

STATUS AND MIGRATION AMONG  
THE PUNJABIS OF PALDI, BRITISH COLUMBIA  
AND PALDI, PUNJAB

by

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines a small caste group in Punjab and its emigrant ties to British Columbia during the first half of the twentieth century. Members of this caste were known as low-status Mahton although they sought recognition as descendents from Rajputs, a higher status caste group. Both at home and abroad, the Mahton Rajputs of this study lived amongst Jats, the dominant agricultural caste of Punjab, and their claims to higher caste status also involved a sense of competition with the Jats. The Mahton Rajputs who came to Canada were from the village of Paldi and its vicinity and, in the 1920s, they established another Paldi in British Columbia where they operated a successful lumber business. The existence of these two villages offers an opportunity to analyze the reciprocal relationships maintained between the Mahton Rajputs of Punjab and those of British Columbia.

The evidence of this relationship comes from oral and written sources. The interviews for this study were conducted in British Columbia between 1988-89 and 1993 with a focus on individuals who had come to Canada in the 1920s and 1930s. The interviews with their contemporaries in Paldi, Punjab, were concentrated into an intense two month period in the autumn of 1993. Information on village development, changing customs, caste attitudes and the immigrant experience from these interviews has been supplemented by the socio-economic evidence of village records and land revenue documents from Punjab and newspaper articles and journals as well as the private letters of emigrants obtained in British Columbia.

Analysis of this material suggests that Mahton Rajput emigrants had much in common with other sojourning emigrants of their period whose

primary concern was with status in their home society. At the same time, the unique social structure of Punjab dictated the specific form that this concern took. For Paldi based emigrants, improvement of status was a corporate enterprise because an individual's social identity was subsumed in his or her family, kin and caste groups. The economic success of Paldi emigrants in Canada contributed to a sense of higher status in the Mahton Rajput community in Punjab. It also contributed to competition among families within the Paldi village community. Because all families were not equally successful in acquiring wealth overseas, there was a reshaping of status relationships within the Paldi-based caste community. Some individuals acquired wealth and power in Canada and that created tensions in matching traditional rankings with present realities. Inevitably, questions of caste and family status do not hold the same meaning for the current Canadian-born generation, but for at least the first forty years, these questions were of central importance to the Mahton Rajputs in British Columbia.

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

Punjabi immigration to Canada is a twentieth century phenomenon. Punjabis came to Canada long after the primary outlines of Canadian society had been established, although permanent settlers were still being sought in large numbers for the western provinces. Their first arrival coincided with the most intensive and massive period of immigration in Canada's history which significantly increased the country's ethnic diversity. Punjabi immigrants, however, did not find a ready welcome because the preference of the Canadian public and the Canadian government was clearly for whites, whether English speaking or non-English speaking.

In the province of British Columbia, where Punjabi immigrants settled, concern about the impact of immigration on the 'quality of the permanent population' that Canada wanted was profound. Here the desire for racial exclusiveness and cultural homogeneity was deeply entrenched among white Canadians. Before the arrival of Punjabis, Chinese and Japanese immigrants had been identified as unwanted. Their entry into Canada had been severely curtailed by restrictive immigration law and policies. Being non-whites, Punjabi immigrants were subjected to similar treatment and soon after the first of them arrived, their legal immigration into Canada was completely stopped for a decade. Faced with racism and immigration restrictions, Punjabi immigrants felt little sense of belonging to the country. They remained socially distant from the mainstream society, turned towards their own immigrant group for socio-psychological support and, as a result, maintained themselves as a distinct immigrant group which was tied closely to its homeland in Punjab.

The reclusive social behaviour of the Punjabi immigrant community, in

response to virulent racism and discrimination in Canada, has been recognised from the beginning. Elizabeth Ross Grace, a contemporary writer, reflected upon it as early as 1908.<sup>1</sup> Isabella Ross Broad highlighted the injustice of it in her pamphlet 'An Appeal for Fair Play for the Sikhs in Canada' in 1913.<sup>2</sup> Over the years, the impact of Canada's discriminatory policy on the settlement, adjustment and adaptation of immigrants from India, both at the social and economic level, has been central to several scholarly studies. H.F. Angus raised the issue of their legal status, Eric W. Morse drew attention to the implications of immigration restrictions from the angle of Canada's imperial relation with Great Britain and F.M. Bhatti highlighted the deliberate and conscious nature of the Canadian racist immigration policy.<sup>3</sup> Further research on the subject has elaborated upon these themes in considerable detail and established how discriminatory immigration policy, and its changes at different stages, resulted in a truncated growth of the East Indian immigrant community in Canada. Norman Buchignani and Doreen Indra's Continuous Journey is one of the most useful studies on the subject so far.<sup>4</sup> The reaction of the host society and its

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1. Elizabeth Ross Grace, "East Indian Immigration." Westminster Hall Magazine, 3, (1908).
  2. Isabella Ross Broad, An Appeal for Fair Play for the Sikhs in Canada. (Victoria: Victoria Society of Friends of the Hindus, 1913).
  3. H.F. Angus, "The Legal Status in British Columbia of Residents of Oriental Races and their Descendants." in N.A.M. Mackenzie, ed., The Legal Status of Aliens in Pacific Countries. (London: Oxford University Press, 1937). Eric W. Morse, "Immigration and Status of British East Indians in Canada: A Problem in Imperial Relations." (M.A. thesis, Queen's University, 1935). F.M. Bhatti, "East Indian Immigration in Canada, 1905-1973." (Ph.D dissertation, University of Surrey, 1974).
  4. Norman Buchignani, Doreen M. Indra with Ram Srivastava, Continuous Journey: A Social History of South Asians in Canada. (Canada: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1985).

impact on Punjabi immigrants is a well developed subject.<sup>5</sup>

Up to the present, studies on the history of Punjabi immigration in Canada have viewed the exclusiveness of the receiving society as the main influence upon a reclusive Punjabi settlement in Canada. An equally significant aspect of Punjabi immigrant experience, the internal community structure maintained by Punjabis, remains unexplored. The significance of this dimension should become apparent as soon as we note the extraordinary gender imbalance among Punjabis in British Columbia during the first half of the twentieth century. Their community was largely made up of adult males. Punjabi immigrants generally did not come to Canada with their families until well after the Second World War. Hugh Johnston in Patterns of Sikh Migration to Canada 1900-1960 has shown the mechanics by which a predominantly male immigrant community survived for two generations, despite limited immigration.<sup>6</sup> A large number of immigrants remained in touch with their families by regularly moving between Punjab and British Columbia as poly-seasonal migrants and thus kept their Canadian community closely integrated with their home villages. They came to Canada primarily to acquire capital to improve the position of their families at home.

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5. Hugh Johnston, The Voyage of the Komagata Maru: The Sikh Challenge to Canada's Colour Bar. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1979); "Surveillance of Indian Nationalists in North America 1906-1918." B.C. Studies, Summer 1988. Michael Campbell, "The Sikhs of Vancouver: A Case Study in Minority-Host Relations." (M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1977). Brij Lal, "East Indians in British Columbia, 1904-1914: A Historical Study in Growth and Integration." (M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1976). W. Peter Ward, White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy toward Orientals in British Columbia. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, c1990).
  6. Hugh Johnston, "Patterns of Sikh Migration 1900-1960," in Joseph T O'Connell, Milton Israel, William G. Oxtoby, eds., Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century. (Toronto: Centre for South Asian Studies, University of Toronto, 1988.)

This thesis takes this understanding a step further. It shows that the factors that ensured that Punjabi immigrants would remain bound to their homeland revolved around familial and kinship ties and considerations of status. Most Punjabi immigrants to Canada at the turn of the twentieth century owned their own land in Punjab and were able to provide sufficiently for the daily existence of their families. They aspired to improve their income not for survival or simply for individual advancement but for the sake of their larger kin group, which was tied closely through caste considerations. Caste alliances and kinship linkages can be seen in the process of Punjabi immigration and settlement through the study of Paldi village in Punjab and the Punjabi village of Paldi in British Columbia. These two villages on opposite sides of the world provide the subject matter of this thesis. Their history shows the way in which Punjabis sustained themselves in Canada as a community centred unmistakably on Punjab.

Paldi village in Punjab was situated in the Hoshiarpur district. It was the only village in the region with a corresponding village of the same name in British Columbia. This connection was not in name only. The immigrants who established Paldi in British Columbia originated in the Punjabi Paldi . Among the land-owning castes of rural Punjab, the economic and social status of the caste group that included the predominant proprietors of Paldi was low. After the establishment of Paldi in Canada, however, the socio-economic position of the Punjabi Paldi proprietors underwent a change. The wealth and position they acquired through the development of Paldi, British Columbia in a foreign land enhanced their status.

Paldi emigrants, who continued to construe their identity in terms of home village relationships, consistently worked towards higher status for their familial and caste kin back home. This they achieved by investing foreign

earned capital in the traditional symbols of status, land, and houses, and by maintaining close contact with their families, and continuing to respect the concepts of izzat, obligation, honour and status for the kin group. Thus even though the two Paldi villages were half a world apart and existed in different socio-cultural environments, an intricate web of linkages connected them more closely than mere proximity would have done.

At one level, one sees a chain migration process connecting the two Paldis. But further examination shows that the essential unit involved is not so much a village as a caste community. In this case a study of two widely separated villages leads to a study of one caste group. To make sense of the evidence it is necessary to place the caste group of Paldi emigrants within the broader socio-economic context of Punjab. An analysis of the patterns and goals of emigrating Paldi villagers provides some insight into changing caste relationships in Punjab, while it highlights the way in which factors such as family and family land in Punjab affected the development of the Paldi immigrant community in British Columbia.

Studies of Punjabi emigrants in different parts of the world have shown that there were varied reasons which motivated a large number of people, who belonged to a fairly localised area in Punjab, to move to other countries and, at the same time, to remain connected to their homeland. This is not to suggest that the experience of Punjabi immigrants in Canada was the same as in other parts of the world because every historical situation is different. Nevertheless, in the absence of studies done on the subject in Canada, one can draw upon parallel studies that deal with Punjabi immigration and settlement in other countries. Arthur W. Helweg has shown in Sikhs in England<sup>7</sup> that Sikh immigrants'

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7. Arthur W. Helweg, Sikhs in England: The Development of a Migrant Community. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1979).

extensive linkages with their homeland, which preserved predominant caste identity, allowed them to maintain ethnic separation from the host community in the United Kingdom. The factor that aided most in this development was the village orientation of the emigrants and their focus on the Punjabi values of family izzat, honour, and seva or service to their kin in their homeland. W.H. McLeod in Punjabis in New Zealand also discusses caste networks among Punjabi emigrants.<sup>8</sup> McLeod not only identifies different caste groups among Punjabis in New Zealand but also reflects upon the nature of their grouping on the basis of caste considerations. He also identifies the emigrants' connections with their homeland, through caste linkages, and the motivation of Punjabi immigrants to attain higher socio-economic standing for their respective caste kin. The subject of grouping among Punjabi immigrants through kinship connections and its impact on the pattern of their settlement is also an element in Bruce La Brack's The Sikhs of Northern California.<sup>9</sup>

Within Punjab itself, the significance of caste in forming the basis of social organisation among Punjabis has been established. The significance of caste and kinship among Punjabis are highlighted also in Marian W. Smith's Social Structure in Punjab, Hamza A. Alavi's Kinship in West Punjab Villages and Jonathan P. Parry's Caste and Kinship in Kangra.<sup>10</sup> When two studies of villages in central Punjab, Tom Kessinger's Vilayatpur and Paul Hershman's Punjabi Kinship and Marriage<sup>11</sup> are added to this body of literature, the significance of

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8. W.H. McLeod, Punjabis in New Zealand. (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1986).
  9. Bruce La Brack, The Sikhs of Northern California. (New York: AMS Press, 1986).
  10. Marian W. Smith, "Social Structure in Punjab," in M.N. Srinivas, ed., India's Villages. (India: Asia Publishing House, 1966). Hamza A. Alavi, "Kinship in West Punjab Villages," Contributions to Indian Sociology, New Series, vol. VI, December 1972. Jonathan P. Parry, Caste and Kinship in Kangra. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979).
  11. Tom G. Kessinger, Vilayatpur 1848-1968: Social and Economic Change in a

caste and kinship to overseas migration of Punjabis becomes clear. Kessinger directly connects caste groups to the process of migration and Hershman weaves in the concept of kinship that held significance for castes in Punjab. General studies of castes have also looked into Punjab castes. Joseph E. Schwartzberg's Caste Regions of North Indian Plains and G. S. Ghurye's Caste and Race in India are important works in this context.<sup>12</sup>

In the historiography of Punjabi immigration to Canada, however, studies of kinship ties based on caste considerations among Punjabi immigrants are practically non-existent. With the exception of one article by Adrian C. Mayer titled A Report on the East Indian Community in Vancouver<sup>13</sup> which argues that caste remained significant among Punjabi immigrants, no recent research study in Canada has attempted to define, identify and examine the role of kinship ties through caste grouping among Punjabi immigrants.

The absence of any study in Canada that concentrates on the aspects of kinship linkages and caste alliances of Punjabi immigrants means one must attempt to answer some pertinent questions. After immigration to Canada, visiting back home helped maintain the importance of the source country's socio-cultural values within the Punjabi immigrant community in Canada. How did this process work? How did it affect the nature and structure of the community of immigrant Punjabis? What were the effects on the source country of continual visiting and remittances on the part of Punjabi

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North Indian Village. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974. Paul Hershman, Punjabi kinship and Marriage. (India: Hindustan Publishing Corporation, 1981.)

12. Joseph E. Schwartzberg, "Caste Regions of North Indian Plains," in Milton Singer and Bernard S. Cohn, eds., Structure and Change in Indian Society. (Chicago: Aldine, 1968). G.S. Ghurye, Caste and Race in India. (London: Kegan-Paul-Trench-Trubner, 1932).
13. Adrian C. Mayer, A Report on the East Indian Community in Vancouver. (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1959).

immigrants? The lack of answers to these questions in the available literature on Punjabi immigration and settlement indicates the need for further research. A key Canadian scholarly work on the subject describes the development of "strong, defensive, community institutions" among Punjabi immigrants and their "collective identity and homogeneity as an ethnic group." This presents their response to overt racism and discrimination without, however, properly explaining the divisions they had to overcome to project themselves as a "whole" community. The boundaries that helped to sustain the Punjabi community in Canada were also boundaries that separated it into parts. The issue assumes particular significance when we consider that in the first half of the twentieth century, Punjabis in British Columbia were few in number although concentrated in a clearly defined, geographical region.



## Chapter 2

### The Place of the Mahton in the Caste Structure of Punjab

There was a geography of caste and a geography of emigration in Punjab. Emigrants originated from a particular region and they belonged to distinct castes. A majority of the emigrants were not poor in comparison with the people they left behind. Their families owned land in one of the most fertile regions of the Punjab and were reasonably secure in material terms. Yet they belonged to a world in which questions of caste and status were inescapable in the daily existence of individuals. Those who belonged to traditionally high status castes had an obvious interest in maintaining the status quo, while those who belonged to lower status caste categories generally aspired to attain a better position for themselves. Caste shaped the socio-economic organisation of Punjabi society; nevertheless, the caste system was not rigid. Historically it allowed scope for the upward mobility of caste groups. Consciousness of status was strong among all castes. People belonging to higher castes sought to perpetuate their traditional status, while those belonging to lower status castes looked for opportunities to improve status. In other words, mobility was a feature of the Punjabi caste system. The fluidity of the caste system meant that people emigrated without any desire to escape it, but with an interest in improving status. Emigrants in Canada were conscious of higher and lower caste designations. They sought more than improvement in their material condition. In their aspirations for status, emigration was a means to gain an advantage.

The villagers who first emigrated to Canada in the early 1900s were drawn from four dissimilar divisions of Punjab - the submontane zone, the

Himalayan tract, the Punjab plains and the Salt Range tract.<sup>1</sup> The Hoshiarpur district, in which Paldi village was located, was a very fertile tract of the submontane zone which formed the base of the low hill range of the Siwalik mountains at the foot of the Himalayan tract. Village Paldi was close to the mountains; the eastern side of the village faced towards the Siwalik range. The location was advantageous because the submontane zone had ample rainfall, from 30 to 40 inches a year; its ground water level was high and wells could be sunk at small expense. The area was said to be free from famines. Land in this tract was highly productive and cultivation without major interruptions across fields.<sup>2</sup> By comparison, the Himalayan tract was equally secure from famine because it received heavy rainfall supplemented by irrigation from perennial hill streams. Cultivation in this tract was, however, scattered in the hills, and of inferior quality.<sup>3</sup> It is significant that emigrants did not move to Canada from this region.

The Punjab plains, which did supply a large number of overseas emigrants as did the submontane zone, also possessed an expanse of highly productive land, traversed by the five rivers from which the province of Punjab gets its name. In the central portion of these plains were situated the administrative districts of Jullundur, Ferozepur, Ludhiana, Amritsar and Gurdaspur - areas which, along with the Hoshiarpur district, became known for the emigration of Punjabis overseas. Overall these districts enjoyed reliable harvests and productivity, made possible as in the submontane zone, by good rainfall, low riverain tracts and plenty of well irrigation.<sup>4</sup> Life was

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1. Census of India, Punjab Series, 1881, (hereafter Punjab Census). Malcolm Lyall Darling, The Punjab Peasantry in Prosperity and Debt. (London: Oxford University Press, 1928).
  2. Ibid. Hoshiarpur District Gazetteer, 1883-84, 1904.
  3. Punjab Census, 1881.
  4. Punjab Census, 1881. Darling, Prosperity and Debt. Neeladri

tougher, however, for people in the south-west and south-east of the Punjab plains. South-west Punjab had a more arid climate where rainfall supported agriculture only marginally and lands were either irrigated from wells or protected by some other means of irrigation. The area was not at risk of acute famine but was prone to distress during periods of reduction in the water supply.<sup>5</sup> This portion of the Punjab plains was developed as the great Canal Colonies in the latter half of the nineteenth century through the construction of irrigation canals, and it attracted a large number of Punjabis from the same districts that became known for overseas emigration to Canada.<sup>6</sup> The region was a destination for emigrants rather than a source. In contrast to the development of the south-west, and the general fertility of the central Punjab plains, the south-east region was plagued by erratic harvests and periodically insufficient rains. Here the population experienced recurring famines, as one might expect considering its proximity to the Rajputana desert.<sup>7</sup> This region generally remained untouched by the movement of Punjabis overseas to countries such as Canada. Similarly, the Salt Range tract, which essentially comprised broken hill terrain, generally referred to as a medley of hillock and hollow,<sup>8</sup> remained outside the area associated with Punjabi overseas emigration.

Paldi village in the Hoshiarpur district, situated in one of the most bountiful areas of Punjab, shared common features with other villages from

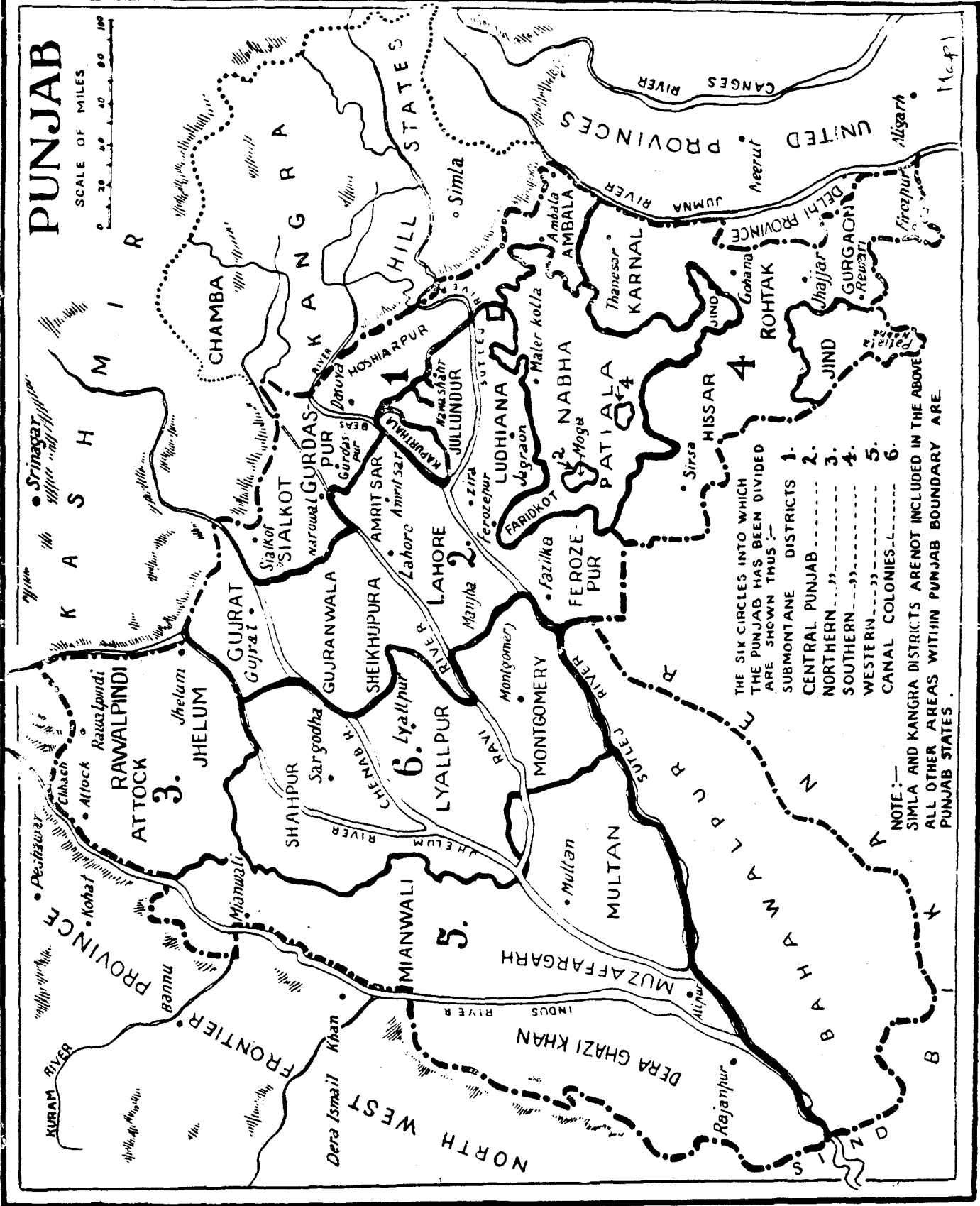
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Bhattacharya, "Agrarian Change in Punjab 1880-1940," (Ph.D dissertation, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1985).

5. Ibid.
6. Bhattacharya, "Agrarian Change in Punjab," p, 28. Darling, Prosperity and Debt, p, 133. See also Indu Agnihotri, "Agrarian Change in the Canal Colony, Punjab, 1890-1935." (Ph.D dissertation, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1987).
7. Punjab Census, 1881. Bhattacharya, "Agrarian Change in Punjab," p, 15-16.
8. Darling, Prosperity and Debt, p, 82. Punjab Census, 1881.

# PUNJAB

SCALE OF MILES  
0 20 40 60 80 100



THE SIX CIRCLES INTO WHICH THE PUNJAB HAS BEEN DIVIDED ARE SHOWN THUS:—

- 1. SUBMONTANE DISTRICTS
- 2. CENTRAL PUNJAB
- 3. NORTHERN
- 4. SOUTHERN
- 5. WESTERN
- 6. CANAL COLONIES

NOTE:—  
SIMLA AND KANGRA DISTRICTS ARE NOT INCLUDED IN THE ABOVE  
ALL OTHER AREAS WITHIN PUNJAB BOUNDARY ARE PUNJAB STATES.

which Punjabi emigrants to Canada originated. These villages were concentrated in Hoshiarpur and the adjoining district of Jullundur as well as Gurdaspur to the north west, and Ferozepur, Ludhiana and Amritsar to the south and west.<sup>9</sup> There was also no insurmountable barrier between villages in these districts. Little could hamper rapid communication between people from one district to another. This contiguity was useful for intending emigrants. The relative short distances between communities made easier the establishment of contacts between people interested in emigration and contributed to the development of emigration chains within the region and to the eventual extension of these chains to Canada. There were other common features of note. The districts were situated roughly between latitudes 30.5' and 32.30' and longitudes 75.30' and 75.35'. In all these districts average rainfall during the monsoon months ranged between 25 to 40 inches and they all lay in the doab region of Punjab i.e. they formed the land between two rivers.<sup>10</sup> Hoshiarpur, Jullundur and Ferozepur formed the area between the rivers Beas and Satluj which was popularly known as Bist doab, the name being the combination of initial letters of the two rivers. Amritsar, Gurdaspur and Ludhiana lay in the Bari doab, the tract so named because it was between the rivers Beas and Ravi. The main physical divisions between the districts were also basically the same but they were called by different names : a low-lying, fertile, alluvial tract along the river, known as bet and hithar in Amritsar and Ferozepur or dhaia in Ludhiana, and the uplands or highlands known as dandi, uttar, rohi or manjha in Ferozepur, Ludhiana and Amritsar

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9. See map 1.

10. Bhattacharya, "Agrarian Change in Punjab," p, 14. Darling, Prosperity and Debt, p, 22. Hoshiarpur Gazetteer. Jullundur Gazetteer, 1904. Ferozepur Gazetteer 1883-84. Ludhiana Gazetteer, 1888-89, 1904.

or in central Punjab generally.<sup>11</sup>

These different names, used to describe particular physical features in the central and submontane districts known for Punjabi emigration, were not indicative of their use as mere synonyms. On the contrary, local terms reflected variation in the conditions of soil and terrain. Their usage also expressed a difference in the notions that were attached to the nature of the settlements in each district.<sup>12</sup> Local differences also held significance for Punjabi emigrants; they became useful in drawing distinctions between people within the immigrant community in Canada. Bet in Ferozepur was known for its high productivity which was influenced by different sources of irrigation: wells or canals or both, or parts flooded by river and parts dependent on the rain. In the Ferozepur uplands, dandi, there was little irrigation and cultivation was supported by rainfall.<sup>13</sup> In Ludhiana, dhaia, was further divided into pawadh, the eastern tract and jangal, the south western. Pawadh sustained a developed agriculture and multiple cropping because of its generally fertile loam, whereas only hardier crops could be grown on jangal.<sup>14</sup> In Amritsar, bet land immediately below the high bank of the river was called pakka bet as it contained richer soil and so on.<sup>15</sup>

Perceptions of status had become attached, by tradition, to the distinct features of these localities. It was commonly said that those who had low-lying land, bet, and high relations always had good luck - they could suffer no loss and their enemies could do no harm.<sup>16</sup> Yet in Ludhiana it was the

11. Ibid. Bhattacharya, "Agrarian Change in Punjab," pp, 18-20.

12. Ibid.

13. Ferozepur Gazetteer. Revenue and Agriculture, Land Revenue, September 1910, 15-A; August 1913, 25-A; November 1914, 10-11-A. (hereafter Rev. & Agr., LR.).

14. Bhattacharya, "Agrarian Change in Punjab," pp, 18-19.

15. Rev. & Agr., LR., January 1913, 28-A.

16. Bhattacharya, "Agrarian Change in Punjab," p, 9.

uplands which occupied the more favourable position. The population settled on the uplands was said to have a high standard of living whereas people of the bet were said to rise little, if at all, above the ordinary standard of such tracts.<sup>17</sup> In Amritsar, notions of prestige and bravery were attached to manjha, the uplands, as these areas were intimately connected with military service. Manjha was also synonymous with Amritsar, the city which contained the holy shrine for Sikhs in the Punjab.<sup>18</sup> In Ferozepur, prosperity was attached to rohi, uplands, because of the large size of its villages and land holdings.<sup>19</sup> Ferozepur was part of the Malwa region in the central Punjab.

When Punjabis emigrated to Canada at the turn of the twentieth century, the six districts of their origin, Hoshiarpur, Jullundur, Ferozepur, Ludhiana, Amritsar, Gurdaspur, were conceptualised by Punjabis as falling within three distinct divisions - Manjha, Malwa and Doaba. Although these conceptual divisions covered many more districts in central and submontane Punjab,<sup>20</sup> Punjabi emigrants from the central districts could conveniently relate their boundaries to the specific areas of their origin - Manjha contained Amritsar and Gurdaspur, Malwa included Ferozepur and Ludhiana and Doaba referred to Jullundur and Hoshiarpur together. The people of these three tracts could also be identified distinctly by their speech because the dialect changed every 20 to 30 miles. Those from Manjha were called Majhail, those from Malwa were Malwai, those from Doaba were Doabi. In the traditional order of precedence, Majhail were first, followed by Malwais and

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17. Ludhiana Gazetteer.

18. Rev. & Agr., LR., January 1913, 28-A. Marian Smith, "Social Structure in Punjab."

19. Rev. & Agr., Revenue, August 1884, 10-12-A.

20. Khushwant Singh, A History of the Sikhs, vol. 1. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987, 7th impression.). Marian Smith, "Social Structure in Punjab."

then came Doabis. Emigrants carried these distinctions with them to Canada and when Doabis came together in their own Punjabi village in British Columbia their consciousness of regional differences kept their community distinct from within. For example for a Doabi living amongst Doabis overseas, Majhail held no significance because -" they are too, too far away from us."<sup>21</sup> At the same time they were aware that a Doabi was always looked down upon by a Malwai because -"they think they are too rich in Malwa. They have big land there and even in "Paldi" they always tell us Doabi, we are poor."<sup>22</sup> Even within Doaba itself people from Hoshiarpur Doaba were seen to be lower than people in other regions because they were popularly believed to find it difficult to make two ends meet.<sup>23</sup>

The popular image of the Hoshiarpur Doabis did have some basis in fact because there were natural limits placed on the extension of cultivation in their district in contrast to other districts in the central Punjab. A large part of Hoshiarpur was cho affected land. The chos were hill torrents which poured down the Hoshiarpur plains in the rains at almost every mile and thus damaged the soil by depositing a lot of sand on their way.<sup>24</sup> Consequently cultivation could be carried on only in certain demarcated zones of productivity which were secure from the ravages of the cho action. Cho affected land was classified as rakkar in the Hoshiarpur district and lay between two productive zones, kandi and sirwal.<sup>25</sup> Of the two, sirwal was richer and it was by any measure, very productive land owing to its capacity

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21. Interview, 11 October, 1993, male, 72 years, Paldi British Columbia.
  22. Interview, 2 February, 1994, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.
  23. Home, Rev. & Agr., Revenue, January 1880, 69-77-A. Joyce Pettigrew, "Some notes on the Social System of the Jat Sikhs," New Community, 1, 5 (1972).
  24. Hoshiarpur Gazetteer. Settlement Report Hoshiarpur District, 1879-84; 1910-1914.
  25. Ibid.



for retaining moisture and, in that sense, was a natural compensatory factor for the presence of rakkar, contributing to the reliability of agriculture in the district. Sirwal stretched from north to south in the Hoshiarpur district and comprised the level fertile plains in which Paldi village was situated. A Doabi from Paldi, Punjab, was thus situated in a relatively prosperous Doabi village even though in relation to other central Punjabis he was considered less progressive.

At the turn of the twentieth century Hoshiarpur district extended 94 miles in length from north-west to south-east and its breadth varied from about 32 miles in the north to 10 miles in the south.<sup>26</sup> It was subdivided for land revenue purposes into sub-collectorates, locally known as tahsil. There were four tahsils - Hoshiarpur, Garhshankar, Dasuya and Una in the Hoshiarpur district.<sup>27</sup> Paldi village fell in the jurisdiction of Gharshankar tahsil. The next administrative unit below the tahsil was a zail, which supervised a number of villages.<sup>28</sup> The number of zails in a tahsil and the number of villages in a zail varied. There were 18 zails in the Hoshiarpur tahsil with between 20 to 54 villages each; in Dasuya there were 19 zails and the number of villages ranged from 12 to as many as 70; in Una the figures were 19 zails with anything from 4 to 83 villages each, and in the Garhshankar tahsil there were 19 zails with villages between 14 to 53.<sup>29</sup> Paldi village in the Garhshankar tahsil was under the supervision of Paddi Sura Singh zail.

These local administrative units were important as, through them, the specific areas of origin of Punjabi emigrants can be located and, by locating

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26. Ibid.

27. Hoshiarpur Gazetteer.

28. Ibid. Interview, 28 September, 1992, male, 75 years, New Delhi.

29. Hoshiarpur Gazetteer.

them, patterns of emigration chains can be traced in a given area. In the Hoshiarpur district, emigration to Canada generally remained restricted to two tahsils - Garhshankar and Hoshiarpur.<sup>30</sup> Within the two tahsils affected by overseas emigration, chains of migration were centred in villages that spread across the northern parts of Garhshankar and the southern portions of Hoshiarpur tahsils. Most emigrants who moved to Canada belonged to the villages settled in that area. The radius of their emigration chains generally remained restricted to ten to twelve miles.<sup>31</sup> Reaching beyond Hoshiarpur, emigration linkages among those going to Canada or North America were noticeable in the region to the south-west of the Garhshankar tahsil. They extended into the Nawashahr, Nakodar, Jullundur and Phillaur tahsils of the adjoining Jullundur district.<sup>32</sup>

The development of emigration chains which drew Doabis to far away lands was facilitated in central Punjab by the general division of society into distinct social groups, based on caste and kinship. In making this observation one must concede that in the context of Punjab, the vocabulary used to describe caste has problems. In central Punjab the word zat was in more general use and it approximated as a close translation of the term jati by which caste was generally known in much of northern India.<sup>33</sup> Sometimes the word qaum, was used in reference to caste groups. It was particularly prevalent in the west of Punjab,<sup>34</sup> but was commonly utilised in other parts of Punjab as well. In the government revenue records, dating from the late

30. Rev. & Agr., LR., September 1914, 26-A; October 1913, 38-A; October 1913, 45-A; January 1914, 37-A.

31. This was the general average distance between tahsils.

32. Rev. & Agr., LR., January 1916, 5-A; March 1916, 1-A; November 1916, 15-A; March 1917, 5-A.

33. Kessinger, Vilayatpur, and Hershman, Punjabi Kinship and Marriage, use the term zat.

34. Punjab Census 1881, 1891, 1901.

nineteenth century, of village Paldi in the Garhshankar tahsil of Hoshiarpur, the term qaum is invariably used to refer to and identify the proprietary caste group of the village.<sup>35</sup> But for the villagers, quam held little meaning. It was effectively replaced by a different term, the baradari. To refer to their caste group during interviews for this study, Paldi villagers commonly used the term baradari. They did not use the word zat to refer to their own group, but used it in specific reference to lower castes. Depending on the context, villagers spoke of their baradari in Garhshankar or baradari Hoshiarpur zila (district) or baradari in Malwa or baradari in Doaba. The same held true for "Paldi" immigrants in Canada who continued to use the term to talk about their baradari in Canada or their baradari desh che, in the homeland. For Paldi villagers, therefore, both in Punjab and Canada, their total, dispersed caste group constituted a baradari and hence that term holds significance for this study. It is thus utilised to mean caste in this thesis. Baradari is a loosely defined term with various connotations. Sometimes it denotes a brotherhood or fraternity,<sup>36</sup> sometimes it specifies ascribed descent groups as maximal lineages,<sup>37</sup> and on some occasions it is used as a referant to ranked hierarchy within a caste.<sup>38</sup> But these varied definitions of baradari are irrelevant to this study as my purpose is to relate its significance to emigration only in the manner in which it held meaning for those Punjabis who moved from the

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35. See Paldi Village Jamabandi ( village revenue records showing ownership, revenue due and size of land holdings), Misl Haqiat (known as special Jamabandi), Bandobast (record of the village land revenue settlement), Shajra Nasb ( geneological chart of the village proprietors appended to Jamabandis and Bandobast), Lal Oitab (village note book).

36. Hamza Alavi, "Kinship in West Punjab Villages."

37. Harjot Oberoi, "From Ritual to Counter Ritual: Rethinking Hindu Sikh Question 1884-1915," in Joseph T. O'Connell et al eds., Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century, p, 139.

38. Parry, Caste and Kinship in Kangra.

vicinity of Paldi village in Punjab and established their own Punjabi village in British Columbia, Canada.

Just as it is difficult to ensure agreement on the vocabulary for caste, so it is equally difficult to establish what caste means in Punjab. This is because the most fundamental aspect of the caste system in India: the division of society into varnas, or levels, in a hierarchical order with Brahmans (priest and teacher) on top, followed by Kshatriya (warrior and ruler), Vaishya (trader and merchant) and Sudra (peasant, artisan) and, below these, the category of Mlechcha, (outcaste or menial), never reached Punjab in its full force.<sup>39</sup> Consequently prominent features generally associated with the caste system, such as the rigidity of hierarchy based on ascription, absolute rise to power of Brahmans, and restrictions on commensal relations between castes on the basis of the rituals of pollution and avoidance, were weaker in Punjab. This is not to suggest that the caste system was all-pervasive in its rigidity about hierarchy and inequality throughout India excepting Punjab. Caste has been an institution of immense strength in India and is also known for its perpetuation of inequality in an extreme form, but it is also an established fact that manifestations of the caste system differed, and still differ, widely in separated regions, areas and villages of India. That caste pluralised into many hierarchies and structures throughout India has been amply demonstrated by numerous scholars. Studies of the spatial location and dominance of varied castes in different regions, of inter-caste relations, of caste ranking and changes therein in similar, individual or separated villages, of the impact of the economy on the caste, and of the political dimensions of the caste are among the many different aspects of the phenomenon of caste that have been

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39. Punjab Census, 1881, 1891. See Satish Saberwal, Mobile Men: Limits to Social Change in Urban Punjab. (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, revised ed. 1990) and Khushwant Singh, A History of the Sikhs, vol. 1.

examined. We have learned that the ties that cut across the lines of caste in India have been as important as the lines of caste itself.<sup>40</sup> Two prominent characteristics of caste - its rigidity and elaborateness<sup>41</sup> - prevailed in the Punjab as they did in the rest of India. Within these parameters, however, caste manifested itself differently in Punjab because the region historically served as the gateway for numerous invasions of India by different races and tribes and consequently its history prevented the growth of the enduring power structures that supported the caste system in other parts of India.<sup>42</sup> In other words, Punjabis generally functioned in a relatively fluid caste order which allowed scope for mobility.

The most rigid aspect of caste in Punjab was the practise of endogamy and in this respect Punjab was similar to other parts of India. Endogamy was the traditional custom of 'marrying in', by which individuals married only within their own caste, and thus made each caste a distinct social group.<sup>43</sup> This feature makes an understanding of kinship alliances fundamental to an understanding of Punjabi society. It was significant in regard to Punjabi emigrants in narrowing down their emigration links, confining them to the community of their affines and other families within the circle of their

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40. Srinivas, ed., India's Villages; Social Change in Modern India. (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1966). M. Marriot, "Multiple Reference in Indian Caste Systems," in J. Silverberg, ed., Social Mobility in the Caste System in India. (The Hague: Mouton, 1968). Singer and Cohn, eds., Structure and Change in Indian Society. Andre Betteille, Castes Old and New: essays in Social Structure and Social Stratification. (India: Asia Publishing House, 1969). D.B. Miller, From Hierarchy to Stratification: Changing patterns of Social Inequality in a North Indian Village. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1975). A.C. Paranjpe, Caste, Prejudice and Individual. (India: Lalvani Publishing House, 1970).
41. The terms are used in Betteille, Castes Old and New.
42. Saberwal, Mobile Men, p, 11. Punjab Census, 1881.
43. Paranjpe, Caste, Prejudice and Individual. Hershman, Punjabi Kinship and Marriage.

particular caste group. In Punjab, however, there was no set pattern of hierarchy among castes on the basis of ascribed descent or hereditary occupation. As agriculture was the mainstay of the economy, the everyday occupation of the majority of people was similar. Punjab was primarily a land of peasant proprietors and all caste groups were directly or indirectly part of the agricultural world. As a result, lines of inequality on the basis of ascribed or hereditary occupational divisions could not be easily drawn in rural Punjabi society. Nevertheless, distinctions and variations did exist and castes in Punjab were differentiated in terms of status according to socio-economic criteria. Economically, distinctions were made on the basis of ownership of land, on the basis of control over the primary resource of subsistence, and on the nature of cultivation that various groups practiced. Socially, castes in Punjab were distinguished on the basis of special customs, beliefs, practices and religious observances. Generally, social ranking and the positioning of various castes in Punjab were graded and judged in terms of attributes which were regarded as worthy of high or low status vis-a-vis the two predominant castes, the Rajputs and the Jats.

Castes in Punjab were assigned their place in the status structure according to their position as dominant or minor caste groupings as well as their agricultural, professional or menial caste occupations.<sup>44</sup> Jats and Rajputs were the dominant castes in the province in terms of their numerical strength and they consequently enjoyed a generally higher status ranking.<sup>45</sup> The Jats predominated in the central districts, the richer tracts of Punjab and those most affected by overseas emigration, and also in the south-east of Punjab, a region which was not so fertile and one which also remained

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44. This was the classification followed in Punjab Census, 1881, 1891, 1901.

45. Ibid.

outside the zone of emigration.<sup>46</sup> Rajputs predominated in the Salt Range tract, throughout the western plains and in the submontane zone, particularly where Hoshiarpur district and Paldi village were situated.<sup>47</sup> But the village Paldi in the Garhshankar tahsil of the Hoshiarpur district was settled and owned primarily by peasant proprietors of Mahton caste, a minor caste in Punjab.<sup>48</sup> They formed the predominant proprietary caste group or baradari in the village.<sup>49</sup> The proportion of minor caste groups varied from district to district; generally their numbers were fewer than those of the dominant caste, whether Jats or Rajputs. But their distribution in the province was considerable. In the central districts alone they included Arain, Awan, Dogar, Gujar, Kamboh, Saini, Pathan, Syad, Kanet, Girath, Bahti, Chhang and Mahton.<sup>50</sup> Of these, Mahton were found only in the Hoshiarpur and Jullundur districts.<sup>51</sup> In the Hoshiarpur district, Mahton along with Saini, Kanet, Girath were a minor caste group but they were as successful a part of the agricultural population as the predominant Jats and Rajputs.<sup>52</sup>

In addition to the agricultural castes the Punjabi castes included money lending and professional groups such as the Khatri, Arora, and Brahmans, who were primarily settled in the hilly submontane and particularly in the Una tahsil of the Hoshiarpur district.<sup>53</sup> Lower status castes in Punjab included Nai (barber), Chamar (leather workers), jhinwar or jhir (water

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46. Ibid.

47. Ibid.

48. Paldi Bandobast, Jamabandi, Misl Haqiat, Shajra Nasb.

49. Ibid.

50. Punjab Census, 1881, 1891, 1901. Hoshiarpur, Jullundur, Ferozepur, Ludhiana Gazetteers.

51. Punjab Census, 1911.

52. Settlement Report, Gazetteer, Hoshiarpur.

53. Rev. & Agr., LR., January 1914, 37-A. Punjab Census 1881, 1891, 1901.

carriers), Chuhras (scavengers).<sup>54</sup> Punjab was a province marked by the multiplicity of its caste groups. In the census enumerations of the province, particularly from the 1880s, as many as two hundred and thirty-eight castes were recorded.<sup>55</sup>

Within Hoshiarpur, caste cohesiveness was evident in the pattern by which villages were settled. Villages could easily be identified and distinguished by the caste which predominated.<sup>56</sup> In the tahsil, Hoshiarpur, Rajputs, Brahmans and Gujars populated the villages along the hills in the kandi region. There was also a spread-out line of Pathan villages in the area. The southern portion of the tahsil contained Jat villages. In the Garhshankar tahsil, the kandi region was inhabited in a similar manner with the predominant Rajput villages, known in the local parlance as kandi wale. On the other hand, villages in the northern portion of this tahsil, a part of the sirwal plains, were nearly all Jats and Mahton. Mahton occupied a cluster of villages in the north-west of the Garhshankar tahsil. Arain villages lay in the neighbourhood of Dasuya tahsil and Saini villages were mostly located in the Hoshiarpur tahsil. Awans and Dogars were found in the Dasuya tahsil, while Girath, Kanet, Bahti, Chhang were mostly settled in the Una tahsil where Rajputs predominated. Thus the Hoshiarpur district, on a small scale, reflected in the social differentiation of Punjabi society. Every rural caste group in Punjab was integrated into a common agricultural economy. Rural Punjabis were all dependent on the same trade patterns and market demands. But social differentiation, based upon caste or baradari and kinship ties, was

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54. Punjab Census, 1881, 1891, 1901.

55. Ibid.

56. The following is based on Settlement Reports Hoshiarpur and the Assessment Reports of the four tahsils. Rev. & Agr., LR., September 1914, 26-A; October 1913, 38-A; October 1913, 45-A; January 1914, 37-A.



strikingly persistent in dividing the Punjabi society from within.

Caste identity cut across the principal religious communities in the province: Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism. Although people belonging to different religions were interspersed throughout the province, Punjab could be broadly divided, nevertheless, into three identifiable zones on the basis of religious following. Generally, Punjab west was inhabited by Muslims, Hindus were in a noticeable majority in the north-east and south-west, while Sikhs were mostly settled in the central and submontane zone. The Sikhs were not a majority in the central districts, which also included Lahore, Kapurthala, Faridkot as well as Hoshiarpur, Jullundur, Ferozepur, Ludhiana, Amritsar, and Gurdaspur, but they formed a prominent minority in the districts affected by overseas emigration.<sup>57</sup> Caste divisions were evident among the followers of all three religions. The census data on Punjab, particularly from 1881 onwards, provide ample evidence of this.<sup>58</sup> One can obtain similar evidence in the district gazetteers, the assessment reports available for villages, tahsils and districts in the province. This has been the subject of considerable academic studies.<sup>59</sup> In theory and in principle both Sikhism and Islam emphasised an egalitarian order, free from caste considerations, in contrast to the traditional culture associated with Hindu religion. But in actual practice and belief, caste was as important to Sikhs and Muslims in Punjab as it was to Hindus.<sup>60</sup> Among the social groups who

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57. Punjab Census, 1881, 1891, 1901.

58. Ibid.

59. W.H. McLeod, The Evolution of the Sikh Community, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976). J.S. Grewal, "Legacies of Sikh Past," in Joseph T. O'Connell et al., eds. Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century. Hershman, Punjabi Kinship and Marriage. Imtiaz Ahmad, Caste and Social Stratification among Muslims in India. (New Delhi: Manohar, 1978).

60. Ibid.

formed middle or lower level castes of Muslim Punjabis were the Rajputs, Jats, Gakhars, Gujars, Yusufzais and Awans.<sup>61</sup> Among Sikhs also caste divisions remained largely intact. Between 1881 and 1921, the Punjab census revealed more than twenty-five castes within the Sikh community.<sup>62</sup> The majority of those listed were Jats, but the community also included Brahmans, Rajputs, Khattris, Saini, Mahton and service-performing, or low castes, such as Nai, Chamar, Chuhras, Tarkhans, Jhinwar etc.

Although Punjabi society was divided primarily on caste lines, we cannot describe caste groups as perfectly homogenous. Each endogamous caste was in turn subdivided into a number of exogamous groups, known as got, and sometimes also categorised as a sub-caste or clan.<sup>63</sup> Gots were based on patrilineal nature of descent: members of individual gots were descended from a common male ancestor and were in that sense related and formed a patrilineal kin group within a caste.<sup>64</sup> Inter-marriage within the same got was therefore customarily forbidden, but by tradition, inter-marriage took place between different gots within a caste.<sup>65</sup> In this manner, kinship ties between caste members remained strong and binding.

The principles underlying endogamous marriages varied across the province, and they differed according to the religion or status of the individual castes. Among Muslims, endogamous marriages represented a fairly restricted circle of kin because customarily inter-marriage between

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61. Punjab Census, 1881, 1891, 1901.

62. Ibid. J.S. Grewal, "Legacies of the Sikh Past," p, 26.

63. Hershman, in Punjabi Kinship and Marriage, treats the term to describe exogamous groups, however, Kessinger, Vilayatpur, uses it to refer to a sub clan.

64. Marian Smith, "Social Structure in Punjab." Hershman, Punjabi Kinship and Marriage.

65. Ibid.

members of one's own group of descent was permissible.<sup>66</sup> Exogamous relationships among Muslims were primarily defined between individuals and not between separate kin-groups as gots. This custom was generally characterised as a patrilateral cousin marriage system.<sup>67</sup> This system produced a collection of related households dispersed over different villages and, more significantly, a network of kin relationships that was encased within a limited group. Families in the community of Punjabi Muslims were so closely and strongly linked that, generally, leaving the community of kin to emigrate was not considered an acceptable option.<sup>68</sup>

In the hilly submontane region of Punjab, which contained the Hoshiarpur district and the Paldi village, the marriage customs followed by Hindu Rajputs had also created exclusive circles of marriage and close kin ties. Rajputs followed the custom of hypergamy or 'marrying up' in which lower status sub-divisions of the caste married their girls to higher status men.<sup>69</sup> The custom of hypergamous marriages was based on a system of internal ranking within the caste. From the Rajput perspective, the practice of giving daughters in marriage to higher status families within the caste was essential to maintain social prestige, pride of lineage, rank and privileges.<sup>70</sup> Families faced a serious loss of izzat or status if they were unable to find suitors in marriage for their children. This concern inhibited emigration for

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66. Hamza Alavi, "Kinship in West Punjab Village."

67. Ibid.

68. Emigration of Muslims to overseas countries is a post-World War Two phenomenon. See Mohammad Anwar, The Myth of Return: Pakistanis in Britain. (London: Heinemann, 1979). Pnina Werbner, The Migration Process: Capitals, Gifts and Offerings among British Pakistanis. (USA: Berg, 1990).

69. Hoshiarpur Gazetteer. See Parry, Caste and Kinship in Kangra. H.A. Rose, Glossary of the Tribes and Castes in the Punjab and North West Frontier Provinces. (Pakistan: Aziz Publishers, 1978. rpt from 1911).

70. Ibid.

far-off lands.<sup>71</sup> There was an added dimension to this selective form of hypergamous marriage: Rajputs did not customarily practice Karewa or widow-remarriage.<sup>72</sup> The prohibition of widow remarriage was a tradition generally associated with higher castes in India.<sup>73</sup> The Rajputs in the hilly submontane region regarded it as one of the primary conditions for maintaining the purity of their caste. Those who indulged in karewa were regarded as having sunk in the social scale, as having abandoned the values associated with the high prestige of an upper caste group.

Rajputs claimed descent from once powerful rulers in Punjab and many parts of northern India. As agriculturists they regarded cultivation with their own hands as demeaning and derogatory and, instead of handling the plough themselves, they preferred to let out their land.<sup>74</sup> In addition, Rajputs also abstained from certain agricultural occupations which were directly connected to farming such as the selling of vegetables.<sup>75</sup> This is not to suggest that, in Punjab as a whole, Rajputs did not take to cultivation, but generally, within the central districts under consideration, that was their usual practice.<sup>76</sup> In central Punjab, where Jat Sikhs were predominant, people tended to reject the association of Rajputs with nobility and power. During much of the period of Sikh rule in Punjab under Maharaja Ranjit Singh, before annexation by the British in 1849, Jats themselves had constituted the ruling class in the central Punjab region. And even though Rajputs had not

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71. Una and Dasuya tahsils, where Rajputs predominated, are not known for overseas emigration to countries such as Canada, United States, Australia, New Zealand.
  72. Rose, Glossary. Punjab Census, 1881, 1891. Settlement Reports Hoshiarpur District. Hoshiarpur, Jullundur Gazetteers.
  73. Ghurye, Caste and Race in India.
  74. Darling, Prosperity and Debt, p, 33-34.
  75. Punjab Census, 1881, 1891.
  76. Ibid. Darling, Prosperity and Debt, p, 33-34.

been completely subjugated by Ranjit Singh, they were not esteemed in the popular culture of central Punjab.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, Punjab was essentially a land of peasant cultivators and so attributes associated with khudkasht, self cultivation, were the cherished values in the region. In the districts of Jullundur, Ferozepur, Ludhiana, Amritsar, and Gurdaspur, Rajputs were described as "indolent" and "lazy".<sup>78</sup>

In the hilly, submontane region in the vicinity of Paldi village, however, Rajputs enjoyed high status and recognition of a wide distinction between themselves and other castes.<sup>79</sup> The image of a Rajput as the traditional Raja, or ruler, persisted in Paldi village and in the Garhshankar tahsil. The Mahton from the Paldi village who left for Canada at the beginning of the twentieth century associated Rajput caste with dignity, notions of royalty, pride of blood and high izzat. In contrast to the rest of central Punjab, the Rajputs of the Doaba were regarded as the gentry of the province<sup>80</sup> and, in Hoshiarpur particularly, as the "aristocrats of the countryside".<sup>81</sup>

The construction of marriage alliances and kinship relations was important also to Jats and to Mahton but they did not create obstacles to mobility and overseas emigration. Endogamous marriages among Jats and Mahton, as among other smaller cultivating castes, were formed more freely because none of these caste groups had established hierarchy of gots. Alliances could be made on the basis of equal status among all the subdivisions of their respective baradari(caste). Generally these communities followed the "four

77. See Khushwant Singh, A History of the Sikhs, vol 1.

78. Darling, Prosperity and Debt, pp, 67-68. Bhattacharya "Agrarian Change in Punjab," see section: The Ideology of Khudkasht, chapter 2.

79. Hoshiarpur Gazetteer.

80. Darling, Prosperity and Debt, p. 34.

81. Ibid.

got" rule in forming a marriage alliance. A family that was looking for a bride had to avoid four gots - those of the groom's father, mother, maternal grandmother and paternal grandmother.<sup>82</sup> The kinship circles created by these marriage alliances were therefore not small or exclusive. At the same time, families would bypass a village or group of villages if a marriage did not fit within the four got rule. The geographical expansion of kinship networks was a consequence of marriage practices among Jats and Mahton. This was encouraged by the fact that the various gots in a baradari (caste) were ordinarily extended over six or seven villages and sometimes over two hundred or even perhaps more.<sup>83</sup>

In much of the central Punjab therefore individuals had kin relations within their village and also with kin groups in separate and dispersed villages. Through marriage a kind of horizontal unity developed between villages belonging to distinct castes.<sup>84</sup> Consequently when the idea of emigrating took hold among a set of individuals their intention was soon known through kinship networks reaching many villages and their action could become a springboard for multi-village emigrant chains. These chains generally developed within fairly localised zones. Traditionally Jats and Mahton formed marriage alliances within a limited geographical area, starting usually from four miles - the minimum distance which apparently carried one beyond one's own descent group or got - and generally rounding off within ten to twelve miles, or perhaps a bit more, but not expanding to a

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82. Hershman, Punjabi Kinship and Marriage. Marian Smith, "Social Structure in Punjab." Punjab Census, 1891, 1901. Rose, Glossary. Understanding based on interview information.

83. Marian Smith, "Social Structure in Punjab." Hershman, Punjabi Kinship and Marriage. Interview, 28 September, 1992, male, 75 years, New Delhi.

84. See Marian Smith, "Social Structure in Punjab," for reflections on the horizontal unity of Punjab villages.

distance which might be practically inconvenient.<sup>85</sup> Paldi village was particularly representative of this practice. Paldi was originally settled by Mahton of the Khatte got.<sup>86</sup> Because the Mahton were a small baradari (caste) and concentrated in the districts of Hoshiarpur and Jullundur they were a particularly cohesive group. This can be seen both in their inter- and intra-village ties. People were related within the village as they shared common ancestry, and because they had to go outside their village for marriages, their connections with other villages of their baradari (caste) were extensive. Consequently, when opportunities arose, their affinal and kinship linkages became the foundations for the development of chains of migrants, and in the long run when emigrants established their village in Canada, their kin networks became useful in extending their baradari (caste) across the oceans.

Single baradari (caste) and single got-dominated villages like Paldi were not common in Punjab. Multi got settlements, where different gots of the same caste lived and cultivated land in the same village, were more common, particularly among the Jat Sikh villages of central Punjab.<sup>87</sup> Such villages were often referred to locally by the predominant got. Jat Sikhs villages with more than one got might be known as Sidhu village, or Gill village.<sup>88</sup> Villages of this kind were also found in the vicinity of Paldi in the Garhshankar tahsil. The Jat Sikh village Behbelpur, located about three miles from Paldi, included several gots: Pader, Kaler, Bains and Dyal but was known as Bains village because there were more members of this got than of the others. The village Kharaudi of Jat Sikhs, situated opposite Paldi, included

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85. Ibid.

86. Paldi Bandobast, Misl Haqiat, Jamabandi, Shajra Nash.

87. Marian Smith, "Social Structure in Punjab." Interview, 28 September, 1992, male, 75 years, New Delhi.

88. Marian Smith, "Social Structure in Punjab."

Gill and Sidhu gots and was known as a Sidhu village.<sup>89</sup> Similarly, multi-caste villages existed in the region from where Punjabi immigrants to Canada originated. Village Hukumatpur in the Garhshankar tahsil, situated in proximity to Paldi, was one example of this kind where both Mahton and Jat baradaris (castes) lived and cultivated land as original proprietary groups.<sup>90</sup> Marriages in such villages were not formed between different baradaris (castes) because of the traditional practice of endogamy. Significantly, however, marriage alliances were also not formed between different gots residing together in the same village. In the rural environment of Central Punjab, people of the same village and belonging to the agricultural proprietary caste groups were notionally considered sare sakke, all real kin.<sup>91</sup> Thus in a multi got, multi caste, village kinship was not explicitly expressed in terms of common descent. On the other hand, aspects of common habitation, which led to the formation of close relationships between members of different gots within the known and set boundaries of a village, were given equal importance. A pendu, cohabitant, from a pind, village, was therefore as much a relative as affines or other kin. Referring to a villager from the central and submontane Punjab, this feature was explained in the following manner - "young men of the same village were his brothers, and the grey beards his fathers, the children following the village herd as he drove the cattle to their rest in the village pen his nephews and nieces, the field his house and the settlement his undivided family."<sup>92</sup>

Consequently when emigration to Canada first began, kin from many

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89. Interview, 28 September, 1992, male, 75 years, New Delhi. Interview, 28 January, 1994, female, 83 years, Burnaby.

90. Interview, 12 October, 1993, male, 72 years, Paldi B.C.

91. Hershman, Punjabi Kinship and Marriage, see chapter on Kinship.

92. Punjab Census, 1881.



villages as well as the unrelated but theoretical kin of a single, multi-got village, all became part of the movement. In the process Majhails, Malwais and Doabis from particular tahsils became predominant in overseas migration. The movement did not take long to establish because of the close connections and network of kin relationships in villages in close proximity across the borders of different districts. Once started, emigration to North America grew immediately and spontaneously and in the years 1905 to 1908 carried almost five thousand Punjabis, in different batches and groups, to the shores of Canada.

W.H. McLeod in his study, Punjabis in New Zealand, has noted the Doabi pre-eminence from Garhshankar, Nawashahr, Jullundur, Phillaur tahsils as something of a 'mystery' among overseas emigrants.<sup>93</sup> He has also drawn attention to the significance of caste and caste consciousness among these emigrants. One would like to know more than he offers about the role of kinship groups in the chain migration of Punjabis to New Zealand, although he does discuss the "connections" which Punjabis of different castes made and used to seek entry into New Zealand and the circles they formed within their own caste groups in New Zealand. The concentration of emigrants from the Doaba region of central Punjab or the importance of "connections" in Punjabi immigrant communities overseas, which retained a strong orientation towards their homeland, requires an understanding of kinship as well as caste connections. Caste without kinship has no meaning for Punjabis whether in Punjab or in Canada or in New Zealand. It was through kinship ties that the emigration movement in Punjab developed in particular regions and among particular groups of people.

Caste, however, was an essential identity marker. It was according to

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93. McLeod, Punjabis In New Zealand, p, 30.

caste that individuals were assigned a high or low status. The placement of a caste group within the status structure of Punjab depended, as we have seen, on the perspective of the observer. Occupation was the first consideration, but caste groups differentiated among themselves according to other relative factors. The most exalted and respectable occupation was the owning and cultivating of land in Punjab. These were not the values of the aristocratic zamindar, landlord, but of the self-cultivating proprietor who took to plough himself and worked in the fields. A prevalent proverb summed up these values aptly - "He who has himself driven the plough gets the whole crop, he who has merely remained with the tenants or labourers gets half, he who only asks - where is my plough, will allow all to be lost after he has sown the seeds."<sup>94</sup> Respect for the work ethic was generally associated with self-cultivating caste groups in central Punjab which included Arains, Gujars as well as Jats. Because the Jats were most numerous and owned the most land, the ideology of khudkasht or direct cultivation was almost synonymous with them alone. It was against the Jats that smaller, cultivating castes such as Mahton or Saini or Awan or Gujar were measured. Among them Mahton, in particular, were treated as forming the lowest rung of the agricultural castes. Jats held significance for Mahton in the Hoshiarpur and Jullundur districts because their villages were situated alongside the Jat villages. But in the Hoshiarpur district specifically, where Rajputs also enjoyed a high ranking, Mahton were conscious of their positioning vis-a-vis Rajputs. They claimed Rajput descendency for their baradari (caste) in the Hoshiarpur Doaba.

In the central districts of Punjab, Jats vastly outnumbered Rajputs everywhere, except in the Hoshiarpur district where their difference in

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94. Bhattacharya, "Agrarian Change in Punjab," p, 87.

numbers was not great. In the 1880s the ratio of Jats to Rajputs per thousand of the total population was 208:56 in Jullundur, 287:6 in Ferozepur, 360:50 in Ludhiana, 230:31 in Amritsar and 157:87 in Gurdaspur.<sup>95</sup> In the Hoshiarpur district their proportion stood at 162:112.<sup>96</sup> These ratios did not change more than slightly in the first half of the twentieth century. Within Hoshiarpur district, Rajputs predominated in the hills of Siwaliks and were the dominant caste group in the tahsils of Una and Dasuya, whereas Jats were the dominant group in the Hoshiarpur and Garhshankar tahsils of Hoshiarpur plains directly below the hills.<sup>97</sup>

The status of predominant castes prevailed in other ways. When we look more closely at the Garhshankar tahsil it becomes evident that the boundaries of a zail, which covered a circle of villages, corresponded closely to the caste distribution of the area and the zaildar, who supervised the circle of villages in a zail, was generally elected as the representative of the predominant caste in the neighbourhood.<sup>98</sup> In the Garhshankar tahsil Jats prevailed in five zails and shared eight with Rajputs. The Mahton in contrast were predominant in only one zail in the tahsil and this was the community's only standing in the district.<sup>99</sup> In Hoshiarpur tahsil Jats were predominant in five zails and shared seven with Rajputs, whereas Rajputs were the predominant caste in four distinct zails in Dasuya and shared four more with other castes. Here Jats were dominant in only one zail. In the Una tahsil, Jats were a marginalised caste group that did not predominate in any single zail.<sup>100</sup>

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95. Punjab Census, 1881.

96. Ibid.

97. Settlement Report Hoshiarpur.

98. Hoshiarpur Gazetteer.

99. Ibid.

100. Ibid.

In the years 1885-1910, when the second revenue settlement of the Hoshiarpur district took place under colonial rule, the principle groups in the area with the total acreage cultivated by each was shown as the following:<sup>101</sup>

Caste	Tahsil		
	Dasuya	Hoshiarpur	Garhshankar
Arain	8,289	4,164	644
Awan	15,632	891	206
Gujar	14,390	8,979	2,306
Jat	35,146	51,016	73,202
Pathan	7,174	5,502	1,391
Rajput	61,570	51,545	48,660
Mahton	****	785	9,735
Saini	12,865	7,917	3,307

These statistics show the numerical strength of various caste groups in the district. The Mahton were the smallest of the eight castes in the Hoshiarpur tahsil and in the Garhshankar were enumerated nearly eight to one. Jats were so much the principal community in the region surrounding the Mahton that people used words like Jat and zamindar, in reference to high status, almost synonymously. Zamindar in local Punjabi parlance actually denoted an owner of land.<sup>102</sup> This usage reflected a general concession of high status to the Jats in the central Punjab. It was popularly observed that "on approaching a village if any other race (caste) but Jats lived in it, the name of the race (caste) would be given in reply. But if the population were Jats the reply would be zamindars live there, zamindar log buste."<sup>103</sup>

101. Settlement Report Hoshiarpur.

102. Himadri Banerjee, Agrarian Society of the Punjab 1849-1901, (New Delhi: Manohar, 1982), See chapter 1.

103. *Ibid*, Chapter 1, fn 4, p. 14.

Numbers were not the only reason that Mahton were not accorded high status. They were also defined by the kind of cultivation they practiced. Both Mahton and Jats were peasant proprietors. They cultivated the land they owned and carried on their agricultural operations with the help of family labour and using hired labour when required. Living in the Hoshiarpur Doaba they were not owners of large estates. The standard and average size of a land holding in Hoshiarpur was generally small, owing to the damaging actions of chos during the monsoons. It was normal for an owner of a ten acre holding to have only five usable acres, as the other five were liable to be turned into sand during the rains.<sup>104</sup> Average proprietary holdings generally varied from five acres of cultivated land to three and a half acres.<sup>105</sup> Within Garhshankar tahsil, the average size of a holding measured around four acres among both Mahton and Jat peasants.<sup>106</sup> Other smaller castes such as Gujar fell in the same category, but holdings were smaller in the case of Arains, which averaged three and Saini, about two.<sup>107</sup> On the other hand, the size of the holdings among Rajputs was larger, averaging six acres while Pathan holdings averaged fourteen acres.<sup>108</sup> The larger figures for these two groups were due to the fact that some Rajput chiefs like the Rana of Manaswal owned several villages and, similarly, among Pathans a few men owned large areas.<sup>109</sup> However, these features did not affect the general pattern of land ownership which remained within the range of 4.3 acres in Garhshankar and about 3.6 acres in the Hoshiarpur tahsils respectively.<sup>110</sup> In this respect the

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104. Interview, 28 September, 1992, male, 75 years, New Delhi.

105. Settlement Report Hoshiarpur.

106. Rev. & Agr., LR., September 1914, 26-A.

107. Settlement Report Hoshiarpur.

108. Ibid. Rev. & Agr., LR., September 1914, 26-A.

109. Ibid. Rev. & Agri., LR., October 1913, 38-A.

110. Ibid.

Hoshiarpur Doaba was not unique. Land holdings were generally small throughout Punjab.<sup>111</sup> In central Punjab they primarily ranged between three to eight acres, except for Ferozepur, which stood well above the provincial average with two of its tahsils containing landholdings with an average of 70 acres.<sup>112</sup> What must be understood, however, is that while landholdings were small in Hoshiarpur, and the range from the largest to smallest was not great, modest differences were the basis of sharp distinctions. The Jats claimed a social importance denied the Mahton, even though, to an outsider, they might have appeared to belong to the same economic category of middle level peasantry.<sup>113</sup>

For Mahton 'market gardening' was their primary productive activity with a focus on the cultivation of vegetables, and the Jats cultivated field crops.<sup>114</sup> In the Jat dominated consciousness of central Punjabi peasants, vegetable growing was degrading, whereas crop farming was a tougher and a more respectable vocation for an asl, a true, farmer. The Jats in the words of British colonial officials were the "marrow and soul" of the peasantry and as the "husbandman, the peasant par excellence of the province."<sup>115</sup> Even though the Mahton in their productive capacity were regarded "unsurpassed" and in their practices "most careful and painstaking cultivators",<sup>116</sup> they were market gardeners and hence of inferior status. This perception, which affected izzat, honour and position was a catalyst which pushed Mahton

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111. See Bhattacharya, "Agrarian Change in Punjab," and Darling, Prosperity and Debt.

112. Rev. & Agr., LR., September 1910, 15-A; August 1913, 25-A; November 1914, 10-11-A; January 1913, 28-A.

113. See Bhattacharya, "Agrarian Change in Punjab," for a detailed analysis of different levels among the Punjab peasantry.

114. Hoshiarpur Gazetteer. Settlement Report Hoshiarpur. Rev. & Agri., LR., September 1914, 26-A. Punjab Census, 1881, 1891.

115. Darling, Prosperity and Debt, p. 35.

116. Settlement Report Hoshiarpur. Rev. & Agri., LR., September 1914, 26-A.

Punjabis to seek new pastures.

The Mahton were not the only baradari (caste) engaged in market gardening, but they were more stigmatised by the occupation than others. Market gardening was usually pursued on a small scale in Punjab. Generally, smaller agricultural caste groups, with less land, tried to make the best living out of limited acreage by market gardening. Arains, who came next to Jats in khudkasht category in terms of actual numbers, were also regarded as 'great market gardeners' in the Hoshiarpur district.<sup>117</sup> Similarly, Saini, who were found in all the four tahsils of the Hoshiarpur district, cultivated small plots in rich, manured lands as 'market gardeners'.<sup>118</sup> The principle difference between the two was religious. If Sikh or Hindu these people would be Saini, if Muslim, they would be Arain.<sup>119</sup> Saini in the Hoshiarpur and Garhshankar tahsils were mostly Sikhs. These groups were paralleled by the Kamboh Sikhs in Ludhiana and Ferozepur districts whom the officials described as excellent 'market gardeners'.<sup>120</sup> Yet it was generally said about Kamboh that "those of them who cultivated crops other than vegetables ranked very little below Jats."<sup>121</sup> In this example, status was measured vis-a-vis Jats. Similarly it was said that an Arain would not mind settling in a Jat village but a Saini living on the periphery of their village community being a Sikh, would claim equality with Jats and consequently would never reside in any of their villages.<sup>122</sup> When these castes took to crop farming they felt some justification in claiming equality with Jats.

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117. Ibid. Punjab Census, 1881, 1891.

118. Ibid.

119. Interview, 28 September, 1992, male, 75 years, New Delhi.

120. Punjab Census 1881, 1891, 1901.

121. See F.W. Falcon, Handbook on Sikhs for the Use of the Regimental Officers, (Allahabad: Pioneer Press, 1896), p. 28.

122. Interview, 28 September, 1992, male, 75 years, New Delhi.

In the Hoshiarpur district, Saini and Mahton were known for their minute subdivision of their land holdings. It was said about a Saini that from one strip of land or metaphorically from one furrow made by a plough, he would not only feed his entire family but would also manage to educate them.<sup>123</sup> The minute subdivision among Mahton meant that, while only four percent of the land of Garhshankar tahsil was in their hands, they owned thirteen percent of the holdings.<sup>124</sup> The image most commonly associated with Mahton in the Hoshiarpur district was that of a Birju, meaning Brij Lal Mahton: one who, on the same strip of land, had grown fruit, planted vegetables and even dug a khuh, well, for sailab, well irrigation.<sup>125</sup> Mahton would also own barani, unirrigated land, dependent on the monsoon. This was the case with Mahton of Paldi village, and some of them were rich. Two well-known Mahton thekedars (contractors), belonging to Paldi and Baddon villages, provided employment for a number of people as labourers working on roads and railways within and beyond the Garhshankar tahsil.<sup>126</sup> Yet the popular view of Mahton in Hoshiarpur emphasized Mahton "penuriousness" and their minute land division "with room for not more than two or three furrows of a plough".<sup>127</sup> Their social image was low enough to provoke a Jat to turn them away, in the case of any dispute, verbal or otherwise, saying - go away Mahton, tere se bo aati hai, you smell."<sup>128</sup>

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, British colonial officials certainly had the impression that the Mahton occupied one of the

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123. Ibid.

124. Rev. & Agr., LR., September 1914, 26-A.

125. Interview, 28 September, 1992, male, 75 years, New Delhi.

126. Information obtained through interviews in Canada and in Paldi Punjab.

127. Settlement Report Jullundur, 1880-06. See also Jullundur Gazetteer, Hoshiarpur Gazetteer.

128. Interview, 28 September, 1992, male, 75 years, New Delhi.



lowest rung of Punjabi social ladder. In the province's census enumerations of 1881, 1891, they were even listed as "outcasts".<sup>129</sup> In Jullundur district officials described them as 'very low class'; in Hoshiarpur as very low in the social scale.<sup>130</sup> The same characterizations were employed in the province as a whole.<sup>131</sup> The Mahton had a reputation for a variety of unattractive qualities. 'Litigious', 'quarrelsome', 'wearing dirty clothes out of choice', 'notorious for peculiar ugliness', 'living on all kinds of garbage' were some of the stereotypical notions perpetuated about them.<sup>132</sup> Yet these perceptions had no substantial basis. British colonial census enumerators made a major mistake in categorising Mahton as "outcastes" because their baradari (caste) owned its "own" land and Mahton were "original" landholders and had been settled and established in their villages for centuries.<sup>133</sup> The Mahton of village Paldi had been given their land during the Mughal rule in return for service to the state.<sup>134</sup> The cluster of Mahton villages in the extreme north-west of the Garhshankar tahsil, as well as the Mahton villages in the south of the Hoshiarpur tahsil, the villages extending into the Jullundur district, including the large and important villages of Darauli, Darauli Khurd, Padiana, and Damunda, and the Mahton villages in the Nawashahr and Phillaur tahsils - all had established histories reaching back to a distant past when their ancestors, like the ancestors of other land-owning castes, had first migrated into the region.<sup>135</sup> In all these villages, Mahton were the original

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129. Punjab Census, 1881, 1891.

130. Hoshiarpur Gazetteer. Settlement Report Hoshiarpur. Settlement Report Jullundur.

131. Punjab Census 1881, 1891, 1901.

132. Ibid. Settlement Report Jullundur. Jullundur Gazetteer. Hoshiarpur Gazetteer.

133. Interview, 4 February, 1993, male, 75, years, New Delhi.

134. Paldi Shajra Nasb appended to Bandobast 1884.

135. Jullundur Gazetteer. Settlement Report Jullundur. Rose, Glossary.

zamindars, and their riwaz-i-am (record of caste or tribal customs) and wajib-ul-arz (village administration paper outlining customary rules with regard to land rights, cesses, etc.), showed them to be the predominant proprietary group historically.<sup>136</sup> Significantly, as zamindars they also had their maurusi (occupancy tenants), and ghair-maurusi (tenants-at-will), who belonged to other castes. In the village Paldi some Gujars and significantly some Jats were the maurusi (occupancy tenants), of the Mahton zamindars.<sup>137</sup>

If Mahton had been outcasts or menials they would have been 'given' land by zamindars to use and not to own and their residential area within a village would have been established at a distance from the proprietary abadi (habitation). Mahton zamindars in the Paldi village, however, had their own service-performing castes or menials who comprised the "outcast" group within their village.<sup>138</sup> In Paldi Punjab, the charda pasa or east side was reserved for the service castes such as the village jhir or birahе (water carrier), nai (barber), chamar (leather worker), who lived in the village and performed services for Mahton zamindars.<sup>139</sup> In the early twentieth century, the Mahton of Paldi employed menials in many ways:

A nai in a Sikh village did not shave the zamindars but he cut their nails and also worked as a messenger, especially in marriage arrangements; a birahе or jhir...not only supplied water from the khuhi, well, to the houses of zamindars but also acted as ordinary messengers to go to other villages; a chamar was not only a leather worker but was also an assistant to a zamindar during harvesting, ploughing, threshing, manuring, hoeing and winnowing. A chamar's labour was as essential to a Mahton as to a Jat, the only difference was that they were untouchables

136. In Hoshiarpur Riwaz-i-am for each of the Mahton Rajput village is included in the general Riwaz-i-am register for the district. Hoshiarpur Riwaz-i-Am Register, Mss, District Commissioner's Office, Hoshiarpur, Punjab.

137. Paldi Jamabandi, 1900-1940. Bandobast, 1884.

138. Visit to the village.

139. Ibid.

-according to a Jat informant who lived in proximity to Paldi.<sup>140</sup>

And Mahton, like Jats, retained some of the discriminatory customs directed against chamars and other untouchables. Although notions of pollution through contact with untouchables were not as prevalent in Punjab as elsewhere in India, the inequality of untouchables was taken for granted. Makhhan Singh, who lived in the Paldi village as a menial to Mahton proprietors, explained:

Upon reaching a zamindar's house before performing the service, a menial was made to wait outside the house for food or eating, he had to carry his own utensils which would not be touched by anyone else. On marriage occasions or at any other festival or celebration, he would be the last to eat and only after he had cleared away the dirty dishes. He could not enter Gurudwara, place of worship, but had to pray from outside.<sup>141</sup>

Mahton could call themselves zamindars with as much justification as Jats or other landowning peasant groups. Yet they did not enjoy a high status in the eyes of their neighbours. Their low status explains the mistake of British colonial census enumerators who, in 1881, 1891 and 1901, confused the Mahton with the Mahtams who were nomads up to the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>142</sup> In the 1881 census we find the statement that "the Mahtams or Mahton, also called Bahrupias, are the great hunting class. They are of very low caste and are little better than vagrants. They have reputation for quarreling and sullenness. A large proportion of them are Sikhs."<sup>143</sup> This mistake was not rectified until 1911 when the Mahton were separated and listed as cultivators.<sup>144</sup> Even when they were in error, however, the census

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140. Interview, 4 February, 1993, male, 75, New Delhi.

141. Interview, 24 April, 1993, male 89 years, Paldi Punjab.

142. Punjab Census for respective years.

143. Ibid. See in particular Punjab Census, 1881.

144. Punjab Census 1911.

enumerators reflected the low status of the Mahton. As we have seen, this low status was the fate of a small caste with limited land that practiced a form of agriculture considered inferior by a dominant caste. But the low status position of the Mahton was also the result of their traditional marriage practices which impeded their attempts to claim equal status with high ranked Rajputs.

Mahton practised karewa or widow-remarriage.<sup>145</sup> In the custom of karewa a widow was married to one of her husband's brothers. Generally in making such a marriage, the eldest brother had the first right and, in the absence of any brothers, any relative.<sup>146</sup> The process involved a simple ceremony called chadar andazi or chadar dalna in which the bride and the groom were covered with a chadar (sheet) while the padha (marriage priest), performed the ceremony by reciting marriage rites. Thereafter the sheet was withdrawn and the couple was declared married. As mentioned earlier, karewa was regarded as derogatory among Rajputs and contradicted their notions of status. It is noteworthy that karewa was traditionally an acceptable practice among Jats in Punjab.<sup>147</sup> In the rhyming proverbs of central and submontane Punjab, a Jat father was made to say - "Come my daughter, be married, if this husband dies there are plenty more."<sup>148</sup> Significantly, this practice had contributed to the social ranking of Jats below Rajputs. But because of their dominant economic position, they were ranked first among the widow remarrying castes, which also included Saini, and were not looked down upon in the same manner as Mahton in the practice of karewa.<sup>149</sup>

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145. Rose, Glossary. Settlement Report Hoshiarpur. Rev. & Agr., LR., September 1914, 26-A.

146. Hoshiarpur Gazetteer. Jullundur Gazetteer.

147. Ibid.

148. Punjab Census, 1881.

149. Hoshiarpur Gazetteer. Jullundur Gazetteer.

Moreover, Jats themselves criticised the marriage practices which the Mahton practiced within the general four got rule.

Mahton marriages followed an improvised form of this rule. In practice they shunned only the groom's own or father's got in seeking a bride. For example, Paldi villagers in the Hoshiarpur and Jullundur Doaba shared the same got with three other villages and "to find a marriage alliance for ourselves we leave these four and marry in any other village."<sup>150</sup> This process resulted in the Mahton making marriage alliances within either the maternal or paternal grandmother's villages. Mahton also practiced the isogamy form of marriages, or matrimonial reciprocation, which placed no restrictions on taking a bride from a village in which a girl from their own village had been married. Through such marriage practices the entire baradari (caste) was closely related. Second or third cousins through masi (mother's sister), bhua (father's sister), mama (mother's brother), could make marriages.<sup>151</sup> The Mahton baradari (caste), from the Jat viewpoint, formed an unacceptably close kinship network. The reasons for these customary practices among the Mahton were pragmatic : "Ours is a small baradari and we have very few villages. It has to be perpetuated."<sup>152</sup> From the Jat perspective, however, such marriage practices were not worthy of high izzat. As a Jat informant explained,

The Mahton system of marriage was not like the Jats. Their manner of got alignment was different. I am a Jat of Kaler got and I am married into Bains got. Now, any Kaler man will take a Bains girl but will never give them his own. Otherwise it would be exchange of brides, which would mean payment in equal terms in kind. I take your girl and so I return you one...But you can't earn from the marriage of your own daughter because giving away your girl in marriage is pun ki kamayee, a holy

150. Interview, 24 March, 1993, male, 88 years, Paldi Punjab.

151. Interview, 11 October, 1993, male, 72 years, Paldi B.C.

152. Ibid.

deed, and so we, Jats, will not make them stand in the market as a commodity. We will bring them with izzat and send them away with izzat. This is how khandan (lineage) is made...Mahton were inferior because they did not believe in these values. There were two Mahton villages near my village Behbelpur, one was Paldi and the other Baddon. They exchanged girls among themselves. Paldi girls came this way towards Baddon and Baddon's went over to Paldi.<sup>153</sup>

In the Mahilpur area near Paldi village in the Garhshankar tahsil, some Jats, particularly of the Bains got, followed the upper caste Rajputs in not practising karewa.<sup>154</sup> They were emulating the Rajputs and in this respect had more in common with Mahton aspirations, although unlike Mahton they did not claim Rajput origins.

Mahton claimed to have been original Rajputs in Hoshiarpur and Jullundur who lost that status upon adopting karewa.<sup>155</sup> They supported these assertions by describing their original settlement in the Doaba region as part of the same migration that brought Rajputs to the region.<sup>156</sup> They also attempted to trace their ancestry to original Rajput lineages.<sup>157</sup> Some of their got names, in use in the early twentieth century, particularly Chauhan, Bhatti, Jaswal, Punwar, and Manhas, were derivations of the names of once powerful Rajput tribes.<sup>158</sup> What was more significant was that by 1904, just a year before the first group of emigrants departed for Canada from Paldi village, the Hoshiarpur district gazetteer listed Mahton as 'Rajput Mahta Sikhs'. By 1911 Mahton had gained some confirmation of their claims that they were Rajputs - even if Rajput of a comparatively low status.<sup>159</sup> An

153. Interview, 4 February, 1993, male, 75 years, New Delhi.

154. Hoshiarpur Gazetteer.

155. Ibid. Settlement Report Jullundur. Interview, 2 February, 1993, male, 75 years, New Delhi.

156. Gazetteer, Settlement Report Jullundur.

157. Ibid. Rose, Glossary.

158. Ibid. Punjab Census, 1911.

159. Hoshiarpur Gazetteer. Punjab Census, 1911.

organisation of Mahton, called the Mahta Rajput Sabha, had succeeded in having a resolution passed to that effect by Rajput chiefs in the Rajput Prantik Sabha under the presidency of 'His Highness Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir'.<sup>160</sup>

The attempt by Mahton to secure recognition of their claims to a lost Rajput status by seeking the sanction of native Rajput chiefs was grounded, ambiguously, in the traditions that a Raja or ruler had the authority to promote a low status baradari (caste) to a high status one.<sup>161</sup> Although Mahtons achieved a nominal success and obtained a new name for their baradari (caste) from a Rajput Raja, this did not translate into a genuine acceptance of their changed status in Punjabi society and in the society of Hoshiarpur in particular. As soon as the Mahton announced their altered name and status other groups raised objections and the issue was placed in abeyance by the authorities.<sup>162</sup> A few years later, some smaller caste groups in the hills of submontane Punjab, the Kanet, Girath, and Rathi, who asserted their origins as either Rajputs, degraded Rajputs, or Rajputs of mixed blood, had successfully campaigned for a classification as castes allied to Rajputs.<sup>163</sup> Traditionally Kanet, Girath and Rathi had been recognised as related but subordinate to Rajputs because they kept widows as wives or had, in some point in time, transgressed their caste rules of endogamy by marrying women from other castes.<sup>164</sup> But Mahton continued to be regarded as a distinct caste

160. Ibid.

161. This issue is beyond the scope of this study. However an extract from the Punjab Census, 1881 deserves attention : "Till lately the limits of the caste do not seem to have been so immutably fixed in the hills as in the plains. The Raja was the fountain of honour and could do as much as he liked...Old men quote instances within their memory in which a Raja promoted a Girath to be a Rathi and, a Thakur to be a Rajput..."

162. Punjab Census, 1911.

163. Ibid. See also Parry, Caste and Kinship in Kangra. Rose, Glossary.

164. Ibid. Punjab Census, 1911, 1921. Jamabandi 1900-1940.

with no claim even to the category of 'spurious' Rajputs.<sup>165</sup>

In seeking recognition as Rajputs the Mahton tried to improve an inferior position by showing that they once had belonged to a high status group. They emphasized the point by adopting the designation Rajput Mahta Sikh. Mahta was a title denoting headman in a village circle and was used in the hills of Hoshiarpur and Sikhs, in principle at least, denied caste hierarchy in any form. Those who reflected their claim, however, observed that Mahton did not possess the lifestyle or caste restrictions associated with the nobility of their supposed parent stock.<sup>166</sup> In particular, they did not have the hypergamous marriage system.<sup>167</sup> Moreover, they were not even part of the marriage, kinship and affinal alliances which were a feature of low status castes associated with Rajputs such as Rathis and Giraths. Rathi and Girath men sometimes married either into other lower artisan or cultivating castes or sometimes contracted marriages between themselves,<sup>168</sup> whereas the Mahton married within their own baradari (caste) and in accordance with their own non-hypergamous customs.<sup>169</sup> Furthermore, their original pattern of settlement was not consistent with that of the Rajputs or even of other castes which were presumed to have settled in Jullundur and Hoshiarpur at the same time.<sup>170</sup> The presence among the Mahton of a number of got names derived from the names of Rajput caste sub-divisions were not compelling evidence of the Mahton claims. Many of the Mahton got names were not found among the Rajputs. Among the distinct Mahton, gots were the

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165. Ibid.

166. Punjab Census, 1881, 1891, 1901. Settlement Report Jullundur District. Jullundur Gazetteer. Hoshiarpur Gazetteer.

167. Rose, Glossary.

168. See Parry, Caste and Kinship in Kangra.

169. Rose, Glossary. Hoshiarpur Gazetteer. Jullundur Gazetteer. Interviews.

170. Ibid. Settlement Report Jullundur.



kharwande, Tuni, Ajuhe, Bhadiar, Gheda, Khuttan, Manas, Thandal, Tiach, and Khatte - gots which predominated in different Mahton villages in the same manner as villages were identified through prominent gots among Jats.<sup>171</sup> For example, the villages of Darauli, Padiana, Darauli Khurd, and Damunda in the Jullundur district belonged to the Manas and Khatti gots. The proprietors of the village of Ghurial were of Karaudh got. In the village Paldi the Khatte got was prominent although the village also contained two houses belonging to the families of Kharwande got.<sup>172</sup> The existence of these gots did not help Mahton in making their case that they were really Rajputs who had been 'sullied' by their 'adoption' of karewa.

Mahton, however, persisted in their efforts to be officially declared high status Rajputs in the districts of Hoshiarpur and Jullundur. Success came some time after the Paldi Mahton established their counterpart community in British Columbia. The process took almost half a century from the time Mahtons first received the sanction of Rajput chiefs for the change of their caste name to 'Rajput Mahta Sikhs'. The Mahton in Punjab officially became Rajputs in 1939 and the Mahton proprietors of the Paldi village were finally listed as Rajputs in the government revenue records in 1941.<sup>173</sup> Their drive to obtain this recognition was connected to their drive to emigrate and had its origins in their position as a land-owning caste with rising expectations.

The Mahton exemplify the fluidity of the caste structure in Punjab. As Punjabi census commissioner Denzil Ibbetson stated "it is almost impossible to make any statement regarding any of the castes...the institution is so

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171. Rev. & Agr., LR., March 1916, 1-A; November 1916, 15-A.

172. Ibid. Interview, 24 March, 1993, male, 88 years, Paldi Punjab.

173. Paldi Roznamcha-i-Wakiyati (daily diary maintained by village Patwari.), 3 January 1941.

extraordinarily unstable, and its phenomenon so diverse in different localities."<sup>174</sup>

By the late nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, caste groups in Punjab had begun to move out of their traditional occupations. This was particularly noticeable in the lower status castes. The Punjab censuses in 1881 and 1891 reported that traditionally many a chamar in Punjab had taken to weaving and had become chamar-julaha (leather worker-weaver) and similarly machhis (fishers) continued to fish as long as they could make a living but became Iats (peasants) when they took to ploughing.<sup>175</sup> Caste was mutable in the case of Brahmans as well. In the Dasuya and Una tahsils of the Hoshiarpur submontane, where Brahmans were settled in substantial numbers, they had taken to money lending by the early years of the twentieth century.<sup>176</sup> These occupational shifts were not made for the short term - alterations and the process of change were gradual over the course of generations. In the twentieth century, the inclination of many communities to change occupations to improve living and status had become a feature of the Punjabi society. In the 1920s Garhshankar tahsil was known particularly for the protest movement among the low status chamars who called themselves as the community of Ad Dharmis.<sup>177</sup> The Punjab census narrates numerous instances of castes from the bottom of the social strata that attempted to elevate themselves by changing their traditional caste designations arbitrarily or officially.<sup>178</sup> The Mahton were part of that process. They had means and motive. In emigrating they sought equal opportunities -

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174. Punjab Census, 1881.

175. Punjab Census, 1881, 1891.

176. Rev. & Agr., LR., January 1914, 37-A.

177. Punjab Census, 1921, 1931. See also Saberwal, Mobile Men.

178. Punjab Census, 1911, 1921.

something they did not enjoy in Punjab.

The policies of the British administration in Punjab worked against groups like the Mahton. In the interest of stability the British tilted towards perpetuating traditional caste status gradings. In dealing with the Sikhs, they tended to give preferential treatment to Jat Sikhs. The British colonial government recruited Jat Sikhs into the colonial army on a large scale. Although Sikhs from the tarkhan (carpenter), chamar (leather worker), and chuhra (scavenging) castes were also recruited, Jats were preferred.<sup>179</sup> The colonial government extended special treatment to Jat Sikhs in other ways. They were given an advantage over other communities in the allocation of land in the Canal Colonies, which the colonial government wished to be developed by the "selected" castes.<sup>180</sup> To give an example - in the Chenab canal area Jat Sikhs received the largest percentage of land, about 23.67, the maximum given to any single caste; and in the Lyallpur Canal colony also they held the maximum acreage, 33 percent.<sup>181</sup> This bias in favour of the Jats assumed a more distinct form in the later half of the nineteenth century as the Sikh community entered a phase of revivalism under the aegis of the Singh Sabha movement.

Singh Sabha was a reform movement in Sikhism. It was concerned with defining forms and rites and spreading its message through various prachar sabhas, khalsa schools, and distribution of Sikh tracts.<sup>182</sup> The Singh

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179. Khushwant Singh, A History of the Sikhs, vol 2. S.D. Pradhan "Punjab's Manpower Contribution to the Indian Army During the First World War," The Punjab Past and Present, April 1978, vol XII-II.

180. See Agnihotri, "Agrarian Change in Canal Colony."

181. Ibid, p. 153.

182. Harjot Oberoi, Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); "From Ritual to Counter Ritual." J.S. Grewal, "Legacies of Sikh Past."

Sabha adopted and promoted one manifestation of Sikhism, the Khalsa Panth, to the detriment of other Sikh denominations such as the Nanak Panth, or the Udasi Panth.<sup>183</sup> A majority of the Khalsa Panthi Sikhs were Jats. The more the Singh Sabha movement succeeded in establishing the Khalsa identity and the Khalsa symbols - the 5 k's, kesh (unshorn hair), kirpan (sword), kachcha (shorts), kangha (comb), and kara (steel bracelet) - as the measure of a true Sikh, the more difficulty they made for non-Jat Sikhs who followed other traditions. We see this in recruitment into the army. The British colonial government saw a 'new culture in the making'<sup>184</sup> to recruit Khalsa Sikhs or Singhs into the army, and that meant primarily Jats. By 1890s it was expressly noted in the information and the instruction material circulated for the use of the regimental officers responsible for the recruitment of Sikhs in the Punjab that -"A Singh is a follower of the tenth Guru, Govind Singh, who has taken the oath of initiation, which carries with it the surname of a Singh; and he alone is counted as true Sikh now-a-days. The Sikh who is not a Singh, is really a Hindu sectarian; the Singh is a believer in a religion, which is distinct from Hinduism".<sup>185</sup>

Mahton Sikhs were primarily Nanak Panthis. They revered the founder of the Sikh religion, Guru Nanak, above all the Gurus, and they did not take initiation into the Khalsa Panth.<sup>186</sup> Taking pahul (oath of initiation) was unheard of among Paldi villagers in the Garhshankar tahsil, even in the second half of the twentieth century. It was certainly not the practice of those who emigrated to Canada in the early years.<sup>187</sup> Paldi villagers called their

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183. Ibid.

184. See Richard G. Fox, Lions of the Punjab: Culture in the Making. (New Delhi: Archives Publishers, 1986).

185. Falcon, Handbook, p. 2.

186. Information based on interviews.

187. Interview, 2 February, 1994, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

place of worship in the village a dharamsala. An informant explained the traditional perspective of the Mahton of Paldi:

Dharamsala is the philosophy of Guru Nanak. He is the founder of our religion and our Guru Granth, holy book, is the bani, teachings, of all Gurus and not specifically of Guru Gobind. It is only now that our village Guruduara is called as such. But we had a dharamsala established according to the teachings of Guru Nanak. Our gyani, saint, Baba Mangal Singh came to spread the message of the Guru in our village and the dharamsala was built by him.<sup>188</sup>

Practices varied among the Mahton from village to village. An informant put it this way:

In Paldi Punjab, Mahton baradari retained uncut hair and beard; in village Nadalon our baradari men were Sahajdhari, mone or cut hair Sikh...In Paldi we had a dharamsala, in our Bhungarni village we called our place of worship Gurudara and in our villages Bham, Binjon, Nadalon, where a lot of Brahmans and pahari (hilly) Rajputs are doing Geeta and worshipped Devi, our place of worship was called shivala. In our Panchta village also we had a shivala.<sup>189</sup>

Although the Sikh community contained many sects, castes and practices, it was the Singh Sabha movement and the Khalsa Panth that had the endorsement and patronage of the government. The army formally conducted pahul or the initiation ceremony for Sikh recruits and formed Khalsa Sikh regiments.<sup>190</sup> In support of this policy, the colonial government had developed the notion of the martial spirits, valour and bravery of Jat Sikh soldiers, consistent with its 'martial race theory' applied to other 'war-like tribes' such as the Gurkhas, the Dogras, and the Rajputs among others.<sup>191</sup> It was in the service of this theory that the colonial government

188. Ibid.

189. Interview, 12 October, 1993, male, 72 years, Paldi B.C.

190. R.E. Parry, Sikhs of the Punjab. (London: Drain's, 1921).

191. Major Macmunn, "The Martial Races of India," Army Review, vol. 1, No.2 October 1911.

consistently advanced the image of 'Singhs' as a separate species possessing superior height and strength and distinctive behaviour (especially the trait of impulsive courage) which was signalled by the unique appearance of the turban and uncut beard.

There was an exception to the colonial government's focus on Jats and Khalsa Panthis. Army recruiters avoided the Hoshiarpur district because "Sikhs of this district are of a somewhat inferior type and are derided by the stricter Sikh of the more central districts."<sup>192</sup> The two tahsils in the district of Hoshiarpur, Garhshankar and Hoshiarpur, in which Jat Sikhs were a smaller proportion of the population than elsewhere in the central districts, were designated as bad regions for the recruitment of Sikh soldiers.<sup>193</sup> The tahsils of Una and Dasuya had the same reputation.<sup>194</sup> In 1901 Sikhs comprised only 7% of the total population in Hoshiarpur, in contrast to Jullundur where they numbered 14%, in Ludhiana 24%, in Ferozepur 24%, in Amritsar 26% and in Gurdaspur 10%.<sup>195</sup> If there had been more Jats Sikhs in Hoshiarpur, army recruiters would have spent more time there. As it was, the Mahton along with other small caste groups such as Saini were classified as "unsuitable" for the military recruitment in the 1890s.<sup>196</sup> We can appreciate the Mahton's concern with status which was fed by desire for both respect and opportunity. They were acutely conscious of their inferior position within Punjabi society not only in their exchange with other Punjabis, but also in the treatment they received from the British. Yet in economic terms they felt themselves with high status groups. When openings appeared, they were prepared to go

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192. Falcon, Handbook, p. 16.

193. Ibid, see chapter V.

194. Ibid.

195. Imperial Gazetteer, Provincial Series, vol. 1.

196. See Falcon, Handbook.

through them, and one opening that they found was emigration. In emigration, they discovered the means to accelerate their drive for improved status. For them, emigration was not an escape but the route that would take them to their deserved place in Punjabi society.

### Chapter 3

#### The Kinship System of the Mahton and Emigration

For the Mahton of village Paldi, like other proprietary groups in Punjab, the notion of izzat, encompassing questions of prestige, honour, and respect applied to the family, the wider kin group, and the baradari (caste). Mahton were conscious of identity and status at each of these levels. Similarly they sought change in the status of their village which, in the early years of the twentieth century, was small and relatively unknown in the Hoshiarpur district. Emigrants who left the village were ambitious to give their jaddi (ancestral) land a new look if they succeeded overseas. They saw in emigration the possibility of bringing progressive change to their village.

Paldi was about 9 miles from the Garhshankar tahsil and about 25 miles from the city of Hoshiarpur, the district headquarters. Among Mahton villages, Paldi was unique because it was surrounded by Jat villages on all sides.<sup>1</sup> There were Mahton in villages near Paldi, such as Hukumatpur and Dholron, but these were smaller villages and Mahton were not the predominant proprietors in them.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Hukumatpur functioned as an extension of Paldi village itself because some of the Paldi families were settled there.<sup>3</sup> Most villages belonging to the Mahton baradari (caste) were situated in the north-west of the Garhshankar tahsil and were contiguous. The Mahton villages in the southernmost edges of the Hoshiarpur tahsil were also close to each other. Paldi village had the reputation of being 'different'.

Paldi villagers were very much aware of the uniqueness of their riwaz (customs and norms) pertaining to internal village administration as it had

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1. See map 2.
  2. Interview, 12 October, 1993, male 72 years, Paldi B.C.
  3. Ibid.



evolved and developed over the centuries in accordance with the requirements of its Mahton malikan (owners). There were internal rules for the use of the village common land called shamilat, for contributions to the village common fund called malba, for income from the use of the village shamilat, and for the modes and amount of payment to the lower castes in return for the services they rendered.<sup>4</sup> There were also rules for protective action against the cho and for the transfer of land to the descendants of the tenants.<sup>5</sup> These rules had been framed by Mahton proprietors and every other caste settled in the village was obligated to follow them.<sup>6</sup> But the same village rules did not apply to the castes of neighbouring villages such as Kharaudi, which was just across the road from Paldi, or even in those villages which adjoined Paldi in the north, east and south such as Khera, Sakruli or Dhada. These Jat villages had their own set of village rules, compiled in their respective wajib-ul-arz, framed according to the customs and norms of their own caste and distinct got or gots.

Although much of their life was governed by their own distinctive rules, Paldi villagers shared unwritten codes and customary values with other villagers. These codes and values were deeply embedded in the system, psyche and consciousness of all rural Punjabis whether Jat, Saini, Arain, Rajput, or Mahton. They determined conceptions of honour, social position, prestige, and status, and they bound an individual in matters of morals, accountability or calling, liability or responsibility, and allegiance or obligation to the immediate kin-group, the family, and through that to the larger community, the caste. These values maintained and sustained the loyalty and commitment of Punjabis towards their families and caste but were

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4. Paldi Wajib-ul-Arz 1884, 1911-12.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

instrumental in strengthening Punjabis overseas as a cohesive in-group that never lost its close connection with their kin at home. For the Paldi Mahton the concept of Punjabi izzat, in its many forms, was a key element in the emigration process. Emigration overseas provided an opportunity to make money in a short time and with money to improve the living standards of their families, with the prospect of enhanced status not only in the village but also within the baradari (caste). In the long run, the growing wealth and prosperity of Paldi villagers abroad was reflected in the improved status of the Mahton baradari (caste) in the Garhshankar tahsil.

When Paldi village was founded sometime in the fifteenth or sixteenth century, Hoshiarpur was a sparsely settled tract.<sup>7</sup> It was founded by one Shri Bhagwati, who had migrated to Hoshiarpur Doaba from the village Darauli of the Mahton baradari (caste) in Jullundur after he was given possession of the village land as an ordinary grant, and not as a reward, in return for his service to the ruler of the time.<sup>8</sup> The village was located on land containing jangal or forest, dhakki or area covered with thick and hardy dhak shrub (*Butea Frondosa*)<sup>9</sup> and aftada or unworkable waste land.<sup>10</sup> The village, however, had potential. From the very beginning Mahton Khatte were the proprietors of the Paldi village; and by the 1850s, after the establishment of British rule, their abadi (residential area) was spread over less than one acre of land. In the local measurement the Paldi abadi was 6 kanal and 8 marla in the 1850s. (20 marla equals a kanal and 10 1/2 kanal equals a Ghumao or an acre).<sup>11</sup> By the 1880s, Paldi abadi land had increased to

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7. Shajra Nasb 1884.

8. Ibid.

9. McLeod, Punjabis in New Zealand, p.15.

10. Shajra Nasb 1884.

11. Jamabandi 1850-51.

65 kanal or about three acres and remained the same until the first decade of the twentieth century.<sup>12</sup> In 1911-12, however, when emigrants had already found a foothold in Canada, the village abadi had increased to about 106 kanal and 10 marla.<sup>13</sup>

There were other kashtkars (cultivators) besides the proprietors in the village of Paldi when emigration began. They were the maurusi (hereditary tenants) and ghair maurusi (tenants-at-will) who held non-proprietary status in the village.<sup>14</sup> They also did not share in the village common land or in the management of the village but abided by the village rules included in the Paldi wajib-ul-arz.<sup>15</sup> In rural Punjab such persons were traditionally known as pahikasht or tenants. They originally belonged to another village and to other gots or castes and at some point in time had either followed or were called in by the zamindars to help clear the land and assist in the cultivation and share the payment of government revenue.<sup>16</sup> When land was abundant in Punjab, cultivators from outside were always welcomed and necessary if the process of the settlement was to proceed. Under British colonial rule such tenants were given permanent occupancy rights on the assumption that they had enjoyed hereditary cultivating rights and because they shared with the zamindars responsibility for the payment of government revenue. In Paldi village, Jats and Gujars held tenant status until the late nineteenth century. Subsequently, the Gujars seemed to have moved out but Jats continued to reside in the village among Mahton proprietors as their maurusi (occupancy

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12. Bandobast 1884.

13. Misl Haqiat 1911-12.

14. Jamabandi 1900-1940. Bandobast 1884. Misl Haqiat 1911-12.

15. Wajib-ul Arz 1884, 1911-12.

16. For the development of tenancies in Punjab villages see Bhattacharya, "Agrarian Change in Punjab."

tenants).<sup>17</sup> Their prominent gots were Kunnar and Gill.<sup>18</sup> Jat Kunnars were among the emigrants from the Hoshiarpur Doaba to North America but they chose to settle in California in the United States and did not join the people of Mahton baradari (caste) in British Columbia.<sup>19</sup>

From the time of its establishment, Paldi village had the reputation of a place that revered and cared for destitute, divine and religious people. Its founder's wife, through khidmatgari and dan (benefaction, almsgiving and charity), attended to fakirs, Muslim divines, sadhs, and Hindu Brahmans, as they passed through the village or took refuge there for the night.<sup>20</sup> It was from one of these fakirs that the village had acquired its name "Paldi"<sup>21</sup> The word means to rear or nurture. Subsequently, some fakirs and sadhs were given rent-free land in the village and their descendents held their land in perpetuity.<sup>22</sup> As Paldi village developed, the Muslim fakirs remained an integral part of the community. In the late nineteenth century they were the caretakers of the village garden.<sup>23</sup> Brahmans also formed an important component of the village community because they performed the basic rituals connected with birth, naming and other ceremonies and they were employed in the arrangement of marriages for the zamindars.<sup>24</sup> Fakirs and Brahmans lived within the general village abadi. The village Brahman also owned a small shop in the village selling loon-tel (basic such necessities as oil and spices).<sup>25</sup> Labourers or artisans belonging to lower castes such as chamar

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17. Bandobast 1884, Misl Haqiat 1911-12, Jamabandi 1900-1940.

18. Interview, 24 April, 1993, male, 80 years, Paldi Punjab.

19. Ibid.

20. Shajra Nasb 1884.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid. Their names appear in the village Jamabandi records.

23. Wajib-ul-Arz.

24. Interview, 25 April, 1993, male, 84 years, Paldi Punjab.

25. Ibid.

(leather worker), teli (oil presser), tarkhan (carpenter) were also resident in the village but their living quarters were distanced from the main abadi and were built on the east side of the village.<sup>26</sup> Lower castes had either accompanied Mahton at the time of the original settlement or had come into the village much later. Paldi Mahton proprietors continued to pay them in kind on the basis of the customary agreements right up to the second decade of the twentieth century when the practice of paying cash for services had also found its way into village custom.<sup>27</sup>

Paldi village land rights and land forms changed a number of times over the centuries. Such changes in land rights were a common feature of the evolutionary process of village settlements in the Punjab. When villages were settled, their land was divided by the original founder or founders by verbal agreements. These agreements became the customary rules and the traditional norms for their inheritors. But these rules and norms had to accommodate periodic adjustments in general partition of land or the size of the holdings or the demarcations of the village common land known as shamilat.<sup>28</sup> Paldi was no exception. Over the course of its four or five centuries, Paldi also passed through several stages in requiring revision of land rights. In the process it evolved as a zamindari village, turned into a pattidari village and eventually became a bhaichara village, representing during its long history three predominant forms of land tenures found to exist in the Punjab.<sup>29</sup> By the time the British took over Punjab, bhaichara was the prevalent form of land tenure in Hoshiarpur and in the other districts of

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26. Ibid. These names are mentioned in the village Jamabandi, 1900-1940.

27. Interview, 25 April, 1993, male, 84 years, Paldi Punjab.

28. See chapter 1, Bhattacharya "Agrarian Change in Punjab," reflections on the changes in land rights that villages in Punjab underwent during the early stages of settlement .

29. Ibid, pp, 59-64.

the central and submontane Punjab.<sup>30</sup> Bhaichara meant severalty in land rights rather than joint ownership which had been the earliest form. The customary rights of the Paldi Mahton proprietors became rights in law when the Mahalwari or Gramvari revenue settlement was introduced by the British in Punjab.

Shri Bhagwati, the original founder of Paldi, was the sole zamindar or proprietor of all the village land and was responsible for the payment of the land revenue of the village.<sup>31</sup> Upon his death, his descendants collectively held the land as bil-jamal or under single ownership for a year before partitioning it into equal pattis (shares). Each of them held their jaddi land (inherited property) as kabza-malikana (in the right or possession of owners). They also chalked out 8 ghumao 6 kanal and 13 marla or about seven acres, as shamilat (village common land) and divided it on the basis of shares known as hal (plough) which was usually as much land as could be cultivated by a plough. These hal were assigned unequally to each pattidar (shareholder). Patti Jassa Singh held 9 hal, Nambar Singh 6 hal, Nand Singh 9 hal and Lal Singh 8 hal.<sup>32</sup>

Patti division subsequently formed the basic land right in the Punjabi Paldi . However, this division of Paldi village land into equal pattis was altered after one of the inheritors, Sri Jeevan, left the village for some other place in the Malwa region. After his departure the remaining inheritors repartitioned the land, both agricultural and shamilat. There was a further repartition when some descendants of Sri Jeevan returned to Paldi a generation or two later. Their share could not be refused because the customary law of these Mahton protected the cultivating rights of all

30. Imperial Gazetteer, provincial Series, vol. xiv.

31. Shajra Nasb, 1884.

32. Ibid.

inheritors, whether or not they were absent from the village.<sup>33</sup> In the early years of the village, the first generation of pattidars and shareholders accommodated the rights of those who returned to the village to reclaim their inheritance, by making another partition of the village land. But this time the land was not divided on an equal basis. Instead, two of the original shareholders gave away part of their land to Sri Jeevan's descendants. Since then patti divisions in Paldi have not changed. The village has passed as the jaddi pind (ancestral village) to the founder's sons' descendants and their descendants through successive generations according to the customary laws of inheritance with the share depending on the number of male descendants in each line.<sup>34</sup> By the nineteenth century when Sikhs were ruling the Punjab, Paldi village had been divided into a number of branches of the families of Mahton Khatte got, each managing its own share and paying a fixed amount of revenue on their village land.<sup>35</sup> Thus evolved the pattidari arrangement of land rights in village Paldi with revenue liabilities regulated by shares. This arrangement continued to 1849.<sup>36</sup>

Under British rule, village revenue records were made for each village, including Paldi, and in them the mamla (revenue) due from each proprietary holding was mentioned separately.<sup>37</sup> Although traditionally a pattidari village, Paldi thus became bhaichara in law with individual property rights firmly established among its owners. The village proprietary group, once simple and homogenous, thus became complex and diversified. This

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33. Ibid. See also Bhattacharya, "Agrarian Change in Punjab," p, 46.

34. Information based on interviews. See also Rai Bahadur Bhai Hotu Singh, Customary law of the Jullundur District, vol. xxix, 1918. J.M. Dunnett, Customary Law of the Ludhiana District, vol. v, 1911.

35. Shajra Nasb, 1884.

36. Ibid.

37. Jamabandi, 1900-1940. Bandobast, 1884. Misl Haqiat, 1911-12.

development affecting the internal composition of the village community planted the seeds for Mahton Sikh emigration to Canada because the investiture of independent proprietary rights meant that a family could now make an independent decision to send members overseas without the approval of the joint community.

Paldi families, however, would not exercise their right under the British system to sell their land to finance emigration or for any other kind of investment. On the contrary, they would retain their land and if they managed to send family members overseas, they would eventually use their earnings to expand their holdings because land was the only resource through which their status could be enhanced at the village level and at the baradari (caste) level. It was also the only resource through which their baradari (caste) status could be enhanced at the broader society level. Among the proprietary castes of Punjab it was the conviction of all families that land was essential if they were to retain any place in Punjabi society. A family that forfeited its land gave up control over cultivation but also faced the loss of izzat and, hence, the ability to make marriage and kinship alliances within their baradari (caste). If this misfortune included many families, it could result in the descent of a whole caste community with the threat that constituted for the social structure of the rural Punjab.

Agricultural caste groups zealously guarded caste control over land by forbidding inter-caste marriages and through customary rules of inheritance which emphasised pre-emption rights for the immediate family or, in the absence of immediate male inheritors, for close agnates.<sup>38</sup> In certain cases, adoptions were permitted but usually from one's own baradari.<sup>39</sup> Adoption

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38. Jullundur, Ludhiana, Customary Code Laws.

39. Ibid.



of baradari (caste) kin was allowed in the Punjabi Paldi . The proprietors of the Kharwande got were the adopted families in the village.<sup>40</sup> For Paldi Mahton who emigrated to Canada, land continued to play an important role in maintaining familial and kinship alliances.

Although patti divisions no longer had their original significance after the bhaichara form of land tenure became established, they still determined the internal organisation of the village. In large villages, where two or three gots were settled from a very early time, both agricultural land and abadi (residential area) had been divided into pattis at the original settlement and each patti was distributed to a different got.<sup>41</sup> Hence the boundaries of pattis in a multi-got village marked the boundaries of gots. This was a common feature of Jat villages in Ludhiana, Jullundur and Hoshiarpur.<sup>42</sup> The system was found among Jat villages in the Garhshankar tahsil as well. For example, Behbelpur village, situated about three miles from Paldi, was settled by four gots of the Jat Sikh caste. Each got had its own patti and so Behbelpur village was divided into four parts, each belonging to a distinct got such as Paderon di patti ( Pader got), Clairon di patti (Clair got), Dyalon di patti (Dyal got) and Bainson di patti (Bains got). The village was known as Bains village because their patti was the largest and had the most land.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, Kharaudi village, situated opposite to Paldi, was divided into Sidhu and Gill pattis.<sup>44</sup>

Pattis were also the basic divisions within single got villages such as Paldi. In these villages, all proprietors claimed a common ancestry and pattis belonged to family branches from the main trunk. Such patti divisions were

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40. Interview, 24 March, 1993, male, 88 years, Paldi Punjab.

41. See Charles Tupper, Punjab Customary Law, 3 vols. (Calcutta: Government Printing, 1881).

42. Ibid. Interview, 4 February, 1993, male, 75 years, New Delhi.

43. Ibid.

44. Interview, 28 January, 1994, female, 83 years, Burnaby.

notional and did not correspond to any physical division of the village. Original patti divisions had been significant in Paldi village because lineages were ascertained, generations reckoned, and inheritance discerned through them. According to existing village records, Paldi was divided into two administrative pattis.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, sixty or seventy years ago villagers divided their community into four distinct pattis and traced their pirhi, descendency, through these separate lineages.<sup>46</sup> The founders of Paldi village in British Columbia belonged to a single patti. That fact illustrates the internal segmentation of the Paldi Mahton who, nonetheless, belonged to the same got from the same baradari (caste).

As the original family in the village had given rise to several families and as their generations grew, alliances of closely related families emerged. With the growth, separation, and division of families, lineages broke down into another unit, smaller than a patti, called a khandan. Each of the four pattis of Paldi Mahton consisted of several khandans. There were thus measures of degree by which Punjabis ascertained their agnatic relationships. Pattis represented descendency directly from a founding ancestor, whereas a khandan indicated a comparatively recent ancestor. A khandan usually comprised a man, his brothers and his uncle's sons in the first generation; his father, and his uncles in the second; his grandfather and his great uncles in the third generation and his great grandfather in the fourth generation. Subsequently, the individual's son (puttar), his grandsons (potra), and his nephews (bhatije) followed in this order and furthered their own khandans.<sup>47</sup> Emigrants who left Paldi for Canada moved within these

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45. Jamabandi, 1990-1940.

46. Interview, 24 March, 1993, male, 88 years, Paldi Punjab. Interview, 2 February, 1994, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

47. Ibid.

kinship alliances and associated with members of families and households within a common khandan.

Punjabis used the term parivar to describe a kin group smaller than a khandan with very immediate ties of blood. In the Punjabi language the kin within a parivar were sakke rishtedars (real relatives). A parivar consisted of a limited 'family circle' that included an individual, his father (piu), his uncles both elder (taya) and younger (chacha), his grandfather (baba) and, if alive, his great grandfather (pardada or bujurg).<sup>48</sup> A parivar was thus formed by all living members of a direct line of males.

Each member of a parivar owed a profound respect, allegiance and loyalty to his 'family members' and in this way bestowed izzat on his living group. The elders of the parivar, baba (grandfather), taya (father's elder brother), and even chacha (father's younger brother), commanded great respect in matters pertaining to inheritance and marriage and also in making decisions about residing outside the village away from the family whether in Punjab or overseas.<sup>49</sup> When decisions were made on issues affecting the status and survival of families, an elder's opinion usually carried the most weight. Without the direct and full cooperation of family elders, no significant action could be taken. Accepting their opinions and decisions with grace and humility enhanced an individual's izzat and the izzat of the parivar itself. When an emigrant moved away from his homeland he carried this sense of responsibility to his parivar with him. Such a sense was especially pertinent for a Punjabi overseas because upon leaving his village, an emigrant was dependent on his parivar to provide for those he left behind, especially women and children, to look after his land and to arrange

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48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.

marriages for himself or for other members of his parivar. Betrothals and marriages were arranged by the elders of a parivar who in turn were obliged to seek consent from their baradari (caste) after a marriage had been arranged between families. This was done by announcing a proposed marriage alliance in front of the panchayat (village council) before proceeding with the wedding.<sup>50</sup>

A Punjabi parivar did not function as a unified, extended family, holding all property in common and cultivating land under the guidance of a single head. Operating within the framework of the parivar was the tabbar, the smallest social and domestic unit in Punjab villages. A tabbar lived in a single residence which, in most cases, was separate from the rest of the houses of a parivar. It usually comprised such kindred as father (piu), sons (puttar), grandson (potra), grandfather (baba) besides the women of the household such as daughters-in-law, unmarried sisters, mother, and grandmother. A tabbar remained intact until a partition of the land marked for house building in the abadi.<sup>51</sup> After a partition, another parivar was germinated and so the cycle continued. In the early years of the twentieth century, when emigrants first left for Canada, tabbars were not as important as parivars in sanctioning and facilitating departures. By 1920s, however, decisions about emigration were being made in tabbars which had become the channels through which Punjabis overseas transmitted their incomes to their village.

It was common for Paldi villagers to identify each other by nicknames or als. They employed als for individuals, tabbars, parivars and even pattis and in creating them found their inspiration in acts of folly or distinguishing

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50. Ibid. The Mahton caste had a strong community structure which was regulated by its ikkaths or caste conferences. Punjab Census, 1911.

51. Ibid.

peculiarities or special events in a person's life. Als were also formed when individuals were associated with occupations that were different from the usual cultivating one. To give an example,

In our village Behbelpur nobody ate meat but some boys wanted to eat. So the question arose as to who would cut the meat. A young fellow came forward to do the job. Ever since he was called a jhatkai, named after jhatka, the process of killing a goat in one stroke. Since then his family became a jhatkai da tabbar.<sup>52</sup>

Not every individual or family had an al and in neighbouring multi-got villages, where families could be distinguished by gots as well as khandans and tabbars in different gots, als were not necessary. Nevertheless in Paldi an al was an important means of discerning kinship relationships and describing members of the same minimal lineages.<sup>53</sup>

At the turn of the century there were nearly sixty households in Paldi and almost every one had an al attached to it. The few who did not were distinguished by not having one.<sup>54</sup> There were following als through which tabbars and parivars were identified: jhangi wale, khuhi de, bania al, rode, chobu, kharwande, chhappar wale, pipal de, akalian, lammara, badi de, munni de, boleya de, bhatti, Calcatte wala tabbar, lambu de, burchhe etc.<sup>55</sup> The rode were known as such because someone in that parivar had been bald; bhatti al family had owned a furnace; pipal de were settled close to the pipal tree; khuhi de had their house next to the khuhi (well); akalian had someone in the family become an akali by taking initiation into the Khalsa Panth and becoming the only Khalsa Sikh in the village, while kharwande was the got of the individual who was adopted by a Paldi tabbar.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, Calcutta

52. Ibid. Group interview, males, 80, 92, 65 years, Paldi Punjab.

53. Interview, 24 March, 1993, male, 88 years, Paldi Punjab.

54. Ibid. Group interview, males, 80, 92, 65 years, Paldi Punjab.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid.

wala tabbar had sent someone to Calcutta a long time back, and jhangi wale, who were the biggest zamindars in the village, were given that name because jhangi (local Punjabi term for lower castes) were their sepidars (menials associated with zamindars on a hereditary basis to perform service); boleya tabbar had acquired that name because someone in the family boli lagade si, used to sing with a drum; and bania al were the family group who also did money-lending in the village besides cultivating land.<sup>57</sup> Families from bania al traditionally collected surplus grain from the villagers and distributed it to other families either as profit, as an advance in times of need, or at the marriage feast or other special occasion.<sup>58</sup>

Paldi Mahton also used als for their four notional patti divisions, which were known as - Lambu de, Burchhe, Jhangi wale and Bania.<sup>59</sup> Among the parivars of the village jhangi wale, khuhi de and lammar belonged to one patti, burchhe and rode to another and bania and boleya to another and so on.<sup>60</sup> In speaking of their traditional rivalries among families, villagers would refer to them by their als. The jhangi wale and bania al families were known to be traditional dushman (rivals) and would not exchange milan-vartan (social relations) on occasions such as marriages.<sup>61</sup> Of the two als, jhangi wale were the big zamindars while bania held a status level with other parivars. The first emigrants to leave Paldi for Canada came from a number of als. Among these men were Ganesha Singh, Gahna Singh, Tara Singh, Partap Singh, Gurdev Singh, Brit Singh, Yoga Singh, Kana Singh, Joginder Singh, Charn Singh, Jagtar Singh, Prabh Singh, Gurditt Singh, Chajja Singh,

57. Interview, 5 October, 1993, male, 80 years, Vancouver.

58. Ibid.

59. Interview, 24 March, 1993, male, 88 years, Paldi Punjab. Interview, 2 February, 1994, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid.

Sahel Singh, Thakur Singh, Karnail Singh, Gurditt Singh, Narayan Singh, Dhumman Singh, Ghanaiya Singh, and Maiya Singh. This group included men from bania al, boleya de, khuhi de, rode, the family with no al, and also a Jat Kunnar whose eventual destination was America.<sup>62</sup> In Canada the bania al emigrants were most successful and eventually they controlled the village of Paldi in British Columbia. This enabled them to bring members of their al and also some individuals from other als to Canada.

Paldi Mahton emigrants belonging to different als could travel half way around the world without loosening any of the traces of the kinship system. They remained tied to tabbar, parivar, khandan, patti and eventually to got and ultimately to a baradari (caste). (See diagram below) The establishment of Paldi, British Columbia as a small, company town owned and managed by Punjabis helped to maintain the significance of these kinship categories. Here Punjabis were able to live in relative isolation from mainstream Canadian society and in the constant company of their own kind and according to their own traditional values. And they were able to integrate their company town's economy with Paldi, Punjab, by using their incomes and profits to buy additional land or build palatial houses there. Members of tabbars and parivars in Punjab that were connected to Canada through their kin were abundantly conscious of the benefits that came to them as a consequence.

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62. Ibid. Group interview, 29 March, 1993, males, 80, 92, 65 years, Paldi Punjab.

T. G. Kessinger in his study of the Punjabi village of Vilayatpur<sup>63</sup> found that, as a rule, households without spare males did not send emigrants overseas and that only young men emigrated. He describes emigration as a conscious strategy employed by families whose fortunes were limited by the size of their land holdings, and who had the labour of more men than they could use effectively. Families with larger land holdings, he says, did not send emigrants. His evidence for Vilayatpur does not fit all that well with the larger picture of early twentieth century Punjabi emigration. Punjabis characteristically emigrated in groups which included both younger males in their late teens and early twenties and older or senior men in their forties.<sup>64</sup> Those who left Paldi belonged to the families from the middle level peasantry with average-sized farms. These were the people who were looking for ways and means to expand their land base and thereby improve their standard of living and status.<sup>65</sup> Of course, the families with more land than most had less motivation to send emigrants because they already enjoyed status, influence and a higher izzat.

In Paldi village, the big zamindars of the jhangi wale al commanded so much influence that earnings of two generations in Canada were not enough for the families of Paldi emigrants to buy a comparable social status. In fact, Paldi emigrants hesitated to equate themselves with the big landlords of their village. When queried by some of their baradari (caste) brethren, emigrants would keep the traditional perspective in view and Mayo Singh who eventually owned all of Paldi in British Columbia would say that -"even if I

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63. Kessinger, Vilayatpur.

64. See chapter 4 below.

65. Similar pattern was discernible in the emigration of Punjabis to New Zealand and England. See McLeod, Punjabis In New Zealand. Helweg, Sikhs in England.



own ten Paldi in Canada I can never dream of becoming equals to jhangi wale".<sup>66</sup> Perhaps the attitude was collapsing by the 1960s, when members of the jhangi wale parivar began to emigrate to Canada.<sup>67</sup> By contrast, the poor Punjabi peasant who owned an acre and a half and did not emigrate overseas found it hard to support his family by earnings, but rented out his land to tenants while seeking local wage labour himself.<sup>68</sup> From the 1890s until about 1911, rural Punjab witnessed a rise in the price of agricultural labour which drew small-scale peasantry to seek wage labour market.<sup>69</sup>

It is difficult to see that the men of proprietary families ever constituted surplus labour on the family farm in the sense that Kessinger suggests. Family members did not provide all the labour required by a household and family size did not define the limits of production.<sup>70</sup> The hiring of labour was as important to a large family with a small holding as it was to a smaller family with a large holding. Cultivation by traditional methods was labour-intensive. Land was cultivated with a hal (plough) yoked to bullocks; sohaga (rolling of the fields) was carried on with a beam of the wood tied to bullocks with a man balancing on it; hoeing was done with a khurpa (trowel); and reaping of crops was done with a dati (sickle).<sup>71</sup> During the peak seasons of harvesting and winnowing, when everyone in the family - father, mother, or grown-up offspring - was employed, the work could not have been done without additional, hired, casual labour. If the harvest was bountiful, more labour was hired. In case of kharaba (a bad or ruined harvest)

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66. Interview, 5 October, 1993, male, 70 years, Nanaimo.

67. At present the entire khandan of the jhangi wale resides in Canada.

68. Tenancy among the poor peasantry grew at a very fast rate from the second decade of the twentieth century. See Bhattacharya, "Agrarian Change in Punjab."

69. Ibid.

70. Ibid, p, 91.

71. Ludhiana Gazetteer.

no extra labourers might be required. In any case, family members could always be put to use. In the Punjabi Paldi, the largest land-holding belonged to the jhangi wale parivars and was about 10 acres in size.<sup>72</sup> Its owners kept more than one-fourth of it for themselves and rented out the rest to a number of occupancy tenants.<sup>73</sup> Consequently the amount of land they had did not determine the amount of labour they needed.

Owners with less land and average families, such as bania al or boleya tabbar or khuhi de, also had tenants and sometimes even tenants kept their own sub-tenants.<sup>74</sup> When the families sent emigrants abroad, they had no concern about loss of labour. By the 1920s as the ties were firmly established between Punjab and British Columbia, some families sent over their minor sons to Canada and in one case an infant boy went with members of his 'parivar'. Some time later his father also entered Canada.<sup>75</sup> It is difficult to relate the decisions these families made to family size.

The ties of a family were reinforced among Punjabi villagers by the physical design of their village dwelling called a ghar. There were two types of villages in the Punjab, nucleated or dispersed. In the Hoshiarpur and Jullundur Doaba, one typified the Jat and the other the Gujars.<sup>76</sup> In the nucleated or Jat type of village, the habitation or abadi was in the centre of the village surrounded by fields on all sides. At the turn of the century, houses in such villages were built close together and clustered together in a circle. Very little space was wasted in the pattern of placement of these houses which were inter-connected with pathways or pagdandian about four or five feet

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72. Bandobast, 1884. Jamabandi, 1900-1935. Misl Haqiat, 1911-12.

73. Ibid.

74. Jamabandi, 1900-1940.

75. Interview, 15 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam. Interview, 11 October, 1993, male 72 years, Paldi B.C.

76. Jullundur Gazetteer.

wide.<sup>77</sup> The layout in the Gujar type of village was different. Houses in them were built in detached groups, maybe four together and then another two or three at a distance and so on.<sup>78</sup> In the submontane Doaba, Rajput villages resembled the Gujar type whereas Saini and Mahton villages were of the Jat type. At the same time, Arain villages were in between the two - some Gujar type and some Jat - while Awans village abadi resembled the Rajput type.<sup>79</sup>

Paldi village in the Garhshankar tahsil of the Hoshiarpur district was a nucleated village. When emigration first started, houses in the village abadi were built of mud blocks with flat and thatched roofs.<sup>80</sup> They were called kache ghar or thatched houses.<sup>81</sup> Structural design of these houses was such that an individual could not escape the scrutiny of family elders and other members of the family even village members.<sup>82</sup> The single family dwelling, as it is known in Canada, had no equivalent in the rural Punjab. In fact British census enumerators tried for decades to define what a 'house' was in rural Punjab. They often merely took note of the structures which seemed most convenient for their purposes.<sup>83</sup> Quite different units were treated simultaneously as houses. Sometimes they counted ghars separately; sometimes they treated an ahata (an open courtyard) with houses generally built on three sides, as a basic unit for enumeration.

In fact, there were three different structural terms used to describe a house in rural Punjab: a makan, a ghar and an ahata.<sup>84</sup> A makan was an

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77. Ibid.

78. Ibid.

79. Ibid.

80. Houses were generally built with mud walls in almost all villages at the time. Hoshiarpur Gazetteer. Jullundur Gazetteer.

81. Ibid.

82. Interview, 28 September, 1993, male, 75 years, New Delhi.

83. Punjab Census, 1881, 1891.

84. Interview, 28 September, 1993, male, 75 years, New Delhi. These

ordinary building with four walls that could house a family but at the same time could also be used for any other purpose such as keeping cattle. An ahata as we have observed was an enclosure formed by a number of houses. In some cases an ahata was capable of expansion to house seventy or more individuals.<sup>85</sup> A ghar was both the actual dwelling place and the family that was housed in it. Most tabbars lived in their own ghar which was built in a joint form in the abadi, although it was not uncommon for a couple of tabbars to live in a ghar together.

A ghar generally consisted of a bera, or open courtyard, with rooms on two or three sides.<sup>86</sup> Upon entering a makan or a ghar, one stepped right into a bera which was used for the keeping of cattle or as a sleeping place for men or for the women in the household when they made yarn on a charkha (spinning wheel), usually in a group of five to six and generally in the afternoons. The living quarters were constructed around this bera. On one side was a sawat, or sitting room, meant only for family men and their visitors from the village or outsiders, where they could smoke hookah (hubble bubble), use all kinds of language and discuss political and other baradari (caste) issues and subjects. This area was so segregated from other parts of the ghar that even eatables were taken into the sawat by the men themselves. Adjoining the sawat was another living room which was used by members of the tabbar or their visiting relations, both men and women. In addition, there would be another room, or rather a bedroom, given only to married couples where other members of family, particularly unmarried girls, were not allowed to go. Apart from these sections, a separate room was

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categories are also mentioned in the Census, 1881, 1891.

85. Punjab Census, 1881.

86. Following understanding is based on a detailed interview, 28 September, 1993, male, 75 years, New Delhi.

used by elderly ladies and young unmarried girls to sleep while older and younger men used bera for that purpose. A special room was also kept in a ghar for the storing of the grain in a bharola. The kitchen or rasoi was in the open, away from other rooms so as to allow smoke to disperse when food was cooking on the chulha (hearth) over burning pathis (cakes made from cow dung) or firewood. A rasoi was also a place for the social gathering of women in a Punjabi ghar, besides the bera, because, unlike the men of the family, they did not have a common room for themselves.

Punjabi women, especially after marriage, generally remained secluded in a ghar and in most cases the senior men of a tabbar and parivar did not hear the voice of young brides or daughters-in-law or come face to face with them for years. In some cases, as a senior villager informed me in Paldi, women themselves did not see the faces of certain men in the family even until death.<sup>87</sup> Punjabi rural women after marriage wore a ghunghat (veil) in the presence of older and senior men and replied in subdued voices if asked a question or sometimes just moved their heads in reply.<sup>88</sup> They were protected from strange men, before and after marriage, and generally treated as special possessions to be guarded because a Punjabi family's izzat in the baradari (caste) and its kinship relationships revolved around the exchange of women through marriages, so exposing them to others put a family's honour at stake. It would be extraordinary for Punjabi women to have accompanied their husbands or brothers to Canada, particularly when the men were ignorant of the new environment. Later, in the 1920s, when Canada permitted Punjabi immigrants to bring in their families, Punjabi men would not consider bringing over their unmarried daughters or sisters to Canada

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87. Interview, 24 March, 1993, male, 88 years, Paldi Punjab.

88. Ibid.

before they were married according to their baradari (caste) customs.

Within a ghar there could be no secrets. The details of all subjects - great or small - inevitably became common property. The making or buying of clothes, new furniture, implements, jewellery, or news of a family member visiting a shahr (town) or (saneha), a message from the family or reports of a villager earning a salary in cash or making good, as well as arrangements for a betrothal, marriage, birth, or death ceremony or for the partition of property were all shared subjects. They would be discussed and accepted or rejected by the family seniors, usually the men, and then praised, appraised or criticised by all the others, younger men and women alike. It was in this environment that the decision for someone to go to Canada was made. And the news about the activities and general affairs of emigrants was also dissected and digested in the same way.

For Paldi Mahton such attention to the affairs of family members implied closeness. It was expected that a family would show special regard for the opinion of its members on issues howsoever mundane. Other Punjabis shared the same outlook, as Punjabi culture had traditionally evolved such forceful familial cautions as "log kya kahenge" (what will the people say), "parivar nu ki dasanga" (how will I face the family) "tabbar di izzat da sawal hai" (it is a question of the family's honour, status), "baradari nu ki muh dakhaiange" (how will I face the baradari). An emigrant who went abroad as a consequence of a decision in his ghar or tabbar or parivar did so with a full sense of his responsibilities to his family. At the turn of the century, defiance of familial or community norms, customs and traditions was unheard of among rural Punjabis. Even though they were separated from home by months of travel, emigrants remained conscious of the value of and the izzat that such closeness maintained.

Among Punjabis in the Garhshankar tahsil, the Mahton were considered a particularly close-knit group. In the community of their neighbours it was said - "kukkar, kan, kabila palde; Jat mihan sansar kabila garde" ("a cockerel, a crow bring up and rear a kabila, a group, whereas a Jat, a buffalo, and a crocodile finish off kabila...but a Mahton first he will take his kind to Canada, his kin. If he does not have any close being then his neighbours will be his first choice.")<sup>89</sup> Such comments by Jats did not reflect criticism because kinship ties were important to the Jats as well and Jats, as the largest emigrant group, provided more emigrants along kinship lines than any other caste in Punjab.<sup>90</sup> Nevertheless such social expressions describe the fact that Punjabis overseas preferred to assist their own caste brethren to join them. Mahton Punjabis brought Mahton to Canada and Jats brought Jats. As a consequence the emigration movement remained concentrated in these caste groups in central Punjab. Moreover, the families that sent emigrants overseas eventually achieved higher standards of living and a higher status in their village, tahsil and district. Even by 1910, a number of tahsils had become noticeable for their growing prosperity fed by money repatriated from overseas.<sup>91</sup> By the end of the 1920s, Paldi in Punjab had acquired the status of a big village and that was the result of constant remittances from Canada.

Remittances had been a factor in the local economy before emigration to Canada began. Men who moved to far-off places within Punjab, to the

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89. Interview, 28 September, 1993, male, 75 years, New Delhi. The proverb is also mentioned in the Settlement Report of Jullundur.

90. See McLeod, Punjabis in New Zealand. Helweg, Sikhs in England. Johnston, East Indians in Canada.

91. Rev. & Agr., LR., September 1914, 26-A; October 1913, 38-A; April 1913, 42-45-A; January 1913, 28-A; January 1916, 5-A; March 1916, 1-A; November 1916, 15-A; September 1916, 3-A.

Canal Colonies or to major towns, were sending money to their villages in the late nineteenth century and continuing to do so in the early twentieth. Villagers from the central districts commonly paid visits to relatives in the Canal Colonies and they seldom returned empty-handed.<sup>92</sup> Families in the tahsils of Hoshiarpur and Garhshankar had done well in obtaining grants of land in the Canal Colonies. Garhshankar people had acquired almost 472 chaks, or squares (one chak equalling 25 acres) in the Colonies which went mostly to the families from villages on sirwal circle where Paldi was situated.<sup>93</sup> By the 1910s, surplus income from these squares in the Garhshankar tahsil was estimated to be about rupees 1,18,000.<sup>94</sup> In the Hoshiarpur tahsil the Canal Colony chak allotment was about 1,520 squares and the surplus income or the net profit from these squares or the amount of money sent home by immigrants to the Hoshiarpur tahsil formed an estimated rupees 2 lakh at the rate of 200 rupees per square.<sup>95</sup> These remittances flowed into the Hoshiarpur Doaba and the other districts of central Punjab with no sign of decreasing as the number of people moving towards the Canal Colonies rose steadily even in the 1920s.<sup>96</sup>

The Canal Colonies offered something prized by Punjabi villagers which was not so accessible to them in Canada. The prospect of income prompted families to dispatch emigrants. However, people also moved to acquire more land because land conveyed status and land was available in the Canal Colonies. The districts of central Punjab were some of the chief recruiting areas of settlers for the Canal Colonies and Jat Sikhs were the

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92. Rev. & Agr., LR., January 1913, 28-A.

93. Rev. & Agr., LR., September 1914, 26-A; October 1913, 38-A.

94. Ibid.

95. Ibid.

96. Bhattacharya, Agrarian Change in Punjab, pp, 23-25.



preferred colonists. The drive to make maximum use of that preference was very strong among the peasant proprietary families as the following illustration about the recruitment of potential settlers for the Canal Colonies in the Amritsar district shows:

Walking down the row I could easily see the men who were physically unsuitable. Many old dotards and mere boys would be brought up, in the hope of thus securing an extra square for the family, though they had no intention of going and would do no good if they did...Next, if any one family was represented by too many members, one or two of these would be weeded out, amid loud protests. Sometimes the three generations would come forward, headed by a hoary old grandfather, and try to secure six or seven squares between them. It was plain that they would not all go.<sup>97</sup>

The value attached to land by the Punjabis was so profound that the British colonial government regularly issued life certificates for those Punjabi men who went overseas but retained their share in their family land, in order to enable their immediate family or tabbar to inherit his share in case there was a partition.<sup>98</sup> Sometimes the colonial officer at the local level went to great lengths to locate a man in whose name a family had petitioned for a life certificate, if he could not be located in the country to which his family said he went.<sup>99</sup> Sometimes even foreign governments remitted share money from a Punjabi immigrant's income overseas after his death, which the individual had left in the name of his heirs in the Punjab.<sup>100</sup>

Land was the basis of familial and social organisation among Punjabi peasant proprietors. On it rested the unity of kinsmen and on that the unity of castes. The loss of status that was implied in the loss of land made a tabbar or parivar extremely unwilling to put their property at risk. Consequently,

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97. Ibid, p, 133.

98. Rev. & Agr., LR., March 1903, 2-4-A.

99. Ibid.

100. Ibid.

when Paldi families sent men to Canada they did not mortgage land on a large scale to pay for passage and other expenses, although it is possible that some families had their land mortgaged for other purposes long before the emigration started and raised additional money from mortgages to help pay for the long distance travel of a family member. Selling land to enable Punjabi emigrants to take their families to Canada was unthinkable.

The British colonial pattern of land revenue settlement along with large-scale public works had contributed to the development of agriculture as a commercial activity reaching deeply into Punjabi society. Railways built in Punjab between 1872 and 1903 extended for 3,086 miles.<sup>101</sup> The irrigation canal system increased from 2,744 miles in 1872-73 to 16,893 by 1902-03 and gave a tremendous boost to the productivity of immense tracts of Punjab.<sup>102</sup> The development of the Canal Colonies in west Punjab that drew settlers from the central districts contributed to the Punjabi disposition to look for opportunities wherever they could be found. Railways promoted mobility and, as feeders for local markets, created new market centres in the province. These developments in the commercialization of agriculture in Punjab required a shift from the production of food crops such as bajra, jowar, kangri, maddul, to cash crops such as cotton, sugar cane and wheat which were grown for imperial, overseas markets as well as domestic markets within Punjab and India.<sup>103</sup> When land became a commercial commodity, the impact upon the lives of Punjabi peasants was fundamental. Rich zamindars and money lenders recognised its potential as an asset, the poor and very

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101. Calvert, Wealth and Welfare, reference p, 107.

102. Ibid.

103. See Himadri Banerjee, Agrarian Society for an understanding of the change that came up in Punjab in response to the growing commercialisation following the British rule.

small peasantry still subsisted on their land, while the middle level peasantry, such as the Mahton of the Hoshiarpur Doaba, became more conscious of its value for subsistence as well as the status of their families and their small baradari(caste).

With commercialization, the Punjabi peasant became exposed to the swings of market forces. The impact of any reverse, whether the consequence of crop failure or a fall in prices, hit hard. At the turn of the century, one could see the critical consequences of the dependence of Punjabi peasants on a market economy. The famine of 1898-99, accompanied by a rise in food prices about the same time and a simultaneous drastic fall in European demand for Punjabi wheat left the Punjabi peasant with a very small margin of safety for a few years.<sup>104</sup> The high revenue demands of the British administration and the rigid, harsh and rigorous manner in which these demands were realized, even during bad harvests or failure of monsoons, on top of the indebtedness assumed in earlier, better years, pressed severely on rural Punjabi proprietors.<sup>105</sup> These adversities affected all of Punjab: areas that subsequently were the source of emigrants and areas that were not. Peasants in all regions of the province had shown a willingness to take on debt by mortgaging land, and indebtedness became a permanent feature of the landscape.<sup>106</sup> In 1929-30 only thirteen percent of the proprietors in Punjab were found to be free from debt.<sup>107</sup> The west of Punjab, with its predominant Muslim population, was

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104. Imperial Gazetteer, Provincial series, Punjab, vol. I. Banerjee, Agrarian Society, pp, 55, 236.
105. See Banerjee, Agrarian Society and G.S.Chhabra, The Social and Economic History of the Punjab, 1849-1901. (New Delhi: Sterling, 1968.)
106. S.S. Thornburn, Mussalmans and Money Lenders in the Punjab. (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1886). P.H.M. Van den Dungen, The Punjab Tradition: Influence and Authority in the Nineteenth Century India. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1972).
107. Bhattacharya, "Agrarian Change in Punjab," p, 461.

the most indebted region and the communities in the south-west were as much involved with money lenders as those in central Punjab. In fact, a money lender was said to flourish more strongly as a professional usurer in the south-east and south-west of Punjab, regions which remained untouched by overseas emigration.<sup>108</sup>

In the central districts, however, mortgages were not evidence of poverty or need alone. Most cultivators in central Punjab were able to mortgage land on a long-term basis at comparatively low rates of interest, lower than in the rest of the province. A peasant's debt in the central Punjab was not liable to the same system of compounding interest employed by money lenders elsewhere.<sup>109</sup> Moreover, in districts such as Hoshiarpur, mortgages often took the form of agricultural leases.<sup>110</sup> In many instances peasants mortgaged part of their holdings to take other land for cultivation because it had better soil or a better location. The holdings of an individual peasant proprietor were generally scattered throughout the fields of a Punjabi village. Consolidation did not begin to take place until the 1930s. In Ludhiana, as well, mortgages were not necessarily a consequence of poverty or unproductive debt, but a method to raise money for investment in other mortgages or land.<sup>111</sup> By the second and third decades of the twentieth century, a large section of the middle level peasantry in the central districts had redeemed more land than they had mortgaged in the first place.<sup>112</sup> They were able to consolidate their position in this way because they possessed

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108. Ibid. Thorburn, Mussalmans and Money Lenders. Van den Dungen, The Punjab Tradition.

109. Bhattacharya, "Agrarian Change in Punjab," see chapter 5, Logic of Tenancy Cultivation.

110. Ibid. Interview, 24 March, 1993, male, 88 years, Paldi Punjab.

111. Bhattacharya, "Agrarian Change in Punjab," chapter 5, Logic of Tenancy Cultivation.

112. Ibid, p, 533.

fertile land, but also because they benefitted in great measure from overseas remittances. Some peasant proprietors had become rich as money lenders by the 1920s.<sup>113</sup> And the climatically advantaged central districts escaped the famines which periodically hit other regions in the province, such as the south-west. During these periods, the central districts were suppliers of food grains.<sup>114</sup>

Punjabi emigrants to Canada, like other emigrants, have contributed to the mythologizing of their experiences. They found it convenient to explain their action as flight from growing indebtedness and poverty - as escape from the clutches of the usurious money lenders. This picture fitted the assumptions of their Canadian audience and it made sense to Punjabis themselves when they contrasted what they had before emigration and with what they gained subsequently. It was easy to say that they had been driven by poverty to seek riches in Canada. But economic advantage was the reason they had emigrated, not economic desperation. A majority of the Jat and Mahton Punjabis, who reacted spontaneously as soon as they heard of possible employment overseas, were attracted by the chance to enhance their position at home by bringing back foreign savings. This is why the movement began with men and remained male-dominated for more than half a century. This was not just the pattern of the movement to Canada and the United States. It was also the pattern of Punjabi emigration to New Zealand and Australia.<sup>115</sup>

Jat Sikhs were the largest caste group among Punjabis overseas. That has been taken as testimony to their enterprise. But enterprise was a virtue that other caste groups also claimed to have. The Mahton Sikhs are an

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113. Ibid, p, 183.

114. See Himadri Banerjee, Agrarian Society.

115. McLeod, Punjabis in New Zealand.

example because they not only accompanied Jats to such countries as New Zealand and Fiji, but in Canada they were the most successful of all Punjabi immigrants.<sup>116</sup> Moreover, the interest of Punjabis in emigration depended on their locality, their surroundings and their socio-economic position, and these factors were more significant than an exclusive economic reason. Rajputs were not motivated to improve upon their high status position by risking an adventure to foreign lands. The same was true of higher status Syads among Muslims or Hindu Jats in the south-east. In contrast minor caste groups who owned small holdings could not afford to move. What we can say of the Jats of the central districts of Malwa, Manjha and Doaba is that they had both means and motive. Their resource base was reasonably stable and they could afford the challenge of going abroad. Mahton Sikhs were similarly placed.

In any case, mortgages were uncommon in Paldi village when the emigration to Canada began. Between the 1880s and 1900s khudkasht or self-cultivation was the prevalent practice among Paldi peasant proprietors and it remained so even after the departure of emigrants.<sup>117</sup> In 1884, when the first regular settlement of land revenue was done in Paldi, there were a total of 64 proprietary holdings subdivided into 132 divisions. Out of these, two divisions were mortgaged with the morgages held by other proprietors.<sup>118</sup> The mortgagers kept the land holding with them for cultivation. By 1900-01, the number of land holdings in Paldi had increased to 93 with 360 subdivisions, of which four were mortgaged, again among the proprietors themselves.<sup>119</sup> In fact Garhshankar tahsil itself was known as the least

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116. Ibid.

117. Jamabandi, 1900-1940.

118. Bandobast, 1884.

119. Jamabandi, 1900-1901.

indebted region in the central and submontane Punjab.<sup>120</sup> Sales of land were also comparatively low in Garhshankar. Slightly less than five percent of the area had changed hands by sale between 1884 and 1914. Of this sixty percent had gone to traditional agricultural castes.<sup>121</sup> Moreover, by 1904 as the effects of the Punjab Alienation of Land Act began to be felt in the province, Jats, Sainis, Rajputs, and even Mahton, who were designated as an agricultural caste under the Act only in 1904, had actually begun to redeem their mortgaged land.<sup>122</sup> In the year 1902-03, redemptions worth rupees 2,14,885 had been recorded by the Jats in Hoshiarpur district.<sup>123</sup> The same trend was evident among Rajputs, Saini, Gujars and Mahtons in the Hoshiarpur district as well as among the agricultural castes of the Jullundur, Amritsar, Ludhiana, Ferozepur and Gurdaspur districts.<sup>124</sup>

This, however, does not mean that mortgaging was on the verge of disappearance before emigration started from Punjab. It was not, and it would not even when emigrants started sending money home from overseas. Mortgaging did not disappear in the central and submontane districts, or for that matter in Punjab as a whole, because it was an intrinsic part of the Punjabi agricultural economy based on the small-size land holdings. Among the middle level peasants such as the Mahton and the Jats, mortgages were a function of their petty production on an ongoing basis.<sup>125</sup> When faced with a natural calamity such as the failure of rains or the death of cattle from disease, a Punjabi family would mortgage a part of their holding to supplement

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120. See Van den Dungen, The Punjab Tradition. Settlement Report Hoshiarpur.

121. Ibid.

122. Rev. & Agr., LR., May 1905, 28-29-B.

123. Ibid.

124. Ibid.

125. See Bhattacharya, "Agrarian Change in Punjab."

income. But Punjabis would not mortgage land to finance emigration overseas if there was no assurance of certain and positive returns.

In the early 1900s, the Punjabis who came to Canada did so without prior arrangements for employment and no assurance of work. All they carried with them was a strong determination to earn more money. They left Punjab during years when their land was becoming increasingly valuable. Land prices had been steadily rising from the late nineteenth century in Punjab and showed no sign of going down at the turn of the twentieth.<sup>126</sup> The Mahton of the Garhshankar tahsil gained particularly from increasing land prices because their villages were settled on the richer soils in the region. For them, therefore, retaining land without encumbrances was not only a matter of necessity but also a matter of pride, a source of influence and, of course, a matter of custom. Through foreign-earned money, families improved their position in the Punjab by buying more land and helping their village become a 'big' village which was desirable - "to be able to marry our children into big, high status, villages".<sup>127</sup> Paldi, in the words of one village informant, was considered small because "it had no special building such as a school or any other concrete structure that could highlight its significance."<sup>128</sup>

Punjabis, as we have seen, were both adventurous travellers and rooted villagers. Their family organisation and family values made it possible for them to spread far and wide while holding onto their village homes and properties with great tenacity. Their mobility, as a consequence, had little to do with population pressure or density. In the twenty year period leading up to the first Punjabi emigration to North America, the population of the

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126. Himadri Banerjee, Agrarian Society. Bhattacharya, "Agrarian Change."

127. Interview, 15 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

128. Ibid.



province showed a sharp downward swing and it did not begin to increase until around 1915.<sup>129</sup> The decline in population was linked to a series of devastating famines between 1896-1907 and recurring epidemics of plague and malaria.<sup>130</sup> In 1901 the decrease in population figures in the Hoshiarpur district over that of 1891 was 2% and by the 1910s the numbers had decreased by a further 6%.<sup>131</sup> Yet both agricultural castes and lower castes were on the move. The number of emigrants from the central districts to the Canal Colonies continued to increase.<sup>132</sup>, while casual labourers moved across the province in search of employment in railway construction or in the small but growing number of textile mills, flour mills and wool factories. Harvests and the movement of the seasons, as well as the cycle of good and bad years moved labourers from district to district or from country to town in search of work.<sup>133</sup>

From the Garhshankar tahsil, a large number of men went all over the province to the towns and bazaars to work as wage labourers.<sup>134</sup> Some went to Simla and worked as porters or rickshaw pullers.<sup>135</sup> Paldi village was a focal point for labourers in the tahsil because its building contractors, the jhangi wale thekedars in partnership with another Mahton of Baddon village, took government contracts to construct roads and school buildings within and outside the tahsil. They also took contracts to build railway lines in the different parts of the Punjab province and in the North West province (Uttar Pradesh).<sup>136</sup> These Paldi contractors employed both their own villagers

129. Bhattacharya, "Agrarian Change in Punjab," p, 23.

130. Ibid. Rev. & Agr., LR., April 1905, 17-B.

131. Rev. & Agr., LR., September 1910, 15-A.

132. Bhattacharya, "Agrarian Change in Punjab," p, 153.

133. Ibid, 153-54.

134. Rev. & Agr., LR., September 1914, 26-A.

135. Ibid.

136. Group Interview, 20 March, 1993, males, 80, 92, 65 years, Paldi Punjab.

and others. They also owned a brick kiln in Paldi where village men from the lower castes made bricks.<sup>137</sup> By the early 1900s brick-making had become an important commercial activity in the Garhshankar tahsil, and some families supplemented their incomes from that source.<sup>138</sup> For some families the sale of karkhana grass, usually grown wild to build thatched roofs, provided an additional income.<sup>139</sup> Similarly some families had begun to make profits from the sale of cattle, especially buffalos, and from the sale of dairy products such as ghi (purified butter).<sup>140</sup> All of these developments, although on a small scale, opened up people to the outside world. Moreover, despite the preference that the army recruiters had for the Manjha and Malwa region, Mahton men were recruited into the army. This increased as the colonial government's requirements for troops became more pressing. As a result, Mahton, along with Jats and Rajput recruits from the region, went overseas to China, the Far East, and South Africa.<sup>141</sup> About two thousand men from the Hoshiarpur tahsil and slightly more than two thousand men from the Garhshankar tahsil were serving in the military by the early 1900s. The number of Mahton in it was small, but in Paldi village about four or five tabbars had their men in the army that time.<sup>142</sup>

In all these ways, Paldi villagers were made conscious of the opportunities that lay beyond their village and tahsil boundaries. At the same time they were aware that Paldi and the Garhshankar tahsil lay within a backwater in which the pace of progress was significantly slower than in other parts of central Punjab. Although British, colonial rule had resulted in large

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137. Ibid.

138. Rev. & Agr., LR., September 1914, 26-A.

139. Ibid.

140. Ibid.

141. Ibid.

142. Group Interview, 20 March, 1993, males, 80, 92, 65 years, Paldi Punjab.

scale expansion of communication networks and irrigation systems, regions such as Garhshankar tahsil had not benefitted from the expansion of the irrigation canals in the same manner as the other districts of central Punjab. The Amritsar district was so profusely irrigated by 1913 that gear had been removed from many of the wells or abandoned.<sup>143</sup> The same was true in the Ferozepur district which was experiencing unsurpassed agricultural prosperity because of the irrigation facility made available from numerous inundation canals.<sup>144</sup> Gurdaspur and Ludhiana were also very well served by irrigation canals.<sup>145</sup> In the districts of Hoshiarpur and Jullundur, however, there were no canals and agriculture depended on the rainfall in the monsoon season and irrigation from wells. Water from these wells was drawn either by Persian wheel or by bucket and rope and their year-round maintenance was essential for a zamindar. The number of wells increased between the 1880s and 1910s, but at the initiative and expense of the peasant proprietors alone. In the Jullundur district there were 29,965 wells in use in 1910 compared to 20,244 in 1884.<sup>146</sup> In the Hoshiarpur district the rise in the number of wells was more dramatic: 7,198 in 1884 to 22,401 by 1910.<sup>147</sup> During the same period the number of wells in the Hoshiarpur tahsil increased from 1,321 to 2,404 and in the Garhshankar tahsil from 1,651 to 3,281.<sup>148</sup> In most cases, peasant proprietors with adjacent fields had taken shares to dig a well together. The shares in a well were treated like shares in the land as hereditary rights and the days for using a well were divided on the basis of the

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143. Rev. & Agr., LR., january 1913, 28-A.

144. Rev. & Agr., LR., september 1910, 15-A.

145. See Himadri Banerjee, Agrarian Society.

146. Settlement Report Hoshiarpur.

147. Rev. & Agr., LR., September, 1914, 26-A.

148. Rev. & Agr., LR., October 1913, 38-A.

shares. There were about sixteen jointly owned wells in the Paldi.<sup>149</sup> Usually the water level in the wells remained at a constant, normal level owing to the moisture-retaining capacity of the sirwal soil, but in 1929-30 Paldi village proprietors faced trying times as suddenly all the wells went dry.<sup>150</sup> Following such a calamity, the proprietors had no government to turn to in order to dig new wells. They lay beyond the government managed irrigation system serving the neighbouring districts of central Punjab.

In addition, the peasant proprietors did not benefit directly from the railways and road links built through central Punjab. Early in the century districts such as Amritsar, Ferozepur and Ludhiana were well connected through railways and a well-distributed network of metalled roads, and the major cities in these districts became significant commercial centres. Ferozepur grew as an important junction and a very important grain mart. Amritsar district became known for its large-scale loading and unloading facilities for wheat and cotton. Ludhiana, Jullundur and Ferozepur were linked through major railways directly with Karachi, the main exporting port for Punjab at the time.<sup>151</sup> On the other hand, Hoshiarpur had no railway line until the second decade of the twentieth century.<sup>152</sup>

The trade had increased significantly in the district but was carried entirely by road on bullock carts and general carts which increased in number by 506 percent between 1884 and 1910.<sup>153</sup> The only metalled roads in the district were 4 miles at Tanda and 8 miles of the road connecting Hoshiarpur to Jullundur. The remaining 700 miles of road in the district were kacha

149. Group Interview, 20 March, 1993, males, 80, 92, 65 years, Paldi Punjab.

150. Interview, 24 March, 1993, male, 88 years, Paldi Punjab.

151. Rev. and Agr., LR., October 1912, 11-A; September 1910, 15-A; March 1913, 10-A. Agnihotri, Agrarian Change in the Canal Colony, p, 153.

152. Settlement Report Hoshiarpur.

153. Ibid.

(unmetalled or gravel) roads.<sup>154</sup> In the Garhshankar tahsil there was only one road, a kacha road, which ran the length of the tahsil to the Hoshiarpur city via Mahilpur; and there were no towns worthy of name. In fact Garhshankar itself, the headquarters of the tahsil, was not regarded as more than a large village at the time of the First World War.<sup>155</sup> The neighbouring tahsil of Hoshiarpur was also noted for the absence of grain marts or trade centres.<sup>156</sup> The facility for commercial activity was so limited in this area that when even the construction of the Hoshiarpur-Jullundur railway began in 1913, the district authorities doubted that Hoshiarpur could become a central mandi (grain market).

The wheat of Hoshiarpur was exported in carts to the Jullundur and Phagwara markets. Phagwara was about 25 miles from the Mahilpur thana (police station) situated about three miles from Paldi and Jullundur was about 65 miles.<sup>157</sup> Most of the maize from the district went to Kangra, while fruit, primarily mango, was exported to Amritsar, Lahore, Ferozepur and Jullundur.<sup>158</sup> The backward transportation system of Hoshiarpur created an opening for middle men that did not exist in districts better served by roads and railways. Village zamindars dealt with traders, who generally carried away the surplus stock of grain.<sup>159</sup> In other districts a zamindar carried his produce to the closest market centres or railway stations himself. Traders frequented Paldi village and contacted those families willing to sell their produce through them or to buy something in exchange. Traders came to Hoshiarpur villages to purchase rice, wheat and sugar cane, and to take it by

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154. Ibid.

155. Ibid.

156. Ibid.

157. Rev. & Agr., LR., September 1910, 15-A.

158. Ibid.

159. Group Interview, 20 March, 1993, males, 80, 92, 65 years, Paldi Punjab.

bangis (carts) to Jullundur or Phagwara. In this way Garhshankar participated in the growing commerce of Punjab, even though it was not at the centre. And the transportation of goods and people into and from the villages brought news about the outside world to the Hoshiarpur Doabis. According to the villagers interviewed, it was from traders frequenting the region that the Paldi Mahton obtained the earliest information about Canada.<sup>160</sup> It was also from these traders that the early Paldi emigrants were able to discover the best way to travel to Calcutta, their port of departure.

One very old man interviewed in the 1990s stated - "our men walked all the way to Kaneda. They walked on foot".<sup>161</sup> At the turn of the century most Paldi villagers must have had an equally vague conception of the distance and the route that emigrants would have to travel. Paldi village was less than a mile from the road to the Mahilpur thana (police station) and on to the Hoshiarpur city. According to one villager - "it was a kacha (unmetalled) road at the time, but a road it was. There was a row of trees on each side of the road which provided comfort, pleasure to commuters to walk on its wide path, even vehicles used to ply on it."<sup>162</sup> Along this path Punjabi emigrants would walk for days at a stretch to reach Hoshiarpur city and then Jullundur railway station where they would take the train to Delhi. From Delhi they would travel on the North Western railway to Calcutta where they would need to find a passage to the Orient and eventually to Canada. Such an arduous journey would not have been possible for a lone man and consequently Punjabis and Punjabi Mahtons generally moved in groups, whether with the members of their tabbars, parivars, pendu (cohabitant in a village) or others. When they travelled they took with them their rural

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160. Ibid.

161. Ibid.

162. Interview, 28 September, 1992, male, 75 years, New Delhi.

maxim kar kar na awe har (work, and you will not want). They also took with them their notions of izzat which bound up their sense of responsibility to tabbar, parivar and baradari.

## Chapter 4

### Developing the Canada Connection

The Mahton were a small sub-group among the first Punjabi immigrants to Canada. They travelled to North America in the company of Jats, the numerically dominant group; they worked in labour gangs alongside Jats, formed business associations with them, and made a common community with them. In a new and socially hostile environment, this was not surprising. But the Canadian experience, over the course of more than two generations, did not result in reducing their caste consciousness. Despite their small numbers they remained distinct among the Punjabis and did not integrate into the mainstream society. Their exclusiveness as well as their success in Canada was related to the objectives these emigrants had when they first left their village, and those objectives were determined within their village-based families.

The consent and agreement of the seniors and elders of the parivars and tabbars in a decision to migrate was essential to assure ownership and inheritance of family land. In case of a partition or any division of land, if a particular shareholder wished to sell part of his land, then an unsanctioned absentee was likely to lose his haq shuda (right of pre-emption).<sup>1</sup> For example, if there were four shareholders in a piece of land, such as four brothers or a father and his three sons, and if one of them wanted to part with his portion of property, the other shareholders could claim their haq (right) before it went to someone else. If one of the shareholders was not

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1. Interview, 26 March, 1993, male, 88 years, Paldi Punjab. Explained that the right of pre-emption ceased to have significance after 1947 when new property laws were introduced by the Indian government.



present because he had emigrated, then he was liable to lose his right of pre-emption at the time of partition or sale.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, if there were only one inheritor, and if that individual emigrated then any question of land ownership and inheritance threatened the status and survival of an individual tabbar.<sup>3</sup> The consequences of such a developments were known to the emigrants and their families. Land was a tangible representation of izzat and status that kept an individual accountable to his family and particularly to the seniors and elders of the parivars and tabbars.

In some cases the head of a parivar, the piu (father), in consultation with others, exercised the authority to allow a family member to depart; in other cases a joint consensus of elder brothers, taya, chacha and piu, permitted intending family members to leave. In the case of the khuhi de tabbar, "we were two brothers and my father decided not to send me to Canada or even to school. I was selected to look after the land and do only farming. My older brother was allowed to proceed overseas, even my piu (father) went and stayed overseas for about three years. There was no question of raising any objection to these decisions."<sup>4</sup> Similarly, when the question arose about the departure to Canada of some members of the bania al, care was taken to ensure that the maintenance of village land and the journey to Canada were both undertaken as a family venture.

In 1905 on the day they left Paldi, my taya Bholla Singh stopped my father, his nephew, who was then a young blood only 14 or 15 years old, in the fields when the group was walking towards the Paldi road and asked him to stay back and look after his jaddi (ancestral) land. My father was the only son of my grandfather and my taya was concerned if something happened to him what will happen to the land. So my taya asked my father to not leave and instead requested my grandfather, his brother, to accompany

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2. Ibid.
  3. Ibid.
  4. Ibid.

the group of those leaving for Canada as an elder and senior to offer moral support and guidance in times of need. My taya also assured my grandfather of his personal responsibility for my father's well being. They were part of the same parivar. And so my grandfather joined the group leaving for Canada and became responsible for the well being of his bhatije, my taya's two sons, Ghanaiya Singh and Maiya Singh. They were then young boys, 18 to 20 years old. My chacha's son also joined. He settled in America where our family had connections later on.<sup>5</sup>

The calculations made by families in deciding who could leave for Canada is suggested in an account involving boleya tabbar - "I did not go to Canada, my father did along with his taye, chache de puttar, (uncles' sons). My father was Ganesha Singh and he was accompanied by his cousin Tara Singh."<sup>6</sup> One tabbar of the bania al made sure "that two sons remained behind with father while two others from the family left for Canada."<sup>7</sup> From yet another tabbar of four sons in the same patti, only one son departed while three remained behind.<sup>8</sup> In yet another case the father moved while his family was left behind and in one tabbar the older son went overseas while the younger stayed behind.<sup>9</sup> These families owned average-sized holdings and could use everyone's labour at harvest time. However, the prospect of making a fortune in a new and supposedly far more prosperous country was compelling. Families tried to strike a balance by sending only as many people as they thought right given the unexplored nature of the opportunities in a far-off land.

The first Mahton emigrants from the Paldi village set off by foot in two separate batches or kafilas (groups) to catch the train for Calcutta from the city

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5. Interview, 5 October, 1993, male, 80 years, Vancouver.
  6. Interview, 22 March, 1993, male, 88 years, Paldi Punjab.
  7. Group interview, 20 March, 1993, males, 80, 92, 65 years, Paldi Punjab.
  8. Interview, 27 November, 1993, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.
  9. Group interview, 20 March, 1993, males, 80, 92, 65 years, Paldi Punjab.  
Interview, 23 April, 1993, female, 78 years, Paldi Punjab.

of Jullundur. The two groups comprised a total of about forty men.<sup>10</sup> "Around 1905 there were no buses or tempos in Hoshiarpur. Those days people always walked in kafilas. Journey on roads could be dangerous. There was jangal (forest) on the routes. Sometimes kafila would be on roads for two or three months at a time. People always walked even as far as Una tahsil in our zila (district)."<sup>11</sup> Because railway lines had not reached Hoshiarpur the nearest railway station in the Jullundur city was about 60 to 70 miles away.

Our men began their journey for Canada at about three or four a.m. in the morning and after covering about two and a half miles from the village to Mahilpur thana (police station) they walked on the Garhshankar - Hoshiarpur road and were in the Hoshiarpur city by 8 or 9 o'clock, same morning, when the kachheri (courts) opened in the District Commissioner's office. It took them about a day and a day and a half or maybe more those days to reach Jullundur station from the Hoshiarpur city. People took rest in the villages on the way.<sup>12</sup>

Mahilpur, Hoshiarpur and Jullundur were three important stops at the beginning of the long route to Canada. By the 1920s, when the second generation of emigrants followed the same path, the formalities were well established. In Mahilpur there was a police station from where one had to acquire a clearance certificate. From the Hoshiarpur District Commissioner's office one had to obtain permission to travel abroad, and from the Jullundur passport office one had to acquire a passport before catching the train for Calcutta.<sup>13</sup> Travel to Canada was cumbersome, it required official approval and documents and for new emigrants the routes ahead posed daunting prospects. Within the group that formed as a kafila, however, all this was manageable. The older and more experienced took the lead and all reached

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10. Interview, 22 March, 1993, Male, 80 years, Paldi Punjab.

11. Group Interview, 20 March, 1993, males, 80, 92, 65 years, Paldi Punjab.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

Calcutta city in Bengal with minimum hardship before embarking upon a ship from the port called Takhta Ghat.<sup>14</sup>

From Calcutta there were no direct ship passage to North America. The lack of a direct, passenger shipping facility meant that the journey had to be divided at two embarkation points between Calcutta and Hong Kong. In 1905, however, agents in Calcutta would sell tickets for different shipping lines operating between Calcutta to Hong Kong and between Hong Kong to British Columbia. The passenger business between Calcutta and Hong Kong was generally handled by Messrs. Jardine Skinner and Company and Apar and Company, agents for the Indo-China Steam Navigation Company Limited.<sup>15</sup> From Hong Kong, emigrants proceeded to Canada by the vessels of the Canadian and Pacific Steam Navigation Company, or the Canadian Pacific Railways Royal Mail Steamship line or by the ships belonging to the Japanese steamship line called the Nippon Yusen Kasha.<sup>16</sup> Most Punjabi emigrants seem to have selected the Canadian Pacific line and its steamers the RMS Tartar, the Empress of India, or the Empress of Japan which brought three exceptionally large contingents of Punjabi emigrants to Canada in 1906 and 1907.<sup>17</sup> Because they had a fixed destination, most Punjabis preferred to purchase tickets for the Hong Kong to Canada voyage from the Canadian Pacific Railway Company's agents Messrs. Gillanders, Arbuthnot and Company in Calcutta, although some did choose to purchase them in Hong Kong.<sup>18</sup> Punjabi men travelled in steerage or third class which meant

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14. Interview, 22 March, 1993, male, 80 years, Paldi Punjab.

15. Commerce and Industry, Emigration, September 1907, 13-14-A. Ibid, June 1908, 7-9-B.

16. Commerce and Industry, Emigration, May 1907, 7-29-A. ibid, June 1908, 7-9-B.

17. Johnston, "Patterns of Sikh Migration," p, 298. Buchignani, Continuous Journey, p, 19.

18. Interview, 10 April, 1989, male, 75 years, Vancouver.

sleeping in the bunk sections of the ship. In those days an informant observed: "First and second class were meant for white people, or rich Indians, and they kept a conscious distance from passengers like us because we seemed to them to be indecently dressed, smelling different, not for the taste of the upper class travelling in the same ship".<sup>19</sup>

However, travelling by third class was not entirely objectionable. "One needed company. First class would have been miserable as we would have been alone in separate cabins."<sup>20</sup> The biggest problem was related to food. "We couldn't eat their (white people's) food because they ate all kinds of meat. All we did at the time was fill ourselves with rice, sometimes with sugar and milk."<sup>21</sup> Some chose to utilise the facility available on the ship to cook, which was equally full of problems - "The ship provided a stove for all those travelling. But there was only one stove and so one could eat only once a day. Also, one had to carry own dishes, pots and pans, vegetables and grocery because ship did not provide any such provision for travellers like us."<sup>22</sup> For some people the journey was more arduous because they travelled in cargo ships, squeezed in between the freight, particularly from Calcutta to Hong Kong.<sup>23</sup>

At Hong Kong, those who had not purchased tickets in Calcutta were obliged to wait an indefinite number of days before securing one. And possession of one did not guarantee passage on the next ship.<sup>24</sup> Under these circumstances, the security of a group of familiar kinsmen and villagers was

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19. Interview, 22 October, 1993, male, 72 years, Paldi British Columbia.

20. Ibid.

21. Interview, 10 April, 1989, male, 75 years, Vancouver. Interview, 20 December, 1993, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

22. Interview, 10 April, 1989, male, 75 years, Vancouver.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid. Explained that shipping companies did not run steamers on schedules.

comforting. Occasionally, one looked for someone from one's own tahsil or baradari (caste) who was settled in Hong Kong and who, if approached, could extend a helping hand.<sup>25</sup> Most Punjabi emigrants in transit at Hong Kong stayed in the Sikh Gurduara. Before leaving, they usually donated money to the Guruduara.<sup>26</sup> Punjabi emigrants adjusted with equanimity to the hardships of the journey, to the problems associated with food and to the snubs of their upper-class fellow passengers on the ship route from Hong Kong to Canada. "They were on a hard journey but the thought of new wealth was uppermost in their minds. After all who minds making money and earning riches. In such a situation one's mentality helps endure even an empty stomach."<sup>27</sup> The thirty-eight days that emigrants spent in the close quarters of the steerage to reach Vancouver from Hong Kong<sup>28</sup> laid a foundation for their life in Canada. Punjabis of different backgrounds got together on the ship to chat, gossip, to entertain and at times to organise a group meal. During the journey Punjabi men learned to cook, a task which, in their village, was solely in the domain of the women, janani de kaam roti banana.<sup>29</sup> For these emigrants, however, learning to cook signalled their determination to adjust to the demands of their adventure. And sharing the experience made companions out of members of other castes from various districts. The creation of alliances across castes began, in many cases, on board ship.

At the end of 1905 and the beginning of 1906 Mahton emigrants first set

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25. Interview, 22 October, 1993, male, 72 years, Paldi British Columbia.  
 26. This practice was common even among those who arrived in mid 1920s. Interview, 20 December, 1993, male, 88 years, Coquitlam. Interview, 28 January, 1994, female, 83 years, Burnaby.  
 27. Interview, 22 March, 1993, male, 80 years, Paldi Punjab.  
 28. Ibid.  
 29. Interview, 10 April, 1989, male, 75 years, Vancouver. Interview, 22 October, 1993, male, 72 years, Paldi B.C.

foot in Canada.<sup>30</sup> Members of the first kafila to leave Paldi village in 1905 arrived in separate groups in late 1905 and early 1906.<sup>31</sup> The emigrants of the second kafila arrived late in 1906.<sup>32</sup> These Mahtons were in the vanguard of Punjabi immigration to Canada. Canadian immigration statistics show about 45 entrants of Indian origin in 1904-05. In 1905-06, the number of immigrants from India was 387. In 1906-07 and 1907-08, Canadian immigration official statistics reported 2,124 and 2,623 immigrant arrivals from India.<sup>33</sup> But in 1908 this movement halted almost completely because in that year Canada passed an exclusionary order-in-council, aimed at Indians. The 1908 order-in-council made it compulsory for intending immigrants to travel directly from the country of their origin on a through journey.<sup>34</sup> The agents of the Canadian Pacific Steamship line in Calcutta were instructed not to sell through tickets so that it would be impossible for emigrants to comply with the regulation.<sup>35</sup> In 1909 the number of entrants from India dropped to 6 and for the next decade the number remained miniscule. Even after 1918 and for the next thirty years, legal immigration was limited to the minor children and wives of men already in Canada. The men who did arrive in these years were mostly illegal immigrants.<sup>36</sup>

30. There was a unanimous agreement about these dates among interviewees in Paldi Punjab and in British Columbia. See also A.O. Tate "Labourer to Lumber King is the Saga of Hindu Immigrant." Newspaper Clipping without reference, Joe Saroya Collection, Simon Fraser University Archives, Burnaby, British Columbia.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Johnston, "Patterns of Sikh Migration," p, 297. See also Buchignani, Continuous Journey, pp, 17-21. Rajnikant Das, Hindustani Workers on the Pacific Coast. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1923), p, 4. Canada Year Book 1905-1908.

34. Buchignani, Continuous Journey, p, 23. Johnston, "Pattern of Sikh Migration," p, 298.

35. Buchignani, Continuous Journey, p, 25.

36. See Johnston, "Patterns of Sikh Migration."

The original emigration had begun without the encouragement of an outside agency. By late 1906, the shipping agents of the Canadian Pacific Railways in Calcutta city were playing a role in attracting emigrants towards Canada but it was not primary. Police enquiries by the colonial government in Bengal and also in Hong Kong showed that in the first instance emigrants responded directly to the news of kin who had gone to Canada in 1904.<sup>37</sup> Police enquiries also showed that a number of emigrants had returned to Punjab in early 1906 with money earned abroad and their return had generated interest among others.<sup>38</sup> Not everybody had returned rich. The District Commissioner from Jullundur reported that many had come back ruined.<sup>39</sup> These failures however did not attract as much attention as the more enticing information that there was a large demand for labour and contract work for good pay in British Columbia and that the government in Canada was granting land for farming purposes.<sup>40</sup> This news, transmitted first-hand, motivated large numbers to try their fortune in Canada.

In the beginning, the shipping agents Messrs. Gillanders Arbuthnot and Company simply facilitated the departure of emigrants. This agency was in telegraphic communication with agents in Vancouver and, as the number of arrivals at their office in Calcutta showed a steady increase, they were advised by the Canadian Pacific Steam Navigation Company that their company would take 'native' passengers on its steamers.<sup>41</sup> The same information went to another agency operating in Calcutta, Messrs. Thomas

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37. Commerce and Industry, Emigration, May 1907, 7-29-A.

38. Ibid.

39. Letter dated 15 February 1907 from A.B. Kettlewell, Officiating Chief Secretary to the Government, Punjab. Commerce and Industry, Emigration, May 1907, 7-29-A.

40. Ibid.

41. Commerce and Industry, Emigration, May 1907, 7-29-A. *ibid*, September 1907, 13-14-A.



Cook and Sons.<sup>42</sup> The response of emigrants was overwhelming - between March and August of 1907, Messrs. Gillanders Arbuthnot and Company sold over 1,200 tickets to Vancouver and all on the purchaser's own risk.<sup>43</sup>

The shipping agencies provided emigrants with basic information about the requirements of the Canadian government concerning medical fitness or the amount of money that every steerage passenger required in order to show Canadian immigration officers that the immigrant was not a beggar.<sup>44</sup> Shipping agencies however did not promote Canada by forwarding offers of assured employment.<sup>45</sup> They could not recruit immigrants from India, as the emigration of contract labour to Canada was not permitted by law in India.<sup>46</sup> No agency in India could formally recruit emigrants for the Canadian employees without being liable to legal proceedings by the government. For the same reason, Canadian shipping agencies could not advertise to recruit immigrants in the local or national level newspapers or circulate their notices in the country or carry out personal recruiting. Only agencies involved in the process of indentured emigration to approved colonial destination had that authority legally.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, the offices of Messrs. Gillanders and Arbuthnot Company, based in Calcutta, did not

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42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. The notices provided by the Gillander Arbuthnot Company read as follows: "Hindus who desired to go to Canada can have full information from the company's agents for the Canadian Pacific Railway Royal Mail Steamship Line...Calcutta. Every steerage passenger must have with him at least rupees 50/ (dollars 16.69) coins of India to show to the immigration officer that the immigrant is not a beggar." Commerce and Industry, Emigration, July 1908, 6-A.

45. Commerce and Industry, Emigration, May 1908, 13-15-A.

46. Ibid, September 1907, 13-14-A.

47. See Karnail Singh Sandhu, Indians in Malaya: Some aspects of their Immigration and Settlement, 1786-1951. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). C. Kondapi, Indians Overseas. (New Delhi: Oxford, 1951).

penetrate the rural areas with their notices at that time. The company's ability to provide information about immigration openings for Canada in the rural areas of Punjab was slight, and unlikely to have much effect on as relatively backward an area as the Garhshankar tahsil.

Punjabis, when they first arrived in Canada, were described as Sikhs and Hindus by the Canadian census enumerators. Sometimes these categories were treated separately and sometimes they overlapped. In the 1911 Canadian census, all immigrants from India were listed as Hindus with their provincial distribution as 3 for Alberta, 2,292 for British Columbia, 13 for Manitoba, 2 for New Brunswick, 17 for Ontario and 14 for Quebec.<sup>48</sup> The district-wise distribution of Indian immigrants in the provinces was also shown under the category of Hindus. Hindu and Sikh categories were combined in tables showing the distribution pattern of Indians in the major cities. Thus 401 Hindus and Sikhs were listed for Vancouver city, 16 for Calgary and 87 for Victoria, the three important metropolitan centres for Indians in 1910.<sup>49</sup> Later censuses are no more helpful.<sup>50</sup> At the most, they offer information about the number of Punjabi entrants to Canada and their subsequent concentration.

In British Columbia, Jat Sikhs from Punjab formed a cohesive immigrant community which became a focal point for other immigrants from India.<sup>51</sup> A few individuals arrived from other Indian provinces as well such as Oudh and Bengal. And from the province of Punjab there were Muslims and Hindus. A majority of the Punjabi Sikhs were from the districts

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48. Canada Census, 1911.

49. Ibid.

50. Canada Census, 1921, 1931.

51. Johnston, East Indians in Canada, (Canada: Canadian Historical Association, 1984), p, 6.

of Hoshiarpur and Jullundur; the next largest number were from Ferozepur and Ludhiana and some also came from Amritsar.<sup>52</sup> Other Punjab districts were also represented, such as Ambala in the south-east Punjab, Lyallpur in the west Punjab, Lahore in the central districts and native states such as Patiala, Nabha and Faridkot.<sup>53</sup> But the number of people from these districts was miniscule. In the large body of Sikh immigrants from Hoshiarpur and Jullundur, the Mahton Punjabis comprised a minority.<sup>54</sup>

It would not have been easy for outsiders to distinguish the Mahton from the Jats among Punjabi immigrants in Canada at the turn of the twentieth century because immigrants did not use their got or caste names to distinguish themselves from each other when they first reached Canada. It was not until after 1947 that the use of last names became common after Canadian immigration began to require last names of those who applied to sponsor families.<sup>55</sup> From a distance, the early immigrant community appeared to be homogenous. Nearly ninety to ninety five percent of Punjabis were estimated to be Sikhs.<sup>56</sup> This identification, however, made no distinction between Nanak Panthis and Khalsa Panthis. As Nanak Panthis, the Mahton did not take pahul (initiation) or wear the Khalsa symbols. Their religious practices underwent a change in British Columbia, particularly in the 1920s after the establishment of their own village on Vancouver Island, but the Paldi Mahton remained essentially Nanak Panthis in their practice.<sup>57</sup>

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52. Ibid. Buchignani, Continuous Journey, p, 32. Das, Hindustani Workers, p, 3.

53. See lists of Outstanding letters issued to enable wives of East Indians to come to Canada; to enable East Indian boys to join their fathers in Canada; of illegal registrants, 1939. Public Archives of Canada, RG 76, file 536999. (hereafter PAC).

54. Ibid.

55. Interview, 5 October, 1993, male, 80 years, Vancouver.

56. Buchgnani, Continuous Journey, p, 11.

57. An immigrant from village Nadalon recalled about his uncle saying

The Punjabi Sikhs used Singh for a last name in Canada because it was not their custom to use their got name in everyday usage. Usually a got name was required for specific purposes such as marriage, legal matters, at the time of enlistment in the military or the government service. However, because an individual usually belonged to the same got as many families in his village, his got name, in normal circumstances, was not much use for personal identification. Upon being asked 'what is your name?' a villager was likely to reply, 'A Singh, son of B Singh,' in order to distinguish his tabbar from others. Unless he was specifically asked, he would not give his got. This feature is highlighted in Canadian immigration files.<sup>58</sup> One finds the mention of only 'Labh Singh, son of Jhanda Singh' or 'Tara Singh, son of Natha Singh', instead of 'Labh Singh Manhas' or 'Tara Singh Gill'. This form was not restricted to the immigration files alone. Pioneers, during interviews, answered the question about their names in the same fashion and the form is still present among villagers in Punjab. This practice creates special difficulty in sorting out the Mahton because they used the name Singh even when they were not Khalsa initiates.

The Mahton, however, formed a distinct group within the community of Punjabi immigrants in British Columbia. But in the absence of any contemporary survey of the caste background of Punjabi immigrants in Canada, their numerical strength cannot be easily established. Some scattered references appear in immigration files in the reports of officials in Canada who were familiar with India or Indians. For example, N.D. Daru of the Geological Survey of Canada wrote to the Under Secretary of States for India

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that if one had a choice one could worship Devi (goddess Durga) in Paldi British Columbia. Interview, 5 October, 1993, male, 65 years, Nanaimo.

58. See Lists. PAC, RG 76, file 536999.

mentioning that Punjabi men had obtained employment on a railroad but quit when they were asked by the employers to work with Punjabis whom they considered to be of lower caste.<sup>59</sup> He was only highlighting the presence of high or low status castes among immigrants. Similarly in 1907, Guy Anderson, an Indian officer and son-in-law to James Dunsmuir, the Lieutenant-Governor of British Columbia, included in a report on the welfare of Indian immigrants in British Columbia that they were "mostly Sikhs and Rajputs from Lahore district and all from Punjab".<sup>60</sup> By Rajputs from Lahore he probably meant Muslim Rajputs because the Mahton in British Columbia were from the Hoshiarpur district. Specific references to Jats, Brahmans and Sonars (goldsmiths), a low-status caste, also appear in the reports of W.W. Hopkinson from the Calcutta police, an inspector employed in the Canadian immigration department to report upon the activities of Indian immigrants in British Columbia.<sup>61</sup> The United States Dillingham Commission's report on immigrants on the Pacific Coast in 1910-11, stated that the majority of the Punjabi Sikhs in the region were Jats.<sup>62</sup> This information was based on the personal data obtained for about 400 Punjabis on the Pacific coast. The Mahton as Mahton or Rajputs from the Hoshiarpur district are not mentioned, either incidentally or specifically, in the immigration files or in the surviving reports of observers who mentioned the presence of castes among the immigrants.

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59. Commerce and Industry, Emigration, May 1907, 7-29-A.

60. Ibid.

61. Commerce and Industry, Emigration, September 1912, 1-B. *ibid*, January 1913, 13-B. *ibid*, February 1913, 28-32-B. See also Johnston "Surveillance of Indian Nationalists in North America, 1906-1918," in BC Studies, Summer (1988). Johnston, The Voyage of the Komagata Maru.

62. U.S. Senate, Reports of the Immigration Commission: Immigrants in Industries, Japanese and Other immigrant Races in the Pacific Coast and Rocky Mountain States, part 25, v1, 61st Congress, 2nd Session, Doc. no. 633. (Washington: Government Printing Office.)

It is possible to calculate the number of Mahton in Canada by making use of information in the files of the Canadian immigration department for the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s.<sup>63</sup> Paldi, as a village of origin of Punjabi immigrants from the Hoshiarpur district, is frequently mentioned in the Canadian immigration records. Other villages of the Mahton baradari (caste) are also mentioned such as Nadalon, Baddon, Dandian, Kalra, Ajnoha, Karnana and also Hukumatpur and Dholron, which were situated near Paldi in the Garhshankar tahsil. Canadian immigration files also mention Jat villages in the vicinity of Paldi such as Kharuadi, Khera, Sakruli, Mahilpur.<sup>64</sup> On the basis of village names, therefore, it becomes possible to establish the presence of caste groups among Punjabis in Canada because the villages in Punjab were known by their predominant castes. Similarly, the concentration of village names appearing in these files underscores the fact that Punjabis in Canada originated from a fairly localised region in their homeland.

The names of individuals and their villages are given in lists of applications made by men in Canada wishing to sponsor wives and sons in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>65</sup> The names of villages and individuals are also given in a 1939 list of illegal Punjabi immigrants.<sup>66</sup> Altogether, these lists provide information on 500 individuals which is a sizeable proportion of the total Punjabi community in Canada at the time.<sup>67</sup> This can be matched with names supplied by surviving pioneers in Canada and by villagers in Punjabi Paldi. It is possible to identify 19 Mahton names, along with their villages, in

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63. Lists. PAC, RG 76, 536999.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.

67. In 1920s and 1930s the total number of Punjabi immigrants fluctuated between 1,016 and 1400. Canada Census 1921, 1931. The fluctuation was higher in between census years. See Johnston, "Patterns of Sikh Migration."

the list of the 218 illegal East Indian immigrants which means that the Mahton comprised about 8.7 percent of the illegals who entered the country in the 1920s and 30s.<sup>68</sup> Eighty men and forty-five women and children are shown in Paldi group photographs taken in the late 1920s and 1930s.<sup>69</sup> This evidence suggests that Mahton baradari (caste) formed eight or ten percent of the Punjabi immigrant community in the 1920s and 1930s, a substantial element of the Punjabi immigrant community at the time.

The first Mahton immigrants in Canada, like the Jats and other early immigrants from Punjab, were all males and generally in the age range from 18 to 45 years.<sup>70</sup> Narayan Singh, Ganesha Singh, Gahna Singh, Karnail Singh, Thakur Singh and Gurditt Singh were the seniors while Ghanaiya Singh, Dhumman Singh, Maiya Singh, Naranjan Singh and Sahel Singh were some of the younger men. They arrived in British Columbia when the province was on the threshold of rapid, economic development and the major sectors of the provincial economy such as lumbering, fishing, and mining were expanding.<sup>71</sup> British Columbia was participating in an unprecedented economic boom prevailing across Canada, following the entry of millions of

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68. Lists. PAC, RG 76, file 536999.

69. Photographs, Joe Saroya Collection.

70. Interviews - 20 March, 1993, male, 80 years, Paldi Punjab; Group, 20 March, 1993, males, 80, 92, 65 years, Paldi Punjab; 26 March, 1993, male, 88 years, Paldi Punjab; 5 October, 1993, male, 80 years, Vancouver; 14 March, 1989, male 88 years, Coquitlam. See Das, Hindustani Workers on the Pacific Coast. Johnston, "Patterns of Sikh Migration." Buchignani, Continuous Journey.

71. Jean Barman, The West Beyond the West: A History of British Columbia, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991). George Woodcock, British Columbia: A History of the Province, (British Columbia: Douglas and McIntyre, 1990). Robert A.J. McDonald, "Victoria, Vancouver and the Economic Development of British Columbia," in Alan F.J. Artibise, ed. Town and City: Aspects of Western Canadian Urban Development. (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1981).

immigrants and the launching of two new trancontinental railways by the government. Between 1901 and 1911, almost three million immigrants arrived in the country, the largest number that has entered the country in any other comparable period before or since.<sup>72</sup> By the time the First World War curtailed immigration to Canada, British Columbia's population had reached 450,000<sup>73</sup> of which the immigrants comprised 214,000.<sup>74</sup> Punjabi immigrants formed a miniscule, almost negligible, proportion of this figure and the Mahton were just a fraction of that.

The lumber industry in the province underwent a phenomenal growth in reponse to an increasing Canadian and external demand for British Columbian lumber.<sup>75</sup> In 1900, the total investment in British Columbia timber stood at about \$2 million; by 1914 it had reached \$150 million. Three years later, British Columbia surpassed every other Canadian province in lumber production.<sup>76</sup> From 1901 to 1913, 65 to 75 percent of British Columbia's lumber was shipped east to the Prairies; 5 to 17 percent was exported overseas and the remainder was used in the province.<sup>77</sup> Lumbering became the principal area for employment for Punjabis, particularly for Paldi Mahton. Within a few years of their arrival, they had specialised in this industry. The opening they had was as unskilled labourers; but the structure of the industry, with many small operators who expanded rapidly and then contracted briefly, made it possible for them to become the

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72. Johnston, "Pattern of Sikh Migration," p, 301.

73. Barman, The West Beyond the West, p, 129.

74. McDonald, "Victoria, Vancouver and the Economic Development of British Columbia."

75. Barman, The West Beyond the West, see chapter 9. McDonald, "Victoria, Vancouver and the Economic Development of British Columbia." Stephen Gray, "Forest Policy and Administration in British Columbia." (M.A. thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1982).

76. Barman, The West Beyond the West, p, 184.

77. Interview, 14 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.



major lumber manufacturer in one region of the province, the Cowichan Valley on Vancouver Island.

Punjabis entered British Columbia at an opportune moment. Between 1901-1906 industrialists in the province faced a shortage of white workers made more acute by strikes and unionised demands.<sup>78</sup> The number of Chinese and Japanese immigrants had significantly declined in the years 1905-1907, following restrictions against their entry. Punjabis were cheap and ready replacements.<sup>79</sup> Unskilled labour was needed throughout mining and agricultural districts, in canneries, on the railways, in road work and land clearance and in the lumber industry. Punjabis who had come to Canada to work and who were not men of capital took the most immediate opportunities available. When the first of them arrived, they accepted jobs on farms and fruit ranches, in market gardens, canneries, and mills - wherever British Columbian employers needed men of muscle and strength.

In 1904 and 1905, some Punjabis were employed in the clearing of the land and in the sawmills.<sup>80</sup> By 1906, immigrants were working in the lumber mills of New Westminster, on railway construction at Grand Forks, loading coal cars at the wharves at Comox, and clearing land in Chilliwack.<sup>81</sup> They were also located at Nelson, working for the Canadian Pacific Railway and on fruit ranches.<sup>82</sup> In early 1907 some were also found in cement works or

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78. Between 1901 and 1906 industrialists in British Columbia lamented the dearth of cheap labour for the resource industries in response to a number of strikes by white workers and their unionised demands.

79. Ken Adachi, The Enemy that Never Was: A History of the Japanese Canadians. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976). Edgar Wickberg, Harry Con, Ronald J. Con, et al, From China to Canada: A History of the Chinese Communities in Canada. (Canada: McClelland and Stewart, 1982).

80. Buchignani, Continuous Journey, pp, 16-17.

81. Commerce and Industry, Emigration, May 1907, 7-29-A.

82. Ibid.

cutting wood.<sup>83</sup> By 1907, however, lumber mills employed a great majority of them as sawyers and loaders.<sup>84</sup> By 1908, the largest concentration of the Punjabi immigrants were found in the mills of the lower Fraser Valley - Vancouver region.<sup>85</sup> Starting from \$1.00 to \$1.25 a day in 1904-05, their wages rose to \$1.50 to \$2.00 a day by 1906 and reached \$2 to \$3 a day by 1907.<sup>86</sup> In 1908, Punjabis were making 45 to 60 dollars a month in British Columbia.<sup>87</sup>

Mahton Punjabi immigrants began their life in Canada by laying railway lines for the Canadian Pacific Railway.<sup>88</sup> The work was tough: "They worked whole day in the heat, in the rain and in the snow even."<sup>89</sup> For some of the early arrivals, the end of the day was harder: "After a long day's work my grandfather Narayan Singh and others slept in the barns with horses. They had nothing to cover themselves with. They shared their bedding with horses."<sup>90</sup> These experiences of the Paldi Mahton were common among their fellow Punjabis especially when they first arrived. In the late autumn of 1906, they were reported in the newspapers as "wandering about without tents of any description, with very meagre supply of blankets in the cold weather."<sup>91</sup> Sometimes the immigrants endeavoured to arrange shelter in heavy rain with thin sheets or slept in box-cars.<sup>92</sup> These immigrants accepted and

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83. Ibid.

84. Commerce and Industry, Emigration, May 1909, 13-A. Johnston, "Patterns of Sikh Migration."

85. Ibid. See also M. Jeanne Meyers Williams, "Ethnicity and Class Conflict at Maillardville/Fraser Valley Mills: The Strike of 1931." (M.A. thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1982).

86. Buchignani, Continuous Journey, p, 18. Commerce and Industry, Emigration, September 1907, 13-14-A.

87. Commerce and Industry, Emigration, May 1909, 13-A. See also Das, Hindustani Workers, pp, 55-60.

88. Interview, 25 September, 1993, male, 80 years, Vancouver.

89. Ibid.

90. Ibid.

91. Victoria Daily Colonist, 1906, August 14, p, 8.

92. Ibid.

endured difficult and trying conditions after their arrival. Within a short time, their situation improved after they developed their own community support system. By January 1908, the immigrants had built a Gurudwara in Vancouver.<sup>93</sup> The Gurudwara not only served as a place of worship for them but also as a community centre and it provided shelter and accomodation to the immigrants in time of need.

The preference that Mahton Punjabis showed for work in sawmills and lumber camps had a basis in the attitudes they brought with them from Punjab. At home they had worked with wood. In Punjabi villages, wood was used for many purposes - agricultural implements, carts, and household furniture. Moreover, the hard, outdoor work required at a sawmill appealed to their sense of men's work. Farm labour did not attract many Mahton Punjabis. Employment as a siri (field labourer) on the British Columbia farms conflicted with their notions of a zamindar's status in their homeland. A field labourer had lower izzat in their perceptions and, consequently, the work was seen as demeaning.<sup>94</sup> The Mahton saw a field labourer as someone in submission and obedience to zamindars and that status was difficult to accept even when away from their homeland. Farm work in British Columbia also paid comparatively less than work in the lumber industry. Unless compelled by circumstances, immigrants would not hire themselves out as field labourers as long as other employment was open to them. Similarly, they did not take other employment generally regarded as unworthy for men in their homeland. Domestic service, laundry work and hotel cooking were avoided by the Punjabis because these occupations were

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93. Johnston, East Indians in Canada, p, 8. Buchignani, Continuous Journey, pp, 32-33.

94. In the words of one immigrant "field labour was a choice only if one starved." Interview, 14 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

not respected in their home society even if they fetched good money.<sup>95</sup>

According to informants, the Mahton did not take to mining and fishing. Perhaps these areas were not attractive because immigrants did not face great difficulties in finding work in the lumber industry. As one informant stated: "I never heard that anyone worked in the mines in the old times. Some built railway tracks, few did little bit farming, some were busy digging roads in the bush. But basically they start with mill and go on with lumber. They do hard labour."<sup>96</sup>

Market gardening, which was their speciality in Punjab, did not carry much appeal for the Mahton in British Columbia. It was a low status occupation associated with their baradari (caste) and was one of the reasons why status was denied to them in their home society. Pursuing that occupation in Canada would not have served their purpose. On the other hand, by working in the lumber industry, they could not only earn more money but also improve their status. The prestige of occupations associated with caste was important to Paldi Mahton. Lakkar da kaam (lumber work) did not carry low prestige in their homeland. The social consequences of doing this work must have dawned upon Paldi Mahton from the time they entered the British Columbia lumber industry. Once they had moved into that area of employment, they did not opt for any other form of employment on a long term basis. The lumber industry was the primary field of employment for Jats as well as Mahton because it provided a regular and secure income.<sup>97</sup> For Mahton, however, lumber work also signified social importance because they were conscious that it did not signify low status.

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95. In British Columbia Punjabis did not become kitchen help or domestics. Johnston East Indians in Canada, p, 8.

96. Interview, 27 November, 1993, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

97. Johnston, "Patterns of Sikh Migration."

In the lumber industry, Mahton preferred contract work which allowed them to decide when they would work, how frequently and how long.<sup>98</sup> It was a method of working with which they were familiar. In their own villages, the kedars employed men on a contract basis. In British Columbia, contract work helped them understand the operation of a mill better. It provided them with the opportunity to learn the tricks of the lumber trade, particularly how to recruit labour and get the maximum output from it. The more they contracted with the employers of different mills, the better they learned the business. When they eventually acquired their own mill, they hired outside labour on a contract basis.<sup>99</sup>

The efforts to create a self-sufficient community supported by its own sawmill business required the sense of distinction that the Mahton had at two levels with the society of British Columbia. They were a small minority within a small minority that was not welcomed by the mainstream society. British Columbia's white population showed a profound dislike for the racial heterogeneity that the country's immigration policies had produced.<sup>100</sup> The responses of members of the mainstream society ranged from casual intolerance of non-whites to hostile verbal attacks, petty street violence, riots, restrictive legislations, and prejudicial government policies.<sup>101</sup> Before the Punjabis arrived, the Chinese and the Japanese had already been identified as unwanted immigrants.<sup>102</sup> In 1904, when Punjabis were arriving at the rate of

98. Interview, 27 November, 1993, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

99. Contract work was generally preferred by Punjabis. Das Hindustani Workers, p, 54.

100. Peter W. Ward, White Canada Forever. Patricia E Roy, A White Man's Province: British Columbia Politicians and Chinese and Japanese Immigrants 1858-1914. Johnston, East Indians in Canada. Buchignani, Continuous Journey. Barman, The West Beyond the West.

101. Ibid.

102. Adachi, The Enemy that Never was. Wickberg et al., From China to Canada.

only 2 or 3 a month, the city clerk of Vancouver complained to Ottawa about their large numbers.<sup>103</sup> By the time 1,300 had landed in 1906, Vancouver's two members of Parliament had gone to Prime Minister Wilfred Laurier to demand that the "Hindoos" be shut out.<sup>104</sup> The opposition to Punjabis had not been particularly vociferous early in 1906 but within months, as their numbers increased, the campaign in the press and in public forums intensified. It was exemplified in descriptions of the community as "an unwholesome group of starved decrepit humanity", which was making attempts to "foist upon this (white) community aged, infirm and impecunious persons."<sup>105</sup>

These descriptions became concrete images in the minds of white British Columbians. India was portrayed as the "hotbed of the most virulent and loathsome diseases such as bubonic plague, smallpox, Asiatic cholera and the worst form of venereal diseases."<sup>106</sup> Journalists and politicians disparaged Punjabis for their mannerism, their unkempt behaviour, their unclean habits.<sup>107</sup> Their religious symbol, the turban, appeared "strange" to Canadians, and because it was conspicuous, it served as a handy representation of all that white British Columbians rejected in the appearance of Punjabi immigrants.<sup>108</sup> The exclusion of Punjabi immigrants after 1908 was a consequence of these attitudes.

Some of the hostile feelings against Punjabis began with the complaints of white labourers about the threat of lowered wages, and a

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103. Johnston, East Indians in Canada, p, 6.

104. Ibid.

105. Victoria Daily Colonist, 1906, September 19, p, 10.

106. Ibid, 1906, October 18, p, 9.

107. Commerce and Industry, Emigration, July 1908, 15-19-A. See also Buchignani, Continuous Journey.

108. Commerce and Industry, Emigration, July 1908, 15-19-A.

depreciated standard of living presented by the willingness of Punjabis to accept lower rates of pay than the white workers.<sup>109</sup> However, a more fundamental source of white antagonism to Punjabis lay in a desire for racial exclusiveness and cultural homegeneity.<sup>110</sup> All levels of the mainstream society manifested prejudice against Asians, including Punjabis: trade unionists, politicians, veterans, businessmen, housewives, and clergy.<sup>111</sup> Premier Richard McBride declared that "British Columbia must be kept white...we have a right to say that our own kind and colour should enjoy the fruits of our labour."<sup>112</sup> The slogans, images and symbols of the period are represented well by the following lines of doggerel:

We welcome as brothers  
All white men still,  
But the shifty yellow race...  
Must find another place.<sup>113</sup>

Among the Mahton Punjabis, the meaning of such discrimination was sharp: "Whites...those days they think we are slaves. They did not consider associating with us at all."<sup>114</sup>

Nevertheless, immigrants did not consider leaving Canada on account of the racism they faced. They continued to earn in British Columbia and most of the time they ignored the white community. What held them in Canada was the possibility of making more money. That was a strong consideration because they were so aware of the improved standard of living

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109. As Asian workers Punjabis were paid less wages as a rule than the white workers. Buchignani, Continuous Journey, p, 18. Johnston, "Patterns of Sikh Migration," p, 302. Das, Hindustani Workers, p, 58.
110. Johnston, East Indians in Canada, p, 7. Buchignani, Continuous Journey. Ward, White Canada Forever.
111. Ward, White Canada Forever, p, 168.
112. Roy, White Man's Province, p, 229.
113. See Ward, White Canada Forever. Also quoted in Khushwant Singh, History of Sikhs, vol. 2, pp, 168-169, fn. 2.
114. Interview, 14 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

which their Canadian-earned incomes provided for their relatives at home.

Those days there was nothing to buy in the villages, not because of poverty or scarcity but because there were not many things. Not much variety. You would grow your own cotton, spin it, make simple clothes. You would use your own butter, and milk. You would keep buffalo, feed it on your land. That's it. Farmers expected nothing...whatever you have that's only good for you.<sup>115</sup>

Canada, on the other hand, meant affluence. "People have electric lights here; we have not even oil lamps."<sup>116</sup> Electric lights, metalled roads, tall buildings, the convenience of urban living in the cities of Vancouver, New Westminster and Victoria conjured up for Punjabi immigrants prospects of improvement and advancement within the measures of their own culture. Paldi Mahton Punjabis had no direct opportunity to live close to shahr (town) life in Punjab. In Canada, they were exposed to possibilities that had never before been immediately available to them. The prospect of improving the living standard and status of their families loomed larger in their minds than the racism and discrimination with which they had to contend. Like other immigrants on Canadian soil, Mahton Punjabis survived, existed, grew and prospered against all odds.

To survive, Punjabis relied on their own immigrant community and drew strength from their own traditions and cultural values. They made alliances and formed friendships within the boundaries of their kinship and village networks. The formation of living groups of four to a dozen individuals became the foundation of the community.<sup>117</sup> Such a development came naturally because Punjabis entered Canada in groups and

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115. Ibid, 22 March, 1989.

116. Ibid.

117. These responses are viewed as defensive reactions against the mainstream society in British Columbia. Buchignani, Continuous Journey, p, 36.



lived and worked in groups. Their networks and contacts had been with them from the beginning. However, their consciousness of themselves as Punjabis, rather than Mahton or Jat or members of a particular got or parivar, strengthened as time passed. Personal loans and partnerships among Punjabi immigrants became common and were necessary for survival and success in a racially discriminatory environment.<sup>118</sup> In these circumstances, Punjabis transcended caste divisions, and Mahton and Jats came together to form partnerships and to make investments.

In the lumber and logging industry, the immigrant workforce was separated into different working gangs. This was normal in sawmills and logging camps.<sup>119</sup> Punjabi immigrants, employed in the sawmills and lumber camps, worked in their own gangs, sleeping and eating together apart from the gangs of other nationalities. In a typical mill they did unskilled work outside, while the whites were doing skilled work inside.<sup>120</sup> Punjabis were always found in groups. "A majority of them travelled across the province or went down south to the United States in small groups or bunches. They lived in tents, worked some place, made some dollars and moved on to the next town and so forth. Those days they themselves wanted to keep in groups because they wanted no conflict with anybody else."<sup>121</sup> Sometimes members of the same tabbar also met accidentally in these tent camps. "My father Tara Singh did not know when his brother Kapoor Singh followed him from his village Kharaudi. Kapoor Singh had first landed in United States and then found his way to Canada. Then somebody in the tent (camp) informed my

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118. Ibid.

119. See Edmund Bradwin, The Bunkhouse Man: A Study of Work and Pay in the Camps of Canada, 1903-1914. (New York: AMS Press, rpt. 1968).

120. Ibid.

121. Interview, 28 January, 1994, male, 68 years, and female, 65 years, Burnaby.

father about the man from his own village and that was his brother." 122 Mahton moved in groups between the United States and Canada in their search for employment. A Paldi villager recalls that "they were somewhere near the border of America and Maiya Singh crossed over the border many times, and others too. There were other men from our village in America."<sup>123</sup>

Each gang had a character of its own. "People from different villages and backgrounds came together and pooled money. One person cooked and others worked. In some tents there were Jats who lived with others also. There was a Brahman, and an educated Muslim sharing with my father and others."<sup>124</sup> In one such group, Mahton and Jats decided to go into the sawmill business somewhere between 1910-1913. "Thirty-five East Indians (Punjabis) got together to lease a sawmill by pooling in money jointly, which was divided into equal shares."<sup>125</sup> They were aware that leasing a mill as a group would yield higher returns for all of them than doing mere labouring jobs or attempting to venture into business as individuals.<sup>126</sup> This group included a number of men from the village of Paldi - Narayan Singh, Dhumman Singh, Ganesha Singh, Maiya Singh, Ghanaiya Singh, Bhan Singh, Sahel Singh and others.

For Mahton immigrants, their collective history in Canada began when their village men came together to lease a mill in the Mission-Chilliwack area of the Fraser Valley. When they talk of this time, they do not mention Jats. Paldi immigrants in Canada, as well as villagers in Punjab, explain that the

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122.. Ibid, male, 68 years.

123. Interview, 15 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

124. Interview, 28 January, 1994, male, 68 years and female, 65 years, Burnaby.

125. Interview, 27 December, 1988, male, white, 84 years, Langley.

126. Interview, 14 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

Mahton kept to themselves even when they formed mill partnerships with Jats out of economic necessity. In any case, the initiative to lease a mill apparently was taken by the Paldi Mahton partners.<sup>127</sup> One Mahton account goes like this:

Our people first settled in 1913 near Mission area, close to Vancouver. They ran a mill there. There was a mill owned by a white man which was not running and our people had no work that time, they only worked in farms. So they thought they had nothing better to do, let's take the mill. They bought the mill and it began to work. Our people made money. Then the white man wanted the mill back. He became greedy. There was a Muslim among our people, he was educated. He intervened to insist that legally white man could not take the mill back. So our men continued to run the mill and then made more money and with that opened another mill at Roosedale. There they made yet more money and after that they moved to Duncan.<sup>128</sup>

In 1913, before they took over the mill on lease, Mahton Punjabis were doing farm work in the Chilliwack area but not as field labourers. They had "leased a forty acre farm from a lady and were busy digging potatoes on it and getting paid \$2.50 for a ton. There was no other work, for anyone, those days."<sup>129</sup> In 1913, the lumber industry in British Columbia entered a deep slump following a recession in the United States. However, when immigrants decided about the mill, they quit the farm. Roosedale, where their first mill was located, was eight miles from Chilliwack. The leased mill at Roosedale was called Cheam Lumber Company.<sup>130</sup> One informant, a parivar member of the Paldi Mahton shareholders, gave the following account:

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127. Interview, 23 September, 1993, male, 80 years, Vancouver. Interview, 14 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.
128. Interview, 23 September, 1993, male, 80 years, Vancouver.
129. Interview, 27 December, 1988, male, white, 84 years, Langley.
130. John F.T. Saywell, Kaatza: The Chronicles of Cowichan Lake. (British Columbia: The Cowichan Lake District Centennial Committee, 1967), p, 136.

The genesis for the settlement of our people in Canada were made when they opened a mill near Chilliwack much before 1913. That time our people were working with other Indians (Punjabis) about fifteen or twenty in all for a white mill owner when they were suddenly told one day that the mill was going to close because of the drop in sales of lumber. The white owner was not able to continue because the mill was not bringing him any profit. So our people with Atmaram as their manager decided to rent out the mill themselves. They didn't mind about the low profits if they could make it run. So they persuaded the white owner to lease them the mill. Since prices were falling low for the timber and lumber sales were bad, our people were able to rent the mill at low prices. They pooled their resources and savings to pay the rent. White man gave away the mill as he got no money out of the mill.

Within two or three years when lumber market improved again and lumber trade came back to its old position and the prices of lumber became normal, the white owner wanted the mill back from our people. But our people were not ready to return the mill. Having failed in his attempts to persuade our people to hand over the mill back to him, white man used force to throw out Indians (Punjabis). One day he brought a few of his friends to throw out our people from their leased property, both the mill and the camp. But Indians (Punjabis) stood their ground and particularly Atmaram who was little bit educated and had legal knowledge, held an axe in his one hand and challenged the white owner and his group to enter beyond the line of their property. After all our people owned that land legally. They had leased the property and were regularly paying rent for it.

But this incident was very scary for our people, they were disgusted at the show of coercion and force by the white owner who was nice only when his business was low.

It was under these circumstances that our people moved to another mill, close to the one they had rented from the white owner and after that they went to Paldi, on Vancouver Island.<sup>131</sup>

The Roosedale mill proved to be profitable. Within a year of its operation, the shareholders made good money supplying lumber to local farmers.<sup>132</sup> By 1916, they had let the mill go because the good timber at the site of the Cheam Lumber Company had all been cut. In the meantime, the

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131. Interview, 14 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

132. See A.O. Tate, "Labourer to Lumber King is the Saga of Hindu Immigrant", Joe Saroya Collection.

lumber industry in the province had begun to revive and they continued to look for another sawmill. Their search ended when they received news about a mill near Roosedale that had gone broke and was practically left vacant by its owner. "So they, all the thirty-five share holders, went around and had a look at it. After finding out what the trustees wanted, they made a deal because it suited them. So they all put forward the dollars they had saved and gotten together in the company's account in a bank and leased another mill in New Westminster."<sup>133</sup>

This mill that the immigrants leased was called Markham Lumber Company and it was situated at the Strawberry Hill south of New Westminster.<sup>134</sup> A couple of companies had been at that site before the Mahton shareholders took over but the remaining timber ran out faster than they anticipated.<sup>135</sup> They operated that mill for ten or twelve months before moving to Vancouver Island to establish their own mill as owners.

A number of als from Paldi village in Punjab were involved at the Roosedale mill. There were men from the bania parivar, boleya de, rode, khuhi de and a few others. There were Tara Singh from the boleya tabbar, Gurditt Singh from the rode al, Thakur Singh of chhappar wale, Dhumman Singh, Ghanaiya Singh, Maiya Singh, Bhan Singh from bania parivar, and Chajja Singh of khuhi de tabbar, Sahel Singh, and Mala Singh were from other families.<sup>136</sup> Bania al had the largest representation and consequently

133. Interview, 27 December, 1988, male, white, 84 years, Langley.

134. Saywell, Kaatza, p, 136.

135. Interview, 27 December, 1988, male, white, 84 years, Langley. See also A.O. Tate "Labourer to Lumber King is the Saga of Hindu Immigrant." Bruce Ramsay, "How the East Indians came to B.C.: Vancouver's Battle of the Komagata Maru." Province, 22 February, 1964, p, 4, Joe Saroya Collection.

136. Group interview, 20 March, 1993, males: 80 years, boleya de; 65 years, Burchhe; 92 years, al not known. Interview, 25 March, 1993, male, 88 years, khuhi de, Paldi Punjab. Interview, 25 March, 1989, male, 88 years,

the strongest voice in the group. Despite that, the stories that survive suggest that communication was good among the immigrants and people understood each other's needs.<sup>137</sup> A number of Paldi family units had formed an alliance in the Fraser Valley region and collectively they preserved a common sense of obligation and izzat in their relations with each other. Informants from the Paldi Mahton baradari (caste) emphasised that these men's respect for traditional values allowed all to benefit equally from the economic opportunity that they jointly exploited.

Their success in launching a lumber business as leaseholders at Roosedale made the Canadian connection more important both for the immigrant men and for their families in Punjab. A number of the Paldi Mahton immigrants departed for Punjab from Canada in 1913-14.<sup>138</sup> They carried the news that "our people were doing well in the lakkar (lumber) business and were making a good income."<sup>139</sup> The news affected the outlook of all villagers and particularly the immediate and close family of the emigrants. They offered support to their men overseas by not requiring them to return for good. Instead they acquiesced when their men decided to extend their stay in Canada. Immigrants maintained constant contact with their families through letters, by repatriating part of their incomes, and through temporary visits.<sup>140</sup> Not everybody managed very well, but generally men with families, such as Bhan Singh bania, remained in regular touch with

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bania al, Coquitlam. Interview, 25 September, 1993, male, 80 years, bania al, Vancouver.

137. Interviews with males: 88 years, Coquitlam; 80 years, Vancouver; 72 years, Paldi, British Columbia.

138. Interview, 5 October, 1993, male, 80 years, Vancouver.

139. Interview, 22 March, 1993, male, 80 years, Paldi Punjab.

140. See letters, Joe Saroya Collection. Temporary visits to the village in Punjab was a common feature and nobody denied it during interviews.

them.<sup>141</sup> The ongoing process of returning to visit every few years reduced the physical distance between immigrants and their families and kept Paldi villagers in close contact with Canada.

Paldi immigrants were not the only Punjabis to go back and forth between Canada and India. This behaviour was consistent with the sojourning mentality with which these immigrants had entered Canada.<sup>142</sup> They came to earn, not to settle permanently, in the land of their immigration. It therefore made sense for them to return home in order to spend or invest their foreign-earned savings. Even after the 1908 ban on new immigration, and after the Canadian government tightened its rules on return migration following an exodus of Sikh freedom fighters from North America in 1914, these men managed to get back to India periodically without losing Canadian domicile.<sup>143</sup> Those who left in 1908 came back in 1909; those who left in 1911 returned around 1915-16; those, such as the Paldi immigrants, who left in 1913-14 came back, usually with sons or other male relative after their baradari (caste) men had established their own mill on Vancouver Island in the 1920s.<sup>144</sup> Their reasons for returning to Punjab varied. Some went home for a short duration to attend to family matters such as supervising cultivation, paying land revenue or settling a tenancy. For Narayan Singh of the bania al "it was not worth continuing in Canada in 1913 because his savings were substantial."<sup>145</sup> Some such as Ganesha Singh of boleya tabbar went home to marry.<sup>146</sup> Around 1913, a large number of

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141. Group interview, 20 March, 1993, males, 80, 92, 65, years, Paldi Punjab. Interview, 5 October, 1993, male, 80 years, Vancouver.

142. See Johnston, "Patterns of Sikh Migration."

143. Ibid. Buchignani, Continuous Journey, pp, 36-39; 65-66.

144. See chapter 6.

145. Interview, 30 September, 1993, male, 80 years, Vancouver.

146. Interview, 22 March, 1993, male, 80 years, Paldi Punjab.

Punjabi immigrants left Canada for good and that reduced the numerical strength of the men in Canada significantly.<sup>147</sup> The members of the reduced group, however, proved to be major players in the evolution of their distant village. The Paldi immigrants who remained behind belonged to the bania parivar and boleya tabbar.

While linkages were being maintained between Paldi village in Punjab and British Columbia, Mahton immigrants were exploiting the available economic opportunities as much as possible. Late in 1916, when they were still operating the mill at the Strawberry Hill in New Westminster, they learned that the Canadian Pacific Railway was selling timber on Vancouver Island.<sup>148</sup> This timber stood on a twenty-mile stretch of land along the Esquimalt and Nanaimo railway on Vancouver Island and was part of a land grant originally held by the Dunsmuir family. The Canadian Pacific Railway purchased it from them in 1905.<sup>149</sup> The forest zone in the Esquimalt and Nanaimo land grant had not been tapped before it was put up for sale. Moreover, the Canadian Pacific Railway welcomed immigrants of any origin and nationality to help exploit the rich forest resource in their railway belt. This was significant, because Punjabis could not obtain timber rights on crown land in British Columbia.

The Mahton immigrants were interested in purchasing timber land on Vancouver Island as soon as they received information about it.<sup>150</sup> However, they considered the option from several angles. In Roosedale and later at

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147. Johnston, "Patterns of Sikh Migration." Buchignani, Continuous Journey, p, 39.

148. Interview, 27 December, 1988, male, white, 84 years, Langley.

149. Rajala, Legacy and Challenge: Lumber Industry in the Cowichan Lake Region. Robert D. Turner, Vancouver Island Railroads. (San Marino: Golden West Books, 1973).

150. Interview, 27 December, 1988, male, white, 84 years, Langley.



Strawberry Hill, they shared the running of their mill with Jats. Venturing into a deal with the Canadian Pacific Railway, a company which not long ago employed them as unskilled labourers, would require an expansion and enlargement of the scale of their mill operations. They did not doubt their ability to start and run a mill on their own but their financial base was shaky even though they had made progress in the lumber business. Their own savings appeared to be marginal compared to the investment needed to start their own mill. One could not predict that the mill would bring success and profits. Nonetheless, in 1916 prospects in the lumber industry seemed bright as it was then rapidly expanding in British Columbia.<sup>151</sup> To reach a consensus on these issues, Paldi immigrants held an ikkath (conference) of their own baradari (caste) men that, according to a bania al informant, excluded Jats and other Punjabi immigrants. In his words "Khalsa (other Punjabi Sikhs) were not made part of this decision-making process."<sup>152</sup>

At this conference, Paldi men such as Tara Singh, Bhan Singh, Dhumman Singh, Karnail Singh, Sahel Singh, Ghanaiya Singh and Maiya Singh decided to start a company by putting their joint shares (patti) in the name of two individuals, Dhumman Singh and Maiya Singh.<sup>153</sup> Dhumman Singh at the time was one of the bania and the senior of the group. He also had more money than others.<sup>154</sup> Maiya Singh, the cook for the group at the Strawberry Hill and the new mill, became part of the mill-founding because the mill was named after him.<sup>155</sup> "Our men wanted a straight-forward name

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151. Gray, "Forest Policy and Administration in British Columbia," p, 18. Barman, The West Beyond the West, see chapter 9.

152. Interview, 25 September, 1993, male, 80 years, Vancouver.

153. Ibid. Interview, 14 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

154. Interview, 15 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

155. Interview, 25 September, 1993, male, 80 years, Vancouver. Interview, 6 february, 1994, male, 88 years, Coquitlam. See also Newspaper Clipping without reference, "How the East Indians came to B.C.", Joe Saroya

for the company. So somebody in the group uttered Maiya many times until Mayo uttered out and so the company was named Mayo Lumber company."<sup>156</sup> The names of these two individuals appeared on the papers for the mill, although a number of others from the group had contributed money and participated as silent partners.<sup>157</sup> The bania family, because of the number of its men involved, had the maximum interest.

Subsequently, the partners decided to include Jats in their mill venture.<sup>158</sup> It does not appear from the information obtained during interviews that the Paldi partners in this venture tried to include their Jat partners from Strawberry hill.<sup>159</sup> Instead they talked to Jats from their own local region in Punjab, the Garhshankar tahsil. These were men who were in Canada but not at Strawberry Hill.<sup>160</sup> It was not difficult to trace villagers from one's own local region back home because the Punjabi immigrant population was so small. Information could be easily acquired at the Gurduaras, the centres of the Punjabi immigrant community in British Columbia and individuals could be located through a kind of network linking Punjabis in different camps across the province. Word would spread as individuals travelled from one camp to another. The first Jat immigrants who became shareholders with the Mahton in the Vancouver Island mill were Shyam Singh of Mahilpur, Bhagwan Singh of Kharaudi village, and

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Collection.

156. Interview, 25 September, 1993, male, 80 years, Vancouver.  
 157. See Agreements, 16 January, 1917, Joe Saroya Collection. Interview, 14, 15, March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam. Names of many partners with share money ranging from 100 and over appear in the letters written to immigrants from their family members in Punjab. See Joe Saroya Collection.  
 158. Interview, 14, 15 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.  
 159. Ibid. Interview, 25 September, 1993, male, 80 years, Vancouver.  
 160. Ibid.

Juvalla Singh of Sakruli village.<sup>161</sup> All realized the need to involve an individual with some education and so they called Kapoor Singh, also from Kharaudi village, who was then in Toronto, to join the group. "His advantage was that he was tenth grade pass at the time, which was very high education then."<sup>162</sup>

The Mahton and Jat immigrants formed two private companies on 16th October 1916 - The Pacific Lumber Company and The Mayo Lumber Company.<sup>163</sup> The shareholders, on paper, were the same for each of the companies: Shyam Singh, Bhagwan Singh and Kapoor Singh among the Jats and among the Paldi men were Dhumman Singh and Maiya Singh.<sup>164</sup> The names of the two Paldi men appeared in an altered form in the company document. Maiya Singh became Mayo Singh and Dhumman Singh became Doman Singh "because Canadians could not pronounce those names with ease".<sup>165</sup> The stated capital for the Pacific Lumber Company was \$20,000 and for the Mayo Lumber company it was \$23,000.<sup>166</sup> Of this amount, the shareholders paid \$6,000 for each share of the company in 1916.<sup>167</sup> By early 1917, however, the two companies appeared to be in financial difficulty and shareholders were selling their shares to other Punjabis.<sup>168</sup> At this time, the Paldi men sent Mayo Singh and Doman Singh and two others to the Canadian Pacific Office in Victoria to acquire timber land in the name of the Mayo Lumber Company.<sup>169</sup> Doman Singh, the senior member of this party,

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161. Ibid. See Agreements, Joe Saroya Collection.

162. Interview, 14, 15 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

163. Agreements, Joe Saroya Collection.

164. Ibid.

165. Interview, 14, 15 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

166. Agreements, Joe Saroya Collection.

167. Ibid.

168. Ibid.

169. Interview, 14, 15 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

was made responsible for negotiation with the CPR and establishing "our" land.<sup>170</sup>

The Mayo Lumber Company acquired from the Canadian Pacific Railway 400 acres of timber land in the forestry zone of the Cowichan Valley region in 1917. The land was granted at the cost of \$10 an acre.<sup>171</sup> The exact description of the land parcel was Cowichan assessment district, identifier number 002-491-125, part of section 10, range 4, Sahtlam District, lying to the north of the right-of-way of the Esquimalt and the Nanaimo Railway company.<sup>172</sup> By coincidence, the property was at a place known as Mayo Siding.<sup>173</sup> The Mayo Lumber Company name had a Punjabi origin while Mayo Siding was definitely a Canadian name. Possibly the similarity of the two names attracted the Paldi partners to the site. By 1941, however, the same Mayo Siding would become "Paldi" in British Columbia.<sup>174</sup> There were more functional advantages of the Mayo Siding site that could have influenced the shareholders. It was adjacent to Currie Creek whose water could be used to build a pond to store logs; and the railway line ran right through the property. After completing the formalities at Victoria, Doman Singh and the other two returned to the Strawberry Hill, while Mayo Singh went to the Sahtlam district to survey the property. By mid 1917, the Paldi Mahton had given up their leased mill at Strawberry Hill and by December 1917 they were settled in the Cowichan Valley.<sup>175</sup>

The response that awaited the Punjabi founders of the Mayo Lumber

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170. Ibid.

171. Interview, 11 October, 1993, male, 72 years, Paldi B.C.

172. State of Title Certificate, Joe Saroya Collection.

173. See British Columbia Directory 1918-1941.

174. Ibid.

175. Cowichan Leader, 30, August 1917, p,1, announced the arrival of Hindus in the Valley. Interview, 14, 15 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

Company in the Cowichan Valley was unexpected. Even before their arrival, the news about their mill and its timber acquisitions had been announced in the Cowichan valley's local newspapers. Significantly, the tone of the announcement was welcoming and positive. The Cowichan Leader announced on its front page in August 1917, "Hindus to operate mill in Cowichan".<sup>176</sup> The arrival of Hindu lumber interests raised the hopes and expectations of the people in the area interested in economic development. The same article explained that - "The Mayo Lumber Company operating "extensively" on the Mainland is reported to have acquired timber tracts on the Esquimalt and Nanaimo land in the eastern vicinity of the Sahtlam Station...this venture marks the advent of the Hindu lumber interests in Cowichan."<sup>177</sup>

This article, however, did not mean a wholehearted welcome from the whites in the Cowichan Valley. It simply indicated that the valley was looking for the development of its resources. Logging was the richest resource in the area, and much of it remained untapped.<sup>178</sup> A new lumber-manufacturing venture was bound to generate an encouraging response because it meant increased demand for the valley's products, and larger local markets and faster progress. The population of the region was small, even in the second decade of the twentieth century. In 1912, the valley's inhabitants totalled 3,500 and there had not been a large increase by 1918.<sup>179</sup> The opening of the Mayo mill in the vicinity of the Sahtlam district was taken as a sign

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176. Cowichan Leader, 30 August, 1917, p, 1. Elizabeth Blanche Norcross, The Warm Land, (British Columbia: Evergreen Press, 1959), p, 72.

177. Cowichan Leader, 30 August, 1917, p, 1.

178. Rajala, Legacy and Challenge, see chapter 1.

179. Arthur James Wright, "A Study of the Social and Economic Development of the District of North Cowichan, 1850-1912," B.A. Essay, University of British Columbia, 1966, p, 107.

that the valley's economy was about to take off.

Unfortunately, the white population in the valley was no less racist than in the rest of the province. Such public places in the region as theatres, restaurants and hotels were closed to all Asians including Punjabis. And Punjabis drew particular discrimination because of their beards and turbans. As a white informant explained:

When Mayo Singh reached Sahtlam district to look at the property and hunted around for a room in a small hotel, he was refused accomodation. They said no, we don't accept people with beard and turban. He was forced to hunt for a place in the woods to sleep for the night where he was fortunate to find an East Indian (Punjabi) Sunder Singh who worked on a section of the CPR railway there and lived in a shack with rats as companions.<sup>180</sup>

In the city of Duncan, where the white population included the families of a number of British India army officers, Punjabis were aware of their British Indian attitudes. Some of these officers had served in the Punjab in the 1/35th Sikh regiment.<sup>181</sup>

They were too shocked to see an ordinary Punjabi come and settle in Canada, no different from their own. Most of them knew Punjabi and Urdu, our language, otherwise they could not have served in the Punjab army. Sometimes if a Punjabi passed by their houses in Duncan, they hurled abuses in Punjabi and Urdu so that we could hear.<sup>182</sup>

Acceptance or rejection at the hands of whites made little difference in determining the goals of these immigrants. They were not competing for a place in the white society. They measured success or failure according to the reactions of their families and their village communities. Their drive to operate a mill on Vancouver Island had behind it a preoccupation with the

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180. Interview, 27 December, 1988, male, white, 84 years, Langley.

181. Cowichan Leader, 15 January, 1920, p. 5. Interview, 5 October, 1993, male, 65 years, Nanaimo.

182.. Interview, 5 October, 1993, male, 65 years, Nanaimo.

position of their families, kinfolk and themselves within the society of their village in Punjab. It was therefore important to make their mill a success. The Paldi Mahton thus ventured ahead with determination to make big profits in the lumber industry of the Cowichan Valley.

## Chapter 5

### Establishment of Little Punjab in Canada

The Paldi Punjabi founders of the Mayo Lumber Company were one of the many small-time mill operators in the Cowichan Valley. The timber land they had purchased in the Sahtlam district was a valuable resource and they wished to draw the largest possible profit from it. The concept of mill "ownership" was closely related to their notions of higher izzat and their ownership of a mill overseas had greater significance. The acquisition of wealth denoted an altered identity and, in consequence, a higher status. Upon settling in the Sahtlam district, therefore, the immigrants worked hard and made use of every possible opportunity to achieve success for their mill. Through their efforts, the Mayo mill not only flourished but attained a commendable reputation as the generator of wealth and employment in the Cowichan Valley. The financial security provided by their mill's success gave the immigrants an opportunity to integrate their Canadian resource base with the life of their families in Punjab and they successfully contributed to a change in the status of their familial and village baradari (caste) brethren.

The Sahtlam district was situated in a region where the Cowichan Valley descended to an altitude of below 150 meters above sea level. It was covered with thick glacial deposits of till, gravel, sand and silt - good soil to support timber.<sup>1</sup> The region experienced a moderate, maritime climate with annual average temperatures around 9.6 degrees celsius, annual rainfall measuring 906 mm and a little snow in the winter.<sup>2</sup> The climate was not much different from other parts of the province where many of the

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1. See J.T. Files, "Geology of the Cowichan Lake Area, Vancouver Island, B.C." B.C. Department of Mines, Bull 37, 1955.
  2. Ibid.



immigrants had spent a number of years before moving to the island. The only difference was that on the island, humidity was slightly higher. By British Columbian standards, this was a congenial climate for the growth of the forests which covered the Cowichan Valley. The region was known for its "carpet of dense foliage...[and] ceiling of towering trees".<sup>3</sup> The area where the Mayo mill was established was dominated by coniferous forests of Douglas fir, hemlock, red cedar, balsam fir and spruce which provided the Mayo Lumber company with rich timber resources. Their commercial value increased considerably in the 1920s as the Cowichan Valley lumber industry experienced a phenomenal growth.<sup>4</sup> The Paldi immigrants prospered at their expense.

Railways played an important role in promoting the growth of the lumber industry in the Cowichan valley. From the time of Robert Dunsmuir, the Esquimalt and Nanaimo Railway Company favoured disposing of its land to private investors. In the 1890s and early 1900s, large stretches of the company's private timber land had been sold to a number of lumber companies on the island because the railway hoped to profit from the logging traffic on its tracks.<sup>5</sup> Private companies were attracted towards the railway land because it was cheap and easily available. The timber on the Esquimalt and Nanaimo property was not directly taxed by the government, consequently profits earned from that source remained largely within the hands of the logging and milling operators or the railway.<sup>6</sup>

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3. Wright, "A Study of the Social and Economic Development of the District of North Cowichan." MA Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1967, p. 51.
  4. Rajala, Legacy and Challenge, Chapter 1.
  5. Ibid.
  6. Gray, "Forest Policy and Administration in British Columbia, 1912-1928," p. 20.

The Esquimalt and Nanaimo Company had granted large tracts of its timber land in the Cowichan region to the American Rockefeller and Standard Oil companies before the twentieth century.<sup>7</sup> The Canadian Pacific Railway, after finalising its lease of the Esquimalt and Nanaimo Railway in 1905, continued the same pattern and also granted large blocks of land to local timber companies in the Cowichan Valley region.<sup>8</sup> On the eve of the First World War, the principal timber holders of the region were big enterprises such as the Eastern Lumber Company, the Victoria Lumber and Manufacturing Company, and the Boyd Company.<sup>9</sup> They carried out their operations on a wide-scale while continuing to acquire more tracts of timber land.<sup>10</sup> After 1916, when the lumber industry was rapidly expanding in the region, many small and medium-scale firms also acquired land in the Cowichan Valley. The Hersfall Company Limited and the Ferguson Brothers were relatively small firms which made strong beginnings in the area at the time.<sup>11</sup> They were in the process of expansion when the Mayo Lumber Company acquired its timber land in the same capacity and became a participant in the Cowichan region's growing stature as one of the most important lumbering centres in the province.<sup>12</sup> Two other companies, the Hillcrest Lumber Company and the Charter Lumber Company, also established their operations in the Sahtlam district at the same time as the Mayo mill. Together, these ventures were regarded as the pioneering mills in

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7. Rajala, Legacy and Challenge, p. 23.

8. *Ibid.* pp. 16-23.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.* British Columbia Lumberman, September 1926, p. 24.

12. Cowichan Leader, 29 January, 1920, p. 1. *Ibid.*, 21 March, 1918, p.1.

this district.<sup>13</sup> Of these, the Mayo mill, being a Punjabi immigrant venture, was unique.

Mayo Siding was a remote region and it provided a different setting for the Paldi Mahton immigrants. In 1917, it was known as a sawmill and logging camp with a population of just 100 and was located about seven miles northwest of Duncan.<sup>14</sup> The Siding was isolated from the other centres of population because of the nature of the Sahtlam district's lumber economy. There were a number of sawmills and lumber camps in the region, situated two or three miles apart, and each with its own population settled at the site<sup>15</sup>. There was only one mill at Mayo Siding, known as the Young and Paitson Lumber Manufacturers, when the Punjabi immigrants first arrived there.<sup>16</sup> The Hillcrest Lumber Company was established at a distance of three to four miles from the Mayo mill in 1918, while the Charter Lumber Company which came in 1920 was located further west at Sahtlam station.<sup>17</sup>

The population was widely scattered beyond these mill settlements. The closest settlement to the Mayo mill was spread along the Old Cowichan highway, starting about a quarter of a mile west of the Mayo mill in the direction of the town of Duncan.<sup>18</sup> The population increased considerably from there and clustered into the Quamichan and the Somenos districts, which were about 20 to 30 miles from the Mayo mill.<sup>19</sup> People also lived to

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13. Ibid. See map 3.

14. British Columbia Directory, 1918.

15. Interview, 5 October 1993, male, 80 years, Vancouver. Interview, 6 February, 1994, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

16. British Columbia Directory, 1918.

17. Cowichan Leader, 20 January, 1920, p. 1.

18. See map 4.

19. Interview, 6 February, 1994, male, 88 years, Coquitlam. Interview, 5 October, 1993, male 80 years, Vancouver.

the north of the Mayo mill, in the direction of Cowichan Lake. The habitation in this direction was located at the Honeymoon Bay Lake Logging Company which was roughly eight miles from the Mahton-owned mill. There were other mill towns further down in the same direction. The one at Youbou was the best known. By the 1940s, a number of Punjabis worked both at the Honeymoon Bay and Youbou mills. There were also some farm settlements in the vicinity of the Mayo mill but they were widely dispersed. Only one or two farms, located on the Old Cowichan highway, could be considered close to the mill. One of these, the Jordan farm, supplied milk, eggs and other necessities regularly to the Punjabis at the mill.<sup>20</sup> Characteristically, even these settlements became distant as one turned off the Old Cowichan highway and ascended the mountain for about half a mile to reach the mill concealed by thick forest. There were no roads leading directly to the mill site when the immigrants first came, but a gravel road was built in the 1920s to connect the highway to the mill.<sup>21</sup> The direct contact of immigrants with the mainstream population was thus reduced and the likelihood of facing racial inequality and discrimination on a day-to-day basis diminished. White British Columbians eventually became part of their lives at the mill but most immigrants interacted with them only in the capacity of fellow workers.

One other aspect of the new surroundings was important for the Mahton immigrants: the nature of their relationship with the Jat immigrants. Apart from the few Jats who had accompanied them in the hopes of achieving economic success, there were no other Punjabis in the area in 1917.

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20. Interview, 5 October, 1993, male, 80 years, Vancouver.

21. Ibid. Interview, 6 February, 1994, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

<sup>22</sup> The Paldi Mahton immigrants could, therefore, work for the success of their own community. But as a baradari (caste), they could not function in isolation from other Punjabis because they sought legitimacy for their altered roles from other castes, and their mobility became evident when measured against the tradition of their own Punjabi background. The Jats in British Columbia were particularly important for the Mahton because their common immigrant experience had reduced the perceived social distance between them. Jats thus remained an important feature of existence for the Mahton immigrants after they established their own mill. When the Mayo mill acquired the characteristics of a Punjabi village in the 1920s, a large number of Jats came to work and settle there.

When the Mayo mill owners first arrived at Mayo Siding in the Sahtlam district, their site was all bush and timber. <sup>23</sup> But optimism was high in the group because they owned a resource which could enable them to become regular suppliers of lumber. Mahton Punjabis were not businessmen per se, neither were they speculators or investors. But their agricultural background and experience as labourers and lease holders in the lumber industry had taught them how to recognise a rich resource when they found one. They immediately became aware that - "their leased property had good timber, that their holdings had good stands of it and that their timber could be easily converted into cash."<sup>24</sup> Immigrants understood the demands of the market and immediately set out to make the maximum profit out of it. Upon reaching the site in 1917, the owners made quick arrangements "to put up a

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22. Ibid. Some Punjabi owned mills came up in the region in the mid 1920. British Columbia Lumberman, January 1920, p. 34. Ibid, July 1922, p. 42. Ibid, October 1922, p. 48. Cowichan Leader, 8 October, 1925, p. 7.

23. Interview, 14, 15, March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

24. Ibid.

tent for immediate shelter until the time when some trees were cut with axe and old fashioned saws and some area was cleared to construct a couple of houses. About the same time an early structure for the mill was built." 25 Thus emerged the site of a Punjabi-owned mill in the Cowichan Valley which in a few years acquired an elaborate structure.

A basic structure for the Mayo mill was constructed by 1918 but at the end of that year the owners suffered a set-back when the mill was gutted by fire. 26 The immigrants, however, renewed their efforts and by early 1920 new buildings were ready at the site. The mill owners also developed housing facilities at the mill site for the potential work force. In the year 1920, the Mayo mill comprised twenty separate, individual dwelling quarters and about four or five bunk houses, two of which were double storeyed and had a capacity to house 50 or 60 individuals at a time. 27 The residential capacity at the Mayo mill was substantial and it was noticed with more than customary interest by others involved in the lumber industry, not only in the Cowichan Valley but also at more distant Vancouver Island sawmills. The representatives of The British Columbian Lumberman, the journal which catered to the general provincial lumber industry, accorded a special reputation to the "Hindu owned mill for its unusually smart layout and tidy buildings." 28 During the peak years of its development, the Mayo mill town housed almost 500 inhabitants: workers and families as well. 29

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25. Ibid.

26. Interview, 27 December, 1988, male, white, 84 years, Langley.

27. British Columbia Lumberman, January 1920, p. 27. Interview, 14, 15 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam. Interview, 5 October, 1993, male, 80 years, Vancouver. Interview, 11 October, 1993, male, 72 years, Paldi B.C.

28. British Columbia Lumberman, January 1920, p. 27.

29. These numbers fluctuated. In the mid 1920s, however, the community was substantial. The official number of employees ranged between 200

The immigrants converted the Esquimalt and Nanaimo railway line passing through their property into an asset. They constructed the sawmill next to it.<sup>30</sup> The cost of transporting their lumber to the market was therefore lowered. Another measure in the economy was undertaken. A toba (pond) was constructed close to the mill for storage of logs. The Mayo mill pond had the capacity to store enough logs to supply lumber for more than three months at a stretch.<sup>31</sup> A dam was also built on the pond so that extra water could be controlled and allowed to flow away when needed.<sup>32</sup> The railway line was to the east of the sawmill and the pond was to the west of it. As the area cleared from the trees expanded and as the timber holdings became more distant from the mill, the owners also worked out the construction of a private railway line to connect the distant timber supply directly with the mill.<sup>33</sup> By 1921, the Mayo lumber mill owned three miles of private industrial railroad out of a total of 713 miles of industrial railroads owned by the various sawmills in the British Columbian lumber industry.<sup>34</sup> These varied in the range of 1 to 50 miles. At the same time, a gravel road, adjoining the railroad and about three miles in length was also made.<sup>35</sup> With this infrastructure the Mayo mill owners started their business in the Cowichan Valley and remained in operation there throughout the twenties and the

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to 250. See British Columbia Lumberman, 1925 to 1930. Interviews, 14, 15 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam. Interview, 5 October, 1993, male, 80 years, Vancouver. Interview, 11 October, 1993, male, 72 years, Paldi B. C.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. British Columbia Lumberman, July 1921, p. 31.

35. Interview 14, 15, March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam. Interview, 5 October, 1993, male, 80 years, Vancouver. Interview, 11 October, 1993, male, 72 years, Paldi B.C.

thirties, until the location of the mill was moved from Mayo Siding in 1944-45.<sup>36</sup> By that time, the Siding had been renamed "Paldi" in British Columbia.

The elaborate form of infrastructure at the Mayo mill indicated that the Paldi Mahton immigrants hoped to draw substantial returns from their place in the Cowichan Valley lumber industry. They, however, did not start with pre-meditated plans for enlargement or concerted long-term designs. On the contrary, their approach to attain success was based upon trial and error methods. They experimented with whatever seemed useful in making profits from their mill business. Once the success of their mill seemed likely, however, the owners expanded their resource base. They purchased more mill equipment, expanded their timber holdings and drew upon a regular supply of labour and converted their venture into a successful operation. In the process, the Mayo mill evolved as a mill town in the Cowichan Valley and, within its boundaries, existed a distinct "Little Punjab" as an ethnic enclave in British Columbia.

The manner in which the immigrants first started their mill work was indicative that growth and expansion were not the primary concerns for the Mahton mill owners in the early stages. Rather they simply looked for profits which seemed substantial from their own perspective. Their investment in the mill's infrastructure in the beginning was small, relative to later years, and after starting they focused primarily upon the sale of logs that were cut to clear their property.<sup>37</sup> Although a mill structure had been constructed by early 1918, in real terms it held small value because it was not fully equipped and, even before it was burnt down, the Mayo lumber company was not noticed to have started its lumber manufacturing. From 1920 onwards, the

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36. The mill was sold to Lake Logging Company in 1944-45.

37. Interview, 14, 15 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.



Mayo mill attracted considerable attention and its progress was observed with keen interest in the local region. When the Mayo mill owners purchased basic machinery in order to start their rebuilt mill's operations in 1920, the transaction was considered important enough to be mentioned in the local newspapers.<sup>38</sup> By the time the Mayo mill was in a position to acquire the entire sawmill machinery of another company, the news was considered to important enough to be covered in detail.<sup>39</sup> And when the mill owners were expanding their timber holdings, the negotiators and purchasers for their deals were announced on the front page of the local newspapers.<sup>40</sup> Thereafter, the mill became part of the developing forest industry in the region and was treated as the other mills in the Cowichan Valley.<sup>41</sup>

Prior to 1920, the Mayo mill owners shared the mill work responsibilities as a group and not on the basis of individual authority or capability. As equal shareholders and joint owners, the Mahton and Jat immigrants were in a similar position. Consequently, their group feeling as the founders of a mill was strong.<sup>42</sup> Necessary responsibilities were nevertheless divided even though the actual workload was shared by all. The Punjabi immigrants appear to have kept their basic community traditions alive when assigning work-related duties soon after settling down at their Sahtlam district mill site. The seniors such as Dhumman Singh and Bhan

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38. British Columbia Lumberman, August 1920, p. 53. Ibid, October 1920, p.33.

39. In December 1921 Mayo mill acquired the entire sawmill machinery of the Frondeg Lumber Company situated in Cobble Hill. Cowichan Leader, 15 December, 1921, p. 7. British Columbia Lumberman, January 1922, p. 42.

40. Cowichan Leader, 29 January 1920, p. 1.

41. The progress of the Mayo mill was regularly covered in the British Columbia Lumberman and the Cowichan Leader, 1920-1940

42. Interview, 14, 15, March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

Singh from Paldi village, Juvalla Singh from Sakruli village, and Bhagwan Singh from Kharaudi village became responsible for the supervision and the construction of the mill. Others such as Tara Singh, Ghanaiya Singh, Shyam Singh and Kapoor Singh looked after the cutting and sale of the logs. The youngest member of the group, Mayo Singh, continued as a cook " he was then young and our seniors handled the heavy and responsible jobs. He wanted to be involved in the mill work but everyone at the time put him in charge of the cooking. They bought food and grocery from the stores near Duncan and gave it to him. He was supposed to cook for all." <sup>43</sup> Such decisions were not questioned, not out of obedience but as a mark of respect to the elders of the parivar and also to the community.

That kind of division of labour could not continue for long, however, because the mill owners realised that their method of sharing responsibilities was not suitable for expanding their business. The immigrants had received a good return from the sale of their first logs and had managed to make sufficient money from further similar sales. <sup>44</sup> But the next logical step was to venture into the process of lumber processing and that meant venturing into the local lumber industry. The seniors and elders within the group were not well-equipped for that purpose, not because of inefficiency but, as an informant stated, they lacked the skills of basic education and knowledge of and fluency in English. <sup>45</sup> Although most immigrants had learned English in a basic form in the past ten or fifteen years, they were not fully conversant with the language and were thus not in a position to use it advantageously for their business as mill owners. With their limited language skills, they

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43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid.

could have carried on perhaps as ordinary mill operators for years. But that prospect was not in accordance with the aspirations of the Mahton immigrants. More ambitious goals, in the context of new developments in the Cowichan Valley region, now seemed attainable.

The lumber industry was forging ahead in the valley in the 1920s.<sup>46</sup> Lumber exports were on an increase and the valley's forest industry benefitted from the second Canadian Pacific railway line that connected the Cowichan Lake region to southern Vancouver Island.<sup>47</sup> After about three or four years of establishing their mill, therefore, the immigrants were hopeful of achieving their goals. They divided the essential responsibilities of their mill work on a formal basis and chose two individuals from among themselves to handle the "outside work", which meant dealing with the general public, the whites, in order to sell their lumber and acquire mill machinery. <sup>48</sup> Others preferred to continue on the production and manufacturing side. The two individuals who were to deal with outside contacts were Mayo Singh from the bania parivar of Paldi village and Kapoor Singh Sidhu (Siddoo) of Kharaudi village. The selection of Kapoor Singh was influenced -"by his education background and he was given the general responsibility of accounting and keeping the records of company's sale and purchase or handling the office work. Mayo Singh had also attended lower level Khalsa Boy's school in Mahilpur. Among our people (Paldi immigrants) at the time he had little bit education background." <sup>49</sup> Both Mayo Singh and Kapoor Singh were expected to work in consortium with

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46. See Rajala, Legacy and Challenge.

47. See Robert D. Turner, Vancouver Island Railroads, (San Marino: Golden West Books, 1973).

48. Interview, 17 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam. Interview, 28 January, 1994, male, 68 years and female 65 years, Burnaby.

49. Interview, 17 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

others when gaining access to the "outside" lumber business in the Cowichan Valley.

There were other reasons for selecting these two individuals. Kapoor Singh was clean-shaven before he joined the group and his appearance was regarded as advantageous in dealing with the wider society. Mayo Singh also opted to cut his hair and remove the turban.<sup>50</sup> Punjabi Sikh immigrants were aware of the social reality of discrimination. They, therefore, made adjustments, and appearances became especially important in this regard. The Paldi Mahton accepted Mayo Singh without his beard and turban so that he could comfortably represent their company in the Cowichan Valley's lumber industry. "The changed appearance did make a difference. They [Kapoor and Mayo] were not discriminated [against] in their business."<sup>51</sup> Maiya Singh was the first among the Paldi Mahton to cut his hair and remove his turban and he was not regarded as a deviant. His appearance, on the other hand, was viewed as an asset for their mill. Moreover, not everybody was obligated to follow his example - "some of them kept turbans, they had hair all rolled up and combs (kangha) in it. They did not cut hair because it was against their religion".<sup>52</sup> In particular, the seniors Dhumman Singh, Bhan Singh, Ghanaiya Singh, Tara Singh never cut their hair or beard.<sup>53</sup>

When they embarked upon lumber manufacturing in the early 1920s, the Mahton immigrants gave importance to thrift. They did not purchase new machinery for their mill, acquiring it instead second-hand from sales. The equipment was purchased at different stages from other companies

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50. Ibid. Interview, 28 January, 1994, male, 68 years and female 65 years, Burnaby.

51. Ibid.

52. Interview, 27 December, 1988, male, white, 84 years, Langley.

53. Interview, 17 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

which were over-hauling their mills. There were two firms which were frequented regularly by the representatives of the Mayo lumber company in this matter. The Canadian Pacific Junk Company and the Foundation Company of British Columbia found Mayo Singh to be a regular client in this connection.<sup>54</sup> The owners purchased equipment from auctions as well. Soon after their arrival at the Mayo Siding, the immigrants had purchased basic mill equipment - two boilers and two engines, from the Lake Logging Company.<sup>55</sup> In 1920, the rebuilt Mayo mill was equipped substantially with second-hand machinery. Its equipment consisted of top and bottom circulars, goods carriage, an ordinary edger, trimmer, live rolls, two planers, one 125 horsepower boiler, one twin engine and two regular engines.<sup>56</sup> Within a short time, this capacity was expanded by the addition of two twin engines and three boilers which generated 250 horsepower. A separate planing mill was also established. It had a separate engine, steam fed instead of the one run by friction, and two saws of 56 inch diameter, an edger capable of cutting 56 inch diameter, two planers with the capacity to handle 16x28 inch wood material.<sup>57</sup> By 1921, the Mayo mill owners were in a position to buy almost the entire mill machinery from the Frondeg Lumber Company, located about 25 miles from the Mayo mill in the Cobble Hill area of the Cowichan Valley, and to also transfer it to their own mill site.<sup>58</sup>

The company initially owned about 25,000,000 feet of standing timber to cut, primarily fir and cedar.<sup>59</sup> This timber was estimated to be enough to

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54. Receipts, Joe Saroya Collection.

55. Cowichan Leader, 30 August, 1917, p. 1. Ibid, 20 December, p. 1.

56. British Columbia Lumberman, January 1920, p. 27.

57. Ibid, August 1920, p. 53.

58. Cowichan Leader, 15 December, 1921, p. 7. British Columbia Lumberman, 1922, p. 42.

59. British Columbia Lumberman, January 1920, p. 27.

enable the mill to operate continuously for ten years. The immigrants expanded their timber resource in a short time. The original acquisition of 400 acres of timber land was expanded to 650 by 1920 and later several lots measuring about 1,000 acres were added.<sup>60</sup> The maximum figure of the company's timber land in the 1930s and 1940s stood at 14,000 feet. The lots were located in different directions of the Mouat Mountain (Hill 60) which faced the mill to the east.

The immigrants consolidated their timber resource because, once they began to make money from their mill, they ceased to regard ten years as the necessary time-limit for their Canadian enterprise. Their motivation to continue the mill operation remained strong in the 1920s because their family members continued to offer psychological support to their men settled overseas. In letters written to their family men in Canada, the Paldi tabbar members encouraged their kin to carry on. In one letter it was stated: "we feel very happy upon receiving your news. Please do not worry about us. Do whatever you think is right about coming back. Use your own judgement in the matter. We are behind you."<sup>61</sup> Tabbar members expressed themselves similarly in other letters: "we are all doing fine here. We always pray to God for your health and well being"; "we are happy to know that with God's grace you are all together and safely settled in Canada. We are very well in every possible way and constantly pray for your prosperity"; "all our ang sak (near and dear ones) are rearing well. The pind (village) is also flourishing"; "Paldi is prosperous. Do not worry."<sup>62</sup> Although in some letters, in this case a letter from a daughter to her father, the family stressed "we miss you very badly,

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60. Anonymous memo draft, The Mayo Group: Its History and Potential, Joe Saroya Collection.

61. Letters, Joe Saroya Collection.

62. Ibid.

please return along with your brother as soon as possible. It has been too long. The money you have earned is enough," from the perspective of the immigrants such requests lost value when other sentences in the letter emphasised "we have received the money you sent. Life is hard here. Things are not available. Clothing is difficult to purchase. Even mitti (soil from earth) sells like [expensive] eggs." <sup>63</sup> After embarking upon the project of lumber manufacturing, therefore, it became almost essential for the Mahton mill owners to expand their timber holdings because it was on the value and the quality of timber alone that the success of their mill depended, and on that success rested the aspirations of the Paldi Mahton to raise the status and living standards of their kin.

The Mahton owners would not have embarked upon an expansion of their mill's infrastructure unless they were confident about drawing good returns from the move. That they were aware of such possibilities becomes clear from the fact that in the year 1920 the immigrants publicised their mill by inserting half-page advertisements announcing the 'reopening' of their mill in the leading lumber industry journal, The British Columbian Lumberman -

Mayo Lumber Company, Duncan, B.C...we wish to announce that we are again operating, having rebuilt our plant into a modern saw-mill of 75,000 feet daily capacity, with Planing Mill and Lath Mill attached, and we are ready to again fill the orders of our numerous customers with the best grades of Vancouver Island lumber, Fir and Cedar...Orders taken for all points in Canada and the United States. We manufacture timbers up to 70 feet dimension, boards, shiplap, cross arm stock, clear fir rough, lath, etc.<sup>64</sup>

They were also featured as regular advertisers in the journal and were included in

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63. Ibid.

64. British Columbia Lumberman, June, July, 1922, p. 82.

the category of the the general lumber manufacturers listed in British Columbia directories. <sup>65</sup> By launching themselves in such a manner, immigrants hoped to attract buyers and labourers to their mill and convert their two primary assets, the mill machinery and the timber, into paying propositions. The immigrants evidently desired to become "big timers" and in the 1920s they managed, indeed, not only to achieve their goals but also went beyond their expectations. Labour was attracted to their mill and included people from many backgrounds: whites, Chinese, Japanese as well as Punjabis. They came to work for the Mayo mill, helped it achieve success and formed a community at the mill site tied together through a single industry.

The number of workers officially employed by the Mayo lumber company in the 1920s was in the range of 200 to 250.<sup>66</sup> This figure was comparable to other mills in the region. The bigger mills such as the Victoria Manufacturing and Lumbering Company employed 350 to 400 workers. The Hillcrest Company, about the same size as the Mayo mill, employed about 150 workers. <sup>67</sup> The Elco Logging Company, which was regarded as the highest-producing concern in the Cowichan forests at the time, had about 175 men in their camps. <sup>68</sup> The increase in production at the Mayo mill reflected the role of the increasing number of workers at the mill. The company, which had projected the production of 50,000 feet of lumber a day in 1917-18, was producing 60,000 feet of lumber in a day by 1921.<sup>69</sup> By 1923, the figure had risen to 75,000 feet in a working day and by 1927 the Mayo mill was reported to have produced and shipped 24 million feet of lumber for ten

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65. Ibid. British Columbia Directory, 1920-1940.

66. British Columbia Lumberman, September 1923, p. 37. Cowichan Leader, 21 April, 1927, p. 1. Ibid, 13 June, 1929, p. 5.

67. Ibid.

68. Ibid.

69. British Columbia Lumberman, January, 1920, p. 27. Cowichan Leader, 29, January, 1929, p. 1.



months of operation.<sup>70</sup> The mill's progress, aided by its substantial workforce, is also evident in the figures for shipments to countries outside Canada, recorded by the Pacific Lumber Inspection bureau for the year 1923, which show that 609,196 feet of lumber was exported by the Mayo Lumber Company, 81,000 by Hillcrest and 241,000 by the Eastern Lumber Company.<sup>71</sup> The principal markets for the Mayo mill products were found in the Prairie provinces, Eastern Canada and the United States.<sup>72</sup>

In the late 1920s, the mill was able to purchase new equipment. It acquired 7 new logging cars in the mid 1920s and by 1927-28 owned 30 different kinds of railroad cars for loading and supplying lumber.<sup>73</sup> New boilers, new re-saws and new quick-change planers had appeared in the mill as the Mayo Lumber Company prospered in association with the overall progress of the Cowichan Valley's lumber industry in the 1920s.<sup>74</sup> The addition of new equipment clearly signified a progressive development in the capacity of the mill from earlier days. The company was doing its part in the development of the Sahtlam district and its contribution was appreciated by businessmen as well as other leading personalities in the Cowichan Valley. J'Slay Mutter, the Mayor of the city of Duncan, A. Peterson, Secretary of the Cowichan Merchants' Association, E. G. Sanford, Manager, Canadian Bank of Commerce, A. B. Thorp, Principal of the High School and David Ford, Postmaster, acknowledged that the Mayo Lumber Company "...is a source of revenue to our town and district...they now [1927] employ over 250 men and...last year they paid over \$200,000 in wages...sawed over 24,000,000 feet of

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70. British Columbia Lumberman, September 1923, p. 37. Cowichan Leader, 20 October, 1927, p. 10

71. Cowichan Leader, 21 April, 1927, p. 1.

72. See Wright, "A Study of the Social and Economic Development of North Cowichan."

73. Cowichan Leader, 21 April, 1927, p.1.

74. *Ibid.* Cowichan Leader, 13 June, 1929, p. 5.

lumber and shipped over 1000 car loads." 75

Labour, however, was not drawn automatically to the mill. Bringing in workers required concentrated efforts on the part of the owners because even though the "Hindoos" acquired a "name" for themselves as lumber manufacturers and potential employers in the Cowichan Valley, their mill was not regarded as an "el dorado". The Mayo mill was not a large-scale venture in the region. Apart from this, there were other constraints. The owners could not easily secure the largest reserve of workers, white British Columbians, because popular prejudice against Asians still commanded great legitimacy among them.<sup>76</sup> Even in the 1920s, white labourers were persistent in their demands to restrict the occupational activities of Asians in the province. Similarly, the Mayo Lumber Company could not easily draw Chinese and Japanese workers because "it depended on them if they wished to have a Punjabi boss" and because they would not come to a mill unless it could provide a regular and steady income, "their condition was worse than us [racially], we were still connected to the British. So naturally they looked for greater security." <sup>77</sup> That was possible only after the mill operations succeeded and its payroll became known in the area. Punjabi immigrants were the most obvious choice of workers for the owners, but they also could not be drawn easily to the mill unless strong incentives, besides jobs, were provided for them. Recruitment of workers was a difficult task. Nevertheless, the Paldi Mahton immigrants were not lacking in motivation and worked to bring in labourers for their mill and settlers for their mill town. The primary responsibility for the recruitment of "outside" workers was vested with Mayo Singh as most members of the bania parivar, boleya tabbar, and Jat shareholders like Kapoor Singh got involved in the

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75. Letter, Joe Saroya Collection.

76. Ward, White Canada Forever. Buchignani, Continuous Journey. Adachi, The Enemy That Never Was. Wickberg et al, From China to Canada.

77. Interview, 15 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

other aspects of mill production, manufacture and office work.

There were two important issues in regard to labour recruitment that, according to the informants, were worked out by Mayo Singh. One was related to the value of employing white people so that they could become useful in communicating the mill's business interests to the larger lumber community in the Cowichan Valley. The other was the issue of reliability; the need to acquire a labour force on which the Mahton could depend for a regular supply. In pursuing these needs, Mayo Singh embarked upon a process of recruiting labour which not only ensured the successful operation of the mill but also resulted in making the 'Hindu Lumber venture' a permanent feature on the Canadian scene. Because of his skill in attracting labour, Mayo Singh began to be admired among his people as a "very smart businessman. He surprised everybody."<sup>78</sup> Workers from different backgrounds were acquired simultaneously for the mill but the process and the means of acquiring them differed in each case. Mayo Singh worked almost independently to bring in white workers. Chinese and Japanese workers either came on their own or were brought in by agents, and Mayo Singh worked in association with others to recruit Punjabis.

Recruitment of white workers was essential for the Mayo mill owners because they were bound by law to employ only whites on the machines and in the capacity of skilled workers.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, the whites represented the mainstream and were an important means through which the Mahton hoped to tap buyers, retailers and distributors, who were invariably white. The company's white workforce, in the long run, did prove advantageous to the progress of the company. At the business level, the Mayo mill managed to earn the confidence of lumber dealers and acquired for itself white buyers and distributors in Vancouver,

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78. Ibid, 14 March, 1989.

79. Ibid.

on the British Columbia mainland, and in the state of Washington across the border in the United States.<sup>80</sup> Another advantage in employing whites was their knowledge of the English language which the owners intended to utilise in business. As a result, care was taken to offer only good positions to them, otherwise they would not have been attracted to the 'Hindu owned mill.' White workers were given only skilled jobs and were generally employed on the machines and in the office, managerial positions.<sup>81</sup> They were also given special consideration in the housing facility. They were provided with independent houses. There were no white bunkhouses at the Mayo mill.<sup>82</sup> Some white workers resided with their families at the mill and some commuted directly from Duncan. The houses for the white workers were built to the south of the mill.

Clarence Martin was one of the very first white employees of the Mayo Lumber Company. He had originally worked for the Mahton immigrants when they were running a leased mill at Roosedale:

I supplied them milk as a young boy. Then I was employed by them to help sell their lumber stuff. I used to sell the slabs (of lumber) that came out of the machine for them at Roosedale. They asked me if I wished to come over to Vancouver Island even before they left for Paldi. I was willing. I earned good money from them at Roosedale as a thirteen years old...Nobody objected my working for the East Indians (Punjabis) then, not my family, none other... After the Mayo mill was built in 1918, Mayo Singh sent me a letter, you wanna come, come at any time. Take CPR boat for Nanaimo from Vancouver. Take CPR train from Nanaimo down to Duncan. Do let me know what date you are coming. I'll meet you in Duncan so that you don't get lost. He came looking for me. I went over there in 1918 and worked for Mayo for 36 years. I started with odd jobs at first and then became an engineer after I took training for running the private railroad engine and drove that until my retirement...That time not many

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80. See Business Cards, Joe Saroya Collection.

81. Interview, 14 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam. Interview, 27 December, 1988, male, white, 84 years, Langley.

82. Ibid.

of them (Punjabis) knew English and Mayo he used to use me.<sup>83</sup>

Clarence Martin was followed by many others. In 1920, George M. Boyer became the first accountant and office manager for the Mayo Lumber Company.<sup>84</sup> The mill soon employed three other white engineers - Phil LeMare, Mr. Twist and Dave Miles.<sup>85</sup> The numbers continued to increase and, within five years of its venturing into lumber manufacturing, the Mayo mill employed about twenty white British Columbians, a substantial number - "scattered all over. In the office, in the machine shop, on the logging railway and in the saw mill."<sup>86</sup> The increasing white workforce can be easily identified from names. The account book of the mill's white cookhouse for the early 1920s listed among others: J.C. Whitesell, H. Loftus, J.P. Johnston, J.L. Crusson, G. Cruikshank, W. Hall, H. Marsh, G. Hudson, Charles Kerr, Myles Charmichael, D. Houghton, C.W. Battrick, L. Coton, M. Beckett, C.H. Reynolds, Shaen, Leadangham and Moore. By mid 1920, a few of these names had disappeared but new ones were added: E.Watt, Lui Smith, Fainall, Redmond, W.Passmore. Gradually the list was expanded to include Hunt Kid, Blk Smith, Mr. Evans, D. Henry, Cambell, Russell, Calterall, Taggert, J. Cavell, Pol Dorro etc.<sup>87</sup> Some of the white workers stayed at the mill for a short time, some for much longer until better opportunities drew them away. A core of white workers was maintained at the mill, nevertheless, and there were others like Clarence Martin, Phil LeMare and Dave Miles who worked and at the Mayo mill until retirement.<sup>88</sup>

How can this development be explained when racism and discrimination

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83. Ibid.

84. Ibid. British Columbia Lumberman, January 1920, p. 27.

85. Cowichan Leader, 2 September, 1982, p. 32.

86. Interview, 11 October, 1993, male, 72 years, Paldi B.C.

87. White Cook House Book, Joe Saroya Collection.

88. Times Colonist, Sunday 1987, no. 1, Joe Saroya Collection.

were strong socio-cultural forces in British Columbia and Punjabi immigrants, as Asians, were relegated to a subordinate position in the mainstream society? A straightforward explanation is that the Mayo mill attracted whites for purely economic reasons. In the rapidly growing lumber industry of the Cowichan Valley in the 1920s, the Mayo mill was one of the very first operations to start in the Sahtlam district. Within a short time, it developed from a small operation to a middle-sized sawmill in the district and, in the 1920s, was accredited along with other mills for generating "more steam and smoke and employment and production between Duncan and Cowichan Lake."<sup>89</sup> As a result, the Punjabi mill owners were treated in the Cowichan region like any other lumber manufacturer: as the producers of wealth and economic expansion. In that capacity, they were not discriminated against because of their different socio-cultural background. Those white British Columbians who responded positively towards the Mayo mill seem to have considered it a viable proposition to work for the Mayo lumber company. They preferred to start with a comparatively small organisation, and eventually moved away to other and bigger mills as and when the opportunities arose. This factor becomes worthy of attention when one considers that there were bigger sawmills operating on Vancouver Island, in the Cowichan Valley, and also in the vicinity of the Sahtlam district, in particular the Shawnigan Lake Lumber Company and the Victoria Lumber and Manufacturing Company which might be expected to have been preferred by the white workers. Yet they continued to find Mayo mill an acceptable place to work. In the 1920s and even later, the "Hindus" were not condemned, criticised or discriminated against in the overall set-up of the Cowichan Valley. Rather, in their economic roles as the producers of wealth and employment, they were treated as integral to the region's growing lumber industry.

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89. Cowichan Leader, 29 January 1920, p. 1.

There was another consideration that may have brought a number of white British Columbians to work at the Punjabi owned mill and encouraged them to stay there on a long-term basis. Mayo Singh's efforts to develop a personal contact with the white workers seems to have played an important role in keeping them at the mill on a long-term basis. During interviews, non-Punjabi workers of the Mayo mill talked about their experiences at the mill in a manner that indicated that for them the Mayo Lumber Company was synonymous with Mayo and not with the whole group of enterprising owners. As Clarence Martin stressed, Mayo Singh was the only one among the owners to keep in regular touch with non-Punjabi employees in the company.<sup>90</sup> Another informant noted that -"he [Mayo Singh] used to take walks around the mill and came to meet us. He could not stay for long, after all he was a busy man and he had to look after his business."<sup>91</sup> Another long-time, non-Punjabi employee of the mill stated in a local newspaper interview that -"Mayo was the finest man to work for."<sup>92</sup>

The Mayo mill, however, was not dependent upon white workers alone. Whites comprised only a certain proportion of the total number of employees and that too in the capacity of skilled workers. The recruitment of unskilled workers was equally important and, in this context, the Chinese and the Japanese formed an important element of the Mayo mill's workforce. Some of them came looking for jobs at the mill by themselves and some were recruited through their agents.<sup>93</sup> Unlike the white British Columbians, however, the Chinese and the Japanese were not given any special consideration in the matter of jobs and housing. "Jobs were aplenty for them because they were needed as mill hands, but, they also

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90. Interview, 27 December, 1988, male, white, 84 years, Langley.

91. Interview, 29 February, 1989, male, Chinese, 65 years, Duncan.

92. See "Old Logging Days Rich in Character," Newspaper Clipping without reference, Joe Saroya Collection.

93. Interview, 15 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

needed jobs in any capacity because they were discriminated against by the larger society. It was not like today. At the Mayo mill, they came to ask for jobs or about new additions, just about anything and they were kept at any position."<sup>94</sup> Often jobs were prearranged for them through their "bosses who mostly brought Chinese workers from small grocery stores in Victoria or from small vegetable shops in Duncan."<sup>95</sup>

The Chinese and Japanese were offered jobs at the mill mainly as unskilled workers. They were employed as construction crews for building and expanding the sawmill. <sup>96</sup> The Chinese built the gravel road and the private railroad that connected Hill 60 with the mill and the mill pond in the east-west direction, and they worked in the capacity of tail sawyers, edgermen and log loaders.<sup>97</sup> The Japanese, on the other hand, supervised the construction work and the repair of the houses.<sup>98</sup> They worked in groups known around the mill town as bull gangs: "they would do anything about the houses, windows, doors, toilets."<sup>99</sup> Punjabi immigrants admired them for their work as skilled tarkhans (carpenters).<sup>100</sup> The Japanese were also mill wrights but not in the capacity of skilled workers, and they repaired the mill machinery when needed: "they wouldn't come to touch the machines when the mill would be running. The bull gang always inspected the mill during lunch hour and then they did quick repairs."<sup>101</sup> The Japanese also held contracts from the mill in the woods - "there were about eight or nine gangs which operated in the logging camps and all at different timings. They would cut

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94. Ibid.

95. Ibid.

96. Ibid. Interview, 11 October, 1993, male, 72 years, Paldi B.C.

97. Ibid, 12 October, 1993.

98. Ibid.

99. Ibid.

100. Interview, 15 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

101. Interview, 12 October, 1993, male, 72 years, Paldi B.C.



logs on contract, fall the trees and buck them for 20 to 30 feet and were paid according to the scale of the bucked timber."<sup>102</sup>

The Chinese at the Mayo mill were mostly single men but there were also two families among them, that of Lum Wah and Sunny Lum, who resided in separate quarters.<sup>103</sup> The number of Chinese employees generally fluctuated between 80 and 100 but at no time fell below 60.<sup>104</sup> Japanese workers were also mostly single, though there were a few families.<sup>105</sup> The number of Japanese immigrant workers remained in the range of 50 or so and they continued at the mill until the time when all of them were evacuated from the Mayo mill by the Canadian RCMP around 1942.<sup>106</sup> Both the Chinese and Japanese lived in separate bunkhouses and those with families were provided with independent housing.<sup>107</sup> Housing for the Chinese and the Japanese was built in the south-west area of the mill.<sup>108</sup> The Chinese and Japanese family quarters were close to their bunkhouses, although some Japanese families were housed in the family quarters built to the east of the mill and close to the residences meant for the mill owners and the Punjabi immigrants.

The Punjabis formed the core of the Mayo mill's workforce and they were preferred by the mill owners because they were believed to be a reliable workforce on which the ongoing operation of the mill could depend. Punjabi immigrants were economically advantageous because they could be motivated to work for more than one shift and thereby help keep labour costs down. Moreover, owners regarded their "own" people as more valuable because they provided a sense of

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102. Interview, 15 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

103. Interview, 29 February, 1989, male, Chinese, 65 years, Duncan.

104. Ibid.

105. Ibid. Interview, 12 October, 1993, Male, 72 years, Paldi B.C.

106. Ibid.

107. Ibid. Interview, 15 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

108. Ibid.

security. For example, they could be relied upon even if the Chinese and the Japanese workers left and at other crucial junctures such as the one during the depression years in the 1930s when the Mayo mill functioned for two years largely because of Punjabi workers.<sup>109</sup> The pivotal role of the Punjabi workers for the mill's operation was recognised and agreed upon by all those who were involved in the founding of the Mayo mill.

Attracting Punjabi immigrants to the mill, however, was a difficult task. Although their numbers were small, and could be contacted conveniently, a majority of them had managed to find a stable foothold in the British Columbia lumber industry in other regions.<sup>110</sup> In the 1920s, most Punjabi immigrants were working in sawmills and a few had also found jobs in planing mills, shingle mills, and with logging camps and logging railways.<sup>111</sup> Some had also started their own small-scale lumber dealerships and had opened their own companies. The Virginia Lumber Company Limited of Lachman Singh, the Punjab Lumber and Shingle Company of Hira Singh and Hazara Singh, the Shingle mill owned by a Hindu syndicate and the Doaba Lumber Company were some of the small-scale ventures opened in the 1920s by Punjabi Jats on Vancouver Island and on the mainland.<sup>112</sup> Moreover, Punjabi immigrants were also scattered throughout the province. In the census of 1921, they were enumerated as residing in all the electoral districts of British Columbia.<sup>113</sup>

The task of attracting Punjabi workers to the Mayo mill was made more complicated by the possibility that Jat immigrants might reject or fail to consider

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109. Ibid. Cowichan Leader, 5 May, 1932, p. 8.

110. Johnston, "Patterns of Sikh Migration." Buchignani, Continuous Journey.

111. Ibid.

112. British Columbia Lumberman, January 1920, p. 34. Ibid, July 1922, p. 42. Ibid, October 1922, p. 48. Cowichan Leader, 8 October, 1925, p. 7.

113. Canada Census, 1921.

the idea of working at the Mayo mill. The number of Jat shareholders in the company was not large enough to attract other Jats. There was also the consideration of their different religious beliefs and practises, which could influence the selective perception of the Punjabi Jats to work for the Mayo mill. To make possible the recruitment of Jats, the Mayo mill owners of the Mahton baradari (caste) worked towards accommodating their requirements as immigrants. They were aware that most Jats in British Columbia had similar aspirations and aims as they did. Punjabi immigrants from both castes looked for economic security and through that hoped to attain an enhanced social status in their homeland, although in the case of the Mahton the social value and prestige of attaining higher status was more profound. Thus, when the question arose about recruiting others from their own immigrant group, the Mayo mill owners embarked upon a plan to provide a homelike environment at their mill in order to knit their community together simply as Punjabis. In other words, the Mahton owners attempted to create a home away from home for Punjabi immigrants at their mill settlement. Through this process they aimed to gather a secure nucleus of Punjabi immigrant workers. In the recruitment of Punjabi immigrants as potential labourers for the mill, the Mahton group of owners cooperated. Mayo Singh was assisted by the seniors. An approach of this kind was essential if the owners were to work within the boundaries of their own socio-cultural background.

Providing the basic amenities and facilities for the Punjabis involved the construction of separate cookhouses and bunkhouses. The Punjabi housing facility was built close to the mill in the east and north east area.<sup>114</sup> Other facilities were added. A separate bath was created for Punjabi men and a khuhi (well) was dug for

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114. Interview, 6 February, 1994, male, 88 years, Coquitlam. Interview, 5 October 1993, male, 80 years, Vancouver. Interview, 12 October, 1993, male, 72 years, Paldi B.C.

drinking water. Although a water supply was already available, it was provided from a reservoir on the mill property. A khui was considered essential because it was symbolic of their Punjabi village background - "people did not like tap water for drinking because they thought thalle da pani changa hai, ground water is pure. So a well was made."<sup>115</sup> The provision of the essential facilities for Punjabis was made complete with the construction of a Gurudwara at the mill site. A Punjabi owned mill settlement could not have attracted their community members without a provision for religious services. The Gurudwara was constructed to the north of the mill and close to the Punjabi cookhouses. It was built in 1922 by Japanese carpenters for approximately \$1000.<sup>116</sup> In British Columbia there were three other Gurudwaras at the time - in Vancouver, Victoria and at Fraser Mills in New Westminster, but these had been built primarily through the cooperative efforts of the immigrants themselves. The Mayo mill Gurudwara, however, was constructed at the company's expense.<sup>117</sup> By building a company-owned Gurudwara, the Mayo mill owners were attempting to provide a wholesome environment for immigrant Punjabis at their mill. An informant explained:

In our Punjabi villages Gurudwaras are generally named after a saint or a Guru who paid visit to the site where the place of worship came up. Our Paldi village Gurudwara is named after Baba Mangal Sahai...Mayo mill Gurudwara was like Baba Mangal Sahai spiritually, but he did not come to visit the Gurudwara. So Mayo mill Gurudwara could not be named after him. If owners had their way they would call it Baba Mangal Singh Sahai, but they could not do that because there were people from other villages. So it was called only a Gurudwara. It was built so that people could come and stay here.<sup>118</sup>

With this objective in mind, the Nanak Panthi mill owners also secured approval from the Khalsa Diwan society in Vancouver to place their Gurudwara

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115. Interview, 6 February, 1994, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

116. Cowichan Leader, 5 May, 1932, p. 8.

117. Interview, 15 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

118. Interview, 12 October, 1993, male, 72 years, Paldi B.C.

under its control.<sup>119</sup> When this was obtained, the front door of the Mayo mill Gurduara was lettered with Khalsa-e-Diwan with its English equivalent, society, written underneath. With this development, Nanak Panthi Mahton Sikhs were placed on the same footing as the Khalsa Panthi Jat Sikhs in British Columbia, a process that helped them to exist simply as Punjabi Sikh immigrants at the mill settlement.

Mayo mill owners publicised their provision of Punjabi institutions and facilities at their mill by putting up notices in the Vancouver and Victoria Guruduaras.<sup>120</sup> They followed this up with "regular telephone contact to the Guruduaras. They gave detail about the facility of Indian (Punjabi) cookhouse, our own bunkhouse. They gave details about Guruduara. Both Dhumman Singh, who was elder among our people, and Mayo Singh made consistent efforts in this process through regular phone calls...and also by visiting Guruduaras."<sup>121</sup> Providing information in this manner produced the desired results for its owners. Punjabis settled in different parts of the province did choose to come to the Mahton owned mill to work and also to settle. In the 1920s, the Mayo mill provided a secure environment in British Columbia for a number of Punjabi immigrants who, in the context of the larger society, were still "not regarded as the rooted elements of the population."<sup>122</sup> Punjabis also chose Mayo mill over other Punjabi-owned mills because none of the other companies had created a work environment to suit the general needs of Punjabi immigrants overseas. Most of the Punjabi-owned lumber companies on Vancouver Island remained small-time one-man ventures, employing about six to ten workers and were not, like the Mayo Lumber Company, able to accommodate Punjabi immigrants on a large

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119. Cowichan Leader, 5 May 1932, p. 6.

120. Interview, 17 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

121. Ibid.

122. Johnston, "Patterns of Sikh Migration," p. 305.

scale. The number of Punjabis who came to the Mayo mill made it a substantial settlement. Their moving to the Mayo mill earned a name for the Mahton Punjabis within their immigrant community as successful sawmill owners.

Punjabi workers were generally employed by the Mayo Lumber Company in the mill and not in the woods,<sup>123</sup> thus accommodating their preference for sawmill work. At the Mayo mill, Punjabis worked in various capacities: as green chain pullers, log pullers, lumber loaders, sawyers or carriers.<sup>124</sup> A large number of them were also employed at the lumber yard loading lumber on the Esquimalt and Nanaimo railway. The Chinese and Japanese were also employed in these jobs "because there was no particular division of labour those days, everything was done by hand and no specific skills were required for the basic jobs. So more hands meant more work."<sup>125</sup> But preference for what was considered outdoor work and hard work was given to the workers of Punjabi background because it suited the workers' preferences and, as for the owners, "they felt proud, they thought they gave right jobs to others [Punjabis]." <sup>126</sup>

The presence of Jats at the Mayo mill town was significant from the point of view of the Paldi immigrants of the Mahton baradari (caste). The fact of their presence at the Mayo mill remained engraved on the memory of the pioneers who belonged to the bania parivar from Paldi village and, even in the last decade of the twentieth century, they could still spell out some names of Punjabi Jat settlers who had worked and lived at the Mayo mill in the mid 1920s and 1930s without much difficulty.

There was Shyam Singh Jat of Mahilpur, Jwala Singh of Nangal Kalan, Pal Singh of Langeri, Jaswant Singh of 'Malwa', his son Naranjan Singh Mahal, Lashman Singh of Khurdpur, Lashman

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123. Interview, 12 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

124. Ibid. Interview, 11 October, 1993, male, 72 years, Paldi B.C.

125. Interview, 17 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

126. Ibid.

Singh of Karnana, Mewa Singh of 'Malwa', Bhunno of Bada pind, Hardyal Singh Atwal, Lal Chand of 'Malwa', Gurnam Singh, Bacchan Singh, Munsha Singh, Karnail Singh, Ujjagar Singh - all from 'Malwa', Labh Singh of Murali pind of Rai got, Dhanna from Jullundur district of Chaheru got, Tara Singh of Thodi pind, Poorn Singh Jat of Hoshiarpur zila, Waryam Singh Jat.<sup>127</sup>

These were important to them not as mere names but as representatives of a different caste among Punjabi immigrants. Different origins among them were identified through village names, regions and gots that were added as the last name. According to the bania al members from the village Paldi - "those days it was easier to identify immigrants from a different caste because nobody used last names then. Baradari (caste) was identified through village names. Our villages were spread out in relatively small area in Punjab so others from a different village were easily recognised by their baradari (caste)."<sup>128</sup>

By employing white British Columbians, Chinese, Japanese, Punjabis - people from different nationalities - the Mayo mill owners had aligned themselves with the wider lumber industry in the Cowichan Valley and in the province generally.<sup>129</sup> Even the layout of their mill settlement had the characteristic appearance of an ordinary sawmill and a lumber camp which generally housed "bunkhouse men" from different backgrounds. The Mayo mill settlement could be conveniently divided into different sections such as the Chinese quarters, the Japanese bunkhouse, the white buildings, and the Punjabi temple (Guruduara). The Mayo mill catered to the different languages, different foods, different lifestyles of its diverse workforce - it's just like you go fifty years back you know, lot of people just come back from the old country. Not very long ago they all worked for Mayo mill. Their English wasn't good. They all want to speak their languages, regardless whether he is Chinese or East Indian (Punjabi). So naturally you didn't want one house here with Chinese and one East Indian (Punjabi) and then one Chinese. The next thing, you know, is that when you get to the neighbours, the other guy didn't know what you were talking

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127. Interview, 30 September, 1993, male, 80 years, Vancouver.

128. Ibid.

129. See Bradwin, Bunkhouse Man.

about. Separated living at the Mayo mill was not by custom. It was just a normal thing, you had Chinese, whites, Japanese and East Indians (Punjabi) scattered all over. You had your Chinese bunkhouse over there, they had their East Indian (Punjabi) bunkhouse over there. Everybody felt better this way. You could have all huddled up, no good for people. At Mayo mill people were segregated in bunches. They were living separately by choice.<sup>130</sup>

Within this general setting, Mayo mill had an added attribute. It existed as a distinct "Little Punjab" for the owners and workers of Punjabi background who constituted the predominant population at the Mayo mill.

The Little Punjab evolved at the Mayo mill settlement when the owners were attempting to attract Punjabis to their mill. The Mahton mill owners had to make conscious attempts to attract immigrants of their own background because at their internal community level, the considerations of status hierarchy remained important among Punjabis. Ordinarily, and if given a choice, Jats would not have opted to work and reside at the Mahton-owned mill. As a Jat informant stated - "They say they are Rajputs (in 1989), I would not work for those Rajputs. But I went to the Mayo mill because the Guruduara was there and also our cookhouse."<sup>131</sup> Others of Jat background who moved to the Mayo mill in the 1920s were motivated by similar reasons - "Guruduara was a special place and cookhouse was the community centre."<sup>132</sup> Some also opted to go because there was a tendency at the time "to help each other, it was inbuilt."<sup>133</sup>

There were other considerations that drew immigrants of Jat origin to the Mayo mill town. One of these was related to the necessities of dressing - "when we worked for other companies, as I worked for the Bloedel lumber mills on Vancouver Island, we shared bunkers with fifteen other men, all arranged in a

130. Interview, 29 February, 1989, male, Chinese, 65 years, Duncan.

131. Interview, 10 April, 1989, male, 75 years, Vancouver.

132. Interview, 24 December, 1988, male, 65 years, Vancouver.

133. Interview, 28 February, 1989, male, 70 years, Duncan.



row. It was not much comfortable. You had to live with everyone and had to be careful about dressing."<sup>134</sup> The "dressing" referred to was the tying of the turban and the long hair and not wearing pants and shirts. Tying a turban in front of those not familiar with their culture put a lot of pressure on the Punjabi Sikhs because their turban had been used as a symbol of discrimination in Canada. A Punjabi Sikh's turban was not a ready-made attire, it was tied from a long piece of cloth about three meters in length and worn in different styles. Styles of tying the turban varied according to personal choice and also according to the background of the individuals. Those from the trading caste had one style of wearing the turban; those who hailed from the jagirdar, or high status, family had another. Those from peasant backgrounds, which included the majority of the Punjabi immigrants in Canada, had a distinct style of turban and those from the lower castes such as shibba (tailor), jhiri (water carrier) had a different style. Whatever the style of turban, wearing it took time and the immigrants preferred privacy for this. Thus when offered opportunities to be in a place where one could live and exist as one desired in an alien land, Punjabi immigrants preferred to come to the Mayo mill town. As a Jat informant explained:

At Mayo mill, there were lots of people to talk to, to get together on Sundays, Saturdays and on week days after the work in the evenings. Dress was familiar ... One could even roam around in pyjamas and ordinary slippers. There was no danger of being branded dirty or something. At Mayo mill, it was living like home, it was free.<sup>135</sup>

Punjabi immigrants acknowledged other advantages of working at the Mayo mill.

Living was not too bad at the Mayo mill. Some bunk houses had four men as co-sharers, some two and some more than four, maybe six. But everyone had a room to himself. There were partitions. Outhouses were provided to relieve oneself. There was no running water all the time but a well was dug by the

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134. Interview, 1910 April, 1989, male, 75 years, Vancouver.

135. Ibid.

residents and the company. Its water was very good. All Indian (Punjabis) there. Everyone knew each other. It was like living in a Punjab village.<sup>136</sup>

Jats could share their similar vision for being overseas and the notions of prosperity and comfort associated with living in Canada with others of their community at the Mayo mill - "life was better in Canada than in India. \$10 saved was like a fortune. There was nothing in India. No electricity, no roads, nothing. One could survive that's all." <sup>137</sup> These amenities had value in the 1920s and 1930s among Punjabi immigrants and they held greater meaning among those who understood each other's background and shared the cultural nuances.

The confluence of Punjabi immigrants at the Mayo mill was further encouraged and strengthened when the mill owners began to hold typical Punjabi festivals and gatherings at their mill settlement. The home-like environment for Punjabis was developed further by the Paldi Mahton immigrants as they made arrangements to hold the traditional festivals known as Jor-malla (Mohalla), literally meaning a festive gathering, at the mill site on July 1st, Canada's Dominion Day, at company expense.<sup>138</sup> Jor-malla was a kind of improvised festival or a substitute for the Punjabi Holla-Mohalla festive gatherings which were held around the Guruduaras or in some open ground near villages at the time of the Sikh festivals such as Vaisakhi or Lohri. They generally lasted for a week or ten days and people from the surrounding areas or even from far-off places visited such festive gatherings. The celebration of the Jor-malla festival had a similar significance for Punjabis at the Mayo mill and on that occasion

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136. Ibid.

137. Ibid.

138. Interview, 17 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam. Interview, 11 October, 1993, male, 72 years, Paldi B.C. See also "Paldi Residents Celebrate Jor Malla." Newspaper Clipping without reference, Joe Saroya Collection.

immigrants came to the mill even from as far away as the United States.<sup>139</sup> On this day, the spirit of the mill town and of the Punjabis was enthusiastic, even though there were few Punjabis in British Columbia at the time.<sup>140</sup> The Mayo mill settlement also became popular among Punjabis because "there were so many single people here [Punjabis at Mayo mill]...some playing kabaddi [rural sport in India], some volleyball, some weight lifting...those days they were coming from India and carried on traditions."<sup>141</sup>

The existence of a Gurudwara played an important role in keeping together the Punjabis from different backgrounds at the Mayo mill, a development aided by the fact that the Gurudwara religious services did not conform to any particular panth, Nanak or Khalsa. Rather, the services evolved out of practical considerations and revolved around certain rituals with which rural Punjabi Sikhs were familiar. Such rituals gradually took the form of everyday custom at the Mayo mill Gurudwara because:

There were no granthis (priests) or ragis (hymn singers) at the time who could take the initiative for religious services and could be kept at the Gurudwara on a full time basis. Moreover, nobody was educated...among our people, who could read the Granth, Sikh holy book. So anyone, with any little bit of reading knowledge, could become granthi and do katha (pray by narration) from the Granth. Usually some old person who could not handle mill work was made responsible for the services and he also took care of the Gurudwara.<sup>142</sup>

There was not much, in fact, to be responsible for: "all that was required was to give swaha at sunset and then fold the holy book, wrap it in a roomal, a piece of cloth, meant for the purpose and next morning open it with a shabad, hymn. This

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139. Letters, Joe Saroya Collection.

140. "Paldi Residents Celebrate Jor Malla," Newspaper Clipping without reference, Joe Saroya Collection.

141. Interview, 12 October, 1993, male, 72 years, Paldi B.C.

142. Interview, 14 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

was everyday custom."<sup>143</sup> Services concentrated on essentials rather than details. Mahton and Jat Sikhs performed the services themselves.

The day for sangat (congregation) was kept on Sundays. Every weekend there was service. That day we worked from 7 am to 12 noon and then kept one or two hours for the Guruduara. About six or seven of us men would get together to do shabad-kirtan (recite hymns). I had studied at the Mahilpur khalsa boys' school up to class 6 which was good in religion, so I could recite the shabad. After that we would go back to the mill because we had to earn also.<sup>144</sup>

A Guruduara was constructed by the Mahton owners of the Mayo mill in order to attract Punjabi workers but the immigrants kept their religion alive because it provided them with a sense of identity and security in an alien world and helped them a keep a continuity with their own socio-cultural background. That kind of continuity, however, had an altered complexion in the Canadian context, not only because followers of two distinct Sikh Panth came together simply as Sikhs, but also because in their village lives in Punjab, the Guruduara had not, in fact, constituted a significant aspect of their day-to-day living:

In our Paldi village nobody visited a Guruduara regularly. There used to be a sangat (congregation) only when some gyani, a saintly figure, visited the village. Otherwise we did not know much about the service. When the gyani came he might do shabad kirtan but no one else. He also did ardas. Our village Guruduara was not known for weekly services. We had akhand path on Gurunanak's birthday or on Chhewin padshahi. Other than this one could not get too involved. We had to look after kheti (cultivation). Usually, we had someone, a granthi, looking after our Guruduara Mangal Sahai. Mahant Sunder Singh was there and before him Gurditta (Gurdeet Singh) when I came to Canada in 1927. Whatever happened there they would do it, not us.<sup>145</sup>

Weekly service at the Mayo mill Guruduara was thus a new feature of life

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143. Ibid, 6 February, 1994.

144. Ibid.

145. Ibid.

for the immigrant Mahton Punjabis. It was essentially a modified form of sangranth (a short, running kind of prayer) found to be a regular feature in the Guruduaras established in the the Jat villages in the Hoshiarpur district. "Sangranth was usually held once a month and villagers on that day tried not to work for a couple of hours in the fields. It was like a compulsory holiday." <sup>146</sup> Even the manner in which immigrants addressed their holy book showed the difference. They called their holy book Granth in Canada; in Punjab Paldi and other villages it was called Pil Baba or Babe di Bir. <sup>147</sup> The appearance of the Gurudwara at Mayo Siding also provided evidence of the altered importance of religious practices for Punjabi immigrants:

Baba Mangal Singh Gurudwara, our place of worship, was originally a dharmshala, a kind of sarai or rest house. In Paldi village it had about eight to ten rooms. In one room, the largest in size, was Pil baba (Granth), kept on a takht posh (a wooden bed-like frame) which was covered with a plain sheet. It was elevated from the floor with a chanani (canopy) on top. Another room was kept in the name of Baba Mangal Singh and it had pictures of Gurus displayed.<sup>148</sup>

At Mayo Siding, a house, one of the largest at the site, was used as a Gurudwara. "It was built next to the cookhouse and the khui. Inside the house was a spacious room where holy book was placed on a pirhi, low wooden stool, elevated from the floor and covered from the top with a chanani. Pictures of our Gurus were there and also in the cookhouse." <sup>149</sup> As a local newspaper reporter found on his visit, the mill Gurudwara was lavishly decorated:

A rich red carpet covered the whole of the floor. A small carpet was run over this from the entrance to the altar at the head of the room. Rich silk was used for the table on which the holy book was placed and also for the canopy. At each corner of the canopy were hung little decorations of imitation flowers,

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146. Interview, 24 December, 1988, male, 65 years, Vancouver.

147. Interview, 6 February, 1994, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

148. Ibid.

149. Ibid.

beautiful lampshades, gold coloured crystals and varieties of coloured glass.<sup>150</sup>

When being interviewed, Punjabi immigrants made clear that they perceived Mayo mill settlement as a Little Punjab: "those days we all lived like separate nations, but Mayo mill was a settlement of our people." <sup>151</sup> Furthermore, although the basic layout of the Mayo mill settlement was similar to other mills in British Columbia, to the immigrants from Punjab the structural arrangement of the mill's buildings was such that it reflected Punjabi influence. Immigrants could easily distinguish and relate to their socio-cultural institutions at the Mayo Siding. They began describing their village layout by working out the directions from the Esquimalt and Nanaimo railway line -

The mill, the machine workshop and the toba was to the west of the railway line. Abadi(Punjabi) was scattered on the other side of the line, to the north-east. The Guruduara was easily recognised by the nishaan sahab (a yellow streamer) near khuhi (well). Cookhouse was next to the Guruduara. A sidewalk from the cookhouse led straight to the bath, meant for use by Punjabi men. The bath had a chulha (hearth) inside to heat the water. Close to the cookhouse were residences built originally to house the owners, these were later given to the Punjabi workers as owners moved to bigger houses to further east of the railway. To the north east of the Guruduara was also all Punjabi housing. They were made bigger depending on the number of people living at the mill. In the 1920s and 30s there were two separate, multi-storey bunkhouses for single Punjabi men. About this time housing for kabildar (family men) had also been built. To accommodate more people, abadi was extended further to the south in the direction of the Hayward junction of the railway going towards Duncan.<sup>152</sup>

The layout was familiar to the Punjabi immigrants because "it was our village. The only difference was that in comparison to the Punjab village, Mayo village was smaller and the houses were not built close together. There was

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150. Cowichan Leader, 5 May, 1932, p. 8.

151. Interview, 17 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

152. Ibid, 6 February, 1994.

distance between shacks, they were not joined in a circle. But we lived among our people and a small pagdandi used to connect the well, the khuhi, and Gurudwara to the houses of our people."<sup>153</sup> The immigrant experience contributed to the development of an unusual degree of inter-action between Punjabis of different castes in Canada. The consequences of this development were far-reaching for the Punjabis of Mahton origin. It changed the context of their identity. From their own perspective, in Canada they enjoyed a distinctly higher status than the Jats.

There were no other East Indian (Punjabi) mills at the time. Sohan Singh brother's mill in Vancouver ran for only two years. So did Harnam Singh's lumber company in Mission, although this made a lot of money. There was another mill, that of Munshi Ram, he ran it first in New Westminster and then at Vancouver but he could make no money. He could not run the mill. Only Mayo Lumber Company succeeded among East Indians (Punjabis) and so naturally all Punjabis came there and we became big.<sup>154</sup>

Such perceptions of success were significant. They strengthened the motivation of Paldi Mahton immigrants to transfer to their village, to their parivars, tabbars in Punjab, the prosperity, wealth and enhanced status they had earned in Canada as mill owners. Paldi immigrants did not disassociate their familial and baradari (caste) brethren from their achievements and worked towards bringing about a change at their village and familial level in Punjab by making concrete contributions from their overseas incomes. They demonstrated their attachment to their homeland: "when you have izzat for the family then you think it's a good step."<sup>155</sup>

Paldi immigrants made monetary contributions from overseas to improve and develop areas which were essential for the Punjab village and were used by all. Immigrants contributed to their Gurudwara, to their village school, to the

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153. Ibid, 15, 17 March, 1989.

154. Ibid.

155. Ibid, 22 March, 1989.

construction of village roads, the village pond and the hospital.<sup>156</sup> Contributions from overseas were made directly to the caretakers of the Paldi Gurudwara, to Mahant Gurditt Singh and later to Mahant Sunder Singh who responded to such gestures by writing letters setting out the expenditure incurred for Paldi Gurudwara services.<sup>157</sup> Immigrants remitted foreign earnings as a mark of respect and reverence to the Baba Mangal Singh Sahai Gurudwara.<sup>158</sup> They also donated to the Secondary Boys' High School in Mahilpur,<sup>159</sup> and some immigrants sent money to the Akali Akhbar, the Akali newspaper in Lahore, and thus became overseas contributors to the cause of the Akali movement.<sup>160</sup> These efforts helped raise the image of the overseas Paldi Mahton in their home region: specifically in Garhshankar tahsil in the Hoshiarpur district. Paldi immigrants worked continually to make their village stand out in the tahsil "because there was a kind of pride in that, that our village should look better, should look like Canada."<sup>161</sup> An informant described the changes that took place in the layout of Paldi village in the Garhshankar tahsil in the 1920s through the efforts of their men settled overseas:

Even before my departure for Canada in 1927, a pakka (brick) road was constructed in the village with money sent from Canada. A toba (pond) was there, but steps were built on it. That was a novelty those days. Even a separate room for ladies to take bath, called chhapar, came into existence. All money for this go from Canada. Our village men came and built big pakke houses. Some were double storeyed. Once pakka construction got underway, this concept was immediately picked up. Houses were built of brick, and bera, the open courtyard in houses, were cemented. No family in the 30s had kachcha house in the

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156. Ibid.

157. Letters, Joe Saroya Collection.

158. Interview, 22 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

159. See receipts and letters, Joe Saroya Collection.

160. Ibid. Immigrants had formed an Akali Committee at Paldi in the 1920s and they sent donations through their Gurudwara to Amritsar.

161. Interview, 22 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.



village, even for low class, ad dharmi, houses were pakke. All pathways or pagdandian became pakka roads and came to have drains on both sides. Gradually the village had a good entrance gate donated by the money sent from overseas. Subsequently, a post office also came up. Eventually a school, a hospital became its redeeming features. When you get these three things - brick buildings, school and hospital, there is no other village like Paldi. Improvement for the village came through Canadians, who were much more than Paldi people and liked Paldi village more than themselves.<sup>162</sup>

The village, which by tradition was known as a low-status Mahton peasant proprietors' village, thus acquired the reputation of being a prosperous village by the 1920s because people "came to know that our village men owned a mill in Canada."<sup>163</sup> Paldi village came to be noticed for its "modern" appearance. People from the neighbouring villages in the Garhshankar tahsil, and even from further away, acknowledged the improvements made in Paldi village. The Jats in the region took particular note of such developments. A Jat immigrant from the Garshankar tahsil stated -"I was born in 1930 and during my entire memory Paldi was a "big" village. It was like a city with paved roads and drains on the sides. Only two villages those days had brick paved streets near my village, Paldi was one of them."<sup>164</sup> Another stated that "I am a Jat Sikh (village Behbelpur). I went to Paldi boys' school in the 1920s. Never did I see any kachcha construction. All were pakka buildings there. There houses were like mansions, meant for commodious living."<sup>165</sup> These impressions were not rare.

Paldi in the Garhshankar tahsil continued to improve its image throughout the 1920s as the village of prosperous "Kanadians". This reputation was consolidated further as the immigrants expanded their resource base by purchasing

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162. Ibid.

163. Ibid, 6 February, 1994.

164. Interview, 24 December, 1988, male, 65 years, Vancouver.

165. Interview, 28 September, 1992, male, 75 years, New Delhi.

additional land in nearby villages or in the neighbouring province to Punjab, Rajasthan. The capacity to purchase additional land was a necessary accompaniment of an improved status for the Paldi Mahton immigrants. Land was the primary source of production in the Punjab but it was also the traditional symbol of high social standing, of honour, of prestige and the izzat that came with it. Immigrants acquired land for themselves and their families because it was the means to retain their wahi badshahi (sovereignty) and because it strengthened their baradari's (caste) status. Immigrants, however, did not purchase land in their own village. In the 1920s land was not sold in Paldi village because it was expensive sirwal property.<sup>166</sup> Moreover, Paldi villagers preferred to retain their own village land for themselves and for their descendants and the Paldi immigrants shared those values. Paldi was a jaddi village from the perspective of the immigrants, therefore they left their village land untouched and instead purchased land outside the vicinity of Paldi but still within the Garhshankar tahsil, besides investing in Rajasthan.

Paldi immigrants bought land in the Jat villages of Sakruli, Kharaudi, Khera and Hukumatpur.<sup>167</sup> Some immigrants also bought land in a Brahman dominated village, Thoana, near to Paldi,<sup>168</sup> in Bagana village in the Hoshiarpur zila (district) and in Ajram village in the Jullundur district.<sup>169</sup> In Rajasthan province, immigrants bought land in the region of Bikaner and Ganganagar.<sup>170</sup> Paldi villagers owned a total of 20 murrabbe (one murrabba equalling 20 acres) in

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166. Group Interview, 20 March, 1993, males 80, 92, 65 years, Paldi Punjab.

167. Letters, Joe Saroya Collection. Interview, 6 February, 1994, male, 88 years, Coquitlam. Interview, 11 October, 1993, male, 72 years, Paldi B.C. Interview, 5 October, 1993, male, 80 years, Vancouver.

168. Interview, 5 October, 1993, male, 80 years, Vancouver.

169. Interview, 11 October, 1993, male, 72 years, Paldi B.C. Letters, Joe Saroya Collection.

170. Interview, 6 February, 1994, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

Bikaner and three quarters of them belonged to immigrants.<sup>171</sup> Land was also purchased by immigrants in the name of the Baba Mangal Sahai Gurudwara in another city, Anandpur Sahai, a place of pilgrimage for the Sikhs in the Punjab. On this land, rooms were built to provide free board and lodging for Paldi villagers as well as for others of their baradari (caste) when they visited Anandpur Sahai.<sup>172</sup> Some Paldi immigrants also purchased shops in the town of Phagwara.<sup>173</sup>

The changes in the material appearance of Paldi village and the capacity of its villagers to purchase additional land were notable because Paldi was the only village in its local region which so clearly demonstrated the substantial gains earned by its emigrants overseas as a unit. The Jat villages of Kharaudi, Sakruli and Hukumatpur did not show similar levels of change.<sup>174</sup> Although Kharaudi village also acquired kothis (large brick houses) through the involvement of its Jat emigrants, it was a multi got village and the structures built by emigrants from one got were not treated as part of the development of the village as a whole.<sup>175</sup> Villages surrounding Paldi, however, aided their Mahton neighbours, if only indirectly, to attain a higher status when the Jat villagers sold land to Paldi Mahton proprietors. Their purchases of land outside Paldi village led to the correlation of Paldi Mahton prosperity overseas with an improved image at home. The significance of changing perceptions about Paldi Mahton in the Garhshankar tahsil in the 1920s is made clear in a Jat informant's words:

Mahton went [to Canada] for enriching themselves, for a better living, to buy more land, to live in rich style. But a Jat went [overseas] to remove hunger...Those days practically the entire

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171. Ibid.

172. Interview Granthi, 28 March, 1993, Paldi Punjab. Interview, 6 February, 1994, male, 88 years, Coquitlam. Interview, 11 October, 1993, male, 72 years, Paldi B.C.

173. Ibid.

174. Visit to the villages.

175. Ibid.

village of Paldi was considered rich. Paldi could not be compared to other Mahton villages also. It was different.<sup>176</sup>

The immigrants in Canada were themselves aware of these notions reflecting the changed reputation of their village and their village baradari (caste) brethren. The reason for this, according to a senior bania al immigrant, was not difficult to understand because:

Nearby villages [in Garhshankar] came to know that Paldi men owned a mill in Canada. They were surprised and envious of this development. Earlier kandi wale [Rajputs] thought we were mahhde (lowly and hopeless)...and Jats they look down upon us, hate us,...think we are of low repute. But then we became big. Asi change ho gai sadi mill chal payee, we had a mill running [in Canada]. It did good, made lots of money. Then all distinguish us in our desh che, homeland, because "our people", mind you, buy land. Other people lend and sell land.<sup>177</sup>

The process of change in the 1920s and 1930s was not confined to Paldi Mahton alone. These years were particularly important for the Mahton baradari (caste) as a whole in Punjab and their ongoing struggle to be officially declared Rajputs developed a more concrete form in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Although the colonial government had admitted their claims for a change in status, as the Punjab census of 1921 showed, they were still not officially listed in the category of Rajputs. So the Mahton baradari (caste) continued its struggle by holding various ikkaths (formal baradari (caste) conferences) in their different villages in Hoshiarpur and Jullundur districts in order to gain internal community support.<sup>178</sup> The unity of the community was strengthened through these ikkaths and they came to speak with one voice in support of their claims. The developments related to the improvement in status for Paldi village and its Mahton proprietors coincided with this phase. As a result Paldi people, especially

176. Interview, 28 September, 1992, male, 75 years, New Delhi.

177. Interview, 6 February, 1994; 23 March, 1989; 13 April, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

178. Ibid. Interview, 27 March, 1993, male, 88 years, Paldi Punjab.

the close kin of emigrants, "their taye, chache, piu," as a villager put it, became involved in their baradari's (caste's) ikkaths.

Around 1935, the Mahton baradari (caste) held one of its largest ikkaths in the high school of their village of Nadalon. "There was a huge gathering of our baradari (caste) at Nadalon high school. Almost every tabbar, from all gots, was represented. Kanedians were represented by their relatives. At the Nadalon ikkath our baradari (caste) decided to arbitrarily change our status to Rajputs." The baradari (caste) had, yet again, invited a traditionally higher-status Rajput, the Raja of Nabha, from a princely state in Punjab to preside over their conference. The independent prince of Nabha, the Raja, belonged to the Sidhu Jat got but his pedigree, like that of other independent princes of Patiala, Jind and Faridkot, was of Rajput descent and stretched back a thousand years. The Raja was offered a chair made of gold as a token of respect by the Mahton baradari (caste) and was asked to represent their case to the British colonial government.<sup>179</sup> The decision to arbitrarily change their caste status through the involvement of a Rajput Raja was not new; they had made a similar arbitrary change in the early 1900s. However, in the 1930s the baradari (caste) made their decision during a campaign that had clearly demonstrated the unanimous support of caste members and had followed this development by filing cases in the Punjabi courts.<sup>180</sup> Their efforts proved fruitful and in 1939 the Mahton baradari (caste) was officially pronounced a Rajput caste. The Paldi village government records, as mentioned earlier, show that original Mahton proprietors became Rajputs in 1941. The consequences of such a development had a significant impact upon the Paldi immigrants of the original Mahton baradari (caste) at the Mayo mill settlement in Canada. In 1941, Mayo

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179 Ibid. For a study of the genealogy of the princes of native Punjab states see L.H.Griffin, The Rajas of Punjab, (Patiala: Languages Department, 2nd ed., 1970. First published in 1873.)

180. Ibid.

Siding in the Sahtlam district was renamed "Paldi" in the province of British Columbia. With this development, immigrants of the Mahton Rajput baradari (caste) managed to bring their two Paldi villages, which were situated in two different parts of the world, closer. Within their community in the Garhshankr tahsil in the Hoshiarpur district, Paldi east came to be regarded as the progenitor of change through its overseas emigrants, and Paldi west came to be viewed as the nucleus of continuity, an extension of the Mahton Rajput baradari (caste) overseas. These images of the two villages across the oceans remained strong within the community of the Paldi immigrants because Paldi in British Columbia had also developed as a village of the prospering Mahton Rajput tabbars and ghars.

Not every Paldi immigrant who settled at the Mayo mill brought his tabbar to Canada. For example, there were some such as Rattan Singh of the boleya tabbar who remained unmarried.<sup>181</sup> There were others from the bania and the boleya parivar such as Bhan Singh and Tara Singh, who were married when they first reached Canadian shores in 1905 and 1906 but never brought their complete tabbars to British Columbia. While Bhan Singh continued to travel back and forth between the village in the Hoshiarpur district and the mill settlement in the Sahtlam district, Tara Singh never returned to visit his tabbar in Punjab, but both brought over their sons to work at the mill in Canada in the 1920s.<sup>182</sup> This pattern was discernible among Jats as well. For example, Bhagwan Singh of Kharaudi village travelled regularly between Punjab and British Columbia and in the 1920s brought over his younger brother to be employed at the mill. Nevertheless, for some Punjabis their complete tabbars were established at the Mayo mill because they either sent for their wives or brought them over from Punjab. There were also men from Paldi village, particularly from the bania parivar, who returned

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181. Ibid.

182. Ibid.

home to marry in the 1920s and brought back their wives. A number of them had originally entered Canada unmarried and remained as such until fifteen or twenty years later when they returned to their village to marry within their own baradari (caste). Some of the bania men were in their forties when they returned to marry, and some in their mid thirties.<sup>183</sup> This was not the traditional age for Punjabi men to marry at the time but, being overseas residents, their decisions to marry late were not questioned. On the other hand, they were accorded greater izzat because almost every Paldi immigrant who returned to the village married according to the traditional marriage customs and norms of their baradari (caste). Immigrants married within their own baradari (caste) and in accordance with their baradari's (caste) got requirements and they underwent both karewa, the widow remarriage, if applicable, and baraati-shaadi, the regular marriage ceremony.<sup>184</sup>

Karewa was a rooted tradition among the Mahton in Punjab and the Paldi immigrants also followed it. By doing so, they demonstrated their izzat for their traditional norms and customs and for their families. A karewa marriage done in the village for a Paldi immigrant from the bania parivar was detailed thus:

Ghanaiya Singh came first to get married. He did not have baraati shaadi (regular marriage). He was the oldest in the family and was also sayana (middle age). When he came his parjai, brother's wife, was a widow. Her husband, Ghanaiya's younger brother, was in the paltan (military) who had died three or four years back. So when Ghanaiya came to marry, his parivar, mother, was still there and father also, decided among themselves to do the marriage chadar dalke, covering them with a sheet. When he was married according to karewa there was no child from the early marriage. Ghanaiya stayed for about six months or a year and then took his wife to Canada.<sup>185</sup>

Other immigrants who married according to the traditional rites also upheld their traditional societal values. Baraati-shaadi was an elaborate ceremony through

183. Ibid.

184. Ibid.

185. Ibid.

which a marriage was completed in different stages. It started with the proposal of names and the sending of messages to prospective families through intermediaries. After that the ritual of the binding ceremony was done. A few days before the actual wedding, the rishtedars, relatives, of the family were invited over to have food. Villagers were also invited for the meals. Although not every villager went to the marriage feast, tabbars participating in marriage rituals sent one person at the time to the marriage feast who also carried his own utensils.<sup>186</sup> Even members from different pattis followed this ritual in Paldi village. On the wedding day itself, other members of a different patti did not join the wedding and the marriage ceremonies were confined to the members of the marrying parivars and tabbars. On the wedding day a baraat, wedding party, consisting only of men, went to the bride's village. The baraat stayed there for four days during which a marriage was sanctified through a variety of rituals, the most important being circumambulating the fire. For Mahton immigrants, their marriages were performed according to Hindu rituals and the marriage was called vedi-vyah because the ceremonies were done by reciting marriage rites from vedas. Thereafter the baraat returned with the bride to the village and the wedding rituals were continued in the man's village for the next three days. After the baraat returned with the bride, women in the household played an important role in the completion of various marriage rituals. They varied from playing kangna to visiting the Jathera (ancestral shrine) besides general merry-making.<sup>187</sup>

Paldi men returned home from Canada to marry after the initial marriage arrangements had been formalised by their senior parivar members. "Those days, consent of the boys and girls meant nothing because marriages were family

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186. Ibid.

187. Ibid.



decisions."<sup>188</sup> Consequently, from the point of view of immigrants, their marriage ceremonies were not lengthy affairs.

The marriage had been arranged for me and I had to honour my family's decision. I had seven days' wedding. After my baraat returned with the bride then from the crowd my parjai (sister-in-law) called for me and as I turned in that direction she threw atta (flour) in my eyes. Its our riwaz (ritual) women do that to their men who return with their new wives. I also played kangna and visited jathera (ancestor's shrine) baba Matiya da in a procession amidst singing by the women.<sup>189</sup>

Traditional marriage customs played an important role in the marriage of other immigrants as well. Mayo Singh and Hari Singh got married in the 1920s according to the traditional rites.

Immigrants from the Jat baradari (caste) also went home from the Mayo mill to marry in the 1920s. They also married in accordance with the got requirements of their caste and according to the vedi-vyah ceremony, in which marriage was sanctified through the Hindu marriage rites. Balwant Kaur, who came to the Mayo mill after marrying one of the Jat Siddoo from Kharaudi village in 1926, belonged to the Hunjal got among Jats from the village, Tholu di Paddi, in the Garhshankar tahsil. Her got was not close to her husband's, his mother's, maternal and paternal grandmother's.

That time it was our riwaz (custom). When elders got together to arrange a marriage they made sure that we went outside four gots. I was very young when I got married, only 14 yeras old, but I remembered my uncles sitting and discussing details of got arrangements for me... My marriage was done as a vedi vyah by a Bahman (Brahman)...My husband and I took lavan phere, (circumambulation)...Then I was taken to my husband's village where I played kangna, and visited jathera. I did not go to the Gurudwara...My jithani (husband's older brother's wife) living in Canada in the 1920s, also married same way...also my sister

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188. Interview, 5 October, 1993, male, 80 years, Vancouver.

189. Interview, 6 February, 1994, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

who also came to the Mayo mill in 1924.<sup>190</sup>

Balwant Kaur and other Punjabi women generally arrived in Canada a year or two after their marriage, when their passports and other immigration formalities were completed. Some came with their husbands who had stayed in Punjab for more than a year, and some followed later with other members of their parivar.

When immigrant women came to join their men, they were relatively young in age, generally in the range of 16 to 18, and most were not even conversant with the basic principles and doctrines of their Sikh religion.<sup>191</sup> None of them was educated; they had not been to even a primary school. Consequently, they could not read from the Granth, the Sikh holy book, which in their village language signified reverence to the Guru as Babe di Bir or Pil Baba "I still don't know the text and also do not understand the meaning of the shabad. That time (1920s) I could barely recite shabad. All women were like that. Bishan Kaur, Khusali, Anar Kaur, Dileep Kaur, my jithani, sister-in-law, everybody was same."<sup>192</sup> When they came to Canada they came as part of the lives of their immigrant men and thus settled down to establish their tabbars and ghars overseas.

The arrival of women provided a new dimension to the settlement of the Punjabi immigrants at the Mayo mill. It helped stabilise the community because for some people their ghar, families and households, were now be established in Canada. Children were born to the immigrant community in the late 1920s and the 1930s.<sup>193</sup> As a result, a resident Punjabi community grew up at the Mayo mill and the settlement acquired the form of a true Punjabi village in the eyes of the immigrants. Housing arrangements also underwent a change to accommodate families. Bigger and separate houses were provided for kabildars, men with

190. Interview, 1 february, 1994, female, 83 years, Burnaby.

191. Ibid.

192. Ibid.

193. Ibid. Community Photographs, Joe Saroya Collection.

families, while single men continued in the bunkhouses. Gradually, women created their own world at their Canadian Punjabi village which was different from their village life in Punjab but similar in some important essentials. Their Punjabi life could not be recreated in full in Canada because houses were of independent design and generally one tabbar, which included husband, wife and children living in a particular house. Among Mahton families, almost every tabbar had an independent dwelling but among Jat families some tabbars lived jointly.<sup>194</sup> Moreover, the nature of the men's world was different in Canada. Punjabi women could not join their men in the mill work and men came home for meals. The Punjabi women gradually adjusted to their new environment. They cooked, washed clothes, looked after their children, participated in the Gurudwara services, joined in the Jor-malla festival and generally socialised among themselves as they would do in their villages. They managed to find time to get together in between the meal times at someone's house, to chat and gossip and exchange their experiences in the new world.<sup>195</sup> Life was different for Punjabi women in Canada but they adjusted to the differences and became more involved with their families: "sada ghar, sada tabbar, my house and my family". In the context of their living overseas the significance of a family came to rest on a tabbar, the husband, wife and children.

Little Punjab at the Mayo mill in the Sahtlam district became an almost self-sufficient village for the Punjabis in Canada because a school was also available at the site. The Mayo mill school was originally started in 1921 to provide an education facility for the children of white families. It was built on the company's property and at the company's expense. Eventually, Punjabi and Japanese children also attended the mill school. In 1929, the local Cowichan Valley newspaper

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194. Interview, 1 february, 1994, female, 83 years, Burnaby.

195. Ibid.

reported a colourful performance by the Mayo mill school children with song and dance at the Christmas break, describing in detail the items performed by Japanese, Punjabi and white children. Significantly, it was the provincial government of British Columbia which provided the school with a teacher, desks, maps and other equipment.<sup>196</sup> The school also had an elected board of trustees. The management of the school remained in the hands of white British Columbians and the school principal and teachers remained white Canadians.

The status gained in Canada brought higher izzat in Punjab. However, the sharing by Paldi immigrants of the success they achieved in Canada with their village and families generated different reactions within their own village community. Their improved socio-economic position attained through wealth created a class awareness among different Paldi families living in the Garhshankar tahsil. This development created differentiation between Paldi parivars and an increasing social distance for the emigrant families. As a corollary to this, the community of Paldi immigrants in British Columbia also underwent a change. Some individuals gained more from the profits earned through the Mayo mill's success and this redefined their status rankings within their immigrant group. Gradually their group orientation ceased to have meaning in the context of their overseas settlement.

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196. Cowichan Leader, 10 March, 1921, p. 9; 6 January, 1921, p. 1; 16 January, 1930, p. 5; 13 July, 1922, p. 6; 3 January, 1929, p. 1; 3 January, 1929, p. 1.

## Chapter 6

### Change and Social Separation

Overseas emigration precipitated considerable change in the districts of central Punjab which had supplied emigrants to far-off countries. The change was markedly noticeable because it resulted in the influx of foreign capital into many villages, in particular tahsils, as emigrants remitted large sums of money to their kin and families. The pouring in of overseas money had tremendous value for the emigrant families in the Punjab, particularly during the years when the province's economy showed a rapid downward swing. The added incomes became a reliable source of security, contributing to a higher level of purchasing power for Punjabis with connections to foreign riches. Inevitably, emigrants and their families were placed at an advantage materially. New wealth came to be associated with a higher level of social standing as well. Its accumulation signified status, influence and power. The combination of new wealth and izzat became especially meaningful for Paldi-based emigrant families. Their accumulating wealth resulted in the rise of a few individuals whose growing influence within the community was reflected in a differentiation between Paldi parivars and tabbars at the level of inter-personal contact. The families with no connection to foreign riches were increasingly alienated. The traditional, high-status zamindars sought to maintain their distinct position. As status became exclusively tied to material wealth, the Paldi emigrant community itself came to be dominated by an individual whose influence was explicitly identified with superior status.

In the second decade of the twentieth century, the Hoshiarpur district became known for the growing level of its prosperity. In the districts of central Punjab, it was no longer markedly different from Ferozepur,

Ludhiana and even Jullundur which in comparison to Hoshiarpur had long possessed economic features more favourable to progress. The comparatively higher standard of living in Hoshiarpur, as in other central districts, was reflected in the general appearance of pakka houses, in the use of different clothing material including silk, muslin and long cloth rather than khaddar or hand-woven material, in the growth of the co-operative movement for agricultural banks and in the increased capacity of the zamindars to redeem land.<sup>1</sup> A substantial increase in the miscellaneous incomes of the central Punjabi peasant proprietors was also noted as part of that development and in this category overseas remittances were said to have become a significant extraneous source of income.<sup>2</sup> Although improving economic conditions were said to be generally common in the central districts, in the second decade of the twentieth century, they were noted more particularly in those tahsils from where Punjabis, both Jat and Mahton, had emigrated overseas.<sup>3</sup>

The tahsils of central Punjab from which emigrants moved overseas - Tarn Taran in the Amritsar district, Moga in the Ferozepur district, Nawashahr, Nakodar, Jullundur and Phillaur in the Jullundur district, and Hoshiarpur and Garhshankar in the Hoshiarpur district - became more progressive by 1915 and the level of their economic prosperity was found to be similar to richer tracts - the tahsils of Muktsar, Fazilka, Zira and Amritsar, which had not supplied overseas emigrants in the early 1900s.<sup>4</sup> It was stressed about the latter tahsils that prosperity was the result of "less inducement to

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1. Rev. & Agr., LR., January 1916, 5-A; March 1916, 1-A; September 1916, 3-A; November 1916, 15-A; September 1914, 26-A; October 1913, 38-A; January 1913, 28-A; April 1913, 42-45-A.
  2. Ibid.
  3. Calvert, Wealth and Welfare, p. 236.
  4. Rev. & Agr., LR., April 1913, 42-45-A; January 1914, 20-A; January 1914, 21-A; January 1913, 28-A; August 1913, 25-A.

overseas emigration" but in the former "overseas emigration [was] the great source of income."<sup>5</sup> In Hoshiarpur district itself the tahsils unaffected by overseas emigration were compared with the relatively prosperous tahsils. Dasuya, for example was regarded as a long way behind Hoshiarpur tahsil in the gains from miscellaneous income.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, the tahsil of Una, which also remained unaffected by overseas emigration, was considered to be in a "backward condition" in its prosperity and progress compared to the Hoshiarpur and Garhshankar tahsils.<sup>7</sup>

Repatriation of money from kin settled away from home was not a new development in the central Punjab districts. What was new in regard to overseas remittances was the unusually large sums involved and the fact that they came from a relatively small number of people residing overseas, all of whom originated from a few particular tahsils. The district of Jullundur, from where a large number of Jats emigrated to Canada, became particularly known for the money it received from its emigrants. A small number of men from the Nawashahr tahsil, about 1253, were found to be residing overseas around 1912.<sup>8</sup> They all belonged to villages which were located in distinct revenue assessment circles: those of Dhak, Retli and Dhaia. Between 1910 and 1914, the annual income remitted from overseas for the Dhak circle was Rs. 2,000,000, for Retli Rs. 82,000, for Dhaia Rs. 42,000.<sup>9</sup> This income was said to be separate from and in addition to a huge amount of not less than Rs. 2,300,000 which was brought home to the tahsil by the returning emigrants themselves.<sup>10</sup>

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5. Ibid.

6. Rev. & Agr., LR, October 1913, 45-A.

7. Rev. & Agr., LR., January, 1914, 37-A.

8. Rev. & Agr., LR., November 1916, 15-A.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

Similarly, about 820 men were said to be residing overseas from the Nakodar tahsil, more than half of whom had originated from one particular assessment circle, Manjki.<sup>11</sup> The total savings remitted to their homes by these emigrants during 1913-14 were estimated at Rs. 50,000.<sup>12</sup> The tahsils of Jullundur and Phillaur also became distinguished during the same period for the large sums annually remitted home by their few emigrants residing overseas.<sup>13</sup>

In the Garhshankar tahsil, only 1,110 men were officially said to be living abroad around 1910-14 and a majority of them were said to have deposited large foreign incomes in the agricultural banks or invested in the purchase of land.<sup>14</sup> A small number of people living in different countries provided extraneous incomes to the families in the tahsil of Tarn Taran and Moga as well.<sup>15</sup> It is important to note that these sources of income were not taken into account in framing the land revenue assessment by the colonial government because revenue in the rural Punjab was obtained primarily from land. But income obtained by the villagers from their relatives settled overseas was noted, nevertheless, to explain the high level of prosperity that the peasantry had attained in certain tahsils. As the assessment officer reported in reference to the Tarn Taran peasant proprietors: "with the greater part of their crops made secure by irrigation and these extraneous earnings to fall back upon, it is not surprising that the standard of living is continually rising."<sup>16</sup>

The trend to repatriate incomes from overseas continued throughout

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11. Rev. & Agr., LR., March 1916, 1-A.

12. Ibid.

13. Rev. & Agr., LR., January 1916, 5-A; November 1916, 15-A.

14. Rev. & Agr., LR., September 1914, 26-A.

15. Rev. & Agr., LR., January 1913, 28-A; April 1913, 42-45-A.

16. Rev. & Agr., LR., January 1913, 28-A.



the second decade of the twentieth century and by the late 1920s it was becoming more pronounced. In the year 1929-30 it was reported, in the oral evidence given to the Punjab Banking Committee by the agent for the Imperial Bank, that the daily average of money remitted from overseas through the Jullundur branch of the bank comprised about Rs. 5,000.<sup>17</sup> The various remittances that were contributed to this sum were destined primarily for the districts of Hoshiarpur and Jullundur although some went to Ludhiana.<sup>18</sup> He went on to state that -"they [emigrants] may not return themselves, but they send [money] to their people here. These drafts are drawn on us and most of these people put the money in their savings bank accounts." He added that, "I remember one man brought about Rs. 25,000, another man Rs. 50,000 which is the highest figure, though the latter told me that he had about Rs. 1,00,000 left there [overseas]." <sup>19</sup> This pattern was not restricted to any particular overseas country. Money was sent from all the countries where Punjabi men had found a foothold in the early decades of the twentieth century. Tarn Taran received remittances from Australia, South Africa, Canada and the United States<sup>20</sup>; in the Moga tahsil from China, the Straits Settlements, the United States and Australia<sup>21</sup> and, in the Garhshankar tahsil where Paldi village was situated, money was being sent from Australia, the United States and Canada.<sup>22</sup>

The agricultural population of the Punjab, during both the pre- and the post-emigration periods, was never without capital for the simple reason that monetary transactions had become the primary basis of trade in the province

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17. Punjab Banking Committee Report 1929-30.
  18. Ibid.
  19. Ibid.
  20. Rev. & Agr., LR., January 1913, 28-A.
  21. Rev. & Agr., LR., April 1913, 42-45-A.
  22. Rev. & Agr., LR., September 1914, 26-A.

and land revenue was also paid in cash during the period of British colonial rule in India. Despite that, however, an ordinary peasant proprietor was not known to have much capital at his disposal even in the comparatively richer districts of central Punjab. The possession of ready cash in large amounts and the access to greater credit which this provided had been available to people and firms such as hundis (indigenous bankers), the banias (money lenders), traders, big zamindars or people who were in direct touch with the market and trade.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, when large sums of money began to be remitted from overseas to the peasant proprietors who comprised the middle-level category among the Punjabi zamindars, the capital so accumulated came to form a new feature in the rural economy of central Punjab.<sup>24</sup> The process brought an altered status for the fortunate, ordinary zamindars and also brought them into prominence as important contributors to the general accumulation of agrarian capital which had become a notable feature of the the central and submontane Punjab in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>25</sup> Those who gained economically from the foreign capital accumulation, and in a relatively short time, came to comprise a class which was not very different from the category of the "more substantial peasants or well-to-do zamindars."<sup>26</sup> The Paldi emigrants and their families shared this enhancement of image.

The manner in which the families and kin of the overseas emigrants utilised the repatriated incomes illustrates the change that affected middle-level zamindars. Invariably their priorities were to replace thatched huts with

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23. Punjab Banking Committee Report 1929-30.

24. Calvert, Wealth and Welfare, p, 230.

25. See Bhattacharya "Agrarian Change in Punjab 1880-1940."

26. *Ibid*, author convincingly establishes the growth of rich peasantry in Punjab, a process that begins to take place roughly after the First World War.

solid structured houses and to invest in land, either by redeeming mortgages, by acquiring mortgages or by buying additional land, both of which initiatives enhanced their status as flourishing zamindars.<sup>27</sup> Their status also improved because in their transactions to invest in land, the consideration of price seemed secondary. We are told that "people who have made money in the foreign countries are prepared to pay very high prices for land."<sup>28</sup> This image carried greater significance in the second decade of the twentieth century because from 1910 onwards land prices, which had risen rapidly throughout Punjab, rose even higher in the central and submontane districts where emigrants were investing. In Punjab generally, the price of an acre rose from an average of Rs. 166 between 1911-16 to an average of Rs. 258 between 1917 and 1921.<sup>29</sup> A cultivated acre was selling for an average of Rs. 345 by 1920-21 in the province.<sup>30</sup> When Paldi emigrants were purchasing land in the Garhshankar sirwal, a cultivated acre had risen in value from an average of Rs. 812 between 1910-14 to an average of 3,456 by 1926.<sup>31</sup> The increase in capital seeking investment in land from overseas was an important contributory factor in the general enhancement of land prices in the central districts.<sup>32</sup>

Emigrants and their families purchased expensive land, regardless of price, because they attempted to expand the only resource which not only served as the primary means of livelihood but was also the symbol of status

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27. Rev. & Agr., LR., January 1916, 5-A; March 1916, 1-A; September 1916, 3-A; November 1916, 15-A; September 1914, 26-A; October 1913, 38-A.
  28. Calvert, Wealth and Welfare, p, 236. Bhattacharya "Agrarian Change in Punjab," p, 527.
  29. Punjab Administration Report 1921-22.
  30. Ibid.
  31. Calvert, Wealth and Welfare, p, 227. Rev. & Agr., LR., September 1914, 26-A.
  32. Settlement Hoshiarpur 1910-1914. Rev. & Agr., LR., October 1913, 38-A.

and wealth. The importance of status over subsistence, however, assumes significance when one takes into consideration the fact that the emigrants did not invest in land improvement.<sup>33</sup> There does not seem to have been any replacement of traditional methods of cultivation, or of traditional implements, in the tahsils known for their emigrants settled overseas in general<sup>34</sup> and in Paldi village, in particular, the families of emigrants continued their agricultural production in the 1920s with the plough yoked to bullocks.<sup>35</sup> Modern technology and equipment, such as tractors and tube wells, did not become a feature of Hoshiarpur villages generally, or in Garhshankar tahsil, until the 1960s. Although the traditional Persian wheel used in well irrigation was beginning to be replaced by a new apparatus called a charsa, and some Mahton villages of the Nawashahr tahsil in the Jullundur district became particularly known for this, the most usual well equipment, even in Paldi, continued to be the bucket and the rope.<sup>36</sup> In Paldi village foreign capital was invested in digging new wells,<sup>37</sup> but emigrant money in the central Punjab was rarely spent on changing and modernising well equipment. It is clear, therefore, that the demand for land among emigrants and their families was not, to simply increase their wealth; if that had been their main objective they would have sought increased profits through agricultural improvements. Rather they sought to expand their land-holdings because these reflected an ample security in the triple chain of caste, custom and character which bound a cultivator, a peasant proprietor, to the soil in the

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33. Calvert, Wealth and Welfare, pp, 228-231.

34. Rev. & Agr., LR., September 1914, 26-A; October 1913, 38-A; January 1916, 5-A; March 1916, 1-A; November 1916, 15-A; September 1916, 3-A.

35. Paldi Village Lal Qitab 1915-1936.

36. Rev. & Agr., LR., November 16, 15-A.

37. At least five new wells which were dug in the 1920s are associated with emigrants in the village

Punjab.<sup>38</sup>

The motivation to consolidate their primary resource among the emigrants was no different from other Punjabi peasant proprietors. Their large scale investments, however, were much more significant because economic conditions showed a downward trend in the Punjab as a whole from the second decade of the twentieth century and as a result, the central Punjabi peasant proprietor faced diminishing returns from the production on his land. In 1914 it was reported from Garhshankar tahsil that a piece of land worth Rs. 500 was yielding a rent of about Rs. 25 from which revenue and other cesses had to be deducted, hence basic returns from the land of an average size holding were being projected as less than five percent.<sup>39</sup> This feature, which indicated the beginning of a period of low returns from land for an ordinary zamindar in the rural Punjab continued to prevail in varying degrees in the 1920s, until a serious drop took place in the depression years of the early 1930s.<sup>40</sup> In the 1920s the average rate of return for an ordinary zamindar, from an average sized holding throughout the province, was estimated to be generally 8 percent on khudkasht and 4-5 percent on batai, rented land.<sup>41</sup> Under such circumstances the investments in land by emigrants like those from Paldi village in the Garhshankar tahsil could only reflect affluence and, simultaneously, establish their reputation as prosperous agriculturists. Furthermore, as agricultural prices began to decline steadily in the Punjab in the 1920s, as the population increased and as the costs of production showed a concomitant increase, there seems little doubt that overseas emigration would continue to make an impact on the rural society

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38. See Darling, Prosperity and Debt p,7.

39. Rev. & Agr., LR., September 1914, 26-A.

40. See Bhattacharya, "Agrarian Change in Punjab 1880-1940."

41. *Ibid*, p, 523.

of the central Punjab districts, particularly in the Garhshankar tahsil.

The prices for export crops, which generally showed a sustained upward movement from the latter half of the nineteenth century to the post-First World War years began to show a slow decline in the Punjab from 1921 onwards until the rates collapsed after 1928 and dropped by 60 to 70 percent in the two years 1929-31.<sup>42</sup> About the same time the population began to show a rapid increase in the province.<sup>43</sup> Abadi in the Paldi village also showed a corresponding growth. From 65 kanals in 1900-01, it rose to 106 kanal and 10 marla by 1916-17 and did not decline thereafter.<sup>44</sup> Increased abadi resulted in increased subdivision of proprietary holdings. In 1920-21, the total number of holdings had risen to 83 in Paldi and their subdivisions became 417 and by 1940-41, the holdings became 107 and their subdivisions 317.<sup>45</sup> But the total cultivated area of the village did not undergo much change. It continued to range between 450 to 470 acres between 1911-12 and 1940-41.<sup>46</sup> The result was that land was being cultivated more intensively than before because of the increased pressure of population. This tendency was not new because the high level of soil fertility of central and submontane region had permitted the peasantry to cultivate land intensively even before the British took over Punjab. By the 1920s, however, the tendency to cultivate land more than once in a year had become more common. This development was noted as a distinct shift in the cultivating pattern of the Punjabi zamindars from 1916-17.<sup>47</sup> The Mahton villages, which were generally distinguished for their smaller subdivisions in the central districts, came to be particularly noticed

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42. Ibid, p, 408.

43. Ibid, p, 23. Punjab Census, 1921, 1931.

44. Jamabandi, 1901-02. Misl Haqiat, 1911-12. Jamabandi, 1916-1940.

45. Jamabandi, 1920-21 to 1940-41.

46. Ibid. Misl Haqiat, 1911-12.

47. Punjab Banking Committee Report 1929-30.

around 1916 for their practice of intensive cultivation. The following extract from a report of the revenue officer from the Nawashahr tahsil in the Jullundur district illustrates the point.

My Mahton informant is as industrious as any Jat, very typical of the best type of peasant proprietor...Owning 46 kanal 13 marla he cultivates himself 44 kanals 2 marlas, lets out on cash rent 2 kanals 11 marlas, and also himself cultivates 12 kanals as a tenant-at-will in addition to his land...On this area of 58 kanals 13 marlas (roughly five acres), he has grown in five years maize 112 kanals, sugarcane 6, chillies 5 1/2, cotton 33, fodder 29 1/2, hemp 3, wheat 89, gram 33, wheat-gram 45, barley 7, fodder 61, vegetables 22.<sup>48</sup>

Similar practices became prevalent in the Garhshankar tahsil where cultivation of a mixture of wheat and gram increased, in addition to the cultivation of wheat and maize as the predominant crops.<sup>49</sup> Cultivation of pure wheat also continued but it did not thrive in that form in the tahsil as a whole.<sup>50</sup> At the same time, the fields meant for sugar cane, an important export crop from Hoshiarpur, were replaced by wheat and gram because cane ceased to offer reasonable margins of profit after a fall in its demand due to the increased competition of cheaper, imported sugar.<sup>51</sup>

The image of the improved economic condition of the emigrants and their kin became stronger as rising costs of production contributed to the increasing economic hardship in the Punjab in the 1920s. The essential expenses of everyday cultivation - bullocks, the sinking of wells, and labour rose in the province as a whole. The average price of bullocks in the province in the 1920s was Rs. 80 in contrast to Rs. 40 twenty-five years earlier.<sup>52</sup> In the Hoshiarpur and Jullundur doab, the price of bullocks was

48. Rev. & Agr., LR., November 1916, 15-A.

49. Rev. & Agr., LR., September 1914, 26-A.

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid.

52. Calvert, Wealth and Welfare, p, 221.

not less than Rs. 100 or 150 and by 1929-30, the cost of maintaining a pair of bullocks for a year averaged Rs. 176 for an ordinary zamindar.<sup>53</sup> The cost of the home-breeding of plough cattle was therefore on the rise. Similarly, the cost of sinking wells increased, an important feature in the economy of Hoshiarpur. In the Hoshiarpur tahsil, it ranged from Rs. 300 to 400 and in the Garhshankar tahsil, anywhere from Rs. 250 to 900.<sup>54</sup> Maintenance of well equipment, such as the rope and the bucket and the charsa, formed an added expense. The usual average cost of maintaining a well ranged between Rs. 8 to 10 in the central Punjab, and a combined annual expenditure for the maintenance of wells and bullocks averaged Rs. 20 to 21 by the late 1920s.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, the average cost of human labour was becoming heavy as a zamindar spent twice as much time on each acre of land because of the increasing intensity of cultivation. The total man-days (work done by one man in approximately 8 hours), both as regards family and hired labour, were found to be highest in the submontane doaba.<sup>56</sup>

Thus at a time when the economic conditions of the families of overseas emigrants, including those from Paldi, appeared to have found a path to economic betterment through large-scale remittances, the change in the agrarian economy of the Punjab made life harder for an ordinary peasant proprietor even in the central districts. In the 1920s, it was becoming increasingly difficult for him to balance the scales between his average annual income and his average annual expenditure. A Mahton zamindar's income from five acres of land was said to average Rs. 603-13-0

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53. Rev. & Agr., LR., March 1916, 1-A. Punjab Banking Committee Report 1929-30.

54. Rev. & Agr., LR., September 1914, 26-A; October 1913, 38-A.

55. Punjab Banking Committee Report 1929-30.

56. Rev. & Agr., LR., March 1916, 1-A. Punjab Banking Committee Report 1929-30.



in 1916.<sup>57</sup> His expenditure averaged Rs. 322-5-0 which included, in addition to the costs of production, an average of Rs. 138-2-0 for household expenses. This left him with a yearly surplus of about Rs. 300 from which he had to pay the land revenue and other cesses.<sup>58</sup> A Mahton, at this time, was still considered penurious in comparison to a Jat.<sup>59</sup> By the late 1920s, when emigrants were remitting large sums to their villages and the mill in Canada owned by the Paldi immigrants was running at its maximum capacity, an ordinary zamindar, in both the Punjab generally and in the central districts of the province, was facing considerable economic hardship. Between the years 1926 and 1930, immediately preceding the depression, the average income for a zamindar had fallen to Rs. 95-14-0 per acre of cultivated land while expenditure was Rs. 40-11-0, which did not include the payment of land revenue and the cultivating labourer's wages.<sup>60</sup> It was reported that five or six years back "one could raise Rs. 100 on a kanal of land but now one has to mortgage two kanals for Rs. 100 only."<sup>61</sup> Between 1930 and 1935 the average income per acre of cultivated land fell to Rs. 58 and the estimated expenditure was Rs. 29, excluding the land revenue and wages.<sup>62</sup>

Emigrants overseas, such as the Paldi Punjabis in Canada, were fully aware of the years of increasing hardship which were making life more difficult for their kin in the village. As a bania al immigrant stated, "life became difficult for our people at home in the 1930s. Crop prices fell and

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57. Rev. & Agr., LR., November, 1916, 15-A.

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid.

60. Report on the Agricultural Worker and the Punjab Land Revenue Committee, 1939.

61. Punjab Banking Committee Report 1929-30.

62. Report on the Agricultural Worker and the Punjab Land Revenue Committee, 1939.

marriages became more expensive. People go outside Punjab [to work]. Then they borrow money and Paldi [British Columbia] people lend money."<sup>63</sup> For a Mahton zamindar, a marriage was still a simpler affair comparatively because of their isogamy custom. By exchanging a daughter or a niece for a bride, there was little spent on guests or jewellery.<sup>64</sup> Around 1916 an average Mahton zamindar with a family of five sons and two daughters was known to spend around Rs. 1,414 for the marriage of four sons and around Rs. 500 on the two daughters.<sup>65</sup> In contrast, a Jat zamindar in a village of Hoshiarpur of the same stature as a Mahton spent about Rs. 569 on the marriage of one son and about Rs. 473 on one daughter.<sup>66</sup> These estimates of marriage costs had probably doubled by the late 1920s and perhaps trebled in the case of emigrant families as, during these years, the costs of production and of everyday living absorbed most of a zamindar's income: "may be over 80 percent, it is not likely to be less than 70, and it is more likely to be nearer 80 than 70."<sup>67</sup> By early 1930s, a Punjabi zamindar with an average family size of 5.95 was spending 26.3 percent of his income on the bare necessities of food and dress, 41 percent on the cost of agricultural production and a minimum of 29 percent on the wages of the labourers, necessary for cultivation.<sup>68</sup> With the rest, less than four percent, he attempted to manage his land revenue payment liabilities. This constituted an almost complete estimate of an average family's

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63. Interview, 13 April, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

64. Darling, Prosperity and Debt, p, 60.

65. Rev. & Agr., LR., November 1916, 15-A.

66. Ibid. Darling, Prosperity and Debt, p, 60.

67. Report on the Agricultural Worker and the Punjab Land Revenue Committee, 1939.

68. Ibid.

budget, including the Mahton's, in rural Punjab in the early 1930s.<sup>69</sup> Under circumstances when life was being reduced to little more than bare subsistence for an ordinary peasant proprietor, increasing remittances from overseas became symbols of prosperity and prestige, of higher *izzat*, for those who had the advantage of overseas connections in areas such as Garhshankar *tahsil* where Paldi village was situated.

Overseas countries, which became known as the lands of riches, thus began to be accorded more importance during the years when Punjabi peasants were beginning to struggle hard to make ends meet. As a result, rural Punjabis continued to depart in large numbers for distant places. But their opportunities were more limited in the 1920s because the countries they sought, in particular Australia, New Zealand, America and Canada, had banned the immigration of people from India.<sup>70</sup> Punjabis, nevertheless, ventured abroad. Many found their way to Fiji, and from there entered New Zealand or Australia by circumventing the entry laws.<sup>71</sup> Some Punjabis travelled to Singapore and Hong Kong and, in the words of one informant "got off the boat when their station arrived," while others continued on their journey, hoping to find a means of gaining entry into North America.<sup>72</sup> Significantly, the background of the intending emigrants departing from the central Punjab in the 1920s became more diverse. Jats were still predominant among the emigrants but people belonging to low-status caste such as *chamars* (leather workers), and Sainis (minor agricultural caste) entered New Zealand during this time.<sup>73</sup> Some

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69. Ibid.

70. McLeod, *Punjabis in New Zealand*. Buchignani, *Continuous Journey*. Johnston, *East Indians in Canada*.

71. McLeod, *Punjabis in New Zealand*.

72. Interview, 28 January, 1994, female, 83 years, Burnaby.

73. McLeod, *Punjabis in New Zealand*.

of them also came to North America. Ships travelling to Canadian shores brought some people from the shibba (tailor) and jhir (water carrier) castes, as well as Mahton and Jats, some of whom belonged to the Gill and the Sangha got.<sup>74</sup>

The remittances to and investments in Punjab by these emigrants had a significant impact. For Paldi villagers, the infusion of foreign capital created status differentiation among different tabbars and parivars of the proprietary community, particularly during the years of growing economic hardships. In general terms, emigrants were appreciated for being productive contributors to the overall development of the village and, through that, for the status enhancement of the Paldi Mahton baradari (caste) brethren.<sup>75</sup> Their economic success overseas and their efforts to establish village tabbars in Canada were also regarded as valuable because the mobility attained by their village emigrants had extended the base of their village across the world.<sup>76</sup> But the reactions of villagers who remained unconnected to overseas riches, but who belonged to the Mahton proprietary group, did not show a uniform enthusiasm for the altered economic position of their emigrant brethren and their close kin in matters of day-to-day living. The responses of the villagers differed because in practice only one Paldi khandan - the bania - and from a specific patti - the bania al - managed to attain both economic security overseas and an enhanced status at home. The members of boleya parivar also made economic gains abroad but in comparison to the banias their contributions to the improvement in the living conditions of the village were negligible.

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74. Interview, 22 October, 1993, male 72 years, Paldi BC.

75. Group interview, 20 March, 1993, males, 80, 92, 65, years, Paldi Punjab.

76. Ibid. Interview, 24 March, 1993, male, 88 years, Paldi Punjab.

<sup>77</sup> As a result, in the perceptions of the villagers, the banias became synonymous with new wealth and a symbol of status differentiation within the village; a characteristic that created social distance between Paldi parivars and tabbars from different pattis and the patti of the emigrant's banias.

Perhaps the villagers would have accepted the altered status of the emigrants as a fact of life if the emigrants had not remained as deeply involved in the life of their Punjab village. Prior to the establishment of the Mayo mill in British Columbia, the amount which was remitted by the banias to their families appeared to be small. The money order receipts dated from 1915 show that at this time emigrants mailed amounts between two and thirty three dollars. <sup>78</sup> But the remittances became both larger and more regular and by the 1920s, emigrants were sending money orders or drafts to their family members in Punjab from British Columbia in amounts ranging from Rs. 268, 273, 304, 704 to 1120, 1500, 4000 and 6400.<sup>79</sup> Money sent directly to the family, however, was only part of the remittance planning of Paldi Mahton immigrants. By the 1920s they were investing through the banks as well. The banks with which Mayo mill immigrants dealt in Punjab were the Hoshiarpur branch of the People's Bank of Northern India, the Amritsar branch of the National Bank of India and the Amritsar branch of the Punjab and Sind bank<sup>80</sup> The amount sent directly to the banks from Canada involved larger figures ranging from Rs. 2,500 through Rs. 5,250 to a high figure of Rs. 141,000. <sup>81</sup>

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77. Interview, 22 march, 1993, male, 80 years, Paldi Punjab.

78. Receipts, Joe Saroya Collection.

79. Ibid.

80. Ibid. Also letters, Joe Saroya Collection.

81. Ibid.

From the perspective of the Paldi immigrants, sending money home was one of the gestures which demonstrated their sense of respect and duty towards their families. But in relation to other parivars and tabbars the large sums of money sent over to some people in the village produced combinations of class and status that excluded other Paldi parivars and tabbars from the "lakhapati, karorapati, millionaires and billionaires [emigrants] who could turn anything their way if they wished through their unlimited riches."<sup>82</sup> On many occasions the non-bania patti villagers became conscious of "ishtmar and eka (affection and unity) which traditionally bound our people closely and not the money."<sup>83</sup> The sense of competition among Paldi villagers increased because the new status of the emigrants was derived not simply from the traditional pattern of inter-relationships between different pattis, khandans, parivars and tabbars but from their different economic roles and experiences.

The differences in status among Paldi parivars widened in the post-emigration period as emigrant families began to secure their life-styles by attaining certain positions. "Returnees always came home with money with which they, like my grandfather, took land on mortgage, gave it to a tenant and lived comfortably, and [he] also found a girl from a rich zamindar to marry."<sup>84</sup> The position of some bania tabbars also became notable because they acquired the kind of possessions which were regarded as the symbol of high-status living among the big landlords in the village, the jhangi wale. According to a senior villager: "traditionally ghoris (horses) were maintained by the thekedars in the village. They had a tabela

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82. Interview, 24 March, 1993, male, 88 years, Paldi Punjab.

83. Group interview, 20 March, 1993, males, 80, 92, 65 years, Paldi Punjab.

84. Interview, 22 March, 1993, male, 80 years, Paldi Punjab.

(stable) and maintained at least twenty horses at a time."<sup>85</sup> The tabbar of Canadian emigrants Ghanaiya Singh and Mayo Singh, however, bought ghoris with their new income and kept them in the village. The Paldi village notebook, Lal Qitab, showed 3 horses in 1920, 7 in 1923, 5 in 1925 and 3 in 1930.<sup>86</sup> "Most of them were in the possession of thekedars, but Bholla Singh bania (Ghanaiya and Mayo's father) also maintained ghori only when his sons sent money from Canada."<sup>87</sup> The same tabbar also gained a reputation as big money lenders because they started a money lending business on a large scale by utilising the money sent from overseas.<sup>88</sup> The bania families originally practiced money-lending within the village and on a personal basis." After the money came from Canada they expanded their business and lent in thousands."<sup>89</sup> The tabbar also had a formal letter-head printed out which read "Sardar Bholla Singh and Sons. Money Landers. Village Paldi. P.O. Mahilpur. District Hoshiarpur."<sup>90</sup>

Other bania families also acquired a special reputation because they spent money buying good clothing and jewellery for their women and on holding marriage feasts on more than one occasion although the traditional practice was to invite the baradari(caste) brethren a day before the wedding day.<sup>91</sup> The emigrant families, on the other hand, developed the tradition of serving "food to villagers three or four times after the wedding."<sup>92</sup> The emigrants, according to informants, also started the practice of holding akhand patth, (uninterrupted reading of the Granth) in

85. Interview, 24 March, 1993, male, 88 years, Paldi Punjab.

86. Paldi Lal Qitab, 1915-1936.

87. Interview, 24 March, 1993, male, 88 years, Paldi Punjab.

88. Ibid. Interview, 13 April, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

89. Ibid.

90. See letter head, Joe Saroya Collection.

91. Interview, 24 March, 1993, male, 88 years, Paldi Punjab.

92. Interview, 26 march, 1989; 17 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

the Baba Mangal Sahai in celebration of their marriages or birth of a child. Earlier [before emigration] one had never heard of such practices."<sup>93</sup> That the emigrants came to hold an influence as a result of their altered position is illustrated by the following incident in which, according to an informant, a Paldi overseas emigrant "refused to be married by a granthi who insisted on my taking pahul. He asked me to do amrit chakhna (initiation) before the ceremony because I married Nandkarich style [Anandkar] in the 1930s. But I didn't and I told him that I will cut my hair in Calcutta. Then the girl's family arranged another granthi who was also available in the village and married me Nandkarich way."<sup>94</sup>

The most concrete example of status differentiation between emigrant and non-emigrant parivars was demonstrated by the appearance of palatial houses which were built under the supervision of the emigrants themselves. The new houses were not only huge but were built in red stone, a luxury in the Punjab of the 1920s, and were also of a novel style: emigrants separated their abadi raqba (residential share) and built independent units. Tabbars in the bania parivars thus came to own independent ghar and all in different parts of the village abadi. Some independent houses were single-storeyed with names of emigrant owners and the date of construction inscribed on them; and some were double-storeyed. It was not possible to acquire details about the measurement of the separated houses because, by tradition, no abadi records were kept in the villages. People divided abadi land by verbal agreements and usually an educated person was made to note down such agreements on a piece of paper which was treated as binding upon all. Even the colonial

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93. Ibid.

94. Interview, 6 February, 1994, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.



government respected such forms of agreements. However, because the houses built by emigrants are still standing in the village, giving an impression of the luxurious style of living in the 1920s, it became possible to formulate an idea about the kind of change their construction would have brought to the village when the village abadi consisted of perhaps eighty to one-hundred houses. They numbered 239 in 1990.<sup>95</sup>

The rooming capacity of the red stone houses was huge. The main sawat was in the form of a hall with the capacity to house twenty to twenty-five people at a time. Separate rooms were provided for the women in the family. There was provision for ventilation as most rooms had windows. The kitchens were covered and a new style of chulha (hearth) was provided. The bera, open courtyard, was cemented and had a changed appearance. It had a corridor, so that one stepped into the corridor from the rooms and thence to the bera. The double-storey construction had cemented, pakka, stairs on two sides of the bera. Before the construction of these houses, there were few parivars which could afford such extravagant buildings, particularly in the 1920s. According to villagers "originally only jhangi wale had pakka makan in the village. Then one subedar [in the army], Amar Singh, built his pakka makan and also a Dileep Singh, who had also returned from overseas."<sup>96</sup> Pakke makan subsequently became a common feature in the village but most were built with bricks.

The disparity between emigrant families and others increased significantly as emigrants purchased expensive land. Apart from the expense involved, the feature that widened the gap was that most bania emigrants had purchased additional land in the names of their family

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95. Paldi Rasadbandi (village census), 1990.

96. Group interview, 20 March, 1993, males, 80, 92, 65 years, Paldi Punjab.

heads (piu) but also with a consideration for each of the male members in their tabbars. A stronger economic position was thus secured for the bania patti and khandan in the future as each bania tabbar was meant to grow into a parivar. The emigrants Ghanaiya Singh and Mayo Singh had purchased 8 murrabbe in their father's name which were to be divided equally between four sons upon inheritance.<sup>97</sup> Tara Singh had bought 1/2 murrabba in his father's name. He was the only inheritor.<sup>98</sup> Dhumman Singh purchased 2 murrabbe to be divided between himself and his three brothers at the time of inheritance.<sup>99</sup> The capacity to secure the future of the bania families did elevate the status of emigrants and their close kin in the village, but it did not ensure a simultaneous acknowledgement of it from other parivar and tabbar members.

The social separation between banias and others became apparent when villagers from the non-bania patti, during interviews, attempted to downplay the new economic roles of the prosperous emigrants at home. They stressed in particular, but inaccurately, the "extremely poor condition" of the emigrants in the village when they first departed for Canada in the early 1900s.<sup>100</sup> They liked to claim that "only poverty-stricken families emigrated to Canada from our village"<sup>101</sup> and that "before they became rich in Canada they [banias] were gareeb sige rajke, on the verge of starvation."<sup>102</sup> Another informant stated that "they were so poor that parsada mushkil honda si, they could barely afford meals"<sup>103</sup>

97. Interview, 2 December, 1993, male 88 years, Coquitlam.

98. Ibid.

99. Ibid.

100. Group interview, 20 March, 1993, males, 80, 92, 65 years, Paldi Punjab.

101. Ibid.

102. Interview, 24 March, 1993, male, 88 years, Paldi Punjab.

103. Interview, 22 March, 1993, male, 80 years, Paldi Punjab.

and that the emigrants belonged to "low income status families in the village."<sup>104</sup>

Certain incidents demonstrate that the new lifestyle in which some of the bania emigrant parivars began to indulge were not generally appreciated. A bania tabbar constructed a new style of building structure in the village abadi, which had a basement, after he returned from Canada. Villagers indicated that "they [banias] tried to show off. They just wanted to do something different because they came back from Canada. Nand Singh built the pora, underground [room], to demonstrate his ameeri (richness). One could reach the room underground by going down the pakki (cemented) stairs. They used pora for men, to merely entertain, chat, gossip, that's all. No utility."<sup>105</sup> Yet another illustration indicated that a comparison of lifestyles came to have value in the village in regard to emigrants. One informant noted that "when Bhan Singh returned from Canada, he used to help poor people a lot. If he saw someone without shoes he would quickly ask why are you bare feet and then would immediately buy a pair of shoes for that person." When asked to name a person he helped in such a manner the informant replied "he bought shoes for Bhagat Singh, his own brother."<sup>106</sup>

Better and new styles of clothing and brick houses, which formed the main basis for comparison between non-emigrant and emigrant families, appear to be minor issues to an outside observer but, in reference to the everyday life of a "simple" villager in the Garhshankar tahsil, they were significant. Issues related to such "symbols" of status provided

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104. Ibid. Group interview, 20 march, 1993, males, 80, 92, 65 years, Paldi Punjab.

105. Ibid.

106. Ibid.

occasions for Paldi villagers to become conscious of their own izzat and prestige, as the following illustration provided by a ninety-two year old villager shows: "When Mayo Singh came from Canada he visited me at the Mahilpur Boys' School where I was studying at the time. There he took me by my arm to a nearby shop and indicated to the shopkeeper, give him a nice shirt. But I refused to take that piece of cloth because our elders did not appreciate such gestures. They said we don't accept things in charity. It is derogatory [lowering in izzat]...They did not bow before them [bania emigrants] or to their riches...Mayo also asked me to come to Canada saying we will keep you at our mill. But I did not go. My family was not willing."  
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Village segmentation tended to become more apparent within Paldi as the improved economic condition of the emigrants and their parivars reinforced distinctions between the traditional rival village pattis, the jhangi wale and banias. The patti segmentation surfaced on matters related to land, the construction of wells and marriage, issues which affected all villagers and baradari (caste) members. The differences arose because the jhangi wale thekedars attempted to assert their dominant position while the emigrant bania parivars attempted to demonstrate their recently achieved higher status. The developments which took place in the village in this manner resulted, according to the villagers, "in the creation of parties [factions]" in Paldi.<sup>108</sup> Almost every new feature associated with the ameeri (richness) of the banias was matched by the jhangi wale, sometimes with the deliberate intention of demonstrating the stronger position they held within the boundaries of their village and in the larger

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107. Ibid.

108. Interview, 26 March, 1993, male, 88 years, Paldi Punjab.

society at their tahsil level.

"Soon after a pakka makan was built by Canadian emigrant Ghanaiya Singh in 1921-22, Nagina Singh thekedar constructed four houses, in red stone and almost double in size, for his three sons and himself in the village abadi. He then built a water tank and connected it to the four houses with pipes for regular water supply. His houses were the only ones in the village with that facility."<sup>109</sup> Similarly Paldi Boys' School was built in 1922-23 on land donated by the thekedars, constructed by their labour and from the bricks supplied from their village kiln, shortly after the Mayo mill school was built in Canada. The school was recognised by the Education Board.<sup>110</sup> Later some emigrants donated money to the same school.<sup>111</sup> The jhangi wale tried to transmit the message of their influential position by intimidating bantias. An informant explained that "Bachitar Singh thekedar (also zaildar) would not let our women live in peace in the village. On many occasions when he took walks around the village [abadi], he made sure to stop in front of our houses to stamp his danda, big stick, a number of times to demonstrate that he was influential in front of our women."<sup>112</sup> The jhangi wale attempted to demonstrate their superiority in other ways. "When Bhan Singh and Doman Singh purchased land jointly from a Jat in Hukumatpur, around 1921-22, the thekedar Bachitar Singh (also zaildar) did not wish that transaction to take place because one who owns more land enjoys an obviously higher status. Bachitar Singh then offered more money to the Jat to have him cancel the

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109. Interview, 2 December, 1993, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

110. Jamabandi, 1923-24, showing school land for the first time.

111. Group interview, 20 March, 1993, males, 80, 92, 65 years, Paldi Punjab.

112. Interview, 20 December, 1993, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

deal with our people. The Jat then refused to honour the transaction with Bhan Singh and Dhumman Singh even though everything was done on paper. Three court cases were fought after the Jat refused to honour the deal. Our (bania) men won the first one, Jat the second and then the Jat won again. Our people lost the land and also spent an additional Rs. 20,000 on the deal." 113

Evidently, emigrants had greater purchasing power in terms of money but the village thekedars had greater social influence in the locality of Paldi. The jhangji wale asserted their traditional dominance by frustrating the attempts of bania emigrants in yet other ways as the following illustration shows - "Mayo (Maiya) Singh had sent money for the repair of the toba and the construction of a room on it. He sent money directly to Sardar Nagina Singh (jhangji wale) because they were the biggest zamindars and they held the strongest influence in matters related to the village development. Even the panchayat (village council) had to take their advice on many matters. As a riwaz (custom) all initiatives for the village improvement were done through them. But the money for the toba which came from overseas was not spent for many many years, until Mayo (Maiya) Singh came and put pressure on the thekedars."<sup>114</sup> According to another informant, thekedar Nagina Singh never used the money sent by emigrants for that purpose and subsequently returned that money, along with interest, to the Canadian banias and later paid for the repair of the toba and built the steps himself. That became village property.<sup>115</sup> These illustrations indicate that the villagers attempted to preserve their traditional style of life even

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113. Ibid, 2 December, 1993.

114. Group interview, 20 March, 1993, males, 80, 92, 65 years, Paldi Punjab.

115. Interview, 24 March, 1993, male, 88 years, Paldi Punjab.

though remittances and investments coming from emigrants were regarded as both forces for and symbols of change in izzat by the Paldi people.

There are two other examples of this type of situation which deserve attention in the context of this study. One deals with the construction of a khuh and the other with traditional marriage customs. These illustrations are significant because they demonstrate the deliberate attempts made by the traditional big zamindars to challenge the strengthening socio-economic position of the bania emigrants in the village. Such challenges were important in the life of the village in the 1920s and early 1930s but they could not stop the process of the long-term changes which took place in Paldi in response to overseas emigration. By the 1960s and 1970s almost three-quarters of the village tabbars were represented among Paldi immigrants in Canada, including the next generation of the thekedar families.

The first example illustrates that the social gradations between different patti members altered significantly. The issue involved was the construction of a khuh by a bania al tabbar and a dispute over it drew clear lines of division between the emigrant parivars and the tabbars associated with the jhangi wale patti. The khuh incident was reflective of open challenges and confrontation in the village.

Nobody objected to the construction of the khuh by Bhulla Singh, Mayo Singh and Ghanaiya Singh's father. He built the khuh close to the village entrance gate. The trouble arose because the khuh was constructed on Chajja Singh's land which Bhulla Singh took because it was closer to his own land. The two made a written agreement and Bhulla Singh was to pay about Rs. 1000 to 1500 at the time. But he changed his mind later and wanted to reduce the amount. But the thekedar opposed that move and insisted that Bhulla Singh should abide by the original agreement. There were two parties on the issue, on one

side was thekedar and on another Bhulla Singh. One day there was open confrontation over the issue. Our village men were near the khuh, where Bhulla Singh along with his brother Narayan Singh (Mayo's taya) again insisted on readjustment of the original deal to which the thekedars men did not agree. Then Bhulla Singh tore up the original agreement and refused to honour the deal and walked away. At that time Hari Singh of khuhi de, from the jhangi patti, picked up every bit of that torn agreement, joined the pieces together and made Chajja Singh file a case against Bhulla Singh. That day our village split into two clear parties. The village people who sided with bania during the court proceedings like Siriya (Sri Ram) Bahman, Ralla Singh, (not a bania) were later helped by the emigrants. Siriya was taken over to Canada and Ralla Singh's son, Gurbaksh Singh, was also helped by them. Gurbaksh Singh went via Panama and then Mayo (Maiya) Singh took him to Canada.<sup>116</sup>

Once factions were created in a formal manner, they prevailed and surfaced again whenever a situation developed in which it became necessary for the different pattis to demonstrate their social influence. The issues involved were generally connected to the notions of prestige and the relative position of families within the community and, at times, within the baradari(caste), as the following shows:

Ghanaiya Singh's son parvara hoke (revolted) and wished to marry a girl of our own got from the village Daruli. He came from Canada to the village to marry. But his chacha refused to honour that arrangement. The boy however went ahead and contracted marriage because the girl was also willing and was as insistent. Then on the wedding day in the village, thekedar approached the boy personally, and took him to village Daruli in his car and got the boy married. The consequences were far reaching. Panchayat (village council) stopped milan vartan (announced social boycott) with Ghanaiya Singh's tabbar and summoned the boy's parents from Canada. The parents were apologetic and helpless because the marriage had been formalised. They attempted to rectify the wrong done by doing whatever was advised to them by the baradari (caste) panchayat

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116. Ibid.



under the circumstance.<sup>117</sup>

The extent to which the thekedars exercised their social influence in the vicinity of Paldi, in response to the improving economic position of the Canadian Paldi emigrants, is further indicated by the fact that the Jat neighbours of Paldi in the Garhshankar tahsil, who were interviewed in the study, could not provide details about the marriage celebrations of the emigrants because they were low-key events in contrast to the jhangi wale parivar marriages which took place in the 1920s. The following illustration is important in this reference:

They were like melas (fairs) which continued for three-four days. Baraat (marriage party) was one aspect of it. So wealthy were they that separate arrangements were made for others attending the marriage. There were langars (free meals) for anyone from the vicinity of Paldi to enjoy the marriage feast. Unlimited food was provided. Jats also went there and chamars (leather workers) also went. Not only this. There was arrangement for music, bands played throughout the wedding ceremonies. Games such as kol, wrestling, were also played during the general merry making. In fact competitions were held and winners were also awarded by the thekedars. I attended two or three such marriages in the family around 1929-30.<sup>118</sup>

Overseas emigration, however, had a polarising effect on the Paldi village community. Villagers continued to seek riches abroad, but not necessarily through the banias. In the 1920s, some Paldi men belonging to als and pattis different from banias, emigrated to Panama and Mexico.<sup>119</sup> Some also managed to find their way into America and Canada.<sup>120</sup> Villagers again departed in groups because the routes to their destination were not completely known. Emigrants in the 1920s had to look for

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117. *Ibid.*

118. Interview, 28 September, 1992, male, 75 years, New Delhi.

119. Interview, 22 March, 1993, male, 88 years, Paldi Punjab.

120. *Ibid.* Lists, PAC, RG 76, file 536999.

indirect routes to enter America or Canada because immigration from India was not allowed at the time.<sup>121</sup> Among the departees from Paldi village in the 1920s were men from the bania khandan who either had not moved overseas in the early 1900s or had returned from Canada around 1913. Their ambitions were stirred because, from their perspective, the Canadian accomplishments of their tabbarmen were praise-worthy and because they could identify themselves with the higher status that the new wealth of their close kin had helped achieve for their patti. The significance of an altered status for emigrants in their own village community thus depended on how everyone involved in the changes resulting from the overseas connections of the village rated their success or failures. The ang sak (close relatives) of Paldi emigrants conveyed their reactions and impressions to their kin overseas through letters in which they extended appreciation, approval and acknowledgement of the success of their family brethren.<sup>122</sup> Some expressed their happiness for the fact that their men were safely settled and all together in Canada, some advised their family men to take joint decisions by sharing important family matters, some extended their support for being the proud relatives of the Canadian mill owners, while some family elders sent open advice to the bania parivar men "to do only the most essential for the village people because out here nobody appreciates the gestures and you end up getting a bad name in the Hoshiarpur zila (district)."<sup>123</sup>

Apart from their attachment to the wider kin group, the bania men were also motivated to move to Canada because the changes brought as a result of the emigrant remittances made an impact on the bania tabbars as

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121. Interview, 5 October, 1993, male, 80 years, Vancouver.

122. Letters, Joe Saroya Collection.

123. Ibid.

well. The bania tabbars had assumed a distinct identity as individual units in response to the pattern set by the construction of new and independent styles of houses. The houses of the parivar of Narayan Singh, Gurditt Singh and Bholla Singh banias had separated in the 1920s and became known as three distinct ghar in the village. Moreover, the changing economic conditions did not improve the material position of all bania tabbars uniformly. The tabbars which supplied more men overseas were in a more favourable position in comparison to those who had only one son living in Canada.<sup>124</sup> The changes in the material conditions of the bania emigrant parivars were real symbols of economic improvement but they also signified a difference of status among the families in the bania khandan itself.

The bania parivar men, unlike others in the village, were impressed by the new appearance of emigrants when they visited home in western style clothing, by their construction of modern-style housing and by their large-scale investments in land: the symbols of new wealth. To them access to Canadian wealth was desirable, not simply as a solution to the problem of economic hardship, because they were relatively better off than others, but because they wanted to live an affluent life. In 1924-25 the total number of land holdings held by owners and shareholders in Paldi were 105, and of these 9, approximately 8 percent, were mortgaged.<sup>125</sup> The mortgages increased to 16 from a total of 113 holdings in 1928-29.<sup>126</sup> Some of these belonged to bania tabbars who had rented out their land to tenants while their parivar men worked and earned in Canada.<sup>127</sup> According to a

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124. Interview, 2 December, 1993, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

125. Ibid. Paldi Lal Qitab, 1915-1936.

126. Ibid.

127. Paldi Intiquial (Mutation) Registers, 1915 to 1941.

senior Paldi bania immigrant, the riches of their Canadian kin "provided concrete images of affluence. I still remember my first impression about a Canadian returnee in the village even though at that time I was about ten or eleven years old. Shyam Singh of Mahilpur, an original shareholder in the Mayo mill, came to visit Ghanaiya Singh in Paldi around 1921. He wore bardi, dress pants and shirt. He also had shoes on and a shiny expensive black turban. He looked wealthy."<sup>128</sup>

The interviewee continued:

"I saw Mayo Singh, Doman Singh, live like kings when they came to the village from Canada. They spent money like water, on giving food to people many times in celebration of their marriages, spending freely on Guruduaras, holding akhand path, and serving food to all at their expense. Both Mayo Singh and Doman Singh bought very expensive land for themselves. They paid in thousands for property and spent hundreds on meals, clothes and jewellery for their people [tabbar]. They built buildings for themselves. Money had value back home at the time. \$100 equalled Rs. 250 then, which was a fortune. Their position was like kings and made them izzatdar, highly respectful. So I wished to come to Canada and did. I made hard choices at a young age by parting with my family. You do that when you wish to live like kings."<sup>129</sup>

Even bania women in the village were conscious of that situation. As Dayal Kaur stated "when Bishan Kaur came to the village on my daughter's marriage she did not wish to live in the village. Life was good for them in Canada, very rich, full of luxury, they lived like Maharajas (royalty). Money was good in Canada, they dealt there in dollars."<sup>130</sup>

Canada thus symbolised the land of riches and wealth for the Paldi villagers and different bania tabbars desired to send more family members overseas to earn a share of the Canadian prosperity by working at the mill

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128. Interview, 15 March 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

129. Ibid.

130. Interview, 26 April, 1993, female, 77 years, Paldi Punjab.

owned by their family members. Consequently, bania kin openly expressed their desires to the emigrants when they came back to the village to marry or for some other purpose. Those who had returned from Canada around 1913 desired to send their sons, who in turn wished to take their own sons. Narayan Singh bania, who had accompanied one of the the early batches of departees in 1905, wished to send away his only son in the 1920s because by that time his only son had three sons of his own. Their land could thus remain secure even if more men from the tabbar went to Canada.<sup>131</sup> Similarly Gurditt Singh, who did not go to Canada in the early 1900s, wished to send one of his two sons. Some who were related to bania emigrants wished to leave the toil and rigours of the hard farming life in Punjab because "working the whole day in the fields with hands would not have made me a rich man. The struggle in the Punjab farms was miserable. One worked in the scorching heat with no comfortable place to rest. While my family could help me attain comforts of life."<sup>132</sup> There were others in the khandan who, according to the bania elders and seniors, deserved to be rescued from their hard existence. Bania elders pointed out to their prospering sons from overseas that it was their duty to help less fortunate tabbars. [Sher Singh's] son described his experience -"After he [Sher Singh] died, we struggled to survive. My mother handled cultivation alone with the help of tenants but it was not easy. My baba (grandfather) was too old to handle that, while my brother and I, we were very young. Then around 1915, our situation worsened because there was a famine in the village, the rains failed that season. At that time we shared one sugar cane among ourselves. So when Doman Singh and later Mayo Singh came,

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131. Interview, 5 October, 1993, male, 80 years, Vanouever.

132. Interview, 11 October, 1993, male, 72 years, Paldi BC.

our uncles, taye-chache, asked them to help us out by taking me overseas to work in the mill."<sup>133</sup>

Closely related kin of Paldi banias from other villages also became interested in sending their tabbar men to be employed at the Mayo mill. Most wanted their elder sons to go first. Some spoke directly about their requests<sup>134</sup> and some approached emigrants through letters, as this extract from a letter addressed to Mayo Singh shows: "Please call Pyara Singh over. We don't wish to put you in any financial difficulty by making this request. But we are aware that for someone in your position it is a minor thing to spend on calling over an individual to Canada because you are mighty wealthy and a benefactor of poor."<sup>135</sup>

This type of assessment was acknowledged by the emigrants because their ties with their kin were strong and they believed in gaining izzat for family members. Paldi emigrants were concerned about the welfare of their kin in the village. A bania immigrant recalled: "Mayo Singh did not bring me to become a worker in the mill. He brought me to Canada because I could earn money and send it back home to help improve my family's living conditions."<sup>136</sup> But emigrants, however affluent, were not in a position to extend direct assistance to their kin and family members to move to Canada. In the 1920s the Canadian government permitted only wives and minor children to join resident Punjabi men. Moreover, after Canada placed its ban on immigration in 1908, the British colonial government in India placed many village-level checks on Punjabis who

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133. Interview, 2 December, 1993, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

134. Interview, 5 October, 1993, male, 75 years, Nanaimo.

135. Letters, Joe Saroya Collection.

136. Interview, 15 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

wished to leave for Canada.<sup>137</sup> Several strategies were devised to enable family members to emigrate. Immigrants on return visits suggested to adult bania family members that they should try to reach Canada through other countries.<sup>138</sup> Younger members of the parivar were sometimes taken to Canada under a disguised identity, showing them as sons of different fathers and sometimes as different sons of the same father.<sup>139</sup> Immigrants made deliberate efforts to evade authorities in both Canada and India and their kin from the village co-operated in the process. Thus developed forms of illegal immigration practiced by the Punjabis settled in the Sahtlam district and they resulted in the arrival of a number of workers who were employed productively at the Mayo mill. The numbers of illegal immigrants were significant and they considerably expanded the Paldi immigrant community at the Mayo mill settlement.

The most important development with regard to the entry of Punjabi illegals was the manipulation done within the framework of immigration regulations in both British Columbia and Punjab. In the 1920s, a Punjabi immigrant returning home for a visit required a re-entry permit from the Canadian authorities for himself as well as for the family members he intended to bring back.<sup>140</sup> In Punjab, a returnee did not require permission to leave but a passport was needed for anyone accompanying him or for anyone who was departing for the first time. A verification of the relationship between the emigrant and his family

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137. Commerce and Industry, Emigration, February 1913, 28-32-B; January 1913, 13-B.

138. Interview, 5 October, 1993, male, 80 years, Vancouver.

139. Most of the immigrants interviewed entered Canada as illegals. Lists, PAC, RG 76, file 536999.

140. Buchignani, Continuous Journey. Interview, 15 March, 1993, male, 88 years, Coquitlam. Interview, 5 October, 1993, male, 80 years, Vancouver. Interview, 12 October, 1993, male, Paldi BC.

members, obtainable from the District Commissioner's office, was also required. According to Canadian Paldi informants, and also to villagers who saw such developments taking place in Punjabi Paldi at the same time, the most significant initiative to bring bania family members through the back door into Canada was taken by Mayo Singh.<sup>141</sup> Other immigrants who visited Paldi in the 1920s were equally aware of what was happening and they too assisted their adult kin, but the informants believed that Mayo Singh played the most important role in the process. Prior to departing for Paldi village in 1925-26 he was said to have acquired permits in British Columbia for bringing his wife and grown-up sons.<sup>142</sup> His intentions, however, must have been to bring young parivar men because, according to bania family members and Paldi villagers, when he returned to Paldi for his marriage in 1925, it was his first visit home since his arrival in Canada in 1906 yet he brought back to Canada young men claiming to be his sons.

In Punjab, he assisted some intending departees by acquiring the necessary papers himself.<sup>143</sup> He also played a role in helping those bania men who reached Canada via Panama.<sup>144</sup> As the immigrants interviewed explained, "when Mayo visited my taya who was Mayo's mama (mother's brother) he was asked to take away the elder son Ram Partap to work at the mill. Then Mayo suggested to change the boy's name to Lashkar, the younger brother. My taya was worried about the verification, but then Mayo said to take Ram Partap to only the police station and have him

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141. Ibid.

142. Ibid.

143. Interview, 24 March, 1993, male, 88 years, Paldi Punjab. Interview, 15 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

144. Ibid.



registered as Lashkar but not to take him to the tahsil or District Commissioner's office because there the certificate from the police was accepted as final. They followed his advice and so Ram Partap entered as Lashkar and original Lashkar came later."<sup>145</sup> The name, Ram Partap, appears on the list of illegal, East Indian registrants. <sup>146</sup> A bania senior who entered illegally through Mayo Singh's assistance in 1927 stated "I was not aware that I was to leave for Canada. One day Mayo took me away from our Paldi village somewhere in the Jullundur district and said that he was getting my passport made. He asked me to keep that a secret and not to disclose the news even to my mother. He feared that the news might spread in the village and the lambardar, village administrative in charge, might be informed about it. The whole village came to know about my leaving only on the day we departed because I came with my cousins from the village and also Mayo's brother-in-law and we all left in a lorry to catch the train from Jullundur. By that time it was too late for the lambardar to find out."<sup>147</sup> Paldi villagers remembered the day bania ang-sak, close relatives, left for Canada in this manner and they also testified that attempts were made to acquire passports by different means by Mayo Singh for his family members.<sup>148</sup> Passports were acquired from the Jullundur office for those allowed to enter Canada legally. But in the case of illegal immigrants, passports were obtained from Lahore or Bombay.<sup>149</sup> Mayo Singh brought young boys from his parivar and also other relatives when

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145. Interview, 5 October, 1993, male, 70 years, Nanaimo.

146. Lists. PAC, RG 76, file 536999.

147. Interview, 15 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam. Interview, 22 March, 1993, male, 80 years, Paldi Punjab.

148. Fictitious Passports, Joe Saroya Collection.

149. Ibid.

he went home two or three other times in the 1920s and 30s.<sup>150</sup>

The role that Mayo Singh played in assisting his parivar members and other rishtedars, relatives, to enter Canada by evading the immigration authorities also becomes clear from the documentary evidence. He seems to have corresponded with the Canadian immigration department regarding his 'sons', not from his village but from a different postal address in India. The copy of the immigration letters addressed to him in India mention "Mayo Singh, son of Bhulla Singh, c/o Punjab Transport Co., P.O. Box No. 658, Bombay, India."<sup>151</sup> The Punjab Transport business was said to be owned by Mayo Singh's mama, uncle, at the time.<sup>152</sup> Then on August 12, 1926 Mayo Singh was given permission by the Department of Immigration and Colonisation, Victoria, to bring two sons, Shankar Singh, aged 12 and Bishen Singh, age 14.<sup>153</sup> In reality Shankar Singh was his taya, Gurditt Singh's son and Bishen Singh was his brother-in-law. The two had departed from Paldi village in the lorry along with others. Bishen Singh is mentioned on the list of illegals, but Shankar Singh seems to have left Canada within a few years when the question of inheritance arose in relation to his family land in Paldi.

Once the process of bringing in people illegally proved successful others followed up on it. Other young Paldi boys entered under fictitious names. Munsha Singh, Mula Singh, Hari Singh, Banta Singh, Santa Singh, Kishen Singh, Bishen Singh, Kashmir Singh and a Meetow Singh, then

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150. Interview, 15 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam. Interview, 5 October, 1993, male, 80 years, Vancouver.

151. Letters, Department of Immigration and Colonisation, Victoria, 1926, Joe Saroya Collection.

152. Interview, 2 December, 1993, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

153. Letters, Joe Saroya Collection.

two years old, entered Canada as prospective immigrants.<sup>154</sup> The routes that the immigrants followed to bring in their brethren to the Mayo mill varied and were generally different from the Canadian Pacific steamship route. Those who came via Panama had originally departed from Paldi sometime in 1923 or 1924 with their destination stated as Mexico.<sup>155</sup> But Indians from Punjab were not allowed to disembark in Mexico, so they moved on to Panama where some villagers remained. But the bania men, such as Tara Singh, later found their way into Mexico with the help of a baradari (caste) brethren who belonged to Baddon village. From Mexico they came to the United States where their family men were settled and were subsequently picked up by Mayo Singh.<sup>156</sup> Some immigrants came via the city of Madras in India to Colombo, Shanghai, Yokohama, San Francisco and, from there, to Canada.<sup>157</sup> Some, such as the group that entered with Mayo Singh in 1927, travelled from Bombay to London, England, from there to Montreal, and then by train to Vancouver, by ferry to Nanaimo and by car to the Mayo mill.<sup>158</sup> Some Punjabis also landed at Halifax, Nova Scotia and reached Vancouver Island from there.<sup>159</sup>

The bania khandan sent its people from Paldi and the bania relatives came from the villages of Nadalon, Kalra, Baddon, Binjon and Dholron.<sup>160</sup> There were also others from the Mahton baradari (caste) who

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154. These names are mentioned in the Lists, PAC, RG 76, file 536999.

155. Interview, 24 March, 1993, male, 88 years, Paldi Punjab. Interview, 5 October, 1993, male, 80 years, Vancouver. Lists, PAC, RG 76, file 536999.

156. Interview, 5 October, 1993, male 80 years, Vancouver.

157. Interview, 12 October, 1993, male, 72 years, Paldi BC.

158. Interview, 20 December, 1993, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

159. Telegrams, Joe Saroya Collection.

160. These vilages are mentioned throughout the interviews.

came from Karnana and Hukumatpur.<sup>161</sup> In the process many other gots came to be represented among the Mahton baradari (caste) immigrants settled at the Mayo mill in the Sahtlam district. Parhar came from the villages of Kalra and Karnana, Parmar from Nadalon, Binjon and Baddon, Luddu from Dholron and Manhas from Hukumatpur and Paldi.<sup>162</sup> These gots were not the original Mahton gots, they belonged to the high-status Rajput caste.<sup>163</sup> Consequently, according to the information from the immigrants, in the 1920s there existed two caste groups among Punjabi immigrants in Canada: the Rajputs and the Jats. The arrival of the Mahton immigrants as Rajputs in Canada indicated that the changes taking place within the Mahton baradari (caste) in Punjab were transported to "Paldi" Canada, long before they began to have an impact upon Punjabis in Hoshiarpur and Jullundur districts. Caste consciousness was strong among Paldi women as well. According to a female Jat immigrant who arrived at the Mayo mill in 1926, "at one time during our casual conversation Khusali and Anar Kaur, Paldi women, got very angry and wanted to leave our house because I pointed out that in Punjab their baradari (caste) was called by a different name - Manyareh (the local Punjabi term for Mahton). Then my jithani (sister-in-law) intervened and said that I was new in Canada, very young just 16, and that similar statements would not be repeated anymore."<sup>164</sup> Because of these developments in regard to caste, some immigrants who came to Canada in the 1920s categorically stated during interviews for this study that they "had no knowledge about

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161. Ibid.

162. Ibid.

163. Rose, Glossary.

164. Interview, 28 January, 1994, female, 83 years, Burnaby.

Mahton, never heard the term."<sup>165</sup> Nonetheless, their practises of forming marriage alliances continued on the basis of the original Mahton, rather than Rajput, marriage customs. Isogamy remained the prevalent norm among the Mahton Rajputs in Canada. Inter-marriages did not take place between the Mahton Rajputs and the Jats in Canada while the pattern of their marriage alliances continued to circulate between Paldi village to Nadalon, Nadalon to Binjon and Binjon to Paldi or Kalra to Paldi, Paldi to Karnana and Karnana to Kalra. A majority of the early and some of the later Mahton Rajput arrivals married their children in the Punjab villages of their baradari (caste) even as late as the 1970s.

With the increase in the numbers of Mahton Rajputs at Mayo mill's (Little Punjab), some changes became apparent. The Mayo mill owners constructed two separate bunkhouses, each with its own cookhouse to accommodate more people. Of the two bunkhouses, one was meant for Doabis and the other for the Mahton Rajput baradari (caste).<sup>166</sup> With regard to the wages of the workers, the Punjabis were paid more than the Chinese, the Japanese and, in some cases, even more than the whites.<sup>167</sup> The logic for this disparity was simple from the perspective of the owners. As one informant noted, "our people, owners, paid more to Indians (Punjabis)...like white man pay more to white workers. So why not Indians (Punjabis). White man favours whites, Indian favour Indians. Chinese and Japanese were more likely to get less both with whites and Indians."<sup>168</sup> According to a former Chinese worker at the mill "there was

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165. There was reluctance to talk about caste.

166. Interview, 5 October, 1993, male, 70 years, Nanaimo. Interview, 11 October, 1993, male, 72 years, Paldi BC.

167. Ibid. Interview, 15 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

168. Ibid.

discrimination at the Mayo mill. If whites, East Indians (Punjabis) paid more than the Chinese it's gotta be discrimination."<sup>169</sup> However, from the viewpoint of the Punjabi immigrants it was more a matter of "our people, so must pay them more."<sup>170</sup> The distinction in the wage payment was not simply in terms of Chinese, Japanese and Punjabis. The members of the bania family were paid even more than other Punjabis. If the rest of the Punjabis got 35 cents an hour, a close family member of the Paldi owners received 45 cents an hour.<sup>171</sup>

Jats also brought their kin illegally to the Mayo mill settlement. The Jats, particularly from the village Kharaudi who were related to Kapoor Singh Sindhu (Siddoo), increased in numbers in the 1920s. Bhagwan Singh, Tara Singh, Naranjan Singh and Kashmir Singh were all Kharaudi Jats and related to each other through the relationship of taye-cache. But the number of illegal immigrants from the Mahton baradari (caste), among them those of the banias and their relatives, was probably higher. According to a senior bania informant "there were ninety of us who were in that position, attempting to hide from the authorities."<sup>172</sup> That number, however, could not be verified owing to the reluctance of the immigrants to disclose information in detail on the issue. Nevertheless, it became clear that in comparison to Jats, the Paldi Mahton came to acquire a stronger position at the Mayo mill Punjabi village.

The process of illegal immigration altered the dynamics among the Paldi banias themselves. The first immigrants who, like Mayo Singh, helped others to enter illegally assumed positions of power over later

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169. Interview, 29 February, 1989, male, Chinese, 65 years, Duncan.

170. Interview, 15 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

171. Ibid.

172. Interview, 5 October, 1993, male, 80 years, Vancouver.

arrivals. The position of immigrants who entered under fictitious names was more vulnerable, particularly in their relationship to Mayo Singh, because they felt obligated to him and bestowed extra izzat upon him. The position of younger bania men was also different because, as an informant stated, "they were brought with an understanding to return their travel and initial settlement expenses to Mayo Singh."<sup>173</sup> Some of the new arrivals were thus brought under a kind of contract. The money, however, was not to be returned to Mayo Singh directly, it was meant to be returned to his piu, father, in Punjab who was a taya-chacha to a number of illegal entrants. Izzat, in the form of obligation and duty, was involved in this regard but an attitude of dominance was also apparent. As a bania member explained:

I paid back every penny that he spent on my fare, my clothes, my food. I did not keep any debt. That was condition also...I was to return money once I start working at the mill...I worked hard for a few years, did not send any money to my family. Then I paid Rs. 1200 to Bholla Singh (Mayo's father), although I owed him 1100. I also paid back Rs. 450 to Attar Singh (Doman's father) because Doman had also sent money to my family. They were related to me as taye-cache.<sup>174</sup>

The position of Mayo Singh became more strong among Paldi immigrants as some of the bania al members attempted to utilise old permits to bring others by selling them at high rates in Punjab.

At one point I sent my permit to Kundan Singh, he lived in Hukumatpur. But he made a wrong move. He did not come himself but sold my permit to someone else, a Jat living close to our village. That move was detected because the immigration officer in Victoria received a letter about my true background from Punjab. Someone played dirty. Then I ran away from Mayo mill and stayed with someone at Nanaimo. But somehow Mayo Singh found out where I was and one day he came to me in

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173. Interview, 2 February, 1994, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

174. Ibid.

Nanaimo with his daughter's notebook in his hand. He wrote some amount, about 358 dollars on it along with another list of items, and said that he had paid that amount to bribe a Canadian lawyer to keep me in Canada and that I should return his money...I was angry. I told him, you try to play smart with me. Have you forgotten that we are same family (parivar)? We grew up together...Not only me but everybody [who came as illegals with Mayo] paid him back eventually.<sup>175</sup>

The bania al family members who came to the Mayo mill in the 1920s also became aware of the dominant position of their kin, the early founders of the mill, because the majority of them were given labouring jobs and even after a few years were not given key management positions, which had become essential for the company as it expanded its production. The difference between the "management" and "labour" (Punjabi) was expressed by a Jat workers like this: "they had no relationship at all."<sup>176</sup> Evidently hopes of bright future by earning riches in a short time became different for later arrivals. A bania immigrant explained:

I had no idea about the kind of work that awaited me at the mill. The mill ran for fourteen hours in a day and in the lumber yard it was work for ten or twelve hours. As long as the daylight remained the work continued. There was no machinery [for unskilled workers], everything was done by hand. No carrier machines, lumber had to be loaded with hands. Men pulled lumber with chains to pile it on top of one another. One person holding and pulling the chain, another using his body labour to put it on the truck [loading car], with man to push. Working conditions were arduous. Workers did not make money. Only management, Mayos, Domans, made money...In Paldi Punjab they bought land with that money and then rent it. They became rich both ways.<sup>177</sup>

The management structure of the Mayo Lumber Company had undergone several changes since the day of its founding. In 1916 it was

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175. Ibid.

176. Interview, 10 April, 1989, male, 75 years, Vancouver.

177. Interview, 17 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.



known as Mayo Lumber Company. When the owners moved to the Sahtlam district the owners registered their company as the Mayo Lumber Company Singh Brothers.<sup>178</sup> By 1923 its legal status had changed to Mayo Lumber Company Limited and later in 1935-36 it became Mayo Brothers Timber Limited and remained as such until its closure at Mayo Siding.<sup>179</sup> In 1916 the number of Jats exceeded that of Mahton on the company's legal agreement. By mid 1920s, Mahton increased as shareholders. Some original Jat shareholders like Shyam Singh of Mahilpur departed permanently for Punjab in 1921-22, while others were bought out.<sup>180</sup> In 1920, the company had dropped the name of Bhagwan Singh Jat and although Juvalla Singh remained at the mill, his position as an equal shareholder became insignificant because his name is not mentioned in either written sources or by immigrants during interviews. On the other hand, Kapoor Singh Jat, who along with Mayo Singh was chosen by early founders of the mill to handle the outside and office work, remained with the company throughout and continued to hold important company positions. By the 1920s, he strengthened his position because his own family and village kin became silent partners in the company.

Paldi banias, nevertheless, held a dominant position in mill management. In 1920, Kapoor Singh was the mill manager but the other positions of mill superintendent and logging foreman were held by Doman Singh and Mayo Singh.<sup>181</sup> Another bania member was included in the management by late 1920. Ghanaiya Singh became mill foreman,

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178. British Columbia Directory, 1920.

179. British Columbia Lumberman, September 1923, p, 37. British Columbia Directory, 1920-1940.

180. Interview, 15 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

181. British Columbia Lumberman, January 1920, p, 27.

Doman Singh became woods superintendent, Mayo Singh was superintendent of the mill and by 1927 more changes took place. Ganda Singh bania became secretary of the company and Tara Singh boleya became mill superintendent.<sup>182</sup> The position of the Paldi Mahton was strengthened further because "almost everyone who arrived [from the Mahton baradari (caste)] was made to put a share, howsoever small in amount, in the company. The purpose being to keep them here [at the mill]."<sup>183</sup> Thus, the number of Mahton silent partners, the majority of whom were banias, increased and in a sense Mayo mill existed as a bania-owned mill in the 1920s.

In actual practice, however, the mill in the late 1920s and early 1930s was controlled by two individuals, Mayo Singh and Kapoor Singh. That happened because both Kapoor Singh and Mayo Singh assumed sole charge of the company's dealings in the lumber business world of the Cowichan Valley by 1927-28. As an informant stated, their position also became strong because "other founders travelled too much between Punjab and British Columbia. Bhan Singh, Doman Singh, were the only ones from their tabbars [residing in Canada] and when they returned to visit their families in Punjab they overstayed. They also sent practically entire savings to their families and fathers...But Mayo Singh he was smarter. He kept money in his hands and also sent to his father."<sup>184</sup> Return migration thus became a significant factor in altering the position of individuals involved in the founding of the Mayo Lumber Company. Those who remained in Canada when others went back to Punjab took over the responsibilities of the departees and gradually improved their own

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182. Ibid, August 1920, p, 53. Cowichan Leader, 21 April, 1927, p, 2.

183. Interview, 11 October, 1993, male, 72 years, Paldi BC.

184. Interview, 2 December, 1993, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

positions while allowing the company to operate on a regular basis.

The dynamics among the original founders changed when the company was at the peak years of its production in the late 1920s. "That change took place when Doman Singh returned from Punjab in 1925 after staying there for three years. Then he was not made part of the key management positions which were in the control of Mayo Singh and Kapoor Singh by that time. Whenever somebody departed, the two of them shared profits. They seemed to have an agreement, you take fifty and I take fifty."<sup>185</sup>

In 1928 the Mayo Lumber Company created the position of Directors: Messrs. Mayo Singh, Kapoor Singh and Ganda Singh.<sup>186</sup> Ganda Singh was Mayo's own brother. The company's directorship was divided further in 1929. Mayo Singh became the Director, and Kapoor Singh the Managing Director.<sup>187</sup> The same year both men, a Mahton Rajput and a Jat, formed another company by the name of Kapoor Lumber Company at mile 35, CNR, near Sooke Lake on Vancouver Island.<sup>188</sup> Mayo Singh and Kapoor Singh shared the principal interests in the Kapoor Lumber Company. The two men prospered as both their companies made profits in the late 1920s and on this basis acquired a special reputation in the Cowichan Valley. The local newspapers published important articles on the two men. In 1933 a major news article in the Cowichan Leader talked about "Mayo Singh and Kapoor Singh and Their Lumber Operations."<sup>189</sup> The contents of the article were significant as they stated that "Kapoor mill was established in

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185. Ibid.

186. Cowichan Leader, 3 May, 1928, p, 10.

187. Ibid, 13 June, 1929, p, 5.

188. "Mayo Singh and Kapoor Singh and their Lumber Operations," Cowichan Leader, January 19, 1933, p,1.

189. Ibid.

1928 by the brothers, Mayo Singh and Kapoor Singh, a \$250,000 investment" and that Mayo Singh was "one of Cowichan's most prominent lumbermen and a leading figure in the industry."<sup>190</sup> Mayo Singh came to be known on Vancouver Island as a philanthropist and a donor as he made monetary contributions to hospitals and schools such as St. Anne's Convent in Nanaimo, St. Joseph's Hospital in Victoria, and The King's Daughter's Hospital in Duncan.<sup>191</sup> How influential these men had become within their own community can be gathered from the fact that during the depression years, when the mill ceased operations for two years and when a number of people departed to Punjab to live off their agricultural land, two houses were being constructed at the Mayo mill in 1932. One house was for Mayo Singh and another for Kapoor Singh and the cost for each was estimated to be roughly \$2,000.<sup>192</sup>

Evidently, individual entrepreneurship and the fulfillment of personal ambition had come to play an important role among the original founders of the Mayo Lumber Company. The change was significant from the perspective of the Mahton immigrants because it placed influence and power in the hands of one individual, the youngest among the first arrivals. The change became more prominent as Mayo Singh began to promote his own tabbar men among the bantias. How he managed to do that could not be made clear by informants but they stated that "by early 1930s Mayo Singh and his real brothers, Ghanaiya Singh, Ganda Singh, his brothers-in-laws Kishen Singh Parhar, Bishen Singh Parhsr and his own nephew, Dharm Singh Parmar, were the managers, mill superintendents,

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190. Ibid.

191. Letters, Joe Saroya Collection.

192. Cowichan Leader, 5 May, 1932, p, 8.

and company's account keepers."<sup>193</sup> Mayo Singh's status changed further as "he began to buy out those immigrants who departed for Punjab, even if on visits for short durations...He contacted them individually to make settlements. Sometimes he would hold a meeting of a group of people in the open grounds of Paldi and would offer money for share settlement."<sup>194</sup>

Not everybody left for Punjab in the depression years. According to a news item in the Cowichan Leader in 1932, a number of Punjabi Sikhs were "cheerfully living and optimistically awaiting the return of more prosperous days."<sup>195</sup> But the Punjabi mill community was not as bustling as the early years. The reason for this was not the tumbling economy alone; the mill settlement changed because the partnership between Mayo Singh and Kapoor Singh had broken up by this time. The community would not have been affected by the split if the two men had parted on their own. The Punjabis at the Mayo mill, both Mahtons and Jats, became involved in that development because a large number of them also had share money pooled in their companies. The community was affected more seriously because, as the informants stated, "both of them [Mayo and Kapoor] attempted to settle by deliberately setting fire to the mill in 1934."<sup>196</sup> That year a major fire destroyed the entire mill structure.<sup>197</sup> Thus for a number of immigrants, their prospects of livelihood were threatened. The mill was

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193. In the words of one Jat informant "the Mayo Lumber Company was a one family company in the mid 1930s." Interview, 10 April, 1989, male, 75 years, Vancouver.

194. Interview, 17 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

195. Cowichan Leader, 5 May, 1932, p, 8.

196. Interview, 17 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam. Interview, 5 October, 1993, male, 80 years, Vancouver.

197. "Mayo Sawmill Destroyed by Fire with \$ 400,000 Loss," Cowichan Leader, 27 December, 1934, p, 1.

rebuilt in 1935 by Mayo Singh, but by that time differences arose within the Mayo mill-Punjabi community. In the words of one Jat informant, "following the split, Kharudi people went one way and Paldi people went one way."<sup>198</sup>

The division of the community along village lines, however, did not mean that all Jats went Kharudi way. Some stayed at the Mayo mill, but not for long because there developed differences among Paldi immigrants themselves. The bania parivar men, both early and later arrivals, did not view competition with Mayo Singh as something worthwhile. By 1934-35 the majority of Paldi banias had moved to other mills. Doman Singh, Meetow Singh, Thakur Singh and Tara Singh found employment in neighbouring Hillcrest Mill.<sup>199</sup> Doman Singh worked as a mill foreman there and as head of the Punjabi gang. He also started his own trucking business. Meetow Singh joined him and did his own lumber fuel supply business. Some Paldi men, along with other Punjabis, went to work at the Youbou mills.<sup>200</sup> While others, like the boleya tabbar men Tara Singh and Rattan Singh, went over to the Kapoor Lumber mill at mile 35, CNR.<sup>201</sup> Some bania men, such as Kashmir Singh, stayed at Mayo Siding but started their own trucking business.<sup>202</sup>

The Mayo mill at the Mayo Siding continued to maintain the two cookhouses, however, because immigrants, both Malwais and Doabis, continued to arrive there seeking work in the late 1930s. Characteristically, their caste differences remained important in some form or the other.

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198. Interview, 28 January, 1994, male, Burnaby.

199. Interview, 14, 15 March, 1989, male, 88 years, Coquitlam.

200. Ibid.

201. Ibid.

202. Ibid.

"Those villagers continued to point out to each other in the cookhouses, you are a Mahton and I am a Jat. They continued to worry about who sold land in Punjab and whose daughter needed to be married in the village and who went into debt and who needed more money and who lost izzat."<sup>203</sup> At the same time, the Mayo mill continued to operate, although in terms of production its output could not match earlier years. For the tabbar of Mayo Singh, however, the mill proved beneficial. He and his own brothers continued to make profits and employed more white workers. The result was that in the early years of the 1940s, "Mayo" and "Mayo Lumber Mill" were regarded as synonymous in the Cowichan Valley and after a further conflict among the tabbar men of Mayo Singh, Mayo became the sole owner of the Mayo mill. In 1941, when Mayo Siding officially became "Paldi", British Columbia, both the village and the business were associated with one individual only, although the settlement had originated as a result of the group efforts of the immigrants from Paldi in Punjab.

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203. Interview, 11 October, 1993, male, 72 years, Paldi BC.

## Chapter 7

### CONCLUSION

The emigration/immigration process has generally been treated in a strictly linear fashion: people are pushed out of one country and pulled to another by a double set of factors that requires them to abandon their roots and begin again in a new environment. If they are successful, they do not turn back but pass from one context to another with some finality. Until recently, the story of immigration to Canada and the United States and other major receiving countries was invariably told this way. When we look intensively at a single emigrant group and pay attention to its continuing ties with home, however, we can see how one-dimensional this story is. More often than not, the migration process involves circular or spiralling patterns that maintain the home community and its expatriots in a common world of exchange. When this is the case, then those who leave and those who stay behind change and evolve together.

The small Paldi Mahton population in British Columbia and in Punjab provides a striking illustration of this kind of mutual development. The picture is particularly sharp in this instance for two reasons. First of all, the Mahton possessed the traditional values of a peasant society which they did not readily abandon, despite their enterprise and ambition. Secondly, in Canada they were treated as outsiders by a culturally and racially biased white majority. They were not encouraged to join the mainstream or to look beyond the company of their own people. For that reason, the centre of their world remained Punjab for an exceptionally long time. They entered Canada as sojourners, and even though many of them remained in the country until they died, their sojourning mentality persisted. It is not surprising that their



first point of reference was always their family and kin in Punjab.

Because caste and kinship groups were the building blocks of rural Punjabi society and because castes, particularly, were arranged hierarchically in the minds of Punjabis, the Mahton had an agenda before they came to Canada which they did not abandon upon arrival. Their concern with the status values of home remained vital overseas, partly because they were still living amongst Jats who looked down on them and partly because they still measured their achievements through the eyes of the villagers they left behind. Their sense of caste identity was strong and undiluted by their Canadian experiences over more than two generations. As a community they did not offer a critique of the caste system. Their objective was to gain respect for their caste origins from other caste groups. In advancing this objective, the Mahton in Canada showed an interest equal to that of their brethren in Punjab. The objective itself was obtainable to some degree because there was flexibility in the Punjabi conception of caste status.

The place and standing of their village also concerned Paldi emigrants. Paldi appeared inconsequential because it contained no solid structured building such as brick houses or a school or hospital. The desire that departing emigrants had to change the material face of the village with the incomes they hoped to earn abroad, translated into concerted action over their long, working lives in Canada. Their investment in large houses and other buildings was a necessary justification for staying abroad. They were always conscious of the loss of pride and self-respect that their families would experience if they had to admit they had an absent member who contributed nothing. And they were equally aware of the impression they could make in neighbouring villages by pushing Paldi ahead. And Paldi's progress would be all the more emphatic because it was located in a comparatively backward

zone within central Punjab.

These concerns and priorities reflect the way in which the ties of kinship reached from Punjab to Canada. Emigrants came to Canada only after a decision was made in the joint family to let them go. The first immigrants came as single males expecting to stay only a few years and even when they stayed on they remained functioning family members, providing economic support and accepting family jurisdiction in the major decisions of their lives.

When they worked in Canada, it was always in the company of their countrymen and generally in the company of kinsmen or men from the same district or region. Similarly, when they formed business partnerships, kinship groupings were a key element. Within a decade, some of them were owner-operators and out of that situation emerged a concentration of wealth and influence in a few hands that significantly altered social relationships in Punjab.

The growing lumber industry in British Columbia was their preferred area of employment. Lumber work was a new occupation for them, but it was both remunerative and psychologically satisfying because it did not have low status connotations. Thinking as Punjabis, they avoided employment in market gardening, agricultural field work and as domestic help, because these occupations were held in low esteem in the social world of rural Punjab. Seeking advancement overseas, they still thought in terms of home. But their success could be understood by Canadians and Punjabis alike. In the Cowichan Valley their reputation as successful lumber manufacturers was established as their sawmill-owning venture made big profits by striding along with the lucrative lumber industry in the 1920s. The Mayo mill not only flourished but it also became a bustling settlement of whites, Chinese, Japanese and Punjabis. The success of the Mayo mill earned a respected name

for Paldi immigrants in the Cowichan Valley region and it also contributed to an altered status of their social identity as a caste group among Punjabis overseas.

The status of the Paldi Mahton immigrants, in comparison to Jats, improved further as they successfully created a "Little Punjab" at their mill site and gave the opportunity to other Punjabis to live in a familiar and secure environment in an alien country, which was provided with their traditional socio-cultural institutions. The mobility gained by Paldi immigrants after settling in the Cowichan Valley also ensured a higher status for them in their home society and through them for their village and familial kin, particularly at the level of their local origin. The changes in the material outlook of their village and in the economic position of their brethren as they expanded their land base, constructed big palatial houses and improved their lifestyles as a result of the remittances sent from overseas, determined an enhanced image for the proprietors of Paldi village among the neighbouring Jat-dominated villages. The changed position of the Paldi proprietors in the post-emigration period was also significant because, through the efforts of their emigrants overseas, the Mahton caste had extended its structural base across the world. Mahton families were established in the village owned and run by Paldi immigrants in Canada and in the 1920s they existed as a higher caste overseas: the Rajputs. Eventually, the Paldi Rajputs in British Columbia reduced the distance with their homeland as the Mahton were officially declared Rajputs in the Punjab and as the Mayo mill settlement in the Cowichan Valley became known as another "Paldi".

The success of Paldi immigrants provided opportunities for their kin and village brethren to raise their status as a group. However, in their own

village life, social separation as a result of the infusion of new wealth into the village, also became apparent. The family groups which remained unconnected with overseas as they did not supply emigrants became self-conscious of their own status, and their response to the improved living of the emigrant families was not uniformly enthusiastic. The distance was greatest between the families which traditionally held high-status positions in Paldi village and the nouveau-rich emigrant families. The village segmentation, in response to the changes brought to the village through the infusion of new wealth, thus became significant among Paldi families and more pronounced as only families from a particular lineage achieved maximum benefits through their kin residing overseas. As a corollary to these developments, the Paldi immigrant community in the Cowichan Valley also underwent change. The new wealth earned from the success of the lumber mill placed a few individuals in a position of influence. The process of regular to and fro migration between Punjab and British Columbia among Paldi immigrants as well as illegal immigration also contributed to bringing a distance between the Paldi immigrants associated originally with the establishment of the Mayo lumber mill and the Little Punjab in British Columbia.

Thus the economic and social mobility that the Paldi Punjabis gained by immigrating to Canada had varied consequences. Their status attainment was not a linear process because, as this thesis demonstrates, the social identity they sought in their home society by earning money overseas changed as the context of their background changed. In regard to their position within Punjabi society in India, the contributions of Paldi immigrants to the material improvement of their village, their families and their caste kin earned them a higher social status. Within their own village

community, in Punjab as well as British Columbia, the newly elevated status of the immigrants gave rise to increasing socio-economic differentiations among Paldi families. In Canada, the Paldi Punjabis eventually became settlers but the idiom of their social position remained traditional and caste-oriented. They retained a high degree of continuity with Punjab over the years and after 1947, as the doors of immigration opened again for Indians, the Paldi immigrants sponsored their khandan and parivar men who in turn brought their own parivars and khandans. The later arrivals entered Canada as Rajputs and exist under that designation until the present. Some Paldi immigrants retain their jaddi property in Punjab village and some immigrants who entered in the 1920s, particularly from the bania khandan, are even now transacting sales of their Paldi land among themselves in Canada.

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