

**Subaltern Cosmopolitanisms:  
Place-making and Translocal Space in Sikh Diaspora across  
Hong Kong, Vancouver and Toronto**

**Amardeep Kaur**

A Dissertation submitted to the  
Faculty of Graduate Studies  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in Geography  
York University  
Toronto, Ontario

August 2020

© Amardeep Kaur, 2020

## Abstract

How does one see what one cannot see? With the objective to move past the orientalizing visual gaze – of exotic temples, food and turbans – this study instead draws attention to the itinerant and elusive place-making which are often overlooked in geographical and urban inquiries of othered religions. Multicultural frames of cosmopolitanism have centered on a visual and consumerist approach to order diverse places and peoples while reproducing binaries of public-private and secular-religious. Vinay Gidwani differently imagines a subaltern cosmopolitanism of dynamic practices of migrants that are transgressive of state and capitalist urban configurations. Similarly, AbdouMalik Simone's notion of a worlding from below brings out the seemingly disparate activities of migrants in the Global South that characterize a lesser seen circuit of urbanity overlooked from top-down snapshots of urban infrastructure and financial capital. This study explores sensuous geographies of Sikhs to contribute to a conceptualization of worlding and cosmopolitanism. The theoretical framework considers the intertwining of religion and race at the source of the making of the problematic figure of Man and its secular-religious dichotomy. In this, the study aims to destabilize the world religion and liberal humanist paradigms which shape the modern episteme and the productions of worlds. The work of decolonial and transnational feminists further a poetic intervention to consider subaltern knowledge practices, particularly of women of colour, that go unrecognized in their embodied resistance. Following M. Jacqui Alexander's call for re-wiring the senses and a sacred feminist praxis, and Trinh T. Minh-ha's tuning to the musical storytelling, this study brings attention to sensuous poetics and topologies of Sikhs that escape representable cartographies. In that, Sikh spaces, epistemologies, and itineraries are conceptualized to give depth to a Sikh geographical imagination. Utilizing multi-sited ethnographies, qualitative interviews, and community mapping, the research followed diaspora Sikhs in Hong Kong, Greater Vancouver, and Greater Toronto. I argue that an everyday horizontal spatiality of relation emerges in Sikh processes of worlding and translocal space, which give insights to a subaltern cosmopolitanism, different from state and secular discourses of multiculturalism.

dedicated to my mummy and daddy

*Rajinder Kaur*  
and  
*Gurvel Singh*

## **Acknowledgements**

This doctoral study took place on the traditional territories of Indigenous nations and peoples. I am thankful for the sustenance provided to me.

At Coast Salish, I carried out fieldwork on the traditional and unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh, Kwantlen, Tsawwassen, Katzie, Sto:lo First Nations and other Coast Salish Peoples.

At Tkaronto, I acknowledge the traditional territories of the Mississaugas of New Credit First Nation, Anishinabeg Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Huron-Wendat and home to many First Nation, Inuit, and Métis communities. This territory is subject to the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement to peaceably share and care for the Great Lakes region.

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	ii
Dedication .....	iii
Acknowledgement .....	iv
Table of Contents .....	v
List of Tables .....	vii
List of Figures .....	viii
Author’s Notes on Style and Spelling.....	ix
Chapter 1 – Introduction .....	1
The Vessel and the Undercurrents .....	1
Circulations and Hong Kong, Vancouver and Toronto .....	2
Literature Review.....	5
Lens and Frames .....	14
Conceptual Toolkit.....	18
Research Questions and Objectives .....	28
Qualitative Research Methods and Study Design.....	28
Field and Inventory: Reflections.....	38
Itineraries of the Dissertation.....	42
Chapter 2 - Theoretical Framework .....	45
Languaging: Reflections on Writing and Positionality.....	45
Postcolonial Theories on Race and Religion .....	48
Decolonial and Transnational Feminisms.....	60
Post-structuralist Geographies on Space and Culture .....	68
Sikh Epistemology .....	74
Chapter 3 – Historical and Geographical Context .....	85
Vignette 1: The Clocktower and the Harmonium.....	85
Hong Kong: From a Fishing Village to a Portal City .....	86
‘mo lo’, ‘Moors’ of Hong Kong .....	94
Vignette 2: <i>Guru Nanak Jahaz</i> , the Steamship .....	97
Greater Vancouver: Coast Salish .....	99
‘Hindoos’, Hindus at Vancouver .....	104
Vignette 3: Waynabozhoo (person), Zhashkoonh (muskrat), and Mikinaag (turtle).....	107
Toronto: On the Shores of Lake Ontario .....	108
“When Lions [Singhs] Roar”, Singhs of Greater Toronto .....	113
Vignette 4: Chungking Mansion and Kowloon Mosque .....	116

Chapter 4 – Gurduara as Path-making .....	118
Sikh Spatial Practice .....	119
Overview of Khalsa Diwan Gurdwaras and Beyond.....	126
Field and Interview Analysis .....	138
Path-making through <i>Gurduara</i> : A Discussion .....	153
Chapter 5 – Vaisakhi Nagar Kirtan.....	155
Nagar Kirtan Roots from Amritsar to Pacific Northwest .....	156
Contemporary Flows and Topoi of City, Country, Village and Suburbs .....	162
Literary Imagination: <i>Barah Mah</i> and the Month <i>Vaisakh</i> .....	169
<i>Mantra, Darshan, Rasa</i> : Aural, Glimpse, Taste .....	172
<i>Tavarikh/Ithihas</i> : History, Memory and Belonging.....	187
Worlding, Place-making, and Post-secular: A Discussion .....	194
Chapter 6 – City: Artist Imaginaries and Community Mapping.....	201
Cube of Life: Mapping with Hong Kong Sikh Youth .....	202
<i>Taike</i> , the Nameless, and Indians.....	213
IN5 Experium: The Golden Temple .....	224
Begampura: City Beyond Sorrow, Toronto Sikh Retreat .....	232
City-imagining: A Discussion on <i>Begampura</i> and Right to the City .....	238
Chapter 7 – Concluding Discussion.....	243
Contribution to Cultural Urban Geography .....	244
Contribution to Post-secular Geographies of Religion .....	250
Contribution to Diaspora and Transnational Studies .....	253
Subaltern Cosmopolitanism: An Outlook.....	256
Closing Seal and Riddle.....	259
References.....	260
Appendix A: Glossary.....	283
Appendix B: Methods Material .....	286
Appendix C: Nagar Kirtan Photo Montages.....	290
Appendix D: Acknowledgements .....	295

## **List of Tables**

Table 1 Sikh Development, 1469-1708. ....	123
Table 2 Timeline of Khalsa Diwan in Hong Kong and Vancouver.....	127
Table 3 Nagar Kirtans of Hong Kong, Greater Vancouver, and Greater Toronto.....	168

## List of Figures

Figure 1 Khalsa Diwan Sikh Temple, Hong Kong. Third-generation, 2015 .....	129
Figure 2 Khalsa Diwan Society, Vancouver, 2019.....	132
Figure 3 Postcard titled Hindoo Religious Procession Vancouver B.C., 1905 (Photo Source: Vancouver Public Library 86540) .....	158
Figure 4 Darshan, at Malton Nagar Kirtan, 2018. ....	175
Figure 5 Invitation Banner, at Hong Kong Nagar Kirtan, 2016 .....	184
Figure 6 The Art of Waiting, at Malton Nagar Kirtan, 2018.....	200
Figure 7 HK Gurdwara Future Envision (Activity A, Group 2).....	203
Figure 8 Mapping Our Khalsa Diwan (Activity A, Group 1).....	205
Figure 9 Cube of Life (Activity B, Group 1).....	206
Figure 10 Pentagonal Pizza of Views (Activity B, Group 2) .....	207
Figure 11 Komagata Maru Memorial at Harbour Green Park, Vancouver .....	213
Figure 12 IkOankar, at IN5 Experium, 2019 .....	228
Figure 13 Punjab and Chenab, at IN5 Experium, 2019 .....	229
Figure 14 Begampuras, at Toronto Sikh Retreat 2017. ....	236
Figure 15 Hong Kong Nagar Kirtan, 2016 .....	290
Figure 16 Vancouver Nagar Kirtan, 2018.....	291
Figure 17 Surrey Nagar Kirtan, 2018 .....	292
Figure 18 Toronto Nagar Kirtan, 2018 .....	293
Figure 19 Malton Nagar Kirtan, 2018.....	294



## Author's Notes on Style and Spelling

The following logics have been adopted for the dissertation:

- 1) Except for words *gurdwara* and *nagar kirtan* that are prominent in this dissertation, non-English words are italicized. Their meanings are provided in Appendix A Glossary.
- 2) Simplified spellings (without diacritics) are used to improve legibility and its oral tradition. In a few instances, spellings with diacritics are provided when the discussion of the term itself is of importance (e.g. *pāth*, *gurduārā*).
- 3) Diacritics are retained in quoted text.
- 4) When poetry from Guru Granth Sahib is directly quoted in Romanized script, spellings with diacritics instead of simple spellings are used.
- 5) *Adi Granth* is italicized but *Guru Granth Sahib* is not, as the latter has title of a Guru.
- 6) Sikh philosophy and poetry are made up of many languages and a few scripts. Transcribed spellings are based on Gurmukhi script.
- 7) Punjabi vernacular renditions of spellings are used over Sanskritized spellings (e.g. *barahmah* over *barahmasa*; *dharamsala* over *dharamshala*). In some cases, when other materials are referred to, the spelling used in the quoted work may be different from the one used in this dissertation.
- 8) Capital letters are used when referring to titles of songs and poems. For example, *Barah Mah*; *Begampura*. When used to refer to genres or concepts, the term is decapitalized unless they start the sentence, e.g. *barahmah*, *begampura*.
- 9) Where multiple spellings and renditions are used, it is likely because different sources are using different renditions.
- 10) Punjabi language is commonly written in Shahmukhi and Gurmukhi. When vocabulary is drawn from everyday Punjabi, popular spellings are used (e.g. *dal chawl*, *salwar kameez*, Punjab)
- 11) Dates are written out using Hong Kong conventions: Day, Month, Year.
- 12) Double quotation marks are used for quoted sentences.
- 13) Single quotation marks are used for short phrases or quoted concepts (e.g. ‘mono-theologicalism’, ‘global sense of place’) when they first emerge. Single quotes are also used for terms in question or terms being problematized (e.g. ‘Moor’, ‘Hindoo’). Single quotation marks are subsequently dropped when terms and concepts are expanded on.
- 14) In a few instances, words in English which are concepts being drawn from theorists are italicized to improve legibility (e.g. *spatial practice*, *representation of space*, *right to the city*, *worlding from below*).
- 15) When different authors use Kaur/Singh, first names are provided first followed by Kaur/Singh in the in-text citations. The reference list alphabetizes them as Kaur/Singh followed by first name.
- 16) The name of Sikh feminist philosopher Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh, whose work features prominently in this dissertation, is sometimes abbreviated as N.G.K. Singh.

## Chapter 1 – Introduction

ਪੁਰਾਬ ਖਾਮ ਕੂਜੈ ਹਿਕਮਤਿ ਖੁਦਾਇਆ ॥

*purāb khām kūjai hikamit khudāiā.*

پر آب خام کوزه ی حکمت خدایا

May this unbaked vessel be filled with the water of your wisdom, O'Khuda (Creator)!

~ Guru Nanak ~

(transcreation by Asha Marie Kaur 2019)

### The Vessel and the Undercurrents

The mystic, Nanak, was born in Talvandi, Punjab in 1469. He is known to have travelled numerous regions of Asia with Mardana, a musician of *rabab*, which is a string instrument with roots in Persia and Central Asia. Together, Nanak – who went on to become the first Sikh guru – and Mardana, the Muslim *rababi*, journeyed and composed songs, melodies, and poetry in multilingual languages.<sup>1</sup> Following the many travels, Guru Nanak established a Sikh centre known as *dharamsala* in Kartarpur (today Pakistan). In those five and half centuries, Earth, *dharams*, languages, world, borders, aesthetics, epistemology, and development have drastically changed. On 9 November 2019, three days before the occasion of Guru Nanak's 550th *gurpurab* (anniversary), India and Pakistan, that is two nuclear state powers, opened a road of exception – Kartarpur Corridor – through the borderlands of Punjab.

This study follows Sikh diaspora in a theorization of subaltern cosmopolitanisms. It embarks on a metaphorical journey onboard the *Guru Nanak Jahaz*, known more commonly as the *SS Komagata Maru*.<sup>2</sup> I travel through the ship's literal ports: Hong Kong, and Greater Vancouver, and through its port of diaspora and entanglement: Greater Toronto. The stories told by this dissertation, however, are not on *Komagata Maru* or immigration legislation and imperial legal jurisdictions. Nor are the stories of positivist socio-spatial demographics of migrants, or theories of a racial Canadian state-building. Instead, the story is of the many places, people, mysteries, and practices not told in the grand narrative of *Komagata Maru*. In this, the

---

<sup>1</sup> Some of these languages consist of Sadhu Bhasha, Punjabi, Lahndi, and Farsi, and are further delineated in Chapter 2.

<sup>2</sup> The ship name *Guru Nanak Jahaz* pays tribute to Guru Nanak. The term *jahaz* means vessel and is used in Punjabi for ships and aeroplanes. *SS Komagata Maru* is the official name of the Japanese ship, which departed Hong Kong in 1914 for Vancouver and was carrying Sikh, Muslim, and Hindu passengers. However, the ship was prevented from docking upon arrival in Canada. Her story is elaborated in Chapter 3.

dissertation asks: how can we engage a conceptualization of Sikh space, worlding, diaspora, place-making and sensuous practices from the bottom up? These are the micro-stories of *Guru Nanak Jahaz*, political in all dimensions, and whose undercurrents I dive into to conceptualize *gurdwara*, *nagar kirtan*, and *City Beyond Sorrow*.

### **Circulations and Hong Kong, Vancouver and Toronto**

Cosmopolitanism's revival over the last two decades has been closely associated with multicultural cities with a dominant focus on middle-class professionals and tourists, that is the cosmopolitan class in the First World. Emerging scholarly works are theorizing an understanding that move beyond creative class individuals and away from a downtown public space aesthetic. Gidwani (2006) argues on the possibility of 'subaltern cosmopolitanism' where subaltern and migrant labourers envision relationships of co-existence that destabilize elitist models of mobility and who are environment-conscious in their own subaltern transgressive account. Building on this, Basu and Fiedler (2017) conceptualize a sense of 'subaltern cosmopolitan citizenry' where ethnic neighbourhoods, informal public spaces, and places of worship in suburbs can act as vital social and organic hubs for public interaction, and that emerge from the ground up through multifarious creativities. Furthering this extant literature, my PhD dissertation contributes a novel empirical entry point into subaltern cosmopolitanisms, consisting of a study of sensuous place-making, translocality, and mobility in Sikh diaspora. In doing so, I focus on the musical and the poetic as they emerge in pluralistic dimensions of *gurdwara*, street-based Sikh processions such as *nagar kirtan*, and finally in new kinds of artistic place-making in the city.

While Sikh diaspora overlaps with co-diasporas of South Asia, there are important differences. South Asians crossing the ocean during the times of British India were overwhelmingly linked to a system of indentured labour in the early 1800s. The indentured workers were mostly recruited from eastern and southern parts of British India where the British East India company had first consolidated its power (Kazimi 2011, 17). Moreover, scholars point to a lower caste status of indentured migrants particularly in the case of Hindus (Kazimi 2011, 17). The indentured labourers were brought across the ocean to the Caribbean such as Trinidad, and Pacific Ocean islands such as Fiji to work on sugar and rubber plantations. This system of

indentured labour was closely linked with transatlantic slavery which brought slaves from Africa to the 'New World'.

Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus shared Punjab at the time of British colonialism and Muslims remain a majority in wholesome Punjab. With the Partition in 1947 by Britain, Muslims came to be located in west Punjab; across the border Sikhs and Hindus today inhabit east Punjab, which was further trifurcated in 1966 to states Haryana, Punjab (where Sikhs form a bare majority), and Himachal Pradesh. The wave of Punjabi and Sikh settlement in Canada emerged in the late 19th century during which time the South Asian labourers were no longer linked to the indentured system. From the mid-19th century, the British East India Company had pushed through Ranjit Singh's empire and annexed Punjab into British imperialism. Large-scale Sikh migrations outside of the subcontinent, thus, emerged about a century later than the earlier Indian diaspora, which was heavily linked to indentured labour (Tatla 1999; Kazimi 2011). The first colonial-period migration of Sikhs from Punjab was catalyzed from the Anglo-Sikh wars and as a result, Sikhs were political prisoners and the exiled (Roy 2018, 48, 52; Tatla 2014, 495-496). Subsequently, migration was catalyzed by British India's recruitment of Sikhs into their army and related police and security forces for deployment in Asia Pacific; and as labourers in eastern Africa for the construction of railways. Internal conditions in colonial Punjab that contributed to this mass migration included drought, famine, food scarcity, excessive taxes, and debt (Kazimi 2011, 38). Reduced land holdings due to British spatial and social engineering were another key factor in the movement out of Punjab (Roy 2018, 45).

The study builds on Sikh diaspora in the regions of Hong Kong, Vancouver, and Toronto. Vancouver stands as a historical legacy city of South Asian labour migrants in Canada that has fostered a unique settlement landscape and place of political resistance (Kazimi 2011). Hong Kong is notable for being a conduit through which Sikhs have then migrated to North America and United Kingdom, and serves as a cultural hub within the Pacific network for flow of ideas and anti-colonial movements such as the Ghadar.<sup>3</sup> Toronto is an emerging home of Sikh youth movements that are embracing hybrid expressions and diasporic citizenship (Nijhawan and Arora 2013). These three cities play a significant role in Sikh consciousness and are illustrative

---

<sup>3</sup> Ghadar, which literally means rebel or revolt, was an anti-colonial movement that originated in the coastal cities of North America at the beginning of the 19th century. The Ghadar Party formed a network across the Pacific Ocean, utilizing gurdwaras to challenge British colonialism of the Indian subcontinent (Sohi 2014).

of ways cities are co-produced. In situating this project within a transnational context – Hong Kong, Greater Vancouver, and Greater Toronto, the research will allow for an enhanced analysis of diasporic flows, ‘*worlding from below*’, and everyday practices of hybrid expressions within community place-making.

Sikhs are a significant component of South Asian communities in Canada but while their immigrant landscapes have been studied through positivist frames, they remain under-researched within geography disciplines on narratives and theories of cosmopolitanism and cultural geographies. In 2011, the total Canadian Sikh population was approximately 455,000 (Statistics Canada 2013a) and resided predominantly in the Toronto CMA and the Vancouver CMA. Sikhs form about 3% of Toronto’s CMA demographic (Statistics Canada 2013c) and are primarily concentrated in the suburban municipality of Brampton where they characterize around 18% of Brampton’s residents (Peel Data Centre 2013, 4). Within the Vancouver CMA, the make-up is close to 7% of the region’s population and they are primarily concentrated in the Surrey municipality (Statistics Canada 2013b). In Hong Kong, Sikhs have had a historical presence where Sikhs first started settling in late 19th century and later re-migrated to places such as Vancouver and Toronto (Cheuk 2008). The population of Sikhs in Hong Kong is estimated to be close to 12,000 (Information Services Department 2018, 327).

This doctoral study comes at a particularly significant and urgent time for Sikhs in Hong Kong and Canada. Hong Kong has stormed the world stage with mass social and political protests for greater autonomy, democracy, and rights against the police state and against the influence of Beijing in Hong Kong’s government. This present-day 2019 Be Water Movement<sup>4</sup> builds on the 2014 Umbrella Movement of Hong Kong. Likewise, Indigenous sovereignty movements following Truth and Reconciliation are gaining new grounds of work against the settler colonial state of Canada. Moreover, the 2015 re-emergence of a Sikh political forum and assembly – Sarbat Khalsa – in Punjab and diaspora space have ignited debates of governance, sovereignty, democratic social movements, diasporic circulations, and collective affinities. A study of diaspora Sikhs in Hong Kong, Vancouver, and Toronto aids in the theorization of the

---

<sup>4</sup> These mass protests erupted against an extradition bill in the spring of 2019. There is not yet an agreed upon name to term the protests. I put forth the term Be Water Movement that I coin, in order to give credit to the protestors who are embodying unique tactics and deploying the motto ‘Be Water’, from Bruce Lee’s martial arts practice and philosophy.

threads of many postcolonials that are weaved in the fabric of diaspora space, geographies of struggle, and the continued colonial and imperial present.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Sikh diaspora in Asia Pacific and Canada***

While much has been written on Sikhs and broader South Asian subjectivities in Great Britain and North America, scholars (Cheuk 2008; Tatla 1999) have pointed to significant research gaps of Sikhs in Hong Kong and many neighbouring places in Asia. Further, scholarly work on Sikh or South Asian or Indian population is generally approached through histories and sociologies (Erni and Leung 2014; Cheuk 2008; Plüss 2005). Weiss's (1991) work that focused on Muslim migrants from South Asia provided some overlapping discussion of Sikhs in a similar labour context during the early days of colonial Hong Kong. Plüss (2005) has theorized on the making of transregional ethnic identities among different Indian migrants – such as Parsi traders, Jain merchants, and Sikh policemen – in Hong Kong. In her argument, Plüss (2005) highlights the role that networks play in mobilizing transregional cultural capital and that different Indian networks were premised on transregional and ethnic identities. Cheuk's (2008) research on Sikhs highlights Hong Kong's role as a transitional migrant city anchored to the role that Hong Kong gurdwara has played as a hub for earlier migrants. A recent study by Jasjit Singh (2015) further engages with questions of identity and belonging of Sikhs in Hong Kong in comparison to Great Britain and from a sociological and anthropological inquiry. A few studies have now charted Sikh social, community, and migrant profiles in Asia Pacific including Hong Kong (Kahlon 2016); and its co-city in Shanghai (Kahlon 2016; Yin 2017). Cao Yin's (2017) work brings out a translocal and mobility perspective on Sikhs in Shanghai by conceptualizing their circulations with their diasporic networks such as in Hong Kong. Within the Asian region, research of Sikhs in Singapore and Malaysia (McCann 2011; Dusenbery 1997) have a much more pronounced historical presence in scholarly work.

Canadian research on Sikhs is prominent particularly with the ethnic turn in the social sciences. Within immigrant, religious, and sociological studies, Canadian research on Sikhs, Punjabi or co-diasporas have covered labour demographics and settlement geographies (Walton-Roberts and Hiebert 1997; Nayar 2004; 2012). Kamalya Nayar (2004; 2012) has addressed the generational patterns and nuances in the settlement geographies for both Sikhs and Punjabis in

two separate works. The history of the Khalsa Diwan Society gurdwaras and the proliferation of gurdwaras in British Columbia have been a significant research focus as well (Nayar 2010; Hans 2003; Johnston 1988). The historical *Komagata Maru* incident has also lent insights to the migration story of Sikhs in Canada (Kazimi 2011; Johnston 2014). Moreover, the interlocking of racialization in Canada's border regulations and the geopolitics of mobility have been examined from the historical *Komagata Maru* incident (Bhandar and Dhamoon 2019; Hyndman 2004). In addition to the historical challenge to Canada's border regulations, recent studies are exploring new kinds of political protests such as on the deportation of Laibar Singh and social activism (Nijhawan and Arora 2013; Buffam 2013). Likewise, questions of healing, youth politics, and diasporic citizenship are increasingly being attended to in Greater Toronto (Nijhawan 2008; Nijhawan and Arora 2013) particularly as the Sikh migration wave into this region was catalyzed by the 1984 conflict in Punjab.

Gender is a prominent analytic in feminist frameworks of powers and inequities studying Sikh, Punjabi, or South Asian groups and their spaces in varied diasporic and transnational settings (Brah 1996; Chanda 2014; Nagar 2014; Nayar 2004; 2012; Puwar 2012). Puwar (2012), for example, conceptualizes the role of *giddha* (Punjabi folk dance) for women as transgressive political arts, especially for first-generation migrants in the homescapes that are often not visible in ways street protests are. Nascent studies are deploying the analytics of caste in numerous geographical settings and groupings. For instance, Upadhyay (2016) has theorized caste-based power relations in South Asian communities who have settled in Canada's settler-colonial state. Caste-centered analytics of division and inequities among Sikhs have emerged as important lens in recent studies, for example by Jaspal and Takhar (2016) and Sato (2012) in Britain; and in the United States by Harmeet Kaur (2011); and in Punjab (Kalra and Purewal 2019; Behl 2010).

### ***Komagata Maru literature***

Over the last two decades, scholarly literature, artist events, news reports, cultural productions, oral history and archival projects on Greater Vancouver have taken on extensive coverage of its immigrant history, the events of the *SS Komagata Maru* and its legacy, and to a less extent Indigenous relations and encounters. Ali Kazimi, a documentary filmmaker and scholar, has outlined the making of white settler colonial state and presented its visual history in *Undesirables* (2011) and the film documentary *Continuous Journey* (2004). Kazimi's historical

work has given depth to the racial encounter in *Komagata Maru* and in the colour-coded state-building of Canada. Jennifer Hyndman (2004) has situated the events of *Komagata Maru* within a framework of geopolitics of mobility – where the geographer argues that the international borders are more porous for capital than migrants and labourers.

Digital archives such as the 2015 Komagata Maru Collection from Simon Fraser University have made possible online open access to historical documents, diaries, news coverage, photographs, and artefacts to the incident. Neighbouring metropolitan cities, such as Seattle in United States, have also covered its racialized migrant histories as documented in *Sikh Community: Over 100 Years in the Pacific Northwest* through the Wing Luke Asian Museum (Chan 2006). Across wider Canada, a community-based artist, oral history, and archive project – *Brown Canada* – emerged in Greater Toronto that was led by the Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA). The project focused on the racial experience of brown people and South Asian people in Canada, going beyond the *SS Komagata Maru* to include many instances where refugees and immigrants were blocked to Canada. In tandem with the broader *Brown Canada* project, CASSA documented *Komagata Maru* through an online repository, a community-based booklet, and artist events such as a play written by Alia Somani (2012). Sikh Heritage Month, which takes place in April in Ontario since 2013 (mostly in Brampton and Mississauga), has likewise brought about the ship's cultural memory through collaborations with the Peel Art Gallery Museum and Archives curated by Marwah and Hagan (2017). Furthermore, Sikh Heritage Museum of Canada (2014) located in Mississauga has brought on a touring exhibit *Lions of the Sea* to Toronto, Halifax, Calgary, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Montreal, and Ottawa.

Place-making and museum exhibits on *Komagata Maru* is increasingly prevalent. *Komagata Maru* has a commemoration memorial monument in Vancouver's harbourfront, a plaque in the Hong Kong gurdwara, and a memorial monument at Budge Budge near Calcutta. The Vancouver gurdwara Khalsa Diwan Society is also home to a permanent Komagata Maru Museum. The national heritage site Gur Sikh Temple in Abbotsford, which is home to Sikh Heritage Museum (2014-2015), has hosted *Komagata Maru* exhibits such as "Challenge and Denial-Komagata Maru 100 Years Later, 1914-2014". India has released commemoration coins while Canada has released commemoration stamps. Moreover, in a strange rupture from the *SS*



*Komagata Maru*'s oceanic journey, and a puzzling moment of scale-breaking, or perhaps a quantum leap, it is in Brampton where the ship's narrative has found a different sense of home in the form of a named garden – Komagata Maru Park. The public park in the City of Brampton opened on 22 June 2019 with ceremonies, speeches, and politicians (*Brampton Guardian* 2019). The Komagata Maru Park is illustrative of new urbanists public space placemaking, which is entangled with the Canadian state discourse of multiculturalism, and with city place-marketing, but also of Sikh diasporic imaginaries, and which in turn exhibits the double-edged nature of worlding in action. The public park in Brampton named after the ship mirrors and reflects the political attention in the sphere of representative politics, particularly in Canada.

Literary works further the cultural repositories through novels that include *Lions of the Sea* by Jessi Thind ([1998] 2003), *Chanting Denied Stories* by Tariq Malik (2010), and *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?* by Anita Rau Badami (2007). The saga is also dramatized through plays by established local playwrights – *Komagata Maru* by Ajmer Rode (1984), the *Komagata Maru Incident* by Sharon Pollock ([1976] 2005), and *Samundari Sher Nal Takkar* (Battle with Sea Lions) by Sadhu Binning and Sukhwant Hundal (1989), and *The Undocumented Trial of William C. Hopkinson* by Paneet Singh (2018). In Toronto, *Oh Canada, Oh Komagata Maru* was written and directed by Alia Somani (2012) as part of the *Brown Canada* theatre project. Radio plays and radio documentaries – *Voyage of the Undesirables: Remembering the Komagata Maru* – have featured on *CBC Radio* (2014). Deepa Mehta, a filmmaker in Canada, has initiated a film on the saga. Another film titled *Lions of the Sea* (based on the novel by Jassi Thind) is in conception as a Bollywood-Canadian blockbuster which ropes in Irfan Khan as actor and Bollywood a-list star Salman Khan as one of the producers (Firsttake Entertainment 2016). Scholarly engagements with such artists and literary works further explore the processes of cultural memory and discourses (Murphy 2015; 2008; Bhatia 2015; Rajender Kaur 2012). More recently, podcasts, such as by the Nameless Collective, expand the repository of local and community-based tales on this legacy ship. In 2019, a mural titled *Taike-Sye 'ya* on the ship's story at Coast Salish was unveiled on a public building in Vancouver public. The podcast, the mural, and the memorial monument in Vancouver are discussed in Chapter 6.

A recent edited volume titled *Unmooring the Komagata Maru* puts forth scholarly chapters exploring the imperial and colonial logics of Canada and develops the argument that the incident cannot be reduced to a single chapter of Canadian history but an ongoing process of racial nation-building project (Bhandar and Dhamoon 2019). A critical theorizing of the ocean and sea jurisdictions that governed colonial cartographies is explored by Renisa Mawani (2018) in *Across Oceans of Law*. Mawani (2018, 6) approaches the narrative of *Komagata Maru* differently than other scholars, by instead conceptualizing that “histories of Indian migration [be] situated within maritime worlds”. In doing so, the scholar has excavated a deep sense of Sikh and Muslim comradery, political resistance, and alternative cosmologies grounded in the ship’s oceanic struggle. Anjali Gera Roy (2018) has further documented the many folds of national, transnational, and diasporic framings in their different investment and approach to memory, mobilities, and commemoration. Roy’s intervention tends to *Komagata Maru* from a conceptualization of mobilities, doing a comprehensive work at attending to Sikh concepts, as well as Punjabi cultural imaginaries. Calcutta-based scholars include Himadri Banerjee (2016) who excavates the buried events at Budge Budge and Calcutta to where the ship returned to. The story of her departure city – Hong Kong, is less prevalent in both scholarly literature and artist works.

### ***geographical and urban studies literature***

Geographical research on Sikhs in Canada has tended to focus on visual markers and cues of Sikh identity such as the turban and visible forms of public discourse (Walton-Roberts 1998), places of worship (Agrawal 2009), and immigration demographics and suburban housing careers (Oliveria 2004). In geography and urban studies, places of worship form a vast array of interest particularly with a desire to study racialized or religious others, sites of conflict, or as architectural buildings. Geographical research, however, has produced limited engagement with concepts of space and place within *sikhi*<sup>5</sup>. Urban planning literature has predominantly taken on the question of places of worship with an empirical engagement of by-laws and zoning regulations governing them in Western Europe, North America, and Australia. Literature on this has covered various structures and communities in different places with a focus on land-use

---

<sup>5</sup> I use *sikhi* (literally means learnings) instead of Sikhism. *Sikhi* enunciates an everyday usage amongst Sikhs, opens the lens for a decolonial praxis, and goes beyond the world religion container of the term Sikhism.

conflicts such as numerous faith communities in Ontario including Sikhs temples (Hoernig 2006; Agrawal 2009), mosques in Toronto (Isin and Siemiatycki 2002), minority places of worship in Montreal (Germain and Gagnon 2003), and a Buddhist temple in California Orange County (Harwood 2005). The dominant focus of this literature concerns itself with the land-use conflict and how the development and planning process plays out at the neighbourhood level and at planning meetings. Some literature in geography tends to focus on the ‘exotic’ nature of non-Judeo-Christian religions and what such visual architecture brings to European landscapes (Peach and Gale 2003).

Critical approaches in geography have shifted some attention away from the physical nature of architecture to the less visible networks, place-making as relation, and cultural flows. While Western discourse of liberalism and multiculturalism usually seeks to contain the racialized otherness through visible markers and boundaries of symbolic and physical places, Isin and Siemiatycki (2002) clarify that Islamic practice of space cannot be reduced to a visual form of communication and instead punctuate the aural aspects of space and belonging. Moreover, a mosque acts as a centre and network and is far more than just a place to pray. Ranu Basu and Robert Fiedler (2017) situate the discussion of varied public and semi-public spaces to highlight the fluid dimension of multifarious spaces, and the rich place-making practices of inhabitants in suburbs. Far from contained, static spaces, the authors note that public spaces operate as a continuum. Moreover, connecting to a discussion of informality of space, where public realm cannot be neatly categorized, ordered, contained, and zoned, the authors highlight that places of worship vary in scale from detached large architectural structures to storefront temples.

More recently, the nascent post-secular theoretical influence in geographies of religion brings into geography the critique of the secular-religious dichotomy in order to frame alternative ways of analyzing and approaching places commonly read as religious. Banu Gökariksel (2009) has criticized geographies of religion centering around physical sites and religious built environments on the bases of public visibility and architectural styles which furthermore are based on notions of formal religion that modern secularism has created. Arguing for an approach that considers “veiling as an embodied spatial practice”, the scholar points to considerations of ‘sacred spaces’ beyond ‘religious sites’ that include the intimate

space of the body (Gökarıksel 2009, 661). Additionally, Gökarıksel and Secor (2015) shed light on an understanding that culture and religion are entwined in mundane everyday life and that religious-based practices cannot be isolated to only examining monumental religious sites.

Justin K.H. Tse uses the concept of ‘grounded theologies’ as a way of overcoming the religious-secular dichotomy and suggests that “the task of geographers who deal with religion is to reveal spaces, places, and networks as constituted by *grounded theologies*, performative practices of place-making informed by understandings of the transcendent” (2014, 202). Geographers would need to engage with how such practices are characterized by a cultural understanding of the transcendent, even when viewpoints, beliefs, or rituals are based not in theologies or the transcendent, but alternative ideas of the world. Tse’s theorizing suggests that cultural place-making practices are inherently tied to a sense of spiritual perception and that what is called secular place-making is likewise tied to an outlook of what being in the world means. Furthermore, Tse (2016) has addressed the role of religion and the spiritual in the social justice protests erupting in the 2014 Umbrella Movement of Hong Kong.

Lily Kong (1990; 2001; 2010) has extensively examined the historical literature of the criss-cross between religion and geography, and the debates and directions that informed intellectual inquiry. Newer works in the geographies of religion have proliferated the sites of investigation, from the officially and formally religious to the transient practices and places including street, shrines, landscapes, and home (Kong 2010). Other areas of inquiry consist of examining religiously-motivated geopolitics at various scales and geopolitical manipulation such as through population movement and settlement, war, genocide, foreign policy, discourse and biopower. The ethnic turn in immigrant and urban studies has produced social geographical exploration of the differential experiences and variants within religion, such as denominations, age, and gender, in the use and contestation of sacred space. Finally, Kong (2001) calls attention to the ‘sensuous geographies’, a subset less explored in geographies of religion where embodied experiences of religious practices signify an aspect of sacred space and epistemology.

### ***Sikh studies***

Within multi-disciplinary scholarship outside of the conventional discipline of geography, scholarly works (Sohi 2014; Roy 2018) have analyzed the depth of ocean

mobilities or gurdwara networks in enabling the transnational spatialities of the Ghadar rebellion and anti-colonial movements. Seema Sohi (2014) specifically centres gurdwaras of the Pacific Coast in their role for anti-colonial uprisings with Ghadar activity. Gurdwaras, thus, can be thought of as more than just functional spaces of prayer and religion. Instead, they offer us a way of understanding self, politics, and collective vis-à-vis the city and translocal networks. Moreover, Kaveri Qureshi's (2014) exploration of women's role and empowerment outside of gurdwara in Britain points to directions of conceptualizing political and religious communities that are not limited to places of worship. Qureshi (2014, 95) refers to these multi-faceted gendered spaces and practices as the "associational life of Sikh women". Navtej Purewal (2010) has prominently addressed the numerous micro-political domains of women's performative, embodied, and vocalizing aspects of kirtan, *seva* (volunteer service) and poetic readings. Such works destabilize the binaries of public-private and secular-religious that are reproduced when positivist literatures centre on places of worship as merely a building that contains othered subjects to be studied. Instead, the transient and sensuous gendered geographies that emerge in Qureshi's and Purewal's research bring out the multi-dimensionality of Sikh space and women's participation in them. Specifically, such feminist works open avenues to move away from the white or Eurocentric gaze into visible public discourses, which tend to focus on a visual lens, such as 1984 conflict iconography, turbans, and the representative politics of gurdwaras and gurdwara committees.

The emergence of *Sikh Formations*, a multi-disciplinary journal in Sikh studies founded in Western academies is providing new points of inquiries and research with questions that move beyond positivism, which have previously tended to center on Sikhs (and racialized or religiously othered communities) as merely empirical datasets. Sikh studies, if disentangled from textual theology and Eurocentric methods, may potentially bring into play a more holistic approach for a decolonial Sikh praxis. Contributors to *Sikh Formations* have brought up a theoretical engagement with Sikh discourses, philosophy, methodology, politics, and literature. In particular, the work of Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh, Giorgio Shani, Balbinder Singh Bhogal, and Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair have opened up pathways and questions, which engage Euro-American theory with Sikh epistemology, philosophy and theory. Noting the need to 'provincialize' critical international relations, Shani seeks concepts of nation, state, sovereignty,

cosmopolitanism, and governance beyond Westphalian models. Khalsa *Panth* and Islamic *Umma* are theorized as offering forms of organizing and political communities that exert governance of a universal community in the form of a “transnational religio-political community” (Shani 2008, 730; 2005). The work of Arvind-Pal Mandair (2009) deconstructs the different Sikh narratives that have emerged with orientalism and colonialism, and the subsequent land and language conflict in the postcolonial context in Punjab. Highlighting that translation is a power play in itself, the scholar argues that religious leaders often try to mold their narratives to one that fits into a ‘globalatinized’<sup>6</sup> fiduciary and Christian framework. Balbinder S. Bhogal (2007) has complicated translation of *sikhi* to instead ask how we can think of Sikh poetics as a sung, performed, and mystical experience rather than through textual rationality. Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh’s (1993) work has not only engaged with gendered relations but also theorized and conceptualized various aspects of feminist epistemology in Sikh philosophy.

By paying attention to the power relations in the discourses of religion-making and varied narratives of different spaces, we can shift analysis away from socio-spatial analysis of places of worship and away from a visual lens such as the site of turban, which reproduces orientalisng desire. Instead, this dissertation focuses on to how Sikhs negotiate their knowledge systems and their relationships across translocal spaces. The literature review informs of three key directives to be cautious in the epistemic considerations in how geography related to religion and race is carried out: 1.) To not reduce Sikh spaces or Sikhs to just gurdwaras, 2.) To not reduce gurdwaras to merely physical places of worship, and 3.) To challenge visual and textual optics by tuning in to sensuous geographies.

Moreover, while *Komagata Maru* has increasingly found a presence in literatures on Canadian geographies of immigration, mobilities, multi-culturalism, and the politics of race and racialization, the deeper dimensions of Sikh geographical imagination remain peripheral to such literature. By that, I mean a decolonial approach that works to conceptualize Sikh spaces, Sikh thought, and their poetics and sensuous dimensions, and not just the visible activities and

---

<sup>6</sup> Mandair (2009) borrows this neologism from Derrida in explaining how religious discourses are shaped not only by globalization narratives that seek secular-religious dichotomies but also by language and Christian theologies.

datasets **in** the place (e.g. ship, gurdwara, memorial event). This dissertation, thus, tours in order to give depth and meaning to the itineraries that escape the cartographies. These are the many places and practices, names or non-names, including *gurduara*/gurdwaras and nagar kirtans, and I engage with the ethos behind them from a lens of deep Sikh conceptualization.<sup>7</sup> It is an inventory of sorts, of itinerant sensuous practices and community maps and arts, which present a relational and topological geographical inquiry. A theoretical framework grounded in postcolonial theories and transnational feminist framework guide this process that I discuss next.

## **Lens and Frames**

The theoretical directives of this study make use of a postcolonial and transnational feminist framework with an eye to discursive power relations on how categories, especially race and religion, and knowledge have taken precedent. Subsequently, the study shifts gear to attend to everyday geographies of resistance. In this, it seeks points of views from lesser seen circuits of place-making and translocal space that emerge through sensuous geographies, sound currents and itineraries, and embodied micro-political actions of women.

Drawing on postcolonial theories, the theoretical framework attends to discursive power relations in knowledge production and challenges Eurocentric conventions of knowledge. Sylvia Wynter (2003) has theorized that the European figure of ‘Man1’ (religious man situated in the science of physics and astronomy as the fallen flesh of God) transitioned to ‘Man2’ (secular man situated in biological sciences and as an evolved human being) in Europe’s making of a racial and imperialistic order. Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak (1999) has traced the figure of native informant through philosophy, literature, history, and culture to argue that European thought did not consider women, people of colour, and aboriginal peoples as human. Moreover, in her deconstruction of translated Hindu texts such as *Bhagavad Gita* by nationalist and orientalist elites, Spivak has highlighted how religious elites often reworked European concepts of modernity, such as Hegel’s idea of Time, into their reinterpretations and translations. Likewise,

---

<sup>7</sup> In this dissertation, I use the popular spelling gurdwara when referring to it as physical site, and I use *gurduara* when nuancing the conceptualization. The different spellings lead to nuanced meanings. While gurdwara suggests the door/house of guru, *gurduara* suggests pathways of guru. The latter meaning connects with a theorization of fluid spaces created by people that are not limited to the places of worship paradigm. Chapter 3 Gurduara as Path-making will detail the nuances.

Mandair (2009) has deconstructed orientalist viewpoints into the Western making of religion, specifically in how Guru Granth Sahib for Sikhs was translated by orientalists such as Ernest Truemp, and subsequently by native elites. We can link up such nationalist or religious elitists' re-imaginings to a broader orientalism at play. Edward Said has highlighted that the founding of religions in the 'Orient' made secular, rational, and philosophical Europe possible: "[H]aving transported the Orient into modernity, the Orientalist could celebrate his method, and his position, as that of a secular creator, a man who made new worlds as God had once made the old" (Said 1979, 121). In analyzing the implications of colonialism and orientalism for Sikh tradition, Mandair (2009) unsettles modern Sikh theology and the framework of 'world religions', which he suggests is an apparatus of orientalism that works to limit expansive knowledge practices and philosophy into a Christianized rubric of theology. Postcolonial theorists such as Richard King (2013) and Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989) have noted how pluralistic cultural practices came to be defined as world religions with some given the ranks of religion while others reduced to spirituality or folk animisms.

In advancing pluralistic knowledges, the work of decolonial and indigenous feminists further an understanding of decolonial transnational feminist praxis. In *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith ([1999] 2012) writes that research itself is a site of struggle between multiple knowledge systems. The Maori scholar highlights that the Western order appropriated different knowledges and re-classified them into their own hierarchy and order of knowledge. A decolonial and transnational feminist framework accounts for diverse knowledge systems, poetics, and practices beyond Western frames of religions and philosophy. M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2010) argue that transnational feminist praxis needs to consider questions of politics of location, spatiality of power, and cross-cultural knowledge production. The feminist writers call to engage in knowledge work beyond academy's binary divides which has privileged academy as the place of 'universal' theory and knowledge production, while community networks and racialized subjects are often relegated to being empirical datasets.

Tying postcolonial theories with a feminist praxis, the epistemological approach of this dissertation seeks to unsettle binaries prevalent in academic research such as academic-activist, theory-case, center-periphery, and knowledge-stories. A key tenet of the transnational feminist



framework is an intersectional approach that analyzes multiple overlapping modalities of power. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty points out:

“[G]ender and race are relational terms: they foreground a relationship (and often a hierarchy) between races and genders. To define feminism purely in gendered terms assumes that our consciousness of being ‘women’ has nothing to do with race, class, nation, state, or sexuality, just with gender” (Mohanty 2003, 55).

A decolonial approach navigates the messy, varied and pluralistic contours of diasporic and transnational cultures, spaces and politics, while also attending to the colonial present.

Religious institutions, for instance, are exclusionary of marginal voices, such as those of youth and women in representation and in ceremonial address, and yet, simultaneously religious spaces – formal or transient – are hallmarks of a subalterity. Such places perhaps constitute aspects of ‘subaltern counterpublics’ (Fraser 1990), ‘heterotopias’ (Foucault 1986), ‘*worlding from below*’ (Simone 2001), and ‘subaltern urbanisms’ (Roy 2011b). The role of women in the politicized networks of faith-based places is prominent even when off the ceremonial stage. In *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Collins ([1990] 2000) highlighted that survival itself is a form of resistance emphasizing how Black women passed knowledge to their children through their child-rearing work. Moreover, Collins points out that although Black women may not be visible figures of authority in church-based communities, they are still central to the formation of politicized church networks. The Sikh centre (gurdwara), likewise, enables counterpublics where youth and women exercise agency and affinities through survival, consciousness-building, *langar*-making (food preparation and outreach), and learning by doing. Richa Nagar, whose feminist ethnogeography took her to Dar es Salaam writes that the “weekly langar preparations in the Gurdwara allowed Sikh women from all classes to combine collective labor with gossip and political analysis” (Nagar 2014, 60). *During Guru Nanak’s 550th celebration, I visited the Pape gurdwara in Toronto. While seated in the langar hall next to a group of women who were taking a break from their langar-making preparation, I witnessed a robust discussion by Sikh women on the Kartarpur Corridor, and its politics. The Sikh women praised Muslims and Pakistan, and trash-talked India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi.* Food-making labour being carried out by the women in the gurdwara was interwoven with world analysis and consciousness-building. A transnational feminist approach, thus, would critique power

geometries of religious patriarchy and frames of Eurocentric religious categories. Concurrently, a transnational feminist approach would apply a lens beyond conventional optics in order to conceptualize processes of survival, resistance, politicized ethics, group solidarities, and most importantly, “the work of rewiring the senses” (Alexander 2005, 337). In other words, a grounding is needed that considers everyday acts, enunciations, and spiritual modes of becoming that neither the positivist feminist nor the text-centered religious elite highlight. But as M. Jacqui Alexander poignantly addresses: “the spiritual is lived in the same locale in which hierarchies are socially invented and maintained” (2005, 338).

Another tenet of transnational feminism relevant to this dissertation is a critique of culturalist arguments that aids us in moving away from narratives of the state and Eurocentric thought. In the *Dark Side of the Nation*, Himani Bannerji argues that the state apparatus of multiculturalism such as the one in Canada often celebrates diversity and reduces “social justice into questions of curry and turban” (2000, 38). For Bannerji, by collapsing racialized communities to cultural categories, the state of Canada limits acknowledgment of “political community organized on the basis of class, gender and racialization” (2000, 47). This dissertation engages with a re-politicization of religious and cultural spaces, and subsequently moves beyond the formally religious, by drawing from post-secular theories and the work of decolonial feminists. Post-secular theorizing by Talal Asad (2003) bring into perspective the challenging flaws in the characterization of Europe and United States as secular constitutions. Furthermore, Alexander has critiqued the cultural relativist and postmodern paradigms which keep to the epistemic separation between secular and sacred, and between modern and tradition. As the scholar highlights, the “analytic challenge we face in considering the spiritual dimensions of work derives from the very nature of the epistemic frameworks” (Alexander 2005, 323).

Feminist thinkers (Anzaldúa [1987] 2012; Alexander 2005; Trinh 2011) who have theorized on space and power – often at the nexus of its racialization and intersections – offer insights where storytelling, everyday survival, the sensuous, and poetry characterize politicized geographies of resistance, place-making, and boundary crossing. In *Pedagogies of Crossing*, Alexander heightens the sensuous awareness by which feminist scholars can consider the sacred in the everyday spaces, bodily experience, and women’s labour. The personal is spiritual and the spiritual is political, as Alexander (2005, 21) emphasizes. Furthermore, Alexander’s poetics of

the ocean and spirituality is taken up by McKittrick and Woods (2007, 4) who theorize on Black geographies and sense of place by putting together a notion of “place-making with the unknowable mysteries” of the ocean. In doing so, McKittrick and Woods challenge conventional positivist knowledge approaches that attempt to map histories through data, archive, and cartography. Similarly, but in a different context Trinh T. Minh-ha (2011) writes along the rhythmic flows of peoples as a way of analyzing humanity in her work *Elsewhere, Within Here*. Spiraling with poetic traditions – from Vietnamese folk songs to the Chinese principles of *yin-yang* – Trinh challenges the visual fields of walls and boundaries by shifting our attention to language and sound. Music, she says, is first language, rather than art, and in the musical elements of rhythm, sound, and vibrations lie the alternative cartographies of the world (Trinh 2011, 55). Drawing on Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands* on a figure of metamorphosis, Trinh argues that the world is experienced and expressed with the creative impulses of people. Moreover, Trinh argues that the demarcation of solid boundaries and visual segregation is always simultaneously accompanied by a musical note that seeks common humanity rather than divisions.

### **Conceptual Toolkit**

The second chapter will detail the theoretical framework and epistemology comprehensively. Here, I delineate the conceptual terms and analytical ideas of relevance to the study.

#### ***map, itinerary, scale, space, translocal***

The research draws from poststructuralist and postcolonial geographies to destabilize categories of static cultures or religions, which are often mapped onto bounded space of representation and scaled in a hierarchical way. Poststructuralist geographies question the positivist ways of thinking that represent space through measure, quantifiable numbers, and grid science. Michel De Certeau (1984) makes a distinction between ‘map’ and ‘itinerary’ in his notion of space as ‘itinerary’. Space as itinerary is tactical as it takes on moving and touring processes and change through each new iteration, while place is characterized as that which seeks a proper strategy through a representation, such as in the form of a ‘map’. De Certeau (1984, 119) conceptualizes ‘map’ as “plain projection totalizing observations” and describes situations in terms of its place, arrangement, and static vector units. In contrast, ‘itinerary’ or ‘tour’, are aspects of “discursive series of operations”, and describe operations and paths based

on bodily movements, actions, and turns (De Certeau 1984, 119). De Certeau critiques that city planning and scientists have dominated a conception of space that privileges the static and fixed ‘map’ in the form of representation of space. Such a conception would read gurdwara as isolated religious places of worship. On the other hand, understanding *gurduara* as a pathway, as opposed to an isolated religious place of worship, and *nagar kirtan*, as songs to the world, demands an understanding of space as itinerary, topological stories, and performed poetry.

Moreover, a conceptualization of scale and scalar thought is needed in the way researchers map or categorize racialized and ethnic communities – often inside national containers or place-bound vectors. Critiquing such ideas of place and essential cultures, Doreen Massey (1994) emphasizes that place is a collection of stories and “meeting place” that consists of multiplicities of identities and multiple memories of a place rather than a singular coherent identity based on past heritage. The concept translocal can aid in the horizontal linkages that diasporas and peoples, and cities and cultures form beyond a nation-state frame. Brickell and Datta (2011) make use of the term translocality to reorient an understanding of transnationalism that is not limited to the confines of scalar thought and national place. The authors highlight that “translocal geographies are multi-sited and multi-scalar without subsuming these scales and sites within a hierarchy of the national or global” (Brickell and Datta 2011, 17). Engin Isin (2007, 214) coins the term ‘scalar thought’ to critique the predominant tendency of geography to define scales as “exclusive, hierarchical and ahistorical”. The premise of scalar logics of modern nation-states naturalize cartographies of matching cultures and space, as Gupta and Ferguson (1992) have theorized. A conceptualization of *gurduara* and *nagar kirtan* as translocal space enables a divergence from scalar thought and acknowledges a form of politicized place-making where racialized or religious subjects may disrupt a state narrative of foreclosure and instead invoke an alternative sense of expression of self and collectives.

Such translocal geographies emphasize the place-making of the subject, or the place reimagining of the user, instead of the ‘proper’ or official narrative of city administrators and marketers. Paul Gilroy (2000, 277) has asked “on what scale is group solidarity to be practiced and recognized: room, street, neighbourhood, city, region, state; blood kin, species kin, planetary kin?” Diaspora and translocal may be the answer as both group solidarity and place reimagining can be addressed. Moreover, place reimagining sheds light on the constancy of change for the

diaspora and a sense of place. Katherine McKittrick's (2006) intervention exposes the tainted optics of academic researchers who reproduce fixed and contained racialized space, particularly in regard to racialized and Black subjects who are reified as objects of research without expression and presented as lacking in their own sense of place. In *Demonic Grounds*, she draws from the poems of Black-Canadian writer Dionne Brand to theorize that Black geographies need to be attentive to both the systematic geographies of domination and also the everyday stories and memories people make of their landscapes, bodies, and streets. McKittrick highlights that ordinary inhabitants can appropriate and imagine places for themselves:

Brand's sense of place continually reminds me that human geography needs some philosophical attention; she reminds me that the earth is also skin and that a young girl can legitimately take possession of a street, or an entire city, albeit on different terms than we may be familiar with. (McKittrick 2006, ix)

Within these embodied speech acts, of walking, of imagining, of relation to landscapes, and of poetics manifest decentralized geographies of resistance and place-making. Echoing McKittrick for a philosophical engagement with *human-geography*, Mahtani (2014) suggests for more methodological and conceptual imagination in challenging the legacy of imperial geographies, which attempt to both naturalize and neutralize certain subjects onto particular places.

### *diaspora*

Questions of Sikh translocal space and place-making, moreover, are interwoven with questions of Sikh identity and diaspora. A major challenge of doing research on geographies of Sikh communities is that ethnic and religious categories are often taken for granted without adequate theorization of how they are socially produced and how they in turn produce space. Chapter 2 will theorize that religion was minted through a power relationship between the metropole and colony. Additionally, scalar logics must be paid attention to in social and spatial sciences works that attempt enumerating diverse peoples. Nayar (2004, 4) has cautioned that an ethnic turn into migration within immigrant, urban, and sociological studies tends to lump diverse groups into broad census-derived categories – Indian, South Asian, Indo-Canadian. Moreover, Arun Mukherjee (1998, 29) has termed South Asian as a “bureaucratic” term, which presents an illusion of a “unitary community that is not actually there”. This study draws on the notion of ‘diaspora’ as it offers a way of thinking through fluid identities over more

homogenizing terms such as Sikh Canadians or Indo-Canadians. Diaspora can also operate as a conceptual aid to overcome the separation between religious subject and cultural subject, which are mapped according to scalar logics.

Indian diaspora has previously been framed as “labour and longing” (Mishra 1996, 22) referring to two aspects of migration: labour and family reunification. Mishra has argued that there is a radical break between the two kinds of Indian diaspora. First is the old diaspora of indentured labourers uprooted from oral history as subalterns and placed into imperial history. Second is the new diaspora starting in mid-20th century often marked by hyphenated labels in relation to a modern nation state (e.g. Sikh-Canadians, Fiji-Indians). It is the second diaspora for whom the umbrella term South Asian has often been utilized. Vinay Lal (2004) has elaborated that Indian and Hindi cinematic representations have played up the new diaspora with its celebratory portrayal of middle-class Indian elites in places like United States, and intentionally underplayed the presence of a historical diaspora in regions such as Caribbean and Asia Pacific. In this regard, Lal (2004) highlights that large Indian diasporic communities remain invisible in modern categories of ‘Non-Resident Indians’ (NRIs) and modern state building of India in terms of capital and global flows.

For the Sikh context, a similar interplay of diaspora characterizes such migrant patterns but with a few key differences. First, Sikh migration under indentured status was less prevalent, and confined to East Africa for railway construction, and to Fiji on sugar plantations (Tatla 1999). Kahlon clarifies that any Sikh migration to Fiji as indentured labourers was likely not from Punjab direct (Kahlon 2016, 154). Second, Sikhs migrating from Punjab have tended to be from rural, less educated, and less literate classes under both the historical diaspora attached to labour in service to colonial empire, and the new diaspora of family migration. Nayar (2004, 4) describes the Sikh diaspora moving from rural Punjab into Canada as “directly ‘transplanted’ into a modern society without having undergone the experience of industrialization”, unlike their Hindu counterparts from urban educated classes. In examining diasporic Sikh literature, Geetajanli Singh Chanda (2014) points out that a third category of diaspora in the Sikh context has come about and that does not neatly fall into migrants tied to labour or family reunification. These are the second or third-generation children of the first-generation migrants.

This study's interest in diaspora is to conceptualize a space and a migratory formation in flux and in relation to power, rather than to enumerate positivist or descriptive demographics of origin and destination. Stuart Hall (1992), in his discussion of Caribbean and Black subjects and their representations in cinema, conceptualizes cultural identity and diaspora as one that is always in process. The cultural theorist problematizes the notion of an authentic past identity that is buried and must be recovered. Instead, Hall offers us ways of thinking of identity as produced and coming out through a position. That is, "[n]ot an essence but a *positioning*" (Hall 1992, 235). Such a framing of diaspora enables a discussion of identity, diaspora, and cosmopolitanism that generates alternative ways to analyze diasporic relations that are not characterized by an "overwhelming nostalgia for lost origins" (Hall 1992, 236). Paul Gilroy, likewise, puts forth an idea of diaspora to explore relations of people and as a challenge to place-bound identities which seek purity and territory. His argument in *Against Race* is a manifesto to rid "camp mentalities constituted by appeals to 'race,' nation, and ethnic difference, by the lore of blood, bodies, and fantasies of absolute cultural identity" (2000, 83). Pointing to trends of genocides, and identity-based conflicts in various parts of the world, Gilroy calls to move beyond 'identity-as-root' and to think of other forms of relation and becoming human. Alongside Hall, Gilroy seeks itineraries of diaspora as relation rather than identity. As he proposes, such a framing of diaspora "disrupts the fundamental power of territory to determine identity by breaking the simple sequence of explanatory links between place, location, and consciousness" (2000, 122). In that, Gilroy shifts away from nostalgia or romanticization in place: "It [diaspora] makes the spatialization of identity problematic and interrupts the ontologization of place" (2000, 122). Avtar Brah (1996) puts forth the term of 'diaspora space', where both the native and diasporian dwells, where new forms of belonging, becoming, and expressions take fold in relation to power, borders, and friction.

Following such framings of diasporas as a relation and positionality to power, place-making for Sikh diaspora cannot be conceptualized as merely an expression of one's authentic identity (religious or homeland or belief) but the circulatory ways that power and location is disrupted, how positionality is enunciated, and the nuances in engagement that emerge between co-diasporas. "Who is a Sikh?" (Sikh Research Institute 2017) is a surging question, particularly in youth, feminist and diasporic spaces. Pashaura Singh (2014, 32) suggests that "diaspora Sikhs

approach these issues from different perspectives, depending on the cultural and political contexts from which they come. In many cases, they rediscover their identity through their interaction with other religious and ethnic communities”. In this regard, the enunciations and belonging taken on by diaspora Sikhs are always in flux, re-interpreted, and in relation to the specific contexts.

### *cosmopolitanism*

Hall’s and Gilroy’s conceptualizations of diaspora offer a tool to think beyond the confines of an authentic historical past locked in nostalgic-distanced land or backward-looking homelands. Another challenge of this research, nonetheless, is the theoretical framing of cosmopolitan narratives that are entangled with analysis of diasporic cultures. As Kalra and Nijhawan (2007, 67) break it down in the Sikh context:

Diasporic cultures are too often represented in terms of a dichotomy between cosmopolitan and fundamentalist . . . . This can work across groups, such as Muslim fundamentalist and cosmopolitan Hindu, or Khalistani fundamentalist and Punjabi cosmopolitan.

Paying attention to the dangerous stereotypes where one culture or group is othered while another is celebrated, this research engages with possibilities of subaltern cosmopolitanisms.

In an exploration of Sikh mobilities from rural environments within the historical Sikh migration from Punjab, Anjali Geera Roy (2018) theorizes on cosmopolitanism in the context of *Komagata Maru*. Her framing draws from the cosmopolitanisms of Bhabha’s vernacular; Clifford’s discrepant, Appiah’s rooted; and de Sousa Santos’s subaltern. Homi Bhabha’s notion of a vernacular cosmopolitanism attempts to engage “contradictory strains of languages *lived*, and languages *learned*” for “its critical and creative impulse” ([1994] 2004, x, italics in original). He further engages the literary worlds of “moving in-between cultural traditions and revealing hybrid forms of life and art that do not have a prior existence within the discrete world of any single culture or language” ([1994] 2004, xiii). Moreover, Bhabha shifts the terms of reference from identity to that of political practices, ethical choices, and right to difference. Pnina Werbner (2006) groups such cosmopolitanisms – vernacular, rooted, discrepant – as oxymoronic and contradictory. To add to another contradictory tension is ‘pastoral cosmopolitanism’, coined and



conceptualized by Roy (2018, 15). For Roy, a pastoral cosmopolitanism provides some nuances as it highlights a sense of “rural and rustic” of country life based on the agro-pastoral origins of nomadic tribes often the case for Sikhs (2018, 15). In Roy’s definition, pastoral cosmopolitanism describes “rural Sikhs forced to move out of their native villages or *pind* due to the geographical engineering of Punjab, land reforms, revenue policies and military recruitment following the British conquest” (Roy 2018, 158).

Such oxymonic cosmopolitanisms destabilize dichotomies of universal and particular and of mobile and static. James Clifford (2008) has emphasized that all cultures are travelling cultures, and so are ethnographies of culture. He, thus, sets up a frame of reference with the concept of ‘discrepant cosmopolitanism’. Unlike the cosmopolitans of the high globalized and capitalist world, discrepant cosmopolitanism is varied, dispersed, not fully defined, and can attend to those violently displaced. He delineates what the notion entails:

In this emphasis we avoid, at least, the excessive localism of particularist cultural relativism, as well as the overly global vision of a capitalist or technocratic monoculture. And in this perspective the notion that certain classes of people are cosmopolitan (travelers) while the rest are local (natives) appears as the ideology of one (very powerful) traveling culture. (Clifford 2008, 324)

Both Clifford’s and Bhabha’s framing are based on notions of culture as a hybrid. But caution also must be drawn on celebrated and romanticized ideas of cultural hybridity, which gets co-opted by capital. Moreover, it is important to note that notions of hybridity are varied and emerge out of specific constellations, contexts, and upheaval.

Rinaldo Walcott draws on “Caribbean as a space of unique intervention” (2015, 186) that can unsettle assimilationist and integrationist processes of hybrid. Far from a romanticised project of a desired fusion or selective mixing, creolization is the consequence of violent power arrangements and new subjectivity. Creolization is unique to the Caribbean region in which transatlantic slavery and plantation society produced a forced relation, and one that now offers the best challenge to nationalisms of ‘identity as root’ as critiqued by Gilroy (2000). In his engagement with frames of cosmopolitanism, Walcott (2015, 192) ultimately takes the position of what he calls “dethroning Man” by way of imagining new modes of humanness, which he frames as vernacular forms of cosmopolitanism. Drawing from Sylvia Wynter’s work, the Caribbean “becomes the place now where genres of the human proliferate and thus offer us

insight into the work of ‘culture’” (Walcott 2015, 186). Walcott calls his vernacular conceptualizing as ‘cosmo-political ethics’. He defines the term as:

[D]ifferent identities and cultures have been pitted against each other, or at least in tension with each other, while simultaneously living intimately with each other and sharing across those differences have produced ‘new’ modes of being human in the region. (Walcott 2015, 197)

In addition to Walcott, numerous scholars have explored counter-canonical interventions to cosmopolitanism. Paul Gilroy imagines a cosmopolitanism in a sense of diasporic relation, that is “in the interest of a heterocultural, postanthropological, and cosmopolitan yet-to-come” (Gilroy 2000, 334).

Geography’s interest in cosmopolitanism, thus far, stems from a desire to reconcile the universality of the global with the particularity of a local either on the stage of international relations and state ideologies, or in the domain of cities and urbanisms. In *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom*, David Harvey (2009) traces the re-emergence of cosmopolitanism politics, from Kantian universal ethics to contemporary discourses of military humanism and neoliberal urbanism. Harvey points out Beck’s transcultural and transhistorical bias in political governance: “Beck, Habermas, and others tend, therefore, to look upon the European Union as some kind of Kantian cosmopolitan construction. They then reflect upon the possibility of expanding this system worldwide” (Harvey 2009, 83). Beck’s cosmopolitanism realism and rhetoric of international cooperation have been criticized for enabling regimes of neocolonialism and imperialism. Mignolo (2000), for example, outlines that the Kantian worldview that Beck relies on has resulted in European colonialism and American imperialism respectively.

Recognizing the need to provincialize international governance, Giorgio Shani (2008) sets out to theorize alternative models of cosmopolitan governance which he argues could be imagined in Khalsa *Panth* and Islamic *Umma*. Shani excavates the events of 1699 in Anandpur when Khalsa *Panth* was founded on the occasion of *Vaisakhi* – a Punjabi harvest festival. In search for non-Western cosmopolitan models, Shani presents 1699 Anandpur as a counter to Western models of sovereignty and the Treaty of Westphalia. *Panth* is a term that means path and denotes a community that walks a path. *Khalsa* is derived from Persian and Islamicate vocabulary *khalisah* that denotes land and estate which belong directly under a monarch to

whom people pay a tax.<sup>8</sup> In the making of Khalsa Panth, intermediaries – such as kings, human gurus, Brahmins, Kshatriyas, *masands* (seat holders) – were made obsolete, and both spiritual and political authority was invested into the hands of ordinary peoples. Khalsa Panth took its call to action under the indivisible crown *IkOankar* (1-ness) and its guidance from *Vahiguru* (Inspirational Enlightner). Shani (2008, 730) frames the founding of Khalsa Panth as unitarian, vernacular, and democratic – setting up a non-Western model of cosmopolitanism and international relations. Moreover, he highlights this making as not “merely conceived as spiritual fraternity . . . but as a sovereign, *political* community” (Shani 2008, 730).

This study’s interest in cosmopolitanism has largely to do with knowledge and grounded practices, and I use subaltern cosmopolitanism to expand. Bouverattano de Sousa Santos makes use of the term ‘subaltern cosmopolitanism’ as a counter-hegemonic form of globalization. In lieu of neoliberal globalization, he advocates for “globalization from the bottom” (2005, 33). For de Sousa Santos, counter-hegemonic struggles such as the Zapatista movement, which replace abstract human rights’ ideals with a localized system of democracy, can make possible alternative economic relations and space other than that of global capitalism and neoliberal globalization. Postcolonial Marxist geographer Vinay Gidwani (2006) approaches this conceptual term from a different angle, igniting cosmopolitan visions with subaltern possibilities that are often unnamed or go un-noticed in a narrative dominated by multicultural states, urban professionals, creative classes, and first-world residents, tourists and travelers. Engaging with a critique of Eurocentric cosmopolitanism, Gidwani imagines the possibility of a ‘subaltern cosmopolitanism’ where subaltern labourers and migrant labourers participate in city-making and everyday environmentalism:

I imagine “subaltern cosmopolitanism”, then, as a *dialectics of non-identity*, neither “subaltern” nor “cosmopolitan” in any final or identitarian sense. Instead, it names practices of thinking, border crossing, and connecting that are transgressive of the established order and that shame and expose its hermetic and de-politicized grids of Difference as *political relations* of difference. (Gidwani 2006, 19)

Following Gidwani, subaltern cosmopolitanism, thus, is not about capturing a subaltern identity nor cosmopolitan identity, but about the recognition of cosmopolitan practices, thinking and knowledge systems that may be subaltern. Such a subaltern fold closely follows Appiah’s (2007)

---

<sup>8</sup> Shani (2008, 729) provides a different meaning of the term than the one I provide here.

characterization for a rooted cosmopolitanism, which come out of lived histories and traditions of practice rather than from a state and capitalist machinery. We see hints and traces of such practices and thinking in Sikh journeys: in the travels shared by Guru Nanak and Mardana; in the space of the ocean and the ship in the colonial periods, and in what will be analyzed by this dissertation – the place-making practices of *gurduara*, *nagar kirtan*, and *begampura* (City Beyond Sorrow).

### ***worlding***

Gidwani's eye to the informal political economy and the subaltern classes situated at the heart and fringe of this economic trade can be further put in conversation with the analytical concept of worlding taken on by the global-south turn in urban studies. In today's context as used by urban studies scholars, worlding as an analytical concept accounts for the multi-dimensional characteristics of city-making initiatives and processes beyond mere official infrastructure projects and place-marketing. In "On the Worlding of African Cities", AbouMalig Simone has mobilized an understanding of this concept as '*worlding from below*' with a specific attention to how African migrants mobilize and support each other through informal religious networks such as *zawiyyah* or Sufi brotherhood.<sup>9</sup> Simone (2001) suggests that there is a certain locality and practice at play with African cities with a sense of uncertainty and preparedness of moving, often by processes and activities away from home. Worlding highlights the under-privileged informal processes and networking of migrant life, livelihoods, and subjectivity that is always in process, circulating, and modifying without a final state of being. Such *worlding from below* is enabled by the economic, social, and religious agents who are not constitutive of formal financial firms. For Ananya Roy (2011a, 314), "worlding is both an object of analysis and a method of critical deconstruction". It provides for an analysis of urban formations and the activities of diasporic communities that are often off the map, while at the same, paying close attention to the 'power geometries' (Massey 1999) that are at play.

---

<sup>9</sup> *Zawiyyah* is a Sufi centre characterized as both place and network. A discussion of the parallels and differences between *zawiyyah* and a Sikh centre is elaborated in the concluding chapter to further expand on the concept of *worlding from below*.

## Research Questions and Objectives

A postcolonial and transnational feminist framework guides us to go beyond state-induced politics of turban, visible others, or the exotic gaze of places of worship and instead center the political in the everyday cultural practices and informal worlding networks of religion. This research does this by shifting the points of analysis away from the visual to the poetic. The work of many theorists-writer-poets such as Gloria Anzaldúa, M. Jacqui Alexander, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Sylvia Wynter offer such a grounding along with the theorizing of race and religion. While the privileging of visual lens has dominated geography as a discipline, theorists such as Michel de Certeau and feminist geographers such as Doreen Massey, J.K. Gibson-Graham, and Katherine McKittrick have differently opened pathways that emphasize the place-making of songs and poetry, Black sense of place, here and now, and alternative cartographies.

In focusing on Sikhs and their translocal space, the dissertation theorizes forms of subaltern cosmopolitanism and sensuous geographies of place-making, through a deep conceptualization of Sikh spaces, practices, and concepts: *gurduara*, *nagar kirtan*, *begampura* (City Beyond Sorrow). The analytical concepts which my research engages with include notions of diaspora, subaltern cosmopolitanisms (Gidwani 2006), and worlding (Simone 2001; Roy 2011a). My research attends to three main questions:

- 1.) What are Sikh place-making practices in Hong Kong, Greater Vancouver, and Greater Toronto that form the basis for their ‘worlding’ networks?
- 2.) How are gurdwaras and *nagar kirtan* imagined, lived, and practiced as translocal spaces?
- 3.) How do Sikh articulations of space, place and belonging further our understanding of cosmopolitanism as they vary and are linked by the city?

## Qualitative Research Methods and Study Design

The transnational study of Sikh diaspora is grounded in qualitative research methods utilizing multi-sited ethnographies including field observations, qualitative interviews, community mapping, and archival research (see Appendix B for method materials). These sites consist of gurdwaras, *nagar kirtans*, and other events and places that are frequently used by Sikhs in Hong Kong, Greater Vancouver, and Greater Toronto. This allows me to trace narratives, stories,

symbols, and signifiers that Sikh communities utilize in their relationship to place across translocal spaces.

### ***multi-sited ethnography***

The multi-sited ethnography makes use of the journey of the *Guru Nanak Jahaz* – known as the *SS Komagata Maru* in Western scholarship – a ship carrying passengers mostly Sikh men via Hong Kong that was refused permission to dock and land in Vancouver in 1914. Recent scholarship (Hyndman 2004; Kazimi 2011; Upadhyay 2016; Roy 2018; Bhandar and Dhamoon 2019) and community projects (for example, *Brown Canada* project) have explored the legacy of *Komagata Maru* with regards to immigration legislature, geopolitics of mobility, and race relations in Canada's state-building. My multi-sited ethnography builds on it and engages with geographies of power and resistance, with a theorizing of translocal spaces and Sikh place-making such as *gurduaras* and *nagar kirtans*. At a deeper level, the multi-sited ethnography follows my own journey as a migrant – from Hong Kong to Vancouver Island to Toronto and back-and-forth. The voyage of the *Guru Nanak Jahaz* is used as a metaphorical tool in the multi-sited ethnography, which goes beyond the event itself to theorize and contextualize the places and practices entangled with the ship's itinerary that are otherwise erased from scholarly conceptualizations or presented as mere places that contain activity and 'others'.

Multi-sited ethnography has been promoted as a useful method to enable a deeper understanding of diaspora and of how cultural knowledge is circulated and dispersed particularly in the context of cultural globalization (Marcus 1995; Falzon 2009). Geographers (Ghosh 2007; Walton-Roberts 2003; Kelly 2003; Sheringham 2010) have increasingly called for a transnational exploration of the economic, cultural, religious, and political linkages of migrants and diasporic communities across multiple sites and scales. In attending to narrative and circulations, "[m]ultisited and global ethnography seek to describe how people in multiple places are tied together through global processes" (Buch and Staller 2007, 189). Moreover, multi-sited ethnography enables the researcher to explore the fuzzy and confusing field, thus making possible for research to attend to proliferating religious spaces beyond the formally religious. For instance, homespace, a street, an art gallery, or a public square may be involved in various aspects of religious or cultural place-making overlooked by the tendency to focus on a bounded place of worship. In this regard, *nagar kirtan* was a significant site of research as it brought out a

movement-oriented sacred through footwork and the sensuous and spirit through the streets. In addition to exploring the transient spaces, multi-sited ethnography lends insights to in-between spaces of co-paths that are sometimes left out of dominant representations of religion and textbook definitions of religion. Kalra and Purewal (2019), in their study of religious and cultural flows in Punjab, both in India and Pakistan, have attended to an ethnography of what people *do*, as opposed to what people *say* they do. They found the so-called religious boundaries established between Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu in Punjab as largely porous with flows and boundary-crossing, especially among women and lower caste subjects. For my study, in Hong Kong, the Hindu *mandir* (temple) in Tsim Sha Tsui bring into perspective Sindhi communities who are avid followers of Guru Nanak as the *mandir* hosts the Sikh scripture Guru Granth Sahib in Nastiliq script (a Perso-Arabic script). Similarly, in Greater Vancouver, Burnaby is home to Sri Guru Ravidas Sabha, which is a gurdwara or a *sabha* (assembly) that is run by the co-path Ravidassia.

Of further relevance to multi-sited ethnography is a feminist ethnogeography (Nagar 1997) that attends to various spaces of power, and those off the view. Multi-sited ethnography connects to feminist ethnogeography to bring out alternative positions and perspectives, for instance, away from the ceremonial stage often held by a male religious elite. In this, the formation of temporary spaces of *sangats* (collectives), through retreats, or women's associational space give insight to how women gather, contribute, or lead beyond the domains of a formal congregation both at gurdwaras or at home, social, and cultural spaces (Purewal 2009, 2010; Qureshi 2014; Puwar 2012). *Sukhmani Sahib* (Pearl of Peace) – a long poem by Guru Arjan – is immensely significant for Sikh women who gather and lead the reading. Such considerations of feminist ethnogeography serve as crucial starting points in the analysis of gurdwaras and nagar kirtans, which are place-making based largely on sensuous itineraries of *sangats*.

For younger Sikhs, and second-generation Sikhs, newer place-making practices beyond gurdwaras have increasingly become nodes in new kinds of activities, relation, and meaning-making. Such place-making ideas constitute camps, retreats, public art initiatives, Sikh Heritage Month programming, and walking tours. In Chapter 6 City, I weave a braid of such place-making initiatives using narrative form.

### *qualitative interviews*

45 Qualitative interviews were collected from Sikhs, with 15 each in the three regions, and were balanced in terms of male and female genders between 2016 and 2018. The study uses pseudonyms to refer to interview participants. Participants were recruited through gurdwaras, events such as Sikh Heritage Month, and through social networks, word-of-mouth, and snowballing. Interviews were conducted with individuals through semi-guided and mostly open-ended questions. Interviews lasted between twenty minutes to an hour. In Hong Kong, most interviews took place in Punjabi, while in Canada, it was a mix of Punjabi and English, with English preferred among youth participants. These took place in meeting rooms, homes, office, or community locations such as library, gurdwara, or gallery. The purpose of the qualitative interviews was to gain depth into participants' relationships to different Sikh spaces, and their practices and insights or contestations in them. Questions explored participants' involvement in *nagar kirtan*, gurdwaras, other places of *sangat*, their practice of poetics, *seva*, or musical practices. Questions also engaged participants on their outlook with the local political movements, for instance the sovereignty and greater autonomy movements such as the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong that erupted in 2014, and Indigenous sovereignty movements of First Nations in Canada. Such questions explore modalities of diasporic relation and local solidarities, and how Sikhs relate to the locality of diverse struggles and social justices.

My style of qualitative interviews was conversational, explorative, and less positivist-oriented social scientific. The semi-structured interviews would draw initial questions from an interview guide but allowed for interviewees to speak to the topics meaningful for them. I would go with the flow of the interview, rather than manage it. In the field, I had to adapt to a different way of approaching knowledge and experiences particularly among women in Hong Kong, and first-generation elders. For instance, in one interview, as the interviewee and I got to a source of contest and conflict at the Hong Kong gurdwara, interviewee Ramandev Kaur<sup>10</sup>, narrated in Punjabi a long story of Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Guru, and his *bhakti* (meditation) practice. For the positivist, the story may be irrelevant, a tangent. But a decolonial feminist contemplation on it brings out how Ramandev is expressing herself on her terms, that is through oral tales, and connecting the dots of conflict or denominational tension to schools of interpretation of Sikh

---

<sup>10</sup> Pseudonyms rather than real names are being used for all interviewees of this study.



thought. Moreover, Ramandev elucidates an important aspect of expressing knowledge and relation in the form of oral tales, one that digresses written transcription and positivist measure. Her account suggests what Hesse-Biber (2007, 184) as worded as “subjugated knowledge of the diversity of women’s realities that often lie hidden and unarticulated”.

Along with conducting in-depth qualitative interviews, the research used varied techniques of interview analysis. At first, I had set about to do thematic analysis through the grouping and coding of interview accounts by common themes. Thematic analysis is helpful in establishing patterns and generalizations across many interviews. However, this approach proved limiting given the diverse vocabulary and complexity of language, as well as the varied contexts and social locations of different participants. Pressing questions emerged in participants narratives, and my analysis of them. What is it about politics in gurdwaras that have made people fed up? How do I get to the underlying layers of the meaning that participants subscribe to various places and their practices? How do I analyze the multi-dimensionality of Sikh place-making practices without reproducing and reifying the dichotomous categories prevalent in English and Canadian multiculturalism: religious versus cultural, or religion versus secular? How do I analyze interviewee accounts if participants use terms differently than me?

For instance, some Sikhs in Western countries have internalized Western categories: religion is used to denote Sikh and culture to denote Punjabi. In such conversations, activities such as *bhangra* (upbeat Punjabi dance), *giddha* (Punjabi folk dance by women), and drinking alcohol are deemed cultural by participants. Second or third-generation participants, particularly in Greater Vancouver, also self-consciously use spirituality as a counter to institutionalized religion. The distinction between spirituality and religion was missing for Sikh participants in Hong Kong – even among youth. In Greater Vancouver, the term spirit was used by participants to describe *nagar kirtan* and speak to a non-tangible quality that escape representation – textual or visual. Spirit is felt. Moreover, there is a collective aspect to spirit. It is not individual spirit. When analyzing interviews, I am operating within the semiotics of how participants use such terms, in addition to my own meanings. Furthermore, it is important to note that terms change meaning quickly within conversations or are rarely fixed in their usages. Participants use Sikh and Punjabi interchangeably at times. Other times, the terms are separated and presented as opposite dualistic forces. This is the legacy of colonialism. Perhaps, Homi Bhabha’s (1984)

notion of ‘ambivalence’ addresses the dynamic and uncertain nature of mimicry, which always escape a complete and defined scholarly grasp.

In attending to such complexities, thematic analysis is not enough. To better address these challenges, the study immersed deeper into language and the layers of meaning of the accounts themselves. The narrative, the storytelling, the *how* of what was being said, and the language of the participants’ accounts became significant. Narrative analysis, in this technique, offered perspectives on participants contexts. Consider, for instance, Nimritha Kaur’s account in her significance of *nagar kirtan* and the meaning she gives to this Sikh place-making practice. When Nimritha Kaur delineated Sikh history, she utilized two words – *tavarikh* (Persian-derived) and *ithihas* (Sanskrit-derived). Though such words are now everyday Punjabi, Farsi loanwords present in Sikh thought speak to the trace of the entanglements of *sikhi* with Persianate and will be elaborated in Chapter 2. Performative analysis was another element that emerged as I immersed myself into narrative form. Fateh Kaur – who brings a tear to her eyes as she elucidates the power of migrants – brings out an affective realm that gets evoked in storytelling. Sahej Singh – who ridicules the Sikh phrase (*raj karega ka Khalsa*; governance of Khalsa shall prevail) through a sarcastic tone and raises his shoulder and chest – physically mimics the politics he is criticizing. Sukhwant Kaur – who repeats her sentences and words multiple times – positions herself into the oral domain of Sikh knowledge by using repetition in storytelling. The narrative accounts of these participants are delineated in Chapter 5 Vaisakhi Nagar Kirtan.

How a geographer analyzes interviews have certain underlying assumptions about knowledge and content. Interviews are in fact “dynamic oral and aural performances with particular aims and backgrounds, which we as researchers frequently turn into visual and static texts” (Wiles, Rosenberg, and Kearns 2005, 90). Narrative analysis can bring out the nuances within accounts by deploying microanalysis and consideration of participants’ language and emotions, and is particularly useful for cultural geography and feminist inquiries. The interview analysis in this study formulated a hybrid technique. It used thematic analysis for initial groupings, and subsequently attended to nuances, deeper layers, and the *how* of participants languages through a structural and performative narrative analysis. As the cultural geographer Patricia L. Price has eloquently put it, “narrative braids a well-traveled crossroads between the

humanities and the social sciences” (2010, 203). Chapter 5 Vaisakhi Nagar Kirtan will, furthermore, interweave narrative analysis from interviews with Sikh and Punjabi concepts by deploying metaphors and symbolism deployed from Guru Nanak’s poem *Barah Mah*.

### ***community mapping***

In addition to interviews, community mapping as a research tool was used to engage youth and to explore cultural imaginaries. Amsden and VanWynsberg (2005) who have deployed community mapping and participatory action research highlight how young people who are often excluded from decision-making processes may find a voice in projects through community mapping. Community mapping makes use of visual storytelling such as maps and drawing to connect with communities on how they understand themselves, the local environment that is important to them, and their relations to the world around them. For Sikh youth who are often disenfranchised from the official committees and politics run by elders, community mapping offers a setting for youth to express their political agency and perspectives. As Amsden and VanWynsberghe (2005, 361) delineate, “maps are a tool for young people to share their stories; stories about themselves”.

In this regard, community mapping is a significant process for furthering dialogue and understanding of groups marginalized within collectives. In addition to a methodological tool, community maps can elucidate the cultural imaginary of a locale, a diaspora, a place, self or a collective. They destabilize the stasis of sealed boundaries of nations-states and scalar thought, which are dominant modern cartographic and positivist epistemic frames that will be critiqued in Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework. When done through decolonial and feminist principles, community maps can be harnessed for empowerment, activism, sovereignties, place-making, and social development. There are many kinds of community mapping. City planners and urban designers run charrette workshops with stakeholders in neighbourhoods as part of revitalization plans. Social development and environmental organizations may use community mapping to chart out local assets, challenges and needs. Educators engage participants and learners through creative map-making activities. Artists, curators, and facilitators can create workshops, shows, place-making creations and exhibitions using participant contributions. Community maps can be of the past, present, or the future. There are numerous approaches and practices on how to community map. One of my interviewees suggested that I map all the food stalls at Surrey’s

Vaisakhi nagar kirtan. Alternatively, one could map the floats of nagar kirtans. Mapping in such a way would likely bring out the many proliferating organizations of Sikhs in Canada. While experts such as urban planners, geographers, and agents of state or capitalist machinery usually carry out community mapping through the rubric of official cartography, community mapping can also defy elements of modern cartographies and topographies. McKittrick and Woods (2007, 4), for instance, have pointed to a tension – “between the mapped and the unknown” – which speaks to the unmeasurable reality of struggles and resistance, as in the context of transatlantic slavery. Furthering such geographies of struggle, Katherine McKittrick (2011, 949) elucidates and charts “fugitive and maroon maps, literacy maps, food-nourishment maps, family maps, music maps” as alternative cartographies through which a Black sense of place was forged.

The kinds of community maps that this dissertation engages with are the cultural imaginaries of a collective – a diaspora in its various locales, and those that go against the standards of modern cartographic and topographical practices. Of interest in these creative, topological and artistic maps is to enable possibilities to engage with Sikh and diasporic sense of place through the polyvalent qualities that characterize that relationship – be it a gurdwara or the city. These are elements that form an affective realm such as processes and paths, memories and stories, relations and networks, and dreams and aspirations. Community maps, in this way, offer a perspective to the psyche and itineraries of peoples, and become tools for those off the centre. Specifically, youth, women, and elderly can express the places, connections, and circulations meaningful for them, often political, which are missed out from the official map and from snapshots of social demographics.

In the field, I encountered stunning, and lively community maps. For instance, one children’s imaginative gurdwara at the Toronto Sikh Retreat 2017 envisioned a water slide situated behind Guru Granth Sahib and a rock-climbing wall. The rock-climbing wall depicted Gurmukhi numerals so that climbers can learn and practice their vernacular tongue. One imaginative gurdwara by a child at Sidak 2016 – a Sikh educational program run by Sikh Research Institute – imagined a ‘Rainbow Gurdwara’, which perhaps speaks to the child’s desire for racial justice, a place for all colours and shades. In Hong Kong, Lennon walls mostly made of post-it notes sparked organic city maps that filled the walls of underpasses, public places, transit places, and which characterize an imaginary for the city. Such maps re-evoke people’s footprints

on the city and are different from homogenizing abstractions of the urban state and capitalist machinery. The imaginative and creative work of artists, dwellers, and community educators in the field made me turn to the existing repository of community maps and what art can accomplish.

Chapter 6 City, thus, became an inventory of such community maps and artistic place-making, in various mediums, that speaks to processes of diaspora, *worlding from below*, and subaltern cosmopolitanisms. In Hong Kong, taking inspiration from Lennon Walls of 2014 Umbrella Movement, I facilitated youth-based community mapping sessions with two small groups, each group consisting of 3-4 youth Sikh participants of mixed genders from ages 12-18 at the local gurdwara. In Canada, I tapped into an existing inventory of community-based mapping practices. For Vancouver, the elusive community mapping through podcast and virtual walking tour by the Nameless Collective offers a rich exposition of Sikh, Asian, diasporic, and Indigenous entanglements at Coast Salish. For the Toronto region, I connected to the expressive arts workshop carried out by facilitators at Toronto Sikh Retreat, and engaged with an immersive art sensorium *IN5 Experium* that was launched in Brampton. While these maps and art are each of a different medium, I explore common themes of itineraries and the polyvalent dimensions that characterize people in relation to the places meaningful to them, be it a *gurdwara*, or imaginaries of a city.

I further complement mappings and tourings with poems as maps. Guru Nanak's *So Dar (That Door)*, *Barah Mah (Twelve Months)* and Ravidas's *Begampura (City Beyond Sorrow)* are such poetic maps. As poetic maps, they are characteristic of becoming an itinerary through each iteration. These poems open Chapters 4 to 6.

### ***archival sources***

Archival research was conducted to gather additional background information on Pacific gurdwaras, their historical emergence, and the tensions narrated in Sikh place-making between colonial, settler, and imperial state on the one hand, and racialized or religiously othered subjects on the other hand. It is important to recognize the limits of colonial archives that privilege certain narratives and forms of knowledge as highlighted by Spivak (1999), Arondekar (2009) and Linda Tuhiwai Smith ([1999] 2012). Spivak, for instance, has suggested that archival material is something that should be “read” – interpreted and deconstructed – rather than taken as factual

history. She further denotes archive as literature that conceals itself from this label. As she writes,

. . . European historiography had designated the archives as a repository of “facts,” and I proposed that should be “read,” . . . The records I read showed the soldiers and administrators of the East India Company constructing the object of representations that becomes a reality of India. This is “literature” in the general sense – the archives selectively preserving the changeover of the episteme – as its condition . . . (Spivak 1999, 203)

Anjali Arondekar (2009) has pointed out that even with critique and readings, there remains a strong scholarly hold on the archive as the location and source of knowledge and subject-making, particularly in South Asian postcolonial scholarship, and more recently in queer and sexuality studies. Another challenge in attending to archive is the appropriation of knowledge. Speaking to indigenous and Maori knowledge practices, Linda Tuhiwai Smith ([1999] 2012) nuances accounts of the archive by pointing out that what the West presents in its archive of colonial regimes is appropriated knowledge from multiple cultural systems, and re-presented as the imperial sorter and coder of knowledge. In this, she suggests using the archive as a metaphor to “convey the process in which the West drew upon a vast history of itself and on multiple traditions of knowledge incorporating cultural views of reality, time and space” (Smith [1999] 2012, 61).

My interest in archival sources is to attend to what and who is made visible, how the language of othering forms and varies, and what and who is rendered silent and nameless in the geographies of power and resistance. A range of digitized archival material was consulted, mostly online: historical media sources, institutional archives, and community-generated material. For historical media sources, *Hong Kong Telegraph* and *British Colonist* offered accounts in the making of the Khalsa Diwan gurdwaras and historic nagar kirtans, and which are provided in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. Moreover, language of othering (e.g. ‘Moors’, ‘Hindoos’) and that of kinship (e.g. *taike*) is delineated in Chapter 3. Institutional archives include *Komagata Maru: Continuing the Journey*, which is a digital archive hosted by Simon Fraser University Library, and archives at Vancouver Public Library. Community-generated material include the work of *Brown Canada* led by Council of Asians Serving South Asians in Toronto, and the Nameless Collective, which is based in Vancouver. Given the growth of *Komagata Maru* literature as delineated earlier, ample scholarly and community work have documented archival

sources in Canada. In this light, I shifted my focus away from the institutional archive itself and towards a narrative approach of emergent works in conversation with archives. The Nameless Collective has produced walking tours of Vancouver, a virtual tour of *Komagata Maru*, and a podcast. In their work, which will be analyzed in Chapter 6, the Nameless Collective creatively engages the archive, place-making, and community mapping.

### **Field and Inventory: Reflections**

Fieldwork was the focus from 2016 to 2018. In fall 2016, I carried out work in Hong Kong. In winter 2017, I did field research in Greater Toronto. In summer 2017, I visited Coast Salish lands. In April 2018, I returned to Vancouver to attend to the Vancouver and Surrey Vaisakhi nagar kirtans. In Hong Kong and Coast Salish, I was hosted by my immediate family and extended family respectively. At Coast Salish, I stayed in East Vancouver with my maternal aunt from where I could get to the places of the city, for instance the historic Khalsa Diwan Society gurdwara on Ross Street (now named Khalsa Diwan Road), the library at University of British Columbia, Guru Nanak's Free Kitchen on East Hastings and Main Street intersection, and the Komagata Maru memorial monument at Harbour Green Park. In Surrey's Newton area, I stayed with another maternal aunt from where I could get to suburban places – for instance, Surrey Newton library, Guru Nanak Sikh Temple, and Dasmesh Darbar.

I lived deep under the skin of a Sikh way of life, engaging with Sikh poetics, reflecting on *hukamnamas*<sup>11</sup>, learning and practicing Gurmukhi script, getting involved with events and community initiatives, doing *seva* (service), eating *langar* (communal food), and going to places I would not normally go to. Mornings came with a newly found radiant energy as I would wake up early for meditation, and sometimes go for *amritvela* (pre-dawn) walks. In the evenings at Surrey, I would go for long walks at the Surrey Lake Park with *So Dar (That Door)* – an excerpt from this poem opens Chapter 4. After the walks, as I returned to the suburban houses in the evening, I could smell the fragrance of Punjabi cooking in the breeze of the valley. Being in public transit allowed me to share space, and rub shoulders with fellow Sikhs, and racialized co-diasporas, often gendered and classed. The buses in Surrey Newton area would often be packed by Sikh elders, youth, and mothers with young children.

---

<sup>11</sup> *Hukamnama* is a poetic selection that is selected by turning a page of Guru Granth Sahib at random and accepting the emerging poetic stanza through a reflection on it.

I actively engaged with organizations and community groups such as the Hong Kong Sikh Youth, Sikh Research Institute, and Toronto Sikh Retreat. Through the Sikh Research Institute, I participated in a two-week-long live-in program called Sidak which I attended in the summer in 2016 and 2017 at Mission, British Columbia. These programs enabled me to ground my Sikh practice, live and reflect with embodied knowledge, and further my own Sikh understanding and perspectives of world, relation, humanity, nature, emotions, and praxis. Sikh Research Institute, for instance, made Guru Granth Sahib accessible to me which I did not previously have access to. During one rare unique experience, I read the *hukamnama* in Gurmukhi for the gathered *sangat* (collective) as well as hoisted Guru Granth Sahib on top of my head. Likewise, I participated in a four-day live-in program with Toronto Sikh Retreat in both 2017 and 2018, which took place at a ranch in Brantford, on the outskirts of Greater Toronto. Through these programs, which I attended primarily for my own personal growth rather than as field sites, I was able to develop a practice in Sikh poetics, which open my subsequent chapters, as well as gain deeper insight into Sikh concepts of space and epistemology that are discussed in this dissertation for the process of decentering Eurocentric methodologies.

The Sikh field felt very different from my Master's research field, which was based in Toronto on public transit in the city. The Sikh field and the translocal space of the doctoral research was a never-ending field. It had no bounds, and since it was multi-sited, I wandered through gurdwaras, *mandirs*, *langar halls*, transit, public space, Guru Granth Sahib, *gutkas* (small pocketbook of selected writings), residences, campgrounds, hallways, *langar* kitchens, homes, art galleries, congregations, streets, museums, parks, restaurants, offices, mountains, and squares. The sounds and smells filled the footwork and itineraries. Moreover, the field had no temporal boundaries; it was a constant, quotidian, cyclical, and seasonal journey. The year would fly and Vaisakh (month approximately starting mid-April) would bring out the *nagar kirtans* each year, and I would return to them once again. *Cha*-time (tea) filled the afternoon space. Sometimes the fieldwork started at 4 or 5am in the pre-dawn. *Degh*-making (blessed pudding), for example, commenced in the *amritvela* (pre-dawn) hours in the *langar* kitchen at Mission, British Columbia. In Hong Kong, at home, *amritvela* was filled by iterations of *Japji Sahib*, and in the evening of *Rehras Sahib* by my mother, my sister, or my *masi* (maternal aunt). Other times, the computers or televisions emitted the bliss of *gurbani* (Word, or poetry of the Gurus) and *kirtan* sounds from YouTube. Many times, I would wake up to my parents putting on a live



kirtan from Mumbai through YouTube. The audio teachings of Sikh philosopher Sant Singh Maskeen would sometimes play that would offer deep perspectives into Sikh cosmologies of space and the vernacular vocabulary of Sikh poetics. On occasions, the field would carry through past midnight particularly on special events such as Guru Nanak's *gurpurab* (anniversary celebration), New Year, Vaisakhi, Diwali, etc. At times, I made multiple trips on a single day to the same place. On New Years Eve in Toronto, for instance, I participated in *langar-making seva* at the gurdwara of Shiromani Sikh Society at Pape Avenue and then returned at night for kirtan and *divan* (poetry session). At times, it became challenging to distinguish when I was in the field for my PhD specific work and when I was in the field for myself, or my own personal growth.

The Sikh field was further made complex by the suburban fabric of Greater Vancouver and Greater Toronto as I had to get to the outskirts of the cities in order to access contemporary Sikh place-making practices in Canada. Unlike Hong Kong, where I lived and walked as a city-dweller for 18 years of my life and used public transit alongside most Sikhs in Hong Kong, travelling in the field in Canada was physically more challenging. I explored suburbs by using public transit, for instance, taking the commuter GO Bus and sometimes GO Train from Union Station in Toronto to Brampton. To reach gurdwaras in the suburbs, I would take buses and then walk from bus stops. At times, these were not pleasant trips. In one instance, leaving the Dixie gurdwara in Mississauga on foot, young men in cars yelled out slurs while I walked on the road and grass beside the gurdwara with no sidewalk. In Surrey, a few times cars with solo men would stop and shout in the typical entitled South Asian male tone in order to force my attention in broad daylight. As I would often wear *salwar kameez* (Punjabi dress wear set) on trips to gurdwaras, my mobility as a young brown-skinned woman was gazed upon by men whose mission was to scare me from my mobility.

At times, fellow Sikhs, families, acquaintances, and friends in my field travels offered car rides to get to hard to reach places such as Abbotsford or to return back home. Sometimes interviewees dropped me off at a skytrain station after an interview. At the Malton nagar kirtan, a fellow Sikh from Toronto Sikh Retreat along with her family kept me company and offered me a ride home after a long full day's walk. Other times, I refused car rides to intentionally ground my fieldwork in walking and public transit. Fieldwork in Greater Toronto was perhaps more challenging compared to Hong Kong and Coast Salish. Because I live in the inner city in

Toronto, adventuring into Mississauga, Malton, and Brampton to get to many Sikh sites, events, and interviewees took planning. Networking with people, carpooling, and socializing was a challenge, but ultimately such activities also enabled some cozier conversations and engagements with the people in the field. Road-trips or carpools brought out more intimate conversations, and at rare times, the collective reading of *Rehras Sahib (Essence of the Way)* in a car.

The adventures in the field and the people I met captivated my life. In one instance, a group of us embarked on a late-night adventure to the Nanaksar Gurdwara in Richmond. My initial confusion in the field was a sensory overwhelm and how was I going to categorise, order, and tabulate the myriad stories, histories, places, and denominations. Perhaps, the sensory overwhelm made known the limits of textualist-centred academics. The more I tried to make sense of the field, the more the field escaped me. At Coast Salish, for instance, the field itself was vast, with numerous gurdwaras and nagar kirtans often competing. People's narratives were convoluted, long, and complex. Ultimately, this made me turn towards the *how* of their narratives, focusing on the language of their accounts and their imaginaries, rather than just the content of what they were sharing, as discussed above in methods for qualitative interviews.

Despite the messiness of the field, the field was also full of life lessons. At the historic Gur Sikh Temple in Abbotsford, a visiting elder at the gurdwara approached me and started engaging in a conversation with me and the person I had arrived with. Upon hearing my tonal Punjabi, he wanted to know from where I was, to which I said Hong Kong. But he wanted more, where from Punjab was I from. I said Amritsar. But he wanted to know more. "Which village?", he continued to ask. I named my maternal village in a satisfactory way believing that I was defying his line of questioning and his paternal forms of categorization. What followed, however, completely caught me off guard. The elder's eyes opened wider with a radiant smile and beaming eyes. He was so fascinated by the village I had named and immediately began talking about Mewa Singh and treating me as a very important person, in the way an elder gives blessing to a younger person. It was at this point that I realized that the dots and patterns that I was looking for in the field, as a scholar, were not the connections and patterns that people made in their lived practice and their approaches to knowledge. Suddenly, I was connected to Mewa

Singh<sup>12</sup>, just from the notion of being from the village Lopoke. The roots of our villages had significant interest for people. The pressure of this doctoral research was now even immense: I had to walk in the footsteps of Mewa Singh and uphold the integrity that he held. This encounter made a pivotal mark in how I now approach epistemology and how I view the field. Instead of seeking to tame the field, and categorize things, people, labels and places, I started to embrace the field. I became more free flowing, like water, allowing the micro-stories and itineraries to speak to me and take me on my multi-sited ethnographic journey. In the process, Richa Nagar's framing of fieldwork rejuvenated in me a deep desire to reflect in a decolonial feminist praxis. She highlights, "Fieldwork can be a form of resistance to dominant ways of acquiring and codifying knowledge" (Nagar 1997, 203).

### **Itineraries of the Dissertation**

The dissertation is organized in two parts. In the first part, Chapter 2 and 3 will further the groundwork by providing theoretical directives, and the historical and geographical context of the study sites. Subsequently, Chapter 4 to Chapter 6 will analyze the empirical materials gained from the fieldwork. There is a spatial logic to their organization: temple, street, and city.

In Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework, I will provide the guiding anchors to the important terms and how I approach them: race, religion, space, culture, knowledge, and diaspora. In developing the framework, I will draw from three theoretical traditions. First, postcolonial theories address the ordering of race and religion and sets up the stage for an emerging post-secular school of thought that challenges elitist, textualist categorizations of world religion. Second, I will draw from decolonial, transnational feminisms to further complicate masculinist epistemologies and call attention to complex power relations. This will establish the groundwork for a poetics of inquiry. Third, post-structuralist thinking on culture and space will destabilize positivist notions of boundaries, place, and representations. Subsequently, the chapter will attend to Sikh conceptualizations of space and epistemology.

Following the theoretical underpinnings, Chapter 3 will take an applied approach to place writing. It will embark on a journey to re-write the geographies of the places to break

---

<sup>12</sup> Mewa Singh was an important figure of the early Sikh settlement at Coast Salish and a member of the revolutionary Ghadar Party. For more on Mewa Singh, see p.147-148 and p.189.

conventions of scale, state boundaries, and religious subjects. Chapter 3 Historical and Geographical Context will tour the three city-regions of the dissertation: Hong Kong, Greater Vancouver, and Greater Toronto. The inter-relationships, migratory tales, and circulations of people and ideas across the Pacific and the Canadian landscapes will be explored. Micro-stories from the street in the making of the cities – colonial and settler – will provide meaning to the expressions or counter-expressions from varied relations of power, diaspora, and belonging.

Chapter 4 Gurduara as Path-making will conceptualize *gurduara* as a conceptual notion distinct from gurdwara, by tracing the historical development of the Sikh spiritual and political centre. I will then follow the forming of Khalsa Diwan Societies across the Pacific, and other gurdwaras. Subsequently, interview analysis will bring out the contemporary expressions and sense of place of participants using and moving with *gurduara*. Such analysis will contribute to a discussion of *worlding from below*, community economy, and subaltern counterpublics.

The focus of Chapter 5 Vaisakhi Nagar Kirtan will be on the street musical processions, that is nagar kirtan of Sikhs. The chapter will ground itself in the poem, *Barah Mah (Twelve Months)* by Guru Nanak, to overcome binaries of religion and culture, and to offer a fluid analysis of movement-oriented sensuous geographies. *Barahmah* is a genre of Punjabi poetry that is characteristic of feminine and folk expressions. A historical background into the nagar kirtans from Amritsar to the Pacific Northwest will provide for the context of the translocal politics that characterized this practice. A three-fold analysis will be offered that is ingrained in notions of *darshan* (glimpse), *mantra* (aural) and *rasa* (taste). The chapter will put forth an argument that a horizontal spatiality of relation emerges in nagar kirtans as street-based poetics and *langar* are launched across the world and in Sikh diaspora space. Moreover, memory, *tavarikh/ithihas* (history), and belonging are emergent themes in participants' narratives.

Chapter 6 City: Artist Imaginaries and Community Mapping will turn to an inventory of creative maps, tours, and itineraries, which speak to a Sikh cultural and diasporic imaginary. In Chapter 6, I will develop the Sikh and the Ravidassia concept of *begampura* (City Beyond Sorrow) alongside the Lefebvrian notion of *right to the city* to imagine cities and their radical utopian potential. The chapter will further cultivate a narrative approach to cultural geography to speak of the untold histories, geographies, and biographies of the places – deploying “‘small stories’ that emphasize mundane events and everyday lives” (Price 2010, 206).

In the final, Chapter 7 Concluding Discussion, I will bring back the analysis of the field to synthesize discussion with academic literature and concepts. The conclusion will offer the possibility of subaltern cosmopolitanism through the notions of (i) subaltern cosmopolitical space (ii) subaltern knowledge practices (iii) sensuous itineraries and (iv) entanglement of co-diasporas. Moreover, the concluding discussion will attend to how my focus has shifted from the *what* of research, to the *how* of storytelling.

## Chapter 2 - Theoretical Framework

Sound is *vismad*, knowledge is *vismad*.<sup>13</sup>

Life, *vismad*, species, *vismad*.

Beauty in all colours is *vismad*,  
wanderers in their naked are *vismad*.

Wind, Water, Fire are *vismad*.

Earth, creation, story is *vismad*.

. . . .

~ Guru Nanak ~

*Asa Ki Var* | *Song of Hope* | Guru Granth Sahib 463-464  
(transcreation mine)

### Languaging: Reflections on Writing and Positionality

Drawing on the work of Frantz Fanon, and speaking in the context of colonial Hong Kong, Rey Chow (2014) explores at length the transformation of language within colonialism and postcolonialisms in *Not Like A Native Speaker*. Chow brings attention to ‘biosemiotics’, that is “the way language possession is translated into and receives its value as skin colour” (2014, 3). In this regard, she suggests that processes of othering have in their foundation both visual and auditory tones through a process that involves “being racialized by language and languaged by race” (Chow 2014, 9). Furthermore, the grammars of racialization make its way through the many names of otherness thrown at a colonized subject. In that, Chow highlights Fanon’s work on racialization as importantly “an experience of language” (2014, 7). For the Cantonese-toned school child in Hong Kong, Chow brings out the complexities of alienation faced by the pupil who must learn written Chinese grammar that conforms to Putonghua, which is distinct from their native tongue, that is Cantonese aural and vernacular tones. On top of that, colonial English imposed its own grammars and merits. Chow’s contributions on postcolonialism and language bring to perspective how aural tones and the plurality of sound have come to be reduced to a textualist representation by a process of monolingualization, in “which writing and sound . . . are made to correspond as though they were a real unity, as though they were one” (2014, 46).

Further, the act of writing, translating, and producing knowledge is implicated in discursive power struggles – gendered, racialized, and othered – in all its tones. Writing and

---

<sup>13</sup> *Vismad* means wonder-struck, awe-struck.

theorizing is seen as a masculinist objective to which women and particularly women of colour are faced with a polyvalent bind. As Trinh T. Minh-ha famously reflected in her poetic writing practice in *Women Native Other*, non-white women are faced with the pressure to “choose from among three conflicting identities. Writer of color? Women writer? Or woman of color? Which comes first? Where does she place her loyalties?” (Trinh 1989, 6). *As a writer of colour alone, I am navigating multiple figurations of colour - between Sikh, Punjabi, Hongkonger, who was born and raised in colonial Hong Kong, and is now living on land that is not mine. Some would be quick to say Sikh is my religious identity, Punjabi my ethnicity or cultural identity, South Asian my group or racial identity, and Hong Kong simply a place I lived in. They would also be very quick to add India to my nationality even as I don't self-identify as such. However, all these labels are unstable and gain their traction through discourse and narratives, and through contextual histories of interaction and cultural flows.*

*Like Rey Chow, I was schooled in what she calls a “genuinely classical colonial education”, one of a colony-metropole relationship (Chow 1998, 161). I learnt English and French in an all-girls Catholic convent (public) secondary school in colonial Hong Kong. However, unlike Chow, I did not learn Cantonese in school, and had to pick it up in limited usage from the street, the market, Cantonese movies, and friends. In this sense, I am a project of the Anglicists – the camp that promoted English by which to govern colonial subjects in the British Empire.<sup>14</sup> I entered school mandated to learn a colonial language different from my mother tongue, and different from the local language. This also meant my oral Punjabi (mother tongue) and limited oral Cantonese, are unhinged by the forces of grammarians and written literacy. My Punjabi, though originating from regions close to Amritsar, takes on its own rustic rural-urban flavour (from rural regions of Punjab mixing with the city life in Hong Kong), and rugged with Cantonese undertones emerging from my Daddy's polyglot trade mix. The production is a strange blend of tonal Punjabi that when it lands in the ears of Punjabis in Canada produces questions of origin. My oral Hindi-Urdu, acquired from social life, market,*

---

<sup>14</sup> Richard King (1999, 87-89) and Mandair (2009, 57; *ibid* 65) have delineated that British colonialism produced two camps by which to govern the colonized subject in the subcontinent: the Orientalists and the Anglicists. Orientalists favoured the learning and modernizing of native languages, religion, and culture. On the other hand, Anglicists, such as Thomas Macaulay, called for an exclusive English education and pushed for a complete European and Christian civilizing mission upon the natives.

songs, and most significantly Indian cinema divests from Sanskritized Hindi and Persianized Urdu.

*It was through language that I first realized what becoming diasporic meant. When my mummy would bring me to visit my maternal village in Punjab, we – my siblings and I and local children – were all playing and being kids. Then one day, I was going around saying Kwai, Kwai, Kwai. Except they could not understand me. And my first instinct was: “What’s wrong with them? Why won’t these kids in Punjab understand”. It was later I realized that it wasn’t their comprehension or mastery of language that was wrong. It was mine. Kwai was a Cantonese word, not Punjabi. And I didn’t even know it was a Cantonese word. And that wasn’t it: Lapsap (rubbish). Syut qwai (refrigerator). Cho fan (fried rice). We didn’t have Punjabi words for these. And so we spoke Punjabi at home in Hong Kong, with Cantonese vocabulary.*

*The simultaneous literacy and illiteracy in my life has a powerful impact on my academic discourse and position. First, because I grew up practicing Punjabi and (less frequently) Hindi-Urdu from outside the domain of its literacy and grammar, I did not associate (or codify) the language with its script,<sup>15</sup> a norm which has come to be dominant since Partition.<sup>16</sup> Second, the affective realm of my thought process is not locatable within a single representable language. The language(s) of self is not the language of this dissertation. What I write here, then, is substitute. Third, the language I write in, English, and my engagement with French and Francophone theorists, yields questions of power, colonialism, and consciousness of immense proportions. My English is rooted in colonialism at its source. I am, by definition, the project of the Anglicists and colonialists, even though I have turned against them and their postcolonial variants.*

---

<sup>15</sup> Christopher King (1994), in *One Language, Two Scripts*, traces the transformation of Hindi-Urdu starting in the early 19th century that at the time used both scripts Devanagari and Nastaliq scripts. Through elite nationalisms, an organic Hindi-Urdu language – with two scripts and diverse strands used by both Hindus and Muslims – came to be divided into insular categories and distinctively codified with religious identity and script. The new code was: Urdu = Nastaliq script = Muslims, while Hindi = Devanagri script = Hindus. For Punjabi language, which also used multiple scripts – Gurmukhi and Shahmukhi (based in Nastaliq) – a similar process occurred. The new code was: Punjabi = Gurmukhi script = Sikhs (Mir 2010; Mandair 2009). The transformation of Punjabi language and for Sikhs is further discussed in this Chapter 2.

<sup>16</sup> Referring to the 1947 Partition of Punjab with the eastern portion coming under India and the western portion under Pakistan.



In this chapter, I engage with a theorization of race, religion, language, culture, space, and power. Consequently, the chapter seeks openings for imagining a poetics of resistance and feminist epistemologies. I draw from three overarching schools of thought: i) postcolonial theories on race and religion, (ii) decolonial and transnational feminisms on power and praxis, and (iii) poststructuralist geographies on culture and space – in aiding an understanding of racialization, religious othering, and Sikh diaspora. Moreover, I complement the theories with (iv) Sikh epistemologies, that overlap with a feminist praxis. In various ways, this dissertation is involved in its own negotiation of power as I engage with my spiritual practice passed down to me by my mother through oral storytelling.

### **Postcolonial Theories on Race and Religion**

While critical lens towards race and racialization have increasingly taken shape in scholarly literature stemming from postcolonial theorization, religion in geography is still taken for granted. When geographers and social scientists have taken on a critical look into religion, religious practices, faith-based communities, and religious subjects, academic exercises have rarely gone beyond an outline of the heterogeneity of religious matter. The work of Sylvia Wynter offers key theoretical insights to how religion and race discourse overlapped at its source – namely the making of ‘Man’ and a racial hierarchy that reproduces itself through homogenous ways of reading and representing space. Edward Said’s theory of *Orientalism* establishes a foundational perspective on the cultural construction of worlds, mysticism, and racialized religions. I further expand on postcolonial theories as they relate to *sikhi* by using Arvind-Pal S. Mandair’s work who draws on Said’s *Orientalism* and Derridean deconstruction of religion. An expansive engagement with ‘religion’ and ‘secular’, moreover, provides a critical lens to understanding and critiquing multicultural narratives, which have reified binaries alongside a commercialization of place-making practices in Canada.

### ***ordering race and religion: from Man1 to Man2***

The colonial order denied humanness to entire populations based on skin colour, physical attributes, culture, gender, and religious practices. In that, a racial spatial epistemic order was made. The founding of human sciences and the basis of the figure of ‘Man’ in human biology was tied up to a categorization of who is proper ‘Man’ and who is less human. Frantz Fanon and

Sylvia Wynter, among many theorists have spoken not only of race, space, and power, but also to the kinds of openings for possible resistance and to shifting to paths for a humanity without a hierarchy. Frantz Fanon best theorizes on the racial order of things. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, he has outlined that colonialism is rooted in its psychological and psychic power between whiteness and Black skin colour. In untangling the deep layers of emotional, linguistic, psychic impact of colonialism, Fanon ([1952] 2008) argues that a struggle for freedom, for decolonization, is not just a struggle for territorial sovereignty, but of an embodied emancipation to envision a new kind of species and humanity.

In the making of ‘Man’ as a biological secular human being, race was established. Wynter (2003) traces two figures of ‘Man’: ‘Man1’ of pre-Renaissance and ‘Man2’ of the Renaissance-Enlightenment-Humanists. Man1 is of physical sciences. Man2 is of biological sciences. The code of “Redeemed Spirit/Fallen Flesh” in Man1 took on a new shape in the form of race and subjugated human others in Man2. Speaking to the Copernican leap in astronomy and the transformation that came with the science that the Earth moves, that it is not the static centre of the universe, Wynter suggests that the medieval Latin-Christian-stratified social and cosmological order had to be mutated, and re-invented. It is in this Copernican’s new astronomy that the figure of Man re-invented itself. As Wynter argues, it made possible the conceptual space for Darwinism and a new episteme – rooted in race – to form. That is, “a space of Otherness”, with lands to expand into and conquer (Wynter 2003, 279). The center, shifting to the sun, thus, led to a shift in the figure of Man, and to make possible His expansion into such othered Earth’s lands. In this epistemic shift, Man was no longer the Adamic fallen flesh of the divine. Instead, the Renaissance humanist mutation meant an order of knowledge based on natural biological sciences, and the otherness to Christian religion transmuted into an otherness of race. Man2 was “secular substitute monohumanist religion of Darwin’s neo-Malthusian biocosmogony” (Wynter and McKittrick 2015, 37). That is, it became a secular substitute but a religion, nonetheless, made in the image of its own monotheistic code of “sacred discourses (Judaism, Islamism, Christianity, for example)” (Wynter and McKittrick 2015, 37).

This re-invented master code, moreover, was projected as a “hierarchy of a graduated table, or Chain of all forms of sentient life, from those classified as the lowest to those as the highest” (Wynter 2003, 306). The colonial and postcolonial spatial order did not emerge out of

issues solely of an economic mode of production, “but rather of the ongoing production and reproduction of this answer — that is, our present biocentric ethnoclass genre of the human . . .” (Wynter 2003, 317). In this ongoing production, new modes of being and subjectivity is projected onto the entire world’s humanity. Man2, that is the figure of secular liberal monohumanist, has anchored colonial and capitalist technologies of whiteness by which to govern, and simultaneously disguises Man2’s own ethno, religious, and bourgeois class in the form of a monohumanist. As Wynter and McKittrick (2015, 19) elaborate,

They [technologies of race and skin colour] reflect, instead, the emergence of a global free-market driven and consumer-oriented mimetic desire that is anchored to a single genre-specific Western European bourgeois model of being that is, itself, projected onto, and incorporates, all those who belong to the now globally economically Westernized middle classes; their working classes; and their criminalized and jobless underclasses.

In such a globalizing and capitalist process of making worlds, “All the peoples of the world, whatever their religions / cultures, are drawn into the homogenizing global structures that are based on the-model-of-a-natural-organism-world-systemic order” (Wynter and McKittrick 2015, 21). Europe’s making of a racial, secular and imperialistic order sets up the European figure of Man1 (religious man situated in the science of physics and astronomy as the fallen flesh of God) to mutate to Man2 (secular man situated in biological sciences and as an evolved human being). Wynter’s theorizing of the sciences and the new racial episteme provides important perspectives on the foundational flaw of the secularization thesis that is of relevance to this dissertation topic. It reveals the so-called secular Man’s own ethno, religious class.

Of further relevance to the discussion of how secularity was minted is Edward Said’s argument on the making of worlds and others. Said’s *Orientalism* launched a striking attack at the perpetual construction and re-production of the ‘Orient’ as otherness upon which Europe has launched its own modern civilizing nobility. To begin with, following Said, it is important to note that there is no ontological or geographical stability to these places the ‘Orient’, the ‘Occident’, the ‘West’ and that though there is a corresponding reality, these locales, regions, and sectors are ‘Man’-made. Central to Said’s conceptualization of orientalism is that it is much more than an academic discipline. It is a discourse, one that is practiced by academic Orientalists, novelists, writers and political theorists; and corporations, think-tanks, militaries. Second, orientalism was more than just a discourse of power as it was ingrained in imperialistic

and hegemonic desires: “The relationship between Occident and Orient, is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony” (Said 1979, 5).

Edward Said’s critiques laid a foundational hallmark in postcolonial studies for problematizing images and literary representations of ‘others’ – often religious others – and challenging their stereotypical and essentializing qualities. Edward Said notes that modern orientalism emerged with the secularization of Europe in the 18th century and through an exercise of othering which erupted secular-religious and rational-mystical binaries. Here, the distinct shape of modern orientalism was made possible through four elements of “expansion, historical confrontation, sympathy and classification” (Said 1979, 120). In terms of expansion, Oriental interest expanded eastwards to study India, China, Japan, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Sanskrit. With this expansion, there was a historical and intellectual confrontation between European worldviews with that of non-European and non-Judeo-Christian practices and philosophies. Furthermore, Said elucidates that orientalism is about Europe more than the ‘Orient’ as the very making of secular Europe, and secular ‘Man’ was dependent upon making and discovering other religions and other worlds. “[H]aving transported the Orient into modernity, the Orientalist could celebrate his method, and his position, as that of a secular creator, a man who made new worlds as God had once made the old” (Said 1979, 121).

To sum up, Europe constructed worlds through its master code by forming an Occidental ideology of secular Man and its others, and likewise, creating different worlds of others. This was carried out by producing a master hierarchy of race (Wynter 2003), and timeless world religions of the Orient (Said 1979). Scholars influenced by Said’s treatise on *Orientalism* have expanded on these categorizations, sorting, and re-packaging of pluralistic, yet overlapping spiritual practices into discrete religions comparable to Western ideas of theology and progress. In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Spivak (1999) deconstructs Hegel’s reading of *Bhagavad Gita* (a prominent Hindu text) and the respective reactionary responses by Indian nationalists and elites to re-package *Gita* on the basis of Hegel’s progression of time and spirit.

[T]he slow epistemic seduction of the culture of imperialism will produce modifications of the *Gītā* that argue for its world historical role in a spirit at least generically though not substantively “Hegelian”. And these will come from Indian “nationalists”. (Spivak 1999, 49)

In the interactions between the Orientalists and the native intellectual community, interpretations of Hindu religions became premised on specific ancient texts written in Vedic Sanskrit. *Vedas* and *Upanishads* became the origins of the religion and *Bhagavad Gita* came to be parallels as the bible of Hindus (King 1999; Mandair 2009; Spivak 1999). In *Orientalism and Religion*, Richard King (1999) draws on Foucauldian notions of dispersed power to argue that Eastern religions emerged out of an interaction and dialogical relationship between colonial elites and native elites, rather than by a singular unilateral power relationship between the ‘Orient’ and ‘Occident’. For Western intellectuals, the interest in the texts *Upanishads* and *Gita* enabled abstraction, interiorization of religious practices, and de-ritualization that was needed in the making of secular Europe. Orientalist perceptions of Sikhism and Guru Granth Sahib also took shape starting with Ernest Trumpp, a German Indologist, who was commissioned by British to provide an official translation of the Sikh scripture. His English translation was released in 1877 and he offered a low ranking and commentary of Sikhism; subsequently, efforts to model and translate Sikhism through the logics of the Orientalists emerged (Mandair 2009, 176). These efforts consisted of privileging a rigid textualist approach (as opposed to performance of poetry), an ontotheological underpinning under the framework of religion and God, and a privileging of the notion of transcendence over immanence (Mandair 2009).

The textualist religious conversion in the East – that is, the privileging of coherent written religious texts over tribal animism, embodied practices, and folk spiritualities – brought out the broader literary bias and individualization of reading during Reformation and Enlightenment (King 1999, 62). Print capitalism enabled religious teachings and readings to retreat to a private interior space and a textualist approach to religion – centered on written word rather than oral storytelling and practices – came to the foreground (King 1999, 65). Moreover, while literacy was previously based on notions of multilingualism without concrete ideas of insider and outsider languages, modern national imaginings fostered notions of foreign languages and native tongues (Sakai 1999) that later became the basis for ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson 1983). Anderson’s imagined communities argues on the role of print capitalism in enabling a transformed secular and comparative field where nations imagined themselves through languages of the state, different from the privileged scripts of “truth-language of Church Latin, Qur’anic Arabic, and Examination Chinese” (1983, 14). In the British colonization of Punjab and the subcontinent, however, the way the colonial technologies played out ascribed a singular script

onto a singular distinct language further mapped onto a category of a distinct world religion (Mandair 2009; Mir 2010). In understanding the transformation into world religions, Trinh T. Minh-ha's (1989, 53) bold statement resonates powerfully in how Europe minted religion, as she says: " 'Religion' institutionalized is a purely Western concept".

### ***subalterity, language, and translation***

In addition to the institutionalizing of religion, and a racial hierarchy upon which secular Man2 thrives, there is the discursive struggle of language. Speaking on Guru Granth Sahib, Balbinder Singh Bhogal (2007, 13) asks, "How is one to translate a multi-authored, musical and sung text, with tone, rhythm, colour and mood, into prose with a singular voice, without committing gross violence and oversimplification?"

Colonialist discourse has set up a challenging conundrum for real life and academic responses for translation, cultures, and subjectivity. On the one hand, expressions and representations of 'third-world' identities get caught up with a re-exertion of static, essential identities. On the other hand, a counter-response for change and difference still reinforces subordination to Europe's superior way of being. In this regard, Rey Chow conceptualizes a notion of 'coercive mimesis' that is critical of third-world postcolonial literature as she provocatively states: "Part of the goal of 'writing diaspora', is, thus, to *unlearn* that submission to one's ethnicity" (Chow 1993, 25, italics in original). The questions that emerge from postcolonial theories are important in how we conceptualize religious-based identities and practices: how to challenge such discursive figurations and power relations? Is the making of homogenous Eastern world religions – Hinduism, Sikhism, and Buddhism – a construction of Orientalists? What to make of third-world, racialized, and religious identities who now constantly speak back to Europe for also being legitimately human or for having legitimate theologies? And what of folk practices that do not qualify as religions? Scholars from Fanon and Wynter to Spivak and Bhabha have all written in different contexts on the challenge of the racialized, the subaltern, or the othered in speaking back to the hegemonic discourse in different ways. The conundrum is captured by Wynter and McKittrick: "It's all of us – the Western and mimetically Westernized middle classes – after we fell into the trap of modelling ourselves on the mimetic model of the Western bourgeoisie's liberal monohumanist Man2" (2015, 22).

In “On Mimicry and Man”, the literary theorist Homi Bhabha establishes a possible workaround to the conundrum. Bhabha theorizes on a sense of ambivalence and indeterminacy to mimicry which “must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference” (Bhabha 1984, 126). This ambivalence is perhaps expressed as “almost the same, but not quite” (1984, 127). Through mimicry, Bhabha suggests that the colonial subject gains a partial presence and perhaps the colonial subject can reverse the disciplinary surveillance gaze of the colonizer through the wearing of a camouflage. The “observer becomes the observed” (1984, 129). Mimicry repeats, and in this process of repeating, it mocks the power and the model. Yet, mimicry also presents another irony, which is that it seeks to present itself as authentic, or is always caught in speaking back to imperialistic discourse. This challenge of authenticity and representation is what anticolonial theories are faced with. For the Indian historian Dipesh Chakrabarty, he highlights: “‘Indian’ history, even in the most dedicated socialist or nationalist hands, remains a mimicry of a certain ‘modern’ subject of ‘European’ history and is bound to represent a sad figure of lack and failure” (Chakrabarty 2000, 40). Despite adopting Bhabha’s ambivalence of hybridity and mimesis in how anticolonial nationalisms have invented themselves, orientalist imaginations set up narratives in which the ‘Indian’ is always “a figure of lack” (2000, 32). In this vein, Chakrabarty suggests there is no longer an outside of Europe, only a decentering project that he refers to as ‘provincializing Europe’.

Postcolonial critiques emerging from subaltern studies school of thought have sought the histories of modernity beyond the frame of Marxist, nationalist or Hindu state-building to consider the figure of the subaltern. The Indian historian Ranajit Guha writes that Indian nationalism is presented under two forms of elitist historiographies, and that despite independence from colonial rule, these two historiographies “have survived the transfer of power and been assimilated to neo-colonialist and neo-nationalist forms of discourse in Britain and India respectively” (Guha 1988, 37). In the case of colonialist and neo-colonialist historiography, national consciousness of Indians is attributed to the colonialists and modernists. In the second historiography of nationalist and neo-nationalist, native elites are valorized as the ones who have raised the consciousness of its people through spiritual guidance. The people are represented as being under the leadership of the native elites, Congress Party, Gandhi, and without their own autonomous consciousness. Guha presents a third ‘un-historical historiography’ – that of the politics of the people and the subaltern – defined by Guha (1988) as non-elite masses and

working classes, often peasants. Erased from history, Guha argues that their politics go back to pre-colonial times. Moreover, their mobilization is distinct from the elites, in that they achieve it horizontally rather than vertically. Unlike the elite mobilization (legalistic, constitutional), the movements by the subalterns were often violent and spontaneous, characteristic of peasant uprisings and a form of resistance to the elite domination (Guha 1988, 40-41).

Since Spivak's (1988) path-breaking theoretical reflection that revolves around the question of "Can the subaltern speak?", the search for a figure of subaltern has divided scholars, partly because of her untranslatability, lack of identity, and heterogeneous difference. Spivak has alluded to the sense that the subaltern position is unattainable to scholars because scholars are always within hegemonic discourse and language. Moreover, Spivak, along with Rosalind O'Hanlon, criticize that the figure of subaltern, particularly the subaltern woman, cannot be placed within representations of an elite-subaltern binary where elites are dominant and subalterns exercise mass resistance and insurgencies. Instead, the subaltern may not be knowable or translatable and the "colonized subaltern *subject* is irretrievably heterogeneous" (Spivak 1988, 26, italics in original). O'Hanlon (1988) has suggested that rather than focusing on moments of peasant uprisings and revolt in the public political domains, it may be helpful to have a different kind of scholarly engagement into resistance, one that looks at the feminine rather than the masculine, and to consider the personal and the private aspects of resistance.

Spivak's oeuvre has tended towards deconstruction of academic writings and literary works to open aporetic spaces of difference and speaking. As a methodological and epistemological approach, deconstruction offers a way to read and expose the inherent bias and shifts within the production of knowledge without a nostalgic yearning to discovering or recovering some original recoverable reality, subject or subaltern agent. Subalternity is, as Spivak (2005, 476) clarifies, "a position without identity". So, how can we understand such positions? For Spivak, it is about "making unrecognisable resistance recognisable" (2005, 477). In her translation and reading of short stories – "Draupadi" and "Douloti the Bountiful" written by Mahasweta Devi – Spivak (1981; 1989) analyzed that gendered bodies are coded and exploited for capitalist economic production and nationalist social reproduction. There is an aspect of religious subalternity of tribal groups to the Hindu caste order: "No Indian, expatriate or otherwise, could bypass the issue of violence in the subcontinent in the name of religious



*identity*. But we must also keep our eye on the differences, where tribal animism does not even qualify as a religion” (Spivak 1990, 109, italics in original).

Alongside yet different from the subaltern studies school of thought, Rey Chow (1993; 2014), Talal Asad (1986), Trinh T Minh-ha (1989), Tejaswini Niranjana (1992) and Naoki Sakai (1997) have challenged the very problematic of translation, writing and interpretation in the representations of ‘Third Worlds’ and instead argued that languages, cultures, and religions are not transparent knowable entities but are read and re-imagined through colonial frames and concepts. Understanding the problematic of translation, thus, is central to understanding how discourses of religion are shaped, and how certain folk or spiritual practices are excluded from the domain of formal religion, while other heterogeneous cultural practices are reimagined and re-packaged as ‘religion’ to correspond to European notions of theological religions. Translation, then, is a site or technology of colonialism and sits within the context of asymmetrical relations between cultures, religions, races, and languages (Niranjana 1992; Asad 1986).

Moreover, it is important to recognize that othered cultures are not just being written and religious texts are not just being translated, but that diverse knowledges and places are being “imaged and re-imaged by colonial ways of seeing” (Niranjana 1992, 6). Thus, one needs to problematize the issue of translation as more than just an inter-lingual process. Rather, there is an entire problematic in representations of cultures and religions themselves, made to be discovered by Orientalists. Ethnography, geography, and anthropology are complicit in this technology of colonialism. Translators, cartographers, and ethnographers assume a transparency of the works, places, and cultures which they write, map, translate, or interpret. Positivism in human sciences have a central assumption that there is an *a priori* reality or origin source that exists externally, and upon which the ethnographer or researcher subsequently writes on. In this regard, representation re-presents what it considers as neutral, objective reality. Niranjana (1992) and Trinh (1989) have challenged such positivist approaches that seek primitive cultures as a state of nature, and instead, have emphasized that there is no primordial essence or origin. One can perhaps understand this theoretical underpinning as there being no outside of translation. As Niranjana (1992, 43) writes, “subaltern, too, exists only ‘in translation,’ always already cathected by colonial domination”. Similarly, Rey Chow emphasizes that there is an “untranslatability of the subaltern discourse to the imperialist discourse” (1993, 35).

Naoki Sakai's (1997) work further unravels complications with the problematic of translation and language and the assumption of transparency upon which religions and nations get imagined. Sakai differentiates between 'homolingual address' and 'heterolingual address'. The former, emerging with modern nationalism, assumes a closed unified language groups where translation acts as a transfer of equivalent value between one whole language to another.<sup>17</sup> Within homolingual address, there is an assumption of a representation of a translation that assumes knowledge and communication is unhindered and transparent. In the latter heterolingual address where there is a cohabitation of plural often oral languages, there is a need for constant repetition; translation is endless and "takes place at every listening or reading" (Sakai 1997, 8).

Where language comes into play in matters of religion, ideas of sacred spaces tend to parallel ideas of sacred language. In *Religion and the Spectre of the West*, Mandair (2009) engages in a postcolonial case study into Sikhism and uses the term 'mono-theo-lingualism' to challenge constructions of nationhood that replicate ideas of a sacred language. Drawing from the problematic of translation and Sakai's conceptualization of homolingual and heterolingual address, Mandair makes the argument that various co-religions in South Asia have sought to re-invent themselves as not just discrete theologies, but discrete religions on the bases of an imagined pure language and homolingual address. Coining the term 'mono-theo-lingualism', Mandair notes that languages and co-religions were often co-contaminated in precolonial India, but that colonialism and postcolonialism has set up a standard to imagine both linguistic and religious purity and singularity: Urdu for Muslims, Hindi for Hindus, and Punjabi for Sikhs. We can connect to Derrida's deconstructive ponderings of how singular pure notions of religion may be contributing to the rising tensions and conflicts: "**Religion?** *In the singular?* Perhaps, *may-be* behind the 'new wars of religion'" (Derrida [1998] 2002, 63, Derrida's emphasis).

---

<sup>17</sup> Of interest is Michel Foucault's archeology in *The Order of Things*, which traces epistemic shifts in how human sciences – linguistics, biology, and economics – took on their modern form. For Foucault, the classical episteme developed a system of categorization and taxonomy which looked for visible representation and transparency of knowledge. Within the domain of language, the classical episteme ordered languages by means of representing its general grammar – seeking words in its grammatical structures to connect between differential languages such as mapping a verb to verb relation that had a transparent connection to its corresponding action in the world. The modern episteme, subsequently, shifted to grammatical relationships where language now no longer represent words, objects, or actions in the world, but thought itself. Foucault, moreover, states that "the new positivity of the sciences of life, language, and economics is in correspondence with the founding of a transcendental philosophy" (Foucault [1966]1994, 244). Of further relevance is Derrida's ([1998] 2002, 50) neologism '*mondialatisation*', which was translated to English as 'globalatinization'.

### *post-secular*

The nascent post-secular turn in politics and postcolonial theories attempts to destabilize the potent secular/religious and public/private epistemic frame, upon which various nationalisms and states have modeled themselves. In Europe's making of religion in the Orient, 'secular' becomes the privileged narrative of the insider's modernity, while 'religion' becomes the origin story and birthplace. In this regard, concepts of secularity and religion were "minted through the interaction between metropole and colony" (Mandair 2009, 56). In the case of India, the mythical stories of kingdoms, folk tales, pluralistic faiths and philosophies, peasants, subalterns, and outcasts are all appropriated into a nationalist project and repackaged into a "secular, linear calendar that the writing of 'history' must follow" (Chakraborty 2000, 41). It is, thus, important to view religion and secular as not separate spheres belonging to private and public domains respectively, but always intertwined to make possible secularism and nation-building as a political doctrine.

Political and social theorist Ashis Nandy (1988) has presented the argument that the category of religion in South Asia was produced and hegemonized through Western constructs of religion and secularism. He makes a distinction between 'religion-as-faith' and 'religion-as-ideology' (Nandy 1988, 178-180). Religion-as-faith is a matter of a way of life, everyday, and often pluralistic in its relation with others in South Asia promoting tolerance and diversity. On the other hand, religion-as-ideology depicts a modern formation through ideologies of singularity, purity, and rigid texts, and which has generated religious nationalism. Nandy, however, is quick to point out that religious ideology and nationalism is not inherent to religion itself but derived from the modern statecraft of secularism. Moreover, it takes on its adherence from the middle classes. The irony, which Nandy points out, is that the secular sphere is not what holds true characteristics of tolerance, which religion as way of life better encompasses. As he puts it, "Tolerance [is] a pre-secular tradition" (Nandy 1988, 188). Moreover, he calls for modern states to "learn something about religious tolerance from everyday Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, and Sikhism" (Nandy 1988, 189) rather than the other way around.

Likewise, in *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, Talal Asad (2003) takes aim at the constructions of the 'secular' within the context of Europe – who is included, who is excluded as a minority, and who is framed as an outsider. He presents a critique

of the European narrative of ‘authentic’ insiders and immigrant outsiders under which a discourse of civilized Europe locates itself. Moreover, Asad makes the argument that minority groups cannot be given a fair chance of representation and participation when a nation-state models its image around its majority group. Instead, he suggests that for minority groups such as Muslims to have a genuine form of representation and participation, there needs to be a political community of multiple minorities rather than a dominant group to which minorities are subjugated towards (Asad 2003, 178). He further seeks to bridge the political gap between Christians and Muslims by highlighting their previously co-existing relations in Europe. In this, Asad traces a different secular imagination of multiple embodied practices that can exist and have existed outside of liberal secular democracies: “Unlike the modern, secular world of nation-states, medieval Christendom and Islam recognized a multiplicity of overlapping bonds and identities. People were not always expected to subject themselves to one sovereign authority, nor were they themselves sovereign moral subjects” (Asad 2003, 179).

Post-secular theories are still a fuzzy and developing field of thought. Part of the challenge in dismantling the secular and religion binary usually results in the framing of post-secularism as the resurgence of religion in the public sphere and public spaces. Such an approach of post-secular is put forth by Habermas (2008) who has framed post-secular as the secular tolerance of religious belief and influence. Moreover, Habermas has characterized Europe and other Western states as a ‘post-secular society’ in its dealing with the considerable resurgence and influence of religious organizations in the public sphere. However, the geographer Lily Kong cautions against such a framing. As she emphasizes, “we need to be careful not to interpret the role of religion as a universally (re-)emergent force, because in some places these have been abiding rather than new, and the emphasis should be on continuities rather than discontinuities” (Kong 2010, 769). My approach on post-secular follows from Asad rather than Habermas. I am interested not in the failure of secularization thesis but that the secular was never secular to begin with. Post-secular theories unsettles the secular and religion dichotomous category, as well as expose how Europe minted religion and race to make its figure of secular Man. Theoretical perspectives from post-secular theories have brought about a nascent field of post-secular geographies of religion where new sets of questions, themes and approaches on the intersections of geography, religion, politics, and culture. Such considerations consist of: frameworks and models of multiculturalism and citizen participation (Asad 2003; Taylor 2007), the engagement

and regulation of religious practices in local public spaces (Gökarıksel 2009), the study of sacred places beyond physical religious buildings (Tse 2014), and processes of cultural hybridization and new religious ethnoscaapes of a transnational public sphere (Appadurai 1996).

The turn to post-secular can further unsettle the multiculturalism upon which the secularization thesis often bases itself on. In the Canadian project, the multicultural state apparatus sets up a top-down formality, in which state and capitalist-centered multiculturalism functions to divide, faction, and trap political agents of change into culturalist essentialist categories (Bannerji 2000). Claims of indigenous sovereignties, Quebec separatism, and immigrant labourers' class unrest are removed from the spotlight by the state-initiated apparatus. When Canada is presented as a state where all can exist, and diversity is tolerated, the state apparatus in turn downplays any politicization of difference. Bannerji explains this state agenda as: "Ethnic or racialized cultural community, not political community organized on the basis of class, gender and racialization, is what the state is willing to acknowledge in their case" (Bannerji 2000, 47). For this study, a post-secular approach can tie political spheres within religion as way of life, and mobilize ethical models of political change that are rooted in ways of life. George Dei unravels the deep intertwine of such political and spiritual awakenings:

[T]he healing pedagogic moment must evoke the power and centrality of spirituality and spiritual knowings in an anti-oppression practice. Politics must be pursued as a series of spiritual awakenings. Politics and civic engagement and transgression begin with self-knowledge, of one's personhood, and the connection between the inner and outer environments. Politics is grounded in a spiritual consciousness of the self. (Dei 2008, 67)

The next section discusses the work of feminist thinkers to further analyze the complexities of power and racialization in world-making, and subsequently open a poetics of resistance grounded in spirituality.

## **Decolonial and Transnational Feminisms**

Feminist theories emerging out of postcolonialism lay the groundwork in a theorization of power, feminism, racism, and the production of space. Of key significance is a call to recognition of asymmetries in gendered discourses that shape transnational landscapes. Notably, transnational feminists introduced a geographical context by which we understand and write about women and social inequities. In *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic*

*Futures*, M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1997) outline the tenets of what transnational means for feminism. First, it is to eye geographical context. Second, it is to critically analyze the relationship between “white, Eurocentric, masculinist, heterosexist regime” (Alexander and Mohanty 1997, xix) and those outside of such a regime. Finally, it is to embed an anti-capitalist and anti-racist critique into feminism in order to consider the economic and political processes by which international institutions operate. In *Feminism Without Borders*, Mohanty (2003, 9) critiques the Western eyes through which liberal feminism asserted itself and calls for a “decolonizing feminism” and “demystifying capitalism” roadmap. Mohanty’s groundwork challenges the prevailing feminisms of its time to pay attention to the processes of race, class, nation, among others, underpinning that gender and race are inseparable and that such an analytic “foreground a relationship (and often a hierarchy) between races and genders” (Mohanty 2003, 55). Another powerful challenge to liberal feminism comes from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who traces the figure of the native informant under postcolonialism. Spivak (1999, 6) reveals and deconstructs that the “typecase of the foreclosed native informant today is the poorest *woman* of the South” (emphasis in original). Spivak’s seminal work on subalternity has challenged both the Eurocentrism and the prevailing liberal feminist international ideals in their fantasy and ideological constructions. She critiques these fantasies as “[w]hite men are saving brown women from brown men” and “[t]he women wanted to die” (1999, 287). Transnational feminists, thus, destabilize the hegemonic idioms of Western feminism by bringing attention to uneven power relations and discourse. These theoretical considerations shed perspective on the lens (overdetermined by sight) by which scholars see racialized women and religiously othered women. A framework guided by transnational feminist principles, thus, provide insights on how these gendered narratives are spatialized such as in public-private dichotomy, and moreover reified in scholarly work. Likewise, the scholarly over-reliance on the formally religious underwrites racialized women’s actual involvement and resistance in the sacred and spiritual realms as Jacqui Alexander (2005) has elucidated.

Further to the interplay of race and gender across transnational discourses and institutions, transnational feminists aid an account of how social and economic inequities were worsened or transformed. As Mohanty (2003, 62) points out, “colonial rule did not operate purely at the level of discourse”. In addition to discursive power constellations, prevailing social

inequities took on a new masquerading form through colonial and neocolonial technologies. Mohanty elaborates that alongside “the construction of hegemonic masculinities as a form of state rule, the colonial state also transformed existing patriarchies and caste/class hierarchies” (Mohanty 2003, 61). In the Sikh and Punjabi context, the social engineering of religious boundaries and the impact of Partition had a devastating gendered impact on women. Gendered relations and formal involvement in gurdwaras were transformed as Sikh women (and Muslim *rababi* players) were not allowed to perform kirtan in Darbar Sahib in Amritsar. The capitalist relationship to land and economic transactions today further complicate the shocking sex ratio in Punjab.

Transnational feminist challenges to discursive and social inequities on the legacies of colonialism are, thus, important in illuminating the racial, spatial, and classed bias in gender analysis. However, these considerations are not limited to relations between the North and the South. Intersectional and Black feminists have similarly mobilized a race and class critique in the work of feminist movement in the North. Black feminists have grounded the inseparability of race from feminism, advocating for an analytical framework of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989), which considers the dynamics of gendered racialization in institutions, particularly legal structures within United States, Canada, and Great Britain. In addition to theorizing how social stratification and power are interwoven, the work of Black intersectional feminists such as Audre Lorde (1984), bell hooks (1984), and Patricia Hill Collins ([1990] 2000) point to an everyday resistance by which they challenge not only systematic oppression and formal structures but also validate the everyday fights of ordinary women of colour and Black women. In *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins gives an important platform to the resistance and activism from the everyday lives of people in their struggle for group survival. “Survival is a form of resistance” ([1990] 2000, 216). Collins offers nuances and strategic complexities by highlighting that identity politics offer a necessity for survival. She says, “Historically African-American’s resistance to racial and class oppression could not have occurred without an accompanying struggle for group survival” (Collins [1990] 2000, 217). In this, the theorist points out that political activism and social science research privilege “public, official, visible political activity” while the less official and invisible spheres of social life are not seen as equally important for political change (Collins [1990] 2000, 217). Labour union and political parties are often

reflective of this with a domination by white males. Collins, thus, advocates for a different understanding of activism, emphasizing that a mother who fights against harmful school policies but unable to express a political feminist ideology is just as much an activist. In this regard, the contributions many Black women (such as Sara Brooks as Collins highlights) and women of colour make to caregiving need be to recognized as valid actions of change. Such activism – in the form of care-giving and passing down knowledge – shed perspective on the myriad ways Sikh women contribute to social change even when they may be less visible on formal committees of activism, faith groups, and gurdwaras. The migrant journey of Harnam Kaur, in Chapter 6, along with women’s role in *langar seva* (food outreach) and *Sukhmani Sahib* poetry sessions in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, will speak to these aspects of feminist work.

Moreover, a take on identity for survival points to the activist tactics and political markings of identity, as opposed to an identity based on cultural essence, which many intersectional feminists have challenged. bell hooks (1984, 31), for instance, takes on the stance of “I advocate feminism” rather than “I am a feminist” to counter the lifestyle and identity-centered politics of white liberal feminism. In characterizing feminism in this manner, bell hooks shifts the lens of feminist ethics from rights-based approach or identity-based power to that of movement, mutual care, and transformation for new kinds of relationship. hooks positioning advocates a political marking of intersectionality to not fall into the trap of essence. Similarly, transnational feminist Inderpal Grewal in an interview with Srila Roy (2017, 259) characterizes the influential role of intersectionality in that it aids us to be “critical of pure identity or a pure, one-dimensional movement”. Grewal further attends to the valuable political feminist work that is happening within religious and cultural spaces by Muslim, Sikh, and Dalit women (Roy 2017, 255; *ibid* 259). Ultimately, intersectionality grounds an understanding that anti-racist, feminist decolonial work is not ascendancy in the power hierarchy or a rights-based liberal feminist movement, but a transformation of life, society, and relation.

The analytics of diaspora with intersectionality further enhances a move against a reliance on purity and essentialism. Avtar Brah shifts categories of identity from its essentialist precursors to a politics of identification that is of relevance to this dissertation in framing diaspora. Speaking in the context of black racialization in Great Britain, *Cartographies of Diaspora* attends to differential power relations with depth and specificities in regard to the



identities and differentiation at play, and emergent through unique contexts and processes. As she delineates, “It is more appropriate to speak of discourses, matrices of meanings, and historical memories which, once in circulation, can form the basis of *identification* in a given economic, cultural and political context” (Brah 1996, 124, emphasis in original). In this regard, she sets into motion a response to critics of essentialism and instead, calls for “continually interrogating essentialism in all its varieties” (Brah 1996, 127). Brah contends that ideas of universalism and specificity of particular cultural formations do not necessarily mean they are essentialist. What she takes issue with is a type of ultimate, primordial essence which attempts to transcend all historical and cultural boundaries. Moreover, she complicates the diaspora experience of racialized young people as not simply enmeshed between two cultures or worlds. Rather, there is a contextual cultural identity that emerges from a lived experience of being Asians in Britain. These complexities are articulated as multi-faceted and marked by intra-Asian relations. Among the complexities are “religion, caste and language” (1996, 47), which Brah suggests re-configures from its South Asian subcontinental context. Geographic context, then, lends itself to another layer of specificity. For instance, Sikh migrants in Uganda, who later migrated to Britain, had a pre-existing urban background, whose experience differed from Sikhs who migrated directly from rural Punjab. The implications of a racialized experience within the context of diaspora space additionally connects to notions of borders.

At the nexus of these transnational and intersectional feminists is a thinking of power and shaping of identities and experience alongside the racialized making of space, state, and borders. In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa speaks to her experience as a working mestiza woman, living in the borderlands that she defines: “a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in the constant state of transition” (Anzaldúa [1987] 2012, 25). Her imagery, symbolism, throughout the book, fosters a sense of this ‘mestiza’ experience and consciousness. Similar to Édouard Glissant’s ([1990] 1997) ‘abyss’, Anzaldúa makes use of sea and ocean as symbolism of her borderlands. Her opening poem illuminates this: “I stand at the edge where earth touches ocean” (23) . . . . “The sea cannot be fenced” (25). The use of water for borderlands marks a hybrid and diasporic political identification, for those who are of neither here nor there, or perhaps of elsewhere from within here. The 21st century borderlands are the subject matter of *Elsewhere, Within Here*, and Trinh theorizes the people

within them and unravels their stories, rhythms, songs, and survival. The wall is not new. Nor are the tactics of resistance to the wall and border-crossing. What Trinh (2011) exposes are the contradictions in first-world (and sometimes non-first-world) rhetoric of democracy, love, boundless globe, and cosmopolitanism. Fortification, gates, securitization, incarceration, and walls prevail while global discourses narrate a planetary penetration of tourism, mobility, global political institutions, and technology and development.

At a time when the rhetoric of blurred boundaries and of boundless access is at its most impressive flourish, the most regressive walls of separation and racial discrimination, of hatred and fear, of humiliation and powerlessness continue to be erected around the world to divide and conquer, exacerbating existing conflicts as one world, one nation, one community, one group continue to be dramatically raised against other . . . (Trinh 2011, 5)

The work of indigenous and decolonial feminist scholars further give light to the ongoing state-building processes of settler colonies. Eve Tuck and K. Wang Yang (2012) have cautioned the use of the term decolonial and decolonization as a metaphor where it could be reduced to a purely discursive exercise. Instead, they bring attention to the real-life work involved in repatriation for Indigenous life. The authors note that settler colonialism is constituted in a triad structure of ‘settler-native-slave’. In this, migrants of colour and Sikhs can also be complicit in settler colonialism: “the decolonial desires of white, nonwhite, immigrant, postcolonial, and oppressed people, can similarly be entangled in resettlement, reoccupation, and reinhabitation that actually further settler colonialism” (Tuck and Yang 2012, 5). Amongst the critiques by Indigenous and ally scholars (Lawrence and Dua 2005; Tuck and Yang 2012; Smith [1999] 2012) is that the discourse and distinct spatial technologies of settler colonialism have not been thoroughly discussed in postcolonial theories. Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua (2005) have further made the argument that Indigenous peoples are often erased from anti-racist works and histories, diaspora theories, and critical race theories.

It is, thus, important to theorize nuances of settler colonialism, and the contribution decolonial feminists have made, especially as this dissertation is situated in Greater Toronto and Greater Vancouver, and is involved in writing the histories and geographies of these regions. Unlike internal and external colonialism, settler colonialism is involved in a process of homemaking that establishes a form of settler sovereignty without a metropole relationship. As

Tuck and Yang (2012, 5) differentiate, “*Settler colonialism* operates through internal/external colonial modes simultaneously because there is no spatial separation between metropole and colony” (italics in original). In addition to spatial regimes of land and entitlement, there is a differential discourse in the gendering and racializing of subjects. The racialization of Black people has been overdetermined by skin colour (Fanon [1952] 2008) and racialization of Sikhs overdetermined by religious othering and turban, while the racialization of Indigenous peoples has operated by mechanisms of erasure and subtraction. As Tuck and Yang (2012, 13) argue, “Native American is a racialization that portrays contemporary Indigenous generations to be less authentic, less Indigenous than every prior generation in order to ultimately phase out Indigenous claims to land and usher in settler claims to property”. These nuances in the racialization provide some depth that is context-specific and offer an understanding to the state’s strategies of power, particularly in how different subjects are gendered and racialized.

In the colonial formation of Canada, the racialized management and imagination of Canada’s space has been key in how the settler colonial regime operates and legitimizes appropriation of land and space. Sunera Thobani (2007) conceptualizes exaltation as a form of biopolitical technique used to produce seemingly ‘natural’ subjects and citizens of Canada’s sovereignty while other subjects are marked for extinction or as supplements. Here, Thobani speaks to a triad formation of “state-nation-subject” (2007, 8). The exaltation happens against the image of the other and outsiders in the ongoing consolidation process of Canada’s settler nation-state and sovereignty. As she deconstructs, “There prevails in Canada a master narrative of the nation, . . . of law-abiding character of its enterprising nationals, who are presented . . . [as] responsible citizens, compassionate, caring, and committed to the values of diversity multiculturalism” (Thobani 2007, 4). Canada’s master idiom consists of the discourse of European ‘discovery’ of Americas and the idea of an empty land without people *terra nullius*. Moreover, to further this notion of *terra nullius*, Canada operated various legal instruments of biopower, states of exception, and governmentality that are also gendered. For example, languages and cultures of aboriginal children in residential schools were reduced, and Aboriginal women, who married a non-Aboriginal, would lose their native status. In this, Canadian sovereignty is actively and constantly consolidated by the exaltation of certain subjects (the nationals), while Aborigines in Canada are “marked for physical and cultural extinction or utter

marginalization (Indians), and yet others for perpetual estrangement or conditional inclusion as supplicants (immigrants, migrants, and refugees)” (Thobani 2007, 6).

Equally important to analyzing the layers of settler colonial tools and spatial structures is the recognition of indigenous ways of knowing and transforming. The Maori and Indigenous studies scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith provokes critical methodologies to consider its real life and practical revolutionary potential. In *Decolonizing Methodologies*, she theorizes that it is “not a method of revolution in political sense but provokes some revolutionary thinking about the roles that knowledge, knowledge production, knowledge hierarchies and knowledge institutions play in decolonization and social transformation” ([1999] 2012, xii). As she puts forward, postcolonial theories that analyze the oppressive structures and reveal the hidden stories are not transformative if they do “not prevent someone from [a premature] dying” (Smith [1999] 2012, 3). Smith proposes a different way to thinking of revolutionary, one that is grounded in a form of participatory action research. Drawing from Maori concepts, Smith calls for “Indigenous Research Agenda”, in which directions and oceanic cosmologies rooted in Maori thought are considered in order for decolonization, healing, transformation, and mobilization to take place.

The intervention by M. Jacqui Alexander further paves decolonial approaches to sacred geographies of becoming and puts forth the political potential of poetics and the sensuous. In *Pedagogies of Crossing*, Alexander argues that “a transnational feminism needs these pedagogies of the Sacred” (2005, 30). Alexander challenges the work of postmodernists who write from the comfort of observing other cultures, but without engaging with the spiritual, for fear of its traditional label. Critiquing such feminist work, Alexander provokes, “Many, I suspect, have been forced into a spiritual closet” (2005, 30). The challenge emerges from the dichotomies of secularism’s order, which presents the secular as free of the sacred, and additionally, characterizes the sacred and spiritual to a depoliticized and privatized status. In the process, the secular-religious dichotomy at play in European and Western secularization has created the privileging of the secular, and the subordination of the sacred. Alexander destabilizes this binary by reinvigorating that the “personal is not only political but spiritual” (21) and that “experience is a category of great epistemic import to feminism” (323). Alexander’s feminist intervention challenges the secular-religious binary worldview and its power constructions. Moreover, it presents critiques of regimes of religious fundamentalism that regulate gender and sexuality. The

metaphor of ‘crossing’, theorized in the context of Black diaspora and transatlantic slavery, conceptualizes the epistemologies and pedagogies needed to make possible a feminist “Sacred praxis” (350). For Alexander, this involves the “work of rewiring the senses” (337) and “knowing who walks with you” (338) like the touch of the wind felt upon the body. In retuning our senses to the myriad sources of the sacred, both within us and beyond, one can re-align knowledge in the form of experience. For its use in *sikhi*, the work of rewiring the senses helps to navigate the sensuous geographies, particular of Sikh women in their poetic iterations and *langar seva* – whether in the household or the gurdwara kitchen – and helps to destabilize a viewpoint that relies exclusively on the text, visual field, and representation – that is, what one sees.

To sum up, the poetics of resistance as addressed by such scholars as Alexander and Trinh open possibilities for non-Eurocentric epistemologies. Moreover, decolonial and transnational feminisms pay attention to the complexities of differential power that prevail or transform in the racialized, gendered or religious othering of subjects. Importantly, transnational and decolonial feminism can delineate and challenge inter-related processes of settler colonialism, nation-building, and nationalism. And finally, a multi-dimensional approach to feminist work enhances a turn to political micro-practices, diasporic entanglements, and sensuous geographies of Sikhs otherwise underlooked in extant literature. Next, I explore poststructuralist thinking in aiding a theorization of space, culture, place, and power.

### **Post-structuralist Geographies on Space and Culture**

Post-structuralist thinking is as varied as multiple strands of postcolonialisms and feminisms. Central to post-structural thinking is a shift in thought that “moves from ‘being’ to ‘becoming’” (Woodward, Dixon, and Jones 2009, 397). The theoretical engagement of this dissertation with post-structuralism draws from post-structural geographies on notions of space and culture, which can challenge conventional categories of positivist Eurocentric thought and offer a radical interrogation of fixed and essentialist ideas of space, representation, and culture. The notion of becoming, as opposed to being, points to a spatialization and subjectivity that is always in process. Henri Lefebvre, Doreen Massey, and Michel de Certeau, in different ways, have taken on the challenging task of re-theorizing space.

In the *Production of Space*, Lefebvre ([1974] 1991) offered a three-fold conceptualization of space, aimed at interrogating positivist and capitalist conceptions of space which were reinforcing notions of a pre-existing spatial *tabula rasa*. He puts forth his defining thesis that space is *produced*. His spatial triad – *representation of space*, *spatial practice*, and *representational space* – lends insight to the various folds and interactions of space as conceived, perceived, and lived respectively. In this, Lefebvre’s constitutive argument is concerned with the modes of economic production as he sought to explain how *representation of space* came to dominate at the turn to urban-capitalist society. This conceived *representation of space* under capitalism took on its established power through an abstraction of space, which approached space as quantifiable, exchangeable, and measurable. Under the domain of abstract space, *representation of space* is led by modernists, technocrats, cartographers, planners, and experts who conceived, arranged, and built space that mirrored its capitalist expansive project – *spatial practice*. *Spatial practice* is the urban and capitalist development, the physical city that is built through roads, public works, buildings, and that we can directly perceive through our senses. Furthermore, this abstraction is linked to a logic of visualization that Lefebvre delineates as a geometric, visual, and phallic formant with the goal of homogenization. As a counter to modern and capitalist abstract space is what Lefebvre terms as *differential space*, or heterotopias, where difference is characteristic of everyday life. While Lefebvre’s work is dominantly used in a critical Marxist approach and is many times against the poststructuralist turn into semiotics and deconstruction, his central thesis of space being produced complicates positivist conceptions of space and being. Moreover, his notion of *differential space* offers useful counters to the homogenizing space of capitalism.

One can further connect Lefebvrian’s conceptualization of the production and abstraction of space with Foucault’s (2003) notion of biopower through spatial ordering and population management, and to the spatialized state-building technologies employed by the colonial state (Scott 1998). In *Seeing Like a State*, James Scott lists the modern state’s social engineering technologies employed through scientific forestry, census statistics, standardization of naming, land tenure, measurements, high modernist urban planning, and colonial cartographies. State projects were involved in processes of sedentarization, simplification, and abstraction for the purposes of creating legibility that served tax collections and population management (Scott

1998). Geography as a modern discipline was complicit in the rise of colonial capitalism and modern state power through practices of imperial cartographies, territorial and military strategies, rationalist ordering of space, ideologies such as orientalism, and Cold War area studies (Harvey 2001). For this doctoral study on Sikh diaspora, the spatial ordering lends perspective to the social engineering in Punjab that transformed it from a land of diverse relation to identities enumerated, marked, and codified with religion, script, and language – ultimately leading to Punjab’s Partition. Decolonial geographers of Punjab must politically and epistemologically refuse demographics, representation of grid space, and the enumeration of Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus – colonial technologies that broke Punjab and killed over a million people during Partition and post-Partition struggles.

The colonial and capitalist production and experience of space also influenced everyday life and culture as delineated by Pierre Bourdieu in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Bourdieu’s ([1979] 1984) conceptualization of ‘habitus’ fills an important gap in the theorization of structure by bringing to focus how the aesthetic aspects of practices and subjectivity are folded into interpretations of space, history, and art. Habitus makes sense of a simultaneous internalization of tastes and aesthetic, and a simultaneous externalization of the socially constructed subjectivity onto spatial arrangements and structures. Through habitus, and a notion of field that gives occupational, classed, gendered and geographical specificity, Bourdieu’s conceptualization accounts for a multi-dimensionality to structuring space. Cultural capital thus plays a prominent role in how it shapes our aesthetic experience of reality, space, and objects. In Bourdieu’s case study of France, the French emerging middle-class would pursue the cultural capital of bourgeois art and historical aristocracy such as through their excursions with museum-going, opera-going, and acquiring noble music instruments. Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of habitus aids in making sense of mutually constitutive relations between social, cultural, and spatial. Taste influences our subjectivity, and aesthetic interpretation is not neutral.

Poststructuralist contributions offer useful critiques to the objectivity of aesthetics and the naturalization of cultures, which get enclosed in or projected onto static space. In this regard, poststructuralist geographies provide an understanding of the mutually constitutive dynamics in how space-culture is produced. For instance, Scott’s (1998) expansive list of state-initiated social engineering discussed above points to the mechanisms by which reality is carved up into isolated

segments and insular categories. Dixon and Jones (1998, 247) term this kind of bounded knowledge as “epistemology of the grid”, describing it as a “spatialization of categorical thought”. Likewise, Gupta and Ferguson (1992) have problematized the normative cartographic boundaries by which national boundaries are naturalized and reified through images of break and disjunction. In such a process, the study of cultures is mapped onto places in singular frames, where space comes to be imaged as “a neutral grid on which cultural difference, historical memory, and societal organization are inscribed” (1992, 7).

The essentialized conceptions of natural boundaries and mapped cultures can be connected to scale and scalar thinking, which is increasingly problematized by critical geographers and anthropologists. Ferguson and Gupta (2002, 982) raise concern with how modern states reify and legitimize itself through ‘verticality’ and ‘encompassment’. Engin Isin (2007) terms this vertical ontologization of space and scale as ‘scalar thought’ and discusses the implications for belonging, cosmopolitanism, and citizenship. Scalar thought “conceals the difference between actual (physical and material) and virtual (symbolic, imaginary and ideal) states” (Isin 2007, 211). In doing so, it creates an image of body politics such as the state that is in fact virtual but ontologically taken for granted. For Isin, cosmopolitanism’s popular conception as another scale – sitting above or beyond the state – is just as problematic as that of the modern state. Accordingly, both the national and the cosmopolitan are presented as “nested, tiered, hierarchical and exclusive scales” (Isin 2007, 224). Isin’s critique of scalar thought is invested in putting forward the city as the place for citizenship and for imagining a cosmopolitanism beyond scalar thought. Scalar thought is closely intertwined with modern conceptions of space, which Massey challenges for a different understanding of space and scale.

Eurocentric conceptions of space in its Enlightenment and modernity era has shaped a perspective of space as an external surface, an expanse, that is, an exterior surface, sitting out there, and timeless or removed from time as valorized in the European ‘discovery’ of the New World. Space gets reduced to being a container of time, where it becomes a static frame, of ‘primitive’ cultures. In *For Space*, Doreen Massey (2005) problematizes this understanding of space in two key ways. First, she suggests that spatial-temporal cannot be extracted from each other and she challenges any narratives that seek to establish a spatial hegemony (that is, space containing time). Conversely, Massey critiques that this problematic notion of spatial hegemony



is flipped by an equally problematic notion of a temporal hegemony, as history and modernity have defined themselves through the dominant linear progression of Time. This privileging of a progression of time is meta-narrative through which modernity implemented colonialism against other cultures, religions, and races who are discursively rendered to be primitive and in static spaces (Massey 2005). Secondly, Massey questions the ways in which spatialization gets equated with representation. In this, space is read as an external, fixed, and natural terrain to which cultures belong. Representing space, or spatialization, then is often mis-read simultaneously as representing cultures or identities. Postivist approaches in geographies of religion have been complicit in such knowledge paradigms by producing European spatial representation of religious subjects.

Massey's argument overlaps with Said's (1979) work on *Orientalism*, which unsettles stable geographical ontologies of culturalist representations or categories of the 'Orient' and the 'Occident'. Further, I connect Massey's argument to challenging the production of "ethnographic maps" (Gupta and Ferguson 1992, 7) in geography and anthropology where space is presented as natural with discontinuous breaks – today seen as countries with visible boundaries. The problem when 'discrete' 'essential' cultures are identified and represented onto discrete places is that it cannot adequately account for inhabitants on the borderlands (Anzaldúa [1987] 2012), pluralistic differences and heterogeneity within a locality itself, and the multiplicities of places to which diasporians may belong (Massey 1994). Indeed, in her argument for a 'global sense of place', Massey (1994, 153) says that "if it is now recognized that people have multiple identities then the same point can be made in relation to places". Massey's global sense of place with its myriad of cultures ties into Arjun Appadurai (1996) work on cultural globalization. Both Massey and Appadurai question the singular homogenizing triumph of the modern or Western state and instead call for an understanding of the linkages between localities. Appadurai, for instance, puts forth a notion of translocal space and clarifies his framing of locality: "I view locality as primarily relational and contextual rather than as scalar or spatial" (Appadurai 1996, 178). Alongside the horizontal relationality and polyvalent nature of places, Massey calls for a radical rethinking of space as interrelations and as always in process with co-existing heterogeneity and plurality. In this aspect, she reimagines space as stories in process rather than in cartographic, abstract, territorial, or Cartesian terms – "space is rather a simultaneity of stories-so-far" (Massey 2005, 130). To understand such stories, De Certeau's work provides insights.

In the *Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel De Certeau turns to stories and temporalities of everyday to re-appropriate space from its modern project. “Space is a practiced place” in the sense of a space of temporality and movement between places (1984, 117). He uses the relationship between ‘map’ and ‘itinerary’ to elucidate his conception of place and space. A map establishes static, totalizing abstractions, a proper place. On the other hand, itineraries enunciate operations and actions of a touring kind such as footsteps, log of paths, time of journey, and en-route stops. De Certeau theorizes that Cartesian and Euclidean mapping overshadowed the itineraries (upon which the modern map is based) of flows, paths, and movements. Additionally, the marking out of totalizing mapped boundaries attempted to erase the stories, and museumify its narratives and objects. The map and representation, however, always remain partially unfulfilled and insufficient because despite its goals in precision, flattening-out, and graphed sequence of points, it lacks the temporal articulation of places that are lived through practice, storytelling, and interpretation where place becomes space. The story is what makes this space. De Certeau’s contributions bring out aspects of the itinerant and poetics that have raised important thinking on the ‘non-representational’ (Thrift 2007). Non-representational theory, or what has come to be termed as the ‘*more-than-representational*’ (Lorimer 2005), brings attention to the unmeasurable creativities, affect, and innovations that people generate in everyday practice – from cooking to walking. These theoretical underpinnings will be revisited in Chapters 5 and 6.

Poststructuralist ideas give rise to thinking how ordinary inhabitants of a city may use tactics such as walking (De Certeau 1984), transgressive moments (Cresswell 1996), *differential space* (Lefebvre [1974]1991), or open a *metis* of know-how alternatives (Scott 1998) against the state and social engineering projects. In De Certeau’s simple take on walking, he re-centers the role of the user of space who finds alternative paths, short-cuts, and ways, and in doing so, re-assert a footprint and a trace back onto the map. Despite the banality of such movements, such micro-stories and itinerants constitute the art of tactics. I connect De Certeau theorization to Scott’s vision for two different kinds of maps, where a second map of ‘tracings’ and ‘*unplanned movements*’ is needed for the complexities, practical knowledge, and interconnections, since the first map of representation, abstraction, and simplification “taken alone, is misrepresentative and indeed unsustainable” (Scott 1998, 347-348). Scott’s second map holds within it a kind of transgressive moment. For Tim Cresswell (1996), within transgression lies an opportunity for a

practice of a new kind of spatial ordering and imagining. David Harvey has called for a return to people's geography different from that of experts and professionals. He critiques the fragmentation of knowledge, spatial compartmentalization, and rationalized ordering of space that imperial geography, modernist planning and GIS carried out. As he says, "geography is too important to be left to geographers" (2001, 116). Another thinking on a different kind of geography comes from Yi-Fu Tuan (1977), who provides a humanistic outlook to geographical thought. Tuan (1997) has engaged with the vast depths of cosmologies rooted in different cultures that go significantly beyond the spatial epistemic parameters defined by Enlightenment and its meta-narratives.

This section raises some provocative thinking on ideas of place, space, scale, time, and locality as being contested concepts in geography, among other place-based entities such as cities, country, and urban. It further takes a critical look by which populations, statistics, and census reify singular notions of identity and map them on space. For this doctoral study on Sikh diaspora, post-structuralist thought nuances the field of transnational cultural geographies. As discussed, Doreen Massey (1994) challenges the homogenizing narratives of globalization to instead think of place as a multiplicity of places. Her view opens the door to think of relational geographies and translocalities. Engin Isin's (2007, 214) critique of scalar thought has challenged ideas of scale as "exclusive, hierarchical and ahistorical". Likewise, Massey calls for a horizontal lens in understanding places, instead of its predominant vertical and scalar formant. In this light, Chapter 3 will undertake a re-writing of history and geography of Hong Kong, Coast Salish, and Tkaronto in order to destabilize vertical, scalar lens of cities and states which reify the space of the state, along with its citizens and its sovereignty as natural.

### **Sikh Epistemology**

By understanding categories of religion and race as what Europe minted in its project of colonial conquest, we can thus shift gear – from a visual, text-centred approach to that of embodied *sikhi* as a way of life – and bring our attention to myriad cultural and political Sikh practices, as will be analyzed in Chapters 4 to 6. Moreover, there is need for feminist and decolonial poetics as counters to Eurocentric rational ordering of knowledge, space, race, and religion. Sikh poetics and epistemology offer insights to alternative cartographies through which

we can conceptualize place, space, and by extension, the world and worldings. Entanglements with Punjabiya, Sufism, and Persianate offer the context of collaborative practices of *sikhi* and ways of life that infuse Punjab.

### ***Sikhi context and entanglements with Punjabiya, Sufism, and Persianate***

While this project is located in contemporary Sikh diaspora, it is important to bring perspective to the early entanglements between Punjabiya and *sikhi*, that are further intertwined with Sufism, Islamicate, and Persianate. Collaborations and affinities of religious pluralism did not start in the turn to diaspora against British colonialism and power. *Sikhi* came out of Punjab led by Sikh gurus – from Guru Nanak’s mystical call in the waters near Sultanpur (Punjab) at the end of 15th century to Guru Gobind Singh’s exaltation of Guru Granth Sahib in 1708 Nanded (Maharashtra). Sikh poetics follow on the heels of Chishti order of Sufism, which gained prominence in Punjab with the poet Shaikh Farid – a late 12th century Sufi mystic. Farid is a leading figure of written and literary Punjabi and the earliest contributor to *Adi Granth*. *Sikhi* shares with Sufism the inner call of love for the eternal Beloved along with a deep ethos of Punjabiya.<sup>18</sup> Punjabiya is a term that could be best described in western language as Punjabi cosmopolitanism – though the latter term is insufficient. Punjabiya is a notion of a Punjab, of a belonging and grounding to a Punjab, something more than the physical space, with a sensibility cultivated by Punjabi language and poetry, and with a sense of sharing a spiritual path as Punjabis – Muslim, Sikh, Hindu. Such “an idea of Punjab” is the subject matter of an edited volume *Punjab Reconsidered* by Anshu Malhotra and Farina Mir (2012) where the contributors – historians and humanities scholars – discuss at length literary figures, cultural works, and performative practices from various Punjabi traditions – religious or otherwise.

Punjabiya is prominently exalted as a larger Punjabi consciousness – a raised ‘secular’ plane sitting above or containing or transcending religious and social divisions. Such dominant conceptualizations, thus, run counter to my thinking, which problematizes space, scale, and secular in such cartographic grammars. Within the Sikh-Punjabi wavelength, colonialism has created split antagonistic forces – one trying to contain the other in Eurocentric spatial

---

<sup>18</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of Sikh and Sufi thematic affinities, see Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh (2019). For the influence of Punjabi Sufis on the ethos of Punjabiya, see Christopher Shackle (2012). For the role of *qisse* genre (romance epics) and its expressions of Punjabiya, see Mir (2012).

grammars. The first and dominant position is held by Punjabi cosmopolitanism against Sikh or religious identity. A second flip position propels a Sikh or religious cosmopolitanism against Punjabi identity. I take neither these two positions.<sup>19</sup> Rather than reproduce a notion of a scaled secular space and dualistically-framed cosmopolitanisms, I prefer to give meaning to Punjabiyaat as entanglements – something inherently knotted with *sikhi* and Sufism. The real challenge is how can a decolonial Punjabiyaat be expressed in an alternative cartography that refuses to do a geography of Punjab based on Eurocentric epistemic scale and grids. Such a comprehensive undertaking will be a subject matter of a different work as the present study focuses on decolonizing Sikh spaces. Micro-threads of such entanglements nonetheless appear through the different themes running in the chapters of this doctoral project – for example, in *barahmah* (twelve months) genre of poetry, Vaisakhi nagar kirtan, the Ghadar movement, the mural in Vancouver, and the art sensorium in Brampton. Moreover, micro-threads of *sikhi*'s entanglements with Sufism emerge in the making of gurdwaras and *langar*, a food outreach practice started by Shaikh Farid in Chishti Sufism.

In addition to Punjabi language and a notion of Punjabiyaat, *sikhi* is entangled with Persian language and Persianate culture. As noted by Farina Mir (2010, 39), Persian and Punjabi were co-eval literary traditions in Punjab each “with its own vitality and lineage”. Punjabi was the vernacular language of the masses, many Chishti Sufi mystics, and disciples of *sikhi* such as Gurdas Bhalla who wrote in Punjabi (see Shackle 2012; Mir 2012). On the other hand, Persian was the administrative and courtly language – from the Gaznavids at the turn to the second millennium through the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal period to Ranjit Singh's reign in early 19th century (Mir 2010, 35). As a courtly language, Farsi was not in popular usage among ordinary Sikhs in Punjab – who came from rural, less educated, and less literate backgrounds from Punjab. Nonetheless, Farsi loanwords are common and everyday within the language of Punjabi and within Sikh vocabulary. Such words include *ardas* (petition, from *arz dasht*), *dastar* (turban), *tavarikh* (history), *degh* (blessed pudding or cauldron), *khalsa*<sup>20</sup>, *divan* (poetry<sup>21</sup>), that are in popular usage by Sikhs. Guru Granth Sahib features some poems in Gurmukhi-scripted

---

<sup>19</sup> In Chapter 5, this persistent dualistic debate takes the form of Vaisakhi parade (framed as Punjabi) versus Khalsa parade (framed as religious). I will instead shift an analysis of nagar kirtan for a different working, which I believe overcomes such a dualistic trap.

<sup>20</sup> Meaning was provided on p.25-26.

<sup>21</sup> *Divan* has multiple meanings or variations depending on context.

Farsi language by Guru Nanak.<sup>22</sup> Likewise, the Sufi-inflected poetry of Nand Lal in Farsi language – though outside of Guru Granth Sahib – is characteristic of Sikh and Persianate entanglements, and further brings out the “Islamicate inheritance” and Persianate tones of Sikh cosmic philosophy (Fenech 2014, 159; Fenech 2008, 241). Additionally, Fenech (2008) has argued that Sikh gurus deployed spatial symbolisms, aesthetic sensibility, and language (e.g. *khalsa*, *hukam*) from the Mughal court – with its Persianate culture of the Eastern Islamicate – to develop the Sikh court (*darbar*) and model it for the exaltation of the divine court. Gurdwaras, which are essentially *darbars*, around the world today exhibit such Islamicate and Persianate tones in their design, itinerary, and process.

### ***Sikh poetics***

Sikh poetics are expressed in 1430 *angs* (pages) of Guru Granth Sahib, among other bodies of works. Known as *Adi Granth* prior to being given the Guru title, the canonical text of *sikhi*, Guru Granth Sahib is primarily poetic and musical writings from 35 contributors. While it is inscribed in a single script called Gurmukhi, the actual languages embodied in Guru Granth Sahib are expansive and offer insights to understanding its multi-lingualism and vernacularism as one approach to the study of cosmopolitanism. The use of multiple languages within Sikh literature sets it apart from Punjabi literature as Christopher Shackle (2014, 109) has highlighted. Harinder Singh, Jaswant Singh, and Surendar Pal Singh (2014, 4-6) at the Sikh Research Institute report that the following languages are used in Guru Granth Sahib: Sadhu Basha, Panjabi, Lahndi, Braj, (hybridized) Sanskrit, Farsi, Sahaskriti, and Gatha. Likewise, they note that Sadhu Basha, rather than Panjabi is more prevalent in Guru Granth Sahib. Sadhu Basha (or Sant Basha) is itself comprised of numerous vernacular forms, or *boli*, used by poets and sages who make use of local lexicons and oral registers from different regions. A precursor to what is today commonly referred to as Hindi-Urdu, Khari *boli* coming from the Delhi region forms the core of Sadhu Basha in the writings of Guru Nanak alongside old Panjabi (Shackle 2014, 112). The first edition, *Adi Granth*, was compiled and installed in 1604 in Amritsar Punjab, while the final edition, sometimes referred to as *Damdama Bir*, was completed by Guru Gobind Singh

---

<sup>22</sup> See the work of Asha Marie Kaur (2019), with expertise in Farsi language and Nastiliq script, on the Farsi compositions in Guru Granth Sahib and related Farsi-linguaged Sikh poetry.

towards the end of the 17th century.<sup>23</sup> From the final edition, Guru Granth Sahib was inaugurated in October 1708 in Nanded, Maharashtra (Bajwa 2014, 358). The writings of the contributors – from the earliest Shaikh Farid of Chishti Sufism to the latest Sikh Guru Teghbahadur – span 12th century to the 17th century. The vernacularism of Guru Granth Sahib offers insights to the pre-colonial subcontinent and pre-Partition geographical writings of Punjab and neighbouring regions that can destabilize the colonial and postcolonial formation of a ‘mono-theo-lingualism’.

To add to the vast employment of vernacular languages, Guru Granth Sahib is best characterized as an artistic anthology of collected poems and songs from an oral and performative tradition. The poetic compositions are primarily arranged and ordered by *rag(a)* – known as musical mood in South Asian music tradition. A *raga* consists of different melodies based on certain note combinations, along with improvisation, to invoke specific moods to complement seasons, emotion, and time. The etymology of the term suggests elements of colouring or dyeing, and thus *raga* goes deeper than sound. There are 31 main *ragas*, and moreover, *ragas* carry many variants. Musicologist Inderjit N. Kaur (2011, 262) mentions that the practice of *raga* used diverse melodic and musical systems: Hindu and Sufi styles, regional forms, and folk-based. Amongst the songs and poems by Guru Nanak, *raga* with South Indian Karnatak elements are often subtitled as Dakhani – meaning southern. While the languages and vocabulary are based in Indo-Iranian family of languages, the compositions in Guru Granth Sahib make use of North Indian Classical, South Indian Karnatak, as well as folk-based music traditions.

Guru Granth Sahib is, thus, experienced as poetry from a mix of different languages, *boli*, and vocabulary composed to musical mood. One can denote the relevance of Sikh sonic utterances to subaltern ways of knowing, which cannot be reduced to a representation of space, nor to a purely visual component of Earth study, nor to a textual approach as in the modern study of religion or theology. Francesca Cassio has signified the importance of the musical aspects of *gurbani* (Word, poetry) and kirtan, in that they are not just songs sung to a tune or to a musical notation, but hold within a sonic worldview or experience. She calls it a “sonic event” and differentiates the event as something that cannot simply be presented as “merely musical act”

---

<sup>23</sup> Scholars are divided on the years and process of when Guru Gobind Singh’s *Damdama Bir* was completed. For a discussion of its complexity and timeline, see Deol (2001), Pashaura Singh (2014), and Bajwa (2014)

(Cassio 2014, 233). Likewise, Shackle and Mandair (2005) have explained that elements of a *raga* experience show the lyrical dimensions of knowledge and that modes of subjectivity and Sikh consciousness cannot merely be reduced to its conceptuality or abstraction. Instead, the distinctive flavour and taste (*rasa*), which *raga* evokes influences one's relation and insight of the poetic piece: "when it is sung the nature and feelings associated with this raga affect the lyrical interpretation of the text" (Shackle and Mandair 2005, xxiii). Navtej Purewal (2011) further complicates *raga* and kirtan within *sikhi* by highlighting the prominent role Muslim artists and Sufi poets played in Sikh musicology through the *rababi* music traditions in its early days. In this, Purewal (2011) situates *kirtan* in the social and political space of early day Sikh-Muslim music practices as one of organic and co-contaminating force. The boundary-crossing can be further connected to the anti-caste political praxis of *sikhi*'s early-day emergence, particularly in the elevation of *rababi* status for music players who were otherwise deemed low-caste in society. Nevertheless, the *rababi* tradition of the Sikh-Muslim musical practice faced a stark demise with the advent of colonialism and postcolonialism.

One can, thus, begin to understand aspects of Sikh epistemology and its cosmic and geographical writings by understanding the musical significance of *raga* in Sikh poetry and to the un-translatable ways of Sikh literature. *Sikhi*'s poetic forms overflow with such mesmerizing depth, repetitive nuances, and vastness in vocabulary that when Puran Singh worked on English translations, he is said to have produced what is called 'transcreations'. Puran Singh was an early 20th century Sikh intellect and poet who went to pursue higher education in Japan. His translations distinguish themselves from those of the grammarians of the Singh Sabha movement in his commitment and devotion to embodying the experience and emotion of poetry. In the latter, the translators sought to match grammatical relationship (such as that of adverb to adverb) to its English counterpart. Transcreations, on the other hand, are driven by re-evoking emotions of a piece. Shackle (2017, 85) explains that "Puran Singh's own versions aim to capture the spirit, not the letter". In *Asa Ki Var, Song of Hope*, Guru Nanak's epic war ballad composed to the beats of a folk tune and in Rag Asa (literally mood of hope) instills a martial and (post)humanist consciousness by exalting various species, women, and castes to be worthy of all cosmic realms. Puran Singh characterizes this song as significantly challenging Brahmanical thought and structures (Puran Singh [1980] 2017, 168). Moreover, in my engagement of *Asa Ki*



*Var*, the song defies notions of demarcated sacred space, which tend to mark only specific places accessible only by particular *dharams* or castes to have the status of gateways. Instead, *Asa Ki Var* seeks to establish that all of creation, nature, and self are of cosmic or sacred status. I use Puran Singh's 'transcreation' of *Asa Ki Var* in his work *Spirit of the Sikh, Part II, Volume One*, published posthumously, to elaborate:<sup>24</sup>

*Sound is Vismād*

The essential mystery of sound in this universe-fills me with worship wonder.

The love-creative wonder, wonder that makes me superconscious, the wonder that makes me infinite, wonder that is at once Absolute knowledge and Absolute ignorance.

*Knowledge is Vismād*

When I contemplate what man knows, my mind rises into the state of ecstatic wonder.

The Soul is *Vismād*

The Soul is wonder.

*Beauty is Vismād*

When I gaze at the inner secret of life intently, the only description that can be given of it is wonder-that it is not passive; wonder that is all-love, all-attraction, wonder that rings passionately in the music of being.

The colour (of life) is inebriating wonder, it is *Vismād*.

*The Spirit World is Vismād*

When I contemplate the naked souls that roam, I am filled with His Mystery, it is *Vismād*.

The winds-they fill me with *Vismād*.

The waters-They fill me with *Vismād*.

The Fires playing and their sports-they fill me with *Vismād*.

The round earth is *Vismād*.

...

*Love-union-they are Vismād*

*Love-separations-they are Vismād*

...

*The road is Vismād*

...

*The Near is Vismād*

*The Far is Vismād*

...

---

<sup>24</sup> Rag Asa, as the above poem is expressed in, invokes hope and optimism. I use this stanza because it is what has struck the chords of my heart and rotated the lens by which I understand, see, walk, and feel my reality. The geographical expanse, indescribable in English, and epistemology of knowledge evokes an intoxicating energy during my *amritvela* encounters (literally time of sweet nectar, referring to time-space before sunrise).

(Guru Nanak, transcreation Puran Singh [1980] 2017: 174-176)  
(abridgment mine, style in original translation)

In the above *salok* (stanza), a sense of fulfilment and inspiration through being wonder-struck (*vismad*) is applied to all dimensions of the cosmic space. All of earth (*dharti*), its elements of wind (*paunu*), fire (*agni*), water (*pani*), its sounds (*nad*). The experience of space is part of the knowledge of being one with the space. Sacredness, then, in *sikhi*, is not about specific people or places blessed to sacred status, which stands in opposition to any other category deemed non-sacred. Rather sacred is an All-ness. The path, journey, way, and the road (*rah*) is likewise exalted as part of the fulfilment and experience of knowledge. Bhogal (2012, 880) outlines that “[s]acred is elemental, vegetal, animal, human, and spiritual; all are infused by the One Sacred Being-Becoming . . . ”.

### ***Sikh cosmologies of space***

Sikh poetics, as the previous poem elucidates, is not merely an expression of emotion, but it is also through which Sikh epistemology and philosophy is elaborated on. The poetics encompass Sikh cosmologies of space with a notion of an experience of the universe that cannot be externalized or reduced to a conceptual dualism of a subject-object, man-god, human-nature. The work of Balbinder Singh Bhogal and Nikki-Guninder Kaur Singh, in different manners, is crucial in how Sikh hermeneutics is seeking the sensual, the feminine, the animal, and the nondualism in Sikh poetics. For Bhogal (2012, 859, italics in original), he characterizes:

The hermeneutic task here, then, demands a recovery of the suppressed ‘pantheistic’ or horizontal dimension to the GGS [Guru Granth Sahib], which entails a delineation of a Sikh scriptural difference that resists being read only as spirit *over* matter, eternity *over* time, God *over* man, and oneself *over* the other.

An analysis of Sikh mysticism requires an almost horizontal or rhizomatic “frame of vision, event, body, location, and desire” (Bhogal 2012, 859). “Animal Sublime” as theorized by Bhogal underpins that the becoming of an animal body in Sikh poetics and mysticism is what offers Sikh practitioners to transcend ego structures. In this regard, I put Bhogal’s (post)humanist figure of “animal sublime” in conversation with the bios-mythoi hybrid (Wynter and McKittrick 2015) and what may dissolve the code of ‘Man1’ and ‘Man2’. Against the backdrop of the Anthropocene, Wynter and McKittrick (2015, 45) ask “How do we *be*, in Fanonian terms, hybridly human?” The thinkers call our attention to a concept of bios-mythois as a hybrid; bios

as the flesh, skin, and brain and mythoi, in the sense of the Word, language, and storytelling. The hybrid is articulated as “[h]umans are, then, a biomutationally evolved, hybrid species – storytellers who now storytellingly invent themselves as being purely biological” (2015, 11). Born, and re-born, in speaking of storytelling, and of mythoi, Wynter and McKittrick (2015, 23) point us to a direction of praxis: “humanness is no longer a noun. Being human is a praxis”. In other words, storytelling and being human as praxis, poetry and alternative cartographies are crucial. Among McKittrick’s (2011, 949) alternative cartographies are “music maps” that were formed outside of so-called ‘real’ maps documenting exploration, roads, routes, and boundaries.

The nameless and un-representable (*nirgun*) is another underlying theme of Sikh praxis where countless poetic odes, sonic renderings, and meditative utterances become the embodied path to experience and understand the ‘such-ness’ that has no name, and no othering. *Vismad* (awe-struck) in Guru Nanak’s *Asa Ki Var*, and Puran Singh’s ‘transcreation’ is that one instance of mergence, however temporary, of a becoming animal, and tuning towards that inexplicable *vismad*-ness wherein one imbues in all its forms, colours, sounds, and interrelations. Separation of self with other is diffused. Bhogal elaborates on this nondualism of wonder: “Being struck by the incomprehensible and inexpressible wonder of the body to the extent of complete immersion in an experience beyond the ego, such that subject–object consciousness dissolves into a paradoxical oneness of self with All . . .” (Bhogal 2012, 860).

The theme of the experience of the cosmos, through sensual awakenings and mergence, is likewise explored by Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh who concerns herself with the Sikh transcendent but in radically different approach from a vertical metaphysics of Christian transcendentalism. In *The Feminine Principle in the Sikh Vision of the Transcendent*, Nikki-Guninder Kaur (N.G.K.) Singh problematizes Eurocentric dualisms by which a modern study of religion has been examined and provides insights to Sikh cosmologies of space that can circumvent such dualisms. As she elucidates, “The Sikh Transcendent does not remain out there; rather it is the ultimate sense – both sensually and spiritually – of Reality present in and experienced throughout our cosmos” (N.G.K. Singh 1993, 244). Further, she seeks to return Sikh philosophy from its theological to its *theas*, the feminine dimensions that bring out the feminine imagery and tones in Sikh poetry and kirtan. The imagery and tones are not just characteristics or symbolism used to represent Earth or the cosmos but defining ways that Sikh epistemology is

rooted. Of key importance are the odes to all elements and life-forms of Earth and the cosmos to break apart notions of Brahmanist hierarchies. “The feminine dimension pervading the Sikh vision possesses the dynamism to interconnect all humans: it breaks all social, creedal, racial, and gender hierarchies, and it connects society with the rest of the cosmos. The monopoly of humans over nature is shattered through her force” (N.G.K. Singh 1993, 244). In this regard, N.G.K Singh presents possibilities of *sikhi* for its transformative feminist approach.

There are parallels worth mentioning between Sikh epistemology and that of postcolonial perspectives and postmodern insights into knowledge. *Sikhi*'s rootedness in the experience of poetry and music, pluriverses of “tongues and traditions” (Bhogal 2014, 288), and “one as always many” (Bhogal 2014, 295) approach to knowledge has resonance with postcolonial's turn to the hybrid (Bhabha 1984), to the borderlands (Anzaldúa [1987] 2012), to the un-translatable vernacular, to the un-representable subaltern, and to the unquantifiable space. Space, in Sikh epistemology, cannot be quantifiable, measured or conceptualized in the manner of representation of space or abstraction space.

ਤੇਰਾ ਕੀਤਾ ਜਾ ਤੇ ਨਾਹੀ ਮੈਨੇ ਜੇਗੁ ਕੀ ਤੇਈ॥

*terā kītā jāto nāhī maino jug kītoī*

Your creation is unmeasurable.

You made me realize Your vastness.

(Guru Arjan, transcreation mine)

Moreover, I relate *sikhi*'s “animal sublime” mysticism (Bhogal 2012) and feminine pervading (N.K.G. Singh 1993), and connect it to the call of the poetic and musical (Trinh 2011), the “work of rewiring the senses” (Alexander 2005, 337), the political as spiritual awakenings (Dei 2008), the bios-mythoi human as praxis (Wynter and McKittrick 2015), and return it to the micro-stories and itineraries (De Certeau 1984).

This chapter has offered a theoretical grounding to my approach to knowledge as it concerns diaspora and transnational cultural geographies. Specifically, I have drawn from three overarching schools of thought: postcolonial theories, decolonial and transnational feminisms, and poststructuralist geographies. I have further put this in conversation with Sikh poetics, cosmologies of space, and epistemology. I have defined religion as a Western construct,

produced through a power relationship between the metropole and the colony. I have further challenged notions of secularism and scalar logics. The rest of this dissertation follows what can be better known as ways of life as opposed to the Western construct of religion. *Sikhi* is a way of life. And, all ways of life are cultures. Culture is the interpretation by which we make sense and interpret self, other, and our environment – both inner and outer. Culture is *rasa*, the tasting sensibility we cultivate to experience and appreciate arts, music, and poetics. Culture is *raga*, the colouring of our musical faculties and mood. Other times, I use the term culture as the lived experience of difference – for example, Punjabi or Sikh or both or diaspora.

In subsequent chapters, I continue to problematize discursive power as they shape the urban, capitalist, colonial landscapes while offering moments of transgressive re-imaginings through poetic offerings and embodied actions of sensuous and political. I now turn to the project of writing, questioning, and re-writing the history and geography of the cities of this study. In attending to complexities of the field of diaspora and transnational cultural geographies, I hope that translocal linkages, borderlands, and networks of Hong Kong, Vancouver, and Toronto emerge as a horizontal lens through which diasporas and cities can be analyzed outside of scalar thought, beyond Western epistemic frames of modernity, and beyond notions of ‘mono-theo-lingualism’ and ‘globalatinization’.

## Chapter 3 – Historical and Geographical Context

### Vignette 1: The Clocktower and the Harmonium

When the British set up an outpost in Amritsar, Punjab, they brought with them the clocktower.

Across the continent, the clocktower emerged in Hong Kong, where it remains in present-day Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon (my hometown).

The clocktower is not just a monument of European architecture. Rather, it is a trope for a certain framing and ordering of time, space, and language – theorized and critiqued in the previous chapter. Spatial practice mirrors its epistemic frame (Lefebvre [1974] 1991). The clocktower symbolizes the triumph of time, of time conquering space, of a linear progression and of colonial expansion. More than that, the clocktower represents the various accompanying instruments of the European administrators, scientists, and experts. One such is the harmonium, a portable musical key-based instrument, that British brought to Punjab, and which literally broke the continuous tones of the numerous string-based Sikh instruments upon which Sikh poetics and *raga* thrived.

Enter the harmonium players and exits the *rababi*.

When the order of *the clocktower and the harmonium* moved in, it displaced that of *the dharamsala and the rabab*.

In this, European code of Time and Man emerged to dominate and produce space, and with it a certain language, religion, race, and their tones – visual and auditory. To return to Rey Chow's (2014) theorizing of language, I extend her use of auditory tones to that of poetry and music in the Sikh tradition. The monotheistic textualist understanding of the Sikh scripture came to dominate over the embodied sensuous performance of her poetry. Likewise, colonial cartographies and spatial practices produced scalar thought, abstract measurements of space, fragmentation of multi-lingualism, enumeration of bounded religious subjects, and finally compartmentalization of pluriverses, borders, and boundaries, upon which the subsequent visual study of cities has risen.

To write the histories and geographies of the places this dissertation is involved with – Hong Kong, Vancouver, and Toronto, I follow the itineraries and the fugitive narratives of the inhabitants, othered, in all their tones.

The saga of *Guru Nanak Jahaz* has only just begun. Across the Pacific Ocean, to my east, is yet another story.

### **Hong Kong: From a Fishing Village to a Portal City**

Hong Kong is a rather unique case in the processes of world-making. This is because it presents a categorical divergence from the making of First, Second and Third Worlds and due to its much later postcolonialism. As a British colony, Hong Kong was developed to be a port city, an entrepôt station, to serve as a shipping channel of goods for colonial Asia and Europe, largely between China and British India. In this regard, Hong Kong did not witness the colonial technologies that destroyed the pre-existing industries of other colonies, such as the textiles industries of India. Instead, it was a center of colonial productivity. With the emerging urban studies literature, Chiu and Lui (2009) highlight that while Hong Kong makes it onto the world cities and global cities map, its presence is merely articulated to connect other cities on the map and to set up the global urban hierarchy. It is, thus, sometimes tabulated as a second-tier city within a semi-periphery of a world city hierarchy (Friedmann 1986, 72) or as a gateway city (Taylor 2004, 91).

Alternative economic geography categories such as South and North, or Global South and Global North, likewise, have remained fuzzy for Hong Kong. Hong Kong's economic and industrial exceptionalism following the World Wars gave it its divergent threads, and it was referred to as one of the four Asian tigers, dragons, the flying geese, new industrializing countries, or Asian miracle economies, with the other three being South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore. However, unlike South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore, it did not neatly fall into the model of Asian developmental state because its development trajectory followed closely to free market principles of an entrepôt. Given its 'handover'<sup>25</sup> only as recent as 1997, it remained divergent to the nationalist and developmentalist ideologies by which the other three Asian tigers have been analyzed for. Jini Kim Watson (2011), for instance, excludes Hong Kong from her theorization of the "new Asian city", for precisely the latter reason. A final manner that dislodges Hong Kong from its co-flying geese, is that unlike South Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan, Hong

---

<sup>25</sup> 'Handover' is a term used uniquely to Hong Kong and Macau, in which British handed over custody of Hong Kong to China; In the case of Macau, it was a handover by Portugal to China in 1999. China has framed its narrative as a 'return'.

Kong cannot be literally seen on a map. In a manner, it does not exist, it is merely a dot, and only to the eager eye.<sup>26</sup> In fact, Hong Kong's constant transitory status is so ripe of ambivalence, amnesia, and abnormality that its infinite paradoxes implode into renderings between visible, invisible; here, there, nowhere, everywhere; neither East, nor West. This abnormality leads Ackbar Abbas to challenge his reader to consider its port status in the most literal sense possible<sup>27</sup>: "a door, a threshold, a conduit through which goods, currencies, and information flow; a kind of nodal point, an in-between state, therefore more of an inter-national city than an international one" (1997, 74). However, it is not just goods and capital, but a portal for the flows of peoples, as pointed out by Elizabeth Sinn (2008, 13; 2012, 9). Hong Kong is an "in-between place", not in the sense of East-West betweenness, but in the sense of itinerant in-betweenness. In this sense, Hong Kong is not so much port as in *entrepôt*, but portal as in a conduit.

Hong Kong's categorical anomaly is of pivotal significance and writing her story is better approached from the street, the village, rather than the gaze of its skyline. As Abbas (1997, 73) points out, "The harder we try to categorize it, the more the city mocks the available categories and remains, in spite of its overwhelming presence, a peculiar kind of 'invisible city' ". How, then, can we make sense of Hong Kong's urban form, cultural landscape, its colonial encounters, 'handover'/'return' unrest, and inter-national circulations? Most importantly, what is currently happening on the streets of Hong Kong today?

As a name, Hong Kong, literally means fragrant harbour. The Cantonese phonetic rendering *hēung góng* and its early romanized spelling 'He-Ong-Kong', derives its source from an inlet bay area now called Aberdeen, which can broadly refer to Aberdeen Town (on Hong Kong Island), Aberdeen Island (Ap Lei Chau), and its harbour as Aberdeen Harbour, situated towards the southern shore of what is now named Hong Kong Island. The local *heung gong* was a reference to the fishing village located on the island Ap Lei Chau. The colonialists, however, mistook the name for Hong Kong Island, north of Ap Lei Chau island. The story of a fragrant harbour has with it many legends and folk tales. The prevailing theory is that the fragrance refers

---

<sup>26</sup> It is worth mentioning that when people have asked me where I am from, and I share Hong Kong, they react as: "Oh, what's it like living in Japan? Or Singapore? Or Malaysia?" This is a strange educational gap in geography given its prominence in Hollywood movies. Ackbar Abbas (1997) has suggested that Hong Kong's hyper visibility, by way of limitless skyscrapers, is also what makes Hong Kong invisible.

<sup>27</sup> I sometimes think of Hong Kong as the imaginary train platform where the character of Neo, played by Keanu Reeves, gets stuck within in the third of the *Matrix* trilogy films – a place of nowhere, or better yet, a portal.



to the aroma of incense derived from agarwood,<sup>28</sup> and stored at *heung gong* before being transported and traded to places in China, Southeast Asia, and as far as Middle-East. Agarwood, along with other products such as incense and spices, formed the pre-colonial raw goods trade across Asia. Today, the Cantonese vernacular of Aberdeen lives through, as it is called *heung gong tsai* - Little Hong Kong.

Hong Kong sits at the mouth of the Pearl River Delta, on its eastern estuary, opening into the South China Sea. Before its Opium Wars, Pearl River Delta was involved in the trading of “silk, palm-leaf fans, pottery, oranges, cotton cloth, iron implements, incense, and sacrificial papers” (Faure and Siu 1995, 3). British East India Company had first set up a trading house in Guangzhou (known in the West previously as Canton) in mid-18th century, while Portugal had set up its base in Macau in 1557 (Carroll 2007, 11). During the Qing dynasty of China, Canton served as the chief and sole trading port by which European companies and foreign merchants could engage in trade. The trading system known as Canton System, however, limited products and exerted settlement restrictions. Moreover, Qing China placed an embargo on opium in response to its growing use in China. When the British East India Company was in a turmoil due to a trade imbalance, it needed to open the Chinese market for opium from India. Hong Kong’s colonial history is tied to the Opium Wars, by which Hong Kong Island first became occupied by British colonialism in 1841 towards the end of the First Opium War.<sup>29</sup> In 1842-1843, Hong Kong was ceded under the Treaty of Nanking. Following the Second Opium War, the British colony expanded to the Kowloon Peninsula, which connects the Mainland, and Stonecutters Island. Kowloon Walled City, a Chinese military fort, was initially excluded when Kowloon first became a colony in 1860 until the colonial expansion further inland. In 1898, the predominant agrarian landmass that came to be known as New Territories was assimilated into the colony under what the metropole called 99-year rent-free lease.

Numerous islands of Hong Kong form clusters of the Wanshan Archipelago. Together, Hong Kong is comprised of 235 islands consisting of administrative districts Hong Kong Island and Outlying Islands, Kowloon, and New Territories. Further adding to Hong Kong’s ambiguity

---

<sup>28</sup> Agarwood is a raw product derived from *Aquilaria* tree species, today endangered. It has been used as incense for Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic ceremonies and practices, as an essential oil, and for its medicinal qualities in traditional Chinese medicine. For more on the fragrant harbour and agarwood, see Jung (2013) and Wei (2014)

<sup>29</sup> For more on Hong Kong’s early colonial timeline, see Shih and Jones (2014, 4)

is its land-sea orientation, which is in constant negotiation through different ruling dynasties of China and subsequently British colonial-capitalist ventures. Throughout its precolonial history, Hong Kong was deemed a geographical outcast by the Imperial Court and characterized as an exile place for “savages, pirates and rebels” (Shih and Jones 2014, 3). Hong Kong’s troubled land-sea configurations and discourses were also shared by other Chinese remote outcasts such as Macau, Taiwan, and Zhuhai. Writing in the context of Zhuhai, a Chinese island city neighbouring Hong Kong, and forming part of the Wanshan Archipelago, Hong (2017) has noted that Chinese state power, under Qing and Ming dynasties of China, sought a mainland of its coastal cities such that the islands oriented themselves toward the interior, the Mainland, and limited their orientation to the ocean. Hong Kong’s oceanic orientation is also in flux. Elizabeth Sinn analyzes that with the California gold rush, Hong Kong’s maritime cartographies were about to shift away from the Indian Ocean, and towards an orientation to the Pacific Ocean. “Pacific century had arrived” and the Pacific transformed “from a peripheral trade zone to a nexus of world trade” (Sinn 2012, 1).

The story of Hong Kong’s urban is, likewise, complicated by its colonial *entrepôt* status, flying geese industrialization, land-sea hybridity, and portal status. Due in part to its mountainous habitus, Hong Kong’s housing strategy is based on building high-rising public estates on reclaimed land from the sea. About half of Hong Kong’s population live in government-owned flats in public housing estates. Ap Lei Chau is the world’s densely populated island (Cheung 2005, 78). Talk of Kowloon’s cagehomes (Davis 2007, 35) and Mong Kok being the densest place on the planet are other corner-stone statistics. There are no shortages of statistics when it comes to Hong Kong’s urban-ness – such that a statistical outline, without its story, can quickly turn into an academic exercise that reproduce discursive power structures of urban studies which generate developmentalist narratives of population exceeding its urban infrastructure or cases in the Western theories of urbanity as critiqued by Robinson (2002), Ong (2011), and Roy (2011a).

Hong Kong significantly served as refuge and sanctuary to migrants and refugees from different parts of China displaced from the World Wars, Japanese occupation, and Mao’s cultural revolution. In 1966, protests broke against a fare raise of Star Ferry, which served the prominent route between Hong Kong Island and Kowloon (Cheung 2009, 9). Subsequently, the 1967 anti-

colonial movements erupted riots and bombings against the colonial regime, and is theorized as a watershed moment in the first making of Hongkongers (Cheung 2009, 5). The British regime moved to reform through education, labour hours regulations, and public housing to appease Hong Kong and also in “quelling the leftist-inspired disturbances” (Cheung 2009, 5). Later in the century, the Sino-British joint declaration of 1984 set up Hong Kong’s new course of postcolonial history with its ‘handover’ / ‘return’ agreed for 1997 to China. When Tiananmen Square incident shook Beijing in 1989, it sent shockwaves across Hong Kong, with a cloud of uncertainty of its financial and political status. Many professionals emigrated to places such as Canada, particularly Vancouver (Jim 2007; Ley and Kobayashi 2005).

In the run up to 1997 were not just economic, social, territorial, and political anxieties, but also cultural nervousness. When the 1996 Atlanta Summer Olympics took place, a question that pressed Hongkongers were whether they would ever be capable of winning a medal before its ‘return’ to ‘mother’ China – a powerhouse in Olympics. Thus, when Lee Lai-Shan brought home a gold medal, in windsurfing, she erupted within Hong Kong a strange sense of unconscious fulfilment, an unexpected euphoria, and a memory return to the island city’s fishing village and seafaring legacies. Lee Lai-Shan hailed from Cheung Chau island. In a news tribute 20 years later, *South China Morning Post* piece “20 Years On” shares that Hongkongers were in a dire need of uplifting, “who were living under a cloud of uncertainty ahead of the handover to Chinese sovereignty in less than a year’s time and were in need of a boost to their Hong Kong identity” (Careem 2018, n.p.). Lee Lai-Shan’s story reflects Hong Kong’s troubled cultural belonging and the city’s divergence from China as root. The messy terrains of Hong Kong’s ‘handover’ is fraught with uncertain identities and memory as Brenda Yeoh (2001) theorizes in her discussion of the continuities of the postcolonial and urban.

As Hong Kong emerges from the shadow via its search for cultural identity, political and economic autonomy, and a struggle for its Cantonese vernacular, scholarly tools are at a scramble to explain its present unrest. In 2019, protests erupted against an extradition bill uniting various contingents of Hongkongers. I term these protests as Be Water Movement in order to give credit to the protestors’ explicit use of Bruce Lee’s “Be water” motto in their protest vision and tactics. Bruce Lee – a martial artist, filmstar, and philosopher – brought the worlds of

kungfu, art, and philosophy together by speaking on the flow of water, and on how to harness its power of movement. In one of his television interviews, he explains the power of water:

Empty your mind, be formless. Shapeless, like water. Now you put water into a cup, it becomes the cup. You put water into a bottle and it becomes the bottle. You put it in a teapot, it becomes the teapot. Now water can flow, or it can crash. Be water, my friend. (Lee in Rothery 1994 [1971])

Since the eruption of the political movement against the extradition bill, the protests have additionally asked for the unconditional release of all political prisoners associated with the protests; retraction of designating the protests as ‘riot’ which can hold a 10 year prison sentence for the protesters; an independent inquiry into the police violence and brutality, and finally universal suffrage to allow Hongkongers to elect law-makers in the Legislative Council and the head of government, that is the Chief Executive.<sup>30</sup> During the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration, the principle of “one country, two systems” was codified. To ensure two political systems, the Basic Law was ratified in 1990 and came into effect in 1997, by which Hong Kong would be guaranteed its own legal and political jurisdiction for 50 years, that is until 2047. Today, both Beijing and Hongkongers are invoking the idiom “one country, two systems”, emphasizing different parts of the principle for their divergent goals.

While 2019 has certainly provoked Hong Kong to a level of unmeasurable urgency, many protest events predate this democracy movement. Such events include the 2003 peaceful march for democracy, 2014 mass street sit-ins that came to be known as the Umbrella Movement, the unrest by street hawkers in Mong Kok in 2016 dubbed as the Fishball Revolts. In this respect, Hong Kong’s story can be characterized as a latecomer to anti-colonial intellectual work. Furthermore, current popular unrest is entangled with the urban at its source with Hong Kong’s ongoing real-estate growth, land scarcity, and hyper development generating a string of protests. Ackbar Abbas, thus, conceptualizes Hong Kong’s spatial temporalities as a “space of disappearance” (Abbas 1997, 69), while Helen Siu has pointed to a “nostalgia of disappearance” (Siu 2011, 139). Siu’s remarks address a cultural turn in Hong Kong whereby locals have responded to hyper development sometimes in support of ‘colonial preservation’. This instance

---

<sup>30</sup> The Legislative Council is presently only partially elected by people, with the other half of seats selected by appointed interest groups and experts known as functional constituencies. Likewise, the Chief Executive of Hong Kong is appointed by a special interest committee of 1200 people, thus allowing Beijing to manipulate the ascension of a leader to its favour. For details of Hong Kong’s democratic structure, or lack thereof, see Tse (2016).

played out in 2006 at the Edinburgh Place Ferry Pier (Star Ferry on Hong Kong Island) when the pier along with its clocktower were demolished. Additionally, there have been outbursts and sit-ins against Urban Renewal Authority's appropriation of prime urban land and displacement of long-term inhabitants of old residential flats, such as the infamous Lee Tung Street (Wedding Card Street) in Wan Chai. Along with the localized protests, a wave of other mass street protests filled Hong Kong's political and social movements in the decade following 1997, such as against the World Trade Organization in 2005, pre-dominantly led by South Korean farmers (who had travelled from South Korea), and domestic migrant workers led by Indonesian and Filipina women.

Hong Kong's inter-referencing with other cities and cultures, and its worlding takes into consideration the constantly changing historical, political, and economic contexts in its urban modeling – with varying local, regional, oceanic, and global dynamics. Since China's development policy shifted from the interior under Mao Zedong to its coastal under Deng Xiaoping, Hong Kong's political economy and land-use has come under a new regionalism (Lin 1997). Economic spaces of exception, and graduated sovereignty, as analyzed by Aihwa Ong (2006), emerge as new administrative technologies and assemblage by which China is increasingly ordering and integrating Hong Kong. This is captured by Cartier (2001, 242) in the idiom, "Shenzhen is Hong Kongized, Guangzhou is Shenzhenized, and the whole country [China] is Guangdongized". Hong Kong's emerging regional geography is further commanded by China's plan for a Pearl River Delta Metropolitan Region. The building and recent launch of the bridge between Hong Kong, Zhuhai, and Macau exhibit the extent of worlding experiments that re-open new configurations of land-sea networks and island-island relations (Hong 2017). The Belt and Road Initiative, also being called the 'New Silk Road', is an emerging plan by Xi Jinping, President to China, who has launched a trade development project which is set to build road (belt), and a maritime shipping channel (road) to link the Far East with the Middle East and Central Asia. While Hong Kong's recent urban phenomenon has strong ties to Chinese policy, Hong Kong is also pursuing identity beyond China. Helen Siu (2011, 147-148) points out renewed financial rivalries between Hong Kong and Shanghai at the start of the 21st century. Following the 1997 financial crises that impacted Hong Kong's stock market, and Shanghai's financial rise since 2000, Hong Kong is furthermore looking to invigorate its Islamic banking

connections and its linkages with Southeast Asia and the Middle East in order to re-establish its trading and economic prowess (Siu 2011, 143).

Helen F. Siu (2011, 133) highlights that there is a certain elusiveness to the term Hongkonger and that it cannot be defined as “a static target population but one that has circulated in and out of the territory at different historical junctures”. Likewise, Shih and Jones (2014, 9) delineate Hongkongers through the experience of “common features of exile from China, refugee experiences, British colonial rule, and particular ways of life”. Prominent Pearl River Delta peoples who today comprise southern Han Chinese include Dan, boat people; Hakka, literally guest people referring to migrants from the north to the south of China; Punti, original agriculturalists of New Territories; and Hoklo, river people from neighbouring Fujian province (Faure and Siu 1995). In 1841 at Britain’s colonization, Hong Kong’s population was 7,450 including boat dwellers of 2,000 (Sinn 2012, 22). Today, the population is 7.4 million (Information Services Department 2018, 285). Fang-Long Shih and Carol Jones (2014, 2-3) explain that Hong Kong was largely inhabited by indigenous Dan people, before becoming gradually sinicized as Han Chinese migrants, mostly Hakka people from the Central Plains of China fled to Hong Kong during their defeat to the Mongols. The Dan people were discriminated against by Imperial China and lived exclusively on boats and waters; they helped service the port infrastructure in the initial days of British colonialism (Sinn 2012, 26-27). Hong Kong’s status as an East Asian and Chinese city is also complicated by its earlier Southeast Asian formation as a Nanyue kingdom, presently Vietnam. Prior to the sinicization by Han Chinese, indigenous peoples known as Baiyue (Hundred Yue) tribes with Malay, Vietnamese, or Polynesian backgrounds are known to have inhabited Hong Kong and southern China (Carroll 2007, 9). Furthermore, Faure and Siu (1995, 13) open categorical and epistemic complexities in the formation of Han Chinese in Pearl River Delta with ponderings of whether the locals of Hong Kong became Han Chinese or if Han Chinese became local. In addition, in its pre-colonial trade, numerous inhabitants of diverging origin circles travelled through the port. Parsee merchants had established a base in Shanghai in mid-18th century and traded through Hong Kong (Siu 2011, 131). Following Parsees also include Sindhi merchants and traders from India, and later constituting a Sindhi diaspora who were dislodged from Partition when the province of Sindh

came under the state of Pakistan. Sikhs started to arrive in Hong Kong in the second half of 19th century following the Sikh-Anglo Wars in Punjab.

### ***‘mo lo’, ‘Moors’ of Hong Kong***

In Hong Kong, I was referred to in Cantonese as ‘*mo lo*’ – ‘Moor’, a Portuguese othering term which was applied to Muslims from North Africa, Arab and Europe. It is pronounced as ‘*mō lō*’. In Hong Kong, ‘*mo lo*’ referred to the pre-colonial Muslims who played a prominent role in Hong Kong’s trading port, shipping channels, and trading connections with the Middle East. During colonial Hong Kong, ‘*mo lo cha*’ came to be applied to all Indians – Muslim or otherwise (Lim 2018, *South China Morning Post*). *Cha*, referred to policemen, as in *cha yan* (police men) and was directed at Hong Kong’s colonial police who derived their men from colonial India.<sup>31</sup> The label ‘*mo lo cha*’ is close to another label ‘*mo lo shan*’, with *shan* referring to mountains or hills in the Cantonese vernacular. A 19th century publication by a German missionary in Hong Kong, Ernst John Eitel (1895, 190), mentions the following: “The Mohammedans built (in 1843) a Mosque on the hill thenceforth called Mosque Gardens (Moloshan).” A web source on *Gwulo: Old Hong Kong* (n.d.) notes ‘*mo lo shan*’ means the mountain of ‘Moors’, and that the label referred to Jamia Mosque on the intersection of Shelley Street and Mosque Street. The Antiquities and Monuments Office of Hong Kong (2018) has additionally recorded the name Lascar Temple for Jamia Mosque. About 15 minutes walk from that mosque is Upper Lascar Row, a street in Sheung Wan on Hong Kong Island. In Cantonese, the street is written out as 摩羅上街 *mo lo soeng* (upon) *gaai* (street). The street’s English name – Upper Lascar Row – likewise adopts *lascar* from Portuguese *lascarins*, who had derived their source from Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). The term emerges from Persian *lashkar*, Arabic *al-‘askar*, and Hindi-Urdu *lashkari*. *Lascar* referred to sailors and seamen often recruited from the subcontinent to service navy and merchant ships of the colonial empire.

In the colony of Hong Kong, similar to other Pacific coastal regions of Eastern Asia such as Singapore and the Shanghai concession, early Sikhs were often employed in army, police,

---

<sup>31</sup> *Cha* also references *accha*, a dynamic Hindi-Urdu word that has multiple meanings depending on how it is expressed, its tone, length, and emphasis. It can denote ‘okay’ - as in an agreement, acknowledgement; or as a surprise, or validation, ‘really?’; as an adjective referring to good; or a quick conversation or question initiator – ‘listen up, so...’

prison, and security forces (Cheuk 2008; Tatla 1999; Kahlon 2016). While some sources suggest a presence of Sikhs in Hong Kong in 1841, most scholars point to 1867 as the earliest arrivals of Sikhs in Hong Kong (Kahlon 2016, 194; Roy 2018, 49). Circulations between Hong Kong and Shanghai were prominent in the arising Sikh translocal and diaspora network (Yin 2017). Sikh soldiers were deployed in Shanghai during the Second Opium War of 1856-1860, and the Hong Kong Regiment of Sikhs was used in parts of China against the Boxer Rebellion at the end of the 19th century, which was an uprising in China against the increasing influence and foreign policy of British and European imperialism (Kahlon 2016, 214-215). Following the Boxer Rebellion, the Hong Kong Regiment was disbanded, and Sikhs moved into the police segment in greater numbers (Kahlon 2016, 195). One study estimates that in 1934 there were 182 Sikhs and 126 Muslims in the Royal Hong Kong Police and that the Sikh population in the police grew to 741 by 1934 (Vaid 1972, 40). Another study estimates about 400 Sikhs in the colony's police force in 1941, forming about half of the size of the police force at the time (Cheuk 2008, 52). In addition to police employment, Sikhs were also recruited as prison guards and correctional staff. In Stanley Prison that was built in 1935, there were about 100 Sikhs and 200 Muslims among total staff personnel of 500 (Weiss 1991, 432).

Following World War II, Sikhs were no longer recruited for police or armed forces. One explanation is that with India's and Pakistan's independence in 1947, there was a fear that Sikhs had shifted their loyalties and allegiances following the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong and Shanghai (Cheuk 2008, 54). Anita Weiss (1991, 434), moreover, elaborates that an agreement was made between the British regime of Hong Kong and the newly formed state Pakistan that mandated only Pakistani Muslims could be employed and that Sikhs could no longer serve in the police force. Thus, Sikh employment and recruitment in the police force was terminated and Sikhs had to leave Hong Kong at the end of their tenure. Unlike the Sikh policemen who were on expatriate terms, those who worked as prison guards were employed on local terms and were able to stay (Cheuk 2008, 55; Weiss 1991, 435). As the British Empire began to collapse, many Sikhs from Hong Kong emigrated to Europe or North America. The Sikhs that remained in Hong Kong then shifted to serve in the service industry as building watchmen, bank security, hotel doormen, and drivers (Cheuk 2008, 55). Some Sikhs ventured into businesses, entrepreneurship, and trade particularly with the opening of Chinese economy in 1980s. However, Sikh pursuit of



merchant work in Hong Kong is significantly less than other South Asian groups such as Sindhi and Parsee merchants and traders (Cheuk 2013). Furthermore, there were migratory circulations of Sikhs in the region that continued in the context of other political contexts. Following the Communist Revolution of China in 1949, Sikhs departed from Shanghai either to Hong Kong or back to Punjab (Kahlon 2016, 221-22; Cheuk 2008, 56). The last batch of Sikhs from Shanghai left in 1963, shutting down the Shanghai gurdwara, and carrying with them the last *sarup* (copy) of Guru Granth Sahib (Kahlon 2016, 222). Moreover, with the 1997 'handover', some Sikhs in Hong Kong re-migrated to Britain and Canada in a move similar to other former colonies of Britain such as in East Africa (Cheuk 2008, 71). Caroline Plüss (2005, 213) describes Sikhs families in Hong Kong as "transitory residents". Today, the Hong Kong Government (Information Services Department 2018, 327) estimates the population of Sikhs in Hong Kong to be close to 12,000 whereas the local Sikh gurdwara estimates the figure to be close to 20,000.

Interestingly, gurdwaras and mosques in Hong Kong and various cities of colonized East and Southeast Asia emerged on police, army, and prison grounds. Initially, at the Central Police Station on Hollywood Road in Hong Kong, one floor was designated for spiritual services – Sikhs getting one room for their gurdwara and Muslims getting another room for their mosque (Cheuk 2008, 53; Weiss 1991, 430-431). The gurdwara at the police station housed Guru Granth Sahib (Bhatra 2012, 93). Later in 1901 when the Sikh regiment was stationed in Hong Kong as part of the British Indian Army, they founded a gurdwara whose current location is in Happy Valley, Wan Chai. For the Sikh gurdwara, the land grant was acquired from the British Government and the *Hong Kong Telegraph* (1902, 2) reported its "Moresque design" ('Moorish'). For the co-path, earlier Muslim traders and seamen – *lascars* were important in the development of Jamia Mosque in the second half of 19th century. Subsequently, Punjabi Muslims who were recruited into police and prison work by the British colony in 1880s contributed to the expansion of mosques in Hong Kong. In addition to its proximity to Upper Lascar Row, Jamia Mosque is located close to Victoria Prison (at that time Victoria Gaol) and the Central Police Station on Hollywood Road on the island. On the Peninsula-side, Kowloon Mosque and Islamic Centre serving the Muslim community was built next to the army barracks of one of the Punjabi regiments stationed prior to the turn to the 20th century (Weiss 1991, 426). Additionally, at the Stanley Prison where Muslims and Sikhs were staffed as prison guards, a

space was designated for the building of a mosque in the prison complex; Stanley Mosque was constructed in 1936 (Weiss 1991, 432). A gurdwara was not permitted in the Stanley Prison (Weiss 1991, 431). Stanley Mosque, Jamia Mosque, and Khalsa Diwan Sikh Temple all have a designation of a historic building by the Antiquities Advisory Board (2020). Weiss (1991, 443) has described Stanley Mosque as “evocative of a village mosque in Punjab with its earhttone colour and casual feeling . . . . to recreate a part of Punjab in their new home”.

*My family migration tale came much later. My paternal grandfather from rural region of Amritsar-Taran Taran departed from the port of Calcutta in a cargo ship to the colony of Hong Kong. Here in Hong Kong, he worked as a security guard at a bank. He subsequently became an entrepreneur – trading Hong Kong and Chinese goods to different parts of South Asia (namely Kathmandu, Nepal), a trade which my daddy took over until the late 1990s. In 1983, my Mother birthed me in the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, located in Jordan, Hong Kong, not too far from my hometown in Tsim Sha Tsui. When my daddy went to the birth registry to register me, a conflict erupted. The registry officer refused to accept my name – Amardeep Kaur – as valid. The administrator insisted that I take on my daddy’s Singh and not my mummy’s Kaur. My dada, paternal grandfather, insisted I am Kaur. My daddy engaged in a back-and-forth negotiation. The colonial implementer offered a compromise – Amardeep Kaur Singh. My daddy, Gurvel Singh, refused, and eventually he did come home with my birth certificate – Amardeep Kaur. I share this story to enunciate, in the lived experiences of peoples, the colonial state’s social engineering technologies to create naming legibility, well theorized by James Scott (1998). Additionally, Sikh naming conventions conflicted with the status quo of other imperial societies.*

## **Vignette 2: Guru Nanak Jahaz, the Steamship**

On 4 April 1914, from the port of Hong Kong, departs the *SS Komagata Maru*, a steamship to its supposed final destination – Vancouver across the Pacific Ocean (Kazimi 2011, 94). Despite arriving in the port of Vancouver, the ship unfortunately took on a tragic twist, and many passengers found themselves to a death-centered final destination at Budge Budge in Calcutta.

The story of this voyage involves Gurdit Singh who had chartered the Japanese-owned ship. Gurdit hailed from Sarhali, a village in Tarn Taran, which is a twin city next to Amritsar, Punjab (Kazimi 2011, 94). Tarn Taran, where my *dada* (paternal grandfather) comes from, literally means the ferry that one takes across the world ocean. As a businessman and government contractor, Gurdit Singh travelled all over Southeast Asia and was settled in the Malay States. When the Japanese ship was chartered, it first took on 165 passengers from its departure city Hong Kong. She then stopped at Shanghai in China, and then Moji, and Yokohama in Japan to load up on more passengers, food, and fuel. A total of 376 passengers sailed across the Pacific Ocean to search for new home and work in Canada: 340 Sikhs, 24 Muslims, and 12 Hindus (Kazimi 2011, 94-96).

The steamship has another name in Sikh popular consciousness. In Hong Kong, Guru Granth Sahib was brought onboard the *SS Komagata Maru* from Khalsa Diwan Sikh Temple, and the steamship was renamed as *Guru Nanak Jahaz*. The steerage deck of the ship was set up for 533 bunks (Johnston 2014, 59). In the forecastle compartment, Gurdit Singh set up a platform and a richly embroidered canopy for Guru Granth Sahib, surrounded by floorspace to seat all passengers cross-legged (Johnston 2014, 59). At this moment, the *SS Komagata Maru* was no longer just a Japanese steamship carrying passengers, but *Guru Nanak Jahaz* – an itinerant *gurdwara* with her own sovereignty and sanctuary, and named after Guru Nanak, *sikhi*'s first erratic mobilizer and enabler.<sup>32</sup> In the 15th century, Guru Nanak had travelled with Mardana, a Muslim *rababi* of 'marasi' lineage who carried and played the *rabab*, a string-based musical instrument emerging from Central Asia and Persia. Navtej Purewal (2001, 374) characterizes "Gurū Nanak's *darbar* [as] mobile, marked by three decades of travel in spreading his message accompanied by his companion and musician Bhai Mardana". Onboard *Guru Nanak Jahaz* in 1914, we once again witness a musical story of relation. Drawing on archival material, Renisa Mawani (2018, 6) reconstructs the moment of the ship embarking from Hong Kong:

“Cries of Sat Sri Akal and Ali Ali”—Sikh and Muslim appeals to the Almighty's omnipotence—“were raised when the ship set sail.” This mutual respect and camaraderie

---

<sup>32</sup> While the *SS Komagata Maru* narrative has gained scholarly and artistic prominence in this century in Canada, the story of the ship as *Guru Nanak Jahaz* remain largely peripheral, usually only emerging in Punjabi-language work such as in Gurdit Singh's own biographical and diary account *Zulmi Katha*. An English-language translation, with an introduction by Darshan Singh Tatla, was published in 2007 as (Gurdit Singh [1928] 2007).

flourished at sea with a “Sikh place of worship on one side of the *Komagata Maru* and a Muhammadan (*sic*) place of worship on the other.”

### **Greater Vancouver: Coast Salish**

Settler cartographies of metropolitan Vancouver, also referred to as Lower Mainland, overlap with the traditional territories of Coast Salish Peoples. Salish Sea encompasses the frontier waters along the islands and mainland of lower coastal British Columbia in Canada and Washington in the United States. The peoples of Coast Salish<sup>33</sup> come from various First Nations. The City of Vancouver, itself, is located on the Unceded Territory of the Tsleil-Waututh, Squamish and Musqueam Nations. The Lower Mainland further includes nations such as Sto’lo and Tsawwassen, among other Coast Salish nations. Metropolitan Vancouver’s geography is divided by the Fraser River. While British named the river as Fraser, the river is known as Sto:lo among the upriver groups of Coast Salish peoples (Archibald 2008, 371).

Indigenous subsistence economy such as salmon fishery, shaped the regional and localized livelihoods, and the subsistence trade took place by canoe via sea or river or to the interior via foot-trails. Heber (2011, 15) described existing Indigenous networks and economic system as a “means of intertribal and interregional exchange”. Alongside fur trade and agricultural products were raw materials such as copper for tools and ceremonial objects (Heber 2011, 16-17). With the European companies arriving and setting up trading posts, the local livelihoods based on small-scale hunting and fishing were rapidly modified into a global network of mercantile trade and capitalist economy (Nayar 2012, 10). The maritime fur trade in the Pacific Northwest consisted of expeditions by numerous European and settler companies. Russia dominated the trade from Alaska (Heber 2011, 19), whereas British made their claim through the establishment of Fort Vancouver (in Washington State) and later Fort Victoria (Vancouver Island) by the Hudson Bay Company (Madill 2015, n.p.). Traders took the fur, particularly sea otter, to Canton (what is today Guangzhou in China) to trade for silk, tea, and porcelain from

---

<sup>33</sup> Coast Salish is a more expansive region than what this doctoral project travels with - Coast Salish spans Pacific Northwest. My use of the term Coast Salish is not to denote equivalency with Pacific Northwest, or Vancouver or any other area; rather, I am invoking a different geography and a different understanding of land, to acknowledge Indigenous sovereignties. I use Coast Salish to destabilize settler colonial cartographies, bounded notions of municipal cities, scalar thought, and nation-state boundaries. Moreover, it is with the intention of using Coast Salish as a temporary placeholder for what is to come, where diverse Indigenous lands are recognized in their unceded territories and nations.

China, which were then sold in Europe for profits (Gibson 1992, xi). Heber (2011, 18) has suggested that the “desire for access to the rich and exotic trade goods of the Orient brought European explorers to North America”. Moreover, trade furthered exploratory ambitions of conquest. Bonita Lawrence (2002, 26) has characterized the European trading regimes in Canada as mercantile colonialism. While the maritime fur trade brought material wealth to the indigenous fur traders, it set up the indigenous communities into an over-reliance and dependence on fur trade (Heber 2011, 29). Subsequently, regional livelihoods were completely re-moulded by capitalist ventures into fisheries and forestry.

The region’s development followed its settler colonial logics, where the structures of internal and external colonialism simultaneously plundered resources for colonial empire’s wealth and consumption, and a settler ideology that managed populations based on a racial hierarchy. The bordering of settler state United States of America and colonial state British North America complicated any natural geographical characteristics including landscapes, trails, and water bodies. Canada as a settler colonial state formed in 1867 and British Columbia joined into that confederacy as a province in 1871.<sup>34</sup> British naming conventions took over those of Spanish colonial navigators and indigenous placenames. The Hudson Bay Company administered New Caledonia, while Vancouver Island and the Gulf islands in the Salish Sea were designated as crown colony by the British government. Just as Victoria on Hong Kong Island was named as capital of Hong Kong, Victoria on Vancouver Island came to serve the provincial capital. New Westminster in the Lower Mainland was initially the colonial capital for British Columbia between 1858-1866. The provincial capital later changed to Victoria on the island in 1866 when Vancouver Island had joined British Columbia.

While initial fur trade established trading ports along coastal Pacific Northwest, colonial expansion and capitalist industrialization soon overtook the region’s spatial character and infrastructure. The Fraser Canyon Gold Rush brought settlers in search for gold and mining riches (Lai 1988). In *Chinatown: Towns within Cities in Canada*, David Chuenyan Lai surveys the historical settlement of Chinese in Canadian cities and the subsequent Chinatowns that accompanied that wave. In 1788, Chinese workers from Canton and Macau had first arrived in

---

<sup>34</sup> For Canadian settlement timeline, see Lai (1988, 15) and Nayar (2012, 10).

the traditional territory of Nuuchahnulth (Nootka Sound on Vancouver Island) through a British trading expedition to clear and build land for settlements (Lai 2003, 12). The Gold Rush brought in the first significant Chinese labourers from Hong Kong. This was followed by a second wave of Chinese labourers in arrival to work on the Canadian Pacific Railway (Lai 2003).

Just as British trading companies sought to correct its trade imbalance with China by using opium from India, fur derived from sea otter pellets in the Pacific Northwest became a lucrative market in China (Gibson 1992, 38). In addition to the British colony of Hong Kong, Britain had also established five Chinese open treaty ports along coastal South China after the Opium Wars that benefited British and foreign trading interest and by extension colonial empire. Moreover, these coastal ports served British trading houses to further operate opium trade between Hong Kong and British Columbia. Port of Victoria, on what is now Vancouver Island, was the largest importer of raw opium from Hong Kong during this time. After fur and coal, opium was the third largest trading product in the Greater Vancouver's earlier settlements (Lai 2011, n.p.). Victoria subsequently refined the opium in Chinatown in opium factories, which was smuggled to United States and generated huge revenue for Canada. Victoria and its Chinatown came to be the main gateway for Chinese labourers from Hong Kong. However, with the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway, Victoria's earlier Chinatown community and prominent trading activities shifted to Vancouver (Lai 2003, 315). In that, Vancouver emerged as the new portal city since it now connected the West Coast and the B.C. province to the interior and prairie Canada via its rail corridor. The industrialization of fishery and forestry accompanied the Canadian Pacific Railway in the Lower Mainland.

Kazimi (2011) highlights the paradoxical cultural diversity of Greater Vancouver's settlements. On the one hand, labourers – Chinese, Japanese, First Nations, Sikh, Punjabis – worked shoulder to shoulder during earlier periods. On the other hand, localities, neighbourhoods and suburbs have become a “disquietingly segregated place” (Kazimi 2011, 6). Another layer of complexity is underlined by Kamala Elizabeth Nayar (2012) who examines the twice-migration of Punjabis in British Columbia – that is, those that re-migrated from rural B.C. to its suburban. Her argument puts forth the contrasting “cultural synergy” of rural migratory life with the “ethnic insularity” of the suburban Punjabi community (Nayar 2012, 178). Earlier

engagements between Sikh and First Nations communities in the Lower Mainland are also revealed through the word *taike*. *Taike* is a Punjabi word, that emerges from *taiya*, which means one's father's older brother. *Taike* refers to the home or the place of one's father's older brother. *Vancouver Courier* (Rossi 2014) reports that the local usage of the term emerged during the earlier Sikh migration and labour work in the lumber mills alongside First Nation peoples, when there was a deeper sense of shared struggle. The Punjabi-speaking Sikhs would refer to First Nations as *taike* in the Lower Mainland. Naveen Girm, a local cultural researcher, highlights that this term has not been used in other Canadian places of South Asian, Sikh or Punjabi migration (Rossi 2014). In 2017, *taike* became a focal point of Indian Summer Festival's (2017b, n.p.) programming stream titled *Taike*, in order to "reignite a sense of kinship" between the three indians – east, west, native.<sup>35</sup>

Together with the neighbouring suburban cities of Burnaby, Richmond, and Surrey, among other suburban municipalities, Greater Vancouver is a focal point of Canadian suburbanization. This dissertation concerns itself more with a loose conceptualization of city-region Vancouver and less with its official census designations and its municipal and administrative boundaries. In this light, as a study of multi-sited ethnography, I am able to follow diasporic narratives that may sometimes fall outside of administrative boundaries or official designations – such as the historical gurdwara in Abbotsford in Fraser Valley. New waves of migration to Canada has largely centred in the urban centres of city-regions Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal. Of relevance to this study is the wave of migration from Hong Kong in the 1980s and 1990s to Vancouver and Toronto in the run up to 1997 of Hong Kong, and a separate wave of migration of Sikh diaspora from Punjab in the aftermath of 1984 discussed in the following.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Vancouver emerged as a destination portal city to Hong Kong's 'handover' anxieties. The aftermath of Tiananmen Square in Beijing in 1989 and prelude to 1997 'handover' had paved the way for Hong Kong families to embark on a new era of Pacific crossing. Geographer Katherine Mitchell (2004) and David Ley (2010) have each investigated the Pacific Rim migration under the new neoliberal logics in which Chinese

---

<sup>35</sup> I have decapitalized in this context in order to use these terms as descriptors and adjective markers rather than as self-identification.

migrants were permitted into Canada as carriers of capital, wealth, and class desirability. Mitchell (2004, 4) notes that these Hong Kong immigrant entrepreneurs were “more visible and powerful than poor migrants”, as seen in the urban and public transformation of Vancouver. The geopolitical climate of this new migration was complemented by capitalist and waterfront land development. Li Ka-Shing, a Hong Kong real-estate industrialist, took advantage of the market to invest in industrial land in False Creek in what was to become a cornerstone deal that brought the twin Pacific cities into yet another collusion course. To that, art historian Jim (2007, 336) asks: What meaning does return have for Hong Kong-in-Vancouver . . . . ?

Since 1997, Hong Kong’s and Vancouver’s connective circulations have gained prominence in the urban studies literature that are analyzing its worlding processes from waterfront development, migrant flows, public art, transitory expansion, and its skyscraper housing market. Vancouver’s modeling of waterfront and residential development after Hong Kong is often idiomized as an Asianization of Vancouver, and even dubbed as ‘Hongcouver’ or ‘Van Kong’.<sup>36</sup> To further complicate ‘Hongcouver’, urban scholars highlight hybridization and travelling mixes by which Asian cities, such as Dubai, lifts and replicates ‘Hongcouver’ (Jim 2014; Lowry and McCann 2011). In this light, while Vancouver is Asianized after Hong Kong, Dubai is Vancouverized. In addition, Alice Ming Wai Jim (2014) and Lowry and McCann (2011) complicate the Asianization processes of the Hong Kong-Vancouver-Dubai urban circuit by connecting to artistic interruptions that further elucidate its hybridization with indigenous languages and culture. In a waterfront place-making art installation in Vancouver, artist Henry Tsang juxtaposes English with indigenous Chinook – a pidgin trading language with indigenous roots that emerged in the Pacific Northwest. Chinook was used north from Alaska, and down south on what is today California (Lowry and McCann 2011, 187). Henry Tsang’s public art project titled *Welcome to the land of light* was launched in 1997. The composed poem (below) draws on puns, “where light be under land,” literally referring to the fibre optic cables of a hyper-connected city, and symbolically to new epistemic engagements with light – from traditional knowledge to that of data and speed. The English rendering further a simultaneous play on communication, window of light (“*If you heart mind open, you receive new*

---

<sup>36</sup> These terms for Vancouver have appeared in the *Guardian Weekly* (de Beer 1994), the *Washington Post* (Claiborne 1991), and the *Los Angeles Times* (Gibson 1989). Henry Yu (2006, 308) mentions that the usage of the term was negative and reactive to what was being perceived as an ‘Asianization’ of Vancouver.



*knowledge*”), understanding and co-habitating while maintaining a sense of incommensurability of knowledge systems and translation (“*where people talk different*”).

Klahowya! Kloshe maika ko yukwa, ka towagh mitlite keekwullie illahee.  
*Greetings! Good you arrive here, where light be under land.*

Alki yaka alta yukwa. Yukwa, maika elip mitlite kahkwa chee.  
*Future it be now. Here, you begin live like new.*

Chako kopa laly ka tillikums wawa huloima, keschi kloshe kunamokst.  
*Come to time where people talk different but good together.*

Spose maika tumtum chako hahlakl, maika iscum chee kumtux.  
*If you heart mind open, you receive new knowledge.*

Maika mitlite kahkwa elektlik eye pe elektlik tumtum pe elektlik wawa latlah.  
*You have same like electric eye and heart mind and talk sound.*

Maika mitlite hyak kahkwa towagh.  
*You live fast like light.*

Nanitch wawa mitlite yukwa, yahwa pe konaway ka kopa ikt laly.  
*See talk be here there and everywhere at one time.*

Nesaika mamook okoke town kloshe, nawitka. Maika halo kwass yukwa.  
*Us make this community good indeed. You not afraid here.*

Yukwa maika elip mitlite kahkwa tyee. Konaway illahee kahkwa kopa maika lamah.  
*Here, you begin live like chief. World same like in you hand.*

(Tsang 1997, n.p.)

### ***‘Hindoos’, Hindus at Vancouver***

When earlier Sikhs arrived in Vancouver, they were referred to as Hindus, spelled at that time as ‘Hindoos’. Scholars (Kazimi 2011, 36; Nayar 2012, 9) note that *Hindoos* emerged as a term referring to Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims in Canada in order to distinguish East Indians from Native Indians. This usage, however, requires further contextualization of nation imaginaries in British India and modern India. The historical term, *Hindu*, is derived as a geographical referent. In Persian, it referred to Sindhu River (now Indus River), and in Arabic *Al-Hind*. The term *Hindu* later became an othering term by Muslims, referring to non-Muslims east of the Indus

River. In the formation of modern-day India, another term Hindustani acquired currency by which the language Hindustani, nation Hindustan, people Hindus and Hindustani, and all elements appropriated as internal to the imaginary India were ascribed a designation of Hindu.<sup>37</sup> This was made possible by a simultaneous othering; only this time Islam and Muslims were characterized as foreign to the Indian ‘mother land’. In other words, modern India re-appropriated Hindu from Muslims, and returned the Hindu-Muslim othering tool with a new face. Caught in this entanglement are Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Adivasis, and Ad Dharmis.

Quite in contrast to the Pacific cities of Asia, the early Sikh migrants in Canada and United States were employed in the resource industry – specifically agriculture and forestry. In Canada, they arrived in British Columbia and eventually settled along the Fraser river where they worked in the lumber sector, including sawmills and wood processing. Sikh and Punjabi labourers became prominent in the inner regions of British Columbia (Nayar 2012). In 1906, there were 2,500 South Asians in British Columbia and they were primarily Sikh and Punjabi (Kazimi 2011, 38), with originary backgrounds in the army and in farming. The lumber mill owners employed the racialized migrants at lower wages often leading to unrest. Khalsa Diwan Society was founded to be political and social service organization catering to Sikhs and broader Indian migrants. A gurdwara was built in 1908 in Vancouver by Khalsa Diwan Society in order to address the settlement of the newly arrived migrants and accommodate Sikhs and Punjabis (Sohi 2014, 9). The gurdwara became a refuge for newly arriving migrants as well as an arena for meetings and organizing. This involved supporting the passengers of the *SS Komagata Maru*, labour organizing, and participating in larger Ghadar activity. In addition to the Vancouver gurdwara, the society opened numerous branches along the Pacific coast: Victoria, Abbotsford, and New Westminster in British Columbia; and neighbouring agricultural towns and cities in Washington, Oregon, and California in USA. By 1912, gurdwaras were also built in Stockton, California and Victoria (Sohi 2014, 9).

---

<sup>37</sup> In his case study of the making of modern India nation-state, Partha Chatterjee (1993, 110; 1993, 113) underscores that secular nationalism of India created a notion of Hindu in which it assimilated heterogeneous groups – Buddhists and Jains – which it considered internal to its Hindu India imagination while casting Muslims as the foreign outsiders and external.

Several authors writing on the diaspora have connected the question of labour organizing with the politicised sites of gurdwaras. Faced with economic challenges and racial discrimination, many agricultural and lumber mill labourers in Canada and United States of America became members of the Ghadar Party (Sohi 2014; Kazimi 2011). The Vancouver gurdwara, alongside Ghadar Party offices in San Francisco and Berkeley, were pivotal in the making and spread of Ghadar thought. Ghadar activity was linked and networked by various ports of the Pacific:

[G]urdwaras across the Pacific were used as meeting places for devising the Party's revolutionary plans and formulating responses to various anti-immigrant and antiradical measures directed against Indian migrants. British surveillance records reveal that colonial authorities were tracking Ghadar activity in gurdwaras in Vancouver, Victoria, Stockton, Hong Kong, Manila, Shanghai, and Nairobi. (Sohi 2014, 13)

The extent of this surveillance is illustrated by the return voyage of the *SS Komagata Maru*. When the *SS Komagata Maru* was sent back, it was refused the right to dock in Hong Kong, and in Singapore for fear that the Ghadarites on board would infuse an anti-colonial rebellion amongst the various Sikh police and army forces across the British Empire (Sohi 2014, 15-16).

The extent of the Ghadar movement's success in overthrowing the British Empire and the involvement of other countries such as Germany is contested. At the outbreak of World War I, the Ghadarites from U.S., Canada, and the colonies in the Pacific had travelled back to Punjab in organizing a rebellion against British rule. Ghadar Party newspapers were published in different languages and were distributed through gurdwaras and regiments transnationally (Sohi 2014). While the mutiny is said to have been crushed by British agents that had infiltrated the movement, the Ghadarites had laid the seeds of anti-colonial uprisings on the subcontinent and across the British Empire. In the words of Ali Kazimi, he captures the moment as: "I see the turning away of the Komagata Maru in 1914 as a transformative moment not just for Canada but also for British India and the British Empire" (Kazimi 2011, xv). The Ghadarites onboard the *SS Komagata Maru* imbued with a different kind consciousness were about to rock the colonial empire.

Sikh migration into Canada re-emerged in the post-war era under a new wave of family migration. With the liberalization of immigration policies in the 1960s, Sikhs were able to migrate through family sponsorships or as skilled labourers. Sikh migration strategies to Canada include migration through arranged marriages with Sikhs from India and transitional places such as Hong Kong (Cheuk 2008, 71). The gender dynamic of migration changed both in Hong Kong and Vancouver as Sikh women were now allowed to migrate and settle as well. Labour trends also changed with Sikhs increasingly moving away from work in the resource industry. Geographers Walton-Roberts and Hiebert (1997) analyze that from the sawmills and wood processing, Indo-Canadians (the term they use) were able to acquire skills and contacts and eventually branched out to residential construction work or started their own wood-based companies and entrepreneurships. They further emphasise the role of extended family networks in the growth and development of these entrepreneurial ventures. Different waves and geographies of South Asian migration also produced varying migration patterns in terms of castes and classes. Sikh migrants into Canada were mostly from rural Punjabi backgrounds with limited formal education and literacy, in contrast to Hindu migrants from urban centres who had the social status of education and literacy (Nayar 2004, 4). Today, the total Canadian Sikh population is approximately 455,000 (Statistics Canada 2013a) and they mostly reside in the Vancouver CMA and the Toronto CMA. Within the Vancouver CMA, the make-up is close to 7% population of the area's population at 155,945 (Statistics Canada 2013d) and Sikhs are primarily concentrated in the Surrey municipality at a figure of 104,720 (Statistics Canada 2013b).

*My arrival story to Canada starts at the turn of the millennium. In 2000, I set sail from Hong Kong to arrive at Coast Salish on Vancouver Island. A few years later, I moved to the Kwarthas in Ontario. However, due to immigration and other barriers, I returned to Hong Kong in 2005, before embarking on a journey once again in 2007.*

### **Vignette 3: Waynabozhoo (person), Zhashkoonh (muskrat), and Mikinaag (turtle)**

Among the Indigenous creation-stories of Turtle Island, is one of the Seven Fires of Creation, which is rooted in Nishnaabeh place-thought – a term conceptualized by Vanessa

Watts (2013). My very partial understanding of this story comes from Leanne Simpson's retelling in *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*.

Meet Mikinaag, the turtle. Waynabozhoo, the person. And the Zhashkoonh, the muskrat. During the great flood, Waynabozhoo, and a few animals had survived in the waters by making use of a log. The expanse of the water was immense, however, with no earth and land in sight. Waynabozhoo needed to dive deep into the sea to find earth, but the water was too deep.

Among the many animals that tried and failed, Zhashkoonh (the muskrat) too made an attempt. The muskrat, however, returned to the surface of the water dead and was not able to survive the deep excursion. Nevertheless, when Zhashkoonh floated to the surface dead, within its paws was some earth recovered from depths of the ocean. Enter Mikinaag, the turtle. Mikinaag offered its back for the earth and expand it, until it became the island, the Turtle Island, as we now know it.

Simpson (2011) explains the relevance of the story, particularly for the Anishnaabe Nation, through the insights of an indigenous elder Edna Manitowabi. She emphasizes that the creation-story has many actors and collaborators, among which include the sacrifices of some, such as Zhaashkoonh. As she writes,

This emphasizes the idea that we each have to dive down to the bottom of the vast expanse of water and search for our own handful of earth. Each of us having to struggle and sacrifice to achieve re-creation is not an easy process. We each need to bring that earth to the surface, to our community, with the intent of transformation. Colonization has shattered the fabric of our nation to such an extent that each of us must be Zhaashkoonh; each of us must struggle down through the vast expanse of water to retrieve our handful of dirt. (Simpson 2011, 69)

The Turtle Island creation-story, grounded in Anishnaabe cosmologies, provides insights on the collaboration between Earth and human and non-human actors (Simpson 2011; Watts 2013).

### **Toronto: On the Shores of Lake Ontario**

Toronto retains its identity through its indigenous name Tkaronto, which has variously been referenced as being of Mohawk or Huron-Wendat origin and as meaning trees standing in the water (Allen 2002, 48; Steckley 1992, 27; Johnson 2013, 61; Recollet and Johnson 2019, 181). The Tkaronto name was a reference to the poles or stakes that were set up in the water as

fishing weirs along Atherley Narrows between Lake Simcoe and Lake Couchicking (Steckley 1992, 27), and used to denote the northern terminus of a prominent travel route that connected the lakes – Simcoe and Ontario (Johnson 2013, 62). The name subsequently travelled southwards to Lake Ontario (a Huron-Wendat word meaning large lake) and to what is now Toronto (Johnson 2013, 62). The geography of this region has its historical roots in the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of New Credit First Nation, the Haudenosaunee, the Huron-Wendat and home to many diverse Indigenous peoples. Like Coast Salish, the shared indigenous territories around Great Lakes have come to be bifurcated through an international boundary of Canada and United States of America. The settler regimes that have been erected on indigenous territories are further complicated by settler state and provincial divisions – such as Ontario, Quebec, and New York in the case of Mohawk Nation – as Audra Simpson (2014) has highlighted in her book *Mohawk Interruptus*. Mohawk forms one of the First Nations in the Iroquois Confederacy, or now more commonly known as Haudenosaunee. Tkaronto is situated at the tip of Lake Ontario, one of the five Great Lakes that distinguishes North America and opens into the Atlantic Ocean via the St. Lawrence River. The place history of this region is expressed in Nishnaabeh thought such as the Seven Fires of Creation outlined in the above vignette, which includes the movement of Nishnaabe peoples from the eastern coast to the Great Lakes region (Leanne Simpson 2011). The Mississaugas of the New Credit are part of the Objibwe Nation, an Anishnaabe-speaking Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous subsistence around the region consisted of hunting-gathering practices, which changed to fur trade under the European trading companies. Unlike the fur trade of Pacific Northwest, however, the fur trade in this region was dominated by beaver pelts to furnish felt hats for Europe (Foster and Eccles 2018). This trade was divided by Hudson Bay Company to the North, and the North West Company based out of Montreal that operated along the St. Lawrence River under a system of canoe convoys. The fur trade generated revenue and profits for Britain and France. Bonita Lawrence (2002) highlights that the commonly referenced material gains of the trade have a darker erased history, one that stirred up trade wars and competition. This had life-changing impacts on First Nations as it decimated populations through warfare and spread of diseases. Moreover, Lawrence (2002, 27) underlines that “warfare and

trade among Indigenous nations profoundly changed the ecology of the land and way of life for nations of many regions”.

British, Canadian, and Indigenous history intersecting with Tkaronto has in its mix a series of controversial land purchases. In 1787, the British and the Mississaugas were involved in a land purchase negotiation that was referred to as the Toronto Purchase, which became apparent later on that it was an empty deed (Freeman 2010, 24). In 1805, an agreement was made by the two parties. However, the deed has increasingly been clarified as not the purchase of land but as a deceitful land treaty through processes of dispossession and from the British exploiting animosity between the Mississaugas and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy (Freeman 2010, 24; Smith 1989, 39). Bonita Lawrence (2002, 40) best delineates that the British agenda in forcing a land surrender across southern Ontario involved procedures consisting of: curbing resistance strategically, deliberately vague terms of land area on documents, and using deceit and manipulation. In response to Indigenous land claims and following generations of Indigenous struggles, the federal regime of the Canadian settler colony finalized a \$145 million claim payment to the Mississaugas of New Credit in 2010 (Government of Canada 2010, n.p.).

Leanne Simpson (2011, 15) writes that Nishnaabeg sovereignty – for the Michi Saagiig Nation – was largely intact until 1787 when the settler-colonial agenda took force. Through Toronto and the colonial securement in southern Ontario in early 19th century, Canada was then able to pursue its colonial interests and head northwards and westwards for settlement and resources (Lawrence 2002, 39-40). In 1867, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick – previously colonies under the British metropole regime – formulated Canada as a settler confederacy, which was based on a Westphalian notion of territorial sovereignty. Subsequently, Canadian settler colony laid the grounds of its new nation-state and the Indian Act that came into effect in 1876 (Lawrence 2002, 55).

As scholars (Amadahy and Lawrence 2009; Thobani 2007) have pointed out, the Indian Act included in its jurisdiction gendered regulation on who is an Indian, and who has Indian status to live on an Indian reserve. Zainab Amadahy and Bonita Lawrence (2009) argue that the Indian Act and its regulation on Indian status seeks to erase indigeneity from mix-raced

Indigenous peoples such as Black-Indian children. The history of Black people in Toronto and Southern Ontario is closely intertwined with that of the East Coast and transatlantic slavery, and further involves Black-Indian off-reserve intermarriages such as Black and Ojibwe peoples. In addition to the Indian Act, Zainab Amadahy and Bonita Lawrence (2009) theorize that settler-colonial regimes, such as the Multiculturalism Act, has served to erase the historic and political identities of Black, Black-Indigenous, and early East Asian and South Asian arrivals, through assimilating new immigrant populations within its rubric of multiculturalism. By lumping all groups into a single struggle, Amadahy and Lawrence elucidate that multiculturalism depoliticizes struggles of resistance and contains them to a frame of ethnicity. Most importantly, this has far-reaching consequences for Indigenous peoples of the land as it creates an uneven “playing field where Aboriginal peoples could potentially be reduced to ‘just another cultural group’ within a multicultural mosaic” (Amadahy and Lawrence 2009, 6).

Of the early East Asians, many Chinese railway workers from the Pacific Northwest came into Toronto following the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway towards the end of the 19th century (Lai 1988, 97). These workers were largely from rural parts of southern China and had settled in the inner city of Toronto where Chinatown emerged. When family migration became more conducive in the 1960s and 1970s, Chinese migrants largely settled in the main Chinatown West and the smaller Chinatown East. The 70s and 80s also saw Sino-Vietnamese and Vietnamese migrants who moved to the Chinatowns. During this period, Toronto’s Chinatown on the West and East took on a new reconfiguration through processes of ‘Vietnamization’ (Luk and Phan 2005). The wave of suburban Chinese migrants who settled in Markham, Mississauga, Scarborough, and Richmond Hill in Greater Toronto in the 1990s came through Hong Kong’s exodus (Lo 2006, 86-87). Moreover, Wang and Lo (2005, 4) highlight that the majority of Chinese emigrants out of Hong Kong chose to settle in the Toronto CMA, followed by Vancouver CMA, over other Canadian urban centres. Thus, even though Vancouver was undergoing a ‘Van Kong’ process, the proportion of Hongkongers moving to Toronto was greater than to Vancouver. This influx generated Hong Kong style shopping centres in the suburbs sometimes termed as ‘Asian theme’ malls (Preston and Lo 2000). Most notably, the Pacific Mall in Markham has gathered scholarly attention in addition to local and tourist attraction in urban and global studies (Leung and Lau 2009). Suburban retail form and business



growth was not the only one informed by the 1997 Hong Kong exodus. The business growth generated from Hong Kong emigrants initiated a new configuration of Chinatown mixed-use buildings that brought residential condominium apartments with office and retail such as that of Dragon City building in West Chinatown (Luk and Phan 2005). These new mixed-use configurations were in large divergence to the prevailing land use and zoning practices of the city (Wang 1999, 19).

Greater Toronto's urban landscapes are, thus, interwoven by the varied waves of migration that characterize its settlement patterns and economies. Urban scholars also highlight that Toronto, like Vancouver and Montreal, are increasingly marked by their regional scale where provincial politics and metropolitan boundaries govern the discourse and urban processes (Boudreau, Keil, Young 2009). This is seen in the 1998 amalgamation of the City of Toronto, and more recently, the 2018 Doug Ford's politics to shrink the municipality's decision-making body – both of which were projects led by the provincial governments of Ontario. Categorization of Toronto as a 'global city' has taken on a dominant presence in the urban studies literature. Brenner and Keil (2006, 3) outline that "while Toronto is not situated within the top tier of the global urban hierarchy, it does serve as the urban core of a second-tier of global financial, cultural, and manufacturing region". However, there is more to these urban regions than municipal and provincial politics and the financial flows of global cities. Urban Toronto, like Vancouver, has within its story Aboriginal urban dwellers who are often erased from settler cartographies and urban geography. Wilson and Peters (2005) point out that the Aboriginal urban dwellers destabilize the rural-urban demarcation through their boundary-crossing movements, and consequently the boundaries of Canadian nation-state from within.

Toronto's cultural landscapes are animated by Dionne Brand from within her literary and poetic imaginations. Her 1997 book *Land to Light On* elucidates engagements with the thirst for land to land on, and land to light on – the land that is the source of knowledge. Brand's poetic verses, however, do not locate any one definable land. In her later work, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, she conceptualizes the crossing that brought the Black diaspora through the Door. Going through this Door forged the Black diaspora in the context of transatlantic slavery, a belonging of a different sense – with no territorial or physical or epistemological return back

through it – even when attempts are made (Brand 2001). This Door is not cartographically locatable on the map. Yet, as Brand elucidates, it holds the Black diaspora together through a psychic and spiritual dimension. Her work has further engaged the entanglements of the various migrants and settlers in the city Toronto, along with the constancy of change. The city is neither a story of origins nor of arrivals, but “a place of transmigrations and transmogrifications” (Brand 2001, 62). It is where “[a]n Indian businessman [becomes] a security guard, [and] a Hong Kong policeman [becomes] a waiter” (Brand 2001, 62). Moreover, Brand’s rendering of the city’s migrants differs from that of the state; in the latter, origin stories of migrants are contained or held within the scalar thought of Canada as a multicultural state. Brand instead paints a sketch of how the city dwellers sit on Ojibway land in *What We All Long For*: “Name a region on the planet and there’s someone from there, here. All of them sit on Ojibway land, but hardly any of them know it or care because that genealogy is wilfully untraceable except in the name of the city itself” (Brand 2005, 4).

Immigrant portraits of Toronto as a city-region punctuates its socio-spatial character in a different way than Vancouver. The latter is dominantly depicted for its Chinese and Punjabi communities as evidenced by local cultural referents ‘Hongcover’ and another I heard in my field travels: ‘Surrey, the smell of curry’. Since the last two decades, Filipino communities via Hong Kong in Vancouver city-region have also taken on a prominence. Toronto demographics, on the other hand, expose its immigrant portraits through a more diversified spectrum of origin countries (Siemiatycki and Isin 1997). Moreover, while South Asian populations in Vancouver overwhelmingly get framed as Punjabi, South Asianess in Toronto is formulated as more of an umbrella or container term. This is largely due to different migration waves and histories of Toronto and Vancouver. Vancouver received earlier Punjabi and Sikh labour migrants coming over the Pacific Ocean. Migrants of colour coming into Toronto took off in the 1960s. Of the forced South Asian migration into Toronto, immigrants from Bangladesh and Sri Lanka formed a large proportion and followed by Sikhs from Punjab India (Ghosh 2014, 722)

### ***“When Lions [Singhs] Roar”, Singhs of Greater Toronto***

Sikh migration to Canadian urban centres – Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal – took on a unique prominence in the 1980s. The new wave of economic and political refugees was

entangled with 1984 Punjab at its source where many Sikhs of mostly Khalsa lineage had to flee India-side Punjab and Delhi from state-dominated violence and discriminatory national policies.<sup>38</sup> Toronto's Sikh migrant landscapes are, thus, closely interwoven by this confluence of 1984 Punjab. From this confluence is the explosion of new itineraries. In 1987, a Costa Rican ship from Rotterdam, Netherlands brought in 173 passengers predominantly asylum-seeking political Sikh refugees (Bedard and Kirby 2011). The *Amelie* freighter docked in Charlesville near Halifax in Nova Scotia on Canada's Atlantic Coast. The aspirations of many asylum-seeking Sikhs were to get to Toronto region, as evident from their news stories and interviews (Bedard and Kirby 2011).

As Sikh migration to Toronto mostly emerged in the post-war period, its pattern closely follows that of suburban growth in North America. After Greater Vancouver's Surrey and London's Southall, Sikhs in Brampton form the next largest Sikh population outside of Punjab. According to the 2016 Census, the largest visible minority in Brampton is of South Asian census designation at close to 45%, which is followed by Black population at about 14% percent out of a total population of almost 600,000 (Brampton Economic Development and Cultural Office 2017b, 5). Almost 19 percent of Brampton's population have Sikh religious designation according to the National Household Survey of 2011 (Peel Data Centre 2013, 4). Furthermore, almost 20% of total population reported Punjabi as their mother tongue language in the 2016 Census (Brampton Economic Development and Cultural Office 2017a, 5). Brampton's visibly South Asian, Bangladeshi, Sikh, and brown people have provoked endless metonyms: 'Bramladesh', 'Singhdale', and 'Browntown' (Ahmed-Ullah 2016, 242). 'Singh City' has also been referenced to call Brampton (Wenderski 2017). Brampton has invited the racialized categorical term 'ethnoburb', coined by Wei Li (2009) in the Chinese community of Los Angeles and used in the Brampton context by Ahmed-Ullah (2016). To Brampton's south is Mississauga – another suburb whose South Asian and Sikh populations are also significant but of smaller proportions than those of Brampton. Sikhs in Mississauga are prominent in the neighbourhood Malton, which has given rise to its own Malton nagar kirtan (Sikh street procession). Both

---

<sup>38</sup> 1984 emerged as a complex web of power play between postcolonial Indian national State, state boundary-making, languaging, Partition politics, British and foreign interests, Punjab rivers and resource battles, social stratification and class othering extended to *panthic* divisions (sectarian lines), and conflicting *taksals* (dharmic schools of interpretation in the context of Sikhism).

Brampton and Mississauga, along with other suburbs, today house prominent Sikh gurdwaras. However, prior to the suburbanization of Toronto, Sikhs were located along its downtown eastern stretch close to Little India, where Ontario's oldest gurdwara is built.

The Sikh community of Greater Toronto presents a different expression of culture and art, that diverges from markers of Sikh-Indigenous relations and complexities and *Guru Nanak Jahaz* tales of the west coast. Present in diasporic youth art in Toronto region, for instance, is a deep cultural memory of 1984 Punjab such as in the event *When Lions Roar* by Sikh Activist Network (Nijhawan and Arora 2013). Lions reference male-gendered Singhs. I will return to the expressions of the three locales – Hong Kong, Vancouver, and Toronto – and Sikh diaspora through an analysis of community mapping and creative touring in Chapter 6. Sikh Heritage Month, which originated in Ontario since 2013, reflect the historical variations of the politics of identifications. Sikhs dominate the South Asian lens in Vancouver, and thus there is a sense of recognition within the framing of Asian Heritage Month, that takes place in May. Asianness in Vancouver takes on a certain historical alliance between Sikhs, Chinese, and Japanese, against Canada's white immigration policy. On the other hand, Ontario's commemoration of Sikh Heritage Month reflects an uneasy separation between Sikh and South Asian, and between Sikh and Asian identification. This can be explained by the later wave of Sikh migration in Greater Toronto that was strongly linked to 1984 Punjab, and the desire to express a specific Sikh positionality and strategically refuse South Asian as an umbrella term. The separation between Sikh and South Asian in Greater Toronto also emerges due to a stronger Hindu and Muslim presence within the South Asian frame. The *nagar kirtan* events in these two locales of Canada, that is Toronto and Vancouver regions, further reflect such subtle variations as will be discussed in Chapter 5.

*In 2008, I shifted my residential base to Tkaronto from the Kwarthas. Today, I live in Regent Park where I rent my high-rise post-war flat, on the boundary of Chinatown East. From here, I regularly make a trip to Chinatown West. To my east is Little India, also known as Gerrard Bazaar (meaning market), a place I go to less frequently than the two Chinatowns. Along the route to Gerrard Bazaar, and hidden on the residential street on Pape Avenue is*

*Toronto's and Ontario's oldest gurdwara. This gurdwara, established by Shiromani Sikh Sangat (Society) in 1969, provided the space for early Sikh migrants in the region.*

In the following chapter, I turn my attention specifically to the historical gurdwaras of the three city-regions. Following Ananya Roy's (2011a) call to unsettle geographic declarations in a theorizing of postcolonial urbanism and cities, I have chosen to uphold the fuzzy boundaries that have emerged in writing the histories of the three locales. Storytelling anecdotes, on either sides of the Pacific Ocean, and across Canada provide accounts of the circularity between Hong Kong, Vancouver, and Toronto that shape their urban landscapes and their worlding processes. Indigenous place-thought furthers an understanding of Turtle Island. The three vignettes juxtapose three idioms of history and geography, and by their extension, sovereignty. In the first, Man2 is introduced through the code of Time. In the second, multiple nations intersect through the Sikh tradition of song and poetry. In the third, human and non-human actors interact and co-habitat for land and water. In writing the history of the three city-regions, the theorist must remember that the decolonial project is incomplete. This dissertation, as such, is a living history. I carry the herstory with me; in each footstep, each polylingual-tone, in each reading of a poem, retracing homes, caught in the entanglements of colonial, postcolonial, and settler empires. In the next chapter, I analyze the polyvalent dimensions of *gurdwara*, by drawing on the Sikh notion of *miri-piri*, and I engage with the experiences of participants in the three locales, along with beginnings of meditation with the poem *So Dar* (That Door). Given the urgency of Hong Kong's unrest, I end this chapter with a fourth vignette.

#### **Vignette 4: Chungking Mansion and Kowloon Mosque**

In October 2019, there was a violent group attack on Jimmy Sham, a leader of the Civil Human Rights Front, allegedly carried out by South Asians, near Mong Kok. The incident triggered hateful messages on Hong Kong protest organizing forums to target Kowloon Mosque and Islamic Centre, Chungking Mansion, and other places of ethnic minorities along the weekend's protest route at Tsim Tsa Tsui (my hometown, also mentioned in the first vignette). In response, counter-calls were circulated among protestors of Be Water Movement to not be divided along ethnic, racial, or religious lines. The counter-calls quickly pledged to protect cultural, religious, and ethnic sites along the protest route from what they called as China and

Hong Kong police's strategy to divide and fragment the protest movement. On Sunday 20 October 2019, Hong Kong protestors, migrants, and locals gathered at Chungking Mansion in a show of support and solidarity between Hongkongers: Chinese Hongkongers, South Asian diaspora, and African diaspora. Water and replenishing resources were distributed along with smiles, hugs, and messages of solidarity and peace. A few blocks from Chungking Mansion, at Kowloon Mosque and Islamic Centre, a police water canon truck launched water canons dyed in blue liquid. The blue water canon stained the mosque and hurt the few people who were at the entrance of that mosque to protect it. In the aftermath, the chief executive Carrie Lam visited the mosque to deliver an apology. These events of October in Hong Kong, however, spurred onto the Hong Kong movement new relations of becoming Hongkongers and new alliances of solidarity against the police state, undemocratic government, and Beijing's influence. Volunteers from different backgrounds worked to clean the blue stains on the mosque. In the week after, Chungking Mansion hosted a cultural tour inviting anybody to come in to witness food, festivities, and encounter. The place, Chungking Mansion, is a cultural hotspot – home, sojourn, market, and workplace – predominately to a historic South Asian diaspora (e.g. Pakistani, Sikh, Muslim, Sindhi, Gurkha) and increasingly to newer African migrants in their worlding networks. Akbar Abbas (1997, 54) has characterized Chungking Mansions as a “truly heterotopic space and living contradiction”.

*Chungking is a place I grew up in, played and explored in, and where I would go to visit my dad's shop with a thermos of cha (tea) from home, and visit other shops.*

## Chapter 4 – Gurduara as Path-making

Where is That Door of yours, that home,  
where you dwell and care for us all?  
Countless sounds vibrate,  
as many as your musicians.  
So many colourful melodies,  
as many as your singers.  
Wind, Water, Fire sing to you

.....

~ Guru Nanak ~

*So Dar | That Door | Guru Granth Sahib 8*  
(transcreation mine)

When the clocktower arrived in Amritsar and was erected next to Harmandir Sahib and Akal Takht, it set the stage of two competing frames. The new frame symbolized by the clocktower was of British power – the triumph of linear time, the material and capitalist production of space (Lefebvre [1974] 1991), and the privileging of the figure of ‘Man1’ and ‘Man2’ (Wynter 2003). The other frame was of *miri-piri*. This chapter grounds itself in an understanding of this pivotal Sikh notion, *miri-piri*, which informs not only Sikh political philosophy but also its spatial practice, and is of relevance to the chapter for conceptualizing gurdwaras. The *miri-piri* concept gains its spatial prominence in Guru Hargobind’s Akal Takht, but its story first appears at Kartarpur with the founding of *dharamsala*. *Dharamsala* is a precursor term for Sikh centre, now known as gurdwara. In this chapter, I briefly chart this origin story, from Kartarpur to Amritsar, as a Sikh context for a deeper understanding of gurdwaras (see Table 4 on p.123 as a guide to this story). The chapter will then provide an overview of the three historical gurdwaras of the cities of this study: Khalsa Diwan Sikh Temple in Hong Kong, Khalsa Diwan Society of Vancouver, and Toronto’s Shiromani Sikh Society Gurdwara. Subsequently, interview analysis will consider the participants relationship, ethos, and sense of place vis-a-vis the contemporary translocal setting of the gurdwaras. In particular, interview analysis engages with questions of how gurdwara functions beyond its religious services and what participants imagine this place to be, the contested political sphere of the gurdwara, and emerging social justice challenges. I make the argument to think of the dynamic dimensions through the concept *gurduara as path-making* and by drawing from Sikh geographic imaginaries over static Eurocentric notions of places of

worship. I use Sikh place-making tools of *dharamsala*, *sarovar*, and *miri-piri* to map out Sikh spatial practice and place-thought which guide the chapter's argument and interview analysis.

## **Sikh Spatial Practice**

### ***dharamsala***

Prior to the term *gurdwara* gaining its popular usage, Guru Nanak had established a *dharamsala* in Kartarpur (today west Punjab) as the centre of dharmic discourse and social uplifting. The village, Kartarpur, was founded in 1519 when Guru Nanak purchased land there following his many travels (Pashaura Singh 2014a, 22). The term *dharam*, as scholars have pointed out, is unique and cannot be neatly translated into religion (King 1999, 109-110). *Dharam* is a type of order of philosophy, ethics, and morality. Moreover, the meaning given to *dharam* varies by different *dharams*. *Sala* denotes a spiritual sanctuary. Guru Nanak invoked *dharamsala* as a metaphorical space – a space of relation – and less its physical building. In this regard, the most important aspect of *dharamsala* in its founding was not its physical infrastructure, but its people – *sangat*. Moreover, Nanak's usage of *dharamsala* co-related it to the earth (*dharti*); used much more metaphorically and less as an empirically bounded site (Hawley 2014, 318; Grewal 2006, 534-535). *Dharamsala* best exemplifies a sense of collectivization and spiritual sanctuary as Guru Nanak promoted a practice of *sangat*, that is understanding the world through a shared process of introspection and devotion. One of the *State of the Panth* report series, "Gurduara: A Sikh Place of Learning", points out that popular terminology and framework such as place of worship is limiting (Sikh Research Institute 2018). The researchers instead emphasize a conceptualization of *dharamsala* and *gurduara* "as a place of community" and "not contained to the structure" (Sikh Research Institute 2018, 8). As *dharamsalas* emerged across the subcontinent at the time, so did a *manji* (literally a wooden seat in Punjabi) system as the Sikh gurus appointed administrative heads at the various locales into its governing structures. *Manji* system was subsequently renamed and revamped into a *masand* (literally a seat or cushion in Persian) system under Guru Ramdas' leadership. Sikh Research Institute (2018, 14) further delineates that of the 22 *manjis*, 4 seats were held by women in the mid-sixteenth century, a trend much more progressive than today's political structures.



Further understanding of *dharamsala* can be elucidated by Nanak's five-fold realms as expressed in his foundational poem *Japji Sahib (Chant of Remembrance)*, with *Dharam Khand* being the first of these realms. The relevance of Nanak's five-fold spiritual journey aligns with our focus on Sikh geographical thought. As N.G.K. Singh (2011, 68) points out: "The maps and charts of this spiritual journey are drafted totally on the longitudes and latitudes of planet earth (*dharat*)". She goes on to elaborate on Guru Nanak's theorization of Earth and *Dharam Khand* as duty: "Its starting point is Dharam Khand – living as moral agents on earth" (N.G.K. 2011, 68).

### *sarovar*

Complementing Guru Nanak's *dharamsala* as earthly sanctuary for the practice of an ethic of cosmopolitanism, Sikh imaginaries of water and ocean emerge with the place development of *sarovars* (pond, lake) in cities and towns. The Ramdas *sarovar* was excavated by Guru Ramdas in the 16th century and is one of the major undertakings of Sikh gurus who involved themselves in water projects for building of cities through inclusivity. The development of the *sarovar* made possible an alternative space from the 68 places of pilgrimage deemed sacred in Hindu thought. Through this pond lives the Tree That Ends Sorrows (Dukh Bhajani Ber), which is one of three historical trees inside the Darbar Sahib complex. The tree is on the side of the *sarovar* where the *langar hall* is located, and is frequently from where pilgrims take their steps into the *sarovar*. The *sarovar* represents a spatial practice and a public space aimed at integrating inclusivity for commoners, where women and those considered lower and outcasts can partake.

Guru Ramdas, who first excavated the *sarovar*, provides us with an insightful glimpse into what the vast ocean carries in one of his poems:

The Ocean is full of Earthly sustenance and gems.  
Uttering *gurbani*, this priceless jewel flows into their hands.  
Your chanters, they sing to the Earth-cherisher, and find the overflowing treasure chest.

From the Ocean this body is churned,  
I now see the dwelling place of the indistinct Oneness.  
Guru shows the Way, and the Way is Guru. Indivisible.

(Guru Ramdas, Guru Granth Sahib 442, transcreation mine)

The vast ocean is what provides the sustenance for living on Earth. The ocean is also full of oneness, of stories and songs. In this Sikh poem, I am also reminded of the creation story of Turtle Island narrated in Chapter 3 Historical and Geographical Context, when Zhashkoonh, the muskrat, dived deep down into the ocean and returned within its paw some earth for Mikinaag, the turtle. Like the Nishnaabeh place-thought, Sikh geographical imaginaries hold significance of oceanic and water orientations which carry important sustenance for life, land, and earth to flourish. Furthermore, the storytellers, the chanters, and the singers find this earthly sustenance from the deep ocean – both materially and spiritually.

### ***pauri* (step ladder)**

The *sarovar* is full of fascinating tales that further an understanding of Sikh imaginaries of water. One such story is “Mai from Kabul”, which I came across through the work of Sikh Research Institute (Tarnjit Kaur 2014). This *sakhi* (oral tale) is geographically set in the context of Goindval *sarovar* and Baoli Sahib in Goindval (today east Punjab) and Kabul (today Afghanistan), in 16th century, and is documented in *Mahima Parkash* by writer Surup Das Bhalla (Tarnjit Kaur 2014). Baoli Sahib is an 84-step staircase constructed to descend down the well in Goindval. Guru Amardas had initiated the construction of this public water project at a time when ordinary publics were prevented from water access at the rivers. The 84-step staircase corresponds to the life cycle of 84 *lakh*<sup>39</sup> life forms which Sikh cosmologies conceptualize, drawing from Hindu cosmologies (Pashaura Singh 2006, 106). Furthermore, there is a practice of reading *Jajji Sahib* on the way down each step, thus producing 84 iterations of *Jajji Sahib*<sup>40</sup>, which itself has 38 *pauris* in its poetic form. The point here is that rather than ascending to the sublime skies, one is climbing down deep into Earth’s water bodies. Furthermore, the act of enunciating is conjoined to embodied actions – filled with a deep desire to cross through the world-ocean (that is, from the material waters of the seen world to the spiritual waters of the unseen world) and merge with the Infinite source. Tarnjit Kaur offers a contemporary reflection through the tale, particularly with regards to the place of women at these public spaces which have gotten dominated by men over the centuries. In the tale, “Mai from Kabul” is a woman who

---

<sup>39</sup> 1 *lakh* equals 100,000

<sup>40</sup> *Jajji Sahib* is a poem written by Guru Nanak, who wrote it through his immersive experience in the waters near Sultanpur.

is helping construct this staircase, and during her labour, she would often rock an imaginary cradle with one of her hands. At night, however, she would disappear, and the *sakhi* shares that she is a mother (*mai*) who returns to her baby in Kabul at night from Goindval's Baoli Sahib in Punjab. This oral tale is characteristic of how Sikh imaginaries of water and ocean, through the construction of *sarovars* and wells, correspond to feminine imaginaries of water. The well, *sarovars*, and water is associated with motherhood and the imagery of womb which gives life.

*Sarovars* and related water bodies have also been sites of death, blood, and conquest. In mid-18th century, the *sarovar* of Amritsar would be damaged and filled with mud by Ahmad Shah Abdali's army during the battles between Durrani Empire and Sikh *misl*s<sup>41</sup> (Townsend 2014, 432). On 13 April 1919, the British shot at Sikh and Punjabi civilians who had gathered during Vaisakhi at the public garden – Jallianwala Bagh – near Darbar Sahib; among the fatalities include dead people being recovered from the garden's well. With Punjab's Partition, wells and rivers were filled with bloodshed and patriarchal killings.<sup>42</sup> During the 1984 attacks and occupation of Darbar Sahib by the Indian State, the *sarovar* was once again damaged, with bodies and blood filed in and around it.<sup>43</sup>

### ***miri-piri, Harmandir Sahib and Akal Takht***

Harmandir Sahib's historical occasion was inaugurated by Mian Mir, a *sant* of the Sufi Qadiri order, who came down from Lahore to Ramdaspur upon Guru Arjan's invite to lay the foundation stone in 1589 alongside the Sikh Guru (Pashaura Singh 2006, 112-113). During this land-water arrangement, the *sarovar* came to be known as Amritsar. *Adi Granth* was completed and installed at Harmandir Sahib on 16 August 1604 (Pashaura Singh 2006, 118), with its 34 poetic contributors at the time, and 31 musical *raga* (musical mood). Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh (2010; 2011) theorizes that in its foundation, the Granth and the place are fused to produce the Sikh aesthetic as a way to usher pilgrims and seekers of knowledge to the possibility of

---

<sup>41</sup> Sikh confederate bands

<sup>42</sup> Cultural and literary works such as *Pinjar* and *Aaj Aakhan Waris Shah Nu* ("To Waris Shah") by Amrita Pritam ([1950] 2009; n.d.) illuminate this pain. I will briefly return to this theme of separation and anguish in Chapter 5 Vaisakhi Nagar Kirtan.

<sup>43</sup> The bloodshed around the *sarovar* and in Darbar Sahib is captured by Sikh artists Amrit Kaur Singh and Rabindra Kaur Singh – the Singh Twins (1998) – in their art piece "Nineteen Eighty-Four".

*Saram Khand*<sup>44</sup> – the realm of sublime and awe. The awe-ness, however, cannot be characterized through a top-down visual gaze. As the theorist emphasizes, the aesthetic of Harmandir Sahib is not representative, but revelatory (N.G.K. Singh 2011, 39). By putting forth the term revelatory, Singh centres the intricate practices, experience, and repetitions that reveal through a musical, aural, and lived experience of journeying, and shifts us away from a purely visual representation of architecture. To that effect, Pashaura Singh (2014b, 232) explains that “the nature of the mystic experience in this realm is indescribable”. Since *nirgun* (without form) cannot be represented, recorded, or even projected, its measure is unravelled through footwork and artwork, through poetry and music, and through everyday places turned sublime.

Table 1 Sikh Development, 1469-1708.

			Spatial Practice		
	Gurus	Town/City Founded	Place Development	Social-Political Development	Musical Development <sup>45</sup>
<i>dharamsala</i>	Nanak	Kartarpur	<i>dharamsala</i>	<i>sangat langar</i>	<i>raga</i> (musical mood) <i>rababi</i> (string instrument) tradition
	Angad	Khadur	Khadur Sahib	<i>langar</i>	
	Amardas	Goindval	Goindval well Baoli Sahib	<i>manji</i> (seat holder)	
<i>Darbar Sahib at Amritsar</i>	Ramdas	Ramdaspur	Ramdas <i>sarovar</i>	<i>masand</i> (seat holder)	
	Arjan	Ramdaspur Taran Tarn	Harmandir Sahib	<i>dasvand</i> (donation of 1/10 <sup>th</sup> amount)	<i>Adi Granth</i> eight <i>chaunkis</i> (musical acts)
	Hargobind	Ramdaspur Kiratpur new Kartarpur	Akal Takht	<i>miri-piri</i>	<i>chaunki charni</i> (mount of musical acts) by Buddha and Gurdas as a form of protest
	Harai	Not included for scope of this chapter			
	Harkrishan				
	Teghbahadur				
<i>gurduara</i>	Gobind Singh	Anandpur	court of poets forts	Khalsa Panth Sarbat Khalsa	Guru Granth Sahib

<sup>44</sup> Translated as ‘beauty’ or ‘art’ or ‘esthetics’ by Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh (1993, 86; 2011, 75); as ‘effort’ by Pashaura Singh (2014, 232). See *Panj Khand* (Five Realms) under Appendix A Glossary.

<sup>45</sup> An overview of the musical development is provided in Chapter 5 Vaisakhi Nagar Kirtan with a deeper discussion of nagar kirtans. In this chapter, I focus on the genealogy of *dharamsala* and *gurduwara*, and their related development.

Further in the historical development of Darbar Sahib at Ramdaspur (today city of Amritsar, east Punjab), Guru Hargobind imprinted the Sikh notion of *miri-piri* to its spatial practice as Akal Takht and Harmandir Sahib. Akal Takht (literally meaning timeless throne) represented the *miri* – the material aspects of Sikh sovereignty with a political governing wing of Sikh worldly affairs. On the other hand, Harmandir Sahib represented the spiritual domain, the *piri*, and was bestowed to instill the spiritual consciousness through performative, literary and musical devotion.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, Akal Takht took care of visible and seen world. Simultaneously, Harmandir Sahib exalted the world and knowledge that cannot be seen. It exalted the *anahad-nad*, literally meaning unheard sound and conceptualized as unstruck melody. In this light, *miri* aligned with the particular, the temporal, the spatial, the earthly, and the worldly while *piri* characterized the universal, the oceanic, the mythical, and the cosmic.

### ***itinerary and gurdwara as path-making***

Guru Ramdas took Nanak's Kartarpur township and *sangat* model and began building the town Ramdaspur starting with the excavation of its *sarovar* next to the historically significant city of Lahore. Lahore's twin city, now known as Amritsar (Amrit-ocean), became the hub of Sikh thought – *miri-piri* – and eventually emerged as the Darbar Sahib complex through different Sikh Gurus. The *dharamsalas* where the human Guru was physically present were called gurdwaras / *gurdwara*, meaning the way of the Guru. J.S. Grewal (2009, 287) describes their special status as 'premier institutions' or 'premier dharamsals'. The term gurdwara, thus, overtook usage when the guruship title was bestowed to *Adi Granth* (Primal Knowledge) in 1708 to make Guru Granth, which is now present in Sikh gurdwaras.

In recent interpretations and expositions, some Sikh educators and organizations have mobilized the spelling *gurdwara* (or *gurduārā*), which is a closer transcription to the Gurmukhi ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਾ. Sikh Research Institute offers the following explanation on one of their educational resource:

---

<sup>46</sup> The terms *miri* and *piri* are derived from Persian and Arabic. *Pir* has been used in Persian and in Sufi ordering to refer to spiritual leads, such as the *panj pirs* (five spiritual guides) in the Chishti order of Sufi. *Mir* is derived from amir which means prince. It is often a title given to a head officer or commander-in-chief or holder of material wealth (Dusenbery 1981, 104)

*Gurduārā* (popularly spelled Gurdwara) is the name given to the Sikh place of learning and not only worship, a place where Sikhs have historically assembled to facilitate their spiritual and political growth. Literally, “through the Guru,” the gurduara is a gateway to Sikh culture and lifestyle. (Sikh Research Institute n.d., n.p.)

This spelling invokes a variant interpretation of the Sikh place-making practice where a concept of pathway (or through-ness) is evoked rather than a physically-bounded entity commonly captured as the door, house, or gate of the Guru in the popular *gurdwara* rendition. The spelling shifts the focus to the way as practiced, and away from a tangible thing, noun. *Path* brings with it a metaphorical connotation, and re-centers the place to its people. In other words, it is a shared *path* of *sangat* involved in *seva* and devotion. My interest in these spellings is not to argue for what an authentic conceptualization or linguistic representation may be. Rather, as a geographer, I am interested in these various renditions to nuance the thinking of *dharamsalas*, *gurdwaras* and *gurduaras*, and their conceptualizations. Within *sikhi*, the notion of path is characterized through related ideas in the vernacular tongue: *panth* and *pāth*. *Panth* delineates the way, such as Khalsa Panth, the way of Khalsa created by Guru Gobind Singh. *Pāth* (ਪਾਠ) also reveals the way, the way through poetic practice, such as *akhand pāth* ਅਖੰਡ ਪਾਠ (uninterrupted, continuous flow) or *sahej pāth* (middle path of harmony and balance). That is, *pāth* through contemplation, reflection, and engagement with poetry. In using italicized *path*, I inject the Sikh notions of *panth* and *pāth* onto the English word path, so as to offer a nuanced conceptualization *path*. This chapter thus moves along, with, and through *gurduara as path-making* to re-centre the people’s stories, poetry, and itineraries, and aligns them as Sikh place imaginaries. The dissertation uses the spelling *gurduara* when used as a concept in such a manner, but I retain the spelling *gurdwara* in regular usage.

Further analysis of *sikhi* and her aesthetic places reveals the itinerant topology of the entire Darbar Sahib complex. The metaphor of crossing the world-ocean prevalent in Sikh poetics, for instance, gains its spatial practice at Harmandir Sahib (the *piri*). Built as a temple afloat a reservoir – to mimic a lotus-flower in water – the layout necessitates a walk around its *sarovar*, with a dive in the *sarovar* at the place of the Tree That Ends Sorrows, followed by a crossing over to the unseen ocean. The *miri*, on the other hand, in Akal Takht, initiated by Guru Hargobind sets up a model of society in which the dharmic-secular domains are mutually

constituent. Finally, the most notable aesthetic experience of the Darbar Sahib complex is that one does not walk up or ascend to Harmandir Sahib. Rather, its site, layout and design require one to walk around the *sarovar* and down – almost as an act of descending into the world-ocean to attain the bliss to be ferried to the other side, the non-material ocean.

In summary, Nanak ji's *dharamsala* in Kartarpur, Guru Amardas's staircase down the well, Guru Ramdas's *sarovar*, Guru Arjan's Harmandir Sahib and *Adi Granth* inauguration, and Guru Hargobind's Akal Takt and *miri-piri*, provide for an understanding of Sikh spatial practice and geographical modality. The Gurus were involved in the production of space through water projects, city-building, and place-making, which were embedded with their politics and principles. The history and meaning of places such as *dharamsala* and gurdwaras are situated within Sikh place-thought and rooted in practices of action, experience, and community-building. Land becomes earthly sanctuary while water imaginaries and oceanic orientation come to characterize a channel to ferry across to the unseen world. In the following, I provide an account of the emergence of gurdwaras in Hong Kong, Greater Vancouver, Greater Toronto and their contemporary expressions by *sangat*.

## **Overview of Khalsa Diwan Gurdwaras and Beyond**

While the first public gurdwara to be built outside of the Indian subcontinent was built in Kilindini (Kenya) in 1892 (Tatla 1999, 50), gurdwaras in Hong Kong and Vancouver soon followed to provide for the new wave of Sikh migrants moving in the context of the British Empire. Upholding their originary relation, many of these gurdwaras in the emerging diaspora space continued the tradition of relation and were ingrained in action, pluralistic membership and affinities, politicized duty, and communal kitchen. In East and Southeast Asia, informal gurdwara spaces emerged on police and army grounds in Rangoon (Burma), Penang (Malaysia), and Singapore before the turn of the 20th century (Kahlon 2016). At the turn of that century, Hong Kong established the first Pacific public gurdwara outside of police and army grounds.<sup>47</sup> On the other side of the Pacific Ocean, Vancouver led the formation of its public gurdwaras.

---

<sup>47</sup> The Rangoon gurdwara had its foundation ceremony in 1897 (Khalon 2016, 26). The Penang gurdwara had its foundation stone ceremony and *nagar kirtan* take place in 1901 (Kahlon 2016, 76). The Penang gurdwara was opened and inaugurated in 1903 (Kahlon 2016, 76). In Shanghai, the gurdwara on DongBaoxing Road / North

Table 2 Timeline of Khalsa Diwan in Hong Kong and Vancouver

	<b>Hong Kong</b>	<b>Vancouver</b>
Earlier Informal Gurdwara Space	room at the Central Police Station	home space gurdwaras and mill gurdwaras
Public Gurdwara Foundation Stone	1901	1907
Public Gurdwara Opening	1902	1908
First Nagar Kirtan	1902	1905 ( <i>prabhat peri</i> ) 1908 (nagar kirtan)

### ***Khalsa Diwan Sikh Temple in Hong Kong***

Prior to the founding of the gurdwara, the Central Police Station on Hollywood Road had allocated a room on the ground floor to Sikh policemen to function for their spiritual services and which housed Guru Granth Sahib. This was not unique to Sikhs; the Hong Kong police station had also allocated a room to Muslim policemen for their prayer needs (Weiss 1991, 430-1). In 1901, Sikhs who were part of a British Army regiment founded a large public gurdwara named Sri Guru Singh Sabha (the name on its foundation stone) in its current location on Queens Road in Happy Valley, Wan Chai.<sup>48</sup> A land grant was acquired from the British Government, and funds were raised from Hong Kong Police, Nos. 1 and 2 Companies of H.K.S.B.R.A.<sup>49</sup>, China Field Force, Victoria Gaol (prison), and the Shanghai Municipal Police for building of the gurdwara structure (*Hong Kong Telegraph* 1902, 2). At its inauguration, a nagar kirtan procession took place which started from the Central Police Station and ended at the new gurdwara to bring Guru Granth Sahib to its new home (*Hong Kong Telegraph* 1902, 2). The place subsequently served as a hub for Sikh, Punjabi, and Sindhi *sangats*.

The Hong Kong gurdwara came to be known as Khalsa Diwan Sikh Temple following the founding of Khalsa Diwan Societies across the Pacific. To accommodate growing communities, a second generation gurdwara was re-designed with the new building opening on 7 April 1934 (*Hong Kong Telegraph* 1934, 5). During the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong, many Sikhs and co-nations had taken refuge in the gurdwara due to a shortage of food and water

---

Sichuan Road had its foundation stone laid in 1907 with its opening ceremony in 1908 (*North China Herald* 1907; 1908; Yin 2017, 80)

<sup>48</sup> *The Hong Kong Telegraph* (1902, 2) reported the opening of the gurdwara on the Gap behind Morrison Hill in Wan Chai.

<sup>49</sup> H.K.S.B.R.A. stands for the Hong Kong Singapore Battalion, Royal Artillery



in Hong Kong. The gurdwara had a well which had been dug 27 September 1903 – a date embedded on its marble stone. Because of the well and because of its communal *langar*, it was able to service the provision of food and water that was running scarce in the war-torn city. The first bombing happened on 12 December 1942 when a bomb detonated on the gurdwara premises, by which the bulk of the building was damaged and collapsed, along with the head (*gyani*) and some refugees getting killed (Bhatra 2012, 29). The local Sikh community resource book has noted that “there was no damage to Sri Guru Granth Sahib” (Bhatra 2012, 28).

A second bomb most likely took place on 4 April 1945 which is the date pointed to in three wartime diaries accessed online. A wartime diary account on that day by Harry Ching (1945, n.p.) notes 20 people to have died in the gurdwara:

To town. Alert while at Ken Chaun’s. They hear bomb scream for first time. Makes you feel ill. Bombs on Causeway Bay typhoon shelter, Wellington Barracks, Sikh temple and school, French Hospital hostel burned. Five nurses killed. 20 killed at Sikh temple. Debris all over Gap Road.

The exact nature and culprit of this bomb is uncertain. In 2014, an American wartime dormant bomb AN-M66 weighing 900kg was discovered in the construction site immediately adjacent to the gurdwara was reported in *South China Morning Post* (Mok 2014). During the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong, the Japanese had overtaken a British naval base on Hong Kong Island, and subsequently used it as their logistics operation centre in the South China Sea. The United States navy and air force would drop bombs from their military aircrafts supposedly aiming for Japanese ships in Victoria Harbour (Kwong and Tsoi 2014). One news source (Lee 2014) in *South China Morning Post* pins the bomb possibly to the US air raid that took place on 16 January 1945. A website source on *Gwulo: Old Hong Kong* (n.d.) suggests that AN-M66 may have been dropped by US bombers on 4 April 1945 and what could have wrecked the gurdwara through its weight and momentum alone but without fully denoting; if so, it was buried in the soft soil until it was unearthed in 2014. The AN-M66 bomb did not go off and was safely defused in 2014.

However, during this time, the gurdwara’s foundation was determined to be structurally unsafe when the adjacent hotel site was being constructed. A project to redevelop the gurdwara emerged upon which the newly designed fourth generation gurdwara is presently undergoing

construction. Prior to the undertaking of this redevelopment, there had been some mobilizations by newer Sikh families to build a new separate gurdwara in Tung Chung on Lantau Island. A new organization, Miri-Piri Society, was established in 2004 in Tung Chung along with a proposed project for a new gurdwara on Lantau Island (Bhatra 2012, 77). This had come out of geographical challenges, since new Sikh migrants had settled in the growing public housing estates of outlying Lantau Island and New Territories, which took long and expensive commute times to the urban core Wan Chai on Hong Kong Island. Moreover, newer Sikh migrant families belonged to a different school of thought and were sometimes at odds with Khalsa Diwan Sikh Temple. However, because the Wan Chai gurdwara was deemed structurally unsafe and needed re-development, the different communities with affinities with the gurdwara made the decision to work together once again and rebuild its historical site. Jasjit Singh (2015, 112) writes that “the relatively small size of the Sikh population in Hong Kong has meant there is a lack of sectarianism within the Hong Kong Sikh community as no one group can gather sufficient numbers to establish an institution of their own”. This is particularly impactful in Hong Kong where the real estate market is out of reach for most ordinary residents and migrants, and working-class people and lower middle-class people live in subsidized government-owned public housing estates.

Figure 1 Khalsa Diwan Sikh Temple, Hong Kong. Third-generation, 2015



The third-generation structure was built in 1949 following the wartime bombing. The opening ceremony held on 4 September 1949 was led by a prominent Parsee figure in Hong Kong, J. H. Ruttonjee (Antiquities Advisory Board n.d., n.p.). Additionally, the Sindhi *sangat* in Hong Kong have played a prominent role in the funding, development, and rebuilding of

gurdwara infrastructure alongside Sikhs (Cheuk 2008; Jasjit Singh 2015). Following the World War bombings, funds were raised from the Sindhi, Punjabi, and Sikh communities to rebuild the gurdwara. Sindhi migrants have tended to be from trading, merchant, and urban classes, while Sikhs migrants of Punjabi lineage have tended to be from rural and lower classes. Jain migrants also used to attend the Sikh temple when they first arrived in 1950s (Plüss 2005, 221). Sindhis continue to regularly host their congregations at the Khalsa Diwan gurdwara, contributing resources to *langar* of the gurdwara, and hold their life cycle rites at the place (Jasjit Singh 2015). It was only in the post-war era that two prominent Hindu *mandirs* emerged at the locations: Tsim Sha Tsui in Kowloon, and Happy Valley Wan Chai on Hong Kong Island. At the *mandir* in Tsim Sha Tsui in the Kowloon Peninsula, Guru Granth Sahib in Nastaliq script is housed. The Nasaliq-scripted Guru Granth Sahib in Hong Kong specifically serves the Sindhi community who has historically relied on that script. The *mandir* is a kind of hybrid space, serving the co-*sangats* Sindhis, Punjabi Hindus, and Sikhs. In addition to the one in Hong Kong, these kinds of Sindhi-Sikh spiritual spaces have been prominent in cities where Sindhi diaspora has migrated alongside Punjabi and Sikh diaspora particularly in East and South-East Asia such as Manila and Jakarta (Hutter 2012).

The *mandir* in Tsim Sha Tsui is located on the third floor of a residential apartment building. It is essentially a flat, with multiple flats purchased and expanded over the decades. Shrines and statues of Hindu deities and goddesses co-exist on one side of the room where *bhajans* (devotional songs) are prominently sung by Sindhi and Hindu women. Another cornered side is semi-partitioned using curtains where Guru Granth Sahib is hosted on a canopy. Fruits would normally be distributed as *prasad* (food offering) to everyone at the *mandir*. During festive special occasions, *langar* is brought from outside and distributed in packed lunchboxes as *sangats* exit the *mandir*. During Guru Nanak's *gurpurab*, which I went to during my fieldwork, a full week of Sikh congregational programs were held with Sindhi, Punjabi Hindu, and Punjabi Sikh *sangats* attending the *mandir*. Sikhs, particularly those living and or working in the Kowloon's urban core, would come out to these celebratory functions. During these *mandir* congregations, Sindhis would normally sit behind on chairs, while Punjabis would often sit in front on the ground. The programs consist of morning *Asa Ki Var* and evening kirtan. Following the kirtan program, *Anand Sahib* is sung and performed, and is then followed by the performance

and singing of *Arti*, a song by Guru Nanak and associates.<sup>50</sup> At the *mandir*, *diyas* (oil-based lamps) on a *thal* (platter) are lit up and performed in front of Guru Granth Sahib. After *Arti*, *Ardas* takes place and is followed by a *hukamnama*. A *hukamnama* is a reflection taken by turning a page of Guru Granth Sahib at random and accepting the poetic stanza for reflection and undertaking. While *Arti* is also performed as part of kirtan at the gurdwara during the evening time of *Rehras Sahib*, it is performed as kirtan and without the performance of a *thal* (platter).

In 2006, however, the Akal Takt in Amritsar issued an edict that the Sindhi *sangat* in Hong Kong had to bring their Guru Granth Sahib from their *mandir* to the gurdwara Khalsa Diwan Sikh Temple (Jasjit Singh 2015). The edict emerged over rules and practices governing the proper placement of Guru Granth Sahib and that stipulated it should not share space with Hindu idols in the same room. Nevertheless, many local Sikhs rebuked the order and expressed their solidarity and affinities with the local Sindhis; they highlighted that Sikhs and Sindhis have shared amicable spaces and relations for over a century in Hong Kong (Walia 2006). The Guru Granth Sahib in the Nastaliq script remains at the Tsim Sha Tsui *mandir*.

### ***Khalsa Diwan Society in Vancouver***

Prior to the construction of the Khalsa Diwan Society (KDS) gurdwara in Vancouver, ‘home gurdwaras’ and ‘mill colony gurdwaras’ served Sikhs and co-nations in the region of British Columbia (Nayar 2010, 44-45). Kamala Elizabeth Nayar (2010, 46) explains that gurdwaras on the mills were considered private organizations, owned by the mills proprietors and were not part of the province’s *Societies Act*, although some mill gurdwaras did register at a later period. Mill colony gurdwaras exemplify the resources of the migrating Sikhs, who had to rely on informal spaces of the home or places within their labouring sites. Whereas gurdwara space first emerged on police and army grounds in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia, mill establishments were the precursors to the public Khalsa Diwan Societies and gurdwaras in British Columbia.

---

<sup>50</sup> It is this poem by Guru Nanak that Rabindranath Tagore is famously known for attributing a status of universal anthem. In addition to Guru Nanak’s composition, poetic stanzas from Ravidas, Kabir, Sain, and Dhanna from the Granth are used in the singing of Nanakian *Arti*.

Figure 2 Khalsa Diwan Society, Vancouver, 2019



Khalsa Diwan Society (KDS) in Vancouver was founded in 1906 and it was formally registered in 1909 (Roy 2018, 80; Hans 2003, 222). Khalsa Diwan Society inaugurated its first gurdwara in 1908 in Vancouver (Nayar 2010, 46). In addition, KDS branches came to numerous towns and mills of the province – Abbotsford, Victoria, Port Alberni and New Westminster – where gurdwaras were also established. In the second half of the century, the various KDS gurdwaras split from the head Khalsa Diwan Society and established their own autonomous KDS in the respective cities. In 2002, Gur Sikh Temple, a gurdwara of Khalsa Diwan Society of Abbotsford, was designated a national historic site of Canada by the federal government (Parks Canada n.d.). Given that this gurdwara building and site location is the original one, it has special status as being the oldest gurdwara in British Columbia outside of mill colonies.<sup>51</sup> The historical gurdwara building in Abbotsford maintains its *darbar* (court) on its top floor while its lower floor has been turned into Sikh Heritage Museum since 2011. Across the border dividing indigenous land, KDS chapters had also opened in Washington, Oregon, and California in the United States during the early 20th century.

For the earlier KDS Vancouver gurdwara, it was inaugurated in 1908 at the location of West 2nd Avenue (Nayar 2010, 46). In 1969, Khalsa Diwan Society purchased new land at a

---

<sup>51</sup> Regarding gurdwaras on mill establishments, the oldest one is known to be located in the town of Golden, in interior British Columbia (Heritage BC n.d.).

different location on Ross Street and Southwest Marine Drive to expand for a growing community (Nayar 2017, 46). The new 8000 Ross Street location is the present site of the gurdwara; it was re-designed and rebuilt over the past few years due to a fire that broke out in 2016 that was deemed accidental. Moreover, the street Ross Street was renamed to Khalsa Diwan Road in 2018 by the Vancouver City Council.

Like Hong Kong's Khalsa Diwan, Khalsa Diwan Society in Vancouver also emerged through pluralistic memberships and affinities between co-nations (Kazimi 2011, 55; Hans 2003, 223; Dusenbery 1981, 105). Ali Kazimi who has followed the Sikh and South Asian migration story to Canada and the *SS Komagata Maru* voyage explains the role of the gurdwara in being a social and political hub. He delineates:

The Vancouver gurdwara was not merely a place of communal worship for Sikhs. It serves as a community centre for all South Asians, and so it was a natural place for British Columbia's South Asians to start organizing for their rights. They were supported in their efforts by highly educated and well-travelled South Asian activists, among them men from the eastern Indian coast province of Bengal and Punjabi intellectuals who had settled in the United States. (Kazimi 2011, 55)

Raj Hans Kumar (2003, 223) points out that the historical KDS gurdwaras had "Hindu as well as Muslim members" and furthermore that they were "contributors to the gurdwara funds". The pioneering pluralistic membership with the gurdwara is further evident by the Shore or Temple Committee that was set up to provide for the detained passengers onboard the *SS Komagata Maru* (Sohi 2014). The Shore Committee advocated for the ship's passengers and pursued legal and political mechanisms for their release. The Shore Committee largely operated their mandate through the political activism of Khalsa Diwan Society and to fight against the deportation of migrants from the subcontinent.

In the later half of the twentieth century, British Columbia gurdwaras particularly in the Lower Mainland had undergone significant proliferation with sectarian and internal divides. According to Nayar (2010), the explosion of gurdwaras closely follow the pattern and contexts of Sikh migration and settlement waves. As she explains, "On the one hand, such growth has given the community greater resources for building gurdwaras; on the other hand, it has also resulted in factionalism in the community" (Nayar 2010, 45). Much of the early-day schism

emerged around doctrinal issues of covering head and keeping hair which led to the formation of Akali Singh Society and their gurdwaras. The 1980s brought about further contentions and political divides as World Sikh Organization and International Sikh Youth Federation wrestled control of the gurdwaras. According to Hugh Johnston (1988, 8), a Marxist-leaning group was another player in the 1970s leveraging for control of Khalsa Diwan Society, but it subsequently established Desh Bhagat Temple in Vancouver when they were ousted from managing power. Another dividing thread emerged in 1998 that became a powerful wave of contention understood colloquially as the ‘*politics of table and chair*’ in diasporic Sikh communities. The *politics of table and chair* encompasses whether to sit and eat on the ground in *langar halls* or at tables and chairs. During this time, Amritsar’s Akal Takt issued an edict mandating the requirement of ground seating at *langar halls* as a qualification for being a Sikh gurdwara (Nayar 2008, 23). Directed at the political contentions at B.C. gurdwaras, the order generated ripples across the globe. In Hong Kong, the gurdwara moved quickly to remove tables and chairs from its *langar hall*. Back in B.C, the fiasco had produced the fundamentalist-moderate schism. As analyzed by Nayar (2010), *langar halls* permitting tables and chairs were called ‘moderate’ whereas those requiring ground-only seating were labelled ‘fundamentalist’ by media. Nayar (2010, 50) further delineates that even in remote smaller towns of B.C, we now see two gurdwaras – one with tables and chairs, and another with ground seating at their *langar halls*. Cynthia Mahmood (2009, 59) has suggested that the politics of “‘tables and chairs’ versus ‘floor’ stood in symbolically for the highly charged political categories” – between Sikhs of Indian loyalists and Sikhs with Khalistani leanings.

Despite the factionalism and proliferation of gurdwaras in the province, Nayar has put forth three central characteristics in how gurdwaras services the communities: “(1) a place for socio-cultural activity, (2) the locus for the Sikh pursuit of social justice, and (3) a base for mobilizing political power” (Nayar 2010, 44). Today, in addition to the various KDS-branded gurdwaras, notable Sikh temples consist of Dasmesh Darbar, Dukh Nivaran Gurdwara, and Guru Nanak Sikh Temple – all in Surrey. While the proliferating gurdwaras have created a political mess of sorts, of internal divides, there are also new kinds of spatial and suburban engagement along inter-faith and intra-faith dimensions. ‘Highway to Heaven’ in Richmond is a rare example of over twenty clustering religious sites from diverse faiths along the corridor No. 5 Road

(Dwyer, Tse, and Ley 2016). Another instance of a different kind is Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha in Burnaby that sits at the crossroads of Buddhist, Sikh, and Ad Dharmi traditions. Initially split from a Buddhist organization Dr. Ambedkar Memorial Association, Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha was set up in 1982 (DeVries 2010, 35). From the Buddhist tradition, the Ravidassia gurdwara (also called *sabha*) draws inspiration from the neo-Buddhist and anti-caste work of B. R. Ambedkar. Through the Sikh anti-caste ontology, the place upholds Guru Granth Sahib and the teachings of the gurus, *bhagats*, and *sant*-poets – notably the poetry of Ravidas, revered as guru by Ravidassia. And finally, from the Ad Dharmi movement founded by Mangu Ram Mugowalia, the place honours the struggles of lower castes, Dalits, and Adivasi peoples. The gurdwara is home to a library dedicated to B.R. Ambedkar, and provides *langar*. Such crossroads exhibit a fluid nature of religions and synergies across dharmic places described by Larry DeVries (2010, 35) as the “dynamic state of the Ravidasi religion”. Recently, City of Burnaby (2020) honoured the work of Ambedkar and the work of Ravidassia and Ambedkar communities in Burnaby by proclaiming 14 April as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Day of Equality

### ***Shiromani Sikh Society of Toronto and more***

Shiromani Sikh Society in Toronto is Ontario’s oldest gurdwara founded in 1969. It emerged much later than the various Khalsa Diwans of the Pacific. Located on Pape Avenue in the eastern stretch of downtown Toronto, the gurdwara is between Gerrard Bazaar (also known as Little India) and East Chinatown. It sits on a residential street and is surrounded by residential houses. *I can usually walk to the gurdwara from my current home in about 25 minutes.* In a news coverage by local television channel in Punjabi *OMNI* (2017), it was mentioned that about 2,000 Sikhs and co-nations would use the space daily in its earlier days. The gurdwara on 269 Pape Avenue was converted from a warehouse. Prior to the founding of this gurdwara, Sikh congregations gathered at homes and later at a community centre on Eglinton Avenue (Pashaura Singh 2012, 338). Given the suburbanization and proliferation of faith spaces in Greater Toronto, today the gurdwara mostly services about 100 people usually on Sundays and special occasions such as Guru Nanak’s *gurpurab* and New Year’s Eve. Kirtan by women is prominent in this gurdwara during the congregations and offers a glimpse to the dedication of Sikh women in its affairs – *langar seva* and kirtan – to continue its operations. Newer migrants such as post-secondary students who attend colleges nearby also provide new flows of *sangat*,



volunteers, and visitors to the gurdwara. Older generation that relocated to the suburbs continue to sustain their support for the Pape gurdwara as well.

As Sikh immigrant communities grew in the 1970s and 1980s, gurdwaras in the suburbs of Greater Toronto were converted from older buildings and warehouses. Pashaura Singh (2012, 338) identifies factionalism for the proliferation of these places in addition of geographic convenience and Sikh immigrant growth. With the post-war suburbanization that is characteristic of North American cities, newer Sikh migrants settled and founded gurdwaras in the outer suburbs of Toronto such as Brampton, Malton, Mississauga. Notable suburban gurdwaras include Ontario Khalsa Darbar in Mississauga, which was started in 1978 in a small trailer according to its website (Ontario Khalsa Darbar n.d.). It subsequently purchased land, expanded, and relocated to Dixie Road where it opened in 1989 (Pashaura Singh 2012, 338). The expansion of Ontario Khalsa Darbar brought about a new wave of gurdwara growth in Greater Toronto. Another gurdwara Sri Guru Sahib Sabha Malton plays a central role within the neighbourhood of Malton in Mississauga, located close to the Toronto Pearson International Airport. Referred to as the Malton Gurdwara, it was inaugurated in 1990 and has been characterized as the largest gurdwara in Canada with a seating capacity of 5,000 people (Pashaura Singh 2012, 338-339). Both the Dixie and Malton gurdwaras are key hubs in their congregational services and in the coordination of the Toronto and Malton nagar kirtans. Despite their physical size, both gurdwaras get full during congregational services of special occasions.

### *pluralistic affinities*

An important question arises on how and why these gurdwaras embodied pluralistic affinities and became political hubs in its early days. The explanation lies in several inter-related factors that are feeding into each other. Given the relatively novel history in the development of gurdwaras (from early 16th century onwards), Sikhs were particularly instrumental in building gurdwaras in the newer places they were migrating to. Guru Nanak was highly critical of the practice of building centres through land grants and state patronage, which were prevalent in the Sufi *khanqahs* in South Asia at the time.<sup>52</sup> Thus, the model of building gurdwaras from a bottom-up process rather than from state patronage meant Sikhs were able to initiate the development of

---

<sup>52</sup> Pashaura Singh (2002, 51), however, has noted that the Chishti order of Sufism did not accept land endowments.

gurdwaras readily even when state grants or access to higher class wealth was missing. Further, as notions of a bounded sacred space were not central to Sikh thought, unlike Hindu mythology, Guru Nanak's model could be replicated anywhere – particularly with its anarchic bottom-up organizing principles. In this regard, the founding of gurdwaras gained their primary impetus from the collectivizing elements of *dharamsala*, *sangat*, and *langar* that were hallmarks of Guru Nanak's *dharamsala* in Kartarpur. These collectivization elements were rooted in sharing a co-path, rather than in notions of identity, thus allowing established gurdwaras to become political translocal hubs. Johnston (1988, 2) has also suggested the regional affinities (e.g. Punjabi) were more influential than that of religious category in the early South Asian settlement. Similarly, Hans (2003, 218) has argued the gurdwaras as “a cultural site for the diasporic Punjabi community”. Additionally, practices of communal eating had gained a unique prominence in the Sikh practice of *langar*. Unlike a Sufi hospice which generally served members of the Sufi order, and Hindu *langar* that operated as a form of charity to lower castes, Sikh hospice and *langar* were not limited to Sikhs nor deemed a charity to the needy. Sikhs drew inspiration from the Sufi *langar*, and developed it to a standard comprehensive practice and pillar at gurdwaras. The role of *miri-piri* in Sikh thought and spatial practice further catalysed the grounds for political activism. The membership of the Ghadar movement was overwhelmingly Sikh. And, the unique migration waves of Sikhs and Punjabis coming out of colonialism gave rise to specific Sikh constellations. In Canada, temples and mosques did not emerge till the second half of the century. Vishva Hindu Parishad was established in 1974 (DeVries 2010, 23) and Islamic Centre in Vancouver in 1964 (MacLean 2010, 67). In Hong Kong, Hindus were initially from Sindh who were avid followers of Guru Nanak, and since a Hindu *mandir* was not founded in Hong Kong till the post-war era, the gurdwara became a logical hub. However, mosques were established in Hong Kong earlier than gurdwaras and had a strong role in community services, water provision, and providing a traveller lodge – *musafir khana*. A final factor in the pluralistic affinities of early gurdwaras is that the boundaries which scholars and states imagine there to be between Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu have been formed through colonial and post-colonial ordering of space and of religion as a distinct world religion category. Even as such religious boundaries and identities are established, Kalra and Purewal (2019) and Ramey (2008) writing in context of Punjabi and Sindhi communities on the subcontinent respectively shed light that religious

categories remain constantly crossed. These linked factors provide perspectives on how gurdwaras acted as hubs for political and social justice regardless of people's affiliation of faith.

Up next, I discuss the themes relating to gurdwaras in the contemporary interviews.

## **Field and Interview Analysis**

### ***gurdwara as shared cultural path***

As Chapter 2 delineated, *sikhi* is a way of life. Furthermore, its spirituality and politics is grounded in culture. Culture is the interpretation by which we make sense and interpret self, other, and our environment – both inner and outer. Culture also operates as the lived experience of difference – for example, Punjabi or Sikh or both or as diasporic formation. Through difference, there is the possibility of fusion and encounter. I characterize this fold as the cultural dimension of *gurdwara* – one where different co-paths merge in engagement, learning, and dialogue, whether temporarily (e.g. school and tour groups visiting gurdwaras) or sustained (e.g. Sindhi and Punjabi *sangats* sharing Sikh space; alternatively, Sikh, Muslim, and Hindu co-religions sharing Punjabi space; or othered diasporas sharing *Guru Nanak Jahaz*).

The cultural aspect of the gurdwara was heavily pronounced in the Hong Kong gurdwara compared to those of the Canadian gurdwaras. In Hong Kong, interviewees did not make a heavy distinction between religion and culture, seeing the gurdwara as a space that is inherently intertwined in culture. This can likely be explained by the limited cultural spaces in Hong Kong for Sikh and Punjabi communities, who then rely on gurdwara as an expression of their cultural identities and sense of subjectivity. As the history of the city and the gurdwara reveals, because there is only one gurdwara in Hong Kong, it serves as a cultural centre in a way that is unique of the city. This significance of the Hong Kong gurdwara is also captured by other scholars such as Jasjit Singh (2015) who compares the Sikh communities of Hong Kong and Great Britain. The Hong Kong gurdwara hosts almost weekly tours for school students as well as other tour groups who are interested in learning about Sikhism, or about South Asian migrants. Since the gurdwara was bombed twice during the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong and World War II and an American bomb was unearthed in the site next door in 2014, the place is significant for its wartime history and draws tourist groups interested in learning about such spaces.

Cultural activities particularly overlap with special occasions. Diwali, New Years Eve, and Guru Nanak's *gurpurab* would often bring in Punjabi and Sindhi *sangat*. *Diyas* (oil-based lamps), candles, and decorative lighting are lit during both Bandi Chor Divas/Diwali and Guru Nanak's *gurpurab*. During these celebrations, some young people would also bring their Chinese friends from schools to partake in the festivities. Concurrently, Sikhs would often go out into the parks with lanterns during Mid-Autumn Festival to participate in the Sino-Vietnamese festival of lights and harvest with their friends and neighbours.

When I asked a visitor how they know if someone is Punjabi or Sindhi in the gurdwara, she shared with me that Sindhi men wear *rumal* (handkerchief) on their head in a unique way. Further, she pointed out to me that the gurdwara sets up the Sindhi *sangat* in the smaller *darbar hall* with chairs during their contribution on Guru Nanak's *gurpurab*.

While speaking to Roshni Kaur, a Sindhi in Hong Kong who resorted to the gurdwara's refuge services during her settlement transitions, she noted to me that she stayed at the gurdwara's residential quarters for a month. Roshni Kaur explains that her parents had moved from Sindh to Chennai and subsequently, she moved to Hong Kong through marriage with her husband. She avidly reads Guru Granth Sahib and is able to follow along with Nastiliq script. But she explains to me that she feels more familiar in Devanagri script since she grew up in Chennai, but that her mother, and the elder Sindhi women who regularly read Guru Granth Sahib at the Tsim Tsa Tsui *mandir*, are much more familiar with Nastiliq script. However, Roshni Kaur reveals to me that times are changing because diasporic Sindhi youth do not have a wholesome comprehension of the languages of *sikhi* or literacy in Nastiliq, Gurmukhi or Devanagari scripts, and therefore have diverged from the *path* of Guru Nanak. The multiplication of subcontinental or dharmic faith spaces in Hong Kong with new Hindu *mandirs* and Radha Saomi *satsangs* (another term for congregation similar to *sangat*, literally collective of truth seekers) has meant that the historic Sikh-Sindhi affinities are less concentrated as they once were.

Roshni now lives on Hong Kong Island and shares how she feels in the gurdwara.

**Roshni Kaur**<sup>53</sup>: When I go the *mandir*, I just pray at deity. When I come to the gurdwara, I feel more comfortable because I do the *seva*. When I was in trouble, one of the girls at the gurdwara, she has also helped me a lot. She said, “You do the *Sukhmani path* and *Japji path*.” And that has helped me a lot. Frequently, I sit here to listen to kirtan. I am very fond of kirtan. Which I didn’t do for so many years. After coming to the gurdwara, I’m practicing how to read *Sukhmani* faster.

*Sukhmani Sahib* (Pearl of Peace) is the quotidian *path* of women, who take the initiative to read and reflect in collective company on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons at the Hong Kong gurdwara. It is exceptional in that it is always led by women, and who often take turns in its vocalizing iterations. *Sukhmani* is a poem by Guru Arjan who composed it while sitting below Dukh Bhajani Beri (a tree) next to the Ramdas *sarovar*.

Umbar Kaur, however, shares that although Hong Kong Sikhs appear to be united from the outside because of its single gurdwara status, the actual practice of it has varied with internal divides and discontent. Notably, Khalsa ‘proper’ and non-Khalsa ‘unproper’ remain a challenging boundary to dissolve as it has come to be attached deeply with a certain psyche and trauma. Alongside, uneasy rifts between Sindhi-Punjabi evoke a space of cultural difference.

**Umbar Kaur**: A lot of it now has to do with power, rules. I think with the whole *Rahit Maryada* (*Lifestyle Manual*), that’s something that I think should be there, for people to understand what the guidance is. But I think instead of going in with a stickler set of rules, which has various versions from what I’ve heard, it’s better to have a mutual understanding of the path of *sikhi*, instead of being like “Oh, you don’t have that, you are not a Sikh”. That shouldn’t dictate who a Sikh is or is not.

**Amardeep Kaur**: Do you think in *sikhi*, that people can have multiple paths, or is it just the path of Khalsa Panth?

**Umbar Kaur**: That’s a really difficult question to answer. But personally, my view is that every person has their own path into achieving *sikhi* in their lives. Different ways. Because if everyone was dictated through the same system, it won’t work because people come from different backgrounds, different life story, they need different types of exposure into it to be really touched by it. Whereas if we had just one system, it would become very authoritarian. And it’s not supposed to be authoritarian.

In fact, having Sindhis, who are so respectable towards the Sikhism way of life, maybe they don’t follow it themselves, but they do put in the effort to respect it, but they don’t get the respect for it. A lot of people don’t. They just look at them as rich people coming to the gurdwara, because why not.

---

<sup>53</sup> Pseudonyms are used for all interview participants. Interview blockquotes are styled in smaller font. When the primary language used was Punjabi, the language is provided next to the pseudonym.

Umbar Kaur touches on ideas of mutuality, collaboration, and shared path. Gurdwara is a space where multiple paths overlap and converge, and difference is engaged for moving forward. In other words, the Sikh notion of *sahej* (balance, harmony) is presented as a way out of polarizing extremes.

Cultural aspects of gurdwaras did not receive the same degree of prominence when I conversed with gurdwara goers in Canada. This is not to say that the cultural dimension is not present in the Greater Vancouver and Greater Toronto gurdwaras; it certainly is as scholars Nayar, Johnston, and Hans have all differently attributed. Rather, interviewees rarely emphasized the gurdwara as a cultural centre in the way that Hongkongers do. A contributing factor is that the religion-cultural bifurcation is more pronounced in first-world states such as Canada where publics have internalized the multicultural states apparatus or Eurocentric modernity of what a religion is, and what a culture is. Religion gets readily mapped onto a formal temple space such as a gurdwara, and the private space of a home through its secular-religious dichotomy, while culture is allocated to the broader fabric of communities as ethnicities through food, regions, and languages. In this regard, participants internalize the discursive bifurcation that this dissertation aims to destabilize, that is Sikh as religion, and Punjabi as culture. Seán McLoughlin (2005, 545) who writes in the context of Britain delineates such a phenomenon as:

While religion can undoubtedly reinforce ethnicity, the children and grandchildren of migrants, born and socialized in quite different contexts to their parents, increasingly produce their own local-global interpretations of traditions, often arguing for the separation of religious ‘universals’ from cultural ‘particulars’ in ways their parents and grandparents rarely did.

Culture and religion are dynamically re-faceted through the changing diasporic contexts and state discourse. Homi Bhabha’s (1984) notion of ‘ambivalence’ and ‘mimicry’ echoes in the spin of this Sikh-Punjabi coin. But if Canada has generated Sikhs who attach themselves to Sikhism’s world religion narrative, it has certainly also produced the flip side of that coin: Sikhs who identify themselves as simply Punjabi to exalt culture as their unifying force. The latter is a phenomenon much more visible in Greater Vancouver than Greater Toronto. This is evident in Greater Vancouver’s Punjabi literary scene, through the socialist remnants of Ghadar, and the identity crises and ambivalences in the aftermath to 1984. Another underlying current in the Sikh-Punjabi bifurcating phenomena is that Sikh youth in Canada are simply moving away from

gurdwaras for their activities and for their cultural and spiritual growth (Nayar 2010, 58-59). This trend has manifested in the use of leadership camps, student clubs and associations at universities, and now Sikh Heritage Month. In the process, the proliferation of space outside of gurdwara has meant that Sikh youth are taking their practice, learning, and awareness of culture to outside the gurdwara space.

### *gurdwara as refuge*

In a highly expensive real estate market such as Hong Kong, the gurdwara has often offered refuge and shelter during personal home challenges (see Roshni Kaur's account above) and wider political or economic upheaval. I spoke with a Sikh who awaits his political asylum case in Hong Kong with the United Nations. Sharanjit Singh estimates to me that about 10,000 people from India await their cases in Hong Kong, and that the ones from India are usually from Punjab, Calcutta, or Delhi. Hong Kong is not a signatory of United Nation's Refugee Convention. But as history and geography revealed in Chapter 3, the city has been a notable place for refugees. Along with India, he says there are many asylum seekers from Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Russia. Singh comes to the gurdwara daily and partakes in *seva* in the gurdwara's *langar hall*, and he also plays the *tabla* (percussion instrument). The gurdwara actively lists on its website that visitors can stay for a period of time usually capped at 15 days: "Free Boarding & lodging is available for new arrivals to Hong Kong who may not have the means to stay elsewhere" (Khalsa Diwan Hong Kong n.d.).

Canadian gurdwaras have also been sanctuaries of refuge. In the historical context of *Komagata Maru* and the earlier pioneers, gurdwara's communal kitchen served people on their basic day-to-day food need. Likewise, throughout the immigration waves, gurdwaras have continued to play a settlement role of the newer migrants. In the post-911 context, however, gurdwaras have pulled back on formal shelter services for the unsettled. While lodging in Canadian gurdwaras is now less common, *langar* is an ever-growing practice which in addition to congregational attendees significantly aids newer Sikh migrants and working-class families, international South Asian students, and homeless and others in need.

### *gurdwara as dharamsala*

In response to the question of whether gurdwaras are primarily places of religious services, Zorawar Kaur instead emphasizes its community-building aspect and relates it to the Guru Nanak's *dharamsala*. She explains:

**Zorawar Kaur:** Actually, this is not correct. Because in the old times also, if you see this concept of *sikhi*, they didn't say it is a religious place. Guru Nanak said it is a *dharamsal*. *Dharamsal* is a place where anybody can come and cater to their own needs - whether these needs are related to soul or relating to food or what. So gurdwaras are not only for religious things. Like, we, for example, if somebody dies, comes to gurdwara, someone wants to get married, comes to the gurdwara. Because there is only one gurdwara, and because in Hong Kong, the houses are very small, people come to the gurdwara. It can be a family get-together also because they get a chance to meet each other in the gurdwara. It is a big community-builder.

As theorized earlier in this chapter, *dharamsala* had a strong community aspect to development with a focus on people, *sangat* and relation. Zorawar's account also expresses an outlook that *dharam* and religion cannot be congruent as unpacked in Chapter 2, Theoretical Framework. *Gurduwara as dharamsala* operates as a space beyond religion. Among the characteristics of the gurdwara that Zorawar Kaur mentions are: what to do when a person dies, what to do when a couple marries, and that the space is for family as much as it is for broader communities. Interestingly, Zorawar Kaur also notes the small spaces of flats in Hong Kong, and as a result gurdwaras became an important meeting place because homes may be too tight to accommodate bigger social meetups. Thus, the gurdwara in Hong Kong as a gathering place takes on its unique flavours and characteristics of city life of Hong Kong.

Outside the subcontinent, gurdwaras have been hubs of traveller's support and hospitality. However, this mandate is not exclusive to diasporic gurdwaras. The first Sikh *dharamsala* in Kartarpur by Guru Nanak served as a hub for pilgrims making journeys through the region of Punjab to Kashmir and Shivalik Hills, and through the Gangetic Plains (Mann 2004, 22). My own journeys between Hong Kong and Punjab via Delhi and vice-versa have often involved *sojorn* at the historical gurdwaras enroute in Delhi – Bangla Sahib and Gurdwara Sis Ganj. *Gurduwara as sojorn* is pivotal as the practice of hotel and motel stay was not prominent in Sikh migrant's early history. Instead, gurdwaras have been the anchors for Sikh travellers – pilgrims or otherwise. Through this accommodation, gurdwaras act as collective sites of repose offering an alternative to the profit-driven capitalist resort and hotel markets of consumer



tourism. Staying at the gurdwara is not limited to Sikhs. In Hong Kong, the gurdwara regularly hosts backpackers and tourists who are looking for temporary places for *sojorn* on the peripheries of the capitalist tourist economies.

A final characterizing feature of *gurdwara as dharamsala* is the affective and social space it converges for elderly and seniors. Older men tend to gather in the gurdwara's courtyard. In Hong Kong, they could get together underneath the shades of the trees (now gone) sipping *cha* and conversing. Elderly women, likewise, gather around gurdwaras, sometimes outdoor, but tend to gather indoor over *langar* preparation activities or related *seva*. At the Hong Kong gurdwara, there are also two exclusive rooms for seniors so that elders can sit on chairs if they have knee pain and follow *divan* (poetry session) on the installed televisions, which is live broadcasted from the *darbar* (court) above. While there is a pivotal social and community space carved out in the gurdwaras for elderly, there are also emerging challenges. One elder woman Sukhwant Kaur I spoke with in Surrey describes the mobility challenges of gurdwaras and the non-conducive access to it. Since *darbar halls* tend to be higher than *langar halls*, staircases often hinder for people in older ages. Likewise, North American auto-centric urban design can present hardship to reach a gurdwara, particularly for elderly or woman who do not drive and not able to acquire a regular ride. Sukhwant Kaur's account describes the actual challenging experiences that arise when gurdwaras are physically designed by monumentalizing staircases, elevations, and widened halls. Thus, although gurdwaras have been anchors of global and local mobility allowing us to experience the itinerary of the spirit and enunciate ourselves in embodied actions, they also remind the various barriers to mobility.

*During fieldwork, as I walked and rode transit along Newton area of Surrey to get to the gurdwaras, I was struck by the number of people, particularly visibly Sikh elders, taking buses with me. To get to Guru Nanak Sikh Gurdwara in Surrey, we'd often had to take two buses interchanging at the Newton Exchange. Younger people – of college and university student age – also packed onto the buses with me and the elderly. Along the way, we would pass Kwantlen Polytechnic University. Although I take public transit in Greater Toronto, I have yet to encounter such a heavily Sikh-occupied bus in the suburbs of Mississauga and Brampton. As an urban planner and cultural geographer, I knew what I was witnessing – all the multi-faceted processes of movement and flows but had no means to resolve the root. All I could do was to engage in*

*conversations on the bus-stop with people, looking into the distance, as we pondered on the bus's arrival. As we'd disembark from the buses, I'd cross the road with them when the pedestrian light finally turns green – if there is a light or a crossing.*

### ***gurdwara as miri-piri***

In the interviews, I asked Sikh participants their thoughts on the types of the politics that have become emergent on the gurdwaras and their stances on that. Sikhs in the Vancouver region displayed a very politicized outlook. Anokha Kaur, for instance, brings to attention the political iconography that is present often in *langar halls*. She goes on to make a distinction between political movements desiring to make things better as opposed to those that seek divisions and cannot work through issues. Furthermore, she also makes the distinction between the campaigning politics of politicians representing different Canadian parties, and those of internal election committees who manage and govern the gurdwaras. In the former, politicians of the Canadian State come in to gather Sikh vote. In the latter, competing Sikh groups with different agendas contest for power and control of gurdwaras.

**Amardeep Kaur:** Ok while we are still talking about gurdwaras, there are some other critiques where people are saying this a lot, that "gurdwaras shouldn't be used for politics".

**Anokha Kaur:** I think that's the opposite of gurdwaras. Gurdwaras are all politics. In the *langar hall*, the hall of the gurdwara, they raised a banner that said "Long Live Khalistan, our homeland". If that's not concerning politics, then what is it. Whether or not one agrees on the topic, that's ample evidence of the politics there.

**Amardeep Kaur:** Ok, so what are your thoughts on: Should those politics happen in a gurdwara?

**Anokha Kaur:** I think politics are inherently part of a gurdwara and the solution is to try and make it not divisive.

**Amardeep Kaur:** Ok, so politics are inherently in any type of community space, and movements can make things better, but when politics become about division, it's becomes a different game.

**Anokha Kaur:** Also, when you are talking about politics in a gurdwara, it's not about internal politics, especially the one in Ottawa, it becomes a campaign trail for every liberal member of parliament trying to make a thing. It's a joke at this point.

**Amardeep Kaur:** It's the party and politician politics that's the problem?

**Anokha Kaur:** Yeah. It's sort of how gurdwara committees are not hesitant to let politicians come in and say their piece. There's no critical reflection on why we should let this. It's classic

Jason Kenny era, religious pandering. Let's write every ethnic date in our calander so send someone to go show face of this really vacant type of canvassing. It's a very Canadian idea.

Mehr Singh, likewise, notes that politics is inherently part of a gurdwara. He draws from Sikh concept of *miri-piri* to explain that a gurdwara is constitutionally tangled with a political sphere. He goes on to expand his thoughts by denoting that *where* in the gurdwara those politics should occur is what needs reflection and problem-solving. In particular, he draws attention to the historically political role gurdwaras of the Pacific have played:

**Mehr Singh:** I think politics are inherently part of the gurdwara. We were talking about *miri-piri* before this. [. . . repeats] Now, where in the gurdwara does it take place, I think that's the difference, that's the million dollar question. . . . Sikh *parcharik* [preacher] . . . said something fantastic to me which was: "There's a reason Harmandir Sahib and Akal Takt exists. One exists free of politics, while the other exists for the purpose of politics". Both of them are gurdwara though, at the end of the day. . . . Khalsa Diwan Society is - 100 percent - without a doubt - a political organization. Pacific Coast Khalsa Diwan. I don't know if it's called Khalsa Diwan in Hong Kong too.

**Amardeep Kaur:** Yes it is.

**Mehr Singh:** Khalsa Diwan Society, even the name is born, it's born out of the Singh Sabha movement in India. It is political. There is no doubt about it. Whether it is religious politics, or whether it is communal politics, or whatever it is. It's political. The fight for enfranchisement, or after being disenfranchised here came out of Khalsa Diwan Society. The fight for immigration rights came out of Khalsa Diwan Society. The representation of the *Komagata Maru* came out of the Khalsa Diwan Society, the Shore Committee. There's no doubt that Khalsa Diwan Society is a political organization. By extension, every gurdwara, or I should say, every public-serving gurdwara, especially the ones affiliated with Khalsa Diwan Society, such as Sukh Sagar's Khalsa Diwan Society, Abbotsford Khalsa Diwan Society, Abbotsford's KDS, Victoria's KDS, under the KDS umbrella, I think those gurdwaras by definition have to be political organization.

In Mehr Singh's narrative emerges a powerful imaginary of the gurdwaras of the Pacific Ocean, which were involved in a political uprising against the British Empire. The different Khalsa Diwan Societies hold an immense public and political responsibility to its *sangat*, and beyond Sikh community to think of politics of relation and its founding mission of a politics of humanity. Mehr goes on to point out how Sikh *sangat* and non-Sikhs took to protest at the gurdwara when they saw it diverging from its social justice political cause and proceeded to hold the management of the gurdwara accountable to its founding politics of humanity.

**Mehr Singh:** I think each gurdwara has responsibility to be political. I mean when there was public outrage when Modi, PM Modi came to this gurdwara, I mean this is a political organization. You are supporting someone who is complicit in genocide. So I mean the public outrage is justified. I think all these insitutions are inherently political.

Mehr Singh is referring to the uproar of 16 April 2015 when protestors gathered at Khalsa Diwan Society as a public outcry against Narendra Modi's visit to the Vancouver gurdwara (Jakara Movement 2015). A coalition of South Asian activists arose from Sikh, Muslim and left-wing Hindus against Hindutva who were dismayed of such a visit. Narendra Modi, who perpetuated a state-orchestrated genocide against Muslims in 2002 in Gujarat India during his reign as a Chief Minister of Gujarat and presently continues a Hindutva regime as present Prime Minister. Sikh protestors were dismayed that the Vancouver gurdwara, with its historical and political significance in terms of fighting for social justice, would accommodate a genocide perpetrator and roll a red carpet for him. Police, security, and gurdwara's management closed off the gurdwara from its own *sangat*, which further infuriated the *sangat* who chanted that the gurdwara belongs to the *sangat*, and not the tyrant. One of the activists at the protest, Moninder Singh, took to the gates in an effort to open the gates of the closed-off gurdwara back to its *sangat*, but he was arrested.

The protest was covered by mainstream Canadian media (for example *CBC*, *CTV*, *Globe and Mail*, *Vancouver Sun*, *National Post*) and by Sikh Punjabi-speaking channels (for example, *TV 84*). Coverage of the protest was overlooked from prominent Indian media such as *Zee News* and *NDTV* which reported Modi's visit to the prominent gurdwara and framed it as being received by welcoming people but failed to report on the gathered protestors who were outraged at Modi and his crimes against humanity. Further ignoring the protest at the gurdwara gates, *Zee News* (2015) reported on Narendra Modi's speechifying inside the gurdwara in which Modi made a reference to Guru Gobind Singh founding of Panj Pyare, one of whom was from Gujarat. However, *Zee News* (2015) did not report people's voices at that gurdwara gates who were calling on recognition and justice of the pogroms against Muslims by the "Butcher of Gujarat".

While Indian media focused its spotlight on the red carpet being rolled for Narendra Modi, Jakara Movement (a Sikh-led initiative) shifted its politics of power to the protestors and social justice revolutionaries, such as Mewa Singh. The Jakara Movement, which originates from Sikh principles to empower Sikh youth, took to live coverage and documented some of these voices at the gates. The videos and coverage are archived on Jakara's YouTube channel and the organization's website (Jakara 2015). The movement invoked Mewa Singh as a call to Sikh

politicized duty in vivid ways that linked the past of Khalsa Diwan Societies of the Pacific and the past of Ghadar to the present cause of mobilizing a coalitional front against state repression.<sup>54</sup>

We stand with all the Mewa Singhs of British Columbia - Vancouver, Richmond, Abbotsford, Surrey, and all the rest - united against the Indian State and its fascism, united with all communities. (Jakara Movement 2015)

Speeches in English and Punjabi were delivered from Sikh, Muslim, and Adivasi groups. Hashtag #MewaOrBela<sup>55</sup> became a cornerstone of the coalition's Sikh front and its regional history in the Pacific Northwest. The protest also brought together Punjabis, Gujaratis, and Kashmiris in a rare unity of strength against the right-wing Hindutva.

However, the place of politics within gurdwara space is not universally shared by all Sikhs as many expressed a discontent at the current nature of politics. This ranged from a discontent at what they see in-fighting of internal factions which involve power grabs by gurdwara committees, corruption or lack of financial accountability, and misuse of budget. Rajpal Singh made a link between these political fighting and the money flow that comes through the gurdwara, and even makes a radical claim to suggest that the *dholak* (treasure chest) be rid of. Another person made a distinction between 'politics of humanity' in the early days of KDS and 'politics of ego' now. Likewise, Nimritha Kaur in Hong Kong distinguishes the politics of *miri-piri* of Gurus with that of present-day individual gain.

**Rajpal Singh:** I just think it's like the politics of ego, right. It's just, it's too much in-fighting. And it's all over. And I joke, you know: Get rid of the *dolak*, the donation boxes in the gurdwara, there will be no committee members, nobody is interested.

**Nimritha Kaur, in Punjabi:** We believe, even Gurus carried out politics, but they did for the peoples, against Mughal power, for the wellness of community. Now, here, politics is about [. . . lists examples] individual gain.

In this manner, perhaps politics is operating as a double-edged sword of the material world alone.<sup>56</sup> There is politics of empowerment, struggle, and transformation on the one hand. On the other hand, there is a politics of division, financial power, and politics of capital and resources.

---

<sup>54</sup> For instance, the past of Ghadar Movement used Vaisakhi and gurdwara spaces as a call to politicized duty. See Gill (2014, 34)

<sup>55</sup> Bela is a reference to Bela Singh (1883-1934), an informant for the immigration department in Vancouver ("Bela Singh" n.d.). Hashtag #MewaOrBela sought to hold Sikhs accountable who are deep in the pockets of Canadian and Indian states.

<sup>56</sup> I make this distinction of the material world because there is a different conceptualization of a double-edge sword (*khande*) in Sikh philosophy that represents "the destruction of ego, deceit, subjugation, and an opening into a just and liberating mode of existence" (N.G.K Singh 2014, 420).

The accounts by Mehr Singh, Anokha Kaur, and Nimritha Kaur captured both the mandate of politics in the gurdwara, and its abuse. The 2015 public outcry against the management of Vancouver KDS gurdwara with Modi's visit expressed a desire to reclaim the public gurdwara.

Likewise, political work that worked through principles of empowerment, such as for youth and women, were often more valued. In Hong Kong, for instance, Zorawar Kaur notes how the gurdwara has offered some skills-building programs such as accounting classes so that Sikh women, especially first-generation immigrants, can find jobs in the office sector in Sindhi companies. But there are also challenges in how empowerment and programming work can take place. Some participants such as Rajpal Singh in Greater Vancouver shared that youth work is really limited, with Punjabi classes and kirtan classes offered for smaller children, but then a big gap in youth programming for adolescence and young adults. The sentiment on this type of political empowerment, however, was not expressed through the language of politics and political activism, but through the language of social place, settlement work, community space, and gurdwara's cultural sphere.

To make sense of the political realm of gurdwaras, we can return to what Mehr Singh emphasizes, where in the gurdwara should these politics take place? The Sikh concept of *miri-piri*, and its spatial practice, as delineated at the beginning of this chapter, aids us in this process. While I was seated at the Guru Nanak Sikh Gurdwara in Surrey during its *miri-piri samagam* (large gathering), an educator addressing the congregation offered his *miri-piri* insights on the Darbar Sahib complex of Amritsar. He elucidates that if one is in Harmandir Sahib, one will not see Akal Takht. On the other hand, if one is in Akal Takht, one will always see Harmandir Sahib. His perspective, which I had previously also heard through the work of Sikh Research Institute, sheds light on the unique spatial placement of Akal Takht in relation to Harmandir Sahib. He goes on to say that one should never bring *rajneeti* (politics of governance) into Harmandir Sahib and further points out that the flag of Harmandir Sahib flies higher than the flag of Akal Takht.

This realm of politics is not shared by all Sikhs. A Nanaksari interviewee, Nirmal Singh, made a diverging claim from this politics as inherently part of the gurdwara by suggesting that Nanaksari gurdwaras are not involved in politics and that the place is involved in pure *gurbani*.<sup>57</sup> Nirmal's remarks idealizes the Nanaksari gurdwaras as the place free from politics. I went to one

---

<sup>57</sup> Nanaksaris are a *sant*-led Sikh group through a following of Nand Singh, a 19th century *sant* (Nesbitt 2014, 364)

in Richmond named Nanaksar Gurdwara Gursikh Temple, which is notable for its subcontinental architectural design and intricate wall carvings on its ceilings and pathways. I arrived there late one night and was able to get a quick tour of the gurdwara since the person I came with had personal connections at the gurdwara. We come down to a basement room at the gurdwara where a Nanaksari leader had spent years of his time in deep meditation. The room honours his *bhakti* (devotion). While the place does not fly *Nishan Sahib* (flag), its congregational services and *langar hall* are typical of a gurdwara and goes above and beyond in them. Recitations of Guru Granth Sahib occur around the clock day and night. The gurdwara also has shower facilities in the washrooms and lockers in the *langar hall*. Its site in Richmond close to the Vancouver International Airport makes it a prominent *gurduara as sojorn*.

Gatekeeping of gurdwaras especially concerning *langar halls* and *darbar halls* is another theme in the messy politics of gurdwaras. *Langar hall* disputes were certainly prolific in Greater Vancouver. This is likely because different gurdwaras by now had varying conventions thus creating misunderstanding or awkward exchanges on the rules to follow at a particular gurdwara. While seated on a table and chair at the Vancouver KDS for my own *langar* during an afternoon, a group of elder women came out of the kitchen after doing their *langar seva* and sat down to eat. Next to them, the two young men – visibly South Asian and student-age, had also just seated themselves and started eating *langar*. However, their heads were not covered. The elder women who had just prepared *langar* for all to eat made a request to the young men to cover their heads. Despite the awkward exchange, the young men still refused to cover their heads.

These micro level exchanges are part of the wider fabric of politics. Umbar Kaur in Hong Kong expresses her disbelief in the prevention of *parikarma* (walk-around) when Ranjit Singh Dhadrianwale – a popular Sikh kirtan musician – made a visit to the Hong Kong gurdwara with his entourage in December 2016. During his kirtan program, *sangat* were discouraged from making a walk around Guru Granth Sahib. Umbar expresses that *sangat*'s relationship to the Granth is more significant than any guest, no matter how important or popular the guest is. Her perspective once again centers that a gurdwara belongs to *sangat*, and not to committees or prominent figures. Likewise, in another instance, Basant Kaur shared her dismay that the gurdwara set up a private reception for the Canadian ambassador who visited Hong Kong's Khalsa Diwan Sikh Temple for the *Komagata Maru* apology. The dismay and agitation in this

instance of a private reception was emphasized in the sense that the purpose of *langar* is to bring together people of different status to sit communally and eat together. Consequently, a dignitary of the Canadian state does not require a special reception outside of a regular *langar*.

These instances of awkward exchanges (and sometimes silences) of rules and conventions in *langar halls* and *darbar halls*, however, are subtle in the diasporic gurdwaras. They are perhaps the micro-politics of *sangat* and leaders within the gurdwara. In some instances, these become the micro-politics of gatekeeping. In other instances, the micro-politics emerge through affect and compassion which the very place of *langar hall* embodies.

### ***gurdwara as subaltern counterpublics***

In discussing the challenges that emerge with gurdwara, Zorawar Kaur shares that despite trying to change the representative body of the Hong Kong gurdwara to be more inclusive of women, they have faced barriers.

**Zorawar Kaur:** Actually, we are all part of the community. We all have thoughts. We cannot blame the gurdwara for that. Because we people are running the management of the gurdwara. One thing I feel, I am very concerned about, women's representation is completely missing in the gurdwara. When I came to the gurdwara, I heard there was no single woman member on the gurdwara committee. And this is very contradictory to our concept of *sikhi*. Because in *sikhi*, we talk about women equality, and that we are on par with everyone. But when it comes to actual implementation, those who are actually capturing the power to run the gurdwara, if they don't have that concept, then that thing cannot be changed. And there are so many problems. Like, even if we try for that, still there will be lots of barriers we'll have to cross.

On the one hand, she explains that it is the responsibility of *sangat* to change the gendered system, instead of merely playing the blame game or victim card. On the other hand, however, she points out that a real hurdle is deployed when those in positions of representative power do not truly embody the feminist empowerment principle of *sikhi*. In Hong Kong, some women did push for change at the level of the committee by putting forth their names during the nomination call. However, a few women revealed to me that the women's slips were removed from the nomination box before the draw took place in front of Guru Granth Sahib.

Faced with hurdles against representative power, some women turned to mobilize through other means. At the gurdwara, some groups of women expressed their long-distance allegiance to the Aam Admi Party through their *salwar kameez* attire and colour while sponsoring *Sukhmani Sahib path* at the Hong Kong gurdwara. Aam Admi Party (Common



Person's Party) is a left-leaning political party that has packaged itself under the banner of fighting corruption in India. The 2017 elections of Punjab's Legislative Assembly had a unique spotlight and interest because of the Sarbat Khalsa assembly that took place in Punjab in 2015 (Ram 2018, 26). Sarbat Khalsa is a Sikh assembly of consensus-driven, bottom-up, and political decision-making. It was prominent in 18th century. Since 1986, it has been dormant and deemed a threat to India and Punjab states.

In Hong Kong, for many Sikh women, who want to see transformation and change for their home soil, the turn to Aam Admi was an expression to bring in a tectonic shift. Ronki Ram (2018) theorizes that Punjab in the run up to the 2017 elections and Aam Admi mobilization had several events climaxing into an almost people's uprising. This consisted of high levels of agricultural debt, struggles of landless peasants, police confrontations against protestors, and Sarbat Khalsa against the Punjab party in power (Ram 2018, 26). Other social issues include Sikh alienation, lack of job opportunities, and drug and alcoholism. Aam Admi mobilization came to embody the third way against a century of rule by either Shiromani Akali Dal Party and Bharatiya Jananta Party alliance (SAD-BJP) or Indian National Congress (INC), which run the game of thrones show in Punjab. The grassroots mobilization for Aam Admi Party and in diaspora, however, failed to materialize in Punjab.

The argument here is not that the Hong Kong *sangat* or the women *sangat* are primarily supporters of Aam Admi Party. Rather, it illustrates the complex multiple entanglements of politics – local and translocal – and the gurdwara as a sphere for that grassroots mobilization. For women, who are generally excluded from the representative voice, from the top level, finding other tactical manoeuvring such as congregating a *Sukhmani Sahib path* becomes a tactical expression and means for political citizenship, or more accurately dissident-ship. Another instance of dissident-ship consists of a micro-gathering held on 10 August 2019, when Sikh youth organized a peaceful and reflective congregation at the Sikh temple in Hong Kong for the affective possibility of “hope amidst turmoil”. The gathering in the wake of political arising in Hong Kong shows the ingrained politico-spiritual processes of gurdwara and its multi-faceted links to the political sphere.

As a sub-theme and overlap to the *gurdwara as miri-piri* notion, *gurdwara as subaltern counterpublics* addresses these dynamic counters to the public sphere and political contestation.

The term ‘subaltern counterpublics’ by Nancy Fraser (1990) lends insight to the pluralistic civic engagement and disobedience. It delineates public sphere as not singular and not just belonging to the citizens of a state, but also the underclass – gendered, classed, religiously othered, and racialized – who can expand discursive space. The historical overview of Khalsa Diwan Society reveals gurdwaras of the Pacific as transnational public spheres in the rise of Ghadar Movement against British Empire. Contemporary counterpublics – small and large, local and translocal – are also in formation: Sikh youth and *sangat* congregating in Hong Kong’s gurdwara in response to political unrest of Hong Kong’s Be Water Movement; creative mobilization of alliances against Hindutva; and, feminist counterpublics to the internal governance of gurdwaras.

### **Path-making through *Gurduara*: A Discussion**

The chapter has offered some interpretation of gurdwaras through a Sikh geographical imagination, and analyzed its contemporary expressions, belonging and relation by people. I sought to move alongside people’s narratives to the complex ‘power geometries’ (Massey 1994) of poetics, politics and piety at play in the gurdwara. Gurdwara is a place of contestation, consciousness, and camaraderie. As a translocal polity without a state, gurdwara constitutes a network of decentralized, dialogical, and discrepant cosmopolitanism. As a networked space, moving through gurdwaras reveals the lesser-seen circuit of ‘*worlding from below*’ (Simone 2001), rooted in migrant kinship linkages, communal eating, and precarious sanctuaries for the displaced, diasporic, and landless. Gurdwaras constitute an alternative spatiality to capitalism, colonialism and nation-state, while also being within their structural fabric. Simultaneously, gurdwaras capture a struggle of internal power, a struggle against external power, and a place where ‘subaltern counterpublics’ (Fraser 1990) emerge against different constellations of power. I sum up these ideas through several concepts that exhibit the multifarious dimensions of the gurdwara which I coin through the nuances and dynamism of *gurduara as path-making*. In framing these places in this orientation, *gurduara as path-making* offers a way of thinking through its other circuit, of constant movement, itineraries, and circularity, of storytelling and people, and away from a static descriptor of its spatial order, form and function.

In *Postcapitalist Politics*, feminist geographers Gibson-Graham (2006) change the focus of discussion against capitalism, from an ultimate revolution to everyday collective economies and spaces of care that live on the fringe of the capitalist space. Among the various economies of

care delineated, Gibson-Graham also outline what Eastern philosophies have to offer to humanity and to Earth. For instance, with the letting go of ego-centered subjectivity and identity, “embodied actions are undertaken so as to constitute new microworlds of affect and behaviour” (2006, 130). *Gurduara as dharamsala* and *gurduara as refuge* both capture the spirit of a *langar hall* run through humility and *seva*. And, eating collectively regardless of social status forms the basic constituents of mitigating ego-centered identities and enabling new micro forms of worlding through affect and food. This is not to say the gurdwaras are free from material wealth or exploitation or financial mis-management, or that gurdwaras are not impacted by capitalist politics; rather, the gurdwara circuit operates a feminist economy of care and compassion, and such micropolitics forms a potential for a possibility of transformation. As Gibson-Graham put it, “a politics of possibility . . . cannot simply be put ‘out there’ in the world with the hope that it will flourish. It needs to be sustained by the continual work of making and remaking a space for it to exist” (2006, xxviii). Gurdwara is one such space, expressing both an ethos and institution of dialogical cosmopolitanism, as day in and out, alongside congregations, volunteers come in to help with food, and countless people regardless of need partake in eating together.

I conclude with a quote from a popular Sikh philosopher Sant Singh Maskeen (2016, n.p., translation mine), who reminds us, “Temples, gurdwaras, mosques, for what have they been built? They are not built for seeing. They are built for understanding . . . In Urdu, we say *yad karo*, in Punjabi *chete karo*, and in Sanskrit, *simran karo*”. Maskeen is drawing on vocabulary from different languages – Hindi-Urdu, Punjabi, and Sanskrit – that each speak to the practice of remembrance to delineate what is involved in understanding. In this, he guides Sikhs to think of these places as collaborative places of learning and engagement. Of memory and storytelling.

In the next chapter Vaisakhi Nagar Kirtan, I further an analysis of politics, poetics, and engagement in other Sikh translocal spaces through the street in the festive season.

## Chapter 5 – Vaisakhi Nagar Kirtan

*Vaisakh*, when new leaves blossom  
I yearn the sight of the holder of nature's wealth,  
Come to my heart's gate,  
come home, Beloved,  
ferry me over!  
Without you, I am worthless.  
Who dares a price tag on your bride?  
I crave to see your true sight,  
Not far, I sense, a presence within.  
O Nanak, experiencing Vaisakhi one finds you  
in the spirit of embodied poetry.

~ Guru Nanak ~

*Barah Mah | Twelve Months | Guru Granth Sahib 1108*  
(transcreation mine)

How does one see what one cannot see? Within the context of this chapter's focus on Vaisakhi and nagar kirtan, how does one shift the top-down multicultural snapshot to a circular and seasonal journey of a love poetry? How does one move past the striking visual orientaling gaze (always marked as othered) of turbans, swords and exotic food, and the plethora of internal social divisions, to its poetics of a humanity? How does one do that without romanticizing and appropriating a consumption of a nation and culture?

To move past such orientaling gaze, one may turn to poetics and songs, rooted in Sikh philosophical concepts, and its historical practice to counter bifurcating discourses. I argue for a nuanced multi-dimensional portrayal of the occasion, in which we can make sense of simultaneous diversity and mergence inter-fused, and co-contaminated, as a way of characterizing the yearning for the experience of Oneness. In the following, I trace the roots of nagar kirtan, before analyzing its contemporary diasporic flows and interview themes. By drawing on Sikh and Punjabi literary imagination, I use some of the symbolism of Vaisakh – described by N.G.K. Singh as “nature, commerce, fellow human beings, spiritual quest” (1993, 94) and of *rasa* (taste, and used to denote aesthetics) – which emerges in Guru Nanak's poems to offer openings to a discussion of the growing celebrations of Vaisakh and nagar kirtan events that are taking shape in diasporic space.

## Nagar Kirtan Roots from Amritsar to Pacific Northwest

This section traces the historical development of nagar kirtan, from Punjab to the Pacific. To outline the threads in this genealogy, Sikh nagar kirtan emanated out of a translocal space and had with it a pluralistic practice of belonging. Moreover, it emphasized an alternative conceptualization of power and sovereignty – one that grounded itself upon ideas of sonic devotion and immanence that best invoke Infinite’s *nirgun-sargun* orientation. Finally, its development in the Sikh tradition is intimately linked as a political tool of resistance, protest, or disobedience.

First, nagar kirtan emphasized the sonic aspects of devotion over its iconography prevalent at the time. The centrality of this musical aspect of Sikh philosophy and poetics can be traced back to Guru Nanak’s travels and a translocal space that shaped his discourse and subsequent poetics. Guru Nanak and Mardana are known to have made four grand journeys in the four cardinal directions, as attributed in his *janamsakhis*, and along these travels Guru Nanak composed poems and songs, and Mardana played the *rabab*. Thus, Purewal (2011, 374) characterizes this translocal space and Sikh-Muslim relation in that “Gurū Nanak’s *darbar* [court] was mobile”. The translocality is more evident when the tradition of *chaunki charni* emerged as a form of protest march from Amritsar to Fort Gwalior as delineated further down.

Second, a notion of immanence pervaded the development of devotional singing. Here, Guru Arjan (the fifth Guru) had set up eight musical sittings (*chaunkis*) at Harmandir Sahib when *Adi Granth* was installed in 1604. Pashaura Singh (2011, 105) has stated that of the eight musical sittings, five are permanent sessions in the sense of their completeness as they conclude with *Ardas* (Petition) and distribution of *prasad* (blessed pudding). Moreover, the musical acts were played alike by Sikh *ragis* (musicians of *raga*) and Muslim *rababis* (musicians of *rabab* instrument), up until Partition that split Punjab between India and Pakistan (Gurnam Singh 2014, 404; Pashaura Singh 2011, 123). Of interest in the development of Sikh musical sittings are the eight acts of *darshan* (glimpse) that were the order of a Vaishanava tradition and the five-fold *naubat*, which were the Islamic periodic musical performances ordained at the court of Mughal emperor Akbar. Nevertheless, Sikh *chaunkis* diverged from the eight sacred watches of Vaishanava bhakti which divided *darshan* into eight organized units of time in a twenty-four

hour day and into a structural and ritualized time. Pashaura Singh (2011, 125) underlines that *chaunkis* in the Sikh tradition “acquired their own distinctive character” and are representative of Sikh philosophy that emphasized continuity and sacred presence within ordinary life. Sikh *chaunkis* emerged to celebrate the horizontal sovereignty – formless, invoked through musical poetics – as opposed to the vertical power held by a ruler or iconographic representations of deities. The musical acts were a constant unfolding itinerary to symbolize sacred presence everywhere, anywhere – characterized by all-form (*sargun*) – and not limited to a temporal unit or spatial boundary nor to a religious or caste identity. As he writes, “For the visiting devotees these musical sessions transform the fabric of ordinary living in the commonplace of hours, days, and seasons, into extraordinary or sacred time” (Pashaura Singh 2011, 125). The ordinary and the quotidian becomes sacred.

Third, the devotional singing was not void of politics, but instead was characterized by a sense of ethics, righteousness, and political practice. When Guru Hargobind was imprisoned by Mughal emperor Jahangir in the early seventeenth century, the Guru’s closest associates<sup>58</sup> started a musical tradition of *chaunki charni*, meaning the mount or march of the *chaunki* (musical acts). The march started from Akal Takht in Amritsar and proceeded to Fort Gwalior, now in Madhya Pradesh, where Guru Hargobind was imprisoned by Mughal emperor Jahangir (Pashaura Singh 2011, 117).<sup>59</sup> Guru Hargobind’s political arrest was largely attributed to the fact that he commanded the *miri-piri* aspects of *sikhi*, and materialized that concept to its spatial practice and warriorhood as delineated in Chapter 4. The procession, thus, emerged as a form of protest and civil disobedience against the Mughal state. Guru Hargobind was released from prison before the full extent of his twelve-year prison term; his release today is celebrated during the occasion of Diwali (festival of lights) as Bandi Chhor Divas (prisoner’s justice day). In the political practices of *nagar kirtan*, Pashaura Singh (2011, 119) also references the *nagar kirtan* precedent set by Srikrishna Chaitanya, a *sant* of the Vaishanava Bhakti movement of the time period overlapping Guru Nanak and based in Bengal. The *nagar kirtan* of the Vaishnava Bhakti tradition used

---

<sup>58</sup> Baba Buddha is credited as the initiator by Pashaura Singh (2011, 117), while Gurnam Singh (2014, 400) credits both Bhai Gurdas Bhalla and Baba Buddha.

<sup>59</sup> The march is documented in the historical Persian source *Dabistan-i-Mazahib*, which is a 17th century account of religious schools of thought on the subcontinent. The *Dabistan-i-Mazahib* does not have an exact known year or verified author. Its contemporary English translator, Ganda Singh, describes the march: “During this time the Masands and the Sikhs used to go and bow down to the wall of the fort” (Ganda Singh 1940, 209).

musical gatherings and processions in public spaces of cities and towns to socially challenge Brahman *pandits* and Mughal authorities of the era (Pashaura Singh 2011, 119).

It is important to remember these elements of translocality, sonic poetics, and civil disobedience in the materialization of *nagar kirtan* by which it characterized a horizontal relation.

Figure 3 Postcard titled Hindoo Religious Procession Vancouver B.C., 1905 (Photo Source: Vancouver Public Library 86540)



When the *nagar kirtan* arrived in the Pacific, thus, the translocal sense of place was already present and it was political, albeit in different ways.

In Hong Kong, the first *nagar kirtan* took place 11 March 1902, documented in *Hong Kong Telegraph* (1902, 2). The newspaper source delineates the event to the opening of Khalsa Diwan Sikh Temple in Wanchai, and that was accompanied by a march that inaugurated the occasion. The march departed from the Central Police Station to the premises of the new *gurdwara* in Wan Chai. As Chapter 3 and 4 delineated, the Central Police Station had a room dedicated to Sikh congregations, and another room for Muslim congregations during the earlier years of British colonialism of Hong Kong. The next documented *nagar kirtan* took place in 1999 during the 300-anniversary celebration of Khalsa inauguration (Bhatra 2012, 117). The procession took place in the streets and was led by the Hong Kong Band. Bhatra (2012, 117) notes that Hong Kong police are unwilling to grant such processions due to traffic blockages. As a result, the predominant style of *nagar kirtans* in Hong Kong are sit-down gatherings in open venues in the outer regions of Hong Kong.

In Vancouver, a first Sikh street procession is recorded in 1905 as the above postcard in colour documents, while the first established nagar kirtan is recorded to be 1908. The 1905 postcard shows a photograph of about 30 Sikhs, all visibly men, and all wearing a turban, involved in a musical march and procession (Vancouver Public Library 86540). Some of them are carrying musical instruments such as *dholki* (percussion), *manjira* (brass cymbals), and *khartaal* (castanets). The postcard does not show the presence of a Guru Granth Sahib *sarup* (copy) and thus is closer to a *prabhat pheri* (neighbourhood rounds). In the background, we see a sign for W. A. Urqhart Liquor Store, which had its address at 54 West Cordova Street. Cordova Street runs parallel to Hastings Street and forms part of Gastown in downtown Vancouver and is close to Chinatown. The marchers are walking intently along the street, rather than on the sidewalk.

Subsequently, a 1908 procession, is normally documented to be the first nagar kirtan of Vancouver, where Sikhs involve themselves into a musical march accompanied with the presence of Guru Granth Sahib (*Asia Pacific Post* 2019). The 1908 nagar kirtan emanated from the opening of the Khalsa Diwan Society gurdwara in Vancouver, that was built in the neighbourhood of Kitsalano. When nagar kirtan arrived in Vancouver, it was closely enmeshed with its politics of belonging and resistance particularly in the context of racialized immigrants' struggle. As Chapter 3 and 4 delineated, the early Sikh arrivals in Vancouver faced stark racial and religious antagonism from the white settler state and European settlers. Sikh organizations, such as Khalsa Diwan Society, and the gurdwaras in Vancouver (and along the West Coast) were an instrumental force for the support of Sikh and fellow migrants and labourers from Punjab as well as neighbouring South Asian places. Moreover, the Ghadar movement was born from the nascent translocal space of the Pacific (Sohi 2014).

A nagar kirtan in Victoria on the island had also historically taken place on Sunday 6 October 1912, upon the opening of the island gurdwara Khalsa Diwan Society at Topaz Avenue, with the procession starting from Hillstreet as Sikhs residing at the time were located in Chinatown. This historical nagar kirtan is documented by the *Daily Colonist* on 8 October 1912 titled "Sikh Procession Spectacular One". The news article accounts for about 1,000 Sikhs at the inauguration event marching behind the carriage and additional participants partaking from the sidewalks. Notably, Teja Singh, a prominent figure of the Singh Sabha movement, was present



and rode on a horseback leading the procession. In a life sketch of *Sant Teja Singh: First Ambassador of Sikhism to the Western World* by Iqbal Singh, the 1912 historical nagar kirtan in Victoria is described as follows:

Prof Teja Singh thought of installing *Guru Granth Sahib* in Victoria B.C. with a grand benefitting function. Accordingly, a huge and well-organized procession was planned. There were about 5,000 Sikhs in uniform moving four abreast and singing hymns. *Guru Granth Sahib* was gracefully positioned on a well decorated six-wheel horse-drawn carriage. Teja Singh with a sword rode on a horseback . . . lectures were given by the Professor to large gatherings. It took five hours for the procession to reach Gurdwara Sahib, passing through important streets of Victoria. (Baba Iqbal Singh 2015, 15)

In 1970, when Khalsa Diwan Society of Vancouver moved its gurdwara to its current location on Ross Street, a nagar kirtan in the form of a bus trip accompanied the travels of *Guru Granth Sahib* to the new site from Kitslano (*Asia Pacific Post* 2019). Subsequently, it was in 1979 when the gurdwara hosted a nagar kirtan to mark the fifth centenary of *Guru Amardas* (*Asia Pacific Post* 2019). Since 1979, Vancouver has been home to the annual occasion, doing a nagar kirtan loop around the Punjabi Market area on Main Street.

In addition to historical nagar kirtans taking place to mark the opening of the Pacific gurdwaras, Vaisakhi celebrations embodied the religious, political, social, and humanitarian movements of the Sikhs. For instance, the Ghadar movement made use of Vaisakhi and Khalsa as a call to political duty, exemplified by an announcement in a California-based Ghadar publication, which called on ‘Singhs’ to fulfil their duty on the occasion of Vaisakhi (Gill 2014, 34). While this instance highlights the community in Stockton California, Gill’s linkages between Vaisakhi gatherings and Ghadar suggest that political organizing was characteristic of the gurdwaras and Vaisakhis in this period along the Pacific. He writes,

[T]he engagement of Ghadaris with Sikh spaces, figures and festivals seem to have generated the latter as mediums for the enactment of radical politics in popular form. Gurdwara as sites of mass dissemination; Gurus as part of an effort to grow immigrant power; Vaisakhi as a celebration of justice and militancy – the religious was in each instance implicated in the transformation of the Pacific Coast community into a menacing rebel bastion. (Gill 2014, 34-35)

Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair (2013), likewise, calls for nuances in the reading of Sikh and Ghadar, and critiques the strand of thought that places the Ghadar movement within a secular rubric.

Instead, he offers an alternative frame by underscoring that Sikh praxis did not fall under a bifurcated secular-religion binary in the first place. Sikh teachings from the Gurus were used as a tool of political engagement and organizing across the co-religions of Punjab. As he writes:

A different way of looking at the motivation of the Ghadr movement is to suggest that it was perfectly possible to appropriate the teachings of the Sikh Gurus in a non-religious manner, based on the fact that these teachings cannot be encompassed within the secular/religious binary. (Mandair 2013, 92)

We, likewise, must come to an understanding where the terms Vaisakhi and Khalsa do not need to be placed as a bifurcated cultural and religious schism. Rather, what Khalsa represents (at least in its originary imaginary) is a political ordering motivated by an anti-caste ontology. The term is from the Persian-derived *khalisah* – the land, domain, and estate that were the direct administrative and taxable jurisdiction of the king. The mobilization of the Khalsa, in the Sikh context, emerged during Vaisakhi congregations in Anandpur Punjab in 1699 when Guru Gobind Singh abandoned the older *masand* system of Sikh institutions. The *masands* were initially Guru-appointed representatives, but had increasingly started to operate as middle-men mediating spiritual access. The tenth Guru thus ridded the *masands* and instead exalted commoners to the status of luminaries and warriors. They took their guidance and insights from Guru Granth Sahib, which held the poetic anthology of the Gurus, Sufis, and Bhakti *sant*-poets. Khalsa's political ordering aimed to resolve not just religious divides, but also cultural and regional divides. The state narrative (Canadian multiculturalism) and the singular religious identity narrative (Ontario Khalsa Day) that place Khalsa as the founding 'baptizing' event of Sikhism inevitably glorify it as an initiation ritual, in order to model it as a parallel to the world religion framework. In the process, its rebellious and revolutionary character is shrunk to party politics and its historical, political, and social justice ordering is reduced to a ceremonial commemoration.

The humbler social justice beginnings of the nagar kirtan in Greater Vancouver have had a much robust transformation over the last decade through the diasporic imagination in Greater Toronto. The *prabhat pheri* of the 1905 Vancouver postcard has transformed into a Khalsa Day Parade. Under the political leadership of Jagmeet Singh – when he served as Member of Provincial Parliament in Ontario – Sikh communities have specifically enshrined the Vaisakhi

nagar kirtan event as Khalsa Day Parade, and subsequently in 2013 established April as Sikh Heritage Month in Ontario (*Sikh Heritage Month Act 2013*). In 2017, April as Sikh Heritage Month was also declared by the Province of British Columbia (2017) with events and programming emerging in 2018. Furthermore, in April 2019 the provincial precedents won Sikh Heritage Month its federal Canadian royal assent (*Sikh Heritage Month Act 2019*). Sikh Heritage Month programming and proclamations continues to spread to several other cities and provinces: Manitoba, Hamilton, and Ottawa.

## **Contemporary Flows and Topoi of City, Country, Village and Suburbs**

### ***Hong Kong: from city to country***

In Hong Kong, four nagar kirtans take place annually – organized by the single gurdwara Khalsa Diwan Sikh Temple. The four nagar kirtans cohere to Sikh *ithisasik* (historical) days. They are attended mostly by regular gurdwara goers. The Sikh city dwellers of Hong Kong move from the city to the countryside. In this trajectory, they exercise a relief from the usual overflow and overcrowd of pedestrian life for a seated bus trip to the countryside, either Lantau Island or Tsing Yi. The islands are established new towns of public housing estates and new homes of recently arrived Sikh families. The outdoor nagar kirtans in the islands and country provide a repose from the compartmentalized miniature flats of public housing estates and the overcrowd of Hong Kong's singular gurdwara.

### ***Greater Vancouver: neighbourhood loops***

The people of car-centric suburbs of Greater Vancouver turn the opposite direction, as they descend upon the street in masses – to walk, perhaps to remember the pedestrian streetlife. Punjabi village becomes global in Surrey, and in the Punjabi Market of Main Street Vancouver. But it is not just the Punjabi villages and towns that travel in this making of translocal space. The Sikh cities such as Anandpur in Punjab, with its celebratory Hola Mahalla, are re-imagined in Surrey. Canadian Vaisakhi nagar kirtan display an over-abundance of wealth as private householders have overtaken the cauldron. Nevertheless, there remains a yearning of a common life – community cooking and eating, and being out on the street without gendered or classed divides of labour. Perhaps this provides a relief from the walls of the compartmentalized mega

suburban homes built on settler colonial land and driven by excesses of simultaneous accumulation and debt. Yet, the excesses of the private householder now flow into the excesses of the city. As the coast faces skyrocketing rents, Sikh and South Asian international students who arrive on visa often rent the basements almost as shared dormitories, while homeowners find new tactics to occupy suburban mortgage now out of range for the youth. It is in this complex social, spatial economic arrangement that the *gurdwaras* in the Lower Mainland compete, and sometimes collaborate, to take alternate weekends from the end of the month of Cet through Vaisakh, to put together a show of Vaisakhi splendour.<sup>60</sup>

Greater Vancouver nagar kirtans are numerous and diverse (see table on p.168). The season of Vaisakhi (springtime, harvest festival) nagar kirtans in Greater Vancouver begins with the Burnaby nagar kirtan that is organized by the gurdwara Sri Guru Ravidass Sabha since 2007.<sup>61</sup> In 2018, it was held on 7 April – that is, at the end of the month of Cet and right before the month of Vaisakh – and celebrates the birth anniversary of Bhagat Ravidas. Bhagat Ravidass is revered as Guru by the Ravidassia and who celebrate the occasion as *gurpurab*, whereas the leading perspectives of Sikhism esteem him as a *bhagat*, and whose spiritual poetry is enshrined in Guru Granth Sahib. Among his poems in Guru Granth Sahib is *Begampura* (to be discussed in Chapter 6 City), which has not only touched followers of *sikhi*, but also mobilized an anti-caste movement on the subcontinent. Following the Burnaby nagar kirtan are the Vaisakhi nagar kirtans in Surrey and Vancouver, usually taking place on alternating weekends.<sup>62</sup>

Diasporic gurdwaras are also finding fresh pathways to make history in its community-building and social justice efforts. In 2017, for instance, Vancouver's Vaisakhi nagar kirtan found a new media spotlight of supporting the inclusion of LGBTQ<sup>63</sup> Sikhs (Takeuchi 2017, *Georgia Straight*; CBC News 2017). This was made possible through a community-building initiative between the historic gurdwara Khalsa Diwan Society and Sher Vancouver, an organization founded to support Sikh and South Asian LGBTQ. This relationship was marked as

---

<sup>60</sup> The month of Cet is mid-March to mid-April, and the month of Vaisakh is mid-April to mid-May in both the Bikrami and Nanakshahi calendars.

<sup>61</sup> The dates of Burnaby nagar kirtan varies with the *gurpurab* of Ravidass, which uses lunar calendar dates.

<sup>62</sup> Other notable nagar kirtan consist of Victoria, which returned to the island streets in 2018, that is 116 years after its historical march in 1912 (Humphrey 2018, *CBC News*). There is also a prominent tradition of nagar kirtan in Abbotsford. Two more nagar kirtans in Surrey happen during *miri-piri* celebrations and Guru Nanak's *gurpurab*, organized by different gurdwaras. A nagar kirtan is also held in New Westminster in summer.

<sup>63</sup> While I prefer the word queer, I use LGBTQ here to reflect Sher Vancouver's model and language.

‘historic’ and setting a precedent for what Vaisakhi nagar kirtan can offer to Sikhs who may be marginalized. The organizers also arranged meet-ups at the event so LGBTQ participants could find each other and walk together, while being inter-mingled within the crowd. Another social justice initiative emerged in 2018 at the Surrey nagar kirtan which made the effort to recognize the unceded lands of First Nations and kindle the possibility of Indigenous-Sikh social justice relations in the Coast Salish traditional territories. Kwantlen First Nation was invited to open and take part in the procession as part of a response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Seucharan 2018, *TheStar*). Moninder Singh, a young Sikh activist affiliated in the gurdwara’s leadership, led this reconciliation initiative at the Surrey nagar kirtan to set up a prominent banner, which displayed the following greeting and land recognition:

Happy Vaisakhi on the traditional, unceded and shared territories of the Kwantlen, Semiahmoo, Katzie, Musqueam, Kwikwetlem, Qayqayt and Tsawwassen First Nations.  
(in Gurpreet Singh 2018, *Georgia Straight*, n.p.)

The Surrey Vaisakhi occasion is organized by Dasmesh Darbar, a gurdwara located in Newton area of Surrey that was established only towards the end of the 20th century (Nayar 2008, 23). It is Canada’s largest nagar kirtan by size with reportedly 500,000 people attending in 2018 according to the *Vancouver Sun* (Crawford and Luymes 2018). The 128th street in Surrey is shut down, and the procession is a slow-moving loop starting and ending at Dasmesh Darbar, where *langar* stalls as well as amusement rides have been set up in the strip mall’s grand parking lot.

The humble social justice beginnings of nagar kirtan in British Columbia have no doubt transformed into a large-scale city enterprise of celebrations of faith, fashion, and food. In this, nagar kirtan has faced a similar appropriation and corporatization like other public political marches – such as Pride – that initially started as a form of protest against police, discrimination, and state regulation of sexuality. However, it is not all about curry, merry go-around, and ceremonial affairs as the news, media and speeches would like us to believe. Social justice is an increasingly strong current in the efforts to reframe nagar kirtan in Greater Vancouver through the cause of social justice and reignite its revolutionary flame. Among the forefront themes that I observed arising at Coast Salish have been environment (the New Westminster nagar kirtan), Indigenous land recognition and reconciliation (the Surrey nagar kirtan), LGBTQ support (the

Vancouver nagar kirtan), and social upliftment in terms of gender and caste (the Burnaby nagar kirtan). These themes are not exclusive of each other and exhibit renewed activisms.

### ***Greater Toronto: parades***

Of the Canadian nagar kirtans, Toronto is unique in that it takes place most visibly in a public space in the downtown city, where the route follows public streets and ends at Nathan Philips Square outside city hall. Thus, semi-public spaces in the form of parking lots of private and commercial property, and fringe public-private spaces of businesses and retail have a limited role in Toronto's gathering unlike the ones that take place in the suburbs.

On the Sundays subsequent to Toronto's nagar kirtan there takes place another nagar kirtan, running from the suburbs Malton in Mississauga to Rexdale in the Etobicoke area of Toronto. The food at Malton nagar kirtan is perhaps ten times more than that of Toronto's. And its walk is the longest of all which I have participated in. Despite being a large-scale event, mainstream Canadian coverage is limited for this nagar kirtan, unlike the one for Toronto, and the procession is covered through primarily Punjabi and Sikh channels. For instance, neither *Toronto Star* nor the *Globe and Mail* provided news stories for the 2018 Malton event. The 5AAB TV (2018) streamed a six and a half hour live telecast, which has been archived on YouTube. 5AAB TV is a Canadian Punjabi-language tv channel serving Greater Toronto. The telecast starts from the procession beginnings to the destination marked by *Ardas*, which is a petition, or political supplication. It further marks a ceremonial opening and closing to Sikh congregations.

On 6 May 2018, I attended the Malton nagar kirtan with a walk that started at 1pm from Sri Guru Singh Sabha Malton in Mississauga and ended at Sikh Spiritual Centre Toronto in Rexdale where it arrived at 6.30pm. Food stalls and information tables of various community organizations – local and global – surround the parking lots of each of the gurdwaras. The route also has additional food stalls set up along key nodes and paths to offer refreshments on the way for the walkers, floaters, and riders. Notable of the Malton nagar kirtan is its neighbourhood scale as it walks through many local streets. Sikh and sometimes non-Sikh South Asian household units often open their front yards to partake in the occasion.

For the Toronto and Malton nagar kirtans, the floats which are mostly the same for both are instrumental in shaping the discourse of the street procession. Each float characterizes a vehicle in the Sikh imaginaries taking precedent and perhaps present a tool of community mapping, a way to understanding diverse Sikh settlement landscapes, its participating demographics, and its socio-political organizing. Among the vehicles is a food drive by Seva Food Bank, a *sikhi*-inspired organization that has adapted Guru Nanak's *langar* ethic to a working of a food bank in Mississauga for all communities. Given the significant walking involved in both the Toronto and Malton nagar kirtans, floats play a prominent presence for the events in the region. At Rexdale's Sikh Spiritual Centre, a segment of the parking lot is also set up to cater to children's rides similar to that of Surrey nagar kirtan. Floats representing Sikh or Khalsa schools with school children partaking in some form of kirtan or music band are also pivotal of Canadian nagar kirtan landscapes.

Floats, while visibly present, play a more peripheral role in the Vancouver and Surrey nagar kirtan, where the events are significantly shaped by decentralized multiple stages, despite an overarching centralization by a single gurdwara. This is not to say that floats are not present, but that because there is a plethora of activities, their presence is not unifying. The decentralization seems to have enabled a greater branching off for wider South Asian communities who are non-Sikh or may be from a co-path to get involved in the Vaisakhi nagar kirtans in Vancouver and Surrey. This is happening both in terms of participants taking part, and group organization tables where broader communities are involved. In Surrey, for instance, Baitur Rahman Mosque had a stall in the 2018 nagar kirtan and was involved in *pani seva* (water distribution) along with their organizational outreach. The mosque is part of Ahmaddiya, a movement of Islam, which like *sikhi* originated in Punjab but in the 19th century. Corporate space is also significant in Surrey and include large corporations such as the big Canadian banks as well as local entrepreneurial businesses.

In contrast, the Toronto and Malton nagar kirtans have limited involvement of the broader South Asian communities who may be non-Sikh. These differences stem from a coordinated effort by gurdwaras to manage the Toronto and Malton nagar kirtans as a Sikh event and as Khalsa Day Parade, whereas in Greater Vancouver the framing of Vaisakhi takes a precedent, with the City of Surrey and the City of Vancouver playing a strong role in its

marketing. Corporate space is largely absent in Toronto and Malton. Moreover, elements commonly labelled as cultural, and not representative of an ideal Khalsa day, are disapproved of. For instance, while partaking in the Malton nagar kirtan, I witnessed a parent preventing her daughter from dancing, in a way that clearly marked dancing as degenerate and not belonging to the sacred sphere of Sikhism. *Bhangra* elements, thus, are less prominent, and perhaps regulated in strategic ways, such as there only being one stage which is given to either politicians to make speeches or used for *parchar* (preaching). Another consideration is the timing of the nagar kirtan itself. Vancouver and Surrey nagar kirtans take place around mid-April at the peak of Vaisakhi festivities. On the other hand, the Toronto nagar kirtan tends to occur on the last Sunday of April or first Sunday of May, and the Malton nagar kirtan on the Sunday after Toronto's. Rather late in the month, most of the Vaisakhi festivities have faded into the background.

The Malton nagar kirtan had much heavier scouting of boundaries, compared to Toronto, Vancouver, and Surrey, that nevertheless exceeded the foot traffic. In addition to event permits, the scouting of boundaries is a strategy to control crowd to walk behind the Guru Granth Sahib's *palki* (carriage). Sometimes, walkers would call others to walk behind the floats rather than out on the sidewalks, saying that the procession will look better that way. Participants also often grew uneasy when walks would come to a standstill, usually at a turn on a major intersection. The standstills made handling strollers with children much more difficult. Participants would move out of the scouted line when stand-stills occurred and shifted to sidewalks or the closed lane. One young participant justified herself, by suggesting that Harmandir Sahib in Amritsar was designed to invite people from all four directions and that her footpath should not be regulated for looks. The attitude perhaps offers a sense of how young people are connected to social justice practices, with less emphasis placed on the birds-eye view of the procession or of the sacred authority of walking behind Guru Granth Sahib. Instead, the openness and acceptance of all paths and people is given significance than archaic rules.



Table 3 Nagar Kirtans of Hong Kong, Greater Vancouver, and Greater Toronto

	Hong Kong	Greater Vancouver	Greater Toronto
<b>No. of Nagar Kirtans</b>	4 in a year   1 around Vaisakh	7 in a year   4 around Vaisakh	3 in a year   2 around Vaisakh
<b>Vaisakh Nagar Kirtans</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vaisakhi Nagar Kirtan by Khalsa Diwan Sikh Society gurdwara</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Burnaby:</b> Ravidas Gurpurab Nagar Kirtan by Sri Guru Ravidassia Sabha</li> <li><b>Vancouver:</b> Vaisakhi Nagar Kirtan by Khalsa Diwan Sikh Society (Ross Street Gurdwara)</li> <li><b>Surrey:</b> Vaisakhi Nagar Kirtan by Dasmesh Darbar</li> <li><b>Victoria:</b> Vaisakhi Nagar Kirtan by Gurdwara Singh Sabha of Victoria (restarted in 2018)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Toronto:</b> Khalsa Day Nagar Kirtan by gurdwaras associations of Ontario</li> <li><b>Malton:</b> Khalsa Day Nagar Kirtan by Malton and Rexdale gurdwaras</li> </ul>
<b>Nagar Kirtan during other months</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nagar Kirtan celebration Guru Nanak <i>gurpurab</i></li> <li>Nagar Kirtan commemorating Chote Sahibzade martyrdom</li> <li>Nagar Kirtan commemorating Guru Arjan Sahib's martyrdom</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Surrey:</b> Miri-Piri Nagar Kirtan by Guru Nanak Sikh Temple (July)</li> <li><b>New Westminster:</b> Guru Arjan Nagar Kirtan by Sukh Sagar Gurdwara (July/August)</li> <li><b>Surrey:</b> Vishal Nagar Kirtan by Gurdwara Dukh Nivaran Sahib (October)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Brampton:</b> Nagar Kirtan by urdwaras: Guru Nanak Mission Centre and Jot Parkash Sahib (June)</li> </ul>
<b>Geography</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A bus from the temple on Hong Kong Island to the countryside.</li> <li>Outdoor <i>divan</i> (poetry session) where people sit down for the whole day.</li> <li>A single <i>langar hall</i> tent area is set up</li> <li>Locations normally alternated between Lai Chi Kok and Tung Chung</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A neighbourhood walking loop from single gurdwara and back to the organizing gurdwara.</li> <li>Main streets (Surrey and Vancouver) have food stalls running throughout the day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Toronto: Walk from Exhibition Place to City Hall and Nathan Phillips Square.</li> <li>Food stalls set up mainly at the end point (Toronto), and both start point and end point (for Malton) at parking lot spaces of the gurdwara</li> <li>Outdoor but small time-period <i>divan</i> set up on the arrival of Guru Granth Sahib. Toronto nagar kirtan: stage is primarily used for politicians' and leaders' speeches.</li> <li>Some lighter food given on route to the walkers</li> </ul>
<b>Flows and topoi</b>	City to the Countryside	Neighbourhood Loops	Toronto: Suburbs to the City  Malton and Brampton: Suburb to Suburb

## Literary Imagination: *Barah Mah* and the Month *Vaisakh*

Before I turn to the contemporary analysis of interviewees, it is important to engage with Sikh poetics and Punjabi literary imagination that aid in the conceptualization of journeying, which is of relevance to us in the context of *nagar kirtan* and *Vaisakhi* (a harvest festival that begins the month of *Vaisakh*). The song of *Twelve Months – Barah Mah* – by Guru Nanak elucidates a human’s relationship to nature in the context of cosmic time and seasons.<sup>64</sup> Drawing from the tradition of Punjabi folk love poetry, Guru Nanak’s song employs the symbolism offered by the bride as a literary figure and as a protagonist-in-the-feminine longing for union and confluence with the Infinite – the bride’s Groom. The aesthetic figure of the bride elucidates a lover yearning for her other self, and observing the nature and its activities as she expresses her emotions alongside the shifting season.

*Barahmah* genre is a style of poetry that bases itself on the twelve calendar months, commonly with twelve respective stanzas. The genre is often known as *barahmasa* in Hindu-Urdu language and sometimes as *ritu* (season) poetry in Sanskrit, while the term *barahmah* is popularly used in Punjabi folk traditions. *Barahmah* has come to overlap with *viraha* genre and is themed on separation. *Viraha* is known for its depiction and expression of the feminine and her emotions, desires, and relationship to nature. The anguish of separation from her lover is also what yields the longing and desire to reunite with her lover. *Viraha-barahmah* strand, thus, is love poetry based on the themes of separation and yearning, and is expressed through the cyclical seasons and the twelve months (Srivastava 2016). Alongside its Punjabi oral folk renditions, Sufis, Nath Yogis, *sant*-poets and Sikh Gurus are known to have adapted the genre and applied it to the context of a human spirit, the bride, yearning to merge back with her Infinite lover.<sup>65</sup> Other notable renditions consist of a revolutionary take by Amrita Pritam. The twentieth century Punjabi poet, Pritam, made use of this *barahmah* genre and applied it to the context of Partition – its resulting anguish and separation.<sup>66</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> Guru Nanak composed his *Barah Mah* in the musical mood Rag *Tukhari*. *Tukhari* is derived from Sanskrit *tushar* and means winter frost (Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh 2011, 192), and its musical mood is set for the mornings of winter seasons; Guru Arjan (fifth Guru) composed his *Barah Mah* in Rag *Magh*.

<sup>65</sup> A comprehensive interpretation of different *barahmah* in the various literary and devotional traditions is beyond the scope of this geography project. See Srivastava (2016) for the various traditions. For thematic overlap on *barahmah* and *qisse* genres among Punjabi Sufis, also see Mir (2010) and Shackle (2012).

<sup>66</sup> See Mitra (2015, 55) and Datta (2008, 13-14) for discussion of Amrita Pritam’s rendition.

For Guru Nanak's *Barah Mah*, it is important to note that the Sikh outlook here is not the suggestion that the feminine weds the masculine. As Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh points out, "[t]he Sikh scriptural message is not the subjugation of the female to the male, for the Groom is beyond gender; rather, it is the rising of the individual spirit towards the Absolute" (1993, 117). Moreover, as some scholars have emphasized, in this love poetry adapted to a spiritual message, all genders take on the figure of the bride, and who yearn for mergence with their Beloved. Guru Nanak is composing his poem in the feminine voice, a practice shared by various Sikh Gurus and Sufi poets such as Farid in their various poetic composure. It is "in the universal language of poetry" that the yearning for the beloved and the spiritual journey takes fold (N.G.K. Singh 2019, 35). Furthermore, "Sufi and Sikh lyrics exalt the universal emotion of love" (N.G.K. Singh 2019, 48).

While both Sufis and Sikh Gurus have adapted either *barahmah* and *viraha* genres of love poetry to its spiritual and devotional context and applied to cosmic time and space, scholars also point to notable differences in their messages. In the case of Guru Nanak's *Barah Mah*, the Beloved is actually everywhere, and in everyone, immanent, and thus most importantly, within the bride's heart. Guru Nanak's verses on the final month (*Phalgun*, February/March) capture that moment of realization and spiritual epiphany, where the separation of self with the Infinite source is dissolved, and "the bride finds her Beloved within" (Guru Nanak, GGS 1109, translation mine). The anguish of separation (*viraha*) felt by the bride is left open-ended in its resolve. But Nikky aids us to see what cannot be seen. In Guru Nanak's song, N.G.K. Singh describes that experience of the bride, where the nature in all its unison, and absent of divisions, is momentarily experienced:

The female psyche perceives the unity of nature. Absent here are all vertical hierarchies; absent here are all horizontal divisions. The snake is not cursed and the frog is not any uglier or the peacock any prettier. From her point of view, they are all – equally enjoying the season. (N.G.K. Singh 1993, 102).

There is no formal union, but an inner resolve, in a momentary experience. Guru Nanak, moreover, aids us in a different epic poem – *Asa Ki Var* – where he conceptualizes a notion of *sanjog-vijog* (union-separation) through which he expresses a perspective on the immanent characteristics of Infinite in nature. Essentially, it is through the love and pain of *vijog*

(separation) that one finds *sanjog* (re-union). Feeling the *vijog* makes possible the experience of *sanjog*.

The notion of *sanjog-vijog* runs parallel to numerous other Sikh concepts, *nirgun-sargun* and *miri-piri*, which may seem as dualism to the amateur eye, but on closer examination reveal Sikh philosophy for its integrated sense of harmony, a Oneness, a mergence, as opposed to a dualism. Anne Murphy notes that while *sikhi* is placed within a *nirgun* stream of thought, it essentially is an inter-play between *nirgun-sargun* to break prevailing rubrics of divinity: “Gurus used the play between *sargun* and *nirgun* as a way to destabilize conventional ways of knowing in the most fundamental terms” (Murphy 2012, 29). Louis E. Fenech (2014) elucidates that the pain of separation in the Sikh context is resolved through its twist ending, where the symbolism or metaphor is often flipped. Fenech elaborates this working of Sikh poetry through the work of Nand Lal, a contemporary to Guru Gobind Singh and who composed volumes of poetry in Punjabi, Braj and Persian languages. The *sargun* stream here emerges in a quick moment of Sikh resolution, or a glimpse (*darshan*), and diverges from how Sufi poetics elucidates the pain of separation. For the Sikh resolve, Fenech explains that a divine presence is in fact everywhere, and it is this paradoxical ending that

. . . allows Nand Lal to eliminate the pain of separation which is very much a hallmark of Sufi poetry and the Sufi path, citing directly the Sikh emphasis on the world as a creation of the divine and God’s immanence within it. In such a light, Nand Lal silently asks, how is it possible to feel insecure? The divine is present in this very world. The cure for any such negative ‘Sufi’ thoughts is therefore simplicity itself. (Fenech 2014, 168)

Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh’s (1993) literary exposition on *Twelve Months* recovers not only the protagonist-in-the-feminine but also captures the senses, mood and intimate of Guru Nanak’s literary imagination. Senses and emotions of the bride are, nevertheless, overpowered by the longing to see – the desire to see the One (or Oneness) who cannot be seen – but the bride embarks on the spiritual quest, nonetheless. The pilgrimage, however, isn’t grand. It is everyday. In the month of *Vaisakh*, the second month in both Nanakshahi and Vikrami calendars, the bride urges to see her Beloved. Singh delineates the setting of Guru Nanak’s springtime stanza,

Following Chet is the month of Vaisākh, when the tree boughs get clothed in fresh leaves. The bride “sees” . . . the newness in verdure and begs the Groom to come home. Since this is the month of harvest, the farmers negotiate business deals. Commerce enters

the bride's vocabulary too [. . . Romanization] “without you I am not worth a penny, but if you are with me, I become priceless.” She then wishes that “Someone, somehow, would see her Beloved and help her to see Him – [. . . Romanization]” Nature, commerce, fellow human beings, spiritual quest become synthesized in the bride's worldview. (N.G.K. Singh 1993, 100-101)

Indeed, how does one see what one cannot see? The song *Barah Mah* is of relevance to this chapter as it offers a counter-dualistic measure on the overlap between a cultural journey and a spiritual journey. The feminine lens of Guru Nanak's song generates useful tropes to analyze contemporary nagar kirtan alongside my field observations and participant interviews. This love arrow characterized by the literary imagination pierces the multicultural frame, which centres a settler colonial state's discourse on migrants, religion, and culture within a divided secular and religious order as delineated in Chapter 2. Moreover, Guru Nanak's poem in the feminine contrasts the politician's language and strategy in Canada which has enshrined the event as Khalsa Day Parade, and which establishes a formal patronage between that of the settler-colonial state of Canada and the religious political elites of Sikhs. I use Vaisakhi nagar kirtan from the vernacular as my preferred choice of words over terms Khalsa Day Parade or Vaisakhi Parade.

### ***Mantra, Darshan, Rasa: Aural, Glimpse, Taste***

*Twelve Months* by Guru Nanak offer insights to the overlapping modalities of senses in the cultural and spiritual journey. *Mantra* characterizes the significance of sound, Word, *raga*, melody, poetics, and the chants. It is the aural dimension. *Darshan* emphasizes the viewing, the desire to catch a glimpse of the inspiration. Finally, there is *rasa* that heightens the sensuous and the aesthetics experience through taste and flavour. *Rasa* is literally the juice of plants, and it is deployed in Sikh poetics as flavour to be relished for the aesthetic and intimate encounter. I ground the stories and accounts of my interviewees in these overlapping modalities prevalent in the dharmic traditions of the subcontinent.

### ***spirit of Vaisakhi nagar kirtan***

As delineated in its historical formation, the hallmark of nagar kirtan is its founding musical poetics which encompasses the power of sound and sacred utterances. Participants' stories as they relate to the sound and music are presented here through the notion of *mantra*, which expresses the aural and oral aspects of *Sikhi*.

**Livdeep Singh:** Baba Buddha ji started the tradition of nagar kirtan I believe. I've been reading a lot of meditative practices, like walking meditation and stuff in Buddhism. I feel that's what it was, a way for connecting to kirtan and *bani* [poetry or Word] and different space.

With regards to questions on how one thinks of and conceptualizes nagar kirtan, Livdeep Singh connects the practice of kirtan and singing to a kind of walking meditation, where one is walking and in an immersive state of meditation which in the Sikh context is *nam simran* (remembrance by *mantra*), and kirtan. A few participants captured the essence of nagar kirtan with something even more intangible than music and kirtan, which they called spirit.

**Joginder Kaur:** But I do love it, when they start at the gurdwara the early morning, before the huge rush happens, I like to be there when they start and they do. So there is the spirit. Or something we are doing here, which is very deep into Sikhism. And I like to tap into that spirit.

**Mehr Singh:** It's when the Guru is taken to the streets and basically the community comes together the neighbourhood, the area comes together to do the kirtan, to sing the praises, to sing the word of the Guru. And it's a festive time. They do this during the times of pomp and celebrations, and ceremony. That to me is a nagar kirtan and it's a spirit. By all means, it is spirit.

By tapping into the spirit, these participants suggest that kirtan is more than sound and music. It is perhaps something intangible than the spirituality of the kirtan itself and the sound currents of *mantra*. *Rasa* comes into play here alongside *mantra*, since *rasa* elevates the kirtan to the aesthetic dimensions and one's inner consciousness. Moreover, the spirit evoked is not individual, but collective.

While the spirit of the nagar kirtan inspired participants from the various places, challenges of outdoor kirtan were also noted. The noise and distractions prevented listening and absorbing oneself fully into the spirit of the kirtan.

**Joginder Kaur:** Some years, the kirtan really attracted me. But then there's so much noise, that unless you are walking with the float or beside the float, which is the kirtan float, you don't get that as well. And I don't have the capacity to walk where it starts to the end, beside the kirtan.

Walking beside the Guru Granth Sahib's float was itself a tough exercise, due to the lengthy distance and time of the walk, but also due to the large crowd competing to walk close to it. Among the older women interviewed, such as Ramandev Kaur in Hong Kong, the challenge to sit in the outdoor space and walk limited their appreciation and access to outdoor congregations.

**Ramandev Kaur, in Punjabi:** There is no real program. No one is actually sitting. No one is actually listening and absorbing. There is no space to sit, in fact. For me, my back hurts, so how much can I sit there? There, elderly cannot sit. And young people, they are also up, wandering around.

**Sukhwant Kaur, in Punjabi:** I used to go, I always used to go to nagar kirtan. To Vancouver. But now, my daughter doesn't take me. She says, 'Ma [Mother], there's so much rush there, the crowd, you will fall. It's not within your control. You will have to walk. And the crowd is pushing and shoving, you will fall'. So she doesn't take me there anymore. I always use to go before. I would walk alongside, and I will just keep going around. On Vaisakhi day.

Despite the usage of school buses which run behind the Guru's float to help elderly be part of the event, the actual lived reality for many seniors is still challenging. However, elderly are not the only ones with the challenges of sitting and walking in the crowd. Livdeep Singh, who is a father to young children and brings them out to the nagar kirtan says that his children get exhausted and complain that their feet hurt.

At the same time, kirtan's spirit has gone beyond the lived practice of walking in the streets, with a translocal engagement emerging through its telecasting streams and made available to diasporic families and elderly who may tune into the spirit. Based in Surrey, Sukhwant Kaur shares that she follows the full *akhand path* (unbroken recitation) from Malton within her home in Surrey and finds much tranquility through a multimedia presence.

**Sukhwant Kaur, in Punjabi:** It's Baba ji's kirtan. Which *gurpurab* [celebration of light] it is, like Guru Gobind Singh ji's *gurpurab*, or Guru Nanak Dev's *gurpurab*. They have different ones for them. I watch in the television sometimes. Then I sit down here and watch. Everything is shown and broadcast inside the tv, then I sit and watch through the tv comfortably. When there is *akhand path*, from there in Toronto, the gurdwara in Malton, that runs for three days. Then those three days, we won't watch anything else. We will just watch that, sit down here. That goes on throughout night and day, and we won't turn off the tv. We watch that, and listen to *path*.

The television is not turned off, and the tethering to a telecasted kirtan in the homespace is ongoing, continuous "night and day" where the boundary between external and internal, or public and private could dissolve. The sacred in her account becomes everyday and ordinary. Conversely, her everyday homespace becomes sacred. Sukhwant, thus, is able to participate in the *mantra*, and a form of *darshan* very deep in *sikhi* – of an inner and everyday pilgrimage, discussed next.

### *groom and his chariot*

This Groom is not just any groom. The Groom is clothed in layers of *rumalla* (cloth), the poetry and music so exquisite that pilgrims descend with gifts of their best cloth and silk to her embodiment. The cherished body of the Groom is endowed with gifts of flowers, and cash donations are also offered to the Groom, who sits on a richly embroidered canopy. The Groom's chariot, *palki*, is decorated with flowers and garlands. Upon physical *darshan*, the pilgrims

Figure 4 Darshan, at Malton Nagar Kirtan, 2018.



receive *prasad*, blessed pudding made of ghee, flour, and sugar.

The visual aspects of a nagar kirtan usually unfolds through this practice of *darshan*, which itself is layered with multiple processes. *Darshan* in Sikh context is complex because the sight and viewing is not actually of a representable entity, even though the desire for such a tangible glimpse is often expressed, and the search for a recognizable physical entity still takes place. *Darshan* unfolds through two pivotal processes. First, it is a *darshan* of the poetic embodiment – Guru Granth Sahib. Some, including myself, would argue that this *darshan* is not necessarily of the physical entity itself, but of her poetry – *gurbani*. *Darshan* happens through the cogent and tangible practice of *matha-teykna* (bowing) and touching, but it can also happen through introspection and practice of *mantra*. That is, instead of looking externally, one looks inwardly. Second, *darshan* occurs through the interplay between the Groom and the brides, between *nirgun* and *sargun*, through the longing of the union, the encounter, and the meeting.



Speaking to questions on what stands out for them at a nagar kirtan, interviewees Livdeep Singh and Harbir Singh share the uniqueness of walking along Guru Granth.

**Livdeep Singh:** So, for nagar kirtan, as I was walking there this past Sunday, I was behind Guru Granth Sahib ji, the whole time, which I have never done before.

\*\*\*

**Amardeep Kaur:** So what would be the most significant aspect for you during nagar kirtan?

**Harbir Singh:** It's when the float comes with the Granth Sahib in it, right.

While the groom's chariot is decorated extensively, its centrality has become less prominent as other activities have taken over. One of the interviewees brings attention to the changes that have accompanied the commercialization of the nagar kirtan. He draws from his lived experience over the decades and his memory of the nagar kirtan of the past to the present ones in Vancouver and says that there is a shift in people's interest where people are less involved in the official religious procession. Characteristic of a nagar kirtan is that as the Guru Granth Sahib's *sarup* (embodiment-as-poetry) arrives, pilgrims center around Guru's *darshan* (glimpse) through a pivotal significance given to practice of *matha-teykna*. This, however, is changing as Mehr Singh witnesses.

Mehr Singh is conducive to the possibility of co-existence and simultaneous nature of the different realms – spiritual, political, cultural. But he points out that nagar kirtans have somewhat lost both their defining spirit and the political contexts by which they arose – within the Sikh Guru period in the subcontinent and settler-colonial Vancouver.

**Mehr Singh:** [. . . commercialization and spirit] To be honest, I don't mind both parts co-exist. I think it's a beautiful thing that both things co-exist. I think the difference is there used to be a respect given to, and a priority give to the Guru Granth Sahib ji's float, to the kirtan happening. That when it's going by, everyone covers their head, and they *matha-tek* [bow], and they stop talking, or whatever. In my own memory, I remember this happening. It's not something that I'm imagining from the 80s. This is my own memory, I remember this happening. To now, where Guru Granth Sahib ji's float, the kirtan coming from it is competing with stages that are set up on the side, where *bhangra* [dance], or *giddha* [folk dance] is happening, or *dhadi* [performed ballads] is happening, where speeches are happening for politicians and community members, right.

In this narrative, it is intriguing to note that Mehr Singh associates distractions and commercialization with the scene of music and dance, which for him does not belong proper to

the sanctity of kirtan realm. He lists out *bhangra*, *giddha* and *dhadi*. *Bhangra* is an energetic Punjabi dance, whereas *giddha* is a Punjabi folk dance by rural women. Both *bhangra* and *giddha* have often been coded and associated with a consumer culture and with Punjabiness. Politics as *dhadi* (performed ballads) or the speeches of politicians have also entered the sphere, in a way that steers politics to the frame of representative leaders and less the street politics of rebellion and protest. While Mehr Singh deems these elements of *bhangra*, *giddha* and *dhadi* as not holding sanctity, he does express a willingness to be open to the possibility of their co-existence.

Iqbal Kaur, a Cree-Punjabi Sikh woman, however, associates the commercialization and growth of nagar kirtan as making possible greater inclusivity of the occasion, particularly for people on the fringes of Sikh diaspora. For Iqbal Kaur, people are getting much more conducive to participating in Vaisakhi, which then allows for a space of learning, interaction, and engagement of its religious elements.

**Iqbal Kaur:** I think it kind of needs to be a mix of both. I like how Vaisakhi is a little bit commercialized, because I think it makes it more accessible to the public. I have people at work asking me what they should do before they go to the Vasaikhi parade for the first time. Or if their spouse would be invited. Sort of what the protocol is. Because it feels like an open space to them, and they want to go jump in. And I feel like if it was strictly a religious event, people would feel really intimidated. And they wouldn't get that opportunity to start the learning process. It's probably an expense, little bit of that, sort of a necessary evil.

The diverging positions of Iqbal Kaur and Mehr Singh in part emerge as Iqbal shifts the fear and gaze from the omnipotent Groom to the omnipresent brides, all in their various journeys and colours, converging at the occasion of Vaisakhi.

Critiques of the commercialization are also multi-layered. Harbir Singh suggests that he does not mind that *langar seva* and food stalls have proliferated through different families setting up their own stalls. But what he doesn't like are commercial enterprises distributing brochures and flyers rather than food.

**Harbir Singh:** I feel it's become a little bit too commercialized, a large *seva* like that. Before, it was really a very religious feel to it. But now you go there, you'll see tents popped up of businesses, promoting the businesses, talking about their business. I mean I like the aspect that any family that sets these portable stoves, and starts serving these meals, just for the heck of it. I'm not keen of other businesses that give out these bags of promotional brochures.

While the vastness and abundance of the *langar* is being distributed through family networks and gurdwaras' *langar* kitchens, some commercial enterprises such as the big banks are exploiting the process by giving out marketing products under the guise of distributing limited water bottles and juice tetra packs.

The extensiveness of the nagar kirtan has also created a long wait for that endearing desire to see the Groom. In the Malton nagar kirtan, with the exceptionally long and slow walk, the wait to catch the glimpse of the Groom (as *nirgun*, formless) is even longer as the Groom (as Guru Granth Sahib, embodiment-as-poetry) is preceded by organizational floats and community groups, thus making the procession slower. *Sevadars* volunteering at stalls along the route and closer to the arrival gurdwara are still waiting for Guru's *darshan*. A woman I spoke to at the Seva Food Bank stall along the route asked me how far away is the One. She expressed she had been sitting and waiting for Guru's *darshan* since morning, and the Groom still hadn't arrived. There was a very real, tangible waiting for the desire to see the One.

### ***bridal make-up***

The Groom is not the only one best-dressed for the occasion. Brides of all genders embark on the journey of union with their best dresses. Their arms are filled with colourful bangles up to their elbows, co-existing with their genderless *kara* (bracelet), and complementing the *mehndi* (decorative body art) and nail polish on their hands of labour. Colours of lipstick further elucidate their poetic expressions from their lips. And the mascara mesmerizes the desired gaze and repels undesired gaze.

The brides' *salwar kameez* (Punjabi dress wear set, also known as *suits*) enunciate the myriad colours of life and its seasons. Saffron and deep crimson elucidate love; colours of wisdom are enunciated with white; colours of warriorhood presented with navy blue; colours of Vaisakhi and Punjab captured by green; colours of spring are expressed in *basanti*. While the saffron *pagg* (turban) takes prominence, *dastars* (turban) along with *chunnis* (thin long scarf) of all colours layer the occasion. If the male brides express their engagement through the folds of their turbans, the women profess their love with their elaborate pleads on their *salwars*. And for those women who wear a turban as well, the *dastar* wraps further complement the pleaded

*salwars*. With regards to questions on how the occasion is unique from regular programs at a gurdwara, respondents shared the essence of getting dressed.

**Nimritha Kaur, in Punjabi:** When it's nagar kirtan, then children are incited with something different: wrap *dastar*, practice *gatka* [martial art]. This is mainly what's different. The rest is the same. Overall the message carries over, of our *qaum* [nation].

The process of getting dressed for the occasion is not just a one-time thing, with tailor-customized suits made for the special occasion, and people appreciating the amount of colour.

**Tanvir Singh:** But Vaisakhi nagar kirtan, no one misses the nagar kirtan. People will come, all dressed up. They will have their special *suits* made. They'll be like, the night before the nagar kirtan...

**Amardeep Kaur:** Do they actually make *suits*, just for the nagar kirtan?

**Tanvir Singh:** Apparently some people do, ok [laughs].

In a newspiece by *CBC News* (2019), the media covered the inner economic workings of businesses involved in the Surrey occasion and the flow of money that is pumped through Vaisakh. To put it into perspective, food stores, fashion retailers, and tent renters do months of preparation so as to provide the right products and sources for the business selling in the time leading up to Vaisakh. Fruiticana is a grocery store that was started in Surrey by Tony Singh in the early 1990s and then franchised to British Columbia and Alberta. It serves produce that was highly desired by South Asian communities, but often scarce in Canada such as okra, guava, sugar cane. For Vaisakh, Fruiticana does much in preparation to stock its store and its Surrey warehouse for Vaisakhi nagar kirtan with items such as mangoes, chickpea flour, and cooking oil capturing a sharp spike in demand. For fashion retailers, they see customers having their new tailored suit just for the annual occasion each year – with a special interest in the colours blue, orange and yellow (CBC News 2019).

**Fateh Kaur:** I love it. It feels like, it literally feels like an opportunity to be ourselves. To be ourselves loudly. You see people doing *seva* [volunteer service]. And just walking, just the amount of colour, you see *suits*. And there are kids running around. I've done it since little. And I still love doing it. It's always so warm outside. I really enjoy doing it.

Among all the dress-up features of the brides and her groom, however, lies the simpler yearning and discovery. Participants express a hope and desire to view their true inner self, and ultimately, catch a glimpse of the Infinite.

**Zorawar Kaur:** Kirtan is a great way to reach to your real self, and to the Almighty.

### *community outreach*

If there is an interplay of a glimpse between the brides and the Groom, there is also an interplay of seeing all the different brides. In taking part in the nagar kirtan, or passing-by it, one sees the various kinds of people. Many participants expressed this outreach version of nagar kirtan – the seeing of Sikhs as a springboard to understanding of different communities and people. Another force in the interplay of *darshan* is community outreach, which centres on seeing and being seen. While *darshan*'s formal process takes place between the physicality of brides and the Groom, such as *matha-tekna* (bowing) and partaking in Guru's *darshan*, there is also an element of seeing all the different kinds of brides – Sikhs or non-Sikhs. Here, the interplay is of brides in their search of recognition of everyone's humanity.

**Nimritha Kaur, in Punjabi:** When there is *divan* [poetry session] outdoors, then Chinese people also see what's up, what's going on. They also then wish to know what's happening, what it is, what it is not. This is the big message. We go in the buses, and we come back in the buses. Where we actually go, that place's community actually learns a bit about it. The rest – newspapers, tv channels – nothing shows there, coverage is limited about us.

**Mehr Singh:** I think there's the socializing aspect, right, and there's kind of the community outreach aspect, that people from other communities now take part in nagar kirtans, right. I mean the Vancouver Kanishka have a stall there, at the Vancouver and Surrey nagar kirtans too. There's a lot of kind of outreach that happens to the South Asian communities there and Sikh communities. And there's a lot of outreach outwards too, where we reach across, like inter-cultural cooperation to make the nagar kirtan happen. Even kind of serving food, and kind of sharing the joy of *sikhi* outside of the gurdwara walls.

**Himmat Singh:** Mission is to provide more knowledge, more Sikhism, to other ones. Who don't know about the Sikhs. Like non-Sikhs, they get to know about Sikh activities there, and increase their understanding.

**Harbir Singh:** Absolutely. And of course, seeing the community out. I get really excited when I do see people outside of the community come out. And they are in there, and they are in awe of everything, I try my own effort and engage with them a bit.

### *taste of Vaisakh*

*Comfort food is the foundation: Dal, chowl, sarron da saag with kank di roti, channa and poori, matar paneer. The sweets, or methai are prolific too: jalebi, besan, ladoo, bharfi, boondi de ladoo. Phulkays and roti are endless, which one must refer to as prasada. Then there are never-ending cups of cha. Gor wali cha. Snack food emerges too. Pakorai. Bread de pakorai. Fries, with a touch of red cayenne and masala. Pizza with extra slimy cheese. Bhel poori, gol gapay and chaat. Cotton candy, every kids' dream. Packets of chips. Fruity. Coke cans. Mango ice-cream, my favourite. Then we have new arrivals, such as ramaali naan. Someone must be getting married. But who?*

Dilruba Singh, who has been running a *langar* stall at the Surrey nagar kirtan says he has mapped out neighbouring food stalls in terms of what they are serving. He tells me that I could do a study just to map out the entire nagar kirtan's *langar* stalls and what food they serve. He offers me this brief snapshot from his own mapping:

**Dilruba Singh:** The food is big part of it. I have, like [laughs], because I've mapped out - there's areas where families have been doing it every single year, and every place has a spot. There's a place for cotton-candy, you know cotton candy. Then you go to the next spot, and they are doing like *ras* [juice] and *shikanjvi* [lemonade]. You know what *shikanjvi* is? And then you go to the next spot, and there's *gol gappay* [snack food] there. And then you go to the next spot, there's fries. Yeah, for the reason, it's fantastic, because I'm like this is so delicious. It's literally going from food truck to food truck.

With the explosive growth of *langar* at many Canadian nagar kirtans and its transformation into commercialized food stalls and food-tasting affairs, food at the nagar kirtan and its multicultural consumption presents a discursive challenge and an uneven playing field. The multicultural apparatus of Canadian state produces uneven terms of engagement and “reduces the problem of social justice into questions of curry and turban” (Bannerji 2000, 38). *Langar*, as a political and social justice practice, is turned into an exotic commodity for the pleasure of white consumers. There are, thus, two forces of food practice in operation: Sikh *langar* and that of multicultural food. How can one discuss food without it turning into an apparatus of state multiculturalism? There are two possibilities for openings. First is to re-centre the essence of Guru Nanak's *langar*, as a breaker of ego. Second, to make sense of the abundance of food, the notion of *rasa* and how Sikh thought conceptualizes *langar* can help to reclaim food from its exotic counterpart. *Rasa* is

literally the sweetness, or sweet juice, and is an aspect of taste and flavour for the aesthetic dimension. While *rasa* has a tangible quality (such as *langar* and food), it also has an unrepresentable quality that exceeds any physical containment. *Rasa* elevates aesthetics to a heightened experience of all the senses. N.G.K Singh writes that a “heightened sensuous experience becomes necessary for metaphysical knowledge” (2011, 74).

It is important to contextualize the essence of Nanakian *langar*, which works as a wall-breaker. This far-reaching practice seeks to break down hereditary, occupational, and social-spiritual divisions of society and their barriers – such as the varna system and Brahmanism that attributes discriminatory and segregated eating practices. Nanakian *langar* is rooted in an anti-varna ontology and sets out to do the exact opposite of Brahmanism, to bring together people of all walks, creed, caste and to eat together in order to break othering practices. *Langar*, thus, is a politically-charged activity and of social justice. It mobilizes food as a breaker of ego, varna, and spatial segregation, and as a dissolver of walls, divisions and boundaries.<sup>67</sup> Its operations and design seek to disrupt the status-quo of an us-versus-them mentality, and it operates less as a charitable institution. Contemporary *nagar kirtan*, then, even with the turn to celebratory and consumption-oriented food fairs still hold within it an essence of breaking othering practices. In this light, Iqbal Kaur’s account shared earlier on the commercialization of *nagar kirtan* holds significant sway as she is able to quickly connect the dots of openness of space to what will potentially allow for the encounter to happen, and for a learning process to be initiated.

Some people find enchantment in the never-ending essence of Guru’s *langar*. Dilruba Singh, for example, shared a story of how in his earlier days of doing *langar seva* at the Surrey *nagar kirtan*, he had a more controlling and possessive mindset in terms of how much food to give out and serve. But upon reflection, he ultimately realized that as it was Guru’s *langar*, it therefore had no measurement or bounds.

**Dilruba Singh:** A lot of people come from the openness of giving. Like the abundance of food. When I’ve always done *langar seva* at the Vaisakhi *nagar kirtan*, right. I, for some reason, got possessive of what I’m doing, and that mindset obviously changed over time because I say things, I thought about things, and I learnt. I remember one time a lady came in and is like [...shares long

---

<sup>67</sup> It is crucial to emphasize that even though Sikh *langar* is a characteristic ideal of breaking down social stratification, there is still social stratification in Sikh and Punjabi contexts. Food, alone, does not eliminate casteism. Natasha Behl (2010), for instance, highlights that pollution and food are narrow frameworks of analyzing caste.

story...] before they got to the end of the block, their buggies were completely filled. And I was shocked. I was like, there's me trying to hoard these two juice boxes, and our Gurus are saying, take as much as you want, it's never going to end. And that gave me the realization when the Gurus, when they actually started it with the 10, 20 rupees, whatever it was to start *langar*, that money is pretty much carried on around the world till this date.

Like *IkOankar*'s infinity-ness, Guru's *rasa* and nourishment has no limits, no measure, no finite number, no quantitative confinement. *Langar*, in ideal *Dharam Khand*, is complete distribution.

In response to questions on involvement and participation, Tanvir Singh also shares that his family and extended family comes together every year to run a *langar* stall at the Surrey event run by Dasmesh Darbar, and they focus on serving *chole* (chickpeas) and *bhaturai* (fluffy deep-fried bread). "Fresh. On the spot," he says. His family comes together for this, to give back to society since they own a restaurant, and as a way for new-generations and children to find out how Guru's *seva* is actually carried out in practice: to see "*seva kevai hundi ya* [how *seva* is done]". His narrative brings out the importance of *sangats* who come together to contribute and put the Vaisakhi nagar kirtan, with all the different activities that go into the event – kirtan, *dhadi* (ballads), and children's rides.

The Hong Kong nagar kirtan has not generated the same degree of debates, ponderings and divides on the abundance and distribution of food. The *langar* at nagar kirtan in Hong Kong is still run with *sevadars* (volunteers) coming and pouring from traditional metal buckets, and consumers seated on the ground on a rug organized by rows. The set up of a temporary *langar hall* with a distinct bounded space next to its *divan* (poetry session) or *darbar* (court) is a design structure and layout that is common of a typical gurdwara. The nagar kirtan attendees usually make one or perhaps two visits to the *langar* seated area, of a main meal and of *cha-vela* (afternoon tea). Moreover, the *langar* is prepared, cooked, and brought from Khalsa Diwan Sikh Temple with *sevadars*, with a limited decentralized *langar*. In Hong Kong, as a result, there is not a massive distribution of food as it occurs in the Canadian nagar kirtans. However, *sevadars* do volunteer overnight shifts to get the food ready for the next day. When I asked Charankamal Kaur about the uniqueness and differences of a nagar kirtan from a gurdwara, she expressed:

**Charankamal Kaur, in Punjabi:** I wouldn't say any difference. Perhaps that which happens in the gurdwara, now occurs in the playground. There are gardens, [...] where we go a little. That's the difference. Everything else is the same. *Prasada* [*langar* food] is also the same. We take it from here and distribute it there.





Figure 5 Invitation Banner, at Hong Kong Nagar Kirtan, 2016

Milk tea, in Figure 5, is not just a reference to Punjabi milk tea. Rather, it draws inspiration from the local variant of milk tea that is unique to Hong Kong. Hong Kong milk tea makes use of evaporated milk (originally) or condensed milk (used later), both of which provide an unusual delicate creamy texture to the otherwise black tea (known as red tea in Chinese). Milk stored in cans is used because of the scarcity of fresh milk in the region and because UHT<sup>68</sup> imported milk from Australia and New Zealand came about much later. Hong Kong milk tea, divergent from the usual green tea and pu'er tea of China, emerged in Hong Kong's street teahouses among the labouring and working classes in the 1940s as an affordable alternative to the English tea. The tea made use of high-grade black tea leaves from South Asia, usually Ceylon. Hong Kong milk tea has an orange tint to it that is different from the usual brown shade of Punjabi *cha*. The milk tea of the Hong Kong gurdwara and nagar kirtan is another mutant of the Hong Kong milk tea, in which the *cha* style of Punjab is blended with that of Hong Kong's milk tea.

<sup>68</sup> Ultra-High Temperature (UHT) processed milk

However, while the excesses of food and style of *langar* did not prominently feature among Hong Kong participants, respondent Yuvraj Kaur compares Hong Kong's nagar kirtan to a picnic outing, and questions the logistical time needed to prepare the Groom's outing.

**Yuvraj Kaur, in Punjabi-English mix:** In USA, Canada and North America, there, you have such long nagar kirtan, *fifteen, fifteen hours*, is it? From one place to another. Here, it is a what, one-hour ride. What is the sense of bring *Baba ji, Guru Granth Sahib di bir* [copy], *for that, and then spending so much time to clean*. But what is the sense? It's something like a picnic, I find. You see, they make so much food. *Whichever guest preacher they invite*, that's why I didn't go, the preacher, he's preaching. *People are just a picnic*. Some are wandering, some sitting and eating.

Others, however, expressed the multi-dimensionality of the nagar kirtan, and willingness to be open to the different processes for different people in their own paths of learning. Nimritha Kaur, for instance, is able to move past the criticism of nagar kirtan as a picnic spot by recognizing that even when it becomes a picnic spot, it holds significance through knowledge processes.

**Amardeep Kaur, in Punjabi:** Now, some people, have been making negative talk about gurdwaras becoming a social function and nagar kirtan has become a kind of picnic. What is your position on this?

**Nimritha Kaur, in Punjabi:** Look, when some work happens, two wings emerge. Positive. And negative. There is positive wing. But there is negative wing as well. See, those who are wise, and are aware of such that is our *itihāsik* day, *itihāsik tavarikh*, our *itihās* [words for history]. In that, we pass on knowledge to children, we sit in *divan* and engage with kirtan, and leave with wellness. Those who come, with fashionable clothes, and leave after eating and drinking a bit, for them it is indeed a picnic. In this, there are two dimensions, we cannot eliminate either. With regards to picnic spot, we Punjabis have lot of challenges, because now we don't pay attention to what day it is, what should be done or not. This is the attitude: 'let's just go, children will meet, play, sit'. Such is our *vichar* [mindset] now. But this doesn't mean all. Some. Children don't sit. But true, the story of the picnic does exist. We cannot say it's not there, that it doesn't become a picnic spot. It does indeed become a picnic spot.

Nimritha Kaur's insights give perspective to an unrepresentable aspect of nagar kirtan as a knowledge practice and to spiritual gathering as a form of wellness and wisdom. The modern gaze into its food as picnic, fashion and festivity, or as only a religious event, is limiting.

The central question of *langar* and its food variant at Canadian nagar kirtans is the same question that has manifested and troubled the schism of Vaisakh cultural festivity and its Khalsa counterpart. But it would be over-simplistic to characterize the abundance of food and its consumption as merely a cultural issue of the Global North. *Langar* during festivities of Holi

Mohalla, Diwali and Vaisakhi in prominent Sikh cities such as Anandpur (City of Bliss) and major historical gurdwaras on the subcontinent – Darbar Sahib in Amritsar, Keshgarh Sahib in Anandpur, and Bangla Sahib in Delhi – have been actualized through fullness, overflow and abundance as well.<sup>69</sup> What is remarkable about global-north nagar kirtans is that everyday households are gaining access to industry-grade kitchen tools and cooking pots thus enabling householders to furnish utensils, space, fuel, and equipment that previously a gurdwara’s industrial kitchen provided. This is further complemented by access to private automobiles, vans, and trucks which allow for the transportation of the kitchen tools and food ration for families. This has caused *langar* of nagar kirtans in such cities and suburbs to be decentralized and less reliant on the exclusive tools of the gurdwara’s *langar* kitchen. Thus, networks of families come together and take on food stalls with householder equipment, ration, and *seva*. Complementing family-run units, commercial enterprises (e.g. Pizza Pizza, 7/Eleven) and restaurants (along Main Street in Vancouver) take on food stalls as well.

The advance of modern communication technology further means that pilgrims are involved in a multiplicity of activities at once. These consist of eating, texting, taking selfies, couple snapshots, family portraits, and streaming, tweeting, whatsapping, while listening to kirtan and rushing for the formal *darshan* of *matha-tekna* (bowing) – activities which have now increasingly folded into each other. In this multiplex circuit of Vaisakhi nagar kirtan, the affective realm of all path-walkers and brides create a new network of being, relation, subject-making and translocal place-making. After all, why would ordinary folks listen to yet another politician’s speech if they could be out and about? Why would children sit when they could play? And why would *mantra* be privileged when both *mantra* and *darshan* need *rasa* for its wholesome experience? Strangely, it is within the space of everyday culture within the nagar kirtan that the demarcation of bride and groom dissolves. The brides have in fact become the groom. *Nirgun* actualized through *sargun*.

Next, the analysis of nagar kirtan and participants’ interviews address the experiences as they relate to memory, belonging, and politics.

---

<sup>69</sup> For instance, in a *National Geographic* (2016) documentary that covered India’s mega kitchens, the scale of *langar* and its *seva* is captured for Anandpur’s Holi Mohalla festival, organized by the Keshgarh Sahib gurdwara.

## ***Tavarikh/Ithihas: History, Memory and Belonging***

The aspect of Sikh history, often referred to as *tavarikh* (from Arabic/Persian) and *ithihas* (from Sanskrit), is a recurring theme in many of the interviewees' accounts of the significance of *nagar kirtan*. This theme especially emerged in Hong Kong and Greater Toronto among those well-versed in *sikhi*. Participants grounded the importance of the occasion by reflecting on what the history carries, whether it was the occasion of the Khalsa's inauguration during the time of Vaisakhi, or contextualizing events taking place in other months in relation to the Gurus. Lakhbir Kaur, for example, emphasizes that Sikh history needs an invigorating celebration and an energetic commemoration because Sikh history is not very prominent. Her thoughts suggest that there are hegemonic discourses of history to which Sikh history is often made subordinate. A first reflection of her comments is that subcontinental thought is largely written from an Indian, Hindu, or Marxist historiography. For instance, Rosalind O'Hanlon (1988) has labelled the genres of South Asian history – mostly Indian – as either neo-colonist, neo-nationalist, or economic Marxist. In the first two modes of historiography, India is either a product of elites who have taken on coloniality, or India is presented as a unified nationalistic force against colonialism. In the third, a conventional Marxist historiography empties “subaltern movements of their specific types of consciousness” (O'Hanlon 1988, 191). At the same time, O'Hanlon problematizes the ideal of finding an authentic history or searching for recoverable subaltern history or subject. Sikh history is normally erased in Indian, Marxist, and Hindu historiography. A second consideration to Lakhbir Kaur's account may be the loss of knowledge that has come from the becoming of a diaspora, Partition, secular multiculturalism of Canada, and modernity. Speaking on why Sikhs have *nagar kirtans*, Lakhbir Kaur links the large congregations of Sikh community to practices of *langar*, *seva*, politics, and historical commemorations. She shares:

**Lakhbir Kaur:** I guess *samagams* and *nagar kirtans* try to celebrate certain major events in Sikh history. They physically try to do that in a way where the community has an involvement, where they can actually organize . . . a political thing . . . That there is gathering of Sikhs, and it is large, and they are working together, they show oneness of the community. . . . I know with the *langar seva* is always really large, and everyone comes together. . . . A lot of people say that they are not necessary. But then again, I would be like: ‘with *sikhi*, because it is so detached from the physicality of things, I think it's important to have a physical celebration at times’. And if not to celebrate anything else, you got to celebrate your own Sikh history, which often gets left behind. [...outlines *samagams* in Toronto].

The iteration – that *sikhi* is detached from physicality – reflects on Lakhbir Kaur’s awareness of the inner realms of devotion, contemplation and *seva*, and less its exterior and physical representation. There is another layer to her iteration, that of *nirgun-sargun*. Because *sikhi* is all about the formless *nirgun*, the physical celebration of the *sargun* orientation may be necessary because it is through *sargun* that *nirgun* is actualized. The actualization occurs because it is community that comes together and organizes, a reflection that is conducive of a horizontal sovereignty. *Sangat* (collective), then, is central to *nagar kirtan* since it is through their collaboration and relation that events unfold. Moreover, *sangats* come together regardless of their different viewpoints, ideologies, as paths will converge to partake in the realm of Guru Nanak’s *Dharam Khand*.<sup>70</sup> The non-representable, the non-physical, and the non-material temporarily takes presence through the physical economy of labour and community network.

Of pivotal importance to *nagar kirtan* and its musical experience is how people imagine the *nagar kirtan* to be. Through the subjective experience and interpretation of the occasion, participants had a different sense and relationship to what made *nagar kirtan* unique and special. With regards to what characterizes the *nagar kirtan*, Mehr Singh, for instance, talks about the historical formations of the *nagar kirtan* processions in Vancouver. Even when Guru Granth Sahib was formally absent – such as in the postcard of 1905 – he suggests that the imaginations of the people carry the procession to the level of *nagar kirtan*.

**Mehr Singh:** Kesar Singh, the novelist, writes in his book about Bhai Mewa Singh, that there's *nagar kirtan* to open the *gurdwara*, which would be 1908. We know for sure that there's a procession. We see Sikh gentlemen with instruments and are singing on 1905. We know for sure, I mean whether you want to call it a *chaunki* or *prabhat peri*, I would consider it a *nagar kirtan*, right? I don't know if they have, pragmatically-speaking, I don't know if they have the logistical accomodation to actually carry Guru Granth Sahib's *sarup* through the streets of Vancouver. But to me, that classifies as *nagar kirtan*. And the imagination around a *nagar kirtan* that Kesar Singh's book talks about imagines these *nagar kirtans* in the streets of Kitslano when they are opening the *gurdwara*, right, before the first *amrit sanchar*.

Mehr Singh is well-versed in the history of Sikh settlement in Greater Vancouver and brings out his knowledge of the writer Kesar Singh who has written extensively in Punjabi on the historical timeperiod of early Sikh migrants. Even though the Guru Granth Sahib’s *sarup* is physically absent in the early days of Sikh marches in Vancouver, the political will of the people elevates

---

<sup>70</sup> See *Panj Khand* under Appendix A

the occasion to nagar kirtan. Mehr Singh is not bothered by notions of the politics of nagar kirtan, viewing it as inherently political. The act of claiming space and the street, and its purpose as a form of civil protest, raises the procession to the level of nagar kirtan. Another person in Toronto also connects to the historical nagar kirtan of Vancouver as a kind of protest and dissent.

**Livdeep Singh:** I feel like there are different kinds of nagar kirtan. There is that, with show of strength, or show of solidarity. Bhai Mewa Singh, after he was hung by the Canadian government, the *sangat* [collective] walked from New Westminster to the West Second Gurdwara with his body, in January, in the cold, many of them without shoes. That's a powerful thing. This is someone who killed a Canadian immigration officer<sup>71</sup>, who was considered a traitor. And your community that is so marginalized, that's a powerful moment to react. I think that is inspiring.

Lakhbir Kaur highlights the “parade-esque” notion of nagar kirtan, which marks it different from multi-day or multi-week programs such as *samagams*. *Samagams* centre around the idea of kirtan and commemorating Sikh history, but predominately take place indoors and at the gurdwaras, sometimes with over-night events that are called *rainsabai*.

**Lakhbir Kaur:** What it [*samagam*] is actually meant for is kirtan. It is one-week of kirtan. They do morning *Asa Di Vars* at gurdwaras, they do evening ones. And the end, they do *Ardas*. That's usually what it is. And the difference between nagar kirtan is that the nagar kirtan is I guess the parade-esque type of celebration they do.

The term ‘parade’ was less prevalent from the experiences of Hong Kong interviewees, with the more relatable terms such as picnic being used when describing the challenges of the excesses of food. This is not to suggest that Hong Kong participants viewed their nagar kirtan as a kind of picnic, but rather that their commentary could not offer discussion to the challenges of parade framings, but could offer thoughts on the framing of the occasion as a picnic. This is because the nagar kirtan in Hong Kong is a predominantly sit-down affair, both in its *divan* and *langar*, and is an excursion to the countryside. In Hong Kong, where annual school picnics take pupils to countryside parks for picnics, the term picnic has become a household name. On the other hand, the terms ‘parades’ and ‘floats’ in the vocabulary likely draw from co-social justice events such as Pride. However, given the circulation of the framing of Khalsa Day Parade, which is travelling from Greater Toronto to Pacific Northwest, it would not be surprising if the term gains currency in Hong Kong over the years as well.

---

<sup>71</sup> The Canadian Immigration officer referenced is William Hopkinson, who was assassinated by Mewa Singh after the *Komagata Maru* incident.

The occasion is also expressed through sentiments of belonging to a community, of being part of the city, neighbourhood, or suburb and being able to connect with the leaders and role models who are meaningful to one. Iqbal Kaur, for instance, points out that during Vaisakhi she would see her schoolteachers who held a food stand distributing ice-cream or pizza outside their house, which enabled their students to connect with them at an everyday level.

**Iqbal Kaur:** It's sort of mobile. Something I really liked about Vasaikhi in Surrey when I was a little kid, a lot of my teachers growing up were White, but there was always one or two Brown teachers at school, and they always lived in my neighbourhood. So when the parade float would go by their house, they would have a little stand with ice-cream or pizza, or something that they've made. So it was a really cool way to see people in your community, like being a part of the community, and feeling connected to something, outside of a space where that connection is kind of forced to happen. It's now outward, and spreading.

The belonging of Iqbal Kaur is an interesting and distinct one, because she does not reduce it to matters of imagined communities of religious identity or abstractions, or to transnationalism. Instead, her belonging suggests affinities to the lived practices of children growing up in schools and in their neighbourhood. Likewise, Tanvir Singh points out that at such a large gathering of almost half a million people, he would see his neighbours and people whom he has not seen for the whole year. Upon the street, they re-appear.

**Tanvir Singh:** It's a gathering, it's a massive gathering 300-400 thousand people, right? And you got to see, I've noticed that, I don't see some people the whole year, I will see them at the nagar kirtan. And the beauty of it is, you are going with Guru Sahib through the streets. That's the nuts of what I see.

Thus, translocal imaginaries that are expressed with the mount of nagar kirtan in cities and towns worldwide are varied with global and local characteristics and cannot be reduced to a singular order of nationhood. Moreover, despite the large populations, the event is lived through neighbourhood relation, and friends and family networks.

*In the fieldwork, I myself was surprised at how large the crowd was and yet how small and cozy it was. While I was walking solo and observing the paths of Surrey's Vaisakhi, I began to wonder how I would connect with my grandaunt who is without a cellphone in this crowd. As I turn my head, there she was, walking the path. Later that afternoon, exhausted from the outdoor fun and pomp, I go to the Dasmesh Darbar gurdwara to find some quieter sit-down peace and tranquility for my introverted self. A male sevadar walks through the gendered-seated darbar to*

*seek woman sevadars – specifically for helping out with prasada (referring to flat-bread in plural). I passionately get some energy back up and get to the langar hall's inner kitchen in order to get involved in the prasada seva. There I find my grandaunt again. The Toronto and Malton nagar kirtans, likewise, have enabled me to constantly bump into people I know despite being in the crowd solo.*

Another significant characteristic of belonging emerged through the family unit. In a world where children and youth have their own distractions, parents expressed their appreciation of being able to go out to an event with their children. This gave them time to spend with them, and offered some parents hopes that the occasion could further their children's knowledge and understanding of *sikhi*, Sikh history, and Sikh diaspora in some way.

**Nimritha Kaur, in Punjabi:** But one thing is that when people go outdoors, when children go out, they sit and listen, they learn. One thing that is different when children come to the gurdwaras, there children just think it's the same regular Sunday *divan* [poetry session] program.

**Joginder Kaur:** Ok, before the kids came, when I was younger, before I was even married, it was great all the families would come from Interior BC, they would come from Victoria. And we are all here. And it becomes a family gathering or fun. [...discusses food and scale] And then the kids came along and I want the kids to embody that feeling, that culture, so it became necessary to go, if not for ourselves, to make sure the kids also get to be part of the Sikh community. And have something to hang on to and not just the Canadian environment that they are exposed to at schools.

Similarly, a key element in many interviewees' accounts were differing experiences that varied with stages of participants' lives. While participants were younger, they were involved largely for fun, food, and play. Tanvir Singh, for instance, says that food is completely insignificant for him now and that he is most invested in Guru Granth Sahib:

**Amardeep Kaur:** Ok, so what's most significant, for you at a nagar kirtan? Is it Guru Sahib? Or is it food?

**Tanvir Singh:** Yes, it's Guru Sahib [laughs]. Ten years ago, like 15 years ago, I would say it's food. Ok. It's like I wanna try that food, I wanna try that food, I wanna try that food. That doesn't mean anything now, that's like nothing.

**Livdeep Singh:** When I was younger, it was more about fun, we would run around and be silly. These narratives suggest that as participants grew, they were appreciative of the deeper aspects of *sikhi*, which they could eventually understand or relate to and interact with its history and its significance. This largely had to do with the incommensurability of *sikhi* with the modern



framing of religion. Modernity and orientalist perceptions of religion has generated a significant challenge for elders to teach *sikhi* to their children in a world dominated by ‘mono-theo-lingualism’ (Mandair 2009) and ‘globalatinization’ (Derrida [1998] 2002).<sup>72</sup> The outlook, however, is changing as youth are finding new ways to connect with and re-interpret *sikhi* as they approach internet media, social networks, and digital language tools.

The single biggest criticism laid down on the challenges of *nagar kirtan* is that of politics. However, this was not a critique of politics itself in the sense of *miri* within the Sikh concept of *miri-piri* (discussed in Chapter 4) or of political dissent such as the historical *nagar kirtans* of Vancouver. It was a critique of contemporary party politics and the politicians partaking in such politics for their own egotistical pursuits. This emotional frustration was expressed by participants in all the locales to a varying degree. Some such as Ramandev Kaur expressed discontent of internal factions within Khalsa Panth. Others such as Nimritha Kaur expressed that problem of money lies in its misuse by parties and opposition parties:

**Nimritha Kaur, in Punjabi:** The other issue is all the money, in buses, cars, in everything. We could in fact use that for a better good, instead of the costs of permissions from governments, bus fees, and other expenditures. In India, these costs aren’t there - wherever the heart desires, you can do the program there. This is Hong Kong, there’s a lot: one needs to get permissions, pay fees, money for buses. Then you see . . . In Punjab, our conditions are very poor, people are on their death beds without any proper medical care. They barely have shelter, food, and health care. We could help. That wing is also right, in its way. If money is put to good use, then good. If money is operating through the logic of party and opposition parties, then it’s a problem. *Nagar kirtan* is necessary, if only people can put it to its best use.

Like the multiplications of *nagar kirtans* in Greater Vancouver, Greater Toronto has also witnessed multiple diverging *nagar kirtans*. Livdeep Singh expresses that Toronto’s *nagar kirtan* has shifted from its spiritual focus, to that of being a public relations campaign. He is unsure what to make of Sikh community, which largely lives in the suburbs of Greater Toronto, but that the community chooses to go to downtown Toronto for its big *nagar kirtan*. The PR campaign, then, becomes not so much of the places where Sikhs live in, but a strategy of marketing themselves and partaking in a type of public image.

**Livdeep Singh:** It's a big PR campaign now, right? I mean that's what it is. Otherwise, why would we be doing it in downtown. Cuz, what happened in our own space? Like as a community. I live in the east-end, you live here. But we are a rarity. Most Sikhs don't live outside the suburbs,

---

<sup>72</sup> These concepts are theorized and explained in Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework.

or the inner suburbs at least. So I think it's a big PR campaign. I'm not going to be so cynical to say that there is not some use in that. Like the day after, at work people ask me what Khalsa means, or they say 'Happy Khalsa Day'. And that's not a bad thing. But for the amount of money that you are doing, is it worthed? Is the purpose of this space for politicians to come and talk? Is there a real spiritual logic to it anymore? I don't know. When they started singing *O Canada*, after *Deh Shiva*<sup>73</sup>, at City Hall, at Nathan Philipps Square, I was like 'Oh God, I can't listen to this anymore. It's too much'.

Because of an appeal to public relations, politicians who are after the Sikh vote bank take on the centre stage. Furthermore, Sikhs have to partake in the Canadian settler-state discourse, such as the singing of the Canadian anthem, to market themselves within the frame of Canadian multiculturalism. For Livdeep Singh, the singing of *O Canada* after *Deh Shiva* is unusual and uncomfortable as he is reflective of living on traditional lands of the Mississaugas of New Credit First Nation, the Haudenosaunee, the Huron-Wendat and the home to many Indigenous peoples.

Finally, amidst the grandiosity, particularly in Surrey, there is an aspect of not even knowing what nagar kirtan is. In response to questions of commercialization, Saihaj Singh expresses profound discontent at its sheer scale and makes criticisms of party politics that have appropriated the occasion:

**Saihaj Singh:** Nagar kirtan is nothing but a commercial enterprise now. It's sad to see the nagar kirtan now. It's supposedly a celebration of the harvest - the Vaisakhi, and the birth of the Sikhism. . . . If you go to the nagar kirtan now, there is so much political messages in there. [. . . observes different politics, parties, and groups]

The essence is lost, or diluted by commercialization and by electoral politics. And there is a collusion of power from all angles. He goes on:

**Saihaj Singh:** So, it's not really done in an open environment, in an understanding way, in a way that other ethnicities can understand. From the outside, even my non-Punjabi friends said that it looks kind of scary - they don't know what is going on, everybody's got these swords. They are walking around. Perhaps, they can do a bit more explaining on what's going on. Tone down. Tone down the preposterous, all these parades, and all these booths. It's more like it's turned into a festival to show power, I think. That we are strong now, that we are tough now - '*raj karega Khalsa!*' ['governance of Khalsa shall prevail!'], in an imitative sarcastic tone] It sort of gives the wrong vibe, I believe. There is no festival involved, there is no festivity . . . Now you see a lot of these Punjabi raps, and singers, and they re-utilize these lines and booster their own standings here, Sikhism this, Sikhism that, in B.C.

---

<sup>73</sup> *Deh Shiva* is a song composed by Guru Gobind Singh as part of *Chandi Charitar* in *Dasam Granth* which is a compilation by the tenth guru Guru Gobind Singh. It is used as a Sikh anthem.

In Saihaj Singh's account, his story resonates to a certain incommensurability of knowledge and translation of this place-making practice. Despite public relations efforts to explain what Sikhism is, what Khalsa is, what Vaisakhi is, what nagar kirtan is, and what Punjabi is, no one truly knows what is actually going on. The Vaisakhi nagar kirtan of Surrey and Vancouver defies neat categories desired by social scientists. It also defies the framings of religious and political elites. People, likewise, are perplexed at messages which attempt to know the true character of Vaisakhi nagar kirtan. Moreover, Saihaj Singh conveys how nagar kirtan may have lost its essence. The earlier nagar kirtans and musical acts in *sikhi* were set up to praise the formless one, as opposed to rolling the carpet or beating the drum for rulers in the *naubat* musical tradition (Pashaura Singh 2011). Nagar kirtan's appropriation by politicians, or self elevation, is certainly a concern.

Concurrently, there is a double circuit of power that launches since power is never fully contained within the parameters of state apparatus and financial capital. There is power of collusion, as Saihaj Singh expresses and criticizes. Then, there is power of struggles. Fateh Kaur shares with me that she has been going to the Malton nagar kirtan since she was small, and she loves it. In her point of view, the nagar kirtan celebration has with it a history of Sikh immigrants' struggles. So, she frames the power as the unity of that struggle:

**Fateh Kaur:** Like I said, the power we have as a unified group, it leaves me in awe. In utter shock. It brings literal tears to my eyes. To see that many people, who worked so hard. And like I know my mom's story. I know like the stories of other immigrants who just worked so hard to be part of the country, that eventually did accept them. It's moving. And to see we are so freely allowed to express that, how loud and just powerful, passionate we can just be as a people is just very well depicted in that celebration. I love it. I like to go every year.

Fateh Kaur is filled with tears, as she expresses to me a sorrowful joy on how she connects with nagar kirtan by witnessing the migration stories of Sikhs. Perhaps, her story captures the historical significance of nagar kirtan, alongside its true essence.

### **Worlding, Place-making, and Post-secular: A Discussion**

Participants' stories and experiences of nagar kirtan offer a complex and multi-dimensional relationship to the occasion. Rather than re-produce rigid positivist and Eurocentric categories of what qualifies as religious, spiritual, cultural, and social, this chapter has upheld the complex entanglements of the various folds. The Sikh *ithiasik* can co-exist with the Khalsa *tavarikh*, and

co-exist with Vaisakh splendour. Ultimately, the nagar kirtan is an inter-play of the different folds of *mantra*, *darshan*, and *rasa* that is increasingly expressed within translocal space and lived through the complexity of the nagar kirtan journey taken.

The *mantra* carries a central significance, as the mind tunes to the melodious sound currents to tether to the Infinite realm. In the words of a few participants, nagar kirtan is spirit. The singing of the tunes on the buses, the *nam-simran* on the streets, and the kirtan entourage that sits or walks by Guru Granth Sahib, the *mantra* remains a major pillar of the occasion. The classical spirit of the nagar kirtan is, nevertheless, infused by its contemporary diasporic hybrids. The younger generation with their upbeat *bhangra* music mixes in the Canadian processions, and stage concerts by popular Punjabi and Sufi singers, such as Kanwar Grewal at Vaisakhi nagar kirtan 2018 in Surrey, co-exist in the spaces. In this regard, there is an ever-evolving aesthetic dimension to the devotional practice of kirtan. Finally, the chapter has also offered tropes to think of the gendered process of dress and attire through the bridal make-up complementing the Groom's chariot. *Darshan* here emerges as a magnetic force between the Groom and the brides. And further, there is an act of seeing each other as humanity. *Rasa* is materially expressed with the fullness and abundance of *langar*. Non-materially, *rasa* is the aesthetic taste of the entire occasion seeking to elevate our senses to heighten the experience of the present and connect to the spirit of the nagar kirtan. It is *rasa* that makes possible knowledge of an intimate experience, both literally as in eating *langar*, and aesthetically in sensing the musical experience through the organ of tongue, where "tasting overcomes all distance by intimately bringing the 'other' into the very body of percipient" (N.G.K. Singh 2019, 44)

Sikh history is another important force by which nagar kirtan events are lived, learnt, and connected to, and in turn, how Sikh history is shaped by the varied translocal processes. The commemoration of Sikh Heritage Month and Khalsa Day now travels and circles from Greater Toronto to other regions of Canada and the wider diaspora space. For some, nagar kirtan's sheer scale helps to ignite a oneness. The oneness, however, is presented with many different frames of thought. There is a oneness that is top-down, strategic, and consolidated in the politician's speeches of the founding event of the Khalsa. Then there is a 1-ness to capture the spirited

cosmic energy of Guru Nanak's *IkOankar* in the wave of *nirgun*.<sup>74</sup> Then there is a more organic network, a oneness-from-below that is less concerned with rigid notions of identity and nation, and more about the plurality of people coming together from different walks, paths, places, abilities and being able to put a public procession and *langar* together through the Sikh sphere of *seva*. It is this oneness that carries with it the story of Sikh immigrants' struggles as expressed in the account of Fateh Kaur, a kind of humanity's worlding through horizontal sovereignty.

To borrow from AbdouMaliq Simone's (2001) '*worlding from below*' and Roy's (2011a) and Ong's (2011) conceptualization of 'worlding', Sikh place-making practice of a *nagar kirtan* is operating through multiple circuits of worlding. There is a top-down worlding by which the multicultural state apparatus and elitist Sikh leadership conjures up whatever new commodity or image or religious-cultural brand that is marketable within the Sikh-Punjabi wavelength. Then there is a sideways worlding which foregoes the state as a focal point of world to tune into a horizontal mode of becoming and whose wavelength channel remains ambivalent, carrying the aspirations, tactics, and hopeful futurities. In this alternative circuit, because all landscapes, streets, suburbs and cities are worthy of sacred status regardless of their historical significance, size, and global status, the very multiplicity of places is brought into a new and temporary planetarium order as *nagar kirtans* events are released around the world. At the same time, *nagar kirtans* compete and experiment with new multimedia art practices, while flows and circulations generate new inter-referencing between different cities of Sikh diaspora. Those who cannot attend and want to can immerse themselves into the live stream of *nagar kirtans* from different cities. At the heart of it, *langar*, people, and storytelling through music characterize this transformative practice.

In this light, while the Canadian multicultural apparatus may have engulfed *nagar kirtan* from its political, social justice, and humbler beginnings, another re-appropriation concurrently brings about the alternative circuit of worlding as participants re-imagine their street, their cities, and their world through *sikhi*. Drawing from De Certeau's (1984) emphasis of practiced spaces,

---

<sup>74</sup> The use of 1-ness as opposed to Oneness is to convey Guru Nanak's iteration of *IkOankar*, which uses the mathematical symbol 1, rather than spelled out *ik*. I use 1-ness to characterize a quality without form, different from the oneness that seeks identity. The work of N.G.K. Singh (1993, 24-27) has explained the significance of the mathematical 1.

Patricia Wood and Liette Gilbert (2005) provide some openings for thinking how the top-down multiculturalism of Canada, while hegemonic, can be challenged by city inhabitants' own urban practices of engagement with other cultures. The geographers challenge the top-down frame by instead conceptualizing "multiculturalism as practice" that emerges in the public spaces:

The fact that people assembled on a sidewalk or shared a subway train certainly does not automatically translate into engaging with each other or with the state; but it is nevertheless the initial contact (made of silence, brief conversations and even conflicts) blurring our private conceptions and public affirmations of multicultural politics. (Wood and Gilbert 2005, 687)

Wood and Gilbert's optimism can be further connected to Doreen Massey's (1994) conceptualization of sense of place in how it complicates singular and fixed notions of places and people. Massey (1994, 153-154) emphasizes that place is a collection of stories, and "meeting place" that consists of multiplicities of identities and multiple memories of a place rather than a singular coherent identity based on past heritage. Nagar kirtan is that mobile meeting place, where brides of different gender, and with racial, religious, and various migratory backgrounds may see each other. In the words of interviewee Iqbal Kaur: "an open space".

Moreover, it is not just nagar kirtan's horizontal and sideways spatiality that takes on a planetary character. There is a deep temporal nature to nagar kirtan's practice. While the present is lived through songs and poetry alongside a practice of *seva*, stories of the past are retold in order to imagine new futurities and open up possibilities for change. Gurveen Kaur Khurana (2011), who has analyzed the nagar kirtan in Yuba City – the largest in size in United States – has likewise argued for its multidimensional and multivalent features, a practice that offers a cultural, religious, or political memory to diasporic Sikh communities. She writes:

Creating both the past and a future through the nagar kirtan, that is, multiple times in a single moment, the events of the nagar kirtan seeks [sic] to redraw the maps of the present, imbuing certain hopefulness for the future and invoking both the memories of equality in Punjab and the wrongs committed towards the Sikhs in the 1980s. (Khurana 2011, 241)

Khurana's work on the Yuba City nagar kirtan particularly illuminates diasporic youth's engagement for social and political justice in the growing appeal of nagar kirtans.

Through the symbolic parallels between Guru Nanak's *Barah Mah* and Vaisakhi nagar kirtan, this chapter has offered a re-telling of the bride's tale, and a Sikh and Punjabi poetic context for the analysis of participants' relationship to the occasion. Nagar kirtan's historical emergence from Amritsar to Pacific Northwest highlights the political and translocal processes rooted in the practice. The immanent characteristics of nagar kirtan, as a devotional practice of music permeating through all space and time, inspires a post-secular (see Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework) understanding of Sikh place-making practices. By a musical practice invoked through poetics in the streets, nagar kirtan sets up a stream of thought which remarks that sacred presence cannot be bounded to a particular locale, capital, holy place, or religious site. This stream of thought is observed in the desire to bring nagar kirtans to smaller towns, and lesser known circuits. The act of opening houses and doors by residents along the route – specifically in the neighbourhoods of suburbs – characterizes a relational topology in the making. Likewise, the account of Livdeep Singh, who characterizes nagar kirtan's historical significance as a walking meditation and “a way for connecting to kirtan and *bani* [poetry or Word] and different space” express a relational topology in the works. There is a Sikh sense of place as being rooted everywhere and nowhere, while taking on the historical arrangements and networks, which are often highly localized. Furthermore, the sacred pilgrimage emerging in the nagar kirtan, though physical and embodied, is not of the physical journey but of the emotional and spiritual experience. The interplay of *nirgun-sargun* (no form, all form), and *sanjog-vijog* (union-separation) elucidate the complexity and multi-dimensionality of the place-making practice.

In thinking through the *nirgun-sargun* and *sanjog-vijog* concepts, I am reminded of Trinh T. Minh-ha's conceptualizations of the wall, the art of waiting, and yearning. Particularly, the moment of confluence between tea and tear takes shape. In *Elsewhere, within here*, Trinh (2011) takes the readers on the history of the 'wall' and boundaries. Her art and poetic narrative offer a re-telling of exile, migratory worlds, and the travelling self. In her theorization of place, she interweaves cultural folklore and migrants' tales to counter dualistic worlds which take form in the wall's various dichotomous forms such as spatial, political, social, and epistemological. Despite the many configurations – flag, nature, border, here versus there, home and abroad, North and South, seen and unseen – the wall “remains actively ambivalent in its transgressive and regressive presence” (Trinh 2011, 3), partly because of “the constant act of border crossing”

(5). The crossing of the wall is characterized as “a story of music” and of mythos, which make possible its transformative quest (Trinh 2011, 2). Moreover, for Trinh the source of mythos is also travelling and is without a singular origin story. Trinh colours into this cultural travelling source by tuning to the love poems of Vietnam, Asian tea practices, African folktales, and Japanese paintings. The “two waters: tea and tear” nourishes a transformative power, a love and longing marked “by the art of waiting” (Trinh 2011, 21). Sikh nagar kirtan embodies an equivalent transformative power: the brides’ endless longing for union (*sanjog*), the yearning for the crossing and the momentarily glimpse (*darshan*), and the sipping of the endless cups of *cha* (tea) in the process.

In Guru Nanak’s calendar love poetry, the bride’s longing to see her Transcendent groom is left to an open-ended resolve. It is not until the month of Magh, in the literary imagination, when the bride realizes that the pilgrimage is of herself. Moreover, there is a paradoxical grasp, in that the sense of sacredness – temporal or spatial – exceed any kind of containment or boundary or division. The aspect of participant interviews that speak to this sense of nagar kirtan, which can shatter the wall and transform are expressed by Mehr Singh and Joginder Kaur, who talk of their desire of tapping into the spirit – something rather intangible. Likewise, Zorawar Kaur who characterizes the kirtan to reach true self alludes to that potential of dissolving self and other, and its boundary. The space of nagar kirtan is also expanded by participants such as Sukhwant Kaur who seeks *darshan* (glimpse) in an inner pilgrimage of herself longing that union, by tuning into the sonic currents in the home space through a telecast. The space of relation is charted by Lakhbir Kaur, in the importance she gives to *sangat* who come together from a bottom-up process. Dilruba Singh who characterizes the limitless nourishment (*langar*) of the Guru delineates an unboundedness of space and the completeness of Earth’s sustenance. Iqbal Kaur’s emphasis on how the commerce of nagar kirtan enable “an open space”, moreover, presents an intertwining of food, marketplace, and becoming. Such intertwining is needed to break othering practices and enter a poetics of relation. The economy is not separate from spirituality. Finally, Fateh Kaur – who speaks of wonder, being awe-struck, being shocked, and describing the occasion as what brings tears to her eyes – certainly paints an impression of nagar kirtan in its transformative power. Thus, it is here, in the here and now, or an “elsewhere within here” (Trinh 2011, 2) that the walls of separation, otherness and boundaries are shattered and



dissolved. *Sanjog* within *vijog*. *Nirgun* within *sargun*. Creator within creation. To interweave a poetic interpretation in *Twelve Months*, this profound realization is described by N.G.K Singh as: “The sacredness of all holy places and of all time would be hers [...]” (1993, 104) and “[t]he walls between sacred and profane are obliterated and every aspect of daily life is imbued with spirituality” (1993, 117). Guru Nanak’s *Twelve Months* is unique in how it elucidates Sikh cosmic philosophy through a Punjabi folktale, but the message it carries is rather universal and reflective of the hallmarks of folklore elsewhere, such as that theorized by Trinh. Five centuries after Guru Nanak, the renowned Punjabi writer Amrita Pritam wrote a poem, which was also modelled in *barahmah* poetic genre, on the blood and tears of Partition. These themes resonate with Trinh’s (2011, 21) exposition of yearning and longing, who expresses: “Tears and other waters – rain, river, blood – as well as the art of waiting are inseparable in folklore and in love stories”.

We are all waiting.

Figure 6 The Art of Waiting, at Malton Nagar Kirtan, 2018



## Chapter 6 – City: Artist Imaginaries and Community Mapping

*Begampura*, the city's name,  
a place free from sorrow, free from suffering.  
no unfair tax to the capital  
no blemish no degeneracy  
I've found the perfect homeland  
where lasting peace flourishes. *Reflect.*  
A kingdom for everyone transpires  
no second or third classes, no othered castes – All are One.  
What a desired city!  
There, dwellers are filled with content  
and stroll freely.  
The secret Palace is accessed by everyone  
Says sovereign Ravidas:  
We are all city-dwellers, my love, my companions.

~ Bhagat Ravidas ~  
*Begampura* | Guru Granth Sahib 345  
(transcreation mine)<sup>75</sup>

This chapter explores Sikh place-making practices and translocal space that go beyond the four doors of gurdwara (Chapter 4), and beyond the public space processions and marches of nagar kirtans (Chapter 5). What are the place imaginaries and fugitive maps of Sikhs in these regions? How do localized geography, political history, and translocal imaginaries emerge and figure in these cultural maps and in place-making projects? By community mapping and artistic place-making, this chapter concerns itself with the relational and topological, as it tours spaces of itineraries, as opposed to the topographical and Cartesian spaces of representation. Through the objective of exploring topological space, the chapter elucidates varying Sikh sense of place that unfolds from interconnections and gives meaning to the micro-stories overlooked from the books of social scientists. Relational topologies can bring out diasporic imaginaries and challenge fixed and abstract notions of space and cultures. As Tim Cresswell writes, “For something to be relational it has to be a product of its connections rather than a product of some essential self. Relational thinking is, therefore, anti-essentialist thinking” (2013, 235).

---

<sup>75</sup> In creating the transcreation of the poem *Begampura*, I drew on inspiration from workshops and content of Toronto Sikh Retreat and Sikh Research Institute.

In Hong Kong, I facilitated two creative mapping groups with youth as a way of exploring Sikh youth's relationship to their gurdwara and to the city of Hong Kong. The community mapping sessions were used to engage youth in how they imagine and experience their public and community spaces, and how they connected to it with their perceptions of home, city, and world. In the regions of Vancouver and Toronto, I draw from an existing rich repository of creative and community maps, artistic projects, and participatory tools. In Vancouver, Nameless Collective's walking tours and their podcast provide a source for the footprint of Sikhs alongside co-diasporas at Coast Salish. Toronto Sikh Retreat facilitated a creative city-building exercise by drawing on the poem *Begampura* of Ravidas. In Brampton, an experiential art project *IN5 Experium: Golden Temple* opened during 2019 Sikh Heritage Month. While these are different community mapping projects and artistic mediums, the central themes of itineraries, polyvalent dimensions of Sikh spaces, and relations with co-diasporas or local groups were explored. The final discussion of the chapter will bring the analysis of the artistic place-making and community mapping to conceptualize a notion of *begampura* (City Beyond Sorrow) as a framework for a *right to the city*.

### **Cube of Life: Mapping with Hong Kong Sikh Youth**

Community mapping activities were conducted with Sikh youth in Hong Kong, who were recruited through the Hong Kong Sikh Youth (HKSJ) organisation. HKSJ is closely affiliated with the local gurdwara, is youth-led, and runs youth-based programming at the gurdwara. I carried out two different map-making activities with the session lasting about three hours with two separate groups. Group 1 consisted of ages 12-18, with 4 participants of mix genders. Group 2 consisted of 3 participants, ages 16-18 of male gender. The two activities consisted of a) Mapping the gurdwara, and b) Community mapping, discussed in the following. The maps are provided on pages 204-207.

#### ***activity a) mapping the local gurdwara***

The first mapping activity focused on mapping the local gurdwara to explore participants' relationship to the gurdwara, the dimensions of the gurdwaras as they experience it, their spatial practice, and their perceptions and uses of the space. Mapping the local gurdwara in Hong Kong was particularly significant as the third-generation Khalsa Diwan Sikh Temple was about to be

rebuilt (discussed in Chapter 4). The community mapping of the gurdwara preserves a memory of the place and its historical third-generation open design which was about to undergo a large transformation and re-design. In this activity, I gave the group participants post-it notes and asked them to chart out all the multifarious dimensions of the gurdwara: religious, spiritual, cultural, social, environmental, creative, health, economic, political. From there, the group collectively brainstormed together their thoughts, and then discussed how they wanted to represent these elements, features, and dimensions on their collective map.

Group 2 mapped Khalsa Diwan Sikh Temple through an intricate floor plan (see figure 7). The level of depth and detail of the floorplan-style map point to a deep sense of experience of the gurdwara by children and youth. Every corner, nook, room, staircase, hidden lanes were embedded with sophisticated details along with footpaths and flows characterizing the significance of itineraries and movement in the lives of children. The centered drawing shows the main floor of the two *darbar halls* and the lower floor of the gurdwara which consist of the courtyard and the *langar hall*. Of interest to the group were the places of the shoe racks and water sinks as the groups expressed how they move in, out, and through the gurdwara space, with each embodied practice. In this regard, the process of the gurdwara, rather than the place itself, was intimately mapped. Other features that prominently figured in the groupwork and discussion were staircases and elevators, as these likely come into children's play ideas. The three trees in the courtyard also provided some thought and reflection, as the group was worried of their disappearance from the new gurdwara designs and expressed their environmental consciousness and strong sense of place to these sites since they are featured in their play itineraries. The prominence given to the three trees highlighted the affinities to the trees as children who play around them, and further as a gathering place for the elderly who round up under the shade with their cups of *cha*.

Group 1 charted out the main spaces of the gurdwara by outlining the various programs, functions, activities, and classes as they emerge in the spaces (see figure 8). The spaces of the gurdwara were organized and arranged on the map through the overarching size and significance of these places in the gurdwara: *darbar halls*, *langar hall*, library, rooms, open courtyard, office, etc. The main *darbar* (court) was the centrepiece of the place, and the group then built the multiple activities and other rooms around the centrepiece.

Figure 7 HK Gurdwara Future Envision (Activity A, Group 2)

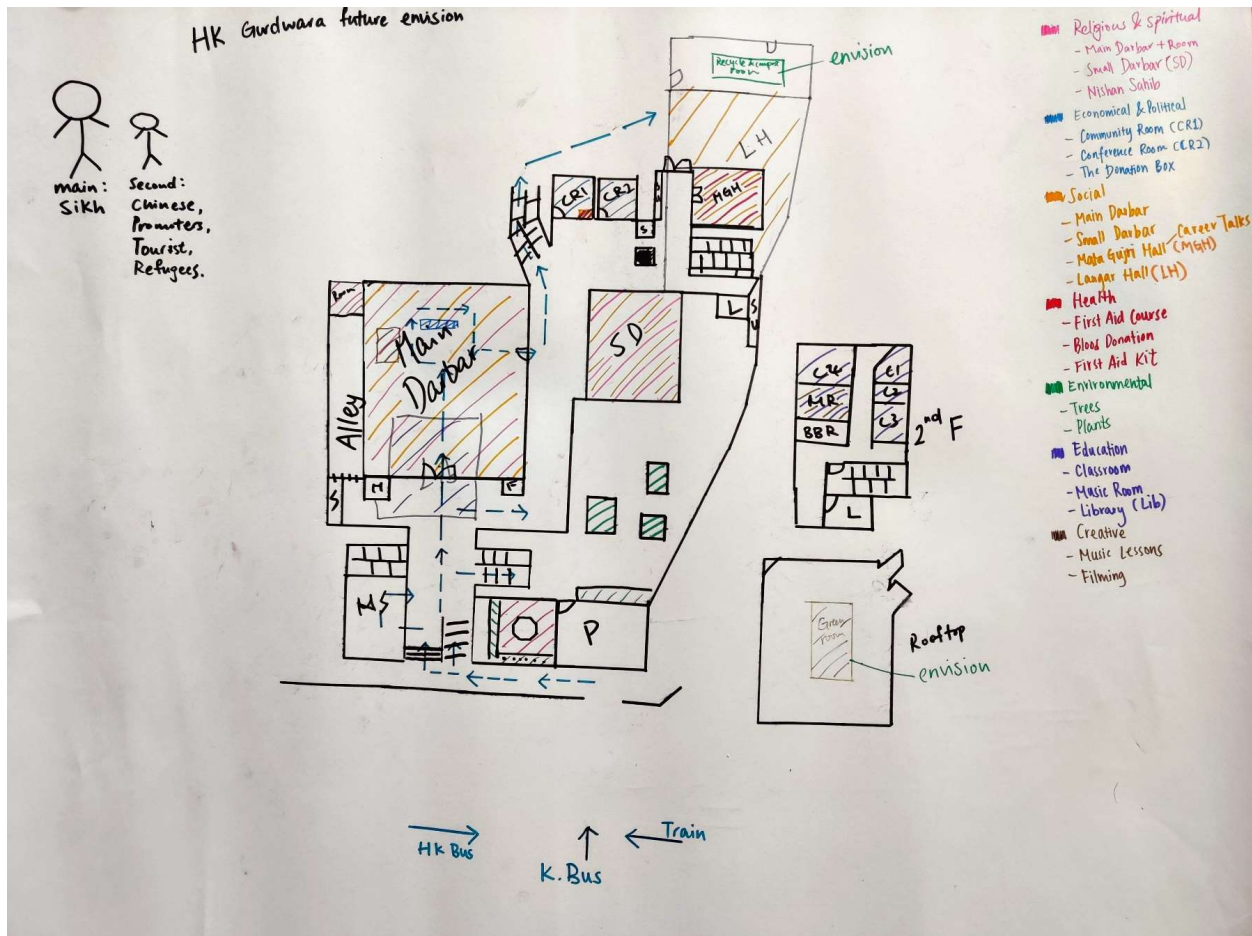


Figure 8 Mapping Our Khalsa Diwan (Activity A, Group 1)

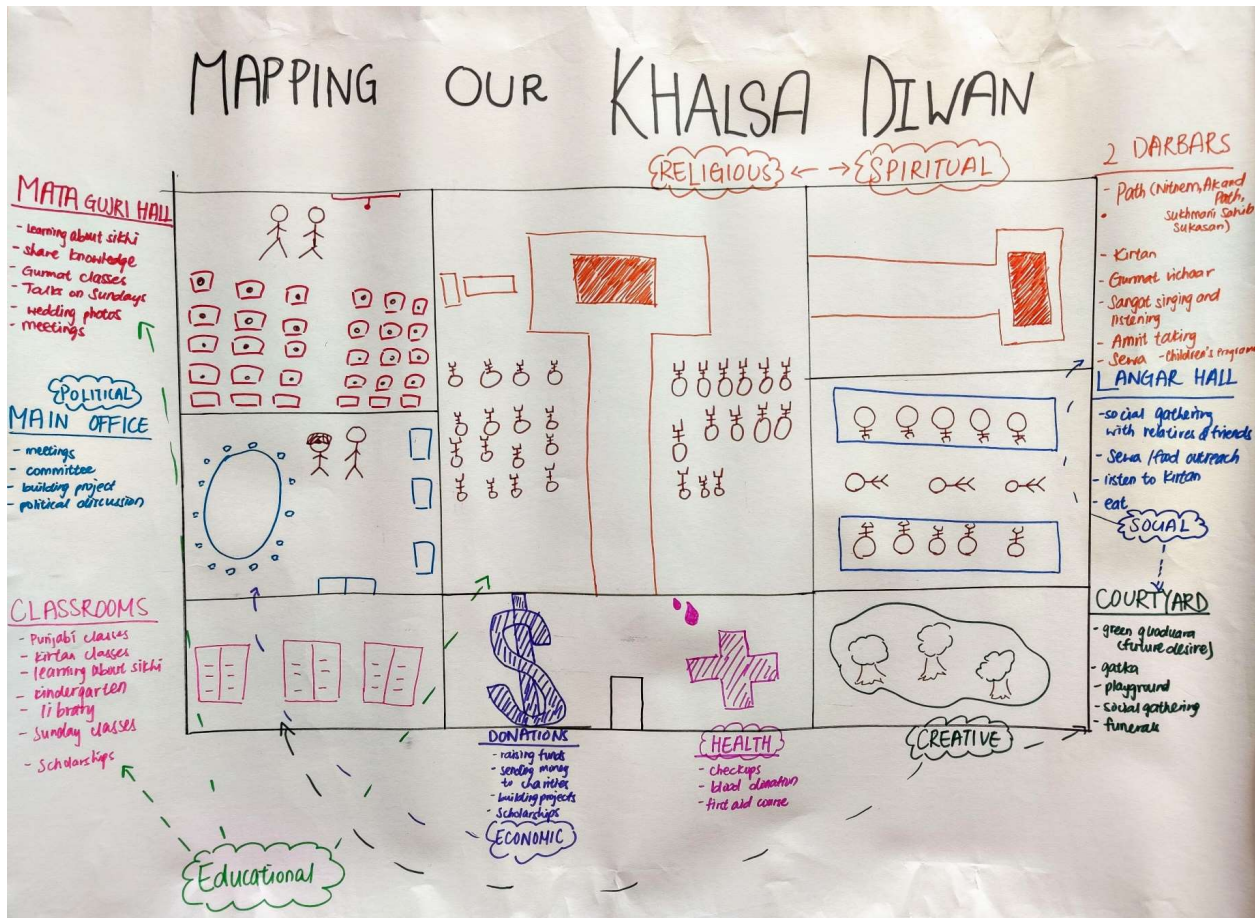
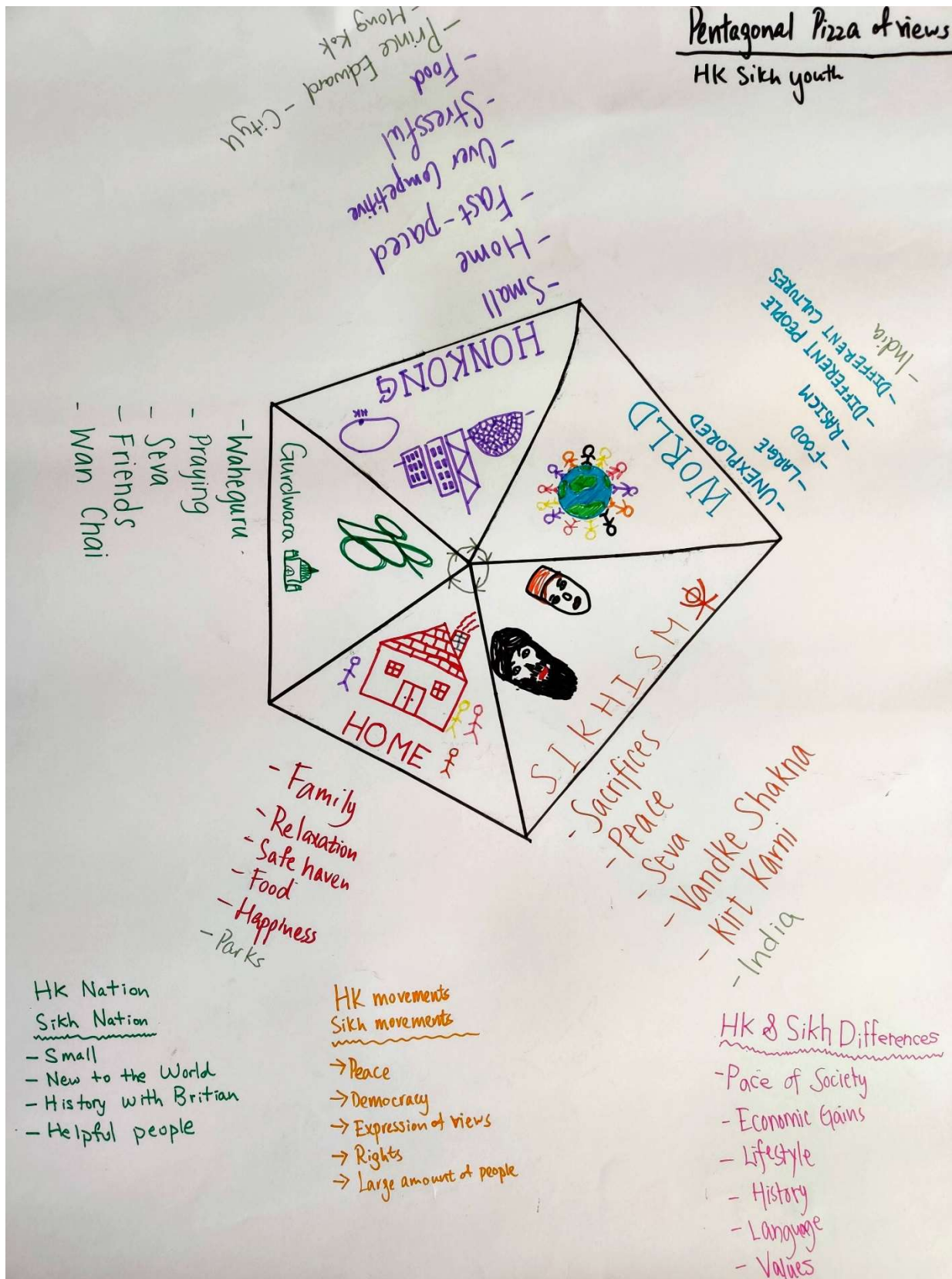




Figure 9 Cube of Life (Activity B, Group 1)



Figure 10 Pentagonal Pizza of Views (Activity B, Group 2)





As dreams and desires, both youth groups expressed strong environmental aspirations which included preserving the three trees, building a rooftop garden, and having a recycling and compost room in the *langar hall*. These aspirations were based out of youth projects that had emerged through the envisioning, leadership, and programming of the Hong Kong Sikh Youth, separate from the dissertation fieldwork. There were four projects that were developed from a multi-day HKSU-led workshop and that were initiated by the youth: (i) *langar* outreach outside of the gurdwara, (ii) green gurdwara, (iii) big brother big sister program – that is, youth-led peer mentorship and buddies system, and (iv) language lab. Of these initiatives, the green gurdwara was a concept plan to promote an environmental-friendly ecosystem within the gurdwara. In addition to green rooftop, and recycling and compost, ideas within this project proposed the use of kinetic energy such as washing machines powered by physical exercising, so that elderly people could come in to the gurdwara and wash their clothes while exercising.

***activity b.) mapping self, collective and place in relation***

The second activity was made up of two segments. In the first segment, participants were prompted to map self and collective in relation to places and ideas. On individual post-it notes, participants were asked to draw, note, colour, and or sketch what comes to mind when they think of these places: home, gurdwara, Hong Kong, world, and *sikhi*. Next, participants offered some reflection and shared each individual piece within the group. The groups were then asked to discuss and imagine their relationships to each other, and the kinds of common thematic ideas they saw in each person's snapshot. From there, the process of collective map-making unfolded and participants were now asked to map the five things given: home, gurdwara, Hong Kong, world and *sikhi*, the flows and relations between the things, and the places meaningful to them in that context.

The second segment of this activity focused on generating a political discussion by charting the affinities and differences between Sikhs and Hong Kongers, and as Sikhs living in Hong Kong. In this light, youth were given three simple, yet complex questions:

- 1.) What are three things Hong Kong social movements and Sikh social movements have in common?

- 2.) What are three things Hong Kong nation and Sikh nation have in common?<sup>76</sup>
- 3.) What are three things Hong Kong nation and Sikh nation that you think are different?

These questions were proposed in light of the insurgent political climate of Hong Kong following the Umbrella Movement in 2014, unrest in Punjab with the Sikh insurrection of Sarbat Khalsa<sup>77</sup> in 2015, and as diaspora Sikhs caught between both worlds. The discussion offered some food for thought where youth could see themselves as valuable stakeholders in the political domain from which they are otherwise disenfranchised or marginalized – both in the Hong Kong context and in the Sikh context. The profound responses and discussion certainly provoked fascinating insights, entanglements, and complexities of the two contexts.

Group 1 charted “Cube of Life” (see figure 9). Cube is an interesting spatial metaphor, particularly for Hong Kong. Physically, it captures the compartmentalized life of tight flats within apartment estates, and the blocks of skyscrapers. Living in a box is often a major challenge for Sikhs migrating to Hong Kong from the rural open fabric of Punjab. Yet, the cube of life is full of fascinating stories, tales, and places, and whose inventory scatters in a way that the cube cannot fully contain. Life takes over. The gurdwara is mapped in the form of knowledge, with an image that the book of knowledge is Guru Granth Sahib, but the image does not guarantee it. Gurdwara is, thus, represented through both the Granth and a broader notion of knowledge. Below it, the Golden Temple is written to generate affinities and affective relations between the local gurdwara and the monumental archetype Harmandir Sahib in Amritsar. *Sikhi* is coded through its world symbol – the *khanda*. That emblem consists of two *kirpans* (swords) placed against each other denoting *miri-piri*; a centered double-edged sword also known as the *khanda*, which depicts knowledge; and finally a *chakkar* (circle) denoting wholesome unity and unbroken continuity. *Sikhi* is uncharted, and everywhere, with the incantation *Waheguru* (Wonderous Enlightener). Earth comes to depict world, with land and water simultaneously depicting the continents and oceans, as well as the islands and peninsula of Hong Kong. Beside that, blocks of

---

<sup>76</sup> The use of the term ‘nation’ was experiential and provocative. At the time of the fieldwork in Hong Kong in 2016, an oath-taking controversy in Hong Kong had erupted in the 2016 Legislative Council election. Several pro-democratic candidates who had won in the election subverted their oath to office, using diverse tactics. Among them, Sixtus Leung and Yau Wai-ching pledged their allegiance to ‘Hong Kong nation’ in lieu of ‘Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China’. Following Beijing’s intervention, their oaths were deemed invalid and they were disqualified from office. I drew on the term, nation, in order to engage the Sikh youth with the political affairs of Hong Kong and to open conversations on belonging, subjectivity, and positioning.

<sup>77</sup> Sarbat Khalsa is a Sikh political assembly.

apartments depict the normative life of Hong Kong, along with more common places depicted in words, clouds or bubbles, such as school; India Club, which is a significant cultural centre for South Asians in Hong Kong; Happy Valley where the local gurdwara is located. The locations of the nagar kirtans taking place in Tung Chung (Lantau Island), Tsing Yi Island, and Tseung Kwan O (New Territories) are also mentioned. Finally, the home is coded through a more imaginative realm, that is a house, since such houses are non-existent in Hong Kong.

Group 2 layed their collective map elements on what they called the “Pentagonal Pizza of Views” (see figure 10). Pizza is another interesting metaphor, as it captures the significance of food and *langar hall* in the gurdwara, but also the nuances of its diasporic setting. Given the prevalence of roti (a type of bread), paneer (a type of cheese), and tomatoes in Punjabi cookings and Sikh *langar*, pizza is a delicious treat in Hong Kong for Sikh youth given that the base of pizza consists of bread, cheese and tomatoes.<sup>78</sup> For instance, when the Sikh youth run their educational camps and programs in the summer, pizza is often ordered to the gurdwara. In this regard, knowing each other through food practice became the foundation upon which relationships, places and ideas were discussed and mapped. In *sikhi*, where eating food communally serves as an ego dissolver and conflict-mitigator, the group’s decision to map relations and places on top of a pizza was like presenting a platter (*thal*) of the cosmic universe.<sup>79</sup> The group then layed out its five elements (home, gurdwara, Hong Kong, world, and *sikhi*) equally on the pentagonal pizza. In it, home is once again drawn as a house just as Group 1 had drawn, eventhough such houses are uncommon in Hong Kong. Hong Kong is projected through the iconic harbour skyline along with a mysterious tiny dot at the tip of a continent or land mass. In this, both its visibility and invisibility is captured. The gurdwara is symbolized with *IkOankar* by using its graphic rendering in Gurmukhi script, along with a design of the Hong Kong gurdwara, which resembles its third-generation view from Queens Park Road. *IkOankar*, perhaps, helps to characterize the gurdwara as a place of cosmic oneness, as opposed to difference and identity that is constantly othered, and helps to shape the gurdwara as a place

---

<sup>78</sup> Pizza as a treat is not unique to Sikh youth in Hong Kong. In Canada, pizza is regularly ordered and made at Sikh camps as well.

<sup>79</sup> There are numerous references to food analogies in Sikh teachings. For instance, Guru Arjan presented Sikh virtues on a food platter in one of his poems (see p.248 of this study). Furthermore, in the poem *Arti*, Guru Nanak (Guru Granth Sahib, 663) presented the entire cosmic universe by drawing on the metaphor of a platter, which is used in the performance of an *arti* (a ceremony of light using a platter). Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh (2019) has analyzed the signifance of food and *rasa* in experiencing the aesthetic dimension of *sikhi*.

where all humans are considered equal. *Sikhi* is presented as Sikhism, which is depicted through the prevailing visual gaze of Sikhs, with Sikh principles and practices written below them. A *khanda* symbol is also drawn alongside the term Sikhism. Earth comes to stand again for world, and is a place of difference, albeit people work together to uphold their dharmic duty on Earth.

For the second segment of charting affinities and differences as Sikhs and Hongkongers, Group 1 expressed that both Sikhs and Hongkongers are relatively small in population size and geography, and that they both have a relatively short history in the world. Both Sikhs and Hong Kong were impacted by British rule and colonialism. The emerging social movements and unrest in Hong Kong and Punjab were characterized as the publics having lost faith in their governments, and where people have moved to fight for rights and justice, and to some degree independence, or at least autonomy. Differences were charted with regards to political system, status as a place, and culture. Hong Kong was noted to have a better structure for democracy and rights than Punjab. Hong Kong's rule of law was outlined as prevailing over that of government, as the youth mentioned that the Hong Kong government, too, was ruled by law. Punjab and India, however, were described as ruled by government, and the government system was characterized as being run by family dynasties, such as the Badals of the Akali Dal Party in Punjab. The youth group showed little confidence in Sikh and Punjabi governing institutions viewing corruption as widespread. Another quality highlighted was that Hong Kong had world status and was recognized as an international city. However, the youth did not feel that Punjab or her cities had the same recognition or international status. Likewise, the participants pointed out that Hong Kong protest movements – 2014 Umbrella Movement – have global coverage, but that Sikhs in Punjab barely received any global coverage, with no one knowing about their protests and assembly during 2015. The ideas charted out by the youth raise some interesting parallels, differences, and challenges.

A full discussion of Hong Kong's rule of law (and now police state), Sikh's Sarbat Khalsa, and Punjab's political family dynasties is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, it is urgent to underline that Hong Kong is undergoing a rapidly morphing political environment and public sentiment with a dwindling confidence in its governing system. Protests broke out in large-scale in the summer of 2019 in Hong Kong, and they were embodying a Be Water philosophy in terms of their street and resistant tactics. The movement rose against a proposed

legislation dubbed extradition bill that was led by Carrie Lam, who is the Chief Executive of Hong Kong. Since then, the protest movements have intensified against police brutality, Beijing influence, and the loss of freedom and social security in Hong Kong. Religiously themed protests have also emerged such as on Saturday 10 August 2019. The Sikh youth in Hong Kong organized a peaceful congregation at the Sikh temple dedicated to finding “hope amidst the turmoil”. The event took place to provide for a reflective environment and give Sikh Hongkongers an opportunity to express themselves as stakeholders in democracy, who may otherwise feel unsafe participating in the frontlines. The same night, Hongkongers made use of the Hungry Ghost Festival in Wong Tai Sin to engage in rituals of burning and offerings as a form of protest. Protestors made use of incense, paper-based dolls of Carrie Lam and police commissioner Stephen Lo, and burnt joss paper. On 31 August 2019, to bypass police bans on its assembly, protestors gathered and marched under the banner of singing Hallelujah. The media has often framed these religious aspects as opportunistic in that the protestors are finding creative or tactical ways to bypass political restrictions which are placed on their assemblies. However, some scholars have emphasized that the role of faith and religion is more than a bypassing tool. Geographer Justin Tse (2016), for instance, has analysed the convergence of religion, space and politics during the Umbrella Movement of 2014 that precede the events of 2019. The papers in his edited volume *Theological Reflections on the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement* engage with the threads of faith, churches, and religious leaders in their role to push for political action. The volume addresses Christian-based faith organizing on the ground, specifically in the “Occupy Central with Love and Peace” sit-ins of the Umbrella Movement. Tse (2016, 3) suggests that the Umbrella Movement is a “birth of a kind of liberation theology in Hong Kong” but that its historical genealogy is distinct from other liberation theologies. Moreover, Rose Wu (2016, 88) characterizes Hong Kong’s protest movements as a story of conscience, an inner “deep spiritual awakening” to act against injustice and alienation.

To return to the Sikh youth who referred to Hong Kong’s governing system as rule of law with some sense of confidence in 2016, what now? The arising new questions and complexities will not be resolved by this study. For the Sikh youth in Hong Kong, democracy, good governance, rule of law, and people’s autonomous and political expressions are now urgently at stake for a city that is their home.

Next, I follow the micro-stories and itinerant maps of Asian and Sikh co-diasporas living on the lands of Coast Salish peoples.

### ***Taike, the Nameless, and Indians***

#### ***community mapping work of the Nameless Collective***

The Nameless Collective is a trio of community-based storytellers, tour guides, and educators who are all based in Greater Vancouver. The trio is composed of Naveen Girm, Milan Singh, and Paneet Singh who time travel to the archives and places of significance to animate the untold stories of the past – particularly of South Asians in Vancouver – and give meaning to the present sites. They run a podcast titled *Nameless Collective Podcast*, produced by *Jugni Style*, a South Asian magazine that explore arts, culture, and fashion. *Jugni* means a female firefly and is a Punjabi literary and narrative device – that is, a firefly that travels to places and makes observations and commentary of spatialities and temporalities travelled. It is often used in Punjabi folk music and Punjabi poetry. *The Nameless Collective Podcast* is supplemented by blog posts on *Jugni Style* featuring historical photos, documents, news clippings, records, and mugshots from the archives. The work of the Nameless Collective has received widespread praise and been featured in *CBC News* (Hennig 2017) and *The Walrus* (Gismondi 2018). In addition to their popular podcast, the trio carry out walking tours of Kitsilano and of *Komagata Maru*, making stops at places of the earlier Sikh, South Asian and Asian diasporas and engage with both the grand narratives and the many micro-stories overlooked from the monumental. Video snippets of their walking tour are available on their Facebook page as a form of virtual walking tour. The exposition in this section is based on their creative community mapping work through their podcast episodes, blogs, and videos, which I draw from in order to conceptualize the lesser known itineraries and cartographies of Sikhs and co-nations at Coast Salish.

Figure 11 Komagata Maru Memorial at Harbour Green Park, Vancouver



The virtual *Komagata Maru Walking Tour* by Nameless Collective was hosted on 23 May 2017 (Nameless Collective 2017b, *Komagata Maru Virtual Walking Tour*). It consisted of the following stops: Harbour Green Park, Coal Harbour, Portal Park, and Vancouver Art Gallery. At the Harbour Green Park sits the Komagata Maru Memorial which was unveiled in 2012 (see figure 11). One component addresses the incident with a photograph in a glass panel. Another component of the memorial makes use of steel panels to mimic the steamship along with inscriptions of names of all passengers onboard the ship. The majority of names are of Sikh men, with only a few women. Milan Singh, one of the hosts in the virtual tour, points out the name of Kishan Kaur, a Sikh woman who came onboard with her baby girl, her son Fauja Singh, and her husband Sundar Singh. There is also a second name Kishan Kaur on the steel panel, who we learn is another woman of an unconfirmed name, and who was listed on the passenger's manifest as "wife of above", that is the wife of Dr. Raghunath Singh ("Passenger List" n.d.). On a digital archival source by the Simon Fraser University Library, the woman "wife of above" receives the name spelt as Kishen Kaur ("Kishen Kaur" n.d).

The baby girl, who is the daughter of the first Kishan Kaur, is the 372nd passenger and is listed on the ship's manifest as "a baby girl" ("Passenger List" n.d.). Simon Fraser University has generated a digital snapshot of the manifest along with passenger information that is documented in their online archive. The following concise biographical information is provided here from the digital archive by Simon Fraser University Library:

#### **A baby girl**

**Full Name of Passenger who Arrived to Vancouver:** A baby girl

**Deported from Vancouver:** Yes

**Sent to Punjab Post-Riot:** Yes

**Emigrant District:** Amritsar

**Emigrant Village:** Timonwal

("A Baby Girl" n.d., bold in original)

The names and non-names, pluralistic spellings, and gender peculiarities are a testament of the elusive power of the field – not fully legible and representable by text and map – and the archive to return peculiarities in the making of the modern episteme. At the same time, such practices provide a snapshot of a colonial power attempting to make names legible that are otherwise non-conventional, gender-subversive, and queer. The arising peculiarities include the very gendered defiance written into the names Kaur and Singh. Pluralistic or confusing spellings

also defy singular standards. On the steel inscriptions of the memorial, person names are grouped by names of their villages and districts which reflect a pre-colonial and pre-partition Punjab. Such groupings, however, also reflect the spatial grid of British colonial Punjab which had created such administrative districts. Thus, the steel monument with the inscriptions is a type of community map, one which provides a snapshot of the diasporas in the making of the early twentieth century.

At the shoreline of the Coal Harbour, the Nameless Collective in their virtual tour points to the waters where the *SS Komagata Maru* was anchored, and subsequently takes us to Portal Park which holds a memorial plaque to mark the 75th anniversary of the ship. Another prominent place mapped and toured by the Collective are the clubhouses where the Shore Committee members would come to meet their lawyer, J. Edward Bird. The final stop in the Nameless Collective's virtual walking tour is the Vancouver Art Gallery, which was previously the Provincial Court House of British Columbia. The tour guides reflect on the history of this place – where William C. Hopkinson was assassinated by Mewa Singh – along with that place's geographical, political, and artistic significance. As the Collective points out, at the top of the building is a public art project named “Four Boats Stranded” that was commissioned and installed featuring four boat miniatures at each corner: a red canoe, a white ship, a yellow boat, and a black ship. In the artist statement by Ken Lum who produced the public art piece in 2001, he expresses that “[t]he boats are each painted a single colour which speaks to a colonial stereotyping of cultural, racial and historical identification. The First Nations boat is red, Captain Vancouver's ship is white, the Komagata Maru is black and the Fujian ghost ship is yellow” (Lum 2001, n.p.). The Fujian ghost ship is a reference to the 1999 fishing boat also called *Black Dragon* that arrived with about 130 Fujian people, most of who were deported (Vickery 2014, *CBC*). In addition to the public art installation, the steps on the outside of the gallery is regularly home to rallies and demonstrators of various political movements. In sharing such a tour and through the awareness-raising processes, the Nameless Collective offers both the legacy and contemporary point of views showing the inter-relationships of the various racialized co-diasporas, migrants, and indigenous peoples at Coast Salish.

In addition to the *Komagata Maru Walking Tour*, the Nameless Collective also runs a *Kitsilano Walking Tour*. Kitsilano, whose name is drawn from Squamish Chief August Jack



Khatsahlano, is a neighbourhood in Vancouver. For the *Kitsilano Walking Tour* that was hosted on 23 July 2017, the stops consisted of: the home of Harnam Kaur, the site of Bhag Singh, the home of William C. Hopkinson, and the original Khalsa Diwan Society Vancouver gurdwara on 2nd Avenue (Nameless Collective 2017d). Harnam Kaur was born in 1886 in Peshawar, now Pakistan (Nameless Collective 2017c, “Episode 2”; Johnston 1998). She was one of the few South Asian, Punjabi, and Sikh women in Canada. Bhag Singh, her husband, was involved in the leadership of the Vancouver gurdwara on 2nd Avenue Street. He worked as a policeman in Hong Kong, prior to his arrival at Coast Salish land, while Harnam Kaur was still in Punjab. In 1911, Bhag Singh returned to India to bring his wife Harnam Kaur to Canada. From Punjab, they travelled to the port of Calcutta, and then to Hong Kong from where Harnam Kaur embarked on her journey across the Pacific Ocean (Nameless Collective 2017c, “Episode 2”). Her entry to North America, however, faced significant hurdles. In her first journey across the Pacific on the *SS Tenyo Maru*, she departed from Hong Kong to San Francisco, with the arrival of the ship in summer 1911. Two different dates are documented with regards to this first arrival: 29 July 1911 and 24 August 1911 (Nameless Collective 2017c, “Episode 2”). However, she along with her companions were deported by the American authorities with the date stamped as 6 September 1911 (Nameless Collective 2017c, “Episode 2”). Back in Hong Kong, Harnam Kaur gave birth to her son, Jopindra Singh (also spelt Joginder Singh), who was born at the end of the year 1911 (Johnston 2014, 30; *Hindustanee* 1914, 122). In her second journey across the Pacific, Harnam Kaur, Bhag Singh, and their son departed on the *SS Monteagle* from Hong Kong and the ship arrived in Vancouver in January 2012 (Nameless Collective 2017c, “Episode 2”). While her husband Bhag was allowed to enter, she was held once again in a long detention along with her son and co-travellers until May 1912 (Nameless Collective 2017c, “Episode 2”), and subsequently, they were released on a large bail of \$2,000 until an appeal hearing (Johnston 2014, 30). Ultimately, she was granted entry to Vancouver on compassionate grounds following the activist work of the local Sikh and South Asian community.

In Vancouver, Harnam Kaur gave birth to her daughter, Karam Kaur, in January 1914, but subsequently died from childbirth complications (Nameless Collective 2017c, “Episode 2”). Her funeral procession is a pivotal scene in the historical photographs of Vancouver as her final rites were widely attended by the local South Asian community. Her dying wishes, articulated by

her husband Bhag Singh at the funeral, give us a sense of the Sikh principles she believed in. According to the Nameless Collective, these were:

One, every year, money should be sent to a Sikh girls' college in Ferozepur, for one day's worth of food. Two, for one day's worth, there should be money given to an Amritsar orphanage, and third, there should be 100 rupees to be sent to Peshawar, again probably for another social cause.

(Nameless Collective 2017c, "Episode 2").

The willed funds for women's education, children's orphanage, and her nascent village reflect her values and aspirations for these estranged women and their empowerment. Her obituary is listed in the *Hindustanee* and highlights the landscapes of Peshawar and British Columbia that were held in high esteem in Punjabi and Sikh imagination: "She was born at Peshawar, a country which resembles British Columbia in scenery and climate" (*Hindustanee* 1914, 122). Today, Harnam's diasporic itinerary is imaginatively envisioned by a contemporary Sikh artist Keerat Kaur in the visual art piece *Journey* as part of her visual series, *The Life of Harnam Kaur*. *Journey* paints the landscapes of Peshawar and Coast Salish that are connected through Harnam Kaur. The series visually captures the story of Sikh and Punjabi diaspora in the making through Harnam's itineraries. As Keerat Kaur (2018, n.p.) shares on her artist website, "Her legacy is one that paved the way for the diaspora as a whole, but particularly for women".

The walking tours of the Nameless Collective takes us on a ride of the places of significance in the city's diasporic making. Furthermore, their tours now also take place as part of Sikh Heritage Month. Sikh Heritage Month for B.C. was proclaimed in 2017 with the programming of it coming out in 2018 through the Sikh student associations of University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University. Along with their walking tours, their lively podcast animates the micro-stories of the early racialized and religiously othered settlers, and the places that were or are composed of these micro-stories. As the Collective points out,

We are called the Nameless Collective, not because we are nameless, but for the nameless people whose stories have remained silenced, and untold, and filtered throughout history. This is an opportunity to provide a space for those voices, stories, silences to be heard.

(Nameless Collective 2017a, "Episode 1")

Such micro-stories include the various forgotten details of the larger *Komagata Maru* narrative. They include the many folds of rites of passage: detentions to cremations; dying wishes to the hopes and dreams of lost nameless children; marriages and unions to initiations and name conversions. When the archival material is incomplete, the Nameless Collective use their imaginations to fill the gaps. The group also complicates what is normally considered as archives. For instance, they access the telephone directories of this period, where nameless South Asians were only listed as “Hindoo, Hindoo, Hindoo” instead of their names (Nameless Collective 2017a, “Episode 1”). Through diverse archival materials such as telephone directories, passenger lists, and obituaries, the work of the Nameless Collective captures the migrant geographies and itineraries of Asians, South Asians, and Sikhs in the city’s making. Likewise, they self-consciously express such a re-mapping process in their podcast: “It’s almost like you can re-map the entire city. I mean, we are re-mapping it, we are re-imagining it through a South Asian lens” (Nameless Collective 2017a, “Episode 1”).

### ***Taike-Sye’yə***

On 9 August 2019, a mural was unveiled at a federal building in Vancouver which was stripped of its previous name that celebrated Harry Stevens, who was a politician and businessman, and a major player in the sending back of the *SS Komagata Maru*. During that period, Stevens had presented the agenda of the “Asian threat to Canada’s future as ‘a white man’s country’” in the Canadian Parliament (Johnson 2014, 90). As Stevens was stripped of his name commemoration, a mural was commissioned in lieu by the Vancouver Mural Festival for the building façade that was led by artists Alicia Point from the Musqueam nation, and a Sikh artist Keerat Kaur.<sup>80</sup> The collaborative mural is named *Taike-Sye’yə* which brings together a Punjabi word *taike* and a Musqueam word *sye’yə*.

In an earlier statement by Vancouver Mural Festival (2019) on its website, there was a suggestion that Musqueam Nation in their canoes (who are depicted in the mural) paddled food and water to the ship. That webpage I previously consulted dated 6 August 2019 has since been updated and the current webpage dated 11 March 2020 no longer references such a remark

---

<sup>80</sup> The mural was a team collaboration of several artists. Keerat Kaur’s design was executed by artists Sunroop Kaur and Sandeep Johal. Alicia Point’s grandson Cyler Sparrow-Point also worked on the artwork. The mural initiative was a partnership between the South Asian Canadian Historical Association (SACHA), the Vancouver Mural Festival, the Indian Summer Festival, and the Surrey Art Gallery (Vancouver Mural Festival 2020; City of Vancouver 2019).

(Vancouver Mural Festival 2020). In the *Conversation*, Ali Kazimi (2019) has established that such a portrayal of Musqueam Nation bringing food and sustenance to the *SS Komagata Maru* is unverified and not factual. Moreover, such artistic portrayals bring into question how events are dressed for political gains, and further, how they sugar-coat deeply entrenched racial and settler rifts. In this case, by depicting an amicable relationship between Sikhs, Punjabis, and First Nations, the mural risks masking the racisms of Sikhs and Punjabis against First Nations and further conceals the racial hierarchy by which racialized settlers often triumph by moving up the race and class ladder. On the one hand, the mural risks re-codifying settler colonial technologies in a different guise – portraying First Nations as being inviting and welcoming of migrants – and thereby legitimizing a settler colonial society. On the one hand, the mural generates alternative cartographies – of Punjabi, Sikh, and Indigenous symbolisms and imaginaries – offering possibilities for decolonial futures beyond colonial state and a process for Truth and Reconciliation. Given the dissertation’s interest in destabilizing scalar epistemic frames, I centre an analysis of the latter next with an approach on its community mapping. Nonetheless, it is important to emphasize that such artistic endeavors must also be troubled for its underlying political strategy by the State and the City. As Kazimi (2019, n.p) brings attention to, “politicians rushed to embrace it [the story] just before a federal election”.

*Taike*, as expressed in Chapter 3, has a unique signification to the geographies of Coast Salish. While some sources point to its significance in Vancouver in early 20th century, other sources point to Prince Rupert and the Skeena region in 1960s (Nayar 2013, 183). The term comes from *taiya*, a Punjabi word that refers to a father’s older brother. *Ke* attributes a belonging to – being of or place of. *Taike* in Punjabi thus reflects the place or home of dad’s older brother (paternal uncle) and by extension one’s cousins. In its Punjabi family relations, *taiya* and *taike* are terms of respect and reverence. In their podcast, the Nameless Collective explores the historical usage of this term by Punjabis and Sikhs for First Nations, along with its troubling signification in the multiculturalism period of Canada (Nameless Collective 2019, “The Politics of Un-Naming”). In its early days, it had emerged as a term of endearment and bonding. This was at a time when Sikhs and First Nations were often working together in the lumber mills and fish canneries, and were collectively racialized by the white settler colonial state. The webpage of Vancouver Mural Festival (2020) states: “The Punjabi word originated in shared working environments and shared experiences between South Asians and Indigenous Nation's in BC - and

specifically Vancouver.” However, *taike* lost some of its originary roots of affection and respect, and the term became derogatory since the 1960s, particularly in the Skeena region of BC as pointed out by Nayar (2012, 183). This breach in the meaning of the term largely reflects rifts between Sikhs and First Nations that had occurred in the political-economic-cultural landscape of the time. With the advent of Canadian multiculturalism, post-war immigration, and expanding settler colonialism, indigenous sovereignty and livelihoods were often alienated while a segment of Punjabi and Sikh population moved through the colonial and capitalist ladder upwards with middle-class jobs, expanding businesses, and ownership of suburban housing. *Taika* came to be condescending and derogatory, furthering tensions between First Nations and Sikhs. Kamala Elizabeth Nayar, who has analyzed the racialized settlements of Punjabis and Sikhs across the province, moreover, explains that “Punjabis did not want to be mistaken for First Nations because of the negative perceptions” (Nayar 2012, 183).<sup>81</sup>

The term *taika* has recently been revived as a way to reflect on and reclaim its earlier legacy in respectful manners. In 2017, the Indian Summer Festival titled one of its ongoing programming stream *Taika*, emphasizing its intent to “reignite this sense of kinship” (Indian Summer 2017b, n.p.). The Indian Summer Festival is an arts organization based in Vancouver with a focus on taking on creative projects that are collaborative, risk-taking, and genre-mixing. Their website delineates their value and approach as:

The festival’s byline, ‘*Where Worlds Meet*,’ speaks to our focus on artistic collaboration. We create what we like to call ‘good friction’ by looking beyond the easy middle ground in order to foster true curatorial risk-taking. (Indian Summer n.d., n.p)

Part of this risk-taking is to generate space for that friction which may be constructive and positive. In their explanation of *taika* program, the festival explains: “We see the role of arts organizations as being spaces in which intercultural dialogue can take place - in our books, on our stages, on our screens, on the walls of our exhibition spaces” (Indian Summer 2017a, n.p). To understand friction, one can draw from the conceptualization offered by Anna Lowenhaupt

---

<sup>81</sup> There are other, politically motivated, Sikh movements, such as Sikhs for Justice (who have gone so far as to petition the United Nations for recognition as an Indigenous people), whose activities may complicate perceptions of Sikh identity and may even have contributed to the renewed interest in the Komagata Maru incident in the years following its centennial. This dissertation is not concerned with state-centred agendas, and the communities who participated in the research were and are not participants in such movements.

Tsing in her work *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Tsing (2005) develops friction as a metaphor for an alternative framing of globalization that counters theses of homogenization, clash of cultures, or postmodern hybridization. Friction instead points to the uneasy relationships of hybrids, that Tsing denotes as “zones of awkward engagements” (xi). As she explains, you need friction for the wheel to move and propel the car to go forward. Tsing is theorizing from the context of rainforests in Indonesia and the global encounters of villagers, nature lover students, experts, and developers. In the context of this study, *taike* speaks to the friction between First Nations and Sikhs.

To return to the mural titled *Taike-Sye'yə*, the art is made up of three walls vertically and connected by a horizontal stretch depicting the sea. The west tower, designed by Keerat Kaur, is a creative cartography of the *Komagata Maru* incident. At the bottom, it imaginatively depicts the *SS Komagata Maru* in a design that blends Sikh and Mughal style ornamental shapes and Punjabi-styled flower work. It has two flags – one of day and sun, and one of night and moon. In this, the flags creatively chart the space of Punjab differently from the modern nation state flags of India and Pakistan. Such a design of the ship evokes its essence as *Guru Nanak Jahaz*. The oceanic imagery merges into a stream of water that is flowing from the mountainous land and forests. The presence of salmon fish in the water characterizes the landscapes of Coast Salish. In the distant mountains, the image blends into a skyline with a land mass of the shape of Vancouver. It is a map of Vancouver, showing the location of the ship docked at Coal Harbour, and the first KDS gurdwara on West 2nd Avenue in Vancouver. Keerat Kaur's creative map blends sky, water and land. Moreover, it marks significant moments, places, and things of the myriad worlds coming together. The ship's cartographic image, moreover, depicts orca whales circling the ship in order to provide their own guardian protection to the ship in conflict. Orca whales are revered by Musqueam Nation.

The term *sye'yə* means friend in an upriver dialect – Halkomelen – of Coast Salish languages. Collaborating with the wisdom of a Musqueam elder and language teacher, Larry Grant, the indigenous mural artists explain they picked the word as it shares in essence a sense of comradery and friendship similar to the references *taike* and cousin (Vancouver Mural Festival 2019). The Musqueam dimension to the mural depicts a pattern artwork that resembles in different perspectives a creative rendition of the medicine wheel and its colours. The vertical

towers are linked through a horizontal stretch featuring sea and three canoes, one of which is in the design of a two-headed serpent. The sea and the canoes centre the point of view of Musqueam Nation in their subsistence livelihood and as caretakers of the unceded Coast Salish territories with co-Indigenous nations.<sup>82</sup> One of the canoes also depicts the Halkomelen word *syeyə* and in Gurmukhi script *taike*, which appears as ਤਾਇਕੇ. The sea merges into another vertical tower featuring a thunderbird. The thunderbird is hailed as the keeper and protector of the skies in the Musqueam tradition.

Above the thunderbird into the skyline, the mural merges back into Keerat Kaur's design where a dream-like feminine creature is holding up a bouquet with her hands. In her artist statement, Keerat Kaur explains what the things being held symbolize:

The East tower includes the personification of a "hopeful sky," pointing to the eventual accomplishments of the community that suffered in the Komagatamaru tragedy. The figure holds a bouquet with motifs relating to victory, culture and celebration. Some of these motifs include: the onion, signifying the culinary excellence of south-asian cuisine; the peacock feather, a symbol of cultural proliferation; the lotus, alluding to both perseverance and spiritual teachings. (Keerat Kaur 2019, n.p.)

The mural's taking on of Punjabi symbolisms (e.g. *phulkari* flower work) and Sikh symbolisms (e.g. lotus, *Guru Nanak Jahaz*, *gurduara*) with Musqueam symbolisms (e.g. thunderbird, orca whales, canoe, Musqueam pattern work) generates dialogues of epistemic values. As creative place-making, the mural furthers the indigenous sovereignty and reconciliation at Coast Salish land. Through the rich artwork, one learns the deep geography, history, and language involved in that coming together of worlds. Moreover, there is an importance given to imagine a different relationship for the future, which for Punjabis and Sikhs mean taking responsibility for our own involvement in settler colonialism. Most significantly, *Taika-Syeyə* highlights the geographical thought of the various nations Punjabi, Sikh, and First Nations rising from the undercurrents of the sea to imagine different ways of thinking about land and ocean, otherwise peripheral to Eurocentric geographies. The mural puts into perspective the many micro-stories that create a network of topologies of *Guru Nanak Jahaz* removed from the grand narratives of *Komagata Maru*. In other words, the mural is an arts-based community map and speaks to place imaginaries that do not rely on secular, colonialist and capitalist abstractions of space.

---

<sup>82</sup> See Ali Kazimi (2019) for expanded discussion and complexities of this portion of the mural.

*sacred as a tea thermos bottle*

The final micro-story addressed at Coast Salish is one of lived practice, in which an interviewee makes her own kind of travelling sacred space, made from constructive friction. In this example, the friction is the brewing of her unique tea and that she carries with her in her tea bottle, or thermos. Iqbal Kaur is of Punjabi-Cree descent and living on Coast Salish lands. She expressed to me some of her processes of sacredness, spirituality, and her negotiation with different religious and cultural spaces through childhood. Iqbal Kaur shares that she is Sikh and Punjabi from her dad's side, and on her maternal side she is Cree from Saskatchewan belonging to Lac La Rong First Nation. She prefers to refer to herself as First Nations, instead of Indigenous, as a way to recognize and respect Coast Salish peoples as the caretakers of the land where she now lives as a guest. Her modes of identification and subjectivity, however, comes in waves as she explains to me. Having grown up mostly Punjabi, while attending churches and gurdwaras, she shares that her First Nations roots and re-learning manifested in her adulthood. A practice that she has ingeniously made her own in this process involves taking the quotidian art of drinking *cha* from her Punjabi and Sikh side, and bringing it "over to [her] First Nation's side". This included putting her four sacred medicines – sage, sweetgrass, cedar and a bit of tobacco – into her tea. Iqbal Kaur notes that her practice now is "using tea as a sort of method of healing".

**Amardeep Kaur:** Ok, in terms of Cree Nation, what are the spirituality that comes into play for you? It doesn't have to be places of worship.

**Iqbal Kaur:** We smudge a lot. So we have our – all across Canada a lot of First Nations have adopted these four sacred medicines, as part of their culture – sage, sweetgrass, cedar and tobacco. So something we do is we get a shell, or something we can put it in, and we burn it. And we sort of cleanse ourselves, so we start by washing our hands in the smoke, and putting it over it, over our hair, over our eyes, over our nose. A couple of times, when I felt really down, or had a lot of anxiety, I had a friend in a totally different province and they will smudge south or smudge west as a symbolic gesture, so that it travels across communities.

**Amardeep Kaur:** So it has a healing effect, or support, caring. And this is part of your life, smudging.

**Iqbal Kaur:** Yeah, I do it quite often.

**Amardeep Kaur:** By often, as in weekly or monthly?

**Iqbal Kaur:** A couple of times a month.

**Amardeep Kaur:** And is your dad involved with it, or other people in your family?



**Iqbal Kaur:** Not so much. When I was growing up, there was one or two other First Nations kids in my high school. So I didn't really feel like going outside to do. But one thing I thought of is that I started putting sweetgrass and cedar, sage, and sometimes a little bit of tobacco, into a tea bag, and carry my sacred medicines with me in a bottle like that, where nobody can really see, but it is really safe space. Coz I used to see my grandma drinking *cha* all the time, and that was her ritual every couple of, like three times a day, and I was like, 'Oh, that really calms her down'. So I kind of copied her. I started using tea as a sort of method of healing, and I got that from my Sikh side, and I brought it over to my First Nation's side.

In summary, artists and city inhabitants are re-imagining Vancouver landscape through generating new waves of diasporic and indigenous art and cultural tools, as well as quotidian practices. Place-making through murals, un-naming and re-naming speaks to how Sikhs and First Nations are involved in the creative and historical spaces of the city Vancouver and its greater for a different kind of urban politics of relation. The community mapping work of Nameless Collective, through their podcast and walking tours, provide the relational topologies of Vancouver through Punjabi, Sikh, and South Asian lens. Quotidian practices, such as the art of tea, moreover, capture the process of healing through one's own sacred safe space – a tea thermos bottle. Next, I analyze and bring into perspective the work of Toronto Sikh Retreat in how they re-map and re-imagine their cities. And I discuss a one of its kind art project *IN5 Experium* that opens in Brampton.

### **IN5 Experium: The Golden Temple**

During Sikh Heritage Month in April 2019, a deeply immersive, high-tech multimedia, and experiential art project titled *IN5 Experium: The Golden Temple* was launched in Brampton. The sensorium event was open for two months where participants could immerse themselves in imagining what experiencing Darbar Sahib of Amritsar may look like, feel like, and learn about Sikh geography and history and its imagination. The sensorium was put together by a company PDA HaB Media and Trade Fairs Pvt Ltd, which is headquartered in Bangalore India, and is an industry leader in trade shows and fairs. Sikh Research Institute (SikhRI) curated the exhibit and developed the content with the following description:

Immerse into a never-before, enveloping and enlightening experiential journey into the history and beliefs of Sikhi – one of the world's youngest religions – and its consummate soul: Harmandir Sahib (The Golden Temple), Amritsar. (IN5 Experium 2019a, n.p.)

The immersive sensorium made use of 30,000 square feet of exhibition space, 42 projectors, and motion sensor and smart touchscreen walls to create a live user experience (IN5 Experium 2019a). Digital videos on loop projected the night and day of the Darbar Sahib complex along with richly designed multimedia graphics such as inter-galactic cosmos in harmony, lotus flowers, oceanic waters, all illuminating the sensorium. The high-tech exhibit perhaps sheds some light on the place of performative narrative of songs and poetry in a world dominated by hyper-visibility. Chapter 3 Historical Context had elucidated one of Vancouver's harbourfront public space placemaking – *Welcome to the Land of Light* by artist Henry Tsang (1997) – which made use of fibre optics and a Chinook poem to juxtapose the knowledge of the storytelling realm with that of high-speed data of the information age, and hope for its collaborative possibility. The *Welcome to the Land of Light* art production was juxtaposed against Vancouver's skyline and the condominium boom that emerged from Asian migrants, particularly from Hong Kong. *Welcome to the Land of Light* captures the worlding of cities – Hong Kong and Vancouver – with its public space placemaking experiments and the inter-referencing of that cultural production, which later brought it back to Asia through Dubai (Lowry and McCann 2011; Jim 2014). In a similar vein, *IN5 Experium: The Golden Temple* is an art project by SikhRI that seeks to fuse the storytelling realm via the songs and poetry of the Sikh tradition, with the space of hyper-visibility, and the possibility for its epistemic collaboration. That is, the epistemic collaboration is made possible in the sensorium between story and history, itinerary and map, poetics and science, and ineffability and representation.

In this experimentation, the sensorium was set up to move participants through the exhibit space with a movement-oriented concept embedded in itinerary and topological storytelling. Upon its entry, participants are invited to experience *IkOankar* as the unity of the cosmic universe, and imagine to the beyond that is unobservable. Following this, an exposition of *sikhi's* opening poem *Mul Mantra* is provided, where an audio accompanies the *Mul Mantra* and a widescreen display projects the inter-play of the cosmic unity. *When I walked into the sensorium in Brampton, I felt as if I had walked into the Space Museum of Hong Kong, only now that it was a Sikh space museum.* In other words, through the cosmic interplay, the project blurs the space of religion and the space of science, and opens up a communicative frequency where the two may talk to each other again. In this regard, a theorization offered by Bruno Latour helps

to grasp knowledge as whole again. Latour, in *We Have Never Been Modern*, critiques the segmentation of academic disciplines: “By all means, they seem to say, let us not mix up knowledge, interest, justice and power. Let us not mix up heaven and earth, the global stage and the local scene, the human and the nonhuman” (Latour 1993, 3). In such a knowledge segmentation, scientists would take on nature and things. Human relationships or society are given to the social sciences. And humanities take care of art and discourse. However, such a modernity project for Latour has failed. Hybrids are, in fact, everywhere.

The sensorium is a pivotal example of an under circuit of worlding, and one that blurs science and religion, subject and object, this world or that world, to augment its own hybrid worlds. Several worlding orientations can be conceptualized in this art project: worlding cities, worlding food, worlding diaspora, and worlding cosmos. In terms of cities, what is being worlded here is an ambrosial city Amritsar in the Global South, and its significance to the Sikh imagination that is topologically networked to a suburban city Brampton in Greater Toronto. The city’s aspirations to belong to the world and become the world, likewise, is made manifest through Darbar Sahib, its symbolic imagination. Furthermore, the centrality given to Darbar Sahib in Amritsar is made manifest among many things by what it accomplishes in terms of food, that is the scale of *langar* practiced there. Darbar Sahib professes itself as the world’s largest communal kitchen, serving free meals daily to visitors, estimated to be 100,000 (Jutla 2016, 269), as both the city and faith positions itself in the world economy from which it is otherwise peripheral. Moreover, this worlding of Amritsar and Brampton is made possible through Sikh diaspora and through Bangalore which acts as a hub in the information technology craft. In a media release, Pradeep Deviah, the CEO of the Bangalore industry PDA HaB Media and Trade Fairs Pvt Ltd, explains that the scale of Sikh diaspora was a factor in how the company selected the site to be reproduced into its contemporary multimedia art model. He continues:

We didn’t want to take a religious subject. But when you are trying this for the first time, we wanted a stepping stone, or an advantage. So we said that because of the large diaspora of Sikhs, there would be a lot of interest, just by virtue of that. That’s why we chose the Golden Temple. (Deviah in Sikh Research Institute 2019, n.p.)

The words capture the competitive and corporate edge that is at stake in the global art-making processes. Notably, the project was launched in Brampton, that is in the city that has made possible Sikh Heritage Month in Ontario, which now travels across Canada. The sensorium also

plans to tour other cities: Vancouver, Calgary, New York, and Fresno. The touring cities capture the major hubs of Sikh diaspora in North America.

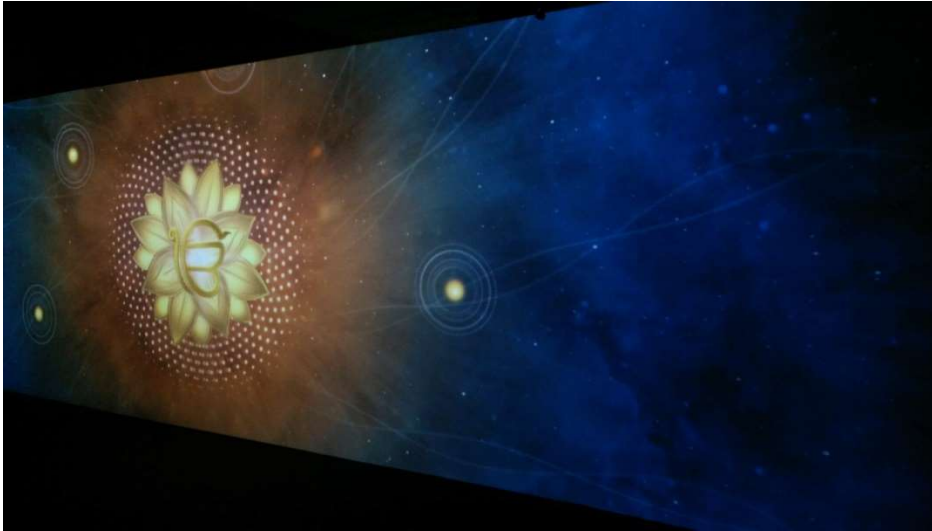
Darbar Sahib is a complex place, one where religious elite, diaspora, corporate entities, artists, politicians, state, urban developers, scholars, and diplomats are increasingly wrestling for its manipulation, capitalization, and image. Its visual appeal and tourist attraction is manifested and appropriated in globalized cultural production as evident in mainstream Mumbai-based cinema, Bollywood (for e.g. *Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi* 2008). Corporate and neoliberal interests have recently emerged in tapping into its tourism market. In 2011, Amritsar and Darbar Sahib was a proposed site for a Personal Rapid Transport (PRT) system. The capital-intensive transportation project was marketed as the first of its kind and size for Asia and the world, that would bring into the Punjabi and Sikh border city the technological development behind the pods of London Heathrow Airport (Ultra Global 2011). The developers behind the proposed project, Ultra and Fairwood, were competing at the time with Suncheon PRT in South Korea and Masdar City in United Arab Emirates, to bring Asia its new pod-based transportation experiment. For the Amritsar PRT, battery-powered driverless pods would have operated on demand along an above ground link to service Darbar Sahib, Amritsar's railway station, and the city's bus terminus. The proposed urban transport infrastructure project was planned to launch in 2014 (Ultra Global 2011), but did not materialize and was shelved.<sup>83</sup> Nonetheless, the proposed transport infrastructure speaks to Amritsar's newer worlding circuits. Specifically, it highlights the turn to market-oriented tourism and urban development players that are ready to tap into religion-themed mobilities. Given that Darbar Sahib caters to 500,000 people on significant festivals, it is on the radar for transportation engineers and urban developers who are looking for numbers on the map and transport models to win quick contracts and to capitalize on. However, actual lived life, existing market, livelihood of shopowners and ordinary transport providers, and the existing city form are not carefully considered in such capital-intensive plans. For the Punjabi and Sikh

---

<sup>83</sup> The *Hindustan Times* (Parshad 2014) reported that the PRT system was shelved because of government delays and unfeasibility due to the negative impact on markets and for shopkeepers who would be displaced. In 2019, another major transportation project emerged for the city of Amritsar that seeks to build a hyperloop corridor between Amritsar and Chandigarh and Delhi. The hyperloop corridor concept consists of a built tube with an aerodynamically designed capsule that is lifted inside the tube using magnetism. The capsule or pod can then travel at super speed, carrying passengers or goods. The US-based corporation Virgin Hyperloop One and the Government of Punjab signed a memorandum of understanding to conduct a pre-feasibility study for such an Amritsar-Chandigarh hyperloop corridor (Punjab Government 2019).

border city Amritsar, worlding by way of Darbar Sahib is perhaps its only path for recognition as it is otherwise non-existent in the world city and global city tiers of formal capital flows.

Figure 12 IkOankar, at IN5 Experium, 2019



To return to the art model of Darbar Sahib launched in Brampton, *IN5 Experium* produces a narrative of worlding cities through temples and all its entities. But, beyond the urban and the earthly dimensions, the sensorium is re-orienting a worlding of the interstellar worlds and their imaginaries through post-anthropocentric commentaries. This kind of cosmic worlding is being shaped by the Sikh art project through its *IkOankar* commentaries. In invoking *IkOankar*, and interpreting it in today's context of planetary crisis of climate change and the Anthropocene, the curators offer perspectives of a cosmopolitan humanism and relation. *IkOankar* is a *mantra* offered by Guru Nanak, by which animate and inanimate, human and non-human are presented not as hierarchies, but through the relation of Oneness. In the sensorium, *IkOankar* is translated as "One Divine", and its commentary evokes a post-anthropocentric context, as it places emphasis on immanence, and a light that permeates all beings human or otherwise and all entities. In the early colonial days, *IkOankar* was translated as "One God", as a transcendental entity often personified as masculine by colonial orientalists and native religious elites (Mandair 2009, 216-217). To counter the Christianized, theological, and androcentric translations, Sikh educators are now turning to its sound-based composition that moves away from representations of God identity. Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh (1993, 24), for instance, breaks down *IkOankar* as the mathematical 1 (*ik*), the alphabetical first (*oan*), and the geometric arch (*kar*) which denotes an infinite continuity – without beginning or end.

Further, in an epistemological break from modern scalar thought, the learning tools of the sensorium moved users through the distant but quotidian cities, towns, and rivers that were networked by the footpaths and *sojourn* of Sikhs and the Gurus. Following the exposition of *Mul Mantra*, participants are ushered into networked maps of the five symbols characteristic of *sikhi*: five objects, five beloved, five rivers, five thrones, and five forts. Objects are the five artefacts that Khalsa pledgers take on. The beloved are the five male fellows from different regions of the subcontinent and different domains of social-caste stratifications who first pledged into Guru Gobind Singh’s inauguration of Khalsa. Notably absent from the learning maps is the modern cartography of India and Pakistan. Instead, the maps voice the five tributary rivers of an undivided Punjab – Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Satlej, and Beas which flow from the Himalayas through Punjab into the Indus. The audio accompaniment of the tour, also available through a mobile app, provides insights to what the waters carry in the Sikh geographical imagination:

Panj Ab or the Five Waters, are the five rivers that flow through Panjab. Water, the source of life is also the fountainhead of civilizations. It occupies a special place in the Sikh psyche, because of its peculiar characteristics and infinity to life. It also serves an important metaphor in the Sikh canon. The *bani* of *Asa Ki Var* [Song of Hope] cites water as the very foundation of life. Emulating the qualities of water, as a Sikh is encouraged, to become an exemplar of Guru Wisdom, in the process of transforming into a divine-like personality. Becoming like water in a river is often cited as a way of becoming a Guru-oriented Sikh. Presence of a *sarovar*, or pool, in *gurdwaras* is a testimony to the centrality of water in the Sikh tradition.

(IN5 Experium 2019b, “Panj Ab”)

Figure 13 Punjab and Chenab, at IN5 Experium, 2019



Alongside the sublimity of water, the sensorium has taken animation and imagery of inter-galactic cosmos and spun it with Sikh tones. The far, the distant, is presented to be experienced through the everyday *mantra*, *IkOankar*. The abstraction of space is complemented with the lived, everyday geography of the Gurus and Sikhs. The sensorium weaves the complexities of Sikh place-making practices. Astrophysics with its quantum-like contradictions are addressed through a Sikh interplay of *nirgun*, *sargun* (no form, all form), and of being here, there and everywhere. It mobilizes on the heightening of senses to move past the limits of understanding this world based merely on the visible. Moreover, it uses the technology of hyper-visibility to evoke the ineffable and elusive. Paradoxes emerge: the turn to hyper-visibility to resolve the visual privileging of the sense of sight of our age. But the hyper-visibility is complemented by itinerary and a return to the auditory tones – using the musical strings and poetic iterations of *gurbani*. Along with poems by the Gurus, the works of the mystic poets in Guru Granth Sahib were also featured. Among the iterations of the mystic poets offered in the sensorium was Shaikh Farid’s – a Sufi mystic of Chishti order, Bhagat Ravidas’s *Begampura*, and Bhagat Kabir’s poem,

To further make sense of this sensorium, it would be useful to return to the idea of *Saram Khand* (Realm of Aesthetics) first introduced in Chapter 4 which Guru Nanak conceptualizes in his foundational poem *Japji Sahib* (see *Panj Khand* in Appendix A). *Saram Khand* is the realm of beauty and aesthetics, through which one is being ushered to the indescribable, of feeling through our senses.<sup>84</sup> This is “where beautification of human faculties and sensibilities take place” (Pashaura Singh 2014b, 232). Art in its most sensuous is evoked. N.G.K. Singh conceptualizes Sikh aesthetic practice as the heightening of senses; that is, arising the senses to a state of ecstatic bliss. As she elucidates,

A heightened sensuous experience is a requirement of metaphysical knowledge. Consequently, the human body is important. The physical is celebrated. Most often, however, religion and esthetics are pitted against each other. Whereas religion is deemed a ‘spiritual’ enterprise, the esthetic is denigrated as something ‘merely’ sensuous.  
(N.G.K Singh 2011, 74)

---

<sup>84</sup> It is translated as ‘beauty’ or ‘art’ by Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh (1993, 86; 2011, 75), and as ‘effort’ by Pashaura Singh (2014b, 232). See *Panj Khand* in Appendix A for description of all five realms.

The realm is closely intertwined with *Gyan Khand* – the Realm of Knowledge. *Saram Khand*, as an aesthetic realm with its power and poetics of performance nourishes the realm of knowledge (*Gyan Khand*). The role of senses in the grasp (or escape) of the elusive is a prominent one. In her chapter “Pedagogies of the Sacred”, Black feminist M. Jacqui Alexander likewise provokes the religiously sensuous, what she calls “the work of rewiring the senses” (2005, 337). Such a rewiring involves tuning to the intangible. To the wind and waters, to the One that walks within us, with us, and through us. It is through a sensuous awakening that Alexander (2005, 329) brings attention to the “process of becoming one with the Sacred”. Another parallel thinking comes from the humanistic geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (2009) who speaks of the ‘aesthetic sublime’, the place that merges into ‘placelessness’. The English word placelessness, however, does not appropriately capture the meaning Tuan may be seeking to convey. Another way of thinking of placelessness is through the Sikh notion of mergence, where the quality of separation and boundary dissolves, self and other is mitigated, I and you is fused. Such a state of ecstatic mergence is characterized as *anand* (bliss) and *sanjog-vijog* in Sikh poetics. Although different in some aspects, it is similarly captured in the Sufi idea of *fana*, or self-annihilation, and Buddhist notion of *nirvana*.

In the European tradition, the *more-than-representational* (also known as non-representational theory) elucidates some aspects of such an epistemological dimension (Lorimer 2005). The performative vocation and embodied knowledge in *more-than-representational* caters to this realm of knowledge and practice that cannot be reduced to a textualist narrative or representation alone. In Darbar Sahib, there is a prominence given to the itinerary – the walk around, the *ashnan* (bath), the poetic iterations, and the senses mesmerized by the temple afloat in the centre of the *sarovar*. The Realms *Saram* and *Gyan* are entangled with such an itinerary and they produce an experience which augment the role of senses and the experiential for knowledge. In this regard, the *IN5 Experium: The Golden Temple* place-making project is characteristic of an immersive experience of the touring type to connect with De Certeau’s (1984, 121) notion of ‘tour’ and ‘itinerary’ as opposed to the static nature of the ‘map’. In the *Practice of Everyday Life*, De Certeau engages with spatial stories, place, movement and the quotidian, returning the art of storytelling and doing to the ordinary inhabitants of a city. The map is characterized by a totalizing static representation of space, which has made use of the



everyday knowledge and itineraries of the people in its creation, but which then erased that know-how from the map's template. The itinerary, on the other hand, is characterized by footwork, logs, movements and stories. The itinerary is "a way of operating" (De Certeau 1984, 100). It captures the spatialized stories, the nuances of each iteration. The totalizing map, however, has comfortably privileged itself, while erasing the very itineraries and sidelining the storytellers. As De Certeau (1984, 121) says, "It remains alone on the stage. The tour describers have disappeared." Unlike the map of the planner and scientist, itineraries move through an invisible drift. They cannot be flattened onto the Euclidean axis or imprisoned into its panoptic visual gaze. Itineraries embody the realm that is intangible. They are like the wind. They are to be felt and experienced through a tacit practice. De Certeau's thinking aligns to the *more-than-representational* theory (Lorimer 2005), which address the epistemological value from doing and engaged experience as opposed to knowledge as representation – map, text, and visual art.

*IN5 Experium* in Brampton is a bold experiment in art and place-making, one that models itself on Amritsar's Darbar Sahib and seeks to capture the trace of its senses and itineraries. Next, I discuss the rather down-to-earth creativities as they emerge in community workshops of Sikhs in Greater Toronto.

### **Begampura: City Beyond Sorrow, Toronto Sikh Retreat**

Toronto Sikh Retreat is an annual four-day workshop in the winter that is held in Greater Toronto. It started in 2003 catering to youth and has since grown to all ages. Participants stay overnight at the location, Circle Square Ranch in Brantford, which Toronto Sikh Retreat rents for its duration. Circle Square Ranch is a Christian campsite that runs programming with children and youth. Toronto Sikh Retreat programs consist of tackling contemporary issues such as gender inequities and environmental concerns, learning to perform *kirtan* (devotional music) and *simran* (remembrance) with a musical instrument such as the harmonium, participatory *divans* (poetry session), making and distributing *prasad* (food offering, usually a sweet), doing *langar* seva, making social connections, practicing Punjabi, and exploring creative arts. Participants from all religious backgrounds and age groups can participate and get to learn *sikhi* and the world in a creative, engaging way and more inclusive ways than at a gurdwara. Toronto Sikh Retreat is an example of educational programs led by diasporic Sikhs and new Sikh

organizations to empower those often marginalized from leading significant *divan* services at a gurdwara and less represented in formal representations at a gurdwara – women, youth and children, sometimes non-Khalsa Sikhs, and less privileged class and caste groups. Other example of such programs is the Sidak leadership two-week program in summer that is run by Sikh Research Institute and has taken place in Mission, British Columbia. The emphasis of these educational programs is to learn by doing, and to make Guru Granth Sahib accessible. In these places such as the Toronto Sikh Retreat, a transient *gurdwara* is set up through the forming of a collective (*sangat*) and Guru Granth Sahib.

At the Toronto Sikh Retreat 2017, Sikh educator Kulvir Singh ran a workshop titled “Challenging the Darkness” and art therapist Rapinder Kaur led a *Begampura* art activity. A webinar version of this workshop has also been presented and made available to the general public through Sikh Research Institute (Kulvir Singh 2018). The analysis here is based on my participation at the 2017 Toronto Sikh Retreat and the webinar hosted on Sikh Research Institute website. “Challenging the Darkness” workshop focused on emerging global, urban and social issues, and addressing them through a *sikhi*-inspired framework. Many issues were highlighted across the globe featuring:

Middle East and Syria; Refugee Crisis; Climate Change; Food Insecurity; Habitat Loss; Water Access in Punjab; Political freedom; Political instability; Dictatorships; Far/Alt Right; Fake News; Global Inequality; Donald Trump; Globalization; Free Trade; Brexit; Indigenous Rights; Terrorism; Religious Extremism; Gender Inequality. (Kulvir Singh 2018, n.p.)

The list is quite prolific and not exhaustive. Such issues form the headline news stories of the decade. But what might a Sikh workshop have to offer to such issues? Part of the answer lies in identifying the deep root causes of these challenges. Among the contributing factors, two forces specifically were highlighted by the educator through a Sikh lens: the ego and a shattered *miri-piri* (Kulvir Singh 2018). First, the power of the ego has produced far-right leaders such as Donald Trump and Narendra Modi of USA and India respectively. In the Sikh context, the ego (*haumai*) is often conceptualized as the separated ‘I’. *Sikhi* is not alone in offering such a conceptualization. For instance, Eastern philosophies such as Ch’an Buddhist teachings speak of mitigating the ego and dissolving the separated self. Radical academic scholars have also conceptualized the problematic of the separated ‘I’, that is the monohumanist ‘I’ in Man. To return to and weave in the theoretical work of Sylvia Wynter (2003), one can connect the

separated 'I' to Man1 and Man2, where an image of the civilized world is built on that figure of the thinking Darwinian Man. In the second contributing factor highlighted by the educator Kulvir Singh, a separation of *miri* (material) and *piri* (spiritual) has taken shape. A shattered *miri-piri* explains the material production of space set on capitalist plunder, while the religious elite maintain their power geometries (for instance, gender, class, and caste hierarchies).

At the Toronto Sikh Retreat, to develop a Sikh response to the pressing challenges, participants subsequently worked in groups to read, translate, and interpret a poem, *Begampura* (see beginning of this chapter). *Begampura* is a poem by Ravidas, and when decapitalized – *begampura* – it is operationalized as a concept. Similar to the *miri-piri* political framework, *begampura* is often used as a guiding tool for building a place or state on Sikh egalitarian principles (Tatla 2008, 26). As a term, *begampura* can be broken down into three parts: *be* (without), *gam* (sorrow, pain, sadness), and *pura* (place or city). While this is commonly how it is conceptualized, another etymology also exists. *Begam* is a term for women used in Urdu and Turkish, traditionally used for women of high rank or nobility in the Islamic world. The poem's visionary, Ravidas, is a leading figure of north Indian bhakti movement and whose works are revered by Sikhs, Ravidassia, and Dalits. Ravidassia revere him as Guru Ravidas, while Sikhs of Khalsa Panth lineage revere him as a leading *bhagat* (mystic or *sant*) of the bhakti movement. Ravidas was a leatherworker, a caste-stratified occupation labelled as '*chamar*' (shoe-maker or leather crafter). The poetic and political works of Ravidas are scripted in Guru Granth Sahib, the oldest record, with his works followed strongly by co-paths Sikhs, Ravidassia, and Ad Dharmis. *Begampura* takes its primary impetus to imagine a place built on fair, socialist values, with a self-governing or autonomous state as opposed to a central state so that workers producing goods are not unfairly paying tax to a centralized state or capital. Kulvir Singh (2018) describes *Begampura* as a political manifesto by Ravidas, which imagines an egalitarian ideal and a place where there are no second or third-class citizens. In this regard, the poem challenges Brahmanical caste hierarchies of the time, which are also gendered, and furthermore offers an empowerment tool to tackle contemporary hierarchies in Punjab and Sikh spaces. Ronki Ram, for example, expresses what Ravidas's radical poetry has meant particularly for those involved in the menial labour:

His struggle against the system of untouchability was anchored in an enlightened vision of an egalitarian social order of *Begumpura* (World without Sorrows) and forcefully

expressed through the medium of radical poetry that won him a special place in the minds of dalit masses. (Ram 2017, 63-64)

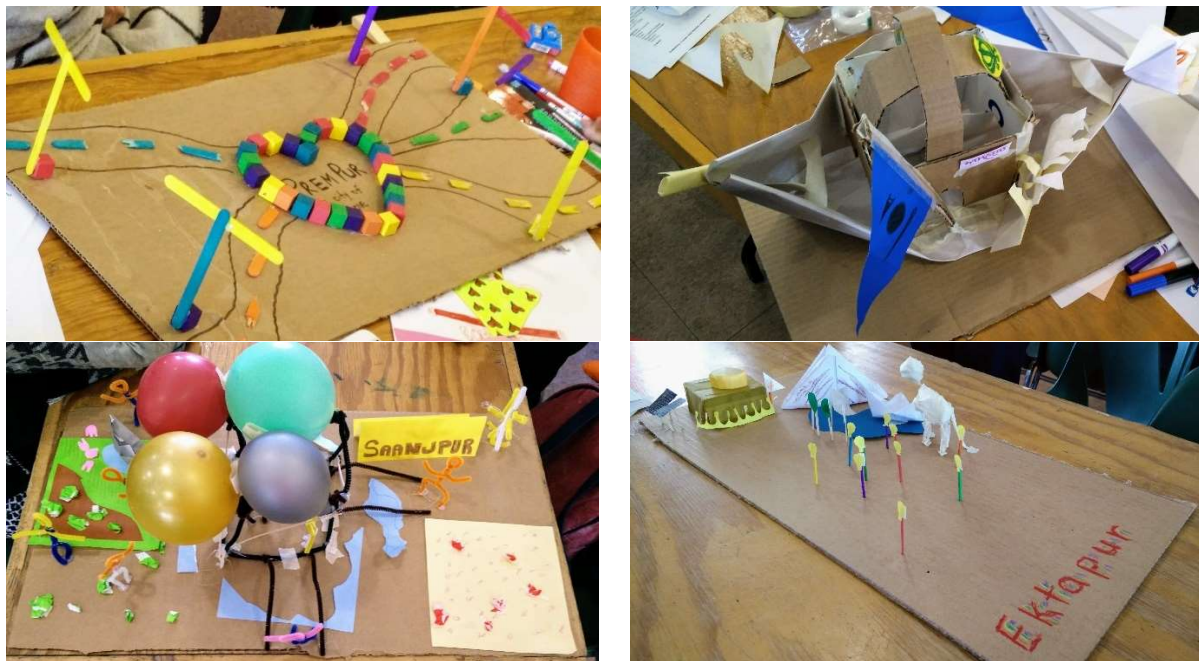
In this light, Ravidas's poem has become a conceptual frame and instrumental mobilizer against caste-based hierarchies and related socio-spatial injustices such as gender and class inequities. Moreover, it offers commentaries on the exploitations of common labourers by a centralized state. It is prominently taken on as a framework by Ravidassia to speak on caste-stratified discriminations which prevail in the subcontinent as well as in Punjabi and Sikh contexts (Ram 2017). Along with Ravidassia social justice organizing, it has been used by Sikhs along similar lines. The Jakara Movement (2012), an organization growing out of the California-based diasporic Sikhs, mobilized *begampura* into one of its conference *Lalkaar 2012 – Building Begampura: Confronting Caste*. Further to ameliorating material conditions, Jasleen Kaur (2019) has conceptualized on a mental *begampura*, of improving our daily lives of world-making through *begampura*. *Begampura* is radical poetry and deploys intersectionality to empower labourers, women, and lower-caste groups.

Building on the cultural and political imaginary of *begampura*, art therapist Rapinder Kaur subsequently led a city-building activity using expressive arts to envision one's *begampura*, that is, a possible utopian city. The activity began with participants thinking of their own superpowers, or rather, unique personality traits that each person brings to a collective. Next, Rapinder Kaur guided the workshop to build their town or city incorporating their superpowers. As Toronto Sikh Retreat is currently made of all ages, such multi-generational activities draw in the creative potential for children, youth, families, and elders to work together. The facilitator then gave different tables different and varied art-making supplies such as scissors, tape, glue, ice-cream sticks, balloons, paper etc. This was to challenge tables to think creatively and to work towards overcoming barriers despite having different resources. The technique was used to mimic real material conditions and varying resources of villages, cities, and nations. *On the table that I was at, we got different coloured origami paper.*

Some of the utopian cities conceptualized and crafted by the different tables are: *Ektapur* (City of Oneness), *Saanjpur* (City of Togetherness), *Prempur* (City of Love), *Amanpur* (City of

Peace) (see figure 14). The imagined city *Prempur* has a center or town square in the form of a heart to symbolize the love felt. The city's paths are mapped through five streets that go through the heart-square centre. Each imagined street is characterized by the personality of the city's crafters. For instance, one of the streets is named Suhagan Road (bride). By crafting five streets, the participants aligned their city's imaginary with the paths of the *panj pyare* (five cherished ones) who came from different regions and social stratifications to congregate at Anandpur Sahib in Punjab.<sup>85</sup> In this, the crafters literally imagine their city as *begampura* where there are no second or third classes, no othered castes. Moreover, *Prempur*, City of Love, brings out the overlap of different paths, and finding a common ground, while speaking to the feminine allegories such as *suhagan* (bride) used in mapping one's non-material relationships. In other words, we (humans) are all brides longing for union and mergeance with *IkOankar*.

Figure 14 Begampuras, at Toronto Sikh Retreat 2017. From top left to bottom right: Prempur, Amanpur, Saanjpur, Ektapur.



<sup>85</sup> The *panj pyare* (five cherished ones) who were the first to join Khalsa Panth drank from the same bowl even though they were from different social stratification (or caste) backgrounds. Moreover, they were from different regions of the subcontinent. The Khalsa founding, thus, is a significant event in Sikh history that characterizes its anti-caste foundation. In addition, *gurdwara*, langar, water projects (such as step-wells and *sarovars* for all including women and lower-caste people to access), and poetic and musical works contributed to the mitigation of social stratification. The ideals and efforts, however, have failed to fully transform in practice; casteism and social stratification remain pressing issues in Punjabi and Sikh society.

Imagined gurdwaras, in several of these *begampuras*, turned into multi-religious or inter-faith centres rather than a Sikh-specific place. *Ektapura* (City of One) blended landscapes of ocean, mountain and forest with an environmentally-conscious design. “This is Vahiguru’s *Begampura*”, one group invoked. The group that crafted *Amanpur* – City of Peace set up a floating city on water by making use of a boat design to further capitalize on the significance of water and ocean in the Sikh imagination. From dragons, to alternative energy, the utopian cities fused Sikh political principles with contemporary issues, notably climate change and the planetary crises. Dragon mythology used is an unusual one but offers perspective of the influence of globalized popular culture iconography and the diaspora space in Sikh imaginaries.

While such arts and crafts mappings and imagined cities may at first seem too utopian, irrelevant to the world of city development and urban politics, it is important to note that real projects, movements, and bottom-up social planning in cities come out of these practices. George Dei (2008, 71) emphasizes that “spirituality should be central to the way we interpret and explain human development and social action”. In terms of political movements, Darshan S. Tatla (2008, 26) who has explored development concepts of wealth and poverty through the lens of Sikhism suggests that the revolutionary socialism of the Ghadar Party in the early twentieth century has in its inspiration some of the ideals of *miri-piri* and *begampura*. With social planning, Seva Food Bank was one such concept plan that emerged from the Toronto Sikh Retreat of 2009 and was implemented in Mississauga. According to the organization’s website, the food bank opened its door in 2010 and now boasts two sites in Mississauga serving an estimate 2000 individuals and 80,000 pounds of food per month (Seva Food Bank 2015). The community initiative is run by the labour of 5 full-time staff members, a dedicated board, and a large network of volunteers. The formal concretization of the initiative comes out of the principal practices of *langar* in the gurdwara. Seva Food Banks draws its inspiration from *sikhi*, highlighting principles of *sarbat da bhalla* (wellness for all), *seva* (service) and *chardi kala* (Seva Food Bank n.d., “Our Beliefs”). *Chardi kala* is an impossible concept to translate, but speaks to a sense of rising political consciousness, spirit, and positive energy and optimism among others.<sup>86</sup> Place-making in its various forms and principles are always linked to certain imaginaries of space, cosmology, and

---

<sup>86</sup> Kamala Elizabeth Nayar (2012, 272) states that it can be deciphered as “an important Punjabi expression that extols fortitude in the face of fear or pain, [and] can be translated as ‘resilience’, as it connotes having or maintaining a positive attitude towards life and the future.”

relationships of self and other. Seva Food Bank draws its inspiration from the utopian potential of *langar* and that is infused with values for a *begampura*. John Friedman, an urban planner, writes on the significance of such utopian dreams. As he frames it,

Utopian thinking, the capacity to imagine a future that is radically different from what we know to be the prevailing order of things, is a way of breaking through the barriers of convention into a sphere of the imagination where many things beyond our everyday experience become possible . . . . We need a constructive imagination to help us create the fictive worlds of our dreams, of dreams worth struggling for. (Friedman 2002, 103)

As part of utopian thinking, moreover, Friedman suggests that ‘constructive vision’ is inseparable from ‘critique’ (Friedman 2002, 104).

Next, the concluding discussion draws on visions of *begampura*, along with the insights of the micro-stories and itinerant maps delineated in the chapter and puts it in conversation with radical urban politics.

### **City-imagining: A Discussion on *Begampura* and Right to the City**

Associating utopias, dystopias, and heterotopias with cities has been a long-standing fascination, and not without flaws. Indeed, from the Greek polis, to Ravidas’s *begampura*, to the contemporary rubric of multicultural or cosmopolitan cities, cities speak to utopian, dystopian and heterotopian qualities at the same time. However, the characteristics of the rural and the rural migrant often get missed in such advances of cities, utopian thinking, and cosmopolitanism. Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan (2003) have attended to such a gap by analyzing the circular migrant in their conceptualization of a rural cosmopolitanism in India. Similarly, Anjali Gera Roy (2018) describes Sikh cosmopolitanism as rural and pastoral. Thus, it is important to recognize the relationality of the migrant, the city, and rural space that is entangled and re-configured in the work of imagining cities. This chapter calls for a constructive vision – a *begampura*, that captures elements of a utopia, a *right to the city*, a migrant, and a cosmopolis yet to come. The utopia *begampura* is complemented by actually-existing heterotopias. Such spaces are the subaltern counter-publics and cosmopolitanisms in-grained in practices of *gurduara* as path-making, the horizontal and sideways spatiality of *nagar kirtans*, as well as the artistic place-making, imaginaries and relational topologies delineated in this chapter. The circular migrant, or the rural migrant, feature in this *begampura* as well, for example Harnam

Kaur whose travels from Peshawar to Coast Salish is intimately depicted in Keerat Kaur's art piece *Journey* (Keerat Kaur 2018).

Urban planning, given its role in city-building and place-making is, hence, of immense significance. Leonie Sandercock's (2003) work on the cosmopolis brings out the utopian thinking back to urban planning. Sandercock critiques city planning's modernist high grounds and shifts gear to a practice of engaging difference. Using 'mongrel city' as a metaphor in her postmodern approach to urbanity, culture and planning, Sandercock (2003, 2) speaks to her desire that could "*practice utopia*, a city politics of possibility and of hope". In this regard, she outlines a planning imagination for the 21st century that she words as "utopian and critical, creative and audacious" (Sandercock 2003, 2). While her intentions are fruitful in challenging rationalist, modernist and colonialist planning, Sandercock's approach as multicultural and postmodern has its flaws and limits. Part of this gap in her work stems from a lack of deep engagement with the practices of othered cultures to fully theorize their histories, epistemologies, and contexts. As a result, her approach tends to produce a romanticized postmodern canvas of celebrating cultures and otherness. The framework she charts, nevertheless, captures some central features of what radical planning and imagination can entail. She delineates,

There are different kinds of appropriate knowledge in planning. Local communities have experiential, grounded, contextual, intuitive knowledges, manifested through speech, songs, stories, and various usual forms (from cartoons to graffiti, from bark paintings to videos). Planners have to learn to access these *other ways of knowing*. (Sandercock 2003, 34)

*Begampura* is one such constructive vision and cosmopolis for a city. The cities, towns, *sarovars* and gurdwaras built that Chapter 4 Gurduara as Path-making detailed are the spatial practices entangled with Sikh utopian thinking. Sikh utopian thought is also charged with the political. The planning of Sikh townships, temples and construction of water projects undertaken by Sikh Gurus as outlined in Chapter 4 was a highly political endeavour. Guru Amardas began the project of Baoli Sahib in Goindval when access to river water was blocked by representatives of the state. Wells at gurdwaras ensured adequate water for visitors during large congregations (I. J. Singh 2017, 18). These water projects were urban public works designed with inclusivity in mind. *Langar*, eating collectively, was aimed at dissolving boundaries of people of different faiths, of us and them, and of segregated food practices that are ingrained in classist and casteist supremacies. In addition to city-building infrastructure, poetics and music were the centrepieces



of development. For instance, Guru Gobind Singh had 52 poets at his court at Anandpur Sahib. *Begampura* is a utopian place. It does not exist. But gurdwaras and nagar kirtans are actually existing practices and they shape the ethos for a *begampura* yet to come.

Furthermore, *begampura* (City Beyond Sorrow) is a Sikh and Ravidassia concept that can be put in conversation with the *right to the city* concept of Henri Lefebvre. In *Writing On Cities*, Lefebvre (1996) reflects on capitalism's dispossession of the rural peasantry by the urban bourgeoisie. Lefebvre shares a contradiction in this urban-capitalist exploitation of nature. Upwardly-mobile city dwellers seek pleasure, leisure and rejoice in the countryside. Eventhough they live in the city, they are able to access such nature places through their wealth and status. Lefebvre (1996, 157) calls this cultural and capitalist trend 'right to nature'. On the other hand, rural inhabitants get dispossessed by the urban elite, but are unable to conversely claim a proper place to or right in a city. Juxtaposed against the elite class's 'right to nature', *right to the city* is Lefebvre's visionary and revolutionary workers' tale of the dispossessed. *Right to the city* calls for a radical transformation that can bring to bloom in urban society, which Lefebvre suggests as a "renewed *right to urban life*" (1996, 158, italics in original). In emerging urban studies, *right to the city* notion has taken on significant currency, "something of a catchphrase" (Purcell 2002, 99), and is woven into urban planning vocabulary of new urbanism and communicative planning (Dikeç and Gilbert 2002). Lefebvre's limitation, however, to the working-class and its usage as a buzzword has posed a challenge for theorists seeking to expand *right to the city* beyond its workers plight.

While David Harvey (2003) retains the Lefebvrian term in its economic and class-only analysis, scholars such as Mark Purcell (2002) provide nuances for *right to the city*. Purcell argues that Lefebvre conflates the working-class with the inhabitants of the city. Indeed, in Lefebvre's radical vision: "Only the working class can become the agent, the social carrier or support of this realization" (Lefebvre 1996, 159). In re-working Lefebvre's notion, hence, Purcell (2002, 106) calls for "urban politics of the inhabitant", which can overcome the limits of economic container, and address the scale and dilemma of liberal citizenship normalized to a nation-state. By rescaling to the urban as Purcell argues, *right to the city* can work as an alternative means of political membership that addresses the flaws, limits, and hegemonies of the national. Goonewardena and Kipfer (2005) present another thinking where *right to the city* is the

differential and radical politics of difference. Merrifield (2011, 480) makes an ontological challenge to *right to the city*, problematizing and re-conceptualizing it as ‘politics of encounter’.

*Right to the city* has many forms and faces; where most scholars seem to agree is that *right to the city* is a radical idea, and not a reformist one. It involves a complete re-structuring for life in the city or in the urban society. Nevertheless, what that entails on the ground and in everyday practice is fraught with academic and ideological tensions. Thus, the question may very well be: where can we locate actually existing *right to the city*?

One approach that can address the limits and gaps in Lefebvre’s *right to the city* notion is to not take the Lefebvrian tale as all-encompassing strategy. As Purcell (2002, 99) puts it, “Right to the city is not a panacea. It must be seen not as a completed solution to current problems, but as an opening to a new urban politics”. By expanding the notion, *right to the city* can work as a conduit of bringing into perspective a network of co-related, and often independent constructive radical visions, utopian thought, and toolkits from varied urban environments and cultures. For instance, Cheryl Teelucksingh and Jeffrey Masuda (2014) have offered contribution on the parallels between *right to the city* and procedural rights in environmental justice, a movement that emerged in the context of a racialized urban political economy of United States. Likewise, *right to the city* offers an urgent toolkit for the possibility of transit equity in Toronto, particularly for racialized women and immigrants (Kaur and Teelucksingh 2015). In the context of this dissertation’s study, *begampura* is one such radical claim from a Sikh perspective that have been the guiding principles behind actually existing Sikh city-building: *langar*, gurdwaras and *nagar kirtans*. Gurdwaras and *nagar kirtans*, though flawed in their ‘power geometries’ (Massey 1994) and structural inequalities, are a striking testimony for a vision of a *begampura*. As Sikh political marches launched in Vancouver from within the unjust and racialized terrains of a white Canada, *nagar kirtan* was a political claim to *right to the city*. Why did the gurdwaras of the Pacific cities revolt against the British Empire? What compelled the racialized othered Sikhs to build gurdwaras and *langar halls* in such magnitude like their lives depended on it? It was to believe in the possibility of a real *begampura*, to prepare for a city yet to come, to cultivate their effort for a collective right to the city.

In summary, the focus of this chapter has been on the fugitive place-making, which move in and out of space through an itinerant trace, that which is not visible on the map. Borrowing

from De Certeau's thinking on map and itineraries, the chapter has mobilized thinking with community maps that I shall now coin here as itinerant maps. Itinerant maps bring into perspective the trace of itineraries and spatialized stories in their various forms back onto the map. Additionally, itinerant maps in the making of diasporic imaginaries take their cue from relational topologies. By relational topologies, scale, absolute location, and territory that are foundational to topographies become less important (Cresswell 2013, 218; Murdoch 2006, 17). Instead, relational topologies draw attention to the relationality of things, a sense of place practiced with processes of becoming and through the connectedness of things, people and locales. In relational topologies, nodes become more important, rather than territorial space and its scale – local, provincial, national, global. In this regard, there is a shift away from space as container – closed, representative, and discrete – to a notion of space that is fluid and made manifest by the connections and networks. Furthermore, itinerant maps operationalize the *more-than-representational* and an experiential aspect of knowledge and resistance. The walking tours and podcast episodes of the Nameless Collective speak to this trace of itineraries in their community-based re-mapping of Vancouver. The gurdwara maps of the Sikh youth in Hong Kong speak to the process of navigating, moving in and out and through, and the making of the space, through footsteps, path-making, and play. The mural piece *Taike-Sye'yə* depicts the entanglements of journeys and the friction between diasporas and the indigenous of Coast Salish along with decolonial futures for a new kind of relation.

In the final Chapter 7 Concluding Discussion, I bring the analysis of gurdwaras, nagar kirtan, and community mapping and the city back in conversation with the broader academic literature, theories, and concepts laid out in the first three chapters.

## Chapter 7 – Concluding Discussion

Religion, to the extent that it hints at the ineffable and the sublime, is poetry.  
Geography, to the extent that it shows how humans make themselves at home on Earth, is prose.

~ Yi-Fu Tuan (2009, 39) ~

Without you I would not know life  
I would not be  
Myself/Yourself  
In me/In you  
Sin tú no hay vida  
Mother/Teacher  
I learn how to caress from the cadence of waves  
Supple  
Gentle  
Tumultuous Enveloping

~ M. Jacqui Alexander (2005, 357) ~

By now, the reader would have learnt that this study is not a project of tangible findings. The dissertation has shifted its research undertakings from socio-spatial hypotheses to the processes of writing, paying attention to language, destabilizing categories, and following ideas of the possibility of urban justice in unusual places: temples, food and arts. In this, it is about the art of storytelling. But what use is that? Storytelling can offer point of views into the cityness and urbanity not seen. AbouMaliq Simone who writes on ‘cityness’, specifically of Asian and African cities, explains that experimentation, invisibility, and the informal processes of the city dwellers hold the creative and tactical solutions to imagine a new kind of city. Such an approach offers “a tool-box of ideas, stories, and points of view applicable to making urban conditions everywhere a little more creative” (Simone 2010, xiv). Stories, thus, offer non-conventional point of views into the networked topologies of people, their flows along with the aspirations, encounters and politics that guide them. Moreover, as De Certeau writes, “Every story is a travel story, a spatial practice” (De Certeau 1984, 115). As the diaspora thinker Avtar Brah (1996, 41) expresses, “inter-cultural travel across the globe is an ancient phenomenon.”

In terms of its intellectual story, this dissertation has pursued a cultural and urban geography of Sikhs by following their place-making in significant cities in the making of Sikh diaspora. Hong Kong and Vancouver are linked literally by the voyage of the *Guru Nanak Jahaz*,

and Greater Toronto through the narrative of the journey's legacy. But the story told in this dissertation is not of *Komagata Maru*. Rather, it is of many micro-stories, names and places whose itineraries exceed any cartography. Moreover, the dissertation analyzed such places and micro-stories by theorizing Sikh geographical imaginaries. In particular, I have focused on conceptualizing *gurduara*, *nagar kirtan*, and *City Beyond Sorrow*, while exploring the forming of Sikh diaspora. The chapters that unravelled the story of Sikh sacred space, translocal processes of belonging, and the poetics of expression follow a spatial logic: from temple to street to city. Chapter 4 *Gurduara as Path-making* focuses on the temple as a dharmic centre, and the meeting place of various paths for engagement, learning and discourse. It puts forth a concept of thinking of *gurduara* not as a bounded structure but through a process of learning and encounter. To think of *gurduara as path-making* – as a gateway invoking throughness, rather than reducing it as a place, house, definable bounded space – we can start to understand the relevance of process and itinerary. Chapter 5 *Vaisakhi Nagar Kirtan* brought the analysis via the street and the flows of the people through music, poetics and food on the ground. The chapter further troubles the cultural and religious bifurcation in its linguistic and discursive framing. Moreover, it offers the political making of *nagar kirtans*, from its historical translocal roots to its emerging diaspora space. Chapter 6 *City* brought the discussion back to the fabric of city to unfold generative thoughts of utopian thinking, counter-canonical cosmopolitanisms, and traces of racialized, colonial and diasporic footprint on cities and across. In this concluding chapter, I wrap up the discussion by turning back to the broader academic literatures and fields to which the ideas of this study best contribute to. These fields are 1) cultural urban geography, 2) post-secular geographies of religion, and 3) diaspora and transnational studies. I further elaborate on the analytic concepts of worlding, subaltern cosmopolitanism, and diaspora within the context of this doctoral study.

### **Contribution to Cultural Urban Geography**

Within urban geography, this dissertation is largely influenced by urban scholars such as Ananya Roy, AbdouMaliq Simone, and Katherine McKittrick who have made critical interventions in the Global North's theorizing and approach of the urban. The optics of urbanity often reduce the racialized or the religious other into datasets or bodies without adequate engagement and theorization of their knowledge systems. McKittrick (2011, 948) theorizes a Black sense of place, which can offer geographers and scholars elsewhere theoretical frames of

urban encounters, what she describes as “a difficult interrelatedness – that promises an ethical analytics of race based not on suffering, but on human life”. Similarly, Roy’s (2011b) ‘subaltern urbanism’ and Simone’s (2001) ‘*worlding from below*’ likewise offer toolkits of understanding urban from a bottom-up approach.

The dissertation takes inspiration from the interventions of the above scholars to dive deeper into a theorizing of the movements and practices of the people in urban life beyond infrastructure. Likewise, it explores the cultural, and religious in the fabric of the city, and the production of its space. This involves not just looking at a religious place, or a cultural space in the city, but also its dimension of ideas. In the words of Tim Cresswell (1996, 17), “to think of place as something produced by and producing ideology”. Such an ideological dimension has many signifiers, from varying contexts with their own unique meanings, framings and critiques. Derek Gregory (1994) calls it geographical imagination. Vanessa Watts (2013) suggests the term place-thought. Henri Lefebvre (1991) argues that capitalism is produced through the abstraction of space. Concurrently, space is being produced (*spatial practice*) through that abstract conception, influenced by the ideology and optics of the *representation of space*. Similarly, alternative conceptions of space have their geographical imagination and place-thought which would need theorizing. The study offered Sikh geographical imagination and place-thought elucidating elements of Sikh cosmology of space and epistemology as detailed in Chapter 2.

In Canada, when culture enters the urban, it tends to do so from the frame of multiculturalism, by both its ideological and discursive critics (e.g. Goonewardena and Kipfer 2005; Bannerji 2000) and by its postmodern celebrators (e.g. Sandercock 2003). Goonewardena and Kipfer (2005) bring out a Marxist critique of what they call ‘bourgeois urbanism’ that laid a strong hold in urban Canada, filled with the commodification of food and its festivities. They analyze such consumerism of food and festivities as a “brand of aestheticized difference – premised largely on the exotic pleasures of ‘visible’ and ‘edible’ ethnicity” (Goonewardena and Kipfer 2005, 672). But “curry and turbans” (Bannerji 2000, 38), critiqued, lead to reification when scholars too reduce food to commodities. So, what would it take to theorize food and culture, and make it political again? Neither camps – the critics nor the celebrators – fully involve themselves into the social justice politics of food. The analysis of food in Chapter 5 Vaisakhi Nagar Kirtan, problematized such gaps by re-politicizing food and offering

perspectives through conceptualizing the political aspects of *langar*. This is not to say that *langar* or food at *nagar kirtans* in Canada is completely free from commodification or bourgeois urbanism. Rather, it is to make the effort to dig our fingers deep into the *dal and roti* (lentils and flatbread), and to pay tribute to its social justice labour that operates on the fringe of the capitalist economy, what Gibson-Graham (2006) coin as the ‘community economy’. It is to theorize the political principles that form the basis of a radical urban politics for many Sikhs. Food as radical urban politics has also been mobilized in various social and political movements. The Black Panthers organized breakfast programs for kids and it was political – a fight for urban racial justice (Heynen 2009). At Pride in Toronto, the brOWN//out Stage hosts community-cooked food at its backstage to feed artists, facilitators, and audiences. In Hong Kong, food has been used to mobilize and build relations among the many Hongkongers in the current protest movements.<sup>87</sup>

Approaching food and culture from the tactical can fill some gaps. Particularly, tactics enable the possibility of re-politicization, and how an urban dweller takes on food and shapes it in their practice and relation. Patricia Wood and Liette Gilbert (2005) remind that multiculturalism may be a governmental strategy, that is official multiculturalism, but it is also everyday, tactical, and lived – a practicing multiculturalism through the ordinary inhabitants of a city. As they argue,

In the city, multiculturalism is an everyday issue. It is particularly localized in the public spaces and institutions of the city where multiculturalism is not only the subject of encounter but it is also a means for the practice of participatory politics and the stage for the enactment of alternative social arrangements. (Wood and Gilbert 2005, 688)

Beyond its top-down ideological apparatus, the scholars shift the lens to a sideways multiculturalism, to believe in the possibility of an alternative spatiality that is not state-orchestrated. The street and public spaces is where the official ideology could be dislodged and re-invented with its own intricate meanings and arrangements. Such a process involves the radical encounter. Ranu Basu (2011) distinguishes between ‘uni-directional’, ‘reciprocal’ and ‘multifarious’ to conceptualize and distinguish different kinds of multi-culturalisms and public spaces. The mural,

---

<sup>87</sup> For instance, during the airport sit-ins in 2019, a Hongkonger carried out a volunteer overnight shift to cook rice for the protestors. Additionally on 20 October 2019, water and replenishing sources were distributed at the steps of Chungking Mansion – a hub of South Asian and African migrants (Creery, Grundy, and Cheng 2019, in *Hong Kong Free Press*).

*Taike-Sye 'ya*, exemplified multifarious collaborations and making possible alternative arrangements of peoples, culture and city. Likewise, Chapter 6 put forth *begampura* as a radical Sikh *right to the city*. *Begampura* is a Sikh utopian imagination. But the place-making practices of *gurdwaras*, *nagar kirtan*, and *langar* are actually existing. They are spatial practices. They form a basis for a radical urban politics, and a collective *right to the city*.

To move past the exotic consumer experience of food, one must indulge in the political encounter of food. And a political encounter of food is to reclaim food not only from its bourgeois urban commodification but also its secular commodification. Food is knowledge. And it is spiritual knowledge. Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh (2011) provides some food for thought through an analogy, which the Sikh Gurus have made between food and knowledge. In a significant poem by Guru Arjan, the Guru presents virtues in the form of dishes on a platter.

In the platter, there dwell three dishes:  
Truth, contentment, and contemplation . . . .  
The Name of ambrosial nectar embodied supports all  
They who eat, who savour it, they are emancipated

(Guru Arjan, Guru Granth Sahib, 1429, transcreation mine)

N.G.K. Singh theorizes that knowledge and food are fused together in this Sikh poem. Knowledge is attained not by a textualist activity in the academic's mind, but through channeling and in the body's alimentary canals. That is, knowledge is lived and experienced through the body and the sensuous: "Knowledge is a delectable banquet. . . . The epistemological value of these dishes is not conceived intellectually or argued logically; it is swallowed and digested by the body" (N.G.K Singh 2011, 76).

Like the political encounter of food, there is a need to move past the visual gaze of places such as temples, gurdwaras, and mosques, and their exotic architecture. For that encounter, an engagement with the geographical imagination, its knowledge practices, and its sensorial is pivotal for a cultural urban geographer. The reduction of faith spaces for a visual consumption has also meant a loss of understanding of the various dimensions of knowledge practiced in faith spaces: from food and *seva* to the sensuous and the sonic. In the Islamic context for instance, Engin Isin and Myer Siemiatycki (2002) have pointed to Islamic conceptions of space as characterized by mosques in Toronto where they amplify the role of sound that has been



overlooked. They further delineate that Muslim spaces are not just religious buildings, but where Muslims gather and form a collective. Emerging Sikh scholarship (Sikh Research Institute 2018; Hawley 2014) similarly emphasize *gurdwara* as a place formed by *sangat* gathering. The notion of *gurdwara as path-making* as conceptualized in Chapter 4 amplifies the polyvalent dimensions of the *gurdwara*, and overcomes its reduction to a religious infrastructure. The multifarious dimensions delineated of *gurdwara as path-making* consist of refuge, *dharamsala*, sojourn, *miri-piri* and subaltern counterpublics.

Worlding as an analytic concept can aid in the theorization of cultural processes within the increasingly planetary urbanization of Earth. AbdouMaliq Simone (2001) uses the notion of worlding to characterize dynamic and networked urban processes – migrants who move through networks and infrastructure often unseen in the maps of urban planners and geographers. There are several layers of meaning with the conceptualization of worlding and how it is used in various disciplines. Worlding is intertwined with being cast out into the world, and demarcated into spatial zones or a world: First World, Second World, Third World, along with its variant vocabulary: North, South; West, East; developed, developing; core, periphery; global or world city; Orient, Occident. All have spatial bearings. Worlding problematizes such static framings of worlds and cities of development by calling on experts to pay attention to the processes of worlding itself, and especially its discursive power. In this light, Ananya Roy (2011a, 314) clarify “worlding is both an object of analysis and a method of critical deconstruction”. As a method of critique and deconstruction, worlding brings into critical thinking and problematizes the meta narratives of world-making – colonial, capitalist, Orientalist, and Marxist, etc. As an object of analysis in urban studies, worlding captures the processes, and circuits and itineraries of the city and inhabitants enmeshed in, but also producing, the world’s exploding urban fabric.

AbdouMaliq Simone (2001), notably, brings to view a less seen circuit of worlding process, a ‘*worlding from below*’, which runs along on a horizontal planetary axis frequently missed in the vertical hierarchies of worlds. Writing in the context of African cities, Simone follows migrants in their city aspirations through loose-knit webs of mutual support and capacity. Simone provides cases and examples of religious organizing across cities that come to play with such *worlding from below* that he names as ‘Zawiyyah City’. *Zawiyyah* is characterized as both a lodging space where accommodation is provided for travellers of a Sufi order, and as a worship

space for *zikhr* (remembrance). Moreover, as an institution, *zawiyyah* engages migrants to a city with economic activities and opportunities (Simone 2001, 27-28). *Zawiyyah* is a “place for hospitality, mutual support, and accountability” and a network is formed for migrants (Simone 2001, 34). Missed by experts and urban planners, Simone theorizes that such *worlding from below* can “help shape new modalities of economic capacity” (2001, 38). In *For the City Yet to Come*, Simone (2004, 123) further characterizes *zawiyyah* as a cosmopolitan institution.

The Sikh centre, *gurduara*, ties into Simone’s *worlding from below* from a different, albeit overlapping context. While the term *zawiyyah* is used in North African context, the terms *khanqahs* and *dargahs* are used in the South Asian context with regards to Sufi hospice and shrines respectively, where Sufi masters imparted wisdom and provided *langar* and hospice. Guru Nanak’s *dharamsala* takes inspiration from such Sufi centres, but there are also important differences to be noted. *Khanqahs* in South Asian context would often get land endowment from rulers and the state, and Guru Nanak was critical of such land grants and state patronage.<sup>88</sup> Gurinder Singh Mann (2004, 25) suggests that Guru Nanak drew from Sufi centres but went on to develop a unique and comprehensive Sikh model. Arguably, it is because the Sikh model was rooted in strong anarchic organizational principles that the founding of diaspora *gurduaras* was of such critical urgency during colonialism. *Gurduaras*, with their translocal and now diasporic condition, have been hubs of Sikh *worlding* and a hospice for the traveller and migrant. Mutual support, accountability, and micro-politics of care are responsibilities that are usually taken on by *gurduaras* or by community networks of *gurduaras* in support of migrants, travellers, or pilgrims. Furthermore, through *gurduara* also operates a feminist and care *community economy* (Gibson-Graham 2006) that make possible actually existing alternative spatialities to capitalism. These are the “unrecognized and unaccredited *seva* of cooking *langar* or teaching children” that women often do (Qureshi 2014, 96). In that, *gurduara* is an actual iteration of a utopian imagination – *begampura* – for a radical urban polity.

In addition to Simone’s conceptualization of a below *worlding*, Ananya Roy and Aihwa Ong in their edited volume *Worlding Cities* (2011) attend to processes such as inter-referencing, modelling, and experimenting in the *worlding* of Asian cities. Their analysis frame a sideways *worlding*, that does not follow a top-down, a state to a city, or a West to East trajectory. Instead,

---

<sup>88</sup> Pashaura Singh (2006, 108) emphasizes that Guru Nanak’s centre (*dharamsala*) in Kartarpur attempts something different from a Sufi hospice by not depending on land grants from the state.

sideways worlding is composed with myriad players – neoliberal institutions, private interests, public-private partnerships, civil society, and governmentality. These are increasingly bold projects undertaken by cities in their pursuit of the “art of being global”, and marked by various capitalist and neoliberal processes that Roy and Ong address and criticize. The urban theorists further deploy the term inter-referencing to characterize the circulations of ideas and the methods by which places re-invent or re-package themselves by appropriating or taking inspiration from elsewhere. Inter-referencing is rarely uni-directional, and so, overcomes the linear teleos of the modernization thesis or the homogenization thesis of globalization. Darbar Sahib in Amritsar, itself an inter-referencing of Mughal-style architecture with Eastern symbolisms (lotus afloat a *sarovar*), now tours through a diaspora art project *IN5 Experium: The Golden Temple*.

Sikh cultural place-making manifest elements of inter-referencing and worlding across the three different city-regions. First, the frame of Sikh Heritage Month travels from Greater Toronto to Greater Vancouver. Another kind of inter-referencing emerges with the art project *In5 Emperium: The Golden Temple* that creates a model of Darbar Sahib in Amritsar through an experiential sensorium launched in Brampton. Finally, with the rise of diaspora nagar kirtans, Sikhs in ordinary cities (e.g. Victoria, Brampton) are increasingly launching their own nagar kirtans in addition to big ones in Surrey, Vancouver, Toronto. Nagar kirtan’s worlding is elucidated in its processes through their political and world-making flavours, and through vocalizations of poetry and rhythms. They are a performed worlding. Additionally, as more launch, diaspora Sikhs are producing a rhizomatic, horizontal sovereignty process through nagar kirtans. Inderjit K. Kaur (2018) has, likewise, given meaning to the role of the sacred and affective sounds in the transnational making of nagar kirtans using the concept of worlding.

### **Contribution to Post-secular Geographies of Religion**

With the positivist scientific paradigm, geography as a modern discipline has gridded the pursuit of secular, rational ordering of space, and the respective ontologizing of defined populations onto categories of enclosed space. Pursuit of spirit or the sacred is mythologized to a study of anthropology, religion, tradition and ritual. Moreover, geographers have a tendency to work from the comfort of mapping religion, its spread, its populations, and its denominations onto the Cartesian plane of representation. This dissertation challenges such secular spatialities through provocations of Sikh geographical imaginaries.

Alongside the humanistic work of Yi-Fu Tuan (1977; 2009), it is literature in the post-secular geographies of religion that have made some significant disciplinary and theoretical openings to the pursuit of the sacred in geography and to which this dissertation contributes to. Drawing from post-secular theorization by Talal Asad (2003), the post-secular geographies of literature has problematized the traditional secular/religious, public/private dichotomies, and modernity's secularization thesis. However, a major challenge of post-secular geographies of religion is an epistemological one. Even as the field of religion is expanded, the secular remains privileged since Westernized geographical work pursues a secular study of the sacred. In that regard, the lens, epistemology, and methodology undertaken remain bounded within a Eurocentric modern secular episteme. Geographers, thus, often expand their topics, scope, sites, maps, and demographical groupings but do not consider their positionalities and the limits of their own secular knowledge. Feminist M. Jacqui Alexander aids in a more radical methodological and epistemological intervention of the distance between religion and geography. Alexander (2005, 20) challenges the privileging of "modernity's secularized episteme" in the way it reads, writes, and investigates sacred space. Alexander calls the predominant empirical and positivist ethnic turn as merely the "institutionalized use value of theorizing marginalization" (2005, 353). Instead, the scholar draws attention to a heightening of senses and challenges feminist scholars to tune into the now of spirit such as remembering the bodily experience of wind that one feels on one's body. In that, the "very *how* of the manifestation of the Divine is a practice to which we have to become attuned and accustomed" (Alexander 2005, 335). Alexander's intervention brings out the sacred and the sensuous as the source of knowledge itself, and not just the object of analysis.

Lily Kong (2010) has highlighted that sensuous geographies are where geographical research on religion is scant. The geographer explains that "[w]hile progress has been made in acknowledging the role of the body in reproducing religious values and identities (or in challenging them), what remains unexplored is the different sensuous ways in which the sacred is experienced and reproduced" (Kong 2010, 757). Kong clarifies the body is not just a carrier of performative actions, but it "has the power to make sense of sacred space" (2010, 757). Sikh sensuous geographies are the coming together of the senses, performative and embodied actions, and place-making. As Chapter 4 Gurduara as Path-Making unravelled, *dharamsala* and *gurduara*

cannot be reduced to their architectural structures. What makes it are the footsteps of the people, and the songs and *ragas*, vocalizing the Granth's iterations for a poetics of becoming.

Moreover, Justin Tse (2014) poignantly reminds geographers of the sacred places from street, shrines, graves and landscapes beyond the formal enclosed religiously denoted buildings such as temples and churches in his conceptualization of 'grounded theologies'. The term draws attention to the lived geographical practice of the sacred beyond metaphysical and abstract debates, hence grounded theologies. Moreover, these are embodied and "performative practices of placemaking informed by understandings of the transcendent". The poetics of the street, a focus in Chapter 4 on Vaisakhi Nagar Kirtan, shed some light to the grounded theologies of *sikhi*, and offers an analysis of practices and places beyond the permanently labelled religious structures. Nagar kirtan, as a transient space filled with colour, food and songs, imbues the sensuous, and evokes at the most fundamental level that Sikh sacred space is not bounded. The conjoining of places (e.g. *dharamsalas*, *sarovar*) and concepts (e.g. *miri-piri*, *langar*) formulate the spatial practices and 'grounded theologies' that punctuate symbolic parallels in thought and practice.

In this light, this dissertation has challenged Eurocentrism and positivist legacies to the extent that this study immerses itself into *sikhi* and Sikh epistemology and cosmology first discussed in Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework. Along the half decade journey of this study, my focus has certainly shifted – away from the tangible findings and grand arguments to be made about Sikhs in the three different locales which social scientists dictate. Instead, I have moved towards the art and process of writing, to ways of knowing, learning and storytelling, and to appreciating the elusive. However, I concede that such a writing process, to disrupt modernity's secular episteme, is far from complete as Hong Kong, Coast Salish, and Tkaronto each have their own multi-dimensional cosmologies and sacred place-thought that must be engaged with for a true practice of decolonial geographical writing. Hong Kong's urban visual snapshot of high-rise skylines often fail to capture its other (more invisible) geographical circuit – that of *fengshui*. *Fengshui*, as one study argues, is a local geographical practice that predated Confucius, Buddhist, or Taoist thought and cosmologies (Teather and Chow 2000). Place practices (from architecture or home placement) based on *fengshui* continue to shape aspects of Hong Kong geography and cultural landscape despite the rising of a colonial gridded space of skyscrapers and

roads. Literally meaning wind and water, *fengshui* is not merely an ancient value system of how and where to build a settlement in line with traditional beliefs, but is part of a broader philosophical system, complete with notions of spiraling energy, non-linear time, the invisible space, *yin-yang* principles, and a martial arts practice. The present day street protests in Hong Kong have captured the element of water, and harnessed the ancient *yin-yang* inspired *kungfu* principles of Chinese martial arts to the context of an urbanized civil disobedience, using the soft energy of water as their movement tactic to re-direct and drain the hard force of the police. The protestors are embodying flow – “Be Water” – by manifesting a phrase by Bruce Lee and politicizing basic elements of how, when, where to move and in what form. For the fallen spirits, the protestors create paper cranes to honour them; towards the police, they burn joss paper.

Thus, further attention could be given to the many pre-existing geographical practices that give meaning to the sacred and the cosmogonical worldviews of the regions of this study: Hong Kong, Coast Salish, and Tkaronto. In the context of indigeneity in Canada, Bonita Lawrence (2002) has challenged the legacy of Eurocentrism which compels scholars to conform to a modern secular episteme. In such an epistemological violence, she explains that organizing concepts of land are packaged merely as tales and myths, and political practices often get reduced to a depoliticized ritual. As she writes,

The ancient histories and cosmologies of our nations need to be removed from their current mythologized and depoliticized locations inside childrens' anthologies and from the mystical and colourful ‘origin myths’ . . . and written back in as the organizing concepts of the histories of this land. (Lawrence 2002, 46)

### **Contribution to Diaspora and Transnational Studies**

In his now famous thesis in *Modernity at Large*, Arjun Appadurai (1996, 11) poignantly lays down that “globalization is not the story of cultural homogenization”. Instead, he puts forth the notion of ‘vernacular globalization’ – that is, cultural imaginations that are transmitted, and written through “micronarratives of film, television, music” rather than the state-centric projects of print capitalism (1996, 10). These global everyday cultural encounters take place in the ‘diasporic public spheres’ through the emerging urban fabric of cities, countries and continents. Furthermore, the new cultural imaginations position globalizing events as still unfolding, contested, and not fully defined. With this, there is a state of ambivalence of an everyday cultural practice as he clarifies that the new global cultural flows are “neither purely emancipatory nor

entirely disciplined but that it is a space of contestation in which individuals and groups seek to annex the global into their own practices of the modern” (Appadurai 1996, 4). The scholarship on cultural globalization divergent from homogenization opens a lens to appreciating how everyday cultural places are imagined, lived and practiced through translocal processes.

In addition to such vernacular processes, the analytical conceptualization of diaspora brings into perspective power, borders, relation, language, translocal space and hybrid cultural expressions. Lily Cho (2007) succinctly captures that becoming diasporic emerges through a process of relation, often in relation to power, that sets up the ‘condition of subjectivity’. Moreover, subjectivity is not defined through a singular identity, but through relations and affinities with other diasporas who are likewise marked as racially and religiously othered, and displaced in service to or against Empire. The ‘condition of subjectivity’ (Cho 2007) of Sikh diaspora was charted out in Chapter 3 and further detailed in the various chapters through the itinerant expressions, politics and art, and quotidian practices that express grief, struggles, sorrows, survival and hopes of the becoming of Sikh diaspora. In this discussion, I bring back this study of Sikhs to the theoretical underpinnings of diaspora.

In *Cartographies of Diaspora*, Avtar Brah theorizes a notion of diaspora space as a plane where diaspora, location and borders intersect and as a point of confluence where different expressions re-configure. In other words, it is “a space where new forms of belonging and otherness are appropriated and contested” (Brah 1996, 244). This theorizing of diaspora space makes apparent that it is not a space of exclusion of a native or an inhabitant of the homeland. Brah’s notion of diaspora space captures the sense of connections, circulations and flows of ideas and people, where those who did not migrate or move still dwell in a diaspora space. In the diaspora space, the diasporian becomes native and the native becomes a diasporian. Of relevance to the conceptualization of diaspora space is ‘entanglement’ (Brah 1996, 242). Brah clarifies that a diasporian becoming native and native becoming diasporian is not through identical or equivalent positions, but in terms of entanglements. Entanglements suggest interwoven networks, transversal and polyvalent interrelationships that are mediated through the numerous cultural, economic, religious, and political dimensions, and different border formations.

In theorizing the construction of diaspora space to conceptualize pluralism and hybridity, Brah interrogates the discourse of what she terms as ‘multi’, which represents the new power re-

figurations of global multi-national institutions and multi-cultural statist discourses. Diaspora space, in lieu, offers an organic and fluid way to theorize pluralism and places of hybridization while interrogating the state and capitalist configurations of 'multi'. As she meticulously puts it, diaspora space can deconstruct "*a re-figured 'Multi' as a sign of power dynamics of intersectionality which the concept of 'diaspora space' interrogates*" (Brah 1996, 214, italics in original). Moreover, diaspora space interrogates power configurations of borders. In addition to Brah's theorizing, Paul Gilroy (2000) and Stuart Hall (1992) have similarly developed a notion of diaspora. For Hall, diaspora is always in process, a positioning and must be distinguished from collective identities which affix to nostalgic past and origin lands. Hall's conceptualization develops out of cultural studies within his discussion of Black and Caribbean subjects in cinema and representation. Building on diaspora as process, Gilroy (2000) suggests that diaspora can challenge place-bound identities that seek purity and territory, particularly in the nationalistic aftermath of colonialism.

One can further connect Brah's characterization of diaspora space and Hall's notion of diaspora to Trinh T. Minh-ha's conceptualization of spatial and linguistic hybridization. Trinh conceptualizes a notion of hybridization that captures the built environment and physical spaces, such as a city's streetlife and home. Practices of language, translation, and storytelling collaborate with the spatial hybrid. Drawing from Walter Benjamin, she reminds us that Paris gains its liveliness and streetlife from the strangers and non-state actors who traverse the passageways between the stone walls of the city's houses. Moreover, these transitional passageways become a home, and a dwelling, that is far from a fixed place of sameness. She further clarifies that no 'original' home can be fully "recaptured nor can its presence/absence be entirely banished in the 'remade' home" (Trinh 2011, 33). Thus, Trinh (2011, 33) characterizes the home for the migrant is always a "transitional or circumstantial place". In this framing, her viewpoint elucidates the process of place-making and an ambivalent nature of homes, never original, and always in flow through itineraries.

Echoing Trinh's conceptualization of a city's streetlife is what AbouMaliq Simone (2010) has worded 'cityness', which brings to play the lesser seen circuit of city's economy, constant movement, workers, and space. Cityness is characterized through an elusive itinerary, a trace where "the assemblage of discrepant activities seems to pile up on each other given their



proximity” (Simone 2010, 4), with an uncertain and anticipatory sense of place and rhythms. Furthermore, in a study of public spaces in Scarborough, Ranu Basu and Robert Fiedler (2017, 26) conceptualizes a notion of ‘subaltern cosmopolitan citizenry’. Drawing from Gidwani’s framing of subaltern cosmopolitanism, ‘subaltern cosmopolitan citizenry’ speak to dynamic multifarious spaces and proximities with their discrepant yet assemblage energies in the suburbs that come out of unanticipated, fluid, and organic moves. Trinh, Basu and Fielder, and Simone all provide a perspective to a city, urban, suburban and street from a different viewpoint than the top-down gaze, and in different geographical contexts through which we gain insight into the confluence of city and diaspora.

### **Subaltern Cosmopolitanism: An Outlook**

The cultural and spatial hybrid is not without its challenges because discourses exoticify, romanticize and order knowledge based on a Western epistemic frame. In *Scattered Hegemonies*, Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (1994) critique the cultural relativism and the postmodern celebration of Western culture that structures a certain modernist and Eurocentric trajectories of hybridity. The term ‘scattered hegemonies’ highlight that the mobility of culture, particularly in its postmodernism circuits, gives rise to cultural neo-imperialism, which characterizes hybridity primarily under the perspective of the West. The authors suggest that postmodernist strands of hybrid culture tend to re-privilege the West as the sorter and consumer of travelling cultures.

[W]hat seems to get theorized in the West as ‘hybridity’ remains enmeshed in the gaze of the West; Westerners see themselves alone as the ones that sort, differentiate, travel among, and become attached or attracted to the communities constituted by diasporas of human beings and the trade of commodities. Western culture continues to acknowledge difference primarily by differentiating the ‘exotic’ from the ‘domestic’ (Grewal and Kaplan 1994, 7).

It is, thus, important to bear in mind and challenge the allure of postmodern hybridity whose agenda reproduce Western and Eurocentric notions of multi, plural and sacred in its foundation. M. Jacqui Alexander, moreover, has critiqued the modern and traditional binary power discourses that remain at play in postmodernism. As Alexander (2015, 324) critiques, “cultural relativist paradigm that undergirds the feminist-as-tourist model is the production of a distant alterity in which tradition is made subordinate to, and unintelligible within, that which is modern.” Alexander poignantly captures the flaws of multiculturalism, postmodernism and Western feminism all at once.

The allure of cosmopolitanism is caught in this very dilemma. Nationalist, liberal and postmodern strands have each packaged cosmopolitan brands, but they are locked between assimilationist or multicultural ideologies of the Westphalian state, liberal international relations, or creative class city respectively. Thus, how can scholars, artists, and people intervene for a different imaginary of a cosmopolitanism?

This dissertation asserts that an intervention into cosmopolitanism requires consideration of plural hybrid cultures, subaltern knowledges, vernacular languages and arts, regional difference, and sensuous geographies. Moreover, it envisions a cosmopolitanism of another scale (or without scale) and of a sense that transgresses overdetermination of sight. This project leans towards a subaltern cosmopolitanism – a largely open, incomplete, undefined, and ambivalent fabric of a cosmopolitanism from below. While the complete fabric is in the making and yet-to-come, the threads of this fabric are nevertheless present. These threads of a subaltern cosmopolitanism are revealed through the traces and the poetics of the ineffable in what I term as (i) subaltern cosmopolitical spaces (ii) subaltern knowledge practices (iii) sensuous itineraries, and (iv) entanglements of co-diaspora, that this study has focused on. My usage of the term subaltern is that which cannot be captured within Eurocentric modalities and epistemologies of world religion or modern secular. I am not referring to a subaltern as a subject, being or person, but a subaltern in an approach to knowledge, sense, praxis, and space.

Within the context of this doctoral study in Sikh place-making, such subaltern cosmopolitical spaces pile up in the processes of a *nagar kirtan*, a horizontal becoming of self, other, Sikh and diaspora, that conventional frames onto Khalsa Day Parade as a single baptizing identity or as Vaisakhi festival miss. Likewise, a subaltern cosmopolitical space emerges in processes of *gurduara*, different from *gurdwaras* (as place of worship), through elusive modes of practices that are outside of dominant cosmopolitan frames of charity, consumption, or tolerance. *Gurduara* as path-making encompasses the polyvalent dimensions of making and walking a shared cultural path, refuge, *dharamsala*, *miri-piri*, and subaltern counterpublics. The notion of subaltern cosmopolitical spaces intersects with subaltern knowledge practices. As Chapter 5 elucidated, *nagar kirtans* are performances of *mantra*, *darshan*, *rasa*, and of *tavarikh-ithihas*. They are a translocal practice where sound and sight mix, taste and memory are experienced, and footwork and politics are embodied. Attending to such a subaltern knowledge practice involves

re-tuning our senses to the sound currents, the itinerant and the performative evoked in sensuous geographies, and recognizing the embodied microworlds to a political relation. I call this immersion and dimension sensuous itineraries. Drawing from M. Jacqui Alexander work on the sacred, crossings, and re-wirings, sensuous brings out intimacy, with “the ability to inhabit different planes of consciousness” and “an agile movement between the metaphysic and the anthropomorphic” (2005, 333). Moreover, the concept of sensuous itineraries draws near the “intimacy between personhood and Sacred accompaniment” (2005, 329).

The notion of entanglements of co-diasporas open possibilities of the complex, far, yet here and everyday anticolonial and decolonial cosmopolitanisms. In this, I borrow from Avtar Brah’s conceptualization of diaspora space and entanglements as an interrogation into varied borders, others, and power. The Pacific gurdwaras role in anti-colonial thought highlights the subaltern cosmopolitical space, where co-diasporas were formed in relation to power. Alongside old anticolonial movements, new movements also intersect with gurdwaras such as the Jakara protests against Narendra Modi at the gates of the gurdwara in Vancouver. Subaltern counterpublics of women mobilize through *Sukhmani Sahib* and *sangat* in Hong Kong to express their political desire for democratic change in Punjab. Sikh youth in Hong Kong reflect on their points of relation and difference with other Hongkongers. Co-diasporas involved in different, yet overlapping struggles and environments gather, such as at Chungking Mansion in Hong Kong on 20 October 2019, to be part of Be Water Movement, distribute water, and refuse divide on racial, ethnic, and religious lines (see vignette 4 in Chapter 3). Through this, nagar kirtans and Be Water Movement are now entangled, too. In such entanglements and radical encounter, I imagine the possibility of a horizontal spatiality of relation, one that attends to translocal and diaspora space, and non-scalar frames of connecting with place, world, and city.

I end with a quote from Rey Chow (2014, 79): “the unevenness between script and sound as well as the hierarchy between what is visible and what is invisible in a modern urban landscape . . . . serve both as reminders of the intractable power politics at play and, paradoxically, as stimulants for alternative thinking”.

## Closing Seal and Riddle

*Sikhi* is subaltern. Sikhism isn't. Sikhism is the world religion. *Sikhi*, is something else. It is an eternal praxis. If the Sikh of Sikhism is the follower of Sikh religion, the Sikh of *sikhi* is the pathwalker understanding that all paths eventually do merge into oneness. If Sikhism is the map, then *sikhi* is an itinerary. Never-ending. Where the house of God is contained in gurdwara, *Sikhi's gurduara* illuminates a cosmic path, filled with songs and poetry. Sikhism, the harmonium. *Sikhi*, the *rabab*, of continuous sounds. The mystic of the *rabab* sits by the shores, singing, knowing (if only momentarily) that after all, nature, all humans (all brides), life – animate and inanimate – are all of one. That creator-creation cannot be separated. If Sikhism is theology, *sikhi* is poetry – the beyond to the beyond to the beyond. If Sikhism is what is contained in the boundary of today's India and Pakistan Punjab, then *sikhi* is the confluence of the five rivers of the Indus, overflowing into the Indian Ocean. If Sikhism is the sky, then *sikhi* is the ferry that one takes to cross the world ocean. Sikhism, the sacred Granth. *Sikhi*, the embodied *gurbani*. Sikhism desires to sit on the tables with the power five – Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism. *Sikhi* has no place, it dances with all of the cosmic energy. *Sikhi* is subaltern to Sikhism just as much as *sikhi* is subaltern to Eurocentric thought. The sacred of Sikhism is contrasted by the continuous vernaculars of *sikhi*. This dissertation is a tribute to the undercurrents of *sikhi* that reveal themselves below the *SS Komagata Maru* voyage, that of *Guru Nanak Jahaz*. It rides along the dance of the infinite oscillation between immanence and transcendence. It seeks to remember that the struggle of *Guru Nanak Jahaz* is one of a common humanity for all and not of yet another religious, settler, racial, gendered, caste, classed, or sexual hierarchy. A Sikh of *sikhi* has no identity, only relation.

## References

- 5AAB TV. 2018. "Live Telecast From Malton Gurudwara Sahib To Rexdale Gurudwara Sahib." Greater Toronto: 5AAB TV. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eNOvskCJ9X8&t=11s>.
- "A Baby Girl." n.d. Digital Archive, Simon Fraser University Library. The Komagata Maru: Continuing the Journey Digital Collection. Accessed September 30, 2019. <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/3861>.
- Abbas, Ackbar. 1997. *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Agrawal, Sandeep. 2009. "New Ethnic Places of Worship and Planning Challenges." *Plan Canada*, no. Special Issue: 64–67.
- Ahmed-Ullah, Noreen. 2016. "Brampton, Aka Browntown." In *Subdivided: City-Building in an Age of Hyper-Diversity*. Toronto: Coach House Books, edited by Jay Pitter and John Lorinc, 242–53. Coach House Books.
- Alexander, M. Jacqui. 2005. *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Alexander, M. Jacqui, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty. 1997. "Introduction: Genealogies, Legacies, Movements." In *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*, edited by M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty. New York: Routledge.
- . 2010. "Cartographies of Knowledge and Power." In *Critical Transnational Feminist Praxis*, edited by Amanda Lock Swarr and Richa Nagar, 23–45. Albany, NY: Suny Press.
- Allen, William Arthur. 2004. "Wa-Nant-Gi-Tche-Ang: Canoe Route to Lake Huron through Southern Algonquia." *Ontario Archaeology* 73: 38–68.
- Amadahy, Zainab, and Bonita Lawrence. 2009. "Indigenous Peoples and Black People in Canada: Settlers or Allies?" In *Breaching the Colonial Contract*, edited by Arlo Kempf, 105–136. Springer.
- Amsden, Jackie, and Rob VanWynsberghe. 2005. "Community Mapping as a Research Tool with Youth." *Action Research* 3 (4): 357–81.
- Anderson, Benedict. 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Antiquities Advisory Board. 2020. "List of the Historic Buildings in Building Assessment." Antiquities Advisory Board. <http://www.aab.gov.hk/form/AAB-SM-chi.pdf>.
- . n.d. "Historic Building Appraisal Number 534: Sikh Temple." Antiquities Advisory Board. [https://www.aab.gov.hk/historicbuilding/en/534\\_Appraisal\\_En.pdf](https://www.aab.gov.hk/historicbuilding/en/534_Appraisal_En.pdf).
- Antiquities and Monuments Office. 2018. "Jamia Mosque - Sheung Wan Route A." Government. Antiquities and Monuments Office. July 31, 2018. [https://www.amo.gov.hk/en/trails\\_sheungwan2.php?tid=5](https://www.amo.gov.hk/en/trails_sheungwan2.php?tid=5).
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. (1987) 2012. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. 4th ed. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.
- Appadurai, Arjun. 1996. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Vol. 1. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Appiah, Kwame Anthony. 2007. *The Ethics of Identity*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Archibald, Jo-anne. 2008. "An Indigenous Storywork Methodology." In *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research: Perspectives, Methodologies, Examples, and Issues*, edited by J

- Gary Knowles and Ardra L Cole, 371–84. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Arondekar, Anjali. 2009. *For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Asad, Talal. 1986. "The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology." In *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus, 1:141–164. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- . 2003. *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Asian Pacific Post. 2019. "Some Key Dates in a Century of Sikhism in B.C." *Asian Pacific Post*, April 4, 2019. <http://www.asianpacificpost.com/article/8530-some-key-dates-century-sikhism-bc.html>.
- Badami, Anita Rao. 2007. *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?* Vintage Canada.
- Bajwa, Kulwinder Singh. 2014. "Takhat Sri Damdama Sahib's Establishment and Role in Sikh History." *Sikh Formations* 10 (3): 355–368.
- Banerjee, Himadri. 2016. "Remembering Komagata Maru: Its Many Journeys, 1914–2014." *South Asian Diaspora* 8 (2): 185–202.
- Bannerji, Himani. 2000. *The Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism and Gender*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.
- Basu, Ranu. 2011. "Multiculturalism through Multilingualism in Schools: Emerging Places of 'Integration' in Toronto." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 101 (6): 1307–1330.
- Basu, Ranu, and Robert S Fiedler. 2017. "Integrative Multiplicity through Suburban Realities: Exploring Diversity through Public Spaces in Scarborough." *Urban Geography* 38 (1): 25–46.
- Bedard, Ella, and Jane Kirby. 2011. "The Amelie: Canadian Refugee Policy and the Story of the 1987 Boat People." *Halifax Media Co-Op: News from Nova Scotia's Grassroots*. <http://halifax.mediacoop.ca/audio/amelie-canadian-refugee-policy-and-story-1987-boat-people/8909>.
- Beer, P de. 1994. "Sweet and Sour for 'Hongcouver' Asians." *Guardian Weekly*, January 20, 1994.
- Behl, Natasha. 2010. *Politics of Equality: Caste and Gender Paradoxes in the Sikh Community*. Los Angeles: University of California (unpublished dissertation).
- "Bela Singh (1883-1934)." n.d. Digital Archive, Simon Fraser University Library. Komagata Maru Continuing the Journey. Accessed November 19, 2019. <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/14680>.
- Bhabha, Homi. 1984. "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse." *October* 28: 125–133.
- . (1994) 2004. "Looking Back, Moving Forward: Notes on Vernacular Cosmopolitanism." In *The Location of Culture*, ix–xxv. Oxon: Routledge.
- Bhandar, Davina, and Rita Kaur Dhmoon. 2019. "Introduction: Unmooring the Komagata Maru." In *Unmooring the Komagata Maru: Charting Colonial Trajectories*, edited by Rita Kaur Dhmoon, Davina Bhandar, Renisa Mawani, and Satwinder Kaur Bains, 3–33. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Bhatia, Nandi. 2015. "Revisiting the Theatre of the Komagata Maru Incident." *Studies in Canadian Literature/Études En Littérature Canadienne* 40 (1): 27–44.
- Bhatra, Gulbir Singh. 2012. *Sikhs in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: Khalsa Diwan (Sikh Temple).

- Bhogal, Balbinder Singh. 2007. "Ghostly Disorientations: Translating the Adi Granth as the Guru Granth." *Sikh Formations* 3 (1): 13–31.
- . 2012. "The Animal Sublime: Rethinking the Sikh Mystical Body." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80 (4): 856–908.
- . 2014. "Postcolonial and Postmodern Perspectives on Sikhism." In *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*, edited by Pashaura Singh and Louis E Fenech, 282–97. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Binning, Sadhu, and Sukhwant Hundal. 1989. *Pikat Lain: Nātak Sangraih*. Chandigarh: Balraj Sahni Yadgar Prakashan.
- Boudreau, Julie-Anne, Roger Keil, and Douglas Young. 2009. *Changing Toronto: Governing Urban Neoliberalism*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. (1979) 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Translated by Richard Nice. Oxon: Routledge.
- Brah, Avtar. 1996. *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. New York: Routledge.
- Brampton Economic Development and Cultural Office. 2017a. "Census Bulletin #3 Families, Households, Marital Status and Language." Census Bulletins. City of Brampton: Brampton Economic Development & Cultural Office. <https://www.brampton.ca/EN/Business/economic-development/Research-and-Data/Pages/Census.aspx>.
- . 2017b. "Census Bulletin #5 Immigration and Ethnocultural Diversity, Housing, Aboriginal Peoples." Census Bulletins. City of Brampton: Brampton Economic Development & Cultural Office. <https://www.brampton.ca/EN/Business/economic-development/Research-and-Data/Pages/Census.aspx>.
- Brampton Guardian. 2019. "Komagata Maru Park Opens in Bramalea." *Brampton Guardian*, June 24, 2019. <https://www.bramptonguardian.com/community-story/9451046-komagata-maru-park-opens-in-bramalea/>.
- Brand, Dionne. 1997. *Land to Light On*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Limited.
- . 2001. *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging*. Random House Canada.
- . 2005. *What We All Long For*. Toronto: Knopf Canada.
- Brenner, Neil, and Roger Keil. 2006. "Global City Theory in Retrospect and Prospect." In *The Global Cities Reader*, edited by Neil Brenner and Roger Keil, 2–16. Oxon: Routledge.
- Brickell, Katherine, and Ayona Datta. 2011. "Introduction: Translocal Geographies." In *Translocal Geographies: Spaces, Places, Connections*, edited by Katherine Brickell and Ayona Datta, 3–20. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd.
- Buch, Elana D., and Karen M. Staller. 2007. "The Feminist Practice of Ethnography." In *Feminist Research Practice: A Primer*, edited by Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber, 187–221. London: Sage Publications.
- Buffam, Bonar. 2013. "Public Demands: Law, Sanctuary, and the Eventual Deportation of Laibar Singh." *Sikh Formations* 9 (1): 29–37.
- Careem, Nazvi. 2016. "20 Years on: San San's Golden Memories of Her Epic Victory at the Atlanta Olympics." *South China Morning Post*, June 28, 2016. <https://www.scmp.com/sport/article/1995824/20-years-san-sans-golden-memories-her-epic-victory-atlanta-olympics>.
- Carroll, John M. 2007. *A Concise History of Hong Kong*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Cartier, Carolyn. 2001. *Globalizing South China*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

- Cassio, Francesca. 2014. "Female Voices in Gurbānī Sangīt and the Role of the Media in Promoting Female Kīrtanīe." *Sikh Formations* 10 (2): 233–269.
- CBC News. 2017. "'We're One People': LGBTQ Group to March in Vaisakhi Parade for First Time." *CBC*, March 22, 2017. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/vancouver-vaisakhi-lgbtq-1.4035449>.
- . 2019. "The Value of Vaisakhi: A Look at the Economic Impact of the Sikh Celebration." *CBC*, April 18, 2019. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/the-value-of-vaisakhi-a-look-at-the-economic-impact-of-the-sikh-celebration-1.5102687>.
- CBC Radio. 2014. "Voyage of the 'Undesirables': Remembering the Komagata Maru." <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/voyage-of-the-undesirables-remembering-the-komagata-maru-1.2914096>.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 2000. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Chan, Garrett. 2006. *Sikh Community: Over 100 Years in the Pacific Northwest*. Seattle WA: Wing Luke Asian Museum.
- Chanda, Geetanjali Singh. 2014. "The Unbearable Heaviness of Being: Diaspora Sikh Womens' Memoirs." *Sikh Formations* 10 (1): 91–104.
- Chatterjee, Partha. 1993. *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Cheng, Ka-man. 2005. "Development Density in Hong Kong: Living Environments vs Living Quality: A Case Study of Ap Lei Chau." Thesis, Pokfulam, Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong.
- Cheuk, Ka-Kin. 2008. "Migration, Settlement, and Remigration: A Study of the Sikhs in Hong Kong." *East Asia Forum-Mediation and Critique: Perspective on East Asia* 11: 47–81.
- . 2013. "Capitalizing on Identity and Mobility: Sikh Mercantile Activity Across the Hong Kong-China Border." In *Sikh Diaspora: Theory, Agency, and Experience*, edited by Michael Hawley, 217–229. Brill.
- Cheung, Gary Ka-wai. 2009. *Hong Kong's Watershed: The 1967 Riots*. Vol. 1. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Ching, Harry. n.d. "Untitled." In *Harry Ching Diary, 1941-1945*. <https://gwulo.com/node/24663>.
- Chiu, Stephen, and Tai-Lok Lui. 2009. *Hong Kong: Becoming a Chinese Global City*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Cho, Lily. 2007. "The Turn to Diaspora." *Topia: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 17: 11–30.
- Chow, Rey. 1993. *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- . 1998. "The Postcolonial Difference: Lessons in Cultural Legitimation." *Postcolonial Studies: Culture, Politics, Economy* 1 (2): 161–169.
- . 2014. *Not like a Native Speaker: On Language as a Postcolonial Experience*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- City of Burnaby. 2020. "Proclamation: Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Day of Equality." <https://pub-burnaby.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=46353>.
- City of Vancouver. 2019. "Taikē-Syē'yə Mural Created in Remembrance of Komagata Maru." August 9, 2020. <https://vancouver.ca/news-calendar/taike-syeye-mural-created-in-remembrance-of-komagata-maru.aspx>.



- Claiborne, William. 1991. "The New 'Hong's' of Vancouver." *Washington Post*, May 12, 1991. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/business/1991/05/12/the-new-hongs-of-vancouver/65cfc529-345d-47d2-8c17-276680298825/>.
- Clifford, James. 2008. "Traveling Cultures." In *The Cultural Geography Reader*, edited by Timothy S. Oakes and Patricia L. Price, 328–336. Oxon: Routledge.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. (1990) 2000. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge.
- Crawford, Tiffany, and Glenda Luymes. 2018. "Hundreds of Thousands Turn out for Surrey's Vaisakhi Parade." *Vancouver Sun*, April 21, 2018. <https://vancouversun.com/news/local-news/tens-of-thousands-turn-out-for-surreys-vaisakhi-parade>.
- Creery, Jennifer, Tom Grundy, and Kris Cheng. 2019. "Hundreds of Thousands Defy Protest Ban in Hong Kong amid Tear Gas, Vandalism and Molotovs, as Mosque Hit by Water Cannon Dye." *Hong Kong Free Press*, October 20, 2019. <https://www.hongkongfp.com/2019/10/20/thousands-defy-protest-ban-hong-kong-amid-tear-gas-vandalism-molotovs-mosque-hit-water-cannon-dye/>.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. 1989. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 139–67.
- Cresswell, Tim. 1996. *In Place/out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- . 2013. *Geographic Thought: A Critical Introduction*. Critical Introductions to Geography. Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Cynthia Keppley, Mahmood. 2009. "Sikhs in Canada: Identity and Commitment." In *Religion and Ethnicity in Canada*, edited by Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, 52–68. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Daily Colonist. 1912. "Sikh Procession Spectacular One." *The Daily Colonist*, October 8, 1912.
- Datta, Nonica. 2008. "Transcending Religious Identities: Amrita Pritam and the Partition." In *Partitioned Lives: Narratives of Home, Displacement, and Resettlement*, edited by Anjali Gera Roy and Nandi Bhatia, 1–25. New Delhi: Dorling Kindersley India.
- Davis, Mike. 2006. *Planet of Slums*. London: Verso.
- De Certeau, Michel. 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- De Sousa Santos, Boaventura. 2005. "Beyond Neoliberal Governance: The World Social Forum as Subaltern Cosmopolitan Politics and Legality." Edited by Boaventura De Sousa Santos and César A. Rodríguez-Garavito. *Law and Globalization from below: Towards a Cosmopolitan Legality* 29: 29–63.
- Dei, George J Sefa. 2008. *Racists Beware: Uncovering Racial Politics in the Post Modern Society*. Brill Sense.
- Deol, Jeevan Singh. 2001. "Text and Lineage in Early Sikh History: Issues in the Study of the Adi Granth." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 64 (1): 34–58.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1998. "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone." *Religion*, 1–78.
- . (1998) 2002. "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone." In *Acts of Religion*, edited by Gil Anidjar, 40–101. Oxon: Routledge.
- DeVries, Larry. 2010. "Hindu and Other South Asian Religious Groups." In *Asian Religions in British Columbia*, edited by Larry DeVries, Don Baker, and Dan Overmyer, 17–42.

- Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Dikeç, Mustafa, and Liette Gilbert. 2002. "Right to the City: Homage or a New Societal Ethics?" *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 13 (2): 58–74.
- Dixon, Deborah P, and John Paul Jones III. 1998. "My Dinner with Derrida, or Spatial Analysis and Poststructuralism Do Lunch." *Environment and Planning A* 30 (2): 247–260.
- Dusenbery, Verne A. 1981. "Canadian Ideology and Public Policy: The Impact on Vancouver Sikh Ethnic and Religious Adaptation." *Canadian Ethnic Studies= Etudes Ethniques Au Canada* 13 (3): 101.
- . 1997. "The Poetics and Politics of Recognition: Diasporan Sikhs in Pluralist Polities." *American Ethnologist* 24 (4): 738–762.
- Dwyer, Claire, Justin Tse, and David Ley. 2016. "'Highway to Heaven': The Creation of a Multicultural, Religious Landscape in Suburban Richmond, British Columbia." *Social & Cultural Geography* 17 (5): 667–693.
- Eitel, Ernest John. 1895. *Europe in China: The History of Hongkong from the Beginning to the Year 1882*. Luzac & Company.
- Erni, John Nguyet, and Lisa Yuk-ming Leung. 2014. *Understanding South Asian Minorities in Hong Kong*. Vol. 1. Hong Kong University Press.
- Falzon, Mark-Anthony, ed. 2009. "Introduction: Multi-Sited Ethnography: Theory, Praxis and Locality in Contemporary Research." In *Multi-Sited Ethnography: Theory, Praxis and Locality in Contemporary Research*, 1–23. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing.
- Fanon, Frantz. (1952) 2008. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated by Richard Philcox. Grove Press.
- Faure, David, and Helen F. Siu. 1995. "Introduction." In *Down to Earth: The Territorial Bond in South China*, edited by David Faure and Helen F. Siu, 1–20. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Fenech, Louis E. 2008. *The Darbar of the Sikh Gurus: The Court of God in the World of Men*. Oxford: University Press.
- Fenech, Louis E. 2014. "The Works of Bhai Nand Lal Goya." In *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*, edited by Pashaura Singh and Louis E. Fenech, 159–69. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Firsttake Entertainment. 2016. "Salman Khan Films & First Take Entertainment Announce 'Lions of the Sea' a Feature Film Based on the 'Komagata Maru Incident.'" *Cision*, November 14, 2016. <https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/salman-khan-films--first-take-entertainment-announce-lions-of-the-sea-a-feature-film-based-on-the-komagata-maru-incident-601101905.html>.
- Foster, John E., and William John Eccles. 2019. "Fur Trade in Canada." In *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Historica Canada. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/fur-trade>.
- Foucault, Michel. 1986. "Of Other Spaces." Translated by Jay Miskowiec. *Diacritics* 16 (1): 22–27.
- . (1966) 1994. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. Vintage Books. New York: Vintage Books.
- . 2003. *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*. Translated by David Macy. New York: Picador.
- Fraser, Nancy. 1990. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." *Social Text*, no. 25/26: 56–80.

- Freeman, Victoria. 2010. "Toronto Has No History!": Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism, and Historical Memory in Canada's Largest City." *Urban History Review/Revue d'histoire Urbaine* 38 (2): 21–35.
- Friedmann, John. 1986. "The World City Hypothesis." *Development and Change* 17 (1): 69–83.
- . 2002. *The Prospect of Cities*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Germain, Annick, and Julie Elizabeth Gagnon. 2003. "Minority Places of Worship and Zoning Dilemmas in Montreal." *Planning Theory & Practice* 4 (3): 295–318.
- Ghosh, Sutama. 2007. "Transnational Ties and Intra-Immigrant Group Settlement Experiences: A Case Study of Indian Bengalis and Bangladeshis in Toronto." *GeoJournal* 68 (2–3): 223–242.
- . 2014. "A Passage to Canada: The Differential Migrations of South Asian Skilled Workers to Toronto." *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 15 (4): 715–735.
- Gibson, James R. 1992. *Otter Skins, Boston Ships, and China Goods: The Maritime Fur Trade of the Northwest Coast, 1785-1841*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Gibson, Robert W. 1989. "Safe Haven for Capital : Hong Kong Buys Into Vancouver." *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 1989. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1989-07-16-mn-5924-story.html>.
- Gibson-Graham, Julie Katherine. 2006. *A Postcapitalist Politics*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Gidwani, Vinay K. 2006. "Subaltern Cosmopolitanism as Politics." *Antipode* 38 (1): 7–21.
- Gidwani, Vinay, and K. Sivaramakrishnan. 2003. "Circular Migration and Rural Cosmopolitanism in India." *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 37 (1–2): 339–67.
- Gill, Parmbir Singh. 2014. "A Different Kind of Dissidence: The Ghadar Party, Sikh History and the Politics of Anticolonial Mobilization." *Sikh Formations* 10 (1): 23–41.
- Gilroy, Paul. 2000. *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gismondi, Melissa. 2018. "Canadian History Isn't Boring." *The Walrus*, September 2, 2018. <https://thewalrus.ca/canadian-history-isnt-boring/>.
- Glissant, Édouard. (1990) 1997. *Poetics of Relation*. Translated by Betsy Wing. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Gökarkırsel, Banu. 2009. "Beyond the Officially Sacred: Religion, Secularism, and the Body in the Production of Subjectivity." *Social & Cultural Geography* 10 (6): 657–674.
- Gökarkırsel, Banu, and Anna Secor. 2015. "Post-Secular Geographies and the Problem of Pluralism: Religion and Everyday Life in Istanbul, Turkey." *Political Geography* 46: 21–30.
- Goonewardena, Kanishka, and Stefan Kipfer. 2005. "Spaces of Difference: Reflections from Toronto on Multiculturalism, Bourgeois Urbanism and the Possibility of Radical Urban Politics." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29 (3): 670–78.
- Government of Canada. 2010. "Canada and the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation Celebrate Historic Claim Settlement." New Releases. Government of Canada. October 29, 2010. <https://www.canada.ca/en/news/archive/2010/10/canada-mississaugas-new-credit-first-nation-celebrate-historic-claim-settlement.html>.
- Gregory, Derek. 1994. *Geographical Imaginations*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
- Grewal, Inderpal, and Caren Kaplan. 1994. *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and*

- Transnational Feminist Practices*. U of Minnesota Press.
- Grewal, J. S. 2006. "The Gurdwara." In *Religious Movements and Institutions in Medieval India*, edited by J. S. Grewal, VII:533–47. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- . 2009. *The Sikhs: Ideology, Institutions, and Identity*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Guha, Ranajit. 1988. "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India." In *Selected Subaltern Studies*, edited by Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 37–44. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gupta, Akhil, and James Ferguson. 1992. "Beyond 'Culture': Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference." *Cultural Anthropology* 7 (1): 6–23.
- Gwulo: Old Hong Kong. n.d. "Sikh Temple - Happy Valley (2nd Generation) [1934-1945]." Gwulo: Old Hong Kong. Accessed September 1, 2019. [https://gwulo.com/node/20836#13/22.2777/114.1667/Map\\_by\\_ESRI-Markers/100](https://gwulo.com/node/20836#13/22.2777/114.1667/Map_by_ESRI-Markers/100).
- Habermas, Jürgen. 2008. "Notes on Post-Secular Society." *New Perspectives Quarterly* 25 (4): 17–29.
- Hall, Stuart. 1992. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." In *Modernity and Its Futures*, 223–37. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hans, Raj Kumar. 2003. "Gurdwara as a Cultural Site of Punjabi Community in British Columbia, 1905-1965." In *Fractured Identity: The Indian Diaspora in Canada*, edited by Sushma J Verma and Radhika Seshan, 217–233. Jaipur: Rawat Publications.
- Harvey, David. 2001. *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography*. New York: Routledge.
- . 2003. "The Right to the City." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27 (4): 939–41.
- . 2009. *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom*. Columbia University Press.
- Harwood, Stacy Anne. 2005. "Struggling to Embrace Difference in Land-Use Decision Making in Multicultural Communities." *Planning, Practice & Research* 20 (4): 355–371.
- Hawley, Michael. 2014. "Sikh Institutions." In *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*, edited by Pashaura Singh and Louis E. Fenech, 317–27. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Heber, R. Wesley. 2011. "Aboriginal People and the Fur Trade." In *Hidden in Plain Sight: Contributions of Aboriginal Peoples to Canadian Identity and Culture*, edited by Daniel J. K. Beavon, Cora Voyageur, and David Newhouse, 2:15–31. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Hennig, Clare. 2017. "Local Podcast Explores 'Humble, Everyday Stories' of South Asian History in Vancouver." *CBC News*, November 25, 2017. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/the-nameless-collective-south-asian-history-vancouver-1.4418777>.
- Heritage BC. n.d. "South Asian Canadian Historic Places." Online Map. Heritage BC. Accessed March 20, 2020. <https://heritagebc.ca/cultural-maps/south-asian-canadian-map/>.
- Hesse-Biber, Sharlene Nagy. 2007. "Feminist Approaches to In-Depth Interviewing." In *Feminist Research Practice: A Primer*, edited by Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber, 182–232. London: Sage Publications.
- Heynen, Nik. 2009. "Bending the Bars of Empire from Every Ghetto for Survival: The Black Panther Party's Radical Antihunger Politics of Social Reproduction and Scale." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 99 (2): 406–422.
- Hindustanee. 1914. *The Hindustanee*, March 1, 1914.
- Hoernig, Heidi. 2010. *Lessons from Recent Immigrant, Minority Place of Worship Development*

- for Urban Planning amidst Cultural Diversity*. University of Waterloo (Unpublished dissertation).
- Hong, Gang. 2017. "Locating Zhuhai between Land and Sea: A Relational Production of Zhuhai, China, as an Island City." *Island Studies Journal* 12 (2).
- Hong Kong Telegraph. 1902. "New Sikh and Hindu Temple." *Hong Kong Telegraph*, May 12, 1902.
- . 1934. "New Sikh Temple." *Hong Kong Telegraph*, April 9, 1934.
- Hooks, Bell. 1984. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. 2nd ed. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.
- Humphrey, Matt. 2018. "After 100 Years, Vaisakhi Returns to Victoria." *CBC News*, April 28, 2018. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/vaisakhi-victoria-parade-1.4635163>.
- Hutter, Manfred. 2012. "'Half Mandir and Half Gurdwara': Three Local Hindu Communities in Manila, Jakarta, and Cologne." *Numen* 59 (4): 344–365.
- Hyndman, Jennifer. 2004. "The (Geo) Politics of Mobility." In *Mapping Women, Making Politics: Feminist Perspectives on Political Geography*, edited by Lynn A. Staeheli, Eleonore Kofman, and Linda Peake, 169–184. New York: Routledge.
- IN5 Experium. 2019a. "IN5 Experium: The Golden Temple." 2019. <https://in5experium.com/>.
- . 2019b. *Panj Ab*. App - Android Play Store, Ver 1.0.5. <https://play.google.com/store?hl=en>.
- Indian Summer. 2017a. "Annual Report 2017." Vancouver, B.C: Indian Summer Arts Society. <https://www.indiansummerfest.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/ISF2017-Annual-Report.pdf>.
- . 2017b. "Taika: South Asian + Indigenous Programming." Indian Summer Festival. May 31, 2017. <https://www.indiansummerfest.ca/2017/05/31/taika-south-asian-indigenous-programming/>.
- . n.d. "About Us: Where Worlds Meet." Indian Summer Festival. Accessed October 15, 2019. <https://www.indiansummerfest.ca/about-us/>.
- Information Services Department. 2018. *Hong Kong Yearbook 2017*. Hong Kong: Information Services Department, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government. <https://www.yearbook.gov.hk/2017/en/index.html>.
- Isin, Engin F. 2007. "City.State: Critique of Scalar Thought." *Citizenship Studies* 11 (2): 211–228.
- Isin, Engin F, and Myer Siemiatycki. 2002. "Making Space for Mosques: Struggles for Urban Citizenship in Diasporic Toronto." In *Race, Space, and the Law: Unmapping a White Settler Society*, edited by Sherene Razack, 185–209. Between the Lines.
- Jakara Movement. 2012. "Building Begampura: Confronting Caste." *Jakara Movement* (blog). June 11, 2012. [https://www.jakara.org/building\\_begampura\\_confronting\\_caste](https://www.jakara.org/building_begampura_confronting_caste).
- . 2015. "Live from Ross Street Gurdwara." *Jakara Movement*. April 16, 2015. <https://www.jakara.org/modi>.
- Jaspal, Rusi, and Opinderjit Kaur Takhar. 2016. "Caste and Identity Processes among British Sikhs in the Midlands." *Sikh Formations* 12 (1): 87–102.
- Jim, Alice Ming Wai. 2007. "Thoughts on the Meaning of Return: HKG <math>\times</math> YVR." *Journal of Visual Culture* 6 (3): 333–341.
- . 2014. "The Maraya Project: Research-Creation, Inter-Reference and the Worlding of Asian Cities." *Third Text* 28 (1): 15–31.

- Johnson, Jon. 2013. "The Indigenous Environmental History of Toronto, "the Meeting Place." In *Urban Explorations: Environmental Histories of the Toronto Region*, edited by L. Anders Sandberg, Stephen Bocking, and Ken Cruikshank, 59–71. Ontario: Ontario: Wilson Institute for Canadian History.
- Johnston, Hugh. 1988. "The Development of the Punjabi Community in Vancouver since 1961." *Canadian Ethnic Studies= Etudes Ethniques Au Canada* 20 (2): 1.
- Johnston, Hugh J. M. 1998. "KAUR, HARNAM." In *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*. Vol. 14. University of Toronto/Université Laval. [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/kaur\\_harnam\\_14E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/kaur_harnam_14E.html).
- . 2014. *The Voyage of the Komagata Maru: The Sikh Challenge to Canada's Colour Bar*. Expanded and Fully revised edition. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Jung, Dinah. 2013. "The Cultural Biography of Agarwood–Perfumery in Eastern Asia and the Asian Neighbourhood." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 23 (1): 103–125.
- Jutla, Rajinder S. 2016. "The Evolution of the Golden Temple of Amritsar into a Major Sikh Pilgrimage Center." *AIMS Geosciences* 2 (October): 259–72.
- Kahlon, Swarn Singh. 2016. *Sikhs in Asia Pacific: Travels among the Sikh Diaspora from Yangon to Kobe*. London: Routledge.
- Kalra, Virinder S, and Michael Nijhawan. 2007. "Cultural, Linguistic And Political Translations: Dhadi 'Urban' Music." *Sikh Formations* 3 (1): 67–80.
- Kalra, Virinder S, and Navtej K Purewal. 2019. *Beyond Religion in India and Pakistan: Gender and Caste, Borders and Boundaries*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Kaur, Amardeep, and Cheryl Teelucksingh. 2015. "Environmental Justice, Transit Equity and the Place for Immigrants in Toronto." *Canadian Journal of Urban Research* 24 (2): 43–63.
- Kaur, Asha Marie. 2019. "Persian Voice in the Guru Granth Sahib – Introduction: The Politics and Poetics of Persian in Gurbani." *Sikh Research Institute*, September 17, 2019. [https://www.sikhri.org/persian\\_voice\\_in\\_the\\_guru\\_granth\\_sahib\\_introduction\\_the\\_politics\\_and\\_poetics\\_of\\_persian\\_in\\_gurbani](https://www.sikhri.org/persian_voice_in_the_guru_granth_sahib_introduction_the_politics_and_poetics_of_persian_in_gurbani).
- Kaur, Harmeet. 2011. "Politics of Discrimination: Study of Caste against Ravidasi Sikhs in the Diaspora." Columbia University (unpublished Masters thesis).
- Kaur, Inderjit N. 2011. "Sikh Shabad Kīrtan and Gurmat Sangīt: What's in the Name?" *JPS* 18 (1 & 2): 252.
- . 2018. "Transnational Affects, Transnational Worldings: Sikhs Sounding Sacred Songs, Making Multiple Worlds." *Civilisations. Revue Internationale d'anthropologie et de Sciences Humaines*, no. 67: 23–40.
- Kaur, Jasleen. 2019. "The Realm Without Sorrow." *Sikh Research Institute*, April 1, 2019. [https://www.sikhri.org/the\\_realm\\_without\\_sorrow\\_jasleen\\_kaur\\_sikhri](https://www.sikhri.org/the_realm_without_sorrow_jasleen_kaur_sikhri).
- Kaur, Keerat. 2018. "The Life of Harnam Kaur." Artist Website. Keerat Kaur. 2018. <http://keerat-kaur.com/the-life-of-harnam-kaur>.
- . 2019. "Komagatamaru Mural." Artist Website. Keerat Kaur. 2019. <http://keerat-kaur.com/komagatamaru-mural>.
- Kaur, Rajender. 2012. "The Komagata Maru in History and Literary Narrative: Cultural Memory, Representation, and Social Justice." *South Asian Popular Culture* 10 (2): 151–165.
- Kaur, Taranjit. 2014. "The Mai From Kabul." *Sikh Research Institute*, March 13, 2014. [https://www.sikhri.org/the\\_mai\\_from\\_kabul](https://www.sikhri.org/the_mai_from_kabul).
- Kazimi, Ali. 2004. *Continuous Journey: A Film*. Peripheral Visions Film & Video.

- . 2011. *Undesirables: White Canada and the Komagata Maru: An Illustrated History*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre.
- . 2019. “Did Indigenous Paddlers Smuggle Food to the Komagata Maru?” *The Conversation*, September 19, 2019. <http://theconversation.com/did-indigenous-paddlers-smuggle-food-to-the-komagata-maru-123076>.
- Kelly, Philip. 2003. “Canadian-Asian Transnationalism.” *Canadian Geographer* 47 (3): 209–18.
- Khalsa Diwan Hong Kong. n.d. “Redevelopment Work – Khalsa Diwan Hong Kong.” Organization Website. Khalsa Diwan Sikh Temple Hong Kong. Accessed September 2, 2019. <http://www.khalsadiwan.com/redevelopment-work/>.
- Khurana, Gurveen Kaur. 2011. “Home and the World.” In *Home and the World: The Nagar Kirtan and Sikh Diaspora*, edited by Pashaura Singh, 228–48. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- King, Christopher. 1994. *One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- King, Richard. 1999. *Orientalism and Religion: Post-Colonial Theory, India and “The Mystic East.”* New York: Routledge.
- “Kishen Kaur.” n.d. Digital Archive, Simon Fraser University Library. The Komagata Maru: Continuing the Journey Digital Collection. Accessed October 15, 2019. <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/3514>.
- Kong, Lily. 1990. “Geography and Religion: Trends and Prospects.” *Progress in Human Geography* 14 (3): 355–371.
- . 2001. “Mapping ‘New’ Geographies of Religion: Politics and Poetics in Modernity.” *Progress in Human Geography* 25 (2): 211–233.
- . 2010. “Global Shifts, Theoretical Shifts: Changing Geographies of Religion.” *Progress in Human Geography* 34 (6): 755–776.
- Kwong, Chi Man, and Yiu Lun Tsoi. 2014. *Eastern Fortress: A Military History of Hong Kong, 1840–1970*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Lai, David Chuenyan. 1988. *Chinatowns: Towns within Cities in Canada*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- . 2003. “From Downtown Slums to Suburban Malls: Chinese Migration and Settlement in Canada.” In *The Chinese Diaspora: Space, Place, Mobility, and Identity*, edited by Laurence J. C. Ma and Carolyn L. Cartier, 311–36. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- . 2011. “Victoria Chinatown: The Oldest Surviving Chinatown in Canada 1858 ~ 2011.” Simon Fraser University: David See-Chai Lam Centre for International Communication. <http://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/davidlamcentre/PDFs/Victoria%20Chinatown-Bilingual-Single.pdf>.
- Lal, Vinay. 2004. “Labour and Longing.” In *Seminar*, 14–26. New Delhi.
- Latour, Bruno. 1993. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Law, Lisa. 2002. “Defying Disappearance: Cosmopolitan Public Spaces in Hong Kong.” *Urban Studies* 39 (9): 1625–1645.
- Lawrence, Bonita. 2002. “Rewriting Histories of the Land: Colonization and Indigenous Resistance in Eastern Canada.” *Race, Space and the Law: Unmapping a White Settler Society*, 21–46.
- Lawrence, Bonita, and Enakshi Dua. 2005. “Decolonizing Antiracism.” *Social Justice* 32 (4): 120.

- Lee, Ada. 2014. "Happy Valley Bomb 'Part of Big January 1945 US Attack on Japanese.'" *South China Morning Post*, February 8, 2014. <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1423487/happy-valley-bomb-part-big-january-1945-us-attack-japanese>.
- Lefebvre, Henri. (1974) 1991. *The Production of Space*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- . 1996. *Writings on Cities*. Translated by Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers.
- Leung, Ho Hon, and Raymond Lau. 2009. "Making of the Pacific Mall: Chinese Identity and Architecture in Toronto." In *Imagining Globalization*, edited by Ho Hon Leung, Matthew Hendley, Robert W. Compton, and Brian D. Haley, 107–125. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ley, David. 2011. *Millionaire Migrants: Trans-Pacific Life Lines*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Ley, David, and Audrey Kobayashi. 2005. "Back to Hong Kong: Return Migration or Transnational Sojourn?" *Global Networks* 5 (2): 111–127.
- Li, Wei. 2009. *Ethnoburb: The New Ethnic Community in Urban America*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Lim, Lisa. 2017. "Where Did the Word Lascar, and Cantonese Mo Lo, Come From?" *South China Morning Post*, March 3, 2017. <https://www.scmp.com/magazines/post-magazine/short-reads/article/2075502/where-word-lascar-and-cantonese-mo-lo-come-and>.
- Lin, George CS. 1997. *Red Capitalism in South China: Growth and Development of the Pearl River Delta*. Vol. 2. Vancouver: UBC press.
- Lo, Lucia. 2006. "Changing Geography of Toronto's Chinese Ethnic Economy." In *Landscapes of the Ethnic Economy*, edited by David Kaplan and Wei Li, 83–96. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Lorde, Audre. 1984. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Berkeley: Crossing Press.
- Lorimer, Hayden. 2005. "Cultural Geography: The Busyness of Being 'more-than-Representational'." *Progress in Human Geography* 29 (1): 83–94.
- Lowry, Glen, and Eugene McCann. 2011. "Asia in the Mix: Urban Form and Global Mobilities – Hong Kong, Vancouver, Dubai." In *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*, edited by Ananya Roy and Aihwa Ong, 182–204. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Luk, Chiu M, and Mai B Phan. 2005. "Ethnic Enclave Reconfiguration: A 'New' Chinatown in the Making." *GeoJournal* 64 (1): 17–30.
- Lum, Ken. n.d. "Four Boats Stranded: Red and Yellow, Black and White." Accessed October 14, 2019. <http://kenlumart.com/four-boats-stranded-red-and-yellow-black-and-white/>.
- MacLean, Derryl N. 2010. "Religion, Ethnicity, and the Double Diaspora of Asian Muslims." In *Asian Religions in British Columbia*, edited by Larry DeVries, Don Baker, and Dan Overmyer, 64–84. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Madill, Dennis F.K. 2015. "Fort Vancouver." In *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Historica Canada. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/fort-vancouver>.
- Mahtani, Minelle. 2014. "Toxic Geographies: Absences in Critical Race Thought and Practice in Social and Cultural Geography." *Social & Cultural Geography* 15 (4): 359–367.
- Malhotra, Anshu, and Farina Mir. 2012. "Punjab in History and Historiography: An Introduction." In *Punjab Reconsidered: History, Culture, and Practice*, edited by Anshu



- Malhotra and Farina Mir. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Malik, Tariq. 2010. *Chanting Denied Shores: The Komagata Maru Narratives*. Calgary: Bayeas.
- Mandair, Arvind-pal Singh. 2009. *Religion and the Specter of the West: Sikhism, India, Postcoloniality, and the Politics of Translation*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Mandair, Arvind-Pal Singh. 2013. *Sikhism: A Guide for the Perplexed*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Marcus, George E. 1995. "Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1): 95–117.
- Marwah, Lally, and Annemarie Hagan. 2017. *Komagata Maru: A Journey to Canada*. Exhibition. <http://pama.peelregion.ca/en/news/index.aspx?newsId=17c4a263-5e5b-4e2e-ba3f-bf54d719c7c0>.
- Maskeen, Sant Singh. 2006. *Mere Vichar*. Fateh Records.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wrBrnTe1Lms&t=703s>.
- Massey, Doreen. 1999. "Imagining Globalization: Power-Geometries of Time-Space." In *Global Futures: Migration, Environment and Globalization*, edited by Avtar Brah, Mary J. Hickman, and Máirtín Mac an Ghail, 27–44. London: Macmillan.
- . 2005. *For Space*. London: Sage.
- Massey, Doreen B. 1994. *Space, Place, and Gender*. Malden, MA: Polity Press.
- Mawani, Renisa. 2018. *Across Oceans of Law: The Komagata Maru and Jurisdiction in the Time of Empire*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- McCann, Gerard. 2011. "Sikhs and the City: Sikh History and Diasporic Practice in Singapore." *Modern Asian Studies* 45 (6): 1465–1498.
- McKittrick, Katherine. 2006. *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- . 2011. "On Plantations, Prisons, and a Black Sense of Place." *Social & Cultural Geography* 12 (8): 947–963.
- McKittrick, Katherine, and Clyde Adrian Woods. 2007. "No One Knows the Mysteries at the Bottom of the Ocean." In *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, edited by Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Adrian Woods, 1–13. South End Press.
- McLoughlin, Seán. 2005. "Migration, Diaspora and Transnationalism: Transformations of Religion and Culture in a Globalising Age." In *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religions*, edited by John R. Hinnells, 526–49. London: Routledge.
- Merrifield, Andy. 2011. "The Right to the City and Beyond." *City* 15 (3–4): 473–81.
- Mignolo, Walter. 2000. "The Many Faces of Cosmo-Polis: Border Thinking and Critical Cosmopolitanism." *Public Culture* 12 (3): 721–748.
- Mir, Farina. 2010. *The Social Space of Language: Vernacular Culture in British Colonial Punjab*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- . 2012. "Genre and Devotion in Punjabi Popular Narratives." In *Punjab Reconsidered: History, Culture, and Practice*, edited by Anshu Malhotra and Farina Mir. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Mishra, Vijay. 1996. "The Diasporic Imaginary: Theorizing the Indian Diaspora." *Textual Practice* 10 (3): 421–447.
- Mitchell, Katharyne. 2004. *Crossing the Neoliberal Line: Pacific Rim Migration and the Metropolis*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Mitra, Rituparna. 2015. *States of Affect: Trauma in Partition/Post-Partition South Asia*. Michigan State University (Unpublished dissertation).

- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. 2003. *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Mok, Danny. 2014. "More than 2,000 Evacuated as Wartime Bomb Unearthed in Happy Valley." *South China Morning Post*, February 6, 2014. <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1422151/hundreds-evacuated-suspected-wartime-bomb-unearthed-happy-valley>.
- Mukherjee, Arun. 1998. *Postcolonialism: My Living*. Toronto: TSAR Publications.
- Murdoch, Jon. 2006. *Post-Structuralist Geography: A Guide to Relational Space*. London: Sage.
- Murphy, Anne. 2008. "Modern Punjabi Literature in Vancouver: A Portrait." *Sikh Formations* 4 (2): 157–175.
- . 2012. *The Materiality of the Past: History and Representation in Sikh Tradition*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- . 2015. "Performing the Komagata Maru: Theatre and the Work of Memory." *Studies in Canadian Literature/Études En Littérature Canadienne* 40 (1).
- Nagar, Richa. 1997. "Exploring Methodological Borderlands through Oral Narratives." In *Thresholds in Feminist Geography*, edited by John Paul Jones III, Heidi J. Nast, and Susan M. Roberts, 203–224. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield.
- . 2014. *Muddying the Waters: Coauthoring Feminisms across Scholarship and Activism*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Nameless Collective. 2017a. "Episode 1: White Canada Forever?" The Nameless Collective Podcast. <https://www.stitcher.com/podcast/jugni-style/the-nameless-collective>.
- . 2017b. *Komagata Maru Virtual Walking Tour*. Vancouver, B.C. <https://www.facebook.com/thenamelessco/videos/1748408372131498/>.
- . 2017c. "Episode 2: Detained and Deported." The Nameless Collective Podcast. <https://www.stitcher.com/podcast/jugni-style/the-nameless-collective>.
- . 2017d. *Kitsilano Walking Tour Presented by The Nameless Collective*. Walking Tour. <https://www.facebook.com/events/460488040981748/>.
- . 2019. "The Politics of Un-Naming." The Nameless Collective Podcast. <https://www.stitcher.com/podcast/jugni-style/the-nameless-collective>.
- Nandy, Ashis. 1988. "The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance." *Alternatives* 13 (2): 177–194.
- National Geographic. 2016. "India's Mega Kitchens: Hola Mohalla Festival." *India's Mega Kitchens*. National Geographic India.
- Nayar, Kamala Elizabeth. 2004. *The Sikh Diaspora in Vancouver: Three Generations amid Tradition, Modernity, and Multiculturalism*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- . 2008. "Misunderstood in the Diaspora: The Experience of Orthodox Sikhs in Vancouver." *Sikh Formations* 4 (1): 17–32.
- . 2010. "The Making of Sikh Space: The Role of the Gurdwara." In *Asian Religions in British Columbia*, edited by Larry DeVries, Don Baker, and Dan Overmyer, 43–63. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- . 2012. *The Punjabis in British Columbia: Location, Labour, First Nations, and Multiculturalism*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press.
- Nesbitt, Eleanor. 2014. "Sikh Sants and Their Establishments in India and Abroad." In *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*, edited by Pashaura Singh and Louis E. Fenech, 360–71. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nijhawan, Michael. 2008. "1984 and the Diasporic Politics of Aesthetics: Reconfigurations and

- New Constellations Among Toronto's Sikh Youth." *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 17 (2): 196–219.
- Nijhawan, Michael, and Kamal Arora. 2013. "'Lullabies for Broken Children': Diasporic Citizenship and the Dissenting Voices of Young Sikhs in Canada." *Sikh Formations* 9 (3): 299–321.
- Niranjana, Tejaswini. 1992. *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- North China Herald. 1907. "The Sikh Gurdwara." *North China Herald*, August 16, 1907.
- . 1908. "The Sikh Gurdwara: Opening Ceremony." *North China Herald*, July 4, 1908.
- O'Hanlon, Rosalind. 1988. "Recovering the Subject Subaltern Studies and Histories of Resistance in Colonial South Asia-Subaltern Studies." *Modern Asian Studies* 22 (1): 189–224.
- Oliveira, Lisa Maria. 2004. *Housing Trajectories into Homeownership: A Case Study of Punjabi Sikh Immigrants in the Toronto CMA*. Toronto: York University (unpublished dissertation).
- OMNI News. 2017. "Pape Ave. Gurdwara." *OMNI Punjabi*. OMNI Television. <https://www.omnitv.ca/ab/pa/videos/pape-ave-gurdwara/>.
- Ong, Aihwa. 2006. *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- . 2011. "Introduction: Worlding Cities, or the Art of Being Global." In *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*, edited by Ananya Roy and Aihwa Ong, 1–26. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Parks Canada. n.d. "Abbotsford Sikh Temple National Historic Site of Canada." Canada's Historic Places. Accessed April 12, 2020. <https://www.historicplaces.ca/en/rep-reg/place-lieu.aspx?id=9358&pid=0>.
- Parshad, Shaheen. 2014. "PODS Project in Amritsar Stands Almost Shelved Now." *Hindustan Times*, July 28, 2014. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/pods-project-in-amritsar-stands-almost-shelved-now/story-KGS0W4M1UMR552JxVOW9MI.html>.
- "Passenger List." n.d. Digital Archive, Simon Fraser University Library. The Komagata Maru: Continuing the Journey Digital Collection. Accessed October 14, 2019. [http://komagatamarujourney.ca/km\\_passengers](http://komagatamarujourney.ca/km_passengers).
- Peach, Ceri, and Richard Gale. 2003. "Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs in the New Religious Landscape of England." *Geographical Review* 93 (4): 469–90.
- Peel Data Centre. 2013. "2011 NHS Bulletin: Ethnic Diversity & Religion." Bulletins on the 2011 Census and NHS. Region of Peel: Peel Data Centre. [https://www.peelregion.ca/planning/pdc/pdf/Ethicity\\_Religion\\_Bulletin.pdf](https://www.peelregion.ca/planning/pdc/pdf/Ethicity_Religion_Bulletin.pdf).
- Plüss, Caroline. 2005. "Constructing Globalized Ethnicity: Migrants from India in Hong Kong." *International Sociology* 20 (2): 201–224.
- Pollock, Sharon. (1976) 2005. "The Komagata Maru Incident." In *Sharon Pollock Collected Works: Volume One.*, edited by Cynthia Zimmerman, 98–137. Toronto: Playrights Canada.
- Preston, Valerie, and Lucia Lo. 2000. "Asian Theme Malls in Suburban Toronto: Land Use Conflict in Richmond Hill [Canadian Urban Landscape Examples, 21]." *Canadian Geographer* 44 (2): 182.
- Price, Patricia L. 2010. "Cultural Geography and the Stories We Tell Ourselves." *Cultural Geographies* 17 (2): 203–210.

- Pritam, Amrita. n.d. "To Waris Shah." In *Selected Poems of Amrita Pritam*, edited by Prithi Nandy, translated by Amrita Pritam. Calcutta: Dialogue Calcutta Publications.
- . 2009. *Pinjar: The Skeleton and Other Stories*. Translated by Khushwant Singh. New Delhi: Tara Press.
- Province of British Columbia. 2017. "Proclamation of Sikh Heritage Month." <http://www.bclaws.ca/civix/document/id/proclamations/proclamations/SikhHeritageMnth2017>.
- Punjab Government. 2019. "Punjab Government Signs MoU with Virgin Hyperloop One for Pre-Feasibility Study of Hyperloop Transportation Project." Government Website. Directorate of Information and Public Relations, Punjab, India. December 3, 2019. <http://diprpunjab.gov.in/?q=content/punjab-government-signs-mou-virgin-hyperloop-one-pre-feasibility-study-hyperloop>.
- Purcell, Mark. 2002. "Excavating Lefebvre: The Right to the City and Its Urban Politics of the Inhabitant." *GeoJournal* 58 (2–3): 99–108.
- Purewal, Navtej. 2010. "'We Do It for Ourselves': Women's Self-Activity, Kirtan and Spiritual Authority among Sikh Women's Organizations." In . University of Birmingham.
- Purewal, Navtej K. 2009. "Gender, Seva, and Social Institutions: A Case Study of Bebe Nanaki Gurdwara and Charitable Trust, Birmingham, UK." In *Sikh Diaspora Philanthropy in Punjab: Global Giving for Local Good*, edited by Verne A Dusenbery and Darshan Singh Tatla, 205–18. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Purewal, Navtej K. 2011. "Sikh/Muslim Bhai-Bhai? Towards a Social History of the Rabābī Tradition of Shabad Kīrtan." *Sikh Formations* 7 (3): 365–382.
- Puwar, Nirmal. 2012. "Mediations on Making Aaj Kaal." *Feminist Review* 100 (1): 124–141.
- Qureshi, Kaveri. 2014. "Sikh Associational Life in Britain: Gender and Generation in the Public Sphere." In *Migration and Religion in Europe: Comparative Perspectives on South Asian Experiences*, edited by Ester Gallo, 93–110. Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd.
- Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi*. 2008. Mumbai: Yash Raj Films. <http://www.imdb.com/>.
- Ram, Ronki. 2017. "The Genealogy of a Dalit Faith: The Ravidassia Dharm and Caste Conflicts in Contemporary Punjab." *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 51 (1): 52–78.
- . 2018. "What Went Wrong With the Third Alternative? Exploring the Rise and Demise of the Aam Aadmi Party in Punjab." *Journal of Punjab Studies* 25 (1).
- Ramey, Steven W. 2008. *Hindu, Sufi, or Sikh: Contested Practices and Identifications of Sindhi Hindus in India and Beyond*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Recollet, Karyn, and Jon Johnson. 2019. "'Why Do You Need to Know That?' Slipstream Movements and Mapping 'Otherwise' in Tkaronto." *Journal of Public Pedagogies*, no. 4.
- Robinson, Jennifer. 2002. "Global and World Cities: A View from off the Map." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 26 (3): 531–554.
- Rode, Ajmer. 1984. *Kāmāgātā Mārū*. Amritsar: Nanak Singh Pustakalaya.
- Rossi, Cheryl. 2014. "Storytelling Festival Connects Communities; 'Cabinet of Curiosities' Filled Personal Narratives, Epics, Fairy Tales, Traditional Folk Stories." *Vancouver Courier*, June 11, 2014, sec. Arts & Entertainment.
- Rothery, Michael. 1994. "Bruce Lee: The Lost Interview (1994)." *The Pierre Berton Show*. Canada: CHCH TV. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bNFfG541MYY>.
- Roy, Ananya. 2011a. "Conclusion: Postcolonial Urbanism: Speed, Hysteria, Mass Dreams." In *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*, edited by Ananya Roy and Aihwa Ong, 307–35. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

- . 2011b. “Slumdog Cities: Rethinking Subaltern Urbanism.” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 35 (2): 223–238.
- Roy, Anjali Gera. 2018. *Imperialism and Sikh Migration: The Komagata Maru Incident*. New York: Routledge.
- Roy, Srila. 2017. “The Positive Side of Co-Optation? Intersectionality: A Conversation between Inderpal Grewal and Srila Roy.” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 19 (2): 254–262.
- Said, Edward. 1979. *Orientalism*. Vintage.
- Sakai, Naoki. 1997. *Translation and Subjectivity: On “Japan” and Cultural Nationalism*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Sandercock, Leonie. 2003. *Cosmopolis II: Mongrel Cities of the 21st Century*. London ; New York: Continuum.
- Sato, Kiyotaka. 2012. “Divisions among Sikh Communities in Britain and the Role of Caste System: A Case Study of Four Gurdwaras in Multi-Ethnic Leicester.” *Journal of Punjab Studies* 19 (1).
- Scott, James C. 1998. *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Seucharan, Cherise. 2018. “Kwantlen First Nation to Make History at the Surrey Vaisakhi Parade.” *The Star*, April 20, 2018, StarMetro Vancouver edition. <https://www.thestar.com/vancouver/2018/04/20/kwantlen-first-nation-to-make-history-at-the-surrey-vaisakhi-parade.html>.
- Seva Food Bank. 2005. “Seva Food Bank – More than 5 Years of History.” Organization Website. Seva Food Bank. September 1, 2005. <https://www.sevafoodbank.com/seva-food-bank-more-than-5-years-of-history/>.
- . n.d. “Our Beliefs.” Organization Website. Seva Food Bank. Accessed February 24, 2020. <https://www.sevafoodbank.com/our-statements/>.
- Shackle, Christopher. 2012. “Punjabi Sufi Poetry from Farid to Farid.” In *Punjab Reconsidered: History, Culture, and Practice*, edited by Anshu Malhotra and Farina Mir. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- . 2014. “Survey of Sikh Literature in the Sikh Tradition.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*, edited by Pashaura Singh and Louis E Fenech, 109–24. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2017. “After Macauliffe: The Wondrous Liberty of Puran Singh.” *Journal of the Irish Society for the Academic Study of Religions* 4 (1): 74–89.
- Shackle, Christopher, and Arvind-pal Singh Mandair. 2005. “Introduction.” In *Teachings of the Sikh Gurus: Selections from the Sikh Scriptures*, edited by Christopher Shackle and Arvind Mandair, xi-. Oxon: Routledge.
- Shani, Giorgio. 2005. “Beyond Khalistan? Sikh Diasporic Identity and Critical International Theory.” *Sikh Formations* 1 (1): 57–74.
- . 2008. “Toward a Post-Western IR: The *Umma*, *Khalsa Panth*, and Critical International Relations Theory.” *International Studies Review* 10 (4): 722–734.
- Sheringham, Olivia. 2010. “Creating ‘Alternative Geographies’: Religion, Transnationalism and Everyday Life.” *Geography Compass* 4 (11): 1678–1694.
- Shih, Fang-Long, and Carol Jones. 2014. “Introduction to Taiwan and Hong Kong in Comparative Perspective: Centres–Peripheries, Colonialism, and the Politics of Representation.” *Taiwan in Comparative Perspective* 5: 1–20.

- Siemiatycki, Myer, and Engin F Isin. 1997. "Immigration, Diversity and Urban Citizenship in Toronto." *Canadian Journal of Regional Science* 20 (1, 2): 73–102.
- Sikh Heritage Month Act, 2013, S.O. 2013, c. 12 - Bill 52*. 2013. <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/s13012>.
- Sikh Heritage Month Act (S.C. 2019, c. 5)*. 2019. [https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/annualstatutes/2019\\_5/page-1.html](https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/annualstatutes/2019_5/page-1.html).
- Sikh Heritage Museum. 2014. "Challenge and Denial-Komagata Maru 100 Years Later, 1914-2014." Sikh Heritage Museum. 2015 2014. <http://canadiansikhheritage.ca/exhibitions/challenge-denial/>.
- Sikh Heritage Museum of Canada. 2014. "Lions of the Sea." Museum Gallery Website. Sikh Heritage Museum of Canada. 2014. <http://shmc.ca/work/52/>.
- Sikh Research Institute. 2017. "Who Is a Sikh?" 1. State of the Panth. Sikh Research Institute.
- . 2018. *Gurduara: A Sikh Place of Learning*. State of the Panth Series 3. Sikh Research Institute. [https://www.sikhri.org/gurduara\\_a\\_sikh\\_place\\_of\\_learning\\_report](https://www.sikhri.org/gurduara_a_sikh_place_of_learning_report).
- . 2019. *Experience the Sri Harimandar Sahib Complex*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8xnKGf5yOy0>.
- . n.d. "Gurduārā: A Sikh Place of Learning." Accessed September 2, 2019. <https://www.sikhri.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Gurduara-A-Sikh-Place-of-Learning1.pdf>.
- Simone, AbdouMaliq. 2001. "On the Worlding of African Cities." *African Studies Review* 44 (2): 15–41.
- . 2004. *For The City Yet To Come: Changing African Life in Four Cities*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- . 2010. *City Life from Jakarta to Dakar: Movements at the Crossroads*. New Life: Routledge.
- Simpson, Audra. 2014. *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life across the Borders of Settler States*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Simpson, Leanne. 2011. *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence*. Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing.
- Singh, Baba Gurdit. (1928) 2007. *Voyage of Komagata Maru or India's Slavery Abroad*. New Delhi: Unistar Books and Punjab Centre for Migration Studies.
- Singh, Baba Iqbal. 2015. *Sant Teja Singh: First Ambassador of Sikhism to the Western World*. New Delhi: Kaligdhar Trust.
- Singh, Ganda, trans. 1940. "Nanak Panthis or The Sikhs and Sikhism of the 17th Century." *The Journal of Indian History* 19 (2): 195–219.
- Singh, Gurnam. 2014. "Sikh Music." In *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*, edited by Pashaura Singh and Louis E. Fenech, 397–407. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Singh, Gurpreet. 2018. "Surrey Vaisakhi Parade Organizers Make History by Recognizing Indigenous Lands." *The Georgia Straight*, April 24, 2018. <https://www.straight.com/news/1067461/gurpreet-singh-surrey-vaisakhi-parade-organizers-make-history-recognizing-indigenous>.
- Singh, Harinder, Jaswant Singh, and Surender Pal Singh Singh. 2014. *Gurū Granth Sāhib: Its Language and Grammar*. USA: Sikh Research Institute.
- Singh, I. J. 2017. "Amar Das (Guru)." In *Sikhism*, edited by Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair, 16–19. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands.
- Singh, Jasjit. 2015. "A Sense of Place: Sikh Identity in Great Britain and Hong Kong." *Asian*

- Anthropology* 14 (1): 103–114.
- Singh, Kulvir. 2018. “Challenging the Darkness: Developing A Sikh Response (Webinar).” Webinar, Sikh Research Institute Website, April 10.  
[https://www.sikhri.org/challenging\\_the\\_darkness\\_developing\\_a\\_sikh\\_response\\_webinar](https://www.sikhri.org/challenging_the_darkness_developing_a_sikh_response_webinar).
- Singh, Nikky-Guninder Kaur. 1993. *The Feminine Principle in the Sikh Vision of the Transcendent*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2010. “Art & Aesthetics in Sikhism.” *Sikhchic.Com*, January 18, 2010.  
<http://sikhchic.com/article-detail.php?id=2127&cat=1>.
- . 2011. *Sikhism: An Introduction*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- . 2014. “Sikh Art.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*, edited by Pashaura Singh and Louis E. Fenech, 419–29. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2019. “Tasting the Sweet: Guru Nanak and Sufi Delicacies.” In *Cultural Fusion of Sufi Islam: Alternative Paths to Mystical Faith*, edited by Sarwar Alam, 36–56. New York: Routledge.
- Singh, Paneet. 2018. *The Undocumented Trial of William C. Hopkinson*. Play.
- Singh, Pashaura. 2006. *Life and Work of Guru Arjan: History, Memory, and Biography in the Sikh Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2011. “Musical Chaunkis at the Darbar Sahib: History, Aesthetics, and Time.” In *Sikhism in Global Context*, edited by Pashaura Singh, 102–129. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2012. “Sikhs.” In *The Religions of Canadians*, edited by Jamie S. Scott, 307–50. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- . 2014a. “An Overview of Sikh History.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*, edited by Pashaura Singh and Louis E. Fenech, 19–34. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2014b. “Gurmat: The Teachings of the Gurus.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*, edited by Pashaura Singh and Louis E. Fenech, 225–39. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2014c. “The Guru Granth Sahib.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*, edited by Pashaura Singh and Louis E. Fenech, 125–35. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Singh, Puran. (1980) 2017. *Spirit of the Sikh (Part II)*. 3rd ed. Vol. 1. 2 vols. Patiala, Punjab: Punjabi University.
- Sinn, Elizabeth. 2008. “Lesson in Openness: Creating a Space of Flow in Hong Kong.” In *Hong Kong Mobile: Making a Global Population*, edited by Helen F. Siu and Agnes S. Ku, 13–43. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- . 2012. *Pacific Crossing: California Gold, Chinese Migration, and the Making of Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Siu, Helen F. 2011. “Returning a Provincialized Middle Class in Asia’s Urban Postmodern: The Case of Hong Kong.” In *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*, edited by Ananya Roy and Aihwa Ong, 129–59. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. (1999) 2012. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. 2nd ed. Zed Books Ltd.
- Sohi, Seema. 2014. “Sites of ‘Sedition’, Sites of Liberation: Gurdwaras, the Ghadar Party, and Anticolonial Mobilization.” *Sikh Formations* 10 (1): 5–22.
- Somani, Alia. 2012. *Oh Canada, Oh Komagata Maru*. Play.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VIWk6BwkJH8>.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1981. “‘Draupadi’ by Mahasveta Devi.” *Critical Inquiry* 8 (2):

- 381–402.
- . 1988. “Can the Subaltern Speak?” In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, 271–313. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- . 1989. “Woman in Difference: Mahasweta Devi’s ‘Douloti the Bountiful.’” *Cultural Critique*, no. 14: 105–128.
- . 1999. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- . 2005. “Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular.” *Postcolonial Studies* 8 (4): 475–486.
- Srivastava, Prem Kumari. 2016. “Separation and Longing in Viraha Barahmasa.” *Journal of the Humanities and the Social Sciences* 3: 43–56.
- Statistics Canada. 2013a. “Vancouver, CMA, British Columbia (Code 933) (Table).” National Household Survey (NHS) Profile. 2011 National Household Survey. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 99-004-XWE. May 8, 2013. <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>.
- . 2013b. “Canada (Code 01) (Table).” National Household Survey (NHS) Profile. 2011 National Household Survey. Statistics Canada Catalogue No. 99-004-XWE. September 11, 2013. <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>.
- . 2013c. “Surrey, CY, British Columbia (Code 5915004) (Table).” National Household Survey (NHS) Profile. 2011 National Household Survey. Statistics Canada Catalogue No. 99-004-XWE. September 11, 2013. <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>.
- . 2013d. “Toronto, CMA, Ontario (Code 535) (Table).” National Household Survey (NHS) Profile. 2011 National Household Survey. Statistics Canada Catalogue No. 99-004-XWE. September 11, 2013. <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>.
- Steckley, John. 1992. ““Toronto,” What Does It Mean?” *Arch Notes* 92 (3): 23–32.
- Takeuchi, Craig. 2017. “Sher Vancouver and Khalsa Diwan Society Unite LGBT and Sikh Communities for Vaisakhi for First Time.” *The Georgia Straight*, March 20, 2017. <http://www.straight.com/life/883751/sher-vancouver-and-khalsa-diwan-society-unite-lgbt-and-sikh-communities-vaisakhi-first>.
- Tatla, Darshan Singh. 1999. *The Sikh Diaspora: The Search for Statehood*. UCL Press.
- . 2008. “Sikhism and Development: A Review.” Working Paper 21. Religions and Development Research Programme. International Development Department, University of Birmingham. [https://www.academia.edu/518655/Sikhism\\_and\\_Development\\_A\\_Review](https://www.academia.edu/518655/Sikhism_and_Development_A_Review).
- . 2014. “The Sikh Diaspora.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*, edited by Pashaura Singh and Louis E. Fenech, 495–512. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Taylor, Charles. 2007. *A Secular Age*. Harvard University Press.
- Taylor, Peter J. 2004. *World City Network: A Global Urban Analysis*. New York: Routledge.
- Teather, Elizabeth Kenworthy, and Chun Shing Chow. 2000. “The Geographer and the Fengshui Practitioner: So Close and yet so Far Apart?” *Australian Geographer* 31 (3): 309–332.
- Teelucksingh, Cheryl, and Jeffery R. Masuda. 2014. “Urban Environmental Justice through the Camera: Understanding the Politics of Space and the Right to the City.” *Local Environment* 19 (3): 300–317.
- Thind, Jessi. (1998) 2003. *Lions of the Sea*. Victoria, B.C.: Trafford Publishing.
- Thobani, Sunera. 2007. *Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and Nation in Canada*. University of Toronto Press.



- The Singh Twins. 1998. Nineteen Eighty-Four. <https://www.singhtwins.co.uk/artwork/paintings-categories/single-paintings.html>.
- Thrift, Nigel. 2008. *Non-Representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect*. New York: Routledge.
- Townsend, Charles M. 2014. "The Darbar Sahib." In *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*, edited by Pashaura Singh and Louis E. Fenech, 430–40. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Trinh, Minh-Ha T. 1989. *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- . 2011. *Elsewhere, within Here: Immigration, Refugees and the Boundary Event*. New York: Routledge.
- Tsang, Henry. 1997. "Welcome to the Land of Light." Artist Website. Henry Tsang. 1997. <http://henrytsang.ca/welcome-to-the-land-of-light/>.
- Tse, Justin KH. 2014. "Grounded Theologies: 'Religion' and the 'Secular' in Human Geography." *Progress in Human Geography* 38 (2): 201–220.
- Tse, Justin K.H. 2016. "Introduction: The Umbrella Movement and Liberation Theology." In *Theological Reflections on the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement*, edited by Justin K.H. Tse and Jonathan Y. Tan, 1–17. US: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. 2005. *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University.
- Tuan, Yi-Fu. 1977. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- . 2009. *Religion: From Place to Placelessness*. Center Books on the International Scene. Chicago, Ill: Center for American Places at Columbia College Chicago.
- Tuck, Eve, and K Wayne Yang. 2012. "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1 (1).
- Ultra Global. 2011. "World's First and Largest Urban PRT System Announced." Ultra Global PRT. December 14, 2011. <http://www.ultraglobalprt.com/worlds-largest-urban-prt-system-announced/>.
- Upadhyay, Nishant. 2016. "*We'll Sail Like Columbus*": *Race, Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism, and the Making of South Asian Diasporas in Canada*. York University (unpublished dissertation).
- Vaid, Kanwal Narain. 1972. *The Overseas Indian Community in Hong Kong*. Vol. 7. Hong Kong: Centre of Asian Studies, University of Hong Kong.
- Vancouver Mural Festival. 2019. "Komagata Maru Mural Project." Vancouver Mural Festival. August 6, 2019. <https://www.vanmuralfest.ca/highlightingindigenousartistsroot/komagatamaru>.
- Vancouver Mural Festival. 2020. "Komagata Maru Mural Project." Vancouver Mural Festival. March 11, 2020. <https://vanmuralfest.ca/indigenous-program-blog/komagata-maru>.
- Vickery, Claude. 2014. "Voyage of the Black Dragon." *The Fifth Estate*. CBC. <https://www.cbc.ca/fifth/episodes/2013-2014/the-voyage-of-the-black-dragon>.
- Walcott, Rinaldo. 2015. "Genres of Human: Multiculturalism, Cosmo-Politics, and the Caribbean Basin." In *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, edited by Katherine McKittrick, 183–202. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Walia, Varinder. 2006. "Takht Directive Divides Hong Kong Sangat: Resentment among Sindhis." *Tribune News Service*, August 12, 2006. <https://www.tribuneindia.com/2006/20060813/punjab1.htm>.
- Walton-Roberts, Margaret. 1998. "Three Readings of the Turban: Sikh Identity in Greater

- Vancouver.” *Urban Geography* 19 (4): 311–331.
- . 2003. “Transnational Geographies: Indian Immigration to Canada.” *Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe Canadien* 47 (3): 235–250.
- Walton-Roberts, Margaret, and Daniel Hiebert. 1997. “Immigration, Entrepreneurship, and the Family: Indo-Canadian Enterprise in the Construction Industry of Greater Vancouver.” *Canadian Journal of Regional Science* 20 (1): 119–140.
- Wang, Shuguang. 1999. “Chinese Commercial Activity in the Toronto CMA: New Development Patterns and Impacts.” *Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe Canadien* 43 (1): 19–35.
- Wang, Shuguang, and Lucia Lo. 2005. “Chinese Immigrants in Canada: Their Changing Composition and Economic Performance.” *International Migration* 43 (3): 35–71.
- Watson, Jini Kim. 2011. *The New Asian City: Three-Dimensional Fictions of Space and Urban Form*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Watts, Vanessa. 2013. “Indigenous Place-Thought and Agency amongst Humans and Non Humans (First Woman and Sky Woman Go on a European World Tour!).” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 2 (1).
- Wei, Peh T’i. 2014. “Why Is Hong Kong Called ‘Fragrant Harbour.’” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch* 54: 33–57.
- Weiss, Anita M. 1991. “South Asian Muslims in Hong Kong: Creation of a ‘Local Boy’ Identity.” *Modern Asian Studies* 25 (3): 417–453.
- Wenderski, Malgosia. 2017. “Why Do We Call Brampton ‘Browntown’?” *Peel Urbanscapes* (blog). April 16, 2017. <https://peelurbanscapes.wordpress.com/2017/04/16/why-do-we-call-brampton-browntown/>.
- Werbner, Pnina. 2006. “Vernacular Cosmopolitanism.” *Theory, Culture & Society* 23 (2–3): 496–498.
- Wiles, Janine L, Mark W Rosenberg, and Robin A Kearns. 2005. “Narrative Analysis as a Strategy for Understanding Interview Talk in Geographic Research.” *Area* 37 (1): 89–99.
- Wilson, Kathi, and Evelyn J Peters. 2005. “‘You Can Make a Place for It’: Remapping Urban First Nations Spaces of Identity.” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 23 (3): 395–413.
- Wood, Patricia K, and Liette Gilbert. 2005. “Multiculturalism in Canada: Accidental Discourse, Alternative Vision, Urban Practice.” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29 (3): 679–691.
- Woodward, Keith, Deborah P Dixon, and John Paul Jones. 2009. “Poststructuralism/Poststructuralist Geographies.” In *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, 396–407. Elsevier Inc.
- Wu, Rose. 2016. “Radical Inclusion in the Umbrella Movement: Interstitial Integrity and the New Pentecostal Rebirth of Hong Kong.” In *Theological Reflections on the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement*, 87–106. US: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wynter, Sylvia. 2003. “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, after Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument.” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3 (3): 257–337.
- Wynter, Sylvia, and Katherine McKittrick. 2015. “Unparalleled Catastrophe for Our Species? Or, to Give Humanness a Different Future: Conversations.” In *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, edited by Katherine McKittrick, 9–89. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Yeoh, Brenda SA. 2001. “Postcolonial Cities.” *Progress in Human Geography* 25 (3): 456–468.

- Yin, Cao. 2017. *From Policemen to Revolutionaries: A Sikh Diaspora in Global Shanghai, 1885-1945*. Leiden: Brill.
- Yu, Henry. 2006. "Is Vancouver the Future or the Past? Asian Migrants and White Supremacy." *Pacific Historical Review* 75 (2): 307–312.
- Zee News. 2015. "PM Modi Visits Vancouver Gurdwara in Canada." *Zee News*. India: Zee News. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aO0vE-hFxZM>.

## Appendix A: Glossary

### I. Terms

<i>Adi Granth</i>	first edition (1604) of Guru Granth Sahib, that is Sikh poetic anthology
<i>akhand path</i>	unbroken recitation
<i>amrit sanchar</i>	Khalsa ceremony for allegiance into Khalsa Panth
<i>amritvela</i>	pre-dawn
<i>bani</i>	poetry, literally Word – given sacred status
<i>baoli</i>	staircase
<i>barahmah</i>	poetry genre, literally twelve months
<i>basanti</i>	a shade of yellow colour
<i>bhagat</i>	devotee; alternatively a title for a <i>sant</i> when capitalized
<i>bhajan</i>	spiritual music in the Hindu tradition
<i>bhangra</i>	Punjabi upbeat energetic dance
<i>bir</i>	a term used to refer to a copy of Guru Granth Sahib; also <i>sarup</i>
<i>boli</i>	dialect
<i>cha</i>	tea
<i>chakkar</i>	circle, ring, part of the Sikh emblem
<i>chaunki</i>	musical act, literally seating
<i>chaunki charni</i>	the mount of musical acts
<i>chunni</i>	long and thin scarf used for head covering and complements <i>salwar kameez</i>
<i>darbar</i>	court
<i>darbar hall</i>	<i>darbar's</i> physical space/room
<i>darshan</i>	glimpse, usually referring to a viewing of a Guru or <i>sant</i> or significant place
<i>dastar</i>	turban
<i>deggh</i>	blessed pudding or food offering; another word for <i>prasad</i> ; also refers to a metal cauldron
<i>dhadi</i>	performed ballads
<i>dharam</i>	way of life; moral and ethical order; often mis-translated as religion
<i>dharamsala</i>	Sikh temple and centre
<i>di</i>	of
<i>diwan / divan</i>	poetry session; can also refer to collections of poetry
<i>giddha</i>	Punjabi folk dance by women
<i>gurbani</i>	literally Word of Gurus; poetry
<i>gurduara</i>	Sikh temple and centre; used in this dissertation as conceptual term
<i>gurdwara</i>	Sikh temple and centre
<i>gurpurab</i>	celebration of light, usually of a Guru's birth, death or guruship
<i>Guru Granth Sahib</i>	final edition of <i>Adi Granth</i> and bestowed the title of Guru
<i>gyani</i>	head preacher

<i>haumai</i>	ego
<i>hukamnama</i>	a reflection taken by turning a page of Guru Granth Sahib at random and accepting the poetic stanza for reflection and undertaking
<i>ithihas</i>	history, derived from Sanskrit
<i>IkOankar</i>	opening chant of Guru Granth Sahib; meaning One-Cosmic-Energy; dissertation uses 1-ness for emphasis at times
<i>ji</i>	a term of respect added at the end of referring to an important person/entity
<i>kara</i>	bracelet
<i>khanda</i>	Sikh emblem
<i>khande</i>	double-edged straight sword
<i>kirtan</i>	spiritual music in the Sikh tradition
<i>langar</i>	communal food
<i>langar hall</i>	communal food hall
<i>mandir</i>	Hindu temple
<i>manji</i>	literally a wooden seat in Punjabi
<i>mantra</i>	repeative chant, characterizing the aural aspects of spirituality
<i>masand</i>	literally a seat of cushion in Persian
<i>matha-teykna</i>	the act of bowing
<i>miri</i>	material
<i>nagar kirtan</i>	outdoor kirtan
<i>nirgun</i>	without form, denoting Transcendent
<i>pagg</i>	turban
<i>palki</i>	carriage or chariot
<i>Panj Khand</i>	Five Realms: Dharam Khand, Gyan Khand, Saram Khand, Karam Khand, Sach Khand. Realms of: Duty, Knowledge, Aesthetics, Grace, Truth.
<i>panj pyare</i>	five cherished ones
<i>panth</i>	community that follows a particular path
<i>parikarma</i>	the perimeter or path around Guru Granth Sahib, or around a <i>sarovar</i>
<i>path</i>	poetic recitation
<i>pauri</i>	step ladder
<i>piri</i>	spiritual
<i>prabhat peri</i>	neighbourhood walking rounds, with simple kirtan, without Guru Granth Sahib
<i>prasad</i>	food offering; usually sweet - made of flour, ghee and sugar. Served in <i>gurdwara</i>
<i>rabab</i>	Persian string instrument
<i>rababi</i>	musician of <i>rabab</i>
<i>raga</i>	musical mood or measure
<i>ragi</i>	musician of <i>raga</i>
<i>rainsabai</i>	overnight program usually at a <i>gurdwara</i>
<i>sahej path</i>	balanced recitation
<i>sahib</i>	a term added at the end of addressing a high-rank person (e.g. guru) or entity (e.g.

	gurdwara)
<i>salwar kameez</i>	Punjabi dress wear set consisting of trousers ( <i>salwar</i> ), and long top ( <i>kameez</i> )
<i>samagams</i>	large congregational and kirtan programs over multiple days or weeks, usually commemorating significant Sikh days
<i>sangat</i>	collective
<i>sanjog</i>	union
<i>sant</i>	mystic, saint
<i>sargun</i>	all form, denoting immanence
<i>sarovar</i>	pond, lake
<i>sarup</i>	literally a copy of Guru Granth Sahib; conceptualized in this study as embodiment-as-poetry
<i>satsang</i>	collective of truth seekers
<i>seva</i>	volunteer service
<i>sevadars</i>	volunteers/servers
<i>simran</i>	meditation by remembrance
<i>suit</i>	a set of <i>salwar kameez</i>
<i>tabla</i>	percussion instrument
<i>tavarikh</i>	history, derived from Persian
<i>thal</i>	a platter
<i>vela</i>	time
<i>vijog</i>	separation
<i>viraha</i>	poetry genre based in the theme of separation
<i>vismad</i>	awe-struck, wonder-struck

## II. Names of Compositions

<i>Anand Sahib</i>	<i>Way of Bliss</i>
<i>Ardas</i>	<i>Petition</i>
<i>Arti</i>	<i>Performance of Light</i>
<i>Asa Ki Var</i>	<i>Song of Hope</i>
<i>Barah Mah</i>	<i>Twelve Months</i>
<i>Begampura</i>	<i>City Beyond Sorrow</i>
<i>Japji Sahib</i>	<i>Chant of Remembrance</i>
<i>Rehras Sahib</i>	<i>Essence of the Way</i>
<i>So Dar</i>	<i>That Door</i>
<i>Sukhmani Sahib</i>	<i>Pearl of Peace</i>

## **Appendix B: Methods Material**

### **I. Community Mapping Groups**

- a. Group 1: 4 youth participants, ages 12-18, mix female and male genders. Session conducted on 4 December 2016, Hong Kong.
- b. Group 2: 3 youth participants, ages 16-18, male genders. Session conducted on 17 December 2016, Hong Kong.

### **II. Group Discussion**

- a. Ravidassia Group. Discussion took place on 22 April 2018 at Sri Guru Ravidassia Sabha. Burnaby, Greater Vancouver.

### **III. Interviewees**

Pseudo names are being used for all interviewees.

#### **a. Hong Kong**

- 1) Kulwant Singh, interview on 6 December 2016
- 2) Yuvraj Kaur, interview on 10 December 2016
- 3) Ramandev Kaur, interview on 10 December 2016
- 4) Basant Kaur, interview on 15 December 2016
- 5) Zorawar Kaur, interview on 17 December 2016
- 6) Roshni Kaur, interview on 17 December 2016
- 7) Inderpal Singh, interview on 19 December 2016
- 8) Jagev Singh, interview on 23 December 2016
- 9) Akal Kaur, interview on 23 December 2016
- 10) Sharanjit Singh, interview on 24 December 2016
- 11) Parjog Singh, interview on 24 December 2016
- 12) Umbar Kaur, interview on 24 December 2016
- 13) Dev Singh, interview on 24 December 2016
- 14) Nimritha Kaur, interview on 25 December 2016
- 15) Charankamal Kaur, interview on 25 December 2016

#### **b. Greater Vancouver**

- 1) Mehr Singh, interview on 15 June 2017
- 2) Anokha Kaur, interview on 6 July 2017
- 3) Harbir Singh, interview on 15 July 2017
- 4) Rajpal Singh, interview on 19 July 2017
- 5) Tanvir Singh, interview on 20 July 2017
- 6) Dilruba Singh, interview on 20 July 2017
- 7) Joginder Kaur, interview on 22 July 2017
- 8) Kashmir Kaur, interview on 9 August 2017
- 9) Nirmal Singh, interview on 12 August 2017
- 10) Iqbal Kaur, interview on 14 August 2017
- 11) Sukhwant Kaur, interview on 25 August 2017

- 12) Pyara Singh, interview on 31 August 2017
  - 13) Veer Singh, interview on 17 April 2018
  - 14) Satrang Kaur, interview on 18 April 2018
  - 15) Saihaj Singh, interview on 24 April 2018
- c. Greater Toronto
- 1) Himmat Singh, interview on 20 April 2017
  - 2) Lakhbir Kaur, interview on 20 April 2017
  - 3) Gurrattan Kaur, interview on 20 April 2017
  - 4) Manjit Singh, interview on 22 April 2017
  - 5) Fateh Kaur, interview on 22 April 2017
  - 6) Baksheesh Singh, interview on 29 April 2017
  - 7) Tara Kaur, interview on 29 April 2017
  - 8) Livdeep Singh, interview on 2 May 2017
  - 9) Palvinder Kaur, interview on 3 May 2017
  - 10) Gurdas Singh, interview on 3 May 2017
  - 11) Ekjot Kaur, interview on 5 May 2017
  - 12) Chand Singh, interview on 31 December 2017
  - 13) Jugat Singh, interview on 25 April 2018
  - 14) Rangjot Kaur, interview on 6 May 2018

#### IV. Interview Guide

These are sample questions for interview dialogue. The interview is semi-guided and participants can guide the conversation based on their values and the themes they feel most comfortable to discuss or know about. My style of qualitative interviews was conversational, explorative, and less positivist-oriented social science. Approximate time: 20 minutes to an hour.

##### ***General Questions, Gurdwara, Nagar Kirtan:***

- Briefly, what is your family migration story?
- How often do you come to the local gurdwara? Which days? Has that changed over time?
- How do you contribute to and participate in the local *sangat*?
- What are the different ways you and your family use the gurdwara?
- What is most significant for you in the gurdwara?
- Some people say gurdwara should not be used for political and community activities and should just be a place of prayer, what are your thoughts?
- There is a lot of *langar seva* at the core of Sikh spaces, what are your thoughts on its mission? Have we diverged from its mission? How do we continue going forward?
- What are your thoughts on the number of gurdwaras we have in Canada? Are they divided on any particular logic?
- Have you been to gurdwaras outside of Canada/Hong Kong, where and for what?
- Hong Kong gurdwaras and some gurdwaras in Canada have played a big part in fighting against the British Empire. What do you know about the Ghadar movement?
- Do you participate regularly in nagar kirtan?



- What is a nagar kirtan for you? What is special about it? How is it different from gurdwaras?
- What is the most significant aspect about nagar kirtan for you? What does it mean for you?
- Nagar kirtans in Canada have become very commercialized, and there is a lot of food, what are your thoughts?
- Other than gurdwaras and nagar kirtans, what other Sikh spaces and activities are important?

### ***Community Relations:***

- How do you relate to the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement? What is at the core of the movement?
- How are your relations to the First Nations communities?
- Have you visited any temples, churches, and other places of faith? How do you relate to other faiths and temples?
- Do you take part in cultural festivals of other faiths and people? How do you negotiate that as part of your identity?
- *Komagata Maru* has been in the spotlight with the apology. What do you feel about the apology? Is it sufficient, do you relate to it?
- Ontario now has a Sikh Heritage Month in April. What do you think this provides for the Sikh community?
- There has been a lot of movement with Sarbat Khalsa since 2015. What are some key issues that are important for you? What would you like Sarbat Khalsa to accomplish?
- What kinds of political changes do you envision for yourself? For the Sikh community? For the local communities? Why?

### ***Sikhi:***

- How would you describe *sikhi*, and Sikh *dharam*?
- Canada is often described as a multicultural country / Hong Kong is often described as a cosmopolitan city. How do you relate to these ideas? Do these words multicultural / cosmopolitan have relevance for *sikhi*?
- There is a line that comes in our end *Ardas* that says: *Nanak nam chardi kala tere bhane sarbat da bhala*. I am interested in the last part, what does *sarbat da bhala* (wellness for all) mean for you? Who/what is *sarbat*?
- Then, at the ultimate end of *Ardas*: *raj karega khalsa* (governance of Khalsa shall prevail), how do you relate to these lines?

## V. Community Mapping Guide

Facilitator provides overview of meaning and purpose of community mapping.

### **Activity A: Mapping Your Gurdwara**

*On individual post-it notes:* Chart out religious, educational, social, political, economical, health, environmental

*Group activity:* Share your individual ideas

*Design your gurdwara:* Using your ideas, now think of how you want to map out your existing gurdwara. Think of paths, people, different spaces. Also, what kind of map of your gurdwara do you want to present? What are the things you want to highlight?

*What other ideas do you imagine for your gurdwara?* (Example: library, food outreach truck, compost, computer, classrooms, *darbar*, playgrounds)

### **Activity B: Mapping Self, Collective and Place in Relation**

#### ***Part 1***

*Prompting images /ideas on individual post-it notes:* What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think of (i) home (ii) gurdwara? (iii) Hong Kong (iv) world (v) *sikhi*?

*Group activity:* Share your thought with each other, and find something that you have in common when you think of these places. What are some places (imaginative, local, global) you have in common?

*Make a map:* Think of how you want to map these places and their relationships. What will your creative map look like?

*Now imagine:* What are other places you think should be on this map? Example, you can think of events, neighbourhoods, cities, other countries, local temples.

#### ***Part 2***

*On your individual post-it notes:*

- i. What are three things Hong Kong social movements and Sikh movements have in common?
- ii. What are three things Hong Kong nation and Sikh nation have in common?
- iii. What are three things that you think are different?

Next, map your thoughts on the map using images, drawings, or words.

**Appendix C: Nagar Kirtan Photo Montages**

Figure 15 Hong Kong Nagar Kirtan, 2016





Figure 16 Vancouver Nagar Kirtan, 2018





Figure 17 Surrey Nagar Kirtan, 2018





Figure 18 Toronto Nagar Kirtan, 2018





Figure 19 Malton Nagar Kirtan, 2018



## Appendix D: Acknowledgements

I am truly grateful for the guidance, which I received on this dissertation from my supervisory committee: Prof. Ranu Basu, Prof. Shobna Nijhawan, and Prof. Laam Hae. Ranu Basu's immense knowledge on migrant landscapes and geographies of power and resistance enabled this project across the three cities. Shobna Nijhawan's expertise on language and South Asian studies strengthened the theoretical underpinnings and helped me enhance the connections I was weaving. Laam Hae's deep insights on post-secular geographies of religion and on urban perspectives of Global South enriched my conceptual tools and viewpoints. Without their support and their openness to the interdisciplinary work, such a diverse and complex project would have never seen the light of its finishing stage.

Prof. Minelle Mahtani and Prof. Ali Kazimi enriched the intellectual provocations of this dissertation. Their dedication and attentiveness to poetry, language, and epistemology made for a profound oral exam and a remarkable celebration of this craft. Thank you for the recognition.

The graduate program in geography at York University and Yvonne Yim offered a warm environment to its students. I am thankful to the faculty in Geography Department, especially Prof. Patricia Burke Wood who made theory engaging and meaningful and through which I was able to open a new perspective to my understanding. Thank you also for chairing my exam. I appreciate my fellow cohort in the geography doctoral seminar and my fellow graduate students in the program with whom I was able to share the myriad folds of academic life, office space, learning, and teaching. Rita Nketiah, I am honoured to be sharing the final moments of this journey with you.

I express my gratitude to Prof. Keith O'Regan who offered supportive clarity, coaching, and mentorship in the tedious final stages.

In carrying out this study, I was supported by generous grants: YCAR Language Award offered me the language training in the course Gurbani 101 which I undertook with Sikh Research Institute in 2017. Albert C. W. Chan Foundation Award from YCAR enabled my air travel for fieldwork in Vancouver. Research Costs Fund from the Faculty of Graduate Studies made possible air travel and fieldwork to Hong Kong. I was further supported by various union funds (CUPE 3903 and CUPE 3902), professional funds, community funds (TSR Sidak Scholarship), and department funds (Glen Frankfurter Conference Fund) that aided me in the complex life and travels of a nomadic graduate student - from conferences to community workshops. Most importantly, SSHRC Joseph Bombardier Doctoral Scholarship and Susan Mann Dissertation Scholarship allowed me to carry out the high level of interdisciplinary scope and multi-sited ethnography that was needed for this vast project. I wish to thank all my reference providers from Trent University to Ryerson University to York University who made education possible for me over the two decades: Prof. Derek Hall, Prof. Fayzi Baban, Prof. Nadine Changfoot, Prof. Haroon Akram-Lodhi, Prof. Cheryl Teelucksingh, Prof. Joseph Springer, Prof. Beth Milroy, and my doctoral supervisory committee.



This doctoral educational pursuit was made possible by Jin Haritaworn, to whom I offer my eternal and sincere gratitude.

York Centre for Asian Research (YCAR) provided a genuine home for this intellectual undertaking as a study that seeks to defy the code of disciplinary boundaries. I was filled by the positive spirits and encouraging welcome of Prof. Abidin Kusno and Alicia Filopwich, and the graduate associates on the 8th floor of the Kaneff Tower. Through the YCAR graduate course, The Making of Asian Studies: Critical Perspectives, I met Susan Rajendran, Khyati Nagar, Sehrish Malik and Simran Kaur – all in Humanities, and forged lasting friendships with them.

Thank you Harshita Yalamarty for the engaging conversations over food and *cha*.

My gratitude and love to Sarena Santilly, Berkha Gupta, kumari giles, Kritikka Ghosh, and Florence Heung who provided warmth, care, and hospice during turbulent times.

I express my heartfelt thank you to Anu Radha Verma, for believing in this project in all its dimensions – poetic, intellectual, political, interdisciplinary, healing, martial, and spiritual. Most significantly, thank you for believing in me through the entire journey.

It is from Ch'an Master Sifu Shi Chang Dao that I could experience true growth and shift in my life and energy. Through Dao's teachings, I could unlock a portal to the experiential and the art of learning by doing. Thank you, Dao, for grounding me. My gratitude to Ben Ho for cultivating in me the spirit of movement and circular seamless flow. Thank you Maggie, Kaiah, Virgillo, for bringing out the best in me.

My educators at Sikh Research Institute (SikhRI) opened the door of learning *sikhi*, often barriered in a gurdwara, in an unequal society, and at a Western academy. Thank you Inni Kaur, Harinder Singh, Inderpreet Singh, Surender Pal Singh, Jaspreet Kaur, and SikhRI's many educators and *sevadars* for initiating the power of the waters and the oceanic ripples of *sikhi*.

Thank you Kirpa Kaur and Sikh Feminist Research Institute (SAFAR). I am grateful to have met many Sikhs through SAFAR, Sidak, TSR, and other journeys. From the SAFAR Sikh Online Book Club, to Sidak WhatsApp groups, I salute the people who are carrying out feminist and community empowerment and doing the important work on reflection, accountability, and activism in the true tradition of building a care and community economy. Such valuable work on the ground is often undermined by Western academic scholars and critics whose sense of sight and textual authority fail them to see real bottom-up organizing and diverse knowledge practices.

The true heroines and brides of this doctoral study are the participants of the study, interviewees, and many enablers who helped in the networking and recruitment. Particularly, the many women participants who would meet with me on short notice, among all other life duties, child-rearing, and care-giving labour, to share their immense wisdom and instill a hope of change for the betterment of life, relationships, and Earth. It is in the true character of *sikhi*, of providing care, *langar* and *seva*, from which many participants and aiders of this project operated on.

The gurdwaras of the various cities made possible multi-sited ethnographies through their world-renowned hospice and *langar*. A very special thank you to Sri Ravidas Sabha in Burnaby, its committee and members, who met me with a genuine will to participate and mobilize for Dalit thought within *sikhi* and in the Ravidassi co-path.

Thank you to the organizing team of Toronto Sikh Retreat, and specifically art therapist Rapinder Kaur who gave me permission to analyze the expressive arts workshop on *Begampura*.

To the Hong Kong Sikh Youth who participated in the community mapping exercise, I was truly delighted to have worked with them.

I wish to thank my sister Guramrita Kaur who aided in the process of youth networking in Hong Kong and with whom I was able to have valuable political conversations on the project, and the world.

This undertaking would not have been possible without my extended family who hosted me in two of the world's most expensive cities Hong Kong and Vancouver.

My eternal gratitude to my brother Sukhdeep Singh, daddy Gurvel Singh, and mummy Rajinder Kaur whose constant support and sacrifices for my quest for knowledge and higher education got me here - from kindergarten to doctoral, from Hong Kong to Vancouver Island to Peterborough to Toronto. To my mummy who nourished my wisdom, path, and sustenance, and who filled the troubled home, spirit, and body with the sound currents of *Japji* and *Rehras*, and the tales of *janamsakhis*, who took me to all the places from Darbar Sahib to Dharamsala, you are truly powerful and transformative.