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**Sikhs as Implicated Subjects in the United States:  
A Reflective Essay (ਵਿਚਾਰ) on Gurmat-Based Interventions in the  
Movement for Black Lives<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract**

As a largely migrant-descendant community in the United States, Sikhs at a national level have taken on normative frameworks of model minority representation and respectability politics. At times, this has been posed as a practice in the name of the faith, framing involvement with state institutions or partisan politics as representative of the framework of Miri-Piri. Meanwhile, Sikhs as a community have yet to reconcile their experiences as targets of U.S. racism with the U.S.'s nationalist project based in white supremacist, colonial, and anti-Black structural violence. As such, this essay offers a critical intervention based in a Gurmat praxis of liberation politics for engaging with the Movement for Black Lives. We invite Sikhs to shift their investments of social and political capital by discussing Sikhs' migrant incorporation within a structural history of U.S. racism and colonialism. Through reframing Sikh racialization and providing a brief discussion of tangible, alternative ways to invest efforts in the Movement for Black Lives, this essay invites Sikhs to reinvest in Gurmat and Miri-Piri as frameworks to guide a Sikh activism that is committed to a form of embodied justice against state repression and exploitation.

**Keywords:** racecraft, praxis, Miri-Piri, Black liberation, implicated subjects

“‘Why is it that all Indians are so smart and well-behaved?’” Piyush Jindal, confronted with this question by his elementary school teacher, paused and then, ‘being a smart-aleck, told her it was the food.’<sup>2</sup> [...] such gestures remind me that I am to be the perpetual solution to what is seen as the crisis of black America. I am to be a weapon in the war against black America. Meanwhile, white America can take its seat, comfortable, in its liberal principles, surrounded by state-selected Asians, certain that the culpability

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<sup>1</sup> Authors are listed alphabetically and contributed equally to this manuscript.

<sup>2</sup> (Still, 2007)

for black poverty and oppression must be laid at the door of black America. How does it feel to be a solution?"

— Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk* (2000)

“Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter round it. They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately [...] How does it feel to be a problem?"

— W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903)

We ground our reflection (ਵਿਚਾਰ<sup>3</sup>) in a praxis of Miri-Piri (ਮੀਰੀ ਪੀਰੀ): a discipline of consciousness-refining meditation (ਅਭਿਆਸ) that cultivates worldly action (ਦੁਨਿਆਵੀ ਕਰਮ) for the realization of Naam (ਨਾਮ). Sikhi (ਸਿੱਖੀ) – as an embodied commitment to practicing Gurmat (ਗੁਰਮਤ) – enlightened a people. Sikhs (ਸਿੱਖ), practitioners and followers of Sikhi, were to be simultaneously rooted in challenging and abolishing structural practices of oppression, like caste and sati, while investing in the truest form of liberation through the experience of and union with Vaaheguru (ਵਾਹਿਗੁਰੂ). Within South Asian political and religious orders, such unmediated access to one’s Divine without a priest was revolutionary, especially for those defined as untouchable within the millennia-long Brahmanical patriarchal social order. Today, Sikhs continue to carry on deep investments in Sikh organizational practices and institutions, as evident with Sikhs in the diaspora continuing to engage with the gurdwara today, for instance. Yet, the existence of Sikh institutions in the U.S. public sphere should not be mistaken as Sikhs having an active investment in historical, collective practices of Gurmat (ਗੁਰਮਤ) required to challenge oppression in order to practice Sikhi to its fullest. In a Gurmat-centered praxis, Sikhs are sovereign and do not seek the safety or approval of a nation-state and its mechanisms of power.

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<sup>3</sup> The inclusion of ਗੁਰਮੁਖੀ/Gurmukhi where appropriate has been taken on more in English-language writing as a move towards decolonizing discussions on Sikhi in a Western context. We include the script to also foster connections with our language, a connection increasingly desired in the diaspora.

As Sikhs in the United States<sup>4</sup>, we often grow up with one of two relationships to racism – aware of its lurking ability to harm but without the words to describe how (structural experience), or with the conception that we are the primary victims of the U.S.’s racialized hierarchy (individual animus experience). A large number of Sikhs who have been in the U.S. for more than two decades since migration came to grapple with their Otherness through the post-9/11 experiences of hate violence, which targeted brown people, particularly those whose bodies were decorated with beards and/or dastaars (ਦਸਤਾਰਾਂ - turbans). In the decade after 9/11, Sikhs were increasingly fearful of being targeted and some felt an urgency to distinguish Sikhs from Muslims to salvage their distinct Americanness (Singh 2019). Yet, when an FBI-identified neo-Nazi attacked the Oak Creek gurdwara with a deadly shooting in 2012, he solidified Sikhs as equally valid targets within the U.S. racialized order.

Even with this more recent history, Sikhs in the U.S. still feel quite intimate and familiar with the United States, despite a lack of critical engagement or knowledge with its core nationalist ideology and institutions. This is not unique to Sikhs who are migrant-descendants<sup>5</sup>, as Sikhs who joined Sikhi but are not from the South Asian diaspora often remain similarly invested in the U.S.’s nationalist ideology. A predominantly migrant-descendant community, Sikhs in the U.S. are only beginning to cultivate and institutionalize relationships with the U.S. state through Sikhs’ second generation of U.S.-born youths. In this dynamic, Sikhs’ relationship with the state is dictated by the United States’ legal regime because it is still largely framed through the U.S. citizenship test or the history textbooks that U.S.-educated Sikhs are trained to regurgitate without challenge from alternative narratives (Glenn 2011; Roy 2020). Despite historians’ consensus that California’s colonial history was a period of Spanish, Mexican, and U.S. invasions against indigenous peoples, for instance, school curricula make little mention on the extent of this violence (Keenan 2019; Spear 2019).

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<sup>4</sup> We address a heterogeneous Sikh community in its responsibility towards a U.S.-originated social movement; thus, we use the broad category of Sikhs in the U.S. We acknowledge that there are various positionalities influencing the experiences of those who identify as Sikhs in the U.S., including, but not limited to, – gender, sexuality, class, caste, occupation, migration timeline, and, of course, racialized background.

<sup>5</sup> We use this term over first-generation U.S. residents or citizens to reframe a Sikh’s subjectivity as one of being positioned constantly outside, or attempting to arrive, in the U.S., rather than situated.

A lack of prior engagement with global paradigms of struggle and violence is particularly dangerous for Sikhs navigating their relationship with the U.S. state, given Sikhs emphasize the importance of fighting state exploitation of all as a Sikh ethos. For example, though Sikhs in the U.S. speak of Sikh history as a fight for Sikh sovereignty against the Indian state from the mid-1700s onwards, Sikhs seldom acknowledge how this fight for consolidating Sikhs into an empire also enabled the institutional rise of Jatt Sikhs' hegemony over Dalit Sikhs (Hans 2016; Kaur 2019). For Sikhs today to build a Panth (ਪੰਥ) in alignment with Gurmat-based principles of egalitarianism, Sikhs must intentionally consider how our relationships with any state – past and present – enables the exploitation of other communities, especially if these relationships structurally benefit Sikhs. This intentionality carries a specific meaning for members of the transnational South Asian diaspora, because these diasporic communities are more likely to lack prior contextual knowledge or a framework of global racialized hierarchies (Christian 2018). As such, this structural position makes it even easier for Sikhs living in the U.S. who are from the South Asian diaspora to accept and regurgitate the ultimate truth of history as devoid of power dynamics and structural oppression (Teeger 2015).

This process is shifting as youth engage with community-based and grassroots political education through social media and other accessible platforms, even bringing it home to their family. Yet, the reality remains that both the educational and political system in the U.S. socialize Sikhs, like other South Asian immigrants, to be the solution to what U.S. politics have historically defined as “the crisis” of Black America (Du Bois 1903; Prashad 2000). When we pair this socialization with the forthcoming discussion of Sikh structural racialization, Sikhs as a collective will likely find faults, at best, and criminality, at worst, within the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) and those who fight alongside the movement. In emphasizing a *structural* analysis of Sikh migrant racialization, we are not providing a determinative or essentialist account of Sikhs' experiences; rather, we are illuminating the historic and political field Sikh migrants entered.

In order to push beyond reactionary mainstream engagement with M4BL, which would frame the entire movement as either “worthy” or “unworthy” of Sikh communities' support, we stage this essay's intervention with a praxis of deconstruction and application. Uncritical or mechanical allegiance to any nation is contradictory to Sikhi-informed liberation, which asks us to be continuously and

intentionally aware of our actions and learn from our choices in existence. Inspired by the legacy of Gursikhi Jeevan (ਗੁਰਸਿੱਖੀ ਜੀਵਨ) – to intervene in the oppressive regimes and mainstream rhetoric that keep communities ignorant to the violences that corrupt their time – this essay engages with theories of racialization, interprets Sikh communities’ current nationalist investments through a Gurmat (ਗੁਰਮਤ)-centered framework, interprets the M4BL platform through this framework, and closes with proposing pathways to re-position ourselves actively in collaboration with the Movement for Black Lives through Sikhi. We root ourselves in the practice of Miri Piri (ਮੀਰੀ ਪੀਰੀ) – being armed with the knowledge, resources, and skills to act in response to the conditions of Kaljug (ਕਲਜੁਗ) and engage with the ongoing work of co-liberation.

### **Racialization: Incorporating Sikh Migrants into the Historic U.S. Racialized Order**

Sikhs’ ongoing legacies of identity-based trauma in Punjab regionally, India nationally, and now in the United States, are embedded within Sikh organizational work (Kaur 2020). As such, Sikhs’ reorientation towards a framework of Gurmat-centered justice, from a Sikh-person or -community centered framework, must be self-initiated. For instance, while Sikhs of all partisan parties make convenient use of Sikh principles for their political investments in the U.S., liberal Sikh voices strategically recognize and credit the U.S. Civil Rights Movement for passing the 1965 Immigration Act, which allowed most Sikh families to voluntarily migrate or flee persecution (SALDEF 2010; Sikh Coalition 2019; Singh 2012). What is less engaged in these partisan formulations is how U.S. state inclusion is grounded in the continued occupation of stolen indigenous land or how to be in political solidarity with Black liberation.

In the United States, this is not by accident because racism forms the bedrock of how the nation’s social contract distributes power and resources within society (Mills 1997; Mueller 2020). A large part of immigrant communities inheriting this structural ignorance is the particular *crafting* that state and organizational actors do to create and manage racialization projects, or projects that obscure the foundational relationship between colonialism, racism, and the United States. In 2020, for example, the 45th U.S. President continued his white nationalist and

supremacist policies by attacking Critical Race Studies (CRS), a field that interrogates the history and persistence of racism, thereby justifying the field's purpose (Gómez 2020; Ray 2020). The need to dismantle CRS was cited by the same administration in its 2020 Presidential Proclamation when the administration recognized Columbus Day as an opportunity for “educators to teach our children about the *miracle of American history* and honor our founding” (The White House 2020, emphasis our own). To challenge this crafted ignorance, we must understand that race “is not an idea but an ideology. It came into existence at a discernable historical moment for rationally understandable historical reasons and is subject to change for similar reasons” (Fields and Fields 2012:121). In the U.S., *race* emerged to rationalize the “contradiction between slavery and liberty by defining Afro-Americans as a race; Afro-Americans resolved the contradiction more straightforwardly by calling for the abolition of slavery” (Fields and Fields 2012:141). Importantly, in defining Afro-Americans as a race, settlers left themselves the category of “white” to use as they wished for defining property rights in the U.S. legal system (Harris 1993). *Racism*, then, included the institutionalized social practices that maintained this exploitative social order from slavery through the nineteenth and into the twenty-first centuries. Abolition, then and now, is rooted in reconciling the attempts to paint the United States project as one that is inclusive and welcoming to all people, all while being built on land acquired through colonially-enforced land treaties and built through the labor of enslaved Afro-descendants. Rather than try to find justice in this white supremacist violence, abolition as liberatory practice says: *we can and must do better – let us start again.*

The practice of racecraft, or the sleight of hand in which something an aggressor does is defined as something that the targeted are, did not conclude with the racialization of Black people as a race in the United States and continued into the 1900s. Throughout the U.S.'s history of political development in the 1700 and 1800s, U.S. settlers and their descendants would differentially racialize “ethnic others” of European descent within the social order to determine whether these communities could be managed or assimilated (Jung 2009; Seamster and Ray 2018). Racialization was the process by which new categories of communities were made for state exploitation and management (e.g., undocumented migrants or refugees). In order to access the social contract's benefits, these communities variably assimilated into the U.S.'s political order by either maintaining or not eradicating white supremacist ideologies and practices embedded within the social contract (i.e., a nation's governing political structure) (Mills 1997). Those who

could *not* be “incorporated” through state policies would be structurally excluded from the start, such as through immigration quotas or the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, or be exterminated, as in the case of the U.S.’s domestic genocidal policies towards indigenous communities. By the start of the 1900s, more visibly non-white communities entered the United States with claims for property rights and civil rights. Yet, in these migrant communities’ homelands, their non-migrant counterparts protested the remnants of colonialism, which had evolved into the United States’ foreign policy projects, driving mass emigration to settler-colonial nations like the United States. Throughout the mid-1900s, this growing non-white presence in the U.S. was conceived of as a threat in political and policy discourses to a white and settler state (Kumar 2020). Culminating in the late 1900s, U.S. foreign and domestic policy discourses increasingly linked migrant communities with anti-state violences abroad as one way to achieve their foreign state interests. Villainizing domestic, migrant communities, U.S. state foreign policy now positioned domestic migrants against their homeland communities to regain power against brown anti-U.S. imperialism activists overseas and protect the United States’ global economic interests. This occurred through state political and policy discussions that crafted the racialized trope of the Arab Muslim as a terrorist to be managed for national security, or through the process of terrorcraft (Kumar 2020).

Against this national backdrop of stigmatizing foreignness and emphasizing social incorporation throughout the 1900s, Sikhs have immigrated to the U.S. in high levels since the late 1900s (La Brack 2005). Though Sikhs may not have recognized themselves as targets of terrorcraft, after the September 11th attacks in 2001, Sikhs increasingly identified as a minoritized community. Yet, in an effort to navigate outside any villainization that could mark Sikhs as violent or suspect, Sikhs invested in the *model minority paradigm* in nationwide awareness efforts or, as Prashad calls it, being the solution (Sikh Coalition 2018). The paradigm paints many Asian Americans, typically East Asians, as the proper type of non-white citizen in the U.S. – one that is “smart and well-behaved” like a young Piyush ‘Bobby’ Jindal. Or, one that is willing to erase the project of racialization on their own body and the body of the nation, like former South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley, previously Nimrita Randhawa, who confidently declared that the “US is not a racist country”<sup>6</sup> at the 2020 Republican National Convention (Yan 2020). Though

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<sup>6</sup> Sikhs must also be conscious of the ways that Sikh practices and frameworks are used to do this type of investment and erasure. Using Sikh presence to acknowledge “America’s right direction”, Harmeet Dhillon launched the 2016 Republican Convention with a recitation of a stanza (ਪਉੜੀ)

Sikhs in the U.S., like Asian Americans, maintain heterodox partisan opinions, these efforts to stitch Sikhs as natural counterparts to the U.S. body politic suggest a need to interrogate the social contract Sikhs are currently making and institutionalizing with the United States.

Rather than take up circular debates in Sikh communities that make apolitical moral judgements on the ideology and action of the Movement for Black Lives absent a Gurmat-based praxis, we have engaged with a few platform items, which we feel are most urgent for helping to shift Sikh communities' understanding. Through this contextual discussion of platform items, we hope to move Sikhs, as individuals, organizationally, and collectively, towards more ready collaboration and cooperation in the struggle for Black liberation.

### **A Gurmat (ਗੁਰਮਤ)-based Intervention for Social Change**

While not all Sikhs or Punjabis take on the overtly normalized and romanticized rhetoric that Haley and Jindal do, the community has largely become “implicated subjects”, or as Hannah Arendt argues, unwilling to take on the “vicarious responsibility for things we have not done...the consequences for things we are entirely innocent of”, not recognizing these consequences as “the price we pay for the fact that we live our lives not by ourselves but among our fellowmen” (Rothberg 2019:1). For Sikhs in the U.S. across racialized backgrounds who do not currently feel entangled in the operations of U.S. white supremacy – *not* simply as victims, but also as perpetrators – the model of the implicated subject may be illustrative. In recognizing how the work of Black and Indigenous liberation activists prior to our diaspora's migration to the U.S., not only from the Civil Rights Movement, have enabled our communities' successes, we can more seriously engage with the ways we have continued to make their struggles for liberation necessary today. For Sikhs, if engaging with the Movement for Black Lives is not one of personal moral compass and acting on the principles of Gurmat and an embodiment of **ੴ**, it must be one of personal and collective reparations for being passive bystanders and implicated subjects to Black collective death.

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from Sukhmani Sahib (ਸੁਖਮਨੀ ਸਾਹਿਬ) that often precedes ardaas (ਅਰਦਾਸ). Meanwhile, her English explanation was divorced from Guru Arjan Dev Ji exalting Vaaheguru's limitless qualities. Instead, she prayed for a political rhetoric that erases the core nationalist and racialized ideology that was used to found and maintain this nation for the “greater good of our nation”.

A key aspect of our intervention is to reorient existing frameworks of organizing within Sikh communities by providing an explicit Gurmat-centered justice framework for Sikhs to interpret and act on the M4BL's demands. Though we do not chart a comprehensive framework here, we outline one by beginning from where any such frameworks would necessarily start: asking what we are already invested in and what we could be invested in instead. Though typically applied in the contexts of ideological, spiritual, or theoretical debates, this question has obvious material implications. A Gurmat-centered framework focuses attention on power hierarchies in society and on the distribution of power within our communities. For instance, Sikhs in the U.S. have created an investment in being "Sikh-American" through various national awareness campaigns and electorally-focused efforts to stitch the Sikh community to the nation's ethos. In this model, not only does the migrant-turned-citizen fulfill their civic duty, but they fulfill the "American Dream" narrative of meritocracy, serving both an imperial and colonial benefit to the U.S. by globally and domestically perpetuating the myth that social and economic mobility are the U.S. norm (Chetty et al. 2017).

Though similar to critiques of the model minority paradigm, under our suggested framework, the model of "Sikh-American" indicates an explicitly nationalist investment as implicated subjects (Kaur 2020). We draw attention to this not to criticize ongoing efforts, but because social movements necessarily challenge one's perception of belonging in a nation, especially those rooted in obtaining centuries-denied justice. Social movements make plain that the existing social order is one of injustice; if you have not felt the injustices thus far, then such a challenge to the social order that benefits you forces a reckoning of what you are invested in and how you are implicated in state exploitation. This is what Guru Nanak Dev Ji (ਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਕ ਦੇਵ ਜੀ) did Themselves in the 1400s upon inquiring, naming, and then rejecting Their family's and society's investment in caste and class as systems for attaining liberation. They put this belief into practice by starting a revolution.

In the case of the Movement for Black Lives, activists emphasize the urgency of the demands for justice because the demands are based on centuries of oppression; the Movement has made evident the nation's racialized contract (Mills 1997). This can feel confusing for many Sikh immigrants and their descendants who remain unaware of the history of state violence against Black, Indigenous, and working-

class communities. As contemporary activist Kimberly Jones explained after the immediate uprising in Minneapolis against the state-sanctioned murder of George Floyd:

“You broke the contract when you killed us in the streets and didn’t give a f\*\*\*. You broke the contract when for 400 years, we played your game and built your wealth. You broke the contract when we built our wealth again on our own by our bootstraps in Tulsa and you dropped bombs on us, when we built it in Rosewood and you came in and you slaughtered us. You broke the contract. So f\*\*\* your Target. F\*\*\* your Hall of Fame. Far as I’m concerned, they could burn this b\*\*\*\*\* to the ground, and it still wouldn’t be enough. And they are lucky that what black people are looking for is equality and not revenge.” (David Jones Media 2020)

Jones demands attention to the question of investment, a question fundamental to our Gurmat-centered intervention. Jones identifies how those who expend energy to defend *property* or *businesses* from social unrest also defend the underlying structure of state exploitation because they benefit from it. Furthermore, Jones names the social contract as broken and, in doing so, makes plain that the uprisings are a *response* to ongoing injustices. Similarly, Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. argued the same in 1967 when condemning riots,

“But at the same time, it is as necessary for me to be as vigorous in condemning the conditions which cause persons to feel that they must engage in riotous activities as it is for me to condemn riots. I think America must see that riots do not develop out of thin air. Certain conditions continue to exist in our society which must be condemned as vigorously as we condemn riots. But in the final analysis, a riot is the language of the unheard. And what is it that America has failed to hear? It has failed to hear that the plight of the Negro poor has worsened over the last few years. It has failed to hear that the promises of freedom and justice have not been met. And it has failed to hear that large segments of white society are more concerned about tranquility and the status quo than about justice, equality, and humanity (King, Jr. 1967).

For Sikhs to understand how our investments in this nation as Sikhs must change to honor the centuries-long battle for justice, a Gurmat-centered framework must take seriously how we as Sikhs, or as Sikh-Americans, have implicated ourselves

to this precise state-sponsored contract and system of exploitation, which both Jones and King name as wretched 53-years apart.

**From Framing to Action**

To help Sikhs develop their Gurmat-centered framework, beyond asking what we are already invested in and what we could be invested in instead, we have applied the simple framing of “investment” to one dimension of M4BL’s 2020 *Vision for Black Lives: We Demand an End to the War Against Black People*. Specifically, the platform demands “an end to the criminalization, incarceration, and killing of our people. We call for not just individual accountability of officers after a murder, but entire police departments” (Movement for Black Lives 2020). We focus on and summarize five of the platform’s thirteen demands in Table 1. For each of these five demands, we outline how the M4BL’s policy platform could be interpreted within the suggested Gurmat-centered framework and include an abridged list of how the M4BL has translated their demands into policy demands. While there are eight additional demands, we highlight these five given their likely intersections with ongoing topics and debates in U.S. Sikh communities.

**Table 1**

<b>Demand</b>	<b>What We Are Invested In</b>	<b>What We Could Be Invested In</b>	<b>Abridged Policy Demands</b>
End the War on Black Communities	Surveillance, policing, mass criminalization, incarceration, and deportation have become default responses to social issues over the past four decades at all levels of government, accompanied by massive disinvestment from meeting community needs.	Invest in making communities stronger and safer through quality, affordable housing, living wage employment, public transportation, education, and health care.	Invest in community-based transformative violence prevention, intervention, and support strategies.  Provide reparations to survivors of police violence and their families, and to survivors of prison, detention and deportation violence, and their families.

<p>End the War on Drugs</p>	<p>The “War on Drugs” has been a primary driver of mass criminalization, incarceration, and law enforcement violence targeting Black people over the past five decades, particularly for Black women, trans, and gender nonconforming people through the regulation of sexual and reproductive autonomy.</p>	<p>Identifying the needs of people with substance dependence and people in the drug and sex trades, including non-coercive, accessible, and evidence-based treatment, housing, health care, education, and living wage employment.</p>	<p>Immediately and retroactively decriminalize drug and prostitution-related offenses and invest savings into programs and services identified by people in the drug and sex trades. Implement a full and comprehensive reparations package for all harmed by the drug war and criminalization of prostitution.</p>
<p>End the Use of Past Criminal History</p>	<p>The federal government tracks over 73 million people—or 33% of people in the U.S.—who currently have a record of past criminal history, thus disqualifying them from publicly-funded social programs.</p>	<p>Uncoupled access of services, care, and support from the criminal punishment system.</p>	<p>Eliminate restrictions and exclusions on access to housing, education, employment, social programs and benefits, voting rights, parental rights, and other civil rights based on prior criminal convictions.</p>
<p>End to All Jails, Prisons, And Immigration Detention</p>	<p>The United States imprisons more human beings than any other country in the world. Incarcerated people are subjected to endemic physical, sexual, emotional, and spiritual violence, deprivation, degradation, violation, isolation, medical abuse and neglect, and forced labor, in gross violation of their civil and human rights. Mass criminalization and incarceration have exacerbated the War on Drugs.</p>	<p>An end to all jails, prisons, immigration and youth detention, and civil commitment facilities, or retroactive elimination of sentences of life without parole (LWOP) and sentences that will result in death by incarceration. While incarcerated, imprisoned people also need support to maintain their health and wellbeing.</p>	<p>A moratorium on all prison, jail, immigrant and youth detention construction, without an accompanying expansion of home arrest or GPS monitoring or other forms of e-carceration.</p> <p>Immediate release of all elders and political prisoners; people in comas, on life support, or in end of life care; and an end to the use of incarceration and solitary confinement.</p>

<p>The Demilitarization of Law Enforcement</p>	<p>Since 1990, the U.S. Department of Defense has transferred over \$6 billion in military equipment to local law enforcement agencies, including school and campus police. Military travel and combat weapons have disproportionately been deployed against Black communities. Customs and Border Patrol has also received at least \$39 million in military equipment, using similar tactics against migrants.</p>	<p>An immediate end to the transfer of military equipment to federal, state, and local police, and campus law enforcement agencies, and an immediate end to the use of military equipment by any law enforcement agency, including Customs and Border Patrol.</p>	<p>We demand an immediate ban on the use of military equipment by law enforcement and Border Patrol, and the immediate disclosure of all military equipment transferred and acquired and its intended use by federal, state, and local governments.</p>
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At the national level, we consider Sikh organizations’ ongoing national campaigns for inclusion. For example, through the framework, initiatives for religious accommodations into the military and law enforcement agencies would contradict the demand to end the war on Black communities and the reliance on jails, prisons, and immigration detention. Fighting for inclusion into the precise systems that are the direct target of the justice movement would indicate Sikhs’ investment *in* the existing social order, which both Jones and King critique. Sikh organizations implicate Sikh communities further when they expend resources towards efforts like naming a post office after a police officer who died while patrolling because the officer was Sikh (The Sikh Coalition 2020). The system the M4BL critiques also extends to immigration detention, or U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), where Sikhs are also implicated. One of largest U.S.-owned security service providers to the U.S. government, for example, is an organization called Akal Security, run by Sikhs and branded under a Sikhi-based concept (Tanzer 2019). The urgency of understanding the links between law enforcement and immigration detention is particularly important as Sikh organizations continue their collaborations with these state systems of exploitation under Sikh banners. Sikhs must consider these implications given the September 2020 reports from whistleblower and nurse Dawn Wooten that mass hysterectomies have been occurring at ICE’s concentration camps. If such reports are verified, then the United States is committing genocide and all U.S.-invested communities are implicated (Lambe 2020).

For Sikh-owned businesses, the demands also call attention to how their businesses are caught in the crosshairs of the state and its reliance on policing. Recognizing that George Floyd's murder in Minneapolis resulted from a convenience store employee's call to the police for a counterfeit bill being used – standard practice under state policy – Sikh artists spoke directly to Sikh business owners and employees (Bayoumi 2020). In a short clip directed by Manmeet Singh entitled "The Price of Keeping Our Heads Down," artist Hoodini 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 2020). One option is to begin divestment from policing and recognize the greater system of exploitation, such as the Minneapolis store owner's vow to never follow the policy "until the police stop killing innocent people" (Bayoumi 2020). Other approaches may attempt to make this a business-wide agreement for all stores within a particular block or community in an effort to reduce the reliance on police and the state's increasing militarization. Thus far, investments in policing may give owners a sense of security, but it is only with investments in relationships within the local community that owners could gain a sense of safety.

For Sikhs who work within organizations as employees or are searching for ways to engage in their private capacity, there is power within any role you take as a worker, as you can lead efforts to end the use of past criminal history in your workplace, find ways to engage your workplace in shifting their culture of policing, or address inequalities geographically near you. For instance, poet Damneet Kaur and photographer and social worker Lara Kaur used their social media platforms to fundraise for specific causes from their followers; these individual donations were then matched by wealthier, non-carceral organizations, tripling the donation to \$34,215.<sup>7</sup> Damneet Kaur and Lara Kaur directed these efforts to benefit those who are structurally most vulnerable at the intersections of gendered, racialized, and sexualized backgrounds. They also channeled these efforts through specific local organizations, such as The Okra Project and The Transgender District, which provide meals, mental health services, and additional livelihood support for Black transgender and queer individuals experiencing poverty and hardships. As Table 1 notes, the war on drugs was particularly harmful for Black women, transgender, and gender nonconforming people because of how it regulated sexual and reproductive autonomy through law. Kaur's fundraising efforts, though not directly

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<sup>7</sup> These numbers were obtained through personal correspondence.

tied to the war on drugs, reveal how Sikhs can still mobilize in creative ways to address the demands by choosing what to divest from and what to invest in, and challenging how they are implicated within systems of exploitation.

### ਜਾਗਰਿਤੀ: The Awakening

Anti-Sikh violence in Punjab, and India at large, has served as a large push factor for Sikh and Punjabi emigrants to the United States and other diasporic homelands.<sup>8</sup> And yet, settling on new lands with fears of recurring violence in the United States, Sikhs and their diasporic institutions have offered neither the historic liberation nor freedom that Sikhs sought; rather, Sikhs have turned towards tools of multiculturalism, diversity, and inclusion to make limited entry in the mainstream society (Kaur 2020). As a result, Sikhs have structurally and actively prevented the investments needed to continue Sikhi's legacies of consciousness, resistance, and struggle against an oppressive state. In order to *reground* Sikhs in the U.S. in a framework of Gurmat-centered justice, we analyzed the Movement for Black Lives's platforms by challenging the anti-Black colonial ideology that permeates U.S. political history and is core to the nation-state's functioning. For Sikhs, understanding racialized incorporation in the context of historic white supremacy enables us to understand the particular relationship we have with *this* state – particularly for those of us who are non-Black migrants, asylees, and descendants –, while also helping us acknowledge the sovereignty we lose by refusing to challenge state-sanctioned and -sponsored violence.

Vijay Prasad's call to all who are perceived as South Asian reminds us that we are not victims in this racialized and nationalist ideology, but implicated subjects who have the autonomy to place our investments in Black life over Black death. The choices we make, or the choices made in our name, continue to make us beneficiaries of white supremacy given the incomplete fight for racial justice. Choosing to invest in safety over security will allow Sikhs to build a community

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<sup>8</sup> Although this is the dominant discourse, we recognize that anti-Sikh violence (of the 1980s, prior, or after) is not the sole impetus for Sikh emigration. We also do not aim to establish a moral hierarchy of motivations among emigrants. For scholarship examining some aspects of the nuanced and complicated narratives of Sikhs' migration, we recommend Kanwal Mand's article "Marriage and Migration through the Life Course: Experiences of Widowhood, Separation and Divorce amongst Transnational Sikh Women" and Radhika Chopra's article "Maps of Experience: Narratives of Migration in an Indian Village".

that is invested in the liberation from our attachments to power and privilege and reinvest in the recognition of all of Vaaheguru's (ਵਾਹਿਗੁਰੂ) creation as valuable and true. This is the ardaas (ਅਰਦਾਸ) we offer instead – may our intentions be rooted in achieving existential love (ਅਨੰਦ), Naam (ਨਾਮ), and ੴ; may our actions be driven by consciousness, humility, and fearlessness; and may our dreams be filled with the “vicarious responsibility for things we have not done”, the sovereignty we have been given by Akaal Purakh (ਅਕਾਲ ਪੁਰਖ) to rectify the past and present, and an overflowing acceptance of Guru Sahib's hukam (ਹੁਕਮ).

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