brahmins within the wider brahmin caste hierarchy.

Zysk, in his study of the religio-medical practices of the Vedic civilizations, states that the bhisaj is another example of the prevalent practitioners in magic for religious and medical purposes. The bhisaj is regarded as a specialist in the process of religious healing and possesses knowledge on the use of natural vegetation and herbs. However it is crucial that he also has a sound understanding of the hymns that refer to demonic possession and their use in the process of religious healing. There is no evidence of the bhisaj's position in the priestly system of the Vedic civilization, but we can assume that the bhisaj had a competent command of the language and the religious rites of the priestly division in order to perform religious healing.

As we can see, the role of the brahmin within the practice of exorcisms is of a secondary and inferior nature which traditionally attracts disapproval. Little evidence links the brahmin to the practice of exorcisms and their use of the abhichara and bshhajani practices, apart from fleeting references such as those of Walker and Stutley. The question of the exorcist's origins and development in the Indian religious traditions must be addressed.

It is unclear at what stage non-brahmin or lower brahmins like ojhas and bhisajs took on the role of exorcists. However the prevalent belief in supernatural phenomena, malaise, and magical practices in the Atharvaveda suggests that practitioners of these arts developed simultaneously with the brahminical priesthood. Knipe (1995) cites the development of the theistic trends in the Indian religions as turning points in the role of the brahmin. As bhakti (loving devotion) became the prominent religious practice, the role of the brahmin as officiator of the religious rites, rituals and sacrifices declined, although the brahmins retained official status as purohits and temple priests to impart Vedic knowledge. As the theistic trends developed in the Indian traditions, the brahminical priesthood became absorbed into the broad base of the Hindu religion. As Knipe states:

Increasingly, brahman priests found themselves to be one category among specialists of the sacred as “Hinduism” slowly broadened its base to accommodate virtually every religious expression of the multicultural subcontinent (Knipe, 1995: 541).

As the Hindu tradition broadened, the role of non-brahmin priests and specialists in their respective religious roles increased. Knipe divides the priesthood of the Hindu tradition by the medieval period into three categories. The Vedic brahmins were the first group who retained their focus on the Vedas. The second priestly group, also of the brahmin caste, focused on the great epics of the Hindu tradition along with the Puranas and Agamas. The language of the brahmins also changed from the traditional Sanskrit, to vernacular languages, in keeping with the development of theistic beliefs where vernacular languages appealed to the wider

society. A larger group of priests who were uneducated in the scriptures and did not use the scripture as the basis of their religious office developed in the medieval period. This provided an integral part of the religious priestly structure in the Indian religious traditions. This group of priests centered around shrines that venerated gods and goddesses famed for their benevolence within set geographical locations (Knipe, 1995: 541).

The centrality of the shrine in rural religious traditions makes it possible for the exorcist to centralize and identify with the local religious beliefs and practices of the community. L. Babb (1975), L. O'Malley (1935), and C. Fuller (1992) refer to this form of Indian religion as 'Popular Hinduism'. The application of 'popular' to a religious tradition implies a tradition which is centralised on the believers' daily beliefs and practices. Fuller's definition of popular Hinduism as "the beliefs and practices that constitute the living, 'practical' religion of ordinary Hindus" (Fuller, 1992: 5) displays the focus of the religious setting in which the exorcist tradition is openly practiced. S. Weightman (1984) has labeled this form of religion 'the pragmatic dimension', where the religious beliefs, rites and practices revolve around the pragmatic matters of life as opposed to other dimensions in which the religious scriptures or goals of salvation and liberation play a vital part. (Weightman, 1984: 57-64)

### ***The Moral Ambivalence of the Exorcist's Role***

The ambivalent nature of the exorcist lies in the duality of the magical practices in the Vedas which I mentioned earlier. Stutley states that the magico-religious rites in the Atharvaveda are in a neutral state until the practitioner utilizes the magical rites to assist in the practice of exorcisms, or to inflict harm upon people. At this stage, the true dualistic role of the exorcist is apparent. Although the title 'exorcist' suggests that the main purpose of the religious official is to expel harmful ghosts, demons, or the causes of harm from a human being; the exorcist can also use the knowledge that he has obtained to inflict pain and suffering on others. Accordingly, the exorcist is not bound by the theory of good or evil, but is bound to uphold his religious duty as the practitioner of these religious rites. This is an underlying problem in the study of the Hindu tradition and the Indian

religious traditions as a whole; the connotation of evil that is held in the religious traditions of India do not correspond to the western or Christian understanding of evil. It is therefore possible to misunderstand the exorcist, his role, his practices and the dualism of the magical rites in the Atharvaveda. The Atharvaveda contains the legitimization in which a person can be saved from a disease or magical attack, but in turn can divert the attack to the source.

The diverse and complex belief system of an agrarian populous whose worldview envelops magic, sorcery, witchcraft, spirit possession, and ancestral possession aids the understanding of the exorcist's paradoxical role in popular belief systems. The array of supernatural malaise that may affect a person or family is extremely large and complex. Witchcraft, for example, is a possible cause of supernatural affliction which may require the services of an exorcist or healer. The exorcist as diviner may also be required to appease local tutelary gods and goddesses whom people have displeased. A person afflicted by the malign gaze or evil eye also requires the assistance of the exorcist. The removal of ghosts or ancestral spirits that may have possessed an individual is achieved by fulfilling the wishes of the invading spirit. Finally, others who are adept at and familiar with the processes and powers of sorcery can only cure a person affected by malevolent sorcery.

It is in the removal of malevolent sorcery that the ambivalent nature of the exorcist practices is best examined. Fuller states that within the setting of popular religious tradition in India, the sorcerer and the exorcist are synonymous with each other (Fuller, 1992: 237). Although the sorcerer uses magical formulae and chants to harm individuals or families, the remedy is also available from an exorcist who has mastered the practice of sorcery but in order to avert the evil magic of other sorcerers.

G. Dwyer (1996), in his study of supernatural affliction and its treatment in Rajasthan, states that the role of the exorcist and the sorcerer as representations of good and evil respectively is ambivalent. Although the sorcerer's role is regarded as evil because of the negative connotations it carries in western society, this is not always the case in the Indian context. The ambiguity of the

exorcist and the sorcerer is again based on their religious and magical practices. Although the sorcerer may use magical practices to inflict harm, the exorcist uses similar magical practices to cure people of the afflictions. This is based on the processes that both exorcist and sorcerer use to gain their powers. Dwyer states that *siddhi* (magical powers) are obtained through *sadhana* (ritual practices and methods) (Dwyer, 1996: 86). Within the Indian sub-continent, especially in north India, several terms refer to the processes of gaining magical powers. Bhakti, for example, refers to the ascetic practices that may be performed to gain such powers. The magical powers, and the process by which they are gained, do not define the way in which such powers will be utilized; hence the process and status of both sorcerer and exorcist are similar. Although believers regard the two figures as opponents insofar as the sorcerer causes supernatural malaise and the exorcist heals such afflictions, the process of gaining their respective powers is the same. Theoretically the exorcist and sorcerer are both able to assist supplicants and exorcise supernatural affliction, or inflict harm and malevolent sorcery upon members of the community. The role of the exorcist as a healer is subsequently placed under suspicion because in order to heal a person of a magical affliction, the exorcist must master the skills with which the magic has afflicted a person. The exorcist, as an upholder of religious duty, attracts suspicion because of the processes of *sadhana* and *siddhi* that he has in common with the sorcerer.

The complex beliefs, rites, and rituals that the exorcist practices are problematic and contribute to the ambiguity of his character. In using his *siddhi* to cure one person, the exorcist may inflict harm on another, either intentionally or unintentionally. Although the aim of the exorcist may be to do good for his supplicants through the processes of exorcism, he may cause suffering to others. Dwyer states:

Whether an individual who possesses supernatural powers is considered in positive or in negative terms, therefore, frequently depends upon whether one is blessed or cursed by him. Furthermore, one person at a certain point may see a practitioner in time as performing helpful magic and, at a later stage, as practicing sorcery (Dwyer, 1996: 96).

The duality of the magical practices that are present in the Atharvaveda remains intact in the popular beliefs systems that are widespread in India. Although originally the abhichara and bshhajani practices were personified by the two rishis Atharvan and Angiras, there is a degree of vagueness surrounding their role in society. As theistic trends developed in the Indian religious traditions and popular forms of religion became centralized in the rural society, the exorcist's role was promoted. However the shared powers of *siddhi* and *sadhana* with the exorcist further confuses the exorcist's position as humanly wicked or an upholder of religious duty. Although the practices and magical powers used in sorcery and exorcism are the same, the conception that the use of these powers by the exorcist determines his wicked or good nature is false. The believer's perception of the exorcist as relatively good or bad, practicing sorcery, or helping others is fundamental in understanding the personification of the exorcist as humanly wicked or the upholder of religious duties. The definition of the exorcist within these two categories is difficult to ascertain, as the perception of the supplicant is the defining factor. The ambivalent nature of the exorcist as an upholder of religious duties or a personification of human wickedness relies inherently on the supplicant's needs and purpose for utilizing magical practices.

### **The Nath Yoga tradition and Tantric powers**

A full analysis of the whole Nath tradition is not intended in this thesis, instead the methods of accumulation of *siddhi* powers and their role in Punjabi religion is endeavoured. This will then be examined in the development of the bhakti tradition and how these two overlapping traditions have provided a discourse in which within Punjabi religion is ingrained. The concepts of *siddhi* explored above are inherently part of the Nath tradition of Tantric Yoga even though they are prevalent in everyday use in north India and its various religious traditions.

The Nath Yogis rose to prominence in north India during the tenth century. The focus of their practices was Hath Yoga or yoga through practices of violent effort. The Hath Yoga prescribes violent effort on the subtle body, *suksma sarir*,

within which the *kundalini* resides at the bottom chakra, the *muladhara*. Through various austerities of the *kundalini* is forced to rise with the *pranayam* (breath) through the other chakras to the *sahasrara* at the apex of the human bodies head. The austerities focus on difficult postures, *asana*, accompanied by various *pranayam*, breathing techniques, which assist the *kundalini* in rising through the *chakras*. The route taken is along the spine where from the *muladhara* at the base of the spine the other *chakras* are pierced and the *granthis* or *bandha* (knots) of *maya* or illusion are entangled. There are three *nadis*, channels, which are highlighted as having the greatest importance in the rise of the *kundalini*. The central *nadi*, the *susumna nadi*, is the channel through which the *kundalini* will eventually rise through the various chakras into numerous other chakras filling the subtle body with bliss and power along the way. The *susumna nadi* runs as an axis down the centre of the subtle body from the *muladhara* to the *sahasrara*. The other *nadis* lie either side of the *susumna nadi* and run from the nostrils to the *muladhara*. From the *muladhara* where the *kundalini* energy is dormant the *pranayam* and *asana* force the energy to pierce the other *chakras* of *svadisthana*, *manipura*, *anahata*, *visuddha*, *ajna* and finally the *sahasrara* where the liberation of the subtle body is believed to take place. These *chakras* relate to the perineum, genitals, solar plexus, heart, throat, between the eyes and the crown of the head. As the *pranayam* and various *asana* raise the *kundalini* through the chakras knots that are caused by the veil of illusion, *maya*, in this world are opened. As the chakras are opened there are different sensations and powers that the practitioner is reported to experience until the liberation occurs at the *sahasrara*. Flood suggests that originally there were more chakras than the seven detailed above, however as the tradition has developed these have become the prominent stages of *sadhana* in Hath Yoga. Flood states there are various texts, which inform on the practices of Hath Yoga, although these are useful they are primarily concerned with the more subtle methods of meditation. To assist the *pranayam* Flood reports other practices also undertaken to purify the subtle body for the more difficult *asana* and *pranayam*. Flood states

the emphasis is undoubtedly upon disciplines of the body: cleansing the stomach by swallowing a cloth, drawing water into the rectum, cleaning the nose with threads and taking water through the nose and expelling it

through the mouth. Such practices are highly regarded as purifications which make the body fit for more difficult practices of postures and breath control. (Flood, 1996: 98)

The goal of the Hath Yoga Naths is to emerge into *samadhi* once the kundalini has risen to its apex and remain there through their pranayam for as long as possible. By holding the pranayam in the sahasrara chakra longevity of life is achieved. Another aspect of Hath Yoga that Flood explores is the experience of inner sound, known as *sabda*. This is achieved by the Naths by blocking the ears, nose, eyes and mouth and concentrating on the *sabda* that perpetually resounds within the subtle body. As the meditation on the *sabda* increases the sound of the *sabda* will also transform from a tinkling sound, to a drum, to a flute before the Nath becomes so absorbed in the sound that it merges with the supreme reality.

However what is the supreme reality in terms of Hath Yoga and the Naths? D. Mariau (2008) provides further assistance in this matter. Discussing Nath Yoga Mariau asserts that 'Its goal is the realisation of the practitioners identity with Siva, the ultimate reality' (2008: 537). Furthermore Nath Yoga according to Mariau mirrors the cosmos with the *chakras* below the navel and the *kundalini* itself representing the *sakti* and above the navel is the domain of Siva. Sakti in the form of the *kundalini* in the body represents the universal energy and *bhoga*, experience. Siva above the navel represents the concept of renunciation, *tyaga*. The rise of the *kundalini* through the *chakras* is accompanied by the symbolism of the two *nadis* either side the *susumna*. Mariau states that the left *nadi* represents Ganga, and the right *nadi* is Yamuna. The symbolism of these *nadis* is immediately apparent in that their confluence is revered as the holiest site, but also the belief in the flow of the invisible Saraswati. The *nadis* are also viewed as Siva and Sakti who finally converge in the highest *chakra* resulting in the emancipation of the practitioner. Mariau also suggests that an accompanying practice is the utterance of sacred syllables attuning the practitioner to the *sabda* resonating in the subtle body. According to Mariau

The whole process is accompanied by the utterance of sacred syllables, or *baja* mantra, which, apart from governing each *cakra*, also enable the

practitioner to become increasingly attuned to the divine sound vibration (sabda) until a state of ‘uttering-non uttering’ (ajapajapa) is reached where the mantra is reabsorbed into its unmanifested origin and the ‘unstruck sound’ (anahata nada) vibrates unimpeded through the whole being. (Mariau, 2008: 538)

We will discuss later that the practices of Hath Yoga were heavily criticised by exponents of the Sant tradition, however the concepts of the subtle body and the inner cosmos were wholly adopted with minor changes to the repetition of sacred syllables and devotional practices. P. Connolly highlights another important component of Hatha Yoga in the importance of the *guru* in teaching the Nath Yogis the method of raising the *kundalini* from its dormant position to the *sahasrara*. The awakening of the *kundalini* only achieved by the grace of the *guru*, and if a *yogin* has not completed the *kundalinis* journey to the highest chakra, through the grace of the *guru*, in the *yogins* next life they will begin from the point in the journey that they departed.

What is interesting in the development of the Nath tradition and their austere practice is the progressive accumulation of *siddhis* as the *kundalini* pierces the *chakras* through *susumuna nadi*. In general terms the Nath Yogis are described as

healers and wizards, to have complete mastery over respiration and other bodily functions, to be able to bring rain or cause drought, control wild animals, serpents, scorpions, ants and insects, ride tigers, and transform themselves into any shape at will. Legends about them tell of magic carpets, aerial cities, visits to heaven and hell, of resurrections from the dead, levitation, clairvoyance, living without food, multiplying the body, and much else. (Walker, 1968: 128)

In short these are some of the *siddhic* powers that are accumulated by the Nath Yogis in their *sadhana*. Although the attainment of liberation is the goal of Nath Yoga, the powers that are realised through their *sadhana* is one of their more famous aspects. It is exactly these *siddhis* powers that are found within the

Punjabi religion discussed in the earlier chapters. However how are these *siddhic* powers present within the largely nirguna and saguna forms of bhakti prevalent in north India and especially in the manifestations of Punjabi religion in the diaspora in Wolverhampton?

### ***The development of the Sant tradition***

The Alvars have played a pivotal and influential role in what is regarded today as the popular forms of devotion, hence the emotionally charged bhakti movement where loving devotion are the key tenets and practices were utilised by the Alvars in their lives and their writings. The emotional nature of the bhakti tradition that is prevalent in north India has been highly influenced by the devotion and literature of the eleven south Indian Alvar saints. Although the Alvars have been influential in the bhakti movement, a direct continuum from the south Indian bhakti movement to the north Indian bhakti movement cannot be substantiated. Although the north Indian bhakti movements has been influenced by the Alvars and their religious devotion, the Svetasvatara and Mahanarayana Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, the Harivamsa, the Bhagavata Purana and the Hindu epics have been highly influential in the development of the north Indian bhakti tradition.

Although the bhakti tradition of north India is not a direct development of the Alvars in south India, the initial beliefs of selfless and loving devotion were physically transported to north India through Maharashtra. Brockington has noted that Maharashtra plays an important part in the movement of bhakti religion from south India to the north of the country. Geographically Maharashtra belongs to south India, however in terms of its linguistic and cultural background Maharashtra belongs firmly to north India. Consequently Maharashtra is placed in a cultural and linguistic milieu within which the bhakti movement that developed further to north India was influenced and hence changed from the practice of bhakti religion in south India. Flood, Klostermaier and Brockington have put the transportation of the south Indian bhakti tradition to north India through the processes of migration forward as a possible theory of the spread of bhakti in north India. Brockington notes the role of Nimbarka, a brahmin of

Andhra Pradesh who migrated and settled in Vrindavan where Krsna's youth was supposedly spent and the source of the Harivamsas subject matter lies. In his migration Nimbarka took with him the religious practices of bhakti from south India to Uttar Pradesh in north India. Although Nimbarka is a minor figure, a sect known as the Nimvats is still present in the region where he settled in Uttar Pradesh, hence leaving a lasting influence of bhakti essentially from south India in the northern part of the country.

The migration of single bhaktas to north India was a reality and hence the message of bhakti was disseminated through migration. Nevertheless it is within the setting of Maharashtra that the bhakti tradition of north India developed and uniquely influenced and transformed bhakti religion which later spread to north India. There are several stages in which the bhakti tradition developed in north India from the Maharashtra state, beginning with the Varkari Panth, famed for the importance and centrality of pilgrimage to Pandharpur, sacred for its association with Vithoba – the Marathi name of Visnu. The Varkari panth is focussed around a succession of fifty Marathi speaking poets over a period of five hundred years whose hagiographic details were collated around the eighteenth century CE. There are four major figures of the fifty Marathi speaking poets that have popularised the Varkari panth through devotion and worship to Vithoba and the translation of some major religious scriptures from Sanskrit to Marathi and other vernacular languages. Jnanesvara is the first of these major figures and is regarded as the founder of the Varkari panth even though worship and devotion to Vithoba had existed for some time. Jnanesvara wrote a commentary on the Bhagavad Gita, the Jnanesvari, which is a fundamental text within the panth, was influenced by Vaisnava bhakti and the Nath tradition. After Jnanesvara the other major figures in the Varkari panth were Namdev, Eknath and Tukaram. All four major figures have contributed to the scriptural and devotional practices, beliefs and tradition of the Varkari panth.

It is the fifty poets of the Varkari panth that were first labelled as saints and where the Sant tradition of the fifteenth century in north India draws its immediate roots. Although the theistic beliefs, which are a central part of the bhakti tradition and the form of loving devotion, are part of earlier devotional movements the

Sant tradition if it were to be explored as a separate and unique movement is founded in the Varkari panth. The presence of the Varkari panth poets is present in the latter Sant tradition of north India. This is especially true of Namdev (1270-1350) who is traditionally thought to have spent some twenty years in the Punjab. As a result sixty-one of Namdev's hymns are in the Sikh scriptures. It is inevitable therefore that Namdev played a prominent role in the spread of bhakti to north India.

Another individual that plays a prominent role in the spread of bhakti to north India and the second and more influential Sant tradition is Ramananda. Traditionally Ramananda is regarded as a disciple and the fifth in succession to the Vaisnava philosopher, Ramanuja. As a result of breaking laws of purification, Ramananda was ostracised from the sect, and subsequently left to form his own movement known as the Ramanandis. Unlike the Varkari panth, Ramananda devotion was to Rama Sita rather than Vithoba and Krsna. Ramananda's movement is exemplary in its practices and beliefs with regards to the Sant tradition in north India. The acceptance of all in the worship of one true God is a definitive characteristic of the north Indian bhakti movement whereas in the Vaisnava bhakti movements caste and gender laws were still adhered to. Consequently women and members of all caste groups were united in the worship of God. Ramananda also used the vernacular Hindi to reach the masses with his teachings and beliefs another important factor in the widespread development of the Sant tradition through northern India. Hence it would initially seem that Ramananda's movement and his teachings were extremely influential in the latter Sant tradition. Ramananda is traditionally attributed with the founding of the two Sant schools of nirguna bhakti and saguna bhakti. Nirguna translated means without form whereas Saguna is 'with form', hence from Ramananda's teachings and devotion to Rama and Sita arose the two schools of the north Indian Sant – bhakti tradition. In nirguna bhakti, which was popularised by sants like Kabir and Nanak, devotion and worship was accorded to the formless God relegating the status of traditional orthodox rituals and practices.

These links have been intensified by traditional accounts of Ramananda's influence on the great sants of north India like Kabir and Nanak. Hagiographic

details of both Ramananda and Kabir have been strenuously forged together to create a link between Ramananda and Kabir, hence traditionally Kabir is regarded as a disciple of Ramananda, however this is highly unlikely as the dates of both figures are dubious and vary widely. For example Klostermaier gives Ramananda's dates as 1400-1470, and Kabir 1440-1518, which allow for a meeting and possible guru-disciple relationship between the two saints. However other dates put forward seem to be exaggerated in order to form a guru-disciple relationship between the two figures. Flood states that it is impossible for Ramananda and Kabir to have met because if Ramananda was born in 1299, as one text suggests, it is highly unlikely that Kabir, born almost 100 years later ever met Ramananda. Apart from the chronological details, which cast doubt on the guru-disciple relationship, Schomer (1987) rightly highlights other plausible reasons for a connection being formed between Ramananda and Kabir. Commenting on the status accorded to Ramananda as the inspiration behind the two divergent schools of north Indian bhakti it is unfeasible that Ramananda's teachings played such a pivotal role in the development of the bhakti and Sant tradition in north India. Schomer states it is impossible for Ramananda to have been the Guru of both nirguna saints and saguna practitioners on account of the chronological difficulties, hence Schomer denies Ramananda's 'Guru' status over the saints and bhaktas of north Indian bhakti. There are two possible reasons for the high status accorded to Ramananda in north Indian bhakti. Either the Ramanandi panth attributed to Ramananda the status of Guru and founder of the nirguna and saguna schools of north Indian bhakti; or panths that developed around saints and bhaktas formed links with Ramananda to legitimise their panths through a Brahmin Guru. Either way the effects of Ramananda and his teachings on the early saints of the north Indian bhakti tradition are minimal even though latter saints like Kabir and Ravidas have been regarded as his disciples.

Kabir, regardless of his relationship with Ramananda, is the first and most influential saint to have emerged from the north Indian bhakti tradition. Kabir's poetry and sayings found in the Sikh scriptures and various other manuscripts set the tone for the sant tradition that swept through north India, influencing the Sikh Gurus and other saints of north India like Ravidas. Although Kabir's hagiographic details are shrouded in mystery and continue to be unravelled in academic study,

the prevalent fact remains that as a practitioner of nirguna bhakti, he is regarded as the fountainhead of sants and bhaktas of the fifteenth century north Indian bhakti/sant movement. Panths that developed around the sants of north India respect Kabir as their 'spiritual ancestor' (Schomer, 1987).

After Kabir, Nanak is heralded as the key exponent of nirguna bhakti and the sant tradition of north India. Nine human gurus succeeded Nanak and finally the Sikh scriptures were accorded the status of eternal Guru for the Sikhs. Of all other panths and sects that developed around a sant in the north Indian bhakti movement, the Sikh panth based on the teachings of Nanak and nine successive gurus has developed into a distinct religious tradition. Although its roots are firmly based within the Hindu tradition through the nirguna bhakti movement, the Sikh tradition gradually developed its own unique identity and religious life outside the traditional forms of the bhakti movement. Under the leadership of the tenth guru, Gobind Singh, the Khalsa panth was initiated in order to protect the Sikh community and tradition from the dominant Mughal reign in India.

Although the Sikh tradition developed a distinct identity as it steadily progressed the initial teachings and practice of nirguna bhakti mirrored the teachings of Kabir. Kabir and Nanak, as the foremost nirguna sants in north India, both believed in a supreme God who through salvific acts would save devotees from the cycle of samsara. For both Kabir and Nanak the religious traditions that surrounded them were false. Focussing on the external rituals of religion, Hindus and Muslims had forgotten the importance and centrality of God in their religious and personal lives. Kabir and Nanak both rejected pilgrimage, ritual worship and religious practices to mark coming of age, like circumcision for Muslims, and the sacred thread ceremony for Hindus. All these acts were futile if the supreme God was not at the centre of an individual's life. Furthermore Kabir and Nanak focussing on the communal unity of humankind as seekers of One God disregarded caste and gender barriers. Unlike the Hindu tradition an ascetic life was never advocated but remaining within the normal walk of life salvation through the grace of God should be the goal. The prominence accorded to the Vedas in the Hindu tradition was also a point of contention for the sants of north India. The Vedas were monopolised by the Brahmins who retained and supported

the hierarchical caste system and the bias against females. Kabir and Nanak attacked Brahmins for their archaic ritual worship focussing on the ritual aspects of religion. The saguna bhakti movement was also heavily criticised by Kabir and Nanak for its focus on the role of the avatar. The avatar in the saguna movement was then worshipped as one's personal Isvara, which led to fighting amongst worshippers of different avatars proclaiming their avatar as the supreme and most worthy of worship. On the basis of this developing sectarianism Kabir vehemently denounced the worship of God in human form proclaiming that God was within each individual and was not encapsulated in the avatar that were ritually worshipped.

It is the key concept of devotion in the bhakti traditions that is both fascinating and can further inform us of how bhakti is used in the healing of individuals afflicted by supernatural malaise. As we have seen in the Punjabi religion of the diaspora in Wolverhampton bhakti is a key theme that pervades the beliefs and practices in the *mandirs*. Vaudeville and other exponents of the sant bhakti tradition state there are three pillars which are vital. These are, repetition of the divine name, devotion to the divine Guru and the company of the holy saints. These three aspects are the corner stone of devotion in the north Indian sant bhakti tradition and are encouraged by the saints to remove the illusory veil of maya and strive for liberation, although this is dependent on the grace of the true Guru. Geaves (2008) notes that the body is regarded in sant mat as a vehicle for inner revelation. Klostermaier (1994) in his discussion of the translation of the word bhakti by scholars notes that the traditional etymology of bhakti is from *bhaj*, which means to devote, and *kti*, which is service. Hence more popularly bhakti is translated to mean loving devotion. However if the root etymology of bhakti was considered as *bhanj*, to separate, the whole concept of bhakti shifts. Klostermaier states

That makes sense insofar as bhakti systems presuppose the supreme, absolute Being to be nonidentical with and separated from the being of the individual, In this view, inner longing for reunion is the characteristic of human life, and the bhakta is one who is aware of the painful

separation between himself or herself and God and tries to overcome it.  
(Klostermaier, 1994: 221)

Hence the sant tradition is focussed more so on the reunion with God because of the state of separation that a bhakta is in. The three pillars are practices, which are utilised to eradicate the veil of separation and attain reunion within the body. The divine name is of paramount importance because it is through the repetition and contemplation on the divine name that the reunion can be facilitated. However the role of the Guru who through his Grace and who in His divine will is the only one that can assist and finally complete the reunion with the ultimate reality. Finally the company of the holy sants, who are in a state of union with God and can also assist in demarcating the path, can accelerate the reunion. McLeod (1995) suggests that Guru Nanak was highly influenced by the Nath tradition. Although the concepts of *pranayam*, *asana* and other physical austerities were criticised and abandoned, the psycho-physical ascent of the *kundalini*, through the *chakras* was accepted. The ultimate goal of spiritual bliss thus formed a part of the sant tradition also. However instead of the physical austerities of the Nath tradition the sants focussed their meditation on the divine Name, to raise the kundalini through the chakras to the *dasam duar*. McLeod defines the *dasam duar* as

The 'tenth door' of Nath(q.v.) physiological theory (in addition to the nine natural orifices of the human body); the portion of the skull corresponding to the fontanelle through which the liberated spirit passes at the climax of the hatha-yoga (q.v.) discipline. The Sikh Guru use the term figuratively. (McLeod, 1995:67)

Even though there are key difference in the concepts of Nath Yoga and the later bhakti sant tradition in north India, it is clear that there are definite overlaps in the two traditions. Although the austerities of Nath Yoga are severely criticised by the sants, the physiological concepts of the body have still influenced the sant tradition. Furthermore although the concepts of the Guru and divine name are expounded in the sant tradition, as highlighted above these aspects were also present in the Nath traditions. The common features in both traditions would

follow that, as the Nath yogins gained siddhic powers through their hatha yoga in which the *kundalini* rises to the *sahasra*; the followers of sant mat would also be able to gain such powers through their own sadhana, which although different, continues on the same physiological path as that of the Naths. However the iconoclastic themes of the sant tradition shroud the siddhi powers completely. The sant traditions focus on the union with God, defers all other powers that are attained as secondary, and hence they do not appear in the bhakti tradition that is extolled by academics. However once we move into the practitioners domain of bhakti on the everyday level, the *siddhic* powers and their importance are immediately clear.

Bhakti and exorcism have up to now been studied as two exclusively separate traditions. Apart from a couple of references by Fuller in *The Camphor flame*, all other studies of exorcism are taken from anthropological or sociological standpoint. Scholars like Brockington, Flood, Carman and Klostermaier never mention exorcism in their study of bhakti. Moreover in their whole studies of the Hindu traditions exorcism or the affects of supernatural malaise are not mentioned once. The problem in terms of a study like this are that the bhakti tradition has been stripped of regional and folk religious beliefs and practices and presented as an homogenised and scriptural based tradition. Although the scripture is in vernacular, the academic portrayal of the tradition centres around, aspects of the tradition that are not the focus of the followers of this tradition. It is left to scholars of other disciplines to explore the beliefs and practices which take place hence they neglect the historical essence of bhakti, and we have received a disjointed account of religious practices and beliefs of the Indian religious traditions. The religious practices and beliefs that were discussed in the previous chapter identify the importance of the *siddhic* powers. Even though the worship at the mandirs would easily be identified within the bhakti traditions of nirguna and saguna thought, *siddhic* powers are still prevalently used by the *babas* and *bhagats*. The *sangat* at these *mandirs* return regularly to the *mandir* with new problems that for them can only be solved through the *shakti* that is controlled by the *babas* and *bhagats*.

## Chapter Five

### Analysing Possession and Exorcism

Anthropological studies of religion in the Indian sub-continent are at the forefront of exploring and analysing the processes of exorcism and healing in the Indian religious traditions. Religious studies has neglected the practice of exorcism in the study of the religious traditions of India. Apart from Graham Dwyer (1996, 1998, 1999), Fuller (1992) and Geaves (1998, 1999) scholars within this discipline have concentrated prevalingly on the historical study of religion or in the case of diaspora communities, the compartmentalised and formalised forms of religion are the sole fascination. This chapter provides a brief overview of the three approaches that have been taken in the study of possession, exorcism and healing rites. These are firstly, the concept of hysteria as an explanation of the phenomenon of possession; secondly, the theory of deprivation cults, and thirdly the model of cultural typification. These models will be briefly explored and analysed as the main models that are present in the study of these phenomena with the aim of evaluating there possible use in analysing the belief and process of exorcism that take place amongst the Punjabi diaspora at Peer Darbar and Ek Niwas. The typical process of exorcisms that take place in the Peer Darbar were outlined in chapter three, focussing on the importance of the kismet dimension in Punjabi religion in the diaspora. The importance of the *babas* in performing exorcisms, healing and as religious leaders and counsellors were highlighted. In this chapter the therapeutic affect of these practices will be assessed and the importance of the kismet and panthic dimension to the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton will be provided.

#### *Hysteria*

The present-day concept of hysteria is somewhat different from what was developed in the 1800s by Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-1893), Josef Breuer (1842-1925) and Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). In today's modern medical world the term hysteria is not in vogue because of the negative connotations it has

accrued. Hysteria is defined as ‘a mental disorder characterized by emotional outbursts, susceptibility to autosuggestion, and, often, symptoms such as paralysis that mimic the effects of physical disorders’ (Collins English Dictionary, 1995: 767). Charcot was attracted to his hypothesis of hysteria based on his concept of hysteria and its relationship to demonic possession. However Charcot’s misdiagnosis of patients with hysteria denigrated its use as a common medical diagnosis. Charcot is recognised as the author of the basic framework of modern neuropathology from which his theory of hysteria was developed and forwarded as a common disease from which many patients suffered. However because of the variant forms of hysteria present it was regarded as a disease rather than a neurological problem or at best a form of epilepsy. Nevertheless originally Charcot believed that hysteria was a disorder of the nervous system. He suggested a victim would experience four stages of hysteria, which had close affinities to the physical distortions recorded in cases of demonic possession during that period. Charcot divided an attack of hysteria into four phases. Firstly the stage of warning in which the victim of hysteria would for several minutes be observed and report to Charcot and his medical team

‘excessive sensitivity around the ovaries with the sensation of a ball rising from the abdomen to the throat, causing a feeling of suffocation. Other characteristic signs were palpitations of the heart, beating at the temples and whistling in the ears, often accompanied by mental excitation and sometimes by hallucinations’. (James, 1995, 57)

Secondly, the epileptoid in which the more popular manifestations of an attack of hysteria would begin. This stage has been compared to a modern day attack of epilepsy, which progressively, hysteria has been regarded. The signs were foaming at the mouth, eyes convulsed upwards and the respiration was described as ‘snorelike’. These symptoms were followed by or in conjunction with the most infamous symptom of hysteria, the great movements, which are the strong physical movements related with hysteria which combined immense shows of strength and anger. James describes the victim ‘in fit of rage in which the subject, howling like a wild beast, tore or broke anything within reach, and attacked anyone who tried to approach’. (James, 1995: 57)

Thirdly, the attack would continue in which the victim suffered a period of postures during which the subject also experiences hallucinations, which would also convey their sentiment of happiness or sadness during the attack. Fourthly, the attack would come to close with a similar experience of the first stage of the attack, however there were possibilities of follow up attacks which would again take the same course of events as outlined above.

By retrospective diagnosis of the forms of hysteria, Charcot observed and catalogued amongst the patients at Salpêtrière in Paris, with accounts of demonic possession from convents in Louviers 1700 and in Loudun in 1693, he asserted that demonic possession as portrayed in historical literature was but an attack of hysteria. Charcot also used works of art to prove his theory. For example, a work of the Flemish painter Rubens, which depicted a person possessed by a devil, was used to illustrate that this was merely a picture of hysteria based on sketches of patients that suffered from the ailment in the Salpêtrière. The main crux of Charcot's alignment of what folk people regarded as demonic possession and hysteria was the second phase of the attack in which the grand movements and the immense superhuman powers were displayed by victims.

However, Charcot's theory is not as simple as it may seem. Charcot worked in a field and period when the positivist tradition was regarded as the only possible way of yielding genuine knowledge. Furthermore the use of retrospective diagnosis is itself highly problematic. James rightly points out that Charcot's focus on hysteria and the links he formed with demonic possession began a culture of suggestion and auto suggestion in which the elements of hysteria gave rise to the phenomenon of demonic possession amongst the patients. Although his idea was grounded in the eradication of superstition, it was not wholly successful. James argues that Charcot's focus on demonic possession brought these supernatural beliefs to the fore.

However one should note that Charcot's whole theory of hysteria and the numerous manifestations it could take was misguided. According to R. Webster (1996) Charcot mis-diagnosed his patient known as Le-Log on which most of

his theory of hysteria was based. Le-Log who for Charcot portrayed the classic four stages of hysteria was actually suffering from what in later medical science was cranial damage from an accident that Le-Log had before becoming Charcot's patient. Charcot could not ascertain the physical or neurological form of the injury because of a lack of medical equipment in that period, however a brief discussion with the patient should have raised queries and links to the accident Le-Log suffered and the subsequent hysteria he was reported to suffer.

However the theory of hysteria as an explanation of possession has persisted after Charcot. Freed and Freed (1964, 1993), two prominent anthropologists who have done extensive work in north Indian villages also concur that possession in the Indian religions is a form of hysteria. There are a number of characteristics with which hysterics are related: these include sexual frigidity, intense fear of sexuality, sexual apprehensiveness, emotional attachments to parents. Furthermore a hysterical attack is thought to be precipitated by unusual stresses like war, dangerous situations and difficulties with parents and employers.

There are also two gains that can be made from a hysterical attack, firstly 'to discharge the tension created by intrapsychic conflict, and express drive and defense simultaneously, short-circuiting conscious perception of conflict related to the oedipus complex' (Freed and Freed, 1964: 167) The Oedipus complex is a group of emotions, usually unconscious, involving the desire of a child especially a male child, to possess sexually the parent of the opposite sex while excluding the parent of the same sex. Secondly, to gain attention and sympathy by focussing on the individuals dire situation and symptoms. Freed and Freed argue that spirit possession is clearly hysteria. They use the possession and exorcism of Daya in a north Indian village as a case study of possession as a form of hysteria. Daya is a young girl recently married who had strained sexual relations with her husband, and an uneasy introduction to her in-laws because of teasing from an older brother-in-law which is uncommon in Indian families Traditionally the younger brother-in-law has such a relationship with their, sister-in-law, where as the older brother-in-law is respected and regarded as a fatherly figure. Furthermore her sexual fears were intensified because of problems her friends

had encountered in her parental village because of pre-marital pregnancies. Freed and Freed conclude that

Daya's remarks indicated that, in accord with Abse's analysis of hysteria, tension and conflict related to the Oedipus complex were the underlying condition of her possession. The precipitating condition was her new role as a wife. (Freed and Freed, 1964: 167)

According to Freed and Freed, the secondary gains she made were numerous, with sympathy and attention from her parents and her in laws, reduced sexual demands from her husband and medical treatment from her father for weakness. They infer that the majority of women that suffer from hysterical attacks or what seems to be spirit possession because of the difficulties they encounter in their lives, especially after marriage and settling in with a new family. The lack of support from the new family and her feelings of being an outsider result in bouts of hysteria to gain recognition and attention. Freed and Freed base their arguments on the fieldwork they have conducted in various north Indian villages. They also draw on the research of other scholars like D. W. Abse (1959) and S. Arieti (1959) and conclude that any form of spirit possession is grounded in, firstly, a psychological medical ailment whether it be hysteria or schizophrenia and, secondly, there is a common cultural trait of victims that suffer spirit possession.

the victim of spirit possession is involved in difficulties with relatives of the nuclear or joint family, and (2) he is often in a situation where his expectations of mutual aid and support are low. (Freed and Freed, 1964: 170)

Other scholars also define possession and exorcism in terms of mental illnesses. For example, B. Pfleiderer (1988) describes the demonic possession of a sixteen year old girl at the Mira Datar Dargah, and concludes the possession was a result of the girl's reluctance to marry and this could be compared to the western medical problem of anorexia nervosa. G. Obeyesekere (1970, 1975), who will be

discussed in more detail later, also supports the theory that possession is a religious idiom used to present psychological problems in society.

P. J. Claus (1984) is sceptical of taking such an approach and argues against the use of a simplistic Western, medical paradigm to explain this phenomenon. He argues that possession and exorcism are complex ethnographic phenomena that should be studied and explored as such. To ascribe these phenomenon western medical systems negates the 'culturally specific symbolic system'. Although the cases of possession may provide evidence of a mental illness of some sort to explain it in such a matter of fact way is implausible. Claus, I think, would be much suited to the ways of I. M. Lewis, B. Kapferer and G. Dywer whom I will discuss now.

### ***Deprivation cults and Cultural typification***

Not all scholars that have written on exorcism or spirit possession are convinced that supernatural malaise is a form of hysteria or any other form of mental illness. Lewis (1966, 1971) set a tone of anthropological enquiry into spirit possession and exorcism, which asserted that women as victims of this malaise, through exorcism, are able to protest against their sub-ordinate and down-trodden position within the family set-up. This is popularly known as the war of the sexes. It was Lewis' article 'Spirit possession and deprivation cults' in 1966 that set out this now well-known hypothesis to analyse possession, trance and exorcism, drawing on evidence from various fields.

Lewis argues that spirit possession occurs in four well defined contexts, based on his fieldwork and observations of possession in Somali. However, what is of interest the fieldwork is carried out in a society which he himself describes as 'male-dominated and highly puritanical culture' (Lewis, 1966: 311), hence the subjugated position of women would have been almost a norm. Firstly, the frustrated love and passion which has been deprived from the women in Somali society leads to spirit possession. The example provided by Lewis is of a jilted girl who exhibits 'extreme lassitude, withdrawal, or even more distinct physical symptoms of illness'. Such a condition is attributed to her possession by the

object of her affection. However, because there is no other institutionalised means to express her feelings as there are no jural rights on which the jilted girl can draw on, illness and the care and protection become the only means to exhibit her feelings. Hence the deprivation in this case is of the beloved and in a system by which justice can be done. Secondly, the camel herdsman of the Somali are traditionally excluded from the rest of the people because of the needs of the other herds to be around water more so than the camels. Hence the camel herdsman traditionally comprise of unmarried youth. However in the wet season the watering patterns change and the unmarried youth herdsman come closer to the whole society. When this happens the herdsman are possessed by sar the word used in Somali to describe jinn. A dance which means beating the sar is performed in which the participation of girls is of paramount importance. The dance is a means for the young men to direct their affection to a prospective bride. Hence the deprivation in this case is from womenfolk and from society as a whole.

Thirdly, Lewis suggests that the phenomenon of the hard-pressed wife has the widest significance and application elsewhere. He argues that the status of women is so deprived within society through spirit possession the women are able to gain some help and alleviation. In the Somali case women are usually possessed when their husband contemplates taking on another spouse. The affliction can only be cured through the lavishing of luxurious gifts. In general there is little security for the women and divorce for the men is easily obtained. Possession and its cure are a means of airing their grievances and gaining some satisfaction. Fourthly the adult men as the most important and religious people of the Somali people are in turn targeted by a more powerful and harmful form of possession by clerical sprites who are the spiritual analogues of human Muslim clerics. Lewis provides numerous examples of tribes and peoples in Africa and further a field supporting his argument that women, who are the most deprived, in society use spirit possession as a way of attaining satisfaction and voicing their problems in public. However I will first discuss Kapferer's cultural typification theory.

'Cultural typification' is a phrase Kapferer uses to describe the particular susceptibility of women to spirit possession. Based on his work amongst the Sinhalese Buddhists, Kapferer argues that women are more prone to possession for three reasons. Firstly, women have a special and significant connection to the demonic. Kapferer suggests that women are more likely to be attacked by demons because of their polluting activities like cooking, disposal of the dead, menstruation and childbirth. Secondly, women are thought to have personality traits similar to demons for example, they are or can be emotionally disturbed, attached to persons and relationships of this world, and are seen as being engaged in the pursuit of worldly desires and as mentally weak. Finally because of women's mediating position between the Sinhalese Buddhist poles of nature and culture, they are structurally weak and vulnerable to demonic disorder . The concept of cultural typification being the root cause for the predominance of women experiencing possession and having to go through the process of exorcism has been utilised in most works on possession and exorcism. If a women is afflicted by possession, the reasons cited usually fall within Kapferer's cultural typification. For example Ballards work on the Punjabi dimensions when he looks at the kismet dimension and the dominance of women in this area assimilates a cultural typification of the relationship between a daughter in law and mother in law. This is a commonly used example for a troublesome relationship in which a possession and exorcism are necessary in studies of the Asian sub-continent. Fuller also supports the idea that possession or affliction are used in the sub-continent to subvert the social superiority of males over females or other hierarchical relationships like a worker and master. Fuller states,

The possessed woman is complaining-indirectly but still forcefully-about her husband or other male relatives. It is clear too, at least to an anthropologist with a knowledge of comparative data, that women's possession episodes are also culturally tolerated opportunities to complain about female inferiority and subordination within Indian society. (Fuller 1994: 233)

Dwyer (1996) also supports cultural typification. However he argues that the approach could also be called phenomenological. According to Dwyer this

approach 'provides a critical perspective for analysing these patterns of affliction as well as for understanding the susceptibility of those who are drawn into the orbit of healing practices in Mehndipur' (Dwyer, 1998: 5) Dwyer argues that this approach is best suited to the study of supernatural affliction because it takes into account the ideas and beliefs about the world and ones place in it, hence the perceptions that emerge and are developed intersubjectively are rooted in the natural attitude of the people. For example because the Hindu view of women is one of vulnerability to possession, exemplified in the number of cases of women that possessed; in the same manner the view of women being unclean, lustful and luxurious desires and weak facilitates the concept that women are more at risk from demonic possession than men.

The role of exorcism in these terms has been questioned by I. Nabokov (1997), V. C. de Munck (1990) and Obeyesekere (1970, 1975). Nabokov does not agree with the more traditional role of exorcism. She rejects the argument that women are pre-disposed to possession because of impurity and weak nature, hence their susceptibility to demonic attack. Instead she argues that through demonic possession the family is able to impose their power on the afflicted and through the exorcism they are able to explore and re-emphasise their authority over the afflicted person. Hence, Nabokov argues that, rather than a means of criticising the systems within which the victims live demonic possession and exorcism assist the families in the re-imposition of societal norms and the image of the 'good wife'. De Munck provides a different dimension to the practice of exorcism based on his fieldwork in Sri Lanka. He argues that exorcism acts as 'an indigenous form of psycho-therapy that effects a temporary cure through catharsis or a permanent cure if the psycho-social dimensions of the disease are effectively restructured' (de Munck, 1990: 317). Based on a specific case of spirit possession in Sri Lanka, de Munck traces from the onset of the possession to its final full exorcism the way in which the family cohesively decide the forms of treatment to be taken from the normal Western medical treatments via local and city based hospitals through to a full exorcism. He states that the treatment of a person possessed is not a personal concern but is one for the whole family and it is usually the men that will decide on the course of action to be taken, hence the treatment is socially centred around the family rather than the patient. Finally,

in the elaborate forms of exorcism carried out in Sri Lanka de Munck suggests that this form of exorcism acts as a rhetorical or dramaturgical form of treatment that ‘articulates culturally shared values and ontological presuppositions through a metaphoric paradigm of similar and contrasting symbols.’ (de Munck, 1990: 317)

Obeyesekere (1970, 1975) also provides a different concept that is noteworthy when one considers the analysis of spirit possession and exorcism. Obeyesekere provides what he calls a psycho-cultural exegesis of these beliefs and practices. He argues that although anthropologists have rightly indicated that possession and exorcism are socially or culturally orchestrated in their treatment of believers, there are also cases where psychological problems are intertwined with these issues. Although the psychological issues arise as a result of the cultural traditions and hierarchical systems that are in place the possession and exorcism are genuine methods to alleviate psychological difficulties. In two separate case studies in Sri Lanka, Obeyesekere details the social and cultural background of the individual and how this in turn has led to the person’s psychological problems ,which have been brought into the public domain through the guise of being possessed. The psychological problems usually a result of social or cultural inferiority is publicised to society through the idiom of demonic possession. Obeyesekere, argues ‘that when a person in Ceylon is confronted with severe psychological stress and is on the verge of a serious breakdown (“the onset of illness”) he will often attempt to express his problems in a publicly intelligible religious idiom.’ (Obeyesekere, 1970: 106)

However regardless of Nabokov, De Munck and Obeyesekere’s different interpretations of possession or exorcism the underlying factor in their analysis of these phenomenon is the prevalence of cultural and societal influences for the reasons behind it. As Dwyer says of his approach

The phenomenological perspective it [this article] articulates is predicated on the view that the actions, behaviour and orientations of pilgrims are to be seen from the standpoint of their social world. (Dwyer, 1998, p5)

I have detailed above a number of complimentary and contrasting approaches that scholars have taken in their studies of possession and exorcism throughout the Indian sub-continent and in Lewis' case Africa. The theory of hysteria, is the most problematic, firstly because of the way in which it was conceived and secondly because it negates the cultural, religious and societal influences on evaluating the role of possession and exorcism in the field. The use of hysteria or other psychological illnesses to refer to the phenomenon of possession and exorcism forces upon the communities that are in question Western views of medicine. Although advances have been made between the interface of the anthropology of religion and the anthropology of medicine (Dwyer 2003, and Kapferer 1979, 1991), the role of religion and cultural are essential in analysing and exploring such phenomenon. Furthermore, Dwyer (1996, 2003) argues that the concept of hysteria does not consider the intrinsic 'cultural construction of illness and cure' (Dwyer 2003: 5). Dwyer refers to the complex role of the pujari and exorcists in Mehndipur, Rajasthan, where his fieldwork was conducted. Rather than having a conflicting role in the healing of devotees with supernatural malaise, the two forms of godmen provide a cohesive and instrumental role in the healing procedure, which would be utterly neglected if the concept of hysteria is forwarded as the cause of possession and exorcism.

The deprivation cult hypothesis also has its critics in the form of Nabokov who based on her field work in Tamil Nadu argues supporters of this hypothesis are mistaken in their assertion that the process of exorcism is empowering the women in society, rather she sees it as a re-affirming of the families power over the possessed person. Her field work in Tamil Nadu focussed on the possession and rituals in exorcism focussing on young brides that had married in the last six years, who had confessed to possession and were then taken through the process of exorcism. In her fieldwork Nabokov found that the young bride easily succumb to possession not because of her deprivation or cultural typification and pre-disposition to possession, it was because of marital problems and a way to express her sexuality that possession was sought. Exorcism, although initiated by the family for their own benefits, the possession is determined by the young bride. Nabokov concludes that the process of exorcism

is one response to a pervasive source of female distress. It is also likely that this ritual does give women some opportunity to voice feelings of loneliness, abandonment and marital disappointment. (Nabokov, 1997, 311)

However, the actual process of exorcism compels the women exorcised to confess their feelings of loneliness and isolation, but more dramatically confess her erotic impulses which manifest in the inhabiting spirits and after exorcism return to the patriarchal family fold from which she escaped all but briefly. Although Nabokov asserts that the process of exorcism is only beneficent for the patriarchal family dynamics, the possession does allow the young brides to express their feeling. Whether this dynamic of exorcism is only to be found amongst the Tamil people is yet to be discovered, so although the role of the exorcism has changed distinctly in Nabokov's work the role of possession is ultimately the same.

Cultural typification or the later model of the phenomenological approach taken by Dwyer provides a more valuable model in which the process of exorcism and possession can be explored in terms of Punjabi religion and the Punjabi diaspora. One must note here that to my knowledge this is the first ever attempt to assess possession and exorcism amongst the Punjabi diaspora by utilising models of analysis based in the Indian sub-continent and essentially not from the Punjab region, which as I stated earlier has a distinct history and composition in terms of its religious traditions, practices and beliefs. I do not agree with Kapferer's views in that women are pre-disposed to demonic possession. Although even amongst the Punjabi diaspora women are mainly those that profess to being possessed and require exorcism. Dwyer states

I have shown that the phenomenological approach is useful, not merely because it facilitates understanding of susceptibility to affliction, but also because it provides an alternative to the kinds of approach that confine themselves to the authority of discourses developed within the Western rationalist tradition. (Dwyer, 2003: 49)

Although Dywer in his research asserts the cultural typification proposed by Kapferer and agrees that women are pre-disposed to possession, the approach itself lends itself to application on the Punjabi diaspora along with Ballard's dimensional approach.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Popular Religion**

‘Popular religion’ is a term that frequently used in the study of Indian religious traditions. The practice of exorcism and healing, belief in possession, ghosts and supernatural malaise that are placed under this title as the norms of popular religious belief and practice. Within the Indian religious traditions and in the context of this dissertation the label popular religion as it is applied to the Indian religions requires exploration and examination. Firstly, I will explore the concept of popular religion in a general form with the roots of the school of thought in European academia. Secondly, the development of the ‘popular religion’ theory and its impact on the study of Indian religious traditions, and the development of the diverse terms that have been used to describe this form of religious stratification, will be undertaken.

The term ‘popular religion’ does not denote a separate religious tradition in itself, but instead was used as a convenient label for religious practices and beliefs that do not fall under the official religion. For Goring (1992), popular religion is a fusion of mainstream traditional beliefs with pagan and supernatural concepts. Charles, H. Long (1995), on the other hand, begins his exploration of popular religion by focussing on the historical development of these terms by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century scholars in Europe. Closely linked are the concepts of popular religion to the class structures of society and acts as a defining factor of the popularity of religion. Within religious traditions, the elite of society have been regarded as the holders of religious authority who define the religious practices and the norms of the society. Any understanding of society could only be gained from the elite classes, as the lower classes were unable to provide a coherent understanding. However, Long suggests that it was Vico (1668-1744) and Herder (1744-1803) who provided the philosophical justifications for the study of the common agrarian society for a better understanding of its workings. Going against the age-old beliefs that the elite were the upholders of social meaning, Vico and Herder justified the lower classes as the holders of social meaning in society, which expressed a form of ‘cultural primitivism’. Herder labelled the localised peasant folk communities

‘the organic mode of life’ referring to the personal relationships between these societies, understanding the nature and purpose of life and the demographic smallness of the communities. These different groups were labelled ‘Gemeinschaft which represents community as organic form: and Gesellschaft is society as a mechanical aggregate and artifact’ (Long, 1995: 443) representing the urban form of life rather than the peasant folk life.

Vico and Herder proposed that the peasant folk traditions held the keys to understanding the roots of the religious traditions rather than the elite of society and religion was pervasive in society and culture especially through the popular forms followed by the folk and peasant people. Long summarises seven significant points of popular religion that have been put forward by the disciplines of anthropology, history and sociology.

1. The organic form of society represents the popular religion. This is regarded as the original meaning of popular religion closely tied to the ecology and agriculture of their world.
2. Popular religion is the religion of the laity rather than clergy. The clergy as the learned control religion from their prestigious position. The sacredness of the agriculture and ecology of their society may involve the clergy but the religion in this form is their own, whereas the clergy has control over the scriptures and religion associated to them they cannot control the laity’s focus on the agriculture.
3. Popular religion is the pervasive form of beliefs, values and rituals in society.
4. Esoteric beliefs and practices differ from the common civil religion. Long suggests it is this form of popular religion that is mainly found in industrialised cities and towns and points to the presence of astrological forecasts or ‘stars’ in daily news publications and the abundance of alternative healing methods. Even though these forms of popular religion are found mainly amongst the socially disadvantaged members of society, the esoteric beliefs exist alongside other forms of religion but do not form a religious tradition of their own.

5. The division of subclasses or minority groups in society based on occupation also formulate separate popular religious practices apart from the religious norms in society.
6. Popular religion is the religion of the masses rather than the privileged few. Unlike the earlier definitions of popular religion, this point refers to the religion of the masses of a democracy and industrial society.
7. Popular religion as that created by the elite of society to promote their own interests. From the beginning study of popular religion was undertaken by the elite this was intensified during industrialisation to bring this form of religion under the political and ideological bureaucracy of the period. The popular religion was re-invented for the new society.

Long rightly recognises that the points listed above provide a variety of meanings and forms of popular religion. However, he notes two common elements in the different forms of popular religion. Firstly, popular religion is concerned with modes of transmission. Whether based in the rural or urban culture the universalization of the mode of transmission marks the popularity of religion. Although the modes of transmission change from the rural context where symbols and archetypes are the focal points, in the urban setting there are several modes of transmission spanning new technology. Secondly, the knowledge acquired through the various forms of transmission. The radically changing nature of transmission renders the content ephemeral hence; the popular religion and culture are semiotic.

### ***Levels in the Hindu tradition***

Scholars who attempt to label religious practices and beliefs by class, educational standards and occupation have proposed a number of theories. The religious beliefs, practices and traditions of the socially disadvantaged members of society were usually given pejorative labels, for example their division of religion was labelled 'non-sanskritic', 'little tradition', 'local', or 'popular'. Although these were not meant to be disparaging of their religious practices they differed to the 'sanskritic', 'great', 'universal tradition' of the literate, socially advantaged members of society. M. N. Srinivas, Mckim Marriott, Robert Redfield, Milton

Singer and David G. Mandelbaum are all key proponents of this trend and have contributed immensely to exploring the different levels of religion that are prevalent in the Hindu tradition. Although the labels used to refer to the separate strands of Hinduism differed the consensus amongst these scholars was the same. The theory of sanskritization by Srinivas provided the starting point for the study of Hinduism in levels. Srinivas' main contention was religion throughout India could be classified into sanskritic or non-sanskritic religion. The sanskritic religion was an encompassing all Indian phenomenon. This form of religion transcended parochial and local forms of religion and presented a form of religion that was practised throughout the Indian sub-continent. The non-sanskritic religion was based on local religious traditions and had little influence throughout India. Srinivas argues that followers of non-sanskritic traditions attempted upward mobilisation to a sanskritic form of religion in order to better not only their religious position but to gain social and economic betterment. It should be noted at this stage that mainly socially disadvantaged members of society with little or no education follow the non-sanskritic tradition. Elite members of society with educational backgrounds follow the sanskritic tradition. Srinivas has called this upward mobilisation the process of sanskritization. Essentially the process works from a lower level moving towards a higher level of religion, culture, class and society. The non-sanskritic elements of religion were displaced through the process of sanskritization. In Srinivas', own words

Sanskritization may be briefly defined as the process by which a 'low' caste or tribe or other group takes over the customs, ritual, beliefs, ideology and style of life of a high and, in particular, a 'twice born' (dwija) caste. The sanskritization of a group has usually the effect of improving its position in the local caste hierarchy. It normally presupposes either an improvement in the economic or political position of the group concerned or a higher group self-consciousness resulting from its contact with a source of the 'Great Tradition' of Hinduism such as a pilgrim centre or monastery or a proselytising sect. (Srinivas, 1989: 56-57)

Srinivas was followed by other anthropologists and sociologists in suggesting Hinduism could be split into distinct separate levels, based mainly on religious practices which were highly influenced by a persons, education, caste and economic status. Although the terms used to define lower levels of religion and higher levels of religion differed the meanings and schema were similar if not identical. Srinivas' work was treated with respect and was used by later scholars to expand their own theories. As a result, during the 1950s there were a number of studies, which standardised Hinduism as a religion of two separate strata. The higher strata based on sanskritic origins were essentially controlled by the literate members of society, this was the 'Great Tradition of Sanskritic Hinduism' (Singer, 1972: 384). In contrast, the lower strata were derived from non-sanskritic elements, as was the little tradition. Another term that has been applied to the lower strata is 'popular Hinduism' However this has not had the same connotations as other terms. I discuss the reasons for this later in the chapter.

Ursula Sharma (1970a) and J.F. Staal (1963) have raised serious doubts about the process of sanskritization and in general the fragmentation of the Hindu tradition. Staal, a classical indologist by his own reckoning, is concerned mainly with the classical texts of the Indian religions. Staal's fundamental problem with the sanskritization theory is that very little has to do with the sanskrit language or the sacred scriptures which use this language. He suggests a naïve reader would assume that sanskritization means a greater use of the sanskrit language or the elements of the religion, however at times sanskrit and sanskritization have very little in common in Srinivas' work. This is clear from Srinivas' own writing where the processes of Sanskritisation are loosely connected to the Sanskrit language. Instead, the emphasis placed on sanskritic deities, the epics and Puranas. Srinivas suggested that sanskritization attained through the promotion of the sanskrit epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The deities involved in the epics were also of sanskrit origin, consequently influencing the lower strata and leading them to devotion of sanskritic gods and goddesses. What Srinivas failed to realise was that, firstly, the epics were not accessible to the people of the lower strata because of their lack of education, and secondly, the epics translated into vernacular languages. The vernacular accounts used in kathas (public discourses) and because of their translation; numerous new elements and forms

of the epics were produced. This raises the question of whether the new elements were also considered part of the sanskritic tradition or not. Furthermore, the development of bhakti had provided a path to salvation or liberation, which bypassed the need for brahminical interference, the use of scripture or a set pattern of rites and rituals. Hence, the only benefits of sanskritization were position within the society.

Staal indicates it is not always the great/sanskritic tradition that influences the little/non-sanskritic tradition. He has found that the opposite can also occur where the little tradition affects the great tradition. Possession and exorcism have been regarded as forms of the little tradition and popular Hinduism. A characteristic attributed to possession is the trembling of the body as well as other physical and mental indications. Staal argues that the trembling and its sanskrit translation *vip* in the Rg Veda signifies that possession is a part of the greater sanskritic tradition. The word *vip* also refers to the Vedic poets who have been inspired by the gods. *Vipra* literally means 'the quivering one' referring to the inspired poets who have attained wisdom and insight. Gradually *vipra* is used commonly to refer to a Brahman. Staal states 'The word *vipra* continues to suggest that the Brahman is the trembling Vedic seer who is possessed by inspiring gods.' (Staal, 1963: 267) What was originally thought to be of non-sanskritic origins is deeply embedded in the sanskritic great tradition.

Another example of the sanskritic nature of exorcism, possession and healing rites is the Atharvaveda and its focus on such matters. Rishi Angiras was a member of the elite seven Maharishis in mythology and a co-author of the Atharvaveda. He was also the purohit and magician for the gods and was regarded as a slayer of demons. Angiras was not only a representative of Agni, from which his name is derived, but also personifies the abhichara, malevolent form of magical practices. Even within the Rg Veda there are hymns pertaining to healing which in the fragmentation of Hinduism is regarded as part of the little tradition. The Atharvaveda provides the majority of references to malevolent and benevolent supernatural phenomena and the healing process. Although the Atharvaveda was marginalised and was not initially a part of the trayi Veda, it still forms part of the Vedic canon and is part of the sanskritic tradition. The

whole idea that exorcism, healing, possession by malevolent spirits, ghosts or ancestors is part of the little parochial tradition is untrue. The prevalence of healing chants, incantations and charms in the Atharvaveda, and to a lesser extent in the Rg Veda, clearly indicate that the practices of exorcism and religious healing and the existence of supernatural malevolent beings are found in the great sanskritic tradition as well as the non-sanskritic tradition. Although the religious practices prescribed in the Atharvaveda were accepted reluctantly, their presence in both the great and little tradition indicates that there are continuing significant factors throughout the Hindu tradition. Although the practices may differ within the different levels, there is a constant belief in the existence of supernatural beings and the effects of magic in both levels.

McKim Marriot (1955) in his work on the Village of Kishan Garhi in Uttar Pradesh alludes to the connection between the great and little tradition by focussing on the festivals and deities that are honoured in the village. Initially Marriot begins by exploring whether, firstly a village like Kishan Garhi can be understood as a whole in itself and secondly whether an understanding of this village can contribute to a better understanding to the greater tradition within which it is set. By focussing on the economy, patterns of kinship and marriage, and organisation of religion, Marriot attempts to define Kishan Garhi as a part of the greater tradition, which surrounds it or simply as an isolated little tradition with little influence or connection with the great tradition. Marriot finds that in terms of economy, kinship and marriage, arguments for Kishan Garhi's position in society are inconclusive, however when the village is studied through its social organisation of religion there are distinct traits, which align the village with the little tradition. However, the universalisation of the great tradition is still present within the traditions of Kishan Garhi even though the process of parochial transformation has interpreted these traditions to suit the climate of the little tradition. Marriot states

Seen through its festivals and deities, the religion of the village of Kishan Garhi may be conceived as resulting from continuous processes of communication between a little, local tradition and greater traditions

which have their places partly inside and partly outside the village.  
(Marriot, 1955: 218)

Marriot develops these ideas further in *India through Hindu categories* (1990) where he proposes the study of the Hindu tradition new Indian ethno sociology by focussing on the layers of society rather than separate entities. Geaves (1999) sums up Marriot's layering process as 'the multi-layered, multi dimensional contexts of Hindu life need to be recognised in terms which originate from India's own systems or categories where there are no absolute or enduring partitions' (Geaves, 1999: 43). Marriot argues that Hindu life can and should be studied in a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional manner based solely on the experiences of the Indian social sciences rather than imposing the standard Western models. If this process is achieved, he suggests

Once the data (on entities, actions or processes) within any sphere are mapped in a three-dimensional property-space, both Hindus and social scientists thinking with Hindu concepts may exploit the adjacent layers' meanings. (Marriot, 1990: 28)

However, Geaves (1999) warns, as does Marriot that these theories need to be thoroughly implemented in the field of Hindu life before their relevance in the academic study of religions can truly be assessed.

Returning to Srinivas' theory of Sanskritisation Sharma raises several questions on its limits. Sharma is initially concerned with lack of definition and constraint given to the term sanskritization. The definition given above is from a later article, but initially Srinivas did not define sanskritization as precisely. As a result, Sharma defines sanskritization as 'sanctioned in scriptural texts written in Sanskrit' (Sharma, 1970a: 2). Sharma argues that the fragmentation of religion into categories blinkers Srinivas' view on the wider picture. Srinivas cites an example of Sanskritisation in the adoption of the annual shraddha festival through the Brahmin rather than their original practice of offering wine and meat through a low caste oracle. The Ramakrishna Mission and the Lingayat sect are regarded as the influential factors and sanskritizing force in this example.

However Sharma questions whether this change was in fact due to sanskritization or ‘does this mean that they have in any way altered their ideas about the after-life or their attitudes towards their ancestors, or are these simply new manifestations of the same religious attitudes?’ (Sharma, 1970a: 3) Sharma asserts that these questions cannot be answered unless the fragmentary approach to Hinduism is removed and such developments are seen in a general sense.

In the same manner, Lawrence A. Babb (1975) raises several questions about the nature and relationship of separate levels of religion as portrayed by Srinivas and other proponents of fragmented Hinduism. Of the relationship between the two levels of Hinduism, Babb states ‘Are they fundamentally different, or are they merely different aspect of the same thing? Do they compete in any sense, or are they functionally complementary?’ (Babb, 1975: 23) Babb rightly points out that Srinivas’ theory has been one of the most influential theories proposed and utilised in the study of Indian religions. However when one attempts to use his model in the study of popular Hinduism, as Babb does, there are several problems that are raised because of the terminology and more fundamentally the idea that there are sanskritic and non-sanskritic forms of religion practised in India which lead one to believe that there are ‘two distinct systems of belief and practice.’ (Babb, 1975: 26) However evidence from Babb’s work in Chatisgarh, Marriott’s work in Kishan Garhi and Geaves work in Punjab and Britain accurately states that religion is not a divisive tradition in terms of great/little, sanskritic/non-sanskritic tradition, rather religious adherents are more than capable of forging there own religious lifestyles based on any number of factors.

Scholars like Babb, Staal, and Sharma have highlighted the dichotomous nature and fragmentation of Hinduism through its study as ‘great’, ‘little’ or ‘sanskritic’ ‘non-sanskritic’. Although the separate strata of Hinduism, as proposed by Srinivas and Singer are problematic, it should be noted that these traditions are not parallel levels where never the twain shall meet, but they intertwine and pass over and through each other at various stages in the religious beliefs, practices, rituals and life cycles of adherents. The diversity of Hinduism cannot be explained by a fragmentary approach where the religion is presented in separate strata. Although the scholars who proposed this admitted that the different strata

were interconnected, there was always the possibility of presenting the different strata as separate forms of religion. Although these were at the time highly useful ways in which the religion traditions of India could be assessed the divisive nature of the proposals overrides the positive elements of the theories proposed by Srinivas and Singer.

### ***Popular Hinduism***

The use of the phrase 'popular religion' is closely related to the theories of great and little tradition explored above. The term 'popular religion' does not propose separate levels of Hinduism or religions but portrays the popular forms of Hinduism followed by adherents. Of Long's seven significant factors of popular religion, several points fit in neatly with the definitions of popular Hinduism supplied by scholars. C. J. Fuller says 'by "Popular Hinduism" I conventionally refer to the beliefs and practices that constitute the living, "practical" religion of ordinary Hindus.' (Fuller, 1992: 5) Fuller distinguishes popular Hinduism from the textual and philosophical Hinduism based in the sacred scriptures of the Hindu tradition. Yet, he is quick to point out that this does not mean that popular Hinduism does not deal or require scripture as parts of popular Hinduism require scripture to operate. Fuller does not state any number of characteristics that belong to the popular domain of Hinduism, but simply says that his focus is on popular theistic forms of Hinduism, where the relationship of an individual with the multiplicity of deities is central to their life.

It would be difficult to place Fuller's form of popular religion into Long's seven significant factors of religion. Whereas Long's definitions of popular religion focus on class, caste and social distinctions, Fuller firmly bases popular Hinduism on the relationship between the supernatural and human beings. Although Fuller explores the relationship of lay people and religious specialists in terms of puja (worship) and bali (sacrifice) the focus of popular Hinduism is on the relationship of an individual with the multitude of deities in the Hindu pantheon.

Simon Weightman (1984) in his study of *Hinduism in the Village setting* begins by considering the approaches taken by scholars in the study of Hinduism and the problems of defining Hinduism because of the restrictive nature of the term. Weightman suggests that Hinduism was initially studied in a historical sense; hence, the focus was on the sacred scriptures and the role of the brahmin in the preservation of the tradition. He rightly states that the problems of this approach were the disregard for the daily religious life of the masses of adherents that academics represented by the historical form of Hinduism. Weightman accurately states 'Hindus are heirs, whether or not it reaches them, or whatever they make of it.' (Weightman, 1984: 6)

The second approach undertaken has been the focus on popular Hinduism; by the introduction of the scholars own 'arbitrary' divisions of where the historical form of Hinduism, ceases and the popular forms of the tradition begin. Often this process relegates the popular Hinduism to mere folklore and superstition, hence the little tradition as opposed to the great tradition of the sacred scriptures in the historical approach. However Weightman shrewdly highlights the contribution of anthropologists and sociologists to the study of popular Hinduism and notes the valuable nature of their observations and finding which are not embedded with the same prejudice approach that may be undertaken by a religious studies scholar. Hence, other social scientists can study Hinduism in the village setting by ignoring the impact of centuries of academic study. The social scientists therefore do not subjugate the religious beliefs and practices of the village people as either a misconstrued representation of Hinduism based on the sacred scriptures and epics, or as a mere collection of beliefs and practices which can at best be described as folk traditions or rank mumbo-jumbo, superstition. The third approach, which is of less significance for this study, is the accounts of Hinduism from practising Hindus. Usually produced by highly educated adherents of the tradition, their accounts produced with the western audience in mind using western terminology; hence, there are as many Hindus as Hinduisms because of the relativism of their approach.

Weightman highlights an important development that is taking place in the study of the Hindu tradition, in that the restrictive term some scholars rigorously

question 'Hinduism' and its origins and development. Günther-Dietz Sontheimer and Hermann Kulke (ed. 1997), Vasudha Dalmia and Heinrich von Stietencron (ed. 1995) and Sharada Sugirtharajah (2003) are a few scholars who have provided new perspectives in the study of the formulation of the concept 'Hinduism'. Although this is a highly exciting and useful approach to the study of the Hindu tradition, I am unable to provide an overview of these approaches because they would negate from the central emphasis and themes of the thesis. However, a future study of popular traditions would greatly benefit from exploring these new academic approaches to the study of Hinduism.

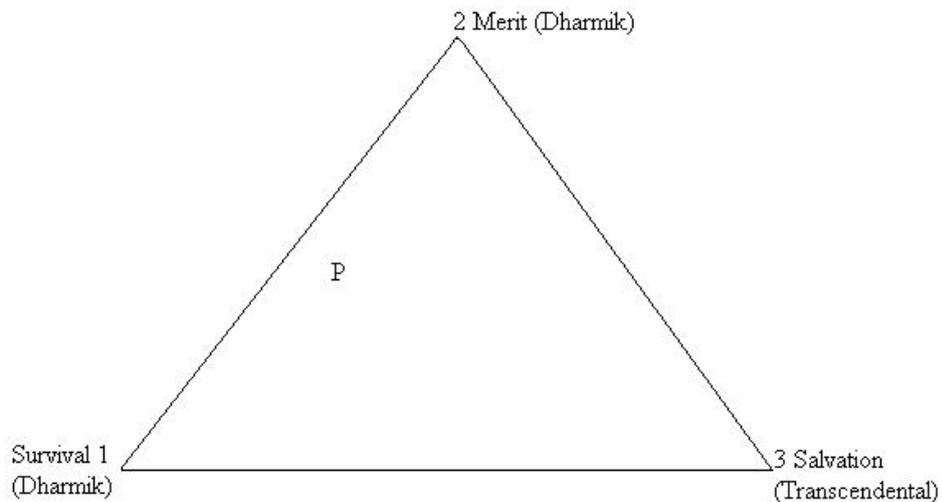
We return once again to Weightman who has developed an influential and extremely useful three complex dimensional approaches to the study of Hinduism in a village setting. Weightman asserts there are three complexes, which inform of the makeup of an adherents religious lifestyle in the village setting. The pragmatic complex, the dharmik complex and the transcendental complex are respectively

the quest for survival and betterment in this life, the quest to acquire merit and be reborn well and the quest for liberation and salvation.  
(Weightman, 1984: 42)

The pragmatic complex in which the constant aim of adherents is to survive daily problems that can range from financial, social, health or supernatural dilemmas. Hence, this complex is solely concerned with this world and life within which the adherent is the central figure. Betterment is the sole purpose. The pragmatic complex is therefore the most influential, and I argue the most important complex within the study of Indian religious traditions, which have been reduced in importance by scholars because of the traditional approaches of study outlined by Weightman and other influences explored earlier in the thesis. The second and third complex dealing with the dharmik and transcendental quests of Hinduism in the village setting are present within the psyche of an adherent's lifestyle, and play an integral role in the belief system. However, because of the nature of these complexes they are not as prevalent as the pragmatic complex. Weightman rightly identifies that the pragmatic complex is concerned with the here and now,

the immediate impact problems have on a Hindu's life. Whereas the dharmik complex is concerned firstly with the present by its focus on one's actions and their results, the results however will not be achieved until the cycle of samsara turns again and the soul is reborn, hence this complex is not as imminent in an adherent's psyche as the pragmatic complex. The transcendental complex on the other hand is almost solely concerned with exiting or liberating the soul from the cycle of birth and death hence removing oneself totally from imminent problems of worldly affairs or actions. Salvation, which is determined by the salvific nature of the adherent's god or God is also another manner in which the Hindu tradition believes the cycle of births and deaths can be exited, which relates to the transcendental complex.

Weightman suggests that if these three complexes viewed as the three points of a triangle.

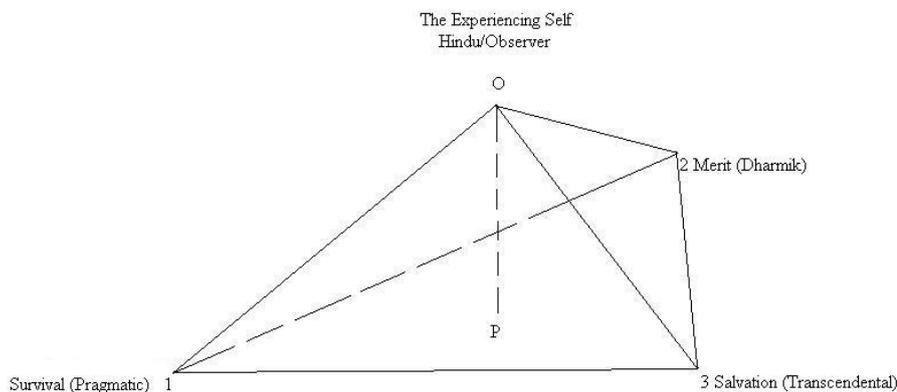


(Weightman, 1984: 44)

Depending on the motives and aspirations of a Hindu, one could place them within the triangle based on the emphasis they have towards one of the three complexes. Providing the example of pilgrimage, Weightman suggests that if the pilgrimage was the fulfilment of a vow for the cure of a child's illness then rather

than being a dharmik act pilgrimage is more pragmatic in nature, hence the person placed on the line in between the dharmik and pragmatic complex. However, if the pilgrimage was to a Vaisnava centre of pilgrimage and the darshan of the deity was undertaken then the transcendental complex would also be travelled towards. Weightman rightly indicates that the three complexes are not exclusive points to which an adherent would fully be linked. In essence the three complexes represented in a triangle with the adherent as a point within it, can variably travel between any of the points based on their motivations and aims. Weightman identifies that while the dharmik complex was more likely to affect the privileged members within the village setting, it was the pragmatic complex, which attracted the underprivileged villagers, whereas the transcendental complex of exit of the samsaric cycle was equally important for the whole spectrum of Hindu village life. However, these are not mutually conclusive or exclusive complexes, in that the underprivileged are not exclusively drawn to the pragmatic complex and those of higher status still gravitate towards the pragmatic complex when the need arises.

Weightman highlights two inadequacies with the triangular model, first it can only manage abstractions, and second it does not consider the place of the experiencing self within the model. The triangular model is modified into the following triangular pyramid.



(Weightman, 1984: 43)

The experiencing self in this triangular pyramid, according to Weightman negates the problems of abstraction and relativity. The experiencing self brings together the abstraction of the three complexes through the experience that each individual has with the three complexes hence becoming relative to everyday experiences. Weightman states

Thus point O, in contrast to the base triangle which represents multiplicity, can be seen as representing the point of unity, which is why it is particularly appropriate that it should be located at the apex of the pyramid. (Weightman, 1984: 43)

Weightman continues by detailing the different modes of the three complexes, exploring how the centrality of his hypothesis on the experiencing self, negates the stratification of religious life in the village by placing the adherent, not the abstractions of the religion at the basis of the religious tradition. Regardless of the centrality of the point O in the analysis of Hinduism in the village or any religious tradition in any setting, a student of religion cannot truly record or explore the experiences of an adherent because we can only record the abstractions of their religious life, the true essence of the religious experience cannot be ascertained. Weightman concludes that

since all one's analysis is incapable of reaching the one place where religion really matters, religious studies are unlikely to do much harm. (Weightman, 1984: 81)

Weightman provides a useful model to the study of popular Hinduism, in that it removes the 'levels' of religion that have been the status quo for so long. The centrality of the experiencing self is an interesting proposal, however how can it be implemented in the study of a whole village, community or diaspora? More so than focussing on the individual this model is more suitable for exploring the experiences of groups of people who have experienced similar life events, like migration and settlement to an alien environment for work, gradually settlement, gradually development. Nevertheless, how can this be achieved in the study of religion particularly in the study of possession and exorcism of an individual?

Religious experience is such a personal and unique part of life that the picture map we as students of religion would receive is beyond comprehension, even if we were able to collate such a thing. Weightman's model is highly informative if utilised in the study of group dynamics and religious experience.

Steven Vertovec (2000) provides a new dimension to the debate on popular religion. Vertovec argues that the levels of great and little tradition used to describe the religious strata of Indian society should be placed on 'a kind of descriptive continuum' where the activities of the believers could be picked from the continuum in accordance with their practices at the time. Hence the great and little tradition are placed on an equal line instead of different levels and the practices of an individual define their closeness to the great or little tradition. However, the levels of great and little tradition cannot be successfully applied to diaspora Hinduism. Vertovec argues that the little tradition has been narrowed or displaced altogether in the diaspora communities. With reference to a number of Hindu diaspora communities, the general trend is the homogenisation of the Hindu tradition where the separate levels of Hinduism have been fused into universal forms of Hinduism. Instead of the different levels of Hinduism that were applied in the Indian setting, Vertovec proposes the notions of popular and official religion be applied to Hinduism in diaspora communities.

Vertovec defines popular religion

basically as beliefs and practices undertaken or maintained by lay believers: these include orthodox practices undertaken outside 'official' auspices (especially domestic worship, but also including local festivals which celebrate mainstream deities or saints), so called superstitious (magico-religious) and/or charismatic phenomena (such as healing rites, spirit-possession and exorcism, pursuits of miraculous ends, or steps taken to ward off evil forces), and 'cult' phenomena (collective religious activity directed towards some specific but usually unorthodox focus, such as an extraordinary person, sacred place or item, or supernatural being propitiated by a relative minority). (Vertovec, 2000, p 41-42)

Vertovec's definition of popular religion does not consider any form of class distinction or in the case of Indian traditions caste distinction. In accordance with Long's definitions of popular religion, Vertovec's definitions focuses on the second point, where popular religion is the religion of the laity rather than clergy, and point four, where popular religion is based on esoteric beliefs and practices which differ from the common civil religion.

Official religion is on the other hand is 'a set of tenets, rites, proscriptions and prescriptions which are promulgated through some institutionalized framework' (Vertovec, 2000: 41). What is different about Vertovec's definition of official religion is that it is not based on the great/sanskritic tradition but it focuses on the institutionalised and rationalised forms of Hinduism that are prevalent in India. According to Vertovec, the official form of Hinduism was produced firstly because of the Hindu renaissance in the early nineteenth century, secondly the British Raj and thirdly the effects of migration. In the Indian setting, the Raj and the Hindu renaissance were the catalysts in the founding of Hindu-based religio-political movements like the Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, Hindu Mahasabha, and Shiv Senna. Although these groups may not have had much influence amongst the British Hindu communities, according to Vertovec they have been extremely influential where the community dynamics have been more fragmented because of individual rather than group migration. Milton Singer (1966) says that these processes of rationalisation in the Hindu tradition have achieved in forming an 'ecumenical' form of Hinduism where the boundaries of sect and caste are blurred. Bhakti plays a key role in this process and assists the overcoming of the class and caste barriers leading to individualism where the rationalised forms of Hinduism circulate.

Within Fuller and Vertovec's definitions of popular Hinduism, the place of bhakti is diversely different. As already stated, Vertovec regards bhakti as a part of the transforming factor of popular religion into official religion. As bhakti is based on individual loving devotion to a personal god or goddess, the boundaries of caste hierarchy are broken and a universal form of Hinduism is developed. Although in essence this was one of the goals of the great Bhaktas and Sants in promulgating this way of salvation, this was not as readily achieved, as Vertovec

seems to believe. Fuller places bhakti in the centre of the popular Hinduism, thus loving devotion pervades through the beliefs of the practitioners. Evidence for this is the focus on the relationship between the deities and the believers and the importance associated with worship to the deities.

The reasons for the differing views of bhakti between Vertovec and Fuller are a result of the development of bhakti in the Indian and diaspora settings. Vertovec proposes bhakti as the ideal form of devotion and worship that has eradicated popular forms of religion, and hence it represents the rationalised view of the Hindu tradition; that is ecumenical in nature and has been supported by various 'neo-Hindu' groups mentioned earlier. Bhakti in this sense is a uniting, overriding factor in the Hindu diaspora communities.

Bhakti within Fuller's study of popular Hinduism is somewhat different. He suggests that bhakti is a form of worship and relationship that is formed by all believers between them and their deities. The essence of bhakti was not only to form a personal relationship between deities and human beings, but was also a form of social and religious commentary on the Hindu tradition. Consequently the brahmanical stronghold over the sacred scriptures and the religious foundations of the Hindu tradition were displaced. As a result, all could be a part of the devotional tradition regardless of class, caste, gender, educational level or economic status. Bhakti in essence is an intrinsic part of popular Hinduism as Fuller says 'devotionalism is nevertheless a vital, constitutive part of popular Hinduism and a stream that runs all through it.' (Fuller, 1992: 158)

The problems that arise with both views of bhakti are that they are idealistic models of bhakti. What these views do not consider is the individual view on the matter of bhakti as a path to salvation and its impact upon other areas of life. There are strands within the large corpus of the bhakti tradition that have vehemently attacked not only the social, economic and religious strains within society but also the practices of the little, parochial traditions, hence bhakti and parochial practices are marginalised even though they may form the most popular practices.

### *Popular religion in the Punjab*

The majority of academic study has focussed on Popular Hinduism. This dissertation focuses on aspects of popular religion found in north India and the diaspora communities; consequently, the place of popular religion in north India and particularly the Punjab is explored. Ballard (1999) has proposed yet another schema by which popular religion, particularly Punjabi religion can be explored. Ballard's approach enables an exploration of the problems of the marginalised little/parochial/popular tradition and its interaction with the bhakti tradition. Ballard's theory will be explored in the next section, which focuses on popular religion in the Punjab.

As the Punjab is an agrarian society, the label of popular religion has been readily applied to their beliefs and practices. The social, economic, and educational status of the common Punjabi and their religious practices would easily place them within several categories of Long's definitions of popular religion. Harjot Oberoi (1997) in his analysis of popular religion and its relationship with the Sikh tradition stresses that are a number of problems in assessing the role of popular religion in Indian society. In terms of the Punjab, Oberoi states that the prevalence of popular religion has been destroyed by the Sikh intelligentsia of the late nineteenth century who attempted to eradicate such practices from the rural classes of Punjabi society. Furthermore, because of the agrarian roots of the Sikh tradition in the Punjab, literacy amongst the socially disadvantaged was scarce; hence there are no records or diaries of any sort that may shed light on the religious practices of agrarian society in the Punjab.

Instead, Oberoi has relied on several sources from which he has gleaned information on popular religion in the Punjab. Firstly with a lack of personal account of religious practices from the rural members of society Oberoi has used court chronicles from the Sikh kingdom, although these do not provide a great insight into the popular religion of the Punjab they are useful in understanding the relationship between what Oberoi calls sanatan Sikhism and village/popular religion. Secondly, the various gazetteers, census and reports by natives for the

Raj provide great detail on the religious beliefs and practices of the rural people. Thirdly, the publications by the Sikh intelligentsia to persuade the agrarian society to follow a sanatan form of Sikhism rather than the popular practices they were accustomed to present the forms of popular religion that were being practised and vehemently dissuaded by the Sikh intelligentsia and later the Singh Sabha.

Of these sources, the reports and gazetteers are easily available and provide invaluable accounts of religious practices amongst the agrarian members of society in the Punjab. As well as the official reports and publications, British officers working in India during the Raj have also chronicled the religious beliefs and practices of India. An example of this source form is William Crooke's book *An introduction to the popular religion and folklore of northern India*. In the preface Crooke states:

‘I desired to collect, for the use of all officers whose work lies among the rural classes, some information on the beliefs of the people which will enable them, in some degree, to understand the mysterious inner life of the races among whom their lot is cast;’ (Crooke, 1994: i)

In the same manner, R.C. Temple (1991) has collected popular legends of India and Pakistan and Crooke has translated the *Qanum-i-Islam*, originally by Ja'fr Sharif. Oberoi rightly points out the ambiguous nature of these sources affected by personal and official biases. He suggests that sources like these should be subjected to the ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’, which result in rich dividends. As a student of religious studies rather than having a focus on historical exploration these sources provide invaluable information on the religious practices and the antecedents of beliefs and practices still prevalent in the Punjab and Wolverhampton.

The kismet dimension alluded to in earlier chapters is of immense importance to the Punjabi diaspora in Wolverhampton as it is to most people in north India. So what is the kismet dimension and why is it so important? Ballard (1999) in his study of Punjabi religion divides sacred activity into four dimensions of

panth, kismet, dharm and qaum. Ballard's dimensional approach to the religion of Punjab focuses on the polarisation of religious traditions in the Punjab from what was seemingly a multi-religious homogenous society before religious reform movements and other major political events within the Indian sub-continent dramatically changed the scene. Rather than focussing on political influences in the process of polarisation, Ballard explores the role religion in the Punjab played in the extraordinary shift in Punjabi religion. As we have already explored, Oberoi's work on the 'enchanted universe' is a striking example of the religious accord and homogeneity in the Punjab before the 1900s. Data gathered by Temple and Crooke also lend support to this assertion. Gradually reform movements within the Hindu, Sikh and Islamic traditions and the devastating upheaval and partition of India and formation of Pakistan were an extremely efficient catalyst in accelerating polarisation in the region. Furthermore, the Euro-centric scholarship within which the religious traditions of India are conveniently studied without assessing its relevance to the subject has negated and prejudiced the accounts of Indian religion that we have received. These accounts do not take into account, as Simon Weightman indicates, the role of the experiencing self in his triangular pyramid. Ballard like Weightman asserts that

religious experience can include a number of quite different dimensions, each which exert differential levels of interest and attraction over different groups of devotees. (Ballard, 1999: 9)

Ballard utilises these dimensions as key indicators to the changes that took place in the Punjab because of the influences indicated earlier. Focussing on the mobilisation of the religious traditions in the Punjab Ballard asserts that before the reformation of the Punjab began panth and kismet were the key dimensions within which the religious traditions of the region operated. Qaum and subsequently dharm were utilised in the face of the socio-political reform movements. A consequence of this shift towards qaum and dharm was the subjugation of panthic and kismetic dimensions from the main arena of religious traditions within Punjab relegating them to the personal and private domain. Regardless of the dominance of the qaumic and dharmic dimensions, the panthic and kismetic dimensions are the 'primary source of spiritual inspiration and

personal solace to most Punjabis, and most particularly so in contexts of severe adversity.’ (Ballard, 1999: 11)

Although qaumic and dharmic elements of religion have a stranglehold on most of the academic world in terms of their portrayal of religious traditions, one must credit scholars like of Ballard and Weightman for their assessment of the situation and the approaches taken to realign religious studies to incorporate the ‘devalued dimensions’. In the same manner Srinivas, Singer, Redfield and Marriot have played exemplary roles in at least recognising that there is not only one great tradition which encompasses all belief systems within the Indian sub-continent. Although subjugated the little tradition is still presented and explored within their understanding of the religious climate in India.

The kismet dimension is of most importance in this research because the popular belief of the people is that misfortune is caused by some form of supernatural affliction. Furthermore humans are also capable of creating misfortune for one another through *nazar* (evil eye), or by magical practices to inflict misfortune on their enemies. However the term kismet needs further explanation and understanding because it highlights how various religious discourses form an intrinsic part of what is labelled Punjabi religion. In its crudest form kismet could be explained as fate, however this does not fully qualify what Ballard is trying to achieve. Ballard begins by exploring the different forms of adversity that the Punjabi tradition envisages. The concept of *hukam* or *bhana* in Punjabi religion relates to the unfathomable will of God that cannot be controlled or changed by any being. Hence any misfortune or malaise that may be experienced is within God’s divine will and is part of ones kismet. Ballard suggests that this removes any sense of guilt for the event but although a useful explanation for any pain or suffering is not sufficient. Hence kismet is also regarded in Punjabi religion as misfortune that is caused by supernatural malaise either through capricious spirits or through the malevolent acts of human agents. This he asserts assists greatly in providing a system within which one can explain misfortune through a much wider array of causes but more importantly they can identify the source of the malevolence and turn adversity in it tracks. For this Ballards panthic dimension of Punjabi religion is very useful. Whereas originally

in its truest sense panth 'is used in India to designate groups following particular teachers or doctrines' (McLeod, 1995: 160). However Ballard expands on the panthic dimension by analysing the role of spiritual masters who all share the similar goal

to find some means of penetrating the self-produced veils of ignorance and insensitivity which obstruct our awareness of the ultimate congruence between our individual microcosmic selves and the universal macrocosm. (Ballard, 1999: 16)

Although they may teach the gnosis of achieving these goals from their own perspectives there is a general consensus that the goal is the same. It is only the veil of illusion which restricts one from viewing it as such. However when used within the concept of the kismet dimension the spiritual masters of the panthic dimension be they *babas*, *bhagats*, *pirs*, *gurus* or *sants* are useful for the *siddhic* powers that they possess not only to diagnose the malaise that a victim may be suffering from but also through the same power the *babas* are able to remove the malaise. Although the spiritual master may regard the *siddhic* powers as a by-product of their spiritual journey towards gaining the higher gnosis, within the kismet dimension and for the majority of the believers the *siddhic* powers not the gnosis become their centre of attention. This aspect of religion is the most widespread in the villages of rural India but maintains its hold even in cities with increasing urbanisation. (Ballard, 1999: 17-21). Hence the kismet dimension is an integral part of Punjabi religion and its dismissal as mere superstition 'is both analytically unsustainable and deeply ethnocentric' (Ballard, 1999: 21). The kismet dimension provides the believers with a belief system in which the inexplicable can be rationalised in life. In Punjabi religion, the panthic and kismet dimensions are of immense importance, but the Punjab only provides a case study for a phenomenon found throughout the Indian subcontinent. However, in spite of its importance, Roger Ballard states:

Yet so intense is the prejudice against this dimension of Punjabi religious practice that I cannot point to a single serious contemporary study of such activities. (Ballard, 1999: 21)

The other salient feature of Punjabi religion is the panthic dimension. These two dimensions together place the holy man or baba at the forefront of Punjabi religion. Within this network the baba is able to heal, exorcise and counsel religious adherents through supernatural and social problems. The panthic element of the sangat following the holy leader acts as a support network where grievances, problems and stories can be shared. The panthic leader is the only one who is capable of solving kismet problems that may be endured and that is why the panth congregates around a baba. Hence, the dimensions of panth and kismet support each other's existence. Without the dimension of kismet, the panthic dimension would exist but not in the same manner. Some may argue that the main stay of the panthic dimension could be directed towards dharm; however, the kismet dimension, the most prevalent of the other dimensions in Punjabi religion, is the most important. S. Bowen's (1988) work on the Sathya Sai Baba community in Bradford is a good example of the way in which the charismatic leader of a panth thrust into the spotlight by the ability to deal with kismet dimensions of religion. Hence, in his monograph Bowen considers the siddhis as the basis of growth. J. Barrow (1999) also mentions the importance of spiritual power to Sant Jaswant Singh's followers, and the way in which stories of miraculous recoveries are told and re-told to confirm the divinity of their panthic leader through the kismet dimension. In the same manner Sants from the Nanaksar sampradaya and others within the Sikh tradition, which will be discussed later, provide an insight into their relationship with kismet forms of religion even though the Sikh tradition frowns on such beliefs per se.

Ballard's dimensional approach to the religion of Punjab is extremely useful in this study. We have already explored the origins and development of the exorcist tradition and belief in supernatural malaise through the Vedic era, however when we explore the bhakti tradition, such practices and beliefs have disappeared. The bhakti tradition represented as a wholesome, homogenised set of beliefs developed by bhaktas expounded primarily through their inspirational poetry. There is no mention, and evidently no place for such base beliefs as those that arise out of the kismet dimension. The panthic dimension is clearly at the forefront of the bhakti movement, but kismet elements are reduced to such a

degree that they are invisible in the abundant literature of the bhakti tradition. This is undoubtedly a consequence of firstly the Euro-centric approach to the study of religions that Ballard highlights as a key factor in the misrepresentation of religion in the Punjab. Secondly, the effect of the reform movements that took place in the 1900s has elevated the bhakti tradition by removing kismet elements, by focussing solely on the bhaktas and promoting their dharmic concepts.

The effect of this polarisation in the Punjab is abundant amongst the diaspora communities settled abroad that have migrated from the region. We will explore in the following chapters how the process of migration and settlement in Britain has been wholly influenced by the polarisation of Punjabi religion in the last century. The construction of religious boundaries that Oberoi explores so well in terms of the Punjab has transferred to the Punjabi diaspora. Consequently, apart from Geaves work on the cult of Baba Balak Nath in Britain, yet no study has explored the place of kismet religion in the diaspora. The exploration of this virgin field of study in the following chapters will provide a preliminary analysis of the settlement and development of the Punjabi diaspora in Britain. Wolverhampton will act as a case study for what could possibly be a pattern of development to identify throughout the Punjabi diaspora in Britain in further studies.

## Chapter Seven

### Conclusion

The Ballards' four-phase theory of migration was published in 1977, some 30 years ago. The fourth phase of migration in which the second generation was born has since developed and a third, possibly fourth generation are growing and being educated in Britain. The South Asian religious communities established in the 1960s and 1970s have been examined initially in relation to identity and ethnicity based on language, caste, region and religion. As the second generation was born and educated in Britain, the problem of culture clashes was raised. How could South Asian children born and educated in Britain navigate the different cultures of their parents and the society in which they were being raised? Hence, ethnicities, and identity with their roots, were highlighted even further. Events in south Asia were still important to communities in Britain. The Indian army invasion of Harimandir Sahib complex in Amritsar in 1984 and the destruction of the Babri Masjid on the Ram Janam Bhoomi in 1992 are prime examples of the links that are kept with the country of origin.

Punjabi religion is something that has gone relatively unnoticed amongst academics, even though it has been present in South Asian communities in Britain for the past twenty years. Eventually Punjabi religion has found its place in Britain and has established itself as a part of the British South Asian religious landscape. Migration from the Punjab to the West Midlands has led to several religious centres dedicated to regional Punjabi deities being opened and established. The mandirs and shrines in Walsall and Wolverhampton based on the deity Baba Balak Nath are a prime example of this trend. Apart from Geaves' work on the Baba Balak Nath cult, there has been no academic study of other Punjabi forms of religion.

There are several reasons for the lack of examination of Punjabi religion or other forms of religion which are focused on charismatic leadership:

1. The compartmentalisation of religion.

According to Oberoi

It is all very well for historians of religion to think, speak and write about Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism, but they rarely pause to consider if such clear-cut categories actually found expression in the consciousness, actions and cultural performances of human actors they describe. (Oberoi, 1997: 1)

In the study of South Asian religious communities in Britain, the labels of Hinduism, Sikhism and Islam are used without hesitation even though religious practices and beliefs are so much more diverse and different from what is presented in academic publications. There are two main reasons for what Oberoi (1997) has labelled 'the construction of religious boundaries'. Firstly, European scholarship categorised from the beginning the religious beliefs and practices of South Asians into Hindu, Muslim or Sikh groups. Secondly, the reform movements in the Hindu and Sikh tradition in the 1900s sought to label distinctly their respective traditions by differentiating themselves from each other.

## 2. Formalisation of religion in a new environment.

As discussed earlier, the importance of religious institutions and organisations did not take place until the second and third phases of migration and settlement in Britain. According to Singer (1972) Indian religions, especially Hinduism, were undergoing processes of ecumenicalism. This was exacerbated through the adverse effects of migration. This paper does not allow for a full exploration of the effects of migration on the construction of religious communities; however, a brief overview is required. Vertovec in his book *The Hindu diaspora* suggests that reproduction of Hinduism in Britain is achieved through cultural transmission through the family and secondly through organisational structures based on the Weberian notion

to create and crystallize...broader symbolic orientations and norms, to articulate various goals, to establish organizational frameworks, and to

mobilize the resources necessary for all these purposes (Vertovec, 2000: 94).

Vertovec explores the organisational reproduction of the Hindu community in three different stages.

In the first phase, where the British Asian population comprised predominantly of young male migrants, religious practices were not required, the hostile conditions necessitated the formation of loose community networks based on common difficulties in the foreign climate, hence caste, region of origin and language were of little importance and all India festivals were celebrated on low key scales.

Furthermore, 'The second phase witnessed the growth of diverse regional-linguistic, sectarian and caste associations.' (Vertovec, 2000: 96) This fits in with the Ballards' third phase of migration where families were being re-united before the implementation of rigid immigration laws. Whereas the all male households were bound by mutual hardship they suffered, the reunion of families reinforced the caste, regional and linguistic divisions of the Indian sub-continent. Hence, communities, organisations, institutions and societies were formed.

Thirdly, the formation of umbrella organisations characterised institutional developments. This was in an aim to achieve the ecumenical form of Hinduism mentioned earlier, overriding the caste, linguistic and regional bias (e.g. The National Council of Hindu Temples). What were presented in Britain were religious traditions that were undergoing massive changes in order to assert their own identity. Aspects of Punjabi religion based on charismatic leaders were not required and hindered the attempts to present South Asian religion as wholesome and homogenous forms of religion. Kalsi (1992) in his monograph on the evolution of the Sikh community in Leeds and Britain highlights the community ethos of the early settlers in Leeds when the establishment of the first Gurdwara in that area was being attempted. Kalsi states

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 to 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. (Kalsi, 1992: 2)

Hence, academics were faced with communities that asserted harmonised religious categories themselves which were much more homogenous in the early years of migration. Gradually through the process of settlement and establishment of families the full array of other factors like caste, biradari, regionality or religious schools of thought have any defining affects on the outward religious perspective of the communities settled in Britain.

3. Aspects of Punjabi religion were maintained in the home rather than on a community basis.

It therefore follows that what Vertovec defined as religious nurturing through the generations occurred in the home rather than community basis. However, the attempt to portray Hinduism as a homogenous religion that was constant throughout India obscures regional religious beliefs and practices.

For the reasons mentioned above, Punjabi religion and other regional religious beliefs, practices and traditions have been neglected by South Asians settling in this country and by academics. However, there is evidence to show that the practices of regional forms of religion are rising, and Punjabi religion is being expressed not only in the homes but is being expressed through specially defined religious centres. What is required in the study of South Asian religion is a closer examination of these forms of religion and their importance in the religious landscape and mindset of the British South Asian communities. In order to examine this, the centrality of the holy man amongst the South Asian diaspora in Britain is required.

The community that has developed under the patronage of Baba Kangar wala in Wolverhampton is unique because it replicates a form of religion that until recently was only found in the Punjab. Although frowned upon by official religious organisations like the gurdwaras and other mandirs like the Baba Balak Nath temple in Walsall, the Peer Darbar has attracted a mass following based on a small, unknown sufi shrine in a Punjabi village. The baba of Peer Darbar, Kapoor, has through his ability to converse with the pir, heal and exorcise attracted a panth which according to Ballard (1996) is

a body of people drawn together by their commitment to the teachings of a specific spiritual master, sometimes living but very often dead.

(Ballard, 1999: 16)

In the case of the Peer Darbar the followers are in touch with both a living and dead spiritual master. Kapoor as the conduit of the pirs power is the living link to the dead divinity. However as the community has developed Kapoor has been placed more so at the physical forefront as the spiritual master. Unlike the babas which Ballard talks about from the panthic dimension who aim

to penetrate (and to assist their devotees to penetrate) the self produced veils of ignorance and insensitivity which obstruct awareness of the ultimate congruence between the microcosm of our individual selves and the macrocosm of the entire existent Universe. (Ballard, 1996: 16)

Kapoor is concerned mainly with the betterment of pragmatic problems faced by the sangat. Although kirtan is recited in the darbar, the baba does not address the sangat in any form to bring them closer to salvation or liberation. Through the hava he receives, he is able to assist the sangat in any problems they face and counsel people where necessary. Although Kapoor has a panthic following his role is firmly within the kismetic dimension, which is the conceptual umbrella under which all unexplainable circumstances can be explained through the supernatural. There is a very strong link between the kismetic and panthic dimensions, where the panthic element-the inspirational guidance of a religious

master living or deceased is required to understand and resolve problems that arise in the kismet dimension, and this is true of the Peer Darbar.

The majority of people that attend Peer Darbar do so for the betterment of their own lives by the removal of malevolence or malaises of any kind. Kapoor guides the sangat both on a spiritual and a societal level where problems encountered within the family can be resolved through his intermediation. As Ballard and Oberoi point out the process of religious counselling that is used by babas of this kind provides a framework within which the unspeakable can be said. A daughter-in-law may under the guise of being possessed be able to reveal the strained relationship between herself and her mother-in-law. This provides the daughter-in-law with the opportunity to say what may not be possible within normal day-to-day life.

Unlike the pirs of Rajpur that Werth talks about the khanqah of Baba Kangar wala has become the focus of large numbers in Wolverhampton. According to Werth, locals only visited the small shrines of Rajpur and no annual celebrations take place. In the case of the Peer Darbar as the khanqah of Baba Kangar Wala and the baba have attracted a large sangat in Britain the effects are visible in India. Furthermore, the khanqah has become a place of pilgrimage as annual trips are made back to India with large numbers of the sangat accompanying Kapoor each year. As a result, the khanqah has been expanded and the sangat from Britain are able to provide large langars for the residents in India at the khanqah. Buildings have been erected around the khanqah for people from afar to rest in.

The Peer Darbar in Wolverhampton is a prime example of the nature in which the Punjabi diaspora community in Britain have accommodated and transformed rural religious traditions from India to the British religious climate. Where initially only gurdwaras, mandirs and mosques were built, the diaspora community are now able to establish a Peer Darbar in honour of their pir. This means that the infrastructure of the migrant communities has developed and now we are able to vividly see the full extent of the Indian religious traditions being practised in the Punjabi religious communities in Britain.

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