

PRG CONFERENCE ABSTRACTS, OCTOBER 2016

Session I Colonial Punjab: Multiple Facets

Chair: Prof. Iftikhar Malik, Bath Spa University

The Martial Race Theory & The Self-Identification of Sikh Soldiers in World War One

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The 'martial race theory' was a nineteenth century ideology based on an imperial conviction that 'races' such as the Highlanders, Gurkhas, Punjabi Muslims and Sikhs from Punjab were inherently 'martial'. Sixty per cent of combatant troops recruited in India between August 1914 and November 1918, came from Punjab. Yet how they defined themselves in accordance with the identity they were recruited for is largely understudied. This thesis draws on 'new military history' approaches to interrogate the impact the theory had on the way Sikh soldiers defined themselves during World War One. I argue that the martial race theory was inherently situational as it emerged in a specific imperial context. The theory's contextual nature was then reflected in Sikh soldiers' experiences, particularly in the letters written to families. It is argued that, aside from a prescribed martial identity, Sikh soldiers' were negotiating multiple identities that were determined by immediate circumstantial factors as well as wider value systems that transcended the war front. Using letters written by soldiers during WW1, this thesis attempts to make a contribution to the broader historiography of the new military history, by humanising Sikh soldiers' experiences in World War One.

Mule-breeding in Colonial Punjab: A Frustrated Enterprise

Prof. William G. Clarence-Smith, SOAS, University of London

Mules were fundamental to British military power in South Asia, and the Punjab was central to breeding them. The nineteenth-century development of the 'screw gun', broken up into half a dozen pieces, made mules essential for artillery forces in dry and mountainous terrain. Moreover, Lord Roberts standardized logistics around this hardy animal. Mules became crucial to Britain's 'pacification' of the Northwest Frontier, and were widely utilized elsewhere in the subcontinent. They also accompanied Indian troops deployed in overseas campaigns. As a sterile hybrid of jack donkeys and mares, mules could only exist in any numbers as the result of intentional human action. The British selected the Punjab as the main breeding zone, but with no more than indifferent success. Hindus, and to a lesser extent Muslims, objected to producing these hybrids, although Sikh reactions remain unclear. Problems occurred with obtaining suitable jack donkeys. Rivalries between different arms of the British forces undermined the impact of 'canal colonies'. Some mules were even illegally

sold across the frontier to the Afghan enemy. In consequence, British India continued to import mules until the end of the Raj, by both sea and land.

Charhdee Kala: Akali Morchas, Indian Nationalism, and the Politics of Selfhood

Avinash Singh, Independent Researcher

This paper places the events of the Gurdwara Reform Movement, 1920 to 1925, within the rubric of the anti-colonial struggle and delineates its consequences for Sikh political identity in colonial Punjab. My analysis seeks to answer how the encounter between Sikh activists (Akalis) and the colonial regime reflected the evolving terms of engagement in the nationalist movement. How did the protest for Gurdwara Reform distill both colonial concepts of religiosity, governance, and political identity for the Sikhs, and set the stage for emergent nationalist concepts of sovereignty?

Yet, any genealogy of Sikh politics must be apprehended as the product of imbricated historical processes that include the Indian body politic in the colonial era. Thus, no assessment of the Gurdwara Reform Movement's impact is complete without a consideration of the interactions between nationalist leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi, and the Sikhs. The contest between the Akalis and the colonial government suggests a more capacious understanding of political agency and Sikh religious identity that is not simply rooted in theological Sikhism but is subject to the vagaries of the historical era, politically, culturally, socially, and economically.

Session II Cultures: Material and Literary

Chair: Prof. Eleanor Nesbitt, Professor Emerita, University of Warwick

Sikh Interpretations of the Mughal Shalamar Garden in Lahore

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Shalamar Bagh, Lahore laid out by the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan in 1636 has inspired countless gardens subsequently commissioned within and beyond the subcontinent. Admired for its *chahar-bagh* layout, its exquisite marble pavilions as well as *khyaban* (walkways), *anhar* (waterways) and *fawwara-afshan* (water girandoles), this phenomenal garden has also been featured as the paradisiacal setting on earth in countless poems, stories and paintings. As Lahore came under Sikh rule in the nineteenth century, Shalamar Bagh became Maharaja Ranjit Singh's favorite haunt. Although he physically appropriated Mughal spaces in the Punjab, especially in Lahore, he disassociated himself from the power semiotics propounded by them. Known to have refused to hold his court in the *Diwan-e-Aam* (public audience hall),

he built his own pavilion for the purpose now known as the *Ath Dara* within the Lahore fort. But in case of the Shalamar Bagh, he not only frequently visited it, he is recorded to have asked the “Shehla Bagh” plan to be followed in the Ram Bagh, a garden he commissioned in Amritsar.

This paper critically studies the physical spaces of the Mughal and Sikh gardens and investigates the extent of Shalamar’s imaginative deployed in the Ram Bagh. It also investigates how Ranjit Singh dealt with the Mughal metaphor of “*bihisht*” or the Quranic “*jannah*” (paradise) reflected in their gardens. In the same vein, in place of the mythical kings like Solomon, Alexander, Naushirwan and Faridun that Jahangir and Shah Jahan hoped to surpass in magnificence and referred to in their architectural inscriptions, what was the Sikh Maharaja’s Weltanschauung? Was there a different set of visual hermeneutics he employed to claim supremacy and legitimate his rule in the Punjab? If yes, does this help us better understand the Sikh Maharaja?

250 Years of Heer Waris Shah and Punjabi Identity

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Waris Shah (1722-1798) completed his legendary epic in 1766 in Sahiwal (West Punjab; now Pakistan). Before Waris Shah, the Qissa of Heer was beckoned in the poetry of Shah Hussain, Bhai Gurdas, Peelo and Hafiz Barkhurdar. The first Punjabi version is believed to be compiled by Haridas Harya (circa 1525). Then Damodar Gulati, Ahmad Gujar, Cherag Awan, Mansa Ram Khushabi and Shahjahan Maqbal produced their versions of this love legend. However, Warish Shah’s composed epic is the most popular and common unifying thread among all castes and religions of the land of five rivers. The idea of Punjabiness has become synonymous with the shared ownership of the Heer’s story. Waris Shah belongs to the Nanak-o-Farid, Farid-o-Nanak tradition of the Punjab where religious identity remains unannounced and dormant. Throughout his epic Waris Shah invokes Hindu mythology and Baba Nanak with the same ease and love that he exhibits while quoting Quranic verses. This paper details poetic dimensions of Heer Waris Shah as well as history of the literary excesses and poetic corruption carried out in his name since arrival of the printing press in the Punjab. This Paper also explains how Waris Shah’s Heer helps us understand Past, Present and Future of the Punjab as well as aspects of pre-colonial Punjabi identity.

Political Consciousness of Punjabi Poetry of the post-1990s

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This paper attempts to trace the political consciousness of Punjabi poetry in the post-90s, in terms of its departure and difference from the progressive poetry of the 1960s and 1970s when leftist resistance movements were at their peak. Given the liberalization of India, militancy in Punjab, stalled economic development in the state and debates on the subaltern which shape contemporary creative thinking at the very

level of the unconscious, the very co-ordinates of political as well as poetical imagination have undergone a paradigmatic shift in the post-90s. The discourse of resistance continues, but it takes different routes. I track its different representations in poetry, from the realization of market onslaught on Punjabi culture to environmental concerns, from the absence of militant radicalism to the identity concerns represented by the Dalit and feminist poets. Examining a range of poetic voices—Lal Singh Dil, Surjit Patar, Madan Veera, Darshan Khatkad, Amarjit Chandan, Vaneeta and Manjit Tiwana—I suggest that poetry in the Punjab post-90s gravitates towards a phase wherein the conceptions of collective resistance and structural change are almost absent, thus largely affirming the postmodern trends. Given that a historically grounded awareness of the progressive movement remains at the background of the whole discussion, the paper hopes to shed light on the changing narratives of resistance, radicalism and social transformation.

Session III Postcolonial Punjab: Economic Trajectories

Chair: Dr. Navtej Purewal, Deputy Director, SOAS South Asia Institute

Landlord prerogative and refugee-rehabilitation: Mudie, Mamdot and the ministerial mess

Dr. Newal Osman, Assistant Professor, Institute of Business Administration, Karachi

This paper explores how refugee rehabilitation in West Punjab was affected by the clash between the personalities of Governor Mudie and the landlords who formed the West Punjab ministry in the immediate aftermath of the partition. Francis Mudie, a British official who had been personally requested by Jinnah to stay back as the governor of the most populous province in Pakistan, was an outspoken man with a progressive agenda of rehabilitation and reform. The Muslim League ministry, comprising mainly of politically-inexperienced, young men from prominent landowning families, had also been hand-picked by Jinnah from among those MLAs of the (united) Punjab legislature who decided to accede to Pakistan. The differences between the two parties crystallised, above all else, around the issue of refugee rehabilitation, not least because some ministers were primarily concerned with acquiring lands for themselves in lieu of those that they had had to leave behind in East Punjab. It also sheds light on how the clash of the landlords with the provincial executive - an unprecedented occurrence in the province - affected the formers attempts to reconsolidate their position, and the means that they had to resort to in order to remove the thorn from their sides.

Punjab: The Long Road to Social Protection

Nadia Singh, PhD Candidate, Oxford Brookes University

Punjab has been one of the fast growing and high per capita income regions of India since its inception in 1966. The overall levels of poverty in Punjab are very low compared to other states of India. However, the state lags behind other developed provinces in many indicators of health, education, food and nutrition. It is a highly patriarchal society with a pronounced gender bias against the girl child. Thus, Punjab is an extremely perplexing story of mismatch between levels of prosperity and outcomes of education, health and nutrition. This paradox was first explored by Singh (2008) in his seminal work on the Punjab economy. He explored the “rich but not developed” paradox, in terms of degree of industrialization and argued that by the criteria of per capita income, Punjab is in the category of richer states but if we look at the level of industrialization it falls in the category of less developed states. In the complex matrix developed in Singh’s “rich but not developed” argument if we add social indicators, the puzzle becomes even more complex as Punjab then ends up in the company of least developed states. This work aims to answer this paradox of under achievement in the social programmes and social outcomes in Punjab through a systematic exploration of social sector programmes in Punjab. The principal conclusion, which emerges is that the centrally sponsored social sector schemes, based on the targeted approach and ‘one size fits all’ are ineffective in addressing the state specific deficits. At the same time the social programmes designed by the state government are extremely limited. These need to be strengthened and in tune with the social realities of Punjab so that the province becomes a “rich and developed” state.

Merchant's Capital in Punjab's Agriculture: Reflections on Farmer-Arhtia Relations

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The role of merchant's capital in agriculture, and in South Asian agriculture specifically, has been a hotly contested terrain. Many scholars have pointed to the exploitative role played by traders and moneylenders vis-a-vis farmers. There are others, however, who argue that given the multiple markets that traders often have access to, there are also productive aspects to their work that need to be recognized. With this literature in the background, this paper seeks to explore the relations between farmers and *arhtias* in Punjab, India. *Arhtias* are commission agents in the primary wholesale markets of the state. This paper is rooted in a political economy framework and based on a year of doctoral fieldwork in a market town and nearby villages in Ludhiana district. It will focus on the role of *arhtias* across multiple crop markets both in terms of marketing and credit relations. It will also engage with the

issue and implications of farmers turning to trading activities. Through a discussion of these issues, this paper will seek to rethink the role of *arhtias* in the agrarian capitalism of the region. Moreover, it will attempt to expand the sociological understanding of economic relations in Punjab's countryside.

Session III Postcolonial Punjab: Political Trajectories

Chair: Dr. Meena Dhanda, Reader, University of Wolverhampton

The Migrant, Migrant-in-Waiting and the Non-Migrant: Diverse Trajectories of Social Mobility

Sugandha Nagpal, PhD Candidate, University of East Anglia

This study examines social mobility narratives of Ravidassia families who have remained or are left behind in a Punjabi village with a strong culture of migration. Historically, Ravidassias are an economically and politically mobile Dalit group in Punjab and have evolved a distinct caste identity through the religious Ravidassia movement. The study is situated in a predominantly Ravidassia village adjacent to Sant Sarwan Das Model School (SSDMS), an affiliate of Dera Sachkhand Ballan which is a religious site of the Ravidassia movement. Specifically, this study provides an ethnographic account of Ravidassia families' negotiations with migration, education and social institutions, as it is mediated by subjectivities of gender and class. The mapping of social mobility is carried forth at two levels. At the conceptual level, respondents' notions of caste politics, migration and education are probed. At the experiential level respondents' interactions with state institutions, political parties, religious groups, educational institutes and migrant actors are analyzed.

Pakistan and the Christians: Creating a Sense of Belonging

Dr. Yaqoob Bangash, IT University of the Punjab, Lahore

This paper traces the relationship of Punjabi Christians with the Pakistan Movement and their responses to the creation of Pakistan. It situates the Punjabi Christians within the framework of post war Punjab and the tussle between the Muslim League, Akalis and the Congress and how Christians and their representative organisations responded to the call for Pakistan. Post partition it analyses how the Christian minority in West Punjab oriented itself to become part of the evolving Pakistan dynamic. The effect of these formative years on the development of Punjabi Christians as a distinct community will also be analysed.

Authority, Apparatus and Gurudwara Administration in Postcolonial West Punjab

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The problem of minorities, particularly of the religious or racial minorities, is one of the most perplexing issues in modern states. In Pakistan, regarding Sikh community, Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (PSGPC) is the central Sikh organization similar to the SGPC in India. The PSGPC collaboratively working with the state to protect the community, to safeguard their rights, to manage affairs related to Gurdwaras; maintenance, preservations and renovation of Gurdwaras and to work for the development of the community. Although the PSGPC tried to sought out the problems of Pakistani Sikh community but the internal factionalism, as well as the harsh attitude of the Panth and SGPC are the major hurdles on its way to claiming a recognition as the legitimate represent of the Pakistani Sikhs. Although, the PSGPC leadership remained disputed and Sham Singh, the late president of committee, faced strong resentment within the community but he still managed to challenge the SGPC and take over the control of Gurdwaras with the help of Pakistan Evacuee Trust Property Board. The prime object of this paper is to appraise the desires, prerequisites, development, successes and failures of the PSGPC in regard to the community. The paper aims to explore the relation of PSGPC to the state of Pakistan and to what extent its performance and regulations are protecting Sikh community.