

A Reflection on the “I Will Meet You Yet Again: Contemporary Sikh Art Exhibit” Through an Intergenerational Resilience Lens

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Abstract

This paper reflects on the profound role of Punjabi Sikh Women² throughout the historical events of the 1947 Partition, the 1984 Sikh Genocide, the aftermath of 9/11, and the 2020 Farmers’ Protest. Through selected artwork from the “I Will Meet You Yet Again: Contemporary Sikh Art Exhibit” at UCLA’s Fowler Museum of Cultural History, I explore how Punjabi Sikh Women showcase intergenerational resilience. This firsthand reflection highlights key moments of historical oppression through the intersection of history and art, and the significance of preserving collective memory to inspire future generations of Punjabi Sikh Women.

Keywords: Punjabi Sikh Women, Intergenerational Resilience, Resistance, Sikh Art Reflection.



Figure 1: Dhami, S., & Puliady, S. (Curators). (2024). *I Will Meet You Yet Again: Contemporary Sikh Art* [Exhibition]. Fowler Museum at UCLA, Los Angeles, CA, USA. <https://fowler.ucla.edu/exhibitions/contemporary-sikh-art/>



Figure 2: Key Themes from the “Sikh History in the U.S.A” Section. In Dhami, S., & Puliady, S. (Curators), *I Will Meet You Yet Again: Contemporary Sikh Art* [Exhibition]. Fowler Museum at UCLA, Los Angeles.

² Punjabi Sikh Women will be consistently capitalized throughout this work to emphasize their significance in our community’s history.

Introduction

As I walked through the halls of the *I Will Meet You Yet Again: Contemporary Sikh Art Exhibit*, I felt an immediate sense of pride and love, while also processing immense grief for my community of Punjabi Sikh Women, who have consistently endured and sacrificed so much for us to be here today (Contemporary Sikh Art, 2024).

This exhibit was displayed in the Fowler Museum of Cultural History at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) from January 28th through May 26th, 2024, and was open and free to the public. The exhibit featured various forms of contemporary artwork created by both Sikh and non-Sikh artists, including paintings, posters, tapestries, and even multimedia installations (Dhami & Puliady, 2024). The exhibit’s sections were titled: 1947 Partition, 1984 in Sikh History, Sikh Heritage as Artistic Expression, Celebrating Sikh Women, Building Home, Farmers Protest in India (2020-2021), and Sikh History in the U.S.A (Dhami & Puliady, 2024).

The purpose of the *I Will Meet You Yet Again:*

Contemporary Sikh Art Exhibit, was to showcase visuals that displayed the themes of “*Sangarsh* (Struggle), *Basera* (Home), and *Birha* (Longing)” (Contemporary Sikh Art, 2024), specifically as we reflect on key moments of Punjabi Sikh history, which display our community’s collective intergenerational resilience.

As Sonia Dhami, the co-curator of this exhibit, expressed in a text displayed on a wall near the entrance:

The resulting presentation of contemporary Sikh art is not the only possible narrative, but one that, I believe, is worthy of recognition in our collective memories...As I continue to build a meaningful life here [in the U.S.], I still ache for the sights, sounds, and tastes of the land I left behind. My longing echoes that of my mother, who became a refugee in India in 1947 and still yearns to return to her birthplace, which now, after Partition, lies in Pakistan...This intergenerational struggle to claim our space (*sangarsh*), build our homes (*basera*), while feeling the pangs of longing (*birha*) for that which was left behind is all too familiar to countless immigrants. – Sonia Dhami



Figure 3: Fowler Museum of Cultural History at UCLA, Los Angeles, CA, USA.



Figure 4: Tut, R. C. (2019). *Decoding the Hate Helix* [Acrylic on jute]. In Dhami, S., & Puliady, S. (Curators), *I Will Meet You Yet Again: Contemporary Sikh Art* [Exhibition]. Fowler Museum at UCLA, Los Angeles.

This exhibit displayed a timeline of sections that began with “Sikh History in the U.S.A.” and the impact of post-9/11 hate crimes against Middle Eastern and South Asian Communities through Rupy C. Tut’s *Decoding the Hate Helix* (Tut, 2019). It then leads us into a historical journey that includes art that showcases the painful yet powerful memories of the 1947 Partition, the 1984 Sikh Genocide, and the 2020 Farmer’s Protest. Additionally, there was a strong emphasis on the importance of Celebrating Sikh Women, Building Home, and Sikh Heritage as Artistic Inspiration (Contemporary Sikh Art, 2024).

Although each section has an intentional purpose and description as to why it was included in the *I Will Meet You Yet Again: Contemporary Sikh Art* Exhibit, this reflection highlights the art pieces and themes that deeply resonated with my identities and experiences, which are in line with the concept of intergenerational resilience. Through this paper, I explore the significance of Punjabi Sikh Women by reflecting on the historical events of the 1947 Partition, the 1984 Sikh Genocide, 9/11, and the 2020 Farmers’ Protest. Drawing from selected artwork in the exhibit, I share my reflections and reactions, beginning with context on the exhibit’s purpose, visuals, and my firsthand experiences at the opening event and guided tour in Punjabi. I then transition into an analysis of selected pieces, focusing on the strength and resilience of Punjabi Sikh Women amid historical oppression. Finally, I conclude with thoughts on how these themes offer valuable lessons for the next generation of Punjabi Sikh Women, encouraging them to draw strength from our shared history.

Personal Reflections: Opening Ceremony and Guided Tour

As a first-generation Punjabi immigrant from Delhi, I often reflect on the concepts of home, identity, longing, and struggle. The concept of home is ever-changing, context-dependent, and shifts constantly based on who is around me, and where I am physically and mentally located. As someone who was raised in a Punjabi Sikh family while growing up within a predominantly Spanish-speaking neighborhood in California before, during, and after 9/11 in the U.S., navigating my identities and feeling at home has always been in a constant flow state for me.



Figure 5: Vaisakhi Community Day, “Celebrating Sikh Women” Section. In Dhami, S., & Puliady, S. (Curators), *I Will Meet You Yet Again: Contemporary Sikh Art* [Exhibition]. Fowler Museum at UCLA, Los Angeles.



Figure 6: Vaisakhi Community Day; Tut, R. C. (2019). *Decoding the Hate Helix* [Acrylic on jute]. In Dhami, S., & Puliady, S. (Curators), *I Will Meet You Yet Again: Contemporary Sikh Art* [Exhibition]. Fowler Museum at UCLA, Los Angeles.

As someone who is part of the South Asian diaspora, the concept of identity and home is a struggle for me because no specific physical location or environment will ever capture the entirety of my experiences and memories. But as I walked through the opening night of this women-centred contemporary Sikh Art exhibit, I felt at home for the first time on the grounds of the UCLA campus, which I have been attending in person since 2021.

I felt this sense of belonging and community when I saw a sea of proud, joyful, excited, brown Punjabi and Sikh people walking through the patio and halls of this exhibit as they enjoyed their samosas, chaat, hot cups of chai, and refreshingly cold mango-flavored drinks. The patio square was filled with echoes of Punjabi music played by a turbaned Sikh DJ. This was another affirmation of how we collectively show up and celebrate each other. It felt like being at a large family gathering in India, much like visiting my *Nani* (Maternal Grandmother) and *Maama’s* (Maternal Uncle’s) family in Delhi.

Seeing what felt like an endless sea of families - grandparents, parents, teenagers, and even young children-overflowing the grounds of UCLA was a rare and beautiful sight to witness and experience

firsthand. This feeling of home resurfaced the next day when I experienced the beauty of the exhibit’s guided tour led by Sonia Dhami, which was spoken in Punjabi. The tour was filled with grandmothers, aunties, grandfathers, and uncles who felt comfortable enough to share their own interpretations of the art. For many of them, the artwork represented their lived experiences. As these community members each shared their insights and expertise, I saw them as guides from whom I could learn. I felt like I was back in Delhi, in Chandigarh, and at home with my family as I walked and listened to them speak and react to the pieces around us.

On a historically white campus like UCLA, this was the first time I felt truly at home in my cultural identity as a brown-skinned Punjabi Woman from a Sikh family. Feeling at home here because of a cultural art exhibit was something I never imagined for myself, but it showed me that even in spaces historically not made for us, we can and should seek and carve out spaces for our heritage, our histories, and our cultural identities. Especially when they are often not seen, felt, or acknowledged on a campus like UCLA.

Walking past the lines of people grabbing food and having conversations about their day, the exhibit, and their family updates, I learned that there were visitors who came from several different places. I overheard how folks flew in from Canada and India, and drove down from the Central Valley and the Bay Area, all to collectively celebrate our shared histories and a contemporary feminist perspective of Sikh Art. This led me to remain in a state of awe, and I was filled with immense joy and pride in my community, especially since this was my first time witnessing a Sikh Art exhibit in the United States.

In my humble opinion, this exhibit showcased key moments of historical oppression that Punjabi Sikhs have endured both in India and in the U.S., in a beautifully tragic yet powerful way. Intentionally designed to depict the historical impacts of the 1947 Partition, the 1984 Sikh Genocide, the 9/11 hate crimes, and the 2020 Farmers' Protests, as well as the ongoing 2024 protests, this exhibit allowed me to feel the pain and grieve the struggles of our community, while also being reminded of the intergenerational resistance, resilience, and strengths that we consistently and collectively hold. It reaffirmed the power and significance of my role as a Punjabi Woman within the Sikh community, especially as a member of the diaspora and as a researcher and educator in the U.S.

Punjabi Sikh Women’s Significance & Intergenerational Resilience Throughout History

On the opening night, I found myself enveloped in a space filled with countless excited visitors, experiencing the Sikh Art exhibit, and sharing their stories of these historical events with both Sikh and non-Sikh community members. As the space filled with a multitude of overlapping conversations, I heard the subtle echoes of a woman singing the hymns of kirtan (devotional singing central to Sikhism). This soothing sound echoed the airways of several conversations and provided a sense of calmness in the lively crowded space. This peaceful kirtan reverberated from the room installation titled Centered, created by artists Harleen Kaur and Gurjote Singh Sethi (2023), which replicated the Golden Temple, also known as ਦਰਬਾਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ (Darbar Sahib), located in Amritsar, Punjab (Kaur & Sethi, 2023).

The display plaque at the entrance shared the following notes from the artists:

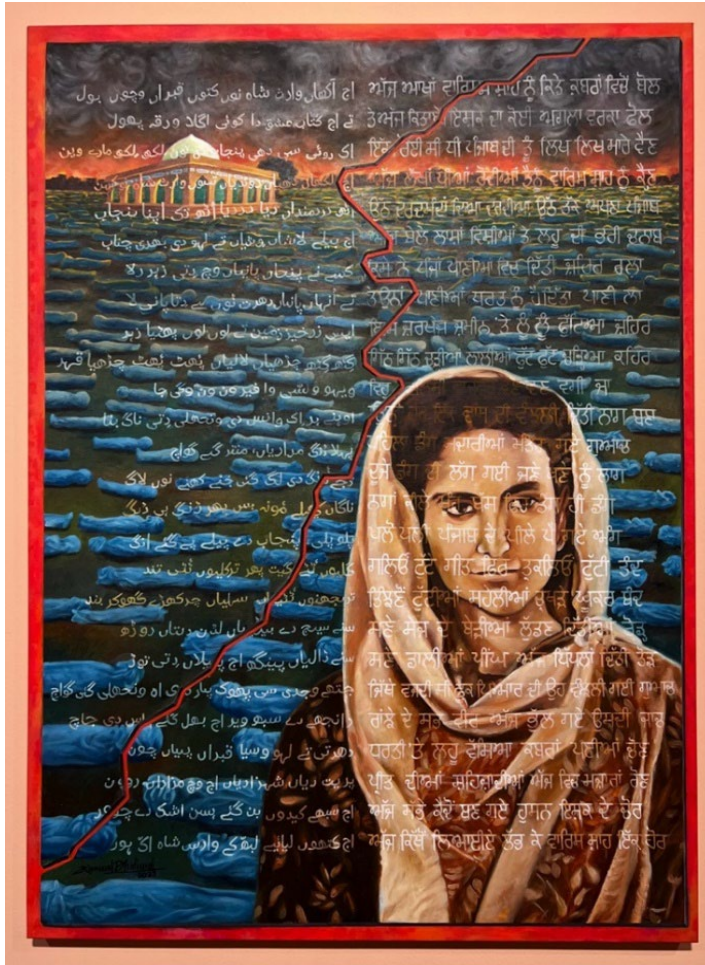


Figure 7: Dhaliwal, K. (2023). *Amrita Pritam* [Oil on canvas]. Sidhu Family Collection. In *I Will Meet You Yet Again: Contemporary Sikh Art* (Exhibition). 2024. London, U.K. Art* (Exhibition). 2024. London, U.K.

An invitation from the artists: engaging with this immersive experience

In the Sikh tradition, devotees and visitors alike remove their shoes and cover their heads when entering a gurdwara. As an embodiment of respect and humility, heads are also covered when engaging with Gurbani (verses from Sikh scripture). We invite you to remove your shoes and, if you are able, to cover your head with a scarf or any piece of cloth available to you before entering this installation. Also central to this experience is the instrumental and vocal soundscape composed in raag—a traditional South Asian structure of musical melody in which Gurbani is written and sung to communicate various emotions. In respect for this space and other visitors, we ask that no more than three people enter at one time and that they move mindfully through this spiritual moment by embracing silence and stillness. - (Kaur & Sethi, 2023).

During this first visit, I experienced a sense of grief for the losses and extreme violence our community has faced, but also this sense of healing as I heard kirtan echoing throughout the Partition and 1984 sections. At first, seeing the artwork in these sections overwhelmed me with immense grief. Tears welled up in my eyes and rolled down my cheeks as I walked past each visual and relived the pains of our past. I also was not able to experience *Centered* given how popular it was during the opening night. However, after the opening night I went back to the *I Will Meet You Yet Again: Contemporary Sikh Art Exhibit* on several occasions. Each of these additional visits allowed me to experience the exhibit differently, perhaps the way it was intended to be.

During these quieter visits, I was able to re-experience *Centered* and feel the impact of the Sikh Woman singing kirtan. Her voice seemed to extend beyond the confines of the ਦਰਬਾਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ (Darbar Sahib) installation, its calmness and peaceful melodies reverberating throughout all aspects of the 1947 and 1984



Figure 8: Kaur, H., & Sethi, G. S. (2023). *Centered*, 2023 [Room installation]. Photographed with a 1958 Rolleiflex 3.5F on Kodak Portra 800 Film. In Dhami, S., & Puliady, S. (Curators), *I Will Meet You Yet Again: Contemporary Sikh Art [Exhibition]*. Fowler Museum



Figure 9: Singh, P. (2020). *Akaal Takhat Sahib Destroyed after Operation Blue Star* [Oil on canvas]. Gurudwara Sahib, Fremont, California. In *I Will Meet You Yet Again: Contemporary Sikh Art (Exhibition)*. 2024. Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

sections of the room. It felt as though her voice was meant to echo in these spaces where we felt the most pain. It was a reminder to me that even in moments of immense grief, there is still the possibility to collectively heal and remember the strengths we hold both individually and as a community. This served as a reminder to me that even in moments of chaos and calamity, our community continues to resist and remain resilient through our faith.

After experiencing the Punjabi Guided Tour led by Sonia Dhami the following day, I decided to take a moment to experience this part of the exhibit alone. So, I walked over and sat down on the bench in the room, with the colorful stitches of my yellow phulkari chunni covering my head. I was looking directly at ਦਰਬਾਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ (Darbar Sahib), and I couldn't help but feel immediate serenity overcome all my senses. I was visiting Amritsar and experiencing what could become a reality for future generations of Punjabi Sikh children, hearing a woman lead in one of the most sacred spaces for our Punjabi Sikh community.

As I sat there bathing in the echoes of a woman singing kirtan in a space often dominated by men, I began to wonder how our community can achieve gender equality for future generations. Hearing a woman sing kirtan was especially powerful because I have never personally experienced this during any of my visits to gurdwaras throughout childhood or adulthood. This part of the exhibit brought me a sense of peace and comfort as I imagined a world where women are seen and treated equally to men, both within and outside of our Sikh and Punjabi communities.



Figure 10: ਬਚਪਨ ਦੀ ਫੋਟੋ (Bachpan di Photo; Childhood Photo) of a Family Visit to ਦਰਬਾਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ (Darbar Sahib; Golden Temple) Gurdwara, located in Amritsar, Punjab, India.

In that moment, and in the moments when I was sharing the exhibit with my mentor and loved ones, I felt a sense of hope that we will collectively choose to resist patriarchy and misogyny in our community, and decide to celebrate, empower, and embolden Punjabi Sikh Women as they take on leadership roles in their careers, homes, and gurdwaras across the U.S., India, and all over the world. It felt as though I was living in a space where my grief was taking over, while simultaneously experiencing moments of hope and joy as I envisioned what our future could look and feel like.

Punjabi Sikh Women’s Intergenerational Sacrifices & Resilience



Figure 11: Kaur, H., & Sethi, G. S. (2023). *Centered, 2023* [Room installation]. Photographed with a 1958 Rolleiflex 3.5F on Kodak Portra 800 Film. In Dhami, S., & Puliady, S. (Curators), *I Will Meet You Yet Again: Contemporary Sikh Art* [Exhibition]. Fowler Museum.



Figure 12: *Great Granddaughter Elevated View*. Tut, R. C. (2022). *Carry-on Baggage* [Mixed-media installation]. In Dhami, S., & Puliady, S. (Curators), *I Will Meet You Yet Again: Contemporary Sikh Art* [Exhibition]. Fowler Museum at UCLA, Los Angeles.

As I walked through the exhibit’s section highlighting the voices of powerful Punjabi Sikh Women (Kaur), I saw reflections of myself in them. This section, titled “Celebrating Sikh Women,” featured a variety of Kaur who have made a positive impact on our community. However, I realized I had never been taught about any of these influential Punjabi Sikh Women until this exhibit, which made this section particularly impactful for me.

As the plaque in the exhibit described, the purpose of this section was to celebrate both “the struggles and achievements of women,” and an effort “to uplift legacies that have often gone unnoticed and construct new narratives that honor our shared past” (Dhami & Puliady, 2024). Among the key Sikh women highlighted were: Amrita Sher-Gil (1913-1941), a pioneer of modern Indian art; Amrita Pritam (1919-2005) a Punjabi poet and author; Princess Sophia Duleep Singh (1876-1948), an activist and suffragette; Kartar Dhillon (1915-2008), a revolutionary U.S Civil Rights activist; and Maharani Jind Kaur (1817-1863), “the regent of the Sikh empire who consistently resisted British colonial rule” (Dhami & Puliady, 2024).

As I learned about how much these Kaurs redefined the concept of womanhood for our community, I imagined the kind of revolutionary legacies we could leave behind for future generations of Kaurs that come after us. Moving through each section, from the post-colonial rule through the 1947 Partition, the 1984 (Chaarasi) Sikh Genocide, the U.S 9/11 hate crimes, and the violence of the Farmers’ Protest of 2020 and now 2024, the concept of intergenerational resilience and resistance against oppression shown through the lives of Punjabi Sikh Women and the Punjabi Sikh community as a whole.



Figure 13: Full View. Tut, R. C. (2022). *Carry-on Baggage* [Mixed-media installation]. In Dhami, S., & Puliady, S. (Curators), *I Will Meet You Yet Again: Contemporary Sikh Art* [Exhibition]. Fowler Museum at UCLA, Los Angeles.

I was especially drawn to the centerpiece of this section: Rupy C. Tut's mixed media installation *Carry-on Baggage*, a physical representation of intergenerational displacement, trauma, and resilience shown through five generations of Punjabi Sikh Women’s vintage suitcases, all connected by braided jute rope (Tut, 2022).

Rupi Tut describes *Carry-on Baggage* (2022) as:

Displacement and the trauma caused by it are genetically carried within my and many other families from varied parts of the world. The stories of loss, tragedy, and resilience remain braided into our existence and upbringing as a bond transferred from mother to daughter.

This work of art was especially inspirational and powerful because it represented the intertwined connections of five generations of Punjabi Sikh Women through the intentionally braided jute rope, a symbol of both physical and psychological inheritance. To me, this braided rope resembled the long traditional braids worn by Punjabi Sikh Women, symbolizing our shared genetic traits and cultural experiences. Each piece of luggage displayed the names and roles of each woman, handwritten in Punjabi (Gurmukhi) and English scripts. It beautifully showcases the literal and metaphorical elevation of each generation of women who endured forced migration and displacement due to the 1947 Partition, the 1984 Sikh Genocide, 9/11, and the possibility of future displacement through climate change.

For me, the title *Carry-on Baggage* is a signal for us to keep pushing and surviving despite the struggles and systemic discrimination we face. This piece symbolized how our great-grandmothers, grandmothers, and mothers navigated systems of oppression, from the colonization of India under British rule to the violence that occurred through the politics of governing entities. It vividly displayed the psychological and physical “baggage” that Punjabi Sikh Women have often carried on their own, as they strive to create a better life for their family’s future, especially for their unborn daughters and granddaughters (Tut, 2022).

This piece captured each aspect of the historical timeline that our community has survived, allowing us as viewers to reflect on the sacrifices made by the lineage of women in our families through the 1947 Partition, the 1984 Sikh Genocide, and the 2020 Farmers’ Protest.

It leads me to ask the following questions to our community:

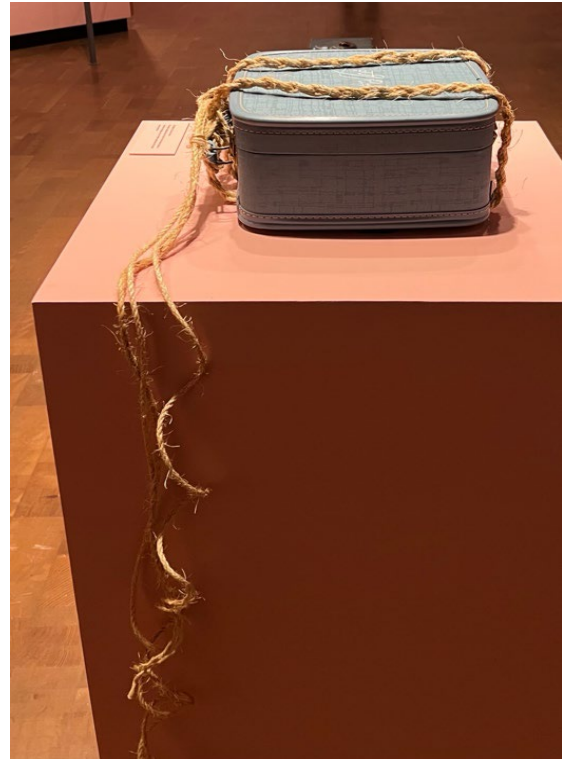


Figure 14: Great Granddaughter's Suitcase and Curled Jute Rope. Tut, R. C. (2022). *Carry-on Baggage* [Plaque information]. In *I Will Meet You Yet Again: Contemporary Sikh Art* [Exhibition]. Fowler Museum at UCLA, Los Angeles, CA.



Figure 15: Great Grandmother's Suitcase. Tut, R. C. (2022). *Carry-on Baggage* [Plaque information]. In *I Will Meet You Yet Again: Contemporary Sikh Art* [Exhibition]. Fowler Museum at UCLA, Los Angeles, CA

- **What are the reasons behind generations of families physically and psychologically relocating?**
- **What are the sacrifices that Women in our lives are making to create a better future for us?**
- **How do we continue to reflect on Women’s sacrifices and find ways to honor them, so they can finally prioritize their physical, mental, and emotional well-being?**



Figure 16: Dhaliwal, K. (2023). *Amrita Pritam [Oil on canvas]*. Sidhu Family Collection. In *I Will Meet You Yet Again: Contemporary Sikh Art (Exhibition)*. 2024. London, U.K.

This art piece shows me how Punjabi Sikh Women have consistently packed all their belongings and memories in one small piece of baggage, sacrificing their sense of self, their identities, and cultural support systems to create a better life for the next generation of girls. It highlighted how common it is for each generation of Punjabi Sikh Women to sacrifice their comforts, personal identities, aspirations, and homes, to struggle most of their lives while caretaking for their families, especially their children. This idea of sacrificing my life to create a better one for my future bloodline is a powerful narrative that transcends the individuality that Western norms often prioritize. *Carry-on Baggage* prompted me to reflect on the kinds of sacrifices I may be expected to make, and how I would challenge these expectations while also considering the legacy I hope to leave behind for the generation that will come after me.



Figure 17: Artist & Daughter's Suitcases. Tut, R. C. (2022). Carry-on Baggage [Plaque information]. In *I Will Meet You Yet Again: Contemporary Sikh Art* [Exhibition]. Fowler Museum at UCLA, Los Angeles, CA.



Figure 18: Mother & Artist's Suitcases. Tut, R. C. (2022). Carry-on Baggage [Plaque information]. In *I Will Meet You Yet Again: Contemporary Sikh Art* [Exhibition]. Fowler Museum at UCLA, Los Angeles, CA.



Figure 19: Full View. Tut, R. C. (2022). Carry-on Baggage [Mixed-media installation]. In Dhami, S., & Puliady, S. (Curators), *I Will Meet You Yet Again: Contemporary Sikh Art* [Exhibition]. Fowler Museum at UCLA, Los Angeles.

The Farmers Protest & Intergenerational Resilience

Although this exhibit was organized as a historical timeline, the first piece of art I noticed on the opening night was Sukhpreet Singh’s *Farmers Protest 2021*. To me, this piece captured both the specific experiences and the broader culmination of the 2020 Farmers Protest, which has now resurfaced in 2024 (BBC News, 2024; Human Rights Watch, 2024; Pradhan, 2024; Sikh Coalition, 2024).

This section of the exhibit, titled “Farmers Protest in India (2020-2021),” commemorated one of the largest protests in history (Dhami & Puliady, 2024; Time, 2020). Led by Punjabi Sikh farmer unions and supported by farmers across the northern states like Punjab, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh, the 2020 Farmers Protest aimed to prevent controversial farm laws that threatened control over the sales, pricing, and storage of crops (Dhami & Puliady, 2024; The New York Times, 2024; South Asian Voices, 2024).

The new proposed farm bills would negatively impact the financial stability and livelihood of the already marginalized farmers (South Asian Voices, 2024). This led both women and men to march in peaceful protest to New Delhi, only to be stopped from entering the nation’s capital. So, they camped along the major highways that lead into Delhi, all while enduring COVID-19 exposure, violence, police brutality, and extreme seasonal weather conditions for an entire year (Human Rights Watch, 2024; Henry & Chhabra, 2024; Mushtaq & Lohia, 2024). This lasted until the government was forced to repeal the laws in November 2021 (Dhami & Puliady, 2024; South Asian Voices, 2024). However, the Farmers Protest has



Figure 20: Broad View. Singh, S. (2021). *Farmers Protest* [Oil on canvas]. In *I Will Meet You Yet Again: Contemporary Sikh Art* (Exhibition, 2024). Khanuja Collection.

resurfaced in 2024 as farmers state their demands have not been met by the Indian government (Human Rights Watch, 2024; South Asian Voices, 2024).



Figure 21: Detailed View. Singh, S. (2021). *Farmers Protest* [Oil on canvas]. In *I Will Meet You Yet Again: Contemporary Sikh Art* (Exhibition, 2024). Khanuja Collection.



Figure 22: Detailed View. Singh, S. (2021). *Farmers Protest* [Oil on canvas]. In *I Will Meet You Yet Again: Contemporary Sikh Art* (Exhibition, 2024). Khanuja Collection.

This was one of the most emotionally moving pieces I encountered during my first visit to the *I Will Meet You Yet Again: Contemporary Sikh Art Exhibit*. I was in tears as I saw and relived the visuals of violence and brutality that our community faced yet again. It reminded me that this was not the first time we encountered these challenging times. The difference this time was that we were now able to witness everything in real-time, as it was all captured on smartphones and circulated across social media platforms despite media blackouts in India during the protest (CNN, 2021; Time, 2021; BBC News, 2023; Barman, 2023). Seeing moments of resilience, where Punjabi Sikh farmers protested peacefully while also showing kindness to police officers amidst the uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic, left a lasting impact on me.

Sukhpreet Singh’s painting *Farmers Protest 2021* was both beautiful and tragic. From a distance, the bright and bold colors draw you in, but as you look closer, the individual moments within the protest emerge, reminiscent of what we saw online and may have lived through firsthand. In this painting, you see depictions of the collective resistance led by our community of Punjabi Sikh Farmers. The violence inflicted by the Indian police force is captured in images of tear gas, water hoses, batons, and concrete barricades lined with barbed wire. We also see the striking contrast of the same police officers who harassed and physically assaulted these farmers

simultaneously being offered and eating *langar* (food from the Gurdwara) provided by the very same farmers they abused.



Figure 23: Detailed View. Singh, S. (2021). *Farmers Protest* [Oil on canvas]. In *I Will Meet You Yet Again: Contemporary Sikh Art* (Exhibition, 2024). Khanuja Collection.

The artwork shows media coverage as well— some media outlets perpetuated negative propaganda against Punjabi Sikh farmers, while others shared accurate news that captured the true intentions and actions of the farmers. Both Indian and Farmer’s Union flags are scattered throughout the painting, with the backdrop of Delhi’s landmarks, a gurdwara, and neighborhoods with residents watching from their *terraces* (rooftops). Women are also prominent in the painting, depicted in leadership roles throughout the protest: driving tractors



Figure 24: Detailed View. Singh, S. (2021). *Farmers Protest* [Oil on canvas]. In *I Will Meet You Yet Again: Contemporary Sikh Art* (Exhibition, 2024). Khanuja Collection.

and motorbikes, giving speeches, holding flags, preparing food, and even recording and reporting the events.

Singh’s *Farmers Protest* visual was particularly moving for me because I watched these events unfold in real time through social media, experiencing them from afar as a member of the Punjabi Sikh diaspora in the U.S. These events, now considered historic, are still unfolding today with the resurgence of the Farmers Protest. This image serves as a powerful reminder of when our Punjabi Sikh community united in



Figure 25: Dua, H., & Sethi, N. K. (2021). *Farmers Protests Graphics* [Graphic illustrations]. In *I Will Meet You Yet Again: Contemporary Sikh Art* (Exhibition). 2024.

India and across the globe to protest systemic injustices amid the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. It was a time filled with pain yet also pride in our collective power to make a difference in the face of adversity. It is a constant reminder of how much strength we have when we come together to resist oppression.

The final piece I saw, *Farmer’s Protest Graphics* by Dua and Sethi, was a fitting conclusion to the exhibit. This artwork highlights the power and strength within our community, transcending age, generation, and gender (Dua & Sethi, 2021). It was a beautiful tribute to resistance and intergenerational resilience, vividly demonstrated through the Farmer’s Protest. It’s inspiring to see the faces of farmers who protested every day in India for an entire year. Whether it was day or night, cold rain or scorching sunshine, these elderly individuals stood at the front lines, fighting for their rights and the rights of generations to come.

This piece is yet another example of how our community is continually fighting to survive, sacrificing their lives for the comfort and safety of their children. All of this is done so they can develop an environment where future generations can thrive and live in a better world. May this serve as a reminder to us all that regardless of our location or how much we may struggle with finding that feeling of home and belonging, we are not alone. There will always be people who have faced similar challenges and survived so that we can live yet another day.

Concluding Reflections on “I Will Meet You Yet Again”

Throughout this exhibit, the themes of intergenerational struggle, resistance, resilience, and collective strength in challenging systemic oppression were presented in so many styles of art. When I reflect on the title “I Will Meet You Yet Again,” it feels like a love letter. It’s a reminder that no matter what odds we face as a community, we will consistently rise to fight against the moments of fear, doubt, violence, erasure, and systemic oppression we may face today and in the future. I found myself reflecting on the themes of this exhibit: home, identity, longing, and intergenerational struggle. Struggling to be both an insider and outsider within this community, I feel the longing to find a home in a country that wasn’t built for women like me. And yet, each day, I find more and more of myself through conversations with loved ones both in the U.S. and India. The longing to understand my ancestors’ strengths, as I learn from and witness their struggles, has in many ways informed my own identity, and the way I carry myself in this world, especially when facing adversity but also when rejoicing in my victories.

Experiencing this exhibit—a tribute to the significance of Punjabi Sikh Women (Kaur) and their significance to our community, I saw myself in them. I saw how we have collectively been marginalized and silenced, and how our labor within and outside of our homes and communities is often diminished or ignored completely. But in this exhibit and in the conversations with Punjabi Sikh Women from the generations before me, who shared their lived experiences with me, I felt a profound connection. These women felt seen and understood through this art, finding a sense of home within the exhibit. Although I met them for the first time during my visits, I knew them and was grateful for them and all the women they symbolized for me. It was as if I were meeting distant *Nanis (Maternal Grandmothers)*, *Maasis (Maternal Aunties)*, and other *rishtedar* (relatives) from my family in India. There was a mutual

understanding and emotional connection that I felt with them that ran deeper than an initial meeting, as though I were reconnecting with family members I had only heard about before. And indeed, we connected immediately, with a shared desire to see each other yet again. It was as if we knew and celebrated the fact that, despite all these tragedies, we are still alive, we are still here. They tried to erase our existence and erase our histories, and here we are together in one space. We are still creating a better future for the generations to come, still striving to live peacefully, and aspiring to not just survive for the next generation, but to live long enough to see them thrive.



Figure 26: Dua, H., & Sethi, N. K. (2021). *Farmers Protests Graphics* [Graphic illustrations]. In *I Will Meet You Yet Again: Contemporary Sikh Art (Exhibition)*. 2024.

This deep connection we hold as Punjabi Sikh Women is crucial as we navigate our power as a collective. Although the concept of longing for a home and the quest to define our identities may remain a constant struggle as we face new challenges, especially as young Punjabi Sikh Women who are part of the first, second, and third generations of immigrants in the South Asian Diaspora. The act of remembering our community's histories and learning from our ancestors' lived experiences should serve as an endless source of inspiration when we face our current challenges and experiences of forced silencing, oppression, and discrimination, regardless of where or who it comes from.

We as Punjabi Sikh Women in the diaspora, must collectively remember the strengths of our ancestors as we navigate ways to overcome our adversities, knowing that our own lived experiences will become a source of strength and resilience for future generations of girls and women. We are creating history each time we challenge a system that wasn't built with us in mind. Just as I saw myself in the women in this exhibit, both through the art and through conversations, future generations will look to us for guidance and wisdom as they face their unique adversities with strength and resilience. Just as we seek this ancestral knowledge to navigate our struggles and resist oppression, they will look to us as well, coming to us for inspiration and support.

We will also collectively carry the torch to consistently push for a better future for generations to come, who will look back at us in awe with tears in their eyes, just as I did for the women who came before me. No matter what our community faces, we will meet each other yet again, in *Chardi Kalla* (an ascending state of optimistic resilience).

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