

PUNJAB RESEARCH GROUP

27-28 June 2014,
Coventry University, Jaguar Graduate Centre, CV1 5DL
Lecture Theatre JAG152

ABSTRACTS

Session 1 Friday 27 June, 11-1pm

One hundred years of remembering: The 'Komagata Maru' and Punjabi migration to Canada, 1914-2014

Anne Murphy (University of British Columbia, Canada)

This paper will explore a single event and how the representation and remembrance of it reflects the development of the Punjabi Diasporic community of British Columbia, Canada, and diversity in Canada overall. The event in question is known as "the Komagata Maru Incident," named for a ship that was the centre of controversy in 1914 when it arrived in the port of Vancouver bearing 376 would-be immigrants to Canada from British India. All but 20 of the passengers on the ship were disallowed from entering Canada under three orders-in-council passed by the Dominion Government that amended Canada's Immigration Act, as a part of a broader move against Asian immigration in the period. The paper focuses on three theatrical representations of the event: "The Komagata Maru Incident" by Sharon Pollock (1976; in English), "The Komagata Maru" by Ajmer Rode (1984; in Punjabi) and "*Samūḍarī sher nāl takkar*" or "Conflict with the Sea Lion," co-authored by Sukhwant Hundal and Sadhu Binning (1989; in Punjabi). Pollock's *The Komagata Maru Incident* has become a classic work in the canon of Canadian theatre; in it, the playwright challenged comfortable assumptions about the country's history at a time when such reexamination was coming to the fore. The works by Hundal/Binning and Rode represent foundational Punjabi-language efforts to remember this troubled past and bring it into the experience of an also sometimes troubled present, expressing ongoing experiences of racism as well as transitions occurring in the Canadian cultural landscape. The plays act as a lens through which we can see how memory produces the present, and how the past creates possibilities for creative engagement with the present and future.

Ghadr Politics: Issues of Transterritoriality and Multiple Identities

Iftikhar H. Malik (Bath Spa University)

Following the installation of BJP-led Modi's government in India amidst unparalleled Hindutva fervour and an accent on so-called majoritarianism all across South Asia and elsewhere, it is instructive to relocate Ghadr's plural activism on its first centenary. Amidst the high politics of nationalism with its fluid and even fraught boundaries, trajectories such as Ghadr either get forgotten or invoke a cursory reference in a few solitary and essentially academic voices. It is partly due to reading history backward or selectively where nation state is essentialised as an infallible *avatar* voicing *Pakistan, Bharat Varsha, Dravidistan, Khalistan, Sonar Bangla, Sindhu Desh* or *Pushtunistan* where cultural identification, justified by a historicised territorial and lingual separatism, assumes a hegemonic and even superarching discourse. In the process, mutualities of all types are conveniently ignored. However, one cannot be irreverent towards unitary and larger discourses either where class, caste, gender, ethnic and creedal pluralities were often sacrificed for the sake of one monolithic and no less romanticised embodiment out of genuine fears of 'balkanisation'. In that sense, Punjab, one of the most plural and innovative

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regions, is posited either as an abode of supra-communal Punjabi-ness, or conversely, is viewed typifying segmentary and fragmentary strands.

The Ghadr was an experience, which like the Irish (Republicans!), Chinese (Sun Yat-sen's nationalists) and Egyptians of the time (Arab nationalists) sought liberation by building itself in Diaspora. Seeking nationalist ethos of romantic variety without its latent fascist manifestations, Ghadrites came from all kinds of communities, classes and creeds but strove for a common and self-respecting free India. It happened at a time when the Indian National Congress, All-India Muslim League—more like Tagore and Iqbal—celebrated their own visions of a *historic, humane, diverse, all encompassing and sovereign India*. With most of its members coming from Punjab, it steered aloof from parochial and communal hazards though the issues of print capital, distance from home, discretionary immigration laws and espionage—so familiar in recent times—posed major roadblocks. Other than periodic publications, public relationing in North America, linkages with Hindustani Diaspora in Asia and in the Sub-continent engendered opportunities as well as anxieties. The Komagata Maru tragedy of 1914, sedition trials in Lahore, Rangoon, San Francisco and elsewhere dampened down the fervour, which, at one level formed interface with the Japanese (through Barkatullah) and Silk Handkerchief Movement in Afghanistan. The Khilafat and Hijrat tried to absorb several Muslim activists {like in recent times!} who, in many cases, ended up in British jails, or in Turkey fighting the Allies. Their exposure to realities in the Near East eventually allowed them to accept Kemal's regenerative reforms while back home some of them took to party politics. Har Dayal and Lajpat Rai pursued politics through “different means” still preoccupied with the quest for *Punjabi/Indian* identity and many Khilafatists joined Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, or themselves founded parties such as the Red Shirts, Ahrars and others. They did not have the finite answer nor did the nationalists of the 1920s, though fascism of Japanese and European varieties did baffle them. By that time, the electoral politics based on numbers (of constituencies, constituents, communities and cabinets) only aggravated the inter-party dissensions causing schisms across an idealized, unitary India of Tagore-Iqbal, Azad-Gandhi praxis. Maybe, Subhas Chandra Bose sought to revive Ghadr model in his own way! It is time to look at the Ghadrites neither merely in nostalgia, nor as a proletarian Jihad from abroad but a substantive and perhaps the only such effort that could have and did forewarn everyone of impending volatility.

Framing Memories of 1984: Changing Political Discourses and Advocacy among Diaspora Sikhs

Shinder S. Thandi, Coventry University

The crushing of the militant movement in Punjab in the early 1990s and banning of the two most active Sikh political groups in the diaspora – *International Sikh Youth Federation* and *Babbar Khalsa* – led to serious introspection by Sikh militant groups. Being aware of their political marginalization, both within the Sikh community and international organizations, the militant movement re-invented itself through using the following strategies and mechanisms: *brokerage* (the linking of disparate networks), *strategic framing* (the use of symbolic politics), *coalition-building* (by forging alliances between organizations), and *social learning or mediated-diffusion* (adoption of new ideas and practices). The central objective appeared to be to construct a strategic frame with a view to mobilizing (a) wider sections of Sikhs; (b) lobbying UK/USA governments and mainstream communities and (c) the international community, under the broader agenda of harmonious community relations, citizenship and human rights – with focus largely on adopting a liberal human rights based frame. In the UK, a vigorous campaign, aided by the emergence of two Sikh satellite channels, All Party Parliamentary Group of Sikhs and *Kesri Lehar*, the latter a new movement to lend support to freeing of long-time Indian prisoners, Davinder Pal Singh Bhullar and Balwant Singh Rajoana, culminated in two historic debates in British Parliament within the last year: firstly the debate on abolition of the death penalty in India and secondly a debate on the British Sikh community.

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This paper will focus largely on the “strategic framing” element of mobilization strategies, especially the development of an overarching frame around events of 1984. This entails consideration of re-alignments among existing Sikh political organizations and actors, emergence of new groups, nature of new mobilization strategies in the UK and USA and their link to UK/USA domestic politics. This paper also explores the different frames through which the memories of 1984 continue to be viewed by diaspora communities and through linking these different frames or via frame-alignment – that is, frames corresponding to three distinct time-periods: from 1978 to events leading to Operation Bluestar in 1984; the Militancy or Khalistan movement period (1984-1992) and post 1992 period - an overarching frame around 1984 began to be created. The recent “Freedom Rally” in Trafalgar Square, to mark the 30th anniversary of Operation Bluestar and Sikh killings in Delhi, was very much a reflection of this emergent overarching frame.

Session 2 Friday 27 June, 2-3:30 pm

Memorializing and recoding the Past by Punjabi Dalits: Memory-History interface in the autobiography of Gurdas Singh Gharu

Rajkumar Hans (MSU Baroda, India)

Gurdas Singh Gharu (b. 1923), elder brother of the celebrated revolutionary poet Sant Ram Udasi, has been the most neglected writer of about 10 books in the Punjabi literary world. His autobiography *Pagdandian ton Jeevan Marg tak* (2000) stands out among Dalit self expressions for highlighting the role of memory in recording the pasts of the marginalized. His keen interest as a child to listen to his grandfathers' historical narratives from their own memories resulted in recording not only the family history but history of the Punjab in general. His Ranghreta Mazhabi family's Sikhi tradition goes back to the second half of the seventeenth century. Two of his great-grandfathers, viz. Jota Singh and Jetha Singh were 'martyred' in the battle with the Mughal army while crossing the Sirsa River. The family remained Khalsa throughout and one of his grandfathers Baba Chet Singh was the commander of 1400 strong cavalry of the Bhangi Misl. Chet Singh's younger brother, Kahla Singh, was a writer of multiple languages and launched a movement for Gurmukhi teaching in the 19th century Malwa region. His elder grandfather Sarmukh Singh was part of the freedom struggle while younger Baba Bhagat Singh was an ardent Kuka. The family has kept up a continuous tradition of activism in the Sikh, Kuka, leftist and national movement. But being Dalits they have also been written off from the pages of established histories. I would address the role the memory plays for Dalits to enter into history and the perpetual problem of neglect by the hegemonic discourses.

Pind, Poetics, Politics: Rural Nostalgia, Jat Memory, and the Disconsolate Present

Nicola Mooney (University of the Fraser Valley, Canada)

The Punjabi village is a site of profound and proliferating nostalgia. The pind is celebrated across a wide range of literary, musical, and visual representations, captured in material fragments of village life that circulate and are ritually consumed across the Punjabi diaspora, reconstructed and lamented in the newly imagined folklores of music videos, tourist havelis, farmstays, and blogposts, even as its contours are still transmitted in the daily praxis of food, dress, and other habits of the body, as well as in both discourse and narrative in the village and beyond. In this paper, I survey the poetics and politics of this rural nostalgia in relation to the shifting agricultural ecology and political economy of the pind, the social forces of development, regional modernity, urbanization, transnationalism, and postcoloniality, and, the affective experiences of village émigrés. Via this examination, I demonstrate that communal village memory (Connerton 1989) is interrupted by modernity, and particularly migration; that the rural is reconstructed in this context as lieu de mémoire amid and against its erasure as

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milieu de mémoire (Nora 1989); and that these processes engage both nostalgia as homesickness (Boym 2001) and the critique of counter-memory (Foucault 1977). I suggest that the pind is especially important for Jat Sikhs, the predominant farmers and landlords of the region. For urban and transnational Jats in particular, the rural imaginary (Mooney 2011) represents an idyllic time and place, premodern and authentic, in which they remain autochthonous and uncolonized; as such, the rural landscape evokes the possibility of an imagined sovereignty amid the unsettling experiences of modernity. I argue that the romanticization of village life and landed identities among farmers who no longer farm is variously a reiteration of tradition in modernity, a technique of diasporic re-emplacement, a refusal of marginality, a claim to uninterrupted sovereignty, and a recognition of the impossibility of return.

Class, communalism and friendship in memories of Partition in Potohar

Anandi Ramamurthy (University of Central Lancashire)

This paper will explore oral history narratives that I conducted in Potohar, Pakistan during 2005 and 2006. In diversifying the narrative of Partition there has been a recent interest in stories of friendship and comradeship. These stories from Potohar also highlight these narratives. However, in recording these stories, I also asked individuals about what life was like in Pre Partition Punjab, these social history narratives highlight the importance of one aspect of Partition that is little discussed at present in relation to the partition of Punjab – class dynamics that were manifested in religious hierarchies in Pre-partition Punjab. This paper will attempt to integrate these memories into the narratives of both communalism and friendship that I have collected.

Session 3 Friday 27 June, 3:45-5:15 pm

Beyond 'ideal' types: Labour relations in the canal colonies

Muhammad Ali Jan (University of Oxford)

Too often the literature on Indian rural labour relations during colonial rule presents a stereotypical view of these being determined by some 'feudal', 'semi-feudal' or 'pre-capitalist' logic. Such a view ignores the fact that there is no 'pure' model of capitalist development and that in rural social formations capitalist relations can take a wide variety of forms depending on a large array of factors. This paper argues how rural labour relations in the canal colonies were complex and took many different forms that were by no means a product of some 'feudal' logic but definitely influenced by Punjab's incorporation into international capitalist circuits of accumulation. However, the shape of rural labour relations (especially share-cropping) were by no means simply determined by International markets but the outcome of various local factors that had to do with migration trends, local land size, the state of technology, the availability of capital and the size of family labour. Using these factors it shows how we can explain both the rise of share-cropping in the area as well as its eventual demise.

A Discourse on the History of Faisalabad, 1947-1961

Muhammad Abrar Ahmad (University of the Punjab, Lahore)

The general trends in the historiography of Pakistan had been to analyze the national or regional history until the new trends in the Pakistan historiography were set in by Ian Talbot and Sarah Ansari etc, to dig out the local history of Pakistan. This paper intends to explore literature on the local history of Faisalabad by throwing light on the history of the city. It lays

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special emphasis on the process of migration, bloodshed, resettlement, and the factors, actors which contributed in making Faisalabad as modern and developed industrial city of Pakistan. Faisalabad has emerged not only as the third largest city population wise, but also the most rapidly industrially and economically developed city in a very short span of time as compared to other cities of Pakistan. The city has shown almost identical industrial growth since the creation of Pakistan in 1947, therefore it was considered as the Manchester of Pakistan. It experienced an industrial revolution that altogether changed the social, cultural, economic and political life of the people of Faisalabad, Punjab and Pakistan. Though Imran Ali, Pippa Virdee and a few others have touched on the socioeconomic and political history of Faisalabad, still the social history of Faisalabad in the twentieth century deserves special attention from the historians. This paper will highlight that there is a research-gap in the historical writings in the social and economic history of Pakistan.

'The Informality of Formal Tax Collection in Pakistani Punjab'

Mujtaba Piracha and Mick Moore (University of Sussex, Brighton)

The paper is based on an immersive, ethnographic investigation of property tax collection in Pakistan. The system is driven by incentives, intra-organisational relationships and institutional logics that an outsider could not be expected to understand or predict. It produces very little revenue, but functions as a vehicle for providing secure and pensionable jobs for the lower level staff of the collection agency. Their livelihoods are to a significant degree funded informally through shadow local financial arrangements. Some of the revenues that should go to the public treasury are used not only to supplement staff salaries, but also to hire additional informal staff and to cover routine operational costs. The relationships between different levels of the formal tax bureaucracy are virtually defined by the hoarding and manipulation of information about actual and potential tax liabilities and collections. Through their control of information, lower level staff are able to buffer and ultimately thwart demands from above for increased collections. Many attempts at piecemeal reforms have failed in the past and are likely to fail again. We conclude that, to be successful, reform should be relatively systemic. Based on our analysis some ingredients of reform are enumerated.

Session 4 Saturday 28 June, 10-11:30 am

Literary Culture of Nineteenth Century British Lahore and Anjuman-i-Punjab

Tahir Kamran (University of Cambridge)

After 1857, Punjab assumed extraordinary significance not only in a strategic sense but culturally too. Urdu was introduced as a vernacular primarily for administrative reasons but later on Lahore was the locus of literary activities which had lasting impact on the future course of Urdu literature. This study focuses on three migrant laureates G. W. Leitner, Muhammad Hussain Azad and Altaf Hussain Hali, underscoring their contribution for ushering in Oriental learning and particularly Urdu literature into an era of modernity. They not only introduced fresh themes of poetry but also new forms of poetic expression. Similarly the institution of Anjuman-i-Punjab and its role in the cultural development of the city is yet another subject that this study brings out. Establishment of such institutions like Oriental College and the University of Punjab became possible only because of Anjuman-i-Punjab's endeavours. A series of Mushairas, held under the auspices of Anjuman and the impact these Mushairas had, on the literary trends, has also been teased out.

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Campaigning for Punjabi in Sahiwal

Virinder Kalra (University of Manchester) and Waqas Butt (Independent Scholar)

This paper is a report back on the seminar: 'The needs and importance of the Punjabi language movement in a globalising world' and the associated Punjabi *mela* which took place in Sahiwal in mid-April, 2014. These two events asserted the basic campaigning slogans that have underpinned the Punjabi language movement in West Punjab; that of mother tongue teaching as a basic human right and the status needed for Punjabi in order for there to be development amongst the rural and urban poor. In addition to the seminar a harvest festival to mark the beginning of the wheat threshing season was also organised by Punjab Lok Lehar, a third sector organisation, that has campaigned for the Punjabi language in Sahiwal. This involved traditional artisans displaying their wares as well as a Punjabi *mushaira* and music. This report will also highlight the contribution of speakers to the seminar and the mela, highlighting the salient points made in favour of the introduction of Punjabi at primary school level in West Punjab.

Punjabi Students under Siege of the English Language

Neelam Hanif (Forman Christian College, Pakistan)

In an English as a second language pre-university course in Pakistan, I deal predominantly with native Punjabi speakers. Most, if not all, of these students are from a rural background and speak Punjabi as their first or native language (L1), but when they are admitted to an English medium university based on a American model of a liberal arts college, they are faced with the huge task of learning English at a very fast pace so that they would be on par with their fluent English speaking fellow students. Over the course of teaching in this course, I have noticed several psychological, social and academic issues that these students face. In this paper, I will interview a sample of those students and try to determine how the change of the medium of communication from Punjabi to English affects their psychological, social and academic performance in a university setting. In addition, how do they relate these issues with the ongoing development of their ethnic identity.

Session 5 Saturday 28 June, 11:45-1:30 pm

Portraying The Divine: Reflections Of Sikhi In Visual Culture

Jasleen Kandhari (University of Oxford)

Portraiture is the predominant theme in Sikh art yet this is a genre of art history that has not been researched extensively whilst portraiture in other South Asian art historical traditions such as the Mughal and Rajput courts has been studied in depth. This paper shall explore the relationship between art and religion in Sikhism and how the core beliefs of Sikhism are portrayed through the representation of the Gurus of the Sikh faith. Based on analysis of historical miniature and provincial paintings in illustrated manuscripts such as the visual narratives of the Janamsakhis - the hagiographical accounts of the life of the first Guru of the Sikh faith, Guru Nanak dev ji, the iconography of the Sikh Gurus shall be explored. Emphasis will be placed on depictions of the first Sikh guru and how the development of his portrait by the Sikh modern art master, Sobha Singh has influenced contemporary representations.

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Gurdwaras in Rawalpindi: A Historical Analysis

Rahat Zubair Malik (Quaid-i-Azam University)

Rich in its cultural heritage, Punjab also enshrines a vibrant religious heritage as people of different religions had been living together in this region for centuries. Sikhism is one of the religions which blossomed here. Although this religion spread through the other regions of the subcontinent, this part of Punjab served as its strong base during its earlier period. The Sikhs established their rule after the collapse of Mughal Rule in this region. Sikh religion and their rule in Punjab is evidence of the long story of their struggle against the Mughals, and later against the British forces. Consequently, this region contains both the rich heritage of Punjab in general and that of Sikhs in particular. This not only helps us understand their culture, but at the same time it is symbol of Sikh majesty. And within this heritage, the Gurdwaras are a very important feature of Sikh 'golden' memories.

There exists a huge number of Gurdwaras in West Punjab including the district of Rawalpindi. Five prominent Gurdwaras in Rawalpindi speak loudly of their glory. All were constructed in different Sikh phases and seem quite different in their architecture and design. They are i) Gurudwara Bhai Mani Singh, ii) Gurdwara Nirankari, iii) Gurdwara Singh Sabha, iv) Gurdwara Chhevin Pathshahi (Damhial), and v) Gurdwara Chhevin Pathshahi (Narali). To date none of them have either been documented in any archaeological survey or have been studied. Given their particular structure and settings, all these Gurdwaras have their own particular significance. Since they were built in time period of different Gurus, they may help us understand the ideals of those phases of Sikh history. Gurdwaras are not only places of worship, but they also provide a central place for social activities, especially for those related to religious practices. Importantly, at present the majority of them are being used as government schools. The study plans to investigate the architecture of these Gurdwaras, their historical and cultural significance along with the factors that later led the government in Pakistan to convert them in government schools or centres of education.

Family memories, calls and visits: transnational kinship through young people's eyes

Kaveri Qureshi, (Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Oxford)

This paper, based on research carried out in the West Midlands and London in 2009-10, considers young so-called 'second generation' British Punjabis' perspectives on transnational kinship. It examines the forms of family memories that have been passed down to them concerning their relatives in Punjab, their personal knowledge of them and how this is produced through calls and visits. Although young people can narrate family stories about their relatives in Punjab, they speak of their awkwardness and embarrassment at being put to talk to them on the phone, and of the emotional distance they feel when they come face-to-face. The paper argues that recent work on 'mediated relationships' needs to be tempered by an exploration of family and personal memories.

Session 6 Saturday 28 June, 2:00 -3:30 pm

Pakistan-a pluralistic state? An analysis of Pakistan's Punjabi Christians

Anita Mir (Independent Scholar)

The Christian narrative in the sub-continent begins some five hundred years ago. Pakistani Christians will often refer to themselves as *Masih qom*/ people of the Messiah, where the term *qom*/people signifies both a religious and ethnic identity. And yet, the majority of Pakistani Christians are ethnic Punjabis and this identity is particularly strong. The Punjab is not only home to the large swell of Pakistani Christians, it is also where a great number of Islamic right-wing groups are based. Since the promulgation of the 1986 Blasphemy Law, which carries the

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death penalty for blasphemy against the Qur'an or the Prophet, religious minorities have been targeted again and again, often with political intent. This paper will examine the situation of Pakistan's Christians and instead of arguing all that is required is that Pakistan's regressive Islamic laws and practices be repealed and changed, I will be arguing from an ideal position that Pakistan becomes a pluralistic state.

Filming "Beggars of Lahore"- A Reflexive critique

Sheba Saeed (University of Birmingham and Visiting fellow at LSE)

As someone belonging to the Pakistani diaspora in Britain, I regard myself to some extent as a postcolonial, ethnic, perhaps, diasporic filmmaker and my film as it unfolds highlights many traits of films belonging to an accented cinema often belonging to diasporic filmmakers. "Beggars of Lahore" was first shot in the Summer of 2005, although re-edited and distributed much later, the production of the film is nearing a decade. On reflection, many years after first shooting this documentary, I will engage in a critique of how my identity of diasporic Punjabi origins brings about accented features that arise within this film. When I first witnessed the begging phenomenon, I suffered a culture shock and I now believe I saw it from a perspective that was very much from a touristic gaze where I was not able to understand the phenomenon as I was overwhelmed. My perspective, in terms of the way I was seeing this phenomenon (Berger), changed as I began to conduct my research in the field. It arose from a more profound relationship through a deeper connection with Lahore, which is the birthplace of my Father, and it is this aspect that I will explore further in my paper.