



Sikh Research Journal

Vol. 5 No. 2

This article is from *Sikh Research Journal*, the online peer-reviewed journal of Sikh and Punjabi Studies

Sikh Research Journal *Vol. 5 No. 2 Published: Fall 2020.

<http://sikhresearchjournal.org>

<http://sikhfoundation.org>

Sikh Research Journal

Volume 5

Number 2

Fall 2020

Contents

Articles

- | | | |
|---|---|----|
| Eleanor Nesbitt | Ghost Town and The Casual Vacancy: Sikhs in the Writings of Western Women Novelists | 1 |
| Sujinder Singh Sangha | The Political Philosophy of Guru Nanak and Its Contemporary Relevance | 23 |
| Arvinder Singh,
Amandeep Singh,
Amarpreet Singh,
Harvinder Singh,
Parm Singh | Building an Open-Source Nanakshahi Calendar: Identity and a Spiritual and Computational Journey | 40 |
| Victoria Valetta | Mental Health in the Guru Granth Sahib: Disparities between Theology and Society | 51 |
| Harleen Kaur,
prabhdeep singh kehal | Sikhs as Implicated Subjects in the United States: A Reflective Essay (ਵਿਚਾਰ) on Gurmat-Based Interventions in the Movement for Black Lives | 68 |

Book Colloquium

- | | | |
|--|--|----|
| | <i>Faith, Gender, and Activism in the Punjab Conflict: The Wheat Fields Still Whisper</i> (Mallika Kaur) | 87 |
|--|--|----|

Navkiran Kaur Chima	Intersection of Faith, Gender, and Activism: Challenging Hegemony by Giving “Voice” to the Victims of State Violence in Punjab	87
Shruti Devgan	The Punjab Conflict Retold: Extraordinary Suffering and Everyday Resistance	91
Harleen Kaur	The Potency of Sikh Memory: Time Travel and Memory Construction in the Wake of Disappearance	96
Sasha Sabherwal	Journeying through Mallika Kaur’s <i>Faith, Gender, and Activism in the Punjab Conflict</i>	100
Mallika Kaur	Book Author’s Reflective Response to Review Commentaries	105
In Memoriam		
Jugdep S. Chima	Remembrance for Professor Paul Wallace (1931-2020)	111

***Ghost Town and The Casual Vacancy:* Sikhs in the Writings of Western Women Novelists**

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Abstract

In 2012 the president of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee demanded that the novelist JK Rowling remove offensive text from her novel, *The Casual Vacancy*. This article focuses on the appropriateness of the Sikh-related content of two 21st-century novels – JK Rowling’s *The Casual Vacancy* and Catriona Troth’s *Ghost Town* – against the backdrop of previous fictional portrayals of Sikhs. Further context is provided by both Sikh and non-Sikh responses to western novelists’ portrayal of Sikh characters and social issues. Sikhs feature – as incidental figures and as protagonists – in a substantial body of English-language fiction, much of it by British women. While the portrayal of Sikhs in 19th- and early 20th-century novels is framed by empire and needs to be viewed in the context of Orientalism, and especially the image of the ‘martial’ male Sikh, many later 20th- and the 21st-century novels (mainly by women writers) are situated in the UK diaspora and their authors express a multicultural sensibility, attentive to aspects of the Sikh faith. This, I suggest, counters one critical opinion, namely that white writing is inherently Orientalist and that (only) South Asian writers can avoid this white hegemonic approach. However, writers’ affirmation of diversity needs to be interrogated for an essentialism reminiscent of Orientalism: Rowling’s treatment is on occasion exoticizing and binary, even though Sikhs’ response to *The Casual Vacancy* has been appreciative, with the exception of the SGPC’s reaction. Moreover, while action-packed historical novels by white authors, focusing on warlike male Sikhs, have given way to diaspora fiction with a greater concern for female Sikh characters and youth, the tradition of historical novels featuring Sikhs continues.

Keywords: Fiction, Sikhs, western women, Orientalism, JK Rowling, Catriona Troth

Introduction

In 2012 the media reported Sikh anger directed at JK Rowling, celebrity author of the Harry Potter novels. The reason for this anger was the way in which, in Rowling’s novel, *The Casual Vacancy*, a school bully had insulted his class-mate, a young Sikh woman. The resultant news coverage spotlighted Sikh sensitivity to portrayals of Sikhs in fiction. The present article examines how Sikh characters are portrayed and how Sikh-related issues are addressed in *The Casual Vacancy*, in parallel with a less well-known novel, Catriona Troth’s *Ghost Town*. I contextualize

these two novels by offering an overview of a century of novels (mainly by non-Sikhs) featuring Sikh characters, and by some Sikh (and other) critics' responses to recent fictional portrayals. While historical fiction involving Sikh warriors has largely given way to socially aware fiction set in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, I suggest, nonetheless, that a critical alertness to Orientalist tendencies is pertinent when examining novels such as Rowling's and Troth's.

The Casual Vacancy and Ghost Town

Foregrounding young Sikhs, both authors' novels appropriately acknowledge aspects of Sikh religion. Both *The Casual Vacancy* and *Ghost Town* are set in England: *Ghost Town* in the West Midlands city of Coventry in 1981 and *The Casual Vacancy* in the imaginary West-country village of Pagford at some point in the present century (we know this much because Facebook plays a key role in the action). For both writers their Sikh characters – two young men, Baz (Bhajan Singh Lister) and Vik (Vikram Singh), in *Ghost Town* and two women, Sukhvinder Jawanda and her mother, Dr Parminder Jawanda, in *The Casual Vacancy* – are central to the action. Moreover, the detail of their depictions and their own statements about the writing process suggest that both writers had researched Sikhs and Sikhism, as well as being familiar with the diasporic setting, in the interests of accurate portrayal.

Rowling's novel begins with the death of Councillor Barry Fairbrother creating a 'casual vacancy' (the technical term) in the council. Factions then form in the run-up to the ensuing election and the candidates are horrified when they find that their darkest secrets have been publicized on the council's online forum by three angry teenagers, one of whom was Sukhvinder Jawanda. An academic failure, because of her dyslexia, Sukhvinder had disappointed her high-achieving doctor mother and was also the victim of merciless bullying. However, by risking her life in an attempt to save the brother of her socially challenged peer, Krystal Weedon (who lives in the 'Fields', a deprived housing estate, rife with addiction and violence), Sukhvinder emerges as the novel's unexpected star, acting out of courage and altruism.

No less socially engaged, Troth's novel surges with the racial tension between skinheads and young Asians (i.e. people of South Asian ethnicity) in Coventry in 1981. That year (in real life) a young Sikh man, Satnam Singh Gill, and an Asian doctor, Dr Amal Dharry, were murdered and *Ghost Town*, a single recorded by The Specials, a successful English Two-tone and ska revival band, was released and played at an anti-racist gig. In the novel, Baz (Bhajan Singh), as a professional

photographer, not only films fatal conflict that erupts but also takes a stand, together with Maia, a white unemployed graduate who is committed to social action. Their base is a center for the homeless (based on one which Troth knew well from a period as a volunteer). The homeless center and the city's famous Two-tone music play an important part in the novel.

Sikh and Non-Sikh Responses to Fictional Portrayals of Sikhs

Sikh protests at fictional (mis)representation of members of their community first made headlines as early as December 2004, because a Sikh screenplay writer and former actress, Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti, had included an imaginary rape scene, set in a gurdwara, in her stage drama *Behzti*. Sikhs' protests in Birmingham resulted in the cancellation of the planned performances (Singh and Tatla 2006). Darshan Singh Tatla and his co-author Gurharpal Singh reflected on Sikhs' anger at Gurpreet Kaur's *Behzti*. They outlined the range of Sikh responses, including denying that such events took place in gurdwaras; commending Sikhs' reasonableness in trying to negotiate a compromise with the theatre; and objection both to the 'double standards' of British society which upheld Christian and Jewish criticisms when religious sensitivities were inflamed, and to a patronizing liberal tendency to sermonize on the right to freedom of expression. In *The Guardian* newspaper, rather than condemning Bhatti for offensive subject-matter, Gurharpal Singh's analysis of the protests was 'Sikhs are the real losers from Behzti... In a single act the community has overturned years of hard work and reverted to type as a militant tradition fixated with narrow communal interests' (2004).

In Rowling's case in 2012, it was not her portrayal of any misconduct, let alone rape, or any sacrilege, by a Sikh protagonist but her imagining of 'corrosive racism' (see Majhail 2018, quoting Rowling) in the form of hostile male pupils' hateful allusions to Sukhvinder's facial hair that drew an angry reaction from Avtar Singh Makkar, the president of the SGPC or Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee in Amritsar, Sikhs' most authoritative elected body. Having received several complaints, Makkar called the fictional bully's descriptions of Sukhvinder 'a slur on the Sikh community'.¹ He further commented: 'Even if the author had chosen to describe the female Sikh character's physical traits, there was no need for her to use provocative language, questioning her gender. This is condemnable.'²

¹ See <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/booknews/9580177/First-Middle-England-now-Rowlings-novel-upsets-Sikhs-as-well.html> (accessed 6 October 2018).

² See <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/booknews/9580177/First-Middle-England-now-Rowlings-novel-upsets-Sikhs-as-well.html> (accessed 6 October 2018).

Rather more Sikh readers, however, expressed appreciation for Rowling's sympathetic treatment of her Sikh characters, whose religion provides the book's moral compass. For instance, the New York-based creative writer, Navdeep Singh Dhillon, posted an online defence (2012). Dhillon satirized the SGPC president's expression of disproportionate outrage at a single sentence in Rowling's book rather than being exercised by France's continuing turban ban or by the abhorrent sexism in contemporary bhangra songs, and for that matter rather than expressing disapproval of other aspects of Rowling's 'dark' novel. Dhillon endorsed Rowling's decision to 'use a Sikh family, not just as tokens in this story, but as very human characters' and he defended the use, in its particular context, of the (odious) bully Fats's insult: 'mustachioed, yet large mammariated, scientists remain baffled by the contradictions of the hairy man-woman'. Instead of the author resorting to exotic stereotyping, Dhillon suggested, 'a genuine effort has been made by Rowling to integrate Sikh values into several characters in the novel, so I don't think we should start our morchas [protests] and book burnings just yet'. Dhillon probably spoke for other Sikh readers in appreciating Rowling's incorporation of 'Sikh values' – presumably a reference to Sukhvinder risking her own life in her courageous altruism. Indeed, according to another Sikh commentator, Harjinder Singh Majhail, 'Though Sukhvinder resorts to self-torture after undergoing racism, she emerges victorious like a brave Sikh by her self-determination and emerges a heroine by helping everybody in Britain' (2019). *The Guardian* also published a spirited defence of Rowling's novel by Balpreet Kaur, a young Sikh woman who had personal experience of coping with reactions to her own facial hair (Kaur 2012).

These fulsome endorsements by Sikhs are especially noteworthy in the wider context of criticisms of Rowling's work, for example for cultural appropriation in relation to her homogenizing treatment of Native American 'wizardry' with regard to the wizardry of the 'Potterverse' (see Little 2016 and Dixon 2018). Indeed, by 2020 Rowling was embroiled in another controversy, this time not because of her publications but because of her 'transphobic' and 'condescending' tweeting about transgender people (Sky News 2020).

It is also worth noting that, by contrast with the affirmative assessments by Sikh reviewers of Rowling's treatment of Sikhs, some other recent novels (by, as it happens, authors of South Asian background) that feature Sikh characters have met with a more negative response from their Sikh readers. Thus, regarding the Californian Punjabi author Bhira Backhaus's novel *Under the Lemon Trees* (2009), one Sikh reviewer, Manjyot Kaur, commented that it provided an 'unpleasant surprise' for its 'rather bleak portrayal of Sikh spirituality and practice' (Kaur

2009). Kaur mused regretfully that ‘It would have been gratifying to have encountered at least one character who was positively portrayed as both a committed Sikh and a likeable, multi-faceted human being’ (2009), even though she endorsed Backhaus’s finely observed exploration of relationships in her own immigrant Sikh community as the Book of the Month selection for January 2010 on the sikhchic.com website.

In the field of Sikh Studies, three Sikh scholars, Nikky Guninder Kaur Singh, Darshan Singh Tatla and Gurharpal Singh, have also criticized fictional portrayals of Sikhs. Nikky Singh’s published critiques concern Kip (Kirpal Singh) in *The English Patient*, a novel by Michael Ondaatje, a Canadian of Sri Lankan/Dutch heritage (Ondaatje 1982). While Singh commended Ondaatje’s characterisation of Kip (Nikky Singh 2001), she deplored the impoverishment of this portrayal in the film of the novel (Nikky Singh 2004). In the case of novels by the Bengali American writer, Bharati Mukherjee (Tatla 2004 on Mukherjee 1988 and 1989) and a Punjabi Canadian writer, Iqbal S. Ramoowalia (Tatla 2017 on Ramoowalia 2005), Tatla took issue with both novelists for their political bias regarding Canadian Sikhs and their alleged implication in downing an Air India plane in 1985.

As an aside: by contrast, and perhaps surprisingly, amid all the Muslim outrage at Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*, Sikhs had been silent about the fact that Rushdie began his narrative with the imagined hijacking of a plane by Sikhs over the English Channel (Rushdie 1988), so reinforcing a stereotype of Sikhs as terrorists. Perhaps this was because the writing itself somewhat obfuscates the terrorist act.

Singh and Tatla have also, authoritatively (and more affirmatively), surveyed British Sikhs in other novels too, written by both Sikhs and non-Sikhs (2006: 197-198), from Iqbal Singh in *The Immigrants* (Massey and Massey 1973), Rupinder Singh (Ruby) in *The Turban-Wallah* (Webster 1994) and Surinder, Danny’s Sikh girlfriend in the award-winning *Pig* (Cowan 1994), through to – in the present century – Manjit in Bali Rai’s *(Un)arranged Marriage* (2001), who discovers the discrepancies between Sikh religious values and his dad’s Jat Sikh culture, and Sushminder in Bally Kaur Mahal’s *The Pocket Guide to Being an Indian Girl* (2004).

As for non-Sikh writers’ responses to fictional representations of Sikhs, Canadian Punjabi author Shauna Singh Baldwin’s Partition novel, *What the Body Remembers* (1999), has been the subject of scholarly reviewing by Deepti Misri (2011) and Jennifer Randall (2014). However, in this case the reviews have focused on the

author's sensitive handling of Sikh women's experience of violence of many kinds, rather than on any treatment of the women *qua* Sikhs. Similarly, neither the novelist Ravinder Randhawa, nor critic Chris Weedon, identify Kulwant Singh (a character in Randhawa's novel, *A Wicked Old Woman*, 1987) as 'Sikh': Weedon simply expresses approval for Randhawa's novel as an exemplar of 'British Black and South Asian' writers 'contesting stereotypical white views of ethnic minority populations' (2006: 55). This article will return later to the assumptions embedded in Weedon's remarks.

Overall, little has been published on the ways in which Sikhs are represented in fiction since my own cursory survey, over thirty years ago, of Sikh-themed stories intended for younger readers (Nesbitt 1988). This survey briefly mentioned Helen Griffiths' novel, *Hari's Pigeon*, alongside other junior fiction including David Martin's *The Man in the Red Turban* (1970) and Len Webster's *The Turban-Wallah: A Tale of Little India* (1984). The authors had, in my view, written realistically about Sikhs in Britain, or (in Martin's case) Australia, and they shared a certain moral stance, showing Sikhs to be 'rich in distinctive culture yet not so different from everyone else after all' (Nesbitt 1988: 383).

By contrast, however, as I illustrated, Dickinson's unfortunately titled futuristic story, *The Devil's Children* (1970) simply involved Sikhs because the writer needed, for his fantasy, a community of people 'already resident in Britain, cohesive among themselves, good mechanics, different from the British in dress and behaviour' (Dickinson, personal communication, 1987). The Sikhs in Dickinson's story are idealized and alien, like 'a procession in fancy dress' (Dickinson 1970: 13), they spoke a 'strange language' (1970: 19) like 'the call of a bird' (1970: 17), and they were 'a soldier people' (1970: 31) who reminisced about military life (1970: 63). This was on the basis of Dickinson's father's wartime memories of Sikhs (personal communication, 1987).

Rowling's and Troth's Attention to the Sikh Faith

Whereas Dickinson had exoticized and idealized Sikhs, and set them in an imagined future, the other above-mentioned authors referred to elements of Sikh tradition to enrich their portrayal of credibly characterised individuals in true to life Sikh community settings. Similarly, in *The Casual Vacancy* and *Ghost Town*, Sikh characters inhabit convincingly realistic British settings – one more rural, and the other urban. Both Rowling and Troth provide carefully researched detail to enhance their characters' experience of wider social malaise, whether society's prevalent racism or young people's quest for identity. Aspects of Sikh tradition – the 5 Ks,

the Guru Granth Sahib and Harmandir Sahib (the Golden Temple, Amritsar) – all feature in ways that are integral, rather than tangential, to each novel’s plotting and characterization.

The ‘5 Ks’ are the five outward signifiers of Sikh identity, incumbent on initiates into the Khalsa, those Sikhs with a distinctive commitment to the faith. The formulation of the 5Ks is attributed to the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh. Through the imagined experiences of Sukhvinder Jawanda, Rowling raises the issues posed by one of the Ks, the *kes* (uncut hair), for Sikh women in the twenty-first century diaspora. First, Rowling imagines how in primary school the ‘boys had pulled Sukhvinder’s long, blue-black plait; it was the easiest thing to catch hold of when playing tag, and it had once presented an irresistible temptation when dangling, like now, down her back, hidden from the teacher’ (Rowling 2012: 120). More significantly, she describes how, in secondary school, this teasing had escalated into tormenting Sukhvinder about facial hair. The bully, ‘Fats’, was her chief tormentor, sending daily quotations and images ‘about hirsutism’ to her Facebook page (Rowling 2012: 120) and insults of the sort that so offended the president of the SGPC.

Rowling is highlighting a live issue: by the late 20th century, some Sikh women and girls living in the UK were increasingly worried about the implications for them of the Khalsa requirement to maintain *kes*. This rule was being interpreted as involving a taboo on removing any unwanted female facial hair. At the same time, British South Asian schoolgirls in general were acutely aware of peer pressure to remove body hair.

Feelings about hair and identity could run deep for men too. In the diaspora, Sikh men’s hair and turbans had become the site of racialization by the dominant white society, and many male Sikhs anticipated and experienced prejudice because of their distinctive appearance. At the same time they risked parents’ disapproval if they had their hair cut and stopped wearing a turban. Young Sikh men’s sensitivities surface in the edgy banter between Troth’s characters, Vik (Vikram) and Baz (Bhajan Singh):

Baz remembered. ‘You’d just cut your hair, and your father gave me the third degree [i.e. interrogated me] about why I’d grown mine long and who my father was and why I didn’t wear a turban or a beard.’ (Troth 2013: 311)

Non-Sikh peers’ questions could be uncomfortable too, as when Baz’s and Vik’s friend Maia asked: ‘Don’t Sikhs grow their hair like Baz? And wear turbans?’

‘Vik’s a *mona* [i.e. short-haired, shaven] Sikh,’ said Baz. ‘Cuts his hair, shaves his beard. His parents don’t approve, which is why he’s so sodding prickly about it.’ (Troth 2013: 87)

Troth’s dialogue realistically portrays the painful choices facing male Sikhs.

Regarding the other Ks, in Baz’s case, it had only been when, aged 13, he had disobediently opened a battered suitcase in his (English) mother’s bedroom, and discovered a *kirpan*, that he realized that his long-deceased father must have been a Sikh. He recognised too the symbolic importance of the other items: ‘the bangle, the combs, the shorts, the linen that could be folded into a turban.’ Inside the suitcase he had found a red sari:

Underneath lay a package wrapped in a linen handkerchief that sat heavy in his palm. He unfolded it and found a plain bangle made of heavy white metal and a pair of wooden combs. Below that was a strip of blue linen, at least five yards of it, and a pair of what looked like white cotton shorts.

He felt again in the suitcase. Something was buried in the folds of the shawl. A curved shape, smooth to the touch. He drew it out, gasped and nearly dropped it.

A small curved blade in a polished wooden sheath, hanging from a wide ribbon embroidered with symbols he recognised but couldn’t read. He’d seen one like it in Auntie Harjit’s house. Knew it was carried by all adult Sikhs.

The *kirpan*. (Troth 2013: 137)

Thus Troth draws on background knowledge of Sikhism to deepen her recounting of Baz’s self-discovery.

So too, well-judged reference by both authors to the Sikh scripture, enriches the narrative without laboring Sikh religiosity. In *Ghost Town*, Gurinder-ji, Vik’s father, warns Vik against seeking revenge for skinheads’ violence by quoting words of ‘the Guru’: ‘Do not turn round and strike those who strike you, kiss their feet and return to your own home’ (Troth 2013: 357). These are, in translation, Sheikh Farid’s words on page 1378 of the Guru Granth Sahib. Similarly, Rowling describes Sukhvinder’s mother, Parminder, turning to scripture for comfort in her grief at the death of Councillor Barry Fairbrother:

She jumped up again, strode back into the sitting room and took down, from the top shelf, one volume of the Sainchis, her brand-new holy book. Opening it at random, she read, with no surprise, but rather a sense of looking at her own devastated face in a mirror.

O mind, the world is a deep, dark pit. On every side, Death casts forward his net. (Rowling 2012: 40)

Rowling suggests realistically that Parminder kept portions (*sanchis*) of the scripture, rather than the full volume, at home and that these were kept on a top shelf (as a mark of respect). The words she read are a rendering of one of the medieval saint-poet Kabir's verses on page 654 of the Guru Granth Sahib. 'Opening it at random' suggests the Sikh practice of taking a *vak* (a reading for guidance) from the Guru Granth Sahib.

Parminder is shown too intoning Guru Nanak's composition, the 'Kirtan Sohila':

There was a terrible weight on Parminder's chest, but did not the Guru Granth Sahib exhort friends and relatives of the dead not to show grief, but to celebrate their loved one's reunion with God? In an effort to keep traitorous tears at bay, Parminder silently intoned the night-time prayer, the *kirtan sohila*.³

*My friend, I urge you that this is the opportune time to serve the saints.
Earn divine profit in this world and live in peace and comfort in the next.
Life is shortening day and night.
O mind, meet the Guru and set right your affairs...* (Rowling 2012: 144)

Rowling's reference to Harmandir Sahib, too, strengthens the text with a delicate realism. Of all the Sikhs' historic shrines, Harmandir Sahib is unquestionably the most powerfully symbolic devotional centre for Sikhs worldwide. In Rowling's narrative Parminder had dismissed her husband Vikram's suggestion of a family visit to Amritsar and the word 'betrayed' suggests the pain that her refusal inflicted on herself no less than on her husband:

She felt dimly that she had betrayed something, in refusing the Golden Temple. A vision of it swam through her tears, its lotus-flower dome

³ Guru Nanak's composition on pages 12 to 13 of the Guru Granth Sahib.

reflected in a sheet of water, honey-bright against a backdrop of white marble. (Rowling 2012: 436)

Both Troth and Rowling also address issues of gender in Sikh society. Rowling parenthetically imagined Parminder Jawanda's feelings about the prospect of having a marriage facilitated by her family. The brackets seem to reinforce the persistence of Parminder's friend Tessa's memory that Parminder's marriage had been 'arranged' and also the ambivalence of Parminder's feelings in the face of an outsider's (Tessa's) likely condemnation of an aspect of her own (Parminder's) family convention:

('It's only an introduction through the family,' Parminder had told her in the early days of their friendship, defensive and annoyed at something she had seen in Tessa's face. 'Nobody *makes* you marry, you know.'

But she had spoken, at other times, of the immense pressure from her mother to take a husband.

'All Sikh parents want their kids married. It's an obsession,' Parminder said bitterly.) (Rowling 2012: 292-293)

However, Troth, in her recreation of Coventry's Punjabi youth culture in 1981, a generation before Rowling's more contemporary Britain, suggests young British Sikh women's growing assertiveness. Mohan, Vik and some of their male friends are planning a march and Narinder, a young Sikh woman friend, demands: 'What about us?' and 'You going to be like your father and tell us the women are meant to stay behind and make food for the *langar*?' (Troth 2013: 333). Moreover, Narinder, suggests an advantage for a Sikh woman in going out with someone who was not as spoilt as Punjabi males tended to be:

'You wonder why I don't want to go out with a Punjabi boy? When you're all like little princes with *laddu* [celebratory sweetmeat] in your mouths, wanting everything done for you?' (Troth 2013: 169)

To assume that either Troth's Narinder or Rowling's Parminder is intended to represent, in some exclusive manner, the attitudes or experience of all their British Sikh female contemporaries is to underestimate the diversity of situations and personalities in both generations and, quite likely, each writer's awareness of this diversity. There is thus no reason to regard either Narinder's or Parminder's characters' attitudes as anachronistic.

‘Mixed’ Relationships and Cultural Fusion

Narinder’s comment on spoilt Punjabi boys leads into the matter of cross-cultural, inter-ethnic relationships. In the UK and other diaspora settings, the later decades of the twentieth century saw an increasing number of relationships between Sikhs and non-Sikhs, like Baz’s parents – his father from the Punjab and his mother from Bilston (Troth 2013: 356). Breaking the mould by embarking on ‘mixed’ relationships typically involved a Sikh man with a non-Sikh woman, rather than vice versa: Narinder’s remark challenges this emergent norm.

Rowling also suggests another dimension of fusion, the perplexing cultural messages for a young Sikh growing up in the UK, with its Christian cultural heritage. She articulates Sukhvinder’s syncretistic mix:

It was all very confusing, and she continued to enjoy Easter eggs and decorating the Christmas tree, and found the books that Parminder pressed upon her children, explaining the lives of the gurus and the tenets of Khalsa, extremely difficult to read. (Rowling 2012: 3010)

She depicts too the emotional demand on Sukhvinder of being asked, as ‘the only brown person in her class’, to ‘talk about the Sikh religion’ to her class fellows:

She had stood obediently at the front of the class and told the story of the Sikh religion’s founder Guru Nanak, who disappeared into a river, and was believed drowned but re-emerged after three days underwater to announce: ‘There is no Hindu, there is no Moslem.’

The other children had sniggered at the idea of anyone surviving underwater for three days. Sukhvinder had not had the courage to point out that Jesus had died and then come back to life. She had cut the story of Guru Nanak short, desperate to get back to her seat. (Rowling 2012: 301)

In *Ghost Town* the complexities of young people’s identity formation in relation to their Sikh backgrounds includes Baz’s sense not of cultural fusion but of himself as ‘mixed’ – having one Sikh parent and one from another culture. Baz has never known his father and being near his Sikh friend, Vik, makes him ‘aware of the thousand tiny things he should have learnt from birth’. ‘Too Paki to be white. Too gora [white] to be *desi* [Indian]’ is how he sums himself up (Troth 2013: 146).

Troth alludes too to the pain of the Ugandan Sikhs who came to the UK as refugees from President Idi Amin in 1972:

Mandeep and Daljit were older than Vik when they were thrown out of their home in Uganda. They'd carried their resentment with them. (Troth 2013: 129)

Continuities in Authorial Stance

In one view, references of this sort, not only to the Sikh religion, but also to Sikhs' cross-cultural marriages and transnational migration, serve to enrich the authors' portrayal without distancing the Sikh characters or burdening the narrative. Both Rowling and Troth had taken care to research their subject matter. Troth (who herself lived in Coventry in 1981) carefully checked her references to Sikh culture and she acknowledged the help of Sudha Bhuchar, the co-director of Tamasha Theatre, in helping her avoid 'the pitfalls inherent in writing about a culture not one's own' (Troth 2013: 458). Similarly, not only had Rowling 'had one big conversation about Sikhism that I can remember' with a young Sikh woman in London many years earlier⁴ but, we are informed, she did a 'vast amount of research' (PTI, Agencies 2012).

Moreover, both Troth's and Rowling's writing is framed by their awareness of the diversity of British society and imbued with multiculturalism, a multiculturalism that chimes with the following vignette of diverse UK society in *The Tidal Zone*, a 2016 novel by another contemporary novelist, Sarah Moss. Here the narrator remarks how in the local park he and his wife 'like the way a group of elderly Sikh gentlemen meet on the benches by the glasshouse every fine afternoon, to share tea from thermos flasks and pass around Punjabi newspapers, and the way one day last summer we could have taken a photo of the local folk dancing club doing the Gay Gordons on the grass, watched by a group of women in burqas picnicking under the trees with an assortment of small children, like a promotional film for a version of Englishness that is now not going to happen' (Moss 2016: 176).

However, just as multiculturalism has been condemned for intrinsic essentialism and tokenism – see, for example, educationist, Barry Troyna (1987) on the flawed conceptualization of multicultural, as opposed to antiracist, education – so, too, writers' acknowledgement of diversity can be dismissed as itself a variant of the binary discourse that Edward Said termed Orientalism (1978). Indeed, another educator, Mariela Nunez-Jane, has much more recently suggested that diversity is

⁴ <http://www.sikhnet.com/news/how-sikhism-fits-jk-rowlings-new-book> See also 'Front Row', BBC Radio 4 27 September 2012 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01mx27g> (accessed 2 February 2018).

itself an ‘Orientalist discourse’ (Nunez-Janes 2007: 41), albeit one in which the essentialism of people and cultures might be decoupled from their hierarchization. In other words, it is theoretically possible to stereotype communities without also ranking them as inferior or superior to each other.

In this context of the alleged Orientalism of multiculturalism it is arguable that not only Dickinson’s imagined ‘Devil’s children’ but also Rowling’s *The Casual Vacancy* exemplify an Orientalist binary discourse. Indeed, Rowling has explained, in a distant echo of Dickinson’s instrumental use of Sikhs in *The Devil’s Children*, how the Jawanda family fulfilled a purpose in her story:

I wanted the Sikh family at the heart of Pagford, and I wanted them to be second generation Britons. So they are insiders and outsiders simultaneously. In the book, it is Sikhism that provides religious morality, not the Church of England, which is represented by an empty church.⁵

Thus, it is Sikh rather than Anglican moral sensibility that is foregrounded in Rowling’s Pagford. Moreover, some readers may detect an Orientalist tinge in Rowling’s character, Samantha Mollison’s, reaction to Vikram Jawanda:

Samantha had heard somewhere, not long after they had become her neighbours, that Vikram and Parminder had had an arranged marriage. She found the idea unspeakably erotic. Imagine being ordered to marry Vikram, having to do it; she had wrought a little fantasy in which she was veiled and shown into a room, a virgin condemned to her fate Imagine looking up, and knowing you were getting that Not to mention the additional frisson of his job [as a surgeon]: that much responsibility would have given a much uglier man sex appeal. (Rowling 2012: 96)

Arguably, Rowling here provides yet another example of western fiction’s exoticizing of Sikh men. In the words of the American scholar of masculinities, Harjant Gill, ‘turbaned Sikh men have frequently appeared as objects of Orientalist fetish and desire in Western literature’ (Gill 2016).

Indeed, a recurrent trope in western writers’ fiction – and certainly in over a century of western women’s novels – is the attractive distinctiveness of male Sikhs: their princely bearing, their beards and handsome features. To quote from just two: regarding Eva Bell’s protagonist, Pertab Singh: ‘Even for a Sikh – that most

⁵ <http://www.sikhnet.com/news/how-sikhism-fits-jk-rowlings-new-book> See also ‘Front Row’, BBC Radio 4 27 September 2012 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01mx27g> (accessed 2 February 2018).

handsome of Asiatic races – he was strikingly good looking’ (Travers 1910: 30) and, similarly, the novelist Eliza Pollard’s character, Futtih Singh, ‘was a handsome man, in the prime of life, muscular and agile, the *beau idéal* of a Sikh warrior’ (Pollard 1896: 15).

Such a sentiment was also consistent with, and perpetuated, widespread British assumptions about Sikhs as a ‘martial race’. However, by 2019 when Vee Walker published a novel, largely based on her grandfather’s diaries and letters from World War 1 in France, this Orientalist view had been challenged. Whereas, eighty years earlier, the novelist and explorer Rosita Forbes had declared, ‘[t]he men are warriors by birth and training’ (Forbes 1939: 67), Walker’s assessment was more nuanced. Perhaps influenced by more recent historical discrediting of the martial race theory, she observed that her grandfather, who ‘had lived among Sikhs for most of his life and had fought alongside them in France for a year’

had once unthinkingly considered them a ‘martial race’, which most of the misguided few leading this war still did. Now he knew better. Many were gentle souls, farmers, often second sons entering the army from rural hamlets because of a long tradition of family service. (Walker 2019: 189)

In addition to the attractiveness and martial reputation of Sikh men, other shared themes, too, link novelists across the generations, although to term these ‘orientalist’ can entail an undeserved value judgement. Thus, Rowling’s evocation of Harmandir Sahib in *The Casual Vacancy* is foreshadowed by novelist Eliza Pollard’s description of the approach to the golden temple in her *The White Dove of Amritsir*:

Futtih Singh and his companions rode beneath the long baghs or groves of mango-trees on their way to Amritsir, and so beheld the golden dome of the Hari Mander glittering in the rays of the setting sun. The effect was almost magical, and, to the thoughtful soul, there was something grand and touching in the effort of human genius to produce a thing of beauty, worthy of that invisible God towards whom the immortal soul of man is for ever straining. (Pollard 1896: 33)

Rowling’s appreciation of the spiritual solace of the Guru Granth Sahib is foreshadowed by the Nobel Prize winning American novelist Pearl S. Buck, not in a novel but in her substantial contribution to the introduction of Dr Gopal Singh’s translation of the *Guru Granth Sahib*, 1938.

Shri Guru-Granth Sahib is a source book, an expression of man's loneliness, his aspirations, his longings, his cry to God and his hunger for communication with that Being. I have studied the scriptures of other great religions, but I do not find elsewhere the same power of appeal to the heart and mind as I find here in these volumes. They are... a revelation of the vast reach of the human heart, varying from the most noble concept of God, to the recognition and indeed the insistence upon the practical needs of the human body. (Buck 1987 unpaginated)

The Guru Granth Sahib is quoted too in Jane Vansittart's novel. Some fifty years after the cremation of the fictitious Sikh raja of Kumkoo, a disfigured rani, who had escaped immolation as a sati, uttered 'the words of Nanuck the great Sikh reformer', 'suttees are those that die of a broken heart.' (Vansittart 1962: 48-49, citing Adi Granth 787 as translated in Cunningham 1849: 364).

Subsequently, in the 1980s, other white UK fiction writers anticipated Troth's and Rowling's realistic and sympathetic depiction of the experiences of Sikhs living in Britain. For instance, Carol Lake won the 1989 *Guardian* Fiction Prize for what appear to have been only very slightly fictionalized 'portraits' from 'Rosehill', an imaginary British Midlands city. Additionally, Helen Griffiths had devoted her novel *Hari's Pigeon* to the experiences of Hari Singh, a Sikh boy of 'mixed' parentage (1982), who had drawn on his knowledge of the Sikh use of the Guru Granth Sahib when naming a child to find a name for his pigeon by opening his dictionary at random.

Lake's 'portraits' include 'Ajit's Story' with its glimpses of her life in Rosehill and, prior to that, in India. Lake includes observations on son preference as Ajit recalls, during her student days, visiting her father's eldest sister in India (Lake 1989: 156) as well as her firm views on 'training' children and also her recollections of a day when 'thousands of Sikhs converged on the *gurdwara*, which had been occupied by supporters of Khalistan for months' (Lake 1989: 12). Here, like Troth, Lake is referring to historical events in the UK of the 1980s, albeit not to racial conflict, but rather to the turbulence following the anti-Sikh violence in north India in 1984.

Moreover, a century before Troth and Rowling were reacting to shifting gender roles in Sikh society, the Canadian author Eva Bell (publishing as John Travers) portrayed Sikh society's expectations of women, in a subordinate position to men: for example, a young widower would remarry following his wife's death (Travers 1910: 129). Bell also suggested generational change that was underway. In her 1910 novel, *Sahib-Log*, she pointed out ways in which a Sikh soldier's second, younger

wife differed from his first wife. ‘That dead and gone mother of his sons had been of another age and of the old, old ways’ (Travers 1910: 132). By contrast, his younger wife had installed ‘wonder of wonders – a tablecloth from Birmingham’ and ‘she could read!’ (Travers 1910: 133).

The question persists, however, whether fictional portrayals of Sikhs, by non-Sikh, White authors, from before the 1980s, bear out Weedon’s suggestion of a pervasive white hegemonic stance. Certainly, Vansittart’s inclusion of the subject of *sati*, on a Sikh prince’s death, continues a tradition of western spectators’ and writers’ ambivalent fascination with the subject of widows’ self-immolation in Hindu society (see, for example, MM Kaye’s best-selling novel, *The Far Pavilions* (1978) and commentary on *sati* in Thompson 1928 and, more recently, Fludernik 1999), even if what Vansittart portrayed was not so much the heroic (or barbaric) sacrifice of unresisting beautiful women as the fugitive existence of a disfigured escapee from a Sikh raja’s pyre.

In terms of their focus, until the 1980s, novels with Sikh content by western writers, both men and women, tended to concentrate on significant military and political events, and to base them on existing source material, historical or contemporary. Published in 1848, the novelist Charlotte Brontë’s poem ‘Passion’, had evoked the high drama and carnage of the Battle of Sohraon in 1846, the climax of the First Anglo-Sikh War ‘where Seik and Briton meet in war’ (see Nesbitt forthcoming 2021). (Brontë wrote either during or very soon after the battle beside the Satluj river that provided her imagery.) Over a century later, in her novel *Prelude to Mutiny*, Jane Vansittart described the scene and the proceedings at Bhairowal, where one of the treaties that followed this battle was signed in December 1846, with ‘[a]ll the pomp of Government, all the grandeur of the Sikh court’ and ‘Dulip Singh [the boy maharaja, sitting] shyly between Lord and Lady Gough’ (1967: 219). One of her sources was her grandmother, Mary Vansittart, who was in Punjab at the time. Similarly, M. M. Kaye’s Sikh soldiers’ heroism in the Second Afghan War (1879) ‘is on record’ (Kaye 1978: 957).

Eliza Pollard’s novel *The White Dove of Amritsir* centred on Sikh combatants in the Sepoy Uprising of 1857 and their esteem for General Nicholson, a hero worship that elevated Nicholson to a reincarnation of Guru Gobind Singh, and which is attested by independent authorities (see Nesbitt forthcoming 2021).

For her ‘vision of Northern India, during the eventful year of 1931’, which she had herself experienced, another novelist, Maud Diver, explained that ‘all Indian episodes – even the least – are based on actual fact; all opinions expressed by

Indians, about themselves and the English, or about Indian affairs, are based on their actual opinions written or spoken' (Diver 1934 in unpaginated 'Author's Note'). Similarly, the events described or hinted at in her earlier novel, *Far to Seek*, have a ring of historical authenticity – for example, the detention in Germany of some Sikh combatants in the First World War and their changing attitudes to British rule (1921: 228-229). Critic Rosemary Raza's comment on nineteenth-century women writers that they had a 'more detached perspective' than their male counterparts may well be warranted and applicable to subsequent authors too. Raza's commendation of these women's capacity for crossing boundaries and 'puncturing the pretensions of power and suggesting the similarity of human experience, irrespective of colour' applies likewise to more recent novelists (2006: 209).

Certainly, the concentration, both by Rowling and by earlier women novelists, on the experience of female characters expresses a sympathetic engagement with their lives, rather than an inherent racial superiority. Rowling's foregrounding of Sikh women – as is the case more generally in the fiction of both Sikh and non-Sikh novelists, Lake, Backhaus, Cowan, Randhawa, Mahal and Baldwin – marks a shift of focus from some earlier novelists. That said, in these earlier novels too, women's expected roles and oppression surface. Examples are Jane Vansittart's attention to the dying rani who had escaped immolation as a *sati* and (in Eva Bell's *Sahib-Log*) the fury of Gulab Singh's wife at his humiliation by sahibs, and the sensitively planned initiative of two memsahibs, Esmé and Beatrice, in inviting Gulab Singh's wife to visit them.

At the same time, novelists (both white and of South Asian background), continue, like their predecessors, to explore the often horrific drama of Sikhs' history. Thus, contemporary with Troth's and Rowling's publications is the Singaporean crime novelist, Shamini Flint's *Inspector Singh Investigates: A Curious Indian Cadaver* (2012), with its heart-rending narration of the murder of a Sikh in Delhi on 31 October 1984 in the carnage following the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and, most recently, Vee Walker's World War 1 novel, *Major Tom's War*, illuminates Sikhs' contribution to the war in France.

In Conclusion

Ghost Town and *The Casual Vacancy* portend a future in which Sikh characters interact convincingly with other characters, as their non-Sikh authors carefully but confidently include them in the action. The Sikhs in recent white British fiction are not stereotypes that might embody what Chris Weedon has termed 'homogeneous

white assumptions about the so-called “Asian community”. The work of both Rowling and Troth (and, for that matter, of twentieth-century authors such as Lake) suggests that writers need not themselves be, as Weedon suggests (2006: 55), ‘migrants’ in order to contest any such ‘hegemonic white-centred narratives of Britishness’ (Weedon 2006: 55).

At the same time, extreme events and continuing social tensions will continue to echo in fictional worlds. Both ‘insiders’ of Sikh – or at least South Asian – heritage, such as Gurpreet Bhatti and Shauna Singh Baldwin, and ‘outsiders,’ like J K Rowling, have risked highlighting and challenging some difficult issues in which Sikhs have been implicated, whether as agent or victim. Adverse reaction, such as Avtar Singh Makkar’s, and indeed the outcry at Bhatti’s play, briefly bring the complexities of Sikh experience and its fictional coverage to a wider public.

The positive response of Sikh critics to *The Casual Vacancy* suggests that any discernibly Orientalist tendencies of the multicultural approach of late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century novelists, including Rowling and Troth, are outweighed by their evident sympathy for Sikhs and their religion and their recognition of identities as fluid. Moreover, sympathetic portrayal itself has a long pedigree: the widespread colonial regard for Sikhs’ military prowess means that Sikhs have been affirmatively represented too by colonial authors, and women’s place in Sikh society has been presented by western authors of successive generations, as changing rather than being stereotyped and immutable.

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The Political Philosophy of Guru Nanak and Its Contemporary Relevance*

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Abstract

This paper aims to understand the political philosophy of Guru Nanak and its contemporary relevance. It traces that philosophy by readings of the Guru's *bani* in Guru Granth Sahib that have a political focus. Having identified five salient political dimensions, these are theorized and presented in the contemporary language of politics. The paper then contextualizes the origins of these dimensions in history through a brief overview of some comparative events. Finally, it examines the influence of the Guru's philosophy in transforming many religio-political and socio-cultural aspects of history in India. The paper concludes by analyzing the continuing impact of Guru Nanak's political philosophy in terms of developing new potential for transforming people and events in India and abroad.

Keywords: Guru Nanak, political philosophy, reform movements, contemporary politics.

Introduction

There is a large body of spiritual, biographical and historical literature available in various forms on the life and philosophy of Guru Nanak. The most authentic and direct source of the Guru's philosophy is his *bani*, that is, compositions comprising the founding segments of the sacred Sikh text, Adi Granth/Sri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS, 1604/1708; Grewal, 1990). Guru Nanak's *bani* is comprehensive and multi-dimensional, involving religio-spiritual, socio-cultural and historical contents. Its linguistic, metaphorical and cultural forms reflect the geo-political and socio-economic context of 15th-16th century India. Guru Nanak mainly used the Punjabi language and Gurmukhi script for composing and sharing his message.¹

The paper's selection and interpretation of philosophical dimensions of Guru Nanak's teachings highlights their spiritual and social nature (Singh, K, 1999; Mandair, 2014). Having identified the key political dimensions of Guru Nanak's political philosophy, the paper provides a contextual framework for understanding

* This paper is revision of a piece written to mark the 550th birth anniversary of the founder of the Sikh religion, Sri Guru Nanak Dev ji (Guru Nanak). The initial paper, 'The Political Philosophy of Sri Guru Nanak Dev ji and Its Contemporary Relevance' was presented at the 6th Dr. Jasbir Singh Saini Chair in Sikh Studies Conference at the University of California, Riverside, and the Punjab Research Group Conference held at the University of Oxford. That paper, in English and Punjabi, was published by Singh Brothers Amritsar in 2019, dedicated to the 550th Anniversary.

¹ Guru Nanak was very likely familiar with Sanskrit, Persian and other languages, which he used in his wider discourse during travels across South and West Asia (Bhardwaj, 2013).

its development. It offers a brief comparative overview of the origins of, and some parallels between, the Sikh and Protestant political philosophies across India and Europe. It also considers the conceptual and linguistic evolution of the philosophical principles which have influenced the development of contemporary Sikh/Punjabi/Indian politics.

Salient Dimensions of Guru Nanak's Political Philosophy

My reading of Guru Nanak's *bani* in Guru Granth Sahib identifies five salient dimensions of the Guru's political philosophy. The theorization of these dimensions explains its contemporary relevance and application, which is analyzed in subsequent sections. The understanding of the philosophy is facilitated by a brief comparative overview of the historical circumstances in India and Europe in Guru Nanak's era. Some significant and parallel, though initially unconnected, events in history, influenced by the rise of Sikh and Protestant reform movements in India and Europe, enhance understanding and clarification of the respective political philosophies. These philosophies have continued to inspire and drive many thinkers, campaigners and reformers in history. Their initiatives and efforts have enlightened and encouraged people to take control of their circumstances. They mobilized resistance, respectively challenging excesses of the dominant religio-political regime of Mughal imperialism in India, and that of hegemonic practices of Roman Catholicism in Europe. These hegemonies were challenged by emphasis on teaching, learning and discourse, shifting the dominant focus from antiquities and objects of ancient times, to understanding religious texts, and to literature and education.

I identify the following five salient dimensions of Guru Nanak's political philosophy set out in contemporary language of politics:

1. Geo-political power, security, impact and wellbeing of Hindustan/India and its people

Guru Nanak's *bani* asserts a universal concern for the well-being of humanity. Within this philosophical framework, the Guru unequivocally voices his deep anguish and condemnation of Baber's invasion, the brutalities of his *Khuraasani* forces and their violent oppression. Guru Nanak in his *bani* highlights the inability, powerlessness and helplessness of people to safeguard themselves, defend their assets, protect their honour, dignity and integrity (SGGS, pp 360, 417/8, 623, 722; Singh, F, et al., 1969; Singh, G, 1979; Grewal, 1990; Dhaliwal, 2004).

2. The characteristics, quality and standard of government, governance and administration

Guru Nanak's concept and expectations of government, governance and administration are amply reflected in his harsh critique of rulers and their oppressive rule, abuse of power in exploitation of people. The Guru noted the harm that was being inflicted on ordinary people by the regime and its failure in delivering their duty and responsibility of providing for basic human needs. The Guru rejected the regime and its functionaries' attitude and behavior towards the people, making their lives a misery (SGGS, pp 767, 1045, 1288; Singh, K, 1999; Singh & Fenech, 2014).

3. Work, welfare and worship

This is one of the basic but most fundamental principles which Guru Nanak established, preached and practised. The value of honest hard work, contribution to the common good, and the freedom of worship/belief (meditation on the name of the One and only God) was emphasised for individual and collective social and spiritual development. The Guru promoted egalitarian principles for the welfare of all, and emphasized the value of teaching, learning and discourse as essential to becoming enlightened and free from the burden of indulgence and rituals. (SGGS, pp 97, 356, 595, 1245; Singh, A, 1970; Singh, I, 2005; Sodhi, 1993).

4. Leadership with vision, values, direction and strategy

Guru Nanak's *bani* identified the highest possible standards for leaders and leadership that people deserve. A visionary and strategic approach based on truth and truthfulness, are fundamental requirements of leaders and leadership at all levels. The Guru boldly analyzed strengths and weaknesses of contemporary religious, civic and judicial leaders who lacked values, integrity and ethics in their conduct. The Guru claimed only a humble status for himself and rejected any patronage of the powerful, and rich, who were seen as sustaining themselves unfairly by exploiting ordinary people. (SGGS, pp 62, 229, 662, 776; Singh, K, 1999; Singh, J, 1999; Sangha, 2011).

5. A fair, inclusive and just society

Guru Nanak's teachings promote personal, social and spiritual liberation, self-sufficiency and dignity (of individual, family, community and society), to raise morale and self-confidence. The Guru's core social guidance is to rise above personal and social prejudice and discrimination caused by caste, creed, gender, faith, race, wealth, power or status. Only then can fairness, inclusivity, social

justice and progress be ensured. The Guru's idea and practice of *seva*/selfless service underpins these principles in the best interest of universal wellbeing and welfare of all - *Sarbat Da Bhala* (SGGS, pp 25, 468, 474, 663, 942; Singh, W, 1981; Singh, H, 1998; Dusenbery & Tatla, 2010; Singh, I, 2014).

Origins of the Sikh and Protestant Political Philosophies

A comparative overview of historical events in northern India and northern Europe around Guru Nanak's era shows some similarities. These provide theoretical insight into the political processes involving the rise of the Sikh movement which challenged Mughal imperialism, and the Protestant movement which challenged hegemonic Roman Catholicism. The Sikh movement played a role in uprooting the Mughal regime, and the Protestant movement brought about reformation in Christianity. The Sikh faith emerged as a new religion and the Protestant reformation emerged as a new faith form within the broader Christian tradition. Observation of this parallel is not new. For example, Jeffrey (1986, p 51) notes "The relationship between politics and the foundation of the Sikh religion has led foreign observers to draw parallels with the Reformation in Europe. They have described the Sikhs as 'the Protestants of India' and pointed out that the founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak (1469 – 1539) was a contemporary of Martin Luther (1483 – 1546)." However, the focus of this paper on political philosophy defines its contribution to exploring this broader comparison.

In Europe, the life and work of thinkers and reformers such as Desiderius Erasmus (1466 – 1536), Niccolo Machiavelli (1469 – 1527) and Martin Luther led the 'Renaissance' and became the catalyst for the 'Protestant Reformation.' In India, the impact of Guru Nanak and his nine successor Gurus between 1469 and 1708 was also profound. But unlike the work of many European thinkers and reformers, the work and impact of the Sikh Gurus remains under-researched, under-reported and under-interpreted within and outside India. While aspects of the Protestant political philosophy flourished with the expansion of British colonial influence across the world, the focus of Guru Nanak's Sikh political philosophy in India first challenged and resisted the Mughal and then British imperial hegemonies. So, in history, the Sikh reformation developed more as a resistance movement, and less as a ruling formation. However, the journey of this unique longitudinal movement was founded, firmed-up and sustained by many of the values, reflected in Guru Nanak's political philosophy. Throughout the history of humankind, the work of master thinkers such as Guru Nanak and his successors, has inspired and guided

people to become aware, analyze, promote and enact what is true and good, their every art, inquiry, action and pursuit have encouraged reform.²

Historically, both the Sikh and Protestant movements in India and across Europe have impacted political theories and practices, with a lasting influence and impact on the language of politics and social change. The political language emanating and evolving from them have shaped modern attitudes and values, but the underlying principles remain rooted in their philosophical origins. Many of the contemporary political ideas and practices in democratic, plural and social welfare driven societies have developed from post medieval resistance and reform movements such as the ones considered in this paper.

Context and Influence of Guru Nanak's Political Philosophy

One of the major developments during Guru Nanak's life was Zahiruddin M Babar's invasion of India in 1524, which the Guru challenged and for which he was subsequently imprisoned. Grewal (1990) documents that Guru Nanak sharply condemned Babar and his forces for causing indiscriminate deaths, destruction and human sufferings. The Guru also highlighted the atrocities and persecution which had taken place during the transition from Turko-Afghan to Mughal rule in India. His *bani* extensively questioned and criticized the oppressive regimes which damaged the social and cultural fabric of India and shattered the lives of indigenous

² German born biblical scholar, theologian and campaigner Martin Luther was a significant figure in initiating and leading Protestant reform. Just as Guru Nanak's spiritual, social and cultural leadership founded a new resistance movement in North India against Mughal oppression, Martin Luther's writing, preaching and activities in North Europe exposed oppression and corrupt practices in Roman Catholicism. Pope Leo excommunicated Martin Luther from the Church; in return, Martin Luther further intensified his preaching and campaigning - triggering not only a major change in Christianity but also a peasants' rebellion. The point of his message was that the Bible, not the Catholic establishment, should be the source of religious authority in Christianity (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1977; Jeffrey, 1986; Bragg, 2011). Martin Luther followed a similar path to that of Guru Nanak, whose message emphasised that learning is the source of contemplative enlightenment and wellbeing: *Vidiya Vichari tan Parupkari* (SGGS, p356). Like the rise of the Sikh movement in North India, the Protestant Reformation in North Europe inspired intellectual, cultural and religious reform, laying the foundations of the modern political philosophy (Watson, 2000; Levene, 2010). Other contemporaries, such as Desiderius Erasmus, also promoted active learning and teaching of theology instead of staying in the monastery, questioning traditional wisdom and applying critical reasoning in conversations with the leading thinkers of Europe and he published his views. Niccolo Machiavelli, who practised administration in internal and external affairs of the Florentine Republic, worked closely with leaders including Louis XII of France, the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian, Pope Julius II and Cesare Borgia. He studied their thoughts and actions and developed a philosophy of how political power can be achieved and retained. The Machiavellian political philosophy was controversial because of the nature of its underlying intentions and its justification of the use of instruments of state power to gain control and to remain in leadership.

people at all levels of society. Sikandar Lodhi (1469 – 1517) destroyed temples and allowed the execution of Hindu religious leaders. State patronage was confined to learned Muslims who received stipends in cash or revenue-free land for developing and maintaining mosques. Non-Muslims, under the Lodhi Sultans (as under their predecessors), were forced to pay a tax called *jizya*. Hindus had to pay a pilgrimage tax (SGGS, p1191), and indigenous people were required to learn Persian to work for a regime which had no checks and balances against the exploitation of people. Much of India remained under the occupation of Turkish and Afghan rulers for five centuries. The dominant Turko-Afghan tribal lords enslaved indigenous manual workers to do their general and domestic work, many of whom changed their faith for convenience or under coercion (Grewal, 1990; Singh, H, 1997). Many of these inequities persisted under the Mughals, with various forms of resistance (Singh, F, et al., 1969; Cole & Sambhi, 1978; Singh, G, 1979; and Padam, 1987).

Guru Nanak's response involved enlightened critical discourse, which formed and consolidated a spiritual and philosophical basis for the consequent socio-cultural reform movement. He questioned the conduct of the self-serving Muslim, Hindu and other religious and civic leaders for tolerating these injustices (SGGS, p 417, Singh, K, 1999). The Sikh Gurus promoted individual and collective morality and ethical practices to underpin social wellbeing, along with the maintenance of a strong identity and the security of society (SGGS, Padam, 1987; Grewal, 1990).

In India, before Guru Nanak, history records the rise of the *Bhakti* movement as contributory to the spiritual awakening of people; Singh, K, (1999) notes that *Bhakt* Ramanand allowed Hindus and Muslims of lower castes to join him in worship; *Bhakt* Kabir (1440-1518) raised socio-spiritual awareness, and the influence of *Bhakt*s and spiritual messengers such as the *Bhakt*s Ravidass, Nam Dev, and Trilochan began to influence people more than the orthodox Brahmanical leadership of Hinduism. *Bhakt* Kabir described himself as being the child of Rama and Allah, espousing that there could only be one God. He did not mince his words in condemning the caste system and thus was perceived as an outcast. However, none of these individuals addressed social and political issues head on.

Guru Nanak's role after this juncture in history proved pivotal; he transformed multi-faceted and fragmented religious preaching into a composite social and spiritual guidance for all. Guru Nanak's *bani* extensively condemned and protested against Khuraasani Babar's invasion of India and terrorisation of its people: '*Khuraasan Khasmaana Keeaa Hindustan Daraea...*' (SGGS, p360). Babar of Khuraasan (a larger area of east and north-east of the Persian Empire including parts of Central Asia) invaded India during Guru Nanak's life-time in 1526. The Guru expressed his deep anguish and concern over the threats and challenges to the

people of Hindustan. It was being shredded, torn apart and he called for its protection: '*Kaia Kaprh Tuk Tuk Hosi Hindustan Smalsi Vela...*' (SGGS, p 623).

It was Guru Nanak who first, five hundred years ago, articulated the threats and challenges to the geo-political entity, existence and security of Hindustan/India and its people. His *bani* poignantly confronts the behaviour of Babar's forces, referring to the various atrocities, infliction of harm, suffering, looting of wealth, and threats to the honour and dignity of Hindustan and its people: '*Pap Ki Junv Le Kablon Dhaia Jorin Mange Dan Ve Lalo...*' (SGGS, p 722).³

Guru Nanak reached out to people; his *bani* enlightened them on the conditions and circumstances of the time. His successor Gurus and followers further inspired, encouraged and organised them into a reform and resistance movement between 1469 and 1708. The process of enlightened reform and the rise of a spiritually, socially, culturally and geographically inclusive *Khalsa Order of the Sikh Panth* in 1699, continued to expand its influence across North India - particularly in Punjab.⁴ Khalsa forces, through various battles, resistance and consolidation during the 18th century, did not only deter and put an end to the raids and invasions of India from the west, but also established the sovereign Sikh *Raj* of Punjab (1799 – 1849) under Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Guru Nanak's teachings laid the foundation of the development of the Sikh reform and resistance movement which contributed to the uprooting of the Mughal Empire.

Guru Nanak communicated with people in their everyday language of Punjabi. Moreover, the Guru offered his thoughts using real life vocabulary from

³ Dr. Jodh Singh, Editor-in-Chief of Encyclopaedia of Sikhism and the first vice-chancellor of Panjabi University, asserts that SGGS (1604/1708) is the first sacred religious scripture in which the word Hindustan was used (Sikh Philosophy, 2018). Hindustan literally means the land of the people of Hindustan - the Persian Islamist invaders had been describing the people of this land as Hindus and their land as Hindustan (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1977). The word Hindustan did not originate from *Veds*, *Prans*, *Upnishds* or any other ancient Hindu religious texts; its roots are in Persian literature. Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha (1930/2006, pp 274 – 75) documents that Hind is a Persian linguistic transformation of Sindh. The land and people of Hindustan stretching from the Himalayas to the sea: 1900x1500 mile, 13 times bigger than Great Britain and geographically equivalent to the European continent. The 1921 census provided data on people of Hindustan as inclusive of AdiVasis, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jains, Jews, Muslims, Parsi, Sikhs and others.

⁴ Much of the original Punjabi literature in Gurmukhi script - including religious, social and cultural poetry, and biographies of the Sikh Gurus and Saints – has assumed a Punjabi identity since Guru Nanak's period. Guru Nanak, his successors and followers, compiled most of their work in the Punjabi language and Gurmukhi script.

Thus, modern spiritual poets like Professor Puran Singh, have linked the land of five rivers of Punjab with the Sikh Gurus and emphasised that '*Punjab Jionda Guran De Nam Te*' – Punjab lives with the name of the Gurus (Singh, P, 1974).

agricultural and commercial environments to inspire and encourage people to connect with society through work, welfare, *seva* or service, and spiritual congregation. For example, Guru Nanak presents the human mind as a cultivator and human body as a field for growing the crop of good virtues and deeds: '*man hali kirsani karni saram pani tan khet...*' (SGGS, p 595). The Guru held those in high esteem who work for what they consume and offer some of it to others in need: '*...ghal khae kish hathon deh nanak rah pashane sae...*' (SGGS, p 1245). The integration of the mind, body, spirit and society should be rooted in truthfulness. '*nanak mel na chukie sache wapara...*' (SGGS, p 1009) - the merchandise in form of truth and spirituality can enhance truthfulness, which can continue to develop '*sacho wakhur ladie labh sda sacho ras...*' (SGGS, p 55).

Applicable stanzas of Guru Nanak's *bani* and observations on the practice of *seva* (selfless service) arising from his teachings show that the idea and tradition of 'selfless service and welfare' is a basic principle of the Guru's philosophy. This value underpins the followers' social and spiritual journey. From Guru Nanak's time the tradition and practice of *seva* has been socially inclusive, involving participation of all people irrespective of their social identity or status. *Seva* goes beyond the call of normal social duty, involving contribution of *daswand* (a tenth or affordable proportion of earnings) for the wider needs of people across the society. This tradition has driven the notion of *sarbat da bhala* (welfare for the wellbeing) of all. It is integral to all Sikh religio-social practices, which inspires individuals, families, community and institutions to support and sustain religious, social, healthcare and educational charities. Arguably for example, the modern idea of taxation to provide welfare services such as the provision of Health Service, Social Care and Education is a secular form of *seva*. *Seva* is central to all Sikh religious practices, engaging people regardless of age, status, gender and background. Guru Nanak's followers worldwide are driven by the spirit of *seva* which inspires them to provide, deliver or contribute to a wide variety of social welfare projects. The Guru introduced the socio-political principle of egalitarianism and social justice through the tradition of selfless service and welfare (Singh, H, 1998; Dusenbery & Tatla, 2010; Singh, I, 2014).

Guru Nanak's political philosophy and the underpinning tradition of *seva* and spirituality have universal applicability. They are as relevant to the contemporary world as they were during Guru Nanak's era and the subsequent history. Guru Nanak's philosophy is concerned about the universal welfare of humanity, notwithstanding social barriers or geo-political considerations. However, the Guru was pragmatic enough to be concerned about the people, heritage and land of Hindustan. He was absolutely forthright in raising his voice against invaders, oppressors and exploiters in the best interest of the people of Hindustan.

Many contemporary geo-political, ultra-ethno/communal/nationalistic tensions, conflicts, social conditions and globalisation can be analyzed in terms of theory and practice arising from Guru Nanak's political philosophy. The quality of attitudes, behavior and performance of local, regional, national and international state institutions can be studied by applying various dimensions of the Guru's political philosophy. How far do the contemporary institutions, their leadership and functionaries match the aspirations and expectations of the Guru's philosophy? How effective are international agencies in encouraging and supporting peace, prosperity and protection of humanity across the world? How much do the contemporary institutions of India, and its elites, protect human rights of minorities and disadvantaged people to ensure popular commitment for collective security and sovereignty? Guru Nanak's political philosophy also teaches to question and resist, any oppressive and exploitative measures of rulers in all settings, and to challenge any malpractice in administrative, social and economic structures of society. (Singh & Thandi, 1996).

Evolution and Contemporary Relevance

The impact of Sikh and Protestant philosophies can be identified and analyzed in terms of the transformation of politics, political activism and the evolution of language which articulate the varying processes in the two traditions. Much of the language of contemporary politics emanates from the religio-political philosophical principles and the social conditions, which were instrumental in raising awareness for political activities in the course of history. At their core, politics and political processes, in operational and structural terms revolve around acquiring power, which Duverger (1972) defines as the ability and capacity to make and implement decisions and to do something - whether in social, financial, legal, military or other settings.

In contemporary democratic political systems, the exercise of power for transformational change is better tolerated and accepted if the ruler or executive leadership in governance who exercise it, are perceived as fit for the purpose and suitably command popular consent. Popular democratic consent provides the essential authority for exercising political power. This is consistent with Guru Nanak's principles for the suitability of a ruler, *takhat bhe takhte ki laik* (SGGS, p 1039; Nabha, 1930/2006, p 570) – provided they are morally and ethically driven. Leftwich (1984, p 123) identifies power as "...an important element in the process of trying to make sense of political ideas, practices and their relationship to the larger life of which they are a part". Ohmae (1996, p 148) goes a step further in his assertion, "The goal, after all, is not to legitimise this or that political establishment or power arrangement. But it is to improve the quality of life of people, regular

people – us, no matter where they live. People came first; borders came afterwards.” The politics for power, where it has been immoral, unethical and without values, has entailed terrible calamities throughout history and in the contemporary era. Guru Nanak’s guidance was that once our sights are raised above the pain of past horrors (as he encouraged and enabled people to do generally, and the victims particularly, after the early 1520s aggression of Babar), human endurance and intellectual capacity proves itself to be profoundly resilient in improving circumstances.

Guru Nanak’s concern for humanity recognised no boundaries; he transformed his experience of Babar’s invasion, its impact on society and his resistance, into a wider socio-spiritual discourse. He deepened and widened his message through spiritual metaphors and intuition rooted in the conditions of his people, place and time. One can grasp the political essence of Guru Nanak’s messages from *bani* in its relevance and application to contemporary socio-political conditions: if one’s mind feels unconnected and alienated, then one may have a sense of displacement and may feel a foreigner: *‘man pardesi je thie sabho des paraya...’* (SGGS, p 767). Guru Nanak’s message is well placed in the socio-political environment of his era. The Guru’s *bani* reflects on the significance, impact and consequences of the exercise of power and influence by rulers. The Guru suggests the nature and style of their governance which sets the direction and affect people’s living conditions: *‘jis hi ki sirkar tishi ka sbho koe...’* (SGGS, p 27). The Guru cautions that deficit of morality and ethics in a ruler’s leadership can damage people and place, unless driven by enlightened vision and virtue: *‘andha agu je thea kio padhr jane...’* (SGGS, p 767). Guru Nanak’s *bani* critiques rulers’ and administrators’ behaviour of his era in terms of their impact on the people: *‘raje shihn mukadam kute, jae jagaen bethe sute...’* (SGGS, p 1288). The loss of their humanity and values, he warns are bringing on a dark age of ignorance and social butchery: *‘kal kati raje kisai dharam punkh kar udrea, kurh amavas sach chandrma dise nahi charihia...’* (SGGS, p 1045). Notably, Guru Nanak’s popular democratic instinct did not absolve the people of their responsibility either. The Guru’s teaching asserts that unworthy rulers spread falsehood which degrades humanity and pollutes the world *‘kurh raja kurh parja kurh sbho sansar...’* (SGGS, p 468).

Guru Nanak aspires for political leadership to embody the highest qualities and virtues of all: *‘tis bin raja avar na koi...’* (SGGS, p 939). A good leader is one who can humbly serve the people and earns appreciation for so doing: *‘wich dunia sev kmaea ta dargeh besan paie...’* (SGGS, p 25). Such leadership, the Guru asserts, can command universal support and admiration: *‘har jan gur pardhan duare nanak tin jan ki renh hre...’* (SGGS, p 1014). Good political leadership and its supporters will have an enlightened alliance based on positive vision and values for making

progress: '*sanj krije gunha kerī shod awganh chalie...*' (SGGS, p 766). Guru Nanak leaves no doubt about the individual and collective responsibility of people in the process: '*ape bije ape hi khae...*' (SGGS, p 25). Reform and progress, he believes, is in the hands of the people and he calls on them to resolve their own affairs through self-effort: '*apne hathi apna ape hi kaj swarie...*' (SGGS, p 474).

Guru Nanak's *bani* and its impact in the form of enlightenment and the rise of the Sikh movement was pivotal in shaping the history of North India after the 15th century. *Bani* is deeply intuitional and reflective of the circumstances of the Guru's time, place and people. It remains inspiring and motivational for social and spiritual change in the interest and wellbeing of all. Its teachings have guided followers to dispel illogical and superstitious thoughts, and to eradicate discriminatory religio-social practices rooted in caste, communal and sectarian divisions. Guru Nanak reached out to people by travelling extensively to engage in discourse with followers of different persuasions, beliefs and faiths. The Guru recommends the quest for truth and adoption of truthful living and conduct as essential for developing a discerning mind (SGGS, p 52). Guru Nanak and his nine successor Gurus developed and provided an inclusive vision, values and direction for the common good of all people over the 16th and 17th centuries. Guru Nanak's political philosophy, theory and practices laid the foundation for transformation of society across North India. However, unlike the spread of the Protestant political philosophy which took root in North Europe and had global influence, the impact of Guru's philosophy remained confined to North India, especially Punjab. However, it relentlessly inspired resistance and reform in the face of successive invasions of India and imperial suppressions of people across India.

The continuity of the Sikh movement was driven by the Gurus' far-sighted inclusive philosophy, socio-spiritual vision, strategic resistance, and succession involving the ordination of Sri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS) in 1708. The influence of the transitional Sikh movement after the Gurus' period (1708 - 1799) was sustained by relentless revolutionary campaigns of warriors like Baba Banda Singh Bahadur and the subsequent leadership of the Sikh *Misls* who continued to defend North India, liberate people from Mughal domination and aggressions from the Northwest. The rise of Sikh *Raj* in geo-historic Punjab (1799 – 1839) was, however, short-circuited and curtailed by expanding British colonial rule across India, which annexed this territory after the Maharaj's death in 1849.

The Sikh movement's political influence expanded and sustained until the end of Sikh *Raj*; from then on, it began to fragment due to the absence of a structured succession, cohesive political plan, and strategic direction. Nevertheless, the underlying core principles of Guru Nanak's philosophy and its work re-surfaced in

the form of numerous organic religio-cultural, social and political initiatives from the 19th century onward (Tully & Jacob, 1985; Singh, K, 1999).⁵

Guru Nanak's life and teachings continue to inspire leadership and people in India and Pakistan to improve communication, liaison and collaboration (despite various wars, incidents of terrorist infiltration and violence). Prime Ministers Narendra Modi of India and Imran Khan of Pakistan and their respective governments initiated development and opening of 'the corridor of Faith' connecting Kartarpur Sahib in Pakistan and Dera Baba Nanak in India to facilitate pilgrims and tourists from 2019. On the occasions of laying the foundation stones, India's Vice-President V. Naidu said that this initiative should be a passage for humanity, humility, faith and universal brotherhood. It should usher in prosperity and peace and progress which can only be achieved if there is religious harmony all around (*The Tribune News Service*, November 26, 2018). Former Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh, reminded us (quoting the poet Dr. Allama Iqbal) how Guru Nanak's voice from Punjab stimulated and mobilised the people of India for liberation. He emphasised that the principles of hard and honest work, sharing of earnings with others and meditation are relevant today. Dr. Singh reminds us that the Guru's strategy of equity and social justice, caste and gender equality transcend barriers of borders and creed (*Tribune New Service*, November 23, 2018). "Are we Indians existing in conditions of freedom, equality and dignity?" asked Rajan Gogoi, Chief Justice of India (*Tribune News Service*, November 27, 2018). In Punjab (and widely), a reflection on present circumstances shows that the people

⁵ These include various Sikh reform movements, especially the Singh Sabhas and modern Shiromani Akali Dal, as well as struggles for greater democracy and democratic decentralization in independent India. Particularly noteworthy were the events of 1984, as Tully and Jacob (1985) noted "She [Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the then prime minister of India] was killed [in 1984] because some Sikhs were convinced that she had deliberately and unjustifiably waged a war on their most sacred shrine (*Sri Harmandir Sahib*/the Golden Temple, Amritsar). The danger of alienation of a large section of the Sikh community was magnified by the government's failure to control violence against Sikhs after Mrs. Gandhi's assassination..." Guru Nanak's political philosophy recommends enlightened truthful dialogue, fairness, justice, apology, forgiveness and reconciliation. Likewise, the authors Tully and Jacob emphasized that if a greater understanding among Sikhs and Hindus of the complex forces that were at work in Punjab (during the 1980s) develops, then it will surely strengthen the hope of reconciliation, which will improve conditions for establishing truth, fairness and justice for all. India's national identity is complex and diverse which is also its pluralistic strength for it underpins fundamental rights, relative freedom and democracy. Many politicians and political groups however, continue to scrupulously exploit and trade on caste divisions, communalist ideology, religious bigotry and regionalism to mobilise voters to gain power. This is inconsistent with Guru Nanak's political philosophy, because beyond the politics of minority rights and identity, the communalist, regionalist, separatist, minority – majority nationalistic divisions breed fascist tendencies.

are in distress, which makes Guru Nanak's message evermore valuable and applicable.

Conclusion

This essay identifies five salient dimensions of Guru Nanak's political philosophy and its contemporary relevance. A brief comparative overview of the historical circumstances in India and Europe in Guru Nanak's time shows unconnected but illuminating parallels. There were significant developments inspired and driven by the great thinkers, campaigners and reformers of the period. Their initiatives and efforts enlightened people, encouraged and motivated them to take control of their circumstances. They mobilised resistance, challenging excesses of the dominant religio-political regime of Mughal imperialism in India, and that of hegemonic Roman Catholicism in Europe. There was comparative emphasis on teaching, learning and discourse, shifting the dominant focus from the antiquities and objects of ancient times, to religious texts, literature and education.

In Europe, "Historians tend to go for 'Renaissance' – literally 'rebirth' – a major revival of interest in ideas from antiquity...It had an enormous impact on every area of intellectual life not just art and architecture but also literature, politics, science, religion and philosophy...All those certainties of the past – one Church, with the King ruling by divine right as God's representative on earth had broken down by the seventeenth century. In England there was the Civil War... throughout Europe there was ongoing conflict between Catholics and Protestants.... Such thinkers as Hobbes and Locke often had to take themselves to other countries ... (for) producing major works of political philosophy" (Levene 2010, pp 82, 88). Bragg (2011, p 335) comments "Democracy, as it took root and developed in Britain and then in America in the 17th century, owed an essential debt to the Reformation and to the King James Bible – which was printed in English in 1611 and changed and moulded the English-speaking people"

It is an under-researched historic parallel and significant coincidence in the world history that the medieval *Bhakti* movement involving spiritual awakening and the rise of Sikh religious and socio-cultural movement in India, culminated in the compilation, editing, installation and ordination of the sacred Sikh Scripture (Adi Granth/Sri Guru Granth Sahib) between 1604 and 1708. This development in India was almost contemporary to the publishing of the King James Bible in Britain. The variation was that the SGGS was a unique new and original religious compilation initiated by Guru Nanak, edited by Guru Arjan Dev, and ordained by Guru Gobind Singh over a period of two centuries in adverse conditions of Mughal repression. The teaching, learning and discourse tradition surrounding the advent of SGGS

brought the issues and concerns of human suffering, social conditions and religio-political oppression to the forefront.

Guru Nanak's life, work and travels initiated and laid the foundations for a new religion and socio-cultural reform which was completed by his nine successors. This process was underpinned by the *Khalsa Panth* order, established by the tenth successor Guru Gobind Singh in 1699. The rise of 18th century Sikh reform and liberation movement mounted a relentless resistance and campaigns during that century. The Khalsa forces of the movement did not only put an end to the invasions of India, but also uprooted the Mughal empire - providing a new vision, sense of freedom and direction in the history of India. However, unlike the study of the rise and influence of the Protestant movement, the significance and impact of Guru Nanak's philosophy and its political dimensions remain under-researched, under-analysed and under-referenced.

Contemporary trends in politics arising from the fractured vision and poor strategic direction of inward looking, narrow, selfish and ultra-nationalistic forces continues to threaten peace, stability and prosperity. Grayling (2007, p 177) identifies this tendency as "...evil... causes wars. Its roots lie in xenophobia and racism, it is a recent phenomenon – an invention of the last few centuries...Disguised as patriotism and love for own country, it trades on the unreason of mass psychology to make a variety of horrors seem acceptable, even honourable. Nations are artificial constructs, their boundaries are drawn on the blood of past wars (and colonial partitions)... religious devotees who feel so embattled and embittered by questioning or rejecting beliefs that they are prepared to cause violence and mass killings by mixing fanaticism with resentment and ignorance." This perspective can also be applied to understand and analyse other forms of conflict causing death, destruction and human suffering.

It is clear that the Guru's teachings and their contemporary interpretations are as relevant and applicable now as they were in the past. Guru Nanak's spiritual pronouncements from his travels within and outside India remain alive and relevant because of their universal concern for humanity. The diversity of ideas, principles and tastes among people is very great, as is the fixity of their notions and reluctance to change. However, master-thinkers and reformers whose mighty works have deeply inspired and guided people have resulted in providing politically significant visions, values and directions (Grayling, 2011). The philosophy of Guru Nanak is one such example in India, which should continue to trigger on-going change and transformation for the good of all (SGGS, pp 83-84, 97, 724).

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Building an Open-Source Nanakshahi Calendar: Identity and a Spiritual and Computational Journey

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Abstract

Until the late twentieth century, Sikhs continued to use multiple calendars, mostly the Bikrami calendar, for determining dates for important Sikh events. The Bikrami calendar is longer than the tropical year and has issues such as a shifting relationship with seasons. Pal Singh Purewal proposed the Nanakshahi calendar in 1992. It was adopted by the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) in 1998, but has since diverged from the original proposal and its intent. As the debate about Sikhs observing their community occasions according to the “reformed” Nanakshahi Calendar or “mool” Nanakshahi calendar continues, the difference is not apparent to many Sikhs. This paper explores the questions, research, and workings of the original(ਮੂਲ) Nanakshahi calendar. An open-source programming library was built to encourage the adoption of the Nanakshahi calendar in software. Further, this paper proposes new terms based on Gurbani and Panjabi language etymology that were left open in the original Nanakshahi calendar.

Keywords: Nanakshahi calendar, Bikrami calendar, open source calendar

Introduction

For social groups, calendars play an essential role in cultural and religious identity. According to Zerubavel, they act “as a symbolic system that is commonly shared by a group of people and is unique to them, the calendar accentuates the similitude among group members—thus solidifying their ingroup sentiments—while, at the same time, contributing to the establishment of intergroup boundaries that distinguish, as well as separate, group members from outsiders.” (Zerubavel, 1982).

For the last 500 years, Sikhs have continued to use Bikrami calendar-based almanacs for observing *gurpurabs*¹ and *sangrands*.² One of the first recorded attempts to create a new calendar comes from a letter, written by Banda Singh Bahadur to the *Sangat*³ of Jaunpur (Deol, 2001) and dated “Poh 12 the first year,” likely after the conquest of Sarhind in 1710 CE. According to Dilgir (1997), Banda Singh “... continued adopting the months and the days of the months according to the Bikrami calendar.” Founding a sovereign Sikh state that eventually extended between the rivers *Yamuna* and *Raavi*, Banda Singh minted coins in the name of the Sikh Gurus, called *Nanakshahi* coins. Maharaja Ranjit Singh also followed this tradition of coinage (SikhMuseum.com, 2013).

Moving to the modern era, after five decades of development, the Nanakshahi calendar was proposed by Pal Singh Purewal in 1992, to replace the Bikrami calendar used to observe Sikh events (Purewal, undated).⁴ The Nanakshahi calendar starts in 1469 CE with the birth year of Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, as its epoch year. Nanakshahi months have seasonal connections to months in *Bara Maha*⁵, as observed in the region of Punjab.

Purewal has stated three objectives to develop and standardize the Nanakshahi calendar:

1. To have a calendar that has a permanent relationship with seasons, as mentioned in *Gurbani*.
2. To have an independent Sikh calendar as part of the identity of a nation.
3. To remediate issues of the lunisolar sidereal Bikrami calendar by basing the Nanakshahi calendar on the tropical solar year.

After consultations, the amended Nanakshahi calendar was adopted in 1998 (McLeod and Fenech, 2014) by the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee

¹ These are events commemorating important incidents in the lives of the Sikh Gurus, literally meaning “Guru’s days.”

² Sangrand is the first day of the month in Indian usage.

³ This is a Sikh congregation.

⁴ The use of the dating from Guru Nanak’s birth is, of course, older Purewal’s specific proposal, and can be found in older documents from Sikh sources. As clarified in this paper, this is only one aspect of a “true” Nanakshahi calendar.

⁵ *Bara Maha* is a form of folk poetry expressing human yearnings and connection with changing seasons of twelve months of the year. Guru Nanak’s *Bara Maha* transforms this love theme into a spiritual realm.

(SGPC), the Sikh organization in India responsible for the management of gurdwaras in Punjab, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh and Chandigarh. The calendar was finally implemented in 2003 (Nesbitt, 2016). In 2010, the SGPC modified the adopted Nanakshahi calendar to align the start of months with the Bikrami calendar, and changed the dates for various Sikh festivals to base them on the lunar calendar. By 2014, according to Purewal, “the changes were scrapped,” and SGPC reverted to the Bikrami calendar entirely, but still published it as Nanakshahi (Graney, 2018).

As the debate about Sikhs observing their community occasions according to the “reformed” (Singh, S., 2018) Nanakshahi Calendar or “mool” Nanakshahi calendar (Bodiwala, 2017) continues, the difference is not apparent to many Sikhs. This paper explores the questions, research, and workings of the original (ਮੂਲ) Nanakshahi calendar. An open-source programming library (Singh, A., 2019a,b) was built to encourage the adoption of the Nanakshahi calendar in software. Further, this paper proposes new terms based on Gurbani and Panjabi language etymology that were left open in the original Nanakshahi calendar.

Background

Various calendars have been in use across the world. These calendars are often based on the movement of the sun (solar) or movement of the moon (lunar). Further, solar calendars can have a tropical year or sidereal year. A summary of different calendars is provided in Table 1.

The sidereal year is the time taken by Earth to orbit around the Sun once, with respect to fixed stars (Nebraska Astronomy Applet Project, 2020). The modern value of the sidereal year is 365.256363 days (Purewal, undated). The Julian and the Bikrami calendars are examples of sidereal year calendars.

In contrast, the tropical year “comprises a complete cycle of seasons” (Nautical Almanac Office, 2010). It is the time it takes the sun to come to the same place on the ecliptic (equinox to equinox) (Nebraska Astronomy Applet Project, 2020). The length of the tropical year is 365.2422 days. The tropical year is shorter by just over twenty minutes than the sidereal year (Nebraska Astronomy Applet Project, 2020). The Gregorian calendar is a tropical year calendar.

In a tropical year, the seasons recur on approximately the same dates. In the sidereal year however, the months continue to shift away from seasons. The Julian calendar did not have the correct length for its year and resulted in a shift of 1 day in 128

years. By 1582, this resulted in a shift of ten days and with the adoption of the Gregorian calendar, Thursday, 4 October 1582 was followed by Friday, 15 October 1582, skipping ten days (Mercado, 2007).

Similarly, the Bikrami year is longer than the tropical year by about 20 minutes and 25 seconds. According to Purewal, “the months of the modern Bikrami calendar drift in seasons at the rate of about 1 day in 70 / 71 years on the average. The drift is about a week in 500 years, a month in 2,100 years, reverse of seasons in 13,000 years, and complete cycle in 26,000 years” (Purewal, undated).

Purewal observed this accumulation error between the year length difference of Bikrami and tropical years. For example, in the year of Guru Nanak’s birth, the summer solstice in the Bikrami calendar was 15 Harh (Bikrami). In 1998, it occurred on 8 Harh (Bikrami). In another five hundred years, it would differ by a month, in the month of Jeth in the Bikrami calendar. Gurbani embodies the condition of mind, associating months, and their seasons as in Gurbani Barah Maha (SikhCast, 2019). Continuing to observe Gurbani with the Bikrami calendar, would, over time, create a loss of historical contexts and their seasonal connection (Purewal, undated). The dates of Gurbani in the Bikrami calendar are calculated using lunar cycles and can shift significantly from year to year. For example, in 1999 CE, there was no Parkash Gurbani⁶ of Guru Gobind Singh Sahib as per the Bikrami calendar (Purewal, undated).

According to Purewal, “Even the dates of *desi*⁷ months as per *Surya Siddhanta*⁸ (year length 365d 6h 12m 36s) which was in use during the Guru period and up to the nineteen-sixties when in most of India it was discarded as being inaccurate, and the *panchanga*⁹ editors switched over to *Drik Ganita*¹⁰ ... (year length 365d 6h 9m 10s)” (Purewal, undated).

⁶ Parkash literally means day of illumination, so it is the birth day of a Sikh Guru.

⁷This is a Panjabi word commonly used for something ethnic or local.

⁸ The Surya Siddhant is a tenth century Indian work on astronomy, forms foundation of medieval Indian astronomy and basis of calendar developed in Nepal (Bowman, 2000).

⁹ A *Panchanga* is the Indian version of the almanac.

¹⁰ *Drik Ganita* is another system of astronomical computations followed by several almanac makers in India (Sarma, 1972).

	Epoch	Type	Year Length	Shift in relation to tropical seasons
CE (Julian)	Year of birth of Jesus Christ	Solar	365.25 days	Approx. 1 day every 128.20 years
CE (Gregorian)	Year of birth of Jesus Christ	Tropical	365.2422 days	Approx. 1 day every 3300 years
Bikrami (Sidhantic)	57 BCE ¹¹	Sidereal	365.258756481 days	Approx. 1 day every 60 years
Bikrami (Modern)	57 BCE	Sidereal	365.256363 days	Approx. 1 day every 70/71 years
Bikrami (Lunisolar)	57 BCE	Lunisolar	354.37 days	NA
Hijri	Hijrah (622 CE)	Lunar	353 - 355 days	10-12 days every year
Nanakshahi	Year of birth of Guru Nanak	Tropical	365.2422 days	1 day every 3300 years

Table 1: Prevalent calendars and their relation to a tropical year.

Purewal notes that Guru Nanak's observation of physical phenomenon was as a vehicle to impart knowledge and not to highlight the phenomenon itself (Purewal, undated).

ਦਿਨ ਰਵਿ ਚਲੈ ਨਿਸਿ ਸਸਿ ਚਲੈ ਤਾਰਿਕਾ ਲਖ ਪਲੇਇ ॥ ਮੁਕਾਮੁ ਓਹੀ ਏਕੁ ਹੈ ਨਾਨਕਾ ਸਚਿ ਬੁਗੋਇ ॥

- ਗੁਰੂ ਗਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ, ਅੰਗ ੬੪

Nothing is permanent, the sun moves, the moon moves, the stars move, the constellations move, all are impermanent. Nanak says that the truth is that only Akal Purkh is permanent.

- Guru Granth Sahib, Page 64

Guru Nanak however, does observe the permanence of Sun and its relation to seasons.

ਸੂਰਜ ਏਕੇ ਰੁਤਿ ਅਨੇਕ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਕਰਤੇ ਕੇ ਕੇਤੇ ਵੇਸ ॥

- ਗੁਰੂ ਗਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ, ਅੰਗ ੧੩

¹¹ See Sharan (2003) for this dating.

The sun is one, but many are the seasons - says Nanak, how many different ways the Creator manifests Himself!

- Guru Granth Sahib, Page 13

On page 1108 of Guru Granth Sahib, Guru Nanak observes the turning of the Sun's yearly movement or Summer solstice as ਰਬੁ ਫਿਰੈ – the turning of the Sun's chariot. This forms the base of Nanakshahi calendar and a relatively fixed season tropical year length.

ਰਬੁ ਫਿਰੈ ਛਾਇਆ ਧਨ ਤਾਕੈ ਟੀਡੁ ਲਵੈ ਮੰਝਿ ਬਾਰੇ॥

- ਗੁਰੂ ਗਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ, ਅੰਗ ੧੦੦੮

The chariot turns, and the soul-bride seeks shade; the crickets are chirping in the forest.

- Guru Granth Sahib, Page 1008

The Nanakshahi year begins as Chet 1, which is the first day of the year, irrespective of the fact that Guru Nanak's birth date falls on a different day. The names of the twelve months are the popular variant of the same names as given in *Baramaha*.¹² The months are described in Table 2.

Nanakshahi *Sangrands* are independent of Indian Zodiac movements and thus may differ from Bikrami *Sangrands*. The first five months of the Nanakshahi year have thirty-one days each, while the last seven have thirty days each. Whenever last month, *Phagun*, falls in leap February, it has an extra day and has thirty-one days instead of thirty.

The Nanakshahi calendar discards the lunar calendar of *sudis*¹³, and *vadis*¹⁴ for the determination of the dates of Gurpurabs and has fixed dates for most Gurpurabs. The exceptions are Guru Nanak Sahib's Parkash Gurpurab and Bandi Chhor Divas (Divali), which continue to be celebrated according to the old calendar. On the

¹² *Baramaha*, or *Bara Maha*, is a form of folk poetry expressing human yearnings and connection with changing seasons of twelve months of the year. Guru Nanak's *Bara Maha* transforms this love theme into a spiritual realm.

¹³ Date One after the full moon, indicating the beginning of the month in the luni-solar calendar.

¹⁴ Day after the new moon, indicating the middle of the month in the luni-solar calendar.

demand of *Sant Samaaj*¹⁵, the *Hola Mohalla* Sikh festival held in Spring, that accompanies the display of military might of Khalsa in Anandpur Sahib was also kept according to old Bikrami calendar.

As the Gregorian and Nanakshahi calendars are both based on a tropical year, there is a fixed Gregorian date for each Nanakshahi date.

	Nanakshahi Month Sangrand (Day 1)	Gregorian Day and Month	Days in Nanakshahi Month
1	Chet / ਚੇਤ	14 March	31
2	Vaisakh / ਵੈਸਾਖ	14 April	31
3	Jeth / ਜੇਠ	15 May	31
4	Harh / ਹਾਰ	15 June	31
5	Sawan / ਸਾਵਣ	16 July	31
6	Bhadon / ਭਾਦੋਂ	16 August	30
7	Asu / ਅੱਸੂ	15 September	30
8	Katik / ਕੱਤਕ	15 October	30
9	Maghar / ਮੱਘਰ	14 November	30
10	Poh / ਪੋਹ	14 December	30
11	Magh / ਮਾਘ	13 January	30
12	Phagun / ਫੱਗਣ	12 February	30/ 31 if leap year

Table 2: Nanakshahi calendar months, number of days and corresponding days on Gregorian calendar

¹⁵ These are socio-religious organization that are part of Sikh Panth, but may have traditions (*maryada*) that vary from one to another

Code

There have been discussions on Nanakshahi Calendar, yet no open-source library was available at the time. The authors felt a need to develop a Nanakshahi date conversion library for quick adoption into any new software.

An open-source library was developed to support Nanakshahi dates. The Ruby programming language was used to develop this Nanakshahi library (Singh, A., 2019b) or *gem* (Singh, A., 2019a).

The library adds functionality, creating Nanakshahi date objects, conversion between Nanakshahi and Common Era (CE) dates, a comparison between two Nanakshahi dates, printing Nanakshahi dates in Gurmukhi script, and checking and displaying Gurburabs that fall on a given date. The inclusion of Nanakshahi *gem* augments the functionality of the Ruby Standard library's date class to convert any date object into a Nanakshahi date object. The code was made available under an MIT license for anyone to use and contribute (Open Source Initiative, 2019).

Proposals

The start of a calendar historically marks the beginning of an era. In Christian usage, the term *BC or Before Christ* precedes era before *AD or Anno Domini*, medieval Latin for "in the year of the Lord," with the modern, non-denominational terms being BCE and CE, for Before Common Era and Common Era. The *Jahiliyyah* is considered the period before Islam in Arabia, an Islamic neologism representing an era lacking in knowledge (*'ilm*) and gentleness (*hilm*) (Khatab, 2006).

For the era before year 1 Nanakshahi, two proposals have been made.

1. The era prior to 1 Nanakshahi should be referred to as Dhundhkaal (ਧੁੰਧਕਾਲ) - a combination of two words - ਧੁੰਧ which means fog and ਕਾਲ - which means era. The nomenclature takes inspiration from Bhai Gurdas Vaaraan (SearchGurbani.com, 2019).

ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਨਾਨਕ ਪ੍ਰਗਟਿਆ ਮਿਟੀ ਧੁੰਧ ਜਗ ਚਾਨਣ ਹੋਆ॥

- ਵਾਰਾਂ ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ

True Guru Nanak has emerged, the fog has cleared and the world is illuminated with light.

- Bhai Gurdas Vaaraan

2. Similar to the *Anno Domini (AD)* system based on the Gregorian calendar, there should be no year zero. Year 1 Dhundkaal precedes year 1 Nanakshahi or 1469 CE. This feature has been added to the Nanakshahi open source library.

Purewal's original work recommends the calculation of dates only past its adoption year of 2003 CE to avoid mixing up historical dates given in the original calendars.

It is argued here, however, that given Sikh history has been registered in a variety of calendars such as Bikrami, Hijri, and CE in the last century, it may be prudent to fix these dates on the Nanakshahi calendar. At the least, the events post 1 Nanakshahi, or 1469 CE can be represented on the Nanakshahi calendar.

Future Work

The implementation of the Nanakshahi code libraries in other programming languages such as Javascript and Python are underway.

The Nanakshahi calendar offers a straightforward yet significant departure from traditional almanac dates based on Bikrami calendars prevalent in twentieth-century Panjab and among many Sikh *Sampradahs*¹⁶. Further advocacy and dialogue are needed to explore its significance in the future of the Sikh Panth.

The permanence of seasons is one of the strong arguments for the Nanakshahi calendar. There has been a mass movement of Sikhs beyond the borders of Panjab in the last century and the Bara Maha's connection to Panjab's local seasons differs from that of the Sikh diaspora's experience. Purewal argues however that "The Barahmahas of Guru Sahiban mention the relation of months with seasons of Punjab and not of Australia" (Purewal, undated).

Further, it needs to be studied if the Nanakshahi calendar software libraries can be extended to take into account the Julian/Gregorian date correction of 1582 CE, to be able to calculate any of the recorded human history dates in the Dhundkaal era.

¹⁶ These are traditional Sikh organizations based on particular religious beliefs or practices.

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Mental Health in the Guru Granth Sahib: Disparities between Theology and Society

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Abstract

The purpose of this work is to address the approach to mental health within Sikh theology found in the Guru Granth Sahib and contrast it to the concurrent practices in societal India. Mental health is both acknowledged and validated through the Guru Granth Sahib, but given the scientific development and clinical understanding of mental health at the time the Guru Granth Sahib came to be, the concept of clinical treatment for mental health is not found within. However a variety of non-medicinal ways of moving through mental health issues are discussed in the Guru Granth Sahib and, given the direct relationship between strengthening religiosity and improved mental health demonstrated in several studies, these non-clinical pathways must be considered. When faced with two solutions which stem from two sides of one's identity, is there a right choice? Religion plays a key role in the mental health of a religious individual, as does social climate and clinical care accessibility; this becomes a valuable question to explore as attempted in this article.

Keywords: Mental health; Sikh identity; depression; healthcare policy

Introduction

Mental health has consistently been a prominent issue and conversation for humanity. In recent years, the conversation has become increasingly vocal and in many countries across the world, governmental action has begun. Mental health includes many illnesses and conditions, however for the purposes of this article the focus will be on depression specifically. Depression is a growingly reported mental illness affecting millions of individuals worldwide, in which relapses are unfortunately rather common. Even in patients receiving the highest recommended treatment of combination therapy, 25% are expected to experience a relapse within two years. Furthermore, the average individual with depression is expected to experience four depressive episodes in their lifetime (Cruwys, et al., 2014). These are just a few of the pressing statistics presented in the ongoing conversation on the need for mental healthcare. For those countries that have not begun to approach it governmentally, the diverse populations advocating for mental health awareness create additional challenges. When one looks into these varying populations, their beliefs, and personal statistics relating to mental health, we find a large variety of responses, which often times have difficulty meshing with one another.

Religiosity in particular often plays a large role in, or is the foundation for the responses of these differing groups. Members of the tradition known as Sikhism represent a population with a unique view of mentality and mental healthcare. Mental health issues are addressed within the Sikh theology, however these theological ideals do not coincide well with the current societal atmosphere of the birthplace and home to the majority of Sikhs, India. The main source of theology for this group aside from the oral traditions, is the holy book known as the Guru Granth Sahib. Otherwise referred to as the living Guru, this holy text is the eternal teacher for the faith, and is respected as a religious figure of leadership. It is within the Guru Granth Sahib that a majority of the theological research for this work is based. Throughout this piece, the theological explanations, sources, and alleviation's for mental illnesses in Sikhism will be explored, and compared to the modern-day climate, legislation, and practices relating to this issue in India.

There has been extensive research conducted exploring religious events and interventions, and their relationship with depression. For the purpose of this paper, the reference point will be a summation which draws from 444 studies globally, of varying intensity. These studies investigate the relationship from the perspectives of overall religiosity, religious intervention, attendance to religious institutions, and suicide and religiosity. 119 out of 178, or 67% of studies surrounding religiosity found that religiosity and depression have an inverse relationship. In those studies specifically centered on suicide, 106 out of 141, or 75% found an inverse relationship between suicide attempts/successes and religiosity (Bonelli et al., 2012). In research based on effects of religious intervention, 61% of studies show a decrease in depressive symptoms and a faster relapse recovery time after religious intervention, while only 6% found opposing results. High risk participants (individuals with parental depression and/or higher ratio of NLEs-negative life events) showed a 76% decrease in likelihood for major depression, and a 69% decrease in likelihood for mood disorders in general with an increase in attendance to religious institutions (Bonelli et al., 2012). These statistics show an alarmingly clear correlation for those who identify with a religion between their faith and their mental well being. It is evident that generally speaking, as one who aligns with a religious system strengthens their personal connection to their beliefs, the task of coping with depression is eased. This link provides foundation for the overarching argument that religion's role in a person's mental health is equally important to that of clinical access, appropriate care and social acceptance.

Religion and Social Identity Impact on Mental Health

The concept and stability of mental well-being is tightly related to the concept of identity for anyone, including the Sikhs of India. Generally speaking, the concept of identity is an intricate weaving of societal constructs and perceptions which form a unique mold pattern for each individual. We attempt to form our molds as closely to those around us as possible, and use these molds as our tickets into and out of situations. Social identity plays into our everyday interactions and influences, and thus interacts with and influences our mental health. The relationship between social identity and mental health, more specifically depression, is interestingly close.

According to a collection of controlled sample studies, social identification was found to predict life satisfaction as well as general well-being. Those within these samples which had high social identification, specifically with a socially valued group, generally showed less depressive symptoms (Cruwys et al., 2014). In a separate study, a group of individuals without any previous relationship, met weekly in gendered groups for social activities. When compared to the baseline after 12 weeks, an inverse relationship between social identification and depression symptoms was identified (Cruwys et al., 2014). Each of these research samples indicate that social identity interacts directly with our mental condition. Interestingly, those among these studies who identified strongly with a mental health awareness group plateaued. While the social connectedness of identity decreased depressive symptoms, strong connection to a stigmatized group tended to cause lower self-esteem (Cruwys et al., 2014).

The correlation between identity and mental health leads us to a unique series of questions. How does the Sikh identity relate to these studies? Is stronger socialization something which should be considered in treatment of depression? Where does religious affiliation fall in these identification studies and statistics? Many people in our lives will label and identify us as they see fit. Sometimes, these provided identifications are fitting and logical. Other times, they are random or born out of stereotypes. This leads to the view of identity at its core being a personal and independent journey. Our identities are multifaceted with layers of external factors and layers of internal decisions which are of varying importance to us. It's here that the person in question hopes to find the answer they are hunting for. If theology is of high importance to the individual, if their faith is more critical than any other piece of who they are, finding strength and guidance through spirituality as best as physically possible within the realm of accepted practical application is a natural

path to follow. If religion is but a portion of who they are, and their sense of cultural strength and pride is much greater, then trusting one's well-being to the Indian healthcare system, or following the general social trends may be the logical answer for the individual. For the person who finds equal strength in both of these, the question then becomes, how can these two worlds come together?

Guru Granth Sahib Analysis

The Guru Granth Sahib contains 26852 lines of text filled with the teachings of the Sikh gurus, and other scholarly scriptural writing. This collection of text is used as a basis for guidance in how to live, conduct oneself, handle conflicts, and to survive the human existence with *Vahiguru* (the name with which the Divine is most often referred to in the Sikh tradition) at heart. This is best summarized by the following: "... the essence of Sikh teachings is to love God, desire a union with Him, and be of service to Humankind." (Morjaria-Keval & Keval, 2015). At a glance, this is a variety of vague pillars, however through analysis one can find how much they truly encompass; incredible detail and guidance, all of which still leaving opportunity for personal interpretation.

The Guru Granth Sahib states that everything which happens in one's life is as per the will of *Vahiguru*, including the balance of karma (Kalra et al., 2013). Karma is a concept with three main connotations: 1. An Act or deed, 2. Predetermined fate as a result of an act or deed, and 3. Divine grace or clemency (Gujral 2009, para. 6-10). In the Sikh tradition, karma is generally viewed in reference to the third ideal. The living gurus accepted karma as a part of life, however unlike most traditions karma is a part of, the Sikh belief system does not view it as immutable. It is rather seen as a natural system which like any other, can be subject to Divine grace (*Nadar*) and Divine order (*Hukam*). Simply put, karma is a force of nature which impacts all forms of life, most critically impacting human life. Karma itself can be changed, or even ended by *Vahiguru*. Guru Nanak was once quoted saying "All forms, beings... are subject to the indescribable hukam and there is nothing outside the real, of Hukam." (Gujral, 2009, para. 6-10).

Human life is the most critical opportunity within the karmic cycle as it is a rare chance for the soul to ascend from the cycle. If one lives a humble and karmically good life of service and submission to *Hukam*, *Nadar* will free them from the process of rebirth; they will achieve liberation. In order to achieve such, it is said that one should not practice rituals or non-action, but should rather live a householder's life of activity and responsibility. One should live with service and

devotion, and an understanding and agreement with divine will and divine law (Gujral, 2009, para. 6-10). The essence of the doctrine of karma can be summed up in the following sentence: There are 8.4 million different forms of life, each of which coexist with one another, and each is an opportunity to restart or learn from one's mistakes (Kalra et al., 2013).

The pressure of living with the concept that free will is not free can be simultaneously stressful and comforting for many minds. This is a concept which we must remember when analyzing the specific content of the Guru Granth Sahib in relation to mental health. The physical body is an object, interpreted as a sort of cloak that absorbs and reacts to karmic effects (Kalra et al., 2013). This view of the human body produces a rather structured, non-empathetic approach to illness in general, which takes into consideration one's environment and one's circumstances. However, the brain, or rather the mind, is seen in a much different light. This is one's true being, as one's consciousness is what allows them to accept Vahiguru, it is seen as the person themselves. This ideal is likely why the Sikh scripture accepts the existence of mental illness (specifically depression), discusses its potential sources, and how to move through it with Vahiguru.

There are two translated quotes from the *Shabad Guru* (the written text of the Guru Granth Sahib) which display the Sikh theology in terms of depression quite clearly: "It is said that total knowledge of God and Ecstasy is an antidote to Depression" and "Go deeply inside, touch your soul and vibrate at the frequency of the Divine. There you will find your victory and satisfaction-your self-mastery" (Khalsa, 2019, para. 1-10). In the first, one sees the concept of depression mentioned directly, and addressed through the strength of one's knowledge of the Divine. In the second quote, one finds something a bit more abstract. It is suggesting the individual focuses on all questions in life through themselves and through the divine, rather than searching the world for answers. This is a reminder that oneself is the missing piece to all of their own puzzles, and they mustn't forget that Vahiguru's will encompasses them.

The concept of depression when discussed in the context of the Sikh faith, will be referred to using the term *dukh*. *Dukh* directly translates to pain, but in several excerpts from the Guru Granth Sahib, it has been interpreted to mean pain of the mind. (Kalra et al., 2012). The concept of mental illness as we know and understand it today is vastly different than that same concept during the time period in which the Guru Granth Sahib was written. Taking this into consideration, many take this interpretation of pain to equate to mental illness, including depression. It is said that

when one forgets the Lord, even for a moment, their mind can be afflicted with terrible diseases. In the same token, when one remembers Vahiguru, happiness is immediately returned to them. This dynamic is where the idea of a comforting stress comes into play. *Dukh* is sometimes seen as a gift of the Divine, as it brings a lost soul home to the Lord. However, this idea when reversed, can lead to the view of *dukh* being a curse of Vahiguru, a view which tends to lead people to not seek professional help for themselves (Kalra et al., 2013).

If we are able to recognize something as a medical condition, then precedent sets that we must recognize that treatment, either in means of alleviation or cure, is the rational next step (Malla et al., 2015). The Guru Granth Sahib indicates that diagnosis and treatment of illnesses is important to taking care of oneself, and as one must be well taken care of to fulfill the pillars of Sikhism, this becomes a distinct point (Morjaria-Keval & Keval, 2015). Yet, the opposing idea which frames *dukh* as a curse of the Lord rather than a gift, is also logically found in analysis of the teachings. This contradiction in the theology may cause confusion, uncertainty and a sense of falling astray in a Sikh struggling with depression.

The acknowledgment of depression and its role theologically develops largely in the idea of its source. The roots of *dukh* according to the Guru Granth Sahib can be separated into three categories: materialistic things, such as sexual desire and egotism, external factors such as loss of wealth, death of a loved one, and madness (attributed to alcohol), and emotional responses, such as taunts, hypocrisy, and anger (Kalra et al., 2013). These events and issues are all still relevant causes of and stressors for depression to this day, whose identification in centuries old scripture is remarkable. This serves as a reminder that in its core, Sikhism is a belief system which is aware of humanity, and the reality of the human existence. This particular mention of *dukh* not only acknowledges its presence, but it also acknowledges a variety of human faults, an important ability for a theology built on the idea of love for all.

Being able to point to a cause of one's pain is often considered the answer in terms of physical pains, as it allows the proper treatment to be aligned and can cause a wave of relief. In the specific context of Sikh theology, medication for mental illness is not addressed, likely due to the limited concept of these conditions as well as limited medicinal knowledge on such during that time period. However, it is said that medications in general are nothing more than ashes, which one can infer leads to a preference for spiritual and personal recovery, within the realms of rationality (Kalra et al., 2013). While any sort of clinical relation to *dukh* is not made,

suggestions for approaching and working through such personal experiences are provided in the teachings. For immediate relief/clarity, it is said that one should meditate and pray, both in the name of the Lord. This connects the idea of remembering Vahiguru to avoid *dukh*, with the theory that finding a moment of tranquility can reset the mind. With the goal of long-term improvement, the Guru Granth Sahib says to stay in the Lord's sanctuary and praise him, turning to the Lord for guidance, assurance, and karmic relief (Kalra et al., 2013).

Depression can lead to frustration, and often causes one to want to point fingers, whether it be at those around them, or themselves. This too is addressed theologically, by the consistent placement of the locus of control on external things, but never individuals. In fact, the Guru Granth Sahib directly clarifies such by explaining that blaming others for one's pain benefits no one, and that one should rather blame their own karma (Kalra et al., 2013). Following this train of thought, and relating it to the concepts of karmic forgiveness *Hukam* and *Nadar*, the individual can begin to find peace and improvement through their faith. The following quote was written in reference to addiction, another mental illness with many symptoms similar to that of depression: "People use their Sikh identities,... to locate themselves psychologically, emotionally, socially, and biographically. The use of spiritual frameworks then become a powerful structure of relevance, such that the use of faith in the service of recovery remolds Sikh identity as the engagement with *Amrit* {baptism} takes hold. To be on the path to spiritual enlightenment... also involves a range of re-engagements with personal identities." (Morjaria-Keval & Keval, 2015). Through Sikhism, the individual may take a journey to find themselves and realign their values.

Societal India's Approach

Depression is a condition that for those it affects becomes a daily struggle, a battle which many attempt to overcome through their faith. Sikh leaders and other contributing authors of the Guru Granth Sahib understood this human journey, and paved the way ideologically for future Sikhs to find their way through the fog by holding tight to their beliefs. The theological teachings are founded in religious care and admiration for the human life, but theology must be re-evaluated and interpreted as the world changes, and is a separate entity from sociology. This divide may be frustrating and confusing for a person within the bounds of both a theological faith and a continuously changing society.

Generally speaking, many ideals that make perfect sense in discussion fail in translation to practice due to social norms and climate. Sikh society in India is no different. India is the home to people of all faith backgrounds; however it contains the holy lands and serves as the birth place of several traditions. The Indian population is made up of significant numbers of the following faiths: Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. This combination of coexisting traditions and their complex history with one another creates a dynamic atmosphere. Within this complicated grouping which is the Indian public, a general, governmentally influenced, set of social norms has come into existence. These norms and implications, while they follow general international trends, vary greatly from those of the religious groups which make up the population. The variants between theory and practice can be observed when we compare the interpretations of mental health and mental healthcare found within Sikhism to the application of mental health awareness and care in India.

When discussing the status of one's mental state in a social context, there are three separate terms which most commonly may be involved: mindfulness, well-being, and mental health. Each describes one's state of mind, but to varying degrees and with differing connotations. Mindfulness refers to one's recognition of personal mentality and emotional processes, and is often brought into conversation alongside topics such as meditation (Crane, 2017). In its general form, positive mindfulness entails being able to acknowledge, accept, and move forward from emotional thoughts and responses (Teper & Inzlicht, 2012).

Well-being is the most vague of these terms. This commonplace term generally refers to a big picture view of mental health. If there is cause for concern over one's mental well-being, it does not insinuate a medical issue (Singh & Mastana, 2015). Every person at one point or another experiences a lowered sense of well-being, be it from stress, loss, etc. This concept is general and all encompassing, and thus has become a buzz word in the modern world. Mentality, similarly to many other subjects of medical diagnosis, has been at the forefront of conversation and at many points, been a controversial one in governments worldwide. In this, the term well-being became a softer substitution to discuss one's mental state.

The term mental health, unlike the other two is a more descriptive and clinical concept (World Health Organization, 2017). The following definition comes from the World Health Organization (WHO) a leading figure in the development of mental health awareness and care worldwide: "[Mental Health] refers to the broad array of activities directly or indirectly related to the mental well-being, prevention

of mental disorders and treatment and rehabilitation of people affected by mental disorders.” (World Health Organization, 2015). These three terms and definitions are the most commonly used internationally. For the following paragraphs dictating the approach to one’s mentality in societal India, the term *mental health* and its previously stated definition will be used.

Prior to discussing the modern practices and approach, it is important to touch on the historical foundations these built upon. At the beginnings of independent India in 1947, there was a bare bones structure for mental healthcare (Murthy, 2011). It is important to note that at this point in history around the world, the family of a mentally ill person was considered a negative influence and was to be separated from the treatment process entirely. In the following few decades, the goal was simply to physically expand the space and ability to treat individuals. Perhaps the most important development in mental healthcare to come out of early independent India is the involvement of the families of the ill. It was India who first identified that the presence of a consistent support system, which one’s family generally creates, could benefit the mentally ill (Murthy, 2011). Over the years leading up to the 2000s, India continued to expand the physical capability of treatment, and to bring increasing humility to the practices.

With today’s international statistics at approximately 800,00 deaths from suicide each year, and depression being the number one cause of disability, depression is at the forefront of every legislative body’s radar (World Health Organization, 2017). A large indicator of a country’s approach to mental health is their treatment gap statistics. The treatment gap refers to the population amount which require care, and those who actually receive such. Across India, the treatment gap is as high as 83%, with 1% of the population considered high suicide risk and the age adjusted suicide rate 21.1 per 100,000 people (Singh 2018). Upwards of 83% of individuals in need of care going without it is indicative of a major issue, and the leading authorities are beginning to act on such.

The IHO (Indian Health Organization) released a statement saying that mental health promotion has been included into the federal Sustainable Development Goals, giving it a higher focus (Singh 2018). One of the biggest governmental motivators in this issue is the question of the treatment gap’s impact on the country’s economic standings. In 2010 the WHO estimated that between 2012 and 2030 India’s economy will lose approximately 1.3 trillion dollars due to mental illness (WHO. 2015). This sizable estimation comes from present statistics on the population unable to preform adequately in their employment, those taking leave

from work, economic affects of addictions formed as coping mechanisms, and places it in perspective of the treatment opportunity and accessibility, as well as presence of importance/promotion for mental healthcare. This estimation breaks down to a loss of 7.2 billion dollars per year. With a loss of 7.2 billion dollars and 21.1 people per 100,000 every year, the question is no longer whether or not mental healthcare requires the country's attention, but rather how can further damage be prevented, and the current issues improved?

In May of 2018, a new legislation regarding mental healthcare came into effect. India's Mental Healthcare Act of 2017 makes access to mental healthcare and treatment a legally protected right for all 1.3 billion Indian citizens (Duffy & Kelly, 2019). This act requires that care be offered for free to those under the poverty line and the homeless, and at minimal, affordable costs for the rest of the country. The regulated services include treatment, rehabilitation, prevention, and promotion. Additionally, the act institutes basic mental health emergency training for all public health officials, and decriminalizes suicide (*de facto*) (Duffy & Kelly, 2019). There are some issues with this legislation, such as a risk of lowered standards of care, and some gaps left unfilled such as treatment and rights protection between periods of direct, required care. Problems aside, this legislation is an important stride for mental healthcare in India.

Another step governments often take is instituting long term improvement plans. The Indian government did just that, in effort to even out the distribution of mental health professionals to those needing care. The current distribution of psychiatrists to the general Indian population ranges from 0.05-1.2 per 100,000. With the additional knowledge that 30% of the population going to general medical facilities are suffering from an untreated CMD (Common Mental Disorder) this unbalanced distribution has been identified as problematic. In an effort to rectify this, the Medical Council of India has instituted a new federal curriculum for medical programs which is competency based, and places heavy weight on psychiatry through interdisciplinary integration of the subject in all other base courses (Singh, 2018). This curriculum will be largely beneficial in the effort to increase access to mental care, however this is a slowly progressing reward. This must be paired with consistent upholding of the Mental Healthcare Act of 2017, as well as development and expansion off of such to ensure progression in the protection of rights and care of the Indian population. If these legislations fall to the wayside, the instituted curriculum alone will not impact the treacherous statistics stacking up against the general public of India for quite some time.

To gain a wide perspective of the climate in India surrounding mental health, the social perceptions must be taken into consideration. While social trends and acceptance are difficult to quantify, the passing of mental healthcare legislation in recent years has brought potentially damaging societal opinions and probable causes of such into conversation. A large contributor to social opinion is awareness of and knowledge about mental health. The following quote from a recent article detailing mental health care policies and their impacts, highlights such: "... In India, the lack of awareness about mental disorders such as depression, anxiety, suicidal risk, and emotional stress reinforces the stigma of getting mental health treatment, and are major impediments to demand for mental healthcare." (Mirza and Singh, 2019). Without awareness, understanding and acceptance are difficult to find, leading many to not seek out the medical care they require. The stigma surrounding mental health and mental healthcare extends beyond the demand for and obtaining of care, to increased homelessness, imprisonment, social exclusion, and other non-clinical rights issues (Kelly 2016). The inclusion of rights to promotional and preventative care in the Mental Healthcare Act of 2017 is a start to working past these issues, however the overall lasting impacts of this will have to be evaluated in the years to come to determine clinical effectiveness, outreach, and changes in social climate.

India is a growing nation with complex relations and a complicated mix of people making up its population. Sikhs dealing with a mental illness, as one of the subgroups within this population are generally placed in a difficult scenario. On the one hand, the social population has shown an expanding, but still fairly limited rate of advocacy and acceptance. What is in place socially, is in a rather clinical and often generalized manner (Ng, 1997). On the other hand is the theological direction provided by the Guru Granth Sahib which approaches mental health from a much more spiritual and humanized manner. One side is the common practice, which can present additional difficulties, but does recognize mental health as a medical concern. The other is an ideal scenario not common to the public, who's treatment process is within one's self and one's commitment to Vahiguru. While this is not a medical approach, it is available to anyone at any point.

How does one who identifies as Indian and identifies as Sikh, fighting with mental illness, approach their struggles? It is this person, with hundreds of others in the same conflicting situation that causes a need for analysis and evaluation of the relationship between sociology and theology. Sikhism falls into a minority category of belief systems as it places less emphasis on the illness, it's negative existence,

and more importance on staying true to one's faith during any struggle, and finding strength through belief.

It should be noted that the concept of mental health being in the Lord's control can have negative impacts on anyone suffering from a mental health issue. Maintaining control and focus are crucial in overcoming these sorts of struggles, and the idea that the situation is controlled by an entity who's will is absolute, is likely to cause internal conflict. However, the overall tone of the Guru Granth Sahib is straightforward and unbiased towards *dukhi* (those experiencing *dukh*). It then must be considered, does one stay strong in their faith and trust Vahiguru's will, or does one take their well being into their own hands? Both scenarios are a very possible reality for these individuals. Just as mental health is the cross roads between clinical and spiritual, Indian Sikhs are presented with a cross roads between acknowledgement and spiritual guidance, and risking the gamble against statistics for the chance of professional medical care. It is difficult to translate any holy text to direct practice as culture and society are drastically different from when the text was written. This growth causes a sort of rift between what could be, what is thought of as what should be, and what is. Here is the home of the cross roads which has been discussed, the core of the debate, the question of what one is to do. What is the correct answer? Is there one? One always hopes to live by the lessons of their faith, but one is also conditioned to respond to societal cues and norms.

Conclusion

Sikhism, born in 1469 CE, is one of the youngest, modern belief systems currently in practice. The holy text was, throughout its creation, a sort of living document, as it is comprised of a variety of teachings accumulated from the living leaders of the faith, as well as other holy men and scholars throughout that time. The Sikh faith stems from the talk of one man, the first Guru, Nanak, who believed that all humans deserve love, and that one's social standing meant nothing of who they truly are. It is a holistic, human approach to existence, which also understands that negativity exists in the world and that society cannot proclaim it as evil in hopes it will disappear, but rather must identify it, and work to overcome without losing ones sense of self. This sentiment, as the document was shaped throughout time, was built upon, expanded and interpreted to apply to nearly every aspect of life, including mental health.

The Sikh theological descriptions of depression are hauntingly accurate to this day: "In front of me, I see the jungle burning; behind me, I see green plant sprouting."

(Cruwys et al., 2014). This translated quote from the Guru Granth Sahib is one of many that describe the feeling of struggling with an obstacle such as *dukh*. Concepts such as possible causes and ways to work through these obstacles, warnings of what happens to those who forget the Lord, reminders of the absolute authority that is Vahiguru's will and what karma can bring, can be found within the text. All of this is contained within the holy text and teachings, awaiting personal interpretation and application to life. Here, one can uncover and interpret strategic, stressful comfort and a form of guidance.

India as a free and independent country is relatively young, similar to the Sikh tradition. At just 73 years old and containing 1/6 of the world population within its borders, India is an important model on an international scale (Duffy & Kelly, 2019). Indian society as a whole does not place a large weight on mental health. Mental healthcare however has recently taken large strides in legislation representation and protection. Given the youth of the policies such as the Mental Healthcare Act of 2017, the world is watching and waiting to interpret the success rate of the governmental action, and how it impacts India's death rates, treatment gap, and economic projections. Although these very recent changes are arguably overdue, there is something to be said about the progress being made.

Legislation is not the only aspect of society which can impact those suffering from mental illness. Awareness and understanding across a population can drastically impress on the number of individuals seeking help. Normalization of mental healthcare from a governmental perspective is a crucial step in increasing social acceptance and reducing stigma. Unfortunately, the concept of mental health has, as it does in many countries, a stigma about it which often negates the clinical side of the issue (Ng, 1997). The notion that if one is mentally ill they aren't suffering from a medical condition, but are rather lesser or wrong-doing individuals has become commonplace internationally. Due to this stigma, people around the world do not speak up about their issues or seek the help they require. It is these social blocks which have propelled calls for change in all aspects of society, for recognition and humane understanding and support for those with mental illness. This stigmatization of an entire group of medical conditions is a large contributor to tragic statistics such as the 83% treatment gap.

It is easy to say that something needs to change, but thousands of years of mixing religions, social precedents, and stigmatic responses makes it incredibly difficult to do so. The beginnings of progress have sprung into action on the part of India's governing body, and we now must watch and hope these legislations are upheld

and serve as a foundation for building an active, appropriate and supportive network of care for individuals with mental illness. Sikhism is unique in the sense that the holy book acknowledges the concepts of mindfulness and mental health, and their presence in humanity. However, between the progress in medical care and clinical knowledge at the time of the Guru Granth Sahib's creation, and the power of commitment to and faith in Vahiguru, the concept of medicinal care for one mental state is not directly seen.

One must interpret what is present on the related topics such as *dukh*, and infer their beliefs of how Sikh practices and clinical mental healthcare intertwine. Socially speaking, acknowledgement, validation, and care for mental health has yet to be fully developed. However, if one is able to push beyond the blind eye, medical care is available. The newly enacted legislation provides hope that this blind eye is dissipating and being replaced with an accessible network of treatment, promotion and prevention opportunities. With all of this in mind, the question is no longer if there is a difference between the way Indian society and Sikh theology handle mental well-being and mental healthcare. The question is now where the bounds between these two intersect, and where does the individual lie between these worlds.

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**Sikhs as Implicated Subjects in the United States: A Reflective Essay (ਵਿਚਾਰ)
on Gurmat-Based Interventions in the Movement for Black Lives¹**

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Abstract

As a largely migrant-descendant community in the United States, Sikhs at a national level have taken on normative frameworks of model minority representation and respectability politics. At times, this has been posed as a practice in the name of the faith, framing involvement with state institutions or partisan politics as representative of the framework of Miri-Piri. Meanwhile, Sikhs as a community have yet to reconcile their experiences as targets of U.S. racism with the U.S.'s nationalist project based in white supremacist, colonial, and anti-Black structural violence. As such, this essay offers a critical intervention based in a Gurmat praxis of liberation politics for engaging with the Movement for Black Lives. We invite Sikhs to shift their investments of social and political capital by discussing Sikhs' migrant incorporation within a structural history of U.S. racism and colonialism. Through reframing Sikh racialization and providing a brief discussion of tangible, alternative ways to invest efforts in the Movement for Black Lives, this essay invites Sikhs to reinvest in Gurmat and Miri-Piri as frameworks to guide a Sikh activism that is committed to a form of embodied justice against state repression and exploitation.

Keywords: racecraft, praxis, Miri-Piri, Black liberation, implicated subjects

“‘Why is it that all Indians are so smart and well-behaved?’” Piyush Jindal, confronted with this question by his elementary school teacher, paused and then, ‘being a smart-aleck, told her it was the food.’² [...] such gestures remind me that I am to be the perpetual solution to what is seen as the crisis of black America. I am to be a weapon in the war against black America. Meanwhile, white America can take its seat, comfortable, in its liberal principles, surrounded by state-selected Asians, certain that the culpability

¹ Authors are listed alphabetically and contributed equally to this manuscript.

² (Still, 2007)

for black poverty and oppression must be laid at the door of black America. How does it feel to be a solution?"

— Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk* (2000)

“Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter round it. They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately [...] How does it feel to be a problem?"

— W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903)

We ground our reflection (ਵਿਚਾਰ³) in a praxis of Miri-Piri (ਮੀਰੀ ਪੀਰੀ): a discipline of consciousness-refining meditation (ਅਭਿਆਸ) that cultivates worldly action (ਦੁਨਿਆਵੀ ਕਰਮ) for the realization of Naam (ਨਾਮ). Sikhi (ਸਿੱਖੀ) – as an embodied commitment to practicing Gurmat (ਗੁਰਮਤ) – enlightened a people. Sikhs (ਸਿੱਖ), practitioners and followers of Sikhi, were to be simultaneously rooted in challenging and abolishing structural practices of oppression, like caste and sati, while investing in the truest form of liberation through the experience of and union with Vaaheguru (ਵਾਹਿਗੁਰੂ). Within South Asian political and religious orders, such unmediated access to one’s Divine without a priest was revolutionary, especially for those defined as untouchable within the millennia-long Brahmanical patriarchal social order. Today, Sikhs continue to carry on deep investments in Sikh organizational practices and institutions, as evident with Sikhs in the diaspora continuing to engage with the gurdwara today, for instance. Yet, the existence of Sikh institutions in the U.S. public sphere should not be mistaken as Sikhs having an active investment in historical, collective practices of Gurmat (ਗੁਰਮਤ) required to challenge oppression in order to practice Sikhi to its fullest. In a Gurmat-centered praxis, Sikhs are sovereign and do not seek the safety or approval of a nation-state and its mechanisms of power.

³ The inclusion of ਗੁਰਮੁਖੀ/Gurmukhi where appropriate has been taken on more in English-language writing as a move towards decolonizing discussions on Sikhi in a Western context. We include the script to also foster connections with our language, a connection increasingly desired in the diaspora.

As Sikhs in the United States⁴, we often grow up with one of two relationships to racism – aware of its lurking ability to harm but without the words to describe how (structural experience), or with the conception that we are the primary victims of the U.S.’s racialized hierarchy (individual animus experience). A large number of Sikhs who have been in the U.S. for more than two decades since migration came to grapple with their Otherness through the post-9/11 experiences of hate violence, which targeted brown people, particularly those whose bodies were decorated with beards and/or dastaars (ਦਸਤਾਰਾਂ - turbans). In the decade after 9/11, Sikhs were increasingly fearful of being targeted and some felt an urgency to distinguish Sikhs from Muslims to salvage their distinct Americanness (Singh 2019). Yet, when an FBI-identified neo-Nazi attacked the Oak Creek gurdwara with a deadly shooting in 2012, he solidified Sikhs as equally valid targets within the U.S. racialized order.

Even with this more recent history, Sikhs in the U.S. still feel quite intimate and familiar with the United States, despite a lack of critical engagement or knowledge with its core nationalist ideology and institutions. This is not unique to Sikhs who are migrant-descendants⁵, as Sikhs who joined Sikhi but are not from the South Asian diaspora often remain similarly invested in the U.S.’s nationalist ideology. A predominantly migrant-descendant community, Sikhs in the U.S. are only beginning to cultivate and institutionalize relationships with the U.S. state through Sikhs’ second generation of U.S.-born youths. In this dynamic, Sikhs’ relationship with the state is dictated by the United States’ legal regime because it is still largely framed through the U.S. citizenship test or the history textbooks that U.S.-educated Sikhs are trained to regurgitate without challenge from alternative narratives (Glenn 2011; Roy 2020). Despite historians’ consensus that California’s colonial history was a period of Spanish, Mexican, and U.S. invasions against indigenous peoples, for instance, school curricula make little mention on the extent of this violence (Keenan 2019; Spear 2019).

⁴ We address a heterogeneous Sikh community in its responsibility towards a U.S.-originated social movement; thus, we use the broad category of Sikhs in the U.S. We acknowledge that there are various positionalities influencing the experiences of those who identify as Sikhs in the U.S., including, but not limited to, – gender, sexuality, class, caste, occupation, migration timeline, and, of course, racialized background.

⁵ We use this term over first-generation U.S. residents or citizens to reframe a Sikh’s subjectivity as one of being positioned constantly outside, or attempting to arrive, in the U.S., rather than situated.

A lack of prior engagement with global paradigms of struggle and violence is particularly dangerous for Sikhs navigating their relationship with the U.S. state, given Sikhs emphasize the importance of fighting state exploitation of all as a Sikh ethos. For example, though Sikhs in the U.S. speak of Sikh history as a fight for Sikh sovereignty against the Indian state from the mid-1700s onwards, Sikhs seldom acknowledge how this fight for consolidating Sikhs into an empire also enabled the institutional rise of Jatt Sikhs' hegemony over Dalit Sikhs (Hans 2016; Kaur 2019). For Sikhs today to build a Panth (ਪੰਥ) in alignment with Gurmata-based principles of egalitarianism, Sikhs must intentionally consider how our relationships with any state – past and present – enables the exploitation of other communities, especially if these relationships structurally benefit Sikhs. This intentionality carries a specific meaning for members of the transnational South Asian diaspora, because these diasporic communities are more likely to lack prior contextual knowledge or a framework of global racialized hierarchies (Christian 2018). As such, this structural position makes it even easier for Sikhs living in the U.S. who are from the South Asian diaspora to accept and regurgitate the ultimate truth of history as devoid of power dynamics and structural oppression (Teeger 2015).

This process is shifting as youth engage with community-based and grassroots political education through social media and other accessible platforms, even bringing it home to their family. Yet, the reality remains that both the educational and political system in the U.S. socialize Sikhs, like other South Asian immigrants, to be the solution to what U.S. politics have historically defined as “the crisis” of Black America (Du Bois 1903; Prashad 2000). When we pair this socialization with the forthcoming discussion of Sikh structural racialization, Sikhs as a collective will likely find faults, at best, and criminality, at worst, within the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) and those who fight alongside the movement. In emphasizing a *structural* analysis of Sikh migrant racialization, we are not providing a determinative or essentialist account of Sikhs' experiences; rather, we are illuminating the historic and political field Sikh migrants entered.

In order to push beyond reactionary mainstream engagement with M4BL, which would frame the entire movement as either “worthy” or “unworthy” of Sikh communities' support, we stage this essay's intervention with a praxis of deconstruction and application. Uncritical or mechanical allegiance to any nation is contradictory to Sikhi-informed liberation, which asks us to be continuously and

intentionally aware of our actions and learn from our choices in existence. Inspired by the legacy of Gursikhi Jeevan (ਗੁਰਸਿੱਖੀ ਜੀਵਨ) – to intervene in the oppressive regimes and mainstream rhetoric that keep communities ignorant to the violences that corrupt their time – this essay engages with theories of racialization, interprets Sikh communities’ current nationalist investments through a Gurmat (ਗੁਰਮਤ)-centered framework, interprets the M4BL platform through this framework, and closes with proposing pathways to re-position ourselves actively in collaboration with the Movement for Black Lives through Sikhi. We root ourselves in the practice of Miri Piri (ਮੀਰੀ ਪੀਰੀ) – being armed with the knowledge, resources, and skills to act in response to the conditions of Kaljug (ਕਲਜੁਗ) and engage with the ongoing work of co-liberation.

Racialization: Incorporating Sikh Migrants into the Historic U.S. Racialized Order

Sikhs’ ongoing legacies of identity-based trauma in Punjab regionally, India nationally, and now in the United States, are embedded within Sikh organizational work (Kaur 2020). As such, Sikhs’ reorientation towards a framework of Gurmat-centered justice, from a Sikh-person or -community centered framework, must be self-initiated. For instance, while Sikhs of all partisan parties make convenient use of Sikh principles for their political investments in the U.S., liberal Sikh voices strategically recognize and credit the U.S. Civil Rights Movement for passing the 1965 Immigration Act, which allowed most Sikh families to voluntarily migrate or flee persecution (SALDEF 2010; Sikh Coalition 2019; Singh 2012). What is less engaged in these partisan formulations is how U.S. state inclusion is grounded in the continued occupation of stolen indigenous land or how to be in political solidarity with Black liberation.

In the United States, this is not by accident because racism forms the bedrock of how the nation’s social contract distributes power and resources within society (Mills 1997; Mueller 2020). A large part of immigrant communities inheriting this structural ignorance is the particular *crafting* that state and organizational actors do to create and manage racialization projects, or projects that obscure the foundational relationship between colonialism, racism, and the United States. In 2020, for example, the 45th U.S. President continued his white nationalist and

supremacist policies by attacking Critical Race Studies (CRS), a field that interrogates the history and persistence of racism, thereby justifying the field's purpose (Gómez 2020; Ray 2020). The need to dismantle CRS was cited by the same administration in its 2020 Presidential Proclamation when the administration recognized Columbus Day as an opportunity for “educators to teach our children about the *miracle of American history* and honor our founding” (The White House 2020, emphasis our own). To challenge this crafted ignorance, we must understand that race “is not an idea but an ideology. It came into existence at a discernable historical moment for rationally understandable historical reasons and is subject to change for similar reasons” (Fields and Fields 2012:121). In the U.S., *race* emerged to rationalize the “contradiction between slavery and liberty by defining Afro-Americans as a race; Afro-Americans resolved the contradiction more straightforwardly by calling for the abolition of slavery” (Fields and Fields 2012:141). Importantly, in defining Afro-Americans as a race, settlers left themselves the category of “white” to use as they wished for defining property rights in the U.S. legal system (Harris 1993). *Racism*, then, included the institutionalized social practices that maintained this exploitative social order from slavery through the nineteenth and into the twenty-first centuries. Abolition, then and now, is rooted in reconciling the attempts to paint the United States project as one that is inclusive and welcoming to all people, all while being built on land acquired through colonially-enforced land treaties and built through the labor of enslaved Afro-descendants. Rather than try to find justice in this white supremacist violence, abolition as liberatory practice says: *we can and must do better – let us start again.*

The practice of racecraft, or the sleight of hand in which something an aggressor does is defined as something that the targeted are, did not conclude with the racialization of Black people as a race in the United States and continued into the 1900s. Throughout the U.S.'s history of political development in the 1700 and 1800s, U.S. settlers and their descendants would differentially racialize “ethnic others” of European descent within the social order to determine whether these communities could be managed or assimilated (Jung 2009; Seamster and Ray 2018). Racialization was the process by which new categories of communities were made for state exploitation and management (e.g., undocumented migrants or refugees). In order to access the social contract's benefits, these communities variably assimilated into the U.S.'s political order by either maintaining or not eradicating white supremacist ideologies and practices embedded within the social contract (i.e., a nation's governing political structure) (Mills 1997). Those who

could *not* be “incorporated” through state policies would be structurally excluded from the start, such as through immigration quotas or the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, or be exterminated, as in the case of the U.S.’s domestic genocidal policies towards indigenous communities. By the start of the 1900s, more visibly non-white communities entered the United States with claims for property rights and civil rights. Yet, in these migrant communities’ homelands, their non-migrant counterparts protested the remnants of colonialism, which had evolved into the United States’ foreign policy projects, driving mass emigration to settler-colonial nations like the United States. Throughout the mid-1900s, this growing non-white presence in the U.S. was conceived of as a threat in political and policy discourses to a white and settler state (Kumar 2020). Culminating in the late 1900s, U.S. foreign and domestic policy discourses increasingly linked migrant communities with anti-state violences abroad as one way to achieve their foreign state interests. Villainizing domestic, migrant communities, U.S. state foreign policy now positioned domestic migrants against their homeland communities to regain power against brown anti-U.S. imperialism activists overseas and protect the United States’ global economic interests. This occurred through state political and policy discussions that crafted the racialized trope of the Arab Muslim as a terrorist to be managed for national security, or through the process of terrorcraft (Kumar 2020).

Against this national backdrop of stigmatizing foreignness and emphasizing social incorporation throughout the 1900s, Sikhs have immigrated to the U.S. in high levels since the late 1900s (La Brack 2005). Though Sikhs may not have recognized themselves as targets of terrorcraft, after the September 11th attacks in 2001, Sikhs increasingly identified as a minoritized community. Yet, in an effort to navigate outside any villainization that could mark Sikhs as violent or suspect, Sikhs invested in the *model minority paradigm* in nationwide awareness efforts or, as Prashad calls it, being the solution (Sikh Coalition 2018). The paradigm paints many Asian Americans, typically East Asians, as the proper type of non-white citizen in the U.S. – one that is “smart and well-behaved” like a young Piyush ‘Bobby’ Jindal. Or, one that is willing to erase the project of racialization on their own body and the body of the nation, like former South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley, previously Nimrita Randhawa, who confidently declared that the “US is not a racist country”⁶ at the 2020 Republican National Convention (Yan 2020). Though

⁶ Sikhs must also be conscious of the ways that Sikh practices and frameworks are used to do this type of investment and erasure. Using Sikh presence to acknowledge “America’s right direction”, Harmeet Dhillon launched the 2016 Republican Convention with a recitation of a stanza (ਪਉੜੀ)

Sikhs in the U.S., like Asian Americans, maintain heterodox partisan opinions, these efforts to stitch Sikhs as natural counterparts to the U.S. body politic suggest a need to interrogate the social contract Sikhs are currently making and institutionalizing with the United States.

Rather than take up circular debates in Sikh communities that make apolitical moral judgements on the ideology and action of the Movement for Black Lives absent a Gurmat-based praxis, we have engaged with a few platform items, which we feel are most urgent for helping to shift Sikh communities' understanding. Through this contextual discussion of platform items, we hope to move Sikhs, as individuals, organizationally, and collectively, towards more ready collaboration and cooperation in the struggle for Black liberation.

A Gurmat (ਗੁਰਮਤ)-based Intervention for Social Change

While not all Sikhs or Punjabis take on the overtly normalized and romanticized rhetoric that Haley and Jindal do, the community has largely become “implicated subjects”, or as Hannah Arendt argues, unwilling to take on the “vicarious responsibility for things we have not done...the consequences for things we are entirely innocent of”, not recognizing these consequences as “the price we pay for the fact that we live our lives not by ourselves but among our fellowmen” (Rothberg 2019:1). For Sikhs in the U.S. across racialized backgrounds who do not currently feel entangled in the operations of U.S. white supremacy – *not* simply as victims, but also as perpetrators – the model of the implicated subject may be illustrative. In recognizing how the work of Black and Indigenous liberation activists prior to our diaspora's migration to the U.S., not only from the Civil Rights Movement, have enabled our communities' successes, we can more seriously engage with the ways we have continued to make their struggles for liberation necessary today. For Sikhs, if engaging with the Movement for Black Lives is not one of personal moral compass and acting on the principles of Gurmat and an embodiment of **ੴ**, it must be one of personal and collective reparations for being passive bystanders and implicated subjects to Black collective death.

from Sukhmani Sahib (ਸੁਖਮਨੀ ਸਾਹਿਬ) that often precedes ardaas (ਅਰਦਾਸ). Meanwhile, her English explanation was divorced from Guru Arjan Dev Ji exalting Vaaheguru's limitless qualities. Instead, she prayed for a political rhetoric that erases the core nationalist and racialized ideology that was used to found and maintain this nation for the “greater good of our nation”.

A key aspect of our intervention is to reorient existing frameworks of organizing within Sikh communities by providing an explicit Gurmat-centered justice framework for Sikhs to interpret and act on the M4BL's demands. Though we do not chart a comprehensive framework here, we outline one by beginning from where any such frameworks would necessarily start: asking what we are already invested in and what we could be invested in instead. Though typically applied in the contexts of ideological, spiritual, or theoretical debates, this question has obvious material implications. A Gurmat-centered framework focuses attention on power hierarchies in society and on the distribution of power within our communities. For instance, Sikhs in the U.S. have created an investment in being "Sikh-American" through various national awareness campaigns and electorally-focused efforts to stitch the Sikh community to the nation's ethos. In this model, not only does the migrant-turned-citizen fulfill their civic duty, but they fulfill the "American Dream" narrative of meritocracy, serving both an imperial and colonial benefit to the U.S. by globally and domestically perpetuating the myth that social and economic mobility are the U.S. norm (Chetty et al. 2017).

Though similar to critiques of the model minority paradigm, under our suggested framework, the model of "Sikh-American" indicates an explicitly nationalist investment as implicated subjects (Kaur 2020). We draw attention to this not to criticize ongoing efforts, but because social movements necessarily challenge one's perception of belonging in a nation, especially those rooted in obtaining centuries-denied justice. Social movements make plain that the existing social order is one of injustice; if you have not felt the injustices thus far, then such a challenge to the social order that benefits you forces a reckoning of what you are invested in and how you are implicated in state exploitation. This is what Guru Nanak Dev Ji (ਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਕ ਦੇਵ ਜੀ) did Themselves in the 1400s upon inquiring, naming, and then rejecting Their family's and society's investment in caste and class as systems for attaining liberation. They put this belief into practice by starting a revolution.

In the case of the Movement for Black Lives, activists emphasize the urgency of the demands for justice because the demands are based on centuries of oppression; the Movement has made evident the nation's racialized contract (Mills 1997). This can feel confusing for many Sikh immigrants and their descendants who remain unaware of the history of state violence against Black, Indigenous, and working-

class communities. As contemporary activist Kimberly Jones explained after the immediate uprising in Minneapolis against the state-sanctioned murder of George Floyd:

“You broke the contract when you killed us in the streets and didn’t give a f***. You broke the contract when for 400 years, we played your game and built your wealth. You broke the contract when we built our wealth again on our own by our bootstraps in Tulsa and you dropped bombs on us, when we built it in Rosewood and you came in and you slaughtered us. You broke the contract. So f*** your Target. F*** your Hall of Fame. Far as I’m concerned, they could burn this b***** to the ground, and it still wouldn’t be enough. And they are lucky that what black people are looking for is equality and not revenge.” (David Jones Media 2020)

Jones demands attention to the question of investment, a question fundamental to our Gurmat-centered intervention. Jones identifies how those who expend energy to defend *property* or *businesses* from social unrest also defend the underlying structure of state exploitation because they benefit from it. Furthermore, Jones names the social contract as broken and, in doing so, makes plain that the uprisings are a *response* to ongoing injustices. Similarly, Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. argued the same in 1967 when condemning riots,

“But at the same time, it is as necessary for me to be as vigorous in condemning the conditions which cause persons to feel that they must engage in riotous activities as it is for me to condemn riots. I think America must see that riots do not develop out of thin air. Certain conditions continue to exist in our society which must be condemned as vigorously as we condemn riots. But in the final analysis, a riot is the language of the unheard. And what is it that America has failed to hear? It has failed to hear that the plight of the Negro poor has worsened over the last few years. It has failed to hear that the promises of freedom and justice have not been met. And it has failed to hear that large segments of white society are more concerned about tranquility and the status quo than about justice, equality, and humanity (King, Jr. 1967).

For Sikhs to understand how our investments in this nation as Sikhs must change to honor the centuries-long battle for justice, a Gurmat-centered framework must take seriously how we as Sikhs, or as Sikh-Americans, have implicated ourselves

to this precise state-sponsored contract and system of exploitation, which both Jones and King name as wretched 53-years apart.

From Framing to Action

To help Sikhs develop their Gurmat-centered framework, beyond asking what we are already invested in and what we could be invested in instead, we have applied the simple framing of “investment” to one dimension of M4BL’s 2020 *Vision for Black Lives: We Demand an End to the War Against Black People*. Specifically, the platform demands “an end to the criminalization, incarceration, and killing of our people. We call for not just individual accountability of officers after a murder, but entire police departments” (Movement for Black Lives 2020). We focus on and summarize five of the platform’s thirteen demands in Table 1. For each of these five demands, we outline how the M4BL’s policy platform could be interpreted within the suggested Gurmat-centered framework and include an abridged list of how the M4BL has translated their demands into policy demands. While there are eight additional demands, we highlight these five given their likely intersections with ongoing topics and debates in U.S. Sikh communities.

Table 1

Demand	What We Are Invested In	What We Could Be Invested In	Abridged Policy Demands
End the War on Black Communities	Surveillance, policing, mass criminalization, incarceration, and deportation have become default responses to social issues over the past four decades at all levels of government, accompanied by massive disinvestment from meeting community needs.	Invest in making communities stronger and safer through quality, affordable housing, living wage employment, public transportation, education, and health care.	Invest in community-based transformative violence prevention, intervention, and support strategies. Provide reparations to survivors of police violence and their families, and to survivors of prison, detention and deportation violence, and their families.

<p>End the War on Drugs</p>	<p>The “War on Drugs” has been a primary driver of mass criminalization, incarceration, and law enforcement violence targeting Black people over the past five decades, particularly for Black women, trans, and gender nonconforming people through the regulation of sexual and reproductive autonomy.</p>	<p>Identifying the needs of people with substance dependence and people in the drug and sex trades, including non-coercive, accessible, and evidence-based treatment, housing, health care, education, and living wage employment.</p>	<p>Immediately and retroactively decriminalize drug and prostitution-related offenses and invest savings into programs and services identified by people in the drug and sex trades. Implement a full and comprehensive reparations package for all harmed by the drug war and criminalization of prostitution.</p>
<p>End the Use of Past Criminal History</p>	<p>The federal government tracks over 73 million people—or 33% of people in the U.S.—who currently have a record of past criminal history, thus disqualifying them from publicly-funded social programs.</p>	<p>Uncoupled access of services, care, and support from the criminal punishment system.</p>	<p>Eliminate restrictions and exclusions on access to housing, education, employment, social programs and benefits, voting rights, parental rights, and other civil rights based on prior criminal convictions.</p>
<p>End to All Jails, Prisons, And Immigration Detention</p>	<p>The United States imprisons more human beings than any other country in the world. Incarcerated people are subjected to endemic physical, sexual, emotional, and spiritual violence, deprivation, degradation, violation, isolation, medical abuse and neglect, and forced labor, in gross violation of their civil and human rights. Mass criminalization and incarceration have exacerbated the War on Drugs.</p>	<p>An end to all jails, prisons, immigration and youth detention, and civil commitment facilities, or retroactive elimination of sentences of life without parole (LWOP) and sentences that will result in death by incarceration. While incarcerated, imprisoned people also need support to maintain their health and wellbeing.</p>	<p>A moratorium on all prison, jail, immigrant and youth detention construction, without an accompanying expansion of home arrest or GPS monitoring or other forms of e-carceration.</p> <p>Immediate release of all elders and political prisoners; people in comas, on life support, or in end of life care; and an end to the use of incarceration and solitary confinement.</p>

<p>The Demilitarization of Law Enforcement</p>	<p>Since 1990, the U.S. Department of Defense has transferred over \$6 billion in military equipment to local law enforcement agencies, including school and campus police. Military travel and combat weapons have disproportionately been deployed against Black communities. Customs and Border Patrol has also received at least \$39 million in military equipment, using similar tactics against migrants.</p>	<p>An immediate end to the transfer of military equipment to federal, state, and local police, and campus law enforcement agencies, and an immediate end to the use of military equipment by any law enforcement agency, including Customs and Border Patrol.</p>	<p>We demand an immediate ban on the use of military equipment by law enforcement and Border Patrol, and the immediate disclosure of all military equipment transferred and acquired and its intended use by federal, state, and local governments.</p>
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At the national level, we consider Sikh organizations’ ongoing national campaigns for inclusion. For example, through the framework, initiatives for religious accommodations into the military and law enforcement agencies would contradict the demand to end the war on Black communities and the reliance on jails, prisons, and immigration detention. Fighting for inclusion into the precise systems that are the direct target of the justice movement would indicate Sikhs’ investment *in* the existing social order, which both Jones and King critique. Sikh organizations implicate Sikh communities further when they expend resources towards efforts like naming a post office after a police officer who died while patrolling because the officer was Sikh (The Sikh Coalition 2020). The system the M4BL critiques also extends to immigration detention, or U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), where Sikhs are also implicated. One of largest U.S.-owned security service providers to the U.S. government, for example, is an organization called Akal Security, run by Sikhs and branded under a Sikhi-based concept (Tanzer 2019). The urgency of understanding the links between law enforcement and immigration detention is particularly important as Sikh organizations continue their collaborations with these state systems of exploitation under Sikh banners. Sikhs must consider these implications given the September 2020 reports from whistleblower and nurse Dawn Wooten that mass hysterectomies have been occurring at ICE’s concentration camps. If such reports are verified, then the United States is committing genocide and all U.S.-invested communities are implicated (Lambe 2020).

For Sikh-owned businesses, the demands also call attention to how their businesses are caught in the crosshairs of the state and its reliance on policing. Recognizing that George Floyd's murder in Minneapolis resulted from a convenience store employee's call to the police for a counterfeit bill being used – standard practice under state policy – Sikh artists spoke directly to Sikh business owners and employees (Bayoumi 2020). In a short clip directed by Manmeet Singh entitled "The Price of Keeping Our Heads Down," artist Hoodini reminds Sikh communities that "[we] have succeeded as entrepreneurs but have failed to understand the cost of that success, both for ourselves and more significantly to our fellow Black Americans" (Singh 2020). One option is to begin divestment from policing and recognize the greater system of exploitation, such as the Minneapolis store owner's vow to never follow the policy "until the police stop killing innocent people" (Bayoumi 2020). Other approaches may attempt to make this a business-wide agreement for all stores within a particular block or community in an effort to reduce the reliance on police and the state's increasing militarization. Thus far, investments in policing may give owners a sense of security, but it is only with investments in relationships within the local community that owners could gain a sense of safety.

For Sikhs who work within organizations as employees or are searching for ways to engage in their private capacity, there is power within any role you take as a worker, as you can lead efforts to end the use of past criminal history in your workplace, find ways to engage your workplace in shifting their culture of policing, or address inequalities geographically near you. For instance, poet Damneet Kaur and photographer and social worker Lara Kaur used their social media platforms to fundraise for specific causes from their followers; these individual donations were then matched by wealthier, non-carceral organizations, tripling the donation to \$34,215.⁷ Damneet Kaur and Lara Kaur directed these efforts to benefit those who are structurally most vulnerable at the intersections of gendered, racialized, and sexualized backgrounds. They also channeled these efforts through specific local organizations, such as The Okra Project and The Transgender District, which provide meals, mental health services, and additional livelihood support for Black transgender and queer individuals experiencing poverty and hardships. As Table 1 notes, the war on drugs was particularly harmful for Black women, transgender, and gender nonconforming people because of how it regulated sexual and reproductive autonomy through law. Kaur's fundraising efforts, though not directly

⁷ These numbers were obtained through personal correspondence.

tied to the war on drugs, reveal how Sikhs can still mobilize in creative ways to address the demands by choosing what to divest from and what to invest in, and challenging how they are implicated within systems of exploitation.

ਜਾਗਰਿਤੀ: The Awakening

Anti-Sikh violence in Punjab, and India at large, has served as a large push factor for Sikh and Punjabi emigrants to the United States and other diasporic homelands.⁸ And yet, settling on new lands with fears of recurring violence in the United States, Sikhs and their diasporic institutions have offered neither the historic liberation nor freedom that Sikhs sought; rather, Sikhs have turned towards tools of multiculturalism, diversity, and inclusion to make limited entry in the mainstream society (Kaur 2020). As a result, Sikhs have structurally and actively prevented the investments needed to continue Sikhi's legacies of consciousness, resistance, and struggle against an oppressive state. In order to *reground* Sikhs in the U.S. in a framework of Gurmat-centered justice, we analyzed the Movement for Black Lives's platforms by challenging the anti-Black colonial ideology that permeates U.S. political history and is core to the nation-state's functioning. For Sikhs, understanding racialized incorporation in the context of historic white supremacy enables us to understand the particular relationship we have with *this* state – particularly for those of us who are non-Black migrants, asylees, and descendants –, while also helping us acknowledge the sovereignty we lose by refusing to challenge state-sanctioned and -sponsored violence.

Vijay Prasad's call to all who are perceived as South Asian reminds us that we are not victims in this racialized and nationalist ideology, but implicated subjects who have the autonomy to place our investments in Black life over Black death. The choices we make, or the choices made in our name, continue to make us beneficiaries of white supremacy given the incomplete fight for racial justice. Choosing to invest in safety over security will allow Sikhs to build a community

⁸ Although this is the dominant discourse, we recognize that anti-Sikh violence (of the 1980s, prior, or after) is not the sole impetus for Sikh emigration. We also do not aim to establish a moral hierarchy of motivations among emigrants. For scholarship examining some aspects of the nuanced and complicated narratives of Sikhs' migration, we recommend Kanwal Mand's article "Marriage and Migration through the Life Course: Experiences of Widowhood, Separation and Divorce amongst Transnational Sikh Women" and Radhika Chopra's article "Maps of Experience: Narratives of Migration in an Indian Village".

that is invested in the liberation from our attachments to power and privilege and reinvest in the recognition of all of Vaaheguru's (ਵਾਹਿਗੁਰੂ) creation as valuable and true. This is the ardaas (ਅਰਦਾਸ) we offer instead – may our intentions be rooted in achieving existential love (ਅਨੰਦ), Naam (ਨਾਮ), and ੴ; may our actions be driven by consciousness, humility, and fearlessness; and may our dreams be filled with the “vicarious responsibility for things we have not done”, the sovereignty we have been given by Akaal Purakh (ਅਕਾਲ ਪੁਰਖ) to rectify the past and present, and an overflowing acceptance of Guru Sahib's hukam (ਹੁਕਮ).

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Book Colloquium

Faith, Gender, and Activism in the Punjab Conflict: The Wheat Fields Still Whisper

Mallika Kaur

Palgrave Macmillan, 2019

Xxi+304, \$34.99 (pb), ISBN 978-3-030-24673-0

Intersection of Faith, Gender, and Activism: Challenging Hegemony by Giving “Voice” to the Victims of State Violence in Punjab

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Mallika Kaur’s *Faith, Gender, and Activism in the Punjab Conflict: The Wheat Fields Still Whisper* is a strikingly intense book that engages beyond the customary telling of Sikh history and the political turbulence of the 1980s. Instead, it delivers a creative and raw telling of “history” through both traditional historiography and, more importantly, ethnography of the comparatively “voiceless” and marginalized—in this case, the Sikhs of Punjab, Sikh women, and those activists confronting the might of the Indian state. Faith, gender, and activism serve as three common themes which are interwoven through this work, and have relevance to other cases of marginalization and human rights violations throughout the globe as well. Through these themes, the previously “voiceless” are given an opportunity to be seen, speak up, and demand justice.

Mallika Kaur recounts the history of Sikhs in a unique manner using concurrent timelines flowing, on one hand, chronologically from Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s early 19th-century empire toward the present and, on the other hand, from the present into the past. These timelines collide in the momentous year of 1984, which is utilized to encapsulate the nature of faith and activism in confronting the excesses of power and demanding a more just social and political order. The specific events covered in her book are often not relatively well-known, but this adds to the contribution of her research—that is, why read about what is known whereas excavating the “voices” of the marginalized from obscurity is an important contribution of both historiography and ethnography. The book itself focuses on three activists—Baljit Kaur, Inderjit Singh Jaijee, and Justice Ajit Singh Bains—whose lives and human rights research and advocacy act as portals into the violent world of insurgency, counterinsurgency, and human rights abuses of 1980s Punjab.

Through their experiences are revealed the stories and experiences of other previously “voiceless” victims of state oppression, including women and children.

As a young Sikh-American woman, Mallika Kaur’s book provided me an opportunity to “experience” the violent conflict and human rights tragedy of Punjab during the 1980s/1990s. In particular, narratives of the victims of state oppression, who never lost their sense of agency in even the most harrowing of circumstances, provided a human element to the usual event-based telling of history. These narratives, dynamics of oppression and cruelty, and heroic attempts of the protagonists of the book to not allow these events, experiences, and history to be lost to an otherwise hegemonic official narrative of the Indian state allowed me to connect the abstract concepts of “marginalization,” “agency,” and “social justice” to tangible experiences and feeling in my own felt “history” as a Sikh woman. In this respect, while reading Mallika Kaur’s book, I became a part of the historical and human narrative by linking my faith and Sikhi, my gender and experience as a woman, and activism and commitment to social and political justice.

Of particular importance is the trite but important notion that history has always been written by the “victors” as a means to institutionalize a sense of power and control over the voice and memory of marginalized groups and individuals—in other words, becoming hegemonic. Hegemonic powers—in this case, the majoritarian Indian state—attempt to warp history to write themselves into the “story” as the protagonist while demonizing the targeted “other” to justify cruelty and violence. The state-sponsored educational system and official histories are a part of this hegemonic project. Mallika Kaur is able to challenge this official narrative and, in fact, break open the layers of dominance and interpretation by recording the bravery and courageous actions of numerous common people of Punjab, including women. While reading this book, I was often overcome with emotion, as I “lived” the experiences told by the three individuals. Of equal importance was Mallika Kaur’s own innocent childhood memories in Punjab, which helped juxtapose the banality and beauty of everyday life in Punjab with the untold human cruelty that was happening at the time in the police stations, interrogation (read: torture) centers, and wheat fields of Punjab.

In particular, Baljit Kaur’s accounts in the book were especially moving and relevant for me. The role of women in Sikh history, including during the 1980s/1990s, is often lost in narratives and accounts traditionally told by men in books, films, media, and social settings. In this respect, Mallika Kaur’s book helps to erode the traditional “masculinized” versions of Sikh history. For example, Baljit Kaur proves that a gender-based hegemonic narrative is incomplete when she

displays love for faith, family, and community through her actions. As narrated in one section of the book, “When asked if there were any other women protesting, she gently shrugs. ‘I think...no!’... ‘And I told the men, Justice Bains and my brother, Please stay behind, they won’t shoot a lady.’...’Well, at least it was less likely for them to shoot me.” (p. 182). This account of Baljit Kaur’s courage to walk in first and be one of the only few women protesting reflects faith in herself and Sikhi. It also acknowledges the cultural gender norms and stereotypes which, while certainly existing, were often challenged and discarded by Sikh women activists of the time for the higher calling of social justice and human rights. Thus, Baljit Kaur demonstrates the intersection of the three aforementioned themes of faith, gender and activism. Her identity and sense of “self” as a Sikh, woman, and activist becomes interfused in such a meaningful fashion. Sikhi promotes the ideal that women are equal to men, and that all Sikhs should uphold justice and human rights. Yet, Mallika Kaur is careful to give “voice” to the unique gendered experiences of women in the Sikh resistance movement including the challenges of managing their menstrual cycles with dignity, caring for their ailing infant children, and avoiding the possibility of rape while in custody in police stations and interrogation centers. The sisterhood of these incarcerated and often-abused Sikh women is explored in Mallika’s ethnographic accounts, which provide a necessary corrective to the usual narratives of the Khalsa brotherhood of male Sikh militant fighters. The nuanced role of gender is even seen in sections of the book in which female police torturers (who are also often Sikh) privately express anguish at the treatment they are forced to inflict on incarcerated women in the name of fighting “terrorism” on behalf of the Indian state.

Another account that reflects this intersection of the three main themes of the book surrounding social justice and giving “voice” to the voiceless is also seen in Baljit Kaur. As told by Justice Ajit Singh Bains: “In 1989 when, along with Baljit Kaur and local activists, he was detained at a police station in Dehlon for a whole day. Young men were beaten in front of them, as intimidation. The Justice then smiles as he remembers how Baljit Kaur raged against the police officers, despite dark warnings...‘This just had to be done.’” (p. 188). Once again, the commitment to activism is apparent; faith can be seen through teachings of Sikhi and Baljit Kaur’s courage to be vocal at great risk to herself; and to experience this story through the lens of a woman is something rare and new in explaining the Sikh experience during the 1980s/1990s.

In “Chapter 6: Holy of the Holy,” multiple accounts of abuse, torture, and trauma are given by Mallika Kaur (or actually Baljit Kaur): “‘I brought the camera...hoping

to capture the victims' voices directly" (p. 168). The details of these stories are riveting, emotionally charged, and saddening. The numerous accounts of horrific abuse given by those in power and endured by those seemingly "voiceless" show the intersection of the three main themes of the book. Throughout the book, Mallika Kaur is able to tie every account and story together in a meaningful and rich fashion, and unleash this powerfully-distinct telling of Sikh history during this period through previously "lost stories," including of Sikh political activists and human rights workers. Baljit and Mallika Kaur's bravery in capturing these previously untold stories disallows for ignorance to be a legitimate defense mechanism for inaction (or, at minimum, acknowledgement), and disproves the widespread hegemonic narrative so carefully promoted by the hegemonic Indian state.

Mallika Kaur's work is an important step in uncovering the hidden truth and purposely perpetuated misinformation surrounding the Punjab conflict, particularly the events leading up to and after 1984. Her work becomes an important contribution in ensuring and working towards a more socially just world by giving those who were traditionally marginalized, forgotten, and forced down a "voice." These activists always had agency but, without this work, their experiences and contributions may have been lost behind the concrete walls of police stations, the killing fields of obscure Punjabi villages, and an official state-sponsored historical narrative. By providing "voice" to the previously voiceless, especially in dealing with state-sanctioned power and privilege over marginalized communities, this book is essential to uncovering ethical responsibility for the harm caused to the Sikh community, including Sikh women, in the name of national security. "Ignorance" is often a defense mechanism for the inability (or actually unwillingness) to uphold human rights, prevent identity-based stigmatization, and engage in cruelty towards others. By writing this historically-based ethnography (and filling it with heartfelt, raw and passionate testimonials), Mallika Kaur bridges the gap between collective ignorance, commonly known as "systemic" and "conscious ignorance," and truly not knowing about a specific community perspective or historical event. This bridge is necessary to limit the excuse for ignorance and hold all parties accountable for their inhumane actions—both separatist militants and state-sponsored terrorists alike. This book is reflective of social justice and human rights, while providing an account of history that challenges the distorted narrative of the state hegemon—or, in the words of deceased human right activist Jaswant Singh Khalra, "shines a ray of light in the vast darkness of oppression."

Reading this book has opened my eyes to the courage and faith of many ordinary Sikhs (including marginalized Sikh women), and made me question my knowledge of not only the history and themes of the Punjab conflict, but world events as told through official state-constructed paradigms and histories. Yet, the book's lessons apply not only to the case of Sikhs in India, but also other cases of marginalized communities in the world including in so-called "advanced democracies" such as the historical status of Blacks in the United States as highlighted by the current Black Lives Matter movement or the indigenous peoples of Australia and Canada. Mallika Kaur gives power to marginalized and a "voice" to the previously quieted through an examination of three interrelated themes of faith, gender, and activism. This book breaks open the well-known and enforced hegemonic narrative, and proves that it is only the beginning to uncovering other hidden truths and ensuring a more socially just and human rights-based society. This endeavor has no territorial or geographical boundaries—to paraphrase Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.: "A threat to justice anywhere, is a threat to justice everywhere." This is also the message offered by the founder of Sikhi, Guru Nanak Dev Ji, and one which can only be brought closer to fruition through "voice" and agency—two concepts so eloquently explored in this well-researched and beautifully-written book by Mallika Kaur. This book opens up new avenues for comparative academic research of other case studies of faith, gender and activism globally, and the human consequences of unjust and enforced patterns of hierarchy. Whether this opportunity and, in fact, responsibility is taken up is dependent on the emerging generation of young scholars and activists (both Sikh and non-Sikh alike) committed to the ideals of social/political justice and dignity of all human beings.

The Punjab Conflict Retold: Extraordinary Suffering and Everyday Resistance

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Mallika Kaur's poignant and skillfully crafted book, *Faith, Gender and Activism in the Punjab Conflict* tells the story of the deadliest decade of the Punjab conflict—1984-1995—refracted through the lens of the human rights movement that emerged at the time. The book weaves together the experiences of its protagonists, three tenacious human rights defenders—Ajit Singh Bains, Baljit Kaur and Inderjit Singh Jaijee—while also pulling out other stories of everyday resistance from under a thick blanket of obscurity and oblivion. The book defies the narrow confines of any

one genre, as Kaur makes the conscious decision to write more than an “ordinary biography” (xi). Kaur borrows from and contributes to feminist methodology in combining history, memory and archival research, and her own personal and political story, but through an atypical arrangement of chronologies. One timeline descends from 1995 (the year supposedly marking the end of the Punjab conflict) while another one moves forward from 1839 (the year of Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s death, setting the stage for the eventual annexation by British colonizers in 1849), both culminating in the landmark, life-changing events of 1984, the year that marked “an end and a beginning” (p. 286). In a writing style, at once engaging, evocative and convivial, Kaur describes this convergence of backward-looking and forward-moving time as “a loving relative, [whose] embrace [of the reader] is pesky and inconvenient at times, but unavoidable” (p. 11). Kaur embeds the stories of her protagonists in these “undulating [temporal] layers” (ibid). This unconventional, complex and messy, sometimes even chaotic chronology stands out to me not only for its newness and creativity, but also because it gets to the heart of the Sikh experience and the heart of the book—the non-linearity and repetition of trauma, its “belatedness...its insistent appearance outside the boundaries of any single place or time” (Caruth 1995, p. 9).

Individuals and groups do not fully experience traumatic events. Instead they can only be experienced *after* the event, and even then, remain elusive, evading “coherence, structure, meaning, comprehensibility” (Andrews 2010, p. 155), and shaping the durability, repetition and spillover of trauma (Caruth 1996). “The very act of rendering [traumatic experiences] into narrative form lends them a coherence which they do not have” (Andrews 2010, p. 148). And yet, “even if language is insufficient for the task, it is, if not all we have, then at least one of the most effective tools we have for communicating that which must not be forgotten” (ibid, p. 158). Through the various human rights initiatives that her protagonists were engaged in, Kaur pieces together stories of the disappeared, abducted, tortured, the hastily cremated, the dead, and the survivors. In doing so, she joins her protagonists in the social struggle and “trauma process” (Alexander, 2004) to recognize and remember trauma and give it a cultural face, and to formulate a language for extreme suffering, no matter how fragmented and inadequate.

An important motivation guiding Kaur to write the book is to wrest the story of the Punjab conflict from the clutches of the dichotomous politicized narratives and focus on noncombatants. The first narrative comes from the Indian state that deliberately constructs the Punjab conflict as a product of “religious extremism,” engendering fear of all Sikhs as “terrorists,” justifying and valorizing its own role

in disciplining and controlling not simply Sikh militants but curbing a “disruptive community,” and portraying their counterinsurgency operations as putting an end to the “Punjab problem.” The second narrative emanates from within the community to account for the rise of a resistance movement in the face of loss of Sikh power and pride, starting off as peaceful and necessitating a violent, militant turn after the Indian state’s attack on the Darbar Sahib and other gurdwaras and the indiscriminate targeting of all Sikhs. Her book is an intervention to complicate these simplistic binaries that drown the feelings of loss and suffering felt by community members-at-large and neglect the quiet but resolute, everyday citizen-activism accompanying the violence. Kaur pays attention to the little details; she writes of ordinary people caught up in extraordinary circumstances and how they manage difficult life situations but also do the work of resistance.

Kaur foregrounds the stories of Bains, Jaijee and Baljit Kaur, who used their own relative privilege and safety in serving the community and doing laborious grassroots work. The story of Kaur’s protagonists is immersed in the story of the community, but the story of the community is also being shaped by the protagonists. Jaijee’s father for instance was an Akali, the political arm of the Sikh reform movement, the Singh Sabha, that among other things advocated the abolition of the caste system. When Jaijee’s father insisted on caste mixing in their home kitchen, his actions were met with criticism. Such details help understand the evolution of her protagonists. This was the milieu in which Jaijee grew up, internalizing these convictions and beliefs, reflected perhaps most starkly in his decision to move towards rather than away from trouble at home (much like Kaur’s own parents). He left a lucrative career in a multinational corporation and moved back to Punjab two months before the Army attack in June 1984, just as the situation in Punjab was getting more turbulent and tense. Justice Bains’ uncle, Harjap Singh, was one of the founding members of the Ghadar Party in the US and Bains’ himself came to be known as the “People’s Judge,” after he chaired the Bains Committee in 1985 to “review the cases of convicts, persons facing trial and all persons under investigation in connection with the political agitation from 1981 to September 1985” (p. 248). Kaur brings attention to the persistence of her protagonists against all odds, including Bains’ own abduction (chapter 5). Baljit Kaur, who had been working as a part-time Air France employee and full-time homemaker, became invested in human rights work with time and started using her family camcorder to document people’s stories, going to “condemned villages and homes during the curfewed years” (p. 9). Baljit Kaur’s story helps Kaur contest the narrative of women as “vulnerable and victimized” and instead portray them active participants during the years of the conflict as “organizers, protestors, videographers,

champions of rights” (p. 14). Though her protagonists’ story unfolds and is present in all chapters of the book, Kaur also devotes space to other citizen activists who were often beleaguered parents of the unlawfully killed and callously disposed—people like Chaman Lal (a Punjabi Hindu) who kept fighting until his last breath to contest the narrative of his son’s apparent “encounter,” and record his son’s murder as a civilian killing (chapter 4); Principal Tarlochan Singh Sandhu whose son Kulwinder Singh, “Kid,” was killed in a staged encounter and who tried his best to prevent a secret cremation, and having failed to do so, was left to play an inhumane and grotesque guessing game of picking one of two urns containing his son’s ashes (chapter 7); and Kuldip Kaur who had send her son from Delhi to a school in Karnataka to save him from the persecution all turbaned Sikh men were facing in 1984, only to die a gruesome death in 1988 in what was supposed to be a place of refuge, and who was denied even semantic justice in remembering her son as “shaheed” or martyr (chapter 8).

Kaur’s commitment to unearthing women’s narratives comes through most explicitly through Baljit Kaur’s life and work, but also extends beyond her story. As Kaur observes, female Sikh identity has been rendered subordinate to male identity, and women’s voices are often missing or go unheard (p. 104). The omissions and elisions that Kaur is identifying then are not just those imposed from *without*, but also the ones that exist *within* the community. In chapter two, Kaur traces the story of human rights defender, Jaswant Singh Khalra and his wife Paramjit Kaur Khalra. When Jaswant publicized his discovery of an estimated 25,000 “unidentified” mass cremations, indicating that the dead had been abducted and killed, he came under scrutiny along with his family. This case of secret cremations along with other cases for justice he was pursuing made him a target for state backlash and eventually he was himself “disappeared.” Kaur writes of Paramjit’s dogged pursuit for justice. Even though not everyone accused in the Khalra case was convicted (most notably K.P.S. Gill), Paramjit’s relentless fight brought attention to the incomplete work of Jaswant and partial justice in his own disappearance case. Most of all, Paramjit’s story is a testament to Kaur’s objective of highlighting the role of quiet female crusaders who keep challenging the culture of impunity. In chapter three, Kaur tells the story of Mrs. Kulbir Kaur Dhami, her involvement in the militant movement and the torture she experienced and witnessed in the 11-month long secret custody, along with her husband and their five-year old son. Kaur even manages to bring up the taboo topic of menstruation, a detail left out of accounts of most conflicts. By telling Kulbir’s story, Kaur brings attention to the agentic role that women played during the conflict. For instance, instead of being a mute victim of the violence, Kulbir reached out to the Akal Takht

and the National Human Rights Commission. This is not to say that silence is tantamount to passivity and repression, as Kaur rightly points out that silence can also be a form of resistance (p. 67). Kulbir's case also highlights the solidarity that women forged during the years of torture and imprisonment. Kaur entitles chapter three, "Monu's Mummy," an acknowledgment and recognition of this sisterhood. Kulbir and "Monu's Mummy," a fellow female jail inmate, had made a pact that if one of them survived jail, the other would take care of the deceased woman's child. When Kulbir was released from jail, she went looking for Monu and upon finding him safe with relatives felt relieved but continued to be haunted by the thought of other children like him left to suffer. This led to her decision to open an orphanage. Even the act of renting a place for an orphanage for marked people like the Dhamis required courage on the part of ordinary Sikhs. Thus, Kaur talks about gendered violence through Kulbir's story, but by also including little details such as the landlord's grit in renting to Kulbir, she shines a light on everyday people who went about doing the work of resistance silently.

Kaur's book is an insightful, meticulously researched and emotional account of the Punjab conflict. The book lacks a theoretical scaffolding, but that was perhaps never Kaur's intention. Instead the book documents the history of the community, events and experiences of the conflict; highlights gendered violence; seeks to find a language to articulate the trauma, pain and suffering of ordinary citizens; and both depicts and does the work of memory, resistance and activism. The book is written for laypeople and scholarly audiences alike, and while it will be of special interest to the Sikh community and South Asian audiences, anyone interested in issues of human rights and everyday resistance, gender, memory and trauma will appreciate the wide-ranging scope and depth of this book.

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The Potency of Sikh Memory: Time Travel and Memory Construction in the Wake of Disappearance

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What words can one string together in an attempt to discuss the most inhumane atrocities that extend beyond several lifetimes? Mallika Kaur has unraveled more than a few and has arranged them seamlessly across nearly 300 pages of text. *Faith, Gender, and Activism in the Punjab Conflict: The Wheat Fields Still Whisper* is a moving work that disrupts norms around temporality, geography, narrative structure, and the archive. The contention surrounding narratives on anti-Sikh violence in Punjab, and India more broadly, has more often focused on which details are included, who is painted as victim versus perpetrator, and who should be seeking justice from whom. Mallika Kaur addresses many of these contentions in her embrace of the "people's narrative," asking "what might shift in our collective understanding and action if we spent nearly as much time fascinated by everyday people" as we are by these contentions and the eroticisms of violence. I will not attempt to lay out the intricacies and details of this narrative here, as Kaur has done so eloquently and painstakingly in her text. Instead, I engage with Kaur's narrative choices and demonstrate that, perhaps more significant than what the story includes in its telling, is how the author chooses to tell it.

Haitian anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot and U.S. historian Hayden White both address the significance of the production of history and narrative discourse in their work (*Silencing the Past* [1995] and *The content of the form* [2009] respectively). While Sikhs are known to repeat the sentiment "history is written by the victors" as representative of how the community's continuous losses have written them out of history, Trouillot's work argues that the silences in history occur at four separate points: "fact creation (the making of sources), fact assembly (the making of archives), fact retrieval (the making of narratives), and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final instance)" (1995, p. 26). This pairs well with White's work on the nuances between historical fact and historical narrative. White argues that, in building a historical narrative, one is writing history from a vantage point of legality, legibility, and consciousness that interprets documented fact with the intention of providing a "coherence, integrity,

fullness, and closure of an image of life that is and can only be imaginary” (2009, p. 24). Understanding these two great risks in writing historical narrative—both the potential of furthering silences through the making of narratives and history and the imposition of fullness and closure onto a history that continues to unfurl into the future—how can one engage with any text on a multi-generation genocide with ease? In Mallika Kaur’s approach, the answer comes through choices in narrative construction—that of the temporal framework.

The book follows several human rights activists who use their relative social and cultural capital within the labyrinth of Indian state politics to wrangle justice for the continued unsettlement and demonization of Sikhs that began from the moment Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s empire lost control over the Punjab region in 1839 and reached a culmination in 1995 with the disappearance of the foremost human rights activist of the 20th century, Jaswant Singh Khalra. Kaur asks the readers to accept the conveyor belt timeline—moving forward and backward in tandem—as the pesky embrace of a

relative, and also names it as a necessary act of solidarity from the reader. The conveyor belt jerks to a halt in the final chapter in 1984, a year that witnessed multiple government-led operations to kill masses of Sikhs, and also the birth of the author herself. This recognition of the author’s arrival into this timeline is far from self-interested; in fact, it is a demonstration of Kaur’s own reckoning and embrace of how Sikhs, and those vested in seeking justice from oppressive states anywhere, can enter into a space of mourning and acknowledging the trauma that has been unfurling long before their presence was dreamed up.

Kaur’s choice in temporal framework is further significant for it does not separate the current oppression of Sikhs by Hindutva India from the ways in which the British Raj took advantage of Sikh identity and sovereignty for their own rule. In

	<i>Contemporary Timeline</i>	<i>Historical Timeline</i>
Chapter 2	1995	1839 - 1917
Chapter 3	1994	1918 - 1935
Chapter 4	1993	1936 - 1947
Chapter 5	1992	1948 - 1959
Chapter 6	1991 - 1990	1960 - 1967
Chapter 7	1989	1968 - 1974
Chapter 8	1988 - 1987	1975 - 1981
Chapter 9	1986 - 1985	1982 - 1983
Chapter 10	1984	



Photo 1.3 The concurrent timelines running through the book’s chapters

fact, these transverse timelines allow us to bear witness to the continued malalignment and misuse of Sikh sovereignty within multiple nation-states who all claimed to be invested in Sikhs' "right to live" until it manifested as fearless resistance. The use of parallel narratives, rather than a normative linear temporality, give much clearer insight into how past traumas do not dissolve with time nor do the structures that caused them. In fact, as Kaur shares with us through community narrative, it was the hypervisibility of Sikhs in British imperial forces that led to the community's general trust of the military which allowed the Indian government to enact martial law in Punjab without a large amount of suspicion; Sikhs saw the military as their own and never would anticipate those same tanks and guns desecrating the Darbar Sahib complex. Kaur's temporal framework reminds us that when injustice's arc has been long-standing, the justice and reparations we seek must stretch at least as far.

Kaur regularly embraces that these narratives of anti-Sikh violence and oppression will be messy, nuanced, and unfinished, but does so through a critical process of stating the power dynamics in narrative and memory making. One of the repeated arcs throughout the book is the criticisms received by the selected protagonists Baljit Kaur, Justice Ajit Singh Bains, and Inderjit Singh Jaijee in their work as the "Movement Against State Repression"—specifically that they were not doing enough to counter the violence being done by Sikh militants and grassroots freedom fighters themselves. The reply never varied: we are fighting state repression; we do not condone any killings, but these are not done by the state. They would further emphasize that, until it was clear Indian courts could deliver true justice, there was no point in attempting to navigate the oppressive system for these murders either. The message is clear; power matters and acknowledging who holds the power is as critical to seeking justice as any other attempts at narrative reconstruction.

At one point Kulbir Kaur, one of Mallika Kaur's interlocutors, voices her own frustration at the oversimplified tellings of contemporary Sikh narrative: "People writing histories today, they make me so mad! They are writing as if there was just one face to the people involved. Or they are writing about things they don't know. And one-sided is not good for the next generation either; people were real, human," says Kulbir, adjusting the hem of her kurta" (p. 74). Mallika Kaur certainly does not tell a one-sided tale, nor does she shy away from the apparent contradictions of communal violence. As indicated by the title of the text, Kaur critically examines when women were present, how, and why; she dives deep into the complexities of self-identified Sikhs being the actors of violence against Sikh victims; she engages with the ways in which Sikh women who were part of the Punjab Police found ways

to resist while bearing witness to atrocities of gender-based violence. Many of these women had received the position after becoming widowed, a generally treasured perk of Indian government positions. But as these policewomen wept to the jailed women about the atrocities they were being forced to witness, one wonders what sanctity could be found for a Sikh even with the relative privilege of a steady paycheck and security of being a police officer. Another tale recounts a Sikh police officer crying after killing a Sikh woman, Surinder Kaur, in custody: “*We told her to do paath, and as she prayed, I shot her*” (p. 87). In weaving together the narratives of unspeakable violence, Mallika Kaur is able to masterfully hold space for individual accountability and the reality that there has not only been one type of victim nor victimization in this struggle. As Kaur demonstrates, to fail to recognize that reality only serves the original divide and conquer strategies laid out by the British Raj and capitalized upon by the post-1947 Indian government.

One of the most potent strategies of Kaur’s historical narrative is the role played by memory. Memory is a key component in developing historical narratives, particularly those marred by extreme violence. Memory studies has blossomed into a multi-disciplinary field after its genesis with scholarship on Holocaust memory and entire methods, like oral history and archival studies, depend on the recounting and documentation of memory. On the other hand, memory is also a contentious data set given its potential for variation and the impact that trauma (lived or intergenerational) can have on memory. This makes the value and space that Kaur gives memory and oral history even more notable; Kaur often opens chapters or sections sharing intimate stories from fireside chats with elders in Chural, a pind that frequents the book’s narrative, or excerpts of conversations she picked up on as a young girl in Chandigarh. Kaur’s unique way of sharing her own memory as she uncovers that of survivors of the anti-Sikh violence is demonstrative that historical narrative is beyond just words or memory—it is a feeling and a spirit that carries forth a people. Kaur reminds us of “the potency of Sikh memory,” with Sardar Udham Singh carrying out justice for the Jallianwala Bagh massacre over 20 years later as he traveled to London and killed the chief executioner O’Dwyer, or the counter-memory efforts carried out by parents whose son was murdered in anti-Sikh violence when the newspaper refused to print the word “shaheed” or “riot.” What is most powerful about how Kaur evokes memory is when she indicates what is no longer remembered. Chapter 7 closes with all three of our protagonists, starting with Baljit Kaur, thinking back on one of many cases of a young Sikh man, barely entered into adulthood, who was disappeared by police:

Asked if Kid was indeed active with a militant outfit...Baljit Kaur pauses thoughtfully and states, “He wasn’t. I don’t think so. His father was politically outspoken and that was all.”

“I am quite sure he was,” remembers Jaijee, when asked the same.

“The point is that the law prohibits eliminating people after kidnapping and hiding and torturing them,” says Justice Bains, who at 93 does not remember the case details as much as surrounding the station with his fearless comrades.

For a community whose collective memory has been erased diligently by its oppressors, from the burning of the Sikh Research Library to the disappearance of entire lineages of Sikh families, this passage is indescribably powerful. Kaur reminds us—readers, community members, history creators, and memory makers—that beyond the legitimacy given to memory or the speed with which legal systems respond is the power of collective action. These are the narratives that will travel across time and memory until they give birth to justice.

Journeying through Mallika Kaur’s Faith, Gender, and Activism in the Punjab Conflict

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Mallika Kaur’s *Faith, Gender, and Activism in the Punjab Conflict: The Wheat Fields Still Whisper* sheds light on the legacies of human rights activism, alongside the everyday lives of those who continue to be haunted by the period of insurgency and counterinsurgency in 1980s and 1990s Punjab and its diaspora. Kaur’s innovative and creative approach pays attention to the voices of those who have been absent from the narrative of the conflict — “the murdered, the tortured, the imprisoned, the dispossessed, the resisting, the expelled, and the returned,” (p. ix)¹ — offering a multifaceted method for understanding how widespread and pervasive the violence seeped into Sikh lives. The book is a journey: one that spans multiple temporal modalities, and offers an array of characters, in particular women and unarmed human rights defenders, who share their experiences and stories in nuanced ways. Kaur’s approach as a researcher is reflexive and instructive, allowing her interlocutors to tell the story in the way that best moves them, rather

¹ Page references are to Kaur’s book, unless otherwise noted.

than imposing her own lens onto their stories. Journeying through *Faith Gender and Activism* requires the reader to push against normative “official” histories or sensational violence of the conflict, and recalibrates a sense of how Sikh women and men lived through, experienced, and resisted violence in their homeland.

The structure of the book works against the grain of linearity and teleology. Rather than moving through a straightforward temporality, Kaur works to disrupt traditional notions of progress, which frame conflict as if it has culminated in success, peace, or justice, and as if the violence has terminated. Working in a back and forth, iterative motion, the book takes us between multiple timelines: a contemporary and a historical. Kaur explains that these timelines will travel forward to embrace the reader. Yet, “[...] like a loving relative, this embrace is pesky and inconvenient at times, but unavoidable” (p. 11). The practice of reading in these multiple modalities of time is challenging and disorienting, as it disrupts conventional practices of knowledge. However, this is precisely the point: conflict is not easily consumed or understood; it is messy, haphazard, and chaotic. The ten chapters oscillate between the following timelines: chapter two focuses on 1995 (the so-called end of the violence) and 1839-1917; chapter three moves across 1994 and 1918-1935; chapter four 1993 and 1936-1947; chapter five, 1992 and 1948-1959; chapter six focuses on 1991-1990 and 1960-1967; chapter seven between 1989 and 1968-1974; chapter eight between 1988-1987 and 1975-1981; chapter nine between 1986-1985 and 1982-1983; and chapter ten focuses on 1984. While most accounts begin with 1984, this book closes with that year, decentering the time and space of the conflict to be more extended and expansive.

As Kaur writes, “The immediate effect on the Sikh psyche was unmistakable: the year 1984 was an end and a beginning” (p. 255). What does it mean to begin where a conflict ends and end where a conflict begins? These timelines help position the reader against a progress-driven narrative of time to instead imagine how the violence lingers into the present. Much like the afterlives of the memories of Kaur’s interlocutors who endured the violence of this period, the reader is asked to think about how the violence is ongoing and lingers into the present. As Inderpal Grewal and I argue in an essay on remembering, forgetting, and refusing the violence of the 1980s, memories of conflict unfold in relation to the slow and structural violence that has manifested through years of living with the after-effects of insurgency and counterinsurgency (Grewal and Sabherwal, 2019, p. 346). Like Kaur, Grewal and I found that many women showed themselves to be historians, witnesses, and active participants in sharing and debating what had happened during the insurgency (Grewal and Sabherwal, 2019, p. 355). The women of our

research, and the women in Kaur's book, show that nearly thirty years later, while Punjab is believed to be at peace and was overcome by the power of the state that put down the insurgency, these narratives of "success," and "peace" do not explain the afterlives of violence, the changes that altered social, political and economic lives, or the complex relations of gender and power that comprise the present as it is informed by the past. Kaur's work reveals that 1984 is not static, or frozen in time, but it is significant in the making of timelines, flashpoints, and memories for Punjabis across generations.

Kaur's work is an important intervention in the fields of Sikh Studies, Women's and Gender Studies, and for scholars and activists who work on religious and ethnic violence. The book is textured and layered, written through an explicitly feminist lens, circling around the lives of three protagonists, who found themselves at the center of the conflict: Justice Ajit Singh Bains, once known as the "communist judge," later affectionately called the "people's judge;" Baljit Kaur, who used a video camera to record significant evidence of the conflict; and Inderjit Singh Jaijee, who returned to Punjab to document abuses even as others were fleeing. Though these three interlocutors narrate, supplement, and provide lawyer-activist lenses to the different stories Kaur highlights, it is the women—Paramjit Kaur Khalra, Kulbir Kaur Dhani, Rachpal Bains, and Kuldip Kaur, among others—who fill in the lacunae of the innerworkings of the conflict. These women work as support systems and care networks for everyone around them. The symphony of women's voices illuminated throughout the book indexes the unwritten stories of those who were often forgotten heroes throughout the conflict. Sharing the stories of women within the context of a conflict that has been told predominantly through the lens of masculinity and men's stories has a profound impact in reshaping the epistemologies of conflict in Punjab.

Undoubtedly, these women's stories are difficult to read. The violence they speak of—police brutality, torture, projects of impunity, physical and sexual violence—are unthinkable acts that have forever left residues for the community. Acts of violence were not met passively, however, and were resisted. Kaur shows how Sikhs lived their lives and defended their families and communities amidst states of emergency and the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA) (p. 86). For instance, Paramjit Kaur Khalra, Jaswant Singh Khalra's wife, worked tirelessly to get justice for her husband who was disappeared and then murdered. As Justice Bains said, "Without her grit, even such an obvious case could not have survived in the courts" (p. 30). It is Paramjit's dedication to fighting for justice that Jaswant's killing has not faded into the background, as just another of the many

cases that were easily dismissed by the Indian government. In one of Kaur's interviews with Paramjit, she powerfully says, "[...] Meanwhile I meet women survivors of violence, like old mothers of boys who were killed, doing menial work to earn daily rotis. But it is in the land of Guru-Shaheeds. A miracle could still happen. Till then, we keep living our lives the best we can" (p. 52). Paramjit's commitment and resilience in the face of violence speaks to the larger argument of the book—how women pushed against logics of the state as fighters of their faith, family, and community. In addition, Kulbir Kaur Dhami, a Sikh woman who was kept in a secret torture camp with her husband and their young son, explains in an interview, "I've seen a lot. My habit is to speak from what I've seen" (p. 63). In describing her life, Kulbir articulates herself as a historian and knowledge-keeper, someone who has lived through, documented, archived, and is now sharing her lived experiences. Her experience of police violence is just one of the many atrocities committed by the police against Sikh families, but as Kulbir tells her own story, it becomes clear that she is not only a victim of this situation, but that she is attempting to bring justice and reconciliation to her family and to others impacted by the violence.

While Kaur's book is a pivotal feminist project, there are a few points that could have been more carefully considered. For instance, while caste is an important part of the project and Kaur discusses the plight of Dalits across Punjab, it is not immediately clear how Kaur is disrupting dominant Jat Sikh history. Though she discusses the ways in which K.P.S. Gill made the conflict out to be one that pitted Jats against non-Jats, there is little additional discussion of how Dalit Sikhs (including Mazhabi Sikhs and Ravidassias) experienced the conflict. Many of Kaur's interlocutors represent a Jat-centered viewpoint. Second, Kaur's discussion of diaspora is significant as she points out the overlapping connections between diasporic Sikhs and those in India (p. 131, 218). However, at times the back and forth between the diaspora and the homeland occurs so seamlessly that it absolves difference between the two communities. Specificities of place could have been teased out more. For instance, the NRI politics of Bhindranwale are very different across different geographies such as the U.K., Canada, and India. More attention to these differences may have produced a sharper sense of how the conflict was being constructed transnationally. Finally, though there is some discussion of Kashmir in the early chapters of the book, there is a way in which claiming Punjab as a laboratory for conflict misses other ongoing conflicts, and further exceptionalizes Punjab. One way to draw out these historical connections could have been to discuss in greater detail K.P.S. Gill and the production of a global security "expertise." Gill used his knowledge from Assam and the Northeast to shape his

work in Punjab. Rather than siloing Punjab's conflict, it would have been helpful to see the continuities in Gill's controversial work as a "supercop."

Though there were points that could have been extended in more detail, *Faith, Gender, and Activism in the Punjab Conflict* cannot be expected to elaborate on every aspect of insurgency and counterinsurgency in the region. Her work remains one of the few to reflect on the conflict both through a gendered lens, and with specific attention to human rights activists in Punjab. The journeys encountered throughout her book—stories about human rights violations, gendered violence, justice, and resiliency—are paramount to understanding the everyday implications of the conflict in India. Her important work paves the way for future research on Punjab, religion, gender, and violence, and urgently adds to scholarly conversations on religion and "communal violence."

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Book Author's Reflective Response to Review Commentaries

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“The very act of rendering [traumatic experiences] into narrative form lends them a coherence which they do not have.”¹

The above excerpted quote and related reflection in Professor Shruti Devgan's book review reminded me of the visceral question I was consumed with while writing this book: how do you provide readers a viable yet honest journey through a tortured history—while also endeavoring to avoid torturing the memory of survivors?

Contesting any monochromatic telling, I wrote this book to provide a radically new approach to telling conflict stories. This approach, and the larger underlying questions it provokes, make the book relatable to anyone interested in civic action, human rights advocacy, citizen movements, peace, and inclusive democracy. It has been heartening to witness an often-eclipsed recent history find such diverse readership.

For their close and careful reading, I would like to sincerely thank reviewers Navkiran Kaur Chima, Shruti Devgan, Harleen Kaur, and Sasha Sabherwal. They critically and enthusiastically engaged with the layers of stories, and shared insightful reflections and suggestions.

The non-linearity of the book, which all four reviewers appreciated as a choice and ethic, asks a little more from the reader than a usual chronological telling. But through the required time-travel, it is my ardent hope all readers, just as these reviewers, are drawn deeper to various historical pockets of recent Sikh history. The book's two braided timelines help the reader traverse a brief telling of Sikh history from 1839 to 1984, in order to better understand the focus of the book, which is the contemporary conflict history from 1984 to 1995. That's a vast time period, but as Harleen Kaur noted in her review: “injustice's arc has been long-standing.”

¹ Andrews, Molly (2010) “Beyond Narrative: The Shape of Traumatic Testimony,” in eds. M. Hyvärinen et. al., *Beyond Narrative Coherence*, Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, pp. 147-166, 148.

While triangulating historical details was important, the book's narration was precisely attempting to evoke the kind of emotions described by Navkiran Kaur Chima: "juxtapose[ing] the banality and beauty of everyday life in Punjab with the untold human cruelty [that] was happening at the time in the police stations, interrogation (read: torture) centers, and wheat fields of Punjab." To be certain, not all Punjabis or even all Sikhs were impacted equally. Yet, even in the most privileged and self-consumed Sikh homes, an undeniable messaging by the State was internalized: Sikhs were considered suspect unless they clearly displayed their fidelity to the status quo; certain political views would cost you your life; resisting such muzzling would be seen as treacherous, dangerous, seditious, regardless of constitutional guarantees under India's own laws. The ways in which Sikhs' minoritization was perfected does indeed have parallels as well as ramifications for other communities, "including in so-called advanced democracies," as Chima noted.

The book contributes to the under-studied question of transitional justice in electoral democracies. In discussing a conflict context that has seen no regime change (unlike say, Argentina or Chile, Punjab was an electoral democracy pre- and post-conflict), the book engages with questions of collective trauma; reparations; and transformative approaches toward a just peace. With the benefit of hindsight; with the State's declared victory against Punjab militancy; with years of aftermath evident, I propose Punjab provides lessons for dialogue on difference, for handling dissent, for building local leadership, for piercing impunity despite staggering odds.

The book's fight against fatalism involves re-focusing us on the possibility of change on the ground, where it matters most to victim-survivors of the conflict. In *The Pinochet Effect*,² Naomi Roht-Arriaza writes about Chilean judges who became "norm entrepreneurs," (p.215) applying international human rights law to their local context. As I note in footnote 82, Chapter 2, Roht-Arriaza measures external pressure and activity by the internal impact it creates: international attention (like the sensational arrest of Chilean dictator Pinochet) and some transnational trials are beneficial precisely when they prompt shifts in attitude in the home countries—such as emboldening judges. I will take this opportunity to remind readers to peruse the footnotes, where I placed several important

² Roht-Arriaza, Naomi (2005) *The Pinochet Effect: Transnational Justice in the Age of Human Rights*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

summaries, anecdotes, foundational underpinnings not for their lesser importance but in order to not interrupt the narrative flow.

The choice for the narrative included employing as vehicles of storytelling the life stories of the three extraordinary people on the cover of the book, people who found themselves at the center of Punjab's hazardous human rights movement: Ajit Singh Bains, Inderjit Singh Jaijee, Baljit Kaur. But this is not a collective biography. Each chapter contains many other stories, most in fact of people and families relatively very disadvantaged when compared to the three protagonists. Most of these stories remain unfinished and illustrate how, despite the State's wishful diktats, as Sasha Sabharwal beautifully notes "narratives of 'success,' and 'peace' do not explain the afterlives of violence." Punjab was declared "post-conflict" without truth, justice, reparation, reconciliation.

Yet, as I say in the Preface "the events in Punjab ha[ve] since been used as a blueprint to respond to dissent and rebellion in other parts of India" (p. vi). To Sabharwal's point regarding exceptionalism, I do not suggest in the book that Punjab is *the* only blueprint used by the Indian state since. Still, I do believe in the importance of studying Punjab independently. Giving it its own attention, is not simply a matter of respect or representation or independent identity, it is also a matter of historical integrity: Punjab's own story is so large, yet so untold, it needs not one new dedicated book, but many more—that I especially hope will emerge on areas that I could not begin to fully explore in my project. This book's undulating layers attempt to highlight just how many diverse stories flowed through Punjab's rivers, first when they flowed in Maharaja Ranjit Singh's empire, outside of British control; later as they were tamed by the British; and then when they were bloodily and artificially separated between two new nation-states. The stories are so numerous, divergent, complex, and as Sabharwal notes, many more need to be told. She is correct that teasing out caste dynamics was not a specific project of this book. As Devgan's review notes, the book early on signals the entrenched caste dynamics in Punjab: "When Jaijee's father insisted on caste mixing in their home kitchen, his actions were met with criticism." And at the subaltern level my understanding is that there were many non-Jatts, including Dalits, among the militants as well accused militant supporters (for example the Dalit Sikh prisoner in Chapter 3 who would bow to the mango tree that witnessed inhumane torture, p. 81). And as I note in Chapter 7, solidarities across castes were extremely threatening to ruling powers, as exemplified by the deadly State resistance to the Minority and Dalit Front organization. Still, the granular stories in the book do not evaluate the differentiated experiences and aftermaths of the conflict by caste, especially for non-dominant

castes. As I note also in Chapter 3, there are several worthwhile and immediately politically relevant investigations pending on the relationships between castes, deras, the conflict, and post-conflict.

Similarly, Sabherwal is correct in noting that this is not a book about the Sikh diaspora. I paused at her observation that “at times the back and forth between the diaspora and the homeland occurs so seamlessly that it absolves difference between the two communities.” I reflected on how the interlocutors—as well as myself—who made those back and forth journeys have come to remember them in an amalgamated manner. The book does not take room to tease out those “specifics of space.” And of course any future project focused on the diaspora should also properly problematize the binary: home and diaspora. There are so many communities within these distant but proximate groups.

Harleen Kaur’s review notes the book’s brief—even if vivid—exploration of a subgroup within the umbrella community of “women” during the conflict. Kaur notes the book “engages with the ways in which Sikh women who were part of the Punjab Police found ways to resist while bearing witness to atrocities of gender-based violence.” The book, focused on human rights defenders and those they were defending, does not for the most part contain stories from the viewpoint of State actors or perpetrators. Yet, I consistently found that my interlocutors had held tightly to stories where agents of the State displayed resistance to top-brass orders and retained their humanity. Perhaps this is why Justice Bains continues to believe that if only the government had allowed a truth and reconciliation process, Punjab’s present would look very different (the State in fact scuttled the one such process, the People’s Commission, led by civil society, as examined in chapter 2).

I must clarify however the point in Harleen Kaur’s review that the protagonists emphasized that “until it was clear Indian courts could deliver true justice, there was no point in attempting to navigate the oppressive system for these murders either.” Legal case details during the conflict years are available to varying extents, which is instructive: till the mid-90s legal remedies were *de facto* suspended in Punjab. Case descriptions in the book thus also draw from non-legal sources. However, as far as possible and as soon as possible, the protagonists pursued legal remedies. They tirelessly believed in engaging systems, no matter how seemingly intractable, towards establishing a rule of law. They never had the luxury to give up on the systems that are meant to protect the people; because that is the only recourse for folks living on-the-ground, despite the deficiencies of those systems. The oldest enforced disappearance case of Kuljit Singh Dhatt, a sarpanch, killed in

police custody in 1989 (as described in Chapter 2), is still in the system: appeals in his case are still ongoing.

Finally, I wish to add that the feminist lens appreciated by each of the four reviewers is not limited to excavating women's stories. Sabherwal notes that the book includes a "symphony of women's voices," a recognition of the diversity within. Further, a feminist lens attempts to bring out a symphony of nuances in all stories. "The Sikhs" or "the militants" in most available accounts are generally presented as abstract, homogeneous groups. Or in more serious works, there is an acknowledgement of the non-homogeneity. But longer and layered stories can show what academic papers tell.

Sikh men's voices, beyond stereotypes, too need increased space in our telling, reading, and understanding of Punjab's recent history. Plenty of Sikh men, even those who were directly persecuted by the State, committed to human rights activism and remained unaffiliated with combatants. To take just one example: the many roles taken by the father who himself was "left to play an inhumane and grotesque guessing game of picking one of two urns containing his son's ashes" as noted by Devgan in her review. For one, this father, Tarlochan Singh ji, later became a fearless conduit for smuggling letters from the woman committed to staying alive in a secret torture center (Ch. 3). His own heartbreak is documented in his will, which bequeathed his small property as well as his murdered son's languishing legal case to a nephew.

Allowing men emotional stories that get to the why of the why is central to a feminist method. Thus, Justice Bains began speaking about his beloved great-grand aunt Mai Jeevi. Asking about his boyhood connections to Mai Jeevi—the foods she cooked, the animals she tended, the advice she gave this rebellious child, the repercussions she faced as a woman who could have no biological children of her own—then shed light on his family's various sung and unsung heroes through the generations, including many single and widowed mothers who exemplified for their children, *chardi kalaa* (the Sikh belief in the ever-ascending ability of the human spirit) in praxis.

A "feminist curiosity" (as coined by the intrepid Dr. Cynthia Enloe) allows for details and granularity. I was so pleased to see Devgan's critical eye catch and comment on some of the details that provided nuance to the stories. Due to space considerations while publishing, many other specifics did not make it to the final form. But collecting those particulars was essential to the feminist process that

involved complicating before simplifying, asking before assuming, listening before leading with more questions.

I welcome the analysis in Devgan's review: "anyone interested in issues of human rights and everyday resistance, gender, memory and trauma will appreciate the wide-ranging scope and depth of this book."

Remembrance for Professor Paul Wallace (1931-2020)

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The field of Sikh and Punjab studies lost a senior member in political scientist Paul Wallace, who passed away peacefully in his sleep on February 22 at his home in Columbia, Missouri. Professor Wallace had a distinguished career spanning over five decades as an internationally-renowned expert on Indian politics, particularly Sikh and Punjab politics, at the University of Missouri starting in 1964 until his formal retirement as professor emeritus in 2005. In the field of Sikh and Punjab studies, he was fondly known as one of the “Missouri twins”---the other being the late historian Professor N. G. “Jerry” Barrier who also taught at Missouri during the same period of time. Professor Wallace’s career included several dozen research/professional trips to India including Punjab, the last one only a few weeks before his passing.

Paul Wallace was born in Los Angeles, California in 1931. He graduated from the University of California—Berkeley in 1953 with an undergraduate degree in political science, and subsequently served in the US Army during the Korean War. He returned to Berkeley to complete a M.A. in 1957, and a Ph.D. in political science in 1966. Paul Wallace’s dissertation was one of the first major academic studies on Punjab politics, particularly focusing on how internal factionalism within the state’s two major political parties (the Akali Dal and Congress) helped integrate a variety of societal interest groups into the emerging democratic political process in India. It emphasized the essential role “factions” play within political parties in aggregating interests and deepening democratic vibrancy in postcolonial settings.

During his long career, Professor Wallace wrote or edited ten books on various aspects of Indian politics and elections including Punjab, and dozens of academic articles and book chapters. Some of his most noted academic works included the edited book *Region and Nation in India*¹ which examined the evolving structures of identity and nation/state-building, and *Political Dynamics and Crisis in Punjab*² which remains one of the most comprehensive and in-depth collections on various aspects of Punjab politics during the years of militancy.

¹ *Region & Nation in India* (New Delhi: Oxford and IBH, 1985).

² *Political Dynamics and Crisis in Punjab* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University Press, 1988).

The political turmoil in Punjab during the 1980s and 1990s turned Professor Wallace's research interests even further toward Sikh politics. As Professor Wallace would often say in personal conversation, "I did not want to study political violence, but the topic came to me whether I wanted it or not." The constructive nature of political factionalism he had studied in the early part of his academic career, quickly turned "destructive" in terms of political instability and the tragic loss of human life with Operation Bluestar, the November 1984 anti-Sikh pogroms, and decade of both anti-state insurgency and state-sanctioned counterinsurgency in Punjab. The result of these emerging political dynamics was a series of academic articles on the topic in various journals and edited volumes including the following: "The Sikhs as a 'Minority' in a Sikh Majority State in India,"³ "Religious and Secular Politics in Punjab: The Sikh Dilemma in Competing Political Systems,"⁴ "Sikh Minority Attitudes in India's Federal System,"⁵ "The Dilemma of Sikh Revivalism: Identity vs. Political Power,"⁶ and "Political Violence and Terrorism in India."⁷ His most important academic contribution during this period was the chapter "Religious and Ethnic Mobilization, and Dominance Patterns in Punjab"⁸ which offered a detailed and comprehensive analysis of patterns of dominance and mobilization in Punjab from the colonial period to the 1980s including on the basis of caste, class, region, and ethnicity/religion. Professor Wallace also wrote a number of election studies on Punjab during this period including on the pivotal 1989 parliamentary elections and the (cancelled) 1991 parliamentary elections in Punjab, which included personal field interviews with activists and leaders of various political parties in the state.

After the end of armed insurgency in Punjab, Professor Wallace's academic interests turned toward national election studies in India. This interest resulted in series of six edited election studies books published by SAGE Publications covering every parliamentary election from 1998 to the present. The most recent titled *India's 2019 Elections: The Hindutva Wave and Indian Nationalism* was

³ *Asian Survey*, vol. XXVII no. 3 (March 1986), pp. 363-377.

⁴ *Political Dynamics and Crisis in Punjab* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University Press, 1988), pp. 1-44.

⁵ Joseph T. O'Connell, Milton Israel, Willard Oxtoby (eds.), *Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1988), pp. 256-273.

⁶ James Bjorkman (ed.) *Fundamentalism, Revivalists, and Violence in South Asia* (New Jersey: Riverdale Press, 1988), pp. 57-75.

⁷ Martha Crenshaw (ed.) *Terrorism in Context* (College Station, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), pp. 352-409.

⁸ Francine Frankel and M.S.A. Rao (eds.), *Dominance and State Power in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 416-481.

published just a few weeks before Professor Wallace's passing. In a personal communication to me shortly after the 2019 national parliamentary elections, he expressed his deep concern about the direction which Indian politics and nationalism was taking in the contemporary period, in contrast to the 1950s when he first began to study India.

Yet, Punjab and the Sikhs were never far away from Professor Wallace's heart. Two of Professor Wallace's last works were written as academic reflections and analysis of the aftermath of the so-called "Punjab crisis." In "Sikh Militancy and Non-Violence,"⁹ Prof. Wallace examined the Sikh tradition of "non-violent militancy" -- that is, the willing to sacrifice oneself for a political or social cause -- which he argued had been more effective in the postcolonial period than armed militancy. Professor Wallace's last work on Punjab was "Punjab, Terrorism, and Closure: It Ain't Over 'Till It's Over,"¹⁰ in which he argued that Punjab, the Sikhs, and India could never reach effective "closure" from the turbulent 1980s unless a truth and reconciliation commission was appointed to objectively examine the reasons behind the "Punjab crisis" and identify both non-state and state actors who engaged in violence during the period. This work demonstrated Professor Wallace deep commitment to humanity.

In addition to teaching and research, Professor Wallace also served as an expert consultant for numerous non-government organizations and governmental agencies including the US State Department. One of Professor Wallace's particularly notable personal contributions was his regular expert testimony in Sikh political asylum cases in the US, including on the west coast. He never charged the usually lucrative professional fees for his expert testimony on behalf of asylum seekers, but instead asked only to be reimbursed for travel and living expenses, explaining that this was a part of his "educational" and "humanitarian" duties as an academic.

Professor Wallace was, in fact, a product of Berkeley in the 1960s---that is, committed to social justice, peace, and human rights. Throughout his life, both he and his wife Robin (who was also a political scientist at the University of Missouri and herself passed away in September) remained deeply committed to humanitarian causes and values. Their home in Columbia, Missouri was appropriately named "Peace Haven," and regularly hosted visiting students and scholars from throughout the world for decades. His hospitality and "Punjabi hugs" always demonstrated a

⁹ Pashaura Singh (ed.), *Sikhism in Global Context* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 122-144.

¹⁰ *Journal of Punjab Studies*, vol. 22 no. 1 (2015), pp. 5-25.

sense of warm and caring for his guests and graduate students, who adored him as both a mentor and father figure. The pizza parties he hosted for his graduate teaching assistants at Shakespeare Pizza or appetizer parties at the Heidelberg Pub after finishing the semester were always festive and fun-filled occasions.

Paul Wallace passed away peacefully in his sleep on February 22, having returned from a book release trip to India only two weeks earlier, and having played his beloved game of tennis with friends earlier that same day. One of his secrets to a long and healthy life was his often-quoted phrase, "Never worry about anything except only once." With his passing, the field of Sikh and Punjab studies lost a long-time contributor, and the world lost one of the most cheerful and caring people to have walked this Earth. The field of Sikh and Punjab studies, his colleagues and former students, and the world in general are much better because of him. He may have "passed on" but lives within all of those, including myself, who had the blessing to have known him as a mentor, colleague, and friend. He will be missed but certainly never forgotten by all those who knew him.