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Nanak Singh's *Khooni Vaisakhi*: The Poet and the Poem

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Abstract

This paper provides insight into key aspects of the Punjabi poem, *Khooni Vaisakhi*, written by Nanak Singh, who was present at the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre of 13 April, 1919, in Amritsar, Punjab. The poem was published in 1920, banned soon after, and was essentially lost for the next 60 years. The current author translated the poem into English, and published it in 2019. This paper uses family history and excerpts of his translation to discuss Nanak Singh's motivation in writing the poem, the events leading up to the massacre, and themes of nationalism and communal amity. It describes Nanak Singh's evolution as a novelist, and his transformation into a nationalist after the massacre. Some brief comments on the poem's relevance for the present are also included.

Keywords: Nanak Singh, *Khooni Vaisakhi*, Jallianwala Bagh, Indian nationalism

Introduction

22-year old Nanak Singh was present at Jallianwala Bagh, in the city of Amritsar, during the infamous massacre on 13 April 1919.¹ He lost two close friends who were killed in the shooting, and he was knocked unconscious in the ensuing chaos, but survived, and wrote a searing long poem called *Khooni Vaisakhi*² that was first published in May 1920. Apart from providing a vivid account of the massacre, it offers a window into that tumultuous first fortnight of April 1919, captures the mood of the people of Punjab and delivers a scathing indictment into the brutality and hypocrisy of British rule in India. Nanak Singh, the paternal grandfather of the author, went on to write over 50 acclaimed books and came to be regarded as the Father of the Punjabi novel.

¹ Briefly, several hundred unarmed men, women and children in a peaceful, but illegal assembly, were killed by firing (without warning) by troops led by a British general, Reginald Dyer. The crowd was protesting the Rowlatt Act (officially, the Anarchical and Revolutionary Crimes Act of 1919), passed by the Imperial Legislative Council in Delhi on 18 March 1919. This Act extended wartime emergency measures of preventive indefinite detention and, imprisonment without trial, as a response to a perceived threat from revolutionary nationalists.

² "*Khooni*" means "bloody, whereas *Vaisakhi* is a harvest festival in mid-April, as well as having major significance in Sikh tradition as the date of the founding of the Khalsa order by Guru Gobind Singh. This is most exactly transliterated as "*Visakhi*" from the original Punjabi, but we will use the more common spelling throughout this paper.

Khooni Vaisakhi was banned and virtually all copies were confiscated. It was lost for the next 60 years until it was rediscovered by the family in 1979 and published again by the author's father in 1980. The author translated the poem from Gurmukhi into English and published it along with additional material to mark the centenary of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre (Singh and Suri, 2019).^{3,4} In this paper, the author attempts to provide an insight into some of the key aspects of the poem. He also offers a personal profile of his famous grandfather.

The Poet

My grandfather Nanak Singh, Bauji to all of us, was born on 4th July 1897 in Chak Hamid, a small hamlet in the Daadan Khan tehsil of Jhelum district. The oldest of four children born to Bahadur Chand Suri and Lacchmi Devi, he was named Hans Raj. His father owned a small shop in Peshawar and Hans Raj was barely eight when he was asked to leave their home in Jhelum to help his father in Peshawar. The rest of the family moved a year later, but the joy of a reunion was short-lived. Bahadur Chand died of pneumonia within a year of their arrival and at the tender age of 10, Hans Raj found himself responsible for the family store, an ailing mother and three siblings. There was little possibility of continuing with school and later in life, he often faced questions about his formal education. He would offer a wry smile and respond, 'I don't know if I should say 4th grade pass or 5th grade fail. You decide.' The lack of a formal education was no deterrent for a literary genius who went on to produce an enormous body of work that has spawned over 50 doctoral dissertations.

He lived in Peshawar for the next 10 years or so, discovering a passion for music and revealing an early talent for stringing rhymes and verses together into rudimentary poetry. '*Seeharfi Hans Raj*' an 8-page booklet of his verses was published in 1909 when he was barely 12. But he showed little interest in running the shop, preferring to leave it in the more capable hands of his younger brother. As he explains in his autobiographical work '*Meri Duniya*', (Nanak

³ The full poem is too long to reproduce in this article, but is available in the reference given. A Punjabi version is also available through <https://www.amazon.in/dp/B07QYLWJ74/>

⁴ This paper will not provide detailed background on the people and events mentioned here, as that is substantially beyond its scope. Extensive information is available online. The centenary of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre produced an outpouring of fresh analysis, including Desai (2018) and Wagner (2019), which incorporated analysis of contemporary documents and relatively untapped contemporary accounts to provide a reassessment of the event. Wagner's analysis is not uncontested, and a review and analysis of multiple historical and political analyses is provided by Lawrence (2020), including imperialist revisionism such as Lloyd (2011). A collection of shorter literary responses from the time of the massacre that can be compared to Nanak Singh's major poem is in Jalil (2019). The collection has eleven poems and eleven prose pieces in just over 200 pages.

Singh, 2014 [1949])⁵ his penchant for music and poetry earned him a set of disreputable friends who sought his company to provide free entertainment at their parties.

He acknowledges leading a purposeless life during these early years in Peshawar until he came under the influence of Giani Bagh Singh, a pious and scholarly figure at the local gurudwara. It was a momentous period for him as he decided to convert to Sikhism at the age of 18. Hans Raj became Nanak Singh in 1915 and displaying all the zeal of the recent convert, he proceeded to apply his poetic talents towards writing hymns in praise of the Sikh gurus. His Satguru Mehma, first published in Amritsar in 1918, became a household name and sold over a hundred thousand copies. He earned the titles Nanak Singh ‘Kavishar’ or poet and Bhai Nanak Singh – the prefix ‘Bhai’ being normally reserved for a person who has made a significant contribution to the Sikh faith. *Khooni Vaisakhi*, in contrast, was a mere blip – written in the aftermath of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, published in 1920 and lost for the rest of his life.

But Jallianwala Bagh was also an important milestone in his life in other ways. He became a staunch supporter of the nationalist cause and a fervent opponent of British rule, joining the Guru ka Bagh movement launched by the Akalis in 1922, getting arrested and spending several months in the infamous Borstal jail in Lahore. He writes about this in the foreword of his novel *Adh Khidya Phul* (1940; published as *A Life Incomplete* in English; Nanak Singh, 2012) and describes it as a transformational period for him as an individual and in his evolution as a writer.

His stint in prison brought him into contact with Pandit Jagan Nath, a Congress party activist who had made good use of his influence to bring a trunk-load of books to his cell. The collection included several novels of Munshi Prem Chand which Bauji eagerly devoured despite a very rudimentary knowledge of Hindi language or Devanagari script. It dawned on him that he had finally discovered his true calling – to write novels that would seek to reform society and make the country a better place. Without wasting any time, he got some paper and started to write his first novel while he was still in prison – only to have it seized and destroyed during a search by prison officials.

Bauji was released from jail as part of the general amnesty to some 5000 prisoners who had been arrested for unlawful protests during the Guru ka Bagh movement. Soon after release, he published *Zakhmi Dil* (1923; in English, *A*

⁵ The two dates indicate the current edition and the date of original publication. *Meri Duniya* was one of the first autobiographies written in Punjabi.

Wounded Heart), his next pamphlet in verse. *Zakhmi Dil* was quite clever in deploying simple fables to carry the message about the devious and rapacious nature of the Raj. The poems had innocuous titles like *The Traveller and the Djinn*; *The Lion and the Lamb*; *The Cat and the Monkeys*, etc. He also used Urdu in some of the poems to deliver a searing account of the violence used by police forces in countering the *Guru ka Bagh* protests. The short poem ‘*Mind your Tongue*,’ goes a step further to warn of the consequences of speaking out because of Dyer and the Rowlatt Act.

The Raj had no appetite for this kind of ‘seditious’ literature and like *Khooni Vaisakhi*, *Zakhmi Dil* was also banned soon after being published in 1923. Like *Khooni Vaisakhi*, it was also lost to the world until 1982 when my father found a copy with a dealer in old books. He again approached Dr. Gupta to provide a detailed foreword and the new edition was published almost six decades after the original, in November 1980.

The government of the day kept a close watch on the media even after the Rowlatt Act was repealed in 1922 and the 1920s were a difficult time to be a writer, printer or publisher. To print or publish anything tinged with nationalist or patriotic sentiment invited the label ‘seditious’ and led to raids by the police and the punishment often included three years in jail along with hefty fines. Bauji recounts in *Meri Duniya* an interesting anecdote of his own experience in setting up a printing press in Amritsar soon after his release from jail. He took a Rs. 3000 loan from Ram Singh – a close friend from his childhood in Peshawar. The venture between the two partners worked but the portfolio of the press included a couple of publications that might invite the wrath of the government. Some other printers had found a nifty little solution to get around the jeopardy. Not wanting to risk a jail term, the owner of the press would get a proxy – usually an unemployed youth who would sign up to become the proxy owner for a monthly salary of about Rs. 25. Bauji wasn’t too keen on this practice but Ram Singh insisted, arguing that their struggling business would collapse if Bauji were to go to jail for a second time. Bauji reluctantly agreed and they found a young man – Inder Singh – who signs up to be the proxy owner so that he can make some extra money. Barely 10 weeks had elapsed and the police arrived at their doorstep with warrants against their press. Poor Inder Singh, as the notional owner, was sentenced to three years’ rigorous imprisonment. Visiting him in jail, Bauji was deeply moved by his plight. Ram Singh wasn’t too happy and in the ensuing argument, Bauji offered to sell the press and give the proceeds to Ram Singh with a promissory note that he would refund the remaining amount soon. He also kept his promise to Inder Singh and went on paying Rs. 25 each month to his family for the duration of his jail sentence.

Although he had lost his printing press, the flame of writing socially relevant novels was burning bright. *Matrayi Maa* (The Step-mother) received widespread public acclaim as his first novel in 1924 (Nanak Singh, 1989). There was no turning back after that. The next five decades saw him produce a new book every year – mostly novels, interspersed with some theatre, short stories and even a translation or two. His major works included *Adh Khidya Phul*, based around the aborted novel that he had started writing in Borstal jail in 1922 and was eventually published in 1940. I had the privilege of translating it as *A Life Incomplete* in 2012. *Ik Mian Do Talwaran (Two Swords in a Sheath)* (Nanak Singh, 2012) revolved around the life of Kartar Singh Sarabha and the Ghadar movement and won the Sahitya Akademi award in 1962. Living in Amritsar through the horrors of the Partition in 1947 had a traumatic effect and he produced a series of novels including *Khoon de Sohile* (Hymns in Blood), *Agg di Khed* (A Game of Fire) and *Manjdhaar* (Midstream) that provide a superb contemporary history into the tumultuous events in Punjab on the eve of India's independence.⁶

The Poem

Khooni Vaisakhi is a fascinating poem, both from a literary and a historical perspective. Over the course of the hundred years since it was first published, much has been written about the Jallianwala Bagh massacre that provides both a historical narrative and an insight into some of the key characters. That also leaves us the possibility of interpreting *Khooni Vaisakhi* in a variety of different ways. From my perspective, the following are some of the facets that stood out as I was translating the poem to mark the centenary of the massacre.

Writing for posterity

Nanak Singh was not quite 23 years old when the poem was published. He would not have known that the Jallianwala Bagh massacre would become such an important milestone in India's struggle for independence, nor that it would mark the beginning of the end of British rule in India. But he recognizes the salience of the event and has a sense that he is writing for posterity. As he says in the opening verse titled 'Prayer to Guru Gobind Singh':

*To pen a portrait of those departed ones,
Grant me the strength, my Divine Guru.
To remind my people across India,*

⁶ All three novels were originally published in the years after Partition. Publication dates for currently available editions are provided in the reference list.

*Lest we forget their sacrifice, my Divine Guru.
To write the saga of our heroes such,
Your disciple is ready, my Divine Guru.
Do help me complete this mission of mine,
Nanak Singh beseeches, O my Divine Guru.*

He also seems to have a premonition of our tendency to forget our heroes and martyrs. He wants us to remember their sacrifices and to build a memorial to commemorate their valor. It is another matter that the Flame of Liberty memorial at Jallianwala Bagh did not actually come up till 1951. In the verse titled Voices of Martyrs, he writes:

*Make time to visit this Bagh of ours,
Echoing tales of our gallant souls, O friends.
With a heavy heart, they mock our nation
Thanks so much for your love, O friends!...*

*No plaque, no bust, no monument built
To mark where we died, O friends?*

He clearly sees the ones who laid down their lives at Jallianwala Bagh as a beacon for future generations:

*Be a man, prepared to serve the nation
Dare not forget this promise, O friends.
Says Nanak Singh, One day you'll die for sure
Why not die for nation's sake, O friends.*

Chronicle of first fortnight of April 1919

The poem is quite remarkable in the manner in which it not only chronicles the dramatic developments in Amritsar during the first two weeks of April 1919 but also for giving readers a remarkable glimpse into the mood of the city during that period, capturing the defiance before the Rowlatt Act was passed and the despair after it is enacted.

*Our cries, our pleas, our calls for compassion
On deaf ears fell, all in vain
With a push and heave, the Bill was passed
Our deeds and hopes went down the drain.*

It also draws a stark contrast between the jubilation amongst the British and their Indian lackeys and the gloom in the nationalist camp.

*But a scene so different on the other side
Friends gather at homes, to celebrate.
A mission accomplished, the Act is done
'Tis time for wine and feast ornate.
Their quislings, turncoats and traitors all
Come laden with gossip and tales narrate...
And a smirk of delight it brings upon the rulers
Who divide and rule, planting seeds of hate*

And he captures the pain of Punjab in these lines:

*A funereal spirit pervades the air
A stifled wail, a silent dirge and a pain innate.
Says Nanak Singh Ah! The pain of Punjab!
Words choke as I speak, they suffocate.*

Spirit of communal amity

The Jallianwala Bagh massacre took place barely three decades prior to the holocaust of sectarian violence unleashed by the Partition of India in 1947. But the people of Amritsar portrayed in Khooni Vaisakhi are a picture of communal amity. The city's two tallest leaders are Saifuddin Kitchlew, a Muslim barrister and Dr. Satyapal, a Hindu surgeon are able to unite the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh populations in their opposition to British rule and the poem has a dramatic portrayal of the Ram Navmi festival being celebrated just four days before the massacre.

*Hindus and Muslims they gathered together
To rejoice at a festival, O my friends
Brotherhood conveyed by Muslims that day
Beyond incredible it was my friends.
A festival of Hindus though it was
Muslims made it just their own, my friends...*

*Doctors Saifuddin and Satyapal together
Tread on a path united, my friends.
Feted with garlands, our stalwart duo
Sent out a message clear, my friends.
Their friendship displayed a bond so strong
Hindu Muslim were the same, my friends.*

There is a specific reference to Muslims and Hindus breaking bread and drinking water from the same glass, a show of amity that caught the attention of British officials, including Deputy Commissioner Miles Irving. In his testimony at the Hunter Commission of Inquiry, Irving was asked about the communal amity at display during the celebrations. He replied, *'I saw that they were using religious organizations to serve political ends, which always in the long run means mischief.'* On the specific question that *'Hindus were drinking water touched by Muhammadans and were joining the religious procession'* Irving reiterates that the motives underlying the unity had a 'sinister purpose.' The poem recounts:

*Discord and difference seemed to vanish
Each saw the other as brother, my friends.
Shared the same glass to drink their water,
Sat down for meals together, my friends.*

The shared grief of the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communities is also captured in these lines about the funeral processions after the violence on April 11.

*Funeral processions joined by thousands more
Walked angrily, dazed and distraught, my friends.
Hindu, Sikh and Muslim strode side by side
Hearts pierced by arrows sharp, my friends.
Then a sight most wondrous was seen
It left us amazed and awed, my friends.
'Ya Hussain!' cried out the Hindus and Sikhs
As Muslims echoed 'Ram, Ram!' my friends.
And thus they reached the graveyard together
Hindu, Muslim and also the Sikh, my friends.
Funeral pyres flamed for Hindus and Sikhs
With Muslims buried alongside, my friends.*

Visual imagery

Although the poem is written in simple verse, it brings out the brutality of the massacre with some truly vivid imagery. The descriptions of the firing by Dyer's Gurkha troops and of bodies collapsing in heaps make the scenes come alive:

*At Dyer's command, those Gurkha troops
Gathered in a formation tight, my friends.
Under tyrant's orders, they opened fire
Straight into innocent hearts, my friends.*

*And fire and fire and fire they did
Some thousands of bullets were shot, my friends.
Like searing hail, they felled our youth
A tempest not seen before my friends...*

*Some ran with bullets ripping their chest
Stumbling to their painful end, my friends.
Others caught the bullet while running away
Dropping lifeless in awkward heaps, my friends.
In minutes, the Bagh so strewn with corpses
None knew just who was who, my friends.
Many of them did look like Sikhs
Amid Hindus and Muslims plenty, my friends.*

There is a particularly poignant description of people sifting through the corpses and searching for their loved ones in the aftermath of the massacre:

*Clutching lifeless bodies of precious sons
Parents mourn the abject horrors of the day.
My child, oh! Wake up just once more
What makes you sleep in a place so grey...*

*If Time indeed had come to part
Your parents could join, without delay.
Says Nanak Singh, You can't fight Fate
When the Master orders, you just obey.*

Transformation as a staunch nationalist

Khooni Vaisakhi also marks Nanak Singh's own transition from a young poet known essentially for his compilations of popular religious verse into an uncompromising advocate of India's freedom struggle. *Khooni Vaisakhi* is replete with references to a shackled Mother India and the brutality being inflicted upon her. In the verse titled 'Protests and Martial Law' following the passage of the Rowlatt Act, he writes:

*Dispirited and despondent by turn of events
They lamented, aghast at miserable fate.
With sinking hearths, they then witnessed
A shadow spread across a nation great.
All comforts and pleasures now sadly gone
Leaving gloom and grief to stalk the state...*

*Strikes called in every city and town
Sobs muffled, they roam in a sorry state.
Those valiant sons of Bharat Mata
Shedding tears, dismayed and desolate*

Nanak Singh's own courage is on display as he bluntly describes Dyer as a bloodthirsty murderer who will surely face the torment of Hell. The fact that he dared to write and publish *Khooni Vaisakhi* at a time when the Rowlatt Act was still in force shows the spirit of nationalist fervor that was prevailing at the time. In the verse titled 'The Martyrs' Certificate to Dyer', he starts with the lines:

*Shame on you, you merciless Dyer
What brought you to Punjab, O Dyer?
Not a sign of mercy unleashing such horror
How badly were you drunk, O Dyer.*

And he goes on:

*Just as you riddled our bodies with bullets
You too will pay the price, O Dyer.
You'll die and head straight for Hell
Ah! Such torment awaits you there, O Dyer.
Coming face to face on that Judgement Day
What answers do you plan to give, O Dyer?
You Tyrant! Until the end of time you'll be called
The Murderer that you are, O Dyer.*

Conclusion

Khooni Vaisakhi is an unusual poem, not just because of it comes from a survivor of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre but also because it provides a contemporaneous view into the mood of the city of Amritsar in 1919. Written in simple verse, it offers an insight into the man who would go on to become a colossus of Punjabi literature. It reveals Nanak Singh's transition from a writer of religious verse into a passionate nationalist who feels the pain of Amritsar, of Punjab and of Mother India. His trenchant criticism of British rule and of powerful figures like Brig. Dyer and Governor Michael O' Dwyer during a time when the Rowlatt Act was still in force reflect the courage of a fearless generation that fought for India's independence.

A hundred years after it was published, some of the poem's themes still remain relevant in India. Sedition laws of the kind propagated by the Rowlatt Act are

alive and well and continue to be used by various government agencies to stifle dissent. Fomenting sectarian dissent continues to remain an active part of the toolkit of various political actors, imparting a special resonance to Nanak Singh's message from the Ram Navmi of 1919.

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**Separation Without End:
Translated Excerpts from Surjit Sarna's Book,
*Vichode Ban Gaye Sadiyan***

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High Commissioner to UK*

Abstract

This paper provides excerpts from a new translation of noted Punjabi poet Surjit Sarna's book, *Vichode Ban Gaye Sadiyan*, written after the death of her husband, Mohinder Singh Sarna, also a noted Punjabi writer. The excerpts are organized around important places from Surjit Sarna's life and her relationship with her husband, and not necessarily by chronology. They provide vignettes into daily life from that time, the impacts of Partition, and Punjabi literary life. The excerpts are preceded by a biographical introduction to Surjit Sarna's life.

Keywords: Punjabi literature, Partition, Lahore, Delhi, Mohinder Singh Sarna.

Introduction

These excerpts have been taken from a new translation of the book that my mother Surjit Sarna wrote in the months immediately following the death of my father, noted Punjabi litterateur Mohinder Singh Sarna, in January 2001. As she tells the reader "these pages do not contain a story, nor an autobiography ... only a tale of pain."

Not only did she feel her loss keenly as any human being would, she reacted to it as a poet and writer. The heavy grief, she writes "had sunk deep down into the heart ... There was a turbulence in life's waters and it seemed that the boat carrying the sorrows of the heart was being tossed around in an unknown and mighty ocean ... The memory of the seasons, the sunlight and the shade that we had both known together had always been in the breezes ...but those too had now gone their way. This is the sad song of those breezes which I now listen to, and I now relate."

In such a mood she took the pen and she let memory speak. Without much attempt at structure, giving free rein to emotion, she recalls their life journey from the days

immediately following the partition of the sub-continent to their courtship in Delhi and Kalyan, and their life together in Nangal, Delhi and Dehradun. The narrative carries all the colours, the sounds and sights, the back and forth, the remembered bits of beauty that the mind's eye captures, and recalls. In the process it reveals the writer's soul, her appreciation of emotions and sentiment and her keen perception of place. Written as prose, these passages actually reveal the poet in her. The places and the events of the times – the partition riots in Lahore, the Sindhi refugee camps of Kalyan, the building of the Bhakra dam near Nangal, the idyllic Dehradun of the sixties with its bungalows and litchi gardens ... are all brought alive by the incandescent glow of her memories.

My father's passing, a month after their fiftieth marriage anniversary, had brought to an end a deep emotional bond, a strong element of which was a shared love of literature. In fact, their marriage itself began as a literary love story, brought together as they were by their appreciation of good literature, both Punjabi and English, as well as their predilections to follow the writing life. My mother's elder sister Prabhjot Kaur and her husband Narinderpal Singh – both of whom would go on to become well-known Punjabi writers – too had then embarked on their literary journey; my father was a close friend of theirs and it was at their house that he met and fell in the love with the 17-year old Surjit, captivated by her charming simplicity, her unworldly demeanour, her early writing and her passion for books.

Surjit grew up in a large family of seven sisters and one brother. Her childhood memories are of life in large cantonment bungalows in the military dairy farms in places such as Poona, Kirkee, Jabalpur, Mhow and Kalyan. Frequent moves meant disrupted school education and the upheaval of the partition ruled out a normal journey through college; despite this unorthodox progress, she would end with a double M.A., in English and in Punjabi, besides a degree in teaching. It was also a childhood of voracious reading, both of the English classics and Hindi translations of Tagore and Sarat Chandra. Her own early poetic efforts, even as a teenager, appeared in Punjabi magazines in Lahore such as *Pritam* and *Punjabi Sahitya*, and as part of a slim volume called *Kafila*. In the fifties, her poems and plays were broadcast over Jalandhar radio. She turned to the short story too early. Her first collection *Tain Ki Dard Na Aaya* somehow reached actor-writer Balraj Sahni when he was in Kashmir in 1962. So impressed was he that he wrote her a generously worded letter in neat Gurmukhi, extolling her stories and her language and putting her in a select group of Punjabi writers. Her later short stories have been collected in *Lahore Kinni Door*; the eponymous title story is one of her most highly regarded.

Three collections of her poems *Gal Mere Ishq Di*, *Teri Meri Preet* and *Nagma Patchhar Da* were published in later years.

While continuing to write poetry and short stories, Surjit had discovered her talent for translation. Among the important English classics that she has made accessible to Punjabi readers for the Sahitya Akademi, Bhasha Vibhag Punjab and National Book Trust are *A Woman in White* by Wilkie Collins, *The Heart of Midlothian* by Walter Scott, *Word* by Jean Paul Sartre and *Fire on the Mountain* by Anita Desai. Among the Hindi classics that she translated into Punjabi are *Meri Teri Uski Baat* and *Divya* by Yashpal, *Woh Bichara* and *Muktibodh* by Jyanendra Kumar. She has also contributed several translated volumes to Sahitya Akademi's series of *Makers of Indian Literature*. She was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Puruskar for translation in 1996 for *Muktibodh* and the Punjabi Akademi award for translation 1996-97. Along with this huge amount of literary translation Surjit Sarna has been a highly sought-after commercial translator. But despite her success, she does not encourage writers to be tempted by translation projects: "It takes away your own creativity," she says.

Her success in translation took her to the radio. For twenty years, beginning in her sixties, Surjit was a regular news reader in Punjabi for All India Radio, often translating the English copy into Punjabi minutes before going live on the air. These years are memorable for her for the last-minute tension and excitement that news can carry and for the companionship and friendships of the news room with colleagues handling other Indian languages. Her passion for current events, her daily devouring of the newspaper and television bulletins- which continues to this day- had been adequate preparation for her work for the radio.

Only a word at the end: hers has not been a secluded and privileged writer's life; her literary work has been done in the midst of demanding family responsibilities and extraordinary constraints. In my view, that makes it all the more valuable.

Separation Without End, by Surjit Sarna: Excerpts

Lahore

I will talk of those dark days when the earth shook not just under my feet, or of those close to me but of all our fellow Indians –young and old, man or woman. Our secure and carefree existence was suddenly engulfed in chaos, shaken to the core as only happens but rarely in human existence. Everything came apart at the seams, in those ill-starred days and terrifying nights. History will never forgive; the memory of those days will forever scar humanity's beautiful face.

*

In college, whatever free time I got was spent in the library, leafing through books. In December 1946 when the examination ended, I issued several books from the library and took them home for the vacations. It was a cold winter: sunny days alternated with short, overcast dark days, which seemed to crouch in the cold, frozen and shivering. We would put the brazier in the room, or put on the heater. Beji, our grandmother, would finish her chores and come and lie down. And I would be lost in reading those novels I had issued, including many of Alexander Dumas, lost in the carefree indolence of youth.

Literature already had me in her grip. Even as a class X student in 1945 my poems had been carried by magazines such as *Pritam* and *Punjabi Sahitya*. We would also enact plays in school inspired by our teacher Prof Harcharan Singh, himself a well-known dramatist whose plays "*Kedhan de din char*" and "*Anjosh*" were being staged in town.

My love of poetry was no secret: my friends Kanwaljit, Baljit, Jasjit, Birinder and Phool Khera all knew it. Of these friends, I only met Birinder and Phool after partition; I have no idea where the others went. We would eat our lunch during the break on the sprawling back lawns of the college. Just outside the back gate, an old man sold *chaat* of boiled sweet potatoes with sweet and sour sauce, which we bought almost every day to add to our shared lunch. The parathas made by Beji in my lunch box were always a hit and I would hardly get any. I would make up on reaching home, around four in the afternoon.

It was not always possible to take the college bus as its few seats were usually taken. The local buses, all belonging to one company - the Nanda Bus Service - were few and far between. On reaching home, Beji would give me hot parathas with tea and her mango pickle, into which she would have thrown long green chilies.

How different life was then, how simple.

*

But all that vanished in the blink of an eye.

One morning Beji returned from the gurudwara with some pamphlets. She asked us to make as many copies as we could. She herself was not sure of the purpose but it was surmised that the gurudwara wanted to distribute them to as many households as possible. We learnt then of the riots in the villages of Pothohar and how women had jumped into wells to escape being dishonored at the hands of the rioters. Those who fell into the hands of the rioters were abducted as village after village was attacked, looted and set aflame. The attackers had killed and murdered and destroyed, and moved on.

Tensions were rising in Lahore too. Slogans began to appear on walls: "We will play Holi with blood." Pakistan had not yet been formed; only the negotiations between leaders were going on. Perhaps even they had no idea about the possible impact of their decisions on the common man. Citizen committees formed in each locality and patrolled the lanes to keep the peace.

For us too things changed very suddenly in view of the rising danger. A couple of us did try to go to college and reached there with considerable difficulty. The place was deserted. The exams had been postponed without any fresh dates being set. A few students could be seen in the deserted hostel, or in the library and they too were keenly aware of the danger of being there. The old man was still selling his *chaat* but that day it had lost its taste. Our childhood, our innocence had vanished somewhere and we had suddenly grown up. What had happened to my beloved Lahore, the Lahore of my childhood, my birthplace... it was now a worried, scared, cowering city.

We went to sleep wearing black, with kirpans at our side. Incidents of knifing and arson had started in Lahore and curfew had been imposed. When reports of some

major incident spread through the bazaars, people would huddle together. The children would cry and their mothers would scold them. "Then why have you locked us up?" some child would ask. There would be sudden nervous laughter and the tension would break.

As the days passed, people- including us- still felt that nothing much would change even if Lahore went to Pakistan. Rulers changed, we said, not populations. Then in those dangerous days my mother suddenly turned up to check on us. I don't know how our father allowed her to travel alone; perhaps one could not fathom the degree of the danger sitting afar. When she alighted at the station there were only a few tongas waiting and not one was ready to take her to our place in Dharampura. On the way they would have to pass through the Muslim locality of Shahu di Garhi and would surely be stopped for carrying a Sikh passenger. At last, one *tonga-wallah* took pity on her but when he reached our area, a crowd surrounded the tonga.

Seeing the crowd on the road, our brother Jeet also reached there and was astounded to see our mother at the center of the crowd. But we knew she was not one to be afraid. She had lived among the Pathans for many years as a young woman in the North West Frontier, in Bannu, Peshawar and Tonk. An incident of my childhood comes to mind. Once in Bannu we were returning from somewhere, probably from a shopping trip, in a tonga. There were three of us with her and there was Aunt Karishma, the store-keeper's wife and adapted sister of my mother. I recall still the long, deserted road lined on both sides by tall trees. My mother had noticed that the tonga-wallah was deliberately taking a wrong route and to let him know that she knew, she started talking about the roads to Aunt Karishma. But he took no heed and carried on. They told him to stop the tonga, but he only increased the speed. If we tried to get up, he would bar our way with his whip. Then my mother stood up in the speeding tonga and slapped him tightly across the face. The Pathan was stunned into submission. We walked home.

The incident worried my father greatly. He said that Pathans always exact revenge; they would kidnap the children for ransom. In fact, a child had earlier been kidnapped from our Military Dairy Farm but when it contracted smallpox, they wrapped it up and left it behind the house. For many days we had to remain locked up at home.

Bannu was a walled city; its gates would be shut at night. There was some arrangement between the British and the Pathans under which the British paid them

off regularly to keep them away from kidnappings and other misadventures but their very presence instilled fear among children. Many years later when we were in Kirkee and Poona, we would see them, dressed in their long *kurtas* and Peshawari *salwars*. My younger sister Tripti was particularly scared of them and would run into the house if she saw one approaching. They would frequent the market in Poona and could be seen lining up outside the gates of the Kirkee Ordnance factory on pay day to recoup the money that the workers had taken from them on credit.

So that day at the height of the tensions surrounding the riots, our mother reached Lahore alone. Beji blessed the trembling *tonga-wallah* and gave him a hundred rupees – a very large sum those days. Two or three men, including our brother, then escorted him back till Shahu di Garhi.

Tensions continued to rise and the situation went from bad to worse. Satanic forces were afoot, using common folk to meet their nefarious objectives. From our roof we could see spirals of smoke rising into the sky. People began to leave the city – the trains were still running.

New rumors about Lahore's fate were born every morning. Lahore was the beautiful, fashionable, throbbing center of Punjab, the home of its literature and culture, just as Amritsar was the keeper of the Harmandir Sahib and the heart of the Sikhs. A strange restlessness, a fear and unspoken terror cast their shadows over everything. Our blameless, innocent hearts were haunted by the prospect of losing something valuable. Anything could have happened but what did happen could not have been anticipated at all.

The day we left our home, there were fires everywhere. The flames around Shah Mali could be seen from a distance. People were now frantic to leave. We too hurried to depart because no one knew what the morrow would bring. Beji did not have even the time to change her dupatta. All her starched dupattas, edged with lace, were left in the trunks there. Everything in the house was left where it was, as if our return was only a matter of time. We did lock the house, but those locks would not be opened by us. Now I feel that the house must have been occupied as soon as we left.

Lahore that day was a strange, unknown city. Somewhere, lost in its lanes, were our smiles and our laughter. Many other families were also heading to the station, convinced that staying on was no longer an option. We had no tickets, but we

crowded into a carriage of the Punjab Mail for what would be our last journey from that land. We would never return.

Our Mother India was divided. With such a sharp blade that the blood still seeps from her body. We had lost the battle – the freedom that we had got was no beautiful bird but a bleeding creature with clipped wings; it would not be able to fly for very long.

Lahore was burning; Delhi was preparing to celebrate, to light candles. Punjab's peace was at an end; the long caravans of loaded bullock carts were on the move. This land of five rivers, this prosperous and fertile land, this land of sweet music, of brave warriors, martyrs and lovers would now be awash in blood. No songs would be heard; only shrieks, screams and wails.

*

Delhi

I had just about entered the hostel, not even settled down properly.

It was the beginning of April. Then even the early mornings of April had a touch of winter. It was a Sunday, or perhaps some festival. I seem to recall that it was *amavasya*. Someone told me that day that the people of Delhi go to bathe in the Yamuna on that day and indeed I did see people heading in the direction of the river.

I can never forget that day. Those moments are inscribed on my heart and soul. Those moments, that time, that day, that season, the weather... That was the moment in my life when you were to meet me. Time must have been waiting for us at that turn, some eternal destiny too.

That day you and Narinder Virji had been cycling around the streets of Delhi and chatting. And while cycling you had had come towards my hostel to see me. You wrote to me about that day later –

Many a summer had sighed past my window and I heeded them not. Until you came and stood in that shady nook of my little garden; and the silent shadows grew plaintive with your presence.

The shy drooping gaze of your dark eyes made the buds flush into a passion of colour and smell; the congregation of leaves clapped its hands and shouted in a madness of mirth.

The tripping breezes knocked at my door so gentle, yet so violent, that coming out I looked at my little garden and stood in a silent, sweet amazement.

I had just washed my hair and come downstairs. I don't remember what I was wearing, but I remember the crepe dupatta that I had draped around my shoulders. Suddenly I saw Narinder Virji coming towards me with someone else. The date of his wedding with my sister Prabhjot had been fixed and he was now posted in Delhi. Gesturing towards you he said –

“This is Mohinder Singh Sarna....my friend.”

I glanced at you, but didn't say anything. We had already greeted each other with Sat Sri Akal. I didn't feel any more curiosity towards you at that moment. I had already read your short stories in *Punjabi Sahitya*. You were wearing a light mauve turban. I didn't know either of you well enough to have a conversation. Virji was telling me to come to his wedding. You also added: “You too must come to Poona for the wedding.” That was all you said, and for the rest sat silently.

About my going I would decide later after talking to my eldest sister. I had just come from Poona and it seemed difficult to go back so quickly. I had an exam coming up and still had no idea of everything that I had to study.

It is said that for meeting some particular person there is a special moment that gets inscribed on the two souls, perhaps for eternity. Even time holds its breath then. There was surely some unspoken old bond, some deep communication between our souls. Else how could we two strangers have come so close to each other and become partners for eternity. But that day I had no idea of all this. You too had read my poems in *Pritam* and *Punjabi Sahitya*. They had been published before your short stories. Perhaps we exchanged some cursory remarks about these stories and poems. That was all. You two writers had come to meet me. For me it was a very strange experience.

Nothing much happened that day, nor did we even talk a lot. But our destinies would have been decided that day for all time to come. Of that momentary meeting you had once written to me –

You are so full of secrets, this I have already written to you in my last year. That you are different also everyone knows. Do open your treasure of secrets in front of me some day, acquaint with me with all the scents of your fragrant heart. What all do you think about, what all do you feel, why do you keep so much locked up within you?

That you are different had become clear to me when one day your eyes filled up with tears for no reason at all. Narinder tried to make you feel better and I got up and left the room. Before that you had glanced into my eyes for a brief moment. A brief glance that seemed to come from very near me. But that was just a coincidence: your tears had nothing to do with me. You were crying because you couldn't go for Prabhjot's wedding.

But how was I to blame for that... I too had tried several times to convince you to go for the wedding then when with your open hair you had come sailing like some ship into the YWCA hostel...what a unique girl, I had thought, how different. (4 September 1949)

You had written and sent me a poem in English ... how many poems, in Punjabi and in English, you used to send. Now when I read them, I can only weep and wonder how someone can love another so much and then depart for another world. I feel you within me. The memory of that day you had sent thus –

*It was an early April morn when her pale, lovely face,
Fresh after the morning bath, like a dew dripping
Lily found its repose in the
Sunshine of my soul
And her loose wet hair streamed
Through my being like the fragrant
Breath of a dark summer night.
A glance from her dark eyes made
The sordid dust of my heart blossom
Into the flowers of a countless spring.
And the music of her voice
Touched my harp with its mellow sweetness and
Gave a meaning to the songs in the air.*

*

Once when we reached Delhi, winter was at its peak. We broke journey to meet our sisters after a gap of six or seven months. Narinder Virji had already written ahead to you of my arrival and we met again there, at sister Prabhjot's house. You looked at me as if I was a stranger – perhaps, I thought, you had forgotten everything.

Memories can make us helpless. As I write these words now, my entire being seems to be crumbling away....

You too recalled that meeting often: "That last evening of last December. Those khadi clothes and white sandals became you so much. You looked like some political leader. I asked myself – who is this girl? She does seem familiar. Is there some bond between us or is this just some illusion of my heart? Those eyes – did they really glance towards me? And what is this churning in my heart? Finally, she has come to sit close to me. She is smiling at me. That smile, that smile I know. It has washed away every doubt, every quibble. Those eyes look deep into my heart and then don't stop looking. That young girl of wise demeanour and simple clothes standing next to the staircase is asking how I am."

Those beautiful days, we would recall them often. Then a separation of a few days or months seemed so long. And now more than a year has passed since we met. How long is this separation? Eons long, and there is no hope of it ending.

A long time ago you had promised me: "Yes, my life, we will be like this forever for each other. On this path of life, our hands clasped, our eyes locked. Partners in life's joys and in life's sorrows. Supporting each other with our love always. We should live like this forever, finding God in each other, worshipping each other. (February 1951)

Now the winter is passing and where do I go without you, where does one go alone? It is the season of sweet peas. We both loved their fragrance. Now flowers and fragrances do not matter. I search for you instead in the fragrances of my spirit. Your passing has taken with it all life's beauty, all fragrance, all hope. Only a sad emptiness remains.

We did not meet often those days, but the hope of meeting was always with us. We passed our days in an intoxicated headiness. The spirit became addicted to love and

the eyes to daydreaming. If only one could pass one's entire life like that. I used to think – a heart that is filled with the sharp sweet ache of love is so rich.

The evenings would bring us together; the twilight would separate us. Our shared heartbeats, our clasped hands stayed with us even when we parted. Your words would linger on my lips, my thoughts would churn in your mind.

You wrote to me of those days: *“The night with its headload of dreams would sprinkle gold dust in our sleep. You would become the light of your smiles and slip away from my trembling hands.”*

Yes, memories nurtured us, our meetings would drive us crazy and the waiting drained us. We were no longer the beings we had been – we had changed beyond recognition. One day we went to see the film ‘*Apna Desh*’ but that day I left for home just as we came out of the cinema. You had wanted to say something, but you stayed silent.

One day you reminded me of this incident in a letter –

We stepped into the cinema as soon as we met. There too you sat so distant, so far away. And with good fortune you found a bus leaving for Karol Bagh on coming out. Why would you stay with me? Maybe there will be no more buses after that. I said let us walk on this long road. We won't meet many people here and in the shadows of this soft sunshine we will reach Gole Market, walking close to each other. But as if you cared, as if you loved anyone!

*

And that day, you remember? What a beautiful day, with so many clouds floating in the sky. I don't know where those clouds came from that day. We were going to Talkatora Gardens from Karol Bagh via Shanker Road. You had a bicycle and you would take it right to the middle of the road and I would pull it back to the side. We were discussing Hobbes and Hegel. That was some strange day. We were walking on that road in some intoxication. Only an occasional passerby was to be seen on that road. You immortalized the memory of that road in a letter –

Then that road where you taught me civic sense and that man, bereft of any civic sense, who kept going into the middle of the road. That day I felt that we had

reached another world. You were looking more and more different to me. I would stop again and again as if to ask you, who are you, where are you taking me, this limitless emotion that is overflowing from your eyes...why does the breeze kiss the curls that fall onto your face, how have the sun's rays melted into your smile.

Then that road ended. How surprised were we that it had ended! Everything seemed so so strange...do roads ever come to an end? But it had. I said – “It is getting very late, and dark.” You were silent and I hailed a tonga and went home, leaving you standing and staring after me.

*

The rose nursery in Talkatora Gardens pulled us towards itself. Roses were the witnesses to our love. Our love too bloomed like those flowers. We had been to that nursery a year earlier too, in the winter. On that sunny afternoon we had sat and talked like strangers, distant and formal. I know you remember each day as well as I do.

Those days the whispers of our love could be heard in the breeze. It seemed even the flowers bent towards each other to talk of our love. Were there any others who loved like us? Those who did not love – how did they survive? The sweetest and the most bitter experience of life, that is love. Bitter when it is not returned, but when it is, it becomes a blessing and all else pales before it.

People do exist without love and live listless lives that are never fulfilled, that never rise above the ordinary. It is love that can touch our existence of flesh and blood with a heavenly light.

You wrote to me: “For your love, I am forever in your debt. Your love has given us the gift of life. Your touch has carved out the fortune line on my palm. Your beautiful presence has introduced me to those golden moments of life when time vanishes and the spirit loses itself into a lighted, heavenly and melodious vastness. I am forever in your debt.”

Then I left for Kalyan and couldn't even say goodbye. I had waited and waited but could not meet you before my departure. We kept missing each other....and then I left.

Kalyan

Your letter arrived.

I was looking forward to meeting you yesterday. I had thought that I would sit long with you and make up for all the missing. But when I reached Prabhjot's home, I found out that you had waited and waited and then left. You are right: the line of my fortune is indeed very dim.

This morning you left for Kalyan. When will you meet me again? Go on say...but then you don't know anything at all.

Your letter filled my days. Love is such an invaluable and beautiful gift. If you know that someone loves you, your entire being changes and everything looks so wonderful and charming. One falls in love with oneself. I had gone so often to Prabhjot's home expecting to see you but no chord had resonated in your heart. Then you wrote –

Today is the 23rd of July. Narinder told me you have really gone away to Kalyan. I was waiting for this day so long and then when I came...well, each to his own luck ... so you left without telling me. Does this ever happen! Does anybody do this! I know how much you truly care for me!

The clouds have lifted today. The sun is out. Let's go out today. Far away, as far as you will take me. See the clouds are gathering again on seeing you. It seems we will get nicely drenched today. But where!

You are sitting in Kalyan; this is all only my imagination. Yet I am not alone. Your warmth envelops me and I can feel your breath around me.

...And I too did not feel alone. Now I do, but then there was the expectation of meeting you, your words would resound in my ear, your smile would flower on my lips.

*

The days in Kalyan were among the most beautiful and carefree days of my life. Kalyan was an important suburb of Bombay, a major army transit camp before partition, first for the British troops and then for troops leaving for Pakistan. When

we reached there for our second stay, at the Military Dairy Farm, Kalyan had become a camp for refugees from Sind, who arrived each day in trucks loaded with their luggage.

The Military Dairy Farm, in which our father was posted, was away from town. Our bungalow was on a hill top, with the staff quarters tucked into its side. The farm's estate, with its cattle yard and green fields, stretched away to the right. All around were small hillocks, green slopes and dips. It was a little hill station, always cooler than Bombay.

The bungalow had a verandah on all sides and a long corridor stretched to the kitchen and pantry at the back; the long monsoons made it necessary that all these spaces were covered. An open courtyard looked down on the refugee camp and in the evening we would sit on its wall and watch the activity below. The refugees had arrived in droves and set up home in the army barracks. The more well-to-do refugees from Karachi and Hyderabad had already settled in Bombay and even started businesses. The fact was that they had not come empty handed, like the refugees from Punjab. They had come with their luggage, their jewellery and their cash.

Suburbs like Kalyan became home to those from the small towns and villages of Sind. The camp grew rapidly in size. Wooden shacks came up on both sides of the long empty roads and all manner of shops started. Just below our bungalow was Camp number 1. A thin road twisted lazily and reluctantly from it down the hill to Camp number 3. Beyond that was the ancient temple of Ambar Nath and the highway to Bombay.

I had earlier seen refugee camps in Pimpri and in Delhi. I had also seen fires in Lahore, heard people crying and wailing for lost ones. But life makes every effort to live on. It does not lose hope even on blood-drenched paths. Weddings and celebrations take place in refugee camps, children are born and felicitations exchanged. At the same time, in every breath there is the abiding memory of those who have been separated. This is life...Life! You are marvellous, I salute you. Your ways are amazing.

The shops in the camps flourished. Clothes, shoes, decorative items and things of daily need were sold and bought. It would not have been possible to believe that such activity would start in a matter of days. The biggest bazaar was in Camp

number 3. That was the place to visit in the evenings, full of shops of fabric, embroidery, jewelry, tailoring and sweets. The people of Sind are hardworking and do not shy away from any sort of business.

One needs everything to go on living. One needs jobs and work. And for that it was necessary to go to Bombay from Kalyan. In a few months, buses began to ply to take people to the railway station from where the local trains would take them to Bombay. Everyone was trying to find a new life, not just there but in the entire country. Those who had never lifted their hand even in their dreams to do any work were willing to try anything. Lakhs had been rendered homeless. Family ties were being formed all over again. There were strangers who became family while some family members turned away their faces.

But even now there were some who sat lost and defeated, not letting their wounds heal, constantly mourning those left behind. But people also found time to visit each other, to extend support and listen to each other's woes.

This was our growing up. We were witnessing and understanding much that we would never have experienced if the country had not been divided.

We had no friends in the Dairy Farm. The families whom we had known in our previous stay had been posted out. But we were four sisters – the other three were married - and we were very close to each other. One evening we stepped out into the refugee camp and were astounded at the change that had overcome the once quiet military area. A veritable new town had come up before our eyes. On our way back we saw four girls standing near a big hall on the same hill as our bungalow. A large family of three sisters and their children lived in that big hall. We exchanged smiles and soon began to visit each other. Without knowing who they were and where they had come from, a friendship began that was to last a lifetime.

Just inside the entrance of the hall stood two big sewing machines with foot pedals. Two of our new friends, Savitri and Kamla, would stitch clothes for hours at a time on those machines, while the younger girls helped with the housework. The family had brought the machines along with them from Sind; those machines were their livelihood. I would go to them to learn stitching, and my sisters would soon follow. But that was just an excuse to sit and chat. Come evening, they would get up from their machines, get ready and step out with us. After a round of the bazaar we would

bring them home for tea and an evening of gossip and chatter. Then we would go to leave them home. This was the pattern of our lives.

*

But those days in Kalyan...those innocent days ... young new days filled with the wealth of your love. That was the town of my love, my dreams whose memory has locked step with me through all these years.

You were also fond of Kalyan, very fond. You wrote to me:

“5th of December 1950, we reached Kalyan in the late afternoon. We were welcomed by smiling sunshine and open fresh breezes. So this was the pretty place where my beloved lived. Everything about the place appealed to me. That open landscape stretching to the horizon, those hillocks and ravines and dips, those slopes covered with golden dry grass. It all seemed familiar, a bit like Rawalpindi where I was born and where I grew up. My beloved’s home was a neighbour of my childhood home. It seemed to me that this girl who was to be my bride was a friend from my childhood. Those breezes, those hills nodded in agreement. That welcoming late afternoon and its beauty are unforgettable. I had become part of those surroundings. There was a new warmth in my limbs, the freshness of a new life. The wonder of it all made me feel that I was floating along on the shoulders of my two brothers.”

Yes, that was the 5th of December 1950, the day before our wedding. That day is etched in my memory too. There weren’t too many guests at home, only my elder sisters had come with their young children. My friend Jasbir too had come. I didn’t have much of an idea about what was happening. It hadn’t sunk in that I would have to leave Kalyan and that the separation would drain me. It was a new turn in my life and even if one desires one cannot go back on life’s paths again. As we move forward, the paths we have traversed close behind us, only their memory remains in our hearts. These trails are never seen again except in the world of our memories. But nobody stops us from visiting that world. The heart, free as a bird, can reach there any time, from any place.

Nangal

Bhakra Nangal, a unique place. A new township coming up for the builders of Bhakra Nangal dam. A magical town, a little pearl of nature.

5 Circular Avenue was a lovely bungalow with its lawns, vegetable beds and flowers. The drawing room led to a verandah in front of which was a circular bed of roses. All kinds of roses, those roses – the witness to our love, were here too. And on the side of the bungalow, the rooms opened out on to a long verandah. A very pretty house. The gate was at end of a long drive. Beyond it, at the centre of a crossing, stood an ancient peepal tree with its thick shade. A cemented circular platform had been constructed around its huge trunk. Many roads let out from this crossing: one towards the club, one to the old Nangal town, another to the offices and yet another on which our house stood. Under this tree the workers would gather for their union meetings. Here slogans were raised: “*Jo ham se takraiye ga, choor choor ho jayega.*” Flowering trees lined those roads, those new roads...everything was so new.

The duties at the dam were in shifts that ran around the clock. One train left with the workers at midnight for the graveyard shift. We would walk in our lawn and look at each flower, each leaf. Not far from the house was the Sutlej river; there a couple of boatmen were always around to take you on the water.

You would leave for office and Navtej and I would go for walks. Sometimes down to the river, at other times to the club or to the market. Or around the huge ground where the Basant fair would be set up. After Lahore this was my second opportunity to live in Punjab; earlier I had stayed in Jalandhar.

This was a different sort of Punjab. This land I felt had been blessed by the touch of Guru Gobind Singh himself. His presence could be felt everywhere. A sacred land. Often, I would set off alone on those deserted roads and go to the Gurudwara Ghaat Sahib on the Sutlej bank. The flowing waters gave me peace. On the opposite bank, across the river atop a hill was the Gurudwara Bhambor Sahib where Guru Gobind Singh had meditated and written the Chaupai sahib. You would recite the Chaupai every evening, from beginning to end..so much so that even little Navtej had memorized parts of it.

Not far from home was the Gole Market. Just a few fashionable shops in a sort of circle. There was a New Empire Store which sold all sorts of things, even food items. Even wool. I was very fond of knitting and would often buy wool from there for sweaters. That shop also sold magazines from England and those days they were not expensive. I would buy my copy of *Women's Own* every month, perhaps for a rupee. Even the Main Market wasn't far away, easily reached by rickshaw. Not that it was much of a market, just a string of shops on either side of a clearing. Whenever family members visited us from Delhi, they would be taken to this market and then down to the river for a boat ride on the Sutlej.

Movies were shown at the club every weekend. We saw Shammi Kapoor's "Tum sa Nahin Dekha" there. One would run into people at the club but I didn't really make any friends. Once in a while I would chat with our neighbour, the wife of Engineer Agarwal. Her two sons were older than Navtej but they would play together. On the other side of the bungalow was only a guest house where officers would come and stay a day or two.

In this town of dreams, I heard little footsteps...someone was coming, someone with messages of happiness for my life, to make even stronger the bonds with this earthly life...my daughter Jaskiran. The day she was born there was a mighty storm and electricity failed at the hospital. It had snowed in Simla. They said it had snowed that early in Simla after a hundred years.

Dehradun

It was evening by the time we reached Dehradun for the first time. The rain had just stopped and the hills looked fresh and clean. The open surroundings of Race Course had a washed look. The gravel that covered the front yard of our house sparkled. It was the beginning of August, in fact the second of August, 1965. You had come earlier and rented the house. We had followed by bus. It was said that people did not survive long in the post of Director Finance in ONGC. Yours was a very responsible job; decisions involving crores of rupees were taken in a matter of minutes.

Dehradun has changed a lot. In those days there were no crowds and life moved at a slow, tranquil pace leaving enough time for many things. The rains would come...the dark clouds would gather over Dehradun's skies and then burst upon

the valley. Those were some clouds, some showers. Everything would turn green and soothing to the eye.

That open expansive feel of Race Course is still intact. The Mussoorie hills greet you with a smile from every point, right to the distinctive summit of Gun Hill. After the rains came the days of Dussehra and the Ramlila would be staged at several places. The days became shorter, the sunlight deepened its colour, the breezes became cooler. The whispers of the coming winter travelled from the distant hills. I was happy. Your presence made everything beautiful. God had been kind – your love, my love, our love and those golden days. A simple life, made up of everyday things, ordinary events that held our interest and charmed our hearts. The Ramlila was one such.... One day in the bazaar it seemed that a wedding was underway, such was the atmosphere. Someone mentioned that the wedding procession of Sri Ramchandrajai was coming. We watched an open jeep travel slowly through the bazaar. Ramchandrajai and Lakshman were seated in it, with several others at their feet. A brass band played ahead of the jeep and whenever the jeep halted several people would break into a dance before it. The festival mood was at its height.

*

A few weeks after we reached Dehradun, the war with Pakistan broke out. It was a time for worry and concern – everyone had someone in the army. Our spirits would rise whenever good news came from the front. Children would enthusiastically greet passing soldiers with salutes and cheers. There would be a “black-out” every night. If any light was seen in any house, the neighbours would shout and have it blocked. When the war ended, and despite the victories over the enemy’s Patton tanks, a pall of mourning descended upon Dehradun. Young Army officers were returning, many without a leg or an arm. Many did not return, and their parents were grieving. Wars always end in wailing. Mothers, sisters, wives, children are left to grieve, to spend their lives coming to terms with the loss. On the Dussehra after the war we were invited to the Gorkha Training Centre for the celebrations. But the sight of the injured officers saddened us and we did not stay long. Even the territory that had been captured by our Army was returned. Then why lose precious lives, shed so much blood?

*

We explored every part of the valley – Sahastardhara, Raipur, Paltan Bazaar, Rajpur and Rajpur Road, and all the way to Mussoorie. Each day was valuable. The sun would linger all afternoon on our front verandah and I would settle down there with my knitting after sending you to office post lunch. One by one the neighborhood ladies would join me. I cannot now remember what we gossiped about- some movie or the film stars or the children. But we were happy – everything happened on that verandah. That was our club and that was our kitty party. The mustard leaves would be chopped there for the *sarson ka saag*, knitting patterns learnt and taught, the children tested on their spelling, recipes of chutneys and pickles exchanged...and the day would pass. I wonder now how did the house run...who did all the housework...

Often, I would tuck in the children and wait for your return from office at the gate. The cold wind would hit me straight in the face and give me a headache. But I would prefer to stay outside till you returned. Those days your meetings in office often went on till very late.

*

When the *gurpurab* came the entire town would descend upon the gurudwara in Race Course. Piles of vegetables would arrive two days earlier and the preparations for the langar would begin and all of us would pitch in whole heartedly. On *gurpurab*, the Sukhmani recitation would begin at four in the morning. That would be the best time. Peaceful, transcendental music, the early morning cold. I would close my eyes and be transported. It was an ethereal experience that would send waves of bliss through my being. The kirtan and discourses would continue all day along with the serving of langar. The evening would see several people going for tea and some rest to the homes of their friends in Race Course – these visits would have been all tied up in advance. The night session at the Gurudwara would be somewhat less crowded, and there would be the expectant build up to the Kavi Darbar at midnight. The children would sleep off there itself.

Those were very nice days and beautiful nights, redolent with moonlight and flowers. Those days were birds on a tree and were flying away one by one, slipping away from my hands, to vanish in unknown skies.

*

Who would have guessed that we would ever return to Dehradun? One morning in Delhi the thought crossed my mind ... it would be so nice if we could go back somehow. But why would you be transferred back on deputation to ONGC again? There would be others in line ... I dismissed the thought from my mind. Two hours later you called to say that we were going back to Dehradun, to head a new office of your own department, the Audit department. I saw it as a miracle that had fulfilled my innermost wish. Another stay in Dehradun was beyond my dreams and now it had become a reality. I wanted to live each day to the full. Your presence shed light on those days, made them beautiful, full of life. The memories come flooding back ...

Living in Dallanwala, we were surrounded by greenery. The gardener in our bungalow on Balbir Road was given the main task of planting flowers. He did a wonderful job, filling the garden with flowers of all kinds. Roses and chrysanthemums would flower in winter. We would take bouquets of chrysanthemums to the gurudwara on *gurpurab*. The bed of sweet peas was just beyond the window of the drawing room and the room would always be redolent with their fragrance.

When the summer arrived, a not too harsh summer, the mango and litchi trees would begin to fruit. There were litchi gardens close to our home which would be contracted out before the season began. The men keeping watch over the fruit would beat tin drums at regular intervals to keep the birds away and when the litchis were ripe, they would begin to pack them in cases in the gardens. We too would buy the freshly picked litchi from these gardens. Our bungalow had two litchi trees and their fruit would be devoured by us straight from the branch. When the mangoes ripened, the *koels* would sing, often all night. The song of the *koel* would plunge me into sadness, bring tears unbidden to me eye, drive away my sleep. I don't know why.

The same sadness would envelop me in the afternoons which were lazy, steeped in silence, devoid of life and color. Those afternoons would push me into a swirl of hopelessness. The daily call of a man selling chopped sugarcane would deepen this feeling; that call signified that the day was soon coming to an end. If I took my bicycle and headed to meet my old friends in Race Course, the empty yawning verandahs of the bungalows on the street would sink my heart. I felt then that everything in life was about to end ... I cannot explain that feeling too.

But the mornings ... When I would open the door in the morning I would see the washed blue mountains before me. The open surroundings would make me want to sing, raise my arms and sing the praises of that Supreme power that had made such a beautiful world. Happiness would overcome my heart without any reason at all...that was the magic of Dehradun, the magic that slowly intoxicated one. But all that was beautiful, lovable, charming and warm because you were warm...because your love was limitless ... just your loving glance would fill my being with a new light.

*

Delhi

The night deepens and I open my eyes, moist with tears.... I cannot see you anywhere ... you are not visible at all. We don't know who is the winner or the loser in this game of Time. I feel I am the one who lost because without you I am very alone.

We were so happy those days in Kalyan. When we went together to Bombay ... it was so nice. We sat near the Gateway of India staring at the vast ocean. The waves crashed repeatedly against the shore. The we went for a ride on the water on a motor boat and a cool breeze caressed us. Life was carefree and those moments were all our own. I cannot ever forget that motor boat ride ... that day we had truly set sail on the unending ocean. Like we had then set sail together on the vast ocean of life.

Casting aside the world and the binding ties of its rituals and traditions, two travellers had started on a journey... then we did not know the destination...only that our love too, like that ocean, was deep, unending, vast.

Those moments passed, as did that day, and so many years of life also merged into eternity.

The seasons change ... the beautiful time comes, the time of going to Talkatora Gardens. To sit in the dappled sunshine and go through our memories refresh them. Talkatora is the biggest witness of our love, our dearest companion. I am taking care of these memories...they were dear to you ... they shouldn't be allowed to crumble away, get lost somewhere. When you shifted to Lodi Road, you were

troubled that Talkatora was now far away. Connaught Place and Gole Market had become distant too ... Now I feel everything is far away.

You wrote to me once, when I left for Kalyan:

I recall often that day when I lay my head in your lap. A crazy thought is again rising in my mind, that I should lay my head again in your lap ... will you let me! Lost in memories, I miss you. I hadn't even looked at you to my heart's content, fulfilled my yearnings but these yearnings will not go even if I look at you all my life ... and you went away. Does anybody behave like this ... is this any way of doing things!

I say the same things to you today. Listen to me. You have not gone anywhere but I want to see you in front of me...smile and squeeze my hand, hold me and say, "Don't worry. This rain will not last forever, my bride."

But today I don't believe your words. This parting will not end. My fingers yearn for the touch of your hand ... they tremble. The remaining days of my life, how so ever many they be, will have to be spent alone. You had never said anything about leaving someone mid -stream like this ...

ends

Translator's note: The chosen excerpts have been, unlike in the book, structured under the names of five places. This liberty has been taken to allow the reader to appreciate the author's keen perception of place in the context of her own emotions and memories.

Writings and Translations by Surjit Sarna

Writings:

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Gal Mere Ishq Di – poetry collection 1988, Arsee publishers

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Lahore Kinni Door – short story collection 1997, Arsee

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Translations:

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The Heart of Midlothian by Walter Scott, 1995 for Bhasha Vibhag Punjab

Raja Ram Mohan Roy by Somendranath Tagore for Sahitya Akademi – in series of Makers of Indian Literature (1985)

Kabir by Prabhakar Machwe for Sahitya Akademi – in series of Makers of Indian Literature (1985)

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Word by Jean Paul Sartre (1992) for Sahitya Akademi

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The Immigrant by Stephen Gill (1992)

Escape by John Galsworthy (1998) Bhasha Vibhag Punjab

Meri Teri Uski Baat by Yashpal (1989) for Sahitya Akademi

Woh Bichara by Jyanendra Kumar (1992) for National Book Trust

Muktibodh by Jyanendra Kumar (1995) for Sahitya Akademi

Modern Indian Short Stories 2003, ed. Shiv K. Kumar for Sahitya Akademi

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Sahitya Akademi Puruskar for translation of *Muktibodh* in 1996

Punjabi Akademi, Delhi award for translation 1996-97

Punjabi Akademi, Delhi award for *Vichode Ban Gaye Sadiyan*

Gathering the Vanishing History of Punjab and South Asia Through Crowdsourced Lived Memories

Guneeta Singh Bhalla

Chairperson and Founder, The 1947 Partition Archive

Abstract

The 1947 Partition Archive is a crowdsourced oral history repository that trains and empowers citizens to document life stories of those who witnessed the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. The novel methods for oral history documentation used by The 1947 Partition Archive aim to democratize the telling of history by exploiting modern communication technology. Groups divided by Partition, such as those identifying by nationality – Indian or Pakistani, or religion – Hindu, Muslim and Sikh among others, share the same platform for documenting and reflecting on oral histories of Partition. The crowdsourced oral histories reveal the wide-reaching international impacts of the Partition on individual lives, communities, economics, arts, culture, education and much more. This paper provides a glimpse into the contents of the oral history archive and explores a variety of new possibilities the oral history record presents in understanding our past, alongside the traditional archive, at times supplementing it, and at other times standing as a new primary source of information. Given the integral connection between Partition and modern Sikh history, the oral history collection is of significance to students studying various aspects of Sikh culture, identity and history.

Keywords: 1947 Partition, oral histories, Punjab, Sikhs, India, Pakistan

Introduction

The 1947 Partition of Punjab and Bengal in South Asia is arguably one of the most defining events for the subcontinent over the last century. Nearly 15 million people became refugees in 1947, anywhere between 250,000 to 3 million lost their lives during unprecedented mass violence, countless children were orphaned and women were kidnapped, raped and killed. As British colonizers retreated from South Asia, hundreds of kingdoms were merged together with British occupied regions or, British India, and reorganized into two new countries: India and Pakistan. Identity building in the two new nations began immediately, and the resettling of millions of refugees was a part of that process. The nature of the colonial power transfer and the birth of a democracy transformed South Asia in fundamental ways that need to be explored from a humanistic perspective. To understand the transformation, the pre-independence history, the Partition process and the post-independence socio-

economic evolution, The 1947 Partition Archive began documenting video-based oral histories of Partition eyewitnesses in 2010. Today, over 9,500 individuals have shared their life stories, building a new tapestry of nuanced perspectives that collectively provide insights into the transformation of a subcontinent from hundreds of kingdoms into three modern nation states: India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Because the Sikh homeland of Punjab was one of the two states directly affected in 1947, Partition is an integral and significant chapter in Sikh history. Here we explore how oral histories from The 1947 Partition Archive provide missing links and a deeper glimpse into Punjabi and South Asian history.

How can we learn about Punjab and its past from oral history?

Too often, the folk history of Punjab as most Punjabis know it, is learned through a communal lens. To generalize: Sikhs may sing the praises of the last beloved Maharaja of the soil, Ranjit Singh. Hindus may take pride in the ancient history of Sanskrit scholarship and the land which hails as the origin place of many yogic and Vedic practices. Muslims may highlight the cultural renaissance and the artistic traditions developed under Muslim leadership and the evolution of unique practices such as Sufism. Furthermore, many Punjabi Muslims take pride in recalling family bloodlines that can be traced back to Central Asia and the Middle East, with ancestors having traveled towards Hindustan with the many rulers or other Silk Road traders during centuries of yore. Hindus, on the other hand, take pride in being indigenous sons of the soil, while Sikhs are generally more concerned with establishing their distinct identity and being neither Hindu nor *Musalman* (Muslim), and recollecting history as it began with Guru Nanak. Yet, our work documenting oral histories reveals that the story of Punjab and Sikhs (or any other group: Muslims, Jains, Hindus, Christians, Jews, among others) can only be understood when taken into context with the complex and nuanced history of Punjab's diverse cultures, dialects and surrounding regions.

Oral histories force us to reconsider our long-held beliefs as we empathize with the human story of another, whose lived experiences may contradict our own preconceptions.¹ This paper explores the launching, ongoing creation and implications of the first and largest oral history archive on Partition as well as contemporary South Asian history today: The 1947 Partition Archive. More specifically, to serve the mission of the *Sikh Research Journal*, this paper explores

¹ See also, Butalia (1998), Sengputa (2013), and Singh Bhalla (2016, 2019).

the documentation of Partition oral histories as they relate to Sikhs and the Punjab – a region which is central to the Sikh faith, since Punjab is the homeland of Sikhism’s founders, the Sikh Gurus whose “gaddi” (or lineage of Guruship) began with Guru Nanak Dev of the Bedi clan from village Talwandi which is located in present-day Pakistan - and whose descendants’ oral histories are preserved in The 1947 Partition Archive.

The 1947 Partition of Punjab (and Bengal) no doubt continues to impact South Asia today and all of those members of the global Punjabi diaspora, who 75 years later, still grapple with resettlement and multiple migrations. The story of Partition is often seen by each community through a communal lens. Sikh participants of the project often mourn the loss of their “*Mecca*,” or the birthplace of their first teacher, Guru Nanak, as having been “left behind in Pakistan.”² Yet, Sikhs are not alone to believe they were the “worst affected,” as many have expressed during the interview process. Sindhi Hindus (or are they Sikhs?)³ often mourn the loss of their “homeland” as it “remains in Pakistan,” and remain largely unaware of the majority Muslim population of Sindh. The Sindhi Hindu view of a loss of homeland is mirrored by Bihari Muslims for instance, and several other groups. Which group then was the worst affected? Or is it even fair to ask this question - because ultimately the experience of Partition arguably varies by individual rather than by group? Socio-economic positioning of individuals in society, it can be argued, played perhaps an even larger role in determining experiences of Partition than ethnicity and religion as we garner from oral history. Why did the Partition happen, and who was responsible? How could we have prevented the violence? What caused the unspeakable violence, specifically in Punjab? Or, was the violence really limited to Punjab, as described in popular lore? (Oral histories tell us it wasn’t.) How and why did we become a global diaspora? Whom amongst us became a part of the global diaspora and who stayed behind? How does Partition continue to impact us today? What about the experience of women? What about epigenetics?

² The events leading up to Partition were complex and historical accounts are still contested. Numerous documents, including newspaper archives and text archives reveal the key role in negotiations between the British leadership and indigenous political parties. Master Tara Singh was one of the leaders representing the Sikhs politically during negotiations. One of the more recent overviews of this history can be found in Gandhi (2013).

³ As oral histories in The 1947 Partition Archive and several publications reveal, Sindhis who did not follow Islam often did not self-identify as Hindu or Sikh, but as Sindhi, and in most cases worshiped Sufi saints alongside the Guru Granth Sahib and a number of idols as well.

As with Holocaust survivors, and Irish potato famine survivors, does Partition impact our DNA?⁴

As our generation awakens to the history of Partition, the inquiries that surface are endless. To help satiate the needs of current and future researchers from all walks of life, we began documenting oral histories of the last survivors of Partition, a disappearing generation, 63 years after the event. Oral histories were gathered in an open-ended manner, with no particular research topic in mind, so as to serve as many fields of inquiry as possible. With time passing on and taking witnesses with it as they age, the documentation process is being executed in a manner of urgency. Below I will provide an overview on the creation of The 1947 Partition Archive, its current status, contents, relevance to Sikh history and its potential to revolutionize our understanding of the near and ancient past of Punjab, South Asia and thus, our own selves.

Origins and development of The 1947 Partition Archive

I am often labeled the “founder” of The 1947 Partition Archive, but in truth, this effort was born out of and continues to grow from the collective contributions of thousands of individuals. Perhaps my main distinguishing contribution is my relentless urge to continue this work, even through the darkest hour of financial adversity. Perhaps my other distinguishing contribution is conceptualizing the idea of documenting Partition oral histories in 2008 and in crowdsourcing it in 2009.⁵ In this too, i.e. the process of documenting Partition oral histories, I am not alone or the first. It appears to have been an idea that touched the conscience of hundreds, perhaps thousands of others, as strangers have confessed to me over the years. What I believe made execution possible during this instance was my unique geographical

⁴ Epigenetic studies of survivors of the Irish Potato famine and those who survived the Jewish holocaust concentration camps reveal a higher propensity for certain genetic markers for obesity in the former case and elevated anxiety levels in the latter case. See, for example, Shen, L., Li, C., Wang, Z. *et al.* Early-life exposure to severe famine is associated with higher methylation level in the *IGF2* gene and higher total cholesterol in late adulthood: the Genomic Research of the Chinese Famine (GRECF) study. *Clin Epigenet* 11, 88 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13148-019-0676-3>, as well as: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/descendants-of-holocaust-survivors-have-altered-stress-hormones/>

⁵ The coining of the term ‘crowdsourcing’ and the idea of distributing work for social good to volunteers using the internet was born in the Department of Physics at University of California at Berkeley by physicists involved in protein folding experiments (as described in an August 2010 issue of *Wired* magazine). The author was then a researcher at the department and influenced by the concept. Further discussion can be found in Singh Bhalla (2021).

placement and my background in technology, as well as a unique time in the history of technological advancements that allowed us access to novel digital tools that overcame the many traditional barriers in documenting oral histories of Partition.

I was born into a military family in Delhi to Punjabi parents. My mother was born in East Punjab and all of my childhood summers were spent frolicking the fields of my maternal grandparents' village where I fell in love with folk history and grew intrigued by the barbed wire fences that separated East and West Punjab. My father was born in Lahore, West Punjab, on the other side of the barbed wire fence and was a toddler when my grandparents were forced to become refugees. My father's military postings took us to Kashmir, Ladakh, Pune and Chandigarh, before we immigrated to the United States following the fallout from Operation Blue Star and the precarious situation for Sikhs in India during the late 1980s. The ongoing India-Pakistan conflict, the folk memories of Partition, and my own memories of the carnage of 1984 were an integral part of my formative years and informed my desire to bridge the gap between folk and official histories later in life. I carried this desire with me, not knowing the solution for nearly two decades. Finally, during a 2008 visit to the oral testimony archives at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial in Japan, I got my answer. It came as a bolt and I finally knew what needed to be done: just like the survivors of the Hiroshima bombing, the story of Punjab, rooted in Partition, needed to be told by those who witnessed it. Only they could convey their lived experiences through their words, emotions, facial expression and body language. Truth is embodied in multiple forms of communications converging to tell the same story. This is why video-based oral testimonies were so powerful: so many forms of communication, the spoken and unspoken, as well as the tonal, could be conveyed together.

Having moved to California in 2009 to pursue post-doctoral research on quantum transport at the Department of Physics at the University of California at Berkeley (hereafter "UC Berkeley") and the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, I began seeking volunteers to join me on the weekends in documenting oral testimonies of Partition witnesses in 2010. Through local resources like the Regional Oral History Office at UC Berkeley and the Department of History at Stanford University, our initial rudimentary storytelling process was formalized into a professional oral history protocol and public teaching module. UC Berkeley students and postdoctoral researchers joined me as volunteers in the mission and together we developed the initial protocols for crowdsourcing during months of all-night sessions in the underground Moffitt Library. It must be noted that the systematic crowdsourcing protocol we developed during these late-night sessions

was informed by the volunteers' work⁶ in measuring electronic signals in quantum transport, and by the basic principles of journalism.

As the initial volunteer team grew, we met in homes, in balconies, in gardens and wherever a community member would provide space. Quite often, we secured classrooms after hours at UC Berkeley. The project was marketed through handmade posters pasted around the UC Berkeley campus and across restaurants and shops in the San Francisco Bay Area. The 1947 Partition Archive was registered in 2011 as a non-profit organization in California. That same year, volunteers developed an oral history workshop that was taught for free to anyone who participated. By late 2011, I had used my years of college level teaching experience to develop an oral history workshop webinar, which then attracted hundreds of "Citizen Historians"⁷ from across the world through social media postings. Through constant public feedback, and feedback from interviewees as well as scholars, the workshop, as well as oral history field materials developed for the project continued to evolve, and do so even to this day.

Because the effort required so many volunteers for each part of the oral history process, in the spirit of egalitarianism, it was decided along the way that the names of volunteers must be documented during each part of the process. For instance, an oral history interview required participation from a trained *Citizen Historian* who recorded the interview together with a camera person. The interview, the accompanying documents and metadata were then received and organized by an archivist, the interview abstract (or summary) reviewed by a copyeditor and eventually curated by a volunteer who posted it on social media. Individual volunteers playing each role in the process were given authorship credit in the archive and anywhere the interview was publicly posted. Furthermore, as an archive that is crowdsourced and crowd-funded, donors who sponsor an oral history interview are also credited.

By late 2011, volunteers from around the globe had begun discovering and participating in the oral history workshops. A unique challenge emerged at this time: the video files they recorded were too large to upload and send through

⁶ The three volunteers' ongoing research work and studies in journalism as well as quantum electronics arguably played a role in conceptualizing the crowdsourcing approach for oral history documentation.

⁷ Volunteers who train at The 1947 Partition Archive's oral history workshops, and then conduct and submit an oral history interview are certified as "Citizen Historians" by The 1947 Partition Archive after their submitted works are reviewed and determined to comply within a formal oral history framework.

existing cloud services and FTP (file transfer protocol) technologies to The 1947 Partition Archive in Berkeley. A solution emerged in 2012 shortly after The 1947 Partition Archive was admitted to UC Berkeley's start-up accelerator program, Skydeck, as a part of its first cohort of early-stage startups. Kloudless, another Skydeck based company developing emerging cloud technology solutions provided a proprietary solution which continues to fuel the backend of The 1947 Partition Archive, solving all uploading needs, including from places with unreliable connectivity. While new technologies have since emerged, making large format video transfer a non-issue presently, the seamless integration of Kloudless into our website application continues to serve this purpose.

In late 2012, yet another challenge emerged: it was becoming evident that crowdsourcing had its shortcomings. This method only enabled oral history documentation within technologically equipped populations leaving gaps in representation from large segments of the population from underprivileged backgrounds, especially rural communities. To solve this challenge, The 1947 Partition Archive launched a competitive Story Scholars program which entails scholars chosen through a competition who are paid to gather oral histories from a predetermined group that is defined either geographically, ethnically or socio-economically. That year, the Story Scholars program was launched through a pilot test in Amritsar with support from the American India Foundation. Subsequently, the program was launched across Pakistan, India and Bangladesh.

Through the combined methods described above, which have continued to evolve in complexity as a result of community feedback and new developments in the field of oral history, The 1947 Partition Archive has helped record and preserve over 9,500 oral history interviews of Partition witnesses. The collection today is the largest in South Asia, and amongst the ten largest video based oral history collections in the world today. The collection will continue to grow as long as Partition witnesses are alive.

Along with documentation work, as a public archive that is also built by the public, The 1947 Partition Archive plays a second role as a curator of its own contents, similar to a museum. This is not a role played by traditional brick and mortar archives which primarily serve the role of being a reference resource. Here again, The 1947 Partition Archive continues to reflect public feedback by employing creative digital means of displaying its contents to satiate viewer curiosity and to engage and teach members of the public in a manner that is compelling and draws more participants to the project. In this sense the archive is a living and evolving entity that reflects public sentiment and grows through public participation, while

also influencing public sentiment. Documenting history thus shapes the future in this feedback loop.

For all participants building The 1947 Partition Archive, surprises never cease. Content that challenges our views or expands our understanding arrives nearly on a daily basis. For instance, within the first two years of beginning this work I was personally taken aback when we received oral histories from ancient South Asian Jewish community members who migrated first to Pune from Karachi and Lahore and then to Israel in 1948 when young Jewish men from India were recruited for the Israeli “builders’ movement.” They left their families behind in India and moved in with adoptive parents in communes known as “kibbutz.” However, most complained about feeling like second class citizens with respect to the Ashkenazi Jews as they took on the more menial work during the Israeli rebuilding process.

Another example of new learnings came from the Sindhi Hindu community of Fremont, California. A man I had personally interviewed explained that it was customary for Sindhis to worship idols alongside the Guru Granth Sahib and images of Muslim *peers* (mystics and saints). They were “Nanak Panthis” or followers of Guru Nanak, but also held in high regard a menagerie of other saints and mystics. Their practices were rejected as “not Sikh” by California Sikhs, he noted, but openly accepted by the California Hindu community. Hence the Sindhis established the Fremont Hindu temple, where they were welcomed to install a Guru Granth Sahib. Sindhis in Mumbai and Delhi were confronted with similar circumstances following Partition, he noted, and found themselves choosing the “Hindu” identity, an identity they only adopted after their migration to India. Yet another Sindhi woman whom I had interviewed in Faridkot, Punjab, India hailed from Sukkur’s Bedi family. She practiced the Sikh faith in India since, she claimed, her family were heirs to the “gaddi” (hereditary seat, similar to a throne) of Guru Nanak Dev’s son whom, she noted, had made a home in Sukkur centuries ago to spread the Guru’s message. The gaddi holder was revered as the true Guru until the family’s forced migration from Sukkur in 1947. This anecdote also serves as an example of one of many ancient traditions forgotten and lost during the refugee resettlement process.

Initial insights on Sikhs, the Punjab, the 1984 genocide and the 1947 Partition

Overall, stories in The 1947 Partition Archive extend from geographies as far east as Burma, reflecting the Nagaland/Burma boundary, and as far west as Kabul reflecting the Durand line boundary. Of these, at least 25% of the oral history

collection reflects the Punjabi experience. Punjab, after all, witnessed the largest migration, not only from the violent mob attacks but later also through a forced government exchange program that many witnesses recall in their interviews. Many, like my own grandfather, had chosen to stay on, in their new countries and ancestral homes. However, they were forcefully evicted after independence, possibly due to pressures on the new governments of India and Pakistan to settle the throngs of new refugees arriving in their place.⁸

The long format oral histories recorded by The 1947 Partition Archive reflect life stories and also ancestral lore. Thus, historical events that occurred before or after Partition that may have impacted the interviewee's life are also recorded. In this sense, the collection reflects South Asian history through most of the last century, as experienced specifically by those who also witnessed the Partition. In Punjab, witnesses whose recordings are preserved in the collection were also witness to incidents such as the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, the 1942 Japanese bombing of Burma and the subsequent migrations of Punjabis who lived in Rangoon and surrounding regions at that time, the post-Partition wars between newly formed India and Pakistan, the Punjabi role in the Bangladesh struggle, the 1984 violence and much more.

The recollections of generational lore passed down in families holds a wealth of information on old Punjabi traditions and lifestyles. For instance, several elders we have interviewed in villages across Punjab have traditionally memorized the names and short biographical sketches of up to 50 generations of ancestors before them. These often include complex relational histories between clans including through marriages. Yet another woman remembered an ancestor who was a contemporary of Guru Nanak, and was a Guru himself. He was however an intellectual rival of Guru Nanak. She put it into perspective by noting that Guru Nanak was alive at the time of "the age of Gurus" and that most of the other movements of that time period had since died out, while unique circumstances in history had galvanized Guru Nanak's followers into forming a new religion: Sikhism. Her family lore may be referencing what has come to be known as the "bhakti movement" from that time period. The other movements, she noted, had faded with time. She reminded me in the interview, that intellectuals and great minds do not arise in a vacuum. It is just that only a few stand out in history while memories of the others fade away.

⁸ An excellent account of the refugee crisis being drawn out into the 1950's can be found in Zamindar (2007).

Another man, who claimed to be a cousin to the late freedom fighter, Bhagat Singh, recalled the story of his family settling in West Punjab. He noted that before the British built the canal system, rural West Punjab mostly consisted of lush forested regions. Following his ancestors' participation in the British military in the mid 1800's they were gifted land in newly canaled West Punjab. They were encouraged to deforest the land for farming purposes. There they ran into nomadic tribes which he referred to as "jangli" (a derogatory term that means "wild and uncivilized"), who wore long black robes and had "yellow hair" and "pointed features." These tribes often raided their newly built village since it was built on their traditional pastoral land and impacted their livelihood. This conflict though eventually faded and it is not clear what the fate of the black robed nomadic tribes turned out to be. Some have pointed out to me the similarity in description to the present day black-robed Nooristani people, who often do fit the description of having "yellow hair."

Many Punjabis recall the Japanese bombing of Burma in 1942 which led to a long caravan-like migration. Thousands fled Rangoon and marched through the jungles for over a month until they reached Bengal, from where they began their journeys back to their ancestral homes in Punjab. Many of these migrants had barely settled back in Punjab when they were forced to migrate again in 1947. For some, the migrations continued again in 1965 during the India-Pakistan war, especially if they were close to the border between the countries, or in 1984 when Punjab faced a Hindu exodus from the rural areas.

Recollections from those who also witnessed the turmoil of 1984 provide a unique glimpse into the multi-faceted aspects of the violence that unfolded. One man, a self-proclaimed gurdwara-going Hindu from Amritsar recalled to me how the residents of the areas surrounding the Golden Temple were growing increasingly wary of Jarnail Bhindrawale's "young Sikh boys." As the conflict with the center escalated, the young boys grew more desperate and began looting and stealing rations, sometimes at gunpoint. The local residents came together to file complaints to the center when such acts became unbearable, according to him. They expected a response but not the one they got. He recalled, with many pauses as he spoke, the days after the troops finally arrived. Young boys were pulled from the temple complex, the same young boys who had been looting the neighborhoods, lined up along the walls, and assassinated one by one. This, the man told me, horrified everyone. It was not the response they expected, he repeatedly told me. Several Sikh families I later interviewed in the walled city recalled similar timelines and circumstances to me, and corroborated the Hindu man's story. For me, having

grown up in Punjab and having memories of seeing the carnage at the Golden Temple in 1984, it was incredibly eye-opening to hear this perspective.

Future possibilities

The examples above provide a tiny glimpse into the rich details and historical nuance that can be found about Punjabi history, and South Asian history in general within The 1947 Partition Archive. There remain immense possibilities for research within the oral histories, in fields as diverse as history, ethnography, anthropology, cultural studies, economics, art, music, agriculture and many others.

The collection and the process of building the archive have made a clear case for opening our minds and reexamining our collective understanding of Punjabi and Sikh history. A complete picture of history can only arise from considering multiple perspectives. Many Sikh interviewees for instance have admitted to committing murders and other acts of violence during the Partition - a narrative we may not hear within our own families. There were no clear victims or perpetrators during Partition though individual communities often do not recollect or repent their own misgivings.

Amongst the critical topics to be explored within the collection of oral histories is the nature and origin of the violence that occurred during Partition. As many authors have asked, “did we go mad?” “What happened to our people?” Is it something about South Asian culture, or Punjabi culture in particular that led to the unspeakable acts of mass violence? How did this violence begin and how did it unfold? How did it spiral out of control leaving anywhere between 250,000 to several million people dead, orphaned or otherwise traumatized?

Oral histories are providing initial clues to the nature of the violence. Amongst the many groups who fought for freedom from the British, some had adopted extreme right ideologies and guerilla style targeted violence to spark distrust and fear: isolated reports of religiously targeted bombings and assassinations began circulating in newspapers as early as 1944 in areas such as Multan. Often, local political leaders and gatherings were targeted. As the British retreated and the grip on law and order loosened during the transition of power, such incidents and the widespread distrust and fear they had spread, began increasing. As many perpetrators of violence have recalled in the interviews, many were rounded as young boys with the lure of loot and a “finders keepers” mentality in exchange for attacking and driving out wealthier sections of society that belonged to those from

the minority religion. For instance, many wealthy Muslim landlords were driven out from areas such as Jalandhar and Ambala, while wealthy Hindu merchants and landlords were driven out of Sindh and cities in West Punjab. Economics, it could be argued was a greater motivator and driver of violence on an individual level than religion. After all, from stories of victims of violence we learn that they were saved by neighbors and friends, or other well-meaning individuals who belonged to the perpetrators' faith. Such good Samaritans were not victimized in these specific situations due to their faith and hence were in a position to play the savior role and it appears they largely did. As one interviewee put it, "I estimate that about 1 to 3% of the population participated in the violence. The rest were ordinary and good people trying to live their lives."

The number of inquiries one can launch into the archive's collections are endless and can serve many fields of study. Some initial projects The 1947 Partition Archive is partnering with researchers on include: (1) finding trends on communal violence via data aggregates retrieved from the nearly 10,000 oral history interviews and associated meta-data stored in the collections and (2) gathering DNA samples from victims of violence to understand links to epigenetics. Additionally, through a research residency grant being offered in collaboration with Tata Trusts, nearly 30 researchers will be exploring the collections for more information on a variety of topics. The 1947 Partition Archive is presently only accessible to researchers. For three years, the impact of the archive on researchers will be considered in order to create the right frameworks for free and open public accessibility to the potentially sensitive collections. This is only the beginning.

Conclusions

The 1947 Partition Archive is the first major oral history resource on Partition created for scholars and the public alike. As this paper has explored, the 9,500+ oral histories within The 1947 Partition Archive's collections contain a wealth of information that serve as an alternate and novel resource not found in the traditional document archive, thus aiding deeper inquiries into the history and culture of Punjab and the South Asian subcontinent it is integral to. Given the present ongoing compilation of the oral history collections, the possibilities for new types of inquiry and discovery into our collective understanding of history are endless and only just beginning.

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The Shadows of Empire: British Imperial and Sikh History on the Streets of Westminster, London

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Abstract

This paper presents field and desk research to give a Sikh perspective on the memorials of British imperialists and Sikhs of the Indian Army found in the City of Westminster, a borough located in Central London, United Kingdom. Given the concentration of sites of national importance and heritage, the streets of Westminster contain a wealth of memorials, artefacts and events which also are connected to Sikh political and military history, the region of Punjab and the Sikh people. The individuals commemorated on the streets of Westminster represent a palpable history of the Sikhs and the Kingdom of Lahore, the East India Company in the Anglo-Sikh Wars and the Indian uprising of 1857, and soldiers and officers serving in the Indian Army in the two World Wars and conflicts in the first half of the 20th century.

Keywords: Sikh heritage, Westminster, East India Company, British empire, Indian army

Introduction

During the mid-1990s Sikh heritage in the UK began to emerge as an area of greater research for a small number of organizations, primarily, the Anglo-Sikh Heritage Trail (ASHT), Sikh Heritage Association Warwick & Leamington (SHAWL) and the UK Panjab Heritage Association (UKPHA, www.ukpha.org). These organizations grew in areas ranging from major exhibitions and book publications, in the case of UKPHA; a heritage trail and commemorative events, in the case of SHAWL and ASHT; and the establishment of the National Sikh Heritage Centre & Holocaust Museum in Derby (www.nationalsikhmuseum.com) by a group of individuals who mapped a range of artefacts in London that came from Ranjit Singh's Kingdom of Lahore.

The present research grows out of the author's community initiative called '*A Little History of the Sikhs*,' which formally began in November 2014 (Singh, 2020). This initiative includes walking tours of Sikh heritage sites throughout London. The author maintains a database of over 100 locations within the 32 boroughs of London, each of which can reveal an insight into Sikh history and heritage, and collectively are connected together to present a range of themed walking tours.

This paper focuses on sites and individuals associated with the annexation of the Kingdom of Lahore in 1849, the Indian uprising of 1857, and the two World Wars. These monuments, memorials and citations are ever-present in London but exist as shadows – they are seldom explicitly recognized or acknowledged. The paper provides visibility to tangible aspects of Sikh history in locations in London where many would not realize their presence.

The paper begins with a short overview of the City of Westminster, in which many of London's world-famous institutions and international tourist attractions are found. These include commemorative statues, memorials and dedications to a number of individuals, of which many in prominent locations are associated with the East India Company, the British Empire, and Sikhs who served in the Indian Army. Extracts and illustrations from *The Illustrated London News*, the world's first illustrated publication, printed from The Strand in Westminster, depict some of the individuals presented in this paper.

Next, the paper provides background on the East India Company, and the subsequent relationship between the British and the Sikhs when the Company was replaced by the British crown (the "Raj"). The relationships between the Sikhs, and the British were complex, going beyond initial conflict and subsequent service, to include aspects of nationalism, revolution and religious expression, though much of those aspects of history is beyond the current scope.

The manuscripts, artefacts and documents that can be found in London highlight the multiple facets of the traditions of the Sikhs – not only warriors in service of the British Empire, but also as a community of artists, and musicians, activists and leaders, with a rich history before the arrival of the British in Punjab. The paper proceeds by exploring the Sikh presence, direct and indirect, in a selection of sites in Westminster. The order of presentation is based on a combination of location and chronology. It ends with a summary conclusion.

The City of Westminster

The City of Westminster is a large London borough to the west of the ancient City of London and east of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (provided a complementary treatment in Singh, 2020). Within the borough are located the many tourist attractions that are associated with London, including Buckingham Palace, 10 Downing Street, the Houses of Parliament, Westminster Abbey and Trafalgar Square. The famous shopping districts of Oxford Street, Regent Street and Bond Street are also there, as well as a number of the Royal Parks – Hyde Park, St James's Park and Green Park.

Given the concentration of sites of national importance and heritage, the streets of Westminster contain a wealth of memorials, artefacts and other markers of

past events. This includes the more well-known locations such as Caxton Hall, Westminster, the site at which Sikh activist Udham Singh shot dead Sir Michael O'Dwyer in 1940, in retaliation for the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in Amritsar, 1919, and Buckingham Palace, which houses many artefacts from Punjab within The Royal Collection.

195-198, The Strand – *The Illustrated London News*

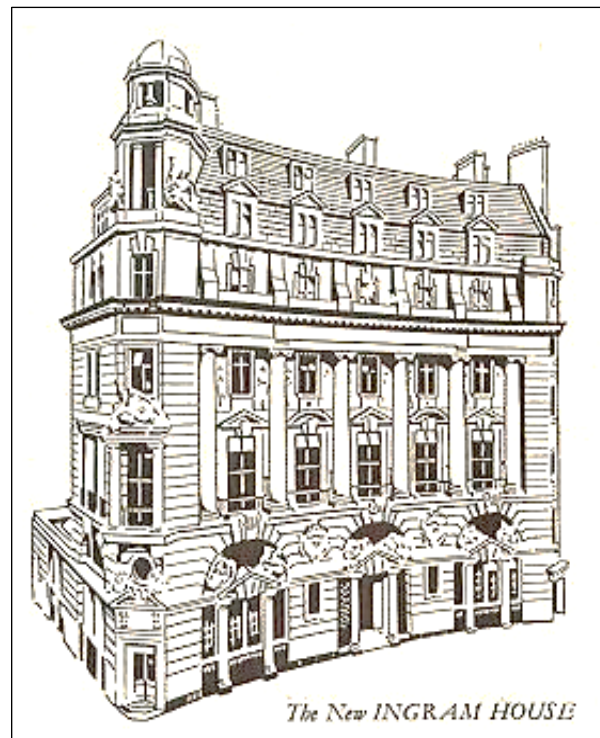


Figure 1 – Ingram House, 195 The Strand

The Illustrated London News was the world's first illustrated newspaper, founded at Ingram House on The Strand (Figure 1), by Herbert Ingram. The first issue of the Illustrated London News was published on 14 May 1842 (Orme, 1986). With the Kingdom of Lahore annexed by the British in the late 1840s, the newspaper articles in *The Illustrated London News* provided eye-witness accounts of the generals and governors of the East India Company and their accounts of the Punjab. Articles and illustrations in the newspaper featured not only the battles of the Anglo-Sikh Wars, Maharaja Duleep Singh (the ruler of the Punjab), and British views of the annexation of the Punjab, but also regularly presented accounts of the Sikh faith and the rich landscape of the Kingdom of Lahore and the Punjab region (the land of the five rivers), the Harmandir Sahib

in Amritsar (more commonly known as the Golden Temple) and the Akalis (the Sikh order of warriors, a subset of the Khalsa), as well as reports on the development of villages and infrastructure in Punjab in the second half of the 19th century.

The author's collection of mid-19th century newspapers includes articles and images from the Illustrated London News, which feature the historical figures presented in this paper, and are included as Figure 2 and 3.

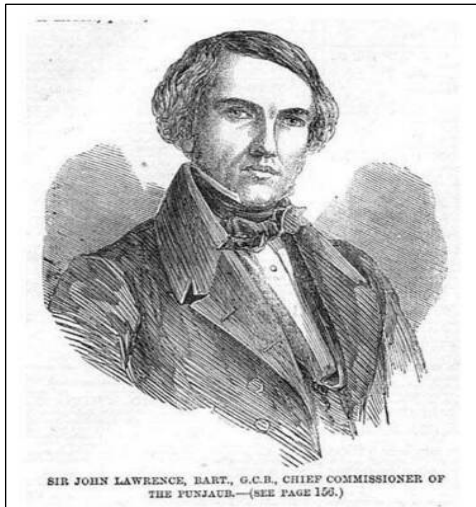


Figure 2 – Sir John Lawrence

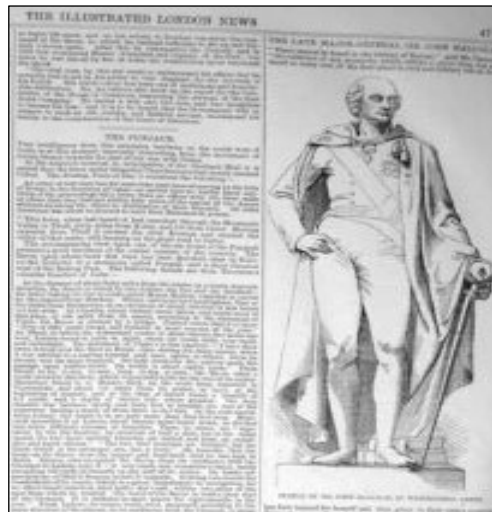


Figure 3 – Sir John Malcolm

Figure 4 shows the front-page report in the Illustrated London News, titled “Victories in the Punjab”, featuring Lord Gough and details of the Battle of Chillianwallah.

THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS



No. 368.—Vol. XIV.] FOR THE WEEK ENDING SATURDAY, APRIL 28, 1849. [SIXPENCE.

THE VICTORIES IN THE PUNJAB.

HILLIANWALLAH has been avenged. Both Houses of Parliament, and the Court of Directors of the East India Company, have voted their unanimous thanks to Lord Gough and his brave companions in arms for their victories in the Punjab, of which that at Gojraia is only the most splendid because it is the completion of the series. There was at one time, and that not very far distant, a disposition in a portion of the press and of the public to take an unfavourable view of the talents of Lord Gough. His bravery was considered rashness, or that kind of courage admirable in a man who has to obey, but mischievous in him who has to give orders. If praised at all, it only received homage at the expense of his skill. It must be confessed, even now, in the hour of victory, that there was some occasion for this mistrust. The slightest real defeat of our arms, or even a victory which had the appearance of defeat, was a diminution of our moral power over the population of India. In the faith of our invincibility, almost as much as in the physical force at our command, lay the source of our power. Lord Gough, we are certain, has generosity enough to forgive his countrymen for their temporary alarm, and for the severe criticism of his operations with which it was accompanied, and good sense enough to know that, under all the circumstances, it was not unnatural. The tide has now turned; to unwilling disparage has succeeded the willing and enthusiastic applause of the nation. His crowning success at Gojraia has been splendid enough to wipe out the recollection of that, under all the circumstances, it was not unnatural. The tide has now turned; to unwilling disparage has succeeded the willing and enthusiastic applause of the nation. His crowning success at Gojraia has been splendid enough to wipe out the recollection of that, under all the circumstances, it was not unnatural. The tide has now turned; to unwilling disparage has succeeded the willing and enthusiastic applause of the nation. His crowning success at Gojraia has been splendid enough to wipe out the recollection of that, under all the circumstances, it was not unnatural.

General Gough, a distinguished British military leader, is depicted in a formal military uniform with a high collar and medals on his chest. He is shown from the waist up, facing slightly to the right but looking towards the viewer.

GENERAL THE RIGHT HON. LORD GOUGH, K.C.B., COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE FORCES IN INDIA.

Figure 4: *The Illustrated London News*, No. 368, week ending Sat. April 28, 1849

The East India Company

“The East India Company grew from being a loose association of British Elizabethan tradesmen in the early 1600s into *the Grandest Society of Merchants in the Universe*” (Keay, 1991) within two centuries. The Company first established a British presence in the spice trade in 1608, which until then had been monopolized by Spain and Portugal.

The company’s management was remarkably efficient and economical, reflected through the growth in its staff. In 1608, the East India Company had a workforce of only six staff, and operated from the residence of the first governor, Sir Thomas Smythe. By 1700 the workforce had increased to 35 employees and moved to a small office in London and by 1785, it had grown to become a huge commercial entity, with a workforce of 159 staff, controlling a vast empire of millions of people, from London (Moosa, 2019).

In 1833, the Government of India Act 1833 (Saint Helena Act) created the title of Governor-General of India. Lord William Bentinck was first to be designated as the Governor General of India. The company eventually became a powerful agent of British imperialism in South Asia and effectively the colonial ruler of large parts of India.

The company’s army played a notorious role in the unsuccessful uprising (also called the Indian Mutiny) of 1857–58, in which Indian soldiers in the company’s employ led an armed revolt against their British officers. During more than a year of fighting, both sides committed atrocities, including massacres of civilians. The Company’s reprisals however far outweighed the violence of the rebels.

The Company’s army commanders included Colonel James Neill, Major-General Sir Henry Havelock and Lieutenant-General Sir James Outram. Neil and Havelock “saw themselves as agents of a stern Providence, chosen by God to chastise, avenge and pacify. Neither flinched from the use of terror in a cause which they believed had Divine approval and against an enemy who were, in Havelock’s words, ‘devil’s incarnate’. Lucifer was loose in India and he had to be checked with fire and sword.” (James, 1997). The officers and generals of the East India Company have been described by historian William Dalrymple as “the first great multinational corporation, and the first to run amok – was the ultimate model for many of today’s joint-stock corporations.”

Some of the generals and officers described in this chapter and memorialized in Westminster offer an insight into the workings of the East India Company, which has been described as “history’s most terrifying warning about the

potential for the abuse of corporate power – and the insidious means by which the interests of shareholders become those of the state” (Dalrymple, 2015).

The uprising effectively bought about the abolishment of the East India Company in 1858, and British India and the princely states came under the direct rule of the British Crown. The Government of India Act 1858 created the office of Secretary of State for India to oversee the affairs, and the Governor-General representing the Crown became known as the Viceroy.

During the East India Company period, the Bengal, Madras and Bombay army units of the East India Company had recruited Sikhs in to their native forces. After the annexation of Punjab in 1849, and during the British Raj period after 1857, Sikh regiments were raised to protect the North West Frontier border with Afghanistan, as part of the Punjab Frontier Force. Sikhs were later classified as a ‘martial race’ with Sikhs being recognized for being stalwart soldiers, and were a part of the Indian army in World War I, World War II and fought in many theatres of war across the globe.

Westminster Abbey - East India Company Officers

Westminster Abbey is a Gothic abbey next to the Palace of Westminster, more commonly known as the Houses of Parliament. Construction of the church began in 1245, but it now holds the status of being a Church of England "Royal Peculiar" - a church that is directly responsible to the sovereign.

All coronations of English and British monarchs have been in Westminster Abbey since 1066, and there have been 16 royal weddings since 1100. The abbey is the burial site of more than 3,300 prominent people in British history, including at least sixteen monarchs, eight Prime Ministers, poet laureates, actors, scientists, military leaders, and the Unknown Warrior.

Sir John Malcolm



Figure 5: Sir John Malcolm

The abbey is where Major-General Sir John Malcolm is buried and memorialized with a statue. John Malcolm (2 May 1769 – 30 May 1833) was a Scottish soldier and also a diplomat, East India Company administrator, statesman, and historian. His memorial, located in the North chapel, states that he was:

“Employed confidentially in those important wars and negotiations which established British supremacy in India by the indefatigable and well-directed exertion of those extraordinary mental and physical powers with which Providence had endowed him, he became alike distinguished as a statesman, a warrior, and a man of letters.”

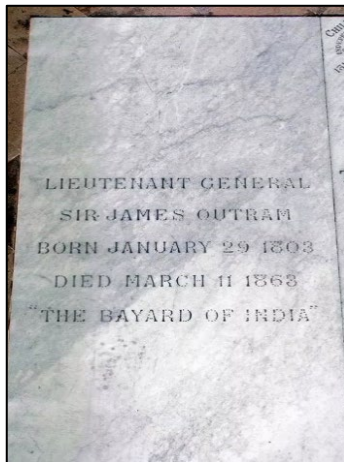
John Malcolm became acquainted with the Sikhs whilst employed as an interpreter during the Treaty of Amritsar (1806) negotiations between Maharajah Ranjit Singh of Lahore and the East India Company. He published his eye witness accounts in the journal *Asiatick Researches* (Madras, 2004) and then published

his book titled *Sketch of the Sikhs: a singular Nation who inhabit the Provinces of the Punjab, between the Rivers Jumna and Indus*. Published in 1810, when the Sikh Kingdom of Punjab was in the ascendancy under the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Malcolm stated that:

“although the information I may convey in such a sketch may be very defective, it will be useful at a moment when every information regarding the Sikhs is of importance.”

Sir James Outram

James Outram was an East India Company Army officer who became a national hero after his successful campaign at Lucknow during the Indian uprising of 1857. In 1842, Sir Charles Napier succeeded Outram as the senior military and political officer in Sindh and declared “Gentlemen, I give you the “Bayard of India”, *sans peur et sans reproche*’ (David, 2002), *a perfect person destined for greatness and riches, without fear and without approach*. The epithet stuck. He spent most of his career in India and Afghanistan, was involved in numerous



armed conflicts, and worked as a political agent who had much success negotiating on behalf of the British with the Princely States. In 1857 he was made a Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath. He died in France and his body was returned to Westminster Abbey for burial. The gravestone inscription at the Abbey, as shown in Figure 6, reads:

*Lieutenant General Sir James Outram.
Born January 29 1803. Died March 11 1863.
The Bayard of India*

Figure 6: Gravestone of Sir James Outram

On the window ledge nearby the grave is a memorial to the General by sculptor Matthew Noble. It consists of a bust with the name OUTRAM below it, and a bas-relief showing the scene at the Residency when Lord Clyde (who is buried near him) relieved Lucknow after a siege. General Havelock (described later in this paper) is shown standing between Outram and Clyde. On either side are



Figure 7: Bust of Sir James Outram at Westminster Abbey

figures of a seated Scindian chief and a seated Bheel chief. The inscription reads:

"To the memory of Lieut.Gen. Sir James Outram Bart. G.C.B. K.S.I. etc. A soldier of the East India Company, who during a service of forty years in war, and in council, by deeds of bravery and devotion, by an unselfish life, by benevolence never weary of well doing, sustained the honor of the British nation, won the love of his comrades, and promoted the happiness of the people of India. Born January 29th

1803. Died March 11th 1863. Erected in this Abbey at the public cost March 25th 1863. This monument is erected by the Secretary of State for India in Council."



Figure 8: Statue of General Sir James Outram at Whitehall Gardens

Close by to Westminster Abbey, in Whitehall Gardens, is a statue of General Sir James Outram, wearing the Order of the Star of India, an honour that was instituted in 1861 and was awarded to Indian princes loyal to the British Crown and to distinguished Britons in India.

Documents, memoirs and extracts from his life provide perspectives on the part played by Sikh regiments in the mutiny of 1857: It was Sir James Outram who recorded the war-cry of Major General Sir Henry Havelock at Lucknow, and is now memorialized in Trafalgar Square and described in the next section of this paper, in his memoirs. He addressed the Ferozepore Regiment of Sikhs: “Soldiers Your Labours Your Privations Your Sufferings and Your Valour

will not be forgotten by a Grateful Country.” (Military Star Press, 1944).

Outram also recorded; 'It was Lieutenant Brasyer and his Sikhs, the Regiment of Ferozepore who alone saved the lives of all the Europeans including 250 women and children at Allahabad. Had the Fort fallen into the hands of the rebels at this moment the result would have been calamitous' (Military Star Press, 1944).

Trafalgar Square - Major General Sir Henry Havelock

The site of Trafalgar Square had been a landmark since the 13th century and originally contained the mews and stables of the monarchy, and was known as the King's Mews. After George IV moved the mews to Buckingham Palace in 1825, the redevelopment of the area commenced. The original square was not built to commemorate a battle, but later acquired the name in 1835 following an announcement on 8th October 1832, in a court circular that stated “His Majesty has signified his desire that the new square at Charing-cross shall be designated after this great naval victory, which has hitherto been passed over in the choice of names for public places” (Mansfield, 2018).

The word ‘Trafalgar’ is a Spanish word of Arabic origin, derived from Taraf al-Gharb, *direction of the west*, (Burton, 1885). The Square commemorates the Battle of Trafalgar, which took place on 21 October 1805, where the British secured a naval victory over Spain and France, during the Napoleonic Wars. At

the centre of the square stands Nelson's Column - commemorating Admiral Horatio Nelson who died at the battle. It opened to the public on 1st May 1844, and the four lion statues guarding Nelson's Column were added in 1867.



Figures 9 ,10, 11: The statue of Major General Sir Henry Havelock at Trafalgar Square

In Trafalgar Square, at the corner facing Northumberland Avenue, stands a statue of Major-General Sir Henry Havelock, K.C.B. Havelock was a British general who is associated with India and was noted for his recapture of Kanpur from rebels during the Indian uprising of 1857.

The Indian uprising of 1857

The Indian uprising of 1857 began as a mutiny of sepoys of the East India Company's army on 10 May 1857, in the cantonment of the town of Meerut, and soon escalated into other mutinies and civilian rebellions. The events posed a considerable threat to Company power in that region, and was contained only with the fall of Gwalior on 20 June 1858.

The Punjab was recently conquered by the British and was considered a security risk in the region, and therefore included a higher proportion of European to natives in the armies. However, the British officials feared that when news of the uprising in Delhi reached Punjab, tribesman in the North-West Frontier Region and former members of Lahore's Sikh Army may join the mutinous sepoys in the Bengal army and oust their colonial rulers (David, 2002). In Punjab, the Sikh princes of the princely states including the Maharaja of Patiala and the rajas of Nabha and Jhind, backed the Company by providing soldiers and support. The large princely states of Hyderabad, Mysore, Travancore, and Kashmir, as well as the smaller ones of Rajputana, did not join the rebellion. In some regions, such as Oudh, the rebellion took on the attributes of a patriotic revolt against European presence.

The rebellion led to the dissolution of the East India Company in 1858. It also led the British to reorganize the army, the financial system and the administration in India, which was thereafter directly governed by the crown as the new British Raj.

The 1st Battalion King George V's Own, Ferozepore Sikhs 11th Sikh Regiment

The Regiment of Ferozepore was raised at the close of the First Sikh war in 1846. The Regiment was raised from ex-soldiers of the Khalsa Army, mainly recruited from the cis-Sutlej area of the Punjab. Recruits were gradually collected at Ferozepore where Captain G. Tebbs became the first commandant on 1st August 1846.

At the start of the Rebellion, the Regiment of Ferozepore was at Mirzapore and received orders to proceed to a strong point at Allahabad. The infantry mutinied and disturbances started in Allahabad on June 5th. Lieutenant Brayser, the commander quickly controlled the situation by paraded his men and disarmed all the guards of the mutinous regiment. General Neil said of the Regiment: "I must be obliged to Brasyer and his Sikhs who deserve the greatest credit for defending the Fort at Allahabad' (Military Star Press, 1944). After Allahabad the Regiment of Ferozepore joined General Havelock's Relief of Lucknow. The Sikhs took a large part in this campaign, commemorated by the unique dual Battle-Honour "Lucknow, Defence and Capture." As a special distinction for its conduct during the mutiny the Ferozepore Regiment was granted the privilege of securing a "red pagri" as its headdress which is still in use today (Military Star Press, 1944).

Trafalgar Square - Major-General Sir Charles Napier

In 1843, two wars were waged by Governor General Lord Ellenborough and Gwalior and Sindh were eventually annexed. It was Major-General Sir Charles Napier, who commanded the Bombay Army of the East India Army at the Battle of Miani, and made the Sindh a British province. But the Sindh affair had political reverberations in England, where Napier was accused of "having deliberately engineered the war through intransigence and underhand manoeuvres when it was clear that the amirs wanted a peaceful accommodation with the Company" (James L, 1997). Sir Robert Peel, the Prime Minister of England, was obliged to defend Ellenborough and in the end both Ellenborough and Napier were vindicated.

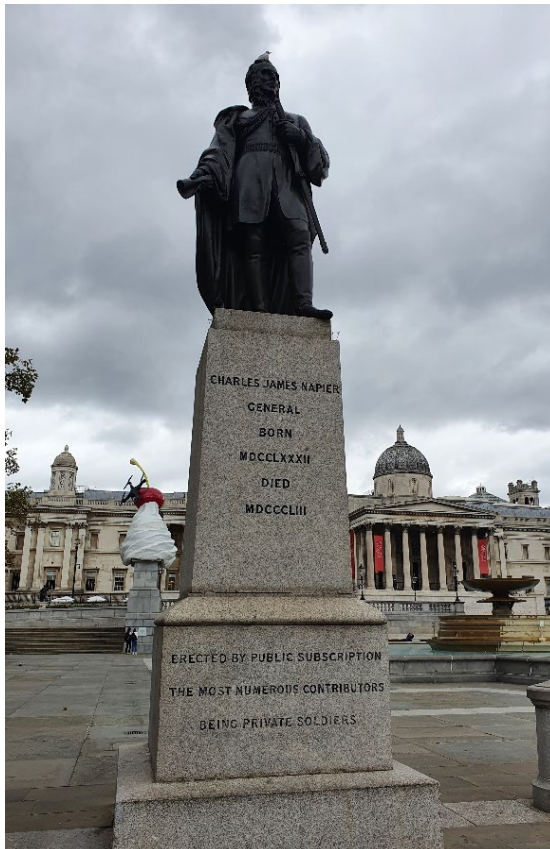


Figure 12 - Sir Charles Hames Napier by George Cannon Adams in the south-west corner of Trafalgar Square in 1855

In November 1845, two villages in Ludhiana, within the Kingdom of Lahore were seized by Major George Broadfoot for the British, on the premise that there were criminals in the villages which who should have been handed to the British authorities. Sir Charles Napier provided a frank view of the intentions of the British in relation to Punjab mentioning a war with Lahore in the Delhi Gazette, stating “If they [the robber tribes of Sind] were allowed to remain undisturbed while Schinde was quiet, they would become turbulent and troublesome when the British Army was called on to move into the Punjab” (Singh A, 2014). The first Sikh war broke out with the Battle of Mudki in December 1845. On 24 December, Charles Napier received orders to assemble at Rohri in Sindh. By 6

February 1846, Napier had assembled his forces at Rohri “with fifteen thousand men, many of whom had been brought from Bombay, eighty-six pieces of cannon, and three hundred yards of bridge” (Bloy, 2016). However, the battle of Ferozeshah was fought during this time, and Sir Henry Hardinge, the recently appointed Governor-General of India, ordered Napier to direct his forces north-east to Bhawalpur, and meet the Governor-General at headquarters in Lahore. Leaving his army on 10 February, he reached Lahore on 3 March, to find Sobraon had been fought and the war was over.

On 9 November 1846 he was promoted from Major-General to Lieutenant-General, but resigned from the government of Sindh in July 1847. He left India for Europe on 1 October. After a short visit to Ireland, he settled down at Cheltenham.

Early in 1849 the Sikh Wars produced a general demand in England for a change in the command. The court of directors applied to the Duke of Wellington to recommend to them a General for the crisis, and he named Napier. The suggestion however, was not well received, and eventually, Sir William

Maynard Glom was selected. Late in February came the news of events at the Battle of Chillianwallah¹, and an outcry arose against Lord Gough, and a popular call for Charles Napier. After the usual banquet at India House in London, Napier left England on 24 March, reached Calcutta on 6 May, and assumed the command; the war was, however, over, and Napier generously praised Lord Gough's conduct of it (Bloy, 2016).

Pall Mall and Westminster Abbey - John Lawrence

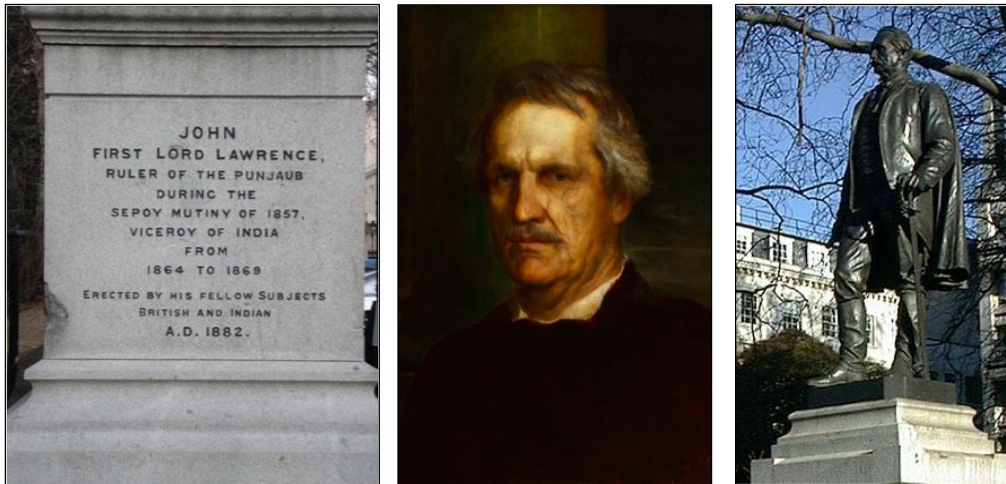


Figure 13, 14, 15: The statue of Lord Lawrence at Waterloo Place, Pall Mall

At the junction of Pall Mall with Waterloo Place, close to the Buckingham Palace, stands a statue of John Laird Mair Lawrence (1st Baron Lawrence), an Englishman who became a prominent British Imperial statesman who served as Viceroy of India from 1864 to 1869.

During the First Sikh War of 1845 to 1846, Lawrence organized the supplying of the British army in the Punjab and became Commissioner of the Jullundur district, serving under his brother, the Governor of the province. In that role he was known for his administrative reforms, for subduing the hill tribes, and for his attempts to end the custom of suttee.

In 1849, following the Second Sikh War, he became a member of the Punjab Board of Administration under his brother, and was responsible for numerous reforms of the province, including the abolition of internal duties, establishment of a common currency and postal system, and encouraged the development of Punjabi infrastructure, earning him the sobriquet of "the Saviour of the Punjab". In this work his efforts to limit the power of local elites brought him into conflict

¹ Further details on the Battle of Chillianwallah can be found in A. Singh (2017).

with his brother, and ultimately led to the abolition of the Administrative Board, instead becoming Chief Commissioner in the executive branch of the province.

In that role, Lawrence was partly responsible for "preventing the spread" of the Indian Rebellion of 1857 to Punjab, and negotiated a treaty with the Afghan ruler Dost Mohammed Khan, and later led the troops which recaptured Delhi from the rebellious sepoys. On 8 July 1859 a 'State of Peace' was officially declared throughout India, and the Viceroy, John Charles Canning proclaimed: 'War is at an end. Rebellion is put down. The Noise of Arms is no longer heard where the enemies of the State have persisted in their last struggle. The Presence of large Forces in the Field has ceased to be necessary. Order is re-established; and peaceful pursuits everywhere have resumed (David, 2002).'

For his part, John Lawrence received a promotion and his post was upgraded from Chief Commissioner to Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab. He soon returned home to England to take up a seat on the new Council of India. Before he left the Punjab, he sent the Viceroy a list of Indian princes who deserved recognition for their support during the mutiny. Among them were three Sikh rulers of the Cis-Sutlej States – the Maharaja of Patiala and the Rajas of Jhind and Nabha. These states had safeguarded the lines of communication to the Punjab and made the re-conquest of Delhi possible. The Maharaja of Patiala was the most influential of the three, and was given land with a rental value of 2 lakh rupees a year, a mansion in Delhi that had belonged to a rebel and the dubious honour of calling himself "Choicest son of the British Government" (David, 2002)

Following the death of Lord Canning in June 1862 and then Lord Elgin within a year, Sir John Lawrence was sent back to India in 1863 to become Viceroy. Lawrence sought to centralize authority by keeping financial control, and blocking the executive councils for his lieutenant-governors. He set in motion an ambitious programme of railway and canal building, and promoting public health, prison reform and primary education. He became increasingly convinced that British rule in India was part of God's purpose. He wrote "We have not been elected or placed in power by the people, but we are here through our moral superiority, by the force of circumstances and by the will of Providence." Lawrence's view was representative of the shift in the British perception of Empire from trading opportunity to civilizing mission (or 'white man's burden'). (David, 2002)

He was raised to the peerage as Baron Lawrence, of the Punjab and of Grateley in the county of Southampton, on his return to England in 1869, and died ten years later. The grave of John Lawrence, is found in the nave of Westminster Abbey where, the inscription reads:

“Here rests from his labours John Laird Mair, 1st Baron Lawrence of the Punjaub. Born 4 March 1811 Died 27 June 1879. Be Ready. His Works Do Follow Him.”



Figure 16: Grave of John Lawrence Figure 17: Bust of John Lawrence

Nearby is a white marble bust by the sculptor Thomas Woolner showing Lord Lawrence wearing a mantle of the Order of the Star of India. The inscription reads:

“John Laird Mair, First Lord Lawrence of the Punjab; who, from the Civil Service of the East India Company, rose to be Viceroy. His public life began among the races of upper India, whose hearts he won and whose lives he inspired. In the Mutiny of 1857 he maintained peace in the Punjab, and enabled our armies to re-conquer Delhi. His Viceroyalty promoted the welfare of the Indian people and confirmed the loyalty of the chiefs and princes. His devotion to public duty was ennobled by the simplicity and purity of his private life. “He feared Man so little, because he feared God so much”.

Constitution Hill, Park Lane - Memorial Gates and the Memorial Pavilion

The Memorial Gates are a war memorial located at the Hyde Park Corner junction with Park Lane of Constitution Hill. Also known as the Commonwealth Memorial Gates, they commemorate the armed forces of the British Empire who served in the First and Second World Wars, who came from

five regions of the Indian subcontinent (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka), as well as Africa and the Caribbean.

The inaugural patron of the Trust was Charles, Prince of Wales and funding was secured from the UK National Lottery via the Millennium Commission and construction of the Memorial Gates began on 1 August 2001. An inscription on the first stone commemorating the construction was laid by the Queen Mother. The Memorial Gates were inaugurated on 6 November 2002 by Queen Elizabeth II, in the Golden Jubilee year of her reign.

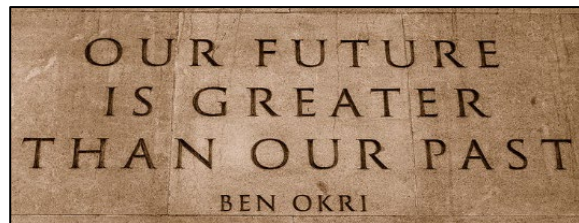


Figure 18 and 19 – the Memorial Gates

Memorial Pavilion

The Memorial Pavilion is located next to the Memorial Gates and has a list of those from the named regions who were awarded the George Cross or Victoria Cross (VC) in the years between and including the two World Wars.

The Victoria Cross is awarded to members of the British Armed Forces (British Army, Royal Air Force, Royal Navy and Royal Marines) of various Commonwealth countries, and previously the territories and dominions of the British Empire. It was instituted on 29 January 1856 by Royal Warrant following the Crimean War (1854-56). The award was unlike any previous military award as it was open to all ranks for acts of supreme gallantry in the face of the enemy. It is the joint highest award for bravery in the United Kingdom with the George Cross, which is the equivalent honour for valour not in the face of the enemy. Dating back to the start of the Crimean campaign in the autumn of 1854, the first 85 awards were made retrospectively and

announced in 'The London Gazette' (one of the official journals of record of the British government) of 24 February 1857.

Indian troops became eligible for the award in 1911, and 74 names from the Indian Army are listed on the ceiling of the small domed pavilion, detailing a total of 62 Victoria Cross recipients and 12 George Cross recipients. In this section of the paper, the author has documented the official announcements in The London Gazette with sourced and verified images, with the aim of providing a reliable source for the Sikh VC recipients. Through researching and presenting guided tours, it was evident that there was often confusion of the number of Indian VC recipients who were Sikh. Recipients such as Gobind Singh, Badlu Singh, Chatta Singh, Gabbar Singh Negi, Ram Sarup Singh are often included as being of Sikh origin, but a brief desktop search confirms that they were not Sikh or from the Punjab region.



Figures 20 and 21: Memorial Pavilion

Five Sikh recipients of the VC are honoured at the Memorial Pavilion. The acts of supreme gallantry in the face of the enemy, as recorded in the London Gazette and are presented for each of the awardees:

Subadar Major Ishar Singh, Bahadur, V.C. O.B.I, 15th Punjab Regiment



Figure 22 - Subadar Major Ishar Singh VC

Sepoy Ishar Singh was the first Sikh awarded the Victoria Cross. He was born on 13 December 1895 at Nenwan, Hoshiarpur, Punjab, and his citation in the London Gazette on 25 November 1921 reads:

“On 10th April, 1921 near Haidari Kach, North West Frontier, India, Sepoy Ishar Singh was No. 1 of a Lewis gun section. Early in the fighting he was severely wounded, all the officers and Havildars of his company became casualties and his Lewis gun was seized. He recovered the gun and went into action again although his wound was bleeding profusely, but when ordered to have it dressed, he went instead to help the medical officer, carrying water to the wounded, taking a

rifle and helping to keep down enemy fire and acting as a shield while the medical officer was dressing a wound. It was nearly three hours before he submitted to being evacuated”

Major Parkash Singh, 8th Punjab Regiment

Parkash Singh was born in the Jammu and Kashmir region of the former British India, on 1 April 1913. He was 27 years old, and a Jemadar in the 4 /13th Frontier Force Rifles during World War II. The citation in the London Gazette of 13 May 1943 described the deeds that took place:



Figure 23: Havildar Parkash Singh

“On the 6th January 1943 at Donbaik Mayo Peninsula Burma when two Gamers had been put out of action. Havildar Parkash Singh drove forward in his own Garner and rescued the two -crews under very heavy fire. At the time of the crews of the disabled Carriers had expended their ammunition and 'the enemy' were rushing the two disabled carriers on foot. This NCO's timely and courageous action entirely on his own initiative saved the lives of the crews and their weapons.

On the 19th January, 1943, in the same area, three carriers were put out of action by an enemy anti-tank gun and lay on the open beach covered by enemy anti-tank and machine-gun fire. One of these Carriers was carrying the survivors of another carrier in addition to its own crew. Havildar Parkash Singh, on seeing what had happened, went out from a safe position in his own Carrier, and with complete disregard for his own personal safety, rescued the combined crews from one disabled Carrier, together with the weapons from the Carrier. Having brought the crews to safety, he again went out on the open beach in his Carrier, still under very heavy anti-tank and machine-gun fire and with the utmost disregard to his personal safety, dismounted and connected a towing chain on to a disabled Carrier containing two wounded men. Still under fire, he directed the towing of the disabled Carrier from under enemy fire to a place of safety.

Havildar Parkash Singh's very gallant actions, entirely on his own initiative, were an inspiration to all ranks both British and Indian.”

He was awarded the Victoria Cross for these widely separated, repeated acts of sterling and selfless courage under murderous fire; a second award (a rare honour indeed), having been considered a distinct possibility by his CO. He rose to the rank of Major, being seconded to 16 Sikh on Partition (8th Punjab Regiment was allotted to Pakistan, later becoming its Baluch Regiment).

Nand Singh, 11th Sikh Regiment

Sepoy (Acting Naik) Nand Singh was born on 24 September 1914 in Patiala, India. As part of the 1/11th Sikh Regiment he was awarded the Victoria Cross in March 1945 His citation in the London Gazette on 6th June 1944 reads:



Figure 24: Nand Singh

“In Burma on the night of the 11th/12th March, 1944, a Japanese platoon about 40 strong with Medium and Light Machine-Guns and a Grenade Discharger infiltrated into the Battalion position covering the main Maungdaw-Buthidaung road”

“Naik Nand Singh commanded the leading section of the platoon which was ordered to recapture the position at all costs. He led his section up a very steep knife-edged ridge under heavy machine-gun and rifle fire. Although wounded in the thigh he rushed ahead of his section and took the first enemy trench with the bayonet by himself. He then crawled forward alone under heavy fire and though wounded again in the face and shoulder by a grenade which burst one yard in front of him, took the second trench”.

A short time later when all his section had been either killed or wounded, Naik Nand Singh dragged himself out of the trench and captured a third trench, killing all the occupants”.

Naik Gian Singh VC, 15th Punjab Regiment

Naik Gian Singh was born on 5 October 1915 in Shahpur, Jullundur. As part of the 15th Punjab Regiment he was awarded the VC in March 1945. His citation in the London Gazette on 18 May 1945 reads:



Figure 25 - Naik Gian Singh VC

“In Burma, on 2nd March, 1945, the Japanese were holding a strong position astride- the road Kamyemyingyan. Two Companies of the 15th Punjab Regiment carried out successfully a wide encircling movement and established themselves on some high ground about one and a half miles in the rear of this enemy position”

“The enemy were well-concealed in fox-holes along cactus hedges and Naik Gian Singh soon observed enemy some twenty yards ahead. Ordering his Light Machine Gunner to cover him, he, alone, rushed the enemy fox-holes, firing his Tommy Gun. He was met by a hail of fire and wounded in the arm. In spite of this he continued his advance alone, hurling grenades.

He killed several Japanese including four in one of the enemy main weapon pits.”

Naik Gian Singh quickly saw the danger to the tanks and, ignoring the danger to himself and in spite of his wounds, again rushed forward, killed the crew and captured the gun single-handed. His section followed him and he then led them down a lane of cactus hedges, clearing all enemy positions which were being firmly held. Some twenty enemy bodies were found in this area, the majority of which fell to Naik Gian Singh and his- section. After this action, the Company reformed to take the enemy positions to the rear. Naik Gian Singh was ordered to the Regimental Aid Post but, in spite of his wounds, requested permission to lead his section until the whole action had been completed. This was granted.”

Lieutenant Karamjeet Singh Judge, 15th Punjab Regiment

Lieutenant Karamjeet Singh was born on 25 May 1923 in Kapurthala, India. His father was a Chief of Police, and he became a member of the Indian National



Figure 26: Karamjeet Singh Judge VC

Congress Party. Instead of completing his studies in politics at Lahore College, Punjab, he seems to have been persuaded to join the army. The status of his family is part of the reason he is one of the few Sikhs in the Indian Army who retained his family name, Judge, in addition to the surname of Singh. As part of the 4th Battalion 15 Punjab Regiment, he was awarded the Victoria Cross in March 1945. Killed in action on 18th March, 1945, near Meiktila, Burma, the citation of his posthumous award in the London Gazette on 3 July 1945 reads:

“In Burma, on 8th March, 1945, a Company of the 15th Punjab Regiment, in which Lieutenant Karamjeet Singh Judge was a Platoon 'Commander, was ordered to capture the Cotton Mill area on the outskirts of Myingyan. In addition to numerous

bunkers 'and stiff enemy resistance a total of almost 200 enemy shells fell around the tanks and infantry during the attack. The ground over which the operation took place was very (broken and in parts was unsuitable for tanks). Except for the first two hours of this operation, Lieutenant Karamjeet Singh Judge's platoon was leading in the attack, and up to the last moment Lieutenant Karamjeet Singh Judge dominated the entire battlefield by his numerous and successive acts of superb gallantry.”

Lieutenant John George Smyth 15th Ludhiana Sikhs, Richebourg L'Avoué, France - 18 May 1915, Battle of Festubert, World War I

The Memorial Pavilion at Constitution Hill, Hyde Park also includes the name of Lieutenant John George Smyth of the 15th Ludhiana Sikhs. John Smyth was awarded the Victoria Cross for an episode that took place during the Battle of Festubert on 18 May 1915.



Figure 27, 28: Lieutenant John Smyth VC, 15th Ludhiana Sikhs

On the 17th May 1915, a company of the 15th Sikhs under Captain Hyde-Cates had relieved part of the 2nd Battalion, Highland Light Infantry in a section of a trench known as the "Glory Hole", near the Ferme du Bois. Here, fierce fighting had been in progress, and the Sikhs had replaced the Highlanders and occupied a section of a German trench.

During the early hours of the 18th May, Captain Hyde-Cates observed that the Germans were attempting to reinforce their comrades in the trench. When morning broke it was seen that the German trench was packed with men who were evidently preparing an attack. A hail of bombs started to fall upon the Sikhs, who replied vigorously. By noon, the supply of bombs for the Sikhs began to fall, and the situation became critical. Only the timely arrival of a bombing party from the reserve trenches would enable them to hold out, and the reserve trenches were approximately 250 yards away, with the ground between the trenches exposed to fire of the Germans.

Lieutenant John Smyth, 15th Sikhs, was ordered to attempt to take bombs from the support trench to Captain Hyde-Cates. Lieutenant Smyth took with him ten

bombers from No. 4 Company, selected from the crowd of volunteers who immediately responded to the call. The names of volunteers were Lance-Naik Mangal Singh, Sepoys Lal Singh, Sucha Singh and Sapuram Singh of the 15th Sikhs; Sarain Singh, Sundur Singh, Harnam Singh and Ganda Singh of the 19th Punjabis; and Fateh Singh and Ujagar Singh of the 45th Sikhs.

At two o'clock in the afternoon Smyth and his band set out on a dangerous journey, taking with them two boxes containing ninety-six bombs. Aspects of the mission were recorded, and stated that:

“By means of pagris [turban material] attached to the boxes, the men in front pulled them along over and through the dead bodies that encumbered the trench, while those behind pushed with all their might. The danger was enough to have appalled the stoutest heart. Rifle and machine-gun bullets ripped up the ground all round them, while the air above was white with the puff of shrapnel. If a single bullet, a single fragment of shell, penetrated one of the boxes of explosives, the men propelling it would infallibly be blown to pieces.

Before they had advanced a score of yards on their terrible journey Fattedh Singh fell, severely wounded; in another hundred, Sucha Singh, Ujagar Singh and Sunder Singh were down, leaving only Lieut. Smyth and six men to get the boxes along. However, spurred on by the thought of the dire necessity of their comrades ahead, they, by superhuman efforts, succeeded in dragging them nearly to the end of the trench when, in quick succession, Sarain Singh, Harnam Singh and Sapuram Singh were wounded. The second box of bombs had therefore to be abandoned, and for the two remaining men to haul even one box along in the face of such difficulties appeared an impossible task. But nothing was impossible to the young lieutenant and the heroic Lal Singh, and presently the anxious watchers in the trench ahead saw them wriggling their way yard by yard into the open, dragging with them the box upon the safe arrival of which so much depended.

As they emerged from the comparative shelter of the trench a veritable hail of lead burst upon them; but escaping it as though by a miracle, they crawled on until they found themselves confronted by a small stream which at this point was too deep to wade. They had, therefore, to turn aside and crawl along the bank of the stream until they came to a place which was just fordable. Across this they struggled with their precious burden, the water all about them churned into foam by the storm of bullets clambered by the further tank, and in a minute more they were amongst their cheering comrades. Both were unhurt, though their clothes were perforated by bullet holes; but it is sad to relate that scarcely had they reached the trench than the gallant Lal Singh was struck by a bullet and killed instantly.” (Bagdatopulos W.S, 2015)

So ended one of the most gallant episodes of the Great War. For his bravery Lieutenant Smyth was awarded the Victoria Cross, and later the Order of St. George, 4th Class (Russia). Lance-Naik Mangal Singh received the Second-Class Indian Order of Merit, while the Indian Distinguished Service Medal was awarded to all the sepoy of the party.

Green Park –Bomber Command Memorial

During the course of World War II, countries from across the globe sent pilots to fly for the Royal Air Force and the RAF Bomber Command. The RAF bomber Command controlled the bomber forces of the Air Force, and undertook the bombing of strategic targets in Germany during World War II, and aircraft included the Manchester, the Halifax, Stirling and Lancaster aircraft bombers, as well as the more popularly known Hurricane and Spitfire. The Bomber Command suffered high casualties, more so than Infantry, and the contributions of Indian airmen in the Bomber Command has often been overlooked.



Figure 29: Bomber Command Memorial

The Bomber Command Memorial was unveiled by The Queen on 28 June 2012, and is located in Green Park, opposite the RAF Club on Piccadilly. The tribute on the memorial reads:

“This memorial is dedicated to the 55, 573 Airmen from the United Kingdom, British Commonwealth & Allied Nations who served in RAF Bomber Command & lost their lives over the course of the Second World War”

The Godmanchester Air Crash, 11 April 1942

On the night of the 10th/11th April 1942, a bombing raid by 18 RAF Stirling bombers took place over the city of Essen in Germany. The aircraft in the raid were damaged by anti-aircraft fire, and one aircraft, a short Stirling N3703, was returning to RAF Alconbury, near Huntingdon in Cambridgeshire. The aircraft was captained by Squadron Leader Drummond Wilson and his co-pilot 19yr old Sgt David Southey who were attempting to land the aircraft. Upon final approach, they were ordered to ‘go around’ and await an aircraft to clear the runway. As they flew over Godmanchester, the engine cut out following a damaged oil pipe breaking, and the bomber aircraft crashed in an area near the A14. Of the crew of eight, the captain, Drummond, and the Mid Upper Gunner, Sgt Edgar Gould, were killed.

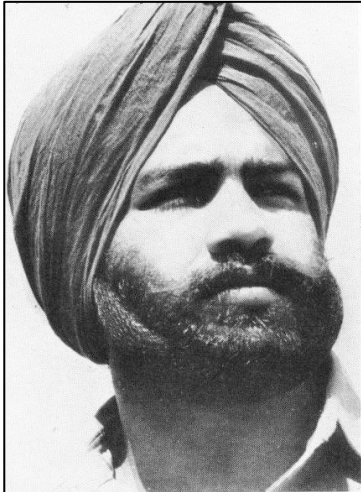


Figure 30 – Flt Lt Drummond Wilson with his first crew, including Shivdev Singh

The story of the Godmanchester crash and the story of Squadron Leader Drummond Wilson, known simply as Drummond, has been told in a recent book by Roger Leivers. The book also details the lives of Drummond’s crews, including Pilot Officer Shivdev Singh. Singh was Drummond’s co-pilot, who Leivers described as being the most conspicuous of Drummond’s original crew.

Shivdev Singh

Shiv Dev Singh was one of 24 Indian pilots who served with the RAF in the Bomber Command. His service records show he served as Drummond's co-pilot on one raid, and then transferred to RAF HQ Middle East in March 1942.



From there he was then stationed in Egypt and then to Burma. After 18 months in Burma delivering low-level fighter and ground-attack support, he moved to New Guinea. By 1945, Shivdev Singh was promoted to the senior officer rank of Squadron Leader, and was a highly respected pilot. He then led No.3 Squadron in Burma against the Japanese, leading to the capture of Rangoon in May 1945. Following the end of the second World War, Shivdev Singh returned to England, working as a liaison staff member of the Royal Indian Air Force based at the High Commission of India in Aldwych.

Figure 31: Shivdev Singh

Conclusion

In this paper, the author has cast light on 'The Shadows of Empire', detailing sites that memorialize often-unacknowledged events and individuals associated with different phases of British India, including the East India Company and the Raj, and the role of Sikhs in those events, as opponents of the invaders, as servants of Empire, and as individuals from a rich and independent tradition of the Punjab. The author has highlighted the stories of Bomber Command co-pilot Shivdev Singh, the story of Lieutenant John Smyth and his Sikh volunteers, and the roles of Company officer's Sir James Outram and Sir Charles Napier alongside the other individuals that are a little more known and associated with Sikh and Anglo-Sikh history such as Sir Henry Havelock, Sir John Lawrence and the Sikh VC winners. An important contribution of this paper is to make the Sikhs who received British gallantry awards more visible as individuals, providing information about their backgrounds as well as their acts of courage.

This area of UK Sikh heritage and history of the Sikhs, Punjab and India has been a focus for organisations such as UKPHA, ASHT, SHAWL and the National Sikh Heritage Centre and Sikh Holocaust Museum in the United Kingdom. Since 2010, the author's own contribution to this field has been to build on the prior collection of information and develop a detailed database of

knowledge of Sikh history and heritage located in memorials, collections and artefacts within museums, buildings and churches in Central and Greater London. This work has brought attention to numerous locations that were previously not presented by heritage organizations in the UK. These include the memorials to the Punjab Frontier Force in St. Luke's Church and at St. Paul's Cathedral, the links of the Pembroke College Mission in Southwark to Charles Free Andrews and his eye-witness accounts of events in the early 1920s in Amritsar and Punjab, the location of art pieces from the mid-late 1800s of Maharaja Duleep Singh and Captain Colin McKenzie at the National Liberal Club in Whitehall.

The City of Westminster also includes a number of other institutions, buildings, law institutions and churches, which also reveal Sikh and Anglo-Sikh histories within the artefacts, paintings and individuals associated with them. The author plans to continue this research, including Sikh and Anglo-Sikh histories associated with Caxton Hall, The Royal Collection, The National Liberal Club, The Royal Courts of Justice, the Wallace Collection, and Westminster Palace (Houses of Parliament).

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Figure 18 and 19: Carcharoth (Commons) English: Part of a series of photos of the Memorial Gates, at the point where Constitution Hill meets Hyde Park Corner and the Wellington Arch, London, UK.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Memorial_Gates,_Constitution_Hill_\(February_2010\)_16.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Memorial_Gates,_Constitution_Hill_(February_2010)_16.jpg)

Figure 22: Online Collection of the National Army Museum

<https://collection.nam.ac.uk/detail.php?acc=1953-07-10-1> accessed 2 January 2021

Figure 23: Major Parkash Singh VC Imperial War Museums (iwm.org.uk)

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Figure 24: Online Collection of the National Army Museum

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Figure 25: Image Credit: The Comprehensive Guide to the Victoria & George Cross <http://www.vconline.org.uk/gian-singh-vc/4586770389> accessed 2 January 2021

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Figure 27: Lieutenant John Smyth,

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Farmers' Movement in India
Part I

On the Farmers' Movement

Editorial Team

Special Issues on Farmers' Movement in India

The *Sikh Research Journal* (SRJ) is meant to build bridges between scholars in the field of Sikh and Punjabi Studies, academics from other disciplines, members of the Sikh community, South Asians and others. The farmers' movement, just as it has catalyzed issues and concerns beyond the details of the design of a set of laws, inspired members of the editorial team to embody and extend this objective, with a set of special issues on the many aspects of the movement. The editors of these special issues include three members of the SRJ core editorial team, all based in the US, and three guest editors based in India. We embark on this journey with the specific aim to be a bridge between academic analysis and lived experience by including voices of academics, activists, and community members on the issue of the farmers' agitation. Our backgrounds and our motivation are briefly described at the end of this introduction.

The special issues on the farmers are a product of a very particular vision on the part of a group of individuals engaged with the issue to offer a platform highlighting the massive resistance to the recently passed farm laws by the government of India, a resistance in which the Punjabi farmers occupy a prominent space. The farmers fear that the new laws, passed in September 2020, will eliminate the minimum guaranteed price for agricultural produce – commonly referred to as minimum support price (MSP) – despite the government's assurances to the contrary; permit stockpiling of agricultural produce by corporations; and expand contract farming without much in the way of safeguards for the farmers. According to the farmers, the new laws will only serve to accelerate their impoverishment, with far reaching impacts on the socio-cultural-political fabric of the Punjab. Resistance to the laws emerged on the Indian national scene in late November 2020, although it had been ongoing in Punjab since the introduction of the central government's ordinances on June 5, 2020, which preceded the parliamentary passage of the reforms as new laws. Almost half a year later, the movement continues to thrive without any sign of the farmers relenting. Their demand stands as is – “kaale kanoon rad karo” or “take back the black laws!”

As this is being written, the movement has support among farmers from other states in India as well, because movement participants and supporters perceive the laws as detrimental to the wellbeing of all on whom they will be imposed and

those who will be affected indirectly in the long run as a result of their implementation. Thus, farmers from Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat have joined in the resistance. The movement has received support from landless laborers, Dalits, and those against the National Register of Citizens and the Citizenship Amendment Act as well. Women, too, have featured prominently in this movement, in ways that have signaled attention to deeper issues of structural gender inequalities. Additionally, the mobilization has spanned national boundaries, drawing in unexpected allies, including solidarity statements from grassroots farmers' and human rights organizations in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom, as well as Rihanna and Greta Thunberg's more-publicized tweets of solidarity.

In response to sustained resistance, including international support, the Indian government has taken increasingly harsh steps to quell the movement, often seeking to construct the movement participants and supporters as seditious and/or separatists, and to control media coverage, in order to mobilize popular support against it. The detentions of journalists and activists like Mandeep Punia, Noddep Kaur, Disha Ravi further exemplify such efforts. Yet, despite accounts and images of pain and injury, the movement has also produced hope and song. In these months, those in the movement, many with long term experience of grassroots organizing in the Punjab, have shown their ingenuity, foresight, creativity and resilience in leading this mobilization. The movement builders' agency is palpable and inspiring.

Thus, we the editors of the special issues on the farmers' movement offer a short primer for those hoping to better understand the movement from multiple vantage points. The essays, articles and visual documentation presented will be published over three consecutive issues of SRJ, this issue being the first of three. The section of the Journal on the movement, while not exhaustive, provides background and examines several dimensions of the ongoing struggle. This inaugural issue is a preview of a more robust set of academic, artistic and community voices to be presented in future issues on the movement.

A particular feature of the special section is contributions in the Punjabi language. The purpose of this linguistic extension, not a regular feature of the SRJ, is threefold. Firstly, it fits with the goal of the editors of the special issues to include community voices, and especially make accessible those voices that otherwise would not be. Secondly, and by way of that, including pieces in Punjabi will capture local voices that would otherwise not be heard on the global stage. Thirdly, this feature can create a space for engagement between ground level local viewpoints and academic voices for a better understanding of a movement as it

continues to unfold. Through this we hope to further illuminate the multiple dimensions of this thriving movement.

The editorial team for these issues comprises of:

Shoma Choudhury Lahiri is Assistant Professor at the Department of Sociology at St. Xavier's College, Kolkata. Her interest in social movements can be traced back to her doctoral research in the villages working alongside the activists of Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad attempting to understand the interventions of the People's Science Movement in Kerala. She has been intrigued by the fact that sociology in India has been neglectful of social movements, being largely oriented towards a consensus model. Considering that the socio-political landscape of India in recent times has seen a wide variety of agitations and social movements, such as citizenship rights, religious rights, right to dissent, against sexual harassment, that have raised significant questions, it is imperative to document, analyze and assess their impact. Her interest in the ongoing farmer's movement also arises from the fact that it is multi-dimensional as well because the movement has gone beyond its locale and is forming alliances with other social movements and civil society groups to mobilize public opinion in other parts of the country. She is watching closely as the movement unfolds and is interested in understanding its long-term impact.

Shruti Devgan is a Visiting Assistant Professor of Sociology at Bowdoin College. As a Punjabi Hindu, Devgan's cultural affinity with Sikhs led her to embark on research on diasporic memories of the 1984 anti-Sikh violence. Her research in turn informs her engagement with the farmers' protests in India. Sikh farmers, mostly from Punjab, have been at the helm of the movement. She is especially interested in the transnational networks that are fueling the protests and sees echoes of the diasporic mobilization that followed in the immediate aftermath of the events of 1984. Even though the violence was unfolding in India, the outrage and sadness resonated with Sikhs globally. In addition to several other developments taking shape in India today, there has been a vilification of Sikhs and a call to recreate the genocidal violence of 1984. Devgan has been closely observing social media platforms, especially Twitter, to see the strong reactions such calls are evoking in the Sikh diaspora. She understands transnational Sikhs' support for farmers, driven by a haunted past, as a means to reclaim and reshape the present and future. She stands in solidarity with farmers and their remarkable resistance to the tyranny of Modi's Hindu nationalist and neoliberal regime.

Diditi Mitra is Associate Professor of Sociology at Brookdale Community College. The seeds of her engagement with the ongoing farmers struggle in India were sown with her dissertation project on immigrant Punjabi-Sikh yellow taxi drivers in New York City. That was two decades ago. Since then, Mitra's theoretical and empirical frames have expanded to understand the factors that incentivize international migration from the Punjab. Thus, she has embarked on fieldtrips to the Punjab, working in collaboration with filmmaker Shashwati Talukdar, with the aim of understanding the local contexts that shape Punjabi (predominantly Sikh) immigrant journeys. For Mitra, the farmers' movement is part of that story about immigration from the Punjab. Through this history of engaging with immigrant Punjabi-Sikhs and the people in Punjab itself, Mitra has come to identify with Punjab, the place and its people. Navigating the many twists and turns of the movement, Mitra hopes that the farmers succeed in securing their rights and dignity as well as lead India towards the promise of Independence.

Nirmal Singh is Assistant Professor of Political Science and Public Administration at Doaba College, Jalandhar (Punjab), India. He holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar. His interest in the farmers' movements arises out of his experience as a border area resident, as an academic researcher and a state/provincial supervisor of various national surveys, including national farmers survey. His initial exposure is a product of academic contribution to a paper on National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) and another comparing the state of agriculture in India and Pakistan. In 2015, while working for a paper on violence in Punjab during the phase of terrorism from the 1980s to mid-1990s, his interest grew further in the farming community and its issues. His recent publication maps Dalit leadership in political parties of Punjab perceived as the party of farmers or Sikhs, particularly Shiromani Akali Dal. Being a resident of the border district of Punjab, he is well aware of the plight of farmers, particularly of farmers whose land is located across barbed wired fencing. He has closely watched how farmers have been suffering from government apathy, its agencies and the impact of various laws. He supervised national surveys held in Punjab between 2011 and 2018. In all these surveys and for border area research project, he travelled extensively throughout Punjab to measure people's perceptions on farm issues, law and order, various government laws and schemes. He opines that the recent unprecedented farmers movement cuts across boundaries of religion, caste, geography, professions, communities, nationalities, etc. This movement sets the global and historical benchmark as a peaceful and a well coordinated protest against the laws of the central government.

Dona Suri is a retired journalist. She has spent 35 years working in newspapers and broadcast media in India – 30 of those years in Chandigarh. She retired as associate editor of the Chandigarh edition of *Hindustan Times*. Her interest in the farmers movement is through her work with a small charitable organization, active in the villages of Punjab's extreme southeast corner. Her work with the organization began in 1995, aiming to help rural children stay in school after the suicide of one or both parents. Between 1990 and December 31, 2020, the organization documented 3196 cases of suicide by farmers and agricultural laborers in a small area of just 146 villages. Debt is the thread that ties these victims' cases together. Initially, the organization focused on farmers, but in time there was a realization that focusing on farmers alone was insufficient because farmers troubles and their pauperization were connected to those of the entire village-laborers, shopkeepers, artisans, and other residents. It has become clear that this pauperization flows from government policies. The centrally legislated agricultural laws that have evoked such strong opposition reflect a long-evolving shift in the Union government's attitude toward the focus of the Indian economy and agriculture's role in it. The recently enacted farm bills, that have pushed the farmers agitation into the forefront of India's socio-political scene is deeply concerning for both the organization and the rural families that it will impact.

Elizabeth Weigler is a User Experience Researcher, and holds a PhD in Anthropology from the University of California, Santa Barbara. She has watched the protests unfold through the eyes of the diaspora in North America and the UK. Growing up in Wisconsin, the community there inspired her to pursue the study of Sikh history and transnationalism, first in Pune, India starting in 2008. The heartbreaking terrorist attack on the Oak Creek Gurdwara in 2012, and the Sikh community's empowering resistance to white supremacy was a catalyst for her PhD research. She works with grassroots organizations that seek to foster community-based knowledge as a means of civic change, primarily through history and heritage. This special section comes from Elizabeth's initial role on the SRJ's editorial board - to promote the incorporation of community voices, and to communicate the value of academic work to community members. Her goal is to provide a holistic understanding of the people and policies that move the Farmers' Protest - from the longitudinal and measured understanding of an academic perspective, to the emotive appeals of those educated in the realities of their own lives.

A final note: this special section owes a debt of gratitude to a number of "behind the scenes" editorial contributors and commentators. To reiterate, we recognize that the issues raised here will not be exhaustive, especially in light of the

evolving nature of the contemporary movement. Rather, we hope that these and subsequent essays will act as a space for dialogue and understanding as well as a catalyst for future research. We seek to always keep in mind the realities of those on the front lines of these protests, who foresee a disproportionate burden of these laws on their daily lives.

Farm Laws versus Field Realities: Understanding India's Agricultural Markets

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Abstract

This paper evaluates the actual state of agricultural markets and existing agricultural market regulation in India. It contrasts this with the design of the new “farm laws,” and argues that those reforms may be misdirected in many respects. The paper makes a case for better understanding of intermediation, the need for several kinds of public investment, improvements in production conditions in agriculture, and attention to the broader economic context within which agricultural marketing reforms occur.

Keywords: agricultural marketing reforms, India, farm laws, APMCs, intermediation, economic development

Acronyms, acrimony and assumptions

Over the last year, in the midst of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the past, present and future of Indian agriculture has been in the national spotlight. The source of the controversy is the introduction of three new agricultural market laws that are perhaps now better known simply as #farmlaws. Read together, these new farm laws represent a set of concerted actions intended to alter the manner and degree of state regulation over the exchange, storage, movement, and taxation of agricultural produce in India. They also mark the first time in Indian legislative history that central law has been brought to bear on the regulation of the critical ‘first transaction’ between the farmer and the primary buyer of their produce. The focus has therefore turned to the country’s vast and varied agricultural markets and to the vital, complex, and contested task of regulating them. As a result, a set of acronyms – ECA, APMC, MSP – have become staples in public commentary in an increasingly polarised public debate.

The public policy discourse broadly has seen two dimensions. First, there are the those in public policy who have framed this as a pro- vs anti- markets and liberalization debate. Those who support it argue these reforms were necessary for transformation of the agricultural sector much like the 1991 liberalization from high tariffs and the infamous license-quota-permit raj that launched India

into a sustained high growth regime. Those who oppose it say that these laws are essentially meant to help large corporates capture Indian agriculture and consequentially would be disastrous for farmers and rural livelihoods. Second, there are the farmers and farmer organizations who have expressed deep rooted anxieties toward a potential loss of their existing systems of trade and marketing and government support. Their anxieties are rooted in history and their lived experience as successive governments have reneged on their promises and support to the Indian farmer. This includes the promise of providing a floor price in 23 commodities, support in terms of easier access to credit, insurance, technical assistance, marketing infrastructure, and protection against market power of larger firms.

Whatever the arguments may be, they are so emotionally charged and polarized that discussions about precise mechanisms through which such changes and transformations would take root are largely absent from the discourse. Our aim here is not to provide an overview of the laws or settle the pro-laws versus anti-laws debate. Instead, we take a step back to evaluate the assumptions behind the framing of the new central farm laws. We evaluate them for their empirical validity in the context of the realities of Indian agriculture, agricultural markets and supply networks. We discuss the extent to which these assumptions should be taken for granted given the actually existing structure and organisation of agricultural market systems in diverse regional and commodity contexts. For example, we argue in this article that statements like ‘allowing farmers to sell outside mandis will give them more options and therefore increase their incomes’ are based on assumptions that need to be empirically validated, are incomplete, and their fulfilment depends on many structural conditions.

Most importantly, these generalized statements ignore the great deal of heterogeneity in the structural conditions and realities across regions. Thus, while a proposal may sound economically logical, the ways in which markets actually work in reality has often been grossly misunderstood. We also provide, wherever useful, comparative analysis of the outcomes of similar proposals in other parts of the globe. We draw upon our own individual and collaborative research and the rich scholarship of those who have spent decades understanding the complexities of Indian agriculture.

The essay that follows is an effort at providing both conceptual and empirical clarification in a vast and vital sector of Indian economy and society that remains persistently underspecified and misunderstood. In doing so, we point to both the possibilities and limitation of regulatory reforms in transforming agricultural markets and expanding farmers’ incomes. Indian agricultural markets require and deserve more and better regulation, which begins with regulatory first principles and is responsive to existing market systems,

structures and relationships. But our engagement and reform imagination must go beyond regulatory reform to proposing new frameworks for well-directed public investment that acknowledge the structural challenges of Indian agriculture and its relationships with the wider non-agrarian economy.

APMC laws, actually existing markets, and farmers' sales in context

The first and foremost assumption behind the new central farm laws is that the existing regulatory regime, operating under state agricultural marketing acts across the country, restricted competition among buyers in primary markets. In doing so, it forced farmers to sell their produce to commission agents and traders in local APMC mandis. As a result, not only were APMC mandis presumed to be the dominant site of exchange across India, but they were also known to operate as corrupt, monopolistic market sites where commission agents and a few entrenched local buyers exploited farmers and controlled the trade. Indeed, this image of APMC mandis as dens of trade run by middlemen and mercantile power has a near canonical, incontestable popular appeal, especially in the imagination of the mainstream media. Against this singular and dramatic claim, the presentation of empirical data to the contrary appears both banal and baffling at the same time.

However, the reality is that even today the majority of Indian farmers, especially small and marginal cultivators, sell their produce to small-scale and largely unlicensed traders and intermediaries in the village or in local sites of exchange (such as periodic *haats* or bazaars) outside regulated market yards. But, if farmers are bound by law to sell in APMC mandis, why are so many of them selling outside?

At least part of the answer is that India still does not have enough mandis. Over the decades, most states in general, and specific regions in particular, have hugely under-invested in the basic infrastructure required to create viable, primary wholesale markets within easy physical reach of farmers. The 2017 Doubling Farmers Income Report estimates that in addition to the current 6,676 principal and sub-market yards under APMCs (also woefully limited in terms of infrastructure) India needs over 3,500 additional wholesale markets. Approximately 23,000 rural periodic markets (or *haats*) have also suffered long-standing neglect.

Another part of the reason for the high proportion of first sales outside mandis has to do with the structural reality of small and marginal farming in India. Most Indian farmers are extremely small. With average land holdings of less than a hectare, many farmers do not have sizeable volumes of marketable surplus.

With little quantities to sell, it makes more economic sense to sell to local aggregators than transporting these amounts to mandis. The local aggregators might in turn sell in APMC mandis. In states that have strong APMC markets, it is generally the larger farmers who are more likely to sell in mandis.¹

The stark reality, however, only becomes apparent when you move from general assumptions and national data to engaging with state, intra-state and commodity-specific contexts of agricultural marketing (Krishnamurthy 2015). For instance in our own recent field-based study across states and seven districts, we found that in contrast to the dominant narrative of restrictive state regulation in agricultural markets in India through the APMC Acts, the eastern Indian states of Bihar and Odisha are characterized instead by market deregulation (Bihar repealed its act in 2006) and limited and weak formal regulation by the state (Odisha, which has one of the oldest marketing acts, but few functional regulated markets on the ground). The vast majority of first sales takes place at the village level itself and remain out of the purview of any formal regulation. Even market exchange and trade in notified market sites, whether mandis or haats (under local government authority), cannot really be considered as formally regulated, at least by usual norms. Furthermore, in Bihar since most wholesale markets are set up for bilateral trade between village aggregators, commission agents and traders with well-established credit and trading relations, many farmers are dissuaded from venturing into the wholesale market even when it is within easy physical reach. This holds true even when the farmers themselves are not bound by credit relations to sell to a particular local intermediary in the village, as one would commonly assume (Chatterjee et al 2020). Rather, it is the fact that the wholesale market is not set up to facilitate direct exchange with many small producers that shuts them out of participating in mandis and keeps village-level exchange between small farmers and small traders/aggregators going.

What about other states, such as Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh – states which did have established APMC Acts and active APMC mandis, especially in agriculturally productive and dynamic regions? Here, there is no denying that where APMC mandis do exist and have established themselves as dominant market sites, mandi committees have often misused their powers to restrict competition. Obtaining a licence for a new entrant — whether a regional trader, processor, national or multinational corporation, or farmer producer organisation — has often proved to be a bureaucratic nightmare and a costly affair.

¹ NSS Situation Assessment Survey of Agricultural Households Round 70.

We must remember though, that while reforms that make it easier to register traders or obtain licenses might seem to be the equivalent to deregulating the market, they can have very different consequences. As an analogy, imagine the consequences if the solution to corruption-related bottlenecks in obtaining drivers licences was to remove the requirement for driving licenses altogether. And indeed, this distinction was recognized up until the new central acts, where the direction of reform was to enable access to APMC mandis *and* alternative marketing sites and channels, but with both operating under a framework of regulatory oversight.

In this regard, it would be very unfair to ignore the steps that different states had already taken, especially over the last two decades to amend their own laws and reform the existing marketing system. Madhya Pradesh, for instance, is well known for having introduced an amendment to enable private corporations such as ITC to set up their own single-license yards outside mandis, even before the central government advocated such a move, in the first Model APMC Act in 2003 (Krishnamurthy 2015). Maharashtra brought changes in its laws to enable the setting up of private markets, of which over sixty licensed private markets are presently operational in the state.² And Karnataka has been recognised for pioneering deep legal and institutional reforms to interlink all its APMC mandis in a common electronic spot market platform, an innovation that partly inspired the central government's e-National Agricultural Market scheme, launched in 2016 (Agarwal et al 2017). In fact, of the 28 states and union territories that had functioning APMC Acts at the time the new central laws were promulgated, 27 enabled corporations to take a single unified trading license, allowed direct marketing outside mandis, and made provisions for the establishment of private wholesale markets.³

Marketing regulation, especially after these state-level reforms, has not directly restricted farmers from selling outside APMC mandis. It is true that in their initial avatar, states with strong APMCs did restrict traders operating in notified market areas to purchasing inside regulated mandi yards. While the aim was to provide better oversight, in many instances this led to indirectly limiting the set of licensed buyers and thus competition in the local market. Over time however, through various reforms, these constraints were, at least formally, removed.

² List of private market license holders in Maharashtra:
<http://erp.msamb.com/online/ListOfMarketReport> (Maharashtra State Agricultural Marketing Board)

³ Status of Marketing Reforms, Directorate of Marketing and Inspection, Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Government of India.
https://www.dmi.gov.in/Documents/Reform_Status.pdf

While this does not mean that the regulatory reform agenda across Indian states was near complete, the claim that until June 2020 Indian farmers were trapped in sales within APMC mandis is a gross mischaracterization of ground realities. For millions of small and marginal farmers in states like Bihar and Odisha or in remote or otherwise marginalized locations across many other states, APMC mandis—whether in letter, spirit or substance—had never materialized in the first place. For others, alternative channels such as private procurement hubs and private markets were already present on the ground or were at least legally viable options for interested commercial buyers. This is true even in the states of Punjab and Haryana for all crops except wheat and non-basmati paddy, the two dominant crops which are procured at Minimum Support Prices by those states. Most importantly, unlike the new central acts, both the Model APMC Acts (2003 and 2017) and the amended state marketing laws in place provided a more robust regulatory framework for alternative channels to operate outside mandis. In primary agricultural markets, marketing infrastructure such as APMC mandi yards are not cosmetic matters, but vital and dynamic elements of the primary marketing ecosystem. Similarly, key aspects of regulatory design are not semantic matters, but are at the heart of regulatory purpose and practice on the ground.

Regulatory principles and the role of mandis as public goods

Given the vilification of APMC mandis, it is perhaps not surprising that the first principles and economic reasoning behind the original regulatory system have been largely overlooked in the design of the new laws. These principles are well worth recalling.

Today it is common to think of APMC mandis primarily or even solely as sites for revenue extraction by the State and as entrenched local markets controlled by powerful local commission agents and traders. These are indeed features of many such marketplaces, especially in certain states. However, the original reasoning behind setting up local physical wholesale markets in agricultural regions was to give farmers access to a publicly regulated marketplace where they could sell their produce to the highest bidder in an auction, benefit from standardization and vigilance in assaying and weighing, and expect that their payments would be honored in full and on time. Given the small size of the majority of producers across India, it was understood that with only a limited number of buyers in any given local market area, tangible regulatory oversight was important to limit the tendency towards the formation and consolidation of monopsonies.

Conceived as multi-seller and multi-buyer market sites, mandis were intended to function as primary spot markets, enabling competitive price discovery, market information and knowledge exchange, on-site dispute resolution, and counter-party risk assurance. Here, farmers could organize collectively, and an elected local committee – dominated, in principle, by farmers but with trader, commission agent, labour and cooperative and other agency representatives – was put in charge of overseeing activities (Krishnamurthy 2020). When in place, well-functioning mandis are public goods. Their presence has spill-over effects even on the prices of non-mandi transactions, where the current mandi rate typically serves as a benchmark for negotiation. This is why it has been commonly observed that private corporate buyers rely on local mandi prices to set prices for procurement outside mandis. Moreover, this is also why even after the state-level reforms discussed above worked towards enabling multiple, alternatives sites outside APMC mandis, state regulation did continue to seek to license all major buyers interested in purchasing produce in the local market area.

On the ground, as we have already mentioned most states and regions did not invest in building enough mandis, existing market yard infrastructure remained woefully deficient, and APMCs are deeply compromised in practice. One of the largest unspent line items of the central budget happens to be the funds allocated to create agriculture marketing infrastructure (Chatterjee and Krishnamurthy 2019). Yet even with all their many infirmities, empirical data show us that wherever they do exist, mandis matter for farmers. Using micro-data on mandi prices, one of us shows that a one standard deviation increase in APMC mandi density is associated with 3-5% higher mandi prices after controlling for local demand and supply conditions (Chatterjee 2020). This, of course, does not mean that creating more markets anywhere will improve prices perpetually. In Punjab, where most paddy is procured at the Minimum Support Price (MSP), creating more markets might make logistics simpler but will have no relationship with prices. However, in other states and commodities, where prices are determined by market forces, more mandis potentially facilitate greater competition and hence help price realization.

Moreover, long-term ethnographic research in states like Madhya Pradesh also demonstrates the capacity that APMC mandis have to reform over time in the interests of producers, both through the leadership and vigilance of farmers and through the actions of mandi functionaries and state administrators. In these contexts, mandis have also demonstrated their distinctive comparative advantage as multi-commodity, multi-buyer, multi-season public market places in contrast to single-buyer, single commodity, seasonal procurement centers, whether they are run by state agencies or private companies. As a result, reforms that improve the competitiveness of trade in mandis and the quality of critical

processes of exchange (improvements in weighing, auctioning systems, ease of payment) tend to be more inclusive as mandis are public sites open to all farmers rather than restricted to those registered and recognised by formal documentation for government procurement or part of particular corporate procurement networks (Krishnamurthy 2011, 2015, 2020).

In this regard and in the present moment, it is especially important not to conflate the primary role of mandis with that of public procurement. It is only in the states of Punjab and Haryana and only for the two main foodgrains, wheat and non-basmati paddy, that the APMC mandi serves as a procurement center for universal, unlimited procurement. In light of the new central laws, therefore, the conflation and interlinkage between the fate of APMC mandis and the future of MSP procurement is unique to Punjab and Haryana. But it does reveal the danger of the Centre pushing market reforms in a complex state subject and vital livelihood system without openly and explicitly sharing its larger vision for Indian agriculture and how its future plans for different, yet interrelated state interventions fit in. Given the scale and dependence of these two states on the food grain procurement regime currently in place – and their huge, mobilized networks of farmers and commission agents – the widespread protests in India's northern granaries reflect their genuine and specific anxieties.⁴ Even so, this should not dominate our understanding of the role that APMC mandis, as publicly regulated market sites for exchange between primary producers and multiple buyers (which may include the state) play in the agricultural marketing ecosystem.

It is true that the new central acts do not repeal existing state marketing acts or legislate on the functioning or taxation of existing APMC mandi yards. However, they do raise very serious concerns about the overall quality of regulatory oversight of commodity exchange in the new trade areas that have been created under these laws. This includes the minimal requirement for buyers to have nothing other than a PAN card (the Indian tax identification number) to procure from farmers, without any system of registration let alone any mechanism for addressing counter-party risk. The numerous cases of traders in states like MP absconding after having made only partial payments to farmers over the last few months have highlighted this problem. The new dispute resolution mechanism under distant, overworked and technically unskilled

⁴ We have earlier made this argument in Chatterjee and Krishnamurthy (2020) 'Farm laws: First principles and the political economy of agricultural market regulation,' as part of a Symposium on the Farm Laws on *Ideas for India* (October 2020). Two recent articles in *The India Forum* by Shreya Sinha (November 2020) and Surinder Jodhka (March 2021) focus on the changing dynamics of agriculture and the anxieties related to the farm laws in the context of Punjab.

district administrators has proved, at least presently, ill-equipped to address such scenarios, while the clause denying farmers recourse to the formal court system has understandably raised alarm bells among farmers organizations.

Traders and intermediaries, like any other businesses, try to make profits and enhance their margins, and they do fleece farmers when they can. These take the form of renegeing on promised prices, using faulty weights, making incorrect claims about quality, and delaying payments. Regulations are supposed to keep these practices in check, rather than assume that they will suddenly disappear. If APMC mandis are failing to protect farmers from malpractices they need to be reformed and held accountable. As already mentioned, there is good evidence that reforming mandis is not an unattainable dream, although it does require serious enhancement of regulatory capacity and public vigilance in the field. Instead, the new laws now allow the same traders suspected of restrictive trade practices within APMC mandis to operate freely outside the mandis without any oversight. Bihar's repeal of its APMC act in 2006 is a prime example of the fact that absence of regulatory oversight does not improve lives of farmers, if anything it made matters worse.

In this context, the fact that the setting up of systems for the registration of traders and the recording of transactions as part of a market intelligence system have been left entirely to the discretion of the central government only if and when they should find these to be necessary in the future, provides little cause for comfort or confidence. Surely, in markets that are well known for asymmetries of information and where ensuring better and more transparent price discovery is an essential function, putting the onus of ensuring such mechanisms are mandatory and should be put in place prior to implementing the acts, is not an unreasonable expectation of the government. Unfortunately, for many farmers, this state of effective deregulation is in fact, the *status quo*. But, given that the stated goal is to have well-regulated and competitive markets, the decision to effectively deregulate is a regressive direction to have chosen. It also reveals something about the status that messy, physical agricultural exchange involving poor, small farmers occupies in the imagination of our law and policymakers. It is impossible to imagine a futuristic vision for drastic deregulation of the stock exchange and financial markets being met with delight and optimism. Ironically and quite surprisingly, the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce Act 2020 has a clause that explicitly keeps the "reforms" from being applied to stock exchanges.⁵

⁵ "Nothing contained in this Act, shall be applicable to the Stock Exchanges and Clearing Corporations recognized under the Securities Contracts (Regulation) Act, 1956 and the transactions made thereunder.", Clause 16, Chapter V, The Farmers' Produce Trade and

Law and market integration: what it is does and does not do

The second major objective of the central laws is to enable market integration. The present government's motto for India's agricultural markets is One Nation, One Market, a slogan that was schematized in the flagship e-National Agricultural Market platform launched in 2016 and now enshrined in law by the very careful choice of words 'trade and commerce' and the avoidance of the term 'marketing' in the title of the most controversial of the three acts.

There are two aspects to market integration. First, facilitation of barrier-free movement of agricultural produce across state borders. Second, creating a uniform set of rules and taxes on agricultural trade across the country. In this light, it is important to ask whether the promulgation of the central acts will indeed bring out a more unified and integrated agricultural market?

Many state governments, when they were faced with shortages of certain crops and rising local prices, have been used to instituting arbitrary bans on export of those crops outside their borders. It is also true that traders were harassed at state borders when they transported agricultural produce and were asked to produce documentation that the relevant mandi tax had been paid. Both these aspects of state intervention were indeed against the idea of a unified national market. Leaving the questions of constitutional validity aside, the central act now makes such practices illegal. However, the extent to which a law is implemented on the ground, by the administration that answers to the state, remains to be seen.

More importantly, on the second issue of creating a unified set of rules and taxes, the effect seems to be virtually the opposite. By declaring all the physical territory outside existing APMC mandi yards or other notified sites under state APMC laws as 'trade areas', the central law has in effect created multiple regulatory regimes both within and across states. This is a deeply counterproductive outcome. It has already given rise to a regulatory turf war between the Centre and the states. A number of state governments have passed resolutions against the laws and at least three opposition-ruled states (Chhattisgarh, Punjab and Rajasthan) have passed their own legislations in response. Across the board it has actually led to regulatory segmentation and generated greater regulatory ambiguity and uncertainty. This is hardly the kind of regulatory environment that will attract private sector investment and incentivize expansion, especially given that corporations have to eventually manage and negotiate their procurement operations in administrative territory of states. Even more worryingly, in the aftermath of the laws and protests, we

have also seen state governments expressing their protectionist impulses to safeguard the interests and entitlements of their own farmers against those of producers from other states.

There were other, better ways to address the problem. The central government could have heeded the voices within its own leadership that had proposed the creation of an interstate council for agriculture to build consensus and achieve greater coordination and regulatory synchronization. This would have been a far more constructive approach to the challenge of market integration. Instead, we have witnessed extraordinary scenes, as a set of central laws with the stated objective of facilitating the free and unfettered inter-state trade of agricultural produce, have given rise to a situation where the State itself erected massive, physical barriers to prevent farmers—the producers—from reaching New Delhi to protest the laws and place their demands.

However, even if the laws had indeed done a more competent job of enabling market integration (rather than resulting in effective fragmentation), it is critical to remember that integration always comes with two very important caveats. First, any form of integration creates winners and losers and therefore has distributional consequences (see Chatterjee 2020 for exposition of one such force). Although we would expect that the net gains are positive for farmers, some benefit more than others. Importantly, there will be some farmers—those who are small and unproductive—who will indeed be worse off. Second, integration also makes incomes more volatile (Allen and Atkin 2016). In the absence of any functioning insurance policy or other credible risk mitigation strategies, this again has serious welfare consequences for farmers. Therefore, as we have emphasised in earlier writing, pushing for greater market integration does not only require far greater institutional capacity, public investment, regulatory innovation, and context-specific implementation. It also must be supplemented by much greater acknowledgement of and preparation for both the gains and losses from integration and their consequences for the millions of lives, livelihoods and economic and social transitions involved in the process (Chatterjee and Krishnamurthy 2020). Instead, the new central farm laws eschew all such responsibility and take recourse in one final major assumption, one that may be seen as the most far-fetched or far-reaching depending on one's perspective. This is the assumption that regulatory reform will incentivize large corporate players to enter India's agricultural markets and plough in massive private investments that will bring much greater efficiency and consolidation, while passing on the gains to farmers, thereby significantly enhancing farmers' incomes.

Agri-business, private investment and farmers' incomes

The one thing that both the supporters of the central farm laws and those protesting against the new legislations will agree on is that the new reforms place great faith in the role that the private sector and large-scale corporate capital can play in transforming Indian agricultural markets. There are actually a series of critical assumptions at work here. First, that bad, restrictive state laws and constant state intervention in markets via the imposition of stock limits have thus far prevented private players from entering local markets and buying directly from farmers and that once these impediments are removed we will see the entry of large corporates into agricultural markets. Second, that large corporate actors will make substantial, transformative investments in agricultural supply chains and systems. And third, that corporate presence will bring much needed consolidation and efficiencies, eliminating intermediaries and passing on the gains directly to farmers, thus boosting their income. Let us examine the evidence around each assumption.

The first assumption that laws and regulation prevent entry of private players into agricultural markets is inaccurate. Indian agricultural market systems are inhabited by an overwhelming number of private actors between producers and consumers: including aggregators, traders, commission agents, brokers, intermediaries, transporters, processors, wholesalers, and retailers. Their scale might be small, but they are private participants in markets nevertheless. The fact that Indian agricultural policy only recognizes them as petty, distortionary figures rather than genuine participants in complex and dynamic agro-commercial systems is a fundamental problem. This basic lack of acknowledgement, or deep-seated misrecognition of their existence and role translates into the absence of a genuine economic and political vision for the real, actually existing system of agricultural markets in India.

Even as small farmers and small firms predominate in India's agricultural markets, large corporations have had a long and varied history of participation in agricultural commodity exchange and trade across different regions and commodity systems. These companies exist in different states with varying regulatory regimes. However, large corporations enter and sustain their participation in these markets when it is profitable for them to do so. On the supply side, they focus on the costs of procurement, but more importantly it is the demand for their products that drive their commercial investments. Stable and substantial source of demand is a critical determinant for large corporates to enter, invest and make profits in agri-business.

Take the case of export markets that provides such a source of stable and substantial demand. Following the potential in international market for shrimps

that opened up due to the spread of the early mortality syndrome disease in East Asia in 2010-11, Indian processors were quickly able to capitalize. While Indian shrimp exports accounted for 6% of global exports in 2009, India is now the world leader having captured more than 20% of the global market. Shrimps are produced in many coastal states with varying forms of regulation, but trade is driven by corporate exporters. Similarly, we see a range of corporations actively participating in markets for oilseeds and raw materials for the feed industry (such as soybean and maize), both of which require investments in processing. Procurement and processing take place in states with and without functional APMC acts.

The structure of supply chains and marketing systems respond to underlying structural conditions of production and demand, while being influenced by regulatory structures. Thus, in cities with enough demand there exist supermarkets like Reliance Fresh and Big Bazaar and other scales of formal or so-called 'modern' retail existing alongside informal (although not unorganized) distribution and vending channels. Given that the top ten grocery retail stores in India have grown at an annual rate of over 70% in the 2000s (Gulati, Joshi, Landes 2008), the claim that regulations have prevented the entry of private players or large corporates might be seen as quite a stretch. In that respect, the new laws can be expected to have a limited impact on the entry of private players since they are already operating wherever they see good commercial opportunities. A very large proportion of the population, however, remains poor and low-income, and depends heavily on subsidized foodgrains from the government. They also depend on local private markets for basic food provisioning and this explains the persistence of a heavily intermediated and persistently small-scale and informal private food distribution system.

Will large corporates make transformative investments in supply chains after the new laws? Nothing in the existing regulations was preventing them from making these investments. Large corporates make investments when it is profitable for them. The presumption is that the removal of storage and stock limits will in and of themselves spur large-scale private investments in infrastructure and logistics. However, even if this were to be the case, since they own these investments – cold storages, transportation networks etc., the corporations are also likely to keep a lion's share of the profits. Further, large corporates have no incentives to create public goods like public marketplaces or market intelligence systems. For instance, Amazon's market intelligence infrastructure is for its own use and not for the use of all market participants at large. If a private platform becomes large enough that it accounts for a sizeable proportion of market transactions, serious questions about monopoly powers will then arise.

On the ground, there has been little evidence that deregulation in a small-holder farming market system drives large-scale private sector investment in infrastructure and supply chains. Bihar, which has had no state regulation in agricultural markets since 2006, is the most well-known example. It has been repeatedly documented that the marketing infrastructure in Bihar is in a dilapidated state. Our research documents that almost all transactions in Bihar are at the farmgate to local traders. Large corporate buyers are only present in very select regions when conditions of production suit their needs. For example, national and multinational corporations that process, trade and export maize for poultry feed operate in some districts to the north of the Ganga river, where farm sizes and productivity is relatively larger. Even then, these companies hardly interact directly with farmers, choosing to go through intermediaries to procure their demand. In fact, our fieldwork in Purnea district observed a proliferation rather than a reduction in local brokerage and intermediation as the demand for maize has increased over the last several years.

Another interesting contradiction is the following. Take the states of Bihar and Karnataka that produce maize for both the domestic and international market. Poultry feed mills in Bihar have a capacity of around 150-200 tonnes per day whereas those in Karnataka are 10 times as large.⁶ If APMC regulations were the binding constraints, why would corporations set up facilities in Karnataka (a state with an APMC) but not in Bihar (a state where agricultural markets are as laissez-faire as it gets)?

In another site, we observed that while newer export markets bring regional agro-commercial investments and spur production, they also increase income volatility for farmers and bring agro-ecological risks. In Balasore district in Odisha, where many farmers have shifted over the years to a paddy-prawn production system where such cultivation is feasible, we saw private enterprises that had world class prawn processing facilities. Here, refrigerated trucks plied the roads to pick-up prawns from farmers villages. While this may have increased incomes of prawn farmers in some seasons, these changes were not transformative from the point of view of farmers. In fact, the volatility of prawn cultivation would often throw many of them into debt. Farmers were also dealing with the problems of saline ingress in their fields.

The reality as it currently stands in India is one where the share of public investment in total investment in agriculture has steadily declined, from a high of 33 percent in the 1960s to 15 percent for the period from 2010-2017. But corporate investment has not risen to meet the need. Corporate investment in

⁶ Singh, S. and Damodaran, D. (2015, June 4). Bihar: An unlikely corn revolution. *The Indian Express* <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/bihar-an-unlikely-corn-revolution/>

agriculture only accounts for 3 percent of the total. It is private investment—predominantly by farming households themselves—that contributes by far the major share of investment in agriculture and allied activities at 82 percent.⁷ The idea that this scenario is sustained by the regulatory stranglehold of the state rather than the structural conditions of production, marketing, distribution and consumption, and most crucially, the political and economic priorities of central and state governments, is deeply unconvincing.

Finally, how should one approach the relationship between large agri-business and farmer incomes? The extent to which farmers' incomes are likely to go up due to investments and procurement by agri-businesses will depend upon the extent to which agri-businesses are willing to share their profits. There is neither a theoretical nor an empirical reason to believe that they would.

Farmers, especially small and marginal farmers in developing countries, are limited in their ability to change supply in response to prices, at least in the short run. In economic parlance, their supply curve is very inelastic. This is because post-harvest, due to poverty, need for cash, and lack of storage they are forced to sell at whatever prices are offered to them. Even in the longer term, the best they can do is switch crops conditional on the agro-ecology, but the options are limited. When supply is inelastic, even a small reduction in demand by agri-business, as they exert market power, can reduce farmer prices significantly and reduce their share in the profit.

Do we have evidence of this? Indeed, with consolidation that gives rise to scale economies in the first place, comes market power. From international experience, the news for farmers is not pleasant. In the United States, which is the epitome of laissez-faire, meat, grain, seed, and pesticide markets are dominated by four large firms. One firm controls equipment manufacturing. This has obviously led to large increases in surplus but that has not been shared with farmers. It is estimated that 75% of contract farmers live below the poverty line⁸ and most of them operate in losses (Taylor and Domina 2010). Farmer suicides as a result of farm distress and debt are on the rise in the US, EU, and Australia.

Big agri-business exerts its market power through 'industry-transforming supply chain restructuring.' The US Department of Justice is currently investigating many cases of price-fixing, bid rigging, and monopsony practices

⁷ Batla, S. and Hussain, S (2021, 5 February). 'Getting the Investment-Subsidy Mix Right in Indian Agriculture', *The Wire*. <https://thewire.in/agriculture/getting-the-investment-subsidy-mix-right-in-indian-agriculture>

⁸ Lowrie, A. (2019, November 11). The Human Cost of Chicken Farming. *The Atlantic*.

by 'Big Ag.'⁹ Experiences in other developing countries where deregulation has fostered growth of agri-businesses has been similar. Entry of agri-business in Kenya has reduced farmer incomes (Dhingra and Tenreyro 2021). In the absence of a strong and high-capacity competition commission, and with the new laws limiting farmers from approaching courts, the Indian case is rather worrisome.

The assumption that intermediaries are a nuisance is faulty. In supply chains and agricultural market systems, they perform many valuable functions like providing credible quality assaying, reducing counter party risk, and provision of credit that both the state and the large corporate sector has failed to provide. Given their regional expertise they are often hired by large corporates. Thus, ad-hoc moves to replace them usually prove counter-productive. For example, when intermediaries were removed through legislation in Bangladesh, the entire edible oils supply chains collapsed, hurting farmers, processors and consumers (Emran et. al. 2020).

Conclusions and the way forward

Our basic argument is that there are no low hanging fruits when it comes to transforming Indian agriculture. While better regulations can improve the existing situation, it is vital not to get carried away in overstating the role of regulatory reform in achieving transformative changes in agriculture, especially when it comes to sustainably enhancing farmers' incomes. Moreover, it is a grave mistake to confuse effective deregulation (which is what the new central farm laws promote) with better regulation that earnest reforms would have sought.

For farmers to benefit from alternative channels, the presence of strong domestic markets and a dynamic and well-regulated marketing ecosystem is vital. This is because alternative procurement platforms, while competing with pre-existing market sites like mandis, at the same time, peg their transactions to local wholesale prices, infrastructure and processes. It is for this reason that multi-buyer physical spot markets, especially those where auctions are conducted for farmers' produce, are particularly important for price setting and discovery. Just as the MSP can only be guaranteed where the state enters the physical market to assure purchase at a minimum price, it is the presence of

⁹ Hafiz, H. and Miller, N. (2021, February 18). Competitive Edge: Big Ag's monopsony problem: How market dominance harms U.S. workers and consumers. *Washington Center for Equitable Growth*.

<https://equitablegrowth.org/competitive-edge-big-ag-monopsony-problem-how-market-dominance-harms-u-s-workers-and-consumers/>

genuine, viable options that make alternative procurement channels valuable to farmers. The answer therefore lies not in binary formulations that are pro- or anti-APMC, but in supporting the creation of multiple options for farmers that respond to the existing constraints that farmers face in specific contexts.

Similarly, new, organized and technologically driven procurement and marketing systems will only work as actual options for producers if they manage to address the real constraints that farmers face on the ground, especially access to credit, inputs, storage, transport, and timely payments. Most of these constraints originate in the relations of land ownership and access, and the limits and exclusions they impose on smallholding farmers and landless cultivators. Simply put, farmers will not be in a position to exercise any previously existing or newly granted regulatory freedom in the market if they cannot overcome these constraints. Equally, while increasing competition among intermediaries is desirable, their elimination is a misguided — and indeed dangerous — objective if one does not respect or replace the roles and risks that they cover.

It is also vital to remember that given the structure and condition of the Indian economy, we cannot afford to only see agriculture as a sector stuck in a low-level equilibrium (as true as that may be in economic terms). We must also acknowledge and engage with it as a vast, diverse and pulsating livelihood system. Agriculture and associated activities like wholesale and retail trade, brokerage and intermediation, transportation and logistics, support millions of livelihoods. All the individuals, families and firms associated with these jobs are not there to make huge profits because they are protected by restrictive state regulation. Working within the structures, opportunities and constraints of both the agrarian and non-agrarian economy, they are there primarily to do the best they can to make ends meet.

These individuals and institutions do a very good job of ensuring efficiency — the swift matching of supply and demand across the Indian economy. The response of these systems in the face of unprecedented disruptions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown was only the most recent instance of the complex and usually invisible interconnections that keep the essential food and agricultural economy going at all times. They also stand in for many public goods that the government ought to provide — accessible credit, quality assaying, basic market infrastructure, information dissemination. And yes, they charge a fee, but not for nothing.

Of course, there is much scope for improvement. Agriculture and agricultural markets certainly need both more investment and better regulation. While significant investments will need to be made by the private sector, others, especially those related to public goods and infrastructure that would benefit

farmers will have to be made by the government. This is not restricted to infrastructure. The poor state of our agricultural universities, for instance, makes us reliant on foreign firms for better technology and leaves our farmers bereft of much needed public extension services. In any case, as we have argued in this article, the impediment to investment – public or private – is not regulation. Moreover, even well-regulated agricultural markets cannot necessarily guarantee remunerative agricultural incomes or agro-ecological sustainability. Farmers will require multiple kinds of support from the state as they face both an intensification and expansion of risks.

What if our policy reformers have a different world in mind? One where more people have better and well-paying jobs such that fewer people rely on agriculture and where farmers have larger landholdings and modernized and consolidated production, marketing, processing and distribution systems maximise and sustain their incomes. The means to that end is also not deregulation. For deregulation, across the world, has consolidated market power in the hands of a few and has not provided the escape to prosperity to those who ensure food on our plates. Across the world, arbitrary and forceful removal of intermediation has led to painful outcomes for everyone. The means to that end is also not pushing farmers into unemployment.

Given the diversity, complexity and scale of the challenge, the approach to agricultural reform needs to be both much more comprehensive and much more contextual. It must be led by the states even as we urgently require better institutional arrangements for both Centre-state and inter-state coordination and consensus building. It will need new frameworks for public investment and regulation, and these must begin by focusing on the multiplier effects that well-directed public investments can generate both on and off the farm. In doing so, it must also recognize the limits to how much surplus agriculture can generate, who gains from surplus and is able to accumulate, and the need for supporting a variety of transition pathways for diversification within Indian agriculture and the Indian economy.

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India's Agricultural Market Acts of 2020: Implications for (small) farmers with special reference to Punjab

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Abstract

Agricultural markets are key to ensuring higher farmer incomes, but in India, agricultural market reforms have been stuck for almost two decades as agriculture is a state subject. The Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmer Welfare (MoAFW) framed two new Acts on agricultural produce wholesale markets and contract farming (besides amending the Essential Commodities Act, 1955) in 2020 to allow and encourage new market channels in terms of buying from or working directly with farmers. These were parallel to state governments changing their APMC Acts, following the Model APMC Acts suggested by the Union MoAFW. This paper assesses the rationale and benefits of the 2020 Acts, and their implications for farmers and other stakeholders. It also examines the major provisions of the new Acts, i.e. APMC *mandi* bypass Act, 2020, which creates a new trade area outside the purview of the APMCs, and the Contract Farming Act, 2020, besides the amendments to these Union Acts by the state government of Punjab (2020), as informed by research studies on various marketing channels used by farmers and their experience of the same. The paper highlights some major lacunae of the 2020 Acts, in the context of Punjab agriculture, and examines the utility of the Punjab's amendments to the Central Acts. The paper highlights the need for legal provisions to protect smallholder interests and leverage new channels for their development.

Keywords: agricultural markets, reform, Punjab, small farmers, contract farming

1. Introduction

The new Union Acts on agricultural markets (constitutionally a state domain) intend to achieve a unified national market, and provide choice to farmers when selling their produce, with better price discovery, as well as attracting private investment in agricultural markets. However, the Acts have attracted serious opposition from farmer unions and many political parties despite the government claiming and highlighting various benefits of the new Acts. Six state governments have passed resolutions against these Acts in their legislatures and three states have also attempted to amend the Union Acts at their levels to enhance protection of the interests of farmers and other stakeholders. In this context, it is crucial to discuss major aspects of the two new Acts: the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) *mandi* bypass

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Act -- a more popular name for the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce Act, and the Contract Farming (hereafter CF) Act in terms of regulation and promotion of agricultural produce markets.

Section 2 examines the major provisions of the APMC mandi bypass Act, and related perceptions about the future of APMC mandis, and the Minimum Support Price (MSP) and procurement mechanism of the Union government from the perspective of small farmers. It also examines implications for Punjab farmers and other stakeholders in the state besides assessing the usefulness of Punjab's amendment to the central Act. Section 3 examines the CF Act in the light of the experience of CF practice in India so far, with special reference to Punjab and the relevance of Punjab's amendments to the CF Act. The final section concludes the article with some ways forward for making regulation of the new channels more effective and specific, in the light of the problems of the APMC mandi system and the practice of contract farming, in order to leverage the new channels for more inclusive and sustainable agricultural development.

2.The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce Act, 2020: Issues and implications

The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act 2020 intends to promote efficient, transparent and barrier free inter-state and intra-state trade of farm produce outside the physical premises of APMC markets (or deemed markets notified under various state agricultural produce marketing legislations). It also aims to provide a facilitative framework for electronic trading and achieve national integration of India's agricultural markets. Previously, under the state APMC Acts, there was a notified market area from which all produce was to be transacted within the designated APMC yards and sub-yards, or else buyers had to seek permission under the amended APMC Acts as per the model APMC Act 2003 and Model Agricultural Produce and Livestock Markets (Promotion and Facilitation) ((APLM(PF)) Act, 2017. This permission had to come from the local APMC, for buying outside the mandi or undertaking contract farming. However, the produce could still be subject to the same or similar taxes and levies as the produce transacted inside the market yard.

It is important to note that the rationale for the 2020 reforms is based on the assumption that the majority or most of the farm produce goes through APMC mandis, and that these mandis had not been discovering prices efficiently and not letting other channels like direct purchase, private wholesale markets and CF flourish as there is a conflict of interest involved.. But, the reality is that only 17%-25% produce goes through them. This is also due to the fact that there are

far fewer mandis than needed (only 7,000 against 42,000 needed), and as per the recommendation of the National Commission for Farmers, a mandi should be available to a farmer within a radius of 5 kms. (Narayanan, 2020; Shah, 2021). Further, in major agricultural states, APMCs are multi-stakeholder elected bodies. Only Punjab has not had an election to APMCs in the last 40 years.

The new Act creates a new 'trade area' outside the APMC market yards, where any buyer with a Permanent Account Number (PAN, an income tax ID in India) can buy directly from farmer sellers and the state government cannot impose any taxes on such a transaction. Hence, the new central Act would lead to the creation of two parallel markets in each mandi town instead of a single market. Also, the recent action (September, 2020) by the Haryana government to stop neighbouring Uttar Pradesh farmers from selling paddy at MSP in Haryana shows that inter-state barriers are not so easy to remove by central regulation, unless states are on board for such opening up of markets. Similarly, Food Corporation of India (FCI) buying from APMC mandis in Punjab through the *Arthiyas* (commission agents), even after the coming into effect of new Act, gives a message contrary to the spirit of the Act (Singh, 2020).

More significantly, the Act includes trader-to-trader transactions within a state or across states under the definition of farmer produce. How can this be justified, as once the primary transaction is completed, it stops being farmer produce as farmer is no longer involved in this transaction? This is similar to the Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) asking for exemption from income tax on their income, arguing that since they deal with their member farmers' produce who are exempted from paying income tax, FPOs should also be exempted from income tax (Singh, 2020).

More importantly, the 'new trade area' has no provision for counterparty risk coverage, unlike the APMC system where all buyers and facilitators are licensed by the APMC and have to pay licensee fees and bank guarantees, so that farmer risk against any payment default could be secured.

Further, some of the provisions, such as payment to farmer by trader on the same day, or within a maximum of three days if procedurally so required, are worse than what already exists under the APMC Act in some states. For example, in Madhya Pradesh, payment for the produce bought in the market yard has to be paid on the same day to the seller, right at the market yard (MPSAMB, 2005).

The hope that this kind of opening up of markets will bring new investments in agriculture may also be misplaced, if one goes by the experience of states like Kerala which never had an APMC Act; or Bihar, which repealed the APMC Act

in 2006 (Singh, 2015; Bera, 2021); or Maharashtra, which delisted fruits and vegetables from APMC in 2018. It is important to note that laws cannot substitute for policy. Therefore, a policy has to be in place to develop the agricultural sector as a whole. New investment would need incentives, and not just ease of doing business (Singh, 2020a).

2.1 Why farmer and *Arthiya* protests and would APMCs disappear?

It is important to note that the Minimum Support Price (MSP) based public procurement regime has been very unfair to some farmers and some states, and mostly benefits a few crops like wheat, paddy and cotton in Punjab, Haryana, MP, Telangana, Chhattisgarh, UP and Odisha. This represents not even 10% of India's farming households: because most of them are double counted in typical data, as they grow both wheat and paddy. However, it is true that the list of MSP based procurement states has expanded, due to decentralized procurement of farm produce, now encompassing 15 states (Gupta et al, 2020). But, most of the small and marginal farmers in these and many other states are still left out of the public procurement net.

There is a (mis)perceived linkage between the new APMC mandi bypass Act, and the Minimum Support Price (MSP) based public procurement system, namely, the belief that MSP-based procurement by the government would not continue once this Act comes into force. It is important to recognise that the MSP and procurement system are policy issues and not legal ones, unlike the APMC mandi bypass Act. The fear being expressed by farmers and their unions about MSP and public procurement arises from the fact that the playing field between the new trade area and APMC market buyers would be unequal, since there would not be any taxes in the new trade area, whereas there are significant buying costs in APMC-mandi based purchases, going as high as 8.5% in Punjab, including 2.5% commission for the commission agents (CAs or *Arthiyas*). Therefore, due to the lower buying cost, traders and agents might move out of the APMC market yards and start buying in the new trade (non-APMC) area. The union government agencies like Food Corporation of India (FCI) and the Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) could also proactively shift (as is being planned according to media reports) to the new trade area to buy directly from farmers. This would still give access to MSP for farmers but the CAs could suffer, as they would not be able to charge commissions which increase with every hike in MSP (Singh, 2020). In fact, after the new Acts, for the first time, CCI bought cotton in Punjab directly from farmers in APMC mandis without paying commission to the *Arthiyas*. If the APMC mandi declines as a channel due to this new Act, then what would be the source of reference price for private buyers in the new trade area? Also, what happens to the argument then that the central Act is more about giving choice of channels to farmers as these would

be only private market channel without any mechanism to discover prices competitively unlike with an auction system in the APMC mandi?

That existing APMCs mandis would face a crisis after the new Act comes into force is clear from the already available reports, which suggest that trade is moving outside the APMCs, and state governments are now lowering the market fees and other cesses to retain some competitive position, as illustrated by the case of Madhya Pradesh (Arora, 2020; Siddique, 2020; Kakvi, 2020; Dwary, 2021).

Farmers' and other stakeholders' apprehension about MSP and procurement going away also comes from the 2020 Acts being linked to some previous policy documents, such as the Shanta Kumar Committee Report of 2015 and the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACAP) reports, which suggested reduced procurement and an end to open-ended procurement from states like Punjab to cut down buying costs of FCI. It is feared that FCI itself may start procuring directly from the new trade area to cut down its buying costs, especially market fees and *arthiya* commissions. In effect, it is the changes in the 'social contract' between the state's farmers and the Union government which is the root cause of this apprehension.

For CAs, the more problematic aspect of the new Acts is that, currently, they typically interlock handling of the farm produce with cash and kind credit to farmers for various purposes, and recover their loans from such sales proceeds of farmers in the APMC market (Singh, 2021; Shah, 2021). In fact, in Punjab, the payments for farmer produce are made to the *Arthiyas*, not the farmers, even by FCI and CCI, and this has been an issue for at least two decades. The state government has not allowed the central agencies to pay directly to farmers for various political economy reasons, including the power of the *Arthiya* lobby, as well as many of the CAs being also large farmers who hold power in the state government and its agencies. The state government is also opposing a recent (March 2021) central directive of the FCI to its food and civil supplies department to pay directly to farmers in their bank accounts citing the practice of large scale (informal) leased land based cultivation of crops which cannot be identified with land records of sellers as they are not owners and also the reasoning that farmers can't do without the credit from the *Arthiyas*.. The CAs are also now being described as a 'necessary evil,' essential to the APMC mandi system, or as service providers (Sinha, 2020). Of course, the *Arthiyas* may get into a new role of being facilitators or agents of corporates in the new trade area. But, they would not be able to interlock the credit and produce or input markets as in an APMC mandi and would have to be satisfied with lower commissions. However, it may still not mean that the buyers in the new trade area would pass on even a part of the lower buying cost to the selling farmers in the form of

higher produce purchase prices (Singh, 2020c). Nevertheless, it can be argued that the disintermediation in farm produce markets, which means removing the *Arthiyas*, has been long overdue: indeed, Madhya Pradesh made that move as long ago as 1985.

2.2 Punjab's half-hearted APMC Mandi Act amendments of 2020 and of 2017

Punjab tried to undo the central reform of agricultural markets with the amendment bills, but ended up mainly focusing on paddy and wheat prices by making MSP the minimum purchase price for any buyer in any channel, penalizing any violation of that restriction. In doing so, the state government was clearly seeking to protect its own revenue, along with other objectives. However, farmers producing other crops, such as cotton or oilseeds, or even maize, for which there is an MSP based procurement provision from the Union government, do not receive protection under this bill (GoP, 2020). This is despite the fact that cotton and maize have been selling at below MSP in the state during the current season (2020-21). It is unfortunate that the thinking of the state government did not go beyond wheat and paddy. The MSP is declared for 23 crops, but none of the other crops' farmers, or those trying to diversify under CF would have the MSP protection of the new bills.

On the issue of enforcement of MSP for all buyers, Punjab's APMC Mandi Bypass Act amendment bill makes buying below MSP an offence which shall be punishable with a term of imprisonment of not less than three years and a fine. But why would a buyer compel or exert pressure on seller farmers and how would that be established? It is more likely that a farmer would be more than willing to sell below MSP, as once the farmer brings produce to the market, it is difficult to take it back -- it would be like taking a dead body back from the cremation ground (Singh, 2020b).

Even earlier, while amending the APMC Act in 2017, and framing rules for it in 2020, Punjab provided for special market yards, private market yards, producer market yards (*Kisan Mandi*) and producer consumer market yards (PCMY). With regard to the setting up of private wholesale market yards, which gave for the first time a choice of a public and a private mandi for the farmer seller, the Act stated '... Provided that the above yard can be established only for the business relating to fruits, vegetables, livestock and its products, woods, flowers and cannot be established within a radius of five kms. from the existing notified principal or sub-market yards' (p.4). This restriction applies to the other two markets i.e. PCMY and Kisan Mandi as well (p.5). This provision shows that Punjab had protected its *arthiyas* and traders (kuccha and pucca *arthiyas* respectively) in the existing APMC mandis, as most of them deal in foodgrains

(wheat and paddy) and cotton which are crops mostly bought by public agencies i.e. FCI and CCI. By excluding these crops from the new market arrangements, the *Arthiya* vested interest was largely left untouched by the amended Punjab Act of 2017 (Singh, 2020c).

So far as direct payment to farmer seller-a long pending and serious issue in Punjab, is concerned the Act states: 'The *Kacha arhtia* (commission agent) or the buyer, as the case may be, shall make payment to the seller through electronic transfer after the weighment is over. If payment is not made by the *Kacha Arhtia* or buyer, as the case may be, in the manner, as stated above, then the same shall be recovered by the market committee concerned from him as an arrears of land revenue and the first lien shall be of seller's right and it shall be made to the seller concerned'. 'Provided further that that the seller shall be at liberty to receive payment up to rupees ten thousand in cash in a calendar month for the agricultural produce sold by him during that month. ... Delivery of agricultural produce after sale shall not be made or taken unless and until the *Kacha Arhtia* or, if the seller does not employ a *Kacha Arhtia*, the buyer has given to the seller a sale voucher in Form J mentioning the payment mode and its authentication, the counterfoil of which shall be retained by the *Kacha Arhtia* or the buyer, as the case may be (p.20-21; Singh, 2020c). This is more about retaining payment to farmers through the *Arthiya* despite the issue being alive for more than 10 years now.

3. The CF Act, 2020, and its limitations

It is important to recognise that CF has been practiced in India since the 1960s in the seed sector, and in other farm produce in many states, including Punjab and Haryana, since the 1990s, with PepsiCo undertaking tomato and potato CF. There is a widespread practice of CF across crops, states and agencies (public, private and multinational) in India, covering dozens of crops and livestock products with hundreds of CF projects or schemes, for domestic processing or for export, and there have been dozens of studies over the last 20 years on its performance and experience. CF has been permitted in most states as per the model APMC Act 2003 of the MoAFW wherein three new channels of farm produce buying and selling i.e. direct purchase, CF and private wholesale markets, were made legal. Most states adopted this within a few years, with one or two exceptions, and later, under the model Agricultural Produce and Livestock Marketing (Promotion and Facilitation) (APLM(P&F)) Act, 2017 as well as the separate model Agricultural Produce and Livestock Contract Farming and Services (Promotion and Facilitation), (APLCF&S (P&F)) Act, 2018. Punjab was the only state which, in 2013, framed a separate Act on CF

instead of providing for it under the APMC Act, which it had not amended adequately until in 2017. However, this separate CF Act (which was technically not needed) was never operationalized.

CF is a system for the production and supply of agricultural and horticultural produce by farmers/primary producers under advance contracts, the essence of such arrangements being a commitment to provide an agricultural commodity of a type (quality/variety), at a specified time, price, and in specified quantity to a known buyer. It basically involves five things -- pre-agreed price, quality, quantity or acreage (minimum/maximum), place of delivery and time of delivery/supply (Singh, 2002). For buyers, CF is the only other option in India outside of buying from APMCs or private wholesale markets, and direct purchase as a corporate farming option is simply not available in India due to the Ceilings on Land Holdings Act, under which non-agriculturists cannot own agricultural land, and the Land Leasing Act, under which they cannot even lease in agricultural land, both Acts having been passed at the state level. Hence, if a company wants to procure desired quality raw material or farm produce in adequate quantity at reasonable cost, which may not be available in the open market or not even grown by farmers, e.g., processing variety (chips grade) potatoes in India before Pepsi came in, then CF is the only option in India, and this is what Pepsi used. For farmers, CF can potentially bring not only assured market and price to farmers but also new technology, seeds, extension services, and such other non-price benefits (Singh, 2020).

But, contract farmers in various parts of India have faced many problems like undue reductions in quality assessment on produce by firms, or no procurement of produce, delayed deliveries at the factory, delayed payments, low price, poor quality inputs, no compensation for crop failure or unexpectedly high cost of production, and even stagnation of contract prices over time, known as 'agribusiness normalization.' Default by both sides (companies and farmers) has been an issue (Singh, 2020) and exclusion of small producers remains a major issue as well (Singh, 2012). That CF has been problematic globally is underscored by the recent FAO initiative on promoting responsible CF (FAO and IISD, 2018).

But, the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020 (the CF Act, 2020) uses the term 'farming agreement,' which itself is unusual, as it is being confused with other arrangements, like sharecropping or leasing agreements. CF is about contract first, with farming being part of it, not just farming. The biggest perception problem is that it is being confused with corporate farming (corporates doing their own farming on leased or owned land) due to the way CF is defined in the Act. The Act clearly says that the contracting agency cannot lay any claims on

a farmer's land and cannot even lease, mortgage or sell it. The model APMC Act 2003 had also protected farmer land clearly. Also, corporate farming is not possible as land leasing and land ceilings Acts at the state level are intact, though they may not remain so for long, going by what Karnataka, Rajasthan and Punjab have on their agenda in terms of opening up of land markets. However, since the model ALPCF&S (P&F) Act, 2018, land leasing has been made part of the CF definition, which is not accurate, as CF can never include land leasing.

The 2020 Act protects farmers' land when it states in Section 14: "No farming agreement shall be entered into for the purpose of (a) any transfer, including sale, lease or mortgage of the land or premises of the farmer; or (b) raising any permanent structure or making any modification on the land or premises of the farmer, unless Sponsor agrees to remove such structure or to restore the land to its original condition, at his cost, on the conclusion of the agreement or expiry of the agreement period, as the case may be". But, there is a problem in these provisions as some other provisions in the Act are contradictory. For example, the dispute resolution section states: "The amount payable under any order passed by the Sub-Divisional Authority or the Appellant Authority, as the case may be, may be recovered as arrears of land revenue." However, then again, it states in the next section (15), "Notwithstanding anything contained in section 14, no action for recovery of any amount in pursuance of an order passed under this section, shall be initiated against the agricultural land of the farmer." (MoAFW, 2020a). But, this still means it can be recovered from other assets and properties of the farmer. The confusion between contract farming and corporate farming created by the Act is so significant that the Rajasthan Amendment Bill, 2020 assumes that leasing is a part of CF. (Singh, 2021a). This provision of the amendment Bill is an outright misunderstanding of CF Act 2020, as a sponsor never cultivates a farmer's field under a CF arrangement, in which the farmer as a producer is central to the very concept of CF.

Poor design, mandi linkage and objective

The very basic aspects of CF, such as acreage, quantity, and time of delivery, are not specified in the Act. This should have been a requirement for any law regulating CF, as these are mandatory aspects of such an arrangement, whether with supply of inputs or otherwise. The government claims that a farmer can withdraw from a contract arrangement anytime without incurring any penalties. This is again not true and cannot be a part of the arrangement if CF is to succeed. The Act also leaves out many sophisticated aspects of modern CF practice, including contract cancellation clauses, delayed deliveries or purchases and damages therein, and 'tournaments' in CF where farmers are made to compete

with each other and paid according to relative performance – a feature which is banned in many countries (Singh, 2020).

It is unfortunate that the Act links bonus or premium prices under contract arrangements over and above the guaranteed or pre-agreed price with APMC mandi prices or electronic market prices forcing this to be part of the contract agreement. This is anti-CF in essence. The price, like many other basic aspects of contract, should be left to the parties to negotiate and cannot be tied to any other channel, especially the APMC price, as the very rationale for bringing this law was to provide alternative channels to farmers and create competition for APMC markets which were ostensibly not discovering prices efficiently.

Another concern is that the Act is more about facilitation and promotion of the CF mechanism, rather than its regulation. That the Act aggressively seeks to facilitate CF is clear from the fact that it mentions that the essential commodities stock limits Act (ECA) would not apply to contract farmed produce. Why should this provision of another Act be specifically mentioned in another law which has nothing to do with this law directly or indirectly? (Singh, 2020). The CF Act guidelines even give a role to a sharecropper as third party in the contract agreement, which is surprising. Furthermore, they state that the contract agreement should meet the requirements of the Indian Contracts Act, while simultaneously keeping contract disputes outside the purview of the civil courts.

3.1 CF in Punjab and its CF Act, 2013

In Punjab, only 30% of the agricultural landholdings are small or marginal, and they account for just 8% of the operated area. Small farmers in the state have been moving out of agriculture due to the phenomenon of “reverse tenancy,” i.e., they have been leasing out their lands to bigger operators -- medium or large holders who have the resources and linkages for modern farming or agribusiness. Importantly, Punjab is the only state in India where the size of operational holdings is increasing. The all-India trend is a declining average size in operational holdings (Singh, 2011).

Though the average size of contract growers' holdings compared with that of the state as a whole is not an exact indicator of exclusion of small growers, micro studies point to their exclusion. Contract growers for Frito-Lay (Pepsi) in Punjab had average operational holdings of 63 acres, with only 22 acres owned and the rest leased. None of the sample contract growers with Frito-Lay had less than 10 acres of operated land, in spite of the fact that the average size of holdings in the state was 9 acres and 70% of holdings were below 10 acres each (Singh, 2008). Another study of CF in Punjab showed that the average size of the operational holding of contract growers was more than one-and-a-half times that of the non-contract growers. It found ‘no marginal farmer (in the size group

of below one hectare) [...] operating under CF. A handful of small farmers (in the size group of one to two hectares) were operating' (Kumar, 2006; p. 5369).

In fact, one of the parastatal agencies in Punjab (Punjab State Co-operative Marketing Federation (Markfed)) placed advertisements in local newspapers many years ago publicizing its basmati rice CF program where it asked potential contract growers to contact its district managers if they were willing to grow at least three acres of basmati rice under CF with Markfed. The questions which arise from this kind of offer are: how many small or marginal farmers can spare three acres for basmati, how many can spare it for CF, and how many would like to spare it for CF with Markfed? A more recent study of CF arrangements of two firms for contract production of chicory and sugar beet from farmers in Punjab found that both mostly excluded marginal and small farmers from their operations. Only one firm had 6% of its contract farmers who were small, despite the fact that 28-32% of the farmers in their operating areas were marginal or small. Operated land holdings of contract farmers in both cases were double those of their non-contract counterparts, and even owned holdings were larger (Kaur and Singla, 2018). This bias in favour of large/medium farmers has been perpetuating the practice of reverse tenancy in regions like Punjab where these farmers lease in land from marginal and small farmers for contract production (Singh, 2002; Singh, 2009).

Punjab had created problems in 2013, when it framed a separate Act on CF, instead of providing for it under the APMC Act, which it had not amended until 2017. Many other states amended their APMC Acts to provide for CF. The major reason for Punjab going for a separate Act on CF can be found in the political economy of the state's agribusiness sector, wherein farming and trading interests have been at loggerheads in protecting their interests until recently. There has been a constant battle between the two lobbies on direct payments by buying agencies to farmers for their produce, and the issue has been unresolved for the last decade. Whereas the farmer lobby wanted direct payments, the *Arthiya* lobby opposed it vehemently. Direct payments hit the business of interlocking of credit, input and output markets run by *Arthiyas* in which a *parchi* (slip) system prevails for lending in kind to farmers and recovery of payments at the time of sale of produce.

Direct purchases (when permitted with the APMC Act amendment) would have reduced volumes in APMC mandis and, therefore, *Arthiyas'* and traders' hold on farmer produce. Furthermore, private wholesale markets (again under the APMC Act amendment) would have created competition for *Arthiyas*/traders operating from APMC mandis and for the Mandi Board itself. This was perhaps the reason that instead of amending the APMC Act, which would have involved allowing direct purchases and setting up of private wholesale markets, besides

permitting CF and, therefore, adversely affecting the *Arthiyas* and the Mandi Board, the separate CF Act route was taken.

In the Punjab Act, only temporary structures on a farmer's land for the duration of the contract could be put up by the buyer, and if these were not removed immediately after the expiry of the contract, these were to become the property of the producer. No recoveries of any dues or penalties could be made from the producer by way of sale or mortgage of his/her contracted land. This provision was in line with the model APMC Act, and removed fears about contracting companies staking claims on contract growers' land.

The district collector was to be responsible for CF dispute resolution and give a decision within 30 days, and no civil court could consider such cases. Decisions of the collector were to be like a decree of the court. A contracting party could appeal after payment of 50% of dues of the disputed amount. Buyers and farmers were to be subject to prison terms and fines for violations of the Act, or failures to correct violations after conviction.

It is interesting to note that the provisions of the Punjab Act were very different from the provisions for CF in the APMC Acts of other states. For example, the Gujarat and Haryana amended APMC Acts had bank guarantees from buyers/contracting agencies (5% and 15% of the value of the contracted produce respectively in the two states) to protect farmer interests in case of reneging by the company/buyer. The Haryana Act even prescribed that, wherever applicable, the contract price would not be less than the MSP of the crop.

There were many missing elements as well as some anomalies in the Punjab Act. For example, notified crops in the Act also included gur, shakkar and khandsari, which are generally not contract produced, as they are value-added products from sugarcane. It seemed the list of crops had been obtained from the state agricultural marketing board which it had notified under the APMC Act. But, all crops/produce on this list would not be amenable to being produced under CF (Singh, 2013b).

3.2 Punjab amendments to the CF Act, 2020

Punjab's CF Act Amendment Bill, 2020 bars any contract agreement for wheat or paddy below the MSP announced by the Central government for that crop. It states: 'No sale or purchase of wheat or paddy shall be valid unless the price paid for such agricultural produce under a farming agreement is equal to, or greater than, the Minimum Support Price announced by the Central Government for that crop' (GoP, 2020a).

However, one would not expect any agency to undertake CF in these two crops in Punjab, or anywhere in India, unless it were basmati paddy or durum wheat. Punjab has some basmati CF but that may not be included under paddy (common rice), and the state does not grow any durum wheat. As discussed earlier, MSP is declared for 23 crops, but other crop farmers, or those trying to diversify under CF would not have the MSP protection of the Bills. In any case, this is a bad conception per se, as contract price should not be tied to any other price, especially state declared prices, but should be negotiated by the two parties. Furthermore, contracting is also about benefits other than price, such as yield, cost or quality of crop. Haryana had made MSP as the minimum contract price for contracting agencies in 2005 under its APMC Act but it was for all crops where MSP was applicable. Punjab should have learned from its neighbor (Singh, 2020b).

Similar to the Mandi Bypass Act amendment, the CF Act Amendment Bill makes a contract price below MSP or forcing a farmer for it an offence which shall be punishable with imprisonment for not less than three years and a fine. Again, the same criticism noted earlier applies. In both the amended Acts, the Punjab state government has created its right to levy cesses on notified or contract farmed agricultural produce bought, brought or sold by a corporate or trader and/or on the electronic platform, as the case may be, for trade and commerce in a trade area and this cess collection would go into a fund to run the market committee and for the welfare of farmers or other purposes related to welfare and promotion of agriculture or agriculturists and development of market infrastructure (Singh, 2020b). Essentially, this extends the APMC tax regime to all other transactions.

By contrast to Rajasthan's amendments, where the state government proposed to enforce stock limits in respect of any agricultural produce under contract agreement when there was a shortage of such produce in the state or the prices of such produce went beyond 25% of the maximum price prevailing in the market within two years before the passing of the order by the state government, Punjab has not provided for this in its amendments to the Central Act. The Rajasthan amendment also brings back CF dispute resolution to the APMC.

In sum, with its amendment bills, Punjab has asserted its federal rights under the constitution, ostensibly to protect farmer interests -- though not as comprehensively as Rajasthan. However, the amendments suffer from the lacunae and problematic provisions discussed in this section and the last. The result is likely to be ineffective protection of farmer interests, even if they withstand legal scrutiny by the courts. One might state even more strongly that Punjab's bills are bereft of any tangible benefits to the state's farmers, and do

not do any service to the sustainability of its farm sector and farmers (Singh, 2020b).

4. Conclusions and Way Forward

There is no doubt that the two Union Acts are poorly designed as regulatory mechanisms. The aspects of farmer empowerment and protection mentioned in the title of the CF Act have been neglected in its contents. The APMC Bypass Act also has promotion and facilitation in its title, not regulation (MoAFW, 2020). Finally, the proof of any law is in its implementation, but as far as farmer interest protection is concerned, these Acts leave much to be desired in their basic design.

APMC markets need to be strengthened, as whatever new channels may become available for small and marginal farmers, the APMC markets -- public or private -- will remain the last resort for those farmers. On the other hand, they will be not be attractive to private players, who generally look for large volumes or high-quality produce, along with other advantages such as delivery by farmer or liberal payment terms.

One can argue that the system of *Arthiyas* in Punjab should be abolished by APMC Act amendment, with their place being taken by Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) such as Primary Agricultural Co-operative Societies (PACS), other Co-operatives, or Producer Companies, as is the case in states like Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and even Uttar Pradesh now, where FCI and state agencies procure from village and local level without going to APMC mandis. Only then can small and marginal farmers hope to exercise choice of channels to benefit from direct purchase in trade area or from competition in the market. Of course, this requires better access to institutional credit for these small and marginal farmers to get them out of the interlocking of credit and produce markets practiced by the CAs in states like Punjab and Haryana, facilitated by public procurement and payments by public agencies to the Arthiya and not the farmer for her produce.

The way forward on the contested Acts of 2020 is either to leave the intra-state agri marketing reforms to the states in the spirit of co-operative federalism, as states are also eager to permit new channels for farmers and buyers, and compete among themselves in this regard, or to amend the Acts in consultation with the states and other stakeholders -- especially farmers -- to make these Acts deliver the regulatory oversight and farmer interest protection. In the case of the first option, the Union government can still legislate on interstate trade and commerce in farm produce under the Union list of the constitution, entry 42. Also, it can explore the provision of entry 7 of the concurrent list for legislating

on CF, as that is about contracts other than agricultural land, and CF is about crops/produce being grown under contract.

In the case of the amendment option, in order to win farmer confidence in CF, the land leasing provision should be removed from the definition of contract agreement in the Act and it should be clearly written in the Act that no recoveries other than from farm produce can be made from farmers, even if they default. Similarly, APMC Mandi Bypass Act should go beyond PAN cards for buyer registration, and also provide for mechanisms for counter party risk guarantees for farmers.

Better and more effective regulation is the first step to protect farmer interests and to ensure that they benefit from CF engagement. Further, since many Indian farmers are marginal or small, they cannot deal with large buyers on their own, even if they are brought under CF by some companies. Therefore, group contracts should be encouraged by policy incentives to make the mechanism inclusive and effective for farmers. The government can facilitate such contracts through credit and extension like in Thailand (Singh, 2005). Also, India now has thousands of Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs), which are business-like entities representing farmers. They can play a role in making CF deliver the objectives of farmer income enhancement by facilitating CF with smallholders, and also undertaking CF on their own (Singh and Singh, 2014; Singh, 2021). They should have been given more careful and detailed treatment in the new Acts.

Given the experience of the impacts of CF on natural resources in Punjab (Singh, 2007), there is also a need to provide for ecological concerns in CF regulation. This can be done by way of land-use planning based on soil depth, soil quality, land slope and suitable water availability. It is also important to understand previous land use and make it mandatory to follow appropriate crop rotations, if necessary (Singh, 2011).

Finally, it is important to realize that whatever expansion occurs for CF and direct purchases, India's large number of marginal and small farmers would need public and private wholesale markets to be reformed or newly set up to serve as an effective option for the large majority of them. These markets need to be reformed in terms of free licensing for better competition, e-payment of market fees, ensuring open auctions, better facilities, representation of producer companies in APLM management and even denotification of Commission Agents/*Arthiyas*. Madhya Pradesh took such steps in 1985, and that example deserves more analysis for designing current reforms in other states. The reform of APLM markets is important, as they serve as competitors to CF and 'direct' purchases practiced by food supermarkets and other buyers, and potentially

even to proposed private wholesale markets. With reform, they can help improve the terms offered by contracting agencies and food supermarkets to growers, as contract/direct prices are benchmarked to APLM prices and the CF Act, 2020 also takes this route to benchmarking contract prices, to some extent.

Finally, for facilitating direct payments to farmers by public agencies, the requirement of land records for large number of landless lease or landed lease farmers can be met if Punjab can legislate on the land leasing issue. It already has a draft model land leasing Bill which can be suitably modified to make it pro-small farmer (Singh, 2020). It would also have to amend its APLM Act, 2017 which provides for payments to farmers through the arhtiyas including a part even in cash. It should also move towards strengthening its co-operative credit structure and also encourage warehouse receipts system for farmers to manage their credit needs and not resorting to sale of produce immediately after harvest. The solutions to small farmers' marketing problems also lie outside just regulatory domain and in policy domains like credit and agro-infrastructure and their participation in value chains and networks for crop and enterprise diversification.

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Images of the Farmer Protests

The following 12 photographs are all taken from the Wikipedia page, “2020–2021 Indian farmers' protest.” We present them with minimal information: location, date taken, and photographer’s name and geographic affiliation. Each photograph has been shared with a Creative Commons license. We urge readers to explore further details of the photographers and the sharing conditions, as well as other photographs available on this Wikipedia page, along with the page text.

The first eight photographs are from two points on the border of Delhi (the National Capital Territory) and the neighboring state of Haryana. Tikri is on the main highway entering Delhi from the west (NH 9), and Singhu is on the main highway entering Delhi from the north (NH 44). The latter direction leads through Haryana to Punjab, and is essentially the route of the old Grand Trunk Road and its precursors. NH 9 also reaches Punjab going west. Photographs on the penultimate page are from a toll crossing on the highway to the Punjab city of Patiala (NH 7), slightly west of NH 44.

The last two photographs are from half a world away, a protest in New York City, spearheaded by the Punjabi Sikh diaspora in that part of the United States, and just one example of many such diaspora shows of solidarity. The placards in English in these photographs highlight the elemental status of food and farming. Similar ideas can be found in the messages in Punjabi and Hindi in the first photograph of this collection. A different kind of statement can be found on the highway to Patiala, commenting on one of the government’s more problematic responses to the protests.

We leave it to readers to explore and reflect on the different verbal messages (English speakers can find someone to translate the Punjabi and Hindi statements), as well as the symbolic meaning and significance of the activities of the protesting farmers, as they camp through the winter months, many miles from their homes.

Flags are another important symbol, and we note that the flag on the first page of the compilation is that of the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU), a large farmers’ union with a national footprint. Readers will find BKU flags in many photographs of the protests outside this compilation, and can further explore the BKU’s role in the protests.



Singhu Border, January 3, 2021

Harvinder Singh, Chandigarh



Tikri Border, December 4, 2020

Mulkh Singh, Haryana



Tikri Border, December 4, 2020

Mulkh Singh, Haryana



Singhu Border, November 29, 2020

Randeep Maddoke, Punjab



Singhu Border, January 8, 2021

Harvinder Singh, Chandigarh



Singhu Border, January 8, 2021

Harvinder Singh, Chandigarh



Dhareri Jattan, Patiala, December 21, 2020

Satdeep Gill, Punjab



Dhareri Jattan, Patiala, December 21, 2020

Satdeep Gill, Punjab



New York City, December 13 2020

Felton Davis



New York City, December 13 2020

Felton Davis



Tikri Border, December 27, 2020

Jagmit Singh Brar, Punjab



Near Delhi, December 5, 2020

Randeep Maddoke, Punjab

Refusing to Be an Exception Anymore: Women in the Farmers' Protest

Navkiran Kaur Natt

There has been much written about the farmer's protest from various perspectives, and gender is one of them. In this piece, I am going to delineate that perspective with a premise that this protest is not solely a farmer protest, but a mass movement led by farmers. Historically, women's labour has not been recognized in any sphere, whether domestic, workspace or in public life. The galaxy of outstanding women in these spaces has broken many barriers and paved a way to snatch their due recognition, but the social structure has at most remembered them as exceptions. There is no material ground to do so, besides patriarchal bias, which always looks at them as an exception. Women make up more than half of the agrarian workforce, and if we include animal husbandry, they outnumber men significantly.

Beyond this, what about women who are, let's say, not from farming families? In Indian households, running the kitchen has been a women's job and the essential commodities act amendment, along with increasing fuel prices, endanger the already-squeezed budget of the majority of the people. It is not just a question of short or prolonged inflation, but of long run deregulation; hence, freeing the government from any possible political, or to be precise, electoral repercussion. This altogether makes a case that everyone is going to be affected invariably by these laws, and as social structure goes, women will have to shoulder the bigger share of this burden, even in non-farming families.

Like landless labourers and workers, women are also present in large numbers in the protest, but even more of them are back home, taking care of the everyday work at home and in fields, so that, unfortunately, relatively more men could be at the protest sites. Women's absence has to be read structurally, not merely by numbers there. Even their absence is facilitating the mobilization, it is not an endorsement but acceptance of rather sad reality.

Looking at the protests from this perspective, along with the farmer leaders like Kavita Kuruganti, Jasbir Kaur Nat, Sukhwinder Kaur and Harinder Kaur Bindu, or workers' leader Nodeep Kaur, who has a long history of organizing and protesting on issues of farmers, laborers, Dalits and women's rights, gives us a sense of women's stake, as well as their participation in this mass

movement. Their recognition as prominent leaders has only made the movement more credible and more reflective of the farming workforce. These leaders have been on the streets, and some even in the jail numerous times, long before this historic struggle started. In fact, they are the building blocks of one of the biggest ever protests in recorded history. As the long history of peasant organizing informs us, there are no overnight leaders, it is just the media and outside world that could no longer ignore them anymore.

I have personally witnessed the hard-fought struggles led by union farmer issues for decades, and my own engagement with various people's movements in the last 15 years has shown that there is no way forward but struggle -- as woman, as landless, as farmer, as Dalit and as worker -- there is no alternative. It is such a historical juncture that gives us a validation to our long-held belief that one day people will realize and take up these issues. There are many everyday activities that we see that give us glimpses of gender-equal futures. Men cooking is a rare thing but even rarer is their conversation about it that, even momentary, recognizes the domestic labor and their apathy towards it. A man, while cooking says to another, "*Veere*, I used to go home at odd hours and wake up my sleeping wife to demand that she make a meal for five people. It didn't seem hard then. Now I know what it means to cook for five." It goes beyond photo-ops.

When the Chief Justice of India remarked on women being "kept" at protest sites, it was just a brute reminder of patriarchy which resonates equally from a faraway countryside field to the echelon of Supreme Court. The temporary settlements at different protest sites tell a story the patriarchy has been afraid to hear and see. Women's presence there – in leadership, in logistics, in mobilization, in singing and sloganeering, in addressing media, running libraries and schools, in producing newsletters, and more, with an ease. The women refuse to be an exception here. That is the story that rattles the status quo of existing institutions. One such story is of Akbari, who has walked for 11 days, from Bathinda, Punjab to the Tikri protest site at the Haryana-Delhi border, in solidarity with the movement. Though landless, Akbari said that when the land is taken over by the corporates, their dream of owning land will also be snatched. She echoes the strong sentiment which puzzles many. The landless, however hard it seems, still sees their present condition as better than corporate takeover. It is this and many similar apprehensions that led to such mass mobilization.

Nodeep Kaur, a labor activist from Mazdoor Kisan Sangathan has been protesting for workers' wages near the Singhu protest site at Delhi's northern border with Haryana, when she was arrested in January and she is still behind

bars, facing custodial violence. The movements are an important juncture to also recognize people like Nodeep, who have been silently fighting for people's rights when no media or common people were around to see and support them, except the State hounding them. It has to become part of our consciousness to recognize these battles that slowly build bigger movements.

Beyond this, I have been at the protest since day one, and along with a few young people, we started a newsletter *Trolley Times* that has established itself as one of the most reliable sources of ground reporting and updates about the movement across the world. Our editorial team has always made sure that the intersectionality of the participants is reflected in our coverage, whether its gender, caste, class or region. In a way, women are not waiting for a platform, but creating platforms, not for self but for the whole movement. They are not separate from the movement, they are the movement.

This movement is giving us a historic opportunity to recognize women farmers, a long due demand, and if a mass movement such as this can achieve this successfully, it can be emulated in other spheres as well. Also, this movement seeks to recognize the gender disparity in domestic and farming labor with a dual strategy of equal work distribution, equal pay, and land rights, as well as the due recognition. If the movement demands this sincerely, then yes it is a revolution in making!

Bio-note:

Navkiran Natt is a student-youth activist and researcher who works between Punjab and Delhi. She is trained as a dentist and later completed her Masters in Film Studies from Ambedkar University, Delhi. She works on transnational Punjabi migration and its reflections in Punjabi popular culture. She also did a podcast series on the health implications of the Green Revolution in Punjab.

Editors' Note:

See also: From Dentist to Activist: Meet a Tenacious Woman Protesting at Tikri Border, by Rohit Kumar, March 12, 2021.

(<https://thewire.in/rights/navkiran-natt-dentist-activist-farmers-protest-tikri-border>)

A Punjabi translation of the article follows on the next page.

ਕਿਸਾਨ ਅੰਦੋਲਨ ਵਿੱਚ ਮਹਿਜ਼ ਅਪਵਾਦ ਨਹੀਂ ਹੈ ਔਰਤਾਂ ਦੀ ਹਿੱਸੇਦਾਰੀ

ਕਿਸਾਨ ਸੰਘਰਸ਼ ਵਿੱਚ ਵੱਖ-ਵੱਖ ਮੁੱਦਿਆਂ 'ਤੇ ਬਹੁਤ ਕੁਝ ਲਿਖਿਆ ਗਿਆ ਹੈ ਅਤੇ ਲਿੰਗ ਪਾੜਾ ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਵਿੱਚੋਂ ਇੱਕ ਹੈ। ਇਸ ਲੇਖ ਦੇ ਜ਼ਰੀਏ ਮੈਂ ਦੱਸਣਾ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੀ ਹਾਂ ਕਿ ਇਹ ਮਹਿਜ਼ ਕਿਸਾਨੀ ਵਿਰੋਧ ਨਹੀਂ, ਬਲਕਿ ਕਿਸਾਨਾਂ ਦੀ ਅਗਵਾਈ ਵਿੱਚ ਇੱਕ ਵਿਸ਼ਾਲ ਲਹਿਰ ਹੈ। ਇਤਿਹਾਸ ਵਿੱਚ ਔਰਤਾਂ ਦੀ ਕਿਰਤ ਨੂੰ ਮਾਨਤਾ ਨਹੀਂ ਦਿੱਤੀ ਗਈ ਚਾਹੇ ਉਹ ਘਰੇਲੂ ਹੋਵੇ, ਕੰਮ ਦੀ ਥਾਂ 'ਤੇ ਹੋਵੇ ਅਤੇ ਜਾਂ ਫਿਰ ਜਨਤਕ ਜੀਵਨ ਵਿੱਚ। ਭਾਵੇਂ ਸਿਰਫ਼ੀ ਔਰਤਾਂ ਨੇ ਆਪਣੇ ਪੈਰਾਂ ਦੀਆਂ ਜੰਜੀਰਾਂ ਤੋੜ ਕੇ ਸਮਾਜ ਵਿੱਚ ਆਪਣੀ ਇੱਕ ਖ਼ਾਸ ਪਹਿਚਾਣ ਸਥਾਪਿਤ ਕੀਤੀ ਹੈ ਪਰ ਸਮਾਜਿਕ ਢਾਂਚੇ ਨੇ ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਅਪਵਾਦ ਵਜੋਂ ਯਾਦ ਕੀਤਾ ਹੈ। ਅਜਿਹਾ ਕਦੇ ਕਿਸੇ ਪਦਾਰਥਕ ਅਧਾਰ ਕਰਕੇ ਨਹੀਂ ਹੋਇਆ ਬਲਕਿ ਪਿੱਤਰਵਾਦੀ ਸੋਚ ਕਰਕੇ ਹੀ ਹੁੰਦਾ ਆ ਰਿਹਾ ਹੈ। ਔਰਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਸਾਣੀ ਵਿੱਚ ਮਰਦਾਂ ਦੇ ਮੋਢੇ ਨਾਲ ਮੋਢਾ ਜੋੜ ਕੇ ਚੱਲਦੀਆਂ ਹਨ ਅਤੇ ਜੇ ਅਸੀਂ ਪਸ਼ੂ ਪਾਲਣ ਦੇ ਕੰਮ ਨੂੰ ਵੀ ਸ਼ਾਮਲ ਲਈਏ ਤਾਂ ਉਹ ਕਿਰਤ ਵਿੱਚ ਮਰਦਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਵੀ ਪਛਾੜਦੀਆਂ ਹਨ।

ਇਸ ਤੋਂ ਇਲਾਵਾ, ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਔਰਤਾਂ ਬਾਰੇ ਕੀ ਜੇ ਕਿਸਾਨੀ ਪਰਿਵਾਰਾਂ ਵਿੱਚੋਂ ਨਹੀਂ? ਭਾਰਤੀ ਘਰਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਔਰਤਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਆਮ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਿਰਫ਼ ਰਸੋਈ ਤੱਕ ਹੀ ਸੀਮਿਤ ਰੱਖਿਆ ਜਾਂਦਾ ਹੈ ਅਤੇ ਨਵੇਂ ਪਾਸ ਕੀਤੇ ਜ਼ਰੂਰੀ ਵਸਤਾਂ ਸਬੰਧੀ ਕਾਨੂੰਨ ਅਤੇ ਨਾਲ ਹੀ ਲਗਾਤਾਰ ਵੱਧ ਰਹੀਆਂ ਤੇਲ-ਗੈਸ ਦੀਆਂ ਕੀਮਤਾਂ ਨੇ ਇਹਨਾਂ ਹੀ ਰਸੋਈਆਂ ਦੇ ਪਹਿਲਾਂ ਤੋਂ ਲਗਾਤਾਰ ਘੱਟ ਹੁੰਦੇ ਆ ਰਹੇ ਬਜਟ ਲਈ ਵੀ ਨਵਾਂ ਖ਼ਤਰਾ ਖੜਾ ਕਰ ਦਿੱਤਾ ਹੈ। ਇਹ ਸਿਰਫ਼ ਥੋੜੇ ਜਾਂ ਲੰਬੇ ਸਮੇਂ ਦੀ ਮਹਿੰਗਾਈ ਦਾ ਸਵਾਲ ਨਹੀਂ, ਬਲਕਿ ਅਨਿਯਮਿਤਤਾ ਦਾ ਸਵਾਲ ਹੈ, ਜੋ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਨੂੰ ਕਿਸੇ ਵੀ ਸੰਭਾਵਿਤ ਰਾਜਨੀਤਿਕ ਜਾਂ ਚੋਣ ਨਤੀਜਿਆਂ ਤੋਂ ਅਜ਼ਾਦ ਕਰਦਾ ਹੈ। ਇਸ ਤੋਂ ਕੁੱਲ ਮਿਲਾ ਕੇ ਇਹ ਪਤਾ ਲੱਗਦਾ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਇੰਨਾਂ ਕਾਨੂੰਨਾਂ ਤੋਂ ਹਰ ਕੋਈ ਪ੍ਰਭਾਵਿਤ ਹੋਵੇਗਾ, ਅਤੇ ਚਲੰਤ ਸਮਾਜਿਕ ਢਾਂਚੇ ਦੇ ਮੁਤਾਬਕ ਇਸ ਬੋਝ ਦਾ ਵੱਡਾ ਹਿੱਸਾ ਔਰਤਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਚੁੱਕਣਾ ਪਵੇਗਾ, ਭਾਵੇਂ ਉਹ ਗ਼ੈਰ-ਕਿਸਾਨੀ ਪਰਿਵਾਰਾਂ ਵਿੱਚੋਂ ਹੋਣ।

ਬੇਜ਼ਮੀਨੇ ਮਜ਼ਦੂਰਾਂ ਵਾਂਗ, ਔਰਤਾਂ ਵੀ ਵੱਡੀ ਗਿਣਤੀ ਵਿੱਚ ਇਸ ਸੰਘਰਸ਼ ਵਿੱਚ ਮੌਜੂਦ ਹਨ ਪਰ ਉਸ ਤੋਂ ਵੀ ਵੱਧ ਗਿਣਤੀ ਵਿੱਚ ਔਰਤਾਂ ਪਿੱਛੇ ਘਰ-ਬਾਰ, ਖੇਤ ਅਤੇ ਰੋਜ਼-ਮੱਰਾ ਦੇ ਕੰਮ ਸੰਭਾਲ ਰਹੀਆਂ ਹਨ; ਜਿਸ ਕਰਕੇ ਤੁਲਨਾਤਮਕ ਤੌਰ 'ਤੇ ਵਧੇਰੀ ਗਿਣਤੀ ਵਿੱਚ ਆਦਮੀ ਇਸ ਸੰਘਰਸ਼ ਵਿੱਚ ਸ਼ਾਮਲ ਹੋ ਸਕਦੇ ਹਨ। ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਦੀ ਗ਼ੈਰਹਾਜ਼ਰੀ ਨੂੰ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਮਹਿਜ਼ ਅੰਕੜਿਆਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਨਾ ਦੇਖ ਕੇ, ਸਮਾਜਿਕ ਸੰਦਰਭ ਦੇ ਪਰਿਪੇਖ ਵਿੱਚ ਦੇਖਣਾ ਚਾਹੀਦਾ ਹੈ। ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਦੀ ਗ਼ੈਰ ਹਾਜ਼ਰੀ ਵੀ ਲਾਮਬੰਦੀ ਵਿੱਚ ਵੱਡਾ ਯੋਗਦਾਨ ਦੇ ਰਹੀ ਹੈ ਅਤੇ ਇਹ ਵਧਾਵਾ ਦੇਣ ਵਾਲੀ ਗੱਲ ਨਹੀਂ ਬਲਕਿ ਇੱਕ ਦੁੱਖਦ ਹਕੀਕਤ ਦੀ ਸਵੀਕ੍ਰਿਤੀ ਹੈ।

ਜੇਕਰ ਅਸੀਂ ਇਸ ਪਰਿਪੇਖ ਨਾਲ ਦੇਖੀਏ ਤਾਂ, ਕਵੀਤਾ ਕੁਰੂਗੰਤੀ, ਜਸਬੀਰ ਕੌਰ ਨੱਤ, ਸੁਖਵਿੰਦਰ ਕੌਰ ਅਤੇ ਹਰਿੰਦਰ ਕੌਰ ਬਿੰਦੂ ਵਰਗੇ ਕਿਸਾਨ ਆਗੂਆਂ ਜਾਂ ਮਜ਼ਦੂਰਾਂ ਦੀ ਆਗੂ ਨੇਦੀਪ ਕੌਰ, ਜਿਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਦਾ ਕਿਸਾਨਾਂ, ਮਜ਼ਦੂਰਾਂ, ਦਲਿਤਾਂ ਅਤੇ ਔਰਤਾਂ ਦੇ ਅਧਿਕਾਰਾਂ ਦੇ ਮੁੱਦਿਆਂ 'ਤੇ ਲੋਕਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਸੰਗਠਿਤ ਕਰਨ ਅਤੇ ਅੰਦੋਲਨ ਕਰਨ ਵਿੱਚ ਦਾ ਲੰਮਾ ਇਤਿਹਾਸ ਰਿਹਾ ਹੈ, ਸਾਨੂੰ ਇਸ ਜਨ ਅੰਦੋਲਨ ਵਿੱਚ ਔਰਤਾਂ ਦਾ ਵੇਦਾਰੀ ਅਤੇ ਉਹਨਾਂ ਦੀ ਹਿੱਸੇਦਾਰੀ ਦਾ ਅਹਿਸਾਸ ਹੋਵੇਗਾ। ਪ੍ਰਮੁੱਖ ਨੇਤਾਵਾਂ ਵਜੋਂ ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਮਿਲੀ ਮਾਨਤਾ ਨੇ ਇਸ ਅੰਦੋਲਨ ਨੂੰ ਵਧੇਰੇ ਭਰੋਸੇਯੋਗ ਤਾਂ ਬਣਾਇਆ ਹੀ ਹੈ, ਨਾਲ ਹੀ ਖੇਤੀ ਦੇ ਕੰਮ 'ਚ ਲੱਗੀ ਕੁੱਲ ਕਿਰਤ ਦਾ ਅਸਲੀ ਪ੍ਰਤੀਬਿੰਬ ਵੀ ਪੇਸ਼ ਕੀਤਾ ਹੈ। ਇਹ ਆਗੂ ਇਸ ਇਤਿਹਾਸਕ ਸੰਘਰਸ਼ ਆਰੰਭ ਹੋਣ ਤੋਂ ਬਹੁਤ ਪਹਿਲਾਂ ਤੋਂ ਕਈ ਵਾਰ ਆਪਣੇ ਹੱਕਾਂ ਲਈ ਸੜਕਾਂ ਤੇ ਆਏ ਹਨ ਅਤੇ ਕਈ ਵਾਰ ਜੇਲ੍ਹ ਵਿੱਚ ਵੀ ਰਹੇ ਹਨ। ਇਥੋਂ ਤੱਕ ਕਿ ਇਹ ਅੱਜ ਤੱਕ ਦੇ ਲਿਖਿਤ ਇਤਿਹਾਸ ਦੇ ਸਭ ਤੋਂ ਵੱਡੇ ਅੰਦੋਲਨ ਦੇ ਢਾਂਚੇ ਦੇ ਮੁੱਖ ਅੰਗ ਪੱਥਰ ਹਨ। ਕਿਸਾਨ-ਮਜ਼ਦੂਰ ਸੰਘਰਸ਼ਾਂ ਦੇ ਲੰਮੇ ਇਤਿਹਾਸ ਵਾਂਗ, ਇਹਨਾਂ ਵਿੱਚੋਂ ਕੋਈ ਵੀ ਰਾਤੇ ਰਾਤ ਆਗੂ ਨਹੀਂ

ਹੁੰਦਾ, ਹੁਣ ਤਾਂ ਸਿਰਫ਼ ਇੰਨਾ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਮੀਡੀਆ ਅਤੇ ਬਾਹਰੀ ਅਵਾਮ ਇਹਨਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਹੋਰ ਨਜ਼ਰ ਅੰਦਾਜ਼ ਨਹੀਂ ਕਰ ਸਕਦੀ।

ਮੈਂ ਨਿੱਜੀ ਤੌਰ 'ਤੇ ਕਿਸਾਨ ਯੂਨੀਅਨਾਂ ਦੁਆਰਾ ਪਿਛਲੇ ਕਈ ਦਹਾਕਿਆਂ ਤੋਂ ਲੜੇ ਜਾ ਰਹੇ ਕਿਸਾਨੀ ਸੰਘਰਸ਼ਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਨੇੜਿਓਂ ਵੇਖਿਆ ਹੈ ਅਤੇ ਪਿਛਲੇ 15 ਸਾਲਾਂ ਦੌਰਾਨ ਵੱਖ-ਵੱਖ ਲੋਕਾਂ ਦੀਆਂ ਲਹਿਰਾਂ ਨਾਲ ਮੇਰੀ ਆਪਣੀ ਸਾਂਝ ਨੇ ਇਹ ਦਰਸਾਇਆ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਆਮ ਲੋਕਾਂ ਕੋਲ ਸੰਘਰਸ਼ ਕਰਨ ਬਾਜ਼ੋ ਹੋਰ ਕੋਈ ਦੂਜਾ ਰਾਹ ਨਹੀਂ ਹੈ, ਭਾਵੇਂ ਉਹ ਇਕ ਔਰਤ ਹੈ, ਇੱਕ ਭੂਮੀਹੀਣ ਮਜ਼ਦੂਰ, ਕਿਸਾਨ, ਦਲਿਤ, ਜਾਂ ਕੋਈ ਵੀ ਕਿਰਤੀ; ਕਿਸੇ ਕੋਲ ਕੋਈ ਦੂਜਾ ਵਿਕਲਪ ਨਹੀਂ। ਇਹ ਅਜਿਹਾ ਇਤਿਹਾਸਕ ਮੌਕਾ ਹੈ ਜੋ ਸਾਡੇ ਲੰਬੇ ਸਮੇਂ ਤੋਂ ਕੀਤੇ ਜਾ ਰਹੇ ਵਿਸ਼ਵਾਸ ਨੂੰ ਪ੍ਰਮਾਣਿਕਤਾ ਪ੍ਰਦਾਨ ਕਰਦਾ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਇੱਕ ਦਿਨ ਲੋਕ ਆਪਣੇ ਹੱਕਾਂ ਦੀ ਹੋ ਰਹੀ ਲੁੱਟ ਨੂੰ ਮਹਿਸੂਸ ਕਰਨਗੇ ਅਤੇ ਉਸਦੇ ਖਿਲਾਫ਼ ਉੱਠ ਖੜੇ ਹੋਣਗੇ। ਕਿਸਾਨ ਅੰਦੋਲਨ ਦੇ ਅੰਦਰ ਰੋਜ਼ਾਨਾ ਦੀਆਂ ਬਹੁਤ ਸਾਰੀਆਂ ਗਤੀਵਿਧੀਆਂ ਵੇਖਣ ਨੂੰ ਮਿਲਦੀਆਂ ਹਨ ਜਿਸ ਤੋਂ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਇੱਕ ਲਿੰਗ ਬਰਾਬਰ ਭਵਿੱਖ ਦੀ ਝਲਕ ਨਜ਼ਰ ਆਉਂਦੀ ਹੈ। ਆਦਮੀਆਂ ਦਾ ਖਾਣਾ ਪਕਾਉਣਾ ਸਾਡੇ ਦੇਸ਼ ਵਿੱਚ ਘੱਟ ਹੀ ਦੇਖਣ ਨੂੰ ਮਿਲਦਾ ਹੈ ਪਰ ਉਸ ਤੋਂ ਵੀ ਘੱਟ ਦੇਖਣ ਨੂੰ ਮਿਲਦੀ ਹੈ ਉਹਨਾਂ ਵਿਚਕਾਰ ਇਸ ਬਾਰੇ ਦੀ ਗੱਲਬਾਤ, ਜੋ ਘਰੇਲੂ ਕਿਰਤ ਅਤੇ ਇਸ ਪ੍ਰਤੀ ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਦੀ ਉਦਾਸੀਨਤਾ ਨੂੰ ਦਰਸਾਉਂਦੀ ਹੈ। ਇੱਕ ਆਦਮੀ ਖਾਣਾ ਬਣਾਉਂਦੇ ਸਮੇਂ ਦੂਜੇ ਨੂੰ ਕਹਿੰਦਾ ਹੈ, "ਵੀਰੇ, ਮੈਂ ਕਈ ਵਾਰ ਕੁਵੇਲੇ ਵੀ ਘਰ ਜਾਂਦਾ ਅਤੇ ਆਪਣੀ ਸੁੱਤੀ ਹੋਈ ਪਤਨੀ ਨੂੰ ਜਗਾ ਕੇ ਮੰਗ ਕਰਦਾ ਕਿ ਉਹ ਪੰਜ ਲੋਕਾਂ ਲਈ ਖਾਣਾ ਪਕਾਵੇ। ਪਹਿਲਾਂ ਇਹ ਕੰਮ ਮੁਸ਼ਕਲ ਨਹੀਂ ਜਾਪਦਾ ਸੀ। ਪਰ ਹੁਣ ਜਦੋਂ ਆਪ ਰੋਟੀਆਂ ਪਕਾਉਣੀਆਂ ਪਈਆਂ ਤਾਂ ਪਤਾ ਲੱਗਿਆ ਕਿ ਪੰਜ ਲੋਕਾਂ ਲਈ ਰੋਟੀ ਪਕਾਉਣ ਦਾ ਕੀ ਮਤਲਬ ਹੈ।" ਇਹੋ ਜਿਹੀਆਂ ਗੱਲਾਂ ਫੋਟੋ ਲਈ ਕੀਤੇ ਗਏ ਦਿਖਾਵੇ ਤੋਂ ਬਹੁਤ ਪਰੇ ਹਨ।

ਜਦੋਂ ਭਾਰਤ ਦੇ ਚੀਫ਼ ਜਸਟਿਸ ਨੇ ਸੰਘਰਸ਼ ਵਿੱਚ ਬੈਠੀਆਂ ਔਰਤਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਉੱਥੇ "ਰੱਖੇ" ਜਾਣ ਦੀ ਟਿੱਪਣੀ ਕੀਤੀ, ਤਾਂ ਇਹ ਸਿਰਫ਼ ਪੁਰਸ਼ਵਾਦ ਮਾਨਸਿਕਤਾ ਦੀ ਇਕ ਝਲਕ ਸੀ ਜੋ ਸਾਡੇ ਦੇਸ਼ ਦੇ ਪਿੱਛੜੇ ਇਲਾਕਿਆਂ ਤੋਂ ਲੈ ਕੇ ਸੁਪਰੀਮ ਕੋਰਟ ਤੱਕ ਬਰਾਬਰ ਨਜ਼ਰੀ ਪੈਂਦੀ ਹੈ। ਵੱਖੇ ਵੱਖਰੇ ਮੋਰਚਿਆਂ 'ਤੇ ਰਹਿਣ ਲਈ ਕੀਤੇ ਅਸਥਾਈ ਬੰਦੋਬਸਤ ਅਜਿਹੀ ਕਹਾਣੀ ਦੱਸਦੇ ਹਨ ਜਿਸ ਨੂੰ ਪਿੱਤਰਸੱਤਾ ਸੁਣਨ ਅਤੇ ਵੇਖਣ ਤੋਂ ਵੀ ਡਰਦੀ ਹੈ। ਇਹਨਾਂ ਮੋਰਚਿਆਂ 'ਤੇ ਔਰਤਾਂ ਦੀ ਮੌਜੂਦਗੀ - ਲੀਡਰਸ਼ਿਪ, ਲੌਜਿਸਟਿਕਸ, ਲਾਮਬੰਦੀ ਕਰਨ, ਲੋਕਾਂ ਦੇ ਗੀਤ ਗਾਉਣ ਅਤੇ ਨਾਰੇ ਲਗਾਉਣ, ਮੀਡੀਆ ਨੂੰ ਸੰਬੋਧਨ ਕਰਨ, ਲਾਇਬ੍ਰੇਰੀਆਂ ਅਤੇ ਸਕੂਲ ਚਲਾਉਣ, ਅਖਬਾਰ ਕੱਢਣ ਅਤੇ ਹੋਰ ਕੰਮਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਬਹੁਤ ਹੀ ਸਹਿਜ਼ ਹੈ। ਔਰਤਾਂ ਇੱਥੇ ਅਪਵਾਦ ਹੋਣ ਤੋਂ ਇਨਕਾਰੀ ਹਨ। ਇਹੀ ਕਹਾਣੀ ਹੈ ਜੋ ਸਥਾਪਿਤ ਸਮਾਜਿਕ ਢਾਂਚੇ ਦੀਆਂ ਜੜ੍ਹਾਂ ਹਿਲਾ ਦਿੰਦੀ ਹੈ। ਅਜਿਹੀ ਹੀ ਇਕ ਕਹਾਣੀ ਅਕਬਰੀ ਦੀ ਹੈ, ਜੋ ਕਿਸਾਨ ਅੰਦੋਲਨ ਦੇ ਸਮਰਥਨ ਵਿਚ ਬਠਿੰਡਾ, ਪੰਜਾਬ ਤੋਂ 11 ਦਿਨ ਪੈਦਲ ਤੁਰ ਕੇ ਦਿੱਲੀ ਟਿਕਰੀ ਮੋਰਚੇ ਵਿੱਚ ਪੁੱਜੀ। ਹਾਲਾਂਕਿ ਅਕਬਰੀ ਬੇਜ਼ਮੀਨੇ ਪਰਿਵਾਰ ਵਿੱਚੋਂ ਹੈ ਪਰ ਉਸਨੇ ਕਿਹਾ ਕਿ ਜਦੋਂ ਜ਼ਮੀਨ ਹੀ ਕਾਰਪੋਰੇਟਾਂ ਦੁਆਰਾ ਹਥਿਆ ਲਈ ਜਾਵੇਗੀ, ਤਾਂ ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਦਾ ਜ਼ਮੀਨ ਦੇ ਮਾਲਕ ਬਣਨ ਦਾ ਸੁਪਨਾ ਵੀ ਖੁੱਸ ਜਾਵੇਗਾ। ਅਕਬਰੀ ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਭਾਵਨਾਵਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਦਰਸਾਉਂਦੀ ਹੈ ਜੋ ਬਹੁਤੇ ਲੋਕਾਂ ਲਈ ਬੁਝਾਰਤ ਹਨ। ਭਾਵੇਂ ਇਹ ਗੱਲ ਬਹੁਤ ਕਠੋਰ ਜਾਪਦੀ ਹੋਵੇ ਪਰ ਬੇਜ਼ਮੀਨੇ ਲੋਕ ਮੌਜੂਦਾ ਸਥਿਤੀ ਨੂੰ ਕਾਰਪੋਰੇਟ ਟੈਕਓਵਰ ਨਾਲੋਂ ਬਿਹਤਰ ਸਮਝਦੇ ਹਨ। ਅਜਿਹੀਆਂ ਹੀ ਬਹੁਤ ਸਾਰੀਆਂ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਵਨਾਵਾਂ ਤੇ ਚਿੰਤਾਵਾਂ ਹਨ ਜੋ ਇੰਨੀ ਵੱਡੀ ਲਾਮਬੰਦੀ ਦਾ ਕਾਰਨ ਬਣੀਆਂ ਹਨ।

ਨੋਦੀਪ ਕੌਰ, ਮਜ਼ਦੂਰ ਕਿਸਾਨ ਸੰਗਠਨ ਦੀ ਇੱਕ ਮਜ਼ਦੂਰ ਕਾਰਕੁਨ, ਨੂੰ ਜਦੋਂ ਜਨਵਰੀ, 2021 ਵਿੱਚ ਗ੍ਰਿਫ਼ਤਾਰ ਕੀਤਾ ਗਿਆ ਉਦੋਂ ਉਹ ਸਿੰਘੂ ਮੋਰਚੇ ਦੇ ਨੇੜੇ ਮਜ਼ਦੂਰਾਂ ਦੀਆਂ ਉਜਰਤਾਂ ਲਈ ਵਿਰੋਧ ਪ੍ਰਦਰਸ਼ਨ ਕਰ ਰਹੀ ਸੀ ਅਤੇ ਉਹ ਅੱਜ ਵੀ ਹਿਰਾਸਤ ਵਿੱਚ ਰਾਜਸੀ ਹਿੰਸਾ ਦਾ ਸਾਹਮਣਾ ਕਰ ਰਹੀ ਹੈ। ਅਜਿਹੇ ਅੰਦੋਲਨ ਨੋਦੀਪ ਵਰਗੇ ਸੰਘਰਸ਼ਸ਼ੀਲ ਲੋਕਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਮਾਨਤਾ ਦੇਣ ਲਈ ਵੀ ਬਹੁਤ ਮਹੱਤਵਪੂਰਣ ਹਨ, ਜੋ ਉਦੋਂ ਵੀ ਸੰਘਰਸ਼ ਕਰ ਰਹੇ ਹੁੰਦੇ ਹਨ ਜਦੋਂ ਕੋਈ ਮੀਡੀਆ ਜਾਂ ਆਮ ਲੋਕ ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਦੇਖ ਜਾਂ ਸਮਰਥਨ

ਨਹੀਂ ਕਰ ਰਹੇ ਹੁੰਦੇ, ਬਸ ਰਾਜਸੀ ਤੰਤਰ ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਘੇਰਨ ਦੀ ਤਾਕ ਵਿੱਚ ਹੁੰਦਾ ਹੈ; ਉਹ ਉਦੋਂ ਵੀ ਚੁੱਪ ਚਾਪ ਲੋਕਾਂ ਦੇ ਹੱਕਾਂ ਲਈ ਲੜਦੇ ਨੇ। ਇਹਨਾਂ ਸੰਘਰਸ਼ਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਪਛਾਣਨਾ ਸਾਡੀ ਚੇਤਨਾ ਦਾ ਹਿੱਸਾ ਬਣਨਾ ਚਾਹੀਦਾ ਹੈ, ਜੋ ਅੱਗੇ ਚੱਲ ਕੇ ਵੱਡੀਆਂ ਲਹਿਰਾਂ ਦਾ ਰੂਪ ਧਾਰਨ ਕਰ ਲੈਂਦੇ ਹਨ।

ਇਸ ਤੋਂ ਇਲਾਵਾ ਮੈਂ ਪਹਿਲੇ ਦਿਨ ਤੋਂ ਇਸ ਸੰਘਰਸ਼ ਦਾ ਹਿੱਸਾ ਹਾਂ ਅਤੇ ਅਸੀਂ ਕੁਝ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਮਿਲ ਕੇ 'ਟਰਾਲੀ ਟਾਈਮਜ਼' ਨਾਮਕ ਇੱਕ ਨਿਊਜ਼ਲੈਟਰ ਦੀ ਸ਼ੁਰੂਆਤ ਕੀਤੀ ਹੈ ਜੋ ਅੱਜ ਵਿਸ਼ਵ ਭਰ ਵਿੱਚ ਇਸ ਅੰਦੋਲਨ ਬਾਰੇ ਜ਼ਮੀਨੀ ਰਿਪੋਰਟਿੰਗ ਅਤੇ ਅਪਡੇਟ ਦੇਣ ਵਾਲੇ ਸਭ ਤੋਂ ਭਰੋਸੇਮੰਦ ਸਰੋਤ ਵਜੋਂ ਸਥਾਪਤ ਹੋਇਆ ਹੈ। ਸਾਡੀ ਸੰਪਾਦਕੀ ਟੀਮ ਨੇ ਹਮੇਸ਼ਾਂ ਇਹ ਸੁਨਿਸ਼ਚਿਤ ਕਰਨ ਦੀ ਕੋਸ਼ਿਸ਼ ਕੀਤੀ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਪ੍ਰਦਰਸ਼ਨਕਾਰੀਆਂ ਦੀ ਅੰਤਰਸੰਗਤਾ ਸਾਡੀ ਕਵਰੇਜ/ਰਿਪੋਰਟਿੰਗ ਵਿੱਚ ਝਲਕੇ ਭਾਵੇਂ ਉਹ ਲਿੰਗ ਹੋਵੇ ਜਾਂ ਜਾਤੀ, ਵਰਗ ਤੇ ਇਲਾਕਾ। ਇਕ ਤਰ੍ਹਾਂ ਨਾਲ ਔਰਤਾਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਪਲੇਟਫਾਰਮ ਦੀ ਉਡੀਕ ਨਹੀਂ ਕਰ ਰਹੀਆਂ ਸਗੋਂ ਆਪਣਾ ਪਲੇਟਫਾਰਮ ਆਪ ਹੀ ਤਿਆਰ ਕਰ ਰਹੀਆਂ ਹਨ, ਜੋ ਕਿ ਕੇਵਲ ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਲਈ ਨਾ ਹੋਕੇ ਸਾਰੀ ਲਹਿਰ ਲਈ ਹੋਵੇ। ਉਹ ਇਸ ਸੰਘਰਸ਼ ਤੋਂ ਵੱਖ ਨਹੀਂ ਹਨ, ਬਲਕਿ ਉਹ ਆਪਣੇ ਆਪ ਵਿੱਚ ਇੱਕ ਸੰਘਰਸ਼ ਹਨ।

ਇਹ ਅੰਦੋਲਨ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਕਿਸਾਨ ਔਰਤਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਮਾਨਤਾ ਦੇਣ ਦਾ ਇੱਕ ਇਤਿਹਾਸਕ ਮੌਕਾ ਦੇ ਰਿਹਾ ਹੈ ਜਿਸਦੀ ਮੰਗ ਕਾਫੀ ਲੰਬੇ ਸਮੇਂ ਤੋਂ ਹੈ ਅਤੇ ਜੇ ਇਸ ਤਰ੍ਹਾਂ ਦੀ ਇੱਕ ਲਹਿਰ ਇਹ ਕੰਮ ਸਫਲਤਾਪੂਰਵਕ ਕਰ ਦਿੰਦੀ ਹੈ, ਤਾਂ ਇਸਨੂੰ ਹੋਰ ਖੇਤਰਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਵੀ ਵਰਤਿਆ ਜਾ ਸਕਦਾ ਹੈ। ਨਾਲ ਹੀ, ਇਹ ਅੰਦੋਲਨ ਕੰਮ ਦੀ ਬਰਾਬਰ ਵੰਡ, ਬਰਾਬਰ ਤਨਖਾਹ ਅਤੇ ਜ਼ਮੀਨੀ ਅਧਿਕਾਰਾਂ ਦੇ ਨਾਲ ਨਾਲ ਬਣਦੇ ਹੱਕਾਂ ਅਤੇ ਘਰੇਲੂ ਅਤੇ ਕਿਸਾਨੀ ਦੇ ਕਿੱਤੇ ਵਿੱਚ ਲੈਂਗਿਕ ਭੇਦਭਾਵ ਦੀ ਗੱਲ ਵੀ ਕਰਦਾ ਹੈ। ਜੇ ਇਹ ਅੰਦੋਲਨ ਇਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਗੱਲਾਂ ਦੀ ਇਮਾਨਦਾਰੀ ਨਾਲ ਮੰਗ ਕਰਦਾ ਹੈ, ਤਾਂ ਹਾਂ ਇਹ ਇੱਕ ਕ੍ਰਾਂਤੀ ਦੀ ਸ਼ੁਰੂਆਤ ਹੈ!

ਬਾਇਓ-ਨੋਟ:

ਨਵਕਿਰਨ ਨੱਤ ਇੱਕ ਵਿਦਿਆਰਥੀ-ਯੁਵਾ ਕਾਰਕੁਨ ਅਤੇ ਖੋਜਕਰਤਾ ਹੈ ਜਿਸਦਾ ਕਾਰਜ ਖੇਤਰ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਅਤੇ ਦਿੱਲੀ ਹੈ। ਉਹ ਪੇਸ਼ੇ ਵਜੋਂ ਦੰਦਾਂ ਦੀ ਡਾਕਟਰ ਹੈ ਅਤੇ ਬਾਅਦ ਵਿੱਚ ਉਸਨੇ ਅੰਬੇਦਕਰ ਯੂਨੀਵਰਸਿਟੀ, ਦਿੱਲੀ ਤੋਂ ਫਿਲਮ ਸਟੱਡੀਜ਼ ਵਿੱਚ ਐਮ.ਏ. ਦੀ ਡਿਗਰੀ ਹਾਸਿਲ ਕੀਤੀ। ਉਹ ਅੰਤਰਰਾਸ਼ਟਰੀ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਪਰਵਾਸ ਅਤੇ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਪੋਪੂਲਰ ਕਲਚਰ ਵਿੱਚ ਇਸ ਦੇ ਪ੍ਰਤੀਬਿੰਬਾਂ ਤੇ ਕੰਮ ਕਰਦੀ ਹੈ। ਉਸਨੇ ਹਾਲ ਹੀ ਵਿੱਚ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਵਿੱਚ ਹਰੀ ਕ੍ਰਾਂਤੀ ਦੇ ਸਿਹਤ ਪ੍ਰਭਾਵਾਂ ਉੱਤੇ ਪੋਡਕਾਸਟ ਲੜੀ ਵੀ ਕੀਤੀ ਹੈ।

Translation by:

Suchetna Singh and Navkiran Natt

Songs and Poems of the Farmers' Protests

The following compilation consists of the lyrics of two songs and the text of three poems. The songs are in Punjabi, and have been transliterated here, as well as translated. No doubt, the transliterations and translations can be improved, but are hopefully good enough to convey meanings adequately. Both songs have video versions, and the music and video are important parts of the experience and impact of each song, of course.

The version of *Ailaan* here is from October 2020, early in the protests. It was subsequently banned by the Indian government. In February 2021, a new version of the song was posted, with the same music and refrain, but very different words. The transliteration was done from a Punjabi (Gurmukhi) text of the lyrics.

Teer Punjab Ton does not seem to have a Gurmukhi text. Transliterations are available, and have been modified to correct inaccuracies, based on listening to the song, but it is possible that inaccuracies remain. Both songs have a similar tone, and have multiple references to Sikh history and values.

Sabh Ton Khatarnaak is also in Punjabi. Only selections from the poem are presented here. The author was a prominent left-wing poet, and was assassinated by militants in 1988. According to news stories, his poem has inspired some of the protestors, and the title is used as the beginning of contemporary comments on the situation leading to the protests.

The Bani of Protest is in English, but has phrases from Sikh sacred writings and Sikh meditative practice. It was written in December 2020.

Finally, *Khauf kyon hai itna hamaaraa* is in Hindi, with strong elements of Urdu vocabulary. It was written in December 2020, and is also available as a recitation with an accompanying video. Readers may find it interesting to compare it to the two Punjabi songs.

In brief, these pieces contain ideas of human rights, the special nature of farming for food production, struggles against oppression, lessons of history, and various dimensions of identity (national, regional, and religious, among others). These multiple identities are not seen as in opposition to one another. Of course, readers can find much more information about the selections presented here, as well as other poems and songs and their authors on the Internet

Ailaan (October 2020)

Vari Rai (Lyrics)

Bhai Manna Singh (Composer)

Kanwar Grewal (Singer)

Koi khande tikhe koi kirpan karoogaa
Tainoon dilliye ikath pareshaan karoogaa
Teraa faaide naalon ziaadaa nuksaan karoogaa
Par fasalaan de faisale kisaan karoogaa

Ihnaan 'katiaan de eke 'ch karor honge
Teri dhauñ de jo manke maror honge
Assi varhe diaan baabian ton lai ke thaaparaa
Tainoon jang daa ailaan naujavaan karoogaa
Tainoon dilliye ikath pareshaan karoogaa
Par fasalaan de faisale kisaan karoogaa

Bas char panj ghanṭiaan di vaat dilliye
Tainoon yaad karvaa diyaange aukaat dilliye
Teri hikk utte charh ke jaikaare launge
Saadi haunslaa afazai asmaan karoogaa
Tainoon dilliye ikath pareshaan karoogaa
Par fasalaan de faisale kisaan karoogaa

Asin haq di larai haq naal laraange
Asin jitaange te deg teg fatih parhaange
Sanoon maan vari rae itihaas de utte
Baaki dudh paani jang daa maidaan karoogaa
Tainoon dilliye ikath pareshaan karoogaa
Par fasalaan de faisale kisaan karoogaa

Proclamation

Some will sharpen a khanda, some a kirpan
Delhi, we will worry you as one
Greater than your gain will be the harm done
But matters of crops the farmers will decide

Individuals uniting will become millions
The beads on your neck will be twisted
Eighty-year old elders will strike you
The young will proclaim war on you
Delhi, we will worry you as one
But matters of crops the farmers will decide

Just a few hours journey, Delhi
We will remind you of your limits, Delhi
Climbing on your chest we will cheer
We will be encouraged by the sky
Delhi, we will worry you as one
But matters of crops the farmers will decide

We will fight the battle for rights with our rights
After winning we will offer charity and protection
We are proud to have the judgement of history
Let truth win on this battlefield
Delhi, we will worry you as one
But matters of crops the farmers will decide

Teer Punjab Ton (January 2021)

Navi Bassi Pathana and Varinder Sema (Lyrics)

Jazzy B (Singer/Composer)

Desh layi jehdhe faansi chadh gaye
Oh vi si Punjabi
Desh layi jehdhe London vadh gaye
Oh vi si Punjabi
Desh layi borderaa utte mar gaye
Oh vi si Punjabi
Dheeyaa bachaa leyande si gajniyo
Baaraa baje Punjabi

Fer vi launa painda sanu hak apne layi dharna
Gal sun lai kann khol ke dilliye
Sade naal je ladhna
Udheya teer Punjab to tikhaa
Phadhlo jihne phadhnaa
Udheya teer Punjab ton tikhaa
Phadhlo jihne phadhnaa

Attwaadi jihnu kehndi dilliye
Khoon de ne sab daani
Chaar vaar sarbans baar
Os kaum di hai nishaani
Saade guraaana ne sikhaayaa
Haq apne layi khadhnaa
Udheya teer Punjab ton tikhaa
Phadhlo jihne phadhnaa
Udheya teer Punjab ton tikhaa
Phadhlo jihne phadhnaa

Peheli sadhe choor hoyegi
Hath jatta de pakke
Saambh ni hone tetho kidre
Khoon khol gaye tate
Godi teri pattni bodi

Gal vich paa ke parna
Udheya teer Punjab ton tikhaa
Phadhlo jihne phadhnaa
Udheya teer Punjab ton tikhaa
Phadhlo jihne phadhnaa

Tu pehal kari asi khatam karaange
Chalne ni tere takey
Seva de vich KhalsaAid Singh Guru de pakke
Bassi Pathana kaihnda Varinder
Pair pachhaa ni tarna
Udheya teer Punjab to tikhaa
Phadhlo jihne phadhnaa
Udheya teer Punjab to tikhaa
Phadhlo jihne phadhnaa

Arrow from Punjab

For the nation, those who went to the gallows
They too were Punjabi
For the nation, those who went to London
They too were Punjabi
For the nation, those who died on our borders
They too were Punjabi
Those who would rescue our daughters at the stroke
Of midnight were Punjabi

Still to defend our rights we have to protest
Listen to our message with open ears, Delhi
If you want to fight with us
A sharp arrow has flown from Punjab
Catch it if you want
A sharp arrow has flown from Punjab
Catch it if you want

Those you call terrorists, Delhi
They have given their blood
Four times – the whole family –

That is the mark of our community
Our Gurus have taught us to
Stand up for our rights
A sharp arrow has flown from Punjab
Catch it if you want
A sharp arrow has flown from Punjab
Catch it if you want
First we will have to be overcome
The hands of the Jatts are firm
You cannot contain us
If our blood is up
We will strike back
You will suffer the consequences
A sharp arrow has flown from Punjab
Catch it if you want
A sharp arrow has flown from Punjab
Catch it if you want

You started this but we will finish it
Your blows will not succeed
In service, KhalsaAid are true Singhs of the Guru
Bassi Pathana and Varinder say
Take your feet away
A sharp arrow has flown from Punjab
Catch it if you want
A sharp arrow has flown from Punjab
Catch it if you want

Sabh Ton Khatarnaak (1987)

Avtar Singh Sandhu ('Paash')

Kirat di lutt, Sabh ton khatarnaak nahin hundi
Police di kutt, Sabh ton khatarnaak nahin hundi
Gaddaari-lobh di muth, Sabh ton khatarnaak nahin hundi

.....

Kapat de shor vich
Sahi hundia vee dab jaana, Bura taan hai
Kise jugnoo di lo vich padan lag jaana, Bura taan hai
Sab ton khatarnaak nahin hundaa

Sabh ton khatarnaak hundaa hai
Murda shanti naal bhar jaana
Na hona tadap da, Sabh sehan kar jaana
Ghar ton niklana kamm,
te kamm to ghar aana
Sab ton khatarnaak hundaa hai
Saade supniyaan da mar jaanaa

The Most Dangerous

Looting of one's labor is not the most dangerous
Beating by the police is not the most dangerous
The fist of treacherous greed is not the most dangerous

.....

In the din of deceit
To be oppressed while staying true is certainly bad
To read by the light of a firefly is certainly bad
But these are not the most dangerous

The most dangerous is
To be filled with the peace of a corpse
To have no feeling and bear everything
Leaving home for work
Coming from work to home
The most dangerous is
Our dreams dying

The Bani of Protest (December 2020)

Madhu Raghavendra

To the farmers marching towards
justice as effortlessly
as the lotus eyed feeds
on sweet rice made by Yashoda

crossing barricades and trenches
thrust by the police on orders of the State,
the way the ultimate truth arrives
on tractors and on feet
with a sickle and a plough

feeding those who come
their way with both hands
under their tents of fearless feast —
carrying us on a boat across the hunger sea

reminding the system
bhukhi-aa bhukh na utree
jay bannaa puree-aa bhaar

and reclaim justice singing
waahay guru, waahay guru,
waahay guru, waahay jeeyo.

Khauf kyon hai itna hamaaraa (December 2020)

Parakram Singh

Khauf kyon hai itna hamaaraa
Ki aavaaz bhi sunanaa chaaho na tum
Jab haq ki baat kareyn ham yoon
To beaavaaz karnaa chaaho tum
Ab jo aazaad desh hai hamaaraa
Phir kyon tum angrezi hukumaton se lagte ho
Jo buland ho kar keh rahe hain ham baat hamaari
To ham par lathiyaan chalaao kyon tum
Us desh ke naagarik hain jahaan 'Jai Javaan, Jai Kisan' kaa naara diya gayaa
Ab chaahе tum paani ki topon se hamein roknaa
Yaa laathion ke khauf se hamein daraanaa
Lekin ham to vaise hi khoon-paseene ke vafaadaar hain
Ye cheezein hamein kaise tarpaaengi
Mausam ki beruki sardi bhi ham kheton ke jotne vaalon ko kaise daraaengi
Are ye jo tumaari aasuon ki gas hai, ye hamein kyaa rulaaengi
In aakhon mein pehle hi aansoo sookh chuke hain
Rakh lo inhe
Kisi aur virodh ko beaavaaz karne ke liye tumhare kaam aayengi
Kis chiz ke gunehgaar hain ye to zaraa batlaate
Naa hi chor hain naa hi farebi
Tumhaare liye anaaj hain ugaate
Agar insaani haq ki baat karna gunaah hai to un hukoomaton se fareb ki boon aati
hai
Kisi avashya beriyon men hamein jakarne ki anthoni si nazar aati hai
Jo kar sako hamaare liye kuchh to hamaare saath aapni bhi aavaaz buland karnaa
Baat rakhne kaa hamein bhi mile haq ye farmaan nazar karnaa
Phir se poochh rahaa hoon
Khauf kyon hai itna hamaaraa
Ki aavaaz bhi sunanaa chaaho na tum
Jab haq ki baat kareyn ham yoon
To beaavaaz karnaa chaaho kyon

Why so much terror of us?

Why so much terror of us
That you don't even want to hear our voices?
When we are speaking of rights
Then you wish to silence us
Now this is our free country
Then why adhere to methods of colonial authority?
We are speaking based on our values
Then why are you hitting us with long staffs?
We are citizens of the nation where "Hail to the soldier, hail to the farmer" was
the cry given to us
Now if you stop us with water cannons
Or use the threat of long staffs to frighten us
In any case we are committed to our lives of blood and sweat
How can these things cow us down?
The nonstop cold of winter, how can it frighten those who work the fields?
Oh, your tear gas, how can it make us cry
When in these eyes, the tears have already dried out?
Keep it
It will be useful for silencing some other opponent
What was our wrongdoing? You should have told us that
We are not thieves or cheats
We grow grain for you
If speaking about human rights is wrong, then these displays of power smell of
hypocrisy
It can certainly happen that we will be confined and chained – what might have
been unimaginable
Those who can do something for us, raise your voices along with us
To speak our piece, give us, too, that right – make that decree public
Again, I ask
Why so much terror of us
That you don't even want to hear our voices?
When we are speaking of rights
Then you wish to silence us

Gurbhajan Gill

ਪਹਿਲੀ ਵਾਰ

ਮੱਥੇ ਦੀਆਂ ਤਿਉੜੀਆਂ
ਸਿਆੜ ਬਣੀਆਂ ਨੇ।
ਹਲ ਵਾਹਕਾਂ ਨੇ
ਦੁਸ਼ਮਣ ਦੀ ਨਿਸ਼ਾਨਦੇਹੀ ਕਰਕੇ
ਦਰਦਾਂ ਦੀ ਵਾਹੀ ਜੋਤੀ ਕੀਤੀ ਹੈ।
ਇਸ ਧਰਤੀ ਨੇ ਬਹੁਤ ਕੁਝ ਵੇਖਿਆ ਹੈ।
ਨਹਿਰਾਂ ਚੋਂ ਡੱਕੇ ਮੋਘੇ ਖੋਲ੍ਹੇ ਨੇ ਬਾਬਿਆਂ।
ਹਰਸਾ ਛੀਨਾ ਅੱਜ ਵੀ ਵੰਗਾਰਦਾ ਹੈ
ਮਾਲਵੇ 'ਚ ਬਿਸਵੇਦਾਰਾਂ ਨੂੰ
ਭਜਾਇਆ ਸੀ ਮੁਜਾਰਿਆਂ ਕਿਸ਼ਨਗੜ੍ਹੋਂ
ਦਬੋਲਿਆ ਪਿੰਡ ਪਿੰਡ ਮੰਡੀ ਮੰਡੀ।
ਸਫ਼ੈਦਪੋਸ਼ਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਸੁਰਖਪੋਸ਼ਾਂ ਪਾਈਆਂ ਭਾਜੜਾਂ
ਇਤਿਹਾਸ ਨੇ ਵੇਖਿਆ।

ਕੈਰੋਂਸ਼ਾਹੀ ਦਾ ਟਾਕਰਾ ਕਰਦੇ
ਖੁਸ਼ ਹੈਸੀਅਤੀ ਟੈਕਸ ਨੂੰ ਵੰਗਾਰਦੇ
ਅੱਜ ਵੀ ਚੇਤਿਆਂ ਚ ਜਾਗਦੇ।
ਚਾਚਾ ਚੋਰ ਭਤੀਜਾ ਡਾਕੂ
ਸੱਥਾਂ 'ਚ ਗਾਉਂਦੇ ਜਾਂਬਾਜ਼।
ਬੋਹਲਾਂ ਦੀ ਰਾਖੀ ਜਾਣਦੇ ਹਨ।
ਤੰਗਲੀਆਂ ਸਲੰਘਾਂ ਵਾਲੇ।
ਸਰਕਾਰਾਂ ਨਾਲ ਲੜੇ ਹਰ ਵਾਰ।

ਪਰ ਇਹ ਤੋਕਿਆ ਪਹਿਲੀ ਵਾਰ
ਵੱਖਰਾ ਸੂਰਜ
ਨਵੀਆਂ ਕਿਰਨਾਂ ਸਮੇਤ ਚੜ੍ਹਿਆ।
ਦੁਸ਼ਮਣ ਦੀ ਨਿਸ਼ਾਨਦੇਹੀ ਕੀਤੀ ਹੈ।
ਕਾਰਪੋਰੇਟ ਘਰਾਣਿਆਂ ਦੇ
ਕੰਪਨੀ ਸ਼ਾਹਾਂ ਨੂੰ
ਰਾਵਣ ਦੇ ਨਾਲ ਫੂਕਿਆ ਹੈ।

ਦੁਸਹਿਰੇ ਦੇ ਅਰਥ ਬਦਲੇ ਹਨ।
ਵਕਤ ਦੀ ਹਿੱਕ ਤੇ
ਦਰਦਮੰਦਾਂ ਦੀਆਂ ਆਹਾਂ ਨੇ
ਨਵੀਂ ਅਮਿਟ ਇਬਾਰਤ ਲਿਖੀ ਹੈ।

ਸਾਨੂੰ ਨਚਾਉਣ ਵਾਲੇ ਖੁਦ ਨੱਚੇ ਨੇ
ਹਕੀਕਤਾਂ ਦੇ ਦੁਆਰ।
ਬੇਸ਼ਰਮ ਹਾਸਿਆਂ ਚ ਘਿਰ ਗਏ ਹਨ
ਤਿੰਨ ਮੂੰਹੇ ਸ਼ੇਰ ਲੁਕਦੇ ਫਿਰਦੇ ਨੇ।
ਤਖ਼ਤਿਆਂ ਵਾਲੇ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਵੰਗਾਰਦੇ।

ਕਦੇ ਕਦੇ ਇਸ ਤਰ੍ਹਾਂ ਹੁੰਦਾ ਹੈ
ਕਿ ਬਿੱਲਾ ਆਪ ਹੀ ਪੈਰ ਧਰ ਕੇ
ਆਪਣੇ ਆਪ
ਫਸ ਜਾਵੇ ਬਲਦੇ ਤੰਦੂਰ ਵਿੱਚ।
ਕਾੜ੍ਹਨੀ 'ਚੋਂ
ਦੁੱਧ ਪੀਂਦਾ ਕੁੱਤਾ ਧੌਣ ਫਸਾ ਬਹੇ।
ਚੋਰ ਪਾੜ ਤੇ ਹੀ ਫੜਿਆ ਜਾਵੇ।
ਗਿੱਦੜ-ਕੁੱਟ ਖਾਂਦਾ
ਫਸਿਆ ਫਸਿਆ ਬੇਸ਼ਰਮੀ 'ਚ
ਕੁਝ ਨਾ ਕਹਿਣ ਜੋਗਾ ਰਹੇ।

ਪਹਿਲੀ ਵਾਰ ਹੋਇਆ ਹੈ
ਕਿ ਖੇਤ ਅੱਗੇ ਅੱਗੇ ਤੁਰ ਰਹੇ ਨੇ
ਕੁਰਸੀਆਂ ਮਗਰ ਮਗਰ ਤੁਰਦੀਆਂ
ਬਿਨ ਬੁਲਾਏ ਬਾਰਾਤੀਆਂ ਵਾਂਗ।
ਸਾਨੂੰ ਵੀ ਲੈ ਚੱਲੋ ਯਾਰ ਕਹਿੰਦੀਆਂ।
ਮਨੂ ਸਿਮ੍ਰਤੀ ਤੋਂ ਬਾਅਦ
ਨਵੇਂ ਅਛੂਤ ਐਲਾਨੇ ਹਨ
ਵਕਤਨਾਮੇ ਦੀ ਅਣਲਿਖੀ ਕਿਤਾਬ ਵਿੱਚ।

ਪਹਿਲੀ ਵਾਰ
ਤੂੰਬੀਆਂ ਢੱਡਾਂ ਸਾਰੰਗੀਆਂ ਨੇ
ਪੀੜ ਪਰੁੱਚੀਆਂ ਤਰਜ਼ਾਂ ਕੱਢੀਆਂ ਨੇ

ਵਕਤ ਨੇ ਹੇਕਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਸ਼ੀਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਖਾਇਆ ਹੈ।
ਮੁੱਕੇ ਵੰਗਾਰ ਬਣੇ ਹਨ
ਚੀਕਾਂ ਕੂਕ ਵਿੱਚ ਬਦਲੀਆਂ ਹਨ
ਲੇਰ ਨੂੰ ਆਵਾਜ਼ ਲੱਭੀ ਹੈ।
ਮੁਕਤੀ ਨੂੰ ਸਿਰਨਾਵੇਂ ਦੀ ਦੱਸ ਪਈ ਹੈ।

ਅੰਦਰ ਦੀਆਂ ਪੱਕੀਆਂ
ਬਾਹਰ ਆਈਆਂ ਹਨ
ਸਾਜ਼ਸ਼ਾਂ, ਗੋਦਾਂ, ਚਾਲਾਂ, ਕੁਚਾਲਾਂ
ਕੰਨਿਆ ਕੁਮਾਰੀ ਤੋਂ ਕਸ਼ਮੀਰ ਤੀਰ
ਭਾਰਤ ਇੱਕ ਹੋਇਆ ਹੈ
ਲੁੱਟ ਤੰਤਰ ਦੇ ਖਿਲਾਫ਼

ਕਿਤਾਬਾਂ ਤੋਂ ਬਹੁਤ ਪਹਿਲਾਂ
ਵਕਤ ਬੋਲਿਆ ਹੈ।
ਨਾਗਪੁਰੀ ਸੰਤਰਿਆਂ ਦਾ ਰੰਗ
ਫੱਕ ਹੋਇਆ ਹੈ ਲੋਕ ਦਰਬਾਰੇ

ਮੰਡੀਆਂ 'ਚ ਦਾਣੇ ਤੜਫੇ ਹਨ।
ਆੜ੍ਹਤੀਆਂ ਨੇ ਹਾਉਕਾ ਭਰਿਆ ਹੈ।
ਪੱਲੇਦਾਰਾਂ ਨੇ ਕਮਰਕੱਸਾ ਕੀਤਾ ਹੈ।
ਸੜਕਾਂ, ਰੇਲਵੇ ਟਰੈਕ ਨੇ
ਬਾਬੇ ਪੋਤਰੇ
ਦਾਦੀਆਂ ਪੋਤਰੀਆਂ
ਜ਼ਿੰਦਾਬਾਦ ਦੀ ਜੂਨ ਪਈਆਂ ਵੇਖੀਆਂ ਨੇ।

ਪਹਿਲੀ ਵਾਰ
ਬੰਦ ਬੂਹਿਆਂ ਦੇ ਅੰਦਰ
ਲੱਗੇ ਸ਼ੀਸ਼ਿਆਂ ਨੇ ਦੱਸਿਆ ਹੈ
ਅੰਦਰਲਾ ਕਿਰਦਾਰ
ਕਿ ਕੁਰਸੀਆਂ ਨੇ
ਨਾਚ ਨਚਾਇਆ ਨਹੀਂ
ਝਾਂਜਰਾਂ ਬੰਨ੍ਹ ਖੁਦ ਨੱਚਿਆ ਹੈ।

ਕਾਠ ਦੀ ਪੁਤਲੀ ਨੂੰ ਨਚਾਉਂਦੀਆ
ਤਣਾਵਾਂ ਮਗਰਲੇ ਹੱਥ ਨੰਗੇ ਹੋਏ ਨੇ।

ਝੋਨੇ ਦੇ ਵੱਢ ਵਿੱਚ
ਕਣਕ ਜੰਮਣੋਂ ਇਨਕਾਰੀ ਹੈ।
ਸਹਿਮ ਗਿਆ ਹੈ ਬੰਬੀਆਂ ਦਾ ਪਾਣੀ
ਕਿੱਲੇ ਬੱਧੀਆਂ ਮਹੀਆਂ ਗਾਈਆਂ
ਦੁੱਧੋਂ ਭੱਜ ਗਈਆਂ ਨੇ।
ਦੁੱਧ ਪੀਣੀ ਬਿੱਲੀ
ਥੈਲਿਓਂ ਬਾਹਰ ਆਈ ਹੈ।
ਹਾਲੀ ਪਾਲੀ ਅਰਥ ਸ਼ਾਸਤਰ ਪੜ੍ਹੇ ਹਨ
ਬਿਨਾ ਸਕੂਲਾਂ ਕਾਲਜਾਂ ਦੀਆਂ
ਜਮਾਤਾਂ 'ਚ ਗਏ ਪਟਾਕਦੇ ਹਨ
ਫਰਨ ਫਰਨ ਅਰਥਾਉਂਦੇ ਹਨ
ਸੱਤਾ ਦੀ ਵਿਆਕਰਣ।
ਫਿਕਰੇ ਜੁੜਨ ਨਾ ਜੁੜਨ
ਅਰਥ ਕਤਾਰੋ ਕਤਾਰ ਖੜ੍ਹੇ ਹਨ।
ਪਹਿਲੀ ਵਾਰ ਅਰਥਾਂ ਨੇ ਸ਼ਬਦਾਂ ਨੂੰ
ਕਟਹਿਰੇ ਚ ਖੜ੍ਹਾ ਕਰ ਲਾਜਵਾਬ ਕੀਤੇ।
ਅੰਬਰ ਨੇ ਤਾਰਿਆਂ ਦੀ ਛਾਵੇਂ
ਮੁੱਦਤ ਬਾਅਦ ਵੇਖੇ ਨੇ
ਪੁੱਤਰ ਧੀਆਂ
ਲੋਹ ਲੰਗਰ ਪਕਾਉਂਦੇ ਵਰਤਾਉਂਦੇ।
ਸੂਰਜ ਤੇ ਚੰਦਰਮਾ ਇੱਕੋ ਜੇਹਿਆ
ਬੇਰਹਿਮ ਤਾਰਾ ਮੰਡਲ ਨੇੜਿਉਂ ਤੱਕਿਆ ਹੈ।
ਕੰਬਲ ਦੀ ਠੰਢ ਵਾਲੇ ਮਹੀਨੇ
ਅੰਦਰ ਅੱਗ ਮੱਚਦੀ ਹੈ।
ਮੁੜ੍ਹਕੇ ਨਾਲ ਭਿੱਜਿਆ ਹੈ
ਪੂਰਾ ਤਨ ਬਦਨ।

ਝੰਡੇ ਅੱਗੇ ਝੰਡੀਆਂ ਮਜਰਿਮ ਬਣੀਆਂ ਹਨ।
ਚੌਂਕੀਦਾਰਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਸਵਾਲਾਂ ਨੇ ਵਿੰਨ੍ਹਿਆ ਹੈ
ਬਿਨ ਤੀਰ ਤਲਵਾਰੋਂ।

ਗੋਦੀ ਬੈਠੇ ਲਾਡਲੇ ਅੱਖਰ
ਬੇਯਕੀਨੇ ਹੋਏ ਨੇ ਚੁਰਸਤਿਆਂ 'ਚ।
ਸੁਆਲਾਂ ਦਾ ਕੱਦ
ਵਧ ਗਿਆ ਹੈ ਜਵਾਬਾਂ ਨਾਲੋਂ।

ਪਹਿਲੀ ਵਾਰ
ਤੱਥ ਸਿਰ ਚੜ੍ਹ ਬੋਲੇ ਹਨ ਬੇਬਾਕ ਹੋ ਕੇ।
ਧਰਤੀ ਪੁੱਤਰਾਂ ਨੇ ਸਵਾ ਸਦੀ ਬਾਅਦ
ਪਗੜੀ ਸੰਭਾਲੀ ਹੈ
ਸਿਆੜਾਂ ਦੀ ਸਲਾਮਤੀ ਲਈ।

Translation by Gurbhajan Gill

The First Time

Frostbite
They became winter.
The plow carriers
By marking the enemy
The cultivation of pains is lighted.
This earth has seen a lot.
Babas opened the moghs from the canals.
Harsa Chhina still challenges today
Biswedars in the Malwa
The mujaras were chased away from Kishangarh
Dablia village mandi mandi.
White-clad bhajras
History has shown.

Opposing Caronism
Happiness Challenges Taxes
Wake up in your mind even today.
Uncle thief nephew robber
Adventurers singing in places.
Know the protection of Bohals.
The ones with tight limbs.
Fighting governments every time.

But this is the first time
Different sun
Climbed with new rays.
Marked the enemy.
Of corporate houses
To Company Shah
Fukiya is with Ravana.
The meaning of Dussehra has changed.
On time
The sighs of the afflicted
New indelible text has been written.

We danced ourselves
The gates of reality.
Surrounded by shameless laughter
Three-faced lions are hiding.
Thrones challenge the thrones.

Sometimes this happens
By holding that cat's feet automatically
By itself
Get caught in the burning oven.
From the carcass
The milk-drinking dog's neck became entangled.
The thief should be caught on the crack.
Eats vultures
Trapped in shamelessness
Nothing to say.

Has happened for the first time
That the fields are moving forward
Chairs follow
Like uninvited guests.
Take us too, friend.
After Manu Simrati
There are new untouchables
In the unwritten book of time.

For the first time
The gourds are made of saffron
The pain has taken its toll

Time has shown the hacks a mirror.
Fists are a challenge
The screams turned into cooks
Lair has found the voice.
Salvation has been told of the address.

Fixed inside
Have come out
Conspiracies, glues, tricks, tricks
Kashmir arrow from Kanya Kumari
India has become one
Against the loot mechanism

Long before the books
Time has spoken.
The color of Nagpur orange
Concerned neo-hippies and their global warming, i'll tell ya

Grains are scarce in the mandis.
The artisans have filled the hauka.
Paledars have made a fuss.
Roads, railway tracks
Grandchildren
Grandmothers granddaughters
I saw Zindabad in June.

For the first time
Inside closed doors
The mirrors attached
Inner character
That the chairs
Not danced
Jhanjara Bandh himself has danced.

Dancing the wooden doll
The hands behind the tension are bare.

In the harvest of paddy
Wheat is denied.
The water of the bombs is frightened
Sing for months

Ran away from the milk.
Cat drinking milk
Has come out of the bag.
Recently studied Pali Economics
Without schools or colleges
Crackers go to classes
Fern means fern
The grammar of power.
Do not connect the paragraphs
The meanings are lined up.
For the first time the meaning of the words
He did a wonderful job standing in the courtroom.
Amber overshadowed the stars
Seen after the deadline
Sons and daughters
They used to cook iron langar.
The sun and the moon are alike
The ruthless constellation is watching closely.
Cold months of blankets
There is a fire inside.
Soaked with sweat
The whole body.

Flags in front of flags have become criminals.
The guards are pierced by questions
Swords without arrows.
Dear characters sitting on the lap
Unbelievable in the foursome.
The height of the questions
Has exceeded the answers.

For the first time
The facts are uttered without hesitation.
The sons of the earth after a quarter of a century
The turban is saved
For winter safety.

Gurbhajan Gill

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Baljit Singh Virk

ਖੇਤਾਂ ਦੇ ਪੁੱਤ

ਖੇਤਾਂ ਵਿਚੋਂ ਉਠੇ ਨੇ ਜੋ ਲਾਟ ਬਣ ਕੇ।
ਦਿੱਲੀ ਵੱਲ ਤੁਰੇ ਨੇ ਉਹ ਹਿਕ ਤਣ ਕੇ।

ਲੈ ਕੇ ਓਟ ਆਸਰਾ ਗੁਰੂ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਦਾ।
ਛਿੜ ਪਿਆ ਜੰਗ ਜੀ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਹਿੰਦ ਦਾ।

ਪਾਣੀ ਦੀਆਂ ਤੋਪਾਂ ਕੀ ਭਜਾਉਣਾ ਅੱਗ ਨੂੰ।
ਪਾਇਆ ਹੱਥ ਕੁਰਸੀ ਨੇ ਸਾਡੀ ਪੱਗ ਨੂੰ।

ਸਰਸਾਂ 'ਚੋਂ ਲੰਘੇ ਜੋ ਚਮਕੌਰ ਲੜੇ ਸੀ।
ਦੇਗਾਂ 'ਚੋਂ ਉਬਾਲੇ ਜਿਹੜੇ ਰੂੰ 'ਚ ਛੜੇ ਸੀ।

ਟਿੰਡ ਦਾ ਸਰਾਣਾ ਲਾ ਕੇ ਸੌਣਾ ਜਾਣਦੇ।
ਇੱਟ ਨਾਲ ਇੱਟ ਖੜਕਾਉਣਾ ਜਾਣਦੇ।

ਕਰੀਏ ਨਾ ਧੱਕਾ ਜੀ ਸਹਿਣਾ ਵੀ ਪਾਪ ਹੈ।
ਬਿਨਾ ਸਿਰ ਲੜਿਆ ਉਹ ਸਾਡਾ ਬਾਪ ਹੈ।

ਲਾਲ ਕਿਲਾ ਕਰੇ ਮਾਣ ਕਿਸ ਗੱਲ ਦਾ।
ਸਦਾ ਨਹੀਂ ਹਕੂਮਤਾਂ ਦਾ ਜ਼ੋਰ ਚੱਲਦਾ।

ਪੁੱਛ ਲੈਣਾ ਕਦੇ ਕਾਬਲ ਕੰਧਾਰ ਨੂੰ।
ਹਰੀ ਸਿੰਘ ਨਲੂਏ ਦੀ ਮਾਰੀ ਮਾਰ ਨੂੰ।

ਪੱਥਰਾਂ ਤੇ ਤਾਰਾਂ ਨੇ ਕੀ ਰਾਹ ਡੱਕਣੇ।
ਹਾਕਮਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਇਹ ਤਾਂ ਫੋਕੇ ਵਹਿਮ ਸੱਖਣੇ।

ਘੋੜਿਆਂ ਦੀ ਕੰਡ ਉੱਤੇ ਸੌਂਦੇ ਸੂਰਮੇ।
ਵੈਰੀਆਂ ਦੇ ਕੁੱਟ ਕੇ ਬਣਾਉਂਦੇ ਚੂਰਮੇ।

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Translation by Satpal Singh

Kheta de putt/Sons of the soil

Those who rise like flames of fire from the fields,
Marched to Delhi with puffed chests,
Taken the blessings of Guru Gobind Singh
War has ignited between Punjab and Indus
What harm can water cannons do to fire?
Power has challenged our esteem and pride
Those who crossed Sirsa and fought in Chamkour
Those who were boiled in cauldrons and burnt in cotton
They know how to sleep on bare lands
They know how to fight neck to neck
Don't oppress and don't be oppressed
Descendants of the father who fought even behead
Red Fort, why to be arrogant?
Even the governments are not permanent.
Go and ask Kabul and Kandhar,
The feats of Hari Singh Nalua.
Barbed wires and boulders may not be barriers
These are mere illusions of rulers.
Warriors spend nights on the backs of horses,
And beat the enemies to pulp.

Satpal Singh
Assistant Professor, English
Lyallpur Khalsa College, Jalandhar

Responses of US-based Sikh Nonprofits to the Farmers' Movement

The farmers' movement has attracted the attention and support of Sikh diaspora communities. In this compilation, we illustrate some of the responses of four US-based Sikh nonprofits: the Jakara Movement, Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF), Sikh Coalition, and United Sikhs. All four are 501(c)(3) organizations under the US tax code. The material has been collected from the organizations' websites and their email communications. During this period, these organizations have continued to pursue their other objectives and activities, including general support to the Sikh community for protection of civil rights, guidance on health and safety during the pandemic, and various community-building, educational and outreach efforts. Each organization has its own distinctive character, though they also share many of the same goals and foundational values. They typically act independently, but will also come together or promote each other when the situation demands.

Jakara Movement

The Jakara Movement is headquartered in California, and that state's Sikh community, especially young people, is the main focus of its activities.

Mission and Vision

"The Jakara Movement is a grassroots community-building organization working to empower, educate, and organize Punjabi Sikhs, and other marginalized communities; to advance their health, education, and economic, social, and political power. We strive to create a Gurmat-inspired community, rooted in the struggle of our foremothers and forefathers, to develop powerful, informed, and organized youth leadership, locally-rooted residential power, and community capacity that will be a key partner in building a better future for all."

Activities

The Jakara Movement was the lead organizer of a "Kisaan [Farmer] Solidarity" car and truck rally which assembled in Oakland, California, and drove across the Bay Bridge to the Indian Consulate in San Francisco, then looping back to its starting point. The rally took place on December 5th, 2020, and gained significant media attention. Several California gurdwara management committees joined in the organizing, and their congregations participated in the rally.

In a December 1st email newsletter, part of a statement explaining the rationale for the rally was provided, framed as an open letter to the "diasporic Sangat," with a

link to the complete document on the web. That document was in Punjabi as well as English, and was signed by about fifteen diasporic organizations from a half-dozen countries. The letter began,

Watching the images of the Kisaan Morcha [Movement] over the past few days has sent a resounding message and reminder to Panthic naujawan [youth] around the world: political power and strength has always ultimately laid in the hands of the sangat. The only question has been when will we decide to break from our doubts and self-imposed restrictions to wield it?"

The statement includes framings in terms of Sikh beliefs and ideals, as well as a critique of many aspects of India's national government, oppressive state power more generally, and the influence of Western powers. Hence, it provides a complex moral and political rationale for the farmers' struggle and for international support of the movement.

After the rally, it was estimated (newsletter of December 14th) that 12,000 vehicles were involved, and that the caravan was 20 miles long. It was characterized as the largest protest by Sikh Punjabis in the US, and included participants from Arizona, Nevada and Washington as well as California. Once again emphasizing the Sikh community's identity, the newsletter stated,

Our collective ਸੰਗਤ (sangat/company/congregation) showed up in immense numbers to support the ਕਿਸਾਨ (kisaan/farmers) protesting in India. From the youngest of the Panth to our elders, the spirit of the Guru and the ਸੰਘਰਸ਼ (Sangharsh/struggle) is alive and well in the West.

Subsequent activities by Jakara included a community forum; a discussion of how to combat misinformation about the farmers' protests on social media – a campaign that has been sponsored by entities associated with India's ruling party; a virtual conversation with independent journalist Sandeep Singh, who has been reporting from the protest sites on Delhi's border; an event linking the farmer protests to Martin Luther King Day and human rights violations by India's government; a campaign to free activists like Nodeep Kaur, who had been arrested; and other ongoing efforts.

SALDEF

SALDEF is headquartered in Washington, DC, and while it has a national presence, many of its activities are focused on giving Sikhs visibility and influence in the nation's political capital, including events for members of Congress (especially Langar on the Hill), congressional internships for young Sikhs, and so on. It is the oldest of the four organizations.¹

Mission and Vision

“SALDEF is a national Sikh American media, policy, and education organization. Our mission is to empower Sikh Americans by building dialogue, deepening understanding, promoting civic and political participation, and upholding social justice and religious freedom for all Americans. We are grounded in our values of optimism (chardi kala), humility (nimrata) and service (seva), inspired by the community (sangat) for the benefit of all (sarbat da bhalla).

“We envision a United States where Sikh Americans are respected and recognized as a vibrant and integral part of the fabric of this nation and are appreciated for our shared values of service, social justice, and an unshakeable belief in freedom and equality for all.”

Activities

SALDEF's weekly newsletter collects and features stories from the media, and the farmers' movement began to appear in these weekly wrap-ups in late November. On December 12th, SALDEF collaborated with South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT) to host a webinar titled, “Punjabi Farmer Protests & Historic March to Delhi - A Global Perspective.” The description indicated its broad conceptual scope: “experts will discuss the current situation of the farmers in Punjab, the uprising against the recent central government policies and the significance of the farmers around the world. Experts will also discuss the implications of these policies from a social and economic perspective.”

At this time, media reports began to include responses by US politicians to the farmer protests, especially Congressman John Garamendi (D-CA-03), Co-Chair of the American Sikh Caucus. Stories about the farmer protests began to be prominent in the weekly media compilations. In January, SALDEF featured alumni from SALDEF's internship program speaking about their perspectives on the protests.

¹ Its original name was Sikh Mediawatch and Resource Taskforce (SMART).

On February 2nd, SALDEF issued a statement that began,

The Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF) is deeply concerned about the escalation of the use of force by the Indian government and attacks on free speech. We strongly condemn the increasing number of human rights violations, including the detention of journalists and other attacks on the press, as farmers from around India protest the passage of the farm laws.

This was followed on February 10th with a more detailed condemnation of human rights violations, which concluded, “We urge you to reach out to your members of Congress and let them know about the human rights violations happening in India right now.” This was supported by resources on the SALDEF website. Subsequent weekly newsletters and additional messages have continued to aggregate media reports on the protests, the Indian government’s responses, and statements of concern from various organizations around the globe.

Sikh Coalition

The Sikh Coalition is probably the largest organization of the four, in terms of budget. It is headquartered in New York, and was formed as a response to the 9/11 attacks, and concerns for the safety of Sikhs after that cataclysmic event.

Mission and Values

“Through the community, courtrooms, classrooms, and halls of Congress, we work to protect the constitutional right to practice your faith without fear. We strive to do this with integrity, selflessness, and the belief that our shared work holds a greater purpose.”

Activities

On December 7th, the Sikh Coalition reported its own efforts to sway US politicians, and urged others to do the same:

TAKE DIRECT CONGRESSIONAL ACTION NOW: Tell your lawmakers in the U.S. Congress to show solidarity with farmers and condemn the Indian government's response to the protest. Take 60 seconds and tell your members of Congress to take action now!

Last week, the Sikh Coalition sent letters to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and the members of

the American Sikh Congressional Caucus in an effort to help raise awareness and request that they join the growing chorus condemning the Indian government's undemocratic response.

Later in December, these calls for action were renewed, and the Sikh Coalition reported on its own efforts, including succeeding in getting Senator Bob Menendez (D-NJ, and the Ranking Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee) to write to India's ambassador to the US about the issue, as well as directly informing various segments of the US media.

In January, the organization used the example of the Seattle City Council which, urged by the area's Sikh community, had passed a resolution in support of the farmers' protest, to draft a model resolution that can be used to ask local, county, state, and federal government officials to stand with the farmers. Once the Biden administration was sworn in, the Sikh Coalition sent letters to the White House and the State Department, asking that it condemn the Indian government's violence against the protestors, hold the government and its leadership accountable, and monitor the Indian government's own, or government-sanctioned, retaliatory actions that have violated the civil rights of protestors, journalists and others.

The Sikh Coalition has continued to focus on influencing the US government and media. In February, it strongly criticized what it viewed as a weak statement from the US State Department about the Indian government's handling of the protests, and through the present, it continues to focus on media influence and advocacy.

United Sikhs

The US headquarters of United Sikhs are in New York, but it also has offices in nine other countries, including Canada and the United Kingdom. United Sikhs also regularly engages in relief activities for domestic and international disasters, such as hurricanes, floods and earthquakes.

Mission

“To transform, alleviate, educate and protect the lives of underprivileged, individuals and minority communities impacted by disasters, natural or man-made, suffering from hunger, illiteracy, diseases, or from violation of civil and human-rights into informed and vibrant members of society by fostering sustainable programs regardless of color, race, religion or creed. We at UNITED SIKHS believe that the development of enlightened and progressive societies can be made

possible by socially conscious groups of people who make a commitment to develop and direct human potential.”

Activities

United Sikhs’ international presence, including in India, and its experience in disaster relief, have distinguished its response to the farmers’ protests. They began reporting on the protests in their newsletters in late November, by which time they were already offering “Langar (meals, water), Medical Services (Urgent care, ambulatory support, medications) and PPE needs (Masks, sanitizers) ...” They also noted that “Volunteer teams of professionals and doctors are available from Punjab and Delhi throughout this march. Our legal teams are also ready to serve with any anticipated needs in the coming days.”

In early December, United Sikhs reported having set up medical camps and ambulance services at the protest sites on the borders of Delhi. They also provided water for drinking, bathing and washing clothes, as well as blankets and bedding. At the same time, the organization mobilized its international presence, with a large (virtual) international conference on December 10th, marking International Human Rights Day.

Communications from the organization also began to tell the stories of United Sikhs volunteers at the protest sites, including medical professionals and people experienced in feeding large numbers of people for relief missions. This included, for example, Parminder Singh, who went to Kerala to help there, so these efforts were not restricted to the Punjab-based protests.

United Sikhs also began to seek donations for families of farmers who had died during the protests, through a Fallen Farmers Fund. Their communications have featured individual stories of the affected families. At the end of January, a legal helpline and fund was launched for those who went missing after the January 26th tractor rally in New Delhi. This has involved partnering with legal professionals, farmers’ unions, and the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee. Many individuals have been detained by the police, often under trumped-up charges, and legal representation for them has been vital. In a March statement, Harpreet Kaur, the United Sikhs Legal Director, India, said, “Safeguarding the welfare of the victims and their families, regardless of the time it takes to process the cases, is part of our Legal Aid project. We continue to receive requests for assistance on our Legal Aid helpline.”

As winter has turned to summer, United Sikhs has been providing fans, coolers and shade shelters. It has expanded its onsite efforts to eye care for the elderly, blood

donations, and trash clean up. These kinds of efforts have become increasingly important as the government has restricted protestors' access to services and conveniences at the protest camps on the borders of Delhi.

Websites

www.jakara.org

www.saldef.org

www.sikhcoalition.org

www.unitedsikhs.org

Faith, Trauma, and Transnational Connections in India's Farmer Protests

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Reprinted with permission from
Berkley Forum: Sikh Identity in the Indian Farm Protests
Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs¹

It has been months since Indian farmers have been protesting against three new agricultural laws instituted by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government. Contrary to government claims about the laws boosting efficiency in the farming sector, farmers say that they risk losing their lands and livelihood in the face of deregulation, deepening corporate control, and the triumph of free-market forces.² Sikh farmers, mostly from Punjab, have been at the helm of the movement.

While Sikh farmers on the ground in India are doing the work of mobilization and resistance, transnational Sikhs across the globe are providing a significant scaffolding for the movement. The Sikh diaspora's centripetal orientation towards Punjab and quest for ways to forge transnational connections becomes exaggerated and visible during certain critical moments such as what we're witnessing today. For Sikhs across the world, the ongoing government repression³ conjures memories of a painful past,⁴ especially the state-sponsored massacre of 1984.

While diasporic Sikhs are often careful to point out that the movement is not only about religion or Punjab, in extending their solidarity they inevitably evoke spiritual, emotional, and material ties with the *sangat* or community, as well as their identities as farmers' lineal and collateral kin.⁵ Transnational Sikhs are drawing upon these lineages with farming, faith, and Punjab to provide moral and material aid to struggling farmers in India.

¹ <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/responses/faith-trauma-and-transnational-connections-in-india-s-farmer-protests>

² <https://www.anticapitalistresistance.org/post/behind-the-indian-farmers-struggle>

³ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-55899754>

⁴ <https://scroll.in/article/985313/red-fort-how-punjabi-protestors-are-tapping-into-history-to-mobilise-against-farm-laws>

⁵ <https://scroll.in/global/981209/children-of-kisaans-the-global-punjabi-diaspora-speaks-up-for-the-farmers-protesting-in-india>

They are keenly following the developments, extending impassioned support to the farmers on the ground by offering free food, essential supplies, medical aid, amenities, and even foot massage machines;⁶ organizing their own protest marches⁷ and teach-ins;⁸ wielding social media as a tool⁹ to generate awareness and express their outrage at the Narendra Modi-led BJP government; issuing strong condemnations of human rights violations;¹⁰ signing petitions;¹¹ and composing songs and poetry of protest,¹² as well as other creative expressions. In the process, they are creating, evoking, and reinforcing fictive and real kinship with Sikh farmers. All of this is tinged with a feeling of *déjà vu*: The oppression and atrocities, the portrayal of farmers as “Khalistani,” or separatist and “anti-national,”¹³ is all too familiar. Behind today’s strong and sustained transnational organizing lies a longer story of violence and suppression, but also contention and struggle. For Sikhs in the diaspora, the past is reflected in this present struggle and an understanding of the present is deflected through past trauma.

Immigrant Sikhs, like many other immigrant communities, create and maintain transnational circuits, simultaneously straddling the worlds of “home” and “host” and forging economic, sociocultural, and political connections. One of the earliest and most vivid illustrations of transnational linkages dates back to the early 1900s when anticolonial leaders began drawing connections between the discrimination that Indians were facing in North America with their colonial status in India, leading to the formation of the Ghadar (mutiny or revolution) Party (Sohi 2014). The party consisted of mostly Sikhs, but also non-Sikh Punjabi migrants from various backgrounds, who came together to bring about violent revolutionary change in India and carve a niche for themselves in their new diasporic locations.

Though the Ghadar movement fell short of achieving their revolutionary goal, it was an early manifestation of a strong, inclusive transnational mobilization supporting India. The movement shows that when it came to political organizing,

⁶ <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/nia-examines-khalsa-aid-functionary-in-case-against-sikhs-for-justice/article33594744.ece>

⁷ <https://scroll.in/global/981209/children-of-kisaans-the-global-punjabi-diaspora-speaks-up-for-the-farmers-protesting-in-india>

⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j2EKPYktBc>

⁹ <https://twitter.com/hashtag/farmersprotest?lang=en>

¹⁰ <https://saldef.org/saldef-condemns-human-rights-violations-at-kisaan-protests/>

¹¹ <https://www.sikhcoalition.org/get-involved/take-action-tell-congress-condemn-indian-government-response-farmersprotest/>

¹² <https://twitter.com/mallikakaur/status/1335325646990364672>

¹³ <https://caravanmagazine.in/politics/republic-day-khalistan-conspiracy-government-playing-dangerous-game-punjab-disaster>

identity as “Indian” rather than Sikh, Hindu, or Muslim was most important. However, these solidarities shifted significantly in a watershed moment in Sikh and Indian history: the violence of 1984. Hitherto muted tensions between Sikhs and Hindus became manifest and solidified in 1984 not just in India but also transnationally.

In June 1984, following political tensions, and under the pretext of “apprehending a handful of militants,” the Indian army under state leadership invaded the “theopolitical center”¹⁴ of Sikhs, the Golden Temple in Punjab. Thousands of pilgrims were killed. Given that this sacred complex lies at the “center of [the Sikh] moral and religious world” it has acquired an anthropomorphized quality. Thus, the attack was mourned for the death of people, but also for the “desecration” and “hurt” inflicted on the Golden Temple as embodying the *sangat* (Chopra 2011).

Following closely on the heels of this attack, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards on October 31, 1984. The assassination precipitated the organized, state-backed massacre of Sikhs in India’s capital city, New Delhi, and other parts of North India.

The initial wave of killing lasted from the evening of October 31 through November 4, with more than 3,000 Sikhs murdered. The events of 1984 initiated at least a decade of extrajudicial killings, disappearances, atrocities, and torture in Punjab sanctioned by the state. “1984” became shorthand, symbolizing the violence of June and October to November but also tensions between the Sikh community and state, when the state assumed a “Hindu” identity, drawing a simplistic association between the majority-Hindu community as the “rightful proprietors” (Hansen 1999) of India.

Transnational Sikhs’ robust involvement that we see today is best understood within this longer genealogy of persecution and resistance. Even though the events of 1984 unfolded in India, the outrage, anger, and sadness resonated with Sikhs globally. In the immediate aftermath of the events, Sikhs in the diaspora were visibly moved to action, with many protests and demonstrations against the Indian state (Kurien 2018). Sikhs perceived the attacks of 1984 as an assault on the Sikh collective body, echoing a foundational principle in Sikhism that the guru or teacher is present in the “corporate body of the community” (Oberoi 1987). Sikhs in the diaspora extend this principle to construct a transnational, “imagined community” (Anderson 1983). So even though diasporic Sikhs were

¹⁴ <https://sikhbookclub.com/2017/08/21/the-golden-temple-its-theo-political-status-by-sirdar-kapur-singh>

physically distant from the violence of 1984, they were injured by the loss of a community which “serves as the repository for binding traditions” (Erikson 1991).

In 1984, for first-generation and second-generation Sikhs who started learning about the events at home and in community settings like gurdwaras, the violence led them to reclaim their religious-cultural identity that they had been gradually renouncing as they assimilated into immigrant contexts. One of the most powerful illustrations of this was in the Sikh performance of embodied identity (expressed through articles of faith, especially *kes* or hair covered by the *pagh* or turban). At the epicenter of the violence in India, many Sikh men were being forced to cut their hair and make themselves less conspicuous. But in a remarkable display of transnational connection and solidarity, it was diasporic Sikhs who answered back to the conflation between bodies of individual Sikhs and the collective Sikh body as “terrorists” in India, by performing community in and through corporeality.

While doing research on intergenerational transmission of trauma among diasporic Sikhs (Devgan 2015), my first-generation interlocutors shared how the violence of 1984 provided them with a lens to start comprehending their parents’ experiences of the 1947 Partition. Today, for second-generation Sikhs—those born in the diaspora or who migrated at a young age—the farmers’ movement is shaping their generational consciousness and becoming the idiom through which to start making sense of historical injustices. They are joining the dots between past genocidal violence and present threats of genocide.

Twitter has been especially abuzz with such activity. A young Sikh woman living in the Bay Area recently tweeted: “Our grandparents saw 1947. Our parents saw 1984. We are seeing 2021.”¹⁵

Another New-York based Sikh woman—a lawyer, activist, and writer—posted a thread on Twitter, connecting Hindu nationalism under the BJP government to anti-Sikh violence related to the farmers’ protest.¹⁶

Successive generations of the Sikh community remember a difficult past, but only through imagination and projection (Hirsch 2012). Yet there are occasions when ghosts of violent pasts that always linger in the background, a shadowy absence-presence, make themselves visible and known. The farmer protests of 2021 are one such moment. In the midst of pro-BJP misinformation in the Indian media

¹⁵ <https://twitter.com/punnettsq/status/1355231800948256769>

¹⁶ <https://twitter.com/sikhfeminist/status/1358062274892677124>

and the vile and frightening campaign to purge India of minority groups, especially Muslims, there are now also calls to recreate the genocidal violence of 1984, both on the ground¹⁷ and on social media.¹⁸ For transnational Sikhs, the temporal divide between 1984 and 2021, and the physical distance between India and their diasporic locations, is getting compressed—trauma that is not finite and finished, but chronic and persistent, is manifesting itself all over again.

A significant dimension of transnational Sikhs' solidarity with the farmers' protests has to do with being haunted by an oppressive past that is considered finite and/or denied. Yet, as sociologist Avery Gordon explains: “[h]aunting” creates the need to transform, change, or a “something-to-be-done” (Gordon 2008). As diasporic Sikhs galvanize support for farmers, they are driven by their haunted past, not so much as an albatross, but as a means to reclaim and reshape the present and future. Protesting farmers in India have been going strong against all odds, worthy contenders to the tyranny of Modi's Hindu nationalist and neoliberal regime. If we prod just beneath the surface of this remarkable movement, we will also see how faith, trauma, and transnational connections nurture, replenish, and reinvigorate the roots of a struggle that will likely have enduring effects not only in the realms of economics¹⁹ and politics²⁰ but also internal differentiation within communities, especially reevaluating gender and caste oppression.²¹

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¹⁷ <https://scroll.in/article/985363/in-delhi-public-support-for-protesting-farmers-is-giving-way-to-anti-sikh-prejudice>

¹⁸ <https://www.thequint.com/cyber/twitter-500-accounts-suspended-violent-calls-repeat-of-1984-red-fort-sikh-farmers>

¹⁹ <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/farm-protests-in-india-are-writing-the-green-revolutions-obituary/>

²⁰ <https://jacobinmag.com/2021/02/farmer-protest-india-narendra-modi>

²¹ <https://caravanmagazine.in/agriculture/left-punjab-haryana-caste-gender-solidarities-farmers-protest>

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Book Reviews

The Legacy of Militancy in Punjab: Long Road to 'Normalcy'

Inderjit Singh Jaijee & Dona Suri,
New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2020,
213 pp., ISBN 978-9352806287

The phases of militancy and “normalcy” in Punjab have been the most debated and contested terrains in the recent scholarship on Punjab. Different scholars, while perceiving the legacy of militancy from various perspectives, have constructed different and, in some cases, even contradictory perceptions with regard to the ramifications of this period of violence. This book authored by Inderjit Singh Jaijee and Dona Suri presents an original, objective, and comprehensive mapping of the undercurrents of the militancy and post-militancy era in Punjab. In particular, it focuses on the lasting political, economic, and socio-cultural effects of the period of militancy which continue to negatively affect the period of post-militancy (or “normalcy”) in Punjab.

The book provides a chronology of events sequenced from 1984 onwards up to 2020 in explaining the political personalities, processes and perceptions related and relevant to the era of militancy and post-militancy. The book amply describes how key, previously unrealized, players in the state have acted to create a sense of “normalcy.” For example, various “mafias”---whether liquor, transport, or mining---have emerged over a period of time under political patronage. There has also been a rising tide of illegal migration of youth to foreign shores because of political and economic turmoil. Indian democracy is increasingly influenced by business tycoons, often closely associated with the political bureaucracy. Dynastic politics, including the selection of candidates on basis of family lineage (so-called “blue blood”) rather than coming from the grassroots has increased intra-party conflicts. Grassroots leaders and “outsiders” are hence unwelcomed in politics, leading to unresponsive and dysfunctional democracy in Punjab. As a result, reformist agendas have been picked up by new groups emerging from middle class concerns such as the Am Admi Party (AAP) but it has been largely unsuccessful in dislodging the traditional Akali Dal and Congress, which continue to hold the reigns of power supported by cronies in the judiciary and bureaucracy. Challenges to these traditional political structures are often labelled “Khalistanis” by the dominant national media. These are some of the new concerns (or

perversions to democracy) emerging from militancy and the new phase of “normalcy” that are highlighted by the authors of this book.

The book begins with a chapter titled “Normalcy” which explains how the term “Khalistan” evolved as a political point of contestation, owing its origin to media-frenzy behavior. The conditions lay bare the political crises that eventually engulfed the state. The actors, be it the central government headed by Indira Gandhi or the state government headed by incumbent ministers, were playing game of political music chairs. The Akalis added to the mix with agitations such as *Rasta Roko*, *Rail Roko*, and *Nehar Roko*. The centre did not pay heed to the regional demands that were being generated in Punjab. The Green Revolution, which was once considered to be the magic word of development promoted by the state, was fading. The chronology of politics demonstrates the destructive competition of two political parties---the Akali Dal and Congress---polar opposites of each other in ideology. The result of Operation Bluestar. These two parties continue to rotate in and out of power even during the post-militancy period of “normalcy,” without bringing any significant change at ground level. Realities are same or have actually become worse than earlier, and no solutions seem to be in sight for the so-called democratic governance apparatus. No fruitful discourse has emerged to sustain the legacy of Punjab and introduce new political ideas into the future. In fact, the political elite in Punjab, irrespective of party, are dominated by traditional, landowning “*sardari* families” who send their children to boarding schools and are thus a socio-economic class apart from most of the Punjabi populations. As the authors show, they use their political clout, kinship networks, and matrimonial alliances to consolidate their family and political power in the state.

The chapter on “Due Process: Punjab” highlights how the unprincipled promotion of political cleavages in society based on religion and ethnicity catalyzed the “Punjab crisis.” To overcome the unfortunate post-1984 political problems, the central state then systematically created draconian laws to clamp down on democracy and use extrajudicial means such as “faked encounters” to restore law-and-order and construct an eyewash for its political failures to the detriment of those living in Punjabi society. The genuine demands of the Punjabi people were covered up by the nomenclature of terms such as “separatists,” “the militant agenda,” and “extremism.” The repressive central state came to function through various ordinances and promulgations as deemed desirable to further strengthening its agenda of ruling by hook or crook. Newly introduced acts such as TADA were torturous in disabling the activities of those who questioned why

the state acted as the supreme entity in all matters and how they were supposedly lesser citizens. These laws were the entry doors for ruthless government professionals who played tricks of evidence and confession to undermine the innocence of youth. The broad categorization of a “terrorist” came into being for repressive (and sometime lucrative) purposes. Torture, extrajudicial killings, and illegal confinement were run by the police and security forces, and their victims were denied the basic right of existence and many of them passed away into oblivion. These illustrations can be compared to problems which emerged later in other regions of India. The kind of treatment Punjab received, being stigmatized for no fault of its own but rather crisis, came from top-down (centralized) approach toward Punjab’s issues.

This book provides gruesome detail of those people branded as “terrorists” or declared as being “anti-national.” Many innocent Sikhs became victims of state-sponsored violence and corruption. The case studies in this book provide ample evidence of how property and wealth were attached on the pretext of being products of “terrorism,” and how many police officers openly indulged in capturing this booty. The events which unfold also saw the spectacle of the glorification of police officers, as they were given coveted postings and position. The case of SSP Ajit Sandhu, who was involved in many extrajudicial killings and yet “escaped” legal repercussions by supposedly committing suicide, is well documented in this chapter. Sandhu sought sadistic pleasure in gruesome cold-blooded murders of unaccounted persons and got decorated with medals and promotions. Those who tried to expose the acrimonious agenda of the police such as Jaswant Singh Khalra were also hunted, tortured, and eliminated. Their cases are still lingering in the judicial system. The term “extrajudicial killing” became the matter of a day which was linked to parties, prizes, and promotion for police officers.

The chapter “Due Process: Delhi” examines the 1984 anti-Sikh pogroms and subsequent travails of its victims. It also provides the backdrop of 1984 pogroms in which the state failed to defend the innocent Sikhs being killed in most cities across north India and, in fact, may have aided and abetted this violence. In fact, both Congress and BJP activists may have been involved in this violence, which the book examines. New dimensions have been added to the tragedy, as previously unknown sites such as Hondh Chillar and Patuadi in Haryana have been identified by human right activists, who have sought information under Right to Information Act. The title for this chapter is “due process” which is satire on the existing system. In fact, insufficient “due process” has been given to

the victims of these pogroms after long decades of court hearing and many have died of old-age awaiting “justice.” In fact, the chapter details how the riots may have eventually been a golden egg for real estate investors and projects in the affected areas, who attained prime property at lower rates after the dislocation of their community residents.

The economic dimension of the era of both militancy and also post-militancy (that is, “normalcy”) is a particularly interesting theme in this book. For example, the chapter titled “If You Can’t be Good” provides insights into the rags-to-riches stories of police officers who confiscated the properties of so-called “terrorists” under TADA, and become rich with these ill-gotten gains. This chapter also provides empirical evidence of how real estate values mushroomed upward as a byproduct of “terrorism” and “counterterrorism,” especially for those who were in power and had close political connections. This networking led to the formation of the so-called PPP (police, *patwari*, and property dealer) gang. In some instances, NRIs in the Doaba belt became the soft targets of this unholy business alliance operating under the guise of fighting militancy. Newspapers eventually carried stories of the open trading of such confiscated properties referred to as “Game of Golden Goose.” This type of scenario also carried into the post-militancy phase of “normalcy,” including the encroachment of land in villages near north Chandigarh adjoining Punjab. As this book points out, the whole process of illegal land deals is subjected to changing hands with the dirty money of politicians and government officers. This “colonization” of spaces becomes an important strategy in the supposed liberal investment friendly scenario dominated by government elites. Thus, the no “normal” in Punjab is a direct result of the era of militancy.

This book also covers the cultural effects of militancy into the subsequent era of “normalcy” in a fascinating fashion, particularly in the chapters “On the Cultural Front” and “Khalistan Redux.” This includes cultural memorabilia related to Punjab’s decade of militancy now innocently plastered on T-shirts, car decals, and posters such as those of militant leader Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale who is idolized by Punjabi Sikh youth who did not experience the dark days of militancy. Bollywood songs offer a glimpse of history not presented by academicians in such a chic manner. The “ethnification” of Sikhs through music, including advertising their issues and demands, have played an important role in staging Sikh identity to youth in both Punjab and the diaspora. Cinema movies play a particularly important role in this sense. The characters in these movies depict the suffering and atrocities committed by the state such as torture and extrajudicial killings.

Some movies show victims of 1984 riots, and their uprooting and moving to safe places in Punjab. “Historical memory” plays an important role in facilitating information regarding the values of freedom and liberty that have been important markers for Sikh community rather than being affected by the homogenization processes of the Indian state. The wounds of 1984 are memorialized in Punjabi-language films *Punjab 1984* and *Saada Haq*. The 1996 Hindi movie *Maachis* also documented the episodes of terrorism and corrupt politicians. It questioned democratic credentials of the Indian state, and showed the displeasure and dismay among the Punjabi youth during those turbulent years. This book captures both the consumer culture around these cultural modes of expression, and also their deeper social meaning.

In conclusion, Jaijee and Suri’s book is a refreshing work of research and presentation on various aspects of militancy and “normalcy” in Punjab, particularly emphasizing how the current mode of “normalcy” has actually been conditioned by the previous period of militancy. This book is must for both academicians and educated readers in general to understand contemporary Punjab beyond militancy, not only in a political sense, but also other socio-cultural and economic concerns that are important, but that have been sidelined when dissecting the Punjab problem and its aftereffects. These points have all been well taken by the authors, hence adding new a dimension to the writing on the “Punjab problem” and providing holistic view of post-militancy “normalcy” in Punjab. As the authors emphasize, this is not the “old normal” but the “new normal” conditions by the era of militancy.

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Spatializing Popular Sufi Shrines in Punjab: Dreams, Memories, Territoriality

Yogesh Snehi,

Routledge, 2019,

Xx + 256 pp., \$ 48.95 (pb), ISBN 9780367730147

The ongoing farmers' protest has emerged as a critical site for both consolidating and complicating regional, religious, and caste identities in North India. With the movement spreading beyond its epicenter, the National Capital Region (NCR), we are witnessing the formation of new political alliances in tandem with an intense scrutiny of past conflicts and violence. Yogesh Snehi's book does not address these recent developments; still, it is an invaluable reading for anyone interested in understanding the vicissitudes of Punjabi identity in postcolonial India.

Spatializing Popular Sufi Shrines in Punjab, as the title unequivocally suggests, is an intricate analysis of popular forms of Sufism and their locally embedded spatial dynamics. Through a well-curated set of case studies, Snehi examines the quotidian religiosity of smaller and lesser-known shrines from post-Partition Punjab in India, covering places like Malerkotla, Jalandhar, Gurdaspur and Abohar. Once we dive into the chapters, it becomes evidently clear that the book presents a much deeper and broader analysis than that suggested by the title. Snehi's extensive research gives an intimate overview of the historical as well as the lived landscape of religion in Punjab. In addition to providing place-specific minutiae about lived religiosity of Sufi shrines, Snehi in each chapter addresses larger questions of identity formation, political contestation, nationalist historiography, communal boundaries, and religious traditions in Punjab.

The book begins with a deceptively simple question, i.e. why does the veneration of Muslim saints continue to thrive among different Sikh and Hindu castes and communities even after the violent religious schism of Partition in the region? Snehi's answer to this question encapsulates the complexity of his argument in the book. He states, "While shrines renegotiate their everyday realms in the post-partition realities, they also continue to be deeply embedded in rituals, memory and dreams of pre-partition social milieu" (83). Like many recent scholars, Snehi questions the linear colonial/nationalist narrative of identity formation, underscoring the significance of "absences, appropriation, adaption, abstraction or exclusion" (49) as processes through which shrine spaces respond to complex social settings and overcome temporal/religious binaries of modern nation-states in South Asia.

With each chapter, Snehi introduces a complex grammar of devotional practices that transform shrines into “archives of everyday, a mirror to understand the complex reciprocity, contestation and dissent of dominant discourses” (59). In Chapter 1, Snehi visits three sites – Dargah Haidar Shaikh at Malerkotla, Baba Lakhdata Pir Nigaha at Langhiana, and Roza Mandhali Sharif near Phagwara – and explains how the popularity of *deras* across Punjab rests on the followers’ belief in *barkat*, the embodied sacral authority and spiritual power of saints, that transcends orthodox hagiographies of conquest and conversion. Chapter 2 traces the widespread practices of Panj Pir veneration from medieval to present-day Punjab and explores the sacred landscape of this tradition through a shrine dedicated to Panj Pir in Abohar. Snehi introduces the concept of *wilayat* (spiritual territoriality) to show how sacred geographies overcome statist notions of territoriality after Partition to create an “organic interplay of popular tradition with everyday lives of people in contemporary Punjab” (124). With Chapter 3, Snehi takes us into the realm of the uncanny, where dreams and memories become palimpsests of dissent against the increasing polarization of religious identities in India. While dream interpretation remains a central tenet of Sufi traditions, Snehi uses three case studies to demonstrate how the dreamscapes of Sufi shrines are kept alive through oral histories, and become “a potent tool for reclaiming a popular memory of Hindu and Sikh veneration of Sufis and their shrines” (166). The final chapter underscores the importance of visual and music cultures in circulating ideas of popular piety beyond reformist critiques or revivalist representations of Punjab’s history. According to Snehi, popular forms like collage posters, pamphlets, videos, paintings, animation, etc. “localize as well as navigate spaces, circulate ideas and ideals of veneration, induce dreams, sustain memories of belonging and materialize saint veneration” (187).

Popular Sufi shrines, according to Snehi, open up a theoretical space to examine the lived Punjabi experience beyond the “metanarratives” of state formation and give important insights into the quotidian practices of piety, patronage, and sovereignty in Punjab. While most scholarship on Sufi shrines locates them within Islamic histories and Muslim cultural milieus, Snehi focuses on encounters, interactions, and negotiations through which Sufi spirituality is imagined and reproduced. Since many of these lesser-known saints from Punjab lack textual hagiographical traditions, their veneration exists on the margins of mainstream religious discourse and remains largely unexplored in academic studies of South Asian history and culture. Snehi’s book fills this lacuna in scholarship by underscoring the liminality of Sufi shrines in Punjab and foregrounding their

peripheral locations as “sites of memory” through which societies reconcile with their violent pasts and a divided present (228).

Snehi argues for a methodological approach that remains attentive to affective modalities of memorialization while unraveling alternate temporalities through spatial practices. He challenges established scholarly traditions of studying Sufi shrines through a liberal-secular lens, pointing out how scholars often interpret Sufi practices as a utopic alternative to the increasing religious polarization in South Asia. Cautioning us against this ‘modernist’ impulse, Snehi takes an interdisciplinary approach to analyze the imaginative topography of Sufi shrines. Combining insights from historical anthropology, visual studies, and semiotics, Snehi provides a rich ethnographic study of the shrines, but, at times, relies a little too heavily on either existing scholarship or available historical records to contextualize his materials instead of interviews with the visitors to the shrines. The length of the literature review and theoretical framing in each chapter further obfuscates Snehi’s own argument and the originality of his extensive fieldwork. Despite Snehi’s repeated disavowal of historical methods, this book is as much a project of historicizing spaces as of spatializing history, and that, in my view, is its biggest strength.

Spatializing Popular Sufi Shrines in Punjab makes significant contributions to South Asian studies by going beyond conventional readings of Sufi shrines as nostalgic sites of syncretic practices or spiritual remnants of Muslim polity. With Snehi’s brilliant and conscientious research, Sufi shrines emerge not only as living embodiments of everyday religiosities, but also as uncanny habitations that refuse to give into the territorial demands of nation states. Despite heavily-patrolled borders and closely-guarded communal boundaries, Sufi shrines continue to flourish in Punjab as not only physical sites of veneration, but also as shared spaces of affective belonging realized through saints’ *barkat*, *wilayat*, dreams, and memories.

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Correction to:

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

by Harleen Kaur & prabhdeep singh kehal

On p. 81, paragraph 1, line 6, the existing sentence should be replaced by the following, with a corrected reference as given below.

In a short clip entitled “The Price of Keeping Our Heads Down,”, filmed by Manmeet Singh and jointly edited by artist HoodiniDidIt (birth name Jagmeet Singh), HoodiniDidIt's spoken word reminds Sikh communities that “[we] have succeeded as entrepreneurs but have failed to understand the cost of that success, both for ourselves and more significantly to our fellow Black Americans” (Singh & Singh 2020).

Reference

Singh, Jagmeet (HoodiniDidIt) and Manmeet Singh. 2020. The Price of Keeping Our Heads Down.