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Understanding Ethno-Nationalism: Sikh Diasporic Imaginings in Southwest Michigan

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Rory G. McCarthy
UNDERSTANDING ETHNO-NATIONALISM:
SIKH DIASPORIC IMAGININGS
IN SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN

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Diaspora as a category is both useful and troublesome for researchers in the discipline of anthropology. It is useful, for it allows anthropologists to approach cultural studies from a position that recognizes flaws in the conception of culture as geographically bounded. Studying diasporic populations, therefore, enables anthropologists to apply new theoretical approaches to culture, without reifying and essentializing social practices. Conversely, using diaspora as a category can homogenize groups by glossing over differences in ethnicity, religion, and migratory experience.

This study aims at bettering the understanding of diversity within a diasporic population by examining the role that religion plays in the imagining of cultural identity. By examining the construction of a diasporic identity among Sikhs living in Southwest Michigan, I demonstrate how historical, political and social processes interact and contribute to the imagining of a diasporic community. This study grounds theoretical arguments about how communities are imagined with field research conducted in the Kalamazoo area, to demonstrate that cultural identity is the product of the interplay between perceived history and current political events. Also, this study demonstrates the value of including religion and ethnicity in a discussion about how communities negotiate identity in a diasporic setting.
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INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Introduction

Anthropology as a discipline grew out of the era of colonialism, when Western scholars were sent into areas controlled by colonial powers, to study the “natives.” Issues of colonial administration and control were as central to these endeavors as any scientific concerns. Recognition of this legacy has inspired reflexive thinking about anthropology’s past, and about long held assumptions that have shaped the discipline, resulting in a questioning of methodologies once referred to as the “hallmarks of ethnographic study.” Recent critiques of the bounded conceptualization of culture, and of a hierarchy of purity regarding field site selection have exposed some of the socio-political forces underlying contemporary anthropological practice (Fox, 1991; Gupta and Ferguson, 1997).

One reason the bounded notion of culture is problematic is that people are not stationary, but rather mobile. In the post-modern age, this mobility has increased, as have the number of people living in places they claim no cultural attachment to. The world has entered into what Appadurai (1991:192) refers to as an era of “detrimentalization,” or the expansion beyond fixed geographic territories by ethnic groups, cultural identities, and political organizations and movements. But what
criteria must an ethnic group meet to be considered existing in diaspora? And to what degree is the diasporic experience similar for these groups?

The study of diaspora, and diasporic communities has become central to academic discourse, due to our increasing awareness of globalization. The study of diasporic populations can be fruitful to anthropology in two ways. First, it forces us, as anthropologists, to look beyond the bounded notions of culture, beyond the linkages of cultural practice to geographical location, and allows us to begin to see culture in a different light. At the same time, ethnographic studies of diasporic communities reveal how identity, often linked closely with culture and geography, is a flexible and at times fluid imagining. Rather than being linked to geography, identity can be seen as linked to historical and political circumstance. As these circumstances change, conceptions of cultural identity can shift, making for new constructions of “Us” and “Them.” Diasporic populations are forced to confront these shifting notions of cultural identity directly, as they are reminded more readily of their difference from those living around them.

Diasporic studies are not without their own host of internal debates. There is little agreement about what we mean by “diaspora,” and less still on the degree to which diasporic communities are a product of globalizing forces. Furthermore, the use of “diaspora” as a category is not without problems. Robin Cohen (1997:x) argues that the term diaspora is “often used casually, in an untheorized, or undertheorized way.” Not only does the term gloss over differences between different groups living in diaspora (i.e. African diaspora, Chinese diaspora, or Sikh diaspora), it also has the
potential to ignore diversity within those groups. The South Asian diaspora as a category, for instance, has recently been criticized within anthropology for its tendency to homogenize the experiences of a vastly diverse group of people (Shukla, 2001).

One aspect of “diaspora” often overlooked by scholars is the degree of ethnic diversity within a given diasporic community. According to Glazier (2001:3), ethnicity “refers to distinctive cultural patterns within the pluralism of the modern nation state.” Rooted in common language and culture, and a sense of shared history, ethnicity becomes a potent force when linked to a specific geographical territory (ibid). Thus, ethnic group identity, an increasingly important part of being human, takes on new meaning when confronted with the homogenizing forces of new global residence patterns.

In this chapter, I plan to show how cultural identity, particularly in a diasporic setting, is a moving target, strongly influenced by historical context and political circumstance. In order to do so, I will bring together three tangentially related theoretical approaches. First, I will look to literature on “imagined communities’, invented traditions, and nationalism to better understand communal identity formation. Second, I will demonstrate how globalization and transnationalism affect diasporic imaginings of community. Finally, I will address colonial/post-colonial literature specific to South Asia to demonstrate how the legacy of European domination has acted to create and constrain possible conceptions of South Asia, both for South Asians, as well as for scholars.
**Imagining a Diasporic Community**

Benedict Anderson (1983) argues that communities are imagined entities. This does not mean that communities are not real, but rather that what binds them together, whatever commonalities are present, stem not from natural linkages rooted in history, but rather from creative ones constructed in the present. Attempting to understand nationalism, Anderson describes nations as imagined political communities. Explaining his use of language, he writes that they are “imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson, 1983:6). In other words, Americans feel intimately connected to other Americans based solely on the fact that they share their “American-ness.” Inherent in that shared “American-ness” is a sense of shared language, shared culture, and a shared history, each binding one to the other on various levels, making all Americans part of a singular, timeless, and wholly natural group. At the same time, nations are “imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (ibid:7). The sense of belonging that accompanies community membership acts to distort or even hide the reality that not everyone can participate in, or benefit from the community equally.

Nationalism, therefore, is a by-product of the imagined community, a sense of loyalty or commitment to the community of which one feels a part. Gellner (1983:1) describes nationalism as “a political principle, which holds that the political and
national unit should be congruent.” Inherent in this definition is an understanding that a national unit, even if imagined, is imagined as specific to a bounded geographical area. Thus the national unit has borders, and the political unit controls and protects those borders. People living within those borders are afforded varying degrees of membership in the national community (ibid). Thus nations are imagined communities, with imagined links to geographical territory, links made to appear natural through the use of history and politics. Because geographical boundaries of nations bump up against borders of other nations, all citizens of the Earth become part of one imagined community or another. Thus, nationality is assumed for all individuals, or as Gellner (1983:6) writes, “Having a nation is not an inherent attribute of humanity, but it has come to appear as such.”

If a nation is imagined as a “deep, horizontal comradeship,” this depth is achieved through the use of history, real or invented. Eric Hobsbawm (1983) identifies close linkages between the rise of the modern nation state, and the use of invented traditions. Invented tradition “is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overt or tacitly accepted rules and of ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (Hobsbawm, 1983:1). It is through this implied link to the past that the imagined community becomes seen as natural, timeless, and rooted in the soil of a particular geographical region. Repetition of civic rituals, such as the Pledge of Allegiance or the National Anthem, and the symbolic observances of historically significant events, like fireworks on the 4th of July, can in
turn add to the legitimacy of the nation by strengthening those connections between past and present. As Hobsbawm (1983:12) states, “all invented traditions, so far as possible, use history as a legitimator of action and cement of group cohesion.” Often times, the invention of tradition can reflect majority interests in the present, as well as define who will be imagined as part of the community.

The concept of the imagined community, therefore, is critical to diasporic studies for two largely divergent reasons. First, while the notion of an imagined community was developed to explain the rise of the nation-state, it can be equally successful when applied to people living in diaspora, people who imagine themselves as part of a larger, transnational community sharing history, language, and culture, as well as a similar migratory experience. Thus, while transnational migration has challenged the primacy and timelessness of the nation state, the social phenomenon that allows for the imagining of a nation also allows for the imagining of a diasporic community. At the same time, diasporic movement creates new links with geographical locations, in the form of the “homeland.” For an Asian Indian living in the United States, “India” as a concept begins to take on a very different meaning than it does for Indians living in India. The imagining of a homeland, and a community’s links to it creates an interesting problem for today’s anthropologists. Gupta and Ferguson (1992:10-11) describe the dilemma as follows:

The irony of these times, however, is that as actual places and localities become ever more blurred and indeterminate, ideas of culturally and ethnically distinct places become perhaps even more salient. It is here
that it becomes most visible how imagined communities (Anderson, 1983) come to be attached to imagined places, as displaced peoples cluster around remembered or imagined homelands, places or communities in a world that seems increasingly to deny such firm territorialized anchors in their actuality.

Even symbolic ethnicity, the expression of ethnic identity without actively participating in ethnic institutions (Glazier, 2001), can be understood in terms of the imagining of community and homeland, as can be witnessed at any Irish Heritage Parade, or Scottish Festival held in the United States. Here, a symbolic longing for "home" is acted out through the wearing tartans, or donning the family crest, through the consumption of ethnic cuisine, or the witnessing of ethnic music and dance.

According to van der Veer (1995:1), the "Diasporic Imagination" is contingent on specific historical contexts, and the "politics of space" associated with them. Therefore, diasporic communities are imagined differently at different times. South Asians living in the United States in the first decade of the 20th century imagined themselves, and their relationship with their homeland, quite differently than South Asians living in America now. Changing political and social attitudes, as well as a radically different geopolitical map of the Indian subcontinent demand that these communities are imagined in new ways. Because of globalization, territories and shifting populations within them are being reshaped, and redefined. Language, once considered by Anderson (1983) to be the defining characteristic of an imagined community, has been replaced by other markers, such as race, culture, and religion.
(van der Veer; 1995). It is from these other markers of identity that nationalist sentiment is now being produced, and around which communities are imagined.

There is a second reason that the concept of the imagined community is important to diasporic studies. It has become impossible to talk about the transnational ebb and flow of population movement outside of the related discourses of the nation and nationality (Lie, 2001; Shukla; 2001; van der Veer, 1995). In fact, the very notions of emigration and immigration "presumes and privileges the place of the nation-state and the meaning of national identity" (Lie, 2001:355). In discussions of immigration, nationality moves to the forefront, while other aspects of identity, such as ethnicity, religion, or regional affiliation become hidden from view. Culture, according to Gupta and Ferguson, has suffered a similar fate due to the dominance of nationalist discourse. "It is so taken for granted that each country embodies its own distinctive culture and society the terms 'society' and 'culture' are routinely simply appended to the names of nation-states, as when a tourist visits India to understand 'Indian culture'" (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992:6-7). Thus, a cultural study of a diasporic community with roots in India would likewise be a means of understanding 'Indian culture,' if this notion was followed to its logical conclusion. This is, of course, simply not the case. Recognition of the invented quality of the nation, and a realization that alternative communities can also be imagined allows us to consider the heterogeneity within diasporic spaces.
Diaspora as a Category

While diaspora has become a popular catch phrase in the social sciences over the past few decades, the term is often used freely, without any theoretical consideration (Cohen, 1997). In order to better understand what is meant by diaspora, it is useful to position the concept within the context of other theoretical considerations regarding globalization in the post-modern world. This should not be taken to mean that diaspora is in any way limited to the era of globalization. As a social phenomenon, diaspora has always been part of the human condition. Its meaning has changed over time, and in an age when more people are moving across national borders than ever before, it is the most contemporary understanding which we seek.

Kearney (1995:548) makes a distinction between globalization and transnationalism, stating that globalization “refers to social, economic, cultural and demographic processes that take place within nations but also transcend them.” The spread of American popular culture on the coattails of global capitalism and American based multi-national corporations’ manipulation of new information technologies, is one example of globalizing processes (LaFeber, 2002). Processes of globalization are more abstract, and less intentional than those Kearney defines as transnational. Transnationalism also transcends the borders of nation states, as the term suggests, but there is an aspect of intention not present in processes of globalization. Transnationalism refers to “cultural and political projects of nation states as they vie for hegemony in relations with other nation states, with their citizens and ‘aliens’”
(Kearney, 1995: 548). Though both phenomena appear to be the same at first glance, it is the intentionality, grounded in politics of territoriality, which separates transnational processes from those of globalization. Migration can be placed within the realm of transnationalism, with nations benefiting from the arrival of cheap wage laborers, while family members living in distant homelands receive otherwise unavailable wealth, and at times prestige (Kearney, 1995; Helweg, 1986). Thus, deterritorialization, in the form of transnational communities, creates transnational spaces. As Kearney points out, transnational space allows its residents the potential for freedoms not necessarily available in the ‘homeland.’ At the same time, a nation state has the power, in some cases, to reach over borders and exert hegemonic control over the migrant community (Kearny, 1995:553). “Deterritorialization in this sense contrasts with the concept of diaspora whereby people imagine themselves as a nation outside of a homeland” (ibid). While Kearney’s attempt to position migration within the larger theoretical framework of globalization and transnationalism is admirable, I am not convinced that intentionality and jockeying for hegemonic position are at the heart of the diasporic movement of people. While nations do benefit from cheap labor, and remittances are welcome in homeland villages, the demographics surrounding the post-1965 immigration boom show many professional, highly educated workers entering the United States, not to become cheap wage laborers, but to become doctors, engineers, and researchers at various institutes of higher learning. At the same time, diasporic experience has at times been linked directly to nationalist movements, whereby oppressed or occupied peoples begin to see themselves as
nations for the first time from abroad (Jeurgensmeyer, 1979; Lie, 2001; van der Veer, 1995). This is certainly true of Indian nationalism, with Gandhi’s travels to South Africa (van der Veer, 1995), and of the Ghadar movement in the United States (Jeurgensmeyer, 1979). Similar claims can be made about Sikh nationalism in the 1970’s and 1980’s (Mahmood, 1996; Tatla, 1999). If nationalist movements gain insight from the diasporic experience, nation-states vying for hegemonic position might be less likely to encourage such migration, knowing the rupture that may result.

According to Kearney (1995), a transnational community refers most often to one that spans the borders of two nation states. Thus, wider dispersal of people into multiple nation states in different corners of the world constitutes a diaspora. The close association of the term ‘diaspora’ with the history of Jewish people has led some scholars to adopt the Jewish experience as an “ideal type,” or template against which all other diasporic claims must be qualified (Clifford, 1994). Recent attention to diaspora in academic circles, however, has forced us to expand the category to include various types of migration, and the experiences associated with them (Clifford, 1994; Cohen, 1997; Tatla, 1999). Conversely, many ethnic groups see themselves in a state of diaspora, requiring social scientists who study such groups, and the related phenomenon of dispersal, to come to some agreement on what we mean when we say ‘diaspora community.’

Robin Cohen (1997) has attempted to address some of the theoretical concerns related to what actually constitutes a diaspora, in his book, Global Diasporas: an Introduction. First, he recognizes a series of traits or characteristics that are shared,
partially or in their entirety, by many groups that exist today in a diasporic state. Borrowing from a list originally compiled by Safran (1991), and revising what he sees as problems, those traits are as follows:

- Dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions;
- alternatively, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambition;
- a collective memory and myth about a homeland, including its location, history and achievements;
- an idealization of the putative ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even its creation;
- the development of a return movement that gains collective approbation;
- a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history and belief in a common fate;
- a troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance at the least or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group;
- a sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement; and
- the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism (Cohen, 1997:26 Table 1.1).
Using these criteria, the history of Sikh migration can be understood in terms of a diasporic experience for several reasons. First, Sikhs are widely dispersed, living in virtually every region of the world. Some early migrants left in search of work, while more recent migration has been attributed to fear of violence during the Khalistani era. Second, Sikhs have a collective memory of a homeland, the Indian region of Punjab. The history of that homeland is intimately tied to Sikh conceptions of their own history, and its future is likewise interwoven with ideas about the future of Sikhism. Ethnic group consciousness exists among Sikhs, although who is included, and how far into the past that consciousness can be traced has been the center of a great deal of academic debate (McLeod, 1989a; Oberoi, 1994; see also Mahmood, 1996 for a discussion of the Sikh response). Troubled relationships with host societies are well documented, both past and present, as are enriching lives in tolerant, pluralist nations. As Tatla (1999:5) writes, “Applying Cohen’s criteria, it seems overseas Sikh communities fulfill the sufficient conditions of a diaspora…”

Aside from generating a set of criteria, Cohen (1997) attempts to construct a typology regarding the variety of ways diasporas can come into being, thus broadening the applicability of the category. With diaspora “types” such as Victim diaspora, Labor diaspora, Cultural diaspora, and Imperial diaspora, Cohen clearly shows that there are a multitude of templates by which diaspora can be understood, rather than relying on the Jewish experience as the standard by which all other diasporic communities must be measured. Unfortunately, there are diasporic communities that
can qualify as several of these types, while still other do not fit clearly in to any, making the typology less practical than it first appears to be.

The Sikh diaspora is described by Cohen (1997) as a diaspora intimately connected with the conception of a homeland, in this case, the creation of one. Tatla (1999), in his book about the Sikh diaspora, draws similar conclusions, as the title of his book, *The Sikh Diaspora: the Search for Statehood*, implies. While this may be true for one segment of the Sikh diasporic population, quite the opposite is true for another. There is no degree of community cohesion on the subject of Khalistan, or on the appropriate means of achieving such a goal. At the same time, a review of the history of Sikh migration will show that labor brought many early migrants out of Punjab, and into Africa, Europe and North America. Similarly, service in the British Indian army during the colonial era scattered Sikhs throughout East Asia, and the islands of the Pacific. In this way, the Sikh diaspora has its roots in what could be considered the Imperial diaspora of the British Empire. Clifford (1994) argues for the consideration of diaspora as a condition that a community experiences, rather than a continual state of being. The same could be argued for the type of diaspora that a community is considered.

**The South Asian Diaspora**

According to Sandhya Shukla (2001:551), the term diaspora refers to "dispersion [of people], which effectively compresses time and space such that it enables the experiences of many places at what would appear to be one moment." As Shukla points out, this notion of diaspora as one-dimensional, regardless of time or
place, is largely problematic, particularly in its failure to acknowledge the variability within a community. Specific to the South Asian diaspora, along with the experiential differences of age, gender, ethnicity, and religion, there is also the phenomenon of "twice-migration," whereby immigrants come to countries such as the US, Canada or Great Britain from former British colonies in Africa, the Caribbean, or the South Pacific (Shukla, 2001). Time and space cannot be compressed for people living in diaspora. Their life experiences, backgrounds, and places of origin create widespread diversity, rather than support a single experiential identity. Others have argued that to understand diasporic identities, South Asian or otherwise, it is necessary to position transnational migration within a larger historical context of colonialism, and within the more dominant discourse of nationalism (Mathur, 2000; Shukla, 2001; van der Veer, 1995). Shukla (2001) and Mathur (2000) both argue that an understanding of South Asian cultures, both on the sub-continent, and around the world, must be underscored by an understanding of colonialism. In other words, colonialism has created and reified monolithic categories, such as Indian, or South Asian, while fostering a sense of nationalism for both colonizer and colonized.

This sense of nationalism is also fostered through transnational migration, as minority groups form communities that contrast culturally with larger "host countries" (van der Veer, 1995). In the case of the South Asian diaspora, these processes have become fused with spiritual traditions, creating what Peter van der Veer (1995) calls an "ethnicization of Religion." The imagined community among South Asian immigrants is constructed along religious lines, rather than linguistic or ethnic
commonalities. Helweg (2002) and van der Veer (1995) both acknowledge the importance of United States immigration law in understanding trends in the make-up of diasporic communities residing in this country. Labor needs also influenced the transnational movements of South Asians, both during the colonial era (Tatla, 1999) and during the post-colonial era (Shukla, 2001; Helweg, 2002). Finally, there is the issue of “twice-migration”, whereby immigrants of South Asian heritage move to the United States, not from India, but from Africa, England, or other parts of the former British Empire (Shukla, 2001; Helweg, 2002). All of these factors can shape and influence the ways in which the South Asian diaspora is imagined, both from within, and from the outside. So, while the ‘South Asian Diaspora,’ or ‘Indian immigration’ can be talked about in academic or political circles, groups within the larger homogenizing category of ‘South Asians’ are busily imagining themselves as part of a variety of communities that do not map as easily onto a theoretical argument or a census questionnaire.

Finally, as Malkki (1995), and Clifford (1994) both suggest, there are political considerations, as well as political implications in these conversations about displaced, or deterritorialized peoples. There is little doubt that issues relating to communal identity are extremely political, as some scholars have found out (see Ulin, 1996:40-45). However, as scholars, we must be constantly aware that the work we do becomes part of the larger political discourse surrounding how ethnic groups perceive themselves, and how they become perceived by others. Homogenizing large groups of
vastly diverse people cannot be considered either academically accurate, or politically empowering to those whom we discuss.

**Conclusions**

Diasporic communities are imagined communities, much like nations are. However, the social markers around which these communities are imagined vary according to the geographical and historical contexts in which they exist. While language may be the unifying factor within a diasporic community, it is just as likely to be nationality, ethnicity, religion, or any number of other social markers. With regard to the South Asian diaspora, it is impossible to put South Asians in a singular category without doing them a great disservice. The rise in importance of religious identity both in India, and in diasporic communities with historic roots in India have led to what Peter van der Veer (1995) calls an “Ethnicization of Religion,” whereby religion becomes linked to identity in the same way that nationality would. At the same time, discourses of nationalism and religion become interwoven and inseparable. As migration is linked to nationalism on several levels, this makes religion become an important component of understanding diasporic identity among South Asians. Thus, by focusing on religious identity within a diasporic community, the varieties of ways in which communities can be imagined become evident.

In the chapters that follow, I will attempt to demonstrate how religion acts as a central factor for imagining a diasporic community, by focusing on Sikh conceptions of community, or *Panth*, as something unique and wholly different from all other segments of Indian society. I will accomplish this by first reviewing Sikh conceptions
of their own religious history, a history that has contributed to a cultural identity rooted in militarism and martyrdom, loyalty and bravery. I will follow that with a discussion of the role that colonial occupation of India by the British, and early migration out of Punjab played in reinforcing certain aspects of these cultural characteristics, particularly bravery and militarism, while also making notions of industriousness, mobility, and hard work synonymous with concepts of being Sikh. A brief review of South Asian immigration to the United States will illustrate how changing social and demographic profiles of Indian immigrants following new legislation in 1965 have created a need for new ways to imagine a community in diasporic space. Finally, I will ground my discussion of cultural identity among diasporic Sikhs by demonstrating how history and circumstance have led to shifting notions of "Us" and "Them" for Sikhs living in and around Kalamazoo, Michigan. I will show how American reaction to events such the World Trade Center attacks on September 11th, 2001, and the most recent war with Iraq have forced Sikhs to actively initiate discussions with the larger community in Kalamazoo regarding what Sikhism is, and that this process is simultaneously reshaping how the community is being imagined from within.
CHAPTER II

REMEMBERING GURUS AND HEROES

Introduction

Founded in the 15th Century by Guru Nanak, Sikhism is the fifth most practiced religion in the world. While estimates range from 16 to 20 million followers world wide, with a concentration of 13 to 17 million in India, Sikhs represent less than two percent of the population of the Indian nation state (Axel, 2001; Tatla, 1999). With a total history of just over five hundred years, Sikhism also represents the youngest of what are considered “World Religions.”

The history of Sikhism can be divided into four eras that, though admittedly arbitrary, do hold some degree of continuity. First, the period of time spanning the lives of the Ten Gurus, beginning with Guru Nanak and ending with Guru Gobind Singh, marks the evolution of a religion in the making. Following the death of Guru Gobind Singh, a tumultuous period marked by violence and warfare began. The post-Guru, or Heroic period lasted about 150 years, and saw the young religion struggling for survival in a Punjab that was a battlefield for two competing Muslim powers in the region (Grewel, 1998). The rise to power of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, and the formation of a “Sikh Empire” in Punjab bring this period to a close. In this chapter, I will discuss these first two periods, showing how the perception of religious history shapes the conception of cultural identity in the present day. While some of this history could be
called into question under the scrutiny of the historian’s lens, this is the history of Sikhs, as they know it. It is for this reason that it becomes important in contemporary notions of what it means to be Sikh.

In the next chapter, I will address a third major period in Sikh history, the Colonial Period, which begins with the annexation of Punjab by the British in 1849, and ends with Indian Independence in 1947. It was during this time that Sikhs began to move out of India, and into other British colonies, usually through the army or colonial police forces. This history is equally important to the formation of cultural identity, for it is in this time period that Sikhs develop a reputation for being mobile, willing to seek out opportunity, and demonstrate their willingness to fight and die for a just cause, namely Indian independence.

Finally, I will examine the Post Independence Period, including the recent struggle for self-rule in Punjab, in the form of the Khalistani movement. During this latest period, more so than any other, the past and present collide, galvanizing a contemporary understanding of the amritdhari Sikh identity of old, with the Khalistani militant, as it is understood in relation to a history of martyrdom, oppression, and long-term courageous struggles for justice. It is this creation direct and indirect links with the glorious past, and the at times violent present, which drove the militancy in its early days and continues to garner sympathy for the cause today. It is the history of oppression, the tradition of militarism and martyrdom, and the golden age of sovereignty under Ranjit Singh which mobilized a generation of Sikhs to fight for
independence, and allowed for those not in favor of Khalistan to be capable of understanding the motivations of those who were.

The following history of the Ten Gurus, and the post-Guru, Heroic Period needs to be understood as a religious history, a history as it is understood by the followers of the Sikh faith. While drawn from varied sources, this history should not be understood as an archival-based work, a history that can be corroborated by multiple historic records and proven to be authentic, for lack of a better word. This is a history of a religion, as it is understood by practitioners of that religion. McLeod (2000) argues that any understanding of Sikh identity must recognize the influence of the Singh Sabha, a reform movement that attempted to eradicate Hindu influences from Sikh practices in the late 19th and early 20th century. McLeod therefore sees Sikh history as a revisionist history, an invention of tradition utilized to by religious reformers to lend validity to their efforts in reshaping the faith. However, the importance of this understanding of Sikh origins and history does not rest upon its authenticity. What matters most is its influence on the ways contemporary Sikhs drawn on it to construct cultural and religious identity. To prove its authenticity, or conversely its inventedness, would do little to benefit our understanding of its impact on how modern Sikhs see themselves in the world.

The Ten Gurus

Guru Nanak was born in 1469 CE near Lahore, in what is now Pakistani Punjab, into an upper, or twice-born caste of Hinduism (Gibson, 1988; Grewel, 1998; Mahmood, 1996; McLeod, 1989a). While a detailed recounting of Nanak’s life is
beyond the scope of this project, a few details are clearly important. According to most accounts, Nanak fulfilled his caste duties while working in Sultanpur for the ruling Afghan governor as a revenue collector. Around the age of 30, Nanak received divine revelation about the true nature of Divinity, and began to travel far and wide, spreading his message and attracting followers. These followers became known as "Sikhs," a term based on the Persian word for "disciple" (Grewel, 1998; Mahmood, 1996).

At first glance, Nanak’s message appears to be a syncretic blend of the prevailing religious traditions of the region, namely Islam and Hinduism. In fact, scholars of Sikhism have found little agreement on this very issue, with some arguing for the blending model, while others see it more as a reform movement within Hinduism (Mahmood, 1996; McLeod, 1989a). Much of the debate stems from the combination of mysticism and monotheism inherent in both scripture and practice. Regardless of scholarly debate, most Sikhs are quick to point out that Nanak’s message was unique.

Nanak’s message was explained to me as three basic tenets by one Sikh at the newly opened gurdwara in town. Worship, hard work, and generosity, he explained, were the basic tenets of Sikhism. Worship referred to nam simaran, or remembrance of “the Name,” Akal Purakh (“Timeless One”), the creator and sustainer of all things. The remembrance is accomplished through meditating on the Name, whereby the existence of Akal Purakh in all things is revealed (McLeod, 1989a). Hard work stresses Nanak’s insistence that Sikhs remain firmly rooted the world around them, as
Akal Purakh could be understood through worldly activity and meditation, as opposed to other Indian traditions which required renunciation of all things worldly (Mahmood, 1996; McLeod, 1989a). Generosity merely refers to the practice of sharing the fruits of one’s labor with those less fortunate. Sikhs are indeed generous people, and my experiences with Kalamazoo area Sikhs reinforced that stereotype. They welcomed me into their homes, and took time out of their busy schedules to accommodate my requests for interviews and information.

Nanak was critical of both Hinduism and Islam, and how they were being practiced at the time (Mahmood, 1996). He was particularly critical of ritual and idol worship, practices that he felt were devoid of any true spirituality. Nanak also rejected the caste system, arguing instead that all humans were equal before God. This is reflected in the practice of langar, or the communal meal that is served after every Sikh religious service. All people sit on the floor, regardless of caste, age or gender, and share a meal, to symbolize their common status in the presence of the divine. It is this notion of universal equality that is the foundation for one of Nanak’s other religious innovations, gender equality. Sikhs pride themselves of being followers of the only religion that espouses such a concept, though it is arguable that this principle translates well into practice. Finally, Guru Nanak rejected the ascetic practices of Hindu Sannyasis, who renounced the world in favor of meditation and the pursuit of absolute truth. Truth was to be found through living a spiritual life while carrying out worldly activities with honesty and sincerity (Gibson, 1988; Mahmood, 1996; McLeod, 1989a). One of the most famous passages written by Nanak reads as follows: “If you
want to play this game of love, come to my street with your head in your palms”
(Mahmood, 1996:33). It is this reference to humility and grace that are most often associated with Guru Nanak. It is this same passage that later came to be interpreted as legitimizing martyrdom as a form of spiritual expression (ibid).

Some of Nanak’s travels are detailed in the *janamsakhis*, or biographies of the first Guru. While these stories do not enjoy the sacred status of the Guru Granth Sahib, they remain a trusted source to Sikhs for information about their faith’s founder (Mahmood, 1996). While these stories provide detail about Nanak’s travels, they also yield instruction, not unlike the tales of Jesus in the Christian Bible. In many of the stories, Guru Nanak confronts religious leaders of both Hinduism and Islam, challenging their practices, and illustrating his own understanding of spirituality.

That early followers of Nanak were drawn from both Hindu and Muslim backgrounds is used as evidence of the universal quality of the Guru’s message. The following anecdote describing the death of Guru Nanak illustrates this point:

Hindu and Muslims who had put their faith in the divine Name began to debate what should be done with the Guru’s corpse. ‘We shall bury him,’ said the Muslims. ‘No, let us cremate his body,’ said the Hindus. ‘Place flowers on both sides of my body,’ said Baba Nanak, ‘flowers from the Hindus on the right side, and flowers from the Muslims on my left. If tomorrow the Hindus’ flowers are still fresh let my body be burned, and if the Muslims’ flowers are still fresh, let it be buried.’
Baba Nanak then commanded the congregation to sing…Baba Nanak then covered himself with a sheet, and passed away. Those who had gathered around him prostrated themselves, and when the sheet was removed they found nothing under it. The flowers on both sides remained fresh, and both Hindus and Muslims took their respective shares. All who were gathered there prostrated themselves again (from the *Puratan Janamsakhi*: 111-115, as translated in McLeod, 1984:25).

It is said that the Guru’s body turned into pure light, and in other versions of the story, his shroud was divided in two, half being buried, while the other half was burned. As Mahmood points out, this story does not represent Nanak, or his message as having roots in either community. Instead, “the new spirituality he represented was respected (respectable) by both.” (Mahmood, 1996:34).

With Guru Nanak’s passing in 1539, the guru-ship was passed to one of his loyal followers, Angad, thus establishing the practice of naming a successor to the guru that would last for the next two hundred years. However, the succession would change in character over time, from achieved to ascribed, and ultimately to the installation of the Adi Granth (Guru Granth Sahib) as supreme spiritual authority in 1708, bringing to an end the Guru period (Mahmood, 1996).

While each of the ten gurus is significant to the development of Sikhism, and each has a list of accomplishments to his name, I will limit my attention to four of Nanak’s successors. However, I should point out that these were not selected randomly. Developments undertaken during the lives of these four religious leaders
have become central the construction of a contemporary “Sikh” identity, and in turn elevated their status in the retelling of Sikh religious history. I will discuss the contribution of the fifth guru, Guru Arjun, and his son Guru Hargobind. I will then turn my attention to the ninth guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur, and his son, the tenth and final guru, Guru Gobind Singh.

Guru Arjun assumed leadership of the Sikh Panth in 1581 CE, following the death his father, Guru Ram Das. This move marks a change in the succession of the gurus that would last until the death of Guru Gobind Singh in 1708 CE. While previous gurus had been appointed by their predecessor based on loyalty and dedication to the message of Nanak, all gurus appointed after Ram Das were part of his lineage, thus shifting the structure of the guru-ship from an achieved to an ascribed position (Grewel, 1998).

Guru Arjun assumed leadership of the Sikh Panth at the age of eighteen, and continued the work of his father, completing the sacred tank at Amritsar. Later he oversaw the construction of a temple in the center of the tank, a temple that came to be known as Harmandir Sahib, or more commonly as the Golden Temple (Grewel, 1998). Important in the lore surrounding the founding of the Golden Temple is that the structure’s foundation stone was laid not by a Sikh, but by Mian Mir, a Sufi saint and friend of the Guru (Mahmood, 1996). This fact is seen as further evidence of other religions’ respect for Sikhism.

Guru Arjun is also credited with the compiling of compositions by all of the previous gurus, as well as writings by mystics of both Islam and Hinduism. These
volumes, known first as the Adi Granth, and later as Guru Granth Sahib, were completed and formally installed at the Harmandir Sahib in 1604 (Grewel, 1998; Mahmood, 1996; Oberoi, 1994).

In 1605 CE, there was a change in power in North India. Under the rule of the Mughal emperor Akbar, Sikhs had been relatively free to practice their religion with little interference. However, with the passing of Akbar in 1605 CE, and the ascension of his son Jahangir to the throne, the religious tolerance once enjoyed quickly evaporated. While there are a number of reasons offered for this change in administrative policy, the most common explanation is that Jahangir was attempting to consolidate power under the guise of religious orthodoxy (Grewel, 1998; Mahmood, 1996). Whether it was out of fear of Guru Arjun’s increasing influence over burgeoning number of followers, or out of anger over anti-Islamic qualities of the recently compiled Adi Granth, Jahangir ordered the Guru’s arrest in 1606 CE. After undergoing grueling tortures over a period of several days, Guru Arjun died at the hands of his captors, becoming the first in a long line of Sikh martyrs willing to give his head in order to “play this game of love,” as described by Nanak.

Guru Arjun is said to have been forced to sit on a large metal plate, heated over a large fire, have burning hot sand poured over his naked body, and even sit in a large cauldron of boiling water. According to most accounts, Guru Arjun endured all of these hardships unwavering in his religious convictions, and without losing a blissful smile. In fact, he is said to have described his fate as the “sweet will of the Lord” (Mahmood, 1996:36). Finally, Arjun was forced to wade into the river Ravi, where he
was drowned. Like accounts of Nanak’s death, it is said that Guru Arjun turned to pure light, and blended with “the Divine Light” before a crowd of onlookers (ibid). Guru Arjun’s martyrdom is significant for a number of reasons. First, while Guru Nanak’s message had been one of self-sacrifice as means of achieving spiritual enlightenment, Guru Arjun’s sacrifice had been physical in orientation (Mahmood, 1996). Thus, martyrdom, or sacrificing of one’s life for one’s faith, came to be seen as a spiritual act. Second, the direction Sikhism was taken by the five gurus who succeeded Guru Arjun can be seen as a reaction to his martyrdom, and the continued persecution of Sikhs in the years to come. A tradition of martyrdom, starting with Guru Arjun, has continued to influence Sikh identity construction, particularly in times of strife.

Guru Hargobind became Sikhism’s sixth guru following the martyrdom of his father, Guru Arjun. Hargobind donned two swords, named miri and piri, representing the temporal and spiritual authority, which he as Guru possessed (Mahmood, 1996; Grewel 1998; Axel, 2001). These two swords are now represented in the Khanda, a symbol closely associated with Sikhism. The Khanda can be found on flags flying outside gurdwaras anywhere in the world, and as Mahmood (1996:41) points out, “The emblem of the double swords is now a particularly prominent symbol of nationhood for Khalistani Sikhs.”

Hargobind oversaw the construction of the Akal Takht, or the “Eternal Throne,” as a temporal compliment to the Harmandir Sahib (Mahmood, 1996). As one Sikh explained to me, when you are in the Harmandir Sahib, you cannot see the
Akal Takht, for time spent in the Harmandir Sahib is time to be spent on religion. However, from the Akal Takht, the Harmandir Sahib is in clear view, a reminder that religion is never too far removed from the political decisions of daily life.

These two related dichotomies, of the double swords and of the Harmandir Sahib/Akal Takht, mark a significant shift in the course of development for Sikhism. Where as the early gurus had been spiritual leaders committed to meditation and pacifism, Guru Hargobind fused spiritual issues with political concerns, and established the guru-ship as a position that had authority over both (Axel, 2001). Hargobind is also credited with developing the concept of sant-sapahi, the “saint-solider,” injecting the Sikh religious identity with a sense of militarism (Mahmood, 1996). Bravery on the battlefield became seen as a justifiable expression of spirituality, especially if the battle was to right injustice. Guru Hargobind, and his sant-sapahis, attempted to right the injustice of Guru Arjun’s martyrdom, clashing with Mughal forces on several occasions (Mahmood, 1996; Grewel, 1998; McLeod, 2000). These battles were never over the acquisition of territory for the Sikhs and their Guru, but were rather defensive in nature. These battles are viewed in hindsight by Sikhs as examples of drawing the sword to defend against injustice, a far more worthy cause than territorial expansion, or consolidation of power (Mahmood, 1996).

Guru Hargobind, and his closest followers left the plains of Punjab for the safety of the Shivilak hills, where he and his two successors remained with little interference from the Mughals (Grewel, 1998; McLeod, 2000). It is not until the time of the ninth guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur that hostilities again erupted between Sikhs and
the Mughal dynasty at Lahore. Guru Tegh Bahadur, the eldest son of the sixth guru, Hargobind, moved back out onto the Punjabi plains, an act that may have been perceived as threatening by the Mughal rulers (McLeod, 2000). Also, the rise to power of Aurangzeb as Mughal emperor in 1658 ushered in an era of religious intolerance in the Punjab, leading to the martyrdom of Tegh Bahadur, and prolonged conflict between Sikhs and their Mughal oppressors (McLeod, 1984; Grewel, 1998). This intolerance, and the Sikh reaction to it, would have a significant impact on how Sikhs practiced their religion, and how they saw themselves in the world for centuries to come.

Though the events that led up to the death of Tegh Bahadur at the hands of his Mughal captors are not without controversy, the collective memory of his martyrdom and its significance has not been lost on the Sikh community. McLeod (2000:57) writes, “In its impact upon panthic self-awareness, true importance attaches to the construction placed upon his death rather than to the actual facts which led up to it. As with the death of Guru Arjun, the execution of the ninth Guru was interpreted as martyrdom and the outcome an ultimate strengthening of panthic cohesion.” However, the martyrdom of Tegh Bahadur is rarely seen by Sikhs as a deliberate attack on the panth, but rather as a sacrifice made by the Guru for the benefit of others (McLeod, 1984; Mahmood, 1996; Grewel, 1998).

According to most accounts, Guru Tegh Bahadur was approached by a group of Hindu Brahmins from the valley of Kashmir, who told horrible tales of religious intolerance, persecution, and forced conversions by the Mughal governor there. The
guru was deeply disturbed by what he heard. After much reflection, he named his successor, and headed for Delhi, and certain death (McLeod, 1984; Grewel, 1998). The Guru had sent the delegation of Brahmins ahead of him, with a challenge for Aurangzeb:

Our master and guide is Tegh Bahadur of noble Kshatriya descent. If the emperor can persuade him to become a Muslim then we too shall convert to Islam. If, however, he refuses, then we should be freed from the obligation to do so (McLeod, 1984:32).

The Guru was arrested, and brought to Delhi, were he was asked to perform a miracle to prove his closeness to God. He refused. He was asked to accept Islam, and he again refused. Three of the Guru’s personal attendants were put to death in front of him, and still he refused to convert. Eventually, he was ordered to accept Islam, or accept death. He chose death, and was publicly beheaded in 1675 (McLeod, 1984; Grewel, 1998). His son, the then nine-year old Gobind Das, became the tenth and final living Guru following the martyrdom of his father.

Tegh Bahadur’s martyrdom is evidence, say many contemporary Sikhs, that the militaristic qualities of the faith should not be misunderstood as fanaticism. The call to battle injustice is just that, a duty to fight for the oppressed in any situation. “The ninth Guru gave his life for religious freedom for everyone,” a prominent member of the Kalamazoo Sikh community explained to an audience of Christians at the People’s Church one Sunday morning last fall. This is how the sacrifice of Tegh Bahadur is most often framed, as a universal act of love. Similarly, one of Cynthia Mahmood’s
interlocutors described the death of the ninth Guru as “so beautiful, because he sacrificed his life for the sake of another religion, for Hindus... That’s really an inspiration to me. That’s why I think Sikhs are in the world, not just for Sikhs alone but for anybody who needs a Sikh” (Mahmood, 1996:42).

If the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur strengthened the resolve of the Sikhs of Punjab, his son and successor, Guru Gobind Singh galvanized it over a period of roughly thirty years. The most significant development within the Sikh Panth during Gobind Singh’s time was the formation of the Khalsa, and its accompanying code of conduct, the Rahit (McLeod, 1989a; Oberoi, 1994). Both a catalyst for, and a result of, ongoing warfare with Aurangzeb’s armies, the Khalsa is seen by many to be the final step in the evolution of the faith, from Nanak, through Arjun and Hargobind, and all the other gurus.

The tenth guru’s rule marks the beginning of the Sikh rise to power in the Punjab, to be fully realized by Ranjit Singh a century later. Gobind Singh also represents the last of the gurus in human form, instilling all of his authority in both the Panth, and the Adi Granth (Guru Granth Sahib) at the time of his death in 1708. I will examine each of these developments in further detail, with particular attention paid to how these continue to shape the construction and negotiation of cultural identity among diasporic Sikhs today.

According to most accounts, after a decade or more of sporadic fighting with Mughal forces, Guru Gobind Singh called on all Sikhs to congregate at Anandpur in March of 1699, during the annual harvest festival of Baisakhi (sometimes spelled
Vaisakhi) (Angelo, 1997; Grewel, 1998; Mahmood, 1996; McLeod, 1989a). After a vast crowd of Sikhs from all over the Punjab had gathered, the Guru stood before his followers, and drew his sword.

"I need one head. Is there anyone who will volunteer to give his head?" The crowd became immediately silent, unsure if they truly understood what the guru was asking. Guru Gobind Singh asked two more times before someone finally stood up. "My head is at your service," the lone Sikh proclaimed (Mahmood, 1996: 43). The Guru led his volunteer into a tent. A thud was heard by all, and Guru Gobind Singh emerged from the tent, drawn sword dripping of blood. Again he raised the sword, and again he demanded the head of one of his followers. Again the crowd was stunned, but one man stood up, and said, "My Lord, here is your servant’s head.” This time the guru asked “Are you not afraid to die?” The Sikh responded to his Guru’s question:

My Lord, I gave you my head on the day I became your Sikh. It has already been entrusted to you. Do with it as you wish. This transitory body is but a morsel for Death to consume. Death is like a man carrying food in his pouch. Some he has already eaten, some he is actually munching, and the remainder he regards with anticipation. When all are thus condemned why should we hesitate to deliver our heads to our Guru? (McLeod, 1984: 35).
Pleased with this answer, Guru Gobind Singh led this volunteer into the same tent, emerging again with a sword dripping of blood. He repeated his request three more time, and repeated his sacrifice with each of the volunteers.

The crowd was shocked and amazed when finally the Guru drew back the opening to the tent, revealing the five volunteers alive and unharmed, and five decapitated goats used to complete the hoax. Because of their willingness to sacrifice their lives for their guru, these five men became known as panj piaras, or the “Five Beloved Ones.” These five men were given amrit, a sacred nectar consisting of sugar and water stirred with a double-edged sword, and became the first five members of the Khalsa, or “the Pure.” The amrit was consumed by the panj piaras, as well as sprinkled in their eyes and in their hair. With that done, the Guru knelt before them, and was himself initiated into the Khalsa (Angelo, 1997; Mahmood, 1996; McLeod, 1989a).

The Guru then gave all five men, and all future members of the Khalsa, the surname Singh, meaning “Lion” (Women, who can also be initiated into the Khalsa, are given the surname Kaur, which means “Princess”). It was at this time that Gobind Singh introduced the Five K’s, the five outward symbols of Sikh Faith made highly visible in order to “ensure that Sikhs would not be able to shirk their duty to defend their faith by blending unnoticed into a crowd” (Mahmood, 1996:45). The five K’s, so named because each sign begins with the letter ‘K’ in Punjabi, are as follows: unshorn hair (kes), a comb worn in the hair (kangha), breeches (kachh), a steel bangle worn on the right wrist (kara), and a small sword or dagger (kirpan). Each outward symbol
has religious significance, as well as symbolism tied closely to military preparedness, yet another way in which militarism and spiritualism are interwoven within Sikhism. The Khalsa initiation, known as the *pahul*, became a ritual expression of the equality inherent in Nanak’s message, and the shared surname *Singh* a rejection of caste distinction (McLeod, 1989a).

The formation of the Khalsa is one of the most significant features of Sikh history, in any period. Commemorated every year on Baisakhi, the Khalsa represents the fusion of militarism with spirituality, where drawing the sword becomes equal with meditation on the Name. The Khalsa represents a military brotherhood, whose members, recognized by their distinct dress, would put a person at ease, realizing they would be protected if the need arose. It is worth noting the same symbols struck a chord of dread during the years of the Khalistani militancy (Mahmood, 1996). The Khalsa, or amritdhari Sikh, represented the ideal of saintliness and soldiery, a devout, spiritual person who was willing to die defending the rights of others to practice the Sikh faith. It is this concept of the Sikh identity that Brian Keith Axel (2001) argues has established hegemonic status in the Sikh community, and severely limiting discussion within the Sikh Panth regarding who is, and who is not, considered to be *gursikh*, or a “True Sikh.”

Some scholars have been critical of accepting this retelling of the formation of the Khalsa at face value, questioning whether or not such descriptive tales have any historical accuracy. However, as McLeod (1989a:29) points out, “If we are seeking to understand the fashioning of a Sikh identity, we can remain uncommitted as far as
most of the details are concerned. It matters little whether five volunteers were actually summoned or whether five goats were actually slain. The overriding fact is that in its essential outline the story is firmly believed and that this belief has unquestionably contributed to the subsequent shaping of conventional Sikh attitudes.”

While the tenth Guru may be best known outside of Sikhism for forming the Khalsa, and forever solidifying the militant side to the faith, he is also credited with revising the Adi Granth (Angelo, 1997) and composing the Dasam Granth, or “Book of the Tenth Master” (Grewel, 1998). Though this text does not enjoy the same level of importance within Sikhism as the Guru Granth Sahib, it also holds the title of Guru, and parts of it are incorporated in the daily prayers expected of all Khalsa Sikhs (McLeod, 1984). Included in this substantial collection of anecdotes, legends, devotional compositions, and biographical tales of the tenth guru is the famous **Zafarnama**, or “letter of victory,” written by Guru Gobind Singh to the emperor of the Mughal Empire, and oppressor of the Sikh Panth, Aurangzeb (Mahmood, 1996; McLeod, 1984).

The Zafarnama was written after the Guru suffered the loss of all four of his sons at the hands of the Mughals. His two eldest sons were killed in battle, and his two youngest, ages six and eight, were executed, bricked alive into a wall after refusing to convert to Islam (Grewel, 1998; Mahmood, 1996; Singh, 1999).

Depictions of the martyrdom of Gobind Singh’s youngest sons were once available, in a downloadable form, from a website targeting North American Sikh youth. The
download was designed for the user to print, and later color the picture of the two boys, calmly watching as bricks were laid, the wall already halfway to completion.

In the Zafarnama, Gobind Singh defiantly wrote, “These are just a few candles that you have snuffed out, but the whole blazing furnace of the Khalsa is all around me, and it will make Punjab so hot that your horses won’t be able to gallop across the burning plains” (as quoted in Mahmood, 1996: 48). It was this fearless attitude, symbolic in the language of the Zafarnama and physically manifested in the Khalsa that would define Sikh activity in the Punjab over the century following the death of Guru Gobind Singh.

In 1708, Guru Gobind was fatally stabbed in the stomach by an assassin, whose identity remains up for debate (Angelo, 1997; Grewel, 1998, Singh, 1999). Gobind Singh’s final act as Guru was to name his successor, an act that changed the face of Sikhism forever. Rather than naming a human successor, Guru Gobind Singh placed all of his political and temporal authority in the Sikh Panth, while instilling all spiritual authority associated with the guruship in the holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib (Angelo, 1997; Mahmood, 1996).

This final democratizing action by Guru Gobind Singh can be seen as bringing to fruition all aspects of a historical trajectory, begun by Nanak, and developed over time by a succession of nine Gurus. The dichotomy of Guru Panth/ Guru Granth was a finalization of the double swords of Hargobind, with the Panth representing temporal authority, and the Khalsa representing the defense of faith. At the same time, the spiritual authority vested in the Guru Granth Sahib formally institutionalized the
importance “the Word,” as put forth by Guru Nanak two hundred years earlier (Grewel, 1998; Mahmood, 1996). In an attempt to understand Khalistani fanaticism, Mahmood (1996: 48) succinctly explains Gobind Singh’s successors as follows: “Granth (Guru Granth Sahib) and Panth are therefore twin repositories of Guru, making veneration of the Word and defense of the Nation dual modes of worship for the orthodox Sikh.”

It is important to note that though the Khalsa was established by Guru Gobind Singh, and had a major impact on future developments within the Sikh Panth, not all Sikhs underwent the Amrit initiation to become a Khalsa (or amritdhari: one who has taken amrit) Sikh during the lifetime of the tenth Guru (Axel, 2001; Grewel, 1998; Mahmood, 1996). This is a fact that has been constant throughout Sikh history, leading to considerable debate regarding how to define “Who is a Sikh?” (For an in depth discussion regarding this controversy, see Axel, 2001, pg. 35-37 and 42-45; Fox, 1985; McLeod, 1989a; Oberoi, 1994). Mahmood (1996) acknowledges that while the Khalsa is certainly respected by Sikhs, it has never had membership equal the entire Sikh Panth. However, Axel (2001) argues that the amritdhari identity has achieved hegemonic status in the discourse surrounding a “Sikh” identity, and who has the right to claim it. According to Grewel (1998:80), “All the Sikhs at the time of Guru Gobind Singh’s death were not his Khalsa, and all his Khalsa were not Singhis. The difference between Singh and Khalsa ended with his death and the two terms became synonymous and interchangeable. The difference between the Sikh and the
Singh remained. It was yet to be seen which component would become dominant in the affairs of the Sikh Panth."

In the century following the death of Guru Gobind Singh, the Sikh Panth was embroiled in a continued struggle for survival, while the whole of Punjab was a battleground in a struggle for power in the wake of Aurangzeb's death in 1707 (Grewel, 1998). This period of time has been called the "heroic period of Sikh history," from which emerged "traditions of bravery and endurance which still fire the modern [Sikh] Panth" (McLeod, 1989b:46). The eighteenth century, then, was a period marked by constant warfare, shifting power relations and political structures, and acts of battlefield bravery and martyrdom by Sikh men and women whose "continuing power of inspiration cannot be underestimated in [their] effect on later Sikh generations" (Angelo, 1997:48).

**The Post-Guru Period: The Heroic Age**

The death of Guru Gobind Singh in 1708 left a void in the power structure of the Sikh Panth. The death of Aurangzeb a year earlier had left a similar void in the political structure for the whole of Punjab. The manner in which these two voids were filled over the course of the eighteenth century culminated in a Sikh Empire established by Ranjit Singh, and an autonomous Sikh state for the only time in Punjabi history (Angelo, 1997; Grewel, 1998; Mahmood, 1996; McLeod, 1989a). While there are a number of significant events during this period of Sikh history that contribute to a modern Sikh identity, I will focus briefly on a select few: the martyrdoms of Banda
Singh Bahadur and Baba Deep Singh, the two Gallugharas, or Sikh “Holocausts,” and rise to power of Ranjit Singh.

Banda Singh Bahadur was a loyal Sikh of Guru Gobind Singh, who went on to become an important military leader in the years following the death of the tenth Guru (Angelo, 1997; Grewel, 1998). He received the title “Bahadur,” which means brave, from Gobind Singh after leading a raid on Sirhind to avenge the deaths of the Guru’s sons. In the years immediately following Gobind Singh’s death, Banda Singh Bahadur continued to battle with Mughal forces, conquering a large portion of Southeastern Punjab, and refusing to recognize the authority of the Mughal government, instead declaring the conquered territories to be a sovereign land of the Sikhs (Grewel, 1979; Mahmood, 1996). In 1714, Banda Singh Bahadur and his followers marched towards Lahore, with ideas of conquering the provincial capital of the Mughals. With some dissent among his followers, Bahadur faced a considerably stronger enemy at the present location of Gurdaspur. The Khalsa, under the leadership of Banda Singh Bahadur, had taken refuge in the fort of Gurdas Nangal, when they were surrounded and besieged for a period of eight months, finally surrendering to the Mughal forces to avoid starvation. Bahadur, and 700 of his followers were taken to Delhi, and paraded through the streets before being executed for their uprising. It is said that Bahadur was even forced to kill his own infant son, before himself being put to death (Grewel, 1998; Mahmood, 1996).

The significance of Banda Singh Bahadur can not be limited to his martyrdom, although his sacrifice for the Sikh Panth is certainly significant, and his bravery in
battle inspirational. However, he also represents the first leader of the Sikh Panth that did not hold the title of Guru (Mahmood, 1996). How much control he had over the Khalsa, and what degree of confidence the Sikh Panth had in him is questionable, as the loss of support just before the final siege at Gurdaspur might indicate (Grewel, 1979; Grewel, 1998; McLeod, 1989a), but his place in the mythology of Sikh heroism and martyrdom has come to overshadow any dissention Bahadur might have experienced at the beginning of the eighteenth century (Mahmood, 1996).

Banda Singh Bahadur is also important for continuing the battle begun by Guru Gobind Singh, which lasted throughout much of the eighteenth century. It is remembered as a battle against tyranny, oppression and religious intolerance, a battle for justice, and the right to practice religion without fear of reprisal. Finally, it was a battle for survival, a struggle for the very existence of Sikhism. The degree to which any of these were actual catalysts for the ongoing struggle between the Sikh Khalsa and the Mughal empire, while debatable in academic circles, matters not to the collective consciousness of the Sikh Panth. The heroes of the post-Guru struggles are well remembered for their skills in battle, their bravery, and for their willingness to give their head for their Guru. These were the characteristics that came to typify a “Sikh,” and much of the other details of the lives of these heroes became secondary (Mahmood, 1996, McLeod, 1989a).

Probably the most significant hero of Sikh history, and most assuredly the best known of the Heroic Period is Baba Deep Singh (‘Baba’ is a title of honor given to holy men, best translated as ‘Father’). The martyrdom of Baba Deep Singh has
become the most literal expression of “playing the game of love,” or of giving one’s head, and his image is popular in Sikh art (Mahmood, 1996; McLeod, 2000). A deeply religious man, Baba Deep Singh was said to have been close to Guru Gobind Singh, and to have fought with Banda Singh Bahadur. In the mid-eighteenth century, as the Afghans struggled with the Mughals for control over India, the Harmandir Sahib was invaded and desecrated by Afghan forces. Baba Deep Singh vowed to enter Amritsar, and reclaim the temple from those whom had sullied it. Marching to battle, Baba Deep Singh encountered a large Afghan army, and a battle ensued. During the battle, as the story goes, Baba Deep Singh’s head was severed from his body. Keeping his vow, the Baba fought on, his severed head resting in his left palm, his sword raised in right (Mahmood, 1996; McLeod, 1989a). Although the distance varies depending on the version of the story, he is said to have continued fighting, covering as much as fifteen kilometers before dying, having just entered Amritsar (McLeod, 1989a:49).

The story of Baba Deep Singh is significant for several reasons. First, the title ‘Baba’ implies that he was a holy man, revered for his religious activities, which included founding the Damdami Taskal, or “the Moving University,” which played a central role in laying the foundation for the Khalistani movement two hundred years later (see Mahmood, 1996). This combination of devout service to religion and battlefield bravery culminating in martyrdom can be viewed as the physical manifestation of all that is expected of a Sikh. Second, Baba Deep Singh’s martyrdom was the result of an attempt to protect the Harmandir Sahib, a theme that became very
important in the years following Operation Bluestar, the 1984 military action carried out by the Indian army at the Golden Temple Complex (Mahmood, 1996; McLeod, 2000). Finally, the martyrdom of Baba Deep Singh can be seen as a literal interpretation of Nanak’s “game of love,” with the fallen hero continuing to swing his sword, and battle forward, so that he could actually come before Waheguru (‘God’) with his head in his palm.

The martyrdoms of Banda Singh Bahadur and Baba Deep Singh represent only two stories among many that can be told of the heroes of this period of Sikh history. The heroic period solidified a tradition of martyrdom, which started with the death of Guru Arjun, demonstrating to future generations of Sikhs what had been sacrificed for them, as well as providing for them an ideal to strive toward. During the early years of the Khalistani militancy in Punjab, it was this tradition of martyrdom, and all the expectations that came with it, that encouraged many young Sikhs to take up arms and lay down their lives for the cause of an independent Punjab (Mahmood, 1996; Pettigrew 1992).

These tales of martyrdom also demonstrate a laundry list of characteristics that have come to define a modern conceptualization of what it means to be ‘Sikh:’ bravery, selflessness, unbreakable spirit, opposition to tyranny and injustice, and ultimately, a desire for sovereignty (McLeod, 2000). Because of the parallels easily drawn between historical martyrs such as Baba Deep Singh, and modern-day martyrs like Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, the Khalistani militants of the 1980’s and 1990’s could frame their own actions in such a way as to gain legitimacy from this historic
period, and its associated tradition of martyrdom (Mahmood, 1996; McLeod, 2002; Pettigrew, 1992).

Equally significant to the communal consciousness of many Sikhs are the two gallugharas of the eighteenth century. Gallughara translates as ‘holocaust’ (Angelo, 1997; Mahmood, 1996; Tatla, 1999), ‘disaster’ (McLeod, 1989a), or ‘carnage’ (Grewel, 1998), and is used to describe two separate events during a twenty-year period where massive numbers of Sikhs were killed battling the oppression and tyranny of India’s Muslim rulers. The Chota Gallughara (also known as the first, or lesser gallughara) occurred in 1847, when 5000 Sikhs were killed in battle, although there is some disagreement as to who the battle was with, be it the Mughals (Mahmood, 1996) or Afghans (Tatla, 1999). This confusion could likely be the result of a Mughal/Afghan struggle for control of India, which began around the same time.

The Vadda Gallughara (or Greater gallughara) occurred about fifteen years later, in 1762. Again, Sikh armies suffered terrible defeat in battle, this time against the Afghan armies of Ahmed Shah Abdali. Death tolls range from 5000 (Grewel, 1998) to as many as 20,000 (Mahmood, 1996), with Tatla (1999:15) simply describing the defeat as “almost to the man.” After the battle, the Afghan armies continued on to Amritsar, where they destroyed the Golden Temple complex (Mahmood, 1996).

The Vadda Gallughara, and the subsequent destruction of the Golden Temple marked a turning point in the power struggle for control of the Punjab, a struggle that ultimately brought to an end afghan rule in northwest India. Sikh response to what was seen as a grave injustice (the desecration of the Temple) and shifting power
structures within the Sikh Panth coalesced in the rise to power of Ranjit Singh, the "Lion of Punjab," who captured Lahore in 1799 at the age of twenty, thus beginning a golden age of Sikh history, the only time Sikhs ruled all of Punjab and some of the surrounding area (Grewel, 1998; Mahmood, 1996; Tatla, 1999).

The two gallugharas are important for a number of reasons. First, these two events, combined with the tradition of martyrdom, galvanized the Sikh opposition to Afghan rule, an opposition that eventually resulted in the founding of a sovereign Sikh state. Second, these gallugharas are remembered by many as ultimate expressions of faith, for there is no death more noble than one encountered in the battle against tyranny and injustice (McLeod, 1989a). Finally, the significance of the gallugharas has been drawn on to make some sense of Operation Bluestar, and the countless deaths associated with it. Operation Bluestar is described by some as a third gallughara, a third holocaust in which thousands of Sikhs died (Tatla, 1999). Similar to the historical connections drawn between Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and important martyrs such as Baba Deep Singh, using the term gallughara to describe Operation Bluestar immediately connects the modern government of India with past oppressors who ruled over Punjab, such as the Mughals and Afghans. Likewise, the deaths of Bhindranwale and his followers, and of the civilians who happened to be in the Golden Temple Complex just prior to the assault, become intimately connected to the slaughter of thousands of brave Sikhs by their eighteenth century oppressors. Thus, as the time and space between the gallugharas and Operation Bluestar disappears, and Indira Gandhi and Ahmed Shah Abdali become indistinguishable, reaction to the Indian
Army's assault on the Golden Temple gains justification from the actions of Baba Deep Singh and others who took up the sword to battle for their faith.

Ranjit Singh rose to power in Punjab as Afghan and Mughal influence waned, and British interests brought the East India Company further and further west (Grewel, 1998; Mahmood, 1996). Though the Sikh Empire was short lived (The Punjab was annexed by the British ten years after the death of Ranjit Singh), it is a time fondly remembered, when Sikhs ruled Punjab, and religious tolerance replaced the intolerance their ancestry had suffered. It is this 'golden age' which militant Sikhs draw on when envisioning what Khalistan, a Punjab liberated from Indian occupation, might look like (Mahmood, 1996). It should be noted that though the reign of Ranjit Singh is heralded as a great age for the Sikh Panth, he was known to have a fairly relaxed attitude toward orthodoxy, with a reputation for indulging in women and alcohol. Hindu influence and practice was reportedly widespread among the Sikhs of Ranjit Singh's Empire as well (Angelo, 1997; MacLeod, 2000).

The court of Ranjit Singh was made up people from various backgrounds, including Hindus, Muslims, and even some Europeans, a fact used to support the idea of religious tolerance present in Lahore during this time. Ranjit Singh used his well trained army to expand his influence, and increase his wealth, and used that wealth to make large endowments to various gurdwaras and other religious temples, Hindu and Muslim alike. It was Ranjit Singh who had the Harmandir Sahib gilded in gold, thus earning it the nickname “Golden Temple” (Mahmood, 1996; Tatla, 1999). Ranjit Singh was not only a good military leader, but he was a shrewd politician as well. He
extracted tribute from many landowning chiefs, and then annexed their land when they
did not pay. He signed treaties with the British, and was recognized as the sovereign
ruler over all of the Punjab (for a thorough discussion of the rise and rule of Ranjit
Singh, see Grewel, 1999).

The reign of Ranjit Singh, who adopted the title Maharaja, lasted forty years
(1799-1839), and saw continued expansion in terms both territory and influence.
Treaties with the British kept the colonial power out of Punjab temporarily, but the
struggle for power following the Maharaja’s death in 1839 opened the door for the
British to enter Punjab. Two Anglo-Sikh wars in the mid nineteenth resulted in the
annexation of Punjab by the British in 1849 (Grewel, 1998; Tatla, 1999).

Conclusions

While the Sikhism being practiced during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh
differed a great deal from the religion being practiced by Guru Nanak’s initial
followers, many Sikhs see a common thread that links one to the other, a destiny or
realization of Nanak’s message in the rugged militarism of Hargobind and Gobind
Singh, a marriage of politics and religion, born out of necessity, and cemented in the
very survival of the Panth. These developments are not seen by Sikhs as changes in
the original message, but rather necessary steps to bring that message to full fruition
(Mahmood, 1996). Therefore, the modern Sikh can be seen as a product of the
original vision of Guru Nanak.

Clearly, certain components of a modern Sikh identity are seen as having roots
in the guru period, while other aspects were groomed over the heroic period following
the death of Guru Gobind Singh. Hard work, living in this world, and generosity are all parts of Nanak’s message. Militarism and saintliness, kindness and bravery, justice and vengeance have all become seen as important aspects of what it means to be a ‘Sikh,’ and all are understood to have links to the teachings of the ten living gurus.

At the same time, martyrdom, battlefield heroics and a willingness to put one’s life on the line in order to protect those in need, planted as characteristics by Tegh Bahadur and Gobind Singh, were certainly nurtured over the eighteenth century by Banda Singh Bahadur, Baba Deep Singh, and others. Links between the heroic period and the Khalistani struggle are numerous, and are used to legitimize the use of force by militants framing their activities in terms of defending their faith.

Finally, the development of the Khalsa, the five “K’s” to be worn by all initiates, and the Rahit to govern everyday activities all have a powerful impact on how identity is perceived among Sikhs around the world. While it is true that amritdhari Sikhs make up only a portion of the various Sikh identities that can be found globally, as Axel (2001) points out, it enjoys a hegemonic position in discourse regarding who is, and who can be a Sikh. In the next chapter, I will focus on the colonial period, and demonstrate how the Sikh Diaspora can be understood in the context of colonial policy in India, and immigration policy abroad. I will also show how the politics of identity were groomed by, as well as an outgrowth of, the introduction of Punjabi agriculture into the global political economy, due in large part to colonial objectives enacted by the British in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.
CHAPTER III

COLONIALISM AND MIGRATION

Introduction

While the first three hundred years of Sikh history provide much fodder for the construction and maintenance of a contemporary Sikh cultural identity, the century and a half that followed the annexation of Punjab by the British saw the beginnings of Sikh transnational migration, and foundation of a modern Sikh diaspora. The movement of Sikhs out of Punjab, and ultimately out of India, is directly tied to British colonial policy, and the placement of both Sikhs and the Punjab within the context of those colonial objectives (Fox, 1985).

In this chapter, I will examine the effects of British colonial rule in Punjab, to show how special attention paid to Sikhs and their Punjab by the British, in terms of development, military recruitment, and creating hierarchy among ethnic groups, resulted in solidifying the importance of the amritdhari identity, and creating a situation where migration was not only possible, but necessary (Angelo, 1997; Axel, 2001; Fox, 1985; Leonard, 1997). I will also analyze the rise of religious reform movements, political parties, and social unrest to show how all contributed to a Sikh consciousness that required recognition of its uniqueness on the Indian subcontinent, and abroad (Angelo, 1997; Juergensmeyer, 1979; McLeod, 2000; Oberoi, 1995). While all of
these issues are complex, I will show how merely scratching the surface can illuminate the impact of colonialism on contemporary conceptions of Sikh cultural identity.

Colonialism, the Military and Agriculture in Punjab

Following two hard fought wars in the middle of the nineteenth century, the Punjab was annexed by the East India Company, and Duleep Singh, ruler of the Sikh Empire and youngest son of the Maharaja Ranjit Singh, was exiled. Having ascended to the throne at the age of five, Duleep was still a young man when he signed the surrender, and allowed to British to take control of Punjab. He was originally exiled to Utter Pradesh, but after converting to Christianity in 1852, eventually he settled in London, where he lived as an “English gentleman” until 1870. His death in 1893 followed a return to the Sikh faith, and an unsuccessful attempt to reclaim Punjab from the British (Axel, 2001:47; Grewel, 1998).

The military prowess, and battlefield bravery of the Sikh armies had made a lasting impression on the British during the Anglo-Sikhs wars. During the Mutiny of 1857, Sikh loyalty to the British further impressed the colonial overseers, earning the Sikhs of Punjab the status of a “martial race,” a concept Richard Fox (1985) argues is rooted in a biological determinism which pervaded the entire British colonial project. Their establishment as a martial race led to disproportionate recruitment of Sikhs by the British for the armed services, a fact that would later become an important component for the foundation of the Sikh Diaspora. By the start of World War I, Sikhs represented 20 percent of the British Indian Army, while representing a considerably smaller percentage of the population of the Indian subcontinent as a
whole (Angelo, 1997; Fox, 1985). While service in the army laid the foundation for transnational migration among Punjabi Sikhs, the martial status, as well as favoritism shown toward amritdhari Sikhs for recruitment, the requirement that all Sikh soldiers become “baptized” into the Khalsa and maintain the Five K’s all began to have an impact of the cultural identity of Sikhs (Angelo, 1997; Fox, 1985).

Richard Fox, in his book *The Lions of the Punjab* (1985), argues that the identity nurtured by the British can in fact be described as a “Singh” identity, rather than one which can be applied to all Sikhs. Recruitment into the military was the result of both the martial status awarded Singhs during British colonial rule, and a bi-product of Punjab’s introduction into the capitalist world economy through competing and often contradictory colonial objectives.

One objective of British colonialism in India, which Fox labels the “development of economic underdevelopment,” or colonialism “on the cheap,” aimed at extracting “maximum land revenue from Indian agriculture with the minimum transformation in agrarian production and labor systems” (1985:15). In other words, the British attempted to shift the focus of agriculture in Punjab from a pre-capitalist, feudal-like economic system to one more driven by, and therefore dependent on the market value of export crops. The result was dependency by small landholders on money lending, often from their non-landowning counterparts in the Punjab. Widespread debt, and limited opportunity to acquire more land, may have been equally important reasons for large numbers of Sikhs seeking military employment, as well as wage labor opportunities in other parts of the British Empire (ibid: 44). Debt was not
felt unilaterally across the whole of Punjab, and regions where small land holdings required more extensive money lending tended to be disproportionately represented in the numbers of military recruits.

A second colonial objective of the British, simply described as “development” by Fox (1985:21), was rooted in a desire by the British to create “a financially secure Indian administration [that could] bear all the costs of the British colonial enterprise.” Such an objective required the investment of large amounts of capital by the British, particularly in regard to areas of Indian agricultural and industrial production, thus contradicting the notion of colonialism “on the cheap.” In Punjab, development was most typified by the creation of massive irrigation projects, bringing the water of Punjab’s five rivers to underutilized agricultural lands. These newly irrigated lands, known as the “canal colonies,” provided new plots to be cultivated, and an opportunity to acquire new land holdings for some of Punjab’s small farmers. At the same time, the canal colonies created new market competition for those same small farmers, increasing their dependency on money lending, and the whims of market place price fluctuation. The result was increased labor efforts by the small farmer of the central Punjab, who was already feeling the weight of debt, to merely stay afloat. Canal colony farmers had the benefit of larger plots of land, less debt, and access to better technologies and irrigation, giving them a distinct competitive advantage over their central Punjab counterparts. Thus, small landholders of central Punjab were fighting a losing battle, and working much harder to do so.
Hard work and industriousness are characteristics often associated with Sikhs, characteristics that remain sources of great pride. However, Fox (1985) argues that these characteristics are neither part of a Punjabi culture, nor biological attributes, as they were described by colonial officials who understood India in terms of various and differing “races” of people. They are in fact byproducts of competing and contradictory colonial objectives as experienced in the daily lives of small farmers in Punjab. Hard work and industriousness are less cultural characteristics than they are economic necessities for the small landholder in 19th century Punjab (ibid).

Poverty and debt are not the only reasons scholars have come up with for what may have motivated Sikhs to leave the Punjab in search of opportunity. In the context of the Punjabi village, honor or prestige, particularly at the level of the family is, and has always been a very important component of social life. Acts of individuals reflect either positively or negatively on the family, and social status is largely understood on the level of the family name. *Izzat*, or prestige, can be greatly influenced by an increase in wealth, and military service was one such way for young men in Punjab to have a positive impact on their family’s honor (McLeod, 2000). McLeod argues that men who joined the military, to serve the British, did not come from the families experiencing the worst poverty, or from those who were already wealthy. Rather, families who could afford to send a son abroad, and would have the most to gain from such a move, were those families that most often did. Increased income, in the form of military service, or overseas labor, should be understood less in terms of debt relief, and more in terms of *izzat*, or status acquisition. For this reason, the decision to go
abroad was rarely made by the individual, and instead can be viewed as a family
decision. Land acquisition, then, was critical not to economic livelihood, but rather to
social livelihood, particularly among Jat peasantry to whom land ownership was the
single most important source of izzat (ibid). While McLeod has introduced izzat to
better understand the origins of the New Zealand Sikh community, Helweg (1979) has
shown that izzat continues to play an important role in post-Independence migration to
Britain, with land acquisition still holding an important place in the migrant laborer’s
intentions.

Colonialism and Migration Out of Punjab

The people of Punjab have a reputation for mobility, and a willingness to go
where opportunities present themselves. Sikhs can now be found in many corners of
the globe, including North America, Europe, Africa, Southeast Asia, Australia, New
Zealand and the Pacific Islands (Dusenbury, 1989; Tatla, 1999). One popular Sikh
joke states that when Neil Armstrong first set foot on the moon, he saw a sardar (a
Sikh) already there, plowing his fields. Nearly ten percent of the global Sikh
community lives outside of India, while about one third living in India can be found
outside the borders of Punjab (Helweg, 1989). Obviously, not all of this migration
took place during the colonial reign of Britain over India. However, many Sikh
communities around the globe were founded during the colonial era, and migratory
networks certainly have origins in colonial times.

As described above, the combination of preferential treatment by the British,
and an increasing financial burden in some parts of Punjab led to a disproportionate
number of Sikhs serving in the British Indian armed services. Military service, in turn, took Punjabi soldiers all over India and the world. Military service was not the only catalyst for migration among the opportunistic population of Punjab, however. Indentured and free labor also brought Sikhs to other parts of the British Empire, whether to work on the railways in Uganda, as colonial “middlemen” in Kenya, or in the agricultural fields of North America (Dusenbury, 1989; Tatla, 1999). Certainly, destination and means of livelihood of Migrants draw strong correlations to social backgrounds in Punjab, and caste as it is practiced within the ranks of Sikhism. Jats, the land owning peasants of Punjab, were the preferred recruits for military service, and also given preference for new holdings in the Canal Colonies (Angelo, 1997; Tatla, 1999). Military service provided a large number of immigrants to Malaysian and Hong Kong first, and later to Australia, New Zealand and North America around the beginning of the 20th century. Meanwhile, Ramgarhia Sikhs, the artisan class, were most prevalent among East African laborers (Leonard, 1997; Tatla, 1999). Ramgharias later migrated from East Africa to Britain in the 1950’s and 1960’s, typifying a phenomenon known as twice migration (Bhachu, 1989; Hall, 2002).

As colonial subjects, and often as employees of the colonial government, Sikhs had some degree of freedom to move about with in the British Empire. As police or military personnel, and as cheap laborers, they filled an important role in many parts of the colonial world. This does not mean, however, that they were widely accepted in those places they emigrated to. Sikhs, as well as other South Asians, met with ill will and at times extreme racism in many places, most notably in Australia, New Zealand,
Canada, and the United States. In these places, immigration restrictions were placed on Asian immigrants, severely limiting the potential for labor and income for opportunistic Sikhs (Cohen, 1997; Helweg, 1989; Tatla, 1999).

**Colonial Migration to North America**

The history of Sikh migration into the United States will be instructive for a few reasons. First, the Sikh “pioneers” who originally settled on the West Coast were typical of many early Punjabi migrants, with military ties and largely from the Jat peasantry (Tatla, 1999). Second, confrontations with a white, often racist majority, and the resulting immigration policies that greatly restricted Asian immigration were felt as strongly in California as they were elsewhere in the world (Leonard, 1997). Third, the reaction to racism and restrictive immigration policies in both the US and Canada were critical to the shift of Sikh attitudes from model colonial citizens to active participants in the Indian independence movement. This is most notable in the Ghadar movement, founded in California in the early 20th century. The Ghadar party, consisting largely of North American Sikh immigrants, had as its ultimate goal the invasion of India, with hopes of inspiring the masses to rise up against the British presence there (Juergensmeyer, 1979). Finally, it is the history of Sikh migration to the United States which begins the story of the Sikh community in Kalamazoo, Michigan, which though much newer, and considerably smaller than those original West Coast communities, cannot be seen in isolation, but rather must be seen as part of a historical trajectory which began over a hundred years ago, with the first Punjabi migrants who arrived in British Columbia.
An 1887 stop in British Columbia, on a return trip from Queen Victoria’s Golden Jubilee in London, was the first time many Sikhs had seen North America. In the years following, many former service men moved to Canada, from both India and colonial posts in the Pacific (Cohen, 1997; Tatla, 1999). While the Canadian Sikh community was not large at first, it was certainly showing amazing growth potential. In 1903, a mere 300 Sikhs were living in British Columbia, yet by 1908 the population had grown to over 5000. Increased industrialization in the area, rising wages, and an ever increasing need for laborers, combined with stories of returning service men circulating in the villages of Punjab all combined to fuel more emigration to Canada, and to the west coast states of the US. Most immigrants found work in the agricultural fields, lumber mills or on the railways, but not without a fair degree of resistance (Tatla, 1999).

Anti-Asian sentiment was widespread in Canada, and in 1907, the Anti-Asian League was formed, petitioning for stronger restriction on South Asian immigration. As immigration became more difficult, Punjabis began to seek safer environs by moving to the United States (Leonard, 1997; Tatla, 199). At the same time, Sikh activists, under the leadership of Teja Singh, formed a Canadian branch of the Khalsa Diwan Society, whose aims were to establish roots through the construction of a gurdwara on Canadian soil, and to petition the governments of India and Britain on behalf of Canadian Sikhs. While the second goal was more elusive, they did succeed in the first, opening a gurdwara in 1909 (Chadney, 1989; Tatla, 1997).
Early South Asian immigration to the United States followed a similar trajectory, but under somewhat different circumstances. South Asians, largely from the Punjab, represented the last in a line of Asian immigrants, particularly in California, who found success in the agricultural fields only to feel the brunt of anti-Asian sentiment and racism. Like the Chinese and Japanese before them, Punjabi immigrants found success at multiple levels in the developing agricultural industries in California, often in the face of widespread social and political discrimination. By the 1920’s, Punjabi’s were barred from further immigration, ineligible for US citizenship, unable to purchase or own land, and denied the ability to marry white women, all based on racist laws aimed at stemming all Asian immigration (Leonard, 1997; Tatla, 1999). Because most of the immigrants from Punjab were men, these restrictions prohibited them from sending for their families, or starting their own in North America. However, because Mexican women did not qualify as white, due to other racist attitudes of the time, they were free to marry Sikh immigrants, and often did, creating an entirely different “bi-ethnic community” in the Imperial Valley of California (for a thorough discussion of the Punjabi-Mexican community in California, see Leonard, 1997; also Mankekar, 1994).

Between 1900 and the implementation of a complete ban on Asian immigration in 1923, over 10,000 Sikhs had settled in California (Tatla, 1999). While numbers in the Sikh community dwindled after 1923, the early settlers managed to establish the United States’ first gurdwara, which opened in Stockton, California in 1915. A Khalsa Diwan Society was also founded in the US in 1910, aimed at supporting Sikh
immigrant interests, and establishing educational scholarships in California (Tatla, 1999). These accomplishments proved to be precursors to a more radical movement, the Ghadar Party.

It is important to note that not all scholars are in favor of discussing this early period of immigration in terms of a "Sikh" diaspora. Karen Leonard (1989, 1997) points out that though a majority of early South Asian migrants in California were in fact Sikh, religion was less significant in their sense of identity than was their Punjabi origin. W.H. McLeod (2000) makes a similar point in his analysis of early South Asian migration to New Zealand. Both scholars argue that religion did not dominate the social identity of these early "pioneers" (to borrow a term from Leonard (1989)), and we therefore need to discuss South Asian migration in the late nineteenth century as a Punjabi diaspora, with a focus on regional origin, rather than religious affiliation.

McLeod (2000) further argues that any understanding of a Sikh identity is inevitably influenced by a revisionist history, an understanding of Sikh history that has its origins in the Singh Sabha movement, a religious reformation concerned with purging Sikhism of any and all Hindu influence and practice (for a detailed discussion about the Singh Sabha, and its impact on modern Sikh identity, see Oberoi, 1994). The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw a great deal of religious reform in India, largely as a reaction to a British presence there, but also in opposition to other reform movements (Fox, 1985; McLeod, 2000, Oberoi, 1994). In this context, the Singh Sabha movement was reacting to the outward threats to the Sikh community, particularly Christian missionizing, and the encroachment of the Arya
Samaj, a Hindu reform movement. However, McLeod (2000) argues that the reach of religious consciousness, as it was being developed by the Singh Sabha, was not great enough to impact social identity in the newly formed diasporic communities in New Zealand. It can be assumed that the same situation would be present in North America, as Leonard (1989:120) agrees that to focus on the religious identity of these migrants is a disservice to those early “Pioneers,” stating that “It was in fact a Punjabi diaspora, and to go back and emphasize Sikhs and Sikhism does violence to the historical experiences of the immigrants and their descendants.”

It is true that a majority of all South Asian immigrants entering the United States during this early period were Sikh. In fact, 85% were Sikh, and another 12% Muslim, making Hindus an exceptional small minority in these immigrant communities (Leonard, 1997). However, the degree to which we can downplay the importance of religion in the formation of social identity begs questioning. The opening of gurdwaras in both the United States and Canada in the first decades of the twentieth century, as well as the formation of a Khalsa Diwan Society in both locations speaks to some degree of religious consciousness among these early Punjabi pioneers. In particular, the Khalsa Diwan Society was inspired by the creation of the Chief Khalsa Diwan, Amritsar, an organization that grew out of the fusion of the two original Singh Sabha chapters in Amritsar and Lahore, respectively (McLeod, 2000; Tatla, 1999). It is likely that if immigrant Sikhs are drawing on the Chief Khalsa Diwan for inspiration, then the organization must have at least been familiar to them, if not indeed having some degree of influence.
The Ghadar Syndrome

While the Khalsa Diwan Society was created with the well being of Sikh immigrants in mind, these organizations focused mainly on things that were going on in the US and Canada. At the same time, Indian nationalism began to develop in North America, in what would later become known as the Ghadar Party (Juergensmeyer, 1979). As a political entity, the Ghadar Party officially began in 1913, with the first publication of the newspaper from which they got their name. Juergensmeyer (1979) argues that as a political movement, the Ghadars’ origins can be traced back to 1907, when large numbers of Punjabi migrants moved to the United States and Canada following civil disturbances over land legislation in Punjab.

In 1909, South Asian immigrants in British Columbia found the Hindustan Association, and began making demands for Indian independence from British rule. Shortly thereafter, an Oregon chapter of the Hindustan Association was formed, recruiting a majority of its membership from Sikh migrants who numerically dominated the South Asian immigrant community (Juergensmeyer, 1979). When Lala Har Dayal, a Hindu intellectual and strong supporter of Indian independence arrived in the US in 1911, he quickly joined the agitation for an end to British rule. With the financial support of a wealthy Sikh farmer, Jwala Singh, Har Dayal established a headquarters for the movement in San Francisco, and began publishing Ghadr, a nationalist newspaper that had readership wherever there were Indian settlers within the British Empire (Helweg, 1989; Juergensmeyer, 1979).
Juergensmeyer (1979) acknowledges the nationalist quality of the Ghadar Party, but argues that its formation, and continuation had less to do with patriotism than it did with concerns of the diasporic communities in the US and Canada. Each development in the evolution of the movement can be seen in relation to racism and violence, not in India, but in North America. The formation of the Oregon chapter of the Hindustan Association happened shortly after riots and violence in a lumber camp in Bellingham, Washington, in which South Asians were targeted by their white counterparts (Juergensmeyer, 1979; Tatla, 1999). Similarly, the Hindustan Association of British Columbia was founded one year after South Asian immigration to that province was closed for good. Likewise, the failed attempt at invading India in 1915 followed two critical events in North America, both of which brutally reminded South Asians of their delicate and dangerous existence in the US and in Canada. The Ghadar mutiny also marked the beginning of a political “about face” for Sikhs, from loyalists to independence activists in the years that followed (Juergensmeyer, 1979; Mahmood, 1996; Tatla, 1999).

The first event occurred in Wheatland, California, in 1914. Asian agricultural workers went on strike alongside European workers in the hops fields in Wheatland. Strikebreakers and anti-labor gangs were brought in, and Asian workers were targeted for violence more so than others. This event is credited with “raising [the] political consciousness” of those Punjabi immigrants in the area (Juergensmeyer, 1979).

The second, and far more notorious incident also occurred in 1914, in British Columbia. Known as the Komagata Maru incident, it was this event that galvanized
the Ghadar play for armed revolt in the Punjab. The *Komagata Maru* was a Japanese ship, chartered by Sikhs, to bring them from India to Canada. The ship and its 376 passengers, all gathered according to the requirements of Canadian immigration law, were turned away as soon as they arrived in Vancouver (Tatla, 1999). Chartering the ship to sail from Hong Kong directly to Canada was an attempt to circumvent the "continuous journey" laws aimed at curtailing Asian immigration. "Continuous Journey" meant that the ship carrying would-be immigrants had to have been made from their homeland to Canada without making any stops along the way (Juergensmeyer, 1979). Such a journey, from India to Canada would be extremely difficult, and therefore never happened. However, carrying Sikhs from Hong Kong and Shanghai, the voyage was possible.

After spending two months in the harbor awaiting a ruling, Canadian officials sent the ship away, with none of its passengers ever setting foot on Canadian soil. Upon docking in Calcutta, violence erupted between the passengers and police forces that were waiting there to take them into custody (Juergensmeyer, 1979, Mahmood, 1996; Tatla, 1999). In the melee, twenty of the *Komagata Maru*’s passengers were killed, as were four police officers. In addition, 172 passengers were arrested and taken into custody (Tatla, 1999). The result of the whole affair was anti-British sentiment both at home and abroad, and an increase in nationalist activity by the Ghadar Party.

The Ghadar Party’s failed attempt at freeing India from British rule was over before it ever began. A 1915 police raid on Ghadar headquarters uncovered plans for
an invasion, with the hope of creating a widespread uprising. It became evident that Ghadarites had been in contact with Germany, and hoped to use World War I, and Britain’s heavy involvement in it, as a decoy for their own nationalist agenda. The results of the raid were trials in India and the United States, and hangings, imprisonment and other sentences being handed out to roughly two hundred Indians on two continents (Angelo, 1997; Tatla, 1999:244 fn.9 & 10).

The importance of the Ghadar Party can be seen on two distinct levels. First, the Ghadar movement demonstrates the interplay between diasporic populations, and their homelands. While the Ghadarites certainly were not the originators of Indian nationalism during the colonial era, they played an important, though short-lived role in a movement that eventually did succeed in ousting the British from the Indian subcontinent. It is important to note here that the Ghadar party was neither expressly religious, nor exclusively Sikh in its makeup. A large number of Sikhs were present in the rank and file of the Ghadar movement, and after the botched attempt at freeing India, the party did take on a decidedly Sikh character, however. From its earliest inception, the Ghadar Party maintained a close association with the Khalsa Diwan Society in both Vancouver and California (Juergensmeyer, 1979). After the conspiracy trial in America, the party became a predominantly Sikh movement, to the point that it was understood in terms familiar to Sikh history. As Juergensmeyer (1979:186) described it:

After 1920, the wing of the Ghadar movement which was focused in the San Joaquin valley of California was, for all practical purposes, a
Sikh organization. There were even some Sikhs who regarded members of the Ghadar movement as *Sant Sapahis*, warriors for the faith.

Though the Ghadar party was not a Sikh party, it has certainly become inseparable from Sikh history, and is now understood within the context of a Sikh worldview. The Ghadar’s lack of religious rhetoric or religious agenda is irrelevant in how the Ghadarites are remembered today. “Sikhism itself is both a religious faith and a social group with a history of a militant past; and the Ghadar enthusiasm is certainly compatible with the militant traditions of the Sikhs. Indeed, one cannot imagine Ghadar in any other Indian context” (ibid:186).

The Ghadar party can be understood on a larger cultural level, outside of the context of Sikh history or the Indian independence movement, as well. Juergensmeyer (1979) describes the evolution and fruition of the Ghadar movement as a “syndrome,” the result of a combination of historical and social phenomena that are not unique to California Sikhs at the turn of the twentieth century. In what he describes as “the fusion of ethnic anger with nationalist pride,” Juergensmeyer (1979:189) posits that the combination of uneasiness that an immigrant community feels as it adjusts to new circumstances, combined with the racist attitudes, and racial tensions that dominated everyday life for most Punjabi migrants in California and elsewhere, during the first few decades of the twentieth century, resulted in a reaction that while on the surface appeared strictly patriotic, in fact acted as “an outlet for their economic and social frustrations, and a vehicle for their ethnic identities.” In other words, the Ghadar
party, while publicly expressing the need for an independent India, was also creating bonds, and the safety those bonds entailed, within a migrant community that felt fragile, if not endangered.

This analysis is instructive for a number of reasons. First, the demonstration of the interplay between diasporic communities and their homelands, and the relationship between immigrant frustration and nationalist sentiment helps in understanding the shift from loyalist to separatist for the Sikhs of the early twentieth century. Networks linking the immigrant communities to their respective natal villages acted as a means of spreading the Ghadar message throughout the British Empire, a message that would take root in the years that followed the Ghadarite’s failed mutiny. Second, humiliation and frustration as mechanisms for armed struggle lend themselves nicely to an analysis of Diasporic support for Khalistan in the late twentieth century (Helweg, 1989). While diasporic Sikhs in North America may have felt a lesser degree of economic and social frustration in the US and Canada then did their pioneer counterparts, the shock and anger resulting from Operation Bluestar and the anti-Sikh riots in New Delhi, following Indira Gandhi’s assassination, was felt worldwide. The western media’s portrayal of Sikhs as terrorists and hooligans added further humiliation to an already volatile situation (Helweg, 1989). One result was a great deal of sympathy for the Khalistani militancy in the diaspora, whether in the form of political or financial support, or in rare occasions the actual participation in the armed struggle. Understanding Khalistani sympathy in terms of the “Ghadar Syndrome” does shed light on diasporic interests in homeland politics.
If the Ghadar mutiny, and its subsequent conspiracy trials did not solidify Sikh support for Indian independence, the 1919 massacre at Jallianwala Bagh certainly did (Angelo, 1997, Mahmood, 1996; Tatla, 1999). World War I saw the British use of a large number of Sikh troops, to the point that one out every five “British” soldiers on the battlefields of this global conflict were in facts Sikhs with Punjabi origins (Angelo, 1997). These Sikhs were recognized disproportionately for their battlefield bravery, receiving 14 of the 22 military crosses awarded to Indian soldiers by the British (Helweg, 1989). However, a reduction in the size of the Indian army following the end of the war, coupled with increased competition from the canal colonies, falling agricultural prices, and lack of support for equal treatment abroad had Sikhs reconsidering their position within the framework of the British colonial system (Fox, 1985). All of these issues came to a head in Amritsar, when on April 13th, 1919 a large group of protesters gathered at Jallianwala Bagh to protest new British laws aimed at curtailing political unrest at the cost of civil rights and judicial process (Fox, 1985; Mahmood, 1996). A smaller group of Sikhs were gathered nearby, commemorating the formation of the Khalsa, something done annually in April.

The British army, under the leadership of Brigadier General R.E.H. Dyer, opened fire on the unarmed crowd, killing four hundred, and injuring as many as two thousand more (Cohen, 1997; Mahmood, 1996). Shortly thereafter, Dyer was honored at the Akal Takht by Sikh functionaries, acting as puppets of the British administration. The massacre alienated the Sikh populace of Punjab, and moved Sikh activism toward the independence struggle. At the same time, the insult of making
Dyer an honorary Sikh outraged many. The entire episode shed dangerous light on the role British administrators were playing behind the scenes in Sikh shrines, using these religious leaders to help maintain colonial control over the Sikh population as a whole (Fox, 1985; Mahmood, 1996). So, while the Jallianwala Bagh massacre solidified Sikh convictions about independence, the honoring of Dyer by the Akal Takht acted as a catalyst to launch the Sikh political party, the Akali Dal, in Punjab, and for the formation of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (Apex Temple Management Committee, or SGPC). Akali Dal, which literally means “Army of Immortals” or “Eternal Army,” agitated for an independent managing body for all Sikh shrines, to be made up entirely of Sikhs. They were successful, and the SGPC was created to assume control of all Sikh shrines. Akali Dal activity became pivotal in the struggle against the British, and the Akalis have continued to play an important role in the political life of Punjab after independence (Angelo, 1997; Fox, 1985; Mahmood, 1996; Tatla, 1999). The SGPC, sometimes referred to as the “Sikh Parliament,” gained control of India’s gurdwaras following the 1925 Gurdwara Act, and like the Akali Dal, continues to remain at the center of much of the political activity in Punjab (Mahmood, 1996; Tatla 1999).

Conclusions

After a review of the history of Sikh migration out of the Punjab, a few conclusions become clear. First, from the time of British annexation, Sikhs have shown a tendency to migrate to where opportunities are. At the same time, those who emigrate tend to come from similar socio-economic backgrounds, as well as from
specific regions within the Punjab. Second, the British presence in Punjab strongly influenced migration and migration patterns for a number of reasons: military recruitment and the stationing of those troops, agriculture and the introduction of the Punjabi small farmer into the global political economy, and preferential treatment of Sikhs and the Punjab by their colonial overlords. Land acquisition, family honor, and the religious requirement of earning an honest living through hard work also promoted migration as a legitimate means of improving izzat for many Jat peasants. Finally, as Sikhs began to rethink their position within the framework of the British colonial experience, diasporic political movements, religious reform movements in India, and the connection between homeland and immigrant community began to coalesce in a renewed expression of Sikh identity, one that drew heavily from a perceived history of oppression, martyrdom, and the call to stand up in the face of tyranny, and proclaim the truth.

In the next chapter, I will demonstrate how immigration patterns changed after Indian independence, due in large part to changes in immigration policies in the US, Canada, and Great Britain. I will also survey briefly the history of Michigan’s South Asian community, and try to place Kalamazoo’s Sikh population within that framework. I will demonstrate why a small community, removed from the safety and security of the larger enclaves found on the east and west coasts of the United States, provides an interesting location for analysis of the formation and maintenance of cultural identity.
CHAPTER IV

POST-INDEPENDENCE MIGRATION AND ITS CAUSES

Introduction

While the colonial period in India witnessed the beginnings of South Asian migration to many parts of the world, it was the period following Indian Independence, particular after 1965, which saw the largest numbers of Indians migrating out of their natal villages and into lands which lay beyond India's borders. This more recent wave of immigration is remarkably different from those early Punjabi pioneers in a number of ways. First, the post-1965 immigration comes from all over India, rather than predominantly from Punjab. Sikhs still migrate in large numbers, but no longer make up a majority of migrants, as they once did. Second, the labor desired of these immigrants is no longer the backbreaking work of railways, lumberyards, or agricultural fields. South Asian immigrants in the post-1965 era tend to be more educated and seek work in professions such as medicine, engineering, and business (Helweg and Helweg, 1990; Leonard, 1997).

In this chapter, I will review the impact of independence in India and the partition of the subcontinent on the Sikh community, reaffirming the memory of martyrs, and a sense of oppression that would later be torn open by Operation Bluestar. I will also demonstrate how changing immigration policies in the West altered migration patterns of those leaving India, allowing large numbers of people to
enter into countries they were once barred from. As a result, there is a rapidly expanding and increasingly influential contingent of South Asians who no longer live in India, yet remain actively interested in the future of their "homeland." The loosening of immigration restrictions has also allowed for family reunification, which has proven to be a key means for increasing numbers of South Asians to gain citizenship for themselves and their loved ones.

*Independence and Partition*

In August of 1947, India and Pakistan were carved out of the geographical territory that had once been the British colony of India, freeing each country of colonial rule, but leaving each with a host of problems (Butalia, 2000; Grewel, 1998; Tatla, 1999). In order to create two states out of one colony, the British opted to partition the subcontinent, drawing an arbitrary line that happened to pass through the middle of Punjab. Each nation had a distinctly religious quality to its population, though India in particular was formed under the auspices of secularism.

Before the plan for partition was formally announced on June 3, 1947, there had been a great deal of negotiation between the British, the Indian National Congress, and the All Indian Muslim League. The Muslim League was concerned about the fate of a Muslim minority in an independent India, and were convinced a separate state with a Muslim majority was the only recourse. Partition, as a political solution to the problem, would create two nations, with Pakistan controlling areas in the northeast and northwest of British India- areas that already had large concentrations of Muslims. The nation state of India would consist of the remaining British territories on the
subcontinent (Grewel, 1998). Punjab, which is in the northwest, and had a slight Muslim majority, would therefore be handed over to Pakistan. Sikhs were resistant to this idea, and two alternatives were developed: a separate state of Khalistan, “still synonymous with an area in which no single community was in absolute majority” (Grewel, 1998:176), or the partition of Punjab itself, with the eastern portion, and its non-Muslim majority remaining a part of the Indian union.

Sikh demands for a separate “buffer state” between India and Pakistan were largely ignored, and many Sikh leaders began to see partition as the only hope for Sikh survival. This became more evident as communal hostilities turned violent in the months leading up to partition. As partition became a reality, the larger Western Punjab, consisting of approximately two thirds of the region, became Pakistani property, and many Sikhs and Hindus were displaced, as were many Muslims living in what would become Indian Punjab (Angelo, 1997; Mahmood, 1996).

The result of partition was the largest single displacement of people in the history of the world. Nearly twelve million people crossed the new border between India and Pakistan in a period of just over three months (Butalia, 2000; Tatla, 1999). With the memories of communal violence that had occurred across the region in the past year still fresh, and the fear of more to come, Hindus and Sikhs left Pakistan in huge numbers, while Muslims fled toward Pakistan for the same reasons. Many of these refugees were on foot, in long human columns called *Kafils*, ranging in size from 30,000 to as large as 400,000 individuals (Butalia, 2000).
Refugees left behind land holdings and livelihood. Partition split Punjab in such a way that 70% of the agriculturally rich canal colonies, and all the wealth associated with them were handed over to Pakistan (Wallace, 1986). Nearly forty percent of Punjab’s Sikhs were living in what became Pakistan, creating a massive refugee problem for India to handle, a problem for which the newly formed government was ill prepared (Angelo, 1997; Butalia, 2000). For Sikhs, many of whom had large land holdings and successful agricultural practices, the pain of losing a livelihood was compounded by the loss of access to more than 140 sacred shrines, including Nankana Sahib, the birthplace of Guru Nanak (Angelo, 1997; Mahmood, 1996; Tatla, 1999). Access to these shrines continues to be a problem, due in large part to continuously strained diplomatic relations between India and Pakistan.

Widespread violence accompanied the massive migration that followed partition, violence committed largely along communal lines. Estimated death tolls range from two hundred thousand to two million, with the actual number of dead probably numbering one million or more. Fear, uncertainty, and hatred fueled much of the violence. Malnutrition, disease, and severe weather all contributed to the catastrophic loss of life (Butalia, 2000). Communal unease and unrest, which began before partition, exploded as the division of the subcontinent became a reality. As historian J.S. Grewel (1998:175) explains, “Punjabis ceased to be Punjabis and became Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs.” Urvashi Butalia (2000:6-7), reflecting on how partition cannot be thought of merely as a historical event, goes further, arguing that these communal distinctions remain embedded in notions of identity in contemporary India:
I looked at what the large political facts of this history seemed to be saying. If I was reading them right, it would seem that Partition was now over, done with, a thing of the past. Yet all around us there was a different reality: partitions everywhere, communal tension, religious fundamentalism, continuing divisions on the basis of religion... All of this seemed to emphasize that Partition could not so easily be put away, that its deep, personal meanings, its profound sense of rupture, the differences it engendered or strengthened, still live on in so many people's lives.

Citing the anti-Sikh riots in New Delhi, and elsewhere, following the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984, as well as clashes between Muslims and Hindus in Bihar, Ahmedabad, Bombay, and Ayhodhya, Butalia argues that memories of the violence during partition play an underlying role in much of the communal unrest that has come to dominate post-Independence India. The irony and tragedy of the anti-Sikh riots in New Delhi is that many of the Sikhs targeted were in fact survivors of partition; Labana Sikhs from what is now Pakistan, with little connection to the Sikhs of Indian Punjab (Kishwar, 1998).

There are two other significant developments from partition that warrant consideration. First, partition, and the ensuing dislocation of people, acted as a catalyst for international migration (Tatla, 1999). With more than four million refuges entering the eastern third of Punjab, many people were without land, and therefore without a means of livelihood. Migration out of Punjab became, for many, the only
logical means for survival (Grewel, 1998). Labor demands in the post-World War II economic boom, particularly in the United States, Canada and Britain, provided a means for earning a living abroad (Tatla, 1999). Second, growing dissatisfaction among Sikhs in India developed immediately after partition, largely due to a feeling of being duped by the Congress, as well as bearing the brunt of violence and chaos that partition had brought. Akali leader Master Tara Singh asked, “...the Hindus got Hindustan, the Muslims got Pakistan, what did Sikhs get?” (quoted in Angelo, 1997:55). While this was certainly not a call for Khalistan, Master Tara Singh’s point did foreshadow many of the complaints Sikhs would make over the next forty years, and some of the grievances that Khalistani Sikhs had with the Indian government in the 1980’s have origins dating back to this era (Mahmood, 1996).

**Punjabi Suba and the Trifurcation of Punjab**

While Sikhs have long called Punjab their homeland, they had never been a statistical majority before 1966, when the Punjabi State Reorganization Bill was passed, creating three new states out of what had once been one (Angelo, 1997; Mahmood, 1996; Purewal, 2000). The initial drive to create a state with a Sikh majority began soon after independence, when it became clear to Akali leaders that Sikh interests could not be addressed with minority status in all states where they lived. When the initial census of 1951 showed Hindus to be a majority in Punjab, making up 62 percent of the population, Sikhs questioned whether they would ever be afforded sufficient representation in electorate of the newly formed democracy (Mahmood, 1996; Malik, 1989). After the census, state boundaries were redrawn
along linguistic lines, in order to avoid communalization according to religion by the secular government. However, a Hindu majority in Punjab reported Hindi as their spoken language, rather than Punjabi, and the state was not considered for reorganization (Mahmood, 1996). The agitation for Punjabi Suba, or a Punjabi-speaking state, began shortly after the original state reorganization, and lasted for about ten years, before finally being conceded to by Indira Gandhi, just after she was elected prime minister (Mahmood, 1996). Spearheaded by the Akali leadership, the Punjabi Suba movement, under the guise of linguistic representation, was seeking a Sikh majority, based on religion, as the following statement by Khushwant Singh, a Sikh historian and journalist, indicates:

I had many meetings with Master Tara Singh and he along with some others including me came to the conclusion that if we had a state in which we were the majority we could perhaps evolve an educational curriculum whereby Sikh religion and Khalsa tradition could be kept alive among the young generation...this was in fact the genesis of the movement for Punjabi Suba.... the linguistic argument was only the sugar-coating for what was essentially a Sikh majority state. (quoted in Malik, 1989:23-24).

Shinder Purewal (2000), in an argument that places enthonationalism in relation to the political economy of post-independence Punjab, sees the religious explanation for Punjabi Suba to be as much a ruse as the linguistic argument, stating instead that the interests of Punjab’s powerful capitalist farmers were in fact being
served. Punjabi Suba was an agitation aimed at protecting class interests, and helping those holding power to maintain that position by binding together all Sikhs under the common bond of religion. In fact, Purewal states that Kulak (capitalist farmer) interests have been propagated by the Akali Dal, and the SGPC, two organizations that have been inextricably linked since the colonial era:

The question to ask is: whose interests does the Akali Dal serve? The Akali Dal does not hide the fact that it is a political arm of the Sikh Panth. The Sikh panth, however, is not a homogeneous entity. Like any other community, it is also divided along class lines. The interests of landless labourers and capitalist farmers are not the same. A careful study of Akali politics in the context of the political economy of Punjab in particular and India in general makes it abundantly clear that it was given its direction by the agenda of the Kulaks (Purewal, 2000:75).

Regardless of the underlying motivations, the Akalis were successful in getting the central government to concede, and reorganize Punjab along linguistic lines. In November of 1966, the Hindu dominated plains in the east became Haryana, while the northern foothills of the Himalayas became Himachal Pradesh, and the rest remained Punjab, with a slight Sikh (or Punjabi speaking) majority (Mahmood, 1996). The reorganization of Punjab was not without its problems, adding to the already noticeable tensions between the Akali Dal and the ruling Congress party (Grewel, 1998). The newly drawn borders of Punjab excluded pockets of densely populated
Sikhs, making them extreme minorities in their new states, and reducing the size of Punjab’s area, and its Sikh majority. Also, the capital city of Chandigarh became a union territory, serving as capital to both Punjab and Haryana, while residing on the Haryana side of the border. Finally, control of Punjab’s river waters, how they would be used, and any planned developments in which they were involved became issues of the Union Government (Grewel, 1998; Mahmood, 1996; Tatla; 1999). Many of these issues remain contentious in Indian politics today, even though several accords have been reached at both the state and Union levels, meant to resolve differences or make concessions. The Anandpur Sahib Resolution, drawn up by the Akali Dal in 1973, and the Rajiv-Longowal Accord, signed by then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Akali president Harchand Singh Longowal in 1985, were both aimed at settling some the issues brought about by the reorganization of Punjab. Both were unsuccessful (Mahmood, 1996; Tatla, 1999). In fact, the Anandpur Sahib Resolution was the basis for many of the Khalistani complaints. The Rajiv-Longowal Accord, however, was perceived as compromising with the enemy, and Longowal was shot and killed for his part in it, just one month after he signed the agreement (Mahmood, 1996).

*Agriculture and the Green Revolution in Post-Independence Punjab*

There is little doubt that Punjab under British colonialism became an important source of agricultural revenue. Massive colonial irrigation projects, and the creation of canal colonies, only added to the agricultural worth of this “Land of Five Rivers.” However, Partition had left Indian Punjab at only one third of its original size, and without 70% of the highly profitable canal works of British colonialism. Still, Punjab
continues to be the “breadbasket” of India, out producing all other states in India in both wheat and rice (Wallace, 1986). In 1980-81, Punjab produced 73% of India’s wheat, and 48% of India’s rice, with per acre production averages bested globally only by Mexico and Japan, respectively (ibid:367). The fact that Punjab’s land area only constitutes 1.6% of the total acreage of India makes these numbers all the more impressive. The result is the highest income per capita in all of India, and a per capita rural income that is not only the highest in India, but is almost equal to that of the average total per capita for all other Indian states (Malik, 1989; Wallace, 1986).

One should be cautious when interpreting these numbers. While Punjab enjoys the highest per capita income of any state in India, in 1981 that income was roughly equivalent to an average annual income of $420 (Wallace, 1986:369). Though agriculture provides the backbone for Punjab’s economy, industry is relatively weak (Purewal, 2000; Wallace, 1986). Punjab ranked only 10th out of India’s 25 states in terms of income generated in the industrial sector, and demands for more industrialization have been largely ignored by the central government (Wallace, 1986:371).

Sikhs dominate the rural demography of Punjab, where Jat Sikhs continue to recognize izzat, or family prestige, through land ownership. For example, in the district of Amritsar, the rural population in 1971 was 89.3% Sikh, while only 8.2% of the rural populous was Hindu (Wallace, 1986:367). At the same time, urban populations are disproportionately Hindu (Mahmood, 1996; Malik, 1989; Wallace, 1986). For instance, while Sikhs far outnumbered Hindus in census data from 1971 in
Amritsar district, the urban Amritsar population was quite the opposite, with a 60.3% Hindu majority (Wallace, 1986). In other words, in a Sikh dominated state, Punjab suffers from a urban/rural divide that is at times understood along communal, or religious lines. At the same time, economic disparities and lifestyle differences between the urban and the rural are often depicted in the political arena in terms of religious or communal identity, largely for political gain (Malik, 1986).

Because of Punjab’s position as an agricultural center in India, it is no surprise that the “Green Revolution,” an agricultural initiative sponsored by the central government in the 1960’s, was widely successful in India’s “breadbasket.” The Green Revolution saw a dramatic increase in the production in both wheat and rice in Punjab, but the increased agricultural production was not without its negative effects (Mahmood, 1996; Purewal, 2000; Tatla, 1999; Wallace, 1986). First, the increasing agricultural yields required an increased need in cheap labor, found mostly in the form of migrants from neighboring states, such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Rajasthan, where the Green Revolution was not as successful (Tatla, 1999; Wallace, 1986). At the same time, emigration from Punjab began to increase, outnumbering immigration. The result was an influx of cheap migrant laborers, combined with the migration out by those reaping the benefits of increased agricultural production, creating a shift in the economic character of the state’s rural population (Wallace, 1986). However, some of the success of the Green Revolution in Punjab can be attributed to financial remittances from overseas Sikhs. The advantages of diasporic capital were
experienced in the form of agricultural machinery, traditional and hybrid seeds, and funding for irrigation projects (Helweg, 2002; Tatla, 1999).

Land ownership, at the heart of Sikh conceptions of family prestige, was greatly altered during the years following the Green Revolution. Sharp increases in landless agricultural workers and a decline in the number of small farmers, who operated plots of land measuring 2.5 acres or less, indicated a concentration of land in the hands of fewer and fewer agriculturalists (Purewal, 2000). With land values tripling in the thirteen years following the implementation of the Green Revolution, and larger numbers of smaller landholders witnessing their tiny plots being taken from them, consolidation of wealth in rural Punjab became widespread. By 1980, seventy-five percent of all agricultural wealth was controlled by ten percent of rural households. At the same time, the poorest seventy percent of rural Punjabis maintained control of a mere seven percent of all agricultural wealth (Purewal, 2000:52-53). In other words, while production was on the rise in Punjab, so was poverty (Purewal, 2000; Wallace, 1986).

Technical advances in agricultural production ushered in by the Green Revolution also created a host of new problems. Punjabi farmers became increasingly dependent on fertilizer, diesel fuel, and credit to compete. The availability of electricity and river water also became contentious issues. All of these things fluctuated in price and availability, making the plight of the Punjabi agriculturalist often times beyond their own control, a frustrating situation for Sikhs who pride themselves on hard work and self-reliance (Mahmood, 1996; Tatla, 1999). Increased
educational opportunity in rural areas resulted in a more highly educated generation of Sikh youth who were confronted with high unemployment and little opportunity, due to an abundance of cheap migrant labor in rural areas, and a lack of industrial employment in urban areas (Mahmood, 1996; Tatla, 1999; Wallace, 1986). Thus, while the Green Revolution does appear on the surface to be an economic success in Punjab, agricultural development was not without economic hardship as well. Many of these issues, particularly unemployment, lack of industrial development, and access to river waters, set the stage for Sikh grievances that would eventually manifest themselves in the form of the Khalistani militancy. At the same time, changing immigration policies in North America and Europe allowed for increased financial opportunities for those who could afford to emigrate.

The New Faces of Immigration

The 1965 U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Act had a major impact on the South Asian migration to the United States. However, it is not the beginning of the story of the “New Immigration” from India. In 1946, the Luce-Cellar Bill was passed by the US congress, allowing earlier Indian immigrants to earn citizenship through naturalization, and for the first time, including non-whites in the national origins quota for India. Aside from allowing citizenship and land ownership, the Luce-Cellar Bill allowed for Indians living in America to bring relatives over, relatives who would in turn qualify for citizenship (Helweg and Helweg, 1990; Leonard, 1997; Tatla, 1999).

The allowance for citizenship and the ability to own land overturned previous legislation, like the California Alien Land Act of 1913, which barred land ownership
for anyone not considered a US citizen (Leonard, 1997; Tatla, 1999). The ban on land
ownership by Asian Indians had been upheld by the US Supreme Court in 1923, when
Bhaghat Singh Thind unsuccessfully attempted to find a legal loop-hole, arguing that
Indians were Caucasian, and therefore should be considered “white” (Angelo, 1997;
Helweg, 2002; Leonard, 1997; Tatla, 1999). The Supreme Court disagreed, stating
that Indians were, in fact, Caucasian, but could not be considered ‘white,’ and
therefore would not be allowed either citizenship, nor land owning rights in the United
States (Leonard, 1997; Tatla, 1999).

The Luce-Cellar Bill was the beginning of a number of changes in US
immigration policy that allowed for an explosion of South Asian immigration, radically
changing the demographics of a community, and forcing North American Sikhs to
renegotiated their place in the larger context of the Indian community in the United
States.

In 1965, the United States congress passed the US Immigration and
Naturalization Act, to go into effect in 1968, thus radically changing immigration
policy, and opening the door for a new kind of immigrant (Helweg and Helweg, 1990;
La Brack, 1989). This new law eliminated the old quota, established by the National
Origins Act of 1924, which had previously limited the number of annual immigrants
allowed from India to a total 105 individuals. While the Luce-Cellar Bill had allowed
for non-white immigration, it did not adjust the quota, which remained quite small in
relation to origin quotas from European countries (Helweg and Helweg, 1990;
Leonard, 1997). The Immigration and Naturalization Act eliminated the national
origins system, increased quotas for Asian and African immigrant to equal those enjoyed by Europeans, and established a preference system that allowed for certain percentages of family members, professionals, refugees, and people needed to fill specific labor shortages. A limit of 20,000 was set for annual immigration from any particular country (Helweg and Helweg, 1990; Leonard, 1997).

The Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 did more than simply change the total numbers of South Asian immigrant allowed into the United States each year. Because preferences were placed on labor needs in certain professions, a shift in the socioeconomic character of South Asian immigration became evident. First, while early South Asian immigrants had come predominantly from Punjab, and were mostly Sikh, new immigration came from all over India, as well as from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh (Leonard, 1997). Second, though early immigration was dominated by a need for cheap manual laborers, post-1965 immigration was dominated by doctors, engineers, and other highly educated professionals, leading to what has been called “Brain Drain” in India, and other South Asian nations (Dusenbury, 1989; Helweg and Helweg, 1990; Leonard, 1997). For instance, nearly one in four graduates from Indian medical schools seek employment in the United States each year (Leonard, 1997:68). Combined with the number of other highly skilled professionals, educators, and scientists leaving India for economic prosperity in the United States, “Brain Drain” appears on the surface to be a potential danger for the future well being of South Asian nations.
The actual impact of “Brain Drain” has been the topic of a great deal of academic debate, particularly with regard to remittances those highly educated emigrants send to their natal villages. Bruce La Brack (1989) argues that the focus on the loss of intellectual potential often overlooks the financial, and more importantly, social benefits of remittances and investment by those who have ventured abroad. Helweg and Helweg (1990) acknowledge both the possible dangers of “Brain Drain,” as well as the potential benefits of remittances. They raise the equally valid point that India’s educational system has produced more highly trained individuals than the economic infrastructure can absorb. With most educated professionals seeking employment in urban areas, and a lack of job opportunities in the less desirable rural areas, the result is a large number of highly trained, unemployed individuals. The question becomes whether or not “Brain Drain” is actually worse than wasting talent in India due to lack of opportunity (ibid). It is also important to note that though highly educated professionals have come to typify post-1965 migration, a steady stream of uneducated migrants continues to flow out of India, and into the United States. This is due largely to early immigration patterns, family reunification, and the resulting chain migration (Dusenbury, 1989).

Other impacts on post-1965 immigration to the United States have been a simultaneous tightening of South Asian immigration in Britain, and a migration out of African countries such as Kenya and Uganda, a phenomenon known as “twice migration” (Bhachu, 1989; Hall, 2002; Helweg and Helweg, 1990; La Brack, 1989). Still, the family reunification clauses of the Immigration and Naturalization Act have
been most critical to the new wave of South Asian immigration, especially after the need for educated professionals cooled somewhat in the 1970’s (Helweg and Helweg, 1990). The act gave familial preference under the following categories: unmarried sons and daughters of US citizens, married sons and daughters of US citizens, brothers and sisters of US citizens, and spouses and unmarried sons and daughters of “an alien lawfully admitted for permanent residence” (ibid: 59 table 3). As more immigrants began to sponsor family members, waiting times became exceeding long. Thus, creative use of family reunification preferences enabled immigrants to find loopholes to speed the process up. In 1978, the average wait when one sibling sponsored another was three months. By 1981, that time had increased to two years, or more (ibid:69). However, sponsorship of one’s parents took less time. Once in the US, they could in turn sponsor their other children, which also took less time, thus speeding up the waiting time for the sibling in question (Leonard, 1997).

Tejinder Singh

I first met Tejinder Singh through his son, Inderprit, who had introduced himself to me just as the Sunday service ended at the Gurdwara Sahib Singh Sabha, in Kalamazoo, MI. It was my third visit to the Sunday services, and those who attended regularly were becoming increasingly curious about my presence at the temple. Inderprit had approached me, offering to find out the page number of today’s passage read from Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book of Sikhism. He figured I could locate an English translation of it online, and read it for understanding. His assumption that the Punjabi version from the service was beyond my comprehension was quite correct.
We talked for a few minutes, and I explained to him the basis for my being there, something I sensed he was curious about. "You must speak with my father, my English is not good," he explained, telling me that he had only been in the US for six months, but that his father had been here much longer, and therefore spoke much better English.

Inderprit returned a minute later with a man in his seventies, who he introduced to me as Tejinder. Tejinder shook my hand warmly, and upon hearing about my project, immediately offered to me the use of several books about Sikhism he had at his apartment. I appreciated the offer, but I was more interested in learning about the local community, I explained. Tejinder was more than happy to share with me the story of his family, and their immigration to the United States, a story that is not all that unique in the years that have followed the post-1965 wave of South Asian migration to the United States.

Another son of Tejinder's had been the first in the family to immigrate to the United States, in the mid 1980's. After obtaining citizenship, he sponsored Tejinder and his wife, who moved to the US in 1989. They, in turn, petitioned for their unmarried children, in 1993. One of his sons, who had a PhD, had difficulty finding work, and decided to return to India, to try his luck there. Another of his sons remained in Chicago, while the rest had relocated to the Kalamazoo area, where his eldest son owned a sandwich shop and deli. "Now, me and my wife, four of my five children, their spouses, and my grandchildren all live here," Tejinder explained with pride. He pointed across the main hall of the gurdwara, to where a small group of
people, of varying ages, had gathered. There, he indicted with his index finger, was three generations of his family, all now living the United States.

Tejinder’s story typifies several aspects of the standard migration tale of the new immigrant from South Asia. A child immigrates, seeking work in a professional field. Family reunification clauses, and chain migration (the sponsorship of some relatives, who in turn sponsor others) follows, and eventually entire families have relocated. The one son who couldn’t find work speaks to another issue raised by Helweg and Helweg (1990). Even though the immigration policies opened the door for entrance based on professional skill, American employers were not always willing to hire immigrants who lacked “American” job experience, a source of a great deal of strife for South Asian immigrants during times of economic recession and joblessness in the United States.

**Bhindranwale, Bluestar and the Call for Khalistan**

In order to fully understand Sikh conceptions of identity, as well as Hindu/Sikh relations both in India and in the diaspora, a brief discussion of the traumatic events of 1984 is required. It was in 1984 that the Indian army surrounded the Golden Temple, and laid siege to it for a number of days, attempting to capture terrorists who had taken refuge inside the complex. Five months later, Indira Gandhi’s assassination sparked widespread violence throughout northern India, directed at Sikhs, which resulted in thousands of deaths, and became the inspiration for thousands more, in the form of the Khalistani movement. While it is hard to say if the Khalistani militancy was inevitable, it is clear that the events of this one calendar year made Khalistani
aspirations an imperative for some members of the Sikh community, at home and abroad. Even those not in favor of such measures were forced to rethink the position of Sikhs within the larger context of Indian society.

During the 1970's, Sikhs made several demands on the central government of India, mostly surrounding agriculture, unemployment, and industrialization. First, throughout the decade the central government maintained firm control over the use and dispersal of river waters in Punjab. That Punjab literally means “Land of Five Rivers” became quite ironic when an estimated 75% of Punjabi river water was rerouted elsewhere in India (Pettigrew, 1995). Meanwhile, Punjabi farmers became increasingly dependant on the use of diesel-powered pumps to draw well water for their fields. With repeated fuel shortages and skyrocketing gas prices, the cost of wheat production in Punjab increased 84% over ten years beginning in 1970 (Pettigrew, 1995).

At the same time, the central government changed policies surrounding military recruitment, stipulating that state representation in the armed forces should proportionately reflect that state’s recruitable male populace. In other words, in a state like Punjab, that was traditionally over-represented in the military, fewer jobs were to be expected. Coupled with rising rates of unemployment, and increased dependence on government pensions by struggling farmers, this change in policy represented bad news for the people of Punjab (Pettigrew, 1995).

In 1973, responding to growing dissatisfaction among the farmers of Punjab, the Akali Dal, a Sikh political party, drafted the Anandpur Sahib Resolution, listing a
series of complaints, and possible legislation to rectify the increasingly difficult situation in the state (Pettigrew, 1995). The resolution met with limited response from the central government, further alienating the Sikh community. It should be noted that throughout the 1970’s, the political climate in Punjab was becoming increasingly hostile. The primary issues surrounded socio-economics, with farmers wanting more control over their land and their water (ibid).

Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale emerged during the late 1970’s as a key figure on the political scene in Punjab. As the leader of a religious school known as the Damdami Taskal, or ‘moving university,’ a school believed to be founded by Baba Deep Singh, Bhindranwale was a charismatic figure that spoke out loudly against both the state government in Punjab, and the central government in New Delhi. Bhindranwale, and his followers in the Damdami Taskal were becoming increasingly associated with militant activity in the early 1980’s, and he was suspected of being behind several politically motivated murders in Punjab, which attracted a great deal of negative attention from the central government (Mahmood, 1996). It was around that time that Bhindranwale and his followers moved into the Golden Temple complex, and began to stock pile arms (ibid). By the end of 1983, the stage was set for a final showdown between Bhindranwale and his followers, and the central government of India.

Due to rising tensions, and increasing violence in Punjab, Indira Gandhi declared emergency rule in the state in 1983. In May of 1984, the army was ordered in to Punjab, where they set up command posts outside of the Golden Temple
complex, in Amritsar, as well as near 37 other gurdwaras throughout India (Mahmood, 1996). On June 2, 1984, Indira Gandhi appeared on national television, asking Indians “not to shed blood, but to shed hatred” (ibid: 88). The next day, Punjab was severed from contact with the outside world. Communications with the rest of India were cut off, the press was forced to leave, and a strict curfew was imposed. Inside the Golden Temple complex, pilgrims had gathered to pay homage to Guru Arjun Dev, whose martyrdom was being remembered. Also inside the complex were Bhindranwale, and his followers.

The Golden Temple complex contains the Golden Temple itself, as well as the Akal Takht, or ‘Eternal Throne’, the historic Sikh Reference Library, various religious buildings and office buildings, and a hostel to house visiting pilgrims (Mahmood, 1996). The militants moved into the Akal Takht, heavily fortifying it against an assumed attack. As night settled on Amritsar, with the army outside the temple, and the militants in the Akal Takht, anywhere from several hundred to several thousand pilgrims remained trapped inside the complex (Mahmood, 1996).

On the morning of June 4th, the army launched an attack on the complex, hoping to flush out the small band of militants in a few hours. They exchanged gunfire throughout the day, but no major offensive was carried out. The army called out the pilgrims, but relatively few came. Regardless, the army planned a major attack for the next day (Mahmood, 1996). Tanks were called in, and though strict orders were given not to harm the temple, the Akal Takht suffered extreme structural damage. The fighting continued for three days, and on June 7th, when the army finally gained entry
in to the complex, Bhindranwale and his closest associates were dead, as were countless numbers of pilgrims and a fair number of soldiers (ibid).

During the armed confrontation, commonly known as Operation Bluestar, the Sikh Reference Library caught fire. The fire burned out of control, burning the structure to the ground, both sides accusing the other of setting the blaze. Inside the library were valuable copies of the Guru Granth Sahib, documents spanning Sikh history, and artifacts attributed to the Gurus (Mahmood, 1996).

When the smoke cleared, there were arguably thousands of Sikhs dead inside the Golden Temple Complex, and the eternal throne of Sikhism, the Akal Takht was reduced to rubble. 500 years of Sikh history was lost in the flames that consumed the Reference Library. Sikhs around the world were in shock.

Operation Bluestar resulted in several major developments, none of which could be considered promising, given the state of affairs in Punjab. First, it alienated Sikhs everywhere, who saw the operation not as an attack on terrorism but as an attack on Sikhism (Mahmood, 1996). Many of these Sikhs were further alienated by police sweeps through villages across Punjab in the months following the operation, looking to flush out any remaining militants, or sympathizers (Pettigrew, 1995). Sikhs throughout India, particularly those who wore the five ‘K’ s, began to feel the distrusting stares of their Hindu neighbors. Orthodox Sikhs, with their turbans and their long beards had become equated with terrorists, widening the gap between Hindu India and Sikh Punjab (Mahmood, 1996). Finally, and most importantly, Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale achieved the status of martyr, a coveted image in the minds of
most Sikhs. Mahmood (1996: 95) quotes Sikh historian Khushwant Singh, who eloquently states, “Bhindranwale’s ghost still stalks the Punjab countryside disturbing the sleep of the Punjabi Hindu, and the conscience of the Punjabi Sikh.” In fact, Bhindranwale’s ghost traveled much further, disturbing the conscience of Sikhs living in the diaspora, as well.

Five months after Operation Bluestar, on Oct. 31st, 1984, Indira Gandhi was shot and killed by her Sikh bodyguards while walking in her garden (Mahmood, 1996). While talk of punishing Indira Gandhi for her role in the attack on the Golden Temple was widespread in the months following Operation Bluestar, it would be inaccurate to say that all Sikhs would have supported her assassination. However, in the three days following her assassination, Sikhs were slaughtered in New Delhi and elsewhere across northern India by roving mobs of “mourning” Hindus (Mahmood, 1996; Kishwar, 1998). Explained in the media as communal violence stemming from overwhelming grief, there are those who question the validity of this reporting. The mob violence was carried out in a systematic way, with little or no interference from the police or government officials (Kishwar, 1998; Mahmood, 1996). In fact, when comparing eyewitness accounts of the riots, it becomes apparent that the attacks where carried out in a highly organized fashion. The attackers all carried similar weapons, mostly lathis, knives, and kerosene. Sikh men and boys were targeted for attacks, usually being stabbed or stunned with the lathis, before being burned alive. The women were often raped, but rarely killed (Kishwar, 1998). Police were accused of sitting idly by and watching, or simply turning their backs and walking away. High-ranking members
of the Congress party, the political party of Indira Gandhi, were accused of masterminding the attacks. Some even accused the Congress party of distributing voter registration information so the mobs would know what addresses belonged to Sikhs, and which did not (Kishwar, 1998). The number of injured was remarkably low compared to the number of dead, indicating a plan for the systematic murder of Sikhs, not merely mob violence. When the violence finally ended, on Nov. 3rd, estimated death tolls ranged from 2500 in New Delhi (Kishwar, 1998), to over 6000 across India (Mahmood, 1996).

If the assassination of Indira Gandhi lacked support when it happened, it did not take long for the Sikh community to see justification in it. Ranjiv Gandhi, Indira's son, was ushered in as the new Prime Minister. When referring to the riots, he simply said, “When a great tree shakes, the Earth trembles” (Pettigrew, 1995). Few arrests were ever made in association with the riots, more often referred to as “pogroms” by the Sikhs. Of those formally charged, only one has gone to jail (ibid). Any amount of alienation felt by the Sikh community before November of 1984, was thoroughly reinforced by the riots and the subsequent lack of justice. Another quote from Khushwant Singh (Mahmood, 1996:139) seems relevant here: “You might have been told that a large number of young Sikhs today wear saffron turbans- no longer blue or white. They are wearing saffron because they have taken an oath of vengeance.” Saffron is the color of martyrdom for Sikhs, and donning it is symbolic of accepting death. The time had come to take up arms in defense of the Sikh faith. The root of
the vengeance referred to by Singh was the perceived attacks on the Sikh identity, creating a pressing need for sovereignty.

The events of 1984, and the rise of the Khalistani movement in their wake, had a dramatic impact on diasporic Sikhs all over the world. While Sikhs living in the United States, Canada and Great Britain were not directly threatened by the violence occurring in Punjab, family members were, and support for the militancy grew quickly in the diaspora. Support for the Khalistani movement varied from protests, sympathies, and political pressure to financial, and even physical involvement in terrorist activities (Dusenbury, 1995; Helweg, 1989; Mahmood, 1996; Tatla, 1999). Not only did the Khalistani movement gain sympathy in the diaspora, it also altered notions of what it means to be Sikh within South Asian diasporic communities. Because the crisis in Punjab quickly took on an international quality, diasporic Sikhs were forced to react to the fighting in some way. At the same time, immigration from Punjab following 1984 brought people from the frontlines of fighting to the diasporic communities, and the nature of identity formation was altered by stories and evidence of the violence in the homeland (Tatla, 1999). Asylum claims by Sikhs in many countries have increased dramatically since 1984, adding another level of understanding of what it means to be Sikh for those living in diaspora. The perceived oppression, and the targeting of Sikhs for violence that accompanied counterinsurgency tactics used by the Indian government created links with past persecution at the hands of Mughal and Afghan overlords. Khalistani militants became understood in terms of heroic martyrs and the commandment to use force when
necessary to defend the faith (Mahmood, 1996; Pettigrew, 1992). Past and present
became inseparable on the battlefields of Punjab, on the tortured or bullet-ridden
bodies of Sikh youth, and in the diasporic space where Sikhs attempted to make sense
of what was happening. (for a discussion of the links between violence,
representation, and diasporic Sikh identity, see Axel, 2001).

**Conclusions**

South Asian immigration to the United States exploded in the late 1960’s
following the passage of the US Immigration and Naturalization Act, opening the
doors for a new kind of immigrant. Unlike the uneducated manual laborer that typified
the early Punjabi pioneers, immigration following 1965 tended to attract highly
educated, highly motivated professionals, particularly in the fields of medicine,
engineering and business. Family reunification clauses in the new immigration
legislation, as well as the increase in quotas, raised the total number of South Asians
allowed into the United States annually, and plenty of immigrants were prepared to
take advantage of the situation. Education, and particularly higher education, also
contributed to the increased numbers of South Asians living in the US.

Factors contributing to migration from India included the violent displacement of
millions of people following Partition, economic hardship exacerbated by the Green
Revolution, and a general shift in the global political economy. It became evident to
many educated Indians that better wages, and a better quality of life were available in
the United States. Remittances by overseas migrants added to family prestige, and
improved the quality of life in natal villages.
Operation Bluestar, and the anti-Sikh riots of 1984 had a profound impact on the diasporic imagination of the Sikh community, as did the ten-year armed struggle for Khalistan that followed. The violence that defined daily life in Punjab during the militancy created windows into the past, allowing for present day suffering to be understood along side past oppression during the heroic period. Political refuges, fleeing India for safety in the diaspora brought with them stories of violence, torture and murder, which fueled the diasporic imagination. While not everyone living in Punjab, or in the diaspora was in favor of the armed struggle for Khalistani independence, Sikhs everywhere were affected by the movement, and cultural identity was altered after 1984.

In the next chapter, a review of the origins of Michigan’s South Asian community will demonstrate some of these larger trends in immigration to the United States. With its origins in the early days of migration to North America, Michigan’s South Asian community had a distinctly Punjabi character until numbers from other parts of India increased after 1965. I will then discuss the developing Sikh population in Kalamazoo, to show how they see themselves in relation to the larger South Asian community in the area. I will also demonstrate how Sikhs living in Kalamazoo reflect many of the characteristics present in the post-1965 immigration from the Indian subcontinent.
CHAPTER V

SOUTH ASIANS IN MICHIGAN

*Introduction*

In the early part of the twentieth century, South Asian immigrants began arriving on west coast of North America. California would become a destination for many of these early migrants, who were drawn to the agricultural work available in that state. The agricultural fields of California were reminiscent of those in Punjab, and because many of these early migrants were from Punjabi farming families, they were quick to excel as workers, and later as landowners (Leonard, 1997). Widespread racism and hostility made California inhospitable at times, and a few immigrants ventured further inland in search of opportunity. Michigan was one state that South Asians were drawn to, largely because of the booming industrial sector, and the high wages of Henry Ford’s automotive plants (Helweg, 2002).

As immigration policy shifted, and the US Immigration and Naturalization Act was implemented, Michigan’s South Asian community grew, and began to diversify. South Asians in Michigan today represent many regions of India, as well as Pakistan and other nations. The numbers of South Asians in Michigan has grown considerably in the past ten years, and continues to grow at rates that outnumber those from many other countries (Helweg, 2002).
In this chapter, I will review the history of Michigan's South Asian community, in reference to larger patterns of Asian Indian migration, both in terms of early pioneers, and the post-1965 immigration. I will then place the Kalamazoo area Sikh community within the context of that history, and discuss some of the implications these migration patterns have for the character of a diasporic community in the making.

**Punjabi Pioneers Move to Michigan**

By 1920, restrictions on immigration were beginning to slow South Asian migration to the United States, and many who had migrated were opting to return to India, rather than face continued hostility and violence (Helweg, 2002; Leonard, 1997; Tatla, 1999). Others, rather than leaving, were relocating within the United States, to areas where anti-Asian sentiment was less palpable. States such as Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, and Colorado were the recipients of these venturous immigrants, as was Michigan (Helweg, 2002; Leonard, 1997).

South Asian immigrants, largely from Punjab, began entering Michigan in the 1920’s, drawn by jobs in the automobile industry, as well as by educational opportunities at schools like the University of Michigan (Helweg, 2002). In this way, these immigrants were similar in background and place of origin to those who had arrived on the west coast ten to twenty years earlier. Arthur Helweg (2002:15) states that the beginning of the South Asian community in Michigan can be traced to six men, the “original six,” who relocated to Detroit from California in 1924. They were all from Punjab, and most of them were Sikh. As mentioned before, these are all
standard characteristics of early South Asian immigration (Helweg, 2002; Helweg and Helweg, 1990; Leonard, 1997; Tatla, 1999). Like many others who came before and after them, they were attracted by educational opportunity, and high wages in the automobile industry. Henry Ford had increased salaries at his plants to $5.00 a day in 1914, and this made moving to Detroit a potentially lucrative venture. People from all over the world headed for Detroit to take advantage of the situation (Helweg, 2001; Rubenstein and Ziewacz, 1995). At the same time, Ford began recruiting labor from all over the country, particularly in rural areas. One such recruiter in California convinced Arjin Singh, one of the “original six,” to seek employment from Ford (Helweg, 2002). After convincing Henry Ford to take a chance on these Sikh immigrants, Arjin and the others moved to Detroit, and began working for Ford in 1924. Though Henry Ford was a notorious anti-Semite, he reportedly treated his Sikh employees rather well, going so far as to telling immigration officials they were in training, thus enabling them to remain in the US on student visas (Helweg, 2002:17; for a discussion of Ford’s anti-Semitism, see Rubenstein and Ziewacz, 1995:181).

Education, particularly in the field of agricultural studies, at the University of Michigan also attracted some of the earliest South Asian immigrants to the state. The intention was to acquire a western education, which was highly respected in India, return to Punjab with the knowledge to improve their lot in their natal village (Helweg, 2002). Some early Punjabi immigrants even landed administrative positions in Punjab’s government following independence. Pratap Singh Karon, who became chief minister of the state of Punjab in 1956, was one such immigrant, educated at the
University of Michigan before returning to India (ibid:18). Links between agriculture, higher education, and Punjab continue to this day.

While early Punjabi Migrants kept themselves relatively isolated from the surrounding community, they maintained close ties with other South Asian communities throughout the United States (Helweg, 2002). For instance, when Arjin Singh, and other Detroit Sikhs wanted to open a gurdwara in the city, they petitioned South Asians all over the United States for financial assistance. In fact, the first contribution, of $100.00 came from none other than Bhagat Singh Thind, most famous for his attempt to obtain citizenship by arguing Indians were Caucasian, and should therefore be recognized as “white,” a quality necessary for both citizenship, and landownership in California (Angelo, 1997; Helweg, 2002; Leonard, 1997; Tatla, 1999). Sikhs in Kalamazoo raised money for their own gurdwara in a similar fashion, decades later.

The Michigan South Asian community, centered in Detroit, did not become particularly large during the early part of the twentieth century. As with elsewhere, South Asian immigration was severely limited after 1923, and the Supreme Court’s decision that Caucasian was not the equivalent of ‘white’, in terms of meaning, or in terms of the rights as they were guaranteed by the United States constitution (Leonard, 1997; Tatla, 1999). In fact, across the United States, the South Asian population decreased significantly after the high court’s ruling on the Thind Case. California, which had a population of over 10,000 Asian Indians in 1914, was left with only 1476 individuals claiming South Asian descent by 1940. That same year, there
were only a total of 2544 South Asians in the US, a number which fell as low as 1500 just before the Luce-Cellar Bill eased immigration restrictions in 1946 (Helweg, 2002). With the passage of the US Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, all of that changed rather rapidly.

*New Immigration Hits Michigan*

The passage of the US Immigration and Naturalization Act in 1965, and its implementation in 1968, had an immediate impact on the South Asian community in the United States. Resulting from the passage of the Civil Rights movement, and a realization that immigration polices also suffered from a racist perspective, the Immigration and Naturalization Act abolished the old “National Origins” quotas, and replaced them with new, higher quotas that brought Europeans and non-Europeans into more equal footing in term of immigration (Helweg, 2002; Helweg and Helweg, 1990).

The impact of this legislation for the South Asian community was two-fold. First, the numbers of South Asians migrating to the United States increased dramatically, moving from a national origins quota of 105, to a new quota of no more than 20,000 from any one country (Leonard, 1997). At the same time, the preferences given to educated professionals diversified the community, both in terms of socio-economics and points of origin.

While a majority of early immigrants came from Punjab, many of whom were Sikh, the new wave of immigration represents several states in India, as well as other South Asian nations, such as Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh (Helweg, 2002;
Indians far outnumber all other nationalities within the South Asian diaspora in the United States, with a population in 1990 that was ten times greater than any other segment of the community (Leonard, 1997: Appendix 2). Within the Indian community, Sikhs are representing a smaller percentage of the total population each year, as immigration from other states, particularly Gujarat, has expanded in recent years (Helweg, 2002; Tatla, 1999). In Michigan, Gujaratis now outnumber Punjabis more than two to one (Helweg, 2002:3).

As mentioned above, the total number of Asian Indians living in the United States reached a low in the years just before the passage of the Luce-Cellar act in 1946. With fewer than 1500 individuals in 1946, the South Asian community felt the immediate impact of looser restrictions when nearly 6000 family members were brought over between 1946 and 1965 (Helweg, 2002; Tatla, 1999). Following legislation in 1965, those numbers increased dramatically. By 1975, the total Asian Indian population had grown to 175,000. Five years later, the total had doubled, and by 1990, the population had exceeded 800,000. In 1997, the Indian population in the United States had passed 1.2 million, with more than 800 immigrants entering the country each week (Helweg, 2002:24). A majority of these immigrants were settling in California, though Michigan does rate within the top ten states for South Asian population size (Leonard, 1997). It is worth noting, that while South Asians do immigrate directly to Michigan from abroad, many also find their way to Michigan via California, or other large communities like New York or Chicago. This is certainly true of several Sikhs living in Kalamazoo. Cost of living and business opportunities
draw Sikhs from other parts of the country, particularly large urban areas on the east and west coasts, where it was hard to get ahead due the expensive nature of living in a city.

Michigan’s Indian population growth reflects that of the national trend. In 1974, there were a total of 3,561 Asian Indians living in Michigan. In 2000, that number had soared, totaling 54,631, a 129% increase since 1990, making India the country of origin for more of Michigan’s immigrant population than any other (Helweg, 2002). Within the Asian Indian community, shifts in the demographic make up also reflect the larger historical trends of the United States as a whole. While Punjabi migrants founded the Detroit community in 1924, a majority of whom were Sikh, Sikhs continue to represent lower percentages of the total Asian Indian population as each year passes. Even though the total number of Sikhs has remained steady, if not increased slightly, immigration from other areas has increased significantly, resulting in Punjabis in general and Sikhs in particular becoming a smaller portion of the population (Helweg, 2002; Tatla; 1999). In 1990, there were 13 people in Kalamazoo who self identified as Sikh, for a total of 5.1% of the Indian community in the city. In 2000, the number of Sikhs remained the same, but the percentage level had dropped to 4.6%. During that same ten-year period, the number of individuals who reported Hinduism as their religious affiliation increased from 167 to 249, or from 65.5% to 77.5% (Helweg, 2002: Table 2). The Socio-economic character of the Asian Indian community in Kalamazoo also reflects trends that have come to typify the post-1965 wave of South Asian immigration. In 2000, the three most reported
occupations among Asian Indians in Kalamazoo were medical doctor (14.9%), business owner (13.1%), and Engineer (10.4). Other professions with significant numbers include physical therapy and education (Helweg, 2002: Table 4). Interestingly, 7.7% of the population sampled is retired.

**Sikhs in Kalamazoo: A Community in the Making**

While the demographic data suggests that the Sikh community in Kalamazoo is one struggling for statistical survival, possibly even on the decline, the Sikhs themselves see a very different light. Local Sikhs saw 2002 as the beginning of something special, a transition in the community’s history that would have a positive impact in the years to come. The excitement that thrived in the Sikh community centered around the opening of the Gurdwara Sahib Singh Sabha, a temple to accommodate the needs of a community that was in fact increasing in size. The growth of population was not centered in the city of Kalamazoo, but rather in the areas surrounding the city, where families were moving at increasing numbers each year. Asian Indians tend not to form enclaves in cities, based on village or state of origin, but rather move to where opportunity exists (Helweg and Helweg, 1990). For this reason, the gurdwara that opened in the fall of 2002, in Kalamazoo, was not so much for Kalamazoo Sikhs, but rather for Sikhs from all over southwest Michigan. People travel to Kalamazoo from Three Rivers (27 miles south), Battle Creek (26 miles east) Grand Rapids (50 miles north), and even as far away as Grand Haven (83 miles northwest) to attend religious services each weekend.
Details about the foundation of a Sikh community in southwest Michigan remain a bit fuzzy, even for the Sikhs themselves. I was told of a man who lived in Dowagiac, a town about forty-five miles southwest of Kalamazoo, whose mother had married a Sikh sometime before World War II. This puts Sikhs living in southwest Michigan well before reforms opened up immigration for South Asians. However, of the Sikhs who attended Sunday services at the gurdwara, the person who had lived in the area longest had been here for 22 years, making the character of the community much more representative of the new wave of immigration, following the passage of the US Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965. Occupations of those I talked to include engineering in the automotive industry, pharmacological research, and small business ownership, indicating similar trends to other post-1965 immigration.

Places of origin for Sikhs living in southwest Michigan were diverse, from those who moved directly from India, to those who represented the phenomenon of “twice migration” from Kenya, or Britain. There were even those who migrated from India to some other country, for temporary labor opportunities, and then continued on to the US, stopping first in California, before finally settling in Michigan. Some Sikhs were attracted to southwest Michigan because of business opportunity, while others were recruited directly into the industrial sector. For example, Jasjit, an engineer who was born and educated in Europe, moved to the Kalamazoo area after labor recruiters from the American automobile industry offered him work, based on his qualifications. Others moved to the US to get an education, and found work upon graduation, some
are still working on their degrees at Western Michigan University, and have become integrated into the community through the commonality of religion.

Three Migration Tales

Rajvinder Singh

Rajvinder Singh moved to the United States in the late 1960’s to pursue a doctorate in nuclear physics. He attended a prestigious west coast university, and upon finishing, immediately found work in the field of research and development for nuclear power plants. For nearly two decades he worked designing systems for nuclear plants, before a move away from nuclear power as a viable alternative energy source in the US led to a reduction of labor needs in the field. Rajvinder left the west coast in the late 1980’s, and settled in southwest Michigan, where he now owns a hotel, which he runs with his wife. He has two children, both who are now adults.

As with many immigrant families, there is a small degree of friction between Rajvinder and his son regarding the degree of influence American social life should have of the second generation of the Sikh community in the United States. Though Rajvinder did not think it was the best idea, his son joined the army, to give back to the country that had given so much to his family. “What have you ever done for this country, after all it has done for you, what have you given in return?” his son challenged him. “I have always paid my taxes, and obeyed the law, worked hard…I thought I had done my part, but I guess not, according to him,” Rajvinder told me one morning, as we sipped hot chai tea in the langar hall of the Gurdwara Sahib Singh
Sabha. "Me, Dad, you will give me, by letting me join the army.' I couldn't really argue with him about that."

The army had not been good for his son, in Rajvinder's mind. He had to keep his hair short, and his face shaven, unthinkable requirements for a Sikh, who is required to never cut his hair. In the Indian army, special consideration for Sikh symbolic requirements allow for soldiers to maintain their hair, and wear turbans, but the United States military has no such considerations. "Now, when he comes to gurdwara, he just sits in the back, not interested in being involved," Rajvinder said, expressing a pressing fear in the Sikh community, that children raised in the US would turn their backs on their parents' religious and cultural background, and emulate American culture instead.

**Harinder Singh**

Harinder Singh first approached following the introductory speeches that kicked off the Akhand Path, or continuous reading of Guru Granth Sahib, meant to mark particularly joyous occasions for Sikhs (McLeod, 1984). He was a short man, with a neatly trimmed, gray and white beard. A saffron bandana was tied to keep his hair covered, a requirement of anyone, Sikh or non-Sikh, who is in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib. We talked briefly about my research, and the significance of the Akhand Path that had just started. He was pleasant, and very interested in answering my questions.

I saw Harinder two days later, at my first Sunday service at the gurdwara, and had a difficult time recognizing him. Not only was he not wearing his glasses, as he
had been on Friday morning, but his saffron bandana had been replaced by a light colored turban. He could tell I was unsure who he was, and pointed to his head, proclaiming, “I have my turban on today!”

After the service, we talked at length about how he had found himself in southwest Michigan. Harinder had moved from India to Germany, where jobs were more available, and pay was better. He worked for a while in Germany before moving on. In the early 1980’s, he moved to California, where he worked hard to earn a decent living. “The problem of living in the city is that it costs so much, you have to work hard just to get by,” he explained. “Once you can save up enough to move, you find Sikhs living in smaller communities, and move there.”

When I asked why, he explained, “To open a business. A lot of these people here today, they moved here to open their own business. It is cheaper to live, and you can borrow money from other Sikhs to get started. I own my own gas station.” He handed me a business card. He then began pointing people out, and indicating what kinds of businesses they owned: gas stations, convenience stores, sandwich shops.

Harinder had moved to Michigan in 1993, and earned his citizenship the following year.

He drove about thirty miles to attend services at the gurdwara, from the nearby city where he lived. “There were only two or three Sikh families around when I first moved here. Now, about 50 or 60 families attend the gurdwara on a regular basis.”

When he first moved to the area, Harinder had joined the Kalamazoo Indian Association, a pan-Indian organization aimed at addressing needs of the larger Asian
Indian community, but found it had little to offer him. “I am listed in their directory (a phone book of all Indians living in the area), and I still receive their newsletter, but there is never anything in there for me. I am thinking about putting together a directory just for Sikhs. We’ll see.”

Harinder’s son, whom I had met upon entering the gurdwara for the very first time (he had greeted me at the door, a little confused as to why I was there… “Are you with the Press?” he had asked), is active in the gurdwara. Though only eighteen, he is a member of the executive committee, who are in charge of the day-to-day affairs of the temple. Unlike Rajvinder’s son, Harinder’s boy was “keeping his hair,” and wore a turban. “We wanted the gurdwara to teach kids about their culture,” Harinder explained to me one morning, “to be American and to be Sikh.”

**Sukhminder Singh**

Of all the Sikhs I met while conducting my research, Sukhminder was at once typical of Asian Indian migration, and atypical of southwest Michigan Sikhs with whom I had interacted. He has lived in Kalamazoo for a little over two years, having come to the area to earn a graduate degree in engineering. In this way, he was representative of the kinds of immigrants who have continuously arrived in the United States since the passage of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965. However, unlike many of the other members of the Sikh community in southwest Michigan, he had no plans of staying here long term.

Born in Himachel Pradesh, Sukhminder is one of four children, and the only one of his family in America. After earning an undergraduate degree in Gujarat, he
came to the US on a student visa. Having just finished his degree at Western Michigan University, he is planning on spending the remaining six months of his visa looking for work. If successful, he will apply for a work visa, and remain in the US. Otherwise, he will return to India to seek employment there.

When he arrived in Kalamazoo, the gurdwara was still in the planning stages. He became involved in the renovations of the old church that was to become the Gurdwara Sahib Singh Sabha, and remained involved in the gurdwara after it was officially opened. Before the gurdwara opened, Sikhs in the area rented a Masonic Temple once a month to hold services. Sukhminder told me that at those services, you could expect to see 60 or 70 people. Now, with the gurdwara opened, 150 to 200 people can be expected on any given Sunday. "The gurdwara is good for the community. It is good for the kids, and the community will grow. When a gurdwara opens, a community will double in the next few years. Family members will move into the area, and people from the cities will move here to open businesses."

When I asked Sukhminder why the gurdwara was good for the community, he explained, "the gurdwara is for connection with the community, and a way to keep informed about what is going on in the world, you know, social issues. The gurdwara is for the community: spiritually, physically, and politically. It is not just for the spiritual. Truth is truth. Some want to avoid the political at the gurdwara, but a gurdwara must be politically active for Sikh issues in a small community."
Conclusions

As the history of the South Asian community in Michigan indicates, its beginnings are not unlike those of west coast communities in California and Vancouver. A majority of early Indian immigrants in Michigan were from Punjab, many of whom were Sikh. While the Sikh community is sizable in Detroit, post-1965 immigration has shifted the demographic make-up of the Asian Indian community in Michigan, and other regions now dominate the cultural landscape of the state’s South Asian diasporic populations. While Asian Indians continue to migrate and settle in Michigan, Punjabis in general and Sikhs in particular account for smaller percentages of the total South Asian population with each passing year.

In Kalamazoo, a small but thriving community of Sikhs also has its origins in the early migration patterns of Punjabi Pioneers, although there is not a lot of detail regarding who these people were, and exactly when they came. The current community is more reflective of the new wave of South Asian immigration, with many of the people drawn to this area to work in professions that require high degrees of education, such as engineering or pharmacology, or to pursue small business ventures. While the Sikh population of Kalamazoo has remained relatively constant, surrounding areas have seen increases in Sikh migration, both from India, and from other parts of the US. The gurdwara that opened in the fall of 2002 services much of southwest Michigan, rather than specifically Kalamazoo, with people traveling from as far away as Grand Haven to attend services on Sunday mornings.
In the next chapter, the gurdwara, and its impact on the Sikh community of southwest Michigan, will be used to frame a discussion of cultural identity among diasporic Sikhs in Kalamazoo and the surrounding areas. Using religion as an ethnic marker, I will demonstrate how Sikhs imagine themselves in opposition to two other religious communities common to India, Hinduism and Islam. Shifting historical circumstances have forced the Sikh community to undertake what can be described as a publicity campaign, aimed at raising the level of awareness about Sikhism in the area. The gurdwara has been at the center of this campaign, acting to create a space within the community of Kalamazoo where a Sikh identity can be expressed safely, while at the same time becoming a catalyst for the dispersal of information about Sikhism to the outlying community. At the same time, the very existence of the gurdwara emphasizes the uniqueness of Sikhism within the larger framework of Indian religious history, thus adding authenticity to a community that understands its own history in terms of a constant struggle for existence in the face of oppression.
CHAPTER VI

SPACE, PLACE AND DIASPORIC IMAGININGS

Introduction

As summer turned to fall in 2002, the Sikh community in and around Kalamazoo opened a religious center, ending more than a year of planning and renovation. On October 23rd of that same year, an Akhand Path, or continuous reading of the Guru Granth Sahib, was held at the newly opened Gurdwara Sahib Singh Sabha, to celebrate this joyous occasion, and acknowledge all the hard work put into seeing this dream become a reality. The opening of a gurdwara in Kalamazoo, the first Sikh temple in southwest Michigan, marks an important transition for the community, symbolizing a permanence that had previously been lacking. With their place of worship a reality, Sikhs now have more leverage with which to negotiate their cultural identity, in contrast to other religions with roots in India and sizable populations in Michigan.

In this chapter, I will position the opening of the Gurdwara Sahib Singh Sabha against a backdrop of communal politics, to demonstrate how Hindu/Sikh relations, and differing conceptions of “India” exist under the surface of one South Asian diasporic community. I will also demonstrate why the opening of the gurdwara has enabled the Sikhs of southwest Michigan to partake in what amounts to a publicity campaign aimed at educating their neighbors about their religion, thus creating a
distinct space within the South Asian diaspora for them to negotiate their own sense of cultural identity. Finally, I will address how the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, as well as the new war in the Persian Gulf, have created new problems for Sikhs living in America.

**Communities of Discourse**

Less than ten years ago, there were no religious temples in Kalamazoo for Asian Indians at which to worship. There was, however, the Kalamazoo Indian Association, a pan-Indian organization that promoted interaction among South Asians living in the Kalamazoo area. Hardev Kaur, a college student who grew up in Kalamazoo, remembers her parents talking about the Indian Association meetings around the time the Hindu temple was originally proposed. “When the idea for the [Hindu] temple was first raised, there were some who thought it was a bad idea. They saw opening a temple as potentially dividing the community along religious lines. But they were never very happy with us, anyway. My mom is Hindu, and my dad is Sikh, and neither were all that into the religious side of things.”

Eventually, a Hindu temple was opened in Portage, the city directly south of Kalamazoo. Named the Indo-American Cultural Center and Temple, its website (http://www.kalamazootemple.org) lists the goals of the temple as follows: “To provide a place of worship for people of Asian Indian origin. To promote and preserve the culture and traditions of India.” While the main hall is available for religious activities, there are Hindu idols present, and any activity that might compromise the sanctity of the sanctum are strictly prohibited. At the same time, only
religions of Asian Indian origin are allowed to use the space, “ruling out Islam and
Christianity” (Helweg, 2002). In other words, the temple is not available as a place of
worship for all people of Indian Asian origin, because Indian Asian as a category is
being narrowly defined along religious lines.

How is it that Asian Indian can be so narrowly defined? In order to understand
this phenomenon, it is necessary to discuss two recent developments in the general
discourse surrounding Hinduism: the notion of Hindutva in India, and the
“Americanization” of Hinduism in the United States. Both of these trends, though
unrelated, have impacted the “diasporic imagination” of large segments of the South
Asian community in North America.

Peter van der Veer (1995:1) sees the “Diasporic Imagination” as the product of
historical contexts, and a “politics of space” specific to time and place. Markers of
ethnicity, religion and cultural background have superceded the primacy of language in
processes of imagining a community within the South Asian diaspora. Thus, these
processes have led to what van der Veer (1995) calls an “ethnicization of Religion,”
where religious identity becomes foregrounded in the dominant discourse of
nationalism that is being produced by transnational migration.

Critical to this ethnicization of religion within the South Asian diaspora is a
rising sense in India of “Hindutva,” or Hindu nationalism (Hansen, 1999). While
Hindu nationalism first arose early in 20th century India, Thomas Hansen argues that it
has found a foothold in post-Independence India due to processes of democracy
undermining age-old social structures. The rise of Hindutva is not expressly political,
nor exclusively religious, but rather has largely occurred in what Hansen calls "Public culture - the public space in which a society and its constituent communities imagine, represent, and recognize themselves through political discourse, commercial and cultural expressions, and representations of state and civic organizations" (Hansen, 1999:4).

Cynthia Mahmood, in analyzing the politics of communalism in India, writes, “Thinking in terms of communities of discourse rather than communities of belief or ritual relieves some of the burden placed on the notion of intra-communal homogeneity” (Mahmood, 2001: 100-101). With the increase in South Asian transnational migration over the past forty years, combined with the rise of Hindutva politics both inside and outside of the Indian nation state, these communities of discourse are as likely to be found in New York or Michigan, as they are in Gujarat or Punjab. Hindu nationalism must not be thought of as tied to a particular political climate in India, but is instead considered part of a larger discourse in India, about India. More importantly, it is portable.

At the same time, the “Americanization” of Hindu practices, coupled with the increasing centrality of Hinduism as a marker of collective identity among many of North America’s diasporic Indians, has led to an atmosphere in this country in which Hindutva can potentially thrive. One reason for this is that the Hindu temple often becomes a center for social and cultural activities, as well as religious services (Kurien, 1998). The Indo-American Cultural Center is one such place. Besides hosting religious services and family prayer sessions, the temple is also used for the celebration
of what could be called ‘cultural’ festivals, such as Holi. As I was told by one worshiper at a Michigan Hindu temple, “for us, [it] is a learning experience. You know, most of us who attend are Western educated. We are trying to retain some sense of our own culture.” Similarly, another patron of the temple told me, “Hinduism is more than just beliefs, more than a religion. It is in all aspects of culture.” In short, Hinduism is Indian culture.

The Sikh community imagines itself, and its relationship with India in a very different way. Seeing Sikhism as a distinct religious message from that of Hinduism, and feeling that the Sikh Panth’s position within the framework of the modern nation-state of India has been a precarious one, Sikhs do not embrace the equation of Hinduism with Indian culture. In fact, many Sikhs see the rising sense of Hindutva in India, and the religious intolerance mainstream Indian society has displayed toward its religious minorities in recent years as symptomatic of problems that have always existed. There has been a long-standing complaint from the Sikh community that the rhetoric of Hindu tolerance has acted to undermine the distinct nature of Sikh religious practice. When Hindus celebrate Guru Nanak’s birth, or the anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh’s Khalsa, these acts are seen as deliberate attempts to swallow Sikhism into the Hindu fold (Mahmood, 1996). As Harinder, a local Sikh businessman told me, “The Khalistani movement, and all that stuff in 1984...that happened because Hindus refused to allow us our own identity, a Sikh identity.” The opening of the Gurdwara Sahib Singh Sabha has been a critical step toward expressing that Sikh identity in the diasporic space that is Kalamazoo, Michigan.
With regard to the Sikh diaspora, the separation of a contemporary diasporic identity from the ethno-nationalist Khalistani aspirations becomes difficult. Since 1984, with the Indian army’s assault on the Golden Temple in Amritsar, some scholars argue that a “universal” Sikh identity has become closely associated with a perceived need for political autonomy, in the form of an independent Punjab (Tatla, 1999). In the diasporic context, others have argued that a sense of group identity has been both directly and indirectly shaped by the events of 1984, and the ensuing struggle for a Sikh homeland. For instance, Axel (2001) states that images of torture victims, and formal portraits of militant Sikhs, now widely available on the Internet, have created a diasporic identity characterized by both masculinity and oppression. This identity is drawing directly on the tradition of martyrdom that rose to prominence during the Heroic period, following the death of Guru Gobind Singh. Portraits of militants and photographs of torture victims act much the way ‘massacre art’, found in gurdwaras and on wall calendars in Sikh homes, act to remind Sikhs of the constant struggle the Panth has undergone. This art, depicting the martyrdom of famous figures such as Bhai Mani Singh, as well as large-scale massacre at the hands of Mughals, the British, and most recently the Indian Army during Operation Bluestar, has a power that cannot be denied. Mahmood (1996:189) describes this art as follows:

In their very gruesomeness, these paintings, drawings and photos assert themselves in a room; they are impossible to ignore, and intrude in conversation, meditation, and everyday activities. Their potency derives only in part from blood; it derives also from their unwillingness
to be masked, covered, or distorted...it is a kind of witness that will allow no one to rest.

Axel (2001) argues that violence propagated by Sikh militants, and against Sikhs by the government of India, as represented in art, photographs, and narratives have come to shape an understanding of what it means to be Sikh, for Sikhs and non-Sikh alike, at home and more importantly, in the diaspora.

On the other hand, Dusenbury (1995) argues that support for Khalistan among North American Sikhs stems more from the desire to be recognized as a legitimate ethnic group, separate from other Indians, than from a desire to return someday to an independent Punjab. This can be viewed as a contemporary manifestation of Jeurgensmeyer’s (1979) Ghadar Syndrome. Similarly, Bhabani Sen Gupta (1991:53) has posited that early calls for Khalistan, all made from the diasporic setting, were in response to difficulties with immigration authorities felt by overseas Sikhs in Canada and in Germany. According to Gupta, the internationalization of the Punjab crisis was the result of deliberate attempts by opportunistic diasporic Sikhs to capitalize on anti-Indian sentiment in the global political arena due to that nation’s perceived Soviet sympathies. In either case, it is clear that the position of the Sikh diaspora within the larger South Asian transnational community has undergone radical repositioning in the past twenty years, and that repercussions of the Khalistani movement are still being felt.

In Kalamazoo, the degree to which divisions along religious lines exist within the Asian Indian community depend largely upon whom you ask. When I posed the
question to Arjun one Sunday morning at the Hindu temple, he quickly responded, “My wife comes from a Sikh family. I come here every week, and go with my wife to the Sikh services once a month. It is not a problem.” However, when I asked a similar question to Jasjit, a leader in the local Sikh community, I was told that there remain underlying tensions between Sikhs and Hindus, stemming from the events of 1984- Operation Bluestar and the Anti-Sikh Riots. Jasjit cautioned, “Some of my dearest friends are Hindus, but there are some topics better left alone.”

“It Means Guru’s Place…”

“It means ‘Guru’s Place,’” Tejinder explained, his eyes seeming to smile wider than his mouth. He gently stroked the bottom of his long gray beard, and repeated, to no one in particular, “Gurdwara; it means ‘Guru’s Place.’” But on the sign outside, we only write ‘Sikh Temple.’” On my first visit to the Gurdwara Sahib Singh Sabha, the sign, and its simplicity had been the first thing I noticed. It reminded me of a black and white photograph from a book in my office, a picture of the first gurdwara to open in the US, in Stockton, CA. The year was 1946. The photograph was of a non-descript building, a gathering of people posed on the front steps. Above their heads, hanging on the wall of the structure, in large white letters, read the words “Sikh Temple.”

After over one hundred years of Sikh immigration to North America, why was it that this diasporic community still felt compelled to simplify their presence? Why did the sign read “Sikh Temple,” and not “Gurdwara Sahib Singh Sabha?” In the end, the simplicity of this sign proved to be a window into the complexity of negotiating cultural identity in the diaspora.
The very basis of the nationalist project is rooted in "politics of space," and the relationship between territory and identity as imagined by communities (van der Veer, 1995). While this is most often manifested in claims to bounded geographical territories, diasporic imaginings allow for new and creative ways to negotiate this politics of space. As van der Veer (1995: 11) writes, "Those who see themselves as a nation often seek a spatial, territorial expression of their nationhood." For Sikhs, the most obvious expression of nationhood can be found in the call for Khalistan, and taking up of arms by some segments of the Panth in order to create that space. There are other ways the politics of space can be manipulated to create authentically Sikh places, particularly in the diaspora. In Kalamazoo, one such place is the Gurdwara Sahib Singh Sabha.

According to Gupta and Ferguson (1992), spaces become imagined as "places" within a hierarchy of power relations, and within a hierarchy of interconnected space. If relations of power, organized hierarchically within interconnected space, dictate how place is imagined, then those who hold little power have little say in this imagining. Conversely, the imagining of place can be empowering to those communities who succeed in the face of disadvantage. Thus, Sikhs, who may feel without power or place in Indian society, and without a bounded geographical nation-state of their own, can gain legitimacy in the diaspora by negotiating space in creative ways. As Gupta and Ferguson (1992: 8) remind us, "Keeping in mind that notions of locality or community refer both to demarcated space and to clusters of interaction, we can see that the identity of a place emerges by the intersection of its specific
involvement in a system of hierarchically organized spaces with its cultural
collection as a community or locality.” Imagining the gurdwara as a space that is
clearly ‘Sikh’ in nature allows for interaction with other South Asian communities to
occur on more equal ground. Being able to imagine this space in concrete, tangible
ways, something that the existence of the gurdwara provides, allows the Sikh
community to enter into power relations with more power of their own.

If the gurdwara allows for a uniquely Sikh place to act out diasporic identity,
to simply be Sikh without fear, just how that identity is enacted varies considerably
from person to person. While there are prescribed symbols for amritdhari Sikhs, not
all Sikhs have become members of the Khalsa, and therefore are not required to wear
the five Ks. There are many who attend services at the Gurdwara Sahib Singh Sabha
who cut their hair, trim or even shave their beards, and cover their heads with
bandanas available at the door, rather than wearing a turban. Others wear the turban,
which I should point out is not a requirement, but have short hair underneath it. In
other words, there is flexibility in how Sikhs honor the symbolic requirements of their
faith. To use Hall’s (2002) language, Sikh identities in the diaspora are translated
through a web of intersections and interactions with the host society. Because the
daily construction of identity is flexible, Harinder Singh can keep his hair short, and his
beard trimmed while managing the day to day activities of his business, which relies
heavily on non-Sikh clientele, and still put on his turban to attend the gurdwara.

The gurdwara does more than offer a space to be Sikh in a non-Sikh world. It
also provides a venue where Sikh cultural tradition can be passed on to another
generation of Sikhs. Sikh children raised in America are those most in jeopardy of losing their sense of what being Sikh means. At the gurdwara, Punjabi is the language used, both in casual conversation, as well as for the signing of hymns. The Tabla and the Harmonium fill the room with the sounds of ‘traditional’ Punjabi music, while the smells of Punjabi food drift up from the langar hall in the basement. Children are not just being exposed to Sikh religious and cultural practices; they are being submerged in it. In addition, classes on Friday nights introduce Sikh youth to reading Gurmukhi, the sacred script of Sikhism, and music lessons are held immediately following Langar every Sunday. Children play music and sing hymns regularly during Sunday services, as well. “We want to have our children very involved in the gurdwara,” Harinder explained to me one Sunday morning, as we drank tea and snacked on sweets before the services started. “It is important that they are part of it at every level.”

Finally, the opening of the Gurdwara Sahib Singh Sabha comes at a time where Sikhs all over the United States are attempting to educate their neighbors about what Sikhism is. This campaign began in the days following the attacks on the World Trade Center, and the Pentagon, by Islamic extremists. Sikhs have been the unfortunate target of hate crimes in the US, as well as is Great Britain, the result of a general misunderstanding of who they are. Hall (2002:206) writes, “rooted in a racialization of global terrorism…The ‘war on terrorism’ has produced its own form of terror in the lives of those, likes Sikhs, who have been implicated however mistakenly as ‘other.’”

Because of the long beards and turbans, many Sikh men have been harassed by Americans who see similarities between their outward signs of faith, and pictures of
Osama bin Laden that dominated the news in the days and weeks following Sept. 11th, 2001. Many Sikhs I talked to describe being called ‘Osama’ by passers-by, or having obscene gestures displayed in their directions by people who mistook them for Muslims. In Ohio, a gurdwara was attacked with Molotov Cocktails on the night of Sept. 11th, while three days later, Balbir Singh Sodhi, a Sikh gas station owner in Arizona was shot three times, and killed, while planting flowers in front of his business (Singh, 2002). While the murder of Sodhi was by far the most extreme case of hate crimes directed at Sikhs, the fear of such a thing happening to any member of the community was real.

In Kalamazoo, signs at a Sikh owned gas station and convenience store appeared immediately following the attacks on the World Trade Center. Printed on basic computer paper, they read, “We Are Sikhs From India: We Believe in One God. God Bless America.” The message was clear: We are not Muslims, and we do not condone these terrorist attacks on the United States. A year later, those same signs, weathered and torn, remained taped to the gas pumps in front of the store, a painful reminder that things hadn’t gotten any better.

With the gurdwara officially opening, Sikhs able to use this space as a venue for interaction with community at large. Members of the press were invited to the Akhand Path, held mark the official opening of the temple. The next day, a full-page article, complete with pictures ran in the Kalamazoo Gazette’s ‘Faith’ section, describing the religion, and its basic tenets to a wide audience of readers in southwest Michigan. A couple of months later, when Guru Nanak’s birthday was
were invited. Also, the gurdwara paid to have 10,000 booklets printed explaining the
history of Sikhism and what Sikhs believed, to be passed out to houses in the
neighborhood surrounding the new gurdwara. Booklets were also placed in businesses
owned by members of the gurdwara, for interested customers. When I mentioned
wanting some to pass out in a class I was teaching, one hundred copies were given to
me before I left the gurdwara that day.

Before the gurdwara opened, the Sikhs of Kalamazoo had rented a Masonic
Temple once a month to hold religious services. Before that, it had been a conference
room at a local hotel. At one point, they had even held services in the living room of
someone’s house. Similarly, tabla and harmonium lessons were once held at the house
of one of the members of the local Sikh community. While all of these activities
contributed to the construction of a diasporic identity for those involved, it was not
until the opening of the gurdwara, which lent previously unavailable legitimacy in the
eyes of the larger non-Sikh community of Kalamazoo, that the Sikhs had gained the
cultural leverage to command press attention and use their new found status as a
recognized religious community to speak to issues of misunderstanding. It was the
gurdwara itself which linked American understanding of religious practice to Sikh
practices of religion, creating a new space within which Sikhs in southwest Michigan
could negotiate their own place within the South Asian diaspora.

“'It means ‘Guru’s Place’, but we only write ‘Sikh temple.’” Tejinder had been
telling me something much larger than I was aware of that day. The simplicity of the
words "Sikh Temple" had within them power to separate, and the ability to distance. People who came to this building every Sunday were different from other religious groups. "Sikh Temple", as written on the sign, provided religious, and by extension cultural and ethnic distance from other Indian groups, such as Hindus and Muslims. "Sikh Temple" was a counter to Hindutva discourse, and a reaction to anti-Islamic actions on the part of frightened Americans. It was, at once, both a disclaimer and a statement of autonomy.

**Conclusions**

Throughout the pages of this thesis, I have been arguing that a rethinking of the category of 'diaspora' is necessary to fully appreciate the nuances of transnational migration, community formation, and the politics of imagining an identity. I have used the Sikh case in particular, for it offers a great deal to think about, in terms of how communities can be imagined around things other than language or nation, but also how the discourse of nationalism that typifies the world in which we live can influences group imagination for those who exist without a nation geographically defined.

To discuss "South Asian" as a diasporic category is to gloss over rich diversity existing within that group. At the same time, such a category downplays tensions that lie at the heart of how groups within this category define themselves in opposition to one another. Again, the Sikh case is exemplary, for it is the religious identity of Sikhs that they feel is most threatened by political circumstance in India, and in the diaspora. Because of close linkages between religion, politics, and history for Sikhs around the
world, this perceived threat becomes central to understanding how identity is constructed.

Crucial to my critique of ‘Diaspora’ is the way in which diasporic populations are talked about from the outside. South Asian, Chinese, Armenian, Palestinian, and Jewish Diasporas are discussed as monolithic categories of people that can be mapped neatly onto geographically specific localities on the ground. In conceptualizing this link between homeland and people, we have ignored the inner politics of group identity construction, and flattened out the variety of ways in which diverse populations can imagine themselves in the world.

By approaching diasporic populations from other markers of identity, in this case religion, we can develop alternative understandings of how group identity is imagined, negotiated or translated according to historical context and political circumstance. Thus, by examining diasporic imaginings of a religious minority in southwest Michigan, in a time where their sense of security is being threatened by a variety of social and political forces, it becomes clear that cultural identity is a shifting, dynamic process of interaction with relations of power, interpretations of history, and geo-political diplomacy.

Sikhs in southwest Michigan draw upon an understanding of their own history that speaks of bravery and sacrifice, of innovation and enterprise. They position this account within a larger history of oppression at the hands of the Mughals, the British, and the modern nation state of India, and a history of harassment and discrimination in the United States, to present an image of a community that refuses to be a victim,
whose justification for action can be traced to the founder of the faith, and whose will can be found in the many martyrs and heroes throughout the ages. In every story of tragedy and violence is a story of hope, grace under fire, and a desire to press on.

While history has informed certain aspects of diasporic identity, a history of immigration policy and legislation has also been critical to the demographic profile of the diasporic community itself. British colonialism in India created a situation whereby Sikhs had motivation and opportunity to leave India for other parts of the British Empire. At the same time, Anti-Asian sentiment in Canada and the United States during the early part of the twentieth century limited the opportunities available to those who were willing to venture to the west coast of North America. As labor needs changed in the US, immigration laws were adjusted to allow for professionally educated South Asians to immigrate, and to bring over family members, changing the make-up of Indian communities throughout the United States.

For Sikhs in and around Kalamazoo, most of whom moved to this area as part of the post-1965 wave of immigration, the community’s roots are still being established. In an Indian community that has been growing increasingly each year, Sikhs are representing small percentages of that community annually. Coupled with the fragile state of Sikh allegiance to India following the events of 1984, and the ensuing struggle for an independent Khalistan, Sikhs do not feel integrated into that larger South Asian diasporic community, instead seeing themselves as a distinct segment, a part, yet apart. This can be seen in the limited involvement with the Kalamazoo Indian Association, and the complete absence of Sikh activity at the Indo-
American Cultural Center in Portage. Instead, Sikhs have recently opened their own house of worship, an act that creates a space for Sikhs to act out their own conceptions of diasporic identity, an identity that reflects the unique position of Sikhism within Indian society, as well as in the larger context of Indian transnational migration.

At the same time, political events and social prejudices brought to the surface of American social life have left the Sikh community feeling threatened in an altogether new way. Anti-Muslim hostility following the Sept. 11th attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon have created a situation where Sikhs have been the target of harassment and hate crime, due to appearances and misconceptions. Recent developments between the US and Iraq have worsened what was already a particularly bad scenario. The gurdwara provides the Sikh community with a diasporic space from which to call attention to their plight. It provides, on the surface, a legitimacy to the unique place that Sikhs see themselves as always existing, a visibility that the Kalamazoo Sikh community had until recently been denied.

In the end, understanding the construction of diasporic identity requires recognition of new and creative ways that communities can be imagined, and the manner in which diasporic space can be redefined in terms of those imaginings. While discourses of nationalism and nationality define how governments deal with issues of immigration, we, as anthropologists, need to think of diasporic communities as communities of discourse, communities who define and redefine themselves according to shifts in the power relations that exist in diasporic spaces. As the Sikh case in
Kalamazoo, Michigan indicates, those shifts in power relations need only to be slight in order to make enough room for a minority community to express itself. Sometimes, as is the situation in Kalamazoo, those relations of power are being defined outside of the community, by historical circumstances that are beyond the control of everyone, but can lead to changes, both positive and negative for those groups who are affected. When talking with me about the events of Sept. 11th, 2001, Dr. Amarjit Singh, from the Khalistan Affairs Centre in Washington D.C., expressed amazement at how Sikhs around the country mobilized to educate others about their faith. As he explained, “out of so much tragedy came a blessing. Americans now know more about Sikhism than they ever did.”
Appendix A

Approval Letter From the Human Subjects
Institutional Review Board
Date: February 11, 2003

To: Robert Ulin, Principal Investigator
    Rory McCarthy, Student Investigator for thesis

From: Mary Lagerwey, Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number: 02-08-29

This letter will serve as confirmation that the changes to your research project “Understanding Ethno-Nationalism: Sikh Diasporic Imaginings in Southwest Michigan” requested in your memo dated February 7, 2003 have been approved by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board.

The conditions and the duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: September 5, 2003
Appendix B

Approval Letter for Changes to Protocol
From the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board
Date: February 11, 2003

To: Robert Ulin, Principal Investigator
Rory McCarthy, Student Investigator for thesis

From: Mary Lagerwey, Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number: 02-08-29
This letter will serve as confirmation that the changes to your research project “Understanding Ethno-Nationalism: Sikh Diasporic Imaginings in Southwest Michigan” requested in your memo dated February 7, 2003 have been approved by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board.

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The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: September 5, 2003
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