

Canadian South Asian Youth Conference Proceedings: Gender, Identity, Sexuality, and Activism

Edited by

HABIBA ZAMAN

*Professor, Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies
Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, Canada*

and

SANZIDA HABIB

*Research Associate, Center for India and South Asia Research
University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada*

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**CANADIAN SOUTH ASIAN YOUTH CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS:
GENDER, IDENTITY, SEXUALITY, AND ACTIVISM**

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CONTRIBUTORS

ISHMAM BHUIYAN is a housing activist, leader of the award-winning Marpole Students for Modular Housing movement, community organizer, and undergraduate student at the University of British Columbia.

AKHIL DATTANI-JOBANPUTRA is majoring in Human Geography at the University of British Columbia. Akhil has also been learning *Khayal*, a genre of Indian classical vocal music, for the past 17 years under both traditional and non-traditional systems of learning. Akhil is the founding President of the Indian Classical Musical Society of Vancouver, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to cultivating a vibrant platform for Indian classical music in British Columbia.

RAJDEEP DHADWAL is a fourth-year undergraduate Honours student in Sociocultural Anthropology at the University of British Columbia. Rajdeep was born and raised on Kwantlen/Katzie/sc̓əwaθen (Tsawwassen)/S'ólh Téméxw (Stó:lō) Indigenous Territory (Surrey, Canada). Rajdeep is currently serving as Co-Editor for *The Ethnograph*, UBC's academic journal for anthropological studies.

AMRIT DHILLON is an upper-level undergraduate student at Kwantlen Polytechnic University pursuing a double minor in Sociology and Counseling. Amrit also works as an Education Assistant with the Surrey School District.

ANEESHA GREWAL is a queer brown femme and survivor of violence with a passion for social justice, especially through decolonization and intersectionality. Aneesha received their Bachelor of Arts with a double major in Psychology and Gender, Sexuality, & Women's Studies from Simon Fraser University.

SANZIDA HABIB is a Research Associate at the Centre for India and South Asia Research/School of Public Policy and Global Affairs, University of British Columbia. Her research interests include South Asian immigrant women's gendered experiences of migration, health, and wellbeing and their access to healthcare and health promotion programs in Metro Vancouver.

AVANTI HAQUE was born and grew up in Manitoba, raised by parents of Bengali heritage. Avanti obtained her Master of Public Policy from the School of Public Affairs, Arizona State University. Avanti pursued her interest in the educational opportunity gap and increasing the representation of racialized and oppressed groups.

MAISHA HAQUE was born in Rajshahi, Bangladesh and raised in Vancouver. Maisha is currently pursuing a degree in biology at Langara College. Maisha fathoms life's facets through the lenses of a scientist, an artist, and a young woman.

LEENA HASAN is a settler Canadian woman born and raised in Winnipeg on the traditional Treaty 1 territory of the Anishinaabe, Cree, and Dakota peoples, which is also the homeland of the Metis Nation. The daughter of Bangladeshi Canadian family physicians, she dropped out of medical school at the University of Manitoba in 2014 to pursue her true passion of addressing social inequities through obtaining a Master of Public Health at SFU and stepping more meaningfully into activism. She is honoured to serve First Nations in BC as a Qualitative Analyst at the First Nations Health Authority.

HARPREET KAUR MANDER is pursuing a Master's degree in Education and Society: Gender and Women Studies at McGill University in Montreal, Quebec. Harpreet received a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies at Simon Fraser University. Harpreet's current research is on the issue of male brown-on-brown violence within the Indo-Canadian community in BC's lower mainland, an issue that is very close to her heart.

BIDUSHY RAHMAN received a Bachelor of Arts in Gender Studies at the University of Victoria. She likes art and jokes, and her academic interests lie in the theory and practice of decolonization.

VERONICA SUDESH is a Master's student in Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies at Simon Fraser University. Veronica was born in Montreal, Quebec and her parents shifted back to India a few years after her birth. She did her schooling and undergraduate degree from New Delhi, India. Veronica has worked with many organizations in Delhi which deal with women and gender-related issues, such as SafetiPin, Breakthrough, the Centre for Health and Social Justice, and so on. Her experience in these organizations taught her how to create safer and public spaces for all genders.

HARSHA WALIA is a South Asian award-winning author and activist trained in the law. Harsha is the author of *Undoing Border Imperialism*, co-founder of *No One Is Illegal*, and Project Coordinator at the Downtown Eastside Women's Center. Harsha has been named one of BC's top ten left-wing journalists and writers by *The Georgia Straight* and one of the most influential South Asians in BC by *The Vancouver Sun*. She is a recipient of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Power of Youth Award, the *Westender's* Best of the City Awards for Activism and Change-Making, and the *Punjab Guardian's* Human Rights Award.

HABIBA ZAMAN is a Professor of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies at Simon Fraser University. She is also a Research Associate at the Centre for India and South Asia Research/School of Public Policy and Global Affairs, University of British Columbia.

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As organizers, our heartfelt appreciation goes to Harsha Walia for her very inspiring keynote speech, which captivated the audience. We thank her for allowing us to print the speech. Our presenters, who were mostly young and beginners, did a terrific job in managing time and using PowerPoint for brief presentations. We thank all presenters, especially those who submitted written papers for the proceedings. Both of us express our sincere gratitude to Mazhar Haque for diligently recording the presentations and editing the videos for YouTube. Thanks to Mazhar for generously volunteering a huge amount of his time. Further, we thank GSWS Library Liaison Moninder Lalli and SFU Burnaby Campus Library staff for making the digitized copy of the Conference Proceedings available for the wider community. We also thank Andar Wårje for superb editorial services.

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Habiba Zaman and Sanzida Habib

**INTRODUCTION TO THE CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS
CANADIAN SOUTH ASIAN YOUTH: GENDER, IDENTITY,
SEXUALITY, AND ACTIVISM**

A large majority of South Asian adults choose to immigrate to Canada to create opportunities for a better future for subsequent generations. While first-generation adult immigrants struggle to integrate and participate in the Canadian labor market, education, healthcare, and other systems, and the community at large, the second generation or youth are expected to have an easier time with such processes. A growing number of anecdotes, literature, studies, and statistics, however, show that second-generation immigrants and youth from South Asian families and ancestral backgrounds find themselves in a different battle to define who they are and where they belong, and to secure a better place on the socioeconomic ladder compared to their first-generation parents. They are generally torn between the differing and somewhat contradictory cultural, social, and political expectations and norms of their families vs. those of mainstream Canadian society, where they often feel marginalized and racialized as the immigrant “other.”

In September 2017, we organized a two-day conference titled *Canada 150 Migration of Bengalis* at SFU Harbour Centre and the UBC Institute of Asian Research/Centre for India and South Asia Research. The conference was the first ever documentation of the migration of Bengalis to Canada. SFU library electronically published the proceedings, and the journal *Alternate Routes* also published selected articles as a special volume under our editorship.

At the Migration of Bengalis conference, there were four youth presenters in the session titled *Canadian Bengali Youth: Identity, Social, Cultural, and Family Life*. They eloquently pointed out that immigrant adults might be overwhelmed in a new country, i.e., Canada; however, the constraints and struggles of their children are frequently undermined and overlooked. Youths encounter both overt and covert challenges at home and beyond and often struggle to fit into Canadian society. The session was very vibrant and much discussed, as it triggered a number of contemporary youth issues including identity, conflicts in family, sexuality, language, multiculturalism, parents’ emphasis on high academic achievement, and “ethnic”/community gossip that often sets limits or cultural boundaries in social interaction. We humbly confess that the conference titled *Canadian South Asian Youth* is the outcome of this stimulating youth session at the Migration of Bengalis conference.

The experience of growing up for Canadian South Asian Youth, similar to youth in many other immigrant communities in Canada, is a continuous struggle between the family and the world beyond. In this context, such mixed experiences of life, personal identities, sexuality, intergenerational conflicts over family values, honor versus shame, and workplace encounters require many social and cultural adjustments. The conference was thus expected to explore issues of identity formation/negotiation, the role of genders/family, sexuality, intergenerational dilemmas and conflict, experiences in the workplace as well as in the job market, the interface

between immigrants and the wider community, and the role of social and community activism related to participation as Canadians.

This one-day conference, titled *Canadian South Asian Youth: Gender, Identity, Sexuality, and Activism*, was held at Simon Fraser University (SFU) Harbour Centre in downtown Vancouver on April 6th, 2019. The program started with a brief welcoming speech by the organizers along with due acknowledgements that the conference was taking place on the ancestral and unceded territory of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. This was followed by Harsha Walia's mesmerizing keynote speech. In her speech, Harsha Walia, a well-known activist of South Asian origin, problematized the category of South Asian and urged the audience to explore beyond simplistic geographical identities to not only examine South Asians' subjugation but also recognize violence against South Asian women and racialized minorities. She critically analyzed how white supremacists are the real domestic threat in Canada despite media efforts to racialize terrorism, specifically by giving it a Muslim face. Harsha further noted the silence around homophobia, transphobia, misogyny, and sexual violence as these are portrayed as taboo subjects in the South Asian community. Harsha cautioned the audience that her commitment to end myriad forms of violence has never been based on the principle of protecting only South Asian people. The keynote speech generated many questions and comments that were eloquently addressed by Harsha. The conversation continued outside the room in the lobby area as Session I started in due course. The keynote speech thus effectively set the tone of the Canadian South Asian Youth Conference.

Sanzida Habib transcribed Harsha's keynote speech, as Harsha had faced constraints in writing a paper due to her activism/family obligations on top of her regular paid job. Considering the significance of Harsha's thought-provoking speech, we negotiated with Harsha and agreed to transcribe and publish her speech, as it was videoed by Mazhar Haque, a committed volunteer for the conference. The accuracy of the transcribed paper was further verified by Harsha. The entire process sounds complicated, but everything worked out smoothly. As editors, we consider it appropriate to include the keynote speech in the style and format delivered at the conference.

The conference consisted of five sessions, including a panel organized by Rebecca Scott Yoshizawa. Session I, *Identity, Cultural Hybridity, and Belonging*, was chaired by Charles Greenberg of Capilano University. This session consisted of four presentations, with three submitting their papers for these proceedings. Aneesha Grewal, a second-generation South Asian settler, argued for a deconstruction of colonialism and imperialism to comprehend the identity of South Asians. The paper highlighted media representation of the South Asian community as problematic, as the media seem to consider that this culture needs intervention. According to Aneesha, South Asian men are generally portrayed as violent and aggressive while South Asian women are portrayed as victims. Such a portrayal of a violent, racialized society offers a justification for white settler-colonialism. In conclusion, Aneesha pointed out that gender equality is still far away for South Asian women. Akhil Dattani explained how his hybrid identity (Gujarati and Canadian) was formed by school experiences as well as music and religion. Akhil pointed out that his ethnicity and religion had become targets of bullying in school, and consequently, he immersed himself into the world of music to search for a sense of belonging. As a child, such experiences of alienation taught him that he was different from the rest of the white Canadian kids. Further, he faced expectations from his parents to perform well

academically. Akhil's paper demonstrated a candid acceptance of his ignorance of the complexities of Indian classical music as a child and how he was influenced by a narrative of not questioning the "guru," i.e., teacher. He discussed how he soon discovered the politics inside the music industry, as he frequently experienced under-appreciation and subjugation. When he went to university, Akhil finally found a place to belong and amassed a group of friends. Consequently, university became a place for his hybrid identity to flourish. According to Akhil, he might still be unpacking his identity, but he does not have to be torn between those two worlds anymore. Maisha Haque, born in Bangladesh but raised in Vancouver, identified herself as a Bengali Canadian and illustrated her bi-cultural lives. She eloquently pointed out factors that have shaped her identity. Maisha emphasized her Bengaliness (saying she was more Bengali than her younger brothers) and argued that culture should not be disregarded as only historical because culture is socially constructed. She also recognized that skin color consciously or unconsciously shapes identities. According to Maisha, to be a South Asian should mean more than just being brown.

Session II, *Gendered Violence, Representation, and Resistance*, chaired by Sarika Bose of the University of British Columbia, consisted of three presentations, of which two are included in the proceedings. Harpreet Kaur Mandel argued that the violence prevalent in the Punjabi Sikh community is the result of a second-generation immigration experience and intersectional oppression. According to Harpreet, there exists a lack of attention to how a culture of toxic and hyper-masculinity has pushed the young men of this community into violence. The notions of patriarchal masculinity and white masculinity with which they are constantly bombarded have given rise to violence as these young men try to navigate their cultural and Canadian identities. Harpreet demonstrated the barriers that immigrant parents of second-generation Canadians experience. She further discussed the ethno-cultural differences that these young men experience in forming their identities, including the split between private and public spheres, interlocking oppressions, multiculturalism, and the cross-cultural barriers they face as second-generation Canadians. As Harpreet rightfully points out, this should be considered a Canadian as opposed to a South Asian issue. Veronica Sudesh unpacked the tragic incidents of second-generation South Asian Canadian youth who have lost their lives due to brutal violence directed against them. Within this category of second-generation South Asian Canadians, youth are more at risk of abuse, exploitation, and violence. Veronica's paper examined three case studies: (a) inter-racial and group-perpetrated violence as seen in the murder of Reena Virk, who was bullied and killed by white teenage youths; (b) intra-community and individual-perpetrated violence as seen in the case of Maple Batalia, who was murdered by her ex-boyfriend; and (c) intra-community and family-perpetrated honor killing as seen in the killing of Aqsa Parvez, who was murdered by her father and brother for not conforming to religious and familial values. The paper also highlights activism on part of those individual families who experienced the loss of their children. According to Veronica, the South Asian Canadian community along with different organizations has made a number of attempts to turn their grief into an awareness-building campaign surrounding issues such as bullying, dating abuse, and all forms of violence against women. Veronica duly pointed out the gaps in existing literature on the issue of violence against second-generation Canadian South Asian youth. There indeed exists a dearth of information pertinent to those who identify themselves as LGBTQIA+ youth.

Session III, *Sexuality, Subjectivity, and Community Resistance*, chaired by Habiba Zaman of Simon Fraser University, consisted of four presentations, with two complete papers ultimately being submitted to these Proceedings. Based on the historical records of polysexuality in South Asian literature, Bidushy Rahman's paper examined sexuality versus desire. According to Bidushy, historically the British were punishing sodomy in the United Kingdom at a time when India was far from such a practice. Bidushy investigated 15th century literature pertinent to the Mughal Empire and demonstrated the intersections of South Asian homosexual relations with age, class, religion, caste, and other dimensions which make it more complicated. Bidushy further pointed out the difference between Hinduism and Islam in dealing with homosexual relationships. Articulating sexuality as separate from desire, Bidushy argued that South Asians did not have a fixed sexual identity until Britain colonized India. Desire is fluid; therefore, Bidushy contends that one cannot categorize it into a heteronormative binary. To counter queerphobia in multiple South Asian communities in Canada, Bidushy argued, there is a need to question the archive, which was preserved by those in power, i.e., colonizers. Consequently, a de-colonizing discourse is required in order to examine sexuality. Moving from an individual to a broader intergenerational lifecycle, Leena Hasan's paper illustrates the evolution of her identity and the reasons she was drawn to activism. She reflected on how her negotiations between the Islamic values taught and lived by her mother as a role model and the dominant Western society she grew up in since her birth shaped her activism. Leena, according to her own accounts, first started activism in medical school, where she led an NGO called "Books with Wings." As a socially and politically conscious person, she identified the intergenerational nature of her privilege, the impacts of colonization on her family, and the significance of positive self-identity. Despite her self-exploration and activism surrounding various issues including the environment and climate change, she still identifies her mother as a significant role model.

Neena Randhawa, a community activist and manager at Chimo Community Services based in Richmond, chaired Session IV: *Poverty, Social Justice and Inclusion*. This comprised four presentations, of which only two were submitted as complete papers. In his paper, Ishmam Bhuiyan convincingly argued that the two concepts that have long been adopted in addressing social-economic inequality and defending the most vulnerable —namely, charity and equality— should be completely rejected. An overreliance on charity normalizes the existence of injustice, and those social movements relying on an equality model assume our communities are equal. This sort of assumption ignores the need for "equity-based activism." As an immigrant settler on the unceded territory of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh peoples who inspired his activism, Ishmam considers integrating a de-colonizing and class-based lens into every social movement. Using an analysis of homelessness in Vancouver and his own activism in high school, Ishmam calls for a collective understanding whereby the most privileged take a step back and make space for social transformation. Avanti Haque, based on self-reflection, narrated the emergence of her consciousness regarding race and identity in a small town school in Manitoba. Avanti described how she lacked a sense of belonging in the classroom because the vast majority of the people around her were white. Avanti believes that a decolonizing curriculum is essential to think over critical matters including race. Further, she emphasized having discussions about race relations at dinner tables in homes to create unity and solidarity

with the larger Canadian society. Avanti's paper puts us in other people's shoes and reminds the reader to view such matters from other people's perspectives.

Session V, *Autoethnographic Reflections of Feminist South Asian Youth*, was organized and chaired by Rebecca Yoshizawa. Only one out of two presenters submitted a final paper to these Proceedings. Amrit Dhillon eloquently pointed out her internalized racism, sexism, and misogyny while narrating her own family life and her experience of the outside world. One of the best examples she offered of internalized racism was a practice of saying her own name in an accent that made it easier for Canadians to pronounce. Amrit witnessed many instances of gendered racism and sexism, and consequently she also internalized sexism and misogyny. As a young child, she vividly remembered her father's abusive behavior and alcoholism, and her mother leaving an abusive relationship; Amrit subsequently started working at a convenience store at a very young age to help support the family. She is equally aware of the subjugation and colonization of Indigenous women as well as the gender stereotypes in the South Asian community. According to Amrit, racialized women's daily challenges and struggles differ from those of white women. She suggested using intersectionality as an analytical tool to investigate South Asian women's subjugation.

To summarize, the papers in these Conference Proceedings include critical personal reflections, sharp discursive analyses, and empirical examinations of complex structural, social, political, and cultural issues that shape identity and involvement in activism around community as well as nation-building for a number of South Asian Canadian youth. The conference provided a glimpse of the experiences and thoughts of Canadian youth whose ancestry may be linked to South Asia and diasporic communities in many other parts of the world. The objective was neither to represent geography nor to represent any particular country, but to identify themes and topics that are burning issues for these youths in Canada. Both of us recognize the downside of identity politics; however, the conference demonstrated how the issue of identity is embedded in the fabric of Canadian society and the discourse of Canadian nation-building. Through the lens of identity, the conference successfully explored sexism, racism, homophobia, classism, ageism, and the intersections among such oppressive systems of power and discrimination. Both of us want to express our sincere gratitude and felicitations to these largely first-time presenters, speakers, session-chairs, volunteers, and most of all, engaged participants. We also hope the Proceedings resulting from this conference will moderately contribute to the literature on this highly relevant topic and ignite further dialogue and research on the important issues raised by a few courageous second-generation Canadian youth.

OPENING & KEYNOTE SPEECH

CHAIR: Habiba Zaman, Simon Fraser University

Keynote Speech by Harsha Walia

“Beyond Mangoes and Coconuts: Thinking Critically about South Asian Representations, Responsibilities, and Relations”



HARSHA WALIA

BEYOND MANGOES AND COCONUTS: THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT SOUTH ASIAN REPRESENTATIONS, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND RELATIONS

INTRODUCTION AND TRANSCRIPTION BY SANZIDA HABIB

What does it really mean by “South Asians”? Harsha Walia dissects this category to critically examine a few relevant intersecting issues – from multiculturalism and race relations in Canada to the anti-black and anti-indigenous racisms/discriminations and cruel caste systems within South Asian communities, and the oppressive class hierarchies created by global capitalist market based economy. The crux of the matter is that such blanket categories hide not only the internal diversity, but more importantly, the unequal power relations and violence emitted from such power. Harsha persuasively elaborated how, despite the celebratory Canadian multicultural policy, racialized immigrants and their children, even if locally born, are cast as eternal outsider with the odd line of questioning around ‘where are you from’ and tagged with hyphenated identities. On the other hand, whiteness is normalized and equated with being native and Canadian irrespective of the history of colonization and dispossession of Indigenous peoples by European settlers.

However, not all South Asian people encounter the same levels of oppression or racialization and the lived material realities experienced by other marginalized communities such as, black and indigenous populations. In fact, the hierarchical notion and practices of white supremacy are infiltrated into other kinds of discriminations including anti-black and anti-indigenous racisms, the inhumane treatment of low-caste and Dalit minorities, the ever spreading Islamophobia, xenophobia, transphobia, misogyny, heteronormativity and all kinds of violence within our communities. Again, many South Asians and other privileged groups of immigrants often become as successful and powerful as the white people, by practicing the neoliberal capitalist standards; and they turn out to be actively complicit in perpetuating such violence and discriminations against indigenous, black, and Dalit peoples. The examples and stories shared by Harsha are eye-opening, flabbergasting, and some are even awe-inspiring! She started the captivating speech with a tribute to Pritam Kaur, an unsung hero in the South Asian community, and she closed it with another extraordinary story of organized community resistance against Laiber Singh’s forced deportation. We present full transcription of the oral speech followed by questions from the audience Harsha addressed equally robustly!

THE SPEECH

Good morning! I was just thinking this is the most legit South Asian Conference where someone is told to eat so many times – “do it well!” And also perhaps not, because we’re starting on time! Thank you everyone for being here and thank you organizers for convening all of us together. It is an honor to be here particularly to be able to speak in the context of South Asians organizing and we’re really thinking what it means to be a South Asian youth knowing that it

means different things to us. How can we build something together to think it through south Asian organizing and politics? This is one of the things for organizers to think – for having me here, and to bring all of us here. And I also want to echo the acknowledgement about the unceded Coast Salish territory.

These are the lands of the Musqueam, the Tsleil-Waututh and the Squamish people. And I think one of things is thinking through South Asian presence on these lands are so vital for us; to recognize that it's not enough to think about South Asia, the colonialism that took place in south Asia, but to think how we're implicated in the ongoing dispossession of the Indigenous peoples on these territories and what our roles and responsibilities are here.

I want to start with the story of Pritam Kaur. She is 90 years old right now. She lives here in the lower mainland. She was a key organizer in the 1970s and 1980s. She was really active in the farm workers' movement in British Columbia. And we know that farm workers in general across Canada are Canada's forgotten workers; they toil in the fields to feed us food, to put food on our tables every single day, and often endure the most horrific conditions. It's one of the most dangerous industries in Canada. Most people think that the kinds of jobs that are hard are being police officers who fend off crime! But in reality, it's the hard work low paid and low wage jobs, mostly done by racialized women, farm workers being one of them working with pesticides. Almost until recently, farm workers were not even fully covered by health and labour and safety standards in BC, and continue to be exempted from a number of health and safety codes under the labor legislation. Particularly immigrant workers are working 12 to 14 hours a day, in some cases often making a dollar an hour, especially back in the 70s and 80s, living in converted chicken coops and suffering from chronic health problems.

So Pritam worked as a farm worker under these conditions. She also worked 14 hours a day, seven days a week. She started organizing in the farm when young Punjabi women complained about sexual violence by the farmer that they worked for. She went to see the farmer with a stretcher and a gun. She said I'm here and I'm not going away. And she didn't. She helped organize farm boycott across farms in the lower mainland. She led court battles for unpaid wages and she was one of the few women that held executive positions in the Canadian farmworkers' union which was initiated here in BC with mostly Punjabi women with very close international and transnational relationships, for example, California ...

She fought for minimum wage and workers' rights including farm working women's rights to use bathrooms, because at that time, farm workers were going to the bathroom in the fields, basically; and for daycare in the farm so that children could have access to day care while they could also work in the farm.

So to me she is one of the many unsung heroes, especially in the South Asian and Punjabi community. She fought for feminist rights, she fought for workers' rights, but you know, she was rarely understood or acknowledged within this movement or even within our own community. Very few people know about women like Pritam Kaur. The Canadian Farm Workers' Association includes hundreds of women like Pritam Kaur and they won an important victory after 15 months strike at a lower mainland mushroom farm which was also initiated by five women and effectively shut down the entire industry sales and distribution of mushroom across BC with the support of other unions. They rallied around the slogan – "united we stand and divided we fall". The farm workers' union captured the imagination of all working class people in BC. To me it continues to be the beacon of hope in face of unsurmountable odds for

not only second class workers but also second class citizens, especially immigrant workers. And I bring up this example not only to honor her but also often time when we think about “success” as South Asians, and I’m going to come back to this category of South Asians because they are fairly awkward and problematic categories. So people like Pritam Kaur are often overshadowed at the expense of glorifying doctors, engineers, lawyers, elected officials because we are told these are the real south Asian success stories. So what I’m going to focus on today is troubling the idea of south Asian representation and by extension, success in few ways.

I want to first think through this discourse of multiculturalism that South Asians get subsumed under than challenge it. I will also problematize, as I mentioned earlier, the category of “South Asians” and how it actively hides violence, by thinking through transnational relationships as well as caste supremacy and race and class relations. And finally I want to try to imagine a different way of what it means to be a South Asian politically organized person or youth and think about our social position and responsibilities to affect change in this current moment. And I say this knowing that this is me, just 1% talking, to the very effect that I’m speaking under the umbrella of South Asian youth, and again, it is a problematic and awkward kind of positioning.

So the first thing I want to talk about is multiculturalism and how we think about it – what it means in the Canadian state context, and how to challenge it. Canadian multiculturalism is seen as Canada’s gift to the world. We talk about it all the time. And what it is understood as, is the framework of how non-white people are welcomed to Canada as immigrants and refugees, how different cultures integrate without actually being assimilated, and still retain parts of ourselves, our language, our culture. Still we are asked if we are Canadian! This is how Canadian multiculturalism is imagined; it is juxtaposed to the US model of the melting pot. Multiculturalism means that we celebrate difference, and that we don’t celebrate racism and discrimination, and that we can celebrate ethnic festivals, we can eat and dance and celebrate together. But what multiculturalism ignores is that we can’t celebrate difference in the context of men’s power and violence; that those differences are constructed as hierarchies and relations of power. The most salient example of this is the idea of eternally hyphenated citizens. How many people here get asked – where are you from? “I’m from Abbotsford, Surrey, Burnaby, Toronto, Scarborough, Mississauga...” “No, where you’re really-really from?” “I’m really-really from there! Well, my mom’s womb is where I’m really-really from! What are you trying to ask me?”

And this line of questioning, even though we all know that it is just the tip of the iceberg; this line of questioning is often harmless, it’s innocuous, someone just trying to find out about where you are really from – this is kind of multicultural questioning. But we know that this is a form of racism because it largely only operates against racialized immigrants. This is a double standard that operates very rarely to white people, or white passing people rarely get asked where are you from – Surrey, Vancouver, Abbotsford, Burnaby ... no, where are you really-really from, like what part of colonizing world are you from! Why are you asking me – I’m not responsible for any of those things, right ...

This double standard, to me, is the epitome, even though it is just the tip of the iceberg; but it is the way in which it is played out in our interpersonal relationships – that shows us how racism operates because it shows us multiple things. Actually I can show three things: one,

white people are somehow inherently from here, and even if you actually are a while immigrant, like American or Australian; you don't get asked this type of question because whiteness is normalized as somehow you're from here. If you're white, or white passing, it's assumed that you're from Canada. And what it does – two subsequent things – one is that it completely erases the reality of settler colonialism in this land – that actually white people are not originally from Turtle Island; white people are colonizers that came from other places and settled down here, and they are responsible for the dispossession and displacement of Indigenous people which continues till today. You know this is not just a relic of the past; residential school is not only a relic of the past. Indigenous people continue to endure theft of land. There are more and more indigenous people in the child welfare system than they ever were in residential schools; indigenous kids continue to be stolen from their families and endure theft of land and culture. The third thing it does is that it continually cast people of color as from somewhere regardless of how long you've been here. In case of South Asian – there's over a century of their presence now – and it's similar for other communities, no matter how long you've lived here, and in some cases even longer than certain European communities, we're always cast as eternal outsider. So that kind of experience of being an eternal outsider, an eternal hyphenated citizen, is a lived experience of many racialized communities. It is not actually a legal matter – it doesn't matter if you're a citizen or not – South Asian Canadian, Punjabi Canadian, Tamil Canadian, Bengali-Canadian, Bangladeshi-Canadian, Pakistani-Canadian – it goes on and on and on. And it is a case of being casting out as an eternal outsider. And also this lends itself to all kinds of things that stem from it. It completely justifies the hate crime of white supremacy which is this kind of double standard. So we see the use of these kinds of words like terrorists and criminals selectively deployed in racialized context. We're living in a context where white people, white crimes, hate crimes are never called a terrorist attack, for example. And the use of words like terrorism is very selectively used specifically against Muslim people. This kind of selective deployment means that all kinds of stereotypes stem from that, and all kinds of violence stem from that.

And of course today we see this multicultural tolerance completely unravelled in the face of escalating white supremacy hate crimes. In Canada right now, the reported hate crime against Muslim increased 253% over the past four years. Canada's own spy agency CISC which is no friend to me, actually list white supremacists as Canada's number one domestic threat. Think about that! None of us ever hear about that! If you ask people who they think is Canada's number one domestic threat – we know all the stereotypes – I'm not going to go into it! We all know what most people would imagine that to be. But there are at least 110 white supremacist groups operating here in Canada today. And those are over-ground overt white supremacist groups. We have to understand this is not just a post-Trump phenomenon because 110 groups don't emerge in two years. They have been operating for years. The Ku-Klux-Klan were openly organizing in Vancouver, and there are so many incredible stories about how the South Asian community members in particular have resisted KKK on the streets. Our people took up arms to fight against the KKK in many instances, particularly in isolated areas like Abbotsford and Chilliwack, we have people that took up arms to resist KKK because they were shooting people in malls, and in people's windows. So there's this legacy of resistance that we should not forget especially when we're thinking what makes "South Asian" community's success stories. Our people fought to show resistance.

And if those polls in Canada shortly after Trump's nomination asked people if they would vote for Donald Trump – as you can expect a lot of polite Canadians would say no, we'd never vote for Donald Trump! But then they asked a follow up question where they didn't say if you'd vote for Trump but basically laid out Donald Trump's platform, for example, if you'd vote for less immigration, if you'd vote for less crime – the things that were basically in his platform without naming him – 76% Canadians said that they'd likely to vote for Canadian candidate with a platform similar to Donald Trump's that focuses is on stricter immigration and being tough on crime.

To me this is the epitome of Canadian BS – they say, oh, we can't stand the racists down the South of the border, but it's couched in another way! We say, we're anti-immigrants but we're not racist! We just don't like a certain kinds of illegal immigrants; we like the legal immigrants, but we don't like the so called illegal immigrants. We like some immigrants who are closer to proximity with whiteness. We're vehemently anti-black – we just don't like black migration into Canada. So this is the way that it plays out. Even thinking through immigration, to me, the way in which the double standard around which this whiteness operates – immigration is a key example to that, because until recently, the single largest demographics of so called "illegals" in BC were white Australians! And again, that is something that most people would never imagine. Most people think that it's the Latinos due to all types of stereotypes that we hear, operating in the United States. But until recently, because now we have a growing, especially since the conservative era, we have a large documented community of people who are refused asylum or refugee status, and also temporary migrant workers who're losing their status – that's has shifted now, but until the 1990s, for example, early 2000, the largest single demographic of undocumented people in BC that was accounted for, were white Australians, because when you go up to Whistler and ski countries – they're all working there. A lot of white Australians are working without visitors' visas or expired visas – so technically working illegally. Whenever media reported a story about undocumented person was a white Australian, there will be like, oh the Canadian bureaucracies, it's so unfair! Look at this young person, he's working hard, look they're contributing to this Whistler economy, and this bureaucracy is so unfair to them! And of course, that was never the media treatment that undocumented Latino, for example, working in the construction industry, would have received. So, there're so many examples that we could think of, about how racism operates. I'm sure people here have their own experiences of how that's operating in their lives. I think that's an experience we all can relate to and understand. So I don't want to talk too much about that.

But what I want to think through now is that we understand how we're living under white supremacy to some degree, we understand that we experience racism, we understand our families have faced that. So now I want to think about how we can trouble that, how we can we nuance that more. For me, one of the ways we need to think through that, is to problematize two things. One is this catch-all category of "people of color" and "racialized", because we've used this to kind of category to simplify this; and also we need to problematize this category of South Asians. To me, there're some fundamental problems with this catch-all identity of people of color or being racialized. Of course, it works in some ways – the way we can construct ourselves in opposition to white supremacy, for people who have experienced the impact of white supremacy. But what it also does is it subsumes whole different groups of people under a category. And specifically I think it's hurtful not only because it subsumes us

under one catchall category as South Asian, and I'll come back to this South Asian category, but for now I'll use it; it also assumes that we South Asians share the same experience as black communities or indigenous communities, which very clearly we do not. I think in thinking about race, it's important to think about how white supremacy impacts all these racialized people, but how some of its pivotal points are actually anti-black racism and anti-indigenous racism – the things that stem from that. We need to think about what it means in concrete material ways. What concrete material conditions in general South Asian communities absolutely do not face the same lived reality, they do not face the same levels of police violence and incarceration; we absolutely do not face the realities of child apprehension. The most violent thing that you can do to a family is tear-apart children from the family. There's nothing else that brings more clear definition of genocide under the UN convention – it is tearing apart children from their families and culture. And we don't experience that as South Asians, again a very broad category. We don't face the same levels of systemic poverty and unemployment rates.

Also, I want to think through the ways in which we South Asian communities, not only do we not experience the same kind of material conditions, but we are actively often complicit in those racisms. There are a lot of personal examples we can all probably give – the ways our families have reproduced stereotypes of indigenous peoples, the kinds of slurs used against black people. But I want to think about it in some structural ways as well. The examples I want to give are both from BC. The first example I want to give is the Cyra case which went to the Human Rights Tribunal in British Columbia, about five or six years ago. It was a case of a South Asian farm owner who was systemically racist against a number of tree planters that were working and staying in his property. They were identified as black migrants from the Caribbean's and various parts of Africa. And the human rights issue was specifically about not only the treatment of them as laborers, but also the anti-black racism that they suffered under the employer. I won't go into the details of that legal case, but to me what was troubling was that when this case came forward, most South Asians, specifically the Punjabi community rallied in support of the farm owner and in support of the Cyra family saying that this was a set up incident against this minority. When the human rights case went ahead, it was set back human rights standards by focusing not on white violence against people of color but rather focusing on so called "minority on minority" violence. So, you see how this umbrella rhetoric and being racialized works to assume that there're no other hierarchies operating as if though South Asian violence against black people – it's not lateral violence, it's an active form of oppressive violence. It's a hard form of hierarchical violence. And a number of people rallied around the Cyra family, it was also seen as a case of shame, a case of 'we need to rally against our own. I was not active on it, but when there were rallies and other things, we'd go out and support the tree planters when there were rallies at the BC Human Rights Tribunal. And at that time I'd get tons of calls about why I was doing this, that I was giving a bad name to the South Asian community. For me, I had to defend myself about why I thought that other people were at the wrong side of this, not only from the basic perspectives of human rights. There was not a shadow of doubt that they were exploited; there was not a shadow of doubt that they were extorted against. One person died, and that was what launched the investigation. But it was the whole philosophy that somehow we have to defend our own no matter what, even if it's an oppressive violence [that was very disturbing].

Another case is out of the Sahotas in downtown east side. The Sahotas are one of the worst slum lords in Canada. They operate a housing – the worst housing in this neighborhood, predominantly the residents are indigenous people. They were found in violation of at least 400 safety infractions, the bylaw infractions; it takes a lot for the City to go and inspect a building. They extorted sex and money from the residents, paid their workers one to two dollars an hour. So these other residents, poor people desperate for money would get paid one/two dollars per hour to clean in the building, to run the front desk. By any standards, they are slum-lords; it is well known that the Sahotas are slum lords. And there's been complete silence in the South Asian, specifically the Punjabi community about the Sahotas. Under any provincial crime laws, under any possible code of the Residential Tenancy Act – they were breaking [laws]. It was covered up by the South Asian, again, by the Punjabi community to save face.

And also, stereotypes about indigenous, we're very anti-indigenous. I'm not going to repeat those BS, but you can imagine, the kind of anti-indigenous racisms that are used to justify why they are exploited by white people. To me, these are just the two examples of the ways in which the category like "people of color" masks violence that we're complicit in. It masks violence that we're responsible for, and the idea that we have a shared experience with other people of color under white supremacy means that we aren't able to see ourselves also as oppressors. It means we only see ourselves as people with shared victimhood, with other racialized communities. That to me is also often the problem with, even the category of South Asians. What South Asian masks is the fact that we are not just diverse people under multiculturalism, that we are from different countries; but that there are active systems of power that are operating within the South Asian community itself. One of those of course, is the Islamophobia; and it's not just something that is happening to Muslim people by white supremacists; it's something that is on the rise amongst specifically non-Muslims of South Asian descents, most obviously by Hindu people and upper caste Hindus. Of course, I am Sikh, I know also that it's on the rise in Sikh community despite the fact that as Sikhs we've suffered at the hands of Hindutwa and Hindtwa forces. We've suffered a genocide. But increasingly there's an alignment amongst the Sikh politicians, Sikh organizations and Narendra Modi and the RSS. So everyone's is, I'm sure aware of the rise of Hindtwa in India itself. The fact that Modi is able to be the prime minister of India despite the fact – it is well known that he committed crime against Muslims in Gujrat, that he continues to openly call for violence against Muslims and Christians, minorities and Dalits in India. These are the things that are of particular importance to diasporic folks because most of funding for the RSS comes from the Indian diaspora – predominantly from the United States and England, but it comes at large, from the Indian diaspora. I think for diasporic Indians, specifically diasporic upper caste Hindus to refrain themselves as victims of white supremacy in North America without acknowledging the linkage between the diaspora and the ascend of authoritarianism and Hindu fascism in the subcontinent – it's a completely hypocritical politics and positioning to have. And it's not only hypocritical because it's happening over there; these politics are transnational. We know that the same people that are supporting Modi are the same people that are supporting Trump in the United States. They are the same kinds, even there's Hindus for Trump in the US ... although I know that there're these networks in the lower mainland. But we know that there are Hindu organizations that are anti-immigrants, for example, in the same way that Trump is.

So I think that it's so important to challenge the broad category of "South Asian" because of the rise of Islamophobia in our communities. What's happening in India and Pakistan – we've so much Indian nationalism in the diaspora, including by people who are so called minorities in the Indian subcontinent, specifically for me, from the perspectives of Sikh Punjabis, the fact that our community is aligning with Indian nationalism and jingoism calling for a war in Pakistan using the framework of Islamophobia as the main rallying calls – it's completely offensive. It's something we have to take up. It's something that's complicating our relations and our processes here. The other thing that I think is completely unacceptable is the silence we maintain in our community around caste. Equality Labs, for example is an organization in the US, and one thing that they write about, and they work specifically around ending caste supremacy and caste apartheid; the organization is led by Dalit folks in the US, and they write, "while we are homogenized through the process of racialization into the category of South Asian, and therefore share many challenges of racism, the reality is that this label renders invisible the history of the caste and religion oppressed immigrants have faced in our home countries and continue to face here because of the structures of Hindu fundamentalism. We believe that all progressive South Asians must work towards the goals of ending white supremacy, but crucially also our internal hegemony such as that exemplified by caste." And I think, again, by talking about caste we see as airing dirty laundry as if though caste and white supremacy aren't completely interlinked experiences. I have refused to accept that caste is somehow an internal taboo. Caste is completely connected to force of white supremacy, to Islamophobia, to Zionism, anti-black racism – to all structures of racial apartheid in the global context. Caste based violence is not only an internal taboo, but also one of the most violent forms of racism that continues to exist. Again, if you're taking it from the interpersonal caste based jokes and slurs, the fact that there continues to be prohibitions on inter-marriages between casts, it continues to happen here, in the lower mainland, they are not over there. There are Gurdwaras in our communities that Dalits can't enter. The Ravi Das Gurdwara is a separate temple, specifically because of the caste based apartheid that continues to operate. And I have a tenuous relationship with "Jatt pride" in the lower mainland. The pride often reinforces very clearly caste violence. What is the relationship between non-land owning people in the Punjab – what is the relationship of the Jatts to immigrants from Bihar and Bengal? And that's a whole other thing and perhaps people are talking about it. But Jatt pride is one of the ways we need to rethink what it means to have so called South Asian pride without thinking through what it reinforces and what violence it makes invisible, specifically by trying to appropriate a social justice anti-oppression based language. There are so many examples of caste based violence! If you're from the lower mainland, I encourage you to check out Dalit Chetna Association, which works on raising Dalit issues here in the lower mainland. They have an Annual Ambedkar Memorial Lecture to raise the issue of caste based violence.

One example that I can give you though, in terms of my personal experience of organizing, is that of Laibar Singh. When I was organizing No One is Illegal – it's a migrant justice based organization, we work a lot with different communities who are facing deportation. And this is a quick side note on one of the ways in which the so called South Asian model minority is reproduced is very much being against refugees, or the idea of people being queue-jumpers. So Laibar Singh is a Punjabi Dalit refugee facing deportation – from Dalit class, and also working class person facing deportation back in 2007-8. It was a really incredible campaign – I

encourage you to check it out. One of the things that we got to do is organizing people to support him and we mobilized a very public campaign in support of him. Well there are three things – why are we supporting someone who is a failed refugee claimant? They were not legal immigrants. Second, that he is a Dalit. “Dalits should go and continue to remain in ...” I’m not going to repeat those [racist ideas] – you can imagine ... And third, he was this so called illiterate poor person. He is not one of those success stories – he’s not a doctor, not a lawyer or engineer. He’s not a land owning farmer. So, when we worked on this campaign, there was so much vehement backlash for us that we were organizing that campaign; there was an active smear campaign I remember – on Punjabi radios, people were trying to say that I was on Canada’s terrorist list, and they were reading out of this false list of names. And they were like ‘Harsha Walia’ is on this list. And I was like, are people really going to believe this! But people did. It was hard. There were people on this radio saying these things, and it was personal too, right! And you’re hearing it in Punjabi and this is really weird. I’m used to hear it from Jason Kenny in the parliament, but it was really weird to hear it on Punjabi radio by people who are fighting against the listing of Sikh organizations on the terrorist list – calling me a terrorist! And they were also calling really offensive rave culture stuff that people need to keep track of me ... One person actually said she wants to be raped, then her mind will be set straight – it’s really offensive stuff. And I don’t bring this up to bring up this horrific-ness of it, but to say how deeply invested were these people who are making sure this man cannot stay here because of what he represented. The flip side of that, I’ll say on a happy note, is that when Laibar Singh was about to be deported on December 10, 2008 – we’ve been organizing for one year at that time, over 1000 mostly Punjabi elders, mostly women showed up at the Vancouver International Airport to physically prevent his deportation. And they surrounded the cab that he was brought in, he was also paralyzed, so he also had all kinds of stuff around disability and ability and the fact that he couldn’t contribute – you know how they work together, right, all these things; so they surrounded the cab that the Canada Border Services Agency was about to deport him from, and he was not able to be deported. It was the first time in recent North American history that the deportation was physically prevented. And it actually inspired a lot of ...Ducupass movement that was happening in the US where they were physically blocking buses, it was actually inspired by here, a very localized example of people rising up. So I say that also that there are many people in our community that resist. They refuse the imposition of what it means to be a so called good immigrant and all the attendant violence that it brings up on other people who stand in solidarity with a paralyzed Dalit Punjabi man who’s a working class and poor, who refuse to buy into the model minority that this is somebody that we don’t accept into our community. So I don’t want to say everything is messed up because we can choose a different way of acting our politics all the time.

Also Kashmir is rarely talked about. You know, as progressives we talk about US imperialism, Canadian imperialism, we talk about the Israeli occupation of Palestine; but we don’t want to talk about Kashmir which is the world’s most militarized zones. It’s not an internal conflict – it’s the world’s largest militarized zone and the largest region occupied by security forces. Again there’s so much work from Kashmiri people, Kashmiri feminists that people can turn to. And we know; we don’t need to turn to statistics about the number of people that are tortured, the number of people killed, the enforced disappearances, the mass blinding, the use of pallet guns to deliberately blind hundreds of people in past few years in Kashmir; the sexual

violence, the everyday harassment, what it means to be in an occupied zone in Kashmir. And yet we continue to talk about it as an internal conflict, not as a form of imperialism even though India is actually a global super power in the region. And the fetishization of India in the context of multiculturalism masks violence, masks occupation. So, for me, taken together, this immigrant experience of being South Asian needs to be troubled, and I want to say specifically as an immigrant as opposed to say refugee experience or the experience of a temporary migrant worker – I wasn't to talk about specifically about immigrant experience. To me the experience of immigrant hardship is often problematic because hardship means that a middle class immigrant family no longer has domestic workers. You know some people say, it's so hard here because I don't have my driver here anymore! Or, it's so hard here because someone doesn't do my laundry here, right! So we need to critically rethink what it means when people talk about this universalist "self-orientalising" of experiencing hardships. And often time the experience is – the quintessential doctor become a cab driver – I'm not trying to say that it's not a hard experience, but we need to see that it's not someone who has always had a hard life; often time it's hard because people who always have had upward mobility, has a brief experience of downward mobility that then continues to be upward mobility through the next generations which also reinforces the bootstraps. We know as immigrants we have always weaponized against particularly black and indigenous peoples. Well, look at those immigrants – they managed to go from taxi driver back to having their kids to be doctor! What we lose in that is the transnational experience, to have always been upper class or middle class, to have one generation to become working class and then go back to be that middle class – is not a story of bootstrap. So we need to think of this immigrant experience in its transnational locations – not only when the experience begins here. We need to think about it in its transnational context, which is not again to minimize the real experience that people have, we're just saying to locate it accurately. Also, to say the immigrant experience again is not the same as refugee experience – it's not the same for a Punjabi refugee or someone like Laibar Singh I talked about – that's not the universal South Asian experience, or Tamil refugees fleeing civil war or genocide in Sri Lanka that came on the MV Sun Sea or the Ocean Lady in 2011 and faced mass incarceration. The Komagata Maru cannot be our only talking point; it cannot be the only way in which we understand South Asian, specifically Punjabi history. There are histories like the MV San Sea and the Ocean Lady where people faced mass incarceration too.

So, what I want to conclude with, again, is thinking about how we share experiences as South Asians, but more importantly, how our alliances are often tenuous. They are tenuous until we actively practice a different kind of politics. And also those alliances somehow assumes that South Asians have more in common with each other than the fact that, for example, the Dalit actors, who organize, build alliances not among South Asians, but because of caste violence, but with the Black Panther Party. So I want to rethink the assumption that somehow all South Asians have more things common with each other while in fact there are South Asians who face oppression specifically from other South Asians. Do I assume that a Pakistani or Kashmiri has an alliance with an Indian upper caste Hindu from North India? No, they have more in common with people under occupation. So we need to think through how we assume our alliances are somehow natural because we come from the same geography. There is a quote which isn't about South Asian experience, but I think when I say you'll see how it resonates. It is a quote from Aurora Levin Morales speaking in the 80s or 90s in American

context when people started using the frame “women of color”. She said, “This tribe called women of color is not an ethnicity. It is one of the inventions of solidarity, an alliance of political necessity that is not the given name of any female with dark skin and a colonized tongue; it is rather a choice about how to resist and with whom.” And I say that because I would echo these, some of the same things I’d like to raise in relation to how we talk about South Asians. Thinking about a South Asian progressive politics as an active practice, it’s an intentional ethical orientation. It means that we are always breaking the idea that somehow there are silences that are taboo in relationship to caste. I didn’t get in to it that much, but we know the way in which misogyny, homophobia and trans-misogyny operates within our communities as well. The fact that there are religious organizations that are willing to defend very clear cases of domestic violence and perpetrators in the Gurdwara committees under the name of upholding community honor – that is shameful and unacceptable. The space that is reduced for South Asian feminists to speak when we speak about violence in our communities that somehow we have to choose between competing loyalties and places where we are welcome, and especially so for trans-women.

One thing that I get asked a lot about is why I do more for “other people” than my community. I work a lot with indigenous families, urban indigenous women in the downtown eastside, the worst neighborhood in the country; I work a lot with refugees from different communities. So I get asked that a lot. And my answer is always – I don’t work on the basis of simply South Asian people. I refuse to support South Asian landlords like the Sahotas. I have nothing in common with them, or the bosses like the Kyra tree planters that I talked about, or the conservative South Asian politicians, of which there are many! I’d never defend them. I don’t feel any shame of publicly denouncing them. For me as a progressive South Asian specifically as a Punjabi person, my commitment is to ending violence, justice to all people. If there’s anything that I’ve experienced under white supremacy or under misogyny is that I’m not going to protect you people simply because we’ve the shared experience of being South Asians. I am much more interested in supporting people who are the victims of any form of violence, caste supremacy, all forms of racism, trans-misogyny, and especially workers. The reality is that we have farm owners across the lower mainland who are exploiting workers, South Asians and other workers, every single days. And we don’t talk about it because either that’s a South Asian success story, someone that owns 60 farms, or because again, we see it as story of shame – we can’t talk about violence because that would bring the community shame. So I want us to think about what a progressive politics means – to never pledge allegiance simply because of the idea that we have shared community. I encourage us to build community based on principle of values. That’s what to me is what a progressive community is based on. The only kind of the ‘other’ that there is – to me the indigenous women in downtown eastside is not an ‘other’ – they are political home for me because the idea of home is a place where everyone is safe. And especially for those of us who are survivors of violence in our homes, we know that home is a tenuous place; that we have to seek home wherever we find safety. So I’d encourage us to rethink what it means to be an alliance, and to think of progressive South Asian politics not as a politics of having a shared geographical connection, but as one that is an ethical orientation about who to struggle with and in what way. Thank you!

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Question: we got the message from you in the last part about what we should do. Can you say very specifically what the youth should do? It was a very general statement about how we South Asians should identify ourselves based on principles not on geography. This is a South Asian forum and these are our future generations who'll lead the issues you raised here. So do you have any specific piece of advice to them?

Answer: I hesitate to be prescriptive partly because I don't know and I don't want to assume what people's different locations are. As I said even South Asian itself can mean very different experiences so I hesitate to be more prescriptive other than again to reinforce that we always think about power. I'm not intending to suggest that we don't face any real experiences of oppression, but I think sometimes what that does is that it doesn't allow us to see the ways in which we might also be reproducing it. So I think, [we should] always tie this to the nuances. Whatever work we're doing, to always try to be as honest as possible. And I don't want to mean that we try to go out and do everything because there's also the question of capacity, but it does mean, for example, for experiencing the form of oppression in our workplace, in our schools or in our departments, but then we also need to think about how can I reach out to other people who are experiencing it perhaps even worse. Are there other communities that are even more under-represented than I am in my department? You know in the context of universities, we know that the indigenous students are the most under-represented, for example. So not only lift up Asian experience but what does it mean to them to be in solidarity, in alliance with other students as well. Also, do something beyond the multicultural framework that the system wants us to do.

Question: You've done a lot of work in the downtown eastside and having experience of growing up with South Asian families too – do you see that there are parallels or there are distances between how South Asian immigrant might relate or reflect upon their commonalities with indigenous people or do you think that there's a gap of knowledge? I do hear that there's a lot of shared cultural genocide ...

Answer: thanks for that question! I think, I used to think I'd say that there's a lot more shared experience; I no longer have that opinion personally ... it's a subjective kind of thing, but I think the most general way the shared experience is – British colonization for example, what it means to be colonized people. But for me there's many ways in which that it falls short. And one is the overwhelming reality that – I'd specifically say this Punjabi, I don't know where it ... but in this context, the lower mainland experience of being Punjabis including those of Sikh refugees and also of immigrants – so there's a very specific class and caste migration dynamics. So South Asians, and also the state selects who it wants. A lot of people who are coming are those so called subaltern, right! So I say the distances are huge because people imagine themselves as upwardly mobile, and are upwardly mobile. People often imagine themselves as beneficiaries of colonialism. A lot of people were educated in British school systems, and also there's very straight up colonialism that I used to think/justify as mediated by white supremacy, like that we'll learn the Canadian stereotypes of indigenous people. But I think in many ways it makes the same racism that, again, Punjabi upper caste people have about Dalits and Adivasis. It's not

simply mediated by white supremacy. These are forms of racism that are, again, transnational, again the kinds of racism that exist against the Bihari migrants, for example, in Punjab. So these are different forms of racism but I don't think that shared experience of colonization is enough. I think it requires specific attention to thinking through the relationship to indigenous people as transnational. It's also the Adivasi community for example, in the subcontinent. And also white supremacy plays into it. But I'm saying that we can't just let ourselves off the hook – the forms of racism that cross the ocean with us. Also I think the reality now, of where communities are, the very specific different class relations – it's a very concrete example, I've worked in the downtown eastside, there's a bad date cheat – women who are sex workers inform other women about bad dates, about clients, about johns who commit violence against them. And this is not something I often share with people, so I have to figure out how to talk about it. I worked in the neighborhood for sixteen years; I see the bad date cheat every week – eight out of 10 clients who's being described is South Asian. You know, these are bad dates, this isn't people who are clients of sex workers; this is violence, people are reporting violence – horrific forms of violence. when we hear about missing and murdered indigenous women and girls – from my experience, in the Vancouver downtown eastside, eight out of 10 experiences that are negative that indigenous women face on the streets, are from South Asians – that are reported. So I think we can't talk about shared relationship until and unless we unearth some of these very real dynamics and relations – beyond any kind of theoretical shared experiences of colonization; that's the material grounded reality. Sadhu Binning who's a wonderful writer; he has a collection of short stories. One of them, I can't remember the name of that one story; it's a beautiful story, a fictional story about this reality about a relationship between a Punjabi man and an indigenous woman, and you see, I think he just beautifully explored the possibility of a relationship but everything that makes it impossible, because of the structural racism that exists.

Question: I'm from Vietnam, so, not South Asia. What are the main ways that South Asians are different from other parts of South Asia, like South East Asia? I'm new here and I'm just curious.

Answer: One thing that strikes me is even the Asian representation is very much dominated by the Hun Chinese in Canada. South East Asians are very much left out of that similar to the different relations in South Asian communities and the imperial relations there are very much obscured within this very much multicultural kind of dominant Hun Chinese experience of what it means to be Asians. I have been having trouble coming up with what South Asian representation in the west is frankly because even in the Canadian context, this very specific criminalization of Sikhs and Sikh people is very different in other parts of Canada. So the legacy of 1984 of Air India, of Sikh organizations being placed under Canada's terrorist list, it's very different across Canada. Similarly the representation of Tamil people with the genocide in Sri Lanka post LTTE being listed, MV San Sea and Ocean Lady – that's very different than the Gujrati Muslims, and even the representation there. So I struggle with what even is a South Asian Australian construction. You know I'd say in the west coast it's probably mostly Bhangra, I don't know, partly because it's such a huge category that even Canadians can't figure out what the subtle differences are. And then also, you have the overt criminalization of Muslims, Bangladeshi Muslims, Pakistani Muslims, Indian Muslims. So there's such diverse experience

which is why even South Asian as a category is so problematic. You have the western construction of communities that are actively celebrated and at the same time actively criminalized.

Question: I think there's a really interesting dynamic in the South Asian community in the last year and half and I don't think it's been addressed when we talk about issues. And it's about the thousands of Punjabi students who are arriving to study at places like Douglas, Capilano, Langara and Kwantlen, and they are really struggling in the most profound ways. But I haven't heard a lot of people in Vancouver talking about it. Douglas Todd writes about it in Vancouver Sun occasionally. I teach at Capilano and my classes have recently become 100% students from Punjab. And they work very long hours for very low pays, they cannot study, and work, and commute. My entire class at Capilano comes from Surrey or Abbotsford, and every month there's hundred and hundred more, I think there's five or six thousands of them, and sexual assault is now being recognized as a lot of women have been facing that. Also, one student of mine got pepper sprayed. She works at McDonald's on Hastings and comes to the class in the morning. She couldn't be there because she was pepper sprayed the night before. So stories like this I'm hearing every day, it's been about a year and a half.

Answer: It's a good question. To me the core issue with international students and what they experience – my partner works at the Graduate Student Services Society at SFU; a lot of their advocacy now is around the relationship to grad students who are international students. And I have a ... that works with the Douglas College international students, so I hear a lot about it. I think the fundamental issue – I think the problem here is that either it's managed as a cultural issue so there's work for that specifically with Indian or Punjabi international students, or it gets managed as a situation of international students whereas to me the fundamental issue is that education is increasingly being commodified and international students are cash cows for universities. So the issue is about the commodification of education. I actually have a lot of problem with the way Douglas Todd has written about it because often time it's framed as a culture clash, right! The Culture clash of international students trying to integrate – and I'm not saying that that's not real, but to me that's not the foundational issue. It's the fact that Canadian institutions and the Canadian government are making a profit off peoples' need for education. That to me is the root issue. And the reason that people have to work so hard is because the tuition is so high. And then you have students needing to work three or four times because they are not able to get bursary or loans. So to me it's fundamentally about citizenship – who gets the right to have education, who doesn't have the right to education; the fact that we justify different treatment. The fact that international students are charged so much and still the tuition is so freaking high in general, so the commodification of education to me is the core issue there. And the fact that international students are being exploited at the workforce is also an issue fundamentally of a lack of labor protection under the capitalist system. International students are generally not covered by labor standards or industry standards because they are not unionized workers. So to me that is a core issue and it gets – not to say that it's not the issue, but to me it's not the primary issue, but it's not a surprise that in the Canadian context that is a dominant frame – that people are struggling and not integrating. If there's a movement around it I'm less invested in a movement to help international students to

integrate better; I'm more invested in how people are not exploited as students and how are people not exploited as worker, how do we de-commodify education. So to me these are more important issues around that because we know that the kind of clash of civilization and the clash of cultures stuff is imperialist and it evades racial and class relationships that are operating. But I think it's such a huge issue and the number of people that are coming to make money for the universities – is a mess and I'm so glad that you brought it up.

Thank you!

SESSION I

Identity, Cultural Hybridity and Belonging

Session Chair: Charles Greenberg, Capilano University

Aneesha Grewal “The Secrets of the Surrey Girl and the Surrey Jack: Settler-Hybrid Identities and the Creation of Stereotypes of South Asian Youths in Surrey, B.C.”

Akhil Dattani “My Identity, My Music”

Maisha Haque “Born ‘Brown’ Raised ‘White’”

Rina Pradhan “Balancing between the Cultures of Their Origin and Adopted Country: Perspectives from Nepali Youths from British Columbia”



**THE SECRETS OF THE SURREY GIRL AND THE SURREY JACK: AN ARCHIVAL
STUDY OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF STEREOTYPES OF SOUTH ASIAN YOUTH
IN SURREY, B.C., CANADA FROM 1990 TO 2008**

ABSTRACT

Surrey, a municipality in British Columbia, is stereotyped as the “ghetto”: where many low-income people reside, where gang activity exists, and where the racialized South Asian community has flourished. South Asians are an ethnic group comprising of peoples from India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The South Asian community began settlement on the Turtle Island in late 1800s to early 1900s, finding work as labourers in the growing industrial sector. Through the different waves of settlement, the South Asian community grew in BC. Through rearing children in a *South Asian* household in the *colonial Western* state, a hybrid identity was created in the children of South Asian immigrants. The implications of this hybrid identity included experiencing the social norms and expectations of both cultures simultaneously. This is a dreadful position because in order to survive in the Western world obedience sometimes means sacrificing the racialized-culture’s values and norms, leaving youths in a very confusing position. Furthermore, this hybrid identity exists with and within the experience of being a visible minority which includes feelings of not belonging as well as facing racism, sexism, and classism associated with colonial ideals. Through the hybrid-identity and visible-minority experience, stereotypes emerged about the racialized and sexualized beings in the space, as usually happens in colonial states. In this paper I will deconstruct the “Surrey Girl” and “Surrey Jack” stereotypes of South Asians, or in other words, the characterization by the colonial framework of racialized beings as uncivilized, and sexualized beings as promiscuous and dirty.

My mother, Rewa Grewal, was born in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India and my father, Harinder Singh Grewal, was born in New Delhi, India. My parents are both Punjabi. My Papa arrived on the lands of the Ktunaxa, Metis, Tsuu T’ina, and Niitsítapi (colonially known as Calgary) in the mid-1980s, and my Mama arrived in the early 1990s. I was born almost five years later on the same lands, moving to Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh lands at eight months old before settling on Semiahmoo, Katzie, Kwikwetlem, Kwantlen, Qayqat, Musqueam, and Tsawwassen lands (colonially known as Surrey). Here, I experienced joys and traumas and learned at a young age that my place in society as a brown queer femme (in this paper, “femme” is used interchangeably with “woman,” while “masc” is used to identify masculine subjects, also known as “men”) was defined by societal norms derivative of the settler-colonial state I was living in, and that I would have to find my own identity in these constructs. Growing up in Surrey, I, along with many other second-generation South Asian

(second-gen S.A.) immigrants who make up 54% of Surrey's population, faced a particular stereotype of South Asian feminine youth called the "Surrey Girl," while South Asian masculine youth faced the "Surrey Jack" stereotype. Both these stereotypes are negative; the Surrey Jack is seen as a criminal—unintelligent, and out of control—while the Surrey Girl is considered amoral, unintelligent, and also out of control. In order to identify the implications of race-based stereotypes on the identity formation of second-gen S.A. youth, newspaper clippings from the Surrey Archives were analyzed to see what narrative of the South Asian community was being created in Surrey's media.

For an individual, identity has two parts: personal identity and social identity ("Identity," 2019). Personal identity refers to an individual's "need for uniqueness," while social identity refers to "membership in various groups—familial, ethnic, occupational..." ("Identity," 2019, n.p.). Identifying with a group "help[s] people define themselves in the eyes of both others and themselves" ("Identity," 2019, n.p.). According to Erik Erikson's theory of developmental stages, identity formation is especially important for youth, because "during adolescence," individuals experience "physical growth, sexual maturation, and impending career choices" ("Identity," 2019, n.p.). Second-gen S.A. youth form their social group identity, specifically their ethnic social group identity, through cultural hybridization.

Cultural hybridity is defined by "the effort to maintain a sense of balance among practices, values, and customs of two or more different cultures," which then "constructs a new identity that reflects a dual sense of being" (Albert & Páez, 2012, p. 522). In "ethno-racially diverse youth," cultural hybridity "is fluid, flexible, multidimensional and used strategically and deliberately...to achieve particular goals in specific situations" (Sundar, 2008, p. 255). Second-gen S.A. youth are examples of cultural hybrids because their identities are influenced by South Asian culture and Western/Canadian culture. Findings from Purnima Sundar's (2008) study on cultural hybridity in second-generation South Asian-Canadian immigrant youth suggest that identity formation was navigated through "emphasizing South Asian characteristics and behaviours" or "foregrounding attributes considered to be more Canadian" so that youth could "make deliberate, strategic choices about how to express their identities in ways that help them achieve material/economic goals or emotional/psychological goals" (p. 265). Cultural hybridity has advantages and disadvantages depending on the individual's "identity capital" gained through social interaction (Sundar, 2008). Identity capital refers to the various resources such as "tangible assets [like] wealth and education, as well as intangible or psychological resources [like] self-reflection and evaluation" that make it either easier or harder for individuals to navigate social interactions (Sundar, 2008, p. 269). According to Goodenow and Espin (1993) and Lew, Rhianon, Papouchis, and Ritzler (1998), if cultural hybrids "are able to successfully integrate aspects of both mainstream society and the culture of origin," they acquire more identity capital in a social interaction (as cited in Sundar, 2008, p. 255). However, if cultural hybrids lose or do not gain identity capital in a social interaction, they can acquire "adjustment and mental health problems arising from feeling 'neither here nor there,' or too 'in-between' cultures," suggest Kanno (2000) and Rodriguez, Ramirez, and Korman (1999) (as cited in Sundar, 2008, p. 255). Decisions to "brown it up" or "bring the brown down" help second-gen S.A. youth "attain... specific goals or manag[e] the challenges of living in a multicultural Canadian context" (Sundar, 2008, p. 270). The more identity capital an individual has, the more likely

their subsequent social interactions will be successful, resulting in further acquisition of identity capital (Sundar, 2008).

Stereotypes affect social interactions because they affect the potential acquisition of identity capital. Negative stereotypes and failure to perform behaviour that reinforces positive stereotypes can decrease identity capital. Stereotypes are “a generalization about a group of people in which identical characteristics are assigned to virtually all members of [a] group, regardless of actual variation among the members” (Aronson, Wilson, Fehr, & Akert, 2013, p. 379). Stereotypes function in order to “maximize...cognitive time and energy” by developing “shortcuts and adopt[ing] certain heuristics in [the] attempt to understand other people” (Aronson et al., 2013, p. 379-380). When a stereotype does not consider “individual differences” and homogenizes and over-generalizes groups of people, “it is maladaptive and unfair, and can lead to discrimination” (Aronson et al., 2013, p. 380).

One of the most prevalent ways stereotypes are formed is through the media’s portrayal of different groups—via television, radio, internet, newspapers, etc. It is important to study the way media constructs stereotypes because “mainstream mass media have historically marginalized, trivialized, demeaned, and underrepresented minority groups” (Ramasubramanian & Murphy, 2014, p. 385). This is significant because media is the “primary, if not only, source of social and interactive information about various groups in society” (Ramasubramanian & Murphy, 2014, p. 385).

Media, specifically the newspaper, has played a role in Canada’s colonization efforts, as “the medium of print is strongly associated with the politics of imperialism and colonialism” (Nesbitt-Larking, as cited in Anderson & Robertson, 2011, p. 3). When “the mainstream positions itself as the rightful owner of Aboriginal lands” in newspapers, settler colonialism is perpetuated (Anderson and Robertson, 2011, p. 3). It is important to name Surrey as a settler-colonial city because “by interrogating the settler city as a foundational essentialism of settler colonialism itself...a more nuanced and relational understanding of the processes and structures that have reproduced it”—in this case, the processes and structures of archiving history in Surrey— can be developed (Tomiak, 2016, p. 10). Settler colonialism is the “specific formation of colonialism in which people come to a land inhabited by (Indigenous) people and declare that land to be their new home” (Row & Tuck, 2017, p. 4). The mainstream media of colonized lands depicts European-colonizers/white settlers to be the justified owners of the land and through this ideology displace Indigenous ownership of land while also “Othering” histories that are not European. The “Other” is a social position categorized through Eurocentrism which posits that the European way of life—including its politics, education, medicine, law, and justice—is superior to all others (Smith, 2012). Racial identities that are not European are relegated to the category of “the Other,” which is posited as inferior. When a social group is considered inferior, this justifies the superior group’s control of and intervention into the inferior group’s way of life while simultaneously solidifying this superior group’s ideologies and identities as the standard and/or default of the culture. Furthermore, the notion is that if the inferior group were to adopt the superior groups’ qualities or ways of life, they would be better off, and their communities would be left alone by the superior group.

In this paper, I provide examples of how Surrey is positioned as a settler-colonial city. I then argue that the Surrey Archives is an institution that perpetuates settler colonialism in the way it constructs the history of the South Asian community in Surrey, specifically through

newspaper clippings archived in the Reference File titled “Indo Canadian Communities Before 2009,” in the “1990’s” and “2000-2008” folders. Additionally, I argue that this archival material perpetuates stereotypes of South Asians as out-of-control and deviant through the sensationalism of violence in Surrey’s South Asian community, especially from 1990 to 2008. This sensationalism affects the identity formation of Surrey’s South Asian youth because it creates negative stereotypes of Surrey’s South Asian community which with second-gen S.A. identify. Lastly, I argue that this construction is purposeful within ongoing settler colonialism, as it creates an inferior Other that needs to be controlled in order to be better off, thereby justifying state intervention and control of the South Asian community in Surrey.

METHOD

Materials

Materials were acquired through three government-funded institutions, one federal and two municipal. First, at the federal level, population and mother-tongue language distribution data in Surrey was provided by the Statistics Canada Census of 2016. Second, at the municipal level, the floor plan of the Exhibitions section at the Museum of Surrey was observed. Third, also at the municipal level, reference materials from the Surrey Archives were analyzed. At the Surrey Archives, the Reference Files included “about 500 files in total, consisting of newspaper clippings and other reference materials on local topics such as bridges, parks, pioneer families and railways.” Newspaper clippings from the Reference File “Indo Canadian” were used. Specifically, data was collected from the time periods 1990–1999 and 2000–2008; this information was found in the “Indo Canadian Communities Before 2009” file—one folder labeled “1990’s” and one folder labeled “2000-2008.”

Procedure

The total number of newspaper clippings archived in the “1990’s” and “2000-2008” folders was counted. Then, each article (“article” is used interchangeably with “newspaper clipping”) was categorized by subject matter. To calculate the percentage of articles based on a particular subject, the total number of articles in each subject matter was divided by the total number of articles in that respective folder. This was done in order to measure the central tendency of the subject matter in these folders. Next, the subjects that were most often mentioned were categorized by theme. This was done by calculating the percentage of the themes mentioned in each subject. Sometimes there was more than one theme per newspaper clipping. The most-mentioned themes were considered as the narratives created through these archival materials. After finding the most-mentioned narratives, an analysis of each narrative was performed in the context of the narrative’s function.

RESULTS

2016 Census Data: Surrey, British Columbia, Canada

According to Statistics Canada, on the lands of the Semiahmoo, Katzie, Kwikwetlem, Kwantlen, Qayqayt, Musqueam, and Tsawwassen First Nations (or what is colonially known as Surrey), 48.9% spoke the official languages, which were English and French; 24.9% spoke Indo-Aryan languages which included Bengali, Gujrati, Hindi, Kashmiri, Konkani, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya (Odia), Punjabi (Panjabi), Sindhi, Sinhala (Sinhalese), and Urdu; 0.34% spoke Dravidian

languages such as Kannada, Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu, and Dravidian languages not included elsewhere; and 0.02% spoke Indigenous languages, which included Algonquian languages, Cree-Montagnais languages, Ojibway-Potawatomi languages, Athabaskan languages, Inuit languages, Tahltan languages, Michif, Salish languages, Siouan languages, Tsimshian languages, Wakashan languages, and other Indigenous languages not otherwise specified (Statistics Canada, 2017).

Museum of Surrey

The exhibits were located on the second floor of the Museum of Surrey, and were comprised of the “Textile Studio,” the “Hooser Library,” a room for “Textile Programs,” the “Surrey Stories Gallery,” and the “Indigenous Hall” (“Sitemap,” n.d.). Most of the surface area of the second floor was taken up by the latter two exhibits. The “Surrey Stories Gallery” in particular was centered and took up most of the space on the second floor (“Sitemap,” n.d.).

The Surrey Archives

Within the “Indo Canadian Communities Before 2009” Reference File, in the “1990’s” folder a total of 31 newspaper clippings were archived, and in the “2000-2008” folder a total of 50 newspaper clippings were archived. Most clippings in both folders had been printed in the *Surrey/North Delta Leader*. Below, the subject and thematic results of an analysis of both folders are described—first the results of the “1990’s” folder and then the results of the “2000-2008” folder.

In the “1990’s” folder, subjects involving violence were the most-mentioned. Almost all of the clippings described the January 11, 1997 altercation at the Guru Nanak Sikh Gurdwara (G.N.S.G.). More than half of the themes relating to violence demonstrated the sensationalism of violence in the community and exemplified Surrey’s operation as a settler-colonial city. A quarter of the themes discussed police intervention in the community, while 11% discussed the negative repercussions of the homogenization of all South Asians as Sikhs. Lastly, 6% of clippings mentioned unity in the Sikh community and the escape from prison of a person accused in the Air India bombings, respectively.

The second-most-mentioned subject in the “1990’s” folder was the financial cost to the City of Surrey directly associated with the South Asian community. Of the themes emerging from this subject, 80% were associated with policing costs—specifically related to the altercation at the G.N.S.G. as well as policing the Communities Against Racism and Extremism Rally in September 1998 and policing the Miri Piri parades in August 1999; lost business associated with celebrations at the Dasmesh Darbar Gurdwara was also mentioned.

In the “2000-2008” folder, the most-mentioned subject matter included violence in and toward the community, issues in the community and community forums about these issues, and cultural celebrations. The second-most-mentioned subject was gender inequality and women’s oppression, and the third-most-mentioned subject involved Sikh-centered terrorism and extremism. Subjects involving violence, community forums, and gender inequality were further discussed.

The most-mentioned theme related to the subject of violence in the “2000-2008” folder was violence toward the community and its members, specifically toward elderly South Asian mascs and the Newton *Masjid-at-Taqwa*. The second-most-mentioned theme was the deaths of South Asian community members. Under the heading of subject matter relating to issues in

the South Asian community, most clippings were about forums held in the Lower Mainland regarding issues of drugs, violence, gangs, and prostitution. Gender equality and women's oppression was the next category of subject matter to be thematically analyzed. Under this heading, most clippings involved gendered cultural celebrations, followed by a fundraiser for resources for femme abuse victims, and lastly the struggle for gender inequality in South Asian culture.

DISCUSSION

2016 Census Data: Surrey, British Columbia, Canada

The language distribution in Surrey is indicative of settler colonialism because it shows how Indigenous existence was erased. In Surrey, only 0.02% of people still spoke Indigenous languages as their mother-tongue, while 25.24% spoke South Asian languages and 48.9% spoke the official languages of English and/or French (Statistics Canada, 2017). This is an alarming disparity based on the history of these lands, where Indigenous populations numbering two million and above thrived and flourished since the brave muskrat dived deep into this planet's waters to collect Earth and create the land as it is known on the back of the Turtle, millennia ago (Travato & Aylsworth, 2018; "The Story of Turtle Island," 2016).

Museum of Surrey

The Museum of Surrey was a visual metaphor for settler colonialism because of the way it centered European history while Othering Indigenous and non-Indigenous racialized communities' histories. The Museum of Surrey is a fairly contemporary structure; it opened in 2019 and is funded mostly by the City of Surrey. The central area of the second floor depicted the "Surrey Stories Gallery," which highlighted the histories of European "pioneers" of certain institutions in Surrey, including medical services, policing, and media (i.e., newspapers). The "Indigenous Hall" gave a brief history of the Kwantlen, Katzie, and Semiahmoo Nations and depicted "artifacts" of the Kwantlen Peoples such as ancient tools. This paints the history of the Kwantlen, Katzie, and Semiahmoo Peoples as in the past and not living today, thereby justifying the place of settlers at the center of Surrey's history. In the corner beside the entrance of the exhibits on the second floor, a very brief history of a single-ethnicity-at-a-time in Surrey is displayed, Othering non-Indigenous racialized cultures by placing their histories on the outskirts of the "Surrey Stories" exhibit.

Surrey Archives: Reference File "Indo Canadians before 2009" to "1990's" Folder

The Surrey Archives are almost fully funded by the municipal government and exemplify how narratives are created which are then used to create stereotypes of groups of people. The role of the City of Surrey as a settler-colonial city is demonstrated within the "1990's" folder through newspaper clippings whose content normalized the European occupation of Indigenous lands that are now called Surrey. Furthermore, by centering the history of the area's South Asian community on violence and the costs associated with policing events held by the South Asian community, word choices and imagery created the narrative that the South Asian community was out of control and a burden to the City of Surrey.

Settler Colonialism

Settler colonialism in Surrey was demonstrated within the newspaper clippings about violence through discussions on police intervention and control, the pacification of the white settler community in the wake of this violence, and the law's precedence over religious symbols. An example of white settler-colonial attitudes is found in the article "OPINION: Let's not put religion before legislation"; in it, Brian Pynn, an editor of the *Surrey Leader*, mentioned his "Anglo-forefathers who tamed the western frontier," demonstrating the idea that white settlers were justified in their beliefs that they were the rightful owners of these lands (Walia, Pynn & Virani, 1997, p. A13).

Normalizing intervention in communities by police—an extension of the colonial institution of justice in Canada—is an example of settler colonialism and the subject positions it creates (i.e., which groups are normalized as having power and authority). In the article "Newton Sikh temple will stay closed until settlement is reached," police justified the shut down and occupation of the G.N.S.G. "because there could be 'renewed violence' that would put the community at risk" if the police were not there (Sinoski, 1997, n.p.). Additionally, in "Bloody clash bars worshippers," a police spokesperson said the Gurdwara would continue to be surveilled and patrolled because "the two sides have thus far refused to meet" and thus there was still a potential for violence (Dillon, 1997a, p. A3). Here, police intervention in the South Asian community was justified because the community was posited as being in need of intervention as they posed a threat to themselves and the larger Surrey community. Imagery, for example, an image with the caption: "A man, bloodied in the riot...cries out for assistance" in "CULTURE SHOCK" (Carlson, 1997a, p. A8), highlighted a racialized community as down or inferior, reaching out for assistance from the superior, colonial state. Through the discussion about the kirpan as a weapon or a religious symbol in "Law murky over kirpans" (Carlson, 1997b, p. A9), superior and inferior positions of power were exemplified through the Othering of non-Christian (non-European) religious symbols and the superior group assertion of control over racialized religions' religious symbols.

Settler colonialism was also perpetuated in these newspaper clippings through the descriptions of the pacification of the white settler community after the altercation at the GNS Gurdwara. White settlers were positioned at the center of society as the narrative of the clippings suggested that they were the ones to be pacified, with one article stating: "The weekend's violence cut deeply into the level of tolerance of an ethnic group long viewed with discomfort..." (Holota, 1997, p. A12). The power imbalance of "tolerance" suggests that there is a superior group that tolerates (i.e., white settlers) and an inferior group to be tolerated (i.e., South Asians). For example, "One...Caucasian man, upon hearing about the violence for the first time, said, 'See? We've got to start getting those people out of here'" (Carlson, 1997a, p. A8). Here, "we" are the white settlers who are entitled to choose whom to "get...out of here" (Carlson, 1997a, p. A8). In "The Guru's Door IS Open," the author stated that "Welcome, welcome" and "Do you need any help?" were "the most immediate greetings two Caucasian visitors receive upon entering the back of [G.N.S.G.]," demonstrating that the Gurdwara was a place that treated white folks generously and need not be feared (Carlson, 1997c, p. A15). The word choice in the title of "Law and order followed by open minds" likewise sought to pacify fears that the South Asian community was out of control by assuring readers that Sikhs were kind to Caucasians and that law and order was being "followed" (Holota, 1997, p. A12).

Sensationalism of Violence

Sensationalism, or the “use of sensational material or language, or a sensationalistic style” is used in “literature or the media...to provoke public interest or excitement” (“Sensationalism,” n.d., para. 2). Sensationalism in the news is used to “sell” stories so that news outlets can “attract audiences and/or to make profit” (Arbaoui, Swert, & Brug, 2016, p. 2). Sensationalism can be problematic when it creates narratives that function through stereotyping groups of people. The archived “1990’s” newspaper clippings at the Surrey Archives sensationalized the G.N.S.G. altercation through the word choices, imagery, and narratives deployed therein.

Word choices used to describe the altercation such as “bloody, sword-swinging clash” (Dillon, 1997a, p. A3), “bloody brawl” (Sinoski, 1997, n.p.), “bloody violence” (Belluk & Carlson, 1997, p. A9), “bloody Jan. 11 temple riot,” “temple fiasco” (Dillon, 1997b, n.p.), “bloodshed and war” (“Breaking Point,” 1997, p. 11), “fighting and spilling blood” (Walia, Pynn & Virani, 1997, p. A13), “people spill[ing] bloody and screaming” from the Gurdwara (Belluk, 1997, p. A3), and “victims [being] carried bloodsoaked from the chaos” (Holota, 1997, p. A12) created imagery that sensationalized the violence in the articles.

In an article titled “Law and order followed by open minds,” people in the altercation are described as “extremists perpetuating the violence” and the altercation is sensationally narrated as though it were a violent battle in this author’s favourite adventure novel: “It was a chilling scene bordering the surreal. Turbaned figures brandishing long swords in temple melee, western-dressed victims carried bloodsoaked from the chaos, uniformed police and riot squads grappling for control” (Holota, 1997, p. A12). In the article “Bloody clash bars worshippers,” a police spokesperson is quoted as saying this situation was “unprecedented,” that “the government of Canada [has never] been in this type of position before,” and that the police “have no reason to believe that there would not be violence if [the police] turn the building over to the (temple) executive...” (Dillon, 1997a, p. A3). This elicited the idea that police intervention was needed and that there would be chaos without it. This same notion is also demonstrated in “Temple opening ‘a very good day for Sikh man and woman,’” where it was stated that “despite the peaceful resolution, temple executive members from the two factions refused to meet face-to-face during their negotiations. And police are still searching for the person responsible for firing a bullet into the home of the temple vice-president” (Dillon & Diakiw, 1997, p. A14). In the article “Violence was a long time brewing,” the authors sensationalize the altercation by trivializing the start of the conflict as “a relatively simple request” that ended in “bloody violence” (Belluk & Carlson, 1997, p. A9). Furthermore, this “bloody violence” is suggested to be “long...brewing” which connotes that it was a developing problem, even though the timeline provided in the clipping only extends back four months before the altercation (Belluk & Carlson, 1997, p. A9). The article “BREAKING POINT” (1997) described the G.N.S. Gurdwara as “a symbol of bloodshed and war between two factions fighting for control” maintained by “Sikh militants,” a situation that “caused fear among Surrey and Delta citizens, who worry the violence will only escalate”; thus, the article implied serious violence by invoking the specter of religious extremism. The sensationalism of a divided community and the negative repercussions this could have on youth was exemplified through imagery in “Confusion the mood at schools,” where two masculine teens, one white and one brown, were displayed with their heads positioned face to face on opposing sides, connoting opposing views and or cultures (Diakiw & Belluk, 1997, p. A8).

Nirmal Singh Gill

Nirmal Singh Gill was a South Asian elder who was Punjabi, Sikh, and a caretaker of the Guru Nanak Sikh Gurdwara. In January of 1998, Nirmal Singh Gill was beaten to death by five white men while opening the G.N.S.G. for morning prayers, one of these men being a self-professed white supremacist named Nathan LeBlanc ("Crown seeks life," 1999). It is especially important to note that, even though most archived articles with information on the history of "Indo Canadians Before 2009" in the "1990's" folder involved the altercation at the Guru Nanak Sikh Gurdwara, there was absolutely no mention of the violent and racist murder of Nirmal Singh Gill to be found at the Surrey Archives.

Surrey Archives: Reference File "Indo Canadians before 2009" to "2000 – 2008" Folder

Sixty-eight percent of the newspaper clippings in the "2000-2008" folder involved themes that depicted the South Asian community as out of control and backwards. In this paper, articles related to forums on the issues of the community and gender inequality will be discussed because they provide insight into the Surrey Girl stereotype.

Violence against and within the South Asian Community

The articles on this subject created a narrative that the South Asian community was stricken with inevitable and never-ending violence, particularly via word choices used in the titles and in the body of the articles. For example, in "Forum tackles South Asian issues," it is stated that "social problems...are in their infancy now" (Joseph, 2003, n.p.). These social problems are enumerated as "drugs, violence, gangs, impaired driving, prostitution, crime, sexual assault, and gender inequality" (Reynolds, 2003, p. A3). Despite the fact that one of the articles included the word "solutions" in the title, the body of the article highlighted "violent local crimes [that] involve[d] Indo-Canadians ma[king] headlines across the Lower Mainland" (Reynolds, 2003, p. A3). A front-page headline in the *Surrey Leader* on June 19, 2002 stated, "'WHAT IS TAKING PLACE...ALMOST DEFIES LOGIC,'" quoting Wally Oppal, the "first Indo-Canadian judge to be appointed to the high court" (Ferguson, 2002, p. 1). The title and body of the article created a narrative of helplessness and confusion about issues in the community, making it easier to justify intervention from sources outside the community (Ferguson, 2002, p. 1). If solutions are created through logic, and the problem defies logic, then how can there be solutions? In "'WHAT IS HAPPENING...ALMOST DEFIES LOGIC,'" a narrative of a racialized and Othered community that needed state intervention was established through the statement that, after a forum on crimes in the South Asian community, "While participants agreed about the severity of the problem, solutions were less easy to identify, beyond a general commitment to better coordinate future community and police crime-fighting efforts" (Ferguson, 2002, p. 1).

Gender Inequality

The articles on this subject were narrated in a way that perpetuated the stereotype of South Asian femmes as victims of a backwards culture in need of rescue. The gendered celebration of Lohri was discussed in "Sisters reach out to brothers in campaign to stop violence," which highlighted the "Save Our Daughters" campaign formed "in the wake of several high profile murders of Indo-Canadian women" and stated that "the[se] tragedies have force[d] the South Asian community to confront their cultural attitudes toward women" (Babic, n.d., n.p.). Using

the words “Sisters reach out...” in the title connoted a subject identity in need of help, maintaining the stereotype of South Asian femmes as victims of a backwards culture (Babic, n.d.). The title of the article “Gender equality still sought” indicated that South Asian women were “still” in need (Singh, 2008), while the title of the article “Support for abused women...” explicitly identified the stereotype of a South Asian femme as a victim, especially of “spousal abuse” (“Support,” 2007). In conclusion, these word choices paint the South Asian femme as in need of help from outside of their cultural community because their out-of-control cultural community placed them in the role of a victim.

CONCLUSION

By choosing to archive certain newspaper clippings that highlighted violence in a backwards and out-of-control community, the Surrey Archives’ reference materials on the history of South Asians created an “Other.” This “Other” is demonstrated through the construction of the “Surrey Girl” and the “Surrey Jack.” Since the Surrey Girls and the Surrey Jacks are part of an out-of-control community, the settler-colonial city’s authority figures center themselves as the ones to intervene. For youth who are stereotyped as Surrey Girls or Surrey Jacks, this stereotyping serves to lower their identity capital because their identity does not help them effectively maneuver social situations. In terms of identity formation, South Asian mascs represented as violent or as extremists are stereotyped as criminals, murderers, and/or gang members, creating the identity of the “Surrey Jack.” South Asian femmes represented as victims of abuse are then stereotyped as needing to be saved, as perpetual victims who are also amoral because they are, after all, part of a backwards culture. Both stereotypes serve as a function of the settler-colonial city, which normalizes itself as the center or standard for culture in Surrey and the larger Canadian context. The Other created through settler colonialism functions as a site of inferiority where an inferior group can be continuously controlled, patrolled, and intervened on based on the narrative that this is needed to better the Othered community as well as the settler-colonial state.

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MY IDENTITY, MY MUSIC

ABSTRACT

This paper addresses my journey unpacking my relationships between my diverse identities and how this process helped shape my resistance to intersecting discriminations. Growing up in Canada, I've always felt a huge cultural disconnect. I was never fond of sports or most things typical for a Canadian-raised boy, and my affinity toward learning more about my Indian heritage put me in the spotlight as a target for bullying, racism, and mental health issues. Since then, I have experienced a constant struggle of identities, and with that comes a struggle to understand who I want to be versus who people want me to become. Indian classical music is largely abstract and requires self-insight to bring out its aesthetic value. Coming to terms with my diverse and conflicting identities, and providing space for all of them to thrive, has allowed me to positively shape my insights into my musical thought process, and to better understand myself. My work establishing the Indian Classical Music Society of Vancouver has been done in the hopes to create a shared space for people with common interests to find a sense of belonging.

My journey of identity is one of “becoming [a] hybrid Canadian” (Bose, 2017, p. 87), a conglomeration of identities that exist in various cultural spaces that are distinct from each other, but that come together to shape a whole and unique sense of being. This journey has, however, presented challenges in coming to terms with intersections between the various cultural spaces in which I have found myself engaging. Understanding how to reach a point of equilibrium and comfort with these sometimes conflicting intersections is a constant process that I will continue to undergo throughout my life. A major part of my identity has been my music, which has influenced every single aspect of my life. My music has become my life, and even though I may not pursue a career as a performing artist or music teacher, music insightfully shapes my relationships and various other parts of my life. The form of Indian classical music I sing is known as *khayal*; the style is well known for its improvisational and aesthetic elements which deeply rely on a sense of self-exploration and self-intimacy. Learning this genre of music has provoked me to look into my sense of being and understand who I am at a profound, creative, and meditative level. My school and religion have been other cultural spaces or institutions that have shaped me over the years, but have often found themselves dominated by my natural affinity toward my music. This paper takes a look at the past 21 years of my life and unpacks my relationships between my diverse identities to show how these have influenced my insight into my music as an Indian classical vocalist.

As a young kid born and raised in Canada, I was oddly active in engaging with South Asian religious and socio-cultural spaces. Most kids would want to play sports on weekends, but I wanted to go to the temple and sing *bhajans*.¹ I started learning Indian classical vocals at the age of three, and despite my class being filled with 30 or so other kids, nobody seemed to be as entrenched in learning this music as I was. It would sometimes be hard for me to find a space of acceptance within the South Asian community, because while other kids my age would “prefer performances of Bollywood and sometimes Punjabi music and dance styles” (Bose, 2017, p. 86), I would prefer performances of devotional or classical music. This would even be considered an oddity for senior communities, who admired my affinity towards heritage traditions but still viewed me as a somewhat odd “other.” I found refuge for myself at the time in going to the temple weekly or sometimes even daily, because “the temple was... a place where ethnicity, religion, and culture converged” (Amarasingam, 2008, p. 162) and where I found solace in exploring my beliefs and my music. I was also exposed to religious practices, but my idea of Hinduism at the time was a blind one, something that I was fed as a child but never really looked at twice to understand. The ritual was that of going to the temple but not really understanding what purpose that serves or how to internalize my beliefs personally. At the same time, I would express my “Indianness” through finding ways I could share my music or share more about my culture and religion. I’d often eat Indian food for lunch and would sometimes even show up to school wearing *kurta pajama*. It didn’t seem strange to me to do so because there were constant reminders everywhere of Canada’s pride in being a “cultural mosaic” (Goitom, 2017, p. 181), and I felt that it was only apt for me to share my heritage with others because we would learn about Hanukkah, the Lunar New Year, and other traditions at my school. There was nothing regarding Diwali or any other Indic custom that would give me space to talk about my culture, so I took it upon myself to share whatever I could with others. Because I was so heavily engaged with creative pursuits, I never felt any necessity to play sports, as most boys at the time were expected to do. My mother tried her best to enroll me in sports activities, but I didn’t enjoy these, even at school, and because of that I started to get picked on. Other boys would call me effeminate and gay among other things because I occupied myself with my music. The bullying intensified, and the fact that my music was linked to my heritage became another point of scrutiny; I wasn’t only doing something “effeminate,” such as music—I was also doing something that was unfamiliar. I started to find myself in an “in-between space... [which created] a fragmented, confusing and ultimately diminishing structure” (Bose, 2017, p. 87) in my childhood and kindled a sense of isolation that was never there before. I started to understand that I was different, and the childlike innocence and open-mindedness that once used to surround me started to disappear. I felt a need to assimilate into “the norm,” sensing that I had to “contend with the dominant construct (White, Christian)” (Amarasingam, 2008, p. 155). At one point during my time in elementary school, a close friend of mine told me that because I wasn’t Christian, I would be going to hell. None of this made sense to me. Slowly, rejection became my biggest fear and acceptance my biggest goal.

By the time I reached high school, the cultural spaces with which I engaged were increasingly in conflict with each other, and I felt like more of an outcast in school and

¹ This is a type of devotional song typically from Hindu religious traditions.

mainstream societal environments. There were also more expectations coming at me from all directions. There were (implied) expectations from my peers to lose my “Indianness” to be more accepted. There were expectations from my family to become more engaged with my Gujarati heritage and to achieve certain academic standards. There were also expectations from my *Gurus* to represent their lineage and their music and to follow their prescribed protocols. There were expectations set forward by religious teachings prescribed at temples I would visit and by my family, which didn’t always sit right with me. I was in a cycle of finding myself and becoming lost again, and “the binary of belonging and not belonging” (Bose, 2017, p. 88) became familiar; I would feel a need to prove myself constantly—in school, religion, and music. “Identity is an interplay between ethnicity and culture” (Goitom, 2017, p. 184), and I found that my ethnicity and my culture started to define me, and became an obstacle in everything from getting picked for a group project to being invited to house parties to finding people who would talk to me and respect me. I started to feel “torn between loyalty to [my heritage] culture and attraction to [mainstream] culture” (Bose, 2017, p. 87) in cases where they clashed, and my overriding need to feel accepted and not be rejected by my peers weighed heavily on me mentally, spiritually, and even physically. At recess, I’d sit in a corner in the library, as I’d have anxiety when I went outside because I didn’t want to be bullied or not have any friends to hang out with. This led me to throw myself more deeply into my music community and trust my *Gurus*² to give me a sense of belonging, which was becoming harder and harder to find elsewhere even as I tried to fit into my school environment.

Throwing myself into my music also resulted in a stronger association with my religion. However, as I grew older, I learned about the diversity within the Hindu belief system, which ranges from the *Aghoris*, who seek to challenge societal norms by adopting taboo practices, to the reserved *Swaminarayans*, who follow a strict religious doctrine. I came to understand that there was a bigger narrative at play within Hinduism than the homogenized narrative I was exposed to as a child. I stopped relating to the temple environments as my Hindu beliefs shaped themselves into in what are often deemed “non-traditional forms of interacting with [the Divine]” (Amarasingam, 2008, p. 161) but are actually quite traditional, as personalized relationships with the Divine exist across various sects of Hindu thought. I felt that the real capability of my belief system was shrouded by biases, and I often experienced a colonized perspective of Hinduism as a monolith of god-fearing devotees, weekly Sunday temple visits, and a congregational vs. personal relationship with the Divine.

This journey in my identity sphere of religion led me to better understand the dynamics of relationships in my musical community. The *guru-shishya parampara* is a very important traditional bond between the *Guru* and their disciple, and is symbiotic in nature. I’ve had a variety of *Gurus* over the years, from local teachers who helped groom me and provide me with the tools I needed to take advanced training to accomplished professionals who frequently tour around the world performing and teaching. The most notable of my teachers is Pandit Jasraj of the *Mewati Gharana*.³ As I grew older, and my music also grew, I found myself understanding

² *Guru* is often translated as “teacher” in English. However, a *Guru* serves as more than a teacher. The term is an amalgam of teacher, mentor, confidante, and parental figure.

³ A *Gharana* is a school or branch of a specific stylistic representation—in this case, *khayal* music. They often represent a geographic area of a court where the style was first patronized.

the complexities of the music world. Being around big personalities in Indian classical music was to me (and to a lot of people) like being around a god. In most cases, we were conditioned never to question, only to obey. This was the framework of the *guru-shishya* relationship I was introduced to. As I grew more immersed in the world of music and tried to find acceptance and community, I was exposed to the politics of that world. The term “politics” is “used in India to describe musicians’ manoeuvres to enhance their own status and degrade that of their rivals” (Clayton & Leante, 2015, p. 415) and of other people situated around them who may challenge their authority or pedagogy. I found myself involved in many conflicts, though I was rarely their perpetrator. Even though I was older, I was still a kid, and I started feeling discriminated against in a cultural space in which I had sought refuge. When I found myself in situations that I couldn’t bear to witness any longer and that deep down I didn’t agree with ethically or spiritually, I was told that it was because of my “Westernness.” People took advantage of me, especially when I was younger, and no matter how much *seva*⁴ I did, some of those to whom I looked up found ways to ensure I remained subjugated and underappreciated. These “[conflicts] can be attenuated by the influence of the ideology of teamwork or by a strategic acceptance of subordination, but nonetheless can be a source of great bitterness and resentment” (Clayton & Leante, 2015, p. 437), and my relationship with music was thus tainted by people to whom I looked up using this beautiful art form to attain power, money, and cult-like followings. A theme which reoccurred in many conflicts was that of seniority, which concerned me “both [as] a source of anxiety and as a strategy [which was] consciously exploited” (Clayton & Leante, 2015, p. 438) around me by people who were in positions of power over me and my peers. Seniority is to be respected, but it isn’t the be-all and end-all to decide if one deserves to be in a position of power and allow those who are senior to treat others in certain ways. With “absolute deference [being expected] from student towards teacher” (Clayton & Leante, 2015, p. 426), I found myself in an increasingly hostile musical community where I could no longer respect some of my seniors because of their actions. It became very hard for me to separate my personal connection to music and the connection others wanted to build for me, and this really pulled me and my music down. With *khayal* music being so heavily entrenched within the principles of self-exploration, insightful creativity, and expressionism, it was important for me to rebuild my musical environment so that it became conducive to the music I wanted to see myself exploring and sharing. I started to draw upon non-traditional styles of learning, such as online lessons, so that I could have access to *Gurus* who would allow me to recreate my musical environment. Online lessons are often regarded as an unproductive means of *guru-shishya* tutelage; “however, many traditional values and pedagogical practices remain intact, thereby retaining the integrity of the overall learning experience for many students involved” (Roy, 2016, p. 128). I had also never really had the chance to choose my *Gurus* before this. For the longest time, my choice of teacher was geographically constrained to Vancouver, and when it was time for advanced lessons, my options were constrained to my *gharana*, which I also didn’t get to choose because it was the only option readily available to me. With this new opportunity to learn and to grow, it was important to build a strong “rapport between [my] teacher and [myself, as this] has the power

⁴ *Seva* is work done out of devotion to another, or selfless service.

to affect the quality of a *tālīm*”⁵ (Roy, 2016, p. 125), and the journey to find this rapport has led me to the *Gurus* I have now. My relationship with them aims to minimize politics and keep the focus on the music itself rather than on power dynamics.

Recreating positive and personalized relationships with my religion and music also carried over into my school life. In university, I opened myself up instead of restricting myself to my cultural spaces of religion and music. Still, I kept in mind the importance of not losing these spaces and thus losing a sense of my core being. I found a sense of rekindled interest and learning on the part of my peers, who seemed open-minded toward my heritage being an important part of my life. Being part of a globalized campus where people come from various places and spaces, I no longer felt alone in my struggle to understand the intersections of my identity. For people all across campus, I noticed that “culture, ethnicity, and identity were dependent on each other and [were] symbiotic in nature” (Goitom, 2017, p. 184); it seemed that many of them were also still figuring things out just like I was, and yet were proactively engaging with socio-cultural spaces in which they felt a sense of belonging. Having my own space in university as I reached adulthood allowed me to fully experience my hybridity and understand who I wanted to be rather than feeling that my identity was fully facilitated through my parents, musical and religious communities, and peers. I no longer needed to compromise, always “being between two worlds” (Goitom, 2017, p. 185); instead, I could explore the full extent of who I wanted to be. I started to push beyond my comfort zone to define belonging for myself, and then felt like I belonged.

My hybridity is something I feel comfortable expressing not only within my school environment but also in my newfound relationships within my music and religious communities. From having some wine with one of my *Gurus*, to talking about ethical and spiritual hardships with Hindu peers at my university, to having school friends attend my concerts, I have finally been able to express my identities as one rather than many. Coming to terms with being an Indo-Canadian, understanding the way my ethnicity, religious and heritage culture, and “Canadianness” intersect through my educational, religious, and musical spaces of influence has shaped who I am today. Unpacking your identity and creating space for yourself to thrive is a constant process, but I’ve come to understand that there’s no need to compromise when my various cultural spaces come into conflict with each other. I still encounter discrimination, bullying, and various systemic abuses at school, in music, and in religion. However, it no longer prevents me from finding a comfortable place within those spaces anymore. The process of understanding these intersections, and what you learn from them, is what largely goes into forming a hybrid identity. This process teaches you how intersections can be a good thing rather than a conflict at every turn.

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⁵ This means training.

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BORN BROWN; RAISED WHITE

ABSTRACT

In this paper, I explore my double identity as a young South Asian-Canadian woman. In order to unravel ways in which Eastern and Western ideologies and philosophies contribute to identity and how I personally navigate this identity-based duality in my life, I share how cross-cultural familial and external expectations in addition to diverging societal normalities influence identity. By analyzing the polarity of Eastern and Western principles, and thereby recognizing the dichotomous nature of their characteristic philosophical core values, I examine the struggle that South Asian youths face to balance both worlds—how being born “brown” and growing up “white” is a balancing act. South Asian Canadians negotiate between Canadian and South Asian culture. I aspire to identify intergenerational discrepancies in values as segregated by culture, religion, art, education, and technology today. I wish to incite South Asian Canadians to introspect regarding the origins of their inner ethics and illuminate the roots of their own identities so that they may unify their multiple contextual identities in a way that appropriately aligns a sense of definition with a sense of limitlessness.

In this paper, I intend to view identity through a multidimensional prism to analyze and further understand my South Asian ancestry and identity. I strive to answer the following questions: What is identity? What does it mean to be a Canadian? What is culture? What does it mean to be South Asian living in Canada? I attempt to explore what it means to identify as a South Asian Canadian practicing a hybridized culture. I try to unravel my personal identity and the cultures I practice as a South Asian Canadian. Through my personal experience and research, I hope to examine how culture and migration intertwine to create a unique and dynamic sense of ethnic and/or national identity for South Asian communities in Canada. Children of immigrant families (such as me) face the challenge of having to negotiate between at least two unique cultures—usually the culture of their hereditary lineage versus the culture in which they grow up and live. South Asian Canadians are born “brown” and yet we are surrounded by a predominantly “white” culture and setting. I try to recognize how aspects of both Western and Eastern philosophies and ideologies shape what it means to be a Canadian and South Asian simultaneously. There are divergences and convergences in these philosophies and cultural values, and I illuminate this idea by analyzing the definition of “culture.”

My experience is personal; therefore, it is limited. While I have neither a sociological background nor any prior academic knowledge in philosophy, gender studies, psychology, or any other related field, I examine my double identity as a young woman who identifies as both Bangladeshi and South Asian Canadian from philosophical, psychological, and sociological

perspectives. My work is subjective and is not intended to represent all experiences. I fully acknowledge that South Asian-Canadian identity cannot be confined to a single definition or experience, and my position provides a humble and limited perspective. I invite Canadian South Asians to examine the source of their personal values, ethnocultural roots, and orientations, shed light on their multidimensional identities, and tell stories of shared and varied experiences.

MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES OF IDENTITY

Identity can be understood in accordance with multiple theoretical frameworks and perspectives. Philosophical theories on self-identification (Camp, 2016) include the character theory (you are yourself based on your traits), the memory theory (you are yourself based on your memories), and the body theory (you are physically yourself). The expansion of the self is an ongoing process, as individual identity is made up of more than mere accounts of personal history (as suggested by the memory theory of identity). According to Professor Byrne (2014), a philosophy professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, identity is a duality consisting of a physical body and a nonphysical mind. Byrne credits philosopher René Descartes, the father of the Cartesian mind-body dualism theory, as the instigator of this theory. Furthermore, identity may be given, meaning it may be passed on from generation to generation; conversely, identity may be self-created, painted onto a blank canvas. While some philosophers theorize that identity is prearranged at birth, others conceptualize it to be constructed thereafter.

From a biological point of view, an individual is a living structure based on genetic codes passed on hereditarily; a prescribed set of intricate instructions are shuffled and sorted to enable a physical existence and determine psychological traits. Furthermore, one's personal physical appearance has an impact on one's identity. An individual is not, however, concretized by a definite destiny according to Western philosophy. Instead, people are generally thought to have free will and make deliberate decisions to navigate the multi-experiential existence that is life. Contrastingly, in Eastern philosophy, people are generally thought to have a determined position and path in life. According to the first perspective, identity may be regarded as a creative process—the accumulation of choices by self-actualization (Lyon, 2016). According to the opposing perspective, identity may be supposed to be pre-set. Thus, it is debatable whether ethnic background emergent from birth is an essential or accidental property of identity.

Yet, from another angle, an individual is composed of multiple identities with each position having its own internalized expectations and meanings (Heshmat, 2014). According to this theory, people assume multiple role-based, ethnicity-based, and gender-based identities. One individual may identify herself as a mother, a sister, and a daughter; these identities are merely a few of her identities based on roles within her immediate family. Aside from an array of fragmented and interrelated identities and stipulated roles, an individual is defined by his or her values and goals. Who you are may be directly proportional to what you do as well as to the reasoning behind why you choose certain actions over others. As people discover and develop personal potential and seek opportunities to implement this potential, a life's purpose is created (Heshmat, 2014). Our environment and our genetics together shape the way we self-identify; we contextualize our identities based on our surroundings, adapting our nature to that of our localization. This theory emphasizes that we are the product of both nature and nurture.

Identity is contextual and based on setting—not only time but also place. To explain the relationship between identity, space, place, and sense of belonging, I quote Bendiner-Viani and Low (2003):

The concept of place identity—the sense of belonging to emotionally, socially, and culturally significant places—is an important facet of people’s self-identity. Place identity situates psychological development in the life spaces, home spaces, neighbourhood spaces, and national/transnational/global spaces where people live and work. As a psychological construct, it highlights the significance of understanding residents’ conceptions of themselves as located in a particular space and time and as members of a social community and cultural group. (p. 1073)

Our identities are interaction-dependent. Living in a multicultural setting, personal multidimensionality is complimented by the ability to flow between cultural norms. Thus, all of the spaces in which we live, grow up, work, and play shape our identity as well as our sense of place and belonging.

Evidently, identity holds numerous unique properties. No single distinctive metaphysical component can define identity, as it is a convoluted and intangible entity. A vague term, “identity” is implicitly complex and thus serves best as an umbrella term preceded by an adjective (e.g., racial identity, sexual identity, class-based identity). Socially constructed identities such as national identity, the “idea of a temporal and spatial continuity of a nation” (Fearon, 1999, p. 8), may give rise to nationalism and draw ethnic boundaries. Dependent on cultural context and ethnic background, people present themselves as they wish to be perceived: “ethnic boundaries are situational and changeable, resulting from external and internal sources that determine how people see themselves relative to the larger society and how the larger society positions them,” (Plaza, 2006, p. 223).

CULTURE, ETHNICITY, AND IDENTITY

Personal identity is affected by family, friends, pop culture and media, internal and external philosophies and ideologies, and religious views, as well as one’s ethnicity and cultural upbringing. Culture is, collectively, the manifestation of intellectual, social, and artistic growth—the customs, achievements, social institutions, and arts of a specified group of people. Our cultures give meaning to our identities, constructing affiliations and boundaries with other groups and individuals (Plaza, 2006). According to Cristina De Rossi, an anthropologist at Barnet and Southgate College, “Culture encompasses religion, food, what we wear, how we wear it, our language, marriage, music, what we believe is right or wrong, how we sit at the table, how we greet visitors, how we behave with loved ones, and a million other things” (as cited in Zimmermann, 2017, n.p.).

Both consciously and unconsciously, people segregate amongst themselves based on different cultures and perceptions of each other. Pigmentation of the skin has an impact on our perception of others and our self-presentation. Defined at birth, ethnic background is a key player in identity. People make stereotypical assumptions based on race, ethnicity, skin colour, and even the tonality of the colour. We tend to generalize ourselves as “brown” and “South Asian,” glossing over rich linguistic, religious, and cultural diversity; in fact, “there is a myriad of ethnic, cultural and national differences within the [South Asian] diaspora” (Goitom, 2017, p. 18). Growing up as a “brown” Muslim girl in Dhaka, Bangladesh is vastly different from growing

up as a “brown” Hindu boy from rural Sri Lanka, and yet these individual experiences fall under examples of “South Asian” life and culture. The Indian subcontinent has a rich demographic diversity of culture and tradition based around religion, philosophy, art, and history. To be South Asian is far more than to be “brown”; however, the experience of living in Canada does not make one “white.”

Western society, which is predominantly white, is defined by the cultures of European countries in addition to countries that have been heavily influenced by European immigration, such as the United States of America and Canada. Conversely, Eastern culture refers to the societal norms of countries in Asia and the Indian subcontinent. Both Eastern and Western culture were heavily influenced by religion in the beginning; however, now “in Eastern culture, there is less of a distinction between secular society and religious philosophy than there is in the West” (Zimmermann, 2017, n.p.). Eastern and Western culture are juxtaposed and perceived as being in opposition to each other. Frequently, one is viewed and presented as superior to the other. Despite this fact, historically, these cultures have interacted with each other; at the same time, both have attempted to maintain their cultural and ethnic “purity.” Additionally, all cultures and cultural practices have been influenced by geography, economy, politics, and history of migration (either by force or by choice). Although ethnicity and culture are important markers of identity to an extent, we often decide what defines us in the sense that we selectively pick and choose what we incorporate into our lives. Ethnic culture is cherry-picked, and thus culture is not historical legacy; past and present cultural elements are juggled constantly, thereby shaping culture as an evolving process (Plaza, 2006).

MULTICULTURAL POLICY: SOUTH ASIAN-CANADIAN OR CANADIAN WITH SOUTH ASIAN DESCENT

According to philosophy professor Elisabeth Camp, people are composed of physical bodies and webs of overlying psychological states (2016). People exist in unique spatiotemporal locations and identify themselves primarily through a narrative view of identity in the sense that one is who one says one is; you are your story, and it is neither temporal nor teleological in nature (Camp, 2016). When one is asked to describe where one is from, the query may be interpreted in a multitude of ways. That’s because this seemingly simple four-word question—“Where are you from?”—has complicated and convoluted meanings. The question does not adhere to any integrity or specificity in comparison to questions such as, “What is your place of birth?” or “Did your family immigrate to Canada? From which nation?” One may interpret the place one is “from” as one’s birthplace, the place where one has the most familial relationships, the place where one’s immediate family resides, or the place where one grew up. Asking someone where he or she is from may be interpreted as a request to know his or her ancestral background, or it may be interpreted as a question regarding citizenship.

I am frequently asked where I am from, and my response to this question would be that my family is from Bangladesh, while I grew up in Canada. While I was born in Bangladesh, my family immigrated to Canada when I was an infant. My blood is South Asian. I was born “brown.” Canada is my home. I was raised “white.” That being said, Bangladesh is a home to me, too. Canada and Bangladesh are both places where I feel a sense of belonging. I am South Asian and Canadian; I am South-Asian Canadian. I am Bangladeshi and Canadian; I am Bangladeshi-Canadian. Such hyphenations are an integral part of my identity as a whole.

I live bi-culturally, as a Bengali speaker born in a divisional city in Bangladesh and as a Canadian. I am bilingual, and I identify myself as a Bengali-speaking Canadian. The first language I ever learned was Bengali. I was quick to learn English as I went to school. Now, I feel more comfortable speaking in English than I do in Bengali. Is Bengali my mother tongue if I feel more at ease with the English language? Fortunately, despite my Canadian education and upbringing, I am still able to speak in and understand Bengali. I can barely read or write in Bengali, and while my literacy is limited, I am proud to say that I have tried to preserve the extent of my ability to speak in Bengali. I compare myself to my younger brothers who can both understand Bengali but struggle to string together sentences as they speak hesitantly and haltingly. We were born into the same family, and yet I speak more Bengali than my brothers do; I feel more Bengali than my brothers do.

I am South Asian as well as Bangladeshi, as the former encompasses the latter. Individuals of South Asian descent comprise Canada's second largest non-European ethnic group, representing 28% of the population "that belongs to visible minority groups" (Papp, 2011, p. 6). Those who identify as South Asian trace their cultural roots back to the Indian subcontinent, consisting primarily of India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Fiji. The South Asian diaspora flows into Africa, the West Indies, and other regions as well. Major South Asian religions include Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Christianity. A diverse ethnic group, South Asians "share values and attitudes towards family, community and social networks" (Papp, 2011, p. 6). The preservation of ethnic customs, traditions, and heritage language proves to be an integral arm of South Asian culture.

I am also Canadian. Canada is a multicultural nation; however, the concept of maintaining or managing multiculturalism is complicated. How does Canada ensure an inclusive, welcoming environment while also acknowledging its Eurocentric norms and allowing for differences in the traditions and cultures of smaller groups? Respect is an implicit component of multiculturalism. Equilibrating inclusivity with a sense of individuality is as complex as it is crucial.

Canadian nationality is vague and largely undefined. Often jokingly, Canadians describe themselves as polite, outdoorsy, hockey-loving Tim Horton's regulars. John Shields and Harald Bauder (2015) state that "those Canadians with the strongest sense of nationalism are also the strongest supporters of immigration and see multiculturalism and diversity as a core defining feature of Canada" (p. 24). Prime Minister Justin Trudeau states: "We define a Canadian not by a skin colour or a language or a religion or a background, but by a set of values, aspirations, hopes and dreams that not just Canadians, but people and the world share" (Hewitt, 2017, p. 12). This definition, while heartfelt, fails to acknowledge Canada's dark history based in racism and policies of assimilation. Having torn apart Indigenous communities and cultures and manifestly disregarded basic human rights, Canada drips in hypocrisy. Empty promises of change pepper Canadian politics as history is side-swept. Canadian identity, though based on a "pluralist conception...considers accommodation through...negotiation to be the best way of responding to tensions—national, regional and ethnic, religious and political—that make up Canada" (Blattberg, 2013, p. 12). Yet today, Canada struggles to accommodate its peoples in a way that is fully inclusive, respectful, and honest. Canadian culture is based on conversation and consideration, unfortunately accompanied by an unforgivable ignorance toward its First Peoples.

Canadian culture tends to promote individualism, self-sufficiency, and egalitarianism. By contrast, South Asian culture is family-oriented, prizing selflessness over self-sufficiency. As a Canadian of South Asian background, I experience such cultural tension on a daily basis. How can Canada, as a nation, accommodate so many different cultures and maintain unity? Goitom (2017) has argued that Canada has devised and implemented the policy of multiculturalism as a strategy:

In the Canadian context, the policy of multiculturalism is a strategy implemented to manage cultural diversity.... [This] much-debated policy...is a continual concern, especially in regard to its definition, implementation, maintenance and utility as one of the social contexts and policy framework. For immigrants and their second-generation descendants, at the forefront of these challenges are questions of belonging and practices of citizenship that mobilize the minds and bodies with identification beyond the nation state. (p. 2)

Canada has been famously coined a “cultural mosaic”; this definition enables the fluidity of what it means to be Canadian. For example, I may identify myself as a South Asian person living in Canada versus identifying myself as a Canadian of South Asian descent. Such subtle divergences in communicating my identity are influential to my self-perception as well as the way others perceive me. “The inscription and articulation of culture’s hybridity” conceptualizes an international culture, and “it is the ‘inter’...the in between space” that negotiates and translates cultures (Bhabha, 1994, p. 38). Unfortunately, despite the recognition and appreciation of cultural differences, Canada as a nation still prizes Caucasian culture and Western philosophies and ideologies above all others. Canadian multiculturalism policy is somewhat paradoxical in the sense that it assumes the equal status of all cultures while centralizing “white” culture. Due to the centrality of white culture, other cultures are marginalized. Despite its problems, the country’s multiculturalism policy has merit, as it allows for a hyphenated identity rather than a singular acculturated one. Identity is fluid; therefore, we tend to morph between our South Asian and Canadian identities, choosing certain perspectives, values, and philosophies over and/or with others.

IMMIGRANTS IN CANADA: BALANCING A HYPHENATED IDENTITY

People move enthusiastically, accidentally, and reluctantly (Bose, 2018). People may move due to poverty and/or economic stagnation or seek refuge for political reasons. Many immigrate to Canada seeking higher education or better career prospects, a safer and more secure living environment, more secure childcare and healthcare systems, etc. Canada is recognized as an inclusive and welcoming nation, accepting LGBTQIA people and advocating for women’s rights. With a relatively healthy economy, stable democratic political system, universal healthcare system, world-class education system, and growing technological industry, Canada offers much promise. Brian Keeley’s (2009) analysis of immigration narratives and patterns indicates that macrostructures push emigrants, whereas microstructures pull immigrants (as cited in Bose, 2018). With immigration arises the challenge of reforming and adjusting one’s identity by integrating oneself into a new lifestyle and cultural mindset while still adhering to one’s own cultural heritage by maintaining integrity and individuality—a process that occurs over time as families integrate into the new society. Identity is shaped by “the deliberate preservation of ethnic membership, values, and a continued economic attachment to ethnic communities”

(Plaza, 2006, p. 212). Immigrants new to Canada are expected to adjust personal views and values to align with that of the nation, all while maintaining the integrity of their home culture.

Supporting Erin Tolley's (2011) work, Shields and Bauder (2015) suggest immigrants follow a series of steps as part of the integration process:

- 1) Identify with the receiving country rather than anchoring their identity in the country of origin; 2) participate with the institutions of broader society; 3) learn the official or dominant language(s) and communicate on an ongoing basis with it; and 4) build friendships and networks that extend beyond one's ethno-specific group. (p. 15)

Based on my personal experience, this process of integration seems to be more applicable to first-generation immigrants like my parents, who migrated to Canada when I was almost a year old. Unlike my parents, I grew up on Canadian soil, learning the country's official languages within the institutions of mainstream "white" society and culture; however, as I also grew up in a "brown" family of immigrants, I maintain a hyphenated identity.

We have constructed uniquely emergent hybridized ethnic identities, finding our footing between Eastern and Western cultures. Our double identities are more symbiotic than they are dichotomous. Culture, identity, and ethnicity are collaborative entities, as becomes evident in the following quote from Plaza (2006):

...The theory of social construction of ethnicity and hybrid identity [is conceptualized] as a fluid, situational, volitional, and dynamic phenomenon, one in which ethnic boundaries, identities, and cultures are negotiated, defined, and produced through social interaction inside and outside ethnic communities. Through social interactions, individuals are able to define and express their identities as "ethnic" actors. (p. 214)

When I was growing up, I often struggled to find the balance between Canadian and Bangladeshi cultures in choosing between different norms. Growing up embracing multiple cultures, I often felt torn between the two. When speaking with my parents, I chose between English or Bengali. When enjoying a meal, I chose between using cutlery or my right hand. When planning my leisure time, I chose between friends or family. In my adolescence, my friends would encourage me to sneak out of the house or skip classes; they wanted me to defy my constraints and disobey my parents— unthinkable for traditional Asian youth. Eastern values dictate compliance, strict rituals, and a deep, unwavering respect for elders. Western values promote expression, individuality, and freedom of thought and speech. As a young girl growing up in a Bangladeshi household in a North American region, I tried my best to maintain the respect of my mother and father while remaining true to my own hybridized values.

In conclusion, identity is a multifaceted entity; it is an umbrella-term best accompanied by a preceding adjective referring to the specific defining context. What it means to be Canadian is also undefined and subject to change over time, since culture is constantly evolving. Culture is defined as a myriad of arts, literature, food, fashion, language, beliefs, and values consistent among a group of people. The South Asian-Canadian group dips into diverse pools of South Asian cultures and a rather ambiguous Canadian culture. Immigrants juggle two unique cultural identities, merging and segregating the two as personally applicable. As I was born into a "brown" family, I faced the challenge of balancing a rich and abundant Eastern historical heritage with Western heritage. Immigrant children are re-potted plants: with their intricate South Asian roots, they are transported to a North American socioeconomic climate, which causes them to fruit and flower in Western ways. How a South Asian-Canadian youth chooses

to nourish his or her Eastern roots while bearing Western fruits and flowers is an individual effort, evolving and shifting according to personal identity and active participation in South Asian and/or Canadian culture(s).

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SESSION II

Gendered Violence, Representation and Resistance

Session Chair: Sarika Bose, University of British Columbia

Harpreet Kaur Mander “Surrey Jacks: A Violent Protest Masculinity”

Veronica Sudesh “Trails of Murder, Tears of Grief: Understanding Violent Crimes against Second Generation Coconuts”

Alysha Amrita Bains “Dominant Narratives and Sites of Creative Resistance: Reimagining Multicultural Canada through South Asian Youth Communities”



“SURREY JACKS”: A VIOLENT PROTEST MASCULINITY

ABSTRACT

British Columbia's Lower Mainland has seen an increase in homicidal shootings and gang violence, which overwhelmingly occur in the predominantly South Asian communities of Surrey and Abbotsford. Thus, the Lower Mainland's Indo-Canadian community has become synonymous with this kind of violence, as most of it occurs between South Asian men. Community members and politicians consistently pose the following questions: Why are young men from affluent families participating in violence and selling drugs when they do not suffer from a lack of money? What are some of the push and pull factors for these specific men in joining gangs and selling drugs? Consequently, most community solutions have been quick to use the law as rectification; discussion is lacking regarding the ways in which the gender identity of these men is an important intersection in finding a solution to the problem. This paper explores the following questions: How do these young men navigate their hybrid, bicultural identity as Indo-Canadians and understand themselves in relation to the dominant notion of a white, hegemonic masculinity? How does the adoption of a kind of protest masculinity known as “Surrey Jacks” render both the young men and the community at large susceptible to racist stigmatization?

INTRODUCTION

Over the last few years, British Columbia's Lower Mainland has seen an increase in homicidal shootings and gang violence. The shootings and gang-related activity overwhelmingly occur in the cities of Surrey and Abbotsford, which both have predominantly South Asian populations. Thus, the Lower Mainland's Indo-Canadian community in particular has become synonymous with this kind of violence, as most of it occurs between South Asian men. There have been numerous accounts of South Asian men engaging in violence with one another, resulting in the death of boys as young as sixteen and seventeen and mindless shootings in public. Community members and politicians consistently pose the following questions: 1) Why are young men from affluent families participating in violence and selling drugs when they do not suffer from a lack of money? 2) What are some of the push and pull factors for these specific men when it comes to joining gangs and selling drugs? As a result, most community solutions rely on law-enforcement to rectify the problem. There is little or no discussion of how the gender identity of these men factors into the search for a solution, though a culture of male bravado in the South Asian community clearly intersects with violence and gang-related activity. In this paper, I explore how these young men navigate their hybrid, bicultural identity as Indo-Canadians and how they understand themselves in relation to the dominant notion of a white, hegemonic

masculinity. I also discuss how the adoption of a kind of protest masculinity known as “Surrey Jacks” renders these young men as well as the community at large susceptible to racist stigmatization. This paper illustrates the multidimensionality of South Asian male-on-male violence by positing it as a feminist issue and exploring the phenomenon’s gendered nature. I believe a more comprehensive analysis of “Surrey Jacks” will provide a much-needed layer to community understanding of why young Indo-Canadian men resort to violence and gang-affiliated activity. This paper provides context to the ongoing violence taking place in Surrey, British Columbia and introduces “Surrey Jacks” as a form of protest masculinity. In seeing this protest masculinity as stigmatizing and racist, I wish to suggest that seeing young men within the confinements of their “Surrey Jack” protest masculinity limits their potential and hinders their possibility of engaging with healthy masculinity.

CONTEXT

As reported by the community online publication *Vancouver is Awesome*, there have been 208 shootings in Surrey between the years of 2015 and 2017 (Kronbauer, 2018). As of July 2018, there were 29 shootings in Surrey in 2018 so far, with many more since last reported (Zytaruk, 2018). Almost every week, there is a news headline about some deadly, dangerous homicidal shooting taking place largely in residential areas, right at peoples’ homes. Likewise, Surrey has become synonymous with danger and death, as the city’s slogan “Surrey: The Future Lives Here” gets taken up and switched to “Surrey: The Future Dies Here” in reference to the city’s violent neighbourhoods. There has been a rise in community and political response to the ongoing violence in Surrey. In June of 2018, community members hosted the “WAKE UP! Rally” at Surrey City Hall in response to the shooting death of two teenage boys aged 16 and 17. Over one thousand people were in attendance, including prominent community members, police officers, and politicians. Similarly, since Surrey’s recent municipal election, there has been a strong push to end Surrey’s contract with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and adopt a municipal police force that will be better equipped to deal with the concerns of Surrey’s predominantly South Asian population.

WHAT ARE PEOPLE SAYING?

There has been a steady increase in media depictions of Surrey as an unsafe and dangerous place. Tom Zytaruk, Senior Reporter for the *Surrey Now-Leader* newspaper, often writes stories covering the shootings in Surrey, and in many of his articles, he posits Surrey as a threat. For example, in his 2018 article titled “Get tough on reckless killers,” Zytaruk reports on two different incidences where visitors to Surrey from out of the province were hit by bullets during non-targeted drive-by shootings. While his article was supposed to report on a shooting incident in Vancouver, it quickly shifted to a discussion on Surrey and how it was an unsafe place for visiting folks. This kind of rhetoric creates and adds to commonly held perceptions of Surrey as a dangerous place, which is problematic for many reasons. For one, it treats the entirety of Surrey as a dangerous place, while only a few neighbourhoods are more predisposed to shootings than others. Second, because Surrey is home to a large South Asian population, people begin to pin stereotypes of violence on the brown people that live there. It’s not Surrey that’s unsafe, it’s the brown people living within Surrey who are unsafe.

Likewise, there has been a lot of discussion and debate as to who is to blame for the shootings. One such debate revolves around Punjabi singer, Sidhu Moosewala. As *Global News* reporters Sonia Deol and Jesse Ferreras reported in an article titled “They carry guns in South Asian gangster rap videos. In real life, many haven’t touched one” published on January 31st, 2018, there is a debate around whether “South Asian gangster rap music” pushes young men into a life of violence, gangs, and drugs. Sidhu Moosewala is a Punjabi singer and lyricist who is extremely popular among young South Asian boys. While he was born and raised in India, his music combines elements of the east and west, hip-hop, and rap music—a blend that is appealing to many who are part of the South Asian diaspora. Moosewala, in particular, is criticized for his portrayal of gangs, guns, and violence, as he’s seen as glamorizing a reality that is not glamorous at all. Thus, many parents, community members, and the media strongly believe that “South Asian gangster rap music” is the reason why young Indo-Canadian men engage in violence and gang-affiliated activity, neatly writing off any of the other myriad possible reasons for this engagement. Here is where I feel there is a gap in how the contentious issue of violence and gang-affiliated activity among young Indo-Canadian men is framed and understood. Often, blame is pinned on forces external to the community or on themes around delinquency, bad parenting, or in this case, the media. Nonetheless, issues that manifest within the community itself are overlooked—especially issues around gender.

A HEAD START ON GENDER

The South Asian community, like the rest of our society, is patriarchal and has sexist tendencies. As an exemplification of this point, while change is occurring, women and girls in the community have long experienced surveillance and the policing of their behaviour. Men have been afforded a lot more freedom than their women counterparts, whether in regards to access to public spaces or making life decisions. While the community has been busy preventing girls from going out, holding them back and policing their behaviour, there has been an omission when it comes to protecting and disciplining the boys. Within this patriarchal, sexist space, men also experience sexism, which has further contributed to the problem. South Asian men and boys have been taught to fear femininity and to internalize their emotions. They have been taught that they cannot cry, have emotions, be vulnerable, or be “too girly.” Instead, they must be tough, work hard, and earn a high income. This manifestation of sexism is problematic because it, too, polices identity. Most importantly, it holds men and boys back from accessing support, and thus it gives way to harmful, violent forms of expression.

Notions of male bravado are not new to the South Asian diaspora. Among the Sikh population of Punjab, the caste system is “based on political superiority, land ownership and labor,” and *jatts*, or farmers, are considered the highest in the hierarchy of caste (Gill, 2012, p. 113). A combination of their role as landowners and the nature of their labour, caste status, and high levels of income has afforded *jatts* many privileges. The *jatt* identity has also created a culture of male bravado and hypermasculinity. The nature of their work required *jatts* to be strong, tireless labourers, and the privileges that came attached to this identity reinforced notions of superiority. As *jatts* make up “the largest group in the Punjabi diaspora” and their gender identity has become “an integral part of popular culture discourse [both] in Punjab and in the diaspora,” it becomes hard to divorce the community from a culture of hypermasculinity

and male bravado as the diaspora takes up the same strong, macho characteristics of *jatts* (Gill, 2012, p.113).

OTHER INTERSECTIONS

Issues around gender are further problematized and magnified for these young Indo-Canadian men as they experience the difficulties that come with being second-generation Canadians from an ethnic immigrant community. While their parents experience barriers as first-generation immigrants in a predominantly white supremacist state, these second-generation individuals experience a different set of barriers. For instance, second-generation individuals often have hybrid identities influenced by their traditional ethnic backgrounds as well as the western, Canadian society in which they live. Not only do they act as cultural bridges between their family and Canadian society, but they also experience cross-cultural conflict in trying to navigate both identities. This phenomenon is not new, as we see in Homi Bhabha's long discussion on hybridity in *The Location of Culture*. Hybridity can be seen as the process of translating and reproducing certain identities while existing in two places at once or "in between" two identities (Bhabha, 1994). Second-generation Canadians, too, exist in between two identities and as bridges for cultural translation.

While some excel in the formation of their hybrid identity, some Indo-Canadian individuals fall through the cracks. One manifestation of this "falling through the cracks" is the creation among men of a protest masculinity in the face of a dominant white masculinity that views their ethnic masculinity as "not good enough." In "Being Brown in a Canadian Suburb," Heather Frost (2010) discusses the notion of "hegemonic masculinity." Hegemonic masculinity is the dominant way of doing masculinity and being a man, and it is often anchored in whiteness. As Frost states, "There exists no absolute, universal masculinity, but a plurality of competing alternatives organized hierarchically around the hegemonic version" (Frost, 2010, p. 221). While some South Asian men can integrate into Canada's notion of a hegemonic masculinity, many young men adopt an alternative "protest masculinity [which] provides a means for confronting and challenging their powerlessness and exclusion" (Frost, 2010, p. 221). These young men, in their adoption of a protest masculinity, resort to "excessively macho behaviours and hypermasculine practices including violence, criminal activity, and/or alcohol abuse" (Frost, 2010, p. 221).

"SURREY JACKS"

The "Surrey Jacks" identity is, therefore, an example of a competing alternative protest masculinity that is organized around Canada's hegemonic masculinity. A quick search of "Surrey Jacks" on Urban Dictionary shows many definitions of the term at various points in time. For example, a definition from 2007 describes "Surrey Jacks" as "frequently drinking 'Crown Royal' (alcohol)," calling each other "PANCHOD'S! (sister fucker)," wearing expensive clothes, and traveling in groups with either their friends or their cousins ("Surrey Jacks," n.d.). The same definition also mentions how "Surrey Jacks" "tend to switch between languages (Punjabi/Hindi and English)" and are visible supporters of many Canadian sports teams, such as the Vancouver Canucks, Calgary Flames, and Edmonton Oilers ("Surrey Jacks," n.d.). Another definition defines a "Surrey Jack" as "a south asian gangster usually with [the following] characteristics:

Ha[ving] high hopes of becoming a successful gangster/dealer, ha[ving] so many enemies (usually of the same ethnicity) that he is afraid to walk in groups of less than four, [and] smok[ing] weed, fuck[ing] bitches, and drink[ing] liquor on a regular basis. ("Surrey Jacks," n.d.)

While both of the above definitions date back to 2007, a more recent Urban Dictionary description of "Surrey Jacks" from 2018 says that "Surrey Jacks" are "Indo Canadians who wear black air forces and a shit ton of Jordan clothing [and] only wear black. [They are supposedly] the gangsters of surrey" ("Surrey Jacks," n.d.). Notably, while approximately 10 years separate the oldest and most recent definitions of "Surrey Jacks" on the website, specific identity markers have persisted over time.

The descriptions of "Surrey Jacks" cited above are illustrative of a number of points. Firstly, they indicate that "Surrey Jack" is a hybrid, bicultural identity. The boys and young men alternate between using their mother tongues—Punjabi and Hindi—and their taught language, English. By wearing jerseys of various Canadian hockey teams, the young men participate in dominant white Canadian popular culture. The idea of traveling in groups made up of cousins or family members is also indicative of the value many Asian cultures place on family and kinship. Secondly, Frost's notion of protest masculinities resorting to "excessively macho behaviours and hypermasculine practices" (Frost, 2010, p. 221) is highly prevalent in the definitions of "Surrey Jacks." "Surrey Jacks" are supposedly young men who are involved in a lot of violence and criminal or immoral behaviour, and they resort to recreational drug and alcohol use. Their behavior is also described as hypermasculine, as exemplified by the degradation of women.

STIGMA

The very specific definition of protest masculinity links "Surrey Jacks" to engagement with drugs and alcohol and participation in gangs and violence, all of which are stigmatized within our society. As Erving Goffman (1963) illustrates in his book *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, there are groups of people who exist as separate or outsiders based on a categorization of stigmatizing attributes. Stigma becomes problematic when we cannot see individuals beyond their stigmatization. When we reduce certain individuals to the sum of their stigmatized characteristics, we see them as undesirable, dangerous, or discredited (Goffman, 1963). Thus, labeling "Surrey Jacks" as violent and gang-affiliated is not only stigmatizing, but it also posits them as outsiders and fails to allow society to see them as anything but transgressive.

The stigmatization of "Surrey Jacks" is, therefore, reductive and limiting. It places the men who embody aspects of this specific protest masculinity into a detrimental box and thus prevents folks from seeing these men as anything other than a threat. For example, the very distinct style of dress for "Surrey Jacks" is often seen as troublesome and dangerous. Many boys who wear certain brands of clothing and shoes or have certain haircuts are often policed by community members. There are numerous cases of young boys being asked to leave public spaces soon after entering simply because they were "dressed like troublemakers." Police officers are more likely to pull over South Asian boys driving expensive luxury cars to question their means of affording such cars. Likewise, many restaurants in Surrey routinely have police officers come by to check the I.D.s of customers. While they claim to be preventing the serving of alcohol to minors, police officers most often check the I.D.s of young South Asian men who

are dressed in a particular way. What the police officers really want to do is to ensure that there is not a gangster in the room. Similarly, if these young men display signs of aggression, anger, or hurt, they are automatically viewed as a threat. While there may be a multitude of factors behind their aggression, such as intergenerational trauma, family strife, or mental health concerns, forms of aggression characteristic of “Surrey Jacks” are perceived as dangerous.

A PROBLEM FOR SOUTH ASIANS OR A PROBLEM FOR CANADA?

In light of the factors discussed above, “Surrey Jacks” can be seen as a direct result of the entanglement of many dimensions: patriarchal, sexist attitudes in the South Asian community; barriers faced by second-generation Canadians; and exclusionary hegemonic masculinity. Even with so many multifaceted reasons behind this violent protest masculinity, the issue is reduced to a South Asian problem rather than a Canadian problem. In addition, while stigma gets attached to these young men, it also gets attached to the Lower Mainland’s South Asian community at large.

The Urban Dictionary definition of “Surrey Jacks” posits these young men as violent, sexist alcoholics who engage in immoral and criminal activity. Through association and conflation, this violent and sexist behaviour is seen as representative of all South Asian folks, particularly all South Asian men—and this conflation gets picked up and deployed by individuals like Zytaruk when they report on incidents of crime in Surrey. The term “Surrey Jacks” is itself highly stigmatizing and reductive, as it suggests that South Asian men who adopt this kind of protest masculinity only exist in Surrey, while in fact there are many South Asian men across the country who are adopting protest masculinity in cities just as diverse as Surrey. This rhetoric begins to frame Surrey and the South Asians living in Surrey as dangerous. As Goffman (1963) would say, both become stigmatized and categorized as “the other.”

It’s also important to deconstruct the rigid confinement of the “Surrey Jack” identity because the label contributes to a form of internalized stigma among the men themselves. As society continues to highlight the negative aspects of their identity, little to no room is left for the boys to see themselves as complex, multidimensional beings. They have little opportunity or allowance to question the role that toxic hypermasculinity plays in governing their lives. As certain aspects of their identity are constantly picked at by society, a hostile environment is created, and this leads to even further displacement. Eventually, they come to see institutions such as schools, the police, family, and community as untrustworthy.

HEALTHY MASCULINITY

Growing up, many “brown boys are exposed to three main competing versions of masculinity: their father’s first generation Punjabi version” (the traditional hypermasculine *jatt* masculinity), “the white variety of their peers; and the Surrey Jack, a form of protest masculinity constructed by other Punjabi young men” (Frost, 2010, p. 221). With only three main competing versions of masculinity to choose from—and with their father’s traditional masculinity seen as outdated and out of context, while strong societal emphasis is placed on the protest masculinity of “Surrey Jacks”—discussions and possibilities for healthy masculinity are rendered invisible or impossible. Frost (2010) found that “many of the brown boys [in her study] blame the Jacks’ and their aggressive behavior for fueling negative mainstream perceptions of Surrey’s Indo-

Canadian males” (p. 222). While Surrey is home to many successful Indo-Canadian men who display healthy forms of masculinity, these examples seldom get highlighted because of the over-exposure of “Surrey Jacks.”

To address the problem of these limited available versions of masculinity, I emphasize a need for significant discussion regarding 1) gender as a legitimate factor in addressing male brown-on-brown violence in Surrey and 2) what healthy masculinity looks like to South Asian men. This is because while a discussion of hypermasculinity as possibly harmful is largely absent in the South Asian community, there is an even bigger negation of gender norms as a possible explanation for the recent violence in the community. This is not to suggest that the community does not recognize its own complicity in the harm; however, there is a tendency to look for external reasons rather than challenging harmful ideas that have been part of the fabric of the community for decades.

FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

In exploring themes of gender in relation to the ongoing violence in Surrey, we must historicize the community’s violence by looking at how a culture of male bravado specific to the community is not new. As I’ve already begun to do in my interrogation of the role played by the reinforcement of a *jatt* identity, we must further explore relationships between young South Asian men and their fathers as well as how notions of masculinity get passed down through the generations. There needs to be more conversation regarding how intergenerational trauma within the community and the parents of second-generation South Asians in Canada are implicated in the displacement of youth. While there is an abundance of opportunities for the empowerment and wellbeing of girls, there are not many such opportunities for boys. There are many initiatives for boys in the form of sports or athletics, but there are not enough safe spaces for boys that focus on emotional wellbeing or discussions of selfhood.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

As discussed in this paper, a culture of sexism and patriarchy exists within this particular South Asian community that affects not only the community’s women but also its men. While there has been a strong push within the community to challenge the sexism against women and girls, there is not nearly enough conversation of how men also suffer because of patriarchy. An interrogation of masculinities in the Lower Mainland’s South Asian community is important because the impacts of toxic hypermasculinity are detrimental to everyone. Such hypermasculinity in its various forms has pushed many men into the prison system, prevented them from forging meaningful relationships, kept them from accepting and openly discussing problems with their mental health, and even gotten some of them killed. Women are also negatively affected by toxic hypermasculinity, with many enduring various forms of abuse, trauma, loss of self-identity, and other impacts. Probing masculinities would provide much needed answers for the causation of such events.

In framing and understanding the shootings taking place in Surrey, examining gender as an intersection is highly necessary. Such examination helps to provide answers to the questions that were initially posed: Why are young men from financially well-off families privy to this kind of violence? If it’s not money and fame they’re seeking, then what is their involvement in violence and gangs providing them? As this paper has shown, involvement in violence and

gangs happens for many reasons. Firstly, it is representative of a sort of protest masculinity that some South Asian men adopt as they find themselves lost within the multicultural mosaic of Canada. Secondly, violence occurs when these men are denied safer ways of releasing emotions such as anger and frustration. Lastly, the constant reinforcement of their masculinity as problematic fails to provide them with any alternative in the form of a realistic and attainable healthy masculinity. In addition, I acknowledge that the process of learning and unlearning something as deeply rooted as masculinity will be challenging for the South Asian community. While some of us can recognize the harmful impacts of rigid gender roles in our community, there are many people who are not able to conceptualize men in other ways.

In conclusion, I assert that young South Asian men dying in the Lower Mainland is a Canadian problem and not merely a South Asian problem. This is true simply because western notions of white supremacy and colonialism are implicated in the violence. As a place that prides itself on being a peace-keeping, multicultural nation, Canada still has a lot of work to do in addressing the racism and violence that permeates non-white communities. While I firmly believe that change must come from people who have membership in the affected community, we cannot do it alone.

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TRAILS OF MURDER, TEARS OF GRIEF: UNDERSTANDING VIOLENT CRIMES AGAINST SECOND-GENERATION COCONUTS

ABSTRACT

Canada is a country of ethnically and racially diverse immigrants who have contributed in many ways toward the process of nation building. As of 2011, the country had a population of 5,702,700 second-generation immigrant people, representing 17.4% of the total Canadian population.⁶ Many of these fall under the “visible minority” category,⁷ with 3 in every 10 second-generation immigrants belonging to this group.⁸ As visible minorities, most racialized immigrants face multiple exclusions (social, economic, cultural, ethnic, racial, gender-based, and religious) in their effort to integrate into the society. These multiple exclusions are linked to and generate multiple vulnerabilities for the second-generation immigrant population. I believe that within the category of second-generation immigrants, it is youth who are most vulnerable to certain things including bullying, drug abuse, gang membership, physical and sexual abuse, and even death resulting from hate crimes. It was also discovered that the median age of second-generation immigrants was younger (31.9 years) when compared to the rest of the general Canadian population (40.1 years).⁹ My concentration therefore lies on second-generation South Asian Canadian youth within the age bracket of 12-30 years. The primary concern of this paper is to analyze different case studies of violence against this population and extrapolate the various reasons behind such violence.

SECOND-GENERATION *COCONUTS* – LOST IN TWO WORLDS

Statistics Canada defines second-generation people as “individuals who were born in Canada and had at least one parent born outside Canada.” In the context of this study, I will use the term “South Asian” to mean individuals coming from countries like India,

⁶ This data is taken from Statistics Canada’s 2011 National Household Survey (NHS), which provided an analysis of the Canadian population in terms of generation status. “Generation status” identifies whether an individual or his/her parents were born in Canada, classifying people as first-, second-, and third- or more generation.

⁷ The Employment Equity Act defines visible minority groups as “persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour.” This includes South Asian, Black, Chinese Arab, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Southeast Asian, West Asian, and Latin American people.

⁸ This data is taken from Statistics Canada’s 2011 National Household Survey (NHS).

⁹ This data is taken from Statistics Canada’s 2011 National Household Survey (NHS).

Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, and the Maldives (Bannerji-Stevens, 2009; Bhatia & Ram, 2004; Ghosh, 2013) and I will employ the term “second-generation” or “hyphenated” youth (Calgar, 1997; James, 2003; Mahtani, 2004) to refer to youth who have spent a major part of their lives growing up in Canada and have straddled and been influenced by two extremely different worlds at the same time. One of these worlds is created by the specific ethnic, religious, historical, and cultural background of their first-generation South Asian parents, while the other is formed by their individual/personal experiences of living in Canada.

Identity formation and acquiring a sense of belonging are two very complex processes for these youth. I find it very interesting that many self-identify as the fruit “coconuts” to symbolize how they feel brown on the outside but white on the inside. They find themselves trying to fit/merge into two radically disparate cultures and are accepted in neither completely. They face exclusion from the dominant Canadian culture due to their brown skin, which becomes an obvious marker of difference and makes them stand out in comparison to the mainstream white Canadian population. At the same time, they face alienation from their South Asian heritage because a) they don’t necessarily subscribe to the same cultural and traditional values as their parents and b) despite making efforts to merge in their South Asian ancestry, their practices might be viewed as “white washed.” Many scholars such as Dwine Plaza, Omari Hisako, Amarnath Amarasingam, and Mary Goitam have pointed out that the complicated process of identity formation for these youth is influenced by interactions with their family, community, and external environment and thus is constantly renegotiated and reformulated in nuanced ways. On certain occasions and during certain human interactions, they go through a dynamic process of identity formation where they make deliberate decisions to “brown it up” or “bring down the brown” after assessing which strategy will work best (Sundar, 2008). For instance, they will take their brownness up a notch when they find themselves among South Asian people to take advantage of their cultural connections, whereas at a formal office event surrounded by white colleagues, they will act more like “Canadians” so as not to feel excluded. This multidimensional and flexible aspect of their identity formation provides them the space to challenge the institutional barriers and oppressive situations that they otherwise encounter as racialized youth (Sundar, 2008). Despite some amount of agency in this area, however, these youth experience much ambiguity surrounding their identities while growing up and find themselves trapped in various worlds at the same time, which increases their vulnerability to violence.

TALES OF VIOLENCE, TEARS OF GRIEF

It is my contention that having no group/community where they can feel fully integrated and lacking a strong sense of identity increases the vulnerability of second-generation South Asian Canadian youth to abuse and violence because in their desperate bid to seek acceptance from their parents, peers, friends, and boyfriends/girlfriends in either culture (South Asian or Canadian), they may be willing to go to extreme lengths and are therefore prone to manipulation and exploitation. This paper will undertake an analysis of three different case studies of violence against

second-generation South Asian Canadian youth: the first will consider inter-racial group violence perpetrated by young girls, the second will discuss intra-community crime by an individual male, and the third will examine honour killing. Each case will bring out crucial points about the discourse of violence against these coconuts.

REENA VIRK

The tragic murder of 14-year-old Reena Virk sent shockwaves across the country as it brought to the fore the extent of brutality, anger, and hatred that teenage girls can display. Virk's parents were first-generation immigrants from India living in Saanich, BC. They belonged to a "minority within a minority," being Jehovah's witnesses¹⁰ in a South Asian community that was predominantly Sikh. Reena tried very hard to fit in with her female peers, but they ostracised her from their subculture which was heavily influenced by LA street gangs. Virk's ethno-racially different body was no match for this climate. She was brutally and repeatedly punched, kicked in the head, and burned with cigarettes on November 14, 1997 at a party she'd been invited to near the Craigflower Bridge. The attackers were a group of teenagers—six girls collectively called the "Shoreline Six"—and a boy. Though she somehow managed to escape after this first horrific beating, she was followed by two teenagers—Kelly Ellard and Warren Glowatski—who beat her again, smashed her face into a tree, and ultimately drowned her. Her scantily clad body was found in the water almost a week after her murder. Ellard and Glowatski were convicted of second-degree murder and given life sentences (Dickson & Burgmann, 2016).

Scholars such as Yasmin Jiwani (2005) point our attention toward a very important aspect of Reena's story that is deliberately left out by the Canadian media and public discourse. She highlights the complex intersecting and interlocking impact of race, gender, and violence as they shape the Canadian public imagination and in particular influence the everyday lives of immigrant girls and women of colour (Jiwani, 2006), and argues that public discourses hand out recognition of one kind of violence while belittling or ignoring another kind (Jiwani, 1999). In Reena's case, emphasis was put on a cultural explanation for her death. Her murder was carefully portrayed as a result of general bullying and girl-on-girl violence, erasing the issue of inequalities and violence arising from systemic and institutional racism. The problem of heightened girl-on-girl violence in Canada has been couched in the argument that "girls have become as violent as boys" (Jiwani, 2000). However, the reality for young women of colour is far from being summed up by this simple explanation, as these girls are more vulnerable due to their social location in a society which is hierarchically racialized and gendered. Racism is naturalized in Canadian society and interacts with widely prevalent sexism to constitute the lived realities for these racialized girls (Jiwani, 2005). As Patricia Hill Collins explains,

¹⁰ Jehovah's witnesses come from diverse linguistic and ethnic backgrounds. They are united by one main goal, that of honouring Jehovah—the God of the Bible and the creator of the world. They are known as Jehovah's witnesses as they talk about or witness Jehovah and his kingdom. They believe in imitating Christ to the best of their ability and helping people understand the Bible and God's kingdom.

“viewing the very definition of violence as lying outside hierarchical power relations of race and gender ignores how the power to define what counts as violence is constitutive of these same power relations” (as cited in Jiwani, 2006, p. 3).

MAPLE BATALIA

An aspiring actress, a part-time model, and a health sciences student at SFU’s Surrey campus, Maple Batalia was just 19 years old when she was brutally stabbed and gunned down by her ex-boyfriend Gary Dhaliwal in the parking lot right outside her university campus. They had been dating for several years, and being from the same South Asian Canadian community, their families knew each other extremely well. Maple’s decision to call off the relationship with Gary was reportedly a consequence of his repeated infidelity and aggressive, possessive, and controlling behaviour. In the weeks before the killing, he sent her thousands of messages, threatened her male friends, and ultimately lay in wait to confront and kill her. He was sentenced to life in prison for first-degree murder 5 years after committing the crime (Omand, 2016).

This tragic tale highlights the risk of violence that young racialized women are exposed to from within their own community. It also sheds light on the issue of dating and relationship abuse that is very common among teenagers. Many times, youngsters from the South Asian community are unable to tell their parents that they are seeing someone or discuss issues or abuse they might be experiencing in the relationship. Parents and children within this community don’t share the same open bond as many western families, and certain topics like relationships and sexual activities are considered a taboo. There are two conflicting and intersecting dynamics at play for women of colour, who deal with a confluence of patriarchal values outside as well as within their communities (Jiwani, 2005). It has been noted by the UN-based Working Group on Girls (WGG)¹¹ that refugee and immigrant women endure increased rates of violence as they face sexism from inside their community and sexism plus racism from the outside society (Friedman & Cook, 1995). A partnership between these “scattered hegemonies” adds to the violence of racism and sexism (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994).

AQSA PARVEZ

Aqsa Parvez was a 16-year-old student at Apple Woods Heights High School in Mississauga, Ontario. Her family had immigrated to Canada from Pakistan and were strict followers of Islam. This was a bone of contention between Aqsa and her family because she didn’t subscribe to the same religious values as they did. She was forced to wear a *hijab*¹² by her family, which she didn’t like doing, so she would change her

¹¹ The Working Group on Girls (WGG) is a coalition of over 40 national and international non-governmental organizations with representation at the United Nations dedicated to promoting the human rights of the girl child in all areas and stages of her life, advancing the inclusion and status of girls and assisting them to develop their full potential as women.

¹² A hijab is typically a veil worn by some Muslim women to protect themselves from the male gaze outside of their immediate family in the public sphere. The term can be used for any face,

clothes when she reached school and vice versa when she was heading back home. A week before her death, she had moved in with another family in the neighbourhood to avoid tensions within her family. Her father had threatened her many times and she wanted to run away from her family. On the day of her death, December 10th, 2007, she was strangled by her brother (Waqas Parvez) out of rage for not wearing a *hijab*. Her father (Muhammad Parvez) took the fall for her murder in order to protect his son. Later, the truth came out and her brother was charged with first-degree murder (“Aqsa Parvez’s Father,” 2010).

As horrible and sad this case was, it was important in raising the issue of honour killings.¹³ Patriarchy, sexism, gender, and religion play important roles in such cases. According to Aqsa’s father and brother, it was their responsibility to save the family pride and honour. When interviewed by the police, Aqsa’s mother relayed her husband’s words about why his daughter needed to be killed: “This is my insult. My community will say, ‘You have not been able to control your daughter.’ This is my insult” (“Aqsa Parvez’s Father,” 2010). This is a clear example of how patriarchy works: the family, community, and nation state’s honour is conflated with women’s honour and thus there is a strict regulation on women’s mobility, sexuality, and bodies. Women must be careful of their actions and words because these are considered to reflect on the family and community’s values. Transgressing the boundaries laid out for women is not tolerated. Aqsa’s case generated questions about the status of women in Muslim communities, but one should not generalize such incidents to a religious community. Patriarchy is the real evil, and it is spread across cultures and societies.

WINDS OF CHANGE – RESISTANCE AND RECLAIMING AGENCY

It is crucial to recognize that the South Asian Canadian community have not remained passive, submissive, or silent victims of these horror tales. One can find many voices emanating from within the community and from various organizations strongly calling for radical change and taking steps in that direction. Individual families that were affected by these violent crimes have tried to create awareness through advocacy in the community and society at large related to issues such as bullying, racism, dating abuse, honour killing, domestic violence, and other crimes against women. This is also a way for them to try and move on with their lives despite suffering such a huge loss. To prevent anyone else from experiencing the loss they did, the families of these slain second-generation South Asian Canadian youths have converted their grief into awareness campaigns so that some good comes out of the loss of their children.

head, or body covering and is usually considered to be a part of Islamic standards of dressing modestly for women.

¹³ The act of killing a female member of the family (usually a daughter) by people who are related to the victim by blood (usually a father or brother) is described as honour killing. This homicidal act takes place out of anger that a female member has brought shame, dishonour, and a bad name to the family by engaging in behaviours (sexual or otherwise) regarded as immodest or unacceptable by the family and community.

Organizations also exist which serve the purpose of ending violence and crime against women of South Asian Canadian descent.

Suman and Manjit Virk are frequent speakers at elementary and high schools, sharing Reena's story with youngsters in the hopes of preventing another tragedy. They have spearheaded anti-bullying campaigns across the country, with their main message being to speak up against bullying. If even one person had made a phone call the night that Reena was bullied, things could have been very different. They work with a provincial program that puts victims of violence in touch with perpetrators, the same program that brought them to forgive Warren Glowatski at a healing circle in 2007 in support of his day parole. Her father wrote a book about his daughter's childhood, which helped him cope with the grief of losing his child.

Maple's mother, Sarbjit, has been a speaker at various forums to create awareness around violence against women. She has written several poems in her native language expressing the loss of her daughter and the dreams that she had for her daughter—dreams which remain unfulfilled due to Maple's untimely death. She shares her grief publicly through these poems and expresses her determination to protect other girls from abusive boyfriends. Maple's sister has also dedicated her life to ending violence against women and wishes that Maple's story would start conversations about this important issue within the South Asian community. The family has hosted many candlelight vigils to honour Maple and all other victims of such violence. Her parents started a bursary for the Health Sciences department at SFU in her honour and the Maple Batalia Memorial Scholarship for the Arts was created in collaboration with Emily Carr University of Art and Design. Community members and businesses have kept her memory alive through charities, and the Vancouver South Asian bridal company Pink Orchid Studio developed a lip gloss shade named after Maple, with proceeds going to the Emily Carr Scholarship fund. A documentary about Maple's life, titled *Maple*, was directed by Jasleen Kaur, a South Asian Canadian woman who coincidentally shares the same birthdate with Maple and was very touched by her story ("I Want Her Story," 2017).

CONCLUSION

Through the case study analysis undertaken in this paper, it has become apparent that the nature of violence faced by second-generation South Asian Canadian youth is racist, systemic, and in many instances gendered. The conflux of intersecting powers and hegemonic systems—patriarchy, race, and gender—creates interlocking oppressions for these youth. This overlap makes certain forms of violence possible and elevates the chance of exposure to violence for these youth. My research found that, at a general level, there is a dearth of information about the issue of violence against second-generation South Asian Canadian youth. However, one can find significant data and information on violence and crimes *committed by* this same population. In my opinion, this is a reflection of how Canadian media works to spread a public discourse around cases of violence against these youth that is predominantly cultural and ethnicity-centered. Blaming the practices within a specific racial/ethnic community helps the state to avoid examining the racist and gendered underpinnings of its institutions, which

create systemic barriers and perpetuate inequalities, discrimination, stereotypes, and violence. Although the scope of victims and perpetrators in this paper was not limited to any specific gender, I found that the victims of violence in most of the cases were women while the perpetrators of crime were men except for in a few cases like Reena Virk's. A big gap existed in the literature with little to no information available on second-generation South Asian Canadian male youth and self-identified LGBTQIA+ youth being victims of violence.

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SESSION III

Sexuality, Subjectivity and Community Resistance

Session Chair: Habiba Zaman, Simon Fraser University

Bidushi Rahman “Decolonizing Desire: Polysexuality in South Asia”

Taqdir Bhandal “The Coloniality of Menstruation and Diasporic Subjects”

Leena Hasan “How did I Get Here? R Reflections of an Introverted Activist



SOUTH ASIA OVER THE YEARS: COLONIALISM AND QUEER DESIRE

ABSTRACT

Although hegemonic Canadian culture systemically and covertly marginalizes queer desire, Bangladeshi hegemony struggles to even make room for it at all. In this paper I map stigmas against queerphobia in multiple South Asian cultures, and then contradict them with our own historical records in order to debunk myths of abnormality and impermanency and to reimagine queer, brown spaces. I, then call into question how sexuality is a Western-cultural imposition on one's lifestyle and how poly-sexuality challenges this process. Indeed, bisexuality, pansexuality, and similar other practices are considered poly-sexual (of multiple desires) and heterosexuality and homosexuality as monosexuality (of one desire). I argue the conclusion of human sexuality as being stable and fixed is a product of tradition more than science. However, I also refute the idea that one can choose their desire as they do their shirt. Indeed, desire is something in and of itself, and the categorization of it is done methodologically. When the British invaded South Asia, the conditions of one's lifestyle and thereby sexuality became reframed as a product of the invasion and integration into the British system. I explore how the Western fixation of desire has enabled toxic categories for further suppression against South Asians. I look into how profound of an impact this imparted on communities who connected the Divine with human love, and hailed poets like Abu Nuwas during the height of the Islamic Golden Age. As a result, I examine how profound of an impact this creates on queer South Asians still to this day.

South Asia has shifted borders and empires throughout its rich and complex history. I will be focusing primarily on the regions of modern day Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan via the cultural and/or religious affiliation of popular literature before, during, and after Partition.

MARRIAGE

I have come to the conclusion that, for South Asia, marriage is inextricable from the Divine. No matter the timeline, South Asians from east to north, west to south have a history of affiliating the Divine with human love. Everywhere from Muslim ghazals and Hindu odes to Rahat Fateh Ali Khan and Bollywood hits, there is a prevalent connection between human intimacy on Earth and the Divine. The Divine places itself above all when it comes to answering questions like, *Why are you here? What will you do?* The Divine gives us our reason to eat, sleep, and breathe because it gives us the purpose for

our existence. To reach ideal serenity in our lives, therefore, our actions and lifestyles must reflect that purpose and structure our belonging accordingly within our homes and communities. I'd like to keep this in mind throughout this essay. As I'm sure we are all aware, South Asians, more or less, have some form of spiritual affiliation with the Divine—even though we may not follow our duties perfectly. This spiritual affiliation has a tremendous affect on our belonging, self-actualization, and relationships, to name a just few facets of our lives. So, I will begin by asking: *What does your life look like when you exist outside of this world?*

The meaning marriage holds for South Asians can't be done justice in a few words. Its traditions are complex and have changed over time. For centuries before the East India Company or the British Raj, people married primarily as a political means to extend one's familial network and maintain property. Indeed, a big part of this was bearing offspring. Families grew alongside businesses and communities, exemplifying the popular communal way of living. However, despite the depth of respect and alliance involved in marriage, deep emotional commitments were normally linked to same-sex platonic relationships that would last a lifetime. "Noblesse oblige," meaning *nobility obligates you*, is a succinct example of the European sense of superiority that Viceroy Macaulay and imperialists like him believed gave them the right to "civilize" South Asia out of its cultures and traditions. Since Partition in 1947, India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan have struggled to stabilize a new socio-economic and political jurisdiction with the psychological effects of imperialism persisting. Understandably, South Asians have aimed to represent themselves as successful, innovative contenders in the global arena; however, due to the impact of centuries of colonization, it's hard to differentiate South Asia's standard of success from capitalist Judeo-Christian European standards. Indeed, it seems we have ingested these beliefs as our own, and our social institutions such as marriage have changed in response. Why wouldn't they, when social order and traditions are notoriously fluid throughout history? We change with our environments, and yet we hang onto tradition for dear life. In times of intense disarray and destruction, we grab onto certainties, seeking a sense of stability and home. This can be seen particularly in South Asians living in diaspora. Immigrants exemplify the ongoing impact of colonization, if not in the search for better living conditions then in the rigid values they try to instill in their second-generation children.

As a broad generalization, brown girls are meant to remain virginal, pursuing promising careers that will not jeopardize their future marriage and their inevitable return to family life. Brown boys with higher paying careers will have their body count wiped clean and marry a pure brown girl, returning to serve as the authoritative breadwinner for their parents and in-laws. Children are non-negotiable. This model arguably causes trouble for everyone, but exceptionally so for queer people. Queerness of any shape or form that derails heteronormative Bengali values is shamed or policed until disciplined.

Earlier, I mentioned the spiritual connection with human love and intimacy that still echoes in our films and songs. Excluding someone from this ethereal, divine sense of self is a prelude to the jeopardized reality queer people experience. Accordingly, we note,

The lack of a public social security system, poverty, and compulsory heterosexual marriage may indeed be the most oppressive aspects of everyday life in India for individuals who identify as glbtq. Consequently, those who do adopt a Westernized gay, lesbian, or transgendered identity often migrate to large Indian cities or live abroad as part of a larger, worldwide South Asian diaspora. (Penrose, 2004, p. 3)

Disha Ganguly committing suicide, Xulhaz Mannan and Mahbub Rabbi Tonoy being hacked to death in Mannan's home, and the plummeting conditions faced by Hijras are just a few examples of internationally hushed-up hate crimes. Despite the naturalization of the past as backwards and unevolved, South Asia was once as good a place as any to be queer. Indeed, while the British were stoning men for sodomy in the 16th century, queer literature was flourishing in South Asia (Penrose, 2006). Throughout this essay, I will be focusing on queer literature because it reflects the cultural consciousness, values, and widespread traditions of popular culture. Furthermore, it helps us track distinct shifts in sentiment about desire and sexuality.

I am not suggesting that lifestyles before colonialism were inherently ontological ideals simply because they are in the past. Situations occurring along any timeline, including our present one, will inevitably become historicized, and I dread the idea that present day neoliberalism risks naturalization. Instead of idealizing the past and its complexities, I use our rich past to help us reimagine our potential. There is a disparity between the values of our ancestors and our modern day politicians. This disparity reveals how fluid our traditions can be, and in turn, how they can be changed. Nor am I looking at the past for answers; rather, I am looking for insight. Tradition can be a source of inertia in the face of epistemology and ontology, and therefore I question the investments we make for the sake of nursing our malignant anxieties instead of exploring them—malignant for those harboring hate and losing loved ones, violent and fatal for those being lost.

CONTEXT AND DEFINITIONS

As we take a glimpse into a queer, South Asian archive, it is important to understand that we are looking at what has survived. What have been recovered, recorded, and handled by western colonial powers are the only resources we have (Dasgupta, 2011). Although there is much to be learned from these records, they cannot provide a cohesive, objective narrative of queerness in pre-colonial South Asia. Even without western influences, no archive can be objective if subjectivity is our most human trait.

Furthermore, we must diverge from the idea that we can measure the validation of queerness through the archive. Heteronormativity relies on this quantification of queerness in order to naturalize heteronormative truths. It seems that, when quantified, queer desire appears miniscule whereas heterosexuality remains steadfast and far more common. Indeed, the archive remains a product of imperialism, and in this respect, it is impossible to discuss South Asian identity and belonging separate from South Asia's history as a British colony. As suggested by Arondekar (2009) in "For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India," sexuality is anywhere but the peripheries of this archive. Indeed, sexuality is centralized within the archive due to its

very calibrated and intentional absence managed by British authorities and maintained in post-independence India. Arondekar (2009) critiques the legitimacy of a homoerotic South Asian history being linked to the archive even as queerness is marginalized via the erasure of non-heteronormative sexualities. In this sense, we are simply inverting the discourse of historical ontology without challenging or disheveling the panopticonic authority of the archive (Arondekar, 2009).

BRIEF HISTORY

I'm sure we are all aware that just because a new bill is made law, changed social conduct does not always follow. However, by enforcing new laws through persecution and violence, imperialists were able to invasively intercept the lives of many South Asians. In 1858, India was annexed by the British Empire from the East India Company, meaning this was the first time the British held complete administrative control over the Indian justice system, revenue, army and civil service, trade, education, and particularly literature. Queer literature came to a standstill after the annexation of India in 1858, despite British presence pre-dating the official declaration. In 1757, the Battle of Plassey determined social, judicial, and cultural structures of society (such as sexuality) throughout the vastly diverse communities of South Asia (Dasgupta, 2011). However, it wasn't until 1773 that a Governor-General directly facilitated governance, and not until 1858 did the Government of India Act officially give the British government complete administrative power. Partition (or independence from Europe) in 1947 only intensified the erasure of sexuality from literature. Likewise, intolerance against homosexual desire increased thanks to nationalist homophobic sentiments granted to us by colonialists (Dasgupta, 2011). Texts such as *The Arabian Nights* were deemed "filthy," and their "gloats of moral harms" prompted the British to purge Perso-Arabic texts, resulting in educational and legal reform (Dasgupta, 2011). Even though *The Arabian Nights* revolved around the intellectual power of women resisting patriarchal conditions, the text was heavily eroticized as it involved harems. Policing South Asian bodies began with the hypersexualization of the *Kama Sutra* by puritanical western discourse. Although it is a book that hopes to guide one to live their most harmonious life, due to the discussion of sexual positions (which make up less than one percent of the book), Indians were figured as sexually deviant and excessive bodies (Penrose, 2006). This, in turn, resulted in the puritanical suppression of sexuality in South Asia (Penrose, 2006). This tone of conservatism, still prevalent amongst Indian modernists, resists sexuality and especially homoeroticism when contesting Indian nationhood and belonging. We inherited a colonial morality which situates the "heterosexual patriarchal family" as "the cornerstone of the nation" through this popular discourse (Penrose, 2006).

Thomas Babington Macaulay designed the educational system to enforce British civilization and thereby morals that condemned homoeroticism and acts of sodomy as criminal and unnatural. Indeed, queer literature became a hotspot for colonial cleansing because of its public accessibility and influence. Penrose discusses this expulsion of queer literature from the colonial archive in further detail in "Colliding Cultures: Masculinity and Homoeroticism in Mughal and Early Colonial South Asia." Many works

of literature such as ghazals, Sufi and rekhti poetry, and novels were destroyed and lost in this purge.

Under the Indian Penal Code of 1864, Penal Code 377, modelled on the Buggery Act of 1533 in England, states the following regarding “unnatural offences”:

Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman, or animal shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and also be liable to fine.

Unnatural acts range from sex with animals and minors to raping women and any sexual conduct between members of the same sex (according to the trans- and intersex-exclusive gender binary). Those familiar with most western-influenced archives will understand the phallic obsession inherent in them, as they are the hotbed of practiced power and dominance by those who hold access a.k.a. power. There is a great absence of non-phallic narratives in recorded history in contrast to those regarding phallus-bearers. Despite this, there are surviving testaments of queer lives before colonization, and they pay homage to a far more tolerant nation.

QUEER SOUTH ASIAN LITERATURE

Through the analysis of popular written works, we witness an unprecedented level of scepticism and antagonism against homosexual acts. Indeed, homosexual desire was seldom a site of public contestation or immoral content before invasion. The popular texts I have selected reflect the transition of our nationhood in regards to queer desire. Beginning with India as a nation undivided, I focus on Hindu and Muslim men as there is significantly more information regarding this group.

Same-sex romantic love was often signified by lifelong celibacy, friendship, or evidence of rebirth for Muslims and Hindus (Dasgupta, 2011). Due to the prevalence of divine homoeroticism in Hindu texts, if two people of the same gender are intimately close it is thought that in a previous life something had prevented their union as man and woman. Therefore, it is in this lifetime that they find each other or their bond was strong enough to surpass reincarnation. Despite this, homosexual desire was still culturally prohibited for reasons such as the anxiety of being the passive partner. Depending on one’s interpretation of the Quran, homosexuality was a sin, but this stricture was addressed solely to men. Furthermore, the act itself was a sin, but the desire found in poetry was not. It is interesting that the presence of revered figures engaging in homosexual acts in Hinduism and the absence of this phenomenon in Islam did not result in disparate social norms. Perso-Arabic traditions for instance, often ignored and tolerated homosexual acts in varying degrees (Dasgupta, 2011).

In the 15th century, odes to young male lovers and reminiscence regarding love affairs between Muslim and Hindu men were popular themes in Mughal poetry. Homoeroticism between men was heavily idolized and favored during this time, provided it remained a longing as opposed to a practice. However, there is material to suggest these traditions were not always followed—including instances where homoerotic sex was actually supported (Penrose, 2006).

With respect to Muslim male desire, status and age were definite factors; love

with a minor was favored. In fact, the love story of Sultan Muhmad and his slave Ayuz was once regarded as the “archetype of perfect male love” during the Mughal era (Penrose, 2006). However, Ayuz’s age is still contested due to records indicating the presence of facial hair. In modern day Afghan cities, valued homoerotic relationships involved varying forms of active and passive masculinity and age differentiation. Due to the presence of various cultures and religions, male-male eroticism in South Asia was complex when approved, as age, religion, status, gender, and caste differentiation all came into play. “Gender” in this context typically meant the younger beloved had not yet become a man, unlike his active counterpart. Indeed, this alternative understanding of gender denotes a certain lack of body essentialism in this fascinating gendered relation (Dasgupta, 2011).

A particularly stimulating area of speculation is the figure of the boy-lover, which stands as a trailblazing testament to the fluidity of desire. Although he engaged with an older man, this “did not preclude ongoing sexual involvement with woman, whether inside or outside of marriage,” and thus the understanding of his “identity differs from modern homosexuality” (Penrose, 2006). Despite the presence of homoeroticism, there is no innate refusal of multiple desires in either the boy-lover or the penetrator (Dasgupta, 2011). Similarly, in paternalistic families, the adult men still desired young attractive men, or Ganymedes, despite being married (Dasgupta, 2011). Polysexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality are a few non-heteronormative desires whose existence was commonplace before the British Raj. Before British legislation designed to regulate South Asian sexuality, South Asians did not have a fixed, stable sexual identity like we do now. Romantic or intimate conquests were not inherent traits of a distinct group of people; rather, people were attached to the action itself. In this society, bisexual erasure was not apparent and everyone was capable of participating in any activity. Although of course there were repercussions for these actions, there was minimal follow-through. Perhaps the popularity of queer poetry indicated a certain level of tolerance or disregard at the societal level.

By the time Ismat Chughtai came around with her story, *Lihaaf*, or *The Quilt*, things had changed in the realm of queer literature. In 1942, *Lihaaf* was published in the literary journal *Adab-i-Latif*, meeting with considerable criticism for its implicit homoerotic tone. Chughtai was summoned to the Lahore court in Pakistan two years after its publication. However, since there was no explicit expression of homosexuality in the text, Chughtai won the case. The Urdu poetry of Hafiz and Azad faced similar public repercussions after being deemed “an abominable vice of sodomy” by British censors in the process of purifying South Asian literature (Penrose, 2006).

The British had been in India for a couple centuries by this point, intimately weaving British values through law and censorship. It would be only five years later that the nation would experience the devastation of Partition. Arguably, the British had finally given us our independence, and yet many millions died if they weren’t already part of one of the largest waves of human migration. Nisid Hajari (As cited in Dalrymple, 2015, n.p.) writes,

Gangs of killers set whole villages aflame, hacking to death men and children and the aged while carrying off young women to be raped. Some British soldiers and

journalists who had witnessed the Nazi death camps claimed Partition's brutalities were worse: pregnant women had their breasts cut off and babies hacked out of their bellies; infants were found literally roasted on spits.

Partition is a crack or wound I believe all of us soothe—a glass shard we haven't been able to tease out of our skin. Briefly, a nation once largely harmonious among people of all religions and lifestyles is now fractured and bloody. Partition marks the chaos that had developed over centuries of colonization, and it signifies the impact of British rule on South Asian identity.

In the retelling of her life in *Cracking India*, Bapsi Sidhwa (1991) recalls her childhood during the Partition of 1947. The egalitarian relationships between Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs as well as the rather uninvolved Parsees crumbled irrevocably as talks of the division of the nation ensued. The novel was later turned into the second part of Deepa Mehta's series—*Earth*. Perhaps due to the homophobic response two years prior to the first film in the series, *Fire*, the queerness of Lenny, the young girl with polio in Sidhwa's story, is erased in *Earth* (Mehta, 1998). In the book, Lenny's admiration for Ayah is often expressed through an erotic fascination. For example, Lenny describes Ayah's "rolling bouncy walk that agitates the globules of her buttocks" (Sidhwa, 1991, p. 14), indicating that Lenny's gaze is drawn to Ayah's body and sex appeal as well as her beauty and infectious personality. Whether or not Lenny desired Ayah in a romantic manner, the homoerotic gaze is present in the story but absent in the film.

I'm sure we've all heard something about *Fire*, by Deepa Mehta—a movie based on the very same short story for which Ismat Chughtai was summoned to the Lahore court. On December 7th, 1998, the film premiered in Mumbai, India, and was met with protests by Shiv Sena Mahila Aghadi, an anti-queer group. Smashed glass panes resulted in media crews covering the story, but surprisingly no police were present (Raval & Jain, 1998). Other armed protests broke out around multiple theatres that screened Mehta's film. Although most of the protestors never watched the film, they remained vigilant against *Fire* and anti-homophobic organizations that supported the film, such as Sakhi and Sangini. Asked if their violent acts were legal, one of the protesters replied, "We are the law" (Raval & Jain, 1998). Interestingly enough, Mehta did not want her film to become a vehicle for lesbian advocacy, and adamantly resisted the categorization of her characters' desire. "It is not about lesbianism," she explained. "It's about loneliness, about choices" (Raval & Jain, 1998).

The film was later cleared by the Censor Board without any cuts after winning several international awards. Despite being banned in Mumbai and Delhi theatres, the movie continued to release without much protest or struggle after the initial controversy. Gayatri Gopinath (2005) describes how, in both *Lihaaf* and *Fire*, "female homoerotic desire... emerges from within the patriarchal confines of the home, within the cracks and fissures of heterosexuality, and is inextricable from the violences of colonialism and misogyny" (p. 183). Exacerbated by British mandates and restrictions, the domain of sexuality shifted from the public sphere and moved even deeper into the heavily gendered private sphere (Penrose, 2006). While the British presence had formally departed, colonialism continued to shape our cultural psyche resulting in stigmatization and violence targeting queer South Asia.



Figure 1: *Two Youths*. From the Fitzwilliam Album, Mughal, ca. 1555 – 60.
 Courtesy of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, UK (161.1948)

ABSENCE OF QUEER WOMEN AND NON-BINARY SOUTH ASIA

As discussed in this essay, the examples of queerness in India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan virtually all depict men and their homoerotic relation to another and give no insight into women's homoeroticism. In this way, archives marginalize those erased from our history through the very absence of their lived realities. Due to the centering of women's sexualities, queer women are even further marginalized because of the mapping of the nation through women's bodies. Nayak (2003) argues that "the public humiliation of women by parading them naked, cutting off their breasts, or tattooing their bodies with nationalist slogans were all violent reminders that women's bodies are contested sites

for fixing competing discourses” regarding the Kashmir conflicts (p. 4). Indeed, the effeminization of South Asian men by British imperialists left an anxiety that needed relieving. Miserably, women’s bodies became the site of contestation for the dismembered nation. Indeed, women demonstrated the purity of the nation through their celibacy until wedded to the nation’s conqueror, the South Asian man. Queer women could not fulfil this civic duty and therefore are erased where present. Indeed, colonized people inherited monogamy, procreative marriage, etc. Modernity erased queer spaces of belonging and instead led to the rise of new subjectivities (Dasgupta, 2011).

British imperialists intentionally targeted unfamiliarly queer Indian bodies in order to prevent the reproduction of anti-heteronormative Indian traditions. The practice of revoking land grants attempted to end gender-variant male sex work and heavily compromised the income of gender-variant female bodyguards (Dasgupta, 2011). Kings and harems were traditionally guarded by Uzbek and Tartar slaves during the Mughal era, and these slaves were all gender-variant women. The sexualities of these masculine women (I use the term “women” loosely here) were distinctly separate from feminine women. Despite the pregnancies that did occur, it was forbidden to be pregnant as a bodyguard. However, gender expectations for gender-variant South Asian women have changed since imperialism. Similarly, Hijras, who were once understood as divine, are increasingly facing marginalization and homelessness.

COUNTERARGUMENTS

Shashi Tharoor’s book *The Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India* signifies the atrocities of colonization and ultimately determines that the British Empire’s presence in India was traumatic. Although Uday Balakrishnan, a writer for the *Hindu BusinessLine*, agrees the arguments made by Shashi Tharoor deserve attention and recognition, Balakrishnan (2016) claims that “it was the British who made us aware of our rich cultural and linguistic heritage” and their benevolent presence in India has been far greater “than Tharoor cares to acknowledge” (n.p.). Balakrishnan is one of many South Asians and non-South Asians to make this point. However, it is not a well-rounded contextual assumption in my opinion.

Indeed, I find it hard to understand how a diaspora created out of a need to escape our nation’s conditions due to the western influences I have highlighted in this paper makes us as South Asians aware of our rich heritage, unless it is the recognition of a home lost that we are admiring in this context. Balakrishnan (2016) also claims,

We must not forget that by the time British rule ceased in India, the country had one of the most extensive railway networks in the world, a thoroughly professional army and an administrative system that has endured to this day. Under the British, most of the subcontinent has also been mapped and counted as never before. (n.p.)

This is a fair acknowledgement of western developments in India; however, I’d like to offer an alternative perspective. Present day globalization is ever-increasing, with vast stores of knowledge and information available between nations, especially in terms of technological advances. With India being a heavy hitter in the realm of trade during the

Silk Road, is it not possible to assume that South Asia would inevitably have developed railway networks and other advancements? The modern-day indoor plumbing system was inherited from India, signifying a certain technological know-how prior to invasion. Personally, I find the type of rhetoric espoused by Balakrishnan to be exaggerated, because I firmly believe we could have received all this information without the terror of colonization. The harm done by the British outweighs the supposed benefits we gained from imperialism, and since India accounted for 27% of the world's wealth before the British arrived, we were clearly fine. Europe however? Not so much.

The archaic veil thrown over history assumes our non-colonized past to have been a stagnant, prehistoric, undeveloped period. This trick is performed by western gatekeepers to mark colonization as an innovative and therefore superior present and future. Due to this understanding of time as linear, the idea of going back to prior ways of being is regressive. That is simply untrue. South Asia's history, for instance, reveals ways of being that we may well strive to return to.

CONCLUSIONS

I wish I had been able to include more information about Indigenous Indians, Hijras, and polysexuality in this paper; however, I hope I created a fissure in our colonial narrative either way. What I offer to the epistemology of South Asian people's ontological wellbeing is how colonialism and deviant sexualities are linked and result in modern day constituencies that regulate our (un)belonging in our communities. By understanding how colonialism shapes our naturalized understandings of our historical identities, ontological being, and social orders such as sexualities, we come to understand that we are a product of our environment—and environments change.

Destabilizing the fixity of sexuality prevents us from organizing people into categories of marginalization and privilege when integrated into our political spheres. (Bi)sexual erasure leads to the solidification of a sexualized social binary or sexual economy, with our fashion of living being a result of our experience. Arondekar (2009) laments the "erasures of the past," and (bi)sexual erasure is just that (p. 171). (Bi)sexual erasure must be dismantled in order for the historically marginalized to be unapologetically comfortable, fulfilled, pleased, and at home without facing persecution from governing forces.

Keeping in mind our participation with colonialist identities, what is it we should do? Should we live with them, uncritically or critically aware? If we are critically aware, can we live in opposition to these systems whilst being facilitated by them? Do we need a core moral truth to begin implementing decolonization?

Personally, I do not think we need a single shared moral truth to begin decolonizing; rather, we require a shared effort towards reducing its violent and limiting effects. We are in a contingent moment in time with colonialism saturated in our imagination and epistemological comfort. Culture is the product of generations of human migration, and I mention this not to dismiss these concerns but to signify how we can change them to include queer South Asia.

I want to stress why the politics of desire matter in our contemporary lives, as desire is often dismissed and compartmentalized into people's bedrooms. The private

and public domain are never separate and are equally relevant in a well-rounded life. After discussing these texts, it is evident that the configuration of western sexuality into South Asia crossed intersections of our livelihood with detrimental consequences.

I challenge us to revamp our vocabularies and denounce sexuality as fixed and stable and instead look at our desire as a lovely unknown territory with infinite possibility. I challenge us to have wandering eyes that land freely without traffic lights directing their gaze—an openness that resists. The past isn't a utopia, but it can be a beginning. What you gain from Decolonial Mindfulness:

1. People are allowed to live their lives without violence
2. You don't harbor as much negative energy, and you don't lose your loved ones
3. Decolonizing one set of harmful beliefs can inadvertently unravel connected ones

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LEENA HASAN

HOW DID I GET HERE? REFLECTIONS OF AN INTROVERTED ACTIVIST¹⁴

ABSTRACT

This essay is a reflection on my journey—as a settler Canadian daughter of Bangladeshi immigrant physicians—toward becoming a climate justice activist with particular focus on the area of climate change. I begin by discussing my identity development and the role models who helped shape my ethics, and then share my personal experience of overcoming my fears and anxieties in order to become an effective change agent. Finally, I outline the lessons learned from my involvement in activism and discuss my vision for moving forward.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF MY VALUES: IDENTITY FORMATION AND ROLE MODELS

There are a variety of factors that lead one to become a social justice activist. Looking back on my own experience, I now acknowledge the significance that my identity formation and personal role models have had in shaping my core values and helping me develop a positive sense of self. These factors provided the foundation I needed to become an advocate for social justice. I was born and raised in Winnipeg, on Treaty 1 territory, as the daughter of Bangladeshi immigrants who were part of a select group of international medical graduates to become licensed as family physicians in Canada. Consequently, I grew up with more privilege than most in the diasporic community, living in a wealthy suburban neighbourhood and attending a private all-girls school. This benefited me in terms of education, but also made me naïve and entitled at times, as I was sheltered from many of the hardships faced by other South Asian girls. Like many South Asian parents, my parents came from relatively humble middle-class beginnings in a region of fluctuating political stability, and thus security was a top priority for them. Because of this, my parents instilled a strong sense of financial and social responsibility in me and my brother, teaching us to appreciate everything we had. We were taught to

¹⁴ This paper and the speech based on it were prepared on the unceded ancestral territories of the Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh, and Musqueam Nations. It is important that we settlers reflect on how we benefit from the oppression of Indigenous people across Canada and the world simply by being here, and consider our role as uninvited guests with a responsibility to stand in solidarity with Indigenous Peoples. We must recognize that the liberation of Indigenous Peoples is tied to the rest of humanity's liberation. I would like to extend my gratitude to Dr. Habiba Zaman for providing me with this opportunity for self-reflection and the chance to share my story; Dr. Sanzida Habib for sharing helpful resources to guide my writing; and Avanti Haque and Jessie Russell for their editing and their emotional support.

look up to people like my mother's own role model, Shariff Hossain, a retired principal who dedicated his life to running an orphanage and providing vocational skills training for single mothers in Bangladesh, taking nothing for himself.

It may be said that my mother is a pioneer in her own right, immigrating to Canada and becoming a keystone in the community. A family doctor trained in Bangladesh, she went against the grain by leaving her homeland to pursue career opportunities in North America as an independent woman. She believed that she could have a greater social impact on the world by taking advantage of the opportunities in Canada to benefit marginalized people in Bangladesh and beyond. Never one to shy away from doing the right thing even when goes against the norm, my mother wears many hats in her community, serving as an advocate for refugees, organizing and fundraising to support the Rohingya people living in refugee camps in Bangladesh, and collecting water bottles for recycling at community events. She is a poet who reminds us of our humanity and purpose and a trusted confidante and friend who always puts service before fun. She is a mother to many, and I am proud to share her.

In addition to my mother, I was fortunate to be surrounded by other inspiring role models such as the Rahman sisters. Daughters of a local Bangladeshi-Canadian physician who was an Elder of the Bangladeshi diasporic community in Winnipeg, these women are the funniest and most creative, active, and passionate people I know. They and their friends helped shape my perspectives of what it meant to be a Canadian Muslim. They taught me how feminism and environmentalism intertwined with Islam, busted patriarchal cultural myths about Islam, and participated in whatever activities they wanted to while continuing to don the hijab. The eldest is an eye surgeon and community advocate who has used her skills to provide surgery free of charge to marginalized communities via Orbis, the world's first mobile eye hospital constructed onboard an airplane. The younger two are award-winning artist entrepreneurs who founded Snow Angel Films, a film production company that creates inspiring, thought-provoking, meaningful, and entertaining films that raise the voices of Muslims and other marginalized people and give audiences the opportunity to engage with social issues. Having these powerful women in my life allowed me to envision the kind of accomplishments that were possible for me as a Bangladeshi-Canadian, and I continue to be inspired by them today.

THE STRUGGLE: MY JOURNEY TO ACTIVISM

Thanks to the combination of my idealistic personality and my Islamic upbringing, I had a heavy conscience from a young age, and was always reflecting on the potential consequences my actions had on humanity and the world. In particular, climate change stood out to me as an issue of grave concern. I strongly felt the urgency of the impending threat to humanity and life on this planet. The issue became all the more personal when my second cousin showed me an article in which I learned that climate change threatened to cause rising sea levels that would put two-thirds of Bangladesh underwater. I was frustrated by the shortsightedness of leaders and people around me, and felt it was my duty to do my part to address it.

For me, becoming an activist was a gradual process. Although I had a fiery passion inside of me to fight against climate change, as someone who was socially anxious, I struggled to find the courage to speak out and try to convince climate deniers. I felt paralyzed by fear of criticism and failure. At the beginning of my journey toward activism, I did not have confidence in my ability to write a letter and was too afraid to post petitions on my Facebook page for all my friends to see.

Another challenge I faced was the all-too-common pressure from my South Asian parents to perform well academically and ensure myself a secure career. Climate change and environmentalism were my true passion, but I was afraid that a degree in Environmental Science would make it difficult for me to find a stable career. I bought into my parents' (let's be real—it was my father's) argument that I should pursue a path in medicine; after all, having the financial stability and influence of a doctor could give me the power to have a greater impact in the future. As a result, I mostly put my true passion on hold until I gained admission into the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Manitoba.

Feeling frustrated because I didn't feel like I was living up to my social responsibility, I finally moved from slacktivism to activism after I began medical school. I was no longer willing to wait until I had my life together to take action, so I finally began to face my fears. One major step in coming out of my shell involved volunteering at a table to raise funds for sick children. The experience of forcing myself to ask for donations helped me face my fear of rejection and gain confidence in advocating to strangers. I realized that most people were polite and I had the ability to not take rejection personally. I took my next step toward finally beginning to address the issue I was most passionate about—climate change. In the fall of 2009, the first International Day of Climate Action was organized in cities across the globe. The idea of people all over the world uniting to bring attention to a shared crisis deeply resonated with me. I finally mustered up the courage to email all my peers and friends to join the local event in Winnipeg. Unfortunately, it took me until the day before the event to muster up the courage to email everyone, so in the end none of them showed up. Despite this, the experience of joining with community members inspired me to join the growing global movement.

My first major step toward becoming an activist was volunteering for and eventually leading a non-profit organization called Books with Wings, which sent thousands of donated medical and other textbooks to university libraries in Afghanistan. I was drawn to the work because I appreciated the overlap of social justice with sustainability inherent in redistributing neglected resources in a socially impactful way. By taking advantage of shipments already going to Afghanistan, we were able to empower Afghan medical students and others with knowledge they could use to improve conditions in the country. This experience was important to my growth, as I gained leadership and organizational skills by learning how to recruit and mobilize volunteers to help collect, organize, and deliver the books. I also learned a painful lesson about the fatal consequences of not understanding the political context in a conflict-ridden nation. Because of our naïveté in labeling the boxes of books with the Canadian

flag, one of the drivers delivering the books was killed. It was a heartbreaking and eye-opening experience.

However, as I moved from the classroom to my clinical rotations, I began losing myself again. I struggled to fully engage in my work and hated myself for being ungrateful for the privilege I held. I wanted so badly to care more and not to lose perspective regarding the importance of the work I was doing. It took years for me to realize that it was not possible to force myself to care and that not feeling passionate about medicine didn't mean I was a bad person. In fact, my inability to continue medicine was a sign that took me months to recognize. After I failed internal medicine and received feedback that I was not engaged, the Dean of Student Affairs, who knew about my passion for social justice through my work with Books with Wings, suggested I pursue a Masters of Public Health. This was a hard pill for me to swallow. To me, it felt like I was being asked to give up, and I never saw myself as someone who would give up without a fight. I thought that if I put my head down and tried harder for a little while longer, all of my struggles would pay off. The only academic support I received initially was feedback on my clinical skills, so I started seeing the school psychologist and a psychiatrist to address why I couldn't focus or perform. Medications for anxiety and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder did nothing. Continuing to struggle, I took a leave of absence, feeling that I needed help before I could go back. After months of silence, I finally heard that the remediation director had quit. I then had to go through the ordeal of returning to the same hospital with staff who recognized me to repeat internal medicine before the school agreed to give me remedial support. I finally received support after failing internal medicine again, but none of the physicians were actually seeing how I worked, so I instead got help from a colleague of my mother's. With his help, I improved, but I was still terrified of going back. In addition, I still struggled with feeling like medicine was too far removed from my true area of interest. Then, as fate would have it, the opportunity of a lifetime came my way. The International Federation of Medical Students Association (IFMSA) was looking for an intern to work on the Climate Change and Health team at the headquarters of the World Health Organization. I poured all my passion into my application and was ecstatic when I found out that I had been accepted. Finally, I had found a way to make use of my medical knowledge and skills to fight for climate justice.

Through therapy, I have come to understand that emotions are information that helps guide us, so it's important for us to listen to them and try to understand where they are coming from instead of resisting them like I did for nine months. My heart was telling me that my life was too far out of alignment with my values. I needed to listen to my feeling brain even though I couldn't explain it adequately to my rational brain. Failure after failure forced me to look inside myself and face my truth. I was burdened by the disconnect between my consciousness about the urgency of climate change and my choice to keep living as though there were time to postpone taking action. I knew I had at least three more years in which I would have to maintain my focus at the individual biomedical level rather than the systems level. I could begin addressing problems at the systems level if I did a residency in Public Health, but my spirit couldn't tolerate waiting three more years to begin focusing on the issues I wanted to address. I

wanted to begin developing the skills I would need to do the work I was passionate about.

I began my internship with the intention of determining whether climate change and health was the area in which I wanted to work. This would help me decide if I should pursue a Masters of Public Health (MPH). While I found the process of writing reports rather dry, I found ways to be active by joining the WHO Intern Board in the new position of Sustainability Coordinator. It was rewarding to work on campaigns that encouraged action, including an environmental documentary-screening series that generated dialogue about environmental issues such as food waste and a Meatless Monday campaign in collaboration with the WHO cafeteria in which we educated WHO staff about the benefits to human health and the environment of reducing overall meat intake. I was also excited to have the privilege of co-organizing the second Climate and Health Summit taking place in Warsaw during the annual United Nations climate negotiations. It was inspiring to learn from leaders working at the intersections of climate change and health who were invited to speak at the summit. My supervisors were also gracious enough to give me the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to represent the WHO and the IFMSA at the UN climate negotiations.

My experience at the UN climate talks was incredibly eye-opening. I was inspired by YouNGO, a convergence of youth and NGOs that met each day of the negotiations to collaborate in planning their actions. I was also honoured and excited to join activists in the Cough for Coal rally who were protesting the World Coal Summit that was happening simultaneously. However, what I was most uplifted by was a youth who advocated for fossil fuel divestment, the fastest growing divestment movement in history. Following the successful example of the South African divestment campaign to end apartheid, students from across the globe began campaigning for their universities—as institutions responsible for producing knowledge to guide society—to remove the moral license of the top 200 corporations who were most responsible for fueling the climate crisis by refusing to invest in them. I was eager to support in any way I could.

After my experience working at the WHO, I finally took the time to do some soul-searching. I did some personal reflection and attended university workshops that helped me understand what I needed out of a career in order to be satisfied. I gained the clarity to see that the areas that interested me most were careers that provided social benefit, were intellectually stimulating, and involved creativity. I also did my own personal research regarding my introverted, intuitive, feeling, and perceiving (INFP) personality type to better understand my strengths and weaknesses.

I wanted to make use of my health knowledge, so I decided that an MPH would strike the perfect balance between health and climate. The Dean of Student Affairs recommended Simon Fraser University's Masters of Public Health program. I saw many advantages to this path. I was excited to see there was a professor there who did research in climate change and health. When I looked into the courses they offered in advocacy and communication, health promotion, and environmental health, it seemed like the program would provide me with the appropriate skills to work as an advocate in climate change and health. Finally, because I knew Vancouver to be a hub of progressive

organizing, especially in the area of climate change, I thought the environment and opportunities there would help nurture me as an activist. After I was successfully admitted to the program, I was not disappointed.

THRIVING AND LEARNING: ALIGNING MY LIFE WITH MY VALUES

I finally found my place when I joined the climate action club, SFU 350. Through SFU 350, I was able to meaningfully live my purpose by supporting the fossil fuel divestment movement. It was incredibly gratifying to find like-minded individuals whose intelligence, empathy, and creativity continue to inspire me. The group's decision-making process was inclusive and collaborative, unlike anything I had experienced before. The members were able to create a safe space where everyone was heard and respected regardless of experience. Together, we learned how to be strategic, balancing positive relationships with the Board of Governors with escalating actions when responses were inadequate. We were also able to share knowledge with other divestment groups across the country and support each other's campaigns. I was finally able to put my personal awareness-raising experience to use on Facebook as the group's Social Media Coordinator, sharing our important work and the work of groups with whom we stood in solidarity. Although the university has not yet agreed to fully divest, our work resulted in the formation of the Responsible Investment Committee and led to a commitment by SFU to reduce the carbon footprint of its investment portfolio by 30% by 2030. However, the most valuable thing many of us gained came in the form of lifelong friendships. Even though we have moved on to different areas of our lives, we continue to support and encourage each other in our activism, careers, and personal lives.

Today, I continue my climate activism through volunteering and supporting climate justice and democracy-related events. Mainly, I do outreach work as a volunteer for the non-profit My Sea to Sky to raise public awareness about the proposed Woodfibre LNG project, which threatens human safety and the ecosystems of communities in the Howe Sound area and much of Metro Vancouver in addition to committing us to potent fossil fuel emissions from fracked methane gas. In addition, I believe that Indigenous self-determination and a deeper understanding of Indigenous worldviews are vital to the spiritual revolution needed to achieve climate justice. This is what motivates my work as a Qualitative Analyst at the First Nations Health Authority, where I support research asking Elders and knowledge-keepers about Indigenous views of ecological health to improve the health and wellness of BC First Nations.

Since moving in 2014 to the portion of unceded Coast Salish territories known as Vancouver, my perspective on power as well as society and my place in it has expanded significantly. As someone who grew up in a mid-sized prairie city, I found many more opportunities in Vancouver compared to Winnipeg for development and growth toward becoming an activist, from community organizing workshops to direct action trainings. I am grateful for the privilege many of us have to hear directly from Indigenous activists fighting on the frontlines of resource extraction projects. I will continue to work in solidarity with these activists and develop my skills to contribute to the ultimate goal of Indigenous sovereignty and climate justice.

SESSION IV

Poverty, Social Justice and Inclusion

Session Chair: Neena Randhwal, Chimo Community Services, Richmond

Ishmam Bhuiyan “Poverty Activism in Vancouver: Replacing Charity and Equality with Justice and Equity”

Sonali Johal “The Need for a ‘Whole’ Education: Encouraging Our Students to Embrace Diversity in the Classroom”

Rajdeep Dhadwal “Understanding and Mitigating Climate Change: Confluences of Traditional Punjabi and Indigenous Perceptions of the Land”

Avanti Haque “Building Relationships between Racialized Communities: Achieving Social Justice in Canada”



A PATHWAY TO EFFECTIVE ACTIVISM: REPLACING CHARITY AND EQUALITY WITH JUSTICE AND EQUITY

ABSTRACT

Charity and equality, two concepts that have been widely adopted in addressing different forms of disparity in communities, need to be rejected and removed from the models we employ to defend the most vulnerable. An overreliance on charity normalizes the existence of injustice; it actively allows suffering to become entrenched in social systems. Similarly, social movements that rely on equality proceed under the presumption that our communities are already equal, ignoring the need for equity-based activism. Using an analysis of homelessness in Vancouver, the Vancouver Tenants Union's staunch defence of Vancouver's working class, my involvement in leading the Marpole Students for Modular Housing movement, and my role as president of the provincial non-profit organization Kitchen on a Mission, this paper explores the need to transition to a justice-based model for activism: changing dysfunctional systems instead of offering relief while working within them. This paper also argues that to effectively deal with homelessness in Vancouver, we need to reach a collective understanding that real social change requires the most privileged to take a step back and make space.

"Keep your coins. I want change."

– Banksy

On January 30th, 2019, billionaires Warren Buffet, Jeff Bezos, and Jamie Dimon announced a joint initiative to ameliorate the incessantly increasing, unsustainable cost of healthcare in the United States by creating "solutions that benefit [their] US employees, their families and, potentially, all Americans" (Isidore, 2018). Three billionaires, collectively worth over \$250 billion USD, promising to fix a healthcare system already afflicted with profit motives and privatization is painfully indicative of how effectively we have been convinced that the solutions to systemic injustices lie in investments by philanthropists and the Buffets of our world, who, despite having consistently demonstrated scabrous greed and indifference to the treatment of workers, are somehow supposed to be our saviours because they are in a charitable mood. Legitimizing such farcical attempts to distract the masses from the need for structural changes to the American healthcare system—involving a transition to a single-payer system, likely made possible by taxing billionaires like Buffet, Bezos, and Dimon at higher rates—delays and counteracts meaningful movements that do not make the mistake of embracing the charity of the wealthy. This tendency to outsource the responsibility to address injustice while solutions are known and within reach for the

public sector to deal with transcends the American healthcare system; to witness its ubiquity, one need look no further than injustices in one's own city.

Most approaches to activism share two significant defects—one is their reverence for and reliance on charity and philanthropy as solutions to systemic injustice, and the other is their mischaracterization of the role of governments in responding to unjust systems. This paper outlines how these errors manifest, specifically as they apply to advocacy on local issues in British Columbia, Canada. It also seeks to propose a refined vision of activism, one devoid of the above criticisms which many mainstream activists share. To develop an understanding of what exactly this would look like in practice, this paper analyzes the resistance to supportive housing in suburban neighbourhoods from this new perspective, which is established by abandoning charity and equality of opportunity as guiding principles.

Activists and unions have accomplished the most significant structural social reforms in human history, with dissident organizations protesting and pressuring governments to sign said reforms into law. Establishing humane working conditions and credit systems for farm workers in the United States would not have been possible without the United Farm Workers Movement led by Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta. Apartheid in South Africa would likely still be alive today, oppressing black South Africans, had it not been for the Anti Apartheid Movement. American segregation would have persisted had it not been for the radical forces within the Civil Rights Movement. These victories share a common thread—it was activists who popularized them, and governments, not charities, who felt obliged to answer the calling of the people. These victories also necessarily included abandoning the mischaracterization of government as the voice of all citizens over which it governs and an institution whose role it is to ensure equality of opportunity for all its constituents. Equality of opportunity—or more briefly put, “equality”—has, I argue, pernicious, long-lasting effects on vulnerable populations and must be replaced more widely by equality of outcome, or “equity.”

In addition to offering a more reasoned form of activism, this paper evaluates examples of charity- and justice-based activism in Vancouver, BC. I discuss my role as president of Kitchen on a Mission, a registered non-profit organization that facilitates the donation of food, hygiene products, books, and clothing from businesses to shelters and supportive housing projects around the city. The paper uses Kitchen on a Mission as an example to evaluate common modes of charity-based activism, and ultimately offers a pathway by which organizations can effectively transition to a justice-based system. To be clear, this paper does not argue that charity is exclusively a negative force. It would be disingenuous to do so. In critiquing the role of charity in activism, this paper cedes that charitable and philanthropic acts have historically contributed to the wellbeing of less fortunate communities, but argues that, in doing so, they have further entrenched the very problems they were supposed to address. Charity has never been a solution to systemic injustice—it has always been temporary relief, a placeholder that allows injustice to become entrenched and metastasize. Addressing injustices in our communities requires us to stop treating symptoms of a broken system and unfair legislation and instead restructure and fix the system, rewriting the legislation that leads to injustice.

CHARITY AND THE NORMALIZATION OF INJUSTICE

Charity retains a squeaky-clean reputation; rarely do we consider its efficacy and potential negative implications. Whereas justice seeks to structurally change broken systems, charity works within these systems, offering temporary relief to injustice. The distinction thus far is purely in terms of definition—that is, anyone who spends any amount of time thinking about the difference between charity and justice would likely arrive at this conclusion. However, the more difficult contention I seek to make is that charity not only falls short of justice as a mode of activism, but it also actively normalizes and deepens injustice and degrades any possibility for real solutions to problems facing vulnerable communities. In order to develop an understanding of the shortcomings of charity as a mode of activism, though, a working definition of the word *charity* itself is a requisite. The same goes for the concept of philanthropy, which is often used interchangeably with charity (Schnurbein et al., 2014, p. 3). In their book, *My Impact – Fundamentals of Modern Philanthropy*, Schnurbein et al. (2014) offer the following definition of philanthropy:

Someone who engages in philanthropy—that is, someone who donates his or her time, money, and reputation to charitable causes—is hence referred to as a “philanthropist.” The most conventional modern definition of philanthropy is “private initiatives, for public, common good, focusing on quality of life.” This combines the social and scientific aspect of philanthropy, developed in the 20th century, with its original humanistic tradition. (p. 3)

Schnurbein et al. accurately characterize charity as private initiatives, meaning initiatives that are separate from the public sector and government control. One way to begin to see the problems with privatized band-aid solutions to issues like urban poverty is to evaluate the most honed versions of charitable action.

Effective altruism, championed by philosopher Peter Singer, is a movement that promotes charity and philanthropy preceded by research into the most effective form of charity (Synowiec, 2016). Ethician Jakub Synowiec notes that the goal of effective altruism is utilitarian; its purpose differs from traditional and hedonistic charity in that it focuses exclusively on the effectiveness of achieving its objectives (Synowiec, 2016). The emphasis that effective altruism places on efficacy is noble; charity is too often viewed and used as a hedonistic outlet, as participants in charity frequently cite and fixate on how good giving makes them feel. However, as polished as this new approach to charity is, it distracts from the drawbacks of the system of charity itself. Daren Acemoglu outlines one such drawback in his critique of Singer, writing, “In the case of philanthropy, the problem isn’t street justice but replacing the government’s role in, say, providing health care” (Acemoglu, 2015). Acemoglu’s dissent uncovers the most gaping hole in the theory of effective altruism—that its practice makes space for the entrenchment of the social dynamics that perpetuate the need for charity. Without the very existence of charity—regardless of effectiveness—the onus of addressing injustice would fall entirely, and more intensely, on the public sector. If charities that distributed food to food-insecure individuals in cities like Vancouver ceased to exist, the pressure on governments to directly act on food insecurity would be far more intense. While charities can be effective in keeping communities going on a short-term basis, a reliance

on third-party action is not sustainable in the long term. It should not be the role of students and activists to close the seams in food systems to account for people who can't afford to eat. Their efforts should instead be funnelled into social movements, pushing for food systems entirely devoid of seams. The solution to food insecurity on a local scale is not charity; it is the abolition of charity. We can only have equitable food systems when public policy removes the need for charity entirely.

I do not propose that charity be sworn off entirely immediately, just that its influence be gradually phased out to make the need for systemic change more conspicuous, and that we begin to view the existence of charity as a failure on behalf of elected bodies. My view of how we abandon our reverence for charity posits an approach that embraces the notion that all who do not directly oppose injustice are complicit. Even one who does not directly perpetrate the injustice must still accept their complicity in its occurrence. This must also apply to elected officials. Immediately upon taking office, elected officials must accept blame for all the oppressive, unjust forces over which they govern. From the colonization and incessant oppression of Indigenous peoples to the existence of homelessness and poverty, responsibility must be concentrated on the silent and, even more strongly, on the elected. Blame for the existence of charities ought to also be placed on elected officials and all those who do not actively work to dismantle the influence of charity. This is no doubt a radical view and shift in thinking—but it effectively brings attention to the urgency of addressing struggles like homelessness that are so inimical that the only logical response is a radical one. Instead of viewing progress as an accomplishment, then, elected representatives ought to begin viewing their work as an obligation. To truly solve homelessness, rampant wealth inequality, and the climate crisis, we need to classify bold action on behalf of governments as an obligation.

On a personal level, though, connecting one's awareness of their complicity in the normalization and entrenchment of injustice to proactive steps towards dismantling charity is not straightforward. In transitioning from charity to justice as a personal mode of activism, one must reconcile the ramifications of ending one's charitable work with those of continuing. Yet progress away from charity must continually be made. Kitchen on a Mission's regular work—of organizing and transporting donations to people in need in Vancouver—is charity, but it is also necessary on a short-term basis. Thus, the issue of abandoning charity is more nuanced than a one-step cancellation of all charity; it must be gradual and steady. At Kitchen on a Mission, for every hour we spend on charitable work, we spend several hours on justice-based work: social media advocacy, rallies, educational workshops, and publishing our book, *Home: 78 Letters for 78 New Neighbours*, and *a Vision for Supportive Housing Advocacy*. A major part of our work involves connecting with other organizations to work collectively toward justice instead of charity. Most representative of this shift toward meaningful activism is our mantra: "we want to go out of commission, replaced by real solutions in our civic systems"; it shows that we—and hopefully an increasing number of people—are cognizant of the fact that real solutions to food insecurity will only be achieved by structural changes to the food system, not donations.

EQUALITY, EQUITY, AND THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

To understand the next defect in common modes of activism, it is necessary to make the distinction between equality and equity. Winston-Salem State University (WSSU) discerns the following:

The terms equality and equity are often used interchangeably; however, they differ in important ways. Equality is typically defined as treating everyone the same and giving everyone access to the same opportunities. Meanwhile, equity refers to proportional representation (by race, class, gender, etc.) in those same opportunities. To achieve equity, policies and procedures may result in an unequal distribution of resources. For example, need-based financial aid reserves money specifically for low-income students. Although unequal, this is considered equitable because it is necessary to provide access to higher education for low-income students. (WSSU, 2016)

Another way of discussing the difference between the two terms is denoting them as *equality of outcome* and *equality of opportunity*. In the paper “Defending Equality of Outcome,” London School of Economics political scientist and professor Anne Phillips notes that equality of opportunity (equality) seeks to set an even playing field in public discourse for all, whereas equality of outcome (equity) recognizes differences in the public’s existing condition and distributes policy and resources unequally but proportionately to address existing inequalities (Phillips, 2004, pp. 1-8). The trouble with embracing equality is that, much like charity, it perpetuates and entrenches injustice. It is a clear and often intentional step back from meaningful action.

In an article for the *New York Times* entitled “In Talk of Economy, Obama Turns to ‘Opportunity’ Over ‘Inequality,’” journalist Jackie Calmes argues that in shifting away from meaningfully addressing inequality through equity and instead touting equality of opportunity, Barack Obama’s rhetoric is a tactic to steer the debate away from “talk of income inequality [that] smacks of class warfare and redistribution of wealth, of taxing the rich to give to the poor” — otherwise known as real solutions to wealth inequality (Calmes, 2014). Further evidence of this ploy by elected officials is ubiquitous on a local scale in Vancouver, and many are falling for it.

As a volunteer and organizer with the Vancouver Tenants Union, an organization that builds grassroots support for progressive policies that protect tenants in Vancouver, I organized in support of City Councillor Jean Swanson’s motion B.10: “Protecting Tenants from Renovictions and Aggressive Buy-Outs.” The motion proposed to end predatory renovictions, ensuring that landlords would not be able to evict tenants to perform renovations without the option for the tenant to return after the completion of the renovations. The full motion read:

Therefore be it resolved

A. That the City immediately amend its Tenant Relocation and Protection Policy to:

- i. Apply to all forms of rental accommodation, all areas of Vancouver and to all permits which will result in the temporary or permanent displacement of tenants; and

ii. Require landlords to offer displaced tenants the opportunity to temporarily move out for the necessary duration of the renovations without their leases ending or rent increasing.

B. That the City devise methods to keep track of all apartment buildings sold in Vancouver and immediately inform Vancouver tenants of their rights.

C. That the City explore measures to regulate and publicly register all tenant buyouts.

D. That the City immediately and forcefully call on the province to implement effective vacancy controls for British Columbia, or alternatively, to give Vancouver the power to regulate maximum rent increases during and between tenancies. (Swanson, 2018)

Renovictions are a form of systematic eviction that displace and alienate working and low-income people from their homes, and the motion was seen by many as a necessary measure to provide struggling renters in the city with relief. However, some of the arguments that were being used to dissuade other councillors from voting affirmatively were deeply troubling, and one of them was particularly misguided and pertinent to this paper: several city councillors argued that a moratorium on renovictions would benefit the lives of working people at the expense of wealthier landlords, which they saw as unacceptable, because City Council's job is to "not tip the balance too much." Much like Barack Obama, several of Vancouver's city councillors evaded substantive reform by deferring to equality. Identifying this technique of gaslighting the public and the negative effects of blindly embracing equality is the first part of building effective activism; the second part is developing a method to use this knowledge, which brings us to the need to fundamentally modify how we view the role of government. Instead of viewing government as an institution whose responsibility is to uphold and represent the interests all its constituents, it must be viewed as one responsible for defending the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. Elected representatives do not hold office to fight for all citizens equally—to the councilmember, MLA, MP, and Minister, disadvantaged communities are categorically more important, because real social change requires that people who have privilege take steps back, and it is the government's role to ensure that happens.

APPLYING JUSTICE, EQUITY, AND CLASS ANALYSIS TO SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

Finally, to demonstrate how replacing charity with justice and equality with equity would look practically, we explore the controversial topic of supportive housing in suburban, middle- to high-income, single-family neighbourhoods. In late 2017, the City of Vancouver announced plans to build 78 modular homes in the neighbourhood of Marpole, across the street from an elementary school—not that that is important. Many locals ardently opposed the project, claiming that a supportive housing project near an elementary school somehow posed a threat to children. The argument had two facets: the first was the claim that a supportive housing project would bring needles to the neighbourhood and would somehow threaten the children nearby, and the second was the claim that members of the relatively affluent neighbourhood should get to choose who lives in their neighbourhood. The first part of the argument is very conspicuously

logically flawed and is not deserving of an in-depth rebuttal, because comparing the hypothetical, unproven fear of needles to the right to housing for people who need it is simply ridiculous. It also implies that it is acceptable to have needles in other neighbourhoods, but they become a problem when—the universe forbid—they enter affluent single-family neighbourhoods. The second facet is more interesting and germane to the topic of this paper, but is equally illegitimate.

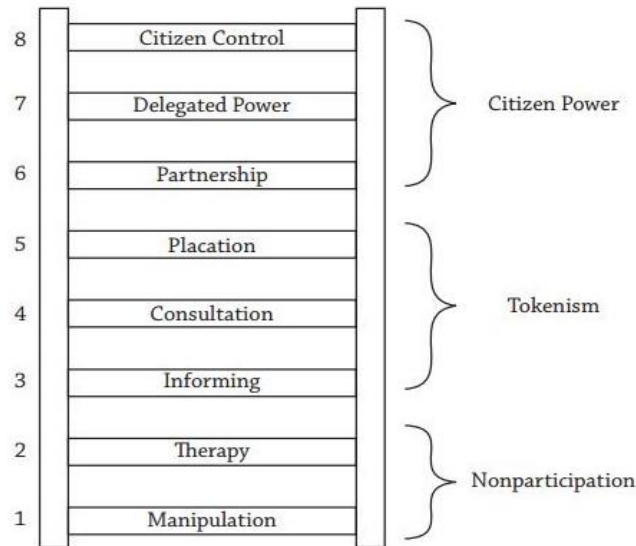


Figure 2: Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation (Arnstein, 1969)

Shown above is Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation, which is a commonly cited model that outlines different levels of citizen participation in public decisions (Arnstein, 1969). The principle is that all decisions can be classified into levels of citizen participation—nonparticipation, tokenism, and citizen power, in ascending order of favourability. Arnstein argues that, ideally, all decisions should be made through citizen control. This theory is not without value: its emphasis on democracy and public participation is important. But it is also incomplete, and is often used to do harm to communities desperate for urgent relief. Similar to charity and equality, one must critically assess the implications of public participation. It is not to be blindly employed. Segregationist resistance to the integration of people of colour into suburban neighbourhoods in Vancouver relied on this blind reverence of citizen participation. Resistance to supportive housing projects uses this same tactic—hateful attitudes covered by illegitimate claims to the right to participate in public decision-making. Thus, public participation and consultation must include an analysis of power and class; they must be applied differently to affluent neighbourhoods opposing supportive housing projects than to low-income neighbourhoods resisting gentrification. In an article published in late 2017, Darcie Bennett of Pivot Legal Society writes,

Municipalities across BC have authority to hold public consultations, and approve or dismiss applications to develop housing using their power over land use and zoning within their jurisdictions. This power, which is well equipped to consider traffic flow, sewers and view corridors, has resulted in a series of poorly

managed referendums on whether or not people living in poverty belong in a community. (Bennett, 2017)

Bennett rightly argues that public participation is being used, as it was once used to advocate for residential segregation, to deny hundreds of people the right to housing (Bennett, 2017). The principle of citizen control is being coopted by groups who discriminate based on social class; it has become in many ways a weapon with which to poor-bash and gate-keep neighbourhoods that have the potential to provide stable housing to homeless people.

This dangerous technique is being employed in neighbourhoods across British Columbia, most recently in Maple Ridge, where locals, with the support of their mayor and all but one city councillor, are protesting a provincially sanctioned modular housing project, using the slogan: “Our city, our voice.” One might listen to this rhetoric and be fooled by its immediate simplicity and seeming correctitude, but once equipped with the arguments of this paper, will, I hope, realize that words are to be analyzed and platitudes are to be challenged.

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MYTH, METAPHOR, AND RELIGIOUS UNDERSTANDINGS: PUNJABI BELIEFS OF THE ENVIRONMENT

ABSTRACT

In this article, I focus on the many folkloric beliefs and religious understandings and definitions of what constitutes the natural environment among middle-age Punjabi immigrants and how they may relate to the natural world in a collective and individualistic manner. This article uses research from a larger project that I conducted in my final undergraduate year as part of my Honours degree requirements. In my original thesis, I explore how transnational migration and Western understandings of the environment affect middle-aged Punjabi immigrants' relationship with and perception of the natural earth and, by extension, how these new or evolved understandings of the environment are disseminated throughout diasporic communities. My research examines ontological systems relating to the land and how these can shift in nature, how physical geography plays a part in shaping one's relationship to the natural earth, and the level of engagement between diasporic and homeland communities regarding environmental degradation and climate change.

INTRODUCTION

Religious worldviews are all-encompassing because they fully absorb the natural world within them. They provide human beings both a view of the whole and at the same time a penetrating image of their own ironic position as the beings in the cosmos who possess the capacity for symbolic thought: the part that contains the whole—or at least a picture of the whole—within itself. As all-encompassing, therefore, religious ideas do not just contend with other ideas as equals; they frame the mind-set within which all sorts of ideas co-mingle in a cosmology. For this reason, their role in ecology must be better understood. (Sullivan, 2001, p. xi)

This article explores folkloric belief and religious understandings of the natural environment through a study of the metaphysical systems of middle-age Punjabi immigrants in British Columbia's Lower Mainland. This article is part of my overall undergraduate Honours thesis, which focuses on how perceptions and approaches to the natural world shift via the process of immigration. For this reason, it was necessary for me to examine the ontological realities of my informants as expressed through myth and religion. In this article, I share the folkloric and religious stories of my informants and how they relate to the natural world around them using myth, metaphor, and religious understandings. My interest in this subject was born of my unwavering curiosity regarding how the environment factored into the lives of Punjabi immigrants

who were born and raised in rural areas of Punjab, India. I wanted to know if it played a significant spiritual role in the everyday life of a Punjabi immigrant—whether the influences of the natural surroundings of Punjab and the physical structures of villages, including the homes, streets, farms, and other infrastructures, as well as the kinds of lives that were lived there, left an impressionable mark on the minds of my informants.

The questions I wanted answers to revolved around how the environment was perceived internally by this specific cohort within the Punjabi diaspora and community. Was nature considered a significant entity in the lives of Punjabi immigrants? Did living in rural areas in Punjab—enveloped by thick trees, dusty air, wild animals, and a sense of shared struggle to survive—create a particular mindset toward the environment? Was there respect toward flora and fauna to begin with, and if so, where did this respect originate? Was it a cultural phenomenon or a religious one, or a mix of both? Did respect for the environment diminish or expand over time?

To answer these questions, I contextualized my research and the information that my participants had shared with me through a variety of theoretical frameworks. For example, the theories of ecosociology (Kovel, 2008), deep ecology (Keller, 2008), ontology, and Wirzba's (2013) notion of ecotheology greatly influenced my research and helped contextualize my data. These theories helped expand and allow me to fully appreciate the information my participants shared and assisted in furthering these discussions on what defines the natural world and how people identify themselves vis-à-vis the environment.

My data shows that there appears to be a weaker relationship between environmental stewardship in the Punjabi-Sikh diaspora in the Lower Mainland than initially thought, at least according to my participants. However, my research also shows that there is a wealth of religious and folkloric beliefs within Punjabi culture that play a large role in how the environment is defined and understood. In fact, these stories encourage environmental stewardship, and there is a history of the environment playing a very important social role within the Punjabi community. This weak relationship is reflective of the changing social dynamics in which many older Punjabi immigrants find themselves situated, especially when they move from a rural area to an urban one and when they move from their homeland to a Western country, where understandings regarding the environment differ (for example, having an animistic understanding of non-human beings versus regarding non-human beings as commodities).

METHODOLOGY

Most of my participants are known personally to me through family connections, as I am of Punjabi-Sikh background and my project was concentrated within my ethnic group. To participate in this project, participants had to have been living in Punjab prior to the 1980s and/or 1990s, had to be approximately 45 years of age or older at the time of the interview, and must have immigrated to Canada within the last 30 years. I chose this time frame so I could examine whether their perceptions and beliefs of the environment had changed over a prolonged period of time. Almost all my participants were in their early forties and fifties. They also had to have maintained some prolonged or continued connection to Punjab since they immigrated and had to possess basic knowledge of

Sikhi. This did not mean that they had to be active participants in the religious community, such as being baptized Sikhs, but merely that they were familiar with the Sikh texts and lived their lives influenced by Sikhi in some manner. Given that all my participants were of middle age and still had deep connections to Punjab and the Punjabi-Sikh diaspora in Canada, they all considered themselves religious to some degree. They prayed most days, went to the Sikh temple (*gurdwara*), or at the very least, respected the religious teachings and identified themselves as Sikh.

I chose to interview older immigrants rather than younger, newer immigrants to Canada for various reasons. Older immigrants had had enough time to settle in Canada and understand how the Canadian social and political systems worked. In addition, with their continual contact with Punjab and their own memories of what rural Punjab used to look like, their recollections and stories could provide valuable knowledge for diasporic communities as well as folklorists, historians, archivists, anthropologists, and others interested in these recollections. Additionally, these stories provided a wealth of information on cultural practices and beliefs that are no longer being practiced in diasporic communities. Furthermore, environmental organizations or those working on behalf of restoring Punjab's environment can use these histories to reconstruct the environment in areas that have been degraded or destroyed.

My participants consisted of four middle-aged Punjabi-Sikh women and one middle-aged Punjabi-Sikh man. They had all immigrated to Canada in the 1980s or 1990s, had been living in British Columbia since that time, and occasionally went back to Punjab, India over the past 30 years to visit family, with the average trip being once every 3-4 years. The oldest participant was 52 years of age while the youngest was 40, and the average age of the participants was 45 years. All belonged to the *Jat* caste. Two of the five participants were housewives (Sonia Kaur and Sukhneet Kaur), one worked in credit counselling (Nishi Kaur), another worked in the healthcare industry (Harleen Kaur), and another worked in the construction industry (Amardev Singh). Harleen was the sole baptized Sikh (*amritdhari*) from this group of participants, but all the participants had extensive knowledge of Sikhi. All my participants came from villages in Punjab, specifically in the Doaba region, and spoke a Doabi dialect of Punjabi (with some minor differences in dialect between some of the participants). None of my participants were Pakistani-Punjabi.

ONTOLOGY

I asked my participants if they would share any beliefs or stories that had to do with the environment to understand how they internally perceived and positioned the natural world. I separate these ontologies from religious beliefs, in that they do not necessarily have a religious origin (although there is a fluid basis for this). Instead, they are akin to "folk beliefs." This does not mean that religion plays no role; rather, these ontologies could be influenced and shaped by religion (whether that is Sikhism, Hinduism, or whatever other religion is dominant in Punjab at any given time). Most importantly, they contextualize understandings of nature within a collective group. They also explain certain actions and behaviours toward the earth that may be performed by people, such

as planting trees to honour children as a means of expressing and processing individual and collective emotion.

In this section, I examine some of the ontological understandings that my participants shared with me that further influenced how they related to and connected with nature when they lived in Punjab. I wanted to know how elements from the natural environment were used in the daily rituals and activities carried out by my informants. How was the natural environment used as an object of expression? How was the environment used as a subject? How did it wield its own agency? What were some affective responses my participants had in carrying out these activities?

According to Lee and Nadeau (2011), Punjabi folk beliefs tend to include natural elements as part of their ethos; this includes things such as “leaves of trees, flower buds, bushes, flowers, animals, birds and landscapes” (p. 1006). Growing up in a Punjabi household, there were a few things that I was taught by my mother with regards to taking care of the plants and animals around me. The first was that all plants and animals had a soul (*atma*) and they could feel the same pains and joys that humans do. For this reason, my siblings and I were encouraged to relate to the natural world around us as though everything was a living entity imbued with the essence of God. My mother would tell me not to disturb plants at night by watering or touching them as they were asleep in the same way that humans fall asleep at night. This was echoed by Amardev Singh and Nishi Kaur, who told me that this belief still exists within the Punjabi community. This understanding of the world around me was incorporated into my own ontological realities and belief system.

Amardev Singh, Sonia Kaur, and Sukhneet Kaur shared beliefs that they had heard from others in their villages as well as the practices and activities carried out by their own families and neighbours. Some of these stories were locally based, meaning that only specific families and villages participated in certain activities, while the wider Punjabi community may have enacted rituals in a different way or may not have shared the same practices and beliefs at all. Some of the stories and beliefs shared were practical in nature, while some activities were carried out in the belief that they would bring about some aspect of relief, happiness, or good fortune to those engaging in them. For example, Sukhneet Kaur told me about the practice among school-aged children of using the leaves of the rare *vidya parahi* (literally translated as “study of wisdom”; *Oriental thuja*) tree as bookmarks. The belief was that this tree contained knowledge and that using its leaves as bookmarks facilitated the absorption of knowledge. Sukhneet Kaur suggested that even if the belief was not true, people engaged in the practice of creating bookmarks from the leaves of this plant because it brought some sense of relief or joy to them. Amardev Singh shared how people used the branches of the *sukhchain* (*Millettia pinnata*) tree as toothbrushes before modern toothbrushes were introduced into rural areas.

Nishi Kaur shared how her family would begin to make spinach curry (*saag*) right before, during, or right after *lohri*, an event that marks the winter solstice. She shared that spinach curry would not be made during other times in the year and that people waited until *lohri* to harvest the greens:

Lohri was always, like, you go to the farm to pick fresh spinach and get sugar canes and you make rice with sugarcane juice. [There was a saying], “Make rice on the sugarcane road.”¹⁵ And that was something—that’s how the spinach was picked. Some families would only make spinach curry on *Lohri* because they’d be like, “this year, we’ll start spinach curry with the *Lohri* day.” So, the *Lohri* day, every single household had spinach curry. And every single household had sugarcane.

When I asked Harleen Kaur about this practice, she said that the harvesting of spinach around the time of *lohri* was not a custom in her village, meaning that this was a local custom in the villages of my other participants. Amardev Singh added that *lohri* was a time when people harvested sugar canes as well as jaggery. Sonia Kaur added that in the past, *lohri* was a time when children would go from door to door and ask for treats, which often included nuts, jiggery, and money. However, she noted that children no longer “ask for *lohri*” anymore; in other words, they no longer go from door to door and engage in this activity.

Although Sukhneet Kaur was a self-identified Sikh, she still knew many folk stories that featured Hindu deities. She spoke about a belief some people in her village held concerning the coming of insects and mosquitoes during the summer months and their disappearance at the onset of winter. According to this myth, mosquitoes, ants, insects, and other bugs appear during *shivratni*, a festival celebrated annually in honour of Lord Shiva. The myth goes that when Lord Shiva opens his knot of hair around the time when summer is to start, he unleashes mosquitoes and insects—this marks the start of summer and is also an explanation as to where these insects originate from during the hot summer months. When summer begins to wind down and winter arrives, the belief is that Shiva gathers up his hair again to put into a knot, taking along with it the mosquitoes and bugs that appeared in the summer (and will be unleashed again the next year). Although I find these beliefs to be fascinating, Amardev Singh felt as though they were simply that—imaginative stories that people told each other without any basis in truth. He echoed this sentiment again after Sukhneet Kaur finished sharing information on *shivratni*, saying, “Whatever happens there [in India], it’s all religious-based.” It seemed like this comment was aimed at dispelling the beliefs that others had, and it appears Amardev Singh himself did not particularly believe in these stories, but I felt as though this could have been because Amardev Singh self-identified as a Sikh and this comment was made in the context of a Hindu belief.

There were also practical beliefs, such as not cutting down fig trees or other large trees, as these provided shade for everyone, including animals. Amardev Singh said that the cutting down of these trees is often looked down upon by others, as it takes away necessary shade in villages. Nishi Kaur shared an anecdote from her childhood in which a famed lemon tree planted on one of her family’s farms had begun to dry up. She and her mother acted upon associated folkloric beliefs to understand what was happening to it and save it:

¹⁵ *ganeaa de rast’ vich chawl banao*

Nobody knows who planted it, where it came from, but that tree had so many lemons, that you could...literally make, like, two hundred kilos worth of pickled lemons (*achhar*), from that one tree. So, I remember that tree started to—like, one year, it started to—I don't know what happened, it dried up...Then my mom said, "Someone must have said something bad to it, now it has been given the evil eye," right? So then she went and then she, I don't know, she tied a black string onto the tree and gave it water.¹⁶ I don't know, she was doing some things to, you know, take away the evil eye from the tree so I could get my fruits and you know—[laughs]. It survived, I think. I don't know if it's still there. But at that time, it survived.

Folk beliefs also revolved around the conservation of animals and taking care of them in the same manner that one would take care of a family member. Harneet Kaur acknowledged that there was respect for animals within the culture and also shared a belief that had been passed down to her by her mother and grandmother, according to which it was frowned upon to sew or embroider anything after sunset. She explained it thusly: "My mom and grandma, they always say that don't sew anything after sunset or doing any embroidery on the clothes. When you're poking the needle in there, it goes into bird's eyes because they are sleeping."

Additionally, peacock feathers are often used as items of décor for homes and businesses, and the accumulation of these feathers was traditionally¹⁷ carried out in a sustainable and safe manner; those interested in selling peacock feathers would pick them up from the ground after they had been discarded by the birds. They were not pulled from birds in an aggressive manner. Harneet Kaur explained the motive behind this:

We don't take them from the birds, we just pick them up when they throw them. Otherwise, it will hurt them. Same thing as our hair, if we pull our hair, it will hurt. Same thing with them, if we pull out their hair, it will hurt.

Even though Harneet Kaur was a baptized Sikh initiated into the *khalsa panth*,¹⁸ she still subscribed to some degree to these folk beliefs. Neufeldt stated that baptized Sikhs "required renunciation of all former preoccupations with caste, status, birth, country, religion, gods, goddesses, incarnations and prophets" (as cited in Mooney, 2011, p. 241), and yet there was a blending of folk beliefs with religious beliefs and practices among Punjabis, "with Hindu and Sikh practices demonstrating a particular overlap" (p. 137). According to Shackle (as cited in Mooney, 2011), "There exists...a whole spectrum of actual religious practice and belief between the fully orthodox positions of Sikhism at one end and Hinduism at the other" (p. 137). These insights help

¹⁶ Tying a string, usually a black string, to a person, animal, or plant is believed to ward off the evil eye.

¹⁷ I have been told that this is the traditional way peacock feathers are acquired for sale in the bazaars and markets by several family members. However, if the method has changed in contemporary times, I have not read or heard about any such thing. Therefore, I have chosen to label this as the traditional method of gathering peacock feathers for sale.

¹⁸ The Khalsa Panth refers to the collective and orthodox group of initiated Sikhs.

explain Sukhneet Kaur's knowledge of and participation in the folk belief of Shiva opening his hair and letting mosquitoes and insects out.

There were Punjabi folk beliefs that also mixed in Islamic figures and influences, such as the figure of Khawaja Khidr. Sonia Kaur shared with me a practice she and her mother used to partake in when she was a child, in which they would place a bowl of oatmeal on the edge of a well; this oatmeal was given as an offer to a water spirit known as *Khawaja*. Although Sonia Kaur was unsure about the name "Khidr," she did identify the water spirit as "Khajawa." According to Longworth Dames (2006), Khawaja (also known as "Khizr" in some parts) is "identified [in India] with a river-god or spirit of wells and streams...and Hindus as well as Muslims reverence him." However, according to Wheeler (2002), Khidr (or al-Khidr) is a messenger or angel who guards the sea.

These folk beliefs which dictate how the environment is approached explain how Punjabis relate to and with the environment. There is a relationship toward the land that reflects how people approach their own kin, and this understanding of kin extends outward to non-human beings. There is a sense of awareness regarding sustainability and consuming and growing food in the right season. Additionally, notions regarding "the evil eye" ensured that other beings (plants, for example) were also taken care of. On the other hand, some participants, such as Amardev Singh, doubted the reality of some of these beliefs. Because of this doubt, it is impossible to define Punjabi folk traditions as belonging to the same, singular ontology. Regardless, a faith-based syncretism exists in the shared beliefs of Punjabis, no doubt influenced by the merging of spiritual traditions in the region.

SIKHI

Since all my participants identified themselves as Sikhs, I wanted to know how their faith, beyond folk religion, influenced their perception of the land. My participants prayed often and visited the Sikh temple (*gurdwara*) on a regular basis. Their faith was an integral aspect of their identity. Because of this, I felt that it was necessary to understand the significance of the land in their lives and how they continued to imagine the land collectively as a people through the Sikh texts. I also examined their spiritual beliefs regarding the environment, which led to a discussion of their interpretations of what *Sikhi* (Sikh philosophy) outlines regarding protection of the environment and whether it is a significant aspect of a Sikh's life. By examining how Punjabi-Sikhs frame their relationship to their natural surroundings as contextualized in the Sikh texts, one might better understand how this faith has shaped their understanding of the world around them.

"Punjabi" and "Sikh" are often synonymous with one another, since "Sikhism is an ethnic religion still closely associated with Punjab, culturally, linguistically and ethnically" (Cole, 2004, p. 2). Islam, on the other hand, is more closely associated with Punjab, Pakistan due to the events surrounding Partition in 1947 as well as the area's geographical position relative to Middle Eastern countries. Punjabi is both an ethnicity and a language, while Sikhism is a religion. However, because Sikhs originated from Punjab, the beliefs of the religion, folk beliefs, and beliefs stemming from Hinduism and Islam all exist in a syncretic fusion of sorts within Punjabi culture. This cultural and

religious fusion is not new in Punjab, even though 57.69% of the total population practices Sikhi, with 38.49% of people practicing Hinduism. India's overall population (79.8%) practices Hinduism, while 2% practice Sikhism (according to a 2011 census). In other words, although most Punjabi-Sikhs practice *Sikhi*, a certain level of familiarity with Hindu stories, texts, and beliefs is not uncommon. Aside from Harneet Kaur, who was a baptized Sikh, my other participants seemed more open to explaining environmental phenomena through some Hindu myths and beliefs, although they still held strong Sikh views on what constituted respect for the environment and how it should be maintained. Harneet Kaur perceived and understood the environment mostly through Sikh teachings (*gurbani*), although she accepted that others in India have a different way of understanding and explaining environmental phenomena.

Harneet Kaur told me she believed that environmental stewardship was an important part of being a Sikh; however, she was very clear that not all Sikhs made the environment a priority. She differentiated these people from what she called "true Sikhs" (i.e., those who did prioritize the environment). "True Sikhs," according to her, were also more pious and devoted than most other Sikhs. She stated her belief that Sikhs were more likely to care for the environment than people from other faiths, and she elaborated on this by examining how some Hindus eat beef and Muslims eat pork, but many Sikhs adopt a vegetarian lifestyle and were therefore more environmentally conscious and sensitive. She further explained what she meant by this:

Most of the Sikh people, they don't hurt the nature. They don't kill anything for to eat. In *Hajur Sahib*,¹⁹ [I heard that] they kill goats to make meat. But I don't think it's true... Guru Sahib couldn't hurt anyone. They can't hurt anyone. I think Sikh people—true Sikhs—they don't hurt other things to make themselves happy. They just eat whatever they can find that's vegetarian. They don't kill chickens, they can eat vegetarian food. Some Hindus eat pig, not all, there are some vegetarians. But some eat pig, and I don't know if there are any Muslims who are vegetarian, but they can eat the cow. [Because of this] I can say that Sikh religion is better for protect environment and nature.

She also provided me with a very interesting story about how stewardship of nature and all beings was enacted by important Sikh figures or saints (*sant*). According to Harneet Kaur, Bhagat Namdev Ji, a Maharashtrian saint (Novetzke, 2008), saw God multiple times. She stated:

He see God about 72 times. He was seeing God in everything, right? One time, [a] dog came to his house and he was making flatbread (*roti*) and dog took the bread from his basket and then he was taking the butter (*ghee*) after him too, and the saint said, "Lord, you don't want to eat dry bread, do you? Here, take some butter as well!"²⁰

¹⁹ A Sikh temple located in Maharashtra, India.

²⁰ "...kenda 'raab ji, tusi roti sukhi tha nahin khani? nale ghae bhi lalo.'" Ohne dog de viche god de darshan hoe sigi.

Amardev Singh stated in his interview that “Singhs²¹ don’t believe in anything”²² when Sukhneet Kaur mentioned that some people in India believe in saints (*pire*). This was an interesting contrast to Harneet Kaur, who was a baptized Sikh and used these stories to support her personal beliefs; she did believe that saints had power that was God-given. Nishi Kaur’s views on religion vis-à-vis the environment were much more pronounced than Harneet Kaur’s and Amardev Singh’s. Nishi Kaur felt as though the lack of environmental stewardship on the part of the baptized Sikh community, who represented the faith, was due to their disinterest in helping the environment. She said:

Sikh philosophy talks about taking care of your surroundings, and your surroundings is the environment. Sikhs should be environmental stewards but they’re not. Not enough dialogue, not enough talk. When we get together, we start off discussing other people. It’s the same thing with baptized people [*amritdharis*].

She strongly felt that “the environment is not a priority for baptized Sikhs.” Cole’s (2008) book on the Sikh religion recounts many historical instances wherein the Sikh gurus themselves or followers of theirs used nature to honour and respect others. Cole (2008) mentions how a jujube tree (*Ziziphus jujuba*) had been planted at a spot inside the complex of the Golden Temple by Guru Arjan Dev Ji²³ “where a crippled man was [once] cured” (p. 6). Another story that Cole (2008) recounted was one in which the fifth *guru* was in the middle of building the Golden Temple during the late 1580s, and “[sat] under another jujube tree, Lachi Ber, to meditate and plan the next stage” (p. 7). Another tree had been planted and named in honour of one of the guru’s followers, Baba Buddha, and helpers in the construction of the temple; the tree planted in his honour was named Ber Baba Buddha. *Sikhi* is filled with stories in which saints and gurus use natural features to honour others, a practice which in turn places special importance on those natural features.

Additionally, there are numerous passages in the *Guru Granth Sahib Ji* in which stewardship of the environment is emphasized. One line that is commonly known and often recited is “*pawan guru, paani pita, mahaat dharat mahat*.” This translates to “the wind is the teacher, the water is the father, and the earth is the great mother.” This line is often evoked in environmental activist circles as evidence that Sikhs need to take care of the environment and help stop climate change.

When I asked Nishi Kaur further about her thoughts on the relationship between baptized Sikhs and the earth, or the general relationship between Sikhs and nature, she was very passionate in her answer, replying thusly:

²¹ *Singh* in this sense refers to baptized Sikhs, specifically males, but could also include the baptized community as a whole.

²² Meaning they don’t believe in spirits, gods, goddesses, etc. Sikhism is a monotheistic religion; however, popular religion or other dominant religions can factor into people’s belief systems.

²³ The fifth *guru*, or teacher, of the Sikh faith. There are 10 human *gurus* in total; the Sikh holy book, the *Guru Granth Sahib Ji*, is considered the 11th and last *guru*.

If you're a Sikh and the *Guru Granth Sahib Ji* says "*pawan guru, paani pita, maata dharat mahat*," get it? *Pawan guru, paani pita*: the wind is the teacher, the water is the father. We can't survive without it, we can't live without it. This is all we have. It is your shadow, it's who you are. It's what connects you with everything. *Maata dharat mahat*: the earth is the mother, can't live without her, it will give you everything including its soul for you to survive. So, if the water is the father and the earth is the mother, why are we not respecting any of it? Some people are like, "the water has become dirty"; so are you telling me, especially baptized people, so are you telling me that you don't respect your father? Don't you care for your dad? Your mother? You're putting all these pesticides into it, you're poisoning it—would you do that to your mother? Literally, to your mother? Would you give her a teaspoon of Round-up every day? Sikh philosophy doesn't talk about destroying anything.

Nishi Kaur especially felt that baptized Sikhs had more of an incentive to help the environment because of the initiation rites they took and their commitment and devotion to scripture; however, she felt as though this particular cohort of the Sikh community did not care much for the environment. Harneet Kaur, a baptized Sikh, said that the environment and taking care of it was important, and that "true Sikhs" would do so. On the other hand, she did admit that environmental stewardship was lacking in the community. Amardev Singh, Sonia Kaur, and Sukhneet Kaur all admitted that the environment was important as it provides food and other health benefits for people, however in reality, the environment was not important for many Punjabi-Sikhs, baptized and non-baptized. It was not seen as something to be concerned about, either in contemporary Punjab with all its present-day environmental issues or in British Columbia, where it was understood to be much healthier and cleaner than Punjab because of government prioritization and cultural attitudes in Canada toward the environment, which differ from those in India. Although there are social justice movements against climate change now, this issue of the environment becoming polluted did not seem to warrant as significant an outcry in the Punjabi-Sikh community as other causes, according to my participants.

Cole (2008) also mentions that while "social justice has always been important [to Sikhs]" (p. 98), there is a double standard within the Punjabi-Sikh community whereby "Punjabi farmers, in their successful efforts to produce high yields have used methods that have polluted river systems and had other harmful effects upon the population" (p. 101). While Nishi Kaur and Amardev Singh were far more critical about what they felt was a lack of care stemming from the baptized community, who often took it upon themselves to represent *Sikhi* as a whole, there do exist organizations and prominent Punjabi-Sikh figures that rely on scripture as justification for helping the environment. My participants were vaguely aware of these organizations and figures, but did not engage in them (e.g., volunteering, giving donations, etc.).

One of the most prominent environmental organizations, located in India and the United Kingdom, is EcoSikh. According to EcoSikh's website, the organization was formed as "a response from the Sikh community to the threats of climate change and the deterioration of the natural environment" (EcoSikh, 2014, n.p.). Using scripture as

the foundational basis of their work, EcoSikh has managed to establish numerous “sacred forests” named after the 10 Sikh gurus in various areas in both Punjab, India and Punjab, Pakistan. They have also started a campaign to plant one million trees, and they have helped to establish a Sikh Environment Day in Punjab, India. They have also compiled a list of Sikh hymns (*shabads*) extracted from the holy book which focus on the environment and how it must be maintained. This compilation is called *Eek Bageecha* or “One Garden.” They have also released statements on climate change and environmental theology that explicitly talk about how Sikhism is an environmental religion that has the resources and tools to combat climate change.

As for other prominent environmentally concerned Sikh entities, Cole (2008) also mentions Bhagat Puran Singh, an activist and humanitarian who “wrote tracts against government policies of deforestation and refused to accept state aid for his institution while such practices continued” (p. 132). Within the holy book of the Sikhs (the *Guru Granth Sahib Ji*) are many passages that contain keywords pertaining to the environment, such as “nature,” “earth,” “wind,” “water,” etc. There are some prominent passages that stand out which speak directly to the positionality of nature within *Sikhi*. A few examples of these passages include the following:

1. The air is the guru, the water is the father, and the earth is the great mother.
2. The Supreme Lord God has unleashed the rain clouds. Over the sea and over the land—over all the earth’s surface, in all directions, He has brought the rain. Peace has come, and the thirst of all has been quenched; there is joy and ecstasy everywhere.
3. The *Gurmukh* sees the Lord on the earth, and the *Gurmukh* sees Him in the water. The *Gurmukh* sees Him in wind and fire; such is the wonder of His Play.
4. Within the home of the self is the earth, its support and the nether regions of the underworld.

Additionally, the hymn below is used by EcoSikh on their website as supporting evidence that Sikh philosophy encourages environmental stewardship:

*There is a garden.
It has so many plants created within it.
And each bears the sweet-nectared
Naam²⁴ as its fruit. ||1||
Consider this, O wise one,
In this garden you may seek the means by which to attain eternal bliss.
O brothers and sisters of Destiny,
This garden has dark pools of poison here and there,
But it also contains the ambrosial nectar within it. ||1||Pause||
There is only one gardener who tends it.
He takes care of every leaf and branch. ||2||
He brought all these plants and planted them there.
They all bear fruit – none is without fruit. ||3||*

²⁴ “Name”; refers to God.

*The one who receives the ambrosial fruit of the Naam
From the Guru – O Nanak,
Such a servant has a way to pass over the ocean of illusion. ||4||5||56||*
(EcoSikh, 2014)

Therefore, the environment does prominently play a major role within the Sikh faith. Even if it may not be a priority within the community, the importance of it is still maintained in scripture, as shown by the examples above from the *Guru Granth Sahib Ji*.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

Environmental stewardship is enshrined within Punjabi folkloric belief and religious stories. Since Punjabi people are one of the largest minorities within Canada, I firmly believe that knowing about these beliefs and stories can help to galvanize support within the Punjabi-Sikh community of Canada for taking better care of the earth and being eco-conscious, especially within the context of a climate crisis. Within these stories of what the environment is and how it should be taken care of is a wealth of knowledge that illustrates the relationship humans have with the earth. These stories reflect the interconnectedness of all beings, and the teachings within these stories can be brought back into social discourse and acted upon. Western discourse tends to depict the environment as a place to escape to or conquer; however, with these stories, we can deconstruct this human/nature divide and approach the environment more respectfully and holistically, integrating it with our everyday lives in much the same manner as my participants did when they were young.

Deep ecology posits that all of humanity is interrelated with every other living being and natural phenomenon on this earth, and that we are inseparable from the natural environment surrounding us (Keller, 2008, p. 206). This concept gives agency and rights to non-human beings, something that is not given by default to animals and plants in Western societies. These two theories combined show the tensions between Western approaches to the environment and Eastern ones (although it should be noted that Kovel was critical of some aspects of *deep ecology*). For example, folk belief in Punjab presents a very animistic understanding of natural phenomena—all living beings, whether human or not, have souls—and the fact that the actions humans take have a lasting effect on the environment around them. *Deep ecology* is also theoretically similar to Atleo's (2004) theory of *heshook-ish tsawalk* and the Sikh concept of *ek onkar*.

Wirzba (2013) examines agrarian *ecotheology* and the importance of analyzing scripture from systems of faith to understand how people think about the nature of reality and how dependent they are on their own conceptions of God, community, and earth. Agrarian *ecotheology* can provide clues as to how we identify ourselves in different places. Wirzba (2013) argues that the Jewish and Christian God is often referred to as the "Gardener/Vinedresser" or the "Good Shepherd" (p. 6), motifs that recall interrelations between humans and nature. He argues that the concept of *ecotheology*, which has focused mostly on Abrahamic religions, should be examined by theologians and scholars from other religious traditions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Indigenous religions, etc.

Ecotheology can be applied to environmental organizations as well. For example, EcoSikh incorporates environmental teachings from *Sikhi* into the environmental restorative work they do in communities. By using scripture as a tool to combat climate change and educate people on environmental issues, it is possible to physically apply scripture that speaks of environmental stewardship. This is especially important as people are more willing to engage in these activities if they are exposed to passages from scripture that encourage environmental stewardship. By examining scripture for what it says about the environment, we can examine how followers construct their relationships and understandings of the environment. This is because scripture is often seen as a kind of directive or guide on how to live a moral and ethical life. On the other hand, if adherents are not doing what scripture says, not only does it lose its power as a guiding tool that is usually seen as imbued with the power of the Creator, but a dissonance is also created between the people and their system of faith. They may be regarded as not “true” to their religion, as Harneet Kaur pointed out. There was an issue that baptized Sikhs—representatives of the religion as orthodox members—were not engaging in environmental stewardship. They are regarded as leaders of the faith, and without their engagement with the land, it seems as though even fewer people are willing to reengage with the land. This also shows that religion plays a far bigger role in influencing one’s relationship with the earth.

When the land is worked on through agriculture or ritual, there is an agentic power that arises that is affectively felt by those interacting with the land. In this way, relationships are built between two subjects—the land and the person working the land. This is the kind of relationship that was understood when my participants lived in Punjab. They were surrounded by the natural world and it was an intrinsic aspect of their identity; physically engaging with it created a relationship of reciprocal agentic power. The earth was nourished by people and people were nourished by the earth. Their identity was based partly on their relationship to the land; this manifested and was expressed through cultural activities, such as praying to the local river spirits or celebrating the harvest.

My research has shown that stories from participants’ past demonstrate a strong attachment to the earth. One of the most important findings I came across in my research was the cognitive dissonance between what is written in the Sikh scriptures and the attitudes of my participants regarding how they feel Sikhs take care of the environment. Their attitudes were overwhelmingly negative, as they believed that many people do not adhere to and follow the “true” path of the *guru*, which asks that the land be protected and taken care of. They felt as though it was not a priority in their lives.

I believe that discussion and dialogue surrounding environmental stewardship is important, and that these stories can be preserved if people continue to engage with them and discuss them in their everyday lives. How we understand and approach the earth is imperative if we wish to work together on solving the climate crisis. It also helps us identify ourselves and how we relate to those around us, including non-human living beings.

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DISRUPTING THE DISCOURSE: A PATHWAY TOWARD DECOLONIZING AND DIVERSIFYING THE CANADIAN CLASSROOM

ABSTRACT

What is the purpose of education? Are educators producing independent thinkers? This essay explores the significance of decolonization and diversification of curriculum in the Canadian context. Ethnocultural and religious diversity is more prevalent than ever before. Nevertheless, educational institutions continue to support and perpetuate social control and cultural capital by promoting the value sets of dominant groups. The author examines the benefits of inclusive educational spaces and methods to practice decolonization and inclusivity. Places of learning must respond to Canada's changing demographics and address its settler history. Policymakers, educators, and curriculum designers can transform social and educational contexts, supporting students to challenge systemic practices and norms.

MY STORY

Growing up in a small prairie city, I found that concepts of identity, culture, and knowledge²⁵ were brought to my attention and reiterated via confrontations with classmates both in and out of the classroom. Attending primary and secondary schools where the majority of students bore little resemblance to me awakened my sense of identity and lack of belonging. While my academic performance was not directly impacted by this lack of representation in the classroom, I felt pangs of isolation and confusion. My elementary experience excluded the stories of Indigenous leaders and communities and glorified settler histories and knowledge. The books I consumed did not reflect my lived experience as a first generation Canadian battling systemic discrimination and covert racism. It was only when I entered Senior 3 that I began to question colonialism, settler colonialism, and Canada's official policy of "multiculturalism."

DECOLONIZING, DISRUPTING, AND DIVERSIFYING THE CANADIAN EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

Immigrants of South Asian descent have fought for recognition and equity since 1897 (South Asian Studies Institute, 2018). Beginning in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, South Asian migrants arrived in western Canada and served as labourers

²⁵ Knowledge is an abstract concept without any reference to the tangible world. It is a very powerful concept, yet it has no clear definition so far. People have tried to define knowledge but the results are still very fuzzy (Bolisani & Bratianu, 2018).

(South Asian Studies Institute, 2018). Canadian history and social studies curricula have a tendency to promote content that is not reflective of the country's multicultural landscape. Multiculturalism was established by Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau in 1971 "to preserve the cultural freedom of all individuals and provide recognition of the cultural contributions of diverse ethnic groups to Canadian society" (Gagnon et al., 2019). It was a tool used to buy votes for the Liberal Party and appease opposition to official bilingualism in the West. Multiculturalism did not result in substantive federal policy changes. Rather, it was a largely symbolic representation of cultural diversity that benefitted the white majority (anglophones and francophones). I did not take time to reflect upon and critically examine the settler colonial framework²⁶ and question who benefitted most from the existing policy until my 17th year of existence.

Disrupting the discourse and re-examining ways of knowing has been a central aspect of my identity as well as my growth and development. My Senior 3 history teacher was the living embodiment of "disrupting the discourse" and taught me to question the system(s) in place. This was the first time I was exposed to curricula highlighting the contributions of First Nations communities and the impact of settler colonialism on First Nations livelihoods. I began to recognize the lapse in Manitoba's secondary school curriculum. The lack of representation with respect to Indigenous ways of knowing and immigrant contributions had been overlooked by curriculum developers. Indigenization and diversification of primary and secondary curricula began in British Columbia and Ontario, with these provinces taking leading roles in decolonizing pedagogies to better reflect the experiences of Indigenous students. Taking a cue from The Truth & Reconciliation Commission's 94 "calls to action" (released in December 2015), by underscoring the importance of language preservation and cultural competency training and developing secondary and post-secondary curriculum to advance the reconciliation process, British Columbia and Ontario classrooms are disrupting ways of teaching and knowing. Educators are diving into unknown territory. Creating a safe and open space for students to reflect and discuss Canada's settler colonial history encourages students to listen to one another, create a sense of belonging and community, counter stereotypes, and support students in exploring their own values (Kanu, 2011).

Decolonizing, disrupting, and diversifying places of learning is an arduous and iterative process, and "there is no simple or fail-safe formula that can be used to guide teachers" (McGregor, 2012). Decolonizing pedagogies requires educators to disrupt assumptions about where and how learning takes place and who facilitates the classroom. Disruption includes consulting with Elders and First Nations community members to revise mainstream education practices, utilizing learning resources that do not perpetuate colonial myths and stereotypes, and employing First Nations community

²⁶ Settler Colonialism is distinct form of colonialism that replaces Indigenous populations with an invasive settler society that, over time, develops a distinctive identity and sovereignty (Barker & Lowman, 2019).

members to lead or co-facilitate workshops on governance, sustainability, and language (McGregor, 2012). Exposure to Indigenous perspectives ensures that students question narratives about Canada's settler history and Eurocentric social practices. Learning should not occur in a vacuum (Centre for Youth & Society, 2019). Place-based education empowers students, restores cultural knowledge and practices, and promotes critical reflection on Canadian history and settler colonialism.

Culturally responsive curricula that reflect the experiences of all students benefit everyone. Literature can play a significant role in identity and self-development. Books convey the human experience and illustrate commonalities that we often fail to acknowledge. Nevertheless, while books are used to share human experiences, the overwhelming majority are penned by white writers who dominate the literary world in Canada. My high school reading list featured works by William Shakespeare, George Orwell, Harper Lee, and Daniel Keyes. While I enjoyed some of these books, such as *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the stories did not reflect my experiences. I sought books written by minority authors and found myself deeply immersed in the worlds of Jhumpa Lahiri, Arundhati Roy, Rohinton Mistry, and Anita Rau Badami. It is imperative that educators move beyond the single story²⁷—a term coined by novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (TED, 2009)—and highlight novels written by racialized and Indigenous authors. Indigenous and visible minority students are more likely to engage in discussions and offer insights when they see themselves reflected in content.

Diversity in the Canadian classroom cannot be ignored. According to the 2016 Census, more than 20% of Canadians are foreign-born (Statistics Canada, 2017). It is projected that the proportion of foreign-born Canadians could reach between 24.5%–30% by 2036 (Statistics Canada, 2017). Moreover, 40% of Canadian children²⁸ have an immigrant background (Statistics Canada, 2017). Finally, the language composition of immigrants has shifted dramatically over the past 100 years. Immigrants with English or French as a mother tongue decreased from 71.2% in 1921 to 27.5% in 2016. Diversifying classroom curricula allows newcomers and first/second generation students to find connection and develop a sense of belonging. An inclusive education fosters a culture of mutual respect and appreciation for individual differences. It allows students to become better equipped for life outside the classroom as children and adults (New Brunswick Association for Community Living, 2019). Inclusive education increases self-confidence and self-worth and creates more opportunity for camaraderie (British Columbia Teachers Federation, 2019). When students see themselves reflected in the curriculum, comprehension and retention of complex concepts is more likely. Educational institutions support and maintain social control and cultural capital via the values of dominant groups (Handelsman, 2011). Standardized or official knowledge is distinguished from and highly favoured over other forms of knowledge (Wotherspoon, 1998). Advocates of alternative ways of learning recognize the importance of disruption

²⁷ As Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie explains in her 2009 TED talk, "The Danger of a Single Story" (TED, 2009), the single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.

²⁸ Children are defined as anyone 15 and younger (Statistics Canada, 2017).

and inclusivity both in and out of the classroom. Fostering the future leadership of this nation will require all 10 provinces and three territories to continually evaluate and update pedagogies and curricula.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Moving forward, policymakers, educators, and curriculum developers should continually reflect on the goal of education (Centre for Youth and Society, 2019). Moving away from a Eurocentric approach to learning and adopting holistic ways of teaching will educate “the whole person” (Centre for Youth and Society, 2019). As a society, we need to examine the mandated education deeply rooted in settler colonial policy. Neocolonialism is perpetuated via curriculum, power relations, and institutional structures. Confronting existing institutional structures involves a myriad of stakeholders. Grassroots activists, Elders, educators, and students working collaboratively could transform social and educational contexts (Asher, 2009).

Canada has been espoused as a leader in peacekeeping and human rights; nevertheless, we have failed to acknowledge our own settler colonial history for centuries. A formal apology by Prime Minister Stephen Harper was a first step towards reconciliation but cannot undo the displacement and dismantling of Indigenous communities. Pierre Elliot Trudeau once stated that no uniform culture could define Canada and that the government accepted “the contention of other cultural communities that they, too, are essential elements in Canada” (Gagnon et al., 2019). Let us not forget the defining features of Canadian democracy. Disrupting and diversifying places of learning and knowing will reinforce this sentiment and reflect an inclusive Canadian experience.

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PANEL PRESENTATION

Autoethnographic Reflections of Feminist South Asian Youth

Organizer/Moderator: Rebecca Scott Yoshizawa, Kwantlen Polytechnic University

Panelists: Amrit Dhillon and Navi Rai



A FEMINIST IN THE MAKING

ABSTRACT

This paper presents an auto-ethnographic exploration of my journey of self-identification as a feminist in the making as a young South Asian immigrant woman. Socially constructed gender roles are significant in South Asian women's life trajectories; from childhood, patriarchal structures instruct them to behave in a quiet, shy manner, get married, and have children at a young age. By sharing my experiences in this paper, I demonstrate the importance of women challenging these roles by choice as well as out of necessity. My mother has been the most influential feminist figure in my life, as she has raised me to be assertive in the choices I make. However, when I became the main income earner for my family at the young age of 21, I was forced to reconcile social teachings about gender roles with the demands of my life. My natural inclinations towards feminist ideologies have undoubtedly been shaped by my experiences at work, where I witnessed the acceptance of my opinions. Feminism is understood in different ways by society; for me, it is the acknowledgement of women as equal human beings who have the right to follow any path they want and stand up for themselves. It isn't so much a battle for equality between the genders as it is a path of exploration where men can help women succeed and vice versa.

AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHY

Auto-ethnography is the understanding and critique of societal, cultural, and political beliefs through personal experiences. I believe that my experiences challenge the dominant South Asian ideology regarding the role of women. It is my contention that a majority of South Asian women are not allowed to pursue the opportunities that men are. Yet, at the young age of 21, I was forced to become the main income earner for my family, and being raised by a single mother has shaped and made me the human being that I am today. I am proud to call myself an independent woman, but on my path of becoming the person that I am today, I have witnessed and endured discrimination and ill treatment because of my gender, race, and class.

The culture and society into which a girl is born play a major role in how she will be allowed to express herself as a woman. In many cultures, to varying degrees, a woman is looked upon as an object to fulfil and satisfy the needs of men around her. She doesn't have a reflection of self because she never learns to focus on her desires. Her world revolves around the men in her life and her duties toward them. In this article, I connect the key concepts of gender, race, and class with a variety of other

issues in my life. I explore who I am and how I came to be the person that I am today, discussing the role of culture, society, and identity by connecting them back to the main themes of gender, race, and class. I also highlight how an intersectional approach has helped me on this self-healing expedition.

Likewise, it has been a learning curve for me to acknowledge that, being a woman, I have the power to shape my life with the choices I make. These decisions may or may not be appreciated by members of society or my family, but they remain my decisions. Living as a racialized, gendered person in a foreign country—one that I now happily call my home—I believe having my own opinions is necessary. While exploring myself and reflecting back on the past 27 years of my life, I believe that I have for a very long time unknowingly internalized sexism and misogyny. In this paper, I will systematically shed light on the internal battles I have waged against the cultural identity forced upon Sikh Punjabi women and decode my journey as a feminist in the making.

Being born as a girl in India is seen as a curse. As a basic definition, “sex” is “a term that denotes the presence of physical or physiological differences between males and females” (Little, 2016, n.p.). Thus, the biological organs and physical differences decide the designated sex of a child as him/her. In India, especially in Punjab, the sex of a child determines their destiny even before birth. I am lucky that I was the first-born child of my parents, because if I was the second, I would not be alive. My mother was forced to abort my younger sister before her birth. My father or grandparents were adamant in their decision of not having another girl born into the family. They had no emotions for the unborn baby or my mother. They were unbothered by the fact that something could happen to her during the procedure. My mother was helpless and could neither save herself from the cruelty of her husband or in-laws nor save her daughter. It has always been a taboo in our society for a girl to be born, as parents consider them a burden to care for until they can be married off. Projects like Pink Ladoo²⁹ are helping create awareness and eliminate gender-based customs by celebrating girls’ births. I feel so blessed that my mother was ecstatic at my birth, and as I grew older, I learned that she was the only one who celebrated my birth by giving sweets to the staff at the hospital. I am thankful for the gift of life every day, as about “47,000 women die from complications of unsafe abortions each year” (World Health Organization, as cited in Hobbs & Rice, 2018, p. 532). I still wonder what I would have done if something had happened to my mother; I certainly wouldn’t be the person that I am today and find it difficult to imagine what my life would have been like without her.

My parents, like a lot of Indian parents, believed that proficiency in the English language was essential to one being considered educated and sophisticated. This societal structure and way of thinking comes from a predominantly British ideology.³⁰ The school I attended from Kindergarten to Grade 10 was an English-speaking Catholic school, and I am certain that the school played a big role in my formation and

²⁹ See <https://www.pinkladoo.org/>

³⁰ This ideology could be defined as a principle of dividing and ruling Indians by indoctrinating them to consider themselves inferior to the British.

perspective towards Punjabi culture. I did my daily prayers at the school chapel, spoke English, and even cut my hair. Unknowingly, I practiced these choices ritually. Later, when I learned about the assimilation of Indigenous people and their culture, I realized that since childhood I was led to believe my Punjabi culture was somehow low-life.

When I was 15 years old, my parents, brother, and I moved to Canada. I thought that we had moved from Punjab for a better quality of life, and thus our move would lead to improved circumstances at home. I did not know that my father's extreme, cruel behavior would stay the same. He got angry at us and would scream at us and torture us. One snowy and freezing cold December night that same year, my dad stormed outside of the house in his shorts. My mother started to panic and cry, begging my father to come inside. We apologized in the hopes that he would stop acting out, even though we hadn't done anything wrong. He was angry because of his own nature. That night I told my mom, we aren't living here anymore. We have to move away for ourselves. My mother, brother, and I left that environment in the hope of finding a peaceful home. Suddenly, life was different; I could breathe and live freely. This freedom was short-lived, however, as I struggled through school in Canada. I was bullied and made fun of for my clothes and appearance. I did not know how to handle my emotions, and constantly wondered why all of this was happening to me. I often wondered how this new, unforgiving country could be seen as a land of opportunities.

After the separation, my mother raised us on her own without much financial support from my father. At this time, I naturally believed it was my duty to help my mother. Punjabi culture and Sikhism teach us to be independent and hard-working. My mother often shared holy recitations from the scriptures to motivate me so that I never lost hope. We were new to Canada and didn't know very many people, and housing for women in Canada has been an ongoing struggle. Of the women in Canada who have dealt with homelessness, 91% have been victims of sexual assault (Sadie, 2018). I now understand that, in addition to our gender, our experiences were also the result of our racialization: "the social process by which certain social groups are marked for unequal treatment based on perceived physiological differences" (Little, 2016, n.p.). Essentially, people of colour are treated differently than and seen as inferior to white people. Being racialized women in Canada, we faced a distinct lack of structural support and social benefits from the government (Sadie, 2018).

I still remember waking up early in the morning and starting work at 4am to make coffee and greet customers at the corner store. My mother always woke up to walk with me to work each morning. I finished work just close to 8am and then quickly ate breakfast and started school at 8:30am. I also used to work some evenings and all weekends. I learned to work hard from a young age and it gave me strength that motivates me to this day. It wasn't the money that gave me this fortitude, but rather working with the right people and having intense, life-changing conversations along the way. At that time, I had been in Canada for only 3 years and didn't have many relatives or friends. People from my workplace became like a family. I remember being dressed for my prom and going to the corner store where I worked because my manager had promised me that he would take my pictures since he had a camera and I did not. He was a 65-year-old gay Caucasian man who was such a wonderful soul. I remember

having conversations with him at work about changing things in society for the betterment of people; he told me, “you can even be the Prime Minister if you work hard for it.” Until then, I hadn’t seen genuinely supportive people who could encourage others.

As a racialized immigrant and a single parent, my mother had a tough time getting hired despite the fact that she was university educated. According to Statistics Canada, women like my mother are called “visible minority women”; these women experience one of the biggest wage gaps due to their gender, race, and lack of Canadian job experience (Stienstra, 2018, p. 646). She was consistently paid less than her coworkers. I now understand that being a visible minority isn’t a neutral description; rather, a minority is “any group of people who are singled out from others for differential and unequal treatment” (Little, 2016, n.p.). After a while, my mother stopped working and stayed at home as she dealt with depression and loneliness because we had been away from our relatives and friends and hadn’t made any new friends in this country. I related to my mother as I had experienced loneliness in high school. When older women migrate from India “without developed English language skills, and a minimal understanding of the host culture and social system,” they are lost in the transition from their home country to foreign land (Alvi & Zaidi, 2017). They are confused and aren’t able to express themselves freely. Despite being a teenager, even I wasn’t able to adapt myself to a new culture, so I knew it must be even harder for older immigrant women like my mother to get used to a new way of living.

As my mother couldn’t continue working due to her health, I started working two full-time jobs around the age of 22. I worked Monday to Friday as an Education Assistant at elementary and secondary schools around the city, and then worked at Fido in the evenings and weekends as a salesperson. I was older than my brother and thus saw it as my responsibility to help my family in every possible way. Yet distant relatives or acquaintances in Canada often said to me, “You are a girl; it’s not your job to earn for your family.” These antiquated views regarding gender roles irritated me. Little (2016) classifies gender as a “term that refers to social or cultural distinctions of behaviours that are considered male or female” (n.p.). A person’s actions, feminine or masculine, help define their gender. Prior to such comments on the part of relatives and acquaintances, I hadn’t realized that humans have to play a certain role in life depending on their gender. I was happy to be helping my family, and to be independent at a young age was even more satisfying. I had seen my mother struggle financially, emotionally, and mentally. I made her struggles and hardships my source of strength. When I was little, I often heard my mother say that she wished she were a man. I never fully understood what she meant. Yet her adult life was filled with difficult times which were the opposite of her childhood. She was the youngest of all her siblings so she was pampered and loved like a boy. She was allowed to dress up in boys’ clothes, which was unheard of in her time. She was given all the same privileges as her elder brothers, which none of her other five sisters had ever benefitted from. After a loving and happy childhood, she was put into a situation of abuse, torture, and trauma with my father. My mother’s struggles made me strong, and I knew from a young age not to depend on others for my happiness. Happiness, for me, is the knowledge that I can earn a living,

share a home with my mother and brother, and enjoy meals together as a family. The credit for my values and good upbringing goes to my mother. Each child is different; my brother and I have different personalities but something that we both have in common is a good heart. We always care for people and respect everybody. I would guess that my brother has probably washed more dishes than I have because my mother was adamant that both of us be treated equally in our home.

In 2012, when I started working as an Education Assistant for the Surrey School District, new knowledge came my way. I learned about the history of Indigenous people in Canada, which led me to understand my role as a settler on their land. It is very important for me to respect the people on whose land I have achieved so much. Learning about the injustices faced by Indigenous women in Canada reminded me of the overtly racist remarks I overheard in high-school. Overt racism can include name-calling, physical violence, and excluding people on the basis of race and ethnicity (Morris, 2018, p. 274). I was victimized by other girls in high school as I looked different and my accent wasn't "Canadian." They often made fun of my clothes, excluded me from group discussions in class, and called me names. Canada presents itself as a country free of racism and sexism to attract immigrants from other parts of the world. Upon arrival in the country, however, people find themselves separated into different classes (Morris, 2018). Class differentiates between rich, working-class, and lower-class people depending on their wealth and social circle. I am a working-class woman in this country, and it is vital for me to work to pay my bills and mortgage and put food on the table for my family.

Women in developed countries believe they understand other women's emotions because womanhood is a shared emotion. Yet the fact that women come from different backgrounds with different cultural and belief systems changes the dynamic of each woman (McKenzie, 2018). This topic has been very sensitive to me as a South Asian woman. Many different sets of ideologies are forced upon women in my culture, but I have always raised my voice against anything that I didn't feel was right for me to do. I always question instances where I am expected to do something just because societal gender roles dictate that a woman should do that task. Since I was a little girl, I have heard people around me say, "The best way to a man's heart is through his stomach; give him good food and he will love you." However, I have never really had the time to stay home learning to cook. If I am hungry, I know how to cook a meal for myself. A man should love me for my personality and not my cooking skills. Another topic on which I have had many conversations with family and friends is fair skin. In Indian and South Asian culture, when deciding upon marriage proposals it is considered very important for a woman to be fair. It is a must for a girl's family to mention that she is fair. Even advertisements perpetuate this injustice by portraying the girls with darker complexions as dull and sad, with no partner and no prospect of a love life. However, in the western world, Caucasian women spend money to go to tanning salons to get the perfect tan. It is believed to be a symbol of class and status, showing they have money to afford such services. The beauty standards in the modern world have led to us always judging ourselves and wanting to lose weight, get fair skin, straighten our hair, and not be content with ourselves. It is important to understand that white women view the

world with a completely different lens, so the oppressions of women of colour are unknown to white women.

During my early days working at Fido, I remember my store manager always proudly telling his regular customers that I (his new employee) was doing so well for myself. He remarked that despite being so young, I was working with the school district along with this job. I had never seen traces of feminism in a man before. I had never felt so good about myself, especially because someone was happy for me without a personal motive. He and I worked together for only a few months; little did I know, 7 years later we'd be sharing a bond much deeper than friendship. I certainly know that because of the way my personality has been shaped, I can only be with a man who respects women and understands that I have a voice and a right to my opinions too. Equality is not even something I have discussed, because in South Asian culture men are raised very differently than women. Patriarchy is a deep-rooted social concern in many cultures in our society. Even in the contemporary world, a lot of men believe they are superior to women, and women are still facing issues that have carried over since the late 1960s and early 1970s—such as wage inequality and preference being given to male employees over women, especially married women or young mothers. So, in my culture, there is still a long way to go toward achieving equality for women. It is important to start looking at societal issues with an intersectional approach, as women need to stand up for themselves and make themselves heard.

Another equally important problem being faced by South Asian girls is that they are told to stay away from premarital dating, whereas boys are given complete freedom in these areas of life (Nichols & Tyyska, 2018). Double standards between boys and girls have a huge impact on girls' development, as girls are victimized at a young age by their parents' controlling behaviour; too often, this dynamic continues into adulthood, with women being abused by their husbands and eventually mistreated by their sons. South Asian parents constantly worry about their sons getting involved in drugs and gang violence, but this has remained a very sensitive topic within the community (Nichols & Tyyska, 2018). It is high time that South Asian parents and other community members help address the underlying factors that draw these young boys toward the glamour of gang life with little understanding of dangerous real-life consequences. In Grade 11, my brother was enticed by his friends to drink with them after school as they were going to Vancouver to watch a Stanley Cup playoff game. Since it was his first time drinking, he fainted and police brought him home. Fortunately, he ended up not going to Vancouver in that state, as the city was marred by riots following the Canucks' loss. Had he been in that environment, I can't imagine how he would have taken care of himself that day. It was a life-changing experience for my brother, as he realized the dangers of intoxication and learned his lesson. With appropriate discipline and advice from my mother, he began to distance himself from the company of his high school friends and didn't get into drugs. Many of his classmates from high school have faced criminal charges related to drugs and weapon possession. Some of these people have been in custody and a couple have even lost their lives. I believe Punjabi pop songs and the music videos associated with them glorify violence, drugs, and a gangster lifestyle. These influence the minds of young boys who see illegal activities as a quick means to obtain flashy,

materialistic things. Another factor in South Asian youth getting attracted to drugs and choosing gang life is a lack of open communication at home. A conservative and orthodox ideology isn't a facet of good parenting, as it pushes teenagers away because they feel misunderstood in their own homes. Some Indian parents choose to maintain relationships only with their upper-class relatives and do not associate with their working-class relatives, and therefore their children believe money is a symbol of societal acceptance. Thus, they crave that luxurious lifestyle, even if selling drugs is the quickest way to achieve it. Domestic issues between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, along with a lack of parental presence at home, mean that children's behaviour gets neglected on a day-to-day basis. Parents need to create a better work/life balance to ensure they provide their children with adequate family time. Punjabi men need to adopt better habits in regards to drinking alcohol at home and treating their wives with respect so their children can have role models in the family and feel loved and supported.

In the meantime, everyone in our country needs to understand that the oppression faced by racialized women is different from that faced by white women. Women of colour from different ethnic backgrounds face daily challenges such as unemployment and a lack of support in learning English, which holds them back from integrating into the Canadian work system (Hobbs & Rice, 2018). Since I have been in Canada, I have unconsciously learned to pronounce my name with a Canadian accent. I always believed that Caucasian people wouldn't be able to pronounce my name correctly. After watching a satirical YouTube video of a substitute teacher mispronouncing students' names,³¹ I realized that by pronouncing my name wrong for all these years I have internalized racism. A person's name should be pronounced the way it is supposed to be pronounced in that person's native language or culture. I now make a point of saying my name in the right way, and if other people can say it correctly that's even better. Intersectionality is the inclusion of women from all races and backgrounds. Women shouldn't feel marginalized due to their race and class.

In this paper, I was able to accomplish my goal of providing a clear understanding of who I am and how my mother and brother have always fully supported me by not putting restrictions on me. I was able to explain concepts like gender, race, and class and how they intersect with one another in women's lives. Marginalized and racialized women don't share their opinions a lot because they have learned that their opinions don't matter and they shouldn't voice them. Until people stand up for the rights of those who have been oppressed, we cannot see a world of happiness for all. The freedom to choose whether to have children, to work, and to defy gender stereotypes can only be accomplished by empowering women and providing them with structural support. I am proud to be a woman. I am happy to be myself and wouldn't want to change a thing about my life because those rough experiences have made me a strong-willed woman. Writing this paper was for me a process of healing, as I was able to let my emotions flow without fear of judgement. As I began to write this

³¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zRpsRKuyi3Y>

paper, I realized that sharing my most emotional memories would be a process of self-discovery.

As an immigrant living in Canada, I was constantly aware of my position as an outsider. The actions of my high school peers reminded me of my distinction from them. Beginning my career with the school district drew my awareness to the removal of Indigenous cultures and populations, and this new awareness of the oppressions faced by Indigenous people in Canada created an understanding of my own past trauma. This in turn brought about my awareness that I need to continue to strive to fulfill my dreams and ambitions without expecting support from anyone else. Feminism indigenously develops from oppressive circumstances; women don't need white saviors. All of these lines of intersecting macro-social oppressions that I have experienced as forms of trauma and violence in my everyday life have actually shaped the understanding of feminism that I have now. I have been confronting societal issues within my culture, which has helped me identify the feminist hidden somewhere deep in my soul. My story is a reflection of strength and the potential of South Asian youth to create social change in a world that limits or stops us by saying, "You are backwards." In fact, it is because I experienced these oppressions that I am a powerful feminist.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Veronica Sudesh and Sanzida Habib
A Report on the Conference

Appendix B

Conference Program



A REPORT ON THE CONFERENCE

This conference was truly an academically and intellectually enriching platform for young people to share their research related to South Asian diaspora as well as their ideas and experiences of growing up and un/becoming a Canadian of South Asian descent. The conference brought together students, youth, and alumni from a number of colleges and universities beyond Simon Fraser University, which hosted the daylong event on April 6th, 2019. Following the brief inauguration and welcome notes by the conference organizers and the awe-inspiring keynote speech by renowned South Asian feminist activist Harsha Walia, a total of 16 presenters spoke on various topics in four differently themed sessions comprised of individual papers as well as one panel comprised of two students and moderated by their professor at Kwantlen Polytechnic University.

In this report, we present our personal perspectives, accounts, and reflections related to the overall conference and the various presentations in all the sessions including the final panel. To avoid repetition of the summary of individual papers described in the Proceedings' Introduction, we have included below a short summary of only those oral presentations that have not been submitted as complete written papers by the authors to be published in the Proceedings. This will give the reader a glimpse of the diverse topics and range of issues discussed in this conference as well as an overview of the unpublished but powerful presentations.

SESSION I: IDENTITY, CULTURAL HYBRIDITY, AND BELONGING

The first session, standing true to its theme, explored the diverse and complex life experiences of Canadian South Asian youth as they navigate their hybrid identities as well as a plethora of ambiguities that come along with that process. This navigation, for instance, took place through systems of oppression for some, and through the world of Indian classical music for others. The personal journeys of finding identities—still an ongoing process—and seeking out groups where youth felt a sense of belongingness came alive in enlightening ways in this session. A remarkable point about this session was that, despite the heterogeneity in experiences of identity formation, all speakers echoed the need to shift away from homogenizing South Asian identity. For example, it was noted that Punjabi culture seems to have overridden the other narratives of South Asian identity and culture in British Columbia, noted one speaker. An ardent desire to embrace diverse cultures was put forward in the session, as one speaker said that it is truly a privilege growing up in diversity. Therefore, acceptance and celebration of differences and diversity within the South Asian identity was a powerful theme that tied this session beautifully together.

The papers by Aneesha Grewal, Akhil Dattani, and Maisha Haque have all been published in these Proceedings; therefore, we will briefly report on the one by Rina

Pradhan, who talked about Nepali youths' perspectives on how they try to strike a balance between the culture of their origin and that of their adopted country, Canada. In her brief presentation, Rina took a few steps back to trace the reasons her research was born in the first place. During her many visits to Nepali events in Canada, she noticed youngsters being glued to their phones, and she wondered about the reasons behind this mobile addiction. Her research process involved holding consensual focus group discussions divided by age. Major findings that emerged from this research included perceived differences between generations and their degree of involvement in Nepali cultural events. Nepali youths were found to constantly deal with the different expectations and perceptions they have about themselves—emerging both from their country of origin and from their adopted country. This makes finding a balance even more pertinent and difficult. Thus, to help youth in this process, Rina felt that support should be provided by people who have experienced similar cultural duality. Her parting thought was that emphasis also needs to be placed on exploring the parents' perspective regarding the strategies they use in supporting their children through this difficult journey.

SESSION II: GENDERED VIOLENCE, REPRESENTATION, AND RESISTANCE

This session incorporated some very harsh and hard-hitting realities about the lives of Canadian South Asian youth. Some of the key issues that these youth face—such as sexism, patriarchal norms, toxic masculinity, racism, and even violence—were brought forward, explored, and critiqued at three levels: familial, community level, and institutional/structural. A core point of discussion that emerged from all three presentations was the negligent attitude and role played by Canadian print and other media in constructing, reinforcing, and reproducing stereotypical images of the immigrant community. This media representation comes to play a pivotal role in maintaining intra-community violence experienced by South Asian women because this violence is seen as inherent and thus separate from the larger society. However, all three presenters—Harpreet Kaur Mander, Veronica Sudesh, and Alysha Amrita Baines—spoke in favour of debunking this notion. They pointed out that the concept of hegemonic masculinity is a problem that permeates society as a whole, and therefore gendered violence is not specific to South Asians. By allowing this notion that it is a community-specific problem to continue, the Canadian state converts it into a tool for intervening in this community as the white settler, as one speaker in particular pointed out. Speakers in this commendable session gave voice to issues that remain silenced in the South Asian community and urged that it is high time for everyone to start having open discussions around these topics. Again, we will present here only a brief summary of the presentation by Alysha Amrita Bains, who chose not to submit a complete paper for the Proceedings.

Alysha's presentation, "Dominant Narratives and Sites of Creative Resistance: Reimagining Multicultural Canada through South Asian Youth Communities," started with a difficult and thought-provoking question: how are identities cultivated and what makes us angry? She noted that racism is not merely represented but also gets reproduced through the media and society; our identities are constantly reconstructed

through various forces. Media representation of race and systemic violence is made hyper-visible; for example, Alysha noted that there is a dual image created of immigrants—the good ones vs. the bad ones—so she always grew up with a notion of what she should *not* be. The idea of Canada being multicultural, she pointed out, is often used as an excuse for state intervention and needs to be problematized. According to her, the policy of multiculturalism hides the dark, violent colonial history that Canada is built on. Alysha’s presentation provided a backdrop against which to introduce her research and guide the direction in which she intends to proceed. She would eventually like to discover the resistance tactics and strategies employed by youth to respond to these issues through creative output.

SESSION III: SEXUALITY, SUBJECTIVITY, AND COMMUNITY RESISTANCE

This session was a true embodiment of individual and collective resistance. Through sharing various examples—whether historical, contemporary, or personal—speakers in this session threw light on the many ways traditional and social orthodoxy is challenged and needs to be challenged on a continuous basis if change is to happen. The session was all about breaking traditional boundaries, issuing challenges, and questioning dominant narratives. Topics around gender non-conformity, sexual desire, and menstruation are still very much taboo even to this day; thus, having presenters speak boldly about these concepts was noteworthy as well as liberating. Most South Asian families are trapped in this traditional mindset of perceiving medicine and engineering as the only legitimate professions or career choices; breaking that box of conformity by choosing to follow one’s passion for social justice and environmental protection is another act of resistance presented in this session. To question and critique the dominant narrative is pivotal because, as this session demonstrated, it is always written, shaped, and controlled by those in power. For example, since phallic symbols rule the historical archive, non-phallic sexuality and desires get sidelined. Similarly, dominant narratives have led to the erasure of the history, language, experiences, and knowledge of Indigenous people, but presenters in this session tried to challenge that by pointing out the wisdom that can be learned from Indigenous communities regarding a multitude of issues, particularly climate change.

Bidushy Rahman’s accounts of polysexuality in South Asia and Leena Hassan’s inner journey into personal and political resistance have been shared in the Proceedings. Taqdir Bhandal bravely opened her presentation, “The Coloniality of Menstruation and Diasporic Subjects,” by sharing with the audience how her writing draws from emergent strategy, radical love, and black feminism. Having established a very peaceful, almost meditative state in the room, Taqdir continued sharing one of her creative projects on menstrual health which came out of a coercive relationship. The recognition that this is still a taboo topic in South Asian Punjabi communities was brought forward, with the speaker emphasizing that the stigma around this subject needs to be broken. “Sikhism” itself celebrates menstrual flow (*Mahvari*), and has four seasons similar to the various stages or phases of the menstrual cycle. Menstruation embodies divine femininity; so “why is there shame and disgust around something so natural?” asked Taqdir. As an example of women’s solidarity, she offered the story of

the women in Kerala, India who in 2019 built a massive human wall to protest menstrual taboo and break patriarchal norms of impurity and restrictions placed on women during menstruation. She also talked about an old *Gurudwara* (Sikh temple) that has initiated a policy of providing free menstrual products and holding workshops to raise awareness around this issue. Toward the end of her presentation, Taqdir poignantly pointed out that while the entire cosmos depends on the process of menstruation, the current practice of Sikhism unfortunately borders on toxic masculinity, which needs to change.

SESSION IV: POVERTY, SOCIAL JUSTICE, AND INCLUSION

The presenters in this session explored some interesting key concepts such as the importance of self-reflection, the need for inclusivity, and decolonizing perspectives in activism and social justice work. Constructing an “other” who is perceived as different from or even “inferior” to us is not only easy but also very dangerous. Therefore, the speakers strongly encouraged the dropping of labels and stereotypes and called instead for deconstructing or decolonizing the “other” in order to see them from a humane perspective. Indigenous and racialized populations already face many institutional barriers, hence it is crucial to stress that each person and issue is different; what we need is an acknowledgement and celebration of diversity and differences. The call for social justice was evident in the session, with a focus on building a community of care, inclusion, and acceptance. The Proceedings include three full papers written by three of the four presenters in this last individual paper session: Ishmam Bhuiyan, Rajdeep Dhadwal, and Avanti Haque.

“The Need for a ‘Whole’ Education: Encouraging our Students to Embrace Diversity in the Classroom” was the title of Sonali Johal’s presentation. Sonali has been a primary school teacher in Canada and the theoretical background on which her work draws is John Dewey’s theory for societal change makers. She began her talk by emphasizing the value of imparting content-based education to children, while highlighting that it is also important to help them express themselves, teach them that their voices are valued, and make sure that they grow mentally, socially, and emotionally. For that purpose, she argued that it is important to move beyond the tolerance model of diversity to that of acceptance. Her philosophy of comfort and openness between student and teacher comes from her own personal experience of being shy and not speaking up in class due to factors such as ethnicity, race, class, and gender. This type of dynamic is not conducive to a child’s growth. Thus, she reinforced the idea of broadening school curriculum, and went on to talk about how she tries to come up with creative, class-based projects which help build solidarity and community among students. By sharing her own life story with students she regularly encourages them to speak up and share their personal stories. She ensures that the differences among us and the diversity that exists all around us are highlighted and recognized—and more importantly, accepted and celebrated. For example, she brings in diverse literature and sets up a reflective photo booth to build a sense of community in her class. In the end, Sonali appreciated that teachers in British Columbia now have access to a revised curriculum which allows more freedom to incorporate all these important values.

PANEL PRESENTATION: AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC REFLECTIONS OF FEMINIST SOUTH ASIAN YOUTH

This last session highlighted extremely powerful accounts of the personal journeys of self-discovery of two incredibly strong young women. In describing the painful path of finding their identities, the young presenters poured their hearts out, sharing the struggles they encountered and the pain and loss they faced. It is not easy to bare one's soul and share intimate thoughts, emotions, and lived experiences in front of a large audience; it takes courage to surrender and feel vulnerable in a public space. It is this courageous storytelling that made this panel so potent. This was, to some extent, overwhelming, as a good number of the audience members (this report's writers included) became completely engrossed in these young women's life stories and lived experiences. For these women themselves, the autoethnographic process would have involved navigating through a lot of emotions—a process which in itself is an act of resistance. Thus, an overpowering theme that emerged from this session is resilience—the courage, strength, and ability women demonstrate to survive and stand tall amidst chaos.

As the organizer and moderator of this panel, Rebecca Yoshizawa briefed the audience about the concept of autoethnography, which she described as a method of discovering “who I am in this world.” She also gratefully acknowledged that the two panelists, her students, provided a chance for her to learn about phenomena, insights, and experiences to which she would not otherwise have had access. The reader will have an opportunity to experience the rich narrative of Amrit Dhillon, the first panelist, who evoked the strong feminist within herself and advocated for an intersectionality framework as an analytical tool to understand the challenges and experiences of racialized and Indigenous women. Therefore, we will present highlights here of the autoethnographic presentation by Navi Rai, the second panelist and final speaker of the conference.

Navi Rai started the presentation by sharing a beautiful poem she wrote about feelings of going back home to Punjab. She was born there and immigrated to Canada at a very young age. She hinted at the constant tug of war, negotiation, and split between her various identities, and the harrowing feeling of encountering an incomplete sense of identity. This forced her to examine her relationship with her own existence in a completely new light. At this point, she stated that being in Rebecca's class on autoethnography had totally changed her perspective. According to her nuanced narratives, the three words *Punjab*, *partition*, and *placenta* all are connected because each denotes traumas and loss of life that many people including her have faced. Partition was a terrifying experience for the people in Punjab; it had an immense impact on their lives, and remnants of this experience still remain in their bodies. Thus, the trauma has been internalized by many of them. Partition, Navi stressed, is an irreplaceable loss; Punjabi women feel that void even today, and experience suffering every day. Navi noted the fact that these traumatic memories have been passed down inter-generationally and get carried to the western world too. She then shared another poem which she had written about placentas, going on to explain that placenta is an essential part of oneself. She narrated how she became obsessed with this idea and

soon found out that her own placenta was buried in her courtyard in Punjab, India. A fascinating point noted by Navi was that pregnancy is an intergenerationally connected phenomenon—pregnant women are affected by the things their mothers and grandmothers were affected by. Navi's parting thoughts were that her placenta prepared her for the western world, giving her the strength derived from all the mothers and grandmothers before her—the generations who survived all the hardships and suffering.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

As the last session brought an end to this eventful conference, the organizers thanked all the participants, sponsors, and audience members for coming and supporting the presenters and being a part of this event. Everyone gathered around to interact and engage with each other's presentation topics and research work. The conference saw a vast number of participants and attendees; but more than this large turnout, it was the quality and depth of discussions generated by the presentations that made this conference a tremendous success. There was time allocated for questions and answers at the end of the presentations in each session. The audience and other participants enthusiastically took advantage of this time to further engage with the speakers and their presentations.

The conference provided youth with a platform to share their experience and research with the larger academic community as well as the South Asian community. One recurring idea that evolved during the conference was that we as a community need to take the first step to initiate dialogue and discussion around the many critical issues faced by our youth and future generations. Another emergent idea also became apparent—namely, that many South Asian Canadian youths are open to troubling and critically examining the vexing relationships between immigrant communities and Indigenous nations. The fact that the conference and exchange of knowledge took place on the indigenous lands was reiterated by a number of speakers as well as the organizers. Such acknowledgement and examination lie at the heart of social justice work and is vital for problematizing South Asians as a homogenous category, as the keynote speaker also suggested. Instead of sweeping things under the rug, it is better to deal with these issues head on and in a collaborative way.

The conference organizers deserve appreciation and applause for organizing such an important forum for youth with a common interest and for research on South Asian diasporic issues, identities, processes, and activism in Canada. According to the organizers, this was inspired by the Canada 150 Conference on Migration of Bengalis, the first one of its kind, held in September 2017. Thus, we are curious what this ground-breaking conference will stimulate or lead to; we definitely hope to see more events and gatherings of such kind every year or two.

CONFERENCE PROGRAM
CANADIAN SOUTH ASIAN YOUTH CONFERENCE
Gender, Identity, Sexuality, and Activism
April 06, 2019 | Saturday



Simon Fraser University, Vancouver Campus
515 West Hastings, Harbour Centre, Room 7000
Ancestral & Unceded Territory of the Musqueam, Squamish & Tsleil-Waututh Nations

REGISTRATION with light BREAKFAST: 8:00 am – 9:00 am

OPENING & KEYNOTE SPEECH: 9:00 am – 9:50 am

Welcome Remarks

Habiba Zaman and Sanzida Habib

Keynote Speech by Harsha Walia

“Beyond Mangoes and Coconuts: Thinking Critically about South Asian Representations,
Responsibilities, and Relations”



SESSION I: 10:00 am – 11:10 am

Identity, Cultural Hybridity and Belonging

Session Chair: Charles Greenberg, Capilano University

Aneesha Grewal “The Secrets of the Surrey Girl and the Surrey Jack: Settler-Hybrid Identities and the Creation of Stereotypes of South Asian Youths in Surrey, B.C.”

Akhil Dattani “My Identity, My Music”

Maisha Haque “Born ‘Brown’ Raised ‘White’”

Rina Pradhan “Balancing between the Cultures of Their Origin and Adopted Country: Perspectives from Nepali Youths from British Columbia”



SESSION II: 11:20 am – 12:30 pm

Gendered Violence, Representation and Resistance

Session Chair: Sarika Bose, University of British Columbia

Harpreet Kaur Mander “Surrey Jacks: A Violent Protest Masculinity”

Veronica Sudesh “Trails of Murder, Tears of Grief: Understanding Violent Crimes against Second Generation Coconuts”

Alysha Amrita Bains “Dominant Narratives and Sites of Creative Resistance: Reimagining Multicultural Canada through South Asian Youth Communities”

12:30 pm – 1:15 pm: LUNCH



SESSION III: 1:15 pm – 2:25 pm

Sexuality, Subjectivity and Community Resistance

Session Chair: Habiba Zaman, Simon Fraser University

Bidushi Rahman “Decolonizing Desire: Polysexuality in South Asia”

Taqdir Bhandal “The Coloniality of Menstruation and Diasporic Subjects”

Sana Janja “Personal, Professional and Political: The Creative Life of a Second Generation South Asian Woman”

Leena Hasan “How did I Get Here? Reflections of an Introverted Activist”



SESSION IV: 2:35 pm – 3:45 pm

Poverty, Social Justice and Inclusion

Session Chair: Neena Randhawa, Chimo Community Services, Richmond

Ishmam Bhuiyan “Poverty Activism in Vancouver: Replacing Charity and Equality with Justice and Equity”

Sonali Johal “The Need for a ‘Whole’ Education: Encouraging Our Students to Embrace Diversity in the Classroom”

Rajdeep Dhadwal “Understanding and Mitigating Climate Change: Confluences of Traditional Punjabi and Indigenous Perceptions of the Land”

Avanti Haque “Building Relationships between Racialized Communities: Achieving Social Justice in Canada”

REFRESHMENT BREAK: 3:45 pm – 4:00 pm



PANEL PRESENTATION: 4:00 pm – 4:55 pm

Autoethnographic Reflections of Feminist South Asian Youth

Organizer/Moderator: Rebecca Scott Yoshizawa, Kwantlen Polytechnic University

Panelists: Amrit Dhillon and Navi Rai

4:55 pm – 5:00 pm: CLOSING

Conference Sponsors:

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