

Foreword: Research and the Publics

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This issue attempts to open up the supposed border between private and public knowledge production by bringing work produced in and by academic institutions into an open-access journal for public discussion. We call it a “supposed border” because of how knowledge production is treated and valued for professional academics, at least in the U.S. Knowledge produced “in the public” or “for the public” is assessed by professional academics through a carceral apparatus of values that restrict and confine who can engage, interact, and understand such pursuits, and what counts as knowledge worthy of pursuit (Cetina 2007; Collins 2009; McKittrick 2021). Whether the border is financial, spatial, logistical, or otherwise, imagining a public enterprise of knowledge brings Sikhi to the forefront. Sikhi itself engages in public knowledge production when we think about the legible knowledge practices in our communities – *saakhis* (pedagogical narrative), *katha* (meditations spoken aloud), and *gurbaani* (divine, living word) – all as pursuits of collective intellect.

Harmeet Kalsi’s paper, *A Reflection on the I Will Meet You Yet Again: Contemporary Sikh Art Exhibit: Through an Intergenerational Resilience Lens* provides an in-depth examination of the Sikh art exhibit hosted at UCLA’s Fowler Museum of Cultural History earlier this year. Kalsi’s autoethnographic account of her experience at the exhibit opens it up to those who could not travel to UCLA while offering her unique insights into embodying the visual, aural, and affective aesthetics of the space and her fellow exhibit goers during a Sikh community-oriented opening event.

The subsequent section includes four papers from an author-meets-critic roundtable held at the 2024 Annual Conference on South Asia at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The roundtable focused on Nishant Upadhyay’s *Indians on Indian Lands: Intersections of Race, Caste, and Indigeneity* and its implications for Sikh and Panjabi studies. Upadhyay’s work examines the experiences of dominant caste migrants of Sikh and Hindu descent in Canada and how these migrants maintain and reproduce casteism in transnational contexts. Three scholars – prabhdeep singh kehal, Sailaja Krishnamurti, and Mona Bhan – engage with Upadhyay’s book, while Upadhyay provides their own response. Upadhyay’s work provides an opportunity for thinking about the limits and possibilities of dominant caste individuals studying casteism. From the pessimism of dominant caste scholars who cannot envision a world without casteism to the individual level caste maneuvers that hide casteism as source of inequality, the symposium brings academic conversations into the public space.

The book cover¹ features art by Sikh artist Jagdeep Raina, who shared the following reflection about his contribution:

¹ See page 26 of this issue.

As a punjabi speaking South Asian settler of Kashmiri descent who is complicit in the ongoing processes of colonization of Indigenous peoples in Canada, making this artwork for Nishant's book allowed me to hold myself accountable and create a work of art that can eventually move past the abyss of cultural amnesia and self-pity.

In addition to Nishant's book, I was also inspired by rich archival material depicting punjabi settlers at the turn of the 20th century as well as this following quote by Pakistani American playwright Ayad Akhtar when making this art work: "My job is to hold a mirror not only to those who would be islamophobic but to ... my own Muslim community. I've got problems with my own community, which usually, when you're an artist of any value, that's actually where you live and breathe, is in the critique of your own community, not in the I am a victim don't hurt me. That's not a really interesting narrative. ...It creates a binary where I'm right and you're wrong. and I don't think that's art. I think that's advocacy." (Akhtar 2016)

Turning archives into a community mirror need not be an academic or elitist exercise alone. For example, the Gurmat School at the Bradshaw Gurdwara in Sacramento, California, created a Safar-e-Shahadat, an exhibit reenacting the *shaheedi* (martyrdom) of the Chhote Sahibzaade through a "visual replica" of their sacrifice (Bradshaw Gurmat School, 2024). Another recent example is the Sahib-e-Kamaal exhibit, Guru Gobind Singh: Journey from Patna to Nanded, at Bangla Sahib gurdwara in Delhi, done in collaboration with the National Institute of Panjab Studies, Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan (Anon n.d., Tribune News Services 2025). These exhibits, much like the UCLA Contemporary Sikh Art Exhibit, brought historical knowledge to the community, allowing individuals to experience it themselves and derive their own meanings rather than be told how they should feel. Unlike the UCLA exhibit, however, this one was placed directly in a local sangat and made available to everyone, without making the sangat navigate to a different location - something that has been a consistent barrier for sangat's engagement with Sikh studies since its inception. Engaging with history as a community reminds us that these are not only stories, we hear but also stories we tell, and where we tell them is an integral part of the storytelling.

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