

## Pockets of high Muslim and Christian presence and growth in Punjab

*It is odd to mention Punjab in the context of places of high Muslim presence or growth. Punjab, like the adjoining Haryana and Delhi, faced the full fury of the communal Partition of India in 1947 and the extremely traumatic and violent transfer of populations that accompanied it. Almost no Hindus or Sikhs survived in West Punjab and nearly all Muslims had to leave East Punjab, which included the current States of Punjab and Haryana and parts of Himachal Pradesh. The share of Muslims in East Punjab of that time came down from 33.0 to 1.8 percent. Correspondingly, the share of Sikhs and Hindus in West Pakistan declined from 22.6 percent to less than 0.2 percent.*

*Even amidst the holocaust that the Partition caused, there were two pockets in East Punjab, where the Muslims remained unharmed because of reasons of history. The population of Muslims in the then principality of Malerkotla, protected by the blessings of the tenth Guru, remained largely intact. And the Muslims of Mewat, who had fought along with first Shershah Suri and then Raja Hemu, against the invading Mughals, remained unmolested in their area that encompasses parts of Gurgaon in southern Haryana and the neighbouring Alwar and Bharatpur districts in Rajasthan.*

*Muslim populations in these pockets have flourished since Independence and Partition. In Malerkotla tahsil, the share of Muslims has increased from 15.2 percent in 1971 to 22.5 percent now; in the recently created Mewat district of Haryana, their share has risen even more sharply, from 66.3 percent in 1971 to 79.2 percent in 2011.*

*In Punjab, there is also a pocket of historically high Christian presence comprising parts of Gurdaspur district. Christians have a share of 7.1 percent in the district; their share in Dera Baba Nanak, Gurdaspur and Batala tahsils is 16.5, 11.2, 7.2 percent, respectively; during 2001-11, there has been a remarkable increase in their share in all three tahsils.*

*We present the data on the Malerkotla and Gurdaspur pockets of Punjab in this post; we shall take up Mewat of Haryana and Delhi in the next post.*

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### Religious Demography of Punjab

*Sikhs and Hindus dominate the population of Punjab*

Sikhs and Hindus comprise an overwhelming majority of Punjab. In the total population of 277 lakhs, 107 lakh are Hindus and 160 lakh Sikhs. Among the remaining 10 lakhs, there are 5.35 lakh Muslims, 3.48 lakh Christians and 1.77 lakh 'Others'; the last include about 33 thousand Buddhists, 45 thousand Jains, 11 thousand ORPs, and 88 thousand in the category of 'Religion Not Stated'. Muslims and Christians form only 1.93 and 1.26 percent of the population, respectively; Indian Religionists (IR) comprise the remaining 96.81 of the population. Punjab has the second highest proportion of Indian Religionists

#### RDI Punjab, 2011

	Population	%Share
Total	2,77,43,338	100.00
Hindu	1,06,78,138	38.49
Sikh	1,60,04,754	57.69
Muslim	5,35,489	1.93
Christian	3,48,230	1.26
Others	1,76,727	0.64

in the country after Himachal Pradesh, where the share of IR is 97.63 percent. Chhattisgarh has the third highest share of IR at 96.06 percent.

*Share of Muslims has been rising*

Though the share of Muslims in the population of Punjab remains low, yet has been growing fairly rapidly in the period following Independence and Partition. In 1961, the proportion of Muslims in the population of the State was only 0.80 percent; it has grown to 1.93 percent in 2011. In the five decades since 1961, the number of Muslims in Punjab has multiplied by six times while the total population has multiplied by a factor of 2.5. As seen in the Table here, growth in the share of Muslims has been much more pronounced during the last two decades. Muslims now form between 2 to 3 percent of the population in 6 of the 20 districts of Punjab; their proportion in Sangrur, which includes Malerkotla tehsil, is now near 11 percent. At the beginning of this period, their share was negligibly small everywhere except in Malerkotla, which we discuss in detail below.

%Share of Muslims	
1961	0.80
1971	0.84
1981	1.00
1991	1.18
2001	1.57
2011	1.93

*Share of Christians has begun to rise recently*

Share of Christians in the population of Punjab was more than that of Muslims in 1961. However, up to 1991, their share had kept slowly declining, while that of Muslims kept rising. By 1991, the Muslims had overtaken the Christians. In the last two decades, the share of Christians has started rising and has now reached the level of 1961. But, it remains considerably below the Muslims. Thus during the last two decades, there has been a remarkable buoyancy in the growth of both Muslims and Christians. Yet the share of Christian remains fairly low in most districts. It is 2.18 percent in Amritsar, 1.19 percent in Jalandhar and near 1 percent in Hoshiarpur and Ferozpur districts; in all other districts, except Gurdaspur, the Christian share is far less than 1 percent. Gurdaspur is, of course, exceptional; Christians form nearly 8 percent of the population there. We discuss this district in greater detail below.

%Share of Christians	
1961	1.25
1971	1.20
1981	1.10
1991	1.11
2001	1.20
2011	1.26

**The Muslims of Malerkotla**

*Muslims of Malerkotla remained secure at the time of Partition*

Kotla, in Punjabi, means a small fortress; the town of Malerkotla gets its name from the fortress of Maler. Malerkotla indeed looks like a fortress of the Muslims, surrounded on all sides by Sikhs and Hindus. Muslims have a share of one third in the population of Malerkotla tahsil (sub-district) and they form a two-thirds majority in the town. The town and its surrounding region remained an island of peace during the great carnage that occurred in Punjab during the Partition of 1947. In those cataclysmic times, not only the Muslims of the town and the surrounding region remained unmolested, but Malerkotla also became a place of temporary refuge for Muslims from elsewhere. To understand this phenomenon, it is necessary to have a quick look at the history.

*They were protected by the blessings of Guru Gobind Singh*

Malerkotla State has its origin in a Jagir granted by Behlol Lodhi in 1454 to a Sufi saint, Sheikh Sadruddin Sadar-i-Jahan, locally known as Haider Sheikh. Behlol Lodhi also

gave his daughter, Taj Murassa Begum, in marriage to the Sheikh; the Jagir was in the nature of a dowry. It acquired the trappings of a State only in 1657, when Aurangzeb granted Bayzid Khan—who was in the sixth generation from Haider Sheikh—the privilege to build the fort of Maler. This was the time when the Sikhs in the Punjab had risen in rebellion against the Mughals; like other Muslim States of the region, the rulers of Malerkotla also engaged in continuous and bloody campaigns against the Sikhs on behalf of the Mughal Emperor and later also on behalf of the Afghan marauder, Ahmad Shah Abdali. A particularly bloody and cruel chapter in this history involved Wazir Khan, the governor of Sirhind and a close relative of the rulers of neighbouring Malerkotla. On December 12, 1705, he got the captive sons of Guru Gobind Singh, Sahibzada Fateh Singh and Sahibzada Zorawar Singh, who were only 6 and 9 years old at that time, bricked alive in a wall. The ruler of Malerkotla at that time was Sher Mohammed Khan. He is said to have strongly remonstrated with Wazir Khan against the cruelty. This act of Sher Mohammed Khan is gratefully remembered in Sikh history. His remonstrance is remembered among Sikhs as *haa da naaraah*, which is a Punjabi expression of disgust at gross injustice, or a cry for justice. Guru Gobind Singh himself is said to have blessed Malerkotla for the gracious act of raising such a cry.

*Banda Bahadur deferred to the blessings of the Guru and spared Malerkotla*

Sikhs avenged the cruel act of Wazir Khan within the decade. On May 12, 1710, the Muslim forces were convincingly defeated, in the battle of Chhappar Chiri near Sirhind; the severed head of Wazir Khan was widely exhibited on the point of a spear; and, terrible vengeance was visited upon Sirhind. Banda Bahadur also conquered and punished several other Muslim principalities in the region. But, in deference to the blessings of the Guru, he spared Malerkotla, even though Sher Mohammad Khan, the Nawab of Malerkotla had fought on the side of Wazir Khan at Chhappar Chiri and was killed there. The State was similarly spared in 1947, when the Sikhs and Hindus had to engage in another mortal and bloody conflict forced upon them by the Partition of the country and consequent exchange of populations.

*Blessings of the Guru prevailed even after the massacre of the Kuka Sikhs at Malerkotla*

In 1872, Namdhari Sikhs, also known as the Kukas, attacked Malerkotla to avenge the killing of cows by the Muslims and the British. The attack resulted in a few deaths and some guns were looted. In retaliation, the British blew a large number of Kukas, with several women and children among them, into smithereens, by placing them in the mouth of cannons. The bloody massacre was carried out at Malerkotla over three days. The number of Kukas killed is not known with certainty; the British officers who ordered the killing had held no trial and kept no records. Different sources put the number between 65 and 69. The days of the massacre are better known; it happened on January 17, 18 and perhaps also January 19 of 1872. Notwithstanding this great massacre of Kuka Sikhs that tainted the history of Malerkotla, the Sikhs continued to respect the blessings of the tenth Guru and the Muslims there remained unmolested in the most difficult of times.

*Malerkotla has flourished in Independent India*

In Independent India, Muslims of Malerkotla have indeed flourished. Iftikhar Ali Khan, the last Nawab of Malerkotla before its accession to the Indian Union in 1948, served

twice as a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) of Punjab. His third wife, Yusuf Zaman Begum, and his fifth wife, Sajida Begum, were also elected MLAs, the latter twice. In the Punjab Legislative Assembly, Malerkotla has always been represented by a Muslim, except once in 1957, when Chanda Singh of the Congress was elected to the Assembly. Muslim MLAs of Malerkotla have often got the opportunity to serve as Ministers in both the Akali and Congress governments. Notwithstanding the dignity, security and prosperity that Malerkotla has provided to the Muslims since Independence, most members of the royal family have left India to settle in Lahore in Pakistan.

### **Share of Muslims in the population of Malerkotla has been rising**

Muslims dominate the politics and economy of Malerkotla; and also, their demographic presence there has been growing. In Malerkotla town, where they already formed two-thirds of the population after Partition, the rise in their share has been less marked, but it has risen spectacularly in the tahsil and the district in which the town is located.

#### *Malerkotla Town*

As seen in the Table here, Muslims formed 65% of the population of Malerkotla town in 1971; their share in 2011 is 68.5 percent, though there has been some decline in the last decade. In the total population of 1.35 lakhs in 2011, 92.8 thousand are Muslims. Besides them, there are 28 thousand Hindus and about 1.5 thousand Jains, the two together account for 21.8 percent of the population. The Sikhs form a small minority of 9.5 percent in the town; their numbers in 2011 add up to less than 13 thousand.

	T	M	%M
1971	48,859	31,740	64.96
1981	65,756	44,236	67.27
1991	88,600	59,928	67.64
2001	1,07,009	73,813	68.98
2011	1,35,424	92,765	68.50

T: Total, M: Muslim, %M: M Share

#### *Current Malerkotla Sub-District*

In the current Malerkotla tahsil, Muslims have a share of 33.3 percent in 2011; their share in 2001 was 30.8 percent. Unlike in the town, Muslims in the tahsil have grown much faster than others during 2001-11. Their rate of growth in this decade has been 20.1 percent compared to just 11.2 percent for the total population of the tahsil.

	T	M	%M
2001	3,86,439	1,19,071	30.81
2011	4,29,754	1,42,945	33.26

T: Total, M: Muslim, %M: M Share

#### *Malerkotla (including Dhuri) Sub-District*

Longer time-series data is available for a bigger territory that includes Dhuri, which was carved out of the earlier Malerkotla tahsil after 1991. The share of Muslims in the earlier tahsil has increased from 15.2 percent in 1971 to 22.5 percent in 2011. Muslims in the tahsil have thus grown faster than others. In the four decades since 1971, their numbers have multiplied by 2.74 while the total population has multiplied by 1.84.

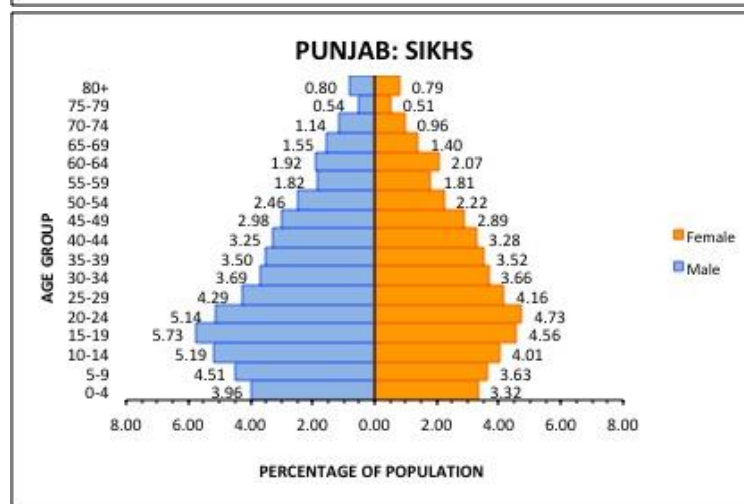
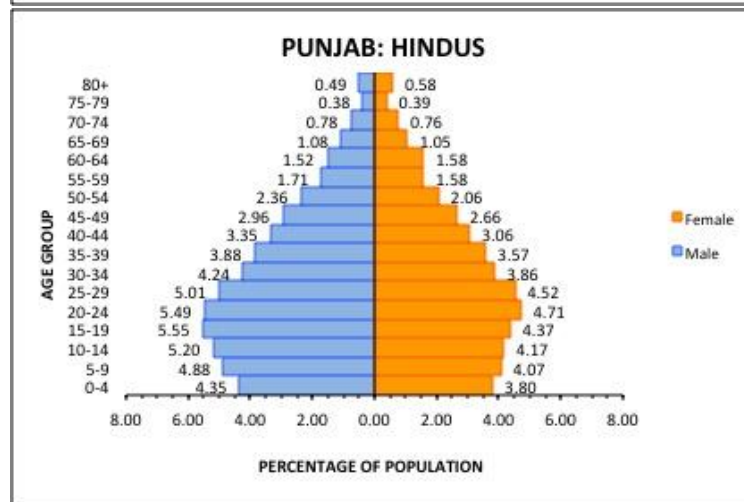
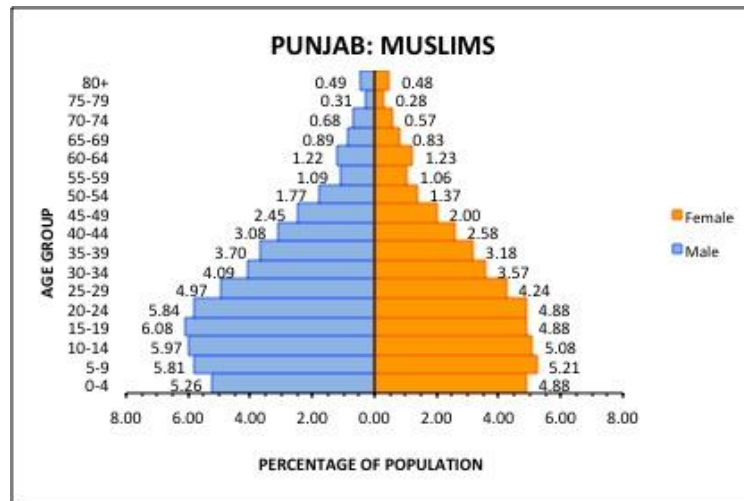
	T	M	%M
1971	3,73,449	56,686	15.18
1981	4,47,670	76,598	17.11
1991	5,47,452	1,02,941	18.80
2001	6,26,519	1,29,279	20.63
2011	6,91,001	1,55,381	22.49

T: Total, M: Muslim, %M: M Share

#### *Sangrur District*

Malerkotla is situated in Sangur district. Share of Muslims in the population of the district has risen from 7.23 percent in 1971 to 10.82 percent in 2011. Total population of the district in this period has not quite doubled while that of Muslims has nearly tripled.

## Age-pyramids of Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs of Sangrur



Higher growth of Muslims compared to other communities can be discerned in the age pyramids above. All three communities seem to have entered the phase of population stabilisation, but the Hindus are far ahead of the Muslims along this trajectory and Sikhs are even farther ahead of Hindus.

Number of children of age 0-6 years among the Muslims of Sangrur is about 13 per hundred compared to 11 for the total population; and female literacy among them is 56.2 percent compared to 62.2 percent for the total population. Hindus in Sangrur have 12.2 children per hundred of the population, which is not very different from the Muslims, but female literacy among them is much higher at 67.9 percent. Sikhs, on the other hand, have considerably lower children than both the Hindus and Muslims at 10.2 per hundred, but female literacy among them is far below the Hindus at 61.0 percent.

	Ch/100	FL
Total	10.96	62.17
Muslims	12.93	56.19
Hindus	12.20	67.91
Sikhs	10.17	61.03

FL: Female Literacy Rate

Muslims thus have done fairly well in maintaining their political, economic and demographic dominance in their niche at Malerkotla.

#### *Muslims of Malerkotla and the rest of Punjab*

In 1971, there were 1.14 lakh Muslims in Punjab, of whom 61.5 thousand were in the current Sangrur district, in which Malerkotla is situated. In 2011, there are 5.35 lakh Muslims in Punjab, of whom 1.79 lakh are in Sangrur. Thus, in these 4 decades, the number of Muslims outside Sangrur has risen from 53 thousand to 3 lakh 56 thousand, implying a multiplication factor of 6.73, while Muslims in the current Sangrur district have multiplied by a factor of 2.91. Muslims in the Malerkotla region have grown quite rapidly, leading to a considerable increase in their share of the population, as we have seen above; but Muslims elsewhere in Punjab have grown at a much faster rate. In fact, Muslims of Malerkotla are quite different than those in other parts of Punjab. The former are Punjabi Muslims, who have been settled there for several centuries. The latter are recent immigrants from other parts of India, particularly from eastern India. The two are culturally quite different, and Muslims of Malerkotla have little in common with the Muslims in other parts of Punjab.

#### **Muslim pocket of Qadian**

There is another, though much smaller, pocket of older Muslim concentration in the Punjab, comprising the town of Qadian in Batala sub-district of Gurdaspur district. The population of this town counted in 2011 is 23.6 thousand, of which more than 3 thousand, forming 13 percent of the total, are Muslim. As seen in the Table here, their share in

	T	M	%M
1971	13,607	601	4.42
1981	15,804	1,112	7.04
1991	18,867	1,370	7.26
2001	22,001	2,411	10.96
2011	23,632	3,065	12.97

T: Total, M: Muslim, %M: M Share

the population of the town has increased to this level from 4.4 percent in 1971. This rise could partly be because of the town expanding to incorporate the Muslim localities in the neighbourhood. But, the proportion of Muslims in Batala tahsil, within which Qadian is situated, has also risen from 0.34 to 0.83 percent in the same period; and, the number of

Muslims in the tahsil has risen from 1,554 to 6,185. These numbers for Batala include those of Dera Baba Nanak tahsil, which has been carved out of Batala after 1991.

The Muslim concentration in Qadian also has a historical context. The town is the birthplace of Mirza Gulam Ahmed, who claimed to be the long awaited Messiah and Mahdi of Muslims, and founded the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamat in 1889. Qadian remained the capital of the Ahmadiyyas up to 1947. During Partition, the community migrated to Pakistan, leaving behind a few men to guard their properties. The capital of the Jamat was shifted to Rabwah in Pakistan; the town is on the banks of Chenab and it has officially been renamed as Chenab Nagar. Ahmadiyyas in Pakistan have been facing public violence and official persecution from the very beginning. In 1989, the population of the whole population of Rabwah was booked for showing disrespect to the Quran.

Qadian was a Muslim majority town before Partition; it continues to retain the second largest concentration of Muslims in Punjab, after Malerkotla; and, as we have seen, the share of Muslims in the town has been growing rapidly. The town also continues to have grand buildings of the Jamat, including Minaratul Masih, and hosts a grand annual congregation (Jalsa Salana) of the Ahmadiyya Muslims.

### Christians in Gurdaspur

#### *Nearly half of the Christians are in Gurdaspur District*

Gurdaspur district—particularly Batala and Dera Baba Nanak tahsils within it—is a pocket of high concentration of Christians. Of 3.65 lakh Christians counted in Punjab in 2011, 1.77 lakh are in Gurdaspur district alone. They form 7.68 percent of the population of the district. Unlike the Muslims in Malerkotla, the share of Christians in

#### Christians in Gurdaspur District

	T	C	%C
1971	12,29,249	79,732	6.49
1981	15,13,435	99,637	6.58
1991	17,56,732	1,20,470	6.86
2001	21,04,011	1,48,981	7.08
2011	22,98,323	1,76,587	7.68

T: Total, C: Christians, %C: C Share

Gurdaspur has shown only a moderate rise, except during the last decade of 2001-11. In this decade, Christians have a registered a growth of 18.53 percent, which is twice the growth of 9.24 percent in the total population of the district. In the previous decades, the rate of growth of Christians has been near that of the total population.

#### *They are concentrated in Gurdaspur and Batala tahsils*

Within the district, Christians are concentrated in Gurdaspur and Batala tahsils; the latter has been divided into Batala and Dera Baba Nanak tahsils after 1991. The data in the Table here is for the earlier Batala (including Dera Baba Nanak) tahsil. Of 1.77 lakh Christians in the district, 97.8 thousand are in Gurdaspur tahsil and another 71.5 thousand in the composite Batala, leaving 7.3 thousand Christians in the rest of Gurdaspur. In both tahsils, the share of Christians has increased considerably during 2001-11. In this decade, Christians in Gurdaspur tahsil have grown by 17.9 percent while the total population has grown by only 10.4 percent; in Batala (composite) tahsil, Christians have grown by 20.5 percent while the total population there has grown by 9.4 percent.

#### Christians in Gurdaspur and Batala (composite) Tahsils

	Population of C		% Share of C	
	1	2	1	2
2001	82,922	59,346	11.14	8.09
2011	97,775	71,520	11.90	8.94

1: Gurdaspur 2: Batala (composite)

### *Christian share is the highest in Dera Baba Nanak*

Of the two components into which Batala tahsil has been divided after 1991, the Christian presence is much higher in the Dera Baba Nanak component. Christians form 18.38 percent of the population in Dera Baba Nanak and only 7.20 percent in the population of the current Batala tahsil. During 2001-11, the share of Christians has increased considerably in both tahsils, but the rise is much more in Dera Baba Nanak.

	Percent Share of Christians	
	1	2
2001	6.52	16.46
2011	7.20	18.38

1. Batala, 2. Dera Baba Nanak

### *History of Christianity in Gurdaspur*

Christianity arrived in Gurdaspur towards the end of nineteenth century. In the Church literature, the event is celebrated as one of the several *mass movements* in which whole communities and castes in different regions of India converted to Christianity *en masse*. The particular movement that led to a concentration of Christians in Gurdaspur began in the neighbouring Sialkot district, now in Pakistan, with the conversion of Ditt, a member of the Chuhra caste, by a Presbyterian missionary, Samuel Martin, in 1873. The example and zeal of Ditt led to several persons—initially from his family and immediate neighbourhood and later from his larger community—being converted. It is said that by 1915 all but a few hundred members of his caste in Sialkot district had converted to Christianity. The neighbouring Gurdaspur district also became an early centre of the mass movement that began in Sialkot, especially because another Presbyterian missionary, Andrew Gordon, lived there from 1875 to 1885 and was very active in rendering the Church ritual and psalms in a manner that would appeal to the Punjabis. The Christians of Gurdaspur are largely the descendants of people who got converted to Christianity in what the Church calls the ‘mighty Chuhra movement’ of the late nineteenth century. This Christian community, like the Muslim community of Malerkotla, has flourished in Independent India. Given their relatively small numbers, no Christian has been elected to the Punjab Legislative Assembly, but they do have an influence in the elections of the representatives from Gurdaspur and also Amritsar constituencies. A considerable number of Christians have been elected as Panchs and Sarpanchs of their Panchayats. Their demographic share in the population had remained relatively stable, but this also has begun to change in the last decade of 2001-11.

### *Christians outside Gurdaspur*

There were 1.62 lakh Christians in Punjab in 1971, of which about 80 thousand were in Gurdaspur district. In 2011, of 3.48 lakh Christians in Punjab, 1.77 lakh are in Gurdaspur. Thus, Christians in Gurdaspur and elsewhere in Punjab seem to have grown at nearly the same rate. In these 40 years, their number has multiplied by 2.21 in Gurdaspur and by 2.08 in the rest of Punjab; the total population of Punjab in this period has multiplied by 2.05.

### **Summing Up**

1. There is a pocket of Muslim concentration in the Sangrur district of Punjab. During the Partition of 1947, and the violent transfer of populations between the West and East Punjab, Sikhs of the area respected the blessings that the Muslims of Malerkotla had received from the tenth Guru and let the Muslims here remain unmolested.



2. In Independent India, Muslims of this small pocket have flourished; they have dominated the economy and politics of the town of Malerkotla; they have had a significant place in the politics of the State; and, their population has increased much faster than others. Their share in the population of Malerkotla tahsil has risen from 15.2 percent in 1971 to 22.5 percent in 2011.

3. Notwithstanding the dignity, prosperity and fertility that the Muslims have experienced in Malerkotla, most of the members of the royal family of this erstwhile principality have relocated to Lahore of Pakistan.

4. Qadian town in Gurdaspur district of Punjab forms another, but much smaller, pocket of considerable Muslim presence and growth. Muslims have a share of 13 percent in the population of Qadian town; it was only 4.4 percent in 1971.

5. Qadian is the birthplace of Mirza Gulam Ahmed, who founded the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamat in 1889. After Partition, the Ahmadiyyas shifted their capital from Qadian to Rabwah in Pakistan, where they have faced continuous violence and persecution. The few Ahmadiyyas, who were left behind in Qadian to protect and guard the properties, have flourished and their numbers have considerably increased. They continue to hold their annual international convention, Jalsa Salana, at Qadian. The last convention held in December 2015 attracted Ahmadiyya delegates from 44 countries. Incidentally, in Pakistan, public expression of the Ahmadiyya faith is legally prohibited.

6. There is also a pocket of high Christian presence in Gurdaspur district, where Christians now form 7.7 percent of the population. The share of Christians has been slowly rising in Gurdaspur, and also the rest of Punjab. But the rise in their share during 2001-11 has been rather high.

7. Christians of Gurdaspur are the descendants of what the Church describes as the “mighty Chuhra movement” of Sialkot; the movement that occurred towards the end of the nineteenth century in Sialkot and the neighbouring Gurdaspur led to a significant majority of the members of an untouchable caste of Punjab converting to Christianity *en masse*.

8. The stories of Malerkotla, Qadian and Gurdaspur are of course emblematic of the secular spirit of India in which different religions and sects continue to flourish and find dignity, security and prosperity, even in very tense times.

9. These stories also remind us that in India since Independence, minority communities have invariably grown faster than the majority. The Sikh majority of Punjab is indeed growing much slower than all others. The rapid decline in the share of Sikhs is of course the main issue concerning the religious demography of Punjab, and also of India. We have discussed this in detail in our *eighth* and *ninth* posts on the Religion Data of Census 2011.

10. The stories of Malerkotla, Qadian and Gurdaspur also tell us that almost every part of India has a long history of its own. This absorbing history, and also rich geography, of every village, town and tahsil of India adds to the sanctity of India; this is what makes India sacred. We need to once again learn to study, appreciate and enjoy the sacred histories and geographies of different parts of India. That is the path to the restoration of the greatness and sanctity of India.

Appendix

**Map XVI: Muslims and Christians in Punjab**

Each dot represents 100 persons

