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The Sikhs – religion and nation Chosen political and social determinants of functioning

Abstract: The article attempts to estimate the influence of the geographical and political conditions on the transformation of a Sikhs community after the decolonisation of India in 1947. The authors have used, among other things, the results of their own field research, statistical analysis and scientific works. The main aim of the paper is to explain the specificity of the functioning of Sikhs who despite extremely unfavourable geopolitical conditions and relatively small number have been able to maintain their own identity and achieve a level of social and economic development higher than average for India and Pakistan. Contemporary Sikhs are often perceived as both – a religious and national community. In general, their main characteristics are sharp cultural and moral distinction and very strong awareness of their identity. They manifest strong bond to their region. Sikhs play crucial roles in social, political, and especially economic and military functioning of the state. Due to their concentration on the India-Pakistan borderland, strong militarisation and separatistic tendencies, Sikhs play crucial role in the domestic and foreign policy of India.

Keywords: Sikhism, India, Pakistan, Punjab, borderland, multiculturalism.

Introduction

Sikhism is the youngest of the world's great monotheistic religions. It was formed at the end of the 15th century in pre-Partition Punjab. However, as many of Sikhism principles came from Hinduism and, even more so from Islam, it is unique for example because of understanding of the divine and the universe and the nature of humanity. Guru Nanak (1469–1539) is considered to be the founder of Sikhism, but another nine gurus (spiritual preceptors) played an important role in giving the new religion its ultimate shape. The word “Sikh” is derived from the Sanskrit *śiṣya*, meaning a student exploring religious knowledge (Macauliffe 1909; Owen, Sambhi 2005).

One of the first actions by Nanak was an attempt at eradicating all religious differences between people. He argued that there is a single impersonal God of many names, before whom all are equal. In this region of the world this was a revolutionary idea, which struck at the base of the Hindu caste system. The

teachings of Nanak were an attractive alternative because regardless of earlier origin and social identification, in Sikhism, as in Islam, all people became brothers and sisters in faith. Sikhism also introduced a real, and not only verbal, principle of equality between men and women. It was very important, as the position of women was traditionally significantly lower than that of men in the hierarchical society of India, both among Hindus and Muslims. Moreover, one of its main objectives was to bring the followers of Hinduism and Islam closer together, promote brotherhood, personal freedom and equality of all communities in India. Therefore, for many different reasons, the expansion of Sikhism should be considered in socio-religious and not only religious terms (Banerjee 1983; Kalsi 2005; Brekke 2014).

Sikhism is based on three basic principles: *Naam Japno* (pray, meditate) *Kirat Karō* (work) and *Vand Chhakō* (share with others). It promotes honest and industrious life, independent maintenance of a family, prohibits begging, teaches respect for others and promotes equality and fraternity in the relations between people, as well as stresses the importance of social solidarity and serving others. It rejects characteristic Hindu concept of ritual purity and defilement, proclaiming that only moral purity has true meaning. Being the most egalitarian of the Indian religious and social systems, it removes the divisions of castes, religions, races and genders. The place of worship is *Gurdwara*, acting as the temple (Nesbitt 2005).

Sikhism in its original assumptions was a partial synthesis, a compilation of Hinduism and Islam, yet fundamentally different from them, especially from the most common religion in India. The main differences between Sikhism and Hinduism are:

- monotheism,
- adoption of a holy book,
- lack of clergy,
- condemnation of the cult of statues and images,
- condemnation of divination and astrology,
- lack of caste system (the equality of all believers),
- actual empowerment of women.

On the other hand, the most important similarities between these two religions are the belief in reincarnation and the large role of meditation.

Despite the apparent closeness of Sikhism and Islam (such as monotheism, the religion of one book, a ban on presenting images of God), the lack of recognition of Allah as God and the failure to acknowledge Koran as a holy book of the Sikhs caused them to be treated as infidels. Although situation was more complicated and depended strongly on successive Mughal rulers, who demonstrated different attitudes towards Sikhs. In the second half of the 16th century, the Fourth Guru, Guru Ram Das, founds the city of Amritsar, where Sikhs raise in the years 1581–1601, what will become after the early nineteenth

century, the “Golden Temple”, which still remains the main centre of the faith, the most important sanctuary and spiritual capital of Sikhism (Fig. 1,2). In the 17th century, persecution and fights against Sikhs led by Mughal and Afghans intensify. As a result, successive gurus become martyrs and the Sikh socio-religious group transforms into a military community (*Khalsa*), the Sikh law is codified, and the tenth Guru, Govind Singh finally elevates the Sikh scripture to the position of Guru and so the *Guru Granth Sahib* which is also called the “eleventh guru”, the highest religious authority and the central part of the liturgy (Banerjee 1983; Owen, Sambhi 2005; Nesbitt 2005).



Fig. 1. The Golden Temple
(*Sri Harmandir Sahib*), Amritsar
Photo by M. Barwiński



Fig. 2. Devout Sikhs in the
Golden Temple, Amritsar
Photo by M. Barwiński

The most important consequence of this period was very strong militarisation of the followers of Sikhism, which for the next few hundred years, until modern times, has become one of the most characteristic features of this community. As part of the fight to defend the community, the faith, justice and truth, the most important rules of conduct of every Sikh were and continue to be, the maintenance of the five attributes of belonging to the community, the so-called “Five K” – *Kirpan* (sword), *Kara* (steel bracelet), *Kachera* (short trousers), *Kesh* (uncut hair), *Kangha* (a comb supporting pinned hair) and the prohibition of eating meat from the Muslim ritual slaughter, the use of tobacco and drugs. Sikhs are distinguished by the characteristic turbans and the suffix *Singh* (lion) with male names or *Kaur* (princess) with female names. These elements are the basis of Sikh identity and the external attributes of every Sikh (Macauliffe 1909; Banerjee 1983; Kalsi 2005) (Fig. 2).

The transformation of the Sikh tradition from socio-religious movement into a military community prevented the eradication of Sikhs by the Muslim armies of Indian rulers of the time, allowed the newly-founded religion to survive, considerably strengthened and solidified the sense of community and independence (religious, cultural, social, economic), and thus led to the transformation from

a religious into a national movement, and creating cultural, linguistic and ethnic identity. This is part of the dominant narrative put forward today by Sikh authorities, but it should be noted that not all Sikhs agree with such an interpretation (Sumail 2007; Harsimranjeet 2010; Jaswinder 2011).

After prolonged persecution from the followers of Islam, during which Punjab was divided into twelve politically and culturally connected Sikh principalities, in the early nineteenth century the position of Sikhism in India increasingly began to be threatened by traditional Hindu beliefs. The increasing activities of Hindus and Christian missionaries forced the Sikhs to take decisive actions. Close relations in Hinduism were proclaimed to be a threat to Sikh culture and attempts were started to go back to “pure” Sikhism (Harsimranjeet 2010).

When the Afghans began their raids of India, the Sikhs took advantage and won their own kingdom in Punjab. Ranjit Singh (1780–1839) led to the military and political unification of the Punjab, signed a favourable peace treaty with the British East India Company and became completely independent in 1805. The Sikh Kingdom has been extended to the conquered provinces of Jammu and Kashmir and occupied a wide triangle from the city of Peshawar and the Khyber pass in the north-west to the Himalayas in the north-east and the plains of Delhi to the south-east. In the south, the Sutlej river separated it from India, where the British were growing in strength. The capital was initially located in Lahore, but it was moved to Amritsar. Punjab became an independent state. However, it lasted only ten years after the death of its founder.

On February 19, 1846 the British defeat the Sikhs in a bloody battle. A treaty was signed in Lahore, under which Jammu and Kashmir were sold to Gulab Singh, whose descendants ruled Kashmir until the decolonisation of India in 1947, not accepting the annexation of these lands to Pakistan. The capital city of the Punjab, Lahore, was occupied by British troops, which controlled the puppet Sikh government. In 1849, the British, suppressing another Sikh mutiny, formally annex Punjab. This move gives them a perfect agricultural base for their possessions in India. Alluvial plains of five rivers crossing the province and numerous drainage channels allowed for the expansion of fields of grain, millet, rice and cotton. In addition, the enrolment of great Sikh soldiers into British-ruled Indian Army eventually brought many strategic benefits, and Sikhs, apart from Nepalese Gurkhas, became the most valuable soldiers in the service of the British in the Indian subcontinent (Owen, Sambhi 1987, 2005; Sumail 2007).

The borderland nation. Sikhs during the decolonisation of India

After the end of the Second World War, the authorities of the ruling Labour Party in the United Kingdom have opted for granting India independence. There were two main obstacles – the conflict between the Hindu majority represented by the

Indian National Congress and the Muslim 1/3 of the population of India represented by the Muslim League, and the status of 565 Principalities formally under British authority but ruled by local rulers. They were 1/3 of the territory of British India. The Government in London, the British Viceroy of India and leader of the Indian National Congress argued for the unity of the future independent India, which was strongly opposed by the Muslim League, which called for the establishment of Pakistan – a new Muslim state occupying the areas with Muslim majority. Because of the inability to reconcile the conflicting interests, mutual distrust of the leaders of the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League, more frequent and bloodier pogroms of Muslims and Hindus, the British authorities decided to divide the country while granting its independence. This did not prevent further bloodshed, new conflicts, separatist movements and ongoing hostility between the two newly established states.

As a consequence of decolonisation, carried out according to the religious criterion, Hindus (India) and Muslims (Pakistan, East Pakistan, now Bangladesh), privileged by British administrators in India, received their own states. Sikhs, a community incomparably less numerous than the followers of Hinduism and Islam not only did not get their own state, but the province most of them inhabited, the cradle of their religion and nation, Punjab, was cut in half by the Indian-Pakistani border, that effectively tore this region apart (Moore 1982).

The division of British India was a tragedy for Sikhs. It destroyed the unity of their native Punjab, caused tens of thousands of casualties, forced more than two million Sikhs to emigrate from Pakistan to India and abandon their life possessions, and since Sikh leaders were more sympathetic to the claims of newly emergent India it tore Sikhs away from their sacred geography, from Lahore and from Nankana Sahib, the site of the birth of their founder Guru Nanak, for example. The holy city of Amritsar, 50 km east of the new border, was however left in India. During the extremely violent riots that swept through Punjab in mid-1947, Sikhs fought Muslims with the cruelty totally foreign to the theoretical assumptions of their religion, while only occasionally raising their sword to Hindus. Muslim districts of Amritsar and other cities in eastern Punjab turned into ashes, Muslims had to choose to flee to Pakistan or be killed. With their centuries of combat experience and military organisation of the community, Sikhs proved to be very effective killers. On the other hand, on the other side of the border Muslims were mass murdering Sikhs and forcing them to flee from Lahore and surrounding towns and villages, taking their houses, shops and farms. Apart from religious, historical and political reasons, this mutual slaughter was also strongly economically motivated (Moore 1982; Boyce 1999; Sandhu 2012).

Modern Punjab

Punjab is the birthplace of Sikhism and a region recognised by Sikhs as their religious and national homeland. It is a land of five rivers, all tributaries of the Indus – Beas, Chenab, Jhelum, Ravi and Sutlej. Historical boundaries of this region in northern India stretch from Himalayan ranges in the north to the deserts of Rajasthan in the south (Fig. 3). Contemporary Punjab, divided in 1947 between India and Pakistan, is only part of the historical region.

The Indian part, located in the north-western tip of the country, covers an area of 50.4 thousand km² and in 2011 was inhabited by 27,743,338 people. The state capital is located in Chandigarh (together with the state of Haryana). The Pakistani part of Punjab is much larger, with 205.3 thousand km². Its population is also larger, according to government data, in 2015 there were 101,391,000 inhabitants. The provincial capital is Lahore (Fig. 3).

The Indian part of Punjab has the best road and rail infrastructure and is the second richest state in India. Its prosperity is mainly due to well-developed agriculture and the small business sector related to it. The main crops include wheat, rice, cotton, sugarcane, fruit and vegetables. It is estimated that the relatively small Punjab produces 1% of world rice harvest, 2% wheat and 2% cotton. The most important industries are: engineering and electromechanical (agricultural machinery, moulding, automotive parts), chemical and textile industry, food processing, chemical, pharmaceutical. Indian Punjab is the province that can boast one of the highest (approx. 60%) rates of literacy in the country (Ghuman 2012).

Pakistani Punjab also stands out against the background of the country. It is the most densely populated province of Pakistan. From the east, it borders with the Indian states of Punjab and Jammu, Kashmir and Rajasthan. It is one of the most industrialized provinces of the country. It has developed textile, electro-mechanical and sporting goods industries. Just as in India, despite the dry climate, a well-developed melioration system makes it one of the most fertile areas. Rice, sugarcane, fruit and vegetables are grown.

Despite the number of cities founded by them, Sikhs are traditionally attached to land and agriculture; 66% of the population of Sikhs in Indian Punjab live in non-urbanised areas (Ghuman 2012). According to E. Nesbitt (2005), despite several generations of migration from the villages of Punjab, many Sikhs still identify themselves as a rural, unsophisticated, farming people, in contrast to the more urban Hindu community. This is confirmed by a popular Punjabi joke that says that “Sikhs have no culture other than agriculture” (Fig. 4).

Due to its natural conditions and the work of many generations of farmers, Punjab still remains India’s granary. Approximately 70% of all traditional cereals (except for rice) in India are produced in Indian Punjab and Haryana. Unfortunately, despite the long tradition of agriculture and high agricultural

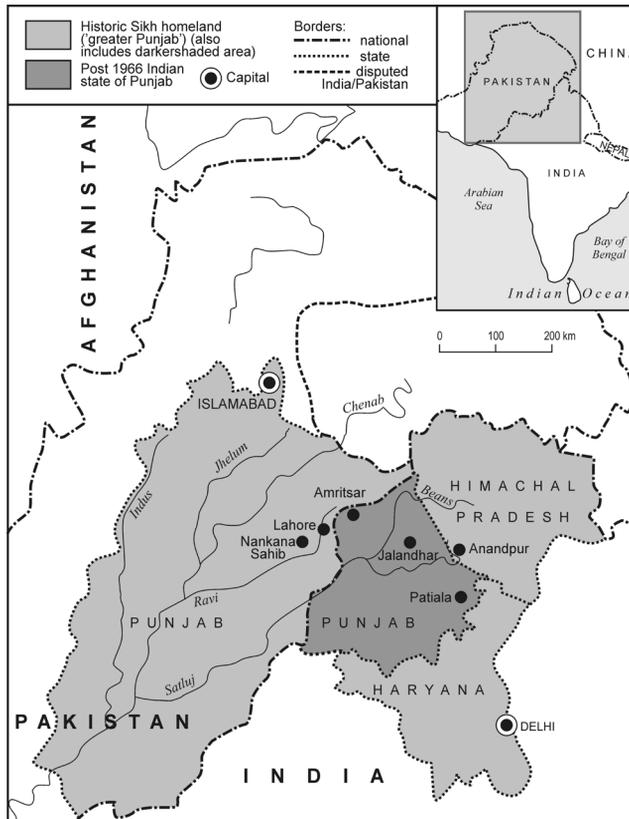


Fig. 3. Contemporary political and administrative division of Punjab

Source: own study based on E. Nesbitt (2005: 9).

culture, many small farmers in Punjabi live below or on the border of poverty. Some 200,000 smallholders have been “forced out” of agriculture, and part of the most indebted people committed suicide, which is a very common phenomenon in rural India. In just 15–20 years, some 10,000 farmers committed suicide because of losing liquidity (Ghuman 2012).

Another problem is the maintenance of the seasonal agricultural workers who do not have their own land. One attempt to cater for this situation is the operation of two Punjabi border crossings between Pakistan and India at Wagah and Hussainiwala, meant to encourage trade and the revival of economic relations on both sides of the border. Unfortunately, due to the unstable political situation on the border between Pakistan and India, mutual hostility and distrust between citizens and frequent conflicts between Sikhs and Hindus and Muslims, both economic growth and the inflow of tourists to this region is significantly lower than the potential.



Fig. 4. Sugarcane harvest in Punjab
Photo by M. Barwiński



Fig. 5. Daily Wagah Attari Border
Closing Ceremony
Photo by M. Barwiński

One characteristic symbol of the modern relations between India and Pakistan is the unique, over an hour long spectacle of closing the border in Wagah, just 30 km from Amritsar. It takes place every day of the year, an hour before sunset, each time gathering 3–5 thousand participants. The ceremony, regarded as a sign of rivalry between two warring states, starts with a multi-coloured military parade, accompanied by the mutual demonstration of power and determination, and ends with solemn coordinated lowering of both flags and the closure of the border. All this is accompanied by pompous atmosphere of numerous spectators. Despite appearances, foreign tourists are only a slight minority among the group. The border spectacle is a unique form of patriotic show, aimed at integrating the citizens of both India and Pakistan (Fig. 5). Unfortunately, it is not always limited to colourful rivalry. In the past, there were several violent incidents during the show. The last bloody attack took place in November of 2014. A bomb detonated on the Pakistani side of the border immediately after the daily ceremony killed 62 people and wounded more than 100. Taliban fighting the Pakistani government took responsibility.

Sikhs – a nation on the border between India and Pakistan

After India's independence, despite their small numbers, Sikhs started having more and more influence on Indian politics, economy and military, while Sikh parties were strongly nationalist. In 1966, Indian authorities carried out the administrative reform of the country, during which the Indian part of Punjab was divided into the states of Himachal Pradesh and Haryana (Fig. 3). This division agitated many Sikhs and was the beginning of an extremist, separatist movement seeking Sikh territorial autonomy or even the creation of a Sikh state. The idea to create a separate Sikh state first appeared back in the 1940s, near the end of

British rule, and was inspired by a political-religious movement, then transformed into a political party Akali Dal (The Army of Those who worship the Immortal God). The party again gained popularity in the early 1980s, mainly because of the growing dissatisfaction with the administrative division of the Punjab.

The growing aggression between Sikhs and Hindus again caused more and more casualties. The demands for autonomy for Punjab were impossible to meet for the Indian authorities, mainly because of both the location of this state in the immediate vicinity of the border with what the Indian government generally considered hostile Pakistan and, consequently, its very important strategic and political and economic role of the region. The Indian government introduced a state of emergency, and on 6 June 1984 troops on orders of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi conducted Operation Blue Star, during which they stormed and subsequently took control of the Golden Temple in Amritsar, by then the main headquarters of Akali Dal separatists. According to official information, some 493 Sikhs were killed during the fighting in the temple complex, unofficially the number exceeded 1000. This resulted in an escalation of tensions and further fighting. On October 31, 1984, in retaliation for the pacification and the desecration of the Golden Temple, two Sikh bodyguards of the Indian Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, successfully assassinated her. After her death, in many parts of India, there were pogroms targeting the Sikhs, with the bloodiest one in Delhi. These were the most serious forms of unrest since the decolonisation of India, with approximately 3000 dead (Bryjak 1985; Leaf 1985; Paroha 1993).

After the death of Indira Gandhi, her son Rajiv Gandhi took over, while the internal situation was still destabilised by the events in Punjab. Despite the pacification in Amritsar, and the signing of the Punjab Treaty by the government and the moderate separatists in 1985, the conflict soon escalated again. Radical supporters of an independent Khalistan (the imagined Sikh state) again resorted to violence and terrorist methods, and the Indian authorities again responded by introducing a state of emergency and sending thousands of police and troops to the Punjab. The authorities also accused the Sikhs of being supported by the Pakistani intelligence in order to break up the unity of India. Support from Pakistan to Sikh separatists at the time has later been repeatedly confirmed. Fighting expanded beyond Punjab, and included Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. The number of victims on both sides of the conflict grew from year to year. In 1988, 1,949 civilians were killed in Punjab alone. The conflict was far more politically than religiously motivated. This state of emergency was lifted until the early 1990s. But almost immediately the social, religious and economic situation of Sikhs in India started to improve. One of the political signs of normalisation was the appointment of Sikh Prime Minister between 2004–2014. Manmohan Singh from the Indian National Congress (Lutz 2017).

The number and location of Sikhs in India

Historical documents from the seventeenth century indicate that the main places of concentration of Sikh community was Punjab and cities such as Agra, Gwalior, Uljana, Burhanpur, Prayag, Patna, Rajmahal and even Dhaka in eastern India (now Bangladesh). Over time, the area inhabited by Sikh population ranged from the Yamuna in the east to the Indus in the west. The first reliable estimates give a number of around 10 million Sikhs in Punjab at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is believed that this number reduced after the fall of the Sikh state in the nineteenth century. In the first census conducted by the British in 1868, only 1,141,848 Sikhs were reported. The next census of 1881 showed 1,853,426 members of the Sikh community (Tab. 1). From now on, we can observe a systematic increase in the number of Sikhs, whose population according to the census of 1911 exceeded 3 million people. A significant increase in the number of Sikhs in the period of twenty years preceding the census of 1921 was explained by the Indian authorities as a result of the development of a sense of identity and actions intended to create a separate national community. Sikh numbers have also been increased by a large number of pariahs. Conversion to Sikhism was for them an opportunity to restore their dignity and personal development, as well as improve their social and living conditions (Iyer 2002; Nesbitt 2005; Harsimranjeet 2010). An important event that influenced the decrease in the growth rate of Sikh population was the division of Punjab in 1947 and the creation of Pakistan. A large number of Sikhs were killed in riots and fights.

In 1966, there were further administrative changes, the state of Punjab shrunk considerably, with parts of it annexed by neighbouring states of Haryana and the unified territory of Chandigarh. Some Sikhs also found themselves in the state of Himachal Pradesh. As a result, the number of Sikhs within the new, limited borders of Punjab, grew (Fig. 6). At the same time, until the 1960s the number of Sikhs in India steadily and dynamically grew (Tab. 1). This growth finally broke as a consequence of foreign migrations during the persecution of the 1980s. The director of the Census Centre for Studies and Research (CCSR) at Punjabi University in Patiala, Harvinder Singh Bhatti, said that this was due to the political situation in the country and the persecution of the Sikhs (Iyer 2002; Ghuman 2012).

The share of the population of Sikhs in Punjab, following increases in the second half of the twentieth century, fell during the last two decades. The results of the census of 2001 show that Punjab was inhabited by 24,358,999 people, and 14,592,387 (59.9%) were Sikhs. The same study repeated 10 years later revealed a total of 27,743,338 inhabitants of the Punjab, of which 16,004,754 people were Sikhs (57.69%). It is clear that, despite the increase in the absolute number of Sikhs and still continuing domination of the community among the residents of Punjab, the percentage decreases.

Table 1. Changes in the number of Sikhs in India in the years 1881–2011

| Year of the national census | The number of Sikhs in India | The increase compared to the previous study period [%] |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|--|
| 1881 | 1 853 426 | not applicable |
| 1891 | 1 907 883 | 2.9 |
| 1901 | 2 195 339 | 15.1 |
| 1911 | 3 014 466 | 37.3 |
| 1921 | 3 238 803 | 7.4 |
| 1931 | 4 306 442 | 33.3 |
| 1941 | 5 691 447 | 32.1 |
| 1951 | 6 219 134 | 9.2 |
| 1961 | 7 845 915 | 26.1 |
| 1971 | 10 378 797 | 32.2 |
| 1981 | 13 070 000 | 25.9 |
| 1991 | 17 178 080 | 31.4 |
| 2001 | 19 215 730 | 11.9 |
| 2011 | 20 833 116 | 8.4 |

Source: Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, 2011, *Census Data*, <http://www.censusindia.gov.in/> and *The Sikh Encyclopedia. Population* [15.12.2016].

The last census from 2011 showed that among 16,004,754 Punjabi Sikhs, 12,348,455 people live in rural areas and only 3,656,299 people in the cities. The same data for the Sikh population in the entire country are as follows: 20,833,116 Sikhs, of which 14,930,792 people live in rural areas and 5,902,324 people live in cities.

Such structure of residence is not a new situation. The director of CCSR, having analysed the population structure of Punjab, concludes that the Sikh community of the region, unlike Hindus, who migrate en masse to cities, is traditionally tied to land and farming. This is also proven by the official statistical data from other regions of India.

Analysing the distribution of Sikh population in the Indian subcontinent, we will notice that it is a community with a very strong territorial concentration, attachment to their own native region – Punjab where, according to 2011 data, 76.8% of all Sikhs in India live. Other states with a high concentration of Sikhs

are: Chandigarh (16.1%), Haryana (5.5%), Delhi (4.0%), Uttaranchal (2.5%) and Jammu & Kashmir (2.0%) are other important States/UTs having Sikh population (Fig. 6).

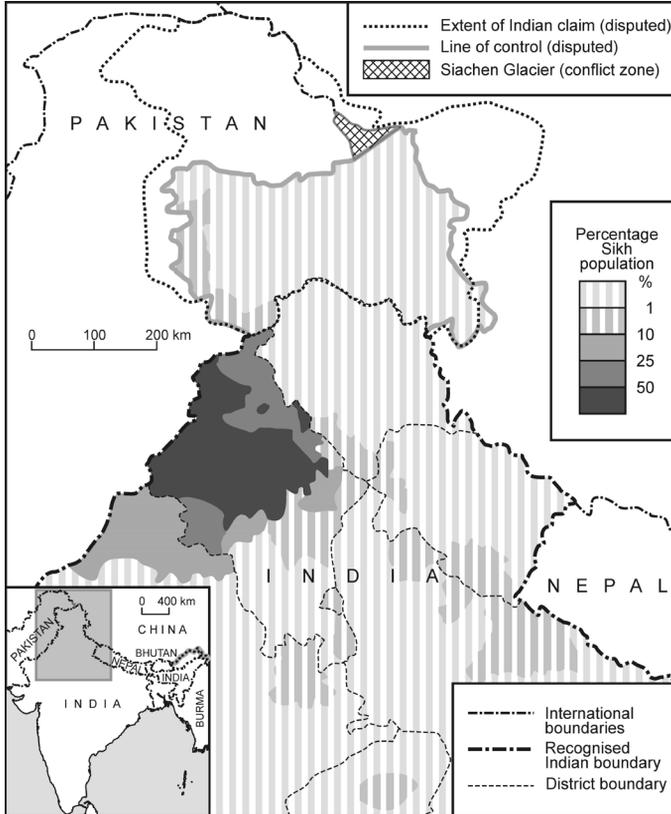


Fig. 6. The percentage of Sikhs in various administrative units in India, according to data from the census in 2011

Source: own study based on: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikhism_in_India

Religious basis for economic success of Sikhs

Sikhs are generally required to follow a number of rules regarding personal development, way of life and approach to others. They should demonstrate the features and take actions that are beneficial to one's neighbour, the nearest community, as well as actively participate in social life. According to Ch. Singh (2016), the key factors for the development of societies of South Asia in view of professed religious ideas include: the role of the caste system and social mobility, status of women in society, and attitude towards literacy, wealth and family life, and the reward system in after-life in terms of heaven and hell. The caste system

in the Hindu community leads to many social inequalities and the failure to reach a certain social status and privileges for members of other castes. Another distinguishing feature of many religious systems is the low social and religious status of women, who must be strictly subjected to men and are considered ritually unclean. Sikhism condemned the caste system, low social status assigned to women and encouraged social mobility and escaping the innate material and social status (Singh 2016: 15).

Charity, social service, sharing with others regardless of their professed faith, gender or position, are among the basic duties of believers. Additionally, Sikhs cannot support themselves by begging or live off welfare. They should be able to maintain themselves and support the needy with fruits of their labour. Living a dignified life with hard work is one of the main principles of Sikhism. According to tradition, the Sikh Gurus also work on their living as farmers, shopkeepers and traders (Kaur 1990; Singh 2016; Kalkat 2017). Sikh philosophy encourages investment, especially capital. Accumulation of wealth and idle savings beyond what is adequate to meet immediate or planned consumption, is discouraged. It seeks to cultivate austerity and modest living, thereby avoiding conspicuous consumption. A Sikh is expected to be enterprising and pursue progress in all walks of life (Singh 2016).

In the social life Sikhs were obliged to follow certain rules. These rulers applied not only to common Sikhs, but also the elite. The people in power were expected, among others, to ensure the possibility of treating the sick. The duties of the followers of Sikhism included subsidising the temples and the local community.

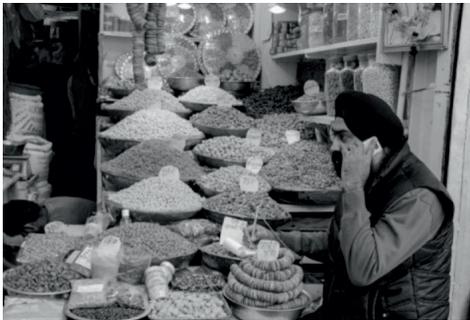


Fig. 7. Private business run by Sikh community member in Punjab
Photo by M. Barwiński



Fig. 8. Amritsar city centre
Photo by Ł. Musiaka

Major Sikh temples today distribute food and medicine to those in need. Such basic tenets of Sikhism were the foundation for the prosperity, economic strength and unity of Sikhs. According to Ch. Singh (2016), Sikhs very quickly, in just a few years after the division of Punjab and mass migration, were able to organise

and settle in a new place, reaching the highest *per capita* income in India. Another distinguishing feature of the Sikh community was the establishment of new towns: Amritsar, Anandpur Sahib, Goindwal, Kartarpur, Kiratpur, Paonta Sahib and Tarn Taran. Cities were created mainly thanks to the commitment of the faithful not receiving fees for their work, as well as by high-class artists and architects. Amritsar, the capital of the Sikhs from the seventeenth century, was an important centre of commerce. Other Sikh cities have enjoyed economic prosperity until today (Nesbitt 2005; Singh 2016).

Conclusions

Sikhs are both a religious and an ethnic group. In addition, they are culturally and socially distinct and have a very strong, historically formed identity and separateness. It is a community with an exceptionally strong regionalism. Punjab is not only a religious and historical cradle of Sikhism, but today the only region where Sikhs predominate and where their religious, cultural, social, economic and political lives focus.

Despite the relatively small number of Sikhs in Indian society, their entrepreneurship and internal organisation, as well as community solidarity, they play an important role in the social, political and, especially, economic and military life of India. They stand out especially in areas such as the army, trade, agriculture, engineering sciences, telecommunications and banking. Entrepreneurship, hard work and professional activity typical of the Sikhs is a consequence of the principles of their religion, in which the basic rules and obligations include honest work and self-sufficiency. In addition, because of their concentration on the border between India and Pakistan, strong militarisation of the community and still active separatist tendencies, their role can also be seen in the domestic and foreign policies of India. Sikhs in many ways can be compared to the Jews. Both nations, in spite of their total geographical, geopolitical and cultural distinctiveness, have surprisingly much in common, both in their history and the present situation. This applies to a similar degree to their national-religious, military, economic, social or political-territorial features. The basic ones include:

- unity of religious and ethnic identities,
- the importance of the holy book, both in religious and everyday life,
- a clear influence of religious dogma on the social and economic life,
- centuries-long history of religious and ethnic persecutions,
- a strong sense of identity, individuality and community,
- despite the large diaspora, great importance of the region treated as home-land,
- above-average economic activity and efficiency,
- hostility of neighbouring countries,
- the division of historical lands, territorial claims,

- military effectiveness,
- the ability to survive in more numerous, hostile and completely different religious, political, social, cultural environments,
- the politico-economic and cultural important exceeding their relatively small demographic potential.

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Sikhowie - religia i naród

Wybrane polityczne i społeczne uwarunkowania funkcjonowania

Zarys treści: W artykule podjęto próbę oszacowania wpływu warunków geograficznych i politycznych na transformację społeczności Sikhów po dekolonizacji Indii w 1947 roku. Autorzy wykorzystali, między innymi, wyniki własnych badań terenowych, analiz statystycznych i opracowań naukowych.

Głównym celem artykułu jest wyjaśnienie specyfiki funkcjonowania Sikhów, którzy pomimo wyjątkowo niesprzyjających warunków geopolitycznych i stosunkowo niewielkiej populacji byli w stanie utrzymać własną tożsamość i osiągnąć poziom rozwoju społeczno-gospodarczego wyższy niż średnia dla Indii i Pakistanu. Współcześni Sikhowie są często postrzegani zarówno jako wspólnota religijna, jak i narodowa. Zasadniczo ich głównymi cechami są wyraźne różnice kulturowe i moralne oraz bardzo silna świadomość ich tożsamości. Przejawiają silną więź ze swoim regionem. Sikhowie odgrywają kluczową rolę w społecznym, politycznym, a zwłaszcza gospodarczym i wojskowym funkcjonowaniu państwa. Z powodu koncentracji na pograniczu indyjsko-pakistańskim, silnej militaryzacji i tendencji separatystycznych Sikhowie odgrywają kluczową rolę w polityce wewnętrznej i zagranicznej Indii.

Słowa kluczowe: Sikhizm, Indie, Pakistan, Pendżab, pogranicze, wielokulturowość.

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