

EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF SUFI MUSIC FOR RECONCILIATION  
BETWEEN EAST AND WEST PUNJAB

by

Arshdeep Khaira

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# ABSTRACT

In this dissertation I explore how music can be used to assist in the process of reconciliation between the Sikhs and Muslims of East and West Punjab (respectively), who had exhibited centuries of interdependence - exemplified by the flourishing *Sikh Empire*, or *Khalsa Raj*, which encompassed the region of the *Greater* or *Historical Punjab*, including present day Kashmir, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Eastern Afghanistan (including Kabul), as well as Punjab Province Pakistan and Punjab State India. I suggest that this period of fruition was systematically disrupted and damaged by British colonialism, which ultimately led to the partition of Punjab and the creation of a national boundary on the basis of artificially construed lines of ethnic and religious demarcation. Under the illusion of independence, the Punjab Province of Pakistan, and the Punjab State of India, experienced decades of nationalist propaganda from the political centres of their respective countries, which contributed to resentment and intolerance, several drawn out wars, and the continued violent conflict that engulfs the neighbouring Kashmir region, which has a deeply rooted and profound connection to the Punjab plains. Kashmir has been historically connected to Punjab as the two regions presently border one another, but were both a part of the *Sikh Empire*. Even today, Sikh and Kashmiri groups mobilize together with the common goal of obtaining increased autonomy for their own people in their own lands. The interdependence between Sikhs and Kashmiris plays out in both non-violent political activism, including the push to implement a plebiscite referendum in both East Punjab and Kashmir, and also at times through militancy with both groups working together in efforts of armed resistance. At the national level, propaganda delivered by both countries centralized around the Kashmir conflict remains the primary antagonist against the process of reconciliation – but this research will show that a very large proportion of the Sikh and Muslim communities have turned the efforts of Hindu-Nationalist groups such as the RSS on their head, and have instead become closer to each other than they have ever been since partition. Through data collected during detailed fieldwork, including interviews and workshops with East and West Punjabis, as well as applied interventions incorporating the creation and distribution of my own music videos, I demonstrate how through the revival of the Punjabi variant of *Sufism*, primarily transmitted through the medium of *musical* exchange, Sikhs and Muslims are once again recreating a strong mutually interdependent cultural relationship with one another, which has had several positive socio-political ramifications for both groups. These include: the opening of the *Kartarpur Corridor*, a passageway for Sikhs to visit the final resting place of Guru Nanak in Pakistan's Punjab Province, as well as the annual pilgrimage of thousands of Sikhs to the many other sites of historical significance for their community in Pakistan; the recreation of *kinship* bonds between both communities; increased positive representation of women in the region in areas of *Sufi* scholarship and performance; decreases in open popular support for violence as a means to settle the conflict in Kashmir; and, increases in non-violent political mobilization to secure greater autonomy for Sikhs and Kashmiris in their own lands.

# PREFACE

This thesis is an original work by Arshdeep Khaira. No part of this thesis has been previously published.

The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board (1) at the University of Alberta:

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All photographs by Arshdeep Khaira (unless where otherwise noted).

I dedicate this work to my mom, Gurpreet, and my dad,  
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This project was undertaken under the guidance and direction of:

Supervisor:

Dr. Michael Frishkopf (University of Alberta)

Professor of Music

Adjunct Professor of Religious Studies

Adjunct Professor, Division of Community Engagement, Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry

Committee:

Dr. Regula Qureshi (University of Alberta)

Professor Emeritus of Music

Dr. Joseph Hill (University of Alberta)

Associate Professor of Anthropology

Dr. Brian Fauteux (University of Alberta)

Assistant Professor of Popular Music

Examiners:

Dr. Marcia Ostashewski (Cape Breton University / University of Alberta)

Associate Professor of Ethnomusicology – CBU

Adjunct Professor in Ethnomusicology – U of A

Dr. Jayson Beaster-Jones (University of California, Merced)

Associate Professor of Music

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## IMPORTANT LINKS

“Kashmir” – Music Video (Directed by Sandeep Sharma)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6\\_jt8RX18Lc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_jt8RX18Lc)

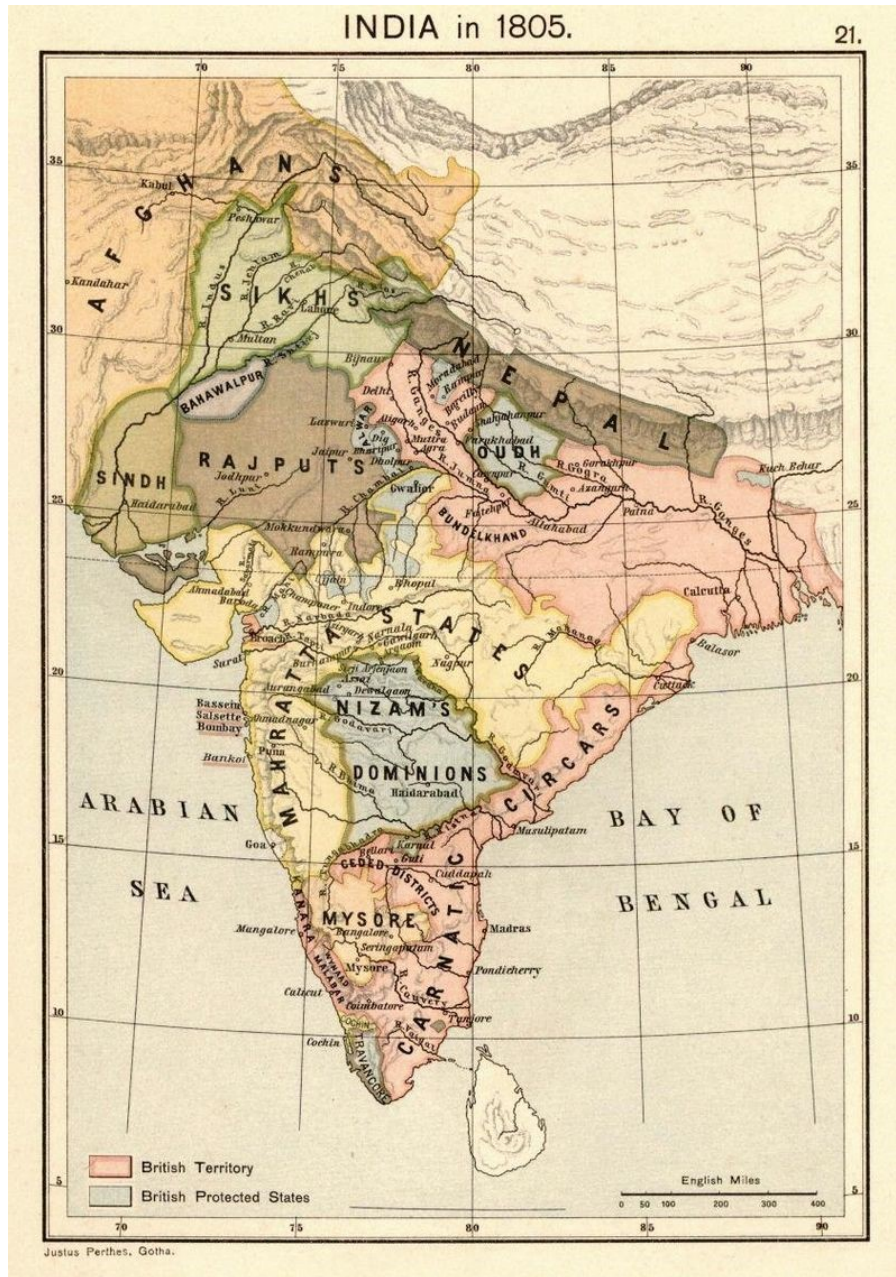
“Allah Hoo” – Music Video (Directed by Sandeep Sharma)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d8zPkDERaoc>

“Pyar” - Music Video (Directed by Sandeep Sharma)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_KATTJGqkdM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_KATTJGqkdM)

“Blood Diamonds” – Music Video (Directed by Redd Angelo)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZwQM6c33D8>

“Shama Paiyan” – Music Video (Directed by Saleed Sayed)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8r6gBs2BWUw>

# 1 INTRODUCTION TO LOCATIONS



**Figure 1-1 Map of India 1805 from: Joppen, Charles [S.J.] (1907), A Historical Atlas of India for the use of High-Schools, Colleges, and Private Students, London, New York, Bombay, and Calcutta: Longman Green and Co. Pp. 16, 26 maps.**





**Figure 1-2 Current Map of Primary Locations**

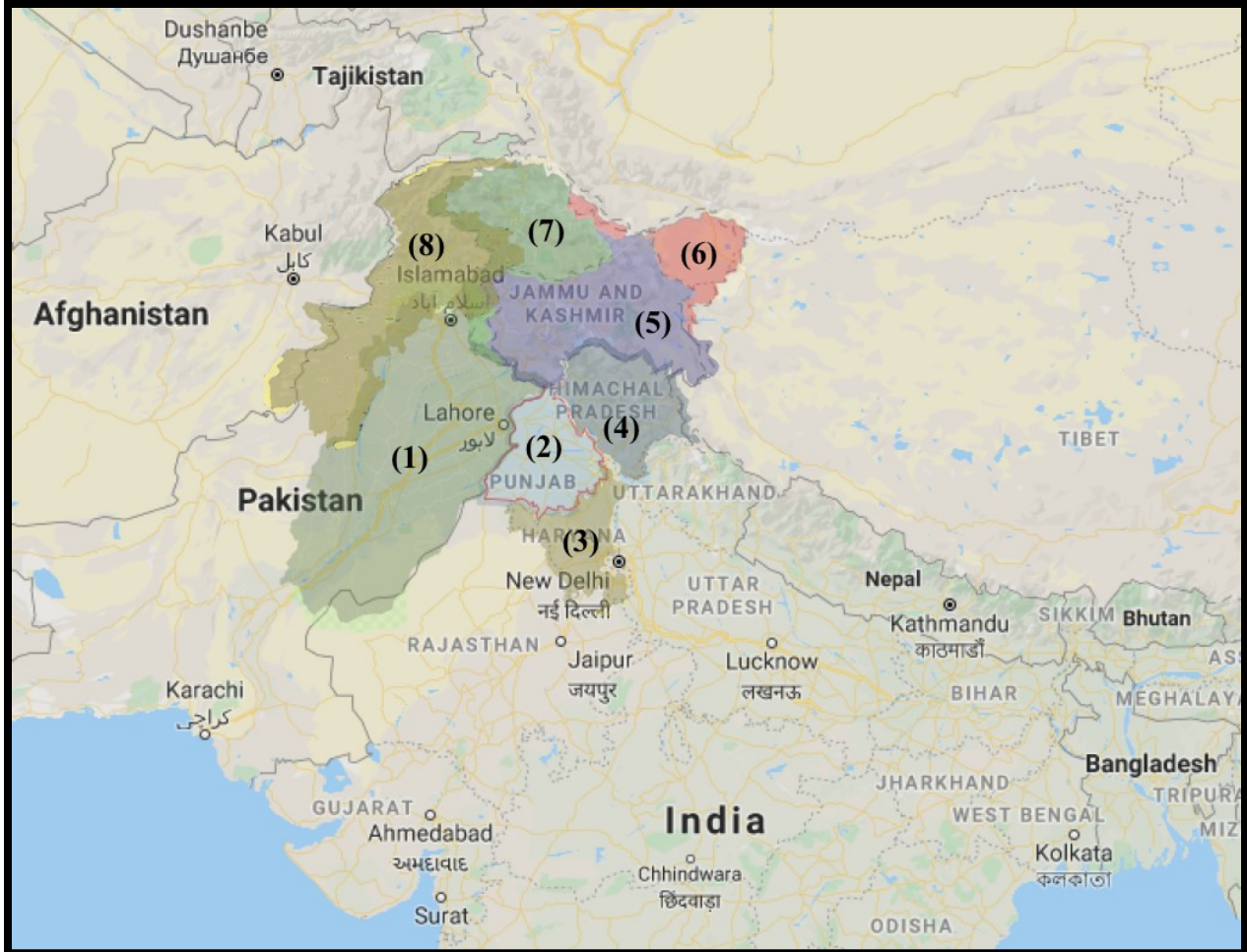
BROWN – West Punjab (Punjab Province, Pakistan)

BLUE - East Punjab (Punjab State, India)

PURPLE – Indian Controlled Kashmir

GREEN – Pakistan Controlled Kashmir

- (1) – Location of *Chak Rehan*, the ancestral village of the Khaira family near Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan.
- (2) – Location of Gurdaspur, Punjab, India.
- (3) – Location of the Waga Border between Amritsar and Lahore.
- (4) – Location of Faridkot, Punjab, India.
- (5) – Location of Hargobindpur, Punjab, India



**Figure 1-3 Current Map of Territories Encompassing the Historical "Greater" Punjab Region**

- (1) – Present Day Punjab Province, Pakistan
- (2) – Present Day Punjab State, India
- (3) – Present Day Haryana State, India
- (4) – Present Day Himachal Pradesh State, India
- (5) – Present Day Indian Controlled Kashmir
- (6) – Present Day Chinese Controlled Kashmir
- (7) – Present Day Pakistani Controlled Kashmir
- (8) – Present Day Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Province Pakistan

## Ethnic Groups of Pakistan

From the CIA – Central Intelligence Agency website – cia.gov

- Punjabi 44.7%
- Pashtun (Pathan) 15.4%
- Sindhi 14.1%,
- Saraiki 8.4%
- Muhajirs 7.6%
- Balochi 3.6%
- other 6.3%



Figure 1-4 A map from the collection of the Perry-Castañeda Library (PCL) of the University of Texas at Austin illustrating the Major Ethnic Groups of Pakistan Including Punjabi (East and West)





**Figure 1-5 Current Map of East and West Punjab**

NOTE\* The states listed as Haryana and Himachal Pradesh were also a part of Punjab but were carved out into separate territories by the Indian government in 1966 during the Punjabi Suba movement.

**Languages of Pakistan:**

**From the CIA – Central Intelligence Agency website – [cia.gov](http://cia.gov)**

This entry provides a listing of languages spoken in each country and specifies any that are official national or regional languages. When data is available, the languages spoken in each country are broken down according to the percent of the total population speaking each language as a first language. For those countries without available data, languages are listed in rank order based on prevalence, starting with the most-spoken language.

- Punjabi 48%,
- Hindko (a Punjabi variant) 2%,
- Saraiki (a Punjabi variant) 10%
- Sindhi 12%
- Pashto (alternate name, Pashtu) 8%,
- Urdu (official) 8%
- Balochi 3%
- Brahui 1%
- English (official; lingua franca of Pakistani elite and most government ministries), Burushaski, and other 8%

Total population of East Punjab - 27.7 Million

Sikh – 16 Million (58%)

Hindu – 10.67 Million (38.49%)

Total Population of West Punjab – 110 Million

First Language:

Punjabi – 75.2%

Saraiki – 17.4%

Urdu – 4.5%

### The Disputed Area of Kashmir



Figure 1-6 Disputed Area of Kashmir from the collection of the Perry-Castañeda Library (PCL) of the University of Texas

## 2 FINDING MY VOICE

As the grandson of a partition survivor, and the son of immigrants from Punjab, I am interested mainly in how communities with similar histories recreate mutually interdependent cultural relationships with each other through contemporary and traditional forms of music. I focus on people groups that were historically interdependent for centuries prior to being divided across artificially created lines of cultural, religious or ethnic demarcation by colonists. My own personal and familial experiences shape much of the narrative and discourse that form my understanding of these matters. In the locality of my ancestry, my eyes see a ghostly reflection of what Punjab once was - an empowered region in which interdependence between Muslims and Sikhs flourished, epitomized by the Khalsa Raj.

I believe traumatic stress can be inherited through multiple generations based on the violent events and atrocities that colonized people were faced with, and that music can play a role in healing these wounds. Music assists with the recreation of mutually interdependent cultural relationships between divided survivors and their future generations. Ultimately, I show through my research that music can be used to help severed communities re-engage with each other. I emphasize this relationship in terms of language, customs, clothing, food and spirituality, but primarily through *cultural and musical interdependence* - which is a concept I will return to throughout this dissertation. It implies the way two or more communities depend and rely on each other in a mutually reciprocal fashion to enrich each others' understandings and appreciation of their traditions. In other words, we can acknowledge that most cultures were not created in a vacuum and instead depended on the amalgamation of several influences from regional neighbours, conquerors and settlers. However, a ramification of colonialism is that strict borders were created to separate cohesive people groups into new and artificially construed

concepts of race and nationality – including the imposition of these new identities with strict categories defining specific groups. In order to reverse the damage inflicted by colonialism on communities that once represented flourishing and co-operative societies, I study and promote revivalism of reconciliation and reunification between historically interdependent peoples who are now divided across national boundaries. I am fascinated in the way this phenomenon affects communities such as the Uighur, Roma, Kurdish, Ismaili, West-African Christians, and the First-Nations of Canada, among others. Specifically, I focus on the Punjab region divided between India and Pakistan to demonstrate these effects.

Born and raised in Edmonton, Alberta, I began my formal musical education with the electric guitar at the age of nine. I was exposed to the onset of grunge music as I entered junior high, where I also enrolled in concert band. As a percussionist I played in jazz ensembles during my school years and had also formed my first rock band in 1997, which stayed together until 2004. As a songwriter I have released six albums in the capacity of a multi-instrumentalist, vocalist, composer and lyricist in the rock, pop, indie and folk formats. I have been featured in several newspapers,<sup>1</sup> magazines,<sup>2</sup> and radio/television shows,<sup>3</sup> both with my various bands and

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<sup>1</sup> See for example:

“Capturing Portraits” in *The Edmonton Journal – Ed Magazine*, by Francois Marchand, June 2, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> See for example:

“Every Portrait Tells a Story” in *See Magazine*,

“Khaira is a Multi-Instrumentalist Who Writes and Performs in Canada” in *Inspire Magazine – PAK.Star Media*, January 18, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> See for example:

“Interview With Arsh Khaira by Naz Uppal” *Culture Avenue*, OMNI Television, May 2013

“Ik Mulaqat – Interview With Arsh Khaira by Jarnail Basota” *Parvaaz TV*, OMNI Television, August 2017



as a solo artist. I have also released several music videos during the course of my musical career, some of which I will talk about in this dissertation.

I began my University education by completing a Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies with a Music Minor from Concordia University of Edmonton (concentrating in classical guitar and piano) in 2009. I then went on to complete a Master of Arts in Biblical and Christian Studies in 2012, during which I presented a thesis on the *Exilic* Prophets and the role of Jesus as a singular personification of Servant Israel.<sup>4</sup> My Biblical education was highly influential in forming the perceptual lens with which I began to see the world, including contemporary social and political issues. After this I completed a Master of Business Administration in 2013 from the University of Alberta, and subsequently began my studies as a Doctoral student in the Music program at the same institution in 2014. In connection with this training I have taught for several years as an instructor of Religious Studies as well as Marketing and Consumer Behavior at Concordia University in Edmonton, and I have also delivered Music courses at the University of Alberta. I have been studying the Persian language since 2006 and during my Master of Arts program I took coursework in Contemporary Farsi and Biblical Hebrew. I have spoken fluency in Dari (Afghan Farsi), Urdu and Punjabi and can fully understand other dialects of Persian including Tajik and Iranian Farsi.

Though I was born in Canada I was raised in a family that valued their ancestral language, traditions and culture. I grew up speaking both English and Punjabi with my parents during my formative years and, beginning in 2004, I took annual trips to India until 2017, sometimes even going twice a year, I had also previously travelled to the region in 1998 and

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<sup>4</sup> See: Khaira, Arshdeep. *The Community of the Faithful: Jesus As a Personification of Servant Israel*. [Edmonton, Alta.]: Department of Religious Studies, Concordia University College of Alberta, 2012.

2001. It was during these journeys that I began to research and collect information about the issues I discuss in this dissertation.

## PROLOGUE: TO KNOW THYSELF IN EXILE... THE LONG ROAD HOME

In this prologue I will draw inwards and engage in a reflective auto-ethnography. I will attempt to combine the various components of my research into a portrait in which I as an individual come to personify, represent and actualize the crux of this work. My hope is that it becomes evident during the course of reading this dissertation how I, myself, symbolize research in action and the lived experience in the context of the many emotive elements that comprise this sequential process of personal reclamation:

1. Trauma – A residual remnant of the violence of partition passed down intergenerationally.
2. Pain – Of separation from the *sar-zameen* (origin).
3. Bondage – To *exile* and *defeat*, amongst the spoils and riches of Babylon.
4. Jihad (Struggle) – Where the battlefield is the heart and the *shamshir* (sword) is the intellect.
5. Liberation – To personal autonomy and the deliverance of a symbolic inheritance.
6. Azadi (Freedom) – To embody and realize my own narrative about my identity.

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All the sisters of mercy, they are not departed or gone  
They were waiting for me  
When I thought that I just can't go on  
And they brought me their comfort  
And later they brought me this song  
Oh, I hope you run into them,  
*You who've been travelling so long...*

- Leonard Cohen, "The Sisters of Mercy"

In the fall and winter of 2004-2005 I made a solo voyage to Punjab. After my journey in 1998 (described in more detail later in this work) and a trek I made in 2001, this excursion became incredibly important, especially because I was only twenty years old and was travelling alone for the flight from Canada to India, and then only with my cousin Parvez throughout Punjab. Prior to leaving for India I purchased a few albums I listened to extensively during this journey, including *Elliot Smith's* "From a Basement on the Hill," *Jimi Hendrix's* "Live at Berkley," *Interpol's* "Antics," as well as *2Pac's* "Greatest Hits." As this was still in the era of the *compact disc*, I carried my portable CD player with me everywhere I went. But during the journey itself, and in the process of reconnecting to my roots, I began to discover the music of artists like *Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan*, and *Hans Raj Hans*, especially upon my return to Canada. For many reasons, this experience turned into the foundation stone of what would become my life's pursuit and vocation, ultimately capstoned by this thesis. During this journey I bore witness to the roots of what I would later come to consider my cultural inheritance, and also came to be wary of my diaspora upbringing; the first time I began to think of this (my life in Canada) in the context of the Babylonian exile:

By oppression and judgment he was taken away.  
Yet who of his generation protested?  
For he was cut off from the land of the living;  
for the transgression of my people he was punished.  
He was assigned a grave with the wicked,  
and with the rich in his death,  
though he had done no violence,  
nor was any deceit in his mouth.

Isaiah 53:8-9<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> This passage refers to the exile and bondage of the Jews in Babylon, currently in South-Western Iran, after the destruction of the first temple in 587 BCE.



**Figure 2-1 Location of Sharif Rauza, Sirhind, Punjab**

Questions pertaining to the price of the freedom and happiness I held so close and dear to myself suddenly began to loom forth. What was the cost of having everything most people in a place like Punjab would never dream of – and was I really to believe that this would be a fair deal? This realization occurred slowly over the course of time, but the initial taste of sour gall pressed to my lips was during this journey. The Sharif Rauza darga (see Figure 2-2), which includes the tombs of Ahmed Al-Sirhindi (1564-1624), a prominent Sufi of the Naqshabandi order who was active as a jurist and scholar during the reign of the emperor Akbar, as well as of Shah Zaman Durrani the king of Afghanistan, and ruler of the Durrani empire from 1793-1800, is one of the holiest places for Muslims in Punjab (both East and West). Not only was this my first time in a mosque, but it just happened to be in Punjab with one of my cousin’s Muslim friends. I recall the moment vividly and am fortunate to have taken some beautiful pictures at the time too.



**Figure 2-2 Sharif Rauza (Foreground) and Gurdwara Fatehgarh Sahib (Background) Both Seen in Close Proximity from the Islamic Cemetery (Photo by Arsh Khaira - 2004)**

In this picture you can see the graves of Muslim devotees and one of the dargas of the Sharif Rauza Masjid, which encompasses several tombs and graveyards, which lay in the foreground, with the Gurdwara where the two younger sons of the 10<sup>th</sup> and final Guru of Sikhism were bricked alive in the background (Fatehgarh Sahib). I snapped this picture not realizing at the time the heavy weight this image would bear on my soul for the rest of my life. This was one of my most vivid experiences, and at the time I knew little about the deeply entrenched shared

history between these two communities, and especially as it encompassed those members of my extended Punjabi family on the other side of the border. It was here at this darga that I also purchased some literature about Islam, as well as a beautiful *Tasbih* that I gifted to one of my childhood friends from Lahore. Though we are no longer in contact, many of my earliest memories of attending *Majlises*<sup>6</sup> or other Sufi gatherings, or learning through small tidbits of information my friend would share with me, are clear to me still.

One of the first *Qawwali* songs of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan that I grew very emotionally attached to and also professionally recorded and performed on several occasions was “Karan Tasbih Mei Data Tere Naam Di,” which means “I will perform the tasbih of your name.” The significance of the tasbih is immense in the Sufi tradition, in which the recitation is “SubhaanAllahi wa Allhumdulillahi wa La Illa Ha Il AllahHu wa Allah Hu Akbar.” This prayer is included in *Salat-Ul-Tasbih* which incorporates it into the four raqats of *Salat*. I later recorded and performed another song originally by Nusrat called “Sahson Ki Mala,” which means “the

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<sup>6</sup> Qureshi (1981) helps us to understand the significance of the *majlis* (the public performance of Islamic devotional music to the Sufi traditions of Punjab). She uses the *majlis* in a Shia sub-context to demarcate the way this minority community enact their spiritual identity through ritualized performance. Her work also allows us to understand the way Shia Muslims in India assert their own sense of Islamic nationhood within the Ummah (Islamic community), in the context of a pluralistic society. She mentions the celebration of *muharam*, centralized around mourning for the martyr Husain, a direct descendant of the *Imam* (Islamic leader) *Aly*. It is mentioned that during the period of mourning, a *majlis* may be held every evening. She also notes that *majlises* are held throughout the year in order to keep the tradition of lamentation alive, partial to the Shia concepts of embodied piety and maintaining a spiritual disposition of perpetual mournfulness. Qureshi mentions that one of the primary motivations for the *majlis* is to remember the sacrifice of Karbala, and the principal poetic discourses from which the lyrical content is drawn for these events focuses on the account of the events that transpired there, including the martyrdom of Husain. The article goes on to offer a structural breakdown of the way a *majlis* operates, including its musical organization and components, in a very systematic way.

tasbih of breaths.” In this instance, the *Qawwali* uses the word *Mala* instead of *Tasbih*. The word *Mala* means the same thing but is normally used by people of the Sikh faith. The *Mala* of the Sikhs and the *Tasbih* of the Muslims serve the same purpose but are used slightly differently with the former having 108 beads (a symbolic value that is a multiple of the number of incarnations in the cycle of birth and death) and the second having 99 (to denote the 99 names of Allah). But in “Sahson ki Mala,” the poetry says that the beloved will pray the mala of “breath,” where in every “sahs,” “dam,” or “nafas” (all terms which signify “breath”), the name of God will be recited.

I am lucky today to have a number of very close friends from Pakistan. Throughout the many years we have known each other we have often shared significant and insightful information amongst each other. Almost every time I have met a Pakistani Punjabi and shared in a profound and caring conversation, they almost always exclaim to me things like: “my grandfather was from Jalandhar”; or “my village was near Patiala,” often referencing these and other cities now in East Punjab. Often when I share with them my own history as beginning in *Chak-Rehan*, just south of Sialkot, we immediately feel a sense of a shared journey and a collective spiritual history and past. Though I would note here that continuous with the history of my own micro-community as a *Khaira*, I would trace my origins further back to Afghanistan and then in step-increments over the centuries gone by towards the Levant. The word *Khaira* itself comes from the Arabic root *Khair* meaning “goodness” or “mercy.” The common expression in Dari is “Jazak Allah, ba khair boshi,” and in Punjabi “Khoda tera khair kare,” which both mean “God will take care of you.” Based on the etymological root of this word all the way back to its Semitic origin, *Khaira* then means the one who “brings good news and

mercy,” from “khair,” and “aan,” (to come or bring) as in “Khair-Ahmdan,” or “goodness came to us.”

One of my most conservative friends from Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa in Pakistan once told me that his ancestors from his village near Abbottabad were also Sikhs. In fact, a large number of my Pakistani friends are religiously observant, praying namaz five times a day and keeping long flowing beards, among following the other *Sunnah* of the prophet. Often when we would go out to movies, restaurants, sporting events, theatre, concerts, ballets and operas, or even shopping, they would stop to pray namaz at the prescribed hour, either at the nearest mosque, in an available room, or even sometimes in a relatively empty parking lot. Though my own closeness to the Pakistani Punjabi community began at a very early age, with my best friend in kindergarten being from Lahore, throughout my early twenties I made many other acquaintances from the old country who still remain very close to me today. During my time as a graduate student studying for my Master of Arts in Biblical and Christian Studies, around 2009, I was closely involved with the Pakistani Students Association at the University of Alberta and performed for them many times. These friends were always close to me and still remain so. I am indebted to many of them for instilling in me a sense of pride in my own identity and encouraging me to learn as much as I could about my family’s past, our language, our customs and our own uniqueness.





**Figure 2-3 The Courtyard at Rauza Sharif (Photo by Arsh Khaira - 2004)**

In Figure 2-3, a photograph I took at the Rauza Sharif dargah, you can see an image of the sky which in Persian, Arabic, Hebrew and Punjabi is referred to as Arsh. The literal meaning of “Arsh,” a word which appears in the Quran multiple times, is the “throne of Allah,” but in its Persianized Punjabi form has come to represent the *sky* in general, for example, in songs and poetry. Prior to this journey and to reconnecting with my roots, I had never fully understood the significance of my name, and had often felt a hesitation when sharing it with others. However, as I embarked on this quest and learned as much as I could about my origin, I began to feel a sense of immense pride in my name. I recall once in 2013 meeting a man from Peshawar on

campus. As he approached me and we began conversing in Urdu he asked me if I was from Afghanistan, to which I replied “no.” He then said “then you must be from Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, to which I also replied “no.” I then said, “Punjab!” to which his response was “to hell with Punjabis.” In this context it is important to recall that many Pashtuns harbour resentment with Pakistani Punjabis because of Punjabi hegemonic control over almost all elements of Pakistani life, including politics, media and art. Further, there is a racial divide between Pashtuns and Punjabis, perpetuated by propaganda, and media misinformation that creates an illusion of *whiteness of contrasts*, in which Pashtuns who have been defined by most scholars and anthropologists as being of *Persian* origin, self-identify as *white* in contrast to *black Punjabis*. For his ignorance of the matter, he literally could not fathom that I was from Punjab. I then told him “I am a Sikh!” to which he replied “Ok! You know three communities that look completely the same are Pashtuns, Sikhs and Jews.” He himself was also a PhD student at the time and when I shared with him my name and some further information he was so elated that he exclaimed “If I have another son, I promise to name him Arsh.” Essentially, people with Persian, Pashtun, or even Hebrew linguistic backgrounds have always shown an immense appreciation for my own name – which essentially far outweighs a lot of the negative things I have heard from many people of other backgrounds.

At this juncture then I want to step back and bring together this short explanation of the significance of my name – and how this has contributed to my own *passion narrative*. If *Arsh* is the throne of Allah, and *Khaira* means the one who brings good news and mercy, then the whole of my name and my identity translates to something like the expression “from the throne of Allah we brought forth mercy and goodness,” or “*Arsh se Khair aya*” in Punjabi. Yes – very high expectations indeed. Though I must note that this may not be the meaning that was in mind

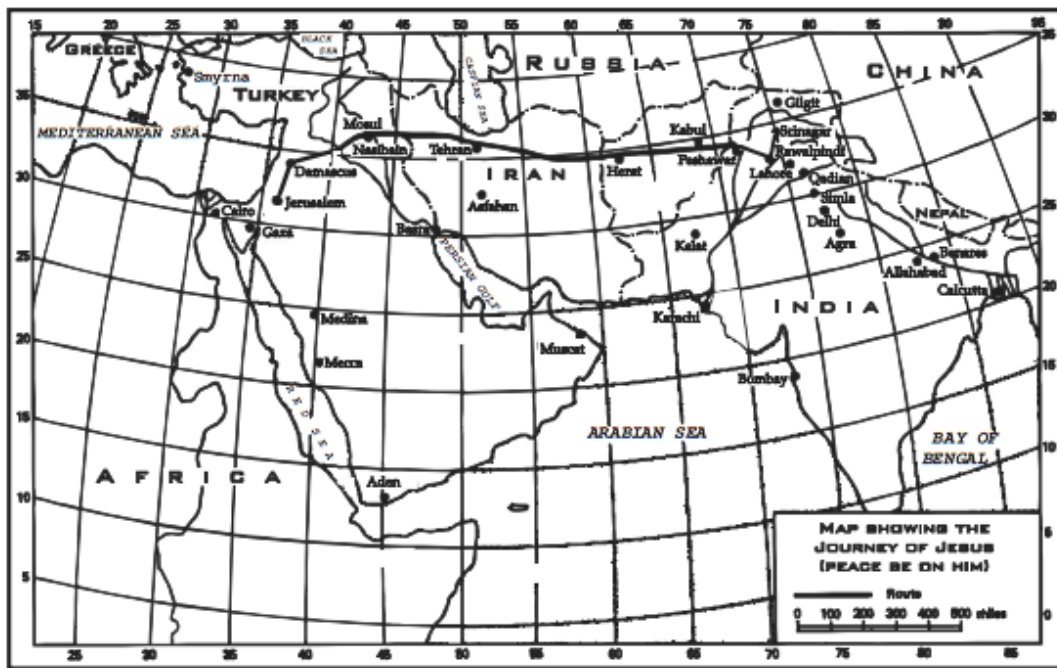
when I was given this name by my *massi* (mother's sister), but that this is the understanding to which I currently relate to most closely, given the context of my research and my work.

I would like to take a moment to shape one perceptual lens by which my research can be understood. With relevance to my graduate education, as well as my teaching experience in the Abrahamic faiths, I wish to draw attention to the possible ancient Israelite and Hebrew influence on the Punjab region, especially as it existed as a cohesive and continuous whole prior to partition - a theory purported primarily by the Ahmadiyya sect of Islam. Though ideas pertaining to the Israelite origins of Pashtuns, Kashmiris or Punjabis have not been explored in detail by scholars, the way in which this possibility is surveyed by Mirza Ghulam Ahmed, the founder of the Ahmadiyya sect, has some personal relevance to my backstory. During my earlier studies in the Old Testament I completed course work in Persian as well as Biblical Hebrew. It was during these studies that I began to see the close correlation between the Hebrew language and Punjabi, and also between the religious practices of the Sikhs and those of Jews. Part of me finds comfort in the notion that Punjabis could be descendants of Israelites and therefore cousins of today's Jews, whatever the factual basis of such claims may be – and for this reason wherever I observe similarities between the traditions, culture, language and religious practices of these groups I tend to take note. Though I do not have a detailed knowledge of Hebrew, I spent an entire summer while working on my master's degree studying under the private tutelage of the late Dr. Russ Nelson learning the language. During this time I noticed that a large number of words in Punjabi could be of Hebrew origin (for example *Naher*- a small tributary; *mot*- death; *Phasul* [which became *Phazul*]- insignificant or worthless; *Akhir*- after, or “end”; *Melich* [which became *Malik*]-king; etc.), though it is worth noting that with centuries of Islamic influence in the region, the direct effect of Arabic, and even more specifically of Persian, in shaping the

Punjabi language is very well documented by linguists and scholars who study such phenomenon very closely. That being said, it is completely plausible that many of the words that seem to exhibit Hebraic origin may have made their way into Punjabi by way of their closely related Arabic and Persian counterparts. Still, some other uniquely Punjabi expressions like the infamous “Oy Vey!” are completely continuous with historical and contemporary Jewish communities.

Some of the writings of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, including his work, “Jesus in India,” attest that a large number of Punjabis, Kashmiris and Afghans are remnants of the Israelite diaspora that scattered after the destruction of the second Jewish temple by the Romans in 70CE, as well as those who had arrived even earlier (perhaps after the destruction of the first Temple and the *exile* to Babylon). It is worthwhile to note that these ideas exist and have been discussed by religious leaders and scholars, with most evidence for such claims being derived from oral history as well as the Hebrew Bible itself. The writings of the *Ahmadiyya* sect of Islam have led many Punjabis and Kashmiris to consider that Jesus himself may be buried in *Roza Bal*, a grave and a dargah in Srinagar, and those who attest to this claim also refute the idea that he died by crucifixion, but rather travelled towards Afghanistan, Punjab and Kashmir where he settled and lived to an old age - which lends itself to the possibility that a large number of Punjabis and Kashmiris, including the founders of the Sikh faith, a strictly monotheistic religion, may have been scattered Israelites who had been led to this area by Jesus himself, including others who were already in the region and whom Jesus had come in search of: the “lost sheep of the House of Israel.” As the centuries progressed, some groups of this remnant became Buddhists (like the Pashtuns most likely were), and some became immersed into Hindu religion, but later returned to their monotheistic pre-disposition and Israelite roots by way of Islam, or

later, Sikhism. Naturally though, this does not apply to the whole of all people who identify as *Sikh*, *Kashmiri* or *Pashtun* - as many people without the genetic inheritance from either have embraced one or the other culturally and practically for convenience, upwards mobility or otherwise. It is important to note that the *Ahmadiyya* movement is quite recent, having its roots in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and it is a religion shrouded in controversy, with most of their adherents being zealously persecuted in Pakistan, though I find many of their ideas, especially with regard to the origins of some Punjabis, Kashmiris and Afghans to be highly intriguing. It is also worth noting that my interests in the writings of Hazrat Ahmad may have peaked after my marriage, as my wife's paternal and maternal villages are both located in very close proximity to Qadian, the town where Ahmad was born.



**Figure 2-4 A Map of Jesus' Journey from Israel to Kashmir and Punjab - According to the Ahmadiyya (Ahmad, Ghulam Mirza: Jesus in India. Islam International Publications).**



**Figure 2-5 Interior of One of the Mausoleums at the Rauza Sharif Dargah (The Afghan Ruler Shah Zaman, as well as his Queen are Buried at this Darga, Along With Shaikh Ahmad Al Faruqi) [Photo by Arsh Khaira - 2004]**

In Figure 2-5 you can see the inside of the dargah where I made my first prostration at the graves of Sufi saints, though I acknowledge now that most Muslims will deny this practice, even if they are Sufis, as it is seen as polytheistic. The mullahs here told me that this was the holiest place next to Mecca for the Muslims of Punjab and that there was a well here in which the water was believed to flow directly from the Holy City. As I mentioned, it was from this mosque that I bought a *tasbih* (rosary) for my childhood Muslim friend Zaman – the first person to tell me about the division of Punjab. Zaman was from Pakistan but would often tell me that he was as Punjabi as I was.





**Figure 2-6 A Picture of Me Travelling Through Punjab (Photo by Arsh Khaira - 2004)**

In 2009 on another one of my annual learning and research trips to Punjab I attended another mosque in Bathinda which was also connected to a Gurdwara (in even closer proximity than Rauza Sharif and Gurdwara Fatehgarh Sahib). The mosque itself devoted to the *pir* Haji Rattan pre-dated the Gurdwara, but for good reason. At the time of Guru Gobind Singh the locals believed that the Mosque, the dargah and the graveyard were haunted – and no one would go near the site after sunset. However, to dispel the fears of the people the Guru went to the graves and would stay there and sleep at night – telling his devotees not to be afraid of such things, only to fear God. Soon after, a Gurdwara was built next to the Mosque, dargah and the graves of local Muslims, to honor the Guru's visit and decree. Please see Figures 2-7 and 2-8 for pictures of my visit to this mosque, dargah, graveyard and gurdwara:



**Figure 2-7 A Photograph of Me at the Hajji Rattan Dargah and Gurdwara (Photo by Gurpreet Khaira - 2009)**





**Figure 2-8 A Photograph of Me at the Hajji Rattan Dargah and Gurdwara (Photo by Gurpreet Khaira - 2009)**

I have to mention that every time we would visit an Islamic site in East Punjab we would always be welcomed with complete warmth and generosity. The mullahs and imams at every one of these sites were always incredibly caring and compassionate and would often make offerings and duas for me and my family. It is worth noting however that after the changeover of the government and the ascension of the BJP to power, things have changed drastically. While once I used to pray to return to Punjab as quickly as possible, and would travel every year, sometimes two times a year to the region (I even sincerely wished to live there for an extended period of time), now with the current situation things are not the same in any way. Going to Punjab used to bring tears to my eyes, especially when I would see the beauty of the wheat-fields, the mountains and the charming and compassionate nature of the people there. I had fallen so deeply in love with Punjab through my annual trips that some Punjabis born in Canada

who had never gone, or maybe gone once every ten years or so would criticize me saying that I was seeing the region through “rose colored lenses.” I remember sitting once in an undergraduate religious studies class during my bachelors’ program when my professor talked about his trip to India. He said he had gone to Mumbai and that the slums there were “filthy and devastating.” I had heard so many things from people, even people who *wanted* to go there that were demoralizing to me. But all such experiences only increased my zealousness and my passion to change these narratives. Ultimately, the truth is that most people will only see what they want to see. For me, not having been born in Punjab but to be able to weep for the land was evidence enough for myself that I truly understood the significance of this place. Indeed, all of the hurtful things I had heard and continue to hear about my name, my people, my ethnicity, my religion, certainly these things are overwhelming, but in the grand design they serve an important purpose as well.

## 3 RESEARCH COMPONENTS AND BRIEF BACKGROUND

### 3.1 RESEARCH AIM AND VALUE

As I sought to examine how the revival of Sufi traditions and music in the Punjab region effects the process of reconciliation between Sikhs and Muslims, several key questions emerged throughout this process that became of paramount importance. I aimed to investigate the role that music with its roots in Sufi and folk traditions plays in the emergence of a *transnational* Punjabi identity that crosses the divides of Muslim and Sikh, a phenomenon that began to manifest itself through the 1980's and is perhaps at the height of its intensity today, representing the closest proximity between these two communities since prior to partition – and most importantly, how such identity conceptualization resonates with the historical legacy of the Punjab region. But I immediately had to ask if even by reviving a shared historical repository of *Sufi* poetry, culture and music, would Punjabis in Pakistan and India be able to recreate (and *grow*) a mutual culturally interdependent relationship in spite of being divided by a highly militarized border?

Throughout my travels as I familiarized myself with the socio-political situation in the region, especially in the context of the current position of Sikhs and Kashmiris in India, I found myself investigating whether the current Sufi music revival in Punjab could have broader implications for the way East and West Punjabis understand their identity in light of the increasing influence of hardline Hindu nationalism in India, as well as conservative-reformist Islam in Pakistan. This led me to question the extent to which cultural solidarity between East and West Punjabis, especially between Muslims

and Sikhs, could contribute to the struggle for increased political and cultural autonomy for Sikhs and Kashmiris in the context of their current ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural persecution in India.

By using three different research strategies: quantitative, qualitative and applied - I sought to examine if the current Sufi music revival in Punjab can segue into the re-creation of a strong mutual and culturally interdependent relationship between East and West Punjabis, and if there can be other beneficial outcomes from this relationship, or alternatively if the revival would cement certain identities, i.e., *Pakistani* and *Indian*, at the expense of unity. I immediately discovered the potential for increases in social health with special regard to the treatment of women and minorities, as exemplified by their positive representation in areas of Sufi scholarship and performance, as well as greater political and cultural autonomy for Sikhs and Kashmiris. In the context of the process of reconciliation between Sikhs and Muslim groups who form the current divided territories of the *Historical Punjab* (including Kashmiris and Pashtuns), the connected outcome of increased autonomy for Sikhs and Kashmiris in their own lands also acts in an enabling function for reunification between these communities. This is because their autonomy is profoundly connected to their interdependence with each other as demonstrated through joint political mobilization both in non-violent activism as well as armed militancy.

In this thesis, I signify two primary interventions into my work – the first is “Leaving Footprints,” and the second I call “Sowing Seeds.” When I incorporate “Leaving Footprints” into a section, this signifies that I travelled to a location in East Punjab that best exemplifies the theme of that topic. I use this title to describe this component of my work, because I travelled to these locations, collected copious amounts of information including photographs and video, and

then quietly continued on my way. In the context of my life in Edmonton, this symbolizes walking through large fields of snow and leaving behind footprints, because at these sites I did not incorporate my own interventions or leave behind any of my own *legacy*, whereas in “Sowing Seeds,” I contributed to the development of informed viewpoints in an interventionist fashion, in other words, I left behind seeds of intellectual worth that would linger in the minds of my informants for a great time to come. Although I could not conduct a similar style of fieldwork by physically travelling to Pakistan, given the political nature of my research and my identity as a Canadian Sikh, there have been several critical works that have explored this area such as “Lost Heritage: The Sikh Legacy in Pakistan,” by Amardeep Singh. This book documents the hundreds of sites of significance for Sikhs in Pakistan, many of which demonstrate the close spiritual and cultural proximity between Islam and Sikhism.

While at each of the locations I travelled to in East Punjab for this component, I engaged in a number of different field-work methods (outlined in the *Methodologies* section). When incorporating a “Sowing Seeds” component into a section, this means I engaged in some type of intervention specifically with individuals or groups of people. Examples of the types of interventions I used include: workshops, interviews, concerts, and the distribution of my own music videos. While many of my research methods represent the progression of ethnomusicology towards new and alternative contemporary forms of enquiry, I also utilized traditional fieldwork strategies, including interviews. In this way my overall research approach represented a blend of techniques in order to obtain as much critical information as possible.

In this Sufi music revival I witnessed the employment of poetry that has its origins in the undivided Punjab and that has a *spiritual* significance shared by Muslims and Sikhs on both sides of the border. Historically, both communities have been connected by Sufi music and

aesthetics, going back to the classical poets/saints of the area including Bulleh Shah, Waris Shah, Shah Hussein, Sheikh Farid and Guru Nanak, among others. These early progenitors of the Punjabi variant of Sufism form the basis for the contemporary revival, in which artists such as Satinder Sartaj, Hans Raj Hans, Nooran Sisters, Diljit Dosanjh, and Arif Lohar utilize the poetry of the saints extensively in their music. As this revival continues to grow in intensity, and localized Sufi music and traditions increase in popularity, it continues, as I will show, that cultural interdependence between these two communities is strengthening – a powerful act of solidarity that signifies a profound message to the world– though these forces are juxtaposed by antagonists in other domains including Hindu Nationalists and some Conservative Reformist Islamists. It could also be suggested that Sikh and Kashmiri separatists may also play analogous roles in solidifying communal boundaries, not necessarily amongst themselves, but perhaps with other groups, such as Hindus. They are also connected by strong historical folk vernacular traditions, many of which are inseparable from the local variant of Sufism. Here, I refer to the love stories of *Mirza-Sahiban*, *Heer-Ranjha*, and *Leila-Majnu* for example, which are completely intertwined into the Sufi heritage of the region. My aim is to disseminate details of this revival so that strategies can be implemented to sustain and promote these heritage traditions, as well as to continue to encourage an interdependent relationship between East and West Punjab, and subsequently, greater political and cultural autonomy for Sikhs in the Punjab region.

During the *Khalsa Raj* the primary languages of the greater Punjab were *Persian* and *Punjabi*, including its variants. Today, many of the newly formed states and provinces that made up the *Historical Punjab* are still largely aesthetically Punjabi, and a high percentage of the people in these places still speak dialects of the language. The *greater region* is made up of the territories that begin at the Khyber Pass, where today idioms of Punjabi including *Hindko* are

predominantly spoken alongside the related language of *Pashto*, with cities like Peshawar and Abbottabad still predominantly reflecting the roots of their Punjabi heritage in the style of dress of locals, as well as in the regional cuisine, architecture and methods of social organization, including tribal bonds and categorizations. During the colonial era, Punjab and the North West Frontier Province were a continuous region in terms of categorization of ethnic and tribal groups in British India. This can be seen for example in the early definitive work, *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and North West Frontier Province*, compiled by H.A. Rose in 1911. This work is still highly referenced by scholars today who need a guide to disambiguating the local ethnic communities of the subcontinent's far North West.

It is also worth noting the profound Punjabi cultural influences on cities even slightly further away including *Kabul*, which was a part of the *Khalsa Raj*. The region then moves north towards the cities of Srinagar and Jammu in Kashmir where Punjabi linguistic dialects are widely spoken, along with the unique language of Kashmiri. Punjabi influence also extends further east towards the areas of Manali and Shimla, as well as the northern mountains of Himachal, which were a part of India's Punjab state until the *Punjabi Suba* movement which led to a second partition of this area in 1966. This movement was spearheaded by the Akali Dal, a Sikh political party in the region, to carve out a separate state on the foundation of language, as other states in India were being reorganized on the same basis at the time. The primary political motive of this movement was to create a Sikh majority state, as the previous East Punjab encompassed a Hindu majority at around 65%. The result was a much smaller East Punjab, but now with a Sikh majority, as the Hindu dominated areas split off into the states of Haryana and Himachal. The southern limits of the greater Punjab area though historically start where the dry and arid regions of Sindh and Rajasthan begin.

To touch briefly on the reach of Punjabi cultural influence into Baluchistan, Kashmir, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh, I turn to Addleton (1986) who explores the significance of various regional languages in Pakistan. He asserts that several dialects of Punjabi, like Saraiki, Potohari and Hindko, are often denoted as separate languages – with most scholars, writers and academics however asserting that these languages are variations of Punjabi. In the context of my research, these dialects are quite important, as there is a rich cultural and musical tradition that is continuous with Punjabi Sufism in these vernaculars. My own family from the paternal side also speak Potohari, also referred to as Pothwari, or sometimes as Pahari, as they trace their origin back to a village near Sialkot, at the foothills of the Kashmiri Himalayas, where my grandfather was born. It is worth noting that the same language is predominantly spoken in the Pakistani territory of Azad Kashmir. Even after making *hijra* (migration) to East Punjab during Partition, their subsequent generations tried to preserve their unique dialect and customs by only inter-marrying with other “refugees”<sup>7</sup> from Pakistan.

Today, some scholars assert that several of the regional languages of Pakistan are facing extinction as they get swallowed up by the dominance of Urdu. However, the census of 2008 does not correlate with this claim, and neither did my own data collection. Addleton takes us through the origins of several regional languages, and also presents demographic information, including the number of speakers in different localities. For example, he tells us that that 92% of the population in Abbottabad speak Hindko (a Punjabi dialect) as their native language, but that in the context of all of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa it only represents around 19% of all households. He basis much of his information on the 1981 census of Pakistan, but this information still remains

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<sup>7</sup> The term “refugee” was used extensively by my paternal family as a self-designation and pseudo ethnic-qualifier – and I heard this word quite often growing up.



relevant today as we can use it to engage in a cross-sectional comparison of the decline or maintenance of regional languages in the country. If we examine the 2008 census, we find that the number of people in Pakistan who speak Punjabi as their first language remains at 45%, Further, another 10% of the population speaks Saraiki as a first language, which is a language highly derivative of Punjabi. Urdu then is spoken as a first language by only 7.6% of the population, predominantly in the urban areas of Sindh, like Karachi for example.

My exploration is centred around the phenomenon of how Sufi music is being revived in Punjab, and the larger effects of this on the Sikh and Muslim communities of East and West Punjab (respectively). The term *East Punjab* refers to the small peripheral state in the far Northwestern plains region of India, bordering Pakistan and Kashmir, that is a mere remnant of the *Greater or Historical Punjab*, and the home of the Punjabi ethnic group who make up less than 3% of the national population, with Sikhs making up less than 1.8% of the population of India. However, in East Punjab, Sikhs form a majority around 60%. *West Punjab* refers to the largest province of Pakistan and the home of the largest ethnic group in the country, the Punjabis, who make up more than 45% of the nation, with the next largest group being the Pashtuns at around 15%. In short, Punjabis in Pakistan are not only a majority, but the dominant ethnic group who have the highest levels of influence in politics, media, art and culture. On the other hand, while Sikhs are a majority in East Punjab, and have exerted a large influence on the socio-economics of that state, in the context of India they have been subject to discrimination, racism and even genocide. This is in spite of demonstrating disproportionate levels of involvement in areas of national pride like the army, where they have historically made up more than 20% of all members, and are amongst the most-decorated, and also in sport.

The Sikhs and Muslims of Punjab lived together for centuries, along with Hindus, Buddhists and Christians, before being divided along religious lines during the Partition of 1947. Prior to the British obtaining control of Punjab, it was under the jurisdiction of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (see: Latif 1964), and was also referred to as the *Khalsa Raj*, or *Sikh Empire*, and this *Historical Punjab* included the entirety of Kashmir, as well as Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and parts of Eastern Afghanistan. After the creation of Pakistan, almost the entire Punjab region was delivered to that country, leaving only a small portion of Punjab which would now be in India to the Sikhs, in spite of the fact the Sikhs controlled and administered the entire *Historical Punjab* region, including Kashmir and KPK, prior to British occupation. Kashmir became a conflict zone with both countries, India and Pakistan, claiming their rights to the territory in its entirety. Every war between the two countries has centralized around Kashmir, and the primary combat frontier has always been the Punjab plains, which are just south of the Himalayan range. For this reason, much of my research involved the incorporation of a Kashmiri perceptual lens, including in my primary intervention, which was a music video called “Kashmir” in the Punjabi language.

When I talk about this intervention, I will also go over the idea of *Idealized Whiteness*, or *Whiteness of Contrasts*, to explain how the Kashmir conflict has become, to some extent, merged into ideas of racism and white, or *Persian*, superiority, and that the highly biased media propaganda that portrays how race is constructed between India and Pakistan contributes to xenophobia and misconstrued perceptions of ethnicity in the areas that encompass the former *Historical Punjab*. These ideas of *Idealized Whiteness* and racism already existed to some extent in the area, but were cemented by British colonialism, and later through the *Partition* on the basis of the Islamic *two-nation theory*, suggesting the Muslims of the subcontinent represented a unique ethno-cultural stock of people with non-Indic origins, who were entitled to their own

nation. Subsequently, the propaganda that continues to proliferate in mainstream media about race and ethnicity in Pakistan leverages a grass-roots racist movement amongst some factions of Pakistanis, aimed at demoralizing “black Indians who have nothing to do with Kashmir,” or in other words, they suggest, and ideologically hold to the concept of, *Persian* superiority. In fact, although I received very few negative comments with regards to my video “Kashmir,” the small number of hateful messages I did receive were written in a similar vein. I suggest that even the current trends in solidarity and interdependence between West Punjabis, Kashmiris and Sikhs, can be in some part attributed to the idea that Sikhs represent for these two Muslim communities a tolerable, or perhaps even “desirable” form of pseudo-whiteness, especially when contrasted to other regional neighbors, based on the popularity of East Punjabi music in Pakistan and the way Indian Punjabi singers, actors and actresses are portrayed in the media, consistent with highly *Persianized* stereotypical expectations of beauty and whiteness. This may implicitly allow most Muslims to see beyond the fact that Sikhs are from a different and distinct religious group apart from Islam, and rather allow them to openly harbor solidarity.

While the current right-wing Hindu-Nationalist government of India, and to a much lesser extent, some factions of Islamic conservative-reformist groups in Pakistan, have engaged in an onslaught of media propaganda efforts to divide the people of the two countries, the Sikhs of East Punjab have come closer in their proximity than ever since Partition to not only the Muslims of West Punjab, but also to Kashmiris. Sikhs travel by the thousands to Pakistan every year to visit the birthplace of their religion, and also to see the many hundreds of sites of historical significance for them there. Note that a large number of Sikhs have their ancestral homes in Pakistan’s Punjab, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Kashmir Provinces, which they were forced to leave in 1947 to be relocated to India. Recently, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran

Khan, opened the *Kartarpur Corridor*, to allow Sikhs open and visa-free access to the final resting place of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, which is in the far Northeast of Punjab Province Pakistan. When movement to open this corridor began, Sikhs and the Muslims of West Punjab were already exhibiting solidarity with one another, however this was met with vile jeering from the extreme Hindu-Nationalist government of India, backed by the RSS, a group that attempts to eradicate the history of non-Hindu communities from the country. However, after the corridor was finally opened, many members of the Indian government changed their positions completely, and began to seek out ways to see how they could use this situation to their advantage. Today, Sikhs and Kashmiris are also closer than they have ever been since the *Khalsa Raj*. The two groups simultaneously engage in non-violent political activism to secure greater autonomy for their own people in their own lands.<sup>8</sup> Even militant groups involved in armed resistance are connected in their networks through both communities.

While the Sufi music revival is one of the major contributors to the process of reconciliation between the Sikhs of East Punjab, and the Muslims of West Punjab, the conflict in Kashmir is the primary antagonist against reunification. To help contextualize this element of my work, I turn to Araujo, (2006) who addresses the terms “violence” and “conflict” particularly as they relate to research currently being undertaken in Ethnomusicology. Indeed, the article was written over a decade ago, but the message remains relevant, if now possibly more than before. The author addresses the issue at hand by asserting that the terms *violence* and *conflict* “very often signal either a social or personal disturbance of an implicit regular order, or an eventual denial of a given order that produces effects on music makers and the music they produce” (289).

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<sup>8</sup> See: “Kashmiris Raising Khalistan Zindabad Slogans Outside NRG Stadium During Narendra Modi’s Visit,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vfMA6uoYHCg>

Araujo approaches the area from a socio-scientific point of view and engages with the field itself in relation to the research we conduct as academics and the employment of terminology that connotes specific ideas with regard to power relationships or dissatisfaction with status quo social-orders. He uses Brazil as a case study to present his research paradigm and also makes mention of the needlessly low amount of research being done in this particular area in this part of the world, aside from not well-known scholars in Brazil themselves.

The Sufi music revival, that I suggest continues to contribute immensely to this process of reconciliation and reunification between Sikhs and Muslims who make up the current divided territories of the *Historical Punjab*, began in the 1980's with the music of artists like Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Ghulam Aly and Alam Lohar all Muslims from West Punjab who were known to perform the hymns of the Sikhs on many recordings and at several performances. At the same time Gurdas Mann and Hans Raj Hans were among the most popular Sufi artists from East Punjab, both Sikhs who were known to perform deeply religious and spiritual music from the Islamic tradition.<sup>9</sup> This revival has continued to grow in its intensity and has branched into

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<sup>9</sup> I wish to clarify one *etic* distinction of the way I understand and will use the terms “sacred,” and “spiritual.” At times, this dissertation will use the word “spiritual” to describe the type of music that presents one very viable solution to the great divide, that is Pakistani-Indian relations. Acknowledging the Islamic concept that the Quran itself is infallible and has its origins in the transcendent realm of God, being revealed to humanity by way of the Prophet Mohammed - the Quran then is “sacred,” Allah (God) is “sacred,” the Prophet Mohammed is the messenger, the one through whom by way of *wahi* (through his auditory senses – Mohammed *heard* the revelations) and the Angel Gabriel (who mediated the word of God to Mohammed), the message of God was revealed. I originally thought about using the word “sacred” to describe the musical tradition that I am researching, or the music described by most people in Punjab as *Sufi* music. That is, music that makes use of the poetry of saints such as Bulleh Shah and Sheikh Farid, among others. But in the context of the religious traditions practiced in the Punjab, I acknowledge from an *etic* perspective, that the word “sacred” itself has very specific connotations. *Sufi* music then is a medium, but itself is not “sacred” in the sense that the word would be understood by the majority of Muslims or Sikhs. “Spiritual” then could connote a human experience that can happen anywhere, something we can all participate in. *Religion* and *sacred* though are connected because actions associated with the institution of Islam itself, like *namaz* (obligatory prayer) or *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca), are religious processes that allow the practitioner to establish a connection to the sacred realm of God. For *Sufis*, the idea of *fanaa*, or, the “annihilation of the self” in which the individual becomes

alternative styles of music, while still maintaining its connection to Sufism. In the 1990's a Pakistani band called *Junoon* began performing *Sufi Rock* music, and catapulted to fame in India during the height of the *Kargil* war between the two countries over the Kashmir region. Today, there are innumerable popular artists performing varieties of Sufi music in both East and West Punjab, including for example, Satinder Sartaj, Nooran Sisters, Harshdeep Kaur, Sabr Koti, Gurdas Mann, Hans Raj Hans, Diljit Dosanjh, Kanwar Grewal, Arif Lohar, Abrar Ul Haq, Bilal Saeed, and many others. At a popular level these performers have an unparalleled sway of influence in uniting both communities. I will show that Sufi music is now broadly understood as a thematic motif that is presented in a variety of musical genres from traditional, to folk, to rock, R and B, rap, and other fusions of these styles.

I became interested in studying this revival in detail after observing the ongoing support for departments dedicated to Sufi studies at universities in the region during several of my annual trips, particularly between 2007 and 2009, for example at Punjab University, Chandigarh, and Punjabi University, Patiala – the latter being where I presented extended seminars and workshops in 2017 with the goal of collecting and disseminating information pertaining to my research area. I also saw indications in the increasing number of artists devoted to the performance of Sufi music in the region, many of whom during the course of this work I was fortunate to perform alongside. When one examines the current state of the music industry in

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absorbed in the name of God, represents contact with the *sacred*, and this connection is mediated by way of *whirling*, *singing* and *dancing* (as well as other expressions). But these acts of *ibadat* (worship) are not sacred in the way that Allah or the Quran is (as anything man-made cannot be sacred) but they allow for the experience of ecstatic liberation for the Sufi in which a drink of the sacred nectar from the transcendent realm of God becomes possible. Spirituality on the other hand can be *shared*, it is an experience that has the ability to transcend religion. Much of Sufi poetry then is deliberately non-canonical, however it remains a poignant and viable medium used in various acts of *ibadat* by Muslims and Sikhs.

Punjab, we find that there are an equal number of Sikhs and Muslims performing this type of music, albeit, the majority of the Muslims are located in West Punjab, and the largest proportion of the Sikhs are in East Punjab. Amongst listeners, Sikhs can be shown to be avid consumers of Punjabi Sufi music, at least equal in their proportion to Punjabi Muslims.

In the context of the current revival, the concept of *Sanjha Virsa* is helpful. Meaning “shared heritage,” the term is used by Punjabis to express solidarity and emphasize unity and a collective cultural identity that transcends borders. Practices that grew together in a cultural milieu, and then grew apart after partition, are now once again in proximity to each other within a very different socio-political context, with one side of the region literally divided from the other - although current trends in the political climate suggest the “physical” proximity between East and West Punjabis could also increase substantially: i.e., the *Kartarpur Corridor*. The rising popularity of traditional Punjabi Sufi musicians, inspired by the 1980s music of the late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Hans Raj Hans and Gurdas Mann – among others, for instance, can be seen as a musical way of adapting to a new and complicated socio-political situation. Broadening our analysis from a regional to a national context, this musical revolution becomes even more interesting in light of recent trends in Hindu nationalism promoted by the Indian government, often seen to denigrate the contributions of Islam as well as those of Persian origin to an Indic civilization, and to perpetrate physical violence against Muslims and Sikhs – as in the genocide of Sikhs in 1984, or the anti-Muslim Gujarat riots of 2002.

While the primary finding I have uncovered in my research is that through musical exchange centralized around Sufi themes and the Punjabi language, the process of reconciliation between East and West Punjab has been propelled forward considerably. Though this process has been underway since the Sufi revival began in the 1980’s, it is now peaking and manifesting

itself in major political moves by Sikhs, West Punjabi Muslims, and Kashmiris, to recreate a strong mutually interdependent cultural relationship with one another. While Sikhs and Kashmiris both have demonstrated a strong desire to secure increased autonomy in their own lands, this movement has actually increased their mutual solidarity with each other, as well as with Pakistani Punjabis. Many of the popular songs in this revival, including my own intervention, suggest that through the reunification of Sikhs and Muslims from the *Historical Punjab* region (which includes Kashmir), the territory can again experience peace and prosperity as it did during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. While the Kartarpur Corridor, and the annual pilgrimage of Sikhs to Pakistan, as well as the physical closeness of these communities in the diaspora, already suggest that the militant demarcation of the border can no longer keep Punjabis divided, many Sikhs and Muslims feel that a goal of further consideration from reconciliation is centralized around autonomy, or the seceding of East Punjab and Kashmir from India. These factions mobilize together in the struggle for the creation of a relaxed and open border between the territories of East Punjab, West Punjab and Kashmir, which for contingents holding to these views, would represent fulfillment in the process of reunification between groups that were historically interdependent for centuries prior to the systematic and deliberate disruption of this unity by British colonialism. Further, evidence of this can be seen in the fact that the territories of the *cis-Sutlej*, or the Punjab plains north of the Sutlej river, had remained a separate political and cultural entity apart from the rest of India, even for almost two centuries after the British had arrived in the country. The British themselves acknowledged the independence of Punjab as a separate and distinct country that encompassed the areas north of the Sutlej river, including present day East and West Punjab, Kashmir and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, particularly as it existed under the administration of the *Khalsa Raj*.



## 3.2 RELATED WORKS

In 2005, Alyssa Ayres explored the possibility that a brotherhood between East and West Punjabis could act as a ray of hope in promoting peace between India and Pakistan. She built her perceptual lens by discussing the 2005 visit of the Pakistani cricket team to Mohali, Punjab, where they spent nearly a month. For the contests between the two rival nations at this time, India allowed Pakistani nationals to cross the border and stay in East Punjab for the duration of the matches. Ayres discusses how nearly three thousand Pakistanis (nearly 38 busloads), who were mostly Punjabis, came and stayed in Mohali. She describes the generous hospitality of East Punjabis to their West Punjabi neighbors – for example, when the hotels in the area became packed and crowded with guests, “Indian Punjabis opened up their homes to the visitors, prompting sentimental newspaper reports of a Punjabi brotherhood spanning the border” (63).

Since the release of this article in 2005, many leaps and bounds of progress have taken place – including the opening of the *Kartarpur Corridor*, a passageway for Sikh pilgrims to the final resting place of Baba Nanak in Pakistan. Although almost fifteen years have passed since the release of this work, the author discussed many of the initiatives that even at that time were taking place to unite East and West Punjab. She describes the renewed appreciation for the essence of *Punjabiya*t in the following way:

Drawing upon this older history of affinity, the new spirit of Punjabiya)t has been nurtured by activists and intellectuals on both sides of the border as well as by the Punjabi diaspora. Their efforts range from musical, literary, and dramatic exchanges to sporting matches and cooperative policy studies examining trade potential (66).

This article resonates leaps and bounds with today’s mutual enthusiasm amongst many in the East and West Punjabi communities to reunite over shared cultural traditions rooted in a

common history. I acknowledge the research of Ayres as an inspiration for my own work in this detailed project.

I also acknowledge the work of Tridivesh Maini, who in 2011 explored the possibility that Punjab as a North West frontier region of India, divided with Pakistan, could serve as a bridge to peace between the two nations. He suggested in his analysis, as well as throughout his prolific career, that as the people of the divided Punjab region share a common heritage, culture and language, even in spite of being divided by religious differences, cultural reunification remains a definite possibility - which could have very positive repercussions for Indian-Pakistani political relations. Over the years the processes employed for building bridges between East and West Punjab has experienced a sine-wave type of relationship. In other words, at times the communities are drawn near, and at moments when there is the possibility of the escalation of war, the national media agencies push strategically to further the agenda of the central governments and divide the people. The writer argues that this area has not been explored enough by journalists, writers and academics - mainly that Punjabi identity can reduce the divide between India and Pakistan by way of a collective culture. I acknowledge Maini's work, and his appeal to scholars to further explore this area, as another inspiration for my project.

It is worth noting that in 2013, Maini further explored this research area in a work that drew a cross-regional comparison to the way the Punjab and Bengal zones both function as divided regions that are not only frontier territories for army activity, but are also significant in terms of their inhabitants sharing in a common language and culture, but divided by religion, with their cross-border neighbors. Indeed, throughout several articles, Maini has explored the role of borders and border regions, including the border of India with China, as liminal spaces in

which the flow of culture and traditions has historically been relaxed, but that recently, cultural transmissions have been artificially limited by the creation of heavily militarized national boundaries. Maini describes how the inhabitants of border-states often lobby and petition for the release of visas that would allow them access to lands historically connected to their people. The author examines the significance of a unifying Bengali identity, and how it compares to the concept of *Punjabiya*, which is a major unifying factor between India and Pakistan. However, I argue that one reason the main paradigm of my research in particular cannot be super-imposed onto the Bengali situation is because the subsequent creation of the Bengal state in India led to the domination of a large Hindu majority in said state, and with unanimous consent Bengali Hindus exhibit intense nationalism when it comes to recognizing India as a Hindu nation (Hindus make up 75% of the state). Bengali Hindus do not have grounds for discontent towards the central Hindu-dominated governments of India, nor have they ever expressed the will to engage in revolutionary struggle for a culturally and politically autonomous region - whether through discourse or armed militancy. In this way the partition of the Bengali region has little in common with the partition of Punjab. The only fair comparison here can be made between the neighbouring regions of Punjab and Kashmir, who themselves have also demonstrated centuries of cultural interdependence – as well as a shared struggle for increased cultural and political autonomy. In spite of diverging in many ways from the viewpoints of these and other writers it is still imperative that in the course of my project I recognize the work of scholars who have researched similar areas of study such as Alyssa Ayres and Trivedish Maini.

### 3.3 CRITICAL SYNTHESIS OF LITERATURE USED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF MY FIELDWORK METHODOLOGY

In formulating a method for fieldwork in ethnomusicology (and related disciplines), many scholars have suggested what strategies should be included or excluded. Most researchers have incorporated theories from a variety of other disciplines, in an effort to enrich our own methods—though there is no “one” way of conducting fieldwork. Ethnomusicologists naturally occupy a liminal space between several different disciplines, and many of our cohorts are often transcending into anthropology, or political science, or even religious studies, but all the while, we maintain the study of music as our central focus. It therein becomes only natural for us to incorporate a multi-faceted ethnographic approach, drawing influence from other neighbouring faculties. Ethnomusicologists, and ethnographers from other disciplines who have greatly contributed to this process, have often found themselves analysing issues related to ethics protocol, interview methods, participant-observation, and field positioning.

The purpose of this section is to engage sources that discuss fieldwork, to situate my own methods within the context of ethnomusicological research. I begin by outlining Fetterman’s (1998) citation of Pelto (1971) in which it is described that research design “involves combining the essential elements of investigation into an effective problem-solving sequence” (Pelto 1971, 331). We are told that this combination is the “most characteristic element of any ethnographic research design” (Fetterman 1998, 8). It is essential for ethnographers to begin with a survey period to learn the basics of our culture or region of study, attempting to understand “the native language, the kinship ties, census information, historical data, and the basic structure and function of the culture to study in the months to come” (p. 8). I will talk shortly about how my

own fieldwork included over a decade of annual journeys to Punjab, and how this connects to these paradigms.

Kvale (2009) discusses qualitative research, with an emphasis on the individual interview, stating there are some claims that “the qualitative research interview lacks objectivity, due in particular to the human interaction inherent in the interview situation” (64). This harkens back to the idea of the researcher explicitly including information about their own views on the matter, and defining them as so, in order to make clear their own partialities pertaining to the subject, and creating a more objective work in itself, ultimately. The idea that when partiality is left unaddressed and remains implicit throughout what is put across as an objective work, this implicit partiality can emanate through at a completely different level than if it is openly addressed, in which case the work takes on a more objective light. For this reason, I specifically chose to include an “auto-ethnographic” component to my own research where I use myself as a case study within my own research paradigm.

Documenting my activities was of central importance throughout this work. In relation to this, Barz (2008) presents us with an interesting confound, declaring that though field-notes seldom if ever assume an authority in ethnographic writing, they are still a very significant part of our work:

Fieldnotes often act as ongoing and changeable scripts for the mediation between experience and interpretation/analyses, and in this way, fieldnotes join the process of performance as we continue to engage them in an ongoing process of interpretation (209).

Barz further declares that “writing notes in the field is a highly interactive process of cultural translation, the engaging of a dialectic between the axiomatic and the observational“ (210). By

outlining examples of his own fieldwork, he describes research as a liminal act that follows the basic structure outlined:

**Field Research (Experience) -> Fieldnote reflection -> Ethnography (Interpretation).**

Charmaz and Mitchell (2001) write extensively about the benefits of using a “grounded theory method,” which “consist(s) of flexible strategies for collecting and analyzing data that can help ethnographers to conduct efficient fieldwork and create astute analyses” (p. 160). Central to this analysis is an understanding that all variants of grounded theory include the following strategies (160):

1. Simultaneous data collection and analysis;
2. Pursuit of emergent themes through early data analysis;
3. Discovery of basic social processes within the data;
4. Inductive construction of abstract categories that explain and synthesize these processes;
5. Integration of these categories into a theoretical framework that specifies causes, conditions and consequences of the processes.

The ethical element of applied ethnographic work was also relevant through the course of my research, and this area has become increasingly important in ethnomusicology in general, especially as copyright laws and legal ownership initiatives began to manifest themselves in the musical and artistic domains over the last several decades. Still, questions linger amongst scholars about the ownership of folk music, and now in the era of mass digital knowledge databases, open source initiatives and ease of access to cultural heirlooms have further muddied the waters. Jackson (1987) addresses our obligation as ethnographers in adhering to strict ethical protocol when conducting fieldwork. Essentially, he describes to us that fieldwork can often incorporate performances or recordings of artists who may be presenting music of which

ownership is not always explicitly clear to us. He gives the example of when the rock group *Cream* included Skip James' "I'm So Glad" on one of its albums. Jackson mentions that the song had actually "earned more in royalties than James had earned from all the records he had cut in the 1930's and the several records he made in the 1960's for Vanguard and Takoma" (261). This led many to beg the question then as to what Cream actually owed James. In this pop-culture example, Jackson makes it clear to us that the legalities that underlay ethnographic work can often create hurdles that ethnographers will have to deal with, and it is important that we have an understanding of these issues prior to venturing into the field. He mentions that the band ultimately did pay royalties to James because anyone could clearly hear the close resemblance between their version and James'. Tying this pop culture example into the relevant academic domain, Jackson further mentions that in the case where the scholar or fieldworker has plans to benefit financially from the project, and that if in any way the work of the artists he has recorded contribute to this, they too should be compensated fairly (268).

Murphy and Dingwall (2001) also provided me with strategies I incorporated into my own research. They disambiguate an ethical theory which focuses on "the inherent rights of the research participants" (339). They mention that "like all researchers, ethnographers have a responsibility not only to protect research participants from harm, but also to have regard for their rights" (339). They further mention the concepts of non-maleficence and beneficence, which essentially entails that research is useful if its benefits outweigh its potential for harm. While most explicitly correlated to bio-medical or psychological study, the authors mention that ethnographers can also create harm for participants by way of creating stress, anxiety or other emotions. These ethical nuances were highly applicable to my own data collections, especially in the case of my interviews with individual persons of interest.

Jackson also mentions that releases should always be obtained by anyone interviewed or photographed to ensure that they will allow for their pictures or recorded statements to be used. Jackson also cites Ives (1980) as mentioning three key things that all interviewers should do in fieldwork collection:

You must tell the informant three basic things: that the tapes will be preserved, that people will be able to listen to them, and that they will be asked to sign a release at the end of the interview.

Dewalt and Dewalt (2002) write on the topic of informed consent and the necessity that “people have a right to know that they are the subjects of a research project” (199). However, they also write that “observation in public places is generally not thought to be covered under informed consent” (199). Briefly addressing the matter of ethical publication, Dewalt and Dewalt give the example that during the Cold War “there were many concerns that village studies being done by anthropologists could be used for counter insurgency purposes” (203). As my own research also has the potential to be understood as having political implications - it was important for me to have an awareness of this.

Jackson goes on to outline some of the basic parameters for conducting effective fieldwork including developing a detailed understanding of the infield and the outfield, and that which is done candidly or “in camera,” and being able to distinguish this from what is actually recorded in the interview (as opposed to a conversation). He also describes to us the benefits of becoming immersed in fieldwork, and conversely, what can be gained from consciously removing oneself from the field. Fetterman (1998) further builds on this by suggesting that “ethnographers do not work in a vacuum, they work with people” (129). I relate this to the way many of us work in symbolic bubbles, or “fishbowls.” Faubion (2009) addresses this issue,



stating: “a good dose of alienation from the ordinary course of social and cultural life is also useful,” further proclaiming that “Bronislaw Malinowski’s diaries alone are sufficient to establish that he who has talent for fieldwork need not be someone who is naturally at ease in whatever human company he happens to find himself” (146) (also: Malinowski 1967).

Rice (2008) describes that since the early 1970s, “an important, perhaps even central, aspect of method in, and a fundamental epistemological problem for ethnomusicology” has been how ethnographers can best situate themselves in the field, especially in relation to their role as insiders or outsiders, observers and/or participants (53). The comparison is usually “traced to a book published in 1954 by the linguist Kenneth Pike, who distinguished between what he called *etic* accounts of language and culture, which were based on the categories of scientifically trained observers, and *emic* accounts, which sought to understand the categories and meaningful distinctions of native speakers and cultural insiders” (53). It followed then naturally that “cultural anthropologists in the late 1950s and 1960s found these distinctions very useful, and it spawned a number of new research paradigms variously labeled ethnoscience, cognitive anthropology, and the ethnography of speaking” (53). These trends then influenced a new and highly focused stream of ethnomusicological research into the 1970’s and 1980’s including that of Timothy Rice himself.

To give an example of this phenomenon at play, Rice felt that through the course of his research he had almost, or perhaps “technically,” become a Bulgarian. It was in the course of his difficulty trying to figure out the high-pitched ornamentations of his acquired instrument where many of his insights revealed themselves to him. Once he stepped out of trying to be an insider, and became actually neither an insider nor an outsider, he experienced what he describes as a

utopia feeling where his playing excelled immensely. Later, upon his return to Bulgaria he was considered good enough to experience life as an insider, though he wasn't ethnically Bulgarian.

He describes this in the following way:

Because ethnomusicologists often find themselves at some cultural or historical distance from the traditions they study, appropriation is the dialectical counterpart of that initial distancing. Even so-called insider ethnomusicologists, those born into the traditions they study, undergo a productive distancing necessary for the explanation and critical understanding of their own cultures. Rather than there being insider and outsider ways of knowing, all who place themselves in front of a tradition use the hermeneutic to move from pre-understandings to explanation to new understandings (58).

I also dealt with similar issues throughout my research, especially in consideration of my position as an outsider, being born and raised in Canada, contrasted to my own personal stake in the issues I study as the grandson of a partition survivor, and the son of immigrants from Punjab. I will talk more about this later in this dissertation.

Marcus (1998) defines a mode of ethnographic research where the purpose of such work is not found in the "reclamation of some previous cultural state, or its subtle preservation despite changes, but rather in the new cultural forms to which changes in colonial subaltern situations have given rise" (79). He discusses the idea of cultural formation within the "lifeworld and the system," an idea for which considerable formal discussion has taken place in our discipline, harkening back to the humanist dialogues of Jurgen Habermas. Marcus attempts like many others to demarcate the foundation for what in other disciplines would be likened to a clearly defined methodology of processes. He describes that with regard to this, we have traditionally relied on the great theorists of our time (he mentions Habermas, Derrida and Durkheim to name a few). In a similar way, Van Loon (2001) draws a succinct relationship between ethnographies in cultural

studies, primarily in the way that through to the 1980's these studies were "predominantly concerned with ways in which lived experiences were marked by and were articulations of wider economic, political and social structures and/or histories" (277). He further argues that these concerns were "predominantly phrased within a framework of analysis that was deeply inspired by Marxism," however this predominant concern with class struggles and the like made it more difficult to understand ethnographic works in the context of feminism or racism (277). Spencer (2001) describes our work in relation to Anthropology, and builds on the idea of Evans-Pritchard stating that our task might essentially be to "render intelligible the ideas and actions of people in another culture," emphasizing that the "content of the original (event/idea) is rendered as faithfully and as coherently as possible" (448). As a foundational idea, he builds on this concept using the theory of ethnographic work after post-modernism. Marcus (1998) mentions that there has been a critical re-thinking of "concepts of space and place in ethnographic research," in which the work of "cultural geographers and sociologists has been a reinforcing inspiration" (88) lending itself to "multi-sited constructions of ethnographic research designs" (88). He also talks about "following the biography," which he calls a favored form of ethnographic data in recent years and a special case of "following the plot." He also mentions "following the conflict," and the strategically situated "single-site" ethnography.

Several scholars have addressed the often highly tantamount socio-political implications of ethnographic work. Dewalt (2002) mentions briefly the significance of gender and sex issues in fieldwork. She writes that women have often been harassed or have become victims of violence in ways different than men. I draw a synergy to the anthropologist Cynthia Mahmood, whom I cite often in this work. Mahmood has studied the plight of Sikhs in Punjab for several decades now and is one of the few academics who has shed light on the great atrocities faced by

this community in the contemporary political context of India. When she first began studying this topic, she was warned by many non-Sikhs not to do so, as it would put her life in danger. After becoming outspoken about the Sikh Genocide of 1984 and voicing her academic work and opinion on the matter in India, she was violently assaulted by whom she presumes were agents of the central government.<sup>10</sup> She mentions that after the attack she became even more resilient in her plight to vocalize to the academic and lay world all of the great atrocities being perpetrated against a community that had historically protected India. Mahmood (2008) states:

We think of scholarship as a quietist occupation, but in this unjust world must it not be sometimes a militant one, as Scheper-Hughes so plaintively suggests (1995)? Is it not amazing that in this day and age, serious scholars get death threats, major academic bodies ignore the human pathos at their very feet, and "terrorism experts" in academia and our governments may never have crossed the path of a person enmeshed in violence? (9)

Kathleen Dewalt (2002) echoes these sentiments and tells us that academics are not always immune to violence and danger, and that we are not always caught up in our ivory-towers, but rather getting our feet wet and hands dirty at the real forefront of knowledge dissemination, even pertaining to controversial issues. Indeed, throughout this work, I too embodied certain fears, along with my hopes and aspirations for its success.

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<sup>10</sup> See: Mahmood, Cynthia Keppley. "Anthropology from the bones: A memoir of fieldwork, survival, and commitment." *Anthropology and Humanism* 33, no. 1-2 (2008): 1-11.

### *3.3.1 TECHNOLOGY EMPLOYED*

A significant component of my ethnographic research involved the documentation of events through the use of various media formats. There were times when it was most functional for me as an ethnographer to make use of video, audio or photography, in place of or alongside field notes - that I recorded using just a pen and paper, or my personal notebook computer. Jackson (1987) mentions that he was “never concerned about becoming a master of a particular medium” of collection, but viewed the various formats in the sense that “they were always just tools” that could be used at his disposal (110). Although the technology we employ in our data collection processes is very important, some early photographers like Walker Evans (mentioned several times in Jackson’s work) argued that there was much more to taking pictures involving your own eyes and minds’ eye than the tools that you used (like your camera) (Jackson 1987, 107).

It was important for me as an ethnographer to be able to discern between which tool to apply in a given situation, and when to cease using any form of electronic medium and rely on note-taking, or “head-notes,” to understand a situation. This became especially important when I was participating first-hand in an activity. If the line between the participant and the observer (myself) became blurred, there were times when I would surrender to the moment in order to fully understand the particular event, including its emotional and sensory-perceptual components. This was sometimes accomplished through complete submission as a participant to the event as it was transpiring. It is true that once we place a physical lens between ourselves and the event, we then detach ourselves from the experience to an extent, and perhaps could also be responsible for altering the experience of those being observed. Many ethnographers have often noticed that participants’ behavior will change when they are being filmed, or audio-recorded.

I documented first-hand events as they transpired in Sufi gatherings at mosques, at Sikh gatherings in Gurdwaras, and at musical events taking place at local universities, among other settings. I created a video diary of events centered around a particular time frame that assisted me in my research processes. Some difficulties arose in the documentation of events and social happenings that were not warm towards image capture. Currently, the political situation in Punjab, and indeed in India, is quite unstable due to communal strife and hate-speech, and as I carried a camera with me everywhere I went in Punjab, I felt at times as though I may have looked suspicious, especially in locations of significance to the Sikhs, or in cities along the border with Pakistan. I noticed that some people would look at me with doubt, as they might look at a journalist. Also, during some of the interviews I conducted there was often a sense of anxiousness that was superimposed over these discussions. Fortunately, I was able to access several important sites, as well as people of interest to interview. In carrying documentation equipment with me during my travels, I ensured I kept my own safety of primary importance by traveling only with my immediate family members in the region who guided me and acted as cultural liaisons.

Photography was also a valuable tool in data collection. For practicality, I emphasized the use of equipment that was light, efficient and robust, as Jackson (1987) mentions in fieldwork, “less is sometimes more” (109). He further states that we should not commit to too many forms of media, which he compares to carrying two hundred pounds of equipment on a hike (108). Fetterman tells us however, that the pen and paper are still the most common tools used by ethnographers, stressing the importance of keeping a small notepad and a pen on one’s person at all times.

### 3.3.2 *INTERVIEW STRATEGIES*

Interviews were an integral part of my data collection processes. According to Fetterman (1998), the “ethnographers most important data gathering technique” (37), the “interview,” is an elusive tool that can be employed to gather very important information about a research topic. This essentially entails that an ethnographer will speak openly with a participant, and with the participant’s consent, record their answers to a number of questions pertaining to a particular area of research. However, there can often be included in these methods a number of questions that may not be directly related to the primary research topic, which are used instead to “break the ice.” This would follow in the way that a good ethnographer would generally start by asking a very basic question like, “where is the bathroom?” and then move towards asking more complicated questions when the conversational situation and mood would entail the presentation of such (37). In this way I followed the advice that a good ethnographer would use a multitude of significant non-threatening questions in order to create golden moments to later ask harder questions that may be more pertinent to the particular area of research they are working in (Fetterman 1998). But at the same time we are also told by experts in the field that there are indeed times when we should take advantage of those “golden opportunities,” but other times when we should know not to take advantage of the informant by prying further into sensitive areas of knowledge.

The interview itself, ideally, should be seamless, essentially eliciting the feeling of a conversation. Jackson (1987) tells us that the best interviewers make the difference between interview and conversation as unobtrusive as possible. Interviews should generally be preceded by permission, which Ives (1995) tells us we can solicit for by publishing a letter in a newspaper

or by writing an article in a local publication after taking permission from the editor. In this way I attempted to be as specific as I could by explaining what precisely I was looking for, while at the same time being careful to not to “lead” by giving out the very information I hoped to get (26). Ives also tells us that the important thing is to have a very clear idea of what it is we want to find out, and that once we know that we will probably have very little trouble finding good people to talk to (25). At the same time, we should not be overly biased with regard to whom we solicit our interviews to. On the one hand, many people feel like they don’t know enough to provide you with adequate information (27), and they may otherwise direct you to a local historian. Ives writes that unfortunately “many local historians have little understanding of and even less interest in the kind of material you will be looking for” (27). This is because of the fact that many historians are “still caught up in the ‘great man/significant event’ history and will not consider a local farmer who used to make up songs important enough for their attention” (27). Essentially Ives is telling us that information can often be ascertained from people who are readily available to us (sometimes we don’t have to look too far). I used these strategies to my advantage by holding interviews with a variety of informants from different backgrounds.

When approaching potential interviewees, I employed several tactics to break the ice, including sometimes writing a letter (e-mail) at first, and then following up with a phone call and setting up an interview. However, as Ives (1995) writes, I needed to be mindful of two basic guidelines. Firstly, I had to try to determine if the person actually had the information I was looking for, and if this turned out to be the case, I then attempted to determine if they were willing to share that information with me (31). This being said, I tried to figure out as much about my interviewees as I could beforehand (35), to best equip myself for the interview that would transpire. During my research, I made sure to adequately provide myself with the best



equipment available to me for these interviews, particularly when my participants were musicians. When interviewing musicians, the opportunity to record a performance was always imminent, which is also a point mentioned by Ives. Further, remembering never to record without consent remained a tantamount focus of consideration. Afterwards, I documented my interviews using analysis and transcription software (77). When soliciting my research, as well as prior to and after taking my interviews, I always told my informants how their information would be used - and I then asked them to sign a release form. If any of my participants changed their minds and asked to remain anonymous, I guaranteed them of this.

### *3.3.3 MY ENGAGEMENT WITH SIGNIFICANT ETHNOGRAPHIC WORKS DURING MY RESEARCH*

As I analyzed examples of ethnographic work (see for example: Berliner 1978; Chernoff 1979; Keil 1979; Besmer 1983; Friedson 1996; Kisliuk 1998) it became evident to me that music and musical culture has often been represented as being vital to the lifeblood of the particular regional context, and also to the people of the territories, that ethnomusicologists work in. It has been shown by scholars, that in every tradition, rite of passage, solemn or celebratory ritual, music plays an everlasting part in each.<sup>11</sup> Musical culture is represented as being an inherently social act that is very often connected to the sacred for various cultural and religious communities throughout the world (Friedson 1996).

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<sup>11</sup> See: Chernoff, John Miller. "The drums of Dagbon." *Repercussions: A Celebration of African-American Music*, London: Century Publishing Co. Ltd (1985).

As I assessed ethnographic examples from the past several decades in order to position myself within my discipline, I observed that “secular music” was a concept that meant little outside of the mainstream commercial music industries of the world. At the very least, it seems to be a recent concept. One may consider African American blues and folk music to be a precursor to modern rock and pop, and ethnographic films such as “Gravel Springs Fife and Drum,” (Evans, Ferris and Peiser 1972) show how even in rural parts of the United States in the 1970’s, traditional folk music was still a predominant part of country life. A great amount of ethnomusicology research deals either directly, or implicitly, with the intersection between music and the sacred. In the Sufi tradition, music, song and dance, can be employed as physical expressions of religiosity, by which contact with the sacred can be experienced. It is indeed with the transcendent realm, or the abode of God, which exists above and apart from our physical reality, that through ritual, Sufis make contact with the *metaphysical*, or that which is “beyond the physical and the apparent.” Music then for many Sufis, and other mystics, represents the epitome of the relationship we have in our physical world with the divine.

An ethnographic work I once saw on “witch-catchers” and “possession ceremonies” in Ghana, seemed to show the ability of the worshipper, as he so believed, to attain contact with the divine through music. It is also suggested in the mystical traditions of major religions of the West (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) that such “Gnosis,” in the case of Gnosticism, or *Fanaa*, in the case of Sufism, is possible. It became evident to me that in the witch-catchers work, the spiritual dancer believes himself to make contact with beings that are immanent in creation but that are beyond the physical/apparent. In the Sufi tradition, the contact achieved through zikr and dance as a physical expression of this is with the transcendent realm of the creator, Allah. In Sufism, as in Islam, beings such as the one with which contact is made in witch-catchers, are

purported to also exist, for example angels, jinns and demons. Supernatural beings who are born of the transcendent realm but whom maintain contact with the physical world, who are not visible, or are beyond the physical/apparent, such as the angels Jibrael and Mikael in Islam, are for believers, an example of the immanence of the *metaphysical* within the physical world. In Sikhism as well, references to being able to make contact with the divine in our physical person are also there, as are allusions to supernatural beings such as the messenger of death Azrael. Baba Nanak writes in Persian in Raag Tilang beginning on page 721 of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib:

Mam sar muye Azraeel garifteh dil hech na dahni.

*Azraeel, the Messenger of Death, has caught me by the hair on my head, and yet, I do not know it at all in my mind.*

Here the First Guru writes that indeed metaphysical beings exist in our world and have an effect on our physicality. This apparent non-dualism, manifest through musical expression, ritual and subsequent “contact” with the sacred, was a common theme in many of the ethnographic works I explored during my research - predominantly those studies which examined the musical cultures of traditions that first began hundreds and sometimes a thousand, or thousands, of years ago. I found that perhaps ethnographic works that emphasize musical traditions that came to be with the advent of modernity, do not expose the same level of non-dualism that these earlier traditions do.

Of course, the works that show the inherent non-dualism perpetuated by mystical traditions, and the role that music plays in this liminality are the ones to which I was most drawn as I conducted this research, and the ones from which I formed much of my own methodological basis in fieldwork. One purpose of fieldwork with sacred, or spiritual music, then is to try to

capture the moment the metaphysical becomes manifest in the physical world for the participant, as they engage in an act of worship in which music (its performance in particular) plays a vital role. Yes, there is a great amount of work in ethnomusicology that deals with secular musical traditions (Evans, Ferris, Peiser 1972; Bishop, Lomax, Long 1979), however these were not as critical in forming a basis for my own work, and as I move through this dissertation, I will talk often about the importance of spiritual music. I further found that what may begin, or seem, as a secular expression of music, can also come to take on the same form and livelihood as spiritual music. I will demonstrate later through a part of my research which looks into the romantic folk-ballads of the Punjab, that while these are understood by many as secular stories, they are deeply connected to Sufism and cannot be separated from the spiritual. The graves of lovers like Layla and Majnun have become centres for worship, dua, pilgrimage and prayer, and many people in these regions have elevated the characters themselves to the status of saints. Further, the recitation of the lovers' ballads has also become a method of contact with the divine through the believed intercessory work of the couples. Much in the same way that saints like Farid and Nizamuddin Auliya are invoked through music to harken their intercessory powers to connect their disciples to God, the lovers are treated similarly, as existing between humanity and God - because of the spiritual worth of their physical and earthly merits (in this case, zealous physical and spiritual love for one another). Musical culture in many of the ethnographic works I examined in detail, is usually represented as being the vessel through which participants and observers can engage in a dialogue with the sacred. Knowing this, as I engaged in documentation of spiritual events, I tried to capture the dynamic nature of the place, and portray through film, and eventually into my writing in this dissertation, what may have been felt by the practitioners, and those observing – including myself.

### 3.4 METHODOLOGY FOR FIELDWORK

In this work I combine my findings from traditional field-work and data collection, with personal autoethnography<sup>12</sup> that deals with my research area. I draw my methodologies for the autoethnographic component of my dissertation from works that address issues of race, culture, and whiteness - some of the themes I address throughout in relation to myself. Phiona Stanley (Stanley and Vass 2018) describes how autoethnography came to take its place as a viable method of research:

The emergence of autoethnography has been connected with a time, or a 'turn', that evokes the notion of moving away from something (that is undesirable) and towards something else (that is preferable). Ellis and colleagues (2011) for example, connect autoethnography to the poststructuralist-initiated 'crisis of confidence' of the 1980s, which caused social science to question the increasingly evident 'ontological, epistemological, and axiological' limits to practice. Similarly, Denzin (2010) has linked autoethnography's emergence to the broader 'paradigm wars' of the 1980s, in which qualitative enquiry more generally was pressed to defend and justify its contribution to understanding and addressing an increasingly complex globalising world. So autoethnography was (and still is?) innovative, and was part of the response to the context in which it emerged (9).

I also draw on Vas, who describes that in autoethnographic work, the researcher does not exhibit complete neutrality, which in the context of this dissertation is an important point to note. I will

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<sup>12</sup> See: Chang, Heewon. *Autoethnography as method*. Vol. 1. Routledge, 2016.

And

Pensoneau-Conway, Sandra L., Tony E. Adams, and Derek M. Bolen. *Doing Autoethnography*, Brill Sense, 2017.

talk later about my own familial and personal story, and how it directly connects to my research area:

Autoethnography opened up an opportunity to produce knowledge differently, and the possibility of producing different types of knowledge that impact on the world in ways that are potentially empowering (after Lather, 2013). Part of this was the burgeoning realisation that research is fundamentally and inescapably *political*, that the researcher is always far from neutral, that knowledge produced by research practices has ‘real-world’ effects (that are not always for ‘good’), and, as a result, that there is a need for methodology to find ways of navigating these potential pitfalls (9).

While I am connected to the culture and the people that I study, I am also to some extent an “outsider,” as I was born and raised in Canada. So, I try to balance both perspectives, that of the insider and that of the outsider, through a detailed awareness of the self, and of the benefits and limitations to research of either position:

But a problem, ethically and methodologically, arises when autoethnographic insights are applied to a *different* (small) culture than one’s own. This is where autoethnography risks adopting the colonial gaze of travel writing (Pratt, 1992), in which the ‘other’ is refracted through the lens of the self (Stanley and Vass 2018, pp. 5).

For the fieldwork component of my research, I engaged in regular annual trips to the Punjab region from 2004-2017, in which time I worked to develop cultural fluency and an aptitude towards understanding the political climate. As Araujo (2009) describes:

One point, however, should be clear: a simple inversion of a worn- out model is not being naively argued for here, i.e. living in the places one researches is an unconditional asset, not a hindrance, to “objectiv- ity”, and therefore academically trained researchers who do not live in the areas they study are peremptorily condemned to superficiality in their social analyses. The claim here is that, whatever their objects are, re-

searchers, in a strictly critical sense, should be aware from the start of the implications of “being or not being there”, as an index of engagement for good or worse.

As I “lived” in Punjab for periods ranging from five to seven weeks during each of my annual journeys, my research was influenced by my residency as Araujo further describes:

By living closer to their interlocutors, the former will be asked permanently and often dramatically not only to write reflexively on but also to act incisively with the concrete social bodies and individuals who directly or indirectly feed their research

During my critical research trip from October 5th to December 7th, 2017, which represented the crux of this project, I collected data through fieldwork workshops, incorporating different activities for participants in local villages, cities and universities. I gave extended seminars at Punjabi University, Patiala, as well as Guru Nanak National College in Dohra, in order to understand how people saw the impact of Sufism - assessing the types of questions, opinions and feedback expressed by my subjects. My aim was to analyze the ideas, interpersonal relationships, feelings and attitudes of informants using Sufi music and culture as a catalyst to spark discussions about broader social and political issues. My research methodology included visiting with people from different demographic groups in their own environments and neighbourhoods, and conducting interviews with a wide variety of people including Marxists, Sikhs, Muslims, Hindus, Kashmiris, scholars, farmers, students and people from other states living in Punjab. I asked questions about how the idea of Punjabi identity has changed over the last decade, and how people saw the impact of Sufi music on generating a culturally interdependent relationship amongst East and West Punjabis, especially between Sikhs and Muslims, and what positive outcomes this could have.

An important part of my research involved performing my own music and documenting the reactions of participants. My music was used to invoke discussions about the relationship between the two Punjabs, as well as social issues affecting the area. I also administered surveys and ran focus groups which had anywhere from three to ten members. In the time I spent in Punjab over a decade of annual trips, I witnessed firsthand the great extent of this Sufi revival, which I discovered is playing a major role in contributing to reconciliation and understanding across the border. During my field work, I also researched this resurgence through documentation at Sikh and Sufi sites of historical significance where music is an important part of spiritual practices, as well as through work in cities in the region that have a historical connection to Sufism. Some of the common spiritual practices I observed included: *mehfils* – a gathering of musicians, poets, artists and laypeople to share live music with one another; *majlises* – a more formal type of Sufi music concert; and visiting *dargas* – the tombs of Sufi saints which become central locations for the performance of spiritual music, chanting and offering prayers. At these sites I conducted ethnographic work involving photography and videography including interviews with visitors and participants. It is critical to note that the same practices happen across the border in West Punjab, and through extensive satellite data collection<sup>13</sup> from Pakistani sources, I was able to verify this component of my research from Canada. Though it has always been a desire of mine to travel to Pakistan, as it was especially during the course of this research, however as I study a highly sensitive area, as a Canadian Sikh it would have been unwise for me to travel to the country at this point, especially because I have made, and hope to continue to make regular trips to East Punjab, India. In spite of not physically being in Pakistan, my deeply

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<sup>13</sup> I use the term “satellite data collection” as it implies that I did not physically visit Pakistan but used communication networks to obtain copious amounts of critical data from my informants there.



entrenched networks into the community allowed me to obtain critical information from many key persons of interest over the phone and during their visits to Canada, without having to worry excessively about my present or future safety.

The applied dimension of my research centered around the creation and distribution of my own music (and music videos) – and in testing the impact of these creative outputs. The main product was a music video called “Kashmir” which presented the current difficulties facing the conflicted region to which I composed the music and provided the vocals. The video was shot deep in the mountains of North India and was very well received in both East and West Punjab. The video included a survey which viewers could complete, adding another dimension of data collection to this component. I also received comments expressing enthusiasm for a mutually interdependent relationship between both sides, and especially between Sikhs and Muslims. I also used my music in the context of workshop activities to catalyze discussion – and the reactions, opinions and questions of listeners were documented and analyzed. Upon my return to Canada I spent time conducting interviews over the phone with people from different demographic groups who live in Pakistan. I used the same research methodologies as I did in East-Punjab without physically visiting Pakistan (satellite research). Through extensive data collection over the phone I re-affirmed that everyone was expressing the same views. The response to my music video “Kashmir” was as supportive from Pakistan as it was from East Punjab. I wish to note that I did receive some push back and negative comments in response to the music video, but they were very few in number. As I mentioned earlier, most of the hateful comments I received centred around ideas of *idealized whiteness* and xenophobia perpetuated through mainstream media propaganda that dehumanizes the “ugly Indian” other, and glorifies the self-proclaimed non-Indic Persian origins of “white” Kashmiris and Pakistanis. I will talk

about this further when I explore the outcomes of my music video “Kashmir” specifically in chapter six.

I used the data I collected to better understand the socio-political implications of Punjabi Sufi culture and to finalize this dissertation.

### *3.4.1 ACADEMIC WORKSHOPS*

I engaged in seminar style workshops at two prominent universities in East Punjab. In line with Dirksen’s (2012) views on applied ethnomusicology, I aimed to “recirculate my knowledge and work back into the community” and to use these workshops as a forum for discussion to collect further information:

Nick Spitzer has indirectly echoed the need for balancing power and encouraging researcher-researchee collaboration whenever he has explained that ethnomusicologists should cultivate a sense of “cultural conversation” in the place of “cultural conservation” (2003; 1992:99).<sup>7</sup> At the same time, though, some folklorists see “social intervention” as a powerful tool by which to (1) promote learning, problem solving, and cultural conversation, (2) improve the quality of life, and (3) build identity and community (Jones 1994)—a view that readily translates to the practice of applied ethnomusicology.<sup>8</sup> In sum, this work involves the collection of knowledge and the re-circulation of that knowledge back into the community studied, often in a way that seeks to advance community-defined goals. Hence, applied ethnomusicology may effectively be understood as “both a discipline and an ethical point of view” (McCarl 1992:121), which results in “knowledge as well as action” (Titon 1992:315).

Ostashewski (2014) also contributes here to my understanding of why activities such as university and community workshops were of central importance to this project:

At this juncture, I return to the changing shape of research outcomes, transformed through researchers' increasing dedication to working *with* the community members being researched. These communities will often wish for at least some part of the research outcomes to be useful to them. For example, they may want a researcher to create an exhibit in their local community, in addition to a scholarly paper, or they may wish to hold a local conference that welcomes public audience members to explore topics of research alongside scholars. This may be held in a public library or community hall rather than (or in addition to) a university. Researchers can also expect their writings and representations to be scrutinized by their community research partners.

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**Independent Variable:** Participation in extended workshops at Universities in East Punjab, including music as well as focus group discussions, small-group conversations, and a lecture.

**Condition:** Subjects took part in a workshop, which included a public presentation of my own music as well as demonstrations of the students' own Sufi music compositions and arrangements.

**Participants:** A stratified sample of students (graduate and undergraduate) from various demographic groups.

- 1) Punjabi University, Patiala (Department of Music)
- 2) Guru Nanak National College, Dohra (Department of Music; Department of History; Department of Political Science; Department of Religious Studies)

**Dependent Variables Examined (examples):**

These outcomes were assessed based on the comments and types of questions presented by participants, which were recorded and documented.

- Attitude towards West (East) Punjabis.
- Gauging preference for different styles of music I performed.
- Effect of my own music on changing attitudes.
- Overall awareness of Punjabi culture and Sufism.

While responses may have been affected by subjects' positioning vis a vis my own position of authority, the *power dynamic* was such that high-ranking faculty were present at these workshops from the institutions themselves who had a much greater sway of control over the students. The senior level faculty members were also able to engage with me in a highly critical fashion and to moderate discussion.

### 3.4.2 *MUSIC VIDEOS*

**Independent Variable:** The release of music videos on social media to a multi-national audience aimed at promoting a mutually interdependent cultural relationship between East and West Punjab.

**Condition:** Subjects watched the music videos on social-media and then had the opportunity to leave comments.

**Participants:** People of Indian or Pakistani origin (ascertained from their profile names).

**Dependent Variables Examined (examples):**

- Attitude towards West (East) Punjabis.
- Gauging preference for different styles of music I performed.
- Effect of my own music on changing attitudes.
- Overall awareness of Punjabi culture and Sufism.

### 3.4.3 *COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS*

**Independent Variable:** Participation in extended workshops in towns and villages in East Punjab, including music as well as interviews with local residents, elders, community members and activists.

**Condition:** Subjects took part in a workshop, which included a public presentation of my own music as well as interviews and focus groups.

**Participants:**

- Barnala (Marxist-Leninist Community Members)
- Malerkotla (Multi-generational Muslim residents including elders, youth, politicians, writers, religious leaders and musicians).
- Chandigarh (Local residents from other states [Kashmir, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh] living in Punjab).

**Dependent Variables Examined (examples):**

- Attitude towards West (East) Punjabis.
- Gauging preference for different styles of music I performed.
- Effect of my own music on changing attitudes.
- Overall awareness of Punjabi culture and Sufism.

It is not likely that responses in this component were affected by subjects' positioning vis a vis my own position of authority, as the *power dynamic* in these workshops was such that participants actually held almost complete control over the information they shared with me. This was demonstrated through the highly opinionated nature of many of their comments, as well as the fact that most of them were quite older than me and held themselves in high-esteem. In Punjab, age plays a major factor in the way conceptions of power are formed.

#### 3.4.4 SURVEYS

Purposes of Component:

Surveys were administered to satisfy the following purposes:

- To see if there is a correlation between an appreciation for Sufi music and attitudes towards cross-border neighbors.
- To measure the extent to which Sufi music contributes towards identity conceptualization for Punjabis.
- To measure existing attitudes of East (West) Punjabis towards West (East) Punjabis.
- Secondary correlation: To measure the effect of my intervention material on eliciting a change in attitude formation, and, to find correlations between my music and dispositions amongst listeners towards their neighbors (East and West Punjab).

I collected quantitative experimental data through the use of surveys administered online, and it possible that the lack of face to face contact in this component allowed subjects to answer more honestly. I asked a series of questions in English and took responses based on measurements from a ten-point scale. In these surveys I also collected some qualitative information with open-ended questions from which I could source direct quotations as to how people reacted to specific ideas, or how they felt about different matters pertaining to the subject. Information was sorted based on demographic qualifiers, and I was able to collect enough data to be able to discern between the ways that different groups responded to the same questions. For all surveys and interviews I collected the necessary permissions from participants to use their

information in my research, in line with the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board protocols.

I used a web survey circulated widely through social media to develop a general consensus for questions pertaining to Indo-Pak relations and the way Sufi music in particular was seen to impact socio-political views. I asked questions about the significance of Punjabi identity and whether or not there were favorable dispositions towards West (East) Punjabis amongst the different East (West) Punjabi groups I surveyed. I used the general survey platform “Survey-Monkey,” and sent out the link to people who currently live in India or Pakistan or who were originally from one of those two countries. For the web-survey component I also used snowballing to be able to solicit the study to enough participants of varied backgrounds to get a good variety of opinion. I also used social media to get as many participants as possible.

Examples of the types of questions asked were the following:

- From a score of 1-10, 1 meaning you completely disagree and 10 meaning you completely agree, how do you feel about the following statements?
  1. Sufism is an important part of Punjabi culture.
  2. I enjoy Sufi music.
  3. I like Sufi poetry.
  4. Bulleh Shah and Sheikh Farid are Punjabi figures that I find inspiring.
  5. Heer Ranjha and Mirza Sahiban are Punjabi folk-tales that have emotional significance for me.
  6. I relate really strongly to my Punjabi roots.
  7. I feel a strong sense of solidarity with West Punjabis.
  8. Preserving Punjabi culture is important.
  9. The Pakistani (Indian) government is an enemy of India (Pakistan) (reverse scored).
  10. Pakistani (Indian) people are enemies of Indian (Pakistani) people (reverse scored).
  11. I feel anger towards Pakistan (India) (reverse scored).
  12. The culture of West and East Punjab has much in common.
  13. I wish to travel to Pakistan (India).

- 14. I hope for peace between India and Pakistan.
- 15. I know quite a bit about Punjabi culture in Pakistan (India).
- 16. I identify with being Punjabi more than I do with being Indian (Pakistani).
- Some examples of concluding open-ended and qualitative questions I asked at the end of the survey are:
  - Who are some of your favorite Punjabi singers from Pakistan?
  - Who are some of your favorite Punjabi singers from India?
  - How do you view your cross-border neighbors in West (East) Punjab?
  - Do you think peace is possible between India and Pakistan? What is the role of Punjabi people in this process?
  - Who are your favorite Punjabi singers?
  - Where do you get your music from (internet, music store, etc.)?
  - How often do you listen to Sufi music?
  - Where do you usually listen to Sufi music (car, home, work, etc.)?
  - Do you usually listen to Sufi music alone or with others? If you listen with others, who do you usually listen with?
- Survey information was then divided based on demographic qualifiers such as the following:
  - Country of Origin
  - Province or State of Origin
  - Born in Punjab (yes/no)
  - Age
  - Religion
  - Ethnicity/Tribe
  - Education
  - Grew up in city or village
  - Languages spoken at home

### 3.4.5 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CREATIVE OUTPUTS

While physically in Punjab I not only conducted fieldwork as described above, but I also participated in applied ethnomusicological work. I was involved in creating music and collaborating with artists in the region, recording music videos, attending and performing at concerts, and offering workshops for different demographic groups in schools, colleges and community centres. During my stays in Punjab I participated in the lived experience and tried to strike a balanced energy between the *emic* and *etic* positions.

### 3.4.6 QUALITATIVE/QUANTITATIVE COMPONENTS (BACKGROUND AND METHOD)

My qualitative research component involved interviews with participants in which answers were collected to a series of questions. These conversations allowed me to enrich the quantitative experimental data I had collected in the surveys by probing deeper through one-on-one questioning with persons of interest. In the design and implementation of my qualitative research in Pakistan I had to rely on web and telephone communication, as travel to Pakistan was not advisable, given my religious and national background as a Canadian Sikh, and the political nature of my research. I used my contacts in Pakistan to initiate discussions with artists and laypeople over the phone and online using WhatsApp and Skype, and then used those informants to snowball into calls with other subjects. I ended up speaking with Pakistanis involved in media, music, poetry and academia, and I also made a concerted effort to get in touch with artists and other persons of interest whenever they came to Edmonton for concerts and visits. I solicited my online surveys to Pakistanis through my social networks as well as through snowballing.

Interviewees were selected first through my own social network webs where I initiated contact with persons of interest through liaisons or intermediaries who had a working rapport with the individual(s) in question. For example, my grandfather knew a professor at Punjabi



University in Patiala who specializes in Sufism. I then contacted the professor at the university to set up an interview and then used that individual to *snowball* into other interviews – although a possible limitation of snowballing is the probability that the participants in a particular web know of each other. This same strategy was used in different relevant professional domains and I employed the use of multiple starting points by activating social-webs from people who were not connected in any way - so that I did not achieve a false sense of consistency derived from all of my informants knowing each other. My interviewees included artists, writers, video-directors, musicians and producers, poets, scholars, laypeople and others involved in journalism and media. The broad demographic-groups included and some examples of the questions I asked in my interviews and surveys were:

- Academics
  - How has the idea of Punjabi identity changed over the last decade?
  - Have you noticed a revival of Sufi culture; can you describe your observations?
  - How do we create a balance between modernity and Punjabi heritage?
- Students
  - List the following identifiers in the order you relate them to your personal identity: Religion, Punjabi, Indian, Tribe or Ethnicity. Can we discuss how you relate to these different identity qualifiers?
  - What does it mean to you to be Punjabi?
  - Are you familiar with Bulleh Shah? Heer-Ranjha? Sheikh Farid? What do you know about them? Can you recite any poetry from these or other Punjabi poets?
- Concert-Goers
  - What do you know about the history behind this music?
  - What is your favorite song of Gurdas Maan (or other artist)?
- Journalists
  - How do you see your role in disseminating objective information to the masses?

- How does the media contribute to people’s attitudes about Pakistan?
- How do you see the impact of Sufi music on generating a culturally interdependent relationship amongst East and West Punjabis? Can Sufi music and culture contribute to a shared sense of identity and do you see this as a pathway to peace?
- Politicians
  - How do you see East Punjab’s relationship to Pakistani Punjab?
- Artists (Musicians, Singers and Writers)
  - Do you feel you have a role in contributing to peace between India and Pakistan?
  - How important to you is a “Sanjha Virsa”?
  - Do you see yourself as a bridge between East and West Punjabis? How would you describe your role in this process?
- Urbanites (Working Class)
- Farmers and Villagers
- Devotees at Religious Sites

I would note here that it is possible that most of the people I spoke to may have represented a segment of the Pakistani middle-class who are naturally inclined towards peace and understanding. Though some of my informants may have had some level of conservative-reformist inclinations, I was not able to speak directly to any Pakistanis openly harboring hatred towards Sikhs. According to the people I did speak to however, those with such extremist views represent a very small segment of the population in the country. In my interviews I asked questions about the significance of Sufi music in a Punjabi cultural context, and how Sufi music contributes to the way individuals understand their own identity. In particular, I asked questions that assessed the extent to which Sufi music strengthens an individual’s association with their religious, cultural, regional and ethnic (micro and macro) identity. I also attempted to determine attitudes towards the “other” Punjab (East or West), and how participation in shared cultural and musical traditions strengthens ideas of “community” with people on the other side of the border.

I worked to achieve a balanced sample by targeting several different areas of experience and expertise including musicians, journalists, video-directors, writers and laypeople, among others, as well as people from different demographic backgrounds - for example Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus. I worked in small villages, large cities, and towns of varying size in between, in Punjab, and used fieldwork strategies to target a broad and diverse array of participants. I always tried to be as approachable and respectful as possible in attempting to get complete strangers to participate in my research.

A major component of my research involved immersing myself in the Punjabi cultural experience and gaining exposure to the way Sufi music was talked about in the regional media. I maintained a scrapbook of newspaper clippings as well, and made note of relevant conversations on the radio and on television during my fieldwork. I also explored online commentaries and articles that discussed this phenomenon.

### 3.5 A NOTE ABOUT THE SECTIONS “LEAVING FOOTPRINTS”

The preliminary data collection fieldwork trips to Punjab were taken annually from 2004-2017 during the development of the theoretical components of this research. I went on these excursions to experience first-hand some of the sites of historical significance in East Punjab that exemplify the close proximity of the relationship between Sikhism and Islam and also to start laying out a framework for my major data collection fieldwork experience which was from October to December of 2017. The primary theorizing pertaining to the data I collected in this phase will be found in the “leaving footprints” components of this dissertation, where I will provide some photographs as well as first-hand accounts of my experiences in exploring this topic. These early journeys were not primarily to collect information from *people* in the region pertaining to views on the issues I analyze in depth in this dissertation, but were mainly

experiential and involved visiting key historical *places* that exemplify the close relationship between these two religions (Sikhism and Islam) as well as the two parts of the divided region (East and West Punjab).<sup>14</sup>

Some of my trips took me outside of the geo-physical borders of the Punjab state into neighboring territories like Ajmer Sharif, the Moinuddin Chishti dargah in Rajasthan, or the purported graves of Leila and Majnoon in Anupgarh (also in Rajasthan), or the mountains of Manali near the Indo-Tibetan border – but that these places are historically connected to the greater Punjab region.

The purpose of these first trips, “leaving footprints,” was to collect information from first-hand experience at sites that demonstrate the close historical and contemporary proximity between Sikhism and Islam, in order to buttress my dissertation’s key hypothesis which proposes that the basis of the current revival, and for the increases in a desire for a mutually interdependent relationship amongst the people of East and West Punjab, is rooted in the resurgence of Sufi music and aesthetics in the region. I spent many weeks at different times in annual trips spanning over a decade - collecting footage, making audio recordings and interviewing accessible persons of interest. Some of the locations were difficult to access and were in derelict conditions such as the *Guru Ki Maseet* (The *Guru’s Mosque*) located just outside Hargobindpur, Punjab, India. Most of the local populations at many of the more obscure and

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<sup>14</sup> As I will discuss in greater detail later in this dissertation, many people, including scholars and lay people on both sides of the Islam and Sikh divide choose to counter-argue the interdependent relationship between Sikhism and Islam for personal or political reasons. They may provide what they think is evidence to refute the Semitic origins of the Sikh faith and label this religion as “pantheistic,” or as being a “dharmic” religion because of belief for example in re-incarnation. The double-edged sword however is that such claims are not levelled against communities like Orthodox Jews, or the Druze community who have similar views with Sikhism pertaining to the concept of re-incarnation.

antiquated, though culturally rich, heritage sites, were only able to provide small amounts of information to me. This was especially the case for those sites that were not commonly known of. I observed that many of these places run the risk of crumbling away, while at the same time new Gurdwaras are being erected throughout the region. Many sources assert that in Pakistan's Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provinces, historic Sikh sites of significance are also becoming derelict in their condition, with many being converted into schools, hospitals or government offices.

I was able to record my observations and converse with people bearing knowledge of the physical locations which I visited. For some places, information about the heritage sites is readily available and well documented, and in those instances I made efforts to document the physical locale and the practices of worshippers there in order to substantiate new and progressive interpretations of the significance of those spots. To touch on this briefly for a moment, my primary research initiative at this point was to demonstrate similarities between the historical religious traditions of the Islamic and Sufi schools pre-dating the advent of Sikhism in the region, and the Sikh tradition itself, as well as the close cultural proximity between East and West Punjab. Therefore, I chose sites that were accessible to me and that provided concrete evidence of this.

With the extended amount of time I had spent in the region over the course of twelve years, it was an arduous task to sort through all of the data, footage, audio and written notes and to decide what to use to substantiate my proposed perceptual position. As the evidence became clearer over time, I made sure to travel to key locations, document my activities, and to use this data to explore deeper into the nature of the relationship between the predominant schools of Islamic and Sufi thought in Punjab and Sikhism, though only few sectors of explicitly *active*

Islamic influence still exist in the Eastern state. The goal that proceeded from this was to work to examine and revive the shared cultural histories of both sides of the divided region, especially important given the socio-political situation - through which I had been beating out a path in the rough terrain of a territory openly traversed by few contemporaries.

### 3.6 A NOTE ABOUT THE SECTIONS “SOWING SEEDS”

The goal for this component of my fieldwork was to study the interpersonal relationships behind and arising from the Punjabi revival of Sufi modes of worship and music, a tradition historically recognized by both Sikhs and Muslims, and to determine if this resurgence could indeed transform the Punjab region, and how such an enterprise could address national trends of intolerance along religious lines. These “Sowing-Seeds” components had as much to do with the *people* of the region (East and West Punjabis) as the “Leaving Footprints” work had to do with *places*. Much of the theoretical framework and backstory for this study looks at how the Sufi revival relates to the cultural and religious history of the area. In “Sowing-Seeds,” I explored experimentally whether music could form a basis for cultural interdependence between the *people* of the two sides of the Punjab, divided by a national border between Pakistan and India, and also by religious differences (Muslim and Sikh). In other words, this component formed the *applied* sections of my research. I found that cultural rapprochements at the regional level have begun to form a strong basis for increased desires to recreate a mutually interdependent relationship amongst Sikhs and Muslims, they have also resulted in a major decline in popular support for war as a method to settle the conflict in Kashmir. Movements to liberate Punjab and Kashmir are now centralized around diplomatic conventions, and the opportunity to implement a plebiscite referendum, as the Sikhs plan to administer in November of 2020.

Just as the other component of my fieldwork, “Leaving Footprints,” provides insight into the present Sufi revival through fieldwork and documentation at Sikh and Sufi sites of historical significance in East Punjab where music is an important part of spiritual practices, as well as through work in cities in East Punjab, and along the border (including Chandigarh, Patiala, Barnala, Ludhiana, Amritsar, Gurdaspur and Batala); in this component (“Sowing Seeds”) I also assessed the impact of the *Sanjha Virsa* cultural view in the following ways: through interviews with Punjabi residents; through participation and documentation of Sanjha events; through interviews with musicians, artists and writers; and through community engagement and applied ethnomusicological work.

The applied dimension of my research centered on *peace activism* through the recording and distributing of my own music and music videos, that were rooted in the shared Punjabi cultural context. Ethnomusicologists hold that musical practice is an essential part of fieldwork engagement – for example, Harrison, et al. (2010) suggest that this involves moving into the field as a physical presence and enacting the very research paradigm we are studying in an “interventionist” fashion. The writers argue that “applied ethnomusicology” involves engaging in research with informed social responsibility and using this work to contribute to the promotion of a greater social good for humanity, working both within, and outside of, traditional academic contexts. As an academic, a performer, and a Sikh Canadian yearning for increased understanding, I was called to investigate—through ideas *and* through performance—whether shared musical forms and practices could resolve conflict based on two primary modalities, the first being: “can it work?” as in testing through research; and the second being: “making it work,” centred around *peace activism* and my own interventions.

## 4 BACKGROUND TO PUNJAB, SIKHISM AND SUFISM

### 4.1 HOW WE GOT HERE – KEY EVENTS LEADING TO THE CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION IN THE REGION

Because Punjab is situated as a Northwest Frontier region, the people who have lived in these lands have been exposed to countless crusades and wars and thus their armies had to remain ever-ready. Territorial wars and violence have plagued the territory throughout history. Because the historical Punjab was the entryway into India, through the infamous Khyber Pass, and into the agriculturally rich and abundant *Land of Five Rivers*, all invading armies that sought to conquer the subcontinent would have first had to wage a victorious war over the Punjabis. Indeed, it is well known that Alexander the Great came as far as the Punjab and established a stronghold here after a drawn-out struggle with the king Porus and his army, and later, the Delhi Sultanate, made up of Islamic Turkic rulers also governed Punjab. The Mughals, the descendants of Chengiz Khan entered India via the Khyber Pass and into the Punjab, and this was followed by a period of Sikh rule in the territory, known as the *Khalsa Raj*, a confederacy consolidating present-day East and West Punjab, Himachal, Haryana, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Kashmir and Eastern Afghanistan, under the jurisdiction of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1799-1849). This empire extended from the borders of Tibet and Westward to *Kabul*, which became an important city within the Sikh Empire. The tenth Guru, Gobind Singh also issued a famous edict to the Sikhs of Kabul known as the *Hukamnama for the Sikh Sangat of Kabul*. Although this period was one of fruition, it was followed by much turmoil and bloodshed. The British had an aptly difficult time annexing Punjab after several of the “Anglo-Sikh wars,” finally doing so by negotiated treaties initiated by Sikh dissenters themselves more than two hundred years after the



British had arrived in India. The struggle for independence quickly ensued when the Punjabis began to feel the weight of living under a new brand of persecution, and though the fight for freedom was spearheaded by many Sikhs including *Bhagat Singh*, it ultimately led to the Partition of the subcontinent, right through the heart of Punjab.

After Punjab was divided in the Partition of 1947 (leading to the formation of the Punjab Province in Pakistan and a Punjab State in India), the colonial structure of the British was further imposed by the dominating political entities on both sides, and through effective propaganda campaigns the ensuing result over the decades to come was that both sides struggled vehemently to define their own religious and cultural practices (“we are what you are not”). The demographic results of this senseless but strategic repopulation by the British wit was a Muslim majority in West Punjab (Punjabis make up more than 40% of Pakistan), and a Sikh majority in East Punjab (with a Hindu minority).<sup>15</sup> This split has led to several wars between the two countries and also to the creation of a violent and disputed conflict zone in Kashmir. The boundary between the divided Punjab remains one of the most highly militarized borders in the world, with the plains region historically being the primary theatre for combat between the two countries - resulting in mobilizations of army infrastructure throughout the area on a regular basis. However, profoundly impacting religious practice in the area: hundreds of sites of religious and historical significance for the Sikhs are located on the other side of a national boundary. The word Punjab itself is derived from the Persian words for *five* “Panj” and *waters* “aub,” so literally the name means the “Land of the Five Rivers.” The irony of the situation then now is that the Punjab province in Pakistan is only really a “se” aub, as it has only *three* of the

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<sup>15</sup> It is worthwhile here to note the demographic anomaly of a Sikh majority state, as people who *identify* as Sikhs form less than 1.5% of the total national population of India.

rivers, and in India the State of Punjab is really a “do” aub, as the remaining *two* rivers fall in Indian territory. Both the State and the Province are landlocked, bordering Kashmir to the North, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to the West and the region of Sindh to the South in Pakistan, and Himachal, Haryana and Rajasthan to the East and South in India.

To understand the current regional situation, including the conflicts between India and Pakistan, or between Sikhs and India, we must first look into the history of the Punjab and the beliefs of the Sikhs. Brian Keith Axel in his book *The Nation's Tortured Body* (2001), uses the symbolism of the “tortured and martyred” Sikh as an archetype for the physical history of the Punjab itself. My own research in Biblical Studies suggests that the narratives of the Old Testament form an archetype for Jesus of the New Testament, in that Jesus is seen to personify the collective Israel and relive their history in a microcosm, including in his death and resurrection<sup>16</sup> (cf. the exile to Babylon – “like a lamb being led to slaughter”), in a similar way Axel proposes that the bloody history of the Punjab region is linked symbolically to both the pure, perfumed and intact body of the maharaja, then juxtaposed to the tortured and mutilated bodies of Sikhs during the 1980's and 1990's.

The book forms the basis of its discourse around the idea of the *amritdhari* Sikh's body as a *total body*. Axel compares the practicing Sikh's adherence to the Five K's and the idea of a

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<sup>16</sup> See: Khaira, Arshdeep. *The Community of the Faithful: Jesus As a Personification of Servant Israel*. [Edmonton, Alta.]: Department of Religious Studies, Concordia University College of Alberta, 2012.

perfect physicality (emphasizing the significance of all the hair of the body as unshorn), to the body of a *Maharaja* (king). This is contrasted to images circulated throughout the internet beginning in the late 1990's of Sikhs who had been mercilessly tortured by the Punjab Police and other central government agencies affiliated with hardline Hindu-Nationalist groups such as the RSS, during the rise of Sikh revolutionary activity in the 1980's and early 1990's. The juxtaposition between the pure physical body of the *amritdhari*, or the *Maharaja*, to the images of tortured Sikhs is paralleled in the geophysical reign of the Sikh Empire (the *Khalsa Raj*) from 1799-1849 (the perfect physical body), to the violence of colonization and then *Partition* (1849-1947) and the state-sponsored attack and genocide of Sikhs in the 1980's and 1990's (the tortured physical body). Axel explains this thus: "Within procedures of torture, what takes on significance is the relation of the profile of the *amritdhari* to the tortured body. In Khalistani practice, however, the tortured body stands against the *total* body: that is, a rapturous system of wounds and piercings stands against a holistic system of bodily adornments (the Five K's)" (151).

Axel draws a religious analogy to other cultures where similar notions of a tortured body juxtapose against the *total body*, like Christianity. He cites Stephen Moore who describes that "the central symbol of Christianity is the figure of a tortured man... God's forgiveness is extended to the sinner over the mutilated body of his Son" (147; see also Moore p. 4, 31). In this way images of the "mutilated Christ" were composed and circulated heavily in medieval Europe. Axel describes that "the fetishism of the image of the Sikh's tortured body by Khalistanis may be understood as an effect of the Indian nation-state's political violence and of the circulation of that image as a commodity" (149).

Cynthia Mahmood (1996) is also important here. She shares conversations with Sikh militants and attempts to uncover the primary causes of what led to the Sikh self-determination movement in the 1980's. A conflation of strategic moves in South and Central Asia at the time had filtered down into East Punjab resulting in a new found zeal and desire for Sikhs to petition on behalf of their basic rights and freedoms. Many Sikhs began to support the mobilization of armed insurgent groups known as *Khadkus* or *Khalistani Freedom Fighters*, to protect the basic rights of Sikhs including autonomy within their own state, as well as the safety of their own people in the face of increasing Indian hostility. The *Khadku* Sikhs at this time, led by Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, a revolutionary leader who had been trained in Sikh theology, began to petition for increased control over their own water, farms and resources as well as the basic right to be identified as a separate religious group distinct from Hinduism (see: Dhillon 1993). The grievances made in the *Anandpur Sahib Resolution* requested no more autonomy than any state or province in a democratic country would be traditionally entitled to. The portrayal of Sikhs as a threat to India became dominant in the mainstream news media, whereas it was quite evident that the Indian state had planned an invasion of Punjab *apriori* and the movement of Sikhs to arm and fortify their *Gurdwaras* was a response to increasing Indian hostility (see: Bhogal 2011). It is important to note however that many Khalistani groups were primarily motivated to create a separate Sikh homeland in Punjab and that in an effort to accomplish these means these organizations also engaged in militancy.

Mahmood's seminal work on the Khalistani (Sikh Separatist) insurgencies that engulfed the Punjab state of India from roughly 1978-1993 explores the phenomenon of violence and terrorism from the point of view of those participating in these activities. She draws on the accounts of her dialogues with Sikh militants and this allows the reader to understand the various

perspectives of a persecuted people and how a language employing terminology like “freedom fighters,” “martyrs,” and “shaheeds” is juxtaposed against terms like “terrorist,” or “militant.” This is also a rare account circulated in the mainstream about the series of events surrounding the attack on the Golden Temple (as well as several other Gurdwaras throughout Punjab) and the subsequent attempted genocide of the Sikhs from 1984-1990, that speaks from the voice of the victims of oppression. Because Mahmood was able to dialogue with Sikh militants from a perspective of understanding and reason, she was subsequently able to gather a great deal of information pertaining to the operations of the various Sikh separatist organizations (like Babbar Khalsa, Khalistan Liberation Force and the Sikh Youth Federation).

An important concept in Sikhism is the tradition associated with *martyrdom* and dying a meaningful death. Mahmood is able to lead the reader through a narrative that elaborates this tradition amongst this religious group, with a particular emphasis on the long history of martyrs in classical as well as contemporary Sikh history. Mahmood describes one militant’s expression that for the Sikhs “(the history) minimizes individual bodily pain in favor of what the victory over that pain can accomplish” (36). She also frames her discourse around the significance of honor and its maintenance amongst men and women. Partial to this she describes in detail based on her first hand accounts with victims of the state-sponsored pogroms against Sikhs, the lengths that many men, women and children had to go to protect their honor.

In an entire chapter titled “The Princess and the Lion,” Mahmood describes the complete gender equality of men and women in Sikhism and how this has led to the formation of mutually supportive attitudes towards the movement: “They become mothers to bring up children who will ‘pick up their fathers’ guns’; like the Sikh woman who told me that if her two sons got

sacrificed, she would only regret that she had only those two, ‘not even enough to make a necklace’ (referring to the historical episode in which Sikh mothers were forced by the Mughals to wear garlands of the flesh of their children” (226). She also gives the example of Resham Kaur who asked for a glass of water from the police, broke it and “slit her throat... so that she might not reveal her husband’s whereabouts under threat of her infant’s torture” (227).

Mahmood’s work is of a graphic nature, and some of the accounts of the atrocities committed by the state against the Sikhs are not for the faint of heart. As an Anthropologist her strategy is much admired by many in the field. Being able to ascertain such significant information from sources that are quite difficult to reach required an entire strategy of earning the trust of her respondents. This had both positive and negative repercussions for Mahmood. On the one hand she was able to get close to several Commanders and Generals involved with the Sikh liberation movement, and because of this she was able to include very sensitive information in her account. However, the downside of this is that she came to be seen by some in the field as being in “close cahoots” with “terrorists.” By giving “terrorists” a forum to voice their views through open dialogue she quickly found herself at odds with the Indian Central Government Agencies. Further she is dismissed by some scholars as being “partial” to the plight of Khalistanis, and in direct opposition to other scholars of Sikhism, who many conservative factions of Sikhs, including Khalistanis, are vehemently opposed against.

Mahmood further does not use the word “terrorist” to describe her informants, but prefers the term “militant,” and her reason continues to be a thorn in the side of many central government officials and their supporters because the term does not immediately place “blame” on any one side. She argues that militants are as justified in their activity as “soldiers” of a state,

and uses this position to show Sikh militants as constituting a chain of command and organizational structure that is conducive to a high level of strategic military efficiency. Further, this idea is echoed in that Sikhs have always embodied an autonomous mindset, understanding themselves as their own nation. At the same time she is clear that she does not have a “position” on Khalistan (p. X), but at the same time that asserts that one of the best ways to avoid future violence in Punjab is by paying “attention to the principle of self-determination” (X). Some of her ideas have drawn negative attention by entities that struggle to suppress the Sikh voice in matters related to autonomy, however she has become a leader in research pertaining to Khalistan and other struggles for self-determination that employ violent tactics and strategies throughout the Middle East and South Asia. I will talk more about this in chapter five where I discuss the Kashmir conflict and its relationship to a renewed and strengthened movement to acquire an independent Khalistan.

When the Indian army invaded Punjab in June of 1984, simultaneously attacking several fortified Gurdwaras in Punjab with brute force, they employed the use of ground power using tanks and machine guns, as well as aircraft and rockets. The major push of this Indian offensive was on the *Darbar Sahib* complex, also known as the Golden Temple, in the middle of a major religious holiday when the complex was packed with thousands of innocent civilians. The army completely destroyed the Golden Temple and burnt down the sacred library within the precinct, destroying hundreds of years’ worth of history contained in original manuscripts. Sant *Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale* who was the leader of the Sikh movement was killed and those involved with the attack in the Indian army were celebrated and awarded prizes of distinction.

The attack itself was ordered by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, however many later documents that have surfaced now show the possible involvement of the British Government in

the planning.<sup>17</sup> Shortly after, Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her two Sikh body guards, Satwant Singh and Beant Singh, who to this day are celebrated by many Punjabis as *Kaum de Heere* (the diamonds of the community).<sup>18</sup> In the aftermath of the assassination of Indira Gandhi thousands of Sikhs were hunted out and killed by state-organized and armed mobs. In a *Time Magazine* article on October 31, 2014, Simran Jeet Singh describes the genocidal act that took place at the time. In this article, Singh outlines that there has been a systematic failure on behalf of the central Indian government to openly acknowledge the events that took place in June and July of 1984 (including the attack on Punjab by the Indian army as well as the genocide of Sikhs that took place after) for what they actually represented - namely, a genocidal campaign against a vulnerable minority community. Singh explicates this in the following way:

Almost as many Sikhs died in a few days in India in 1984 than all the deaths and disappearances in Chile during the 17-year military rule of Gen. Augusto Pinochet between 1973 and 1990,” pointed out Barbara Crossette, a former New York Times bureau chief in New Delhi, in a report for World Policy Journal.

He mentions that many other countries that have experienced state-sponsored ethnic cleansing, like Chile and South Africa, have subsequently openly acknowledged the events that took place and have made steps towards reconciliation. The Indian government, according to this article, simply refuses to acknowledge this event as a genocide, although it is worth noting that many

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<sup>17</sup> See:

“British Government ‘Covered Up’ Its Role in Amritsar Massacre in India,” by Jamie Doward, in *The Guardian – International Edition*. October 29, 2017.

“The Secret Behind Operation Blue Star: Britain’s Dilemma Explained,” in *The Economic Times*, June 13, 2018

<sup>18</sup> “Kaum de Heere” is also the title of a Punjabi movie released in 2014 but subsequently banned by the Indian government for release.



other nations have acknowledged this event as such, including the provincial government of Ontario. The Indian government instead refers to this event as a “riot,” a term that Singh explains is highly problematic:

The word riot is problematic because it implies random acts of disorganized violence. It invokes images of chaos that overwhelms law enforcement and the government that is there to protect its people.

Singh maintain that the anti-Sikh violence of 1984 was not a riot. The massacres were not spontaneous, anomalous or disorganized. According to a report belatedly commissioned by the Government of India in 2000, “but for the backing and help of influential and resourceful persons, killing of Sikhs so swiftly and in large numbers could not have happened. He further goes on to describe the genocidal act in the following way:

Frenzied mobs of young Hindu thugs, thirsting for revenge, burned Sikh-owned stores to the ground, dragged Sikhs out of their homes, cars and trains, then clubbed them to death or set them aflame before raging off in search of other victims.

Witnesses watched with horror as the mobs walked the streets of New Delhi, gang-raping Sikh women, murdering Sikh men and burning down Sikh homes, businesses and Gurdwaras (Sikh houses of worship). Eyewitness accounts describe how law enforcement and government officials participated in the massacres by engaging in the violence, inciting civilians to seek vengeance and providing the mobs with weapons.

In the Spring of April 2017, the Ontario provincial government officially recognized this as a *genocide* of Sikhs. Further, the states of Pennsylvania and Connecticut have also done likewise in the United States.<sup>19</sup> Many Kashmiris have openly expressed solidarity with Sikhs

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<sup>19</sup> See:

“Ontario Passes Motion Calling 1984 Riots Genocide, India Says Move Misguided,” by Anirudh Bhattacharya, in *The Hindustan Times*, April 8, 2017.

regarding the event.<sup>20</sup> Pakistani media has covered the event regularly to this day often expressing solidarity with Sikhs as an oppressed minority in India.<sup>21</sup>

The decades following the attack on Punjab and the genocide of Sikhs has been marked by an easy willingness to forget amongst many people in India. If one examines the musical and mainstream media culture promoted in Punjab during the 80's, shortly after the attack and then into the 90's, it becomes evident that there was a systematic attempt to forget history. Drugs became increasingly ubiquitous, and today the abuse of synthetic varieties in Punjab is at epidemic proportions. Songs about alcohol and women became increasingly popular. Intoxicants became readily available, and the situation has continued to deteriorate to today. It is possible that some Sikhs wanted to forget what had happened, and many locals claim that the central government made attempts to ensure that the vices were readily accessible so that people *would* forget.<sup>22</sup>

To briefly touch on the issue of drug abuse in Punjab, I wish to draw attention to the work of Jain and Singhal, who in a 2012 article examined this epidemic in Punjab involving the use of primarily synthetic drugs and opiates. They describe that the majority of the drugs can trace their origin to parts of North West Pakistan and Afghanistan and are smuggled in large

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"Pennsylvania Recognizes 1984 Riots as 'Sikh Genocide'," by Yudhvir Rana, in *The Times of India*, October 20, 2018.

"Connecticut Becomes First State to Recognize Sikh Genocide," by Paolo Zialcita, *WNPR Radio*, July 23, 2018.

<sup>20</sup> "Sikh victims of operation Blue Star remembered" - Press Release issued by Kashmir Media Service.

<sup>21</sup> "Remembering Operation Blue Star." *Pakistan Observer*, June 09, 2016

<sup>22</sup> See for example the article by Jim Yardley for the New York Times on April 18, 2012 – "Indian State Finds Itself in the Tight Grip of Addiction."

quantities across the Punjab border. This article describes how the Punjab government has employed the services of the BSF or “Border Security Force,” however there seems to be a complacent attitude amongst authorities when dealing with these issues. Much of the sale of these drugs at the highest level is used to fund militant groups like Lashkar-e- Toiba, but the brunt of the effect is felt in Punjab which demonstrates one of the highest rates of usage amongst the states of India (Jain and Singhal 2012). There are entire villages that have been devastated by drugs, particularly in the rural areas, where due to decreasing water levels, and farmers who are under massive debt, the use of illicit drugs has climbed rapidly. Farmer suicides are also common in these areas as there has been little that has been done to contribute to the rehabilitation process for drug addicts, and this epidemic has led to a large loss of life.

The recent “awakening” of Punjabi youth, primarily pushed by diaspora Sikhs, represents a dramatic change in the momentum of the last several decades after *Blue Star*. Sufi music and culture for many Sikhs represents continuity with the essence of their faith and is a major part of the attempted reclamation and reconciliation process. In the face of war, and then genocide, and now *cultural* genocide, the revival I have examined in detail becomes increasingly important to understand.



**Figure 4-1 A Sikh Informant and Me in Punjab (Photo by Gurdeep Khaira – Winter 2017)**

## 4.2 RELIGIOUS EXTREMES

### *4.2.1 RIGHT-WING HINDU-NATIONALISM*

India today is controlled by a political party known as the BJP. The head of this party, and the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, achieved success through the promotion and sustained propagation of a hard-line policy promoting Hindu nationalism. Along with endorsing a revival of Brahmanical Hinduism, their policies also include the vilification of Muslims, Christians, and Sikhs. The RSS represents a militarized wing of the BJP that aims to enforce Hindu nationalist agenda and policy throughout India. Siddiqui (2016) describes this in the following way:

At present, the RSS has millions of members spread throughout most parts of India with more than 50,000 shakhas (branches). It also runs thousands of schools where young minds are poisoned with hate against Muslims. In Uttar Pradesh State alone, there are some 20,000 RSS-controlled shishumandir schools which

teach that the Muslims and Christians are unreliable people stirring up hatred against both Muslims and Christians, with children being taught that both these groups are foreigners and outsiders. (Oza, 2007).

The RSS is well known to show open admiration for the policies of fascist leaders such as Hitler and Mussolini.<sup>23</sup> Kanwar Singh (2019) references Jafferlot's (1996) work, where the latter compares some of the Hindu-Nationalist movements' ideologies to those of the Nazis:

Insinuating the Hindu movements from Arya Samaj to Hindu Mahasabha to the RSS as militant movements, (Jafferlot) draws RSS's parallel with the Nazi ideology of Hitler while calling it a special kind of racism (Singh 2019, 133).

Siddiqui (2016) describes this racism in the following way:

At present, India faces an immense threat from fascism in the guise of Hindu nationalism. The ideology of Hindutva has received widespread coverage in the press in recent years, but it is a crude attempt to camouflage upper-caste Hindu groups, who have used religion as a tool to maintain their hegemony over the vast majority of the Indian people (Siddiqui 2016, 2).

The BJP platform is centralized on creating a Hindu homeland and to remove or subdue non-Hindu cultural religious and linguistic elements from the country. Some of the other

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<sup>23</sup> See: Andersen, Walter, and Shridhar D. Damle. *Messengers of Hindu Nationalism: How the RSS Reshaped India*. Hurst & Company, 2018.

And

Jafferlot, Christophe. "The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics." *sl: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers* (1996).

policies of the RSS who actively engage in both physical cultural subliminal and psychological warfare is to absorb other religions like Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism, into Hinduism. This includes actively engaging its millions of members in efforts to distort the history and theology of the Sikhs, through propaganda literature and state sponsored scholarship.

To briefly touch on the way pro-Hindutva groups such as the RSS operate, and especially how they exert their ideological influence through music and culture, I wish to draw attention to the work of Anna Shultz. In a 2008 article, she explored the way ultra-conservative nationalist sentiment is conveyed via religious music in India. In this context, she focused on the *Rastriya Kirtan* (Hindu spiritual music) of *Maharashtra*, in the *Marathi* language. She mentions the concept of “madness,” to denote the willingness to engage in physical action conducive to what a participant may construe as in the best interest of their *nation*, as influenced by regular exposure to this style of spiritual music. In the context of her work, *nation* would refer to a multi-ethnic society united under a common religious tradition, Hinduism. She suggests that people may be mobilized to elicit physical action in large part due to the rhetoric and maliciousness of the music in question. She acknowledges that considerable attention has been offered to similar areas of study, including the transmission of nationalist sentiment in mainstream media and culture in India, however she argues that little consideration has been given to the “performance process through which discourse is transformed into immediate, personal experience” (32).

Schultz mentions her difficulty in dealing with research related to conservative-reformist Hinduism, and participants with ultra-orthodox worldviews who “attempt to drown out alternative identities” (34). She also acknowledges that the open expression of her own political views could very well have pre-emptively ended any informant relationships she had developed

with members of the community. She mentions that it was “important to study power not only from the position of the marginalized, but also from the perspective of those who seek to maintain established hierarchies” (35). As the music of *Rastriya Kirtan* that she examines is shown to have a profound effect on listeners, creating attitudes of ultra-nationalism, she therefore suggests the possibility that such forms of spiritual music have contributed to increased ethnic violence, as well as the marginalization of minority communities.

Manuel (1993) can also help us understand how music and media have been used by Hindu-Nationalist groups in India. While the advent of cassette tapes in the country proved to create a mobilization of music and an increase in its consumption amongst the masses, the author also argues in this account that the medium was also used to incite factionalism and even racism or religious xenophobia in different parts of the country. This is an integral work for research in ethnomusicology, and it aptly explores how technological transformations shaped the way music was consumed in India. Manuel questions the role of various mediums in transmitting messages, propaganda or news, to mass-audiences, which the he explores was one of the repercussions of the ease of availability of cassette tapes in India.

An understanding of Frishkopf’s (2008) work is also critical here to contextualize this idea. He discusses how in the period following the Egyptian revolution in 1952, nationalism in the country became confounded by a paradoxical rhetoric. Essentially, “nationalist discourse mapped out two theoretically contradictory world-views – one empowering to the citizenry, the other empowering to the state – bound to lead to contradictions in practice, exacting tremendous personal tolls” (30). Among activities such as the execution of political enemies by the regime and the nationalizing of major industries in the country, there were also severe cultural

ramifications. The music industry was decimated when private sector record manufacturing was replaced by a state-run company: *Sawt al-Cahiro* (SonoCairo). The writer traces through the tragic life and career of the Egyptian nationalist and artist Muhammad Fawzy, in an effort to show “the latent conflict between popular and statist forms of nationalism” (30). The case-study on Fawzy’s career allows for an understanding of not only the socio-economic repercussions of statist nationalism, but also the effect of such strategies enacted by powerful government entities on various forms of creative, artistic and cultural expression.

The influence of the RSS’ ideologies even extends to Bollywood, where they exert massive control. Roy (2014) helps us understand this through her analysis of how Sikhs have been typically portrayed in mainstream Indian cinema. Historically, Sikhs have been misrepresented in Bollywood, as less than intelligent, albeit brave-hearted jokesters. This has contributed to ignorance about Sikhs amongst the masses that are in-line with stereotypes perpetuated by the media. Many Indians assume Punjabis are loud, proud, heavy drinkers, but that they are equally generous and honest, if not as intellectually gifted. The author explores the way portrayals of Sikhs in mainstream Bollywood cinema had shifted after the industry began to take note of the success of diaspora Sikhs in the UK, Canada and America. Roy explores this connection as such by examining “images of Sikhs in new Bollywood films to inquire if the romanticizing of Sikhs as representing rustic authenticity is a clever marketing tactic used by the film industry to capitalize on the increasing power of the Sikh diaspora or if it is an indulgence in diasporic techno-nostalgia that converges on the Sikh body as the site for non- technologized rusticity” (203). She describes that “since the mid- 1990s, Mumbai filmmakers have been forced to genuflect to the rising economic and political power of the Sikh diaspora through the integration of the Sikh subject in the visual and narrative economy of the Hindi film” (203).



Roy explores the phenomenon of stereotyping Sikh identity in Bollywood as actually pushing the community further aside in commonplace Indian society. That in spite of increasing representation in Bollywood cinema, “the Sikh subject continues to be displaced in the Indian nation” (204). Although Sikhs are predominantly found residing in Punjab, there are Sikh communities in other parts of the country, though their overall population is less than 1.5% of the total population of India. For many Indians, their limited exposure to Sikhs is through mainstream Bollywood movies, further perpetuating stereotypes about a small minority community. Combatting against these stereotypes, Sikhs form a grossly large and disproportionate number in the armed forces, and also include some of the most influential businessmen in the country. Though in national politics, their representation is purposely limited outside of the state of Punjab.

#### 4.2.2 CONSERVATIVE-REFORMIST ISLAM

Zaman (2007) explores how during their five-year rule of Afghanistan, the Taliban are said to have maintained a very close contact with the madrassas of Pakistan. In fact, he argues that it is from these very theological schools that the origins of the Taliban can be traced (the word *Taliban* itself means “student”). As most South Asian Muslims are predominantly *Sunni* (62), much of the *Deobandi* view of Islam follows this approach with regard to translations and also with regard to the centrality of the *Hanafi* school of law and jurisprudence (62). In fact, the author mentions that *Hanafi* law studies are a central component of schooling in the madrassas of South Asia (64).

Madrasa learning in South Asia “carries a rich and multi-faceted sense of tradition” (66) however it has continued to evolve over recent history. The author mentions that much of the

evolution of teaching styles in South Asian madrassas over the last number of decades “has increasingly done so in a highly adversarial environment defined by governmental proponents of ‘reform’ and by deep misgivings about the nature and direction of this reform amongst the ulama” (66). What we see based on this critical exploration by Zaman is that the madrasa tradition in South Asia continues to play a central role in the propagation of a highly conservative and orthodox view of Islam that has seen the support of the Taliban in the past and that seeks to marginalize perceived unorthodox communities of Muslims who predate many of the conservative reformist schools’ arrival in the region, like the *chishtis*.

Many extremists in Pakistan trace their origins back to the Deobandi school of Islamic orthodoxy, which is centred in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. Inspired by Shah Waliullah Dehlawi, it has its roots in Deoband, India. This movement seems to stand in strict opposition to other earlier schools of Islam, for example the Chishti (a Sufi order), and some may observe that the practices of a group like the Chishti are seen as un-Islamic by Deobandis - but the relationship is a bit more complex than we may originally conceive. Consider that Deobandi scholars have often been initiated into Sufi orders, including the Chishtiyya, Naqshbandiyya, and Suhrawardiyya (often all of them simultaneously), yet they have practiced these orders quietly through private meditation. What they often critique is the widespread practices of visiting tombs and *mawlid* celebrations, such as that which takes place on the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad. A common misconception is that they are against Sufism as a whole, but rather many Deobandi teachers also act as murshids for their students, initiating them into several *turuq*, or a congregation of Sufis organized around a master, though in practice they end up appearing to be anti-Sufi on the whole, because Sufism is usually represented in South Asia by Barelvis, who defend the more widespread communal practices. There has also been an

increasing favour for Salafi Islam<sup>24</sup> (an ultra conservative-reformist branch of Sunni Islam) that has become gradually relevant in Pakistan based in large part on the economic relationship the country has with Saudi Arabia, from where most Salafi schools of theology are based.

I would like to briefly explore here how with the rise of conservative-reformist Islam and the way supporters of these ideologies have typically been portrayed in mainstream media, there has been a rise in *Islamophobia*, particularly in the West, and this has had a massive effect of the Sikh community as well. Arora allows us to understand why this is so (Arora 2013). She looks at the devastating number of hate crimes that have been perpetuated against Sikh men in the United States following the events of 9/11 and the subsequent war on terror, which are in proportion to their population, very high. Sikhs remain one of the most targeted groups of hate violence in the United States for the most part because turbans and beards have been consistently vilified on state run media and news outlets. This article explores, through a series of interviews, the way several Sikh men have dealt with this stigma in the United States, and suggests that for many Sikhs, this type of negative attention has led to a new found exuberance for their own faith and a desire to share more with the common American about the origins and beliefs of Sikhism.

Of particular emphasis for many of her interviewees is that the essence of the Sikh faith promotes tolerance and justice for people from all walks of humanity and does not buy in to the ideology of the “in-group” and the “out-group,” but rather accepting all people as reflections of the one light of God. A popular slogan adopted by many Sikhs in recent years is the idea that

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<sup>24</sup> Salafi may not have a consistent emic meaning, or may also not be considered a "branch." This is because the term has been popularized recently more by outsiders seeking a way to pool together various conservative-reformist movements.

“we are all Sikhs,” or that we are all people of one God and that we are all “students” or “disciples” in his court. The writer shares the significance of the Sikh turban in the following way:

The turban carries particular significance for Sikhs. It is an article of faith that represents piety, honor, and courage. The turban signifies the wearers’ commitment to assisting those in need, as he is easily identifiable. A Sikh may wear his turban for any combination of these reasons or simply for his adherence to his faith (Gohil & Sidhu, 2008) (117).

She goes on to describe how a symbol of justice, honesty and courage has been relayed to a misinformed American public as a symbol of exactly the opposite - namely: terror, vengefulness, and racism. The author describes that “after 9/11, Sikhs who shared Osama Bin Laden’s visual image of the turban and beard came to be seen as suspicious and were targets of racial violence (Ahluwalia & Pellettiere, 2010)” (117).

## 4.3 WHERE ARE WE NOW?

*Chin aur Arab hamara, Hindustan hamara,  
Muslim hain hum watan hai, saara jahaan hamara...*  
Central Asia (China) is ours, Arabia is ours, India is ours,  
We are Muslims and the whole world is our homeland...

- Allama Iqbal

The poet Iqbal wrote the “Tarana-e-Milli” to unite Muslims and to mitigate the rise of specific nationalisms amongst the multi-ethnic *Ummah* (the Muslim community). Iqbal openly became a supporter of the “two-nation theory” that would divide the subcontinent into India and Pakistan, but the poem continues to have relevance for Muslims because it fosters the idea of being “ham watan,” or united by Islam no matter where they are. Interestingly, Iqbal’s “Tarana-e-Hindi,” which he wrote prior to “Tarana-e-Milli,” remains a popular ballad amongst Indians, including the armed forces, as it promotes the idea of a shared nation, or a glorious Hindustan, in which people of many religions live together freely (though this is far from the current truth).

The present-day situation in Pakistan shows strong nationalist sentiments amongst the political classes. Still, allusions continue to be made by some such as Bilawal Bhutto Zardari towards the hopes that Jinnah may have had (as reflected in some of his speeches) about a secular homeland guided by the principles of Islam but welcoming to all people, essentially a land in which Jinnah once suggested that Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims (they would all be *Pakistani*). But today, few Pakistanis would openly criticize the conservative reformist brand of Islam that is a major by-product of strong Saudi-Pak relations. There is a rigid view of what constitutes national identity in Pakistan (though solidarity with Sikhs is also a common thread of discussion on Pakistani television, as

documented in my fieldwork, amongst people from all classes of Pakistani society), just as there is amongst conservative Hindu nationalists in India.

Given today's grim political climate in South Asia, with particular regard to the intense conflict in Kashmir, it is now more important than ever for the people of East and West Punjab to recognize their shared cultural ties and push forward the process of reconciliation. It has become increasingly important to explore avenues for the promotion of peace and the mitigation of escalating violent conflict. Pakistan and India have been locked in combat over the past seventy years resulting in the deaths of many innocent civilians as well as armed personnel. Pakistan is experiencing movement towards conservative-reformism amongst militant groups, as well as some other influential segments of society, and the subsequent deterioration of cultural institutions is one byproduct - whether in terms of historical infrastructure, linguistic links (regional languages), or dress, marriage and musical customs. In India, pro-Hindutva organizations such as the RSS are engaged in whitewashing the history of the Sikhs, who form a very small minority (< 1.5 %) and are attempting to obliterate their unique linguistic, ethnic and religious identity through the systematic proliferation of drugs, as well as the implementation of assimilationist policies, and targeted *cultural genocide* (see: Jafferlot 1996; Siddiqui 2016; Andersen 2018).

The work *Nationalism, Minorities and Diasporas: Identities and Rights In the Middle East* (Schulze, et al. 1996) is relevant here. The writers suggest that minority communities are those people of a country who are fewer in number than the majority and have specific cultural or religious practices that differentiate them from the mainstream. They also propose that minority communities often have to deal with the nationalizing processes of the majority controlled political powers which often seek to homogenize the state and create uniformity in

culture, as well as other areas such as language and religion. The writers offer several well known examples of such peoples including Turkish Kurds, Iraqi Kurds, and Israeli Arab Muslims. They suggest that minority groups such as the Kurds in Iraq have faced increasing difficulty at maintaining their unique cultural practices and ethnic identity in the context of attempted ethnic cleansing and the deterioration of their rights under the state. In this context the authors ask questions along the lines of: is it possible to be an Arab Muslim Israeli? The indigenous Arab peoples of Israel-Palestine who now live in the modern nation-state of Israel have a hard time conjoining these identities. Or perhaps, is it possible to be a Kurdish Turk?

While the majority of this work focuses on the Middle East, there are similarities to be found throughout the world, where minority identities take precedence for certain peoples that are often in counterpoint to the nationalist dialogues and agenda of their host country. Often, these people may be indigenous to the land, and become displaced in the processes of nationalization. For example, how can we reconcile Tibetan and Chinese identity? How about Sikh and Indian identity? Is it necessary to pledge allegiance to a nation that has over time continued to seek to absorb your community in a process of homogenization and has ceaselessly undermined your unique cultural practices and beliefs? What if they do not even recognize you as a culturally and ethnically unique group? Questions such as these are addressed in this book that offers insight into how we can protect minority communities from the processes of language, ethnic and cultural assimilation.

It is possible that by way of increasing awareness even outside of demographically Punjabi identifying groups about the shared common history between Sikhs and the Muslims of Pakistan, in one fell swoop we can progress towards moving away from further unnecessary violence in Kashmir and East Punjab. By acknowledging that the conflicts in the two bordering regions are profoundly

connected and correlated to one another, we can then promote initiatives that emphasize mutual solidarity and interdependence – such as my music video “Kashmir.” Peaceful solutions to armed conflict can be found through enterprises that uncover the reality of the situation in the territory through detailed research such as is contained in this dissertation. This is a very important issue that many people outside of the immediate sphere of influence are either not aware of, or do not see the importance of.

To touch on the reality of this “socio-political situation” for a moment, and in doing so to further elucidate the significance of research such as mine, I provide the following example of my own experiences with the media and the energy which I felt in the region in the winter season of December 2014-January 2015. During this time, the horrific events of the Taliban siege of an elementary school in Northwest Pakistan took place. Further, the Line of Control in the region of Kashmir remained ever active. Kashmir has often been called the “most dangerous place in the world,” while also the most beautiful. It did not seem to be on the minds of those near and dear to me that for us resting in Punjab, this battlefield was at times less than one hundred kilometers away. Personally, I could sense the ongoing military activity. During a previous visit to Punjab in the summer of 1998, I was about to enter my senior year of junior high school (in most parts of Alberta that correlates to grade nine). Every which way we travelled we saw heavy mobilization of artillery vehicles, tanks and armored trucks, as we also saw during many of our other trips to the region. Though as I recollect, this was my first exposure to, and the first time I had witnessed, a highly militarized zone. The next summer, in 1999, the Kargil war in Kashmir took place.<sup>25</sup> This was a high-intensity war fought at extreme altitudes in the Himalaya

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<sup>25</sup> See: Hagerty, Devin T. "The Kargil War: An optimistic assessment." In *Nuclear Proliferation in South Asia*, pp. 112-128. Routledge, 2008.



mountains of Kashmir between India and Pakistan, both of whom had nuclear capabilities at the time. Though I was not in Punjab during the Kargil war, as the conflict in Kashmir has carried on throughout the years, with Punjab being so close, and a frontier region bordering Pakistan, I have many times observed increasing militarization in the state. During the summer of 1998, however, Sufi rock music was being brought to eminence by bands such as Junoon. I spent a great deal of my time watching Channel V and MTV and witnessing the phenomenon of Junoon bridging the divide and uniting young people from both sides of the border, while just north of us a war was escalating.

Coming back to the winter of 2014-2015, I could almost sense when a ceasefire violation was going to happen, without suggesting here which nation would “instigate.” On New Year’s Eve, I spent the night dancing with my relatives until 3 or 4 am on January 1st. While we danced, I knew in my heart that once again tensions on the border would escalate. The next morning in the newspaper I indeed read that villages along the LOC (“line of control”) just north of Punjab had been ravaged with bullets, though we were unaware of what savagery was inflicted by the Indians on the Pakistani side. I remember asking my mother in law what would happen if these attacks began to occur just a few kilometers south of where they were happening, she said to me, “Pakistan would never dare to attack along the Punjab border.” However, just a few months later an attack took place in Gurdaspur, in the far Northwest region of East Punjab, though many Sikhs claimed it was an inside job done by the Indian centre itself.



**Figure 4-2 Location of Gurdaspur, PB (Google Maps)**

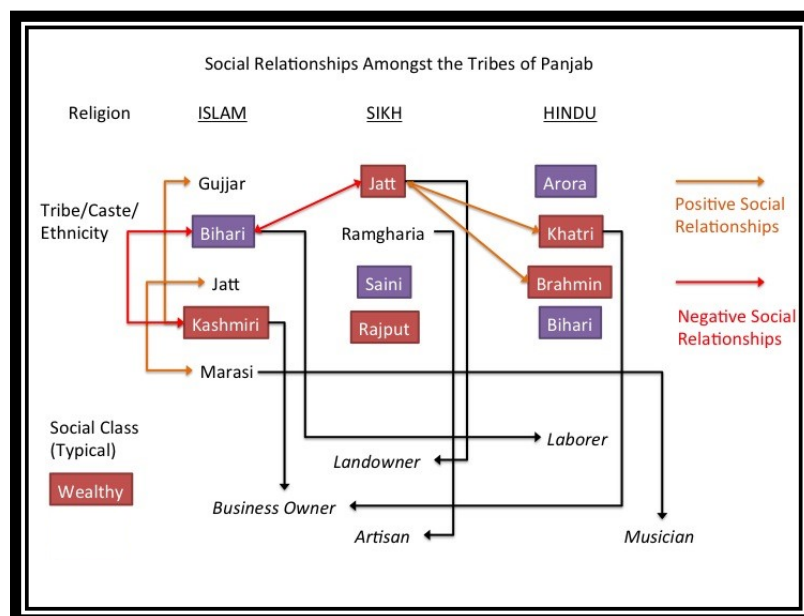
My wife and her family have their ancestral village near Gurdaspur (see Figure 4-2) very close to Qadian, the ancestral home of Mirza Ghulam Ahmed, the founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, and naturally, my father in law is a veteran of the Indian Armed Forces. Although Sikhs form less than 1.5% of the population of India, they form a disproportionately large percentage of the Indian Army. In 1947, Sikhs formed more than 50% of the Indian army, at a time when they formed an even smaller proportion of the national population, and today they form more than 20% of the army. The numbers have declined steadily since Operation Blue Star and the Sikh Genocide in 1984, as at that time thousands of Sikh soldiers mutinied against India in response to the nation's attack on Punjab. The Indian centre's policies towards this small but

highly influential minority community has aggressively decreased the number of Sikhs joining the army, air-force and navy. In Punjab, a Northwest border state, the realities of army mobilization then are a part of the day to day existence. However, it is a shared history, language and culture that serves to unite. Punjab therefore plays a major role in the perpetuation of peace in South and *Central* Asia, as after being literally divided in two during the partition, it has since served as a primary frontier for cultural exchange between India and Pakistan, and also the dominant combat theatre.

At this juncture then, questions of religious coexistence are increasingly urgent. The political situation in South Asia is in dire-straits as vile rhetoric continues to be employed by the hardline Hindu-Nationalist government of India, as well as amongst militant groups in Pakistan - inciting mutual distrust and violence between regional neighbors. It is increasingly apparent that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to the problem. As many scholars have argued, liberal Western assumptions that global coexistence depended on the emergence of a secular, rational (in a particular, modern sense) public sphere have proved inadequate. In fact, India does better on this score than Pakistan - but I suggest something different: that what is required is a deeper spiritual interpretation of faith that subsumes the surface differences in practice and belief. My examination of how Punjabis can and do cross divides without erasing difference provides an instructive example of alternative grounds of coexistence. As I began this dissertation, I mentioned my exposure to Junoon during the events surrounding the backdrop to the Kargil war. Music has been seen throughout history to have the ability to unite people in times of conflict. The significance of recognizing the ties-that-bind is now more critical than ever given the current crisis.

## 4.4 INTER-TRIBAL RELATIONSHIPS IN EAST PUNJAB

Due in large part to communal strife amongst the various tribal groups of the Punjab, there has been much negativity directed towards the issue of racial inequality in the region. The Punjab is made up of various different ethnic groups, but only three major religions. Adherents to Islam, Sikhism and Hinduism speak a common regional language (which has dialectical differences based on the particular part of Punjab they come from), and they also share much in common in terms of their cultures. Division amongst the groups of Punjab occurs at three levels: firstly at the religious level, where people from different religions subject each other to different levels and types of treatment; the second is tribal, where even people who are a part of the same religious tradition differ amongst ethnic groups; and thirdly, social class, where people from various levels of the social strata engage differently with others of different classes. This relationship is depicted in the following diagram:



**Figure 4-3 Diagrammatic Depiction of Inter-Tribal Associations in East Punjab (Arsh Khaira)**

Information pertaining to race and ethnicity in the Punjab region has been explored in detail by Denzil Ibbetson, who in 1987 traced a history of the origins of the various ethnic groups that make up the territorial demographic. Today, many Sikhs inadvertently mistake the various tribal groups of the Punjab for *castes* in the way that Ibbetson describes the Hindu community has been divided based on a racial hierarchy of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. However, this is not the case for the various ethnic groups of the Punjab including for example Jatts, Gujjars and Rajputs. Ibbetson shows that the Sikh community is made up of several different ethnic groups, most of whom have a connection to the Punjab region. Today, Sikhs refer to marriages between different Punjabi ethnic groups, within the same religious tradition as *inter-caste* marriages (see: Singh, Jagjit 1996) - however, these are not fundamentally *caste*, but rather *ethnic* differences. This cumulative account traces the history and origin of the peoples of Punjab through a Western lens and contains an index of common Punjabi last names and their representative ethnic groups.

Further information regarding demographic percentages can also be obtained from the 2011 *Census of India*. Briefly, this census demonstrates that roughly 58% of East Punjab is Sikh, 39% is Hindu, and the remainder is Muslim, Christian or Buddhist. Roughly 1/3 of the population belongs to the *Forward Castes*, 1/3 to the *Scheduled Castes* and another 1/3 to *Backward Classes*. These are designations the government uses to define the different ethnic groups in the region - for example, Jatts, Rajputs and Brahmins are considered by the government to be forward castes (see: Ibbetson 1987). De Zwart (2000) explains the concept of the backward class in the following way:

About half the population of India belongs to the so-called Socially and Educationally Backward Classes. Although this term seems degrading, 'backward' status is much sought after

in India. The reason is that Socially and Educationally Backward Classes are eligible for affirmative action. The central government reserves 27 percent of all government jobs and places in institutions of higher education exclusively for the backward classes.

He further describes the organization of castes in India:

The caste system, as historians and social scientists since the late 19th century portray it, is governed by division and hierarchy (some classical studies on caste are Mayer 1960; Srinivas 1962, 1966; Beteille 1965; Dumont 1970; Mandelbaum 1970). The units of division are endogamous groups with a traditional occupation and a hereditary membership. The basic criterion for ranking these groups is ritual purity. Purity and pollution of castes follow from their traditional occupation and stick to castes as a whole. Most polluting are death and bodily emissions. Castes whose traditional occupation entails contact with them (for instance, washermen, leatherworkers and barbers) rank low. All members of a caste – regardless of whether they follow its traditional occupation – share its rank in the hierarchy. This does not mean that the present occupation of caste members is completely irrelevant to status. Castes are not immobile. Many studies show that given time, means, organization and a favourable political climate, castes and sub-castes (not individuals) can rise in the status hierarchy (Kothari & Maru 1965; Rudolph & Rudolph 1967; Mandelbaum 1970:23–24; Shah 1975).

What is most evident is that Sufism, along with its related cultural components, including the vernacular folk traditions of the Punjab (especially the “love-stories”), provide a cultural framework that supersedes caste and tribal, as well as social class differences, as many musicians and poets that perform Sufi music, along with the “romantic ballads” are from tribes that form the lower socio-economic strata of the region. Many of these musicians who are of *marasi* descent have noble and vested family lineages of music. It is worthwhile to note that even the *khandan* (family lineage) of Bhai Mardana, Baba Nanak’s closest companion and *rubab* player, still live in the Pakistan’s Punjab province, and perform the traditional Shabads of the first Guru

in the ancient form.<sup>26</sup> However, even they have not been allowed to perform Shabad Kirtan at Sikhism's holiest site, Harmandir Sahib (the Golden Temple), because a recent act passed by the Akali Dal (the governing body of the Sikhs) stipulated that only Sikhs could serve as musicians at the Golden Temple even though Mardana and his family lineage are all Muslim, as well as many other descendants of key religious figures in Sikh history. While the holy site is open to people of all faiths and creeds (like all other Gurdwaras in the world) this is a very unfortunate stipulation. I myself have seen Muslims from the Punjab dressed in their cultural clothes, including women dressed in niqabs, which cover the head and face only leaving the eye area open, and even burkas, which cover the face and eyes with only a mesh screen to see through, paying obeisance at the Golden Temple and other Gurdwaras in the Punjab, though this is not considered a style of dress suitable for *Sikh* women, who also must cover their heads, but not their face or eyes.. The Sikh faith shares many similarities with Punjabi Islam and because of this, many of the first Sikhs were of Muslim descent, and even today many Muslims pay obeisance at *Sikh Gurdwaras*, especially in Pakistan where a large number of historical sites are under the care of locals.

Sufism and the historical folklores of the Punjab serve to unite the different groups of the region into a shared cultural context wherein they can all relate to the thematic content and symbolisms. The diagrammatic depiction I have designed does not take into account all of the various tribal groups of the territory, and the positive and negative social associations are based on my own observations.

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<sup>26</sup> Sikh and Muslim descendants of key figures in Sikh history:

<http://www.info-sikh.com/PageDesc.html>

Indeed, there are also many other tribal groups that live in the area. The term *Bihari* itself, refers to many of the migrant workers who come to work in Punjab, most of whom are Muslims from Bihar. The very interesting thing, is that for every five natural Punjabis, there is one migrant from Uttar Pradesh or Bihar in Punjab. However, nearly 81% of all of these migrants have adopted Punjabi culture, including changing the language they speak, the clothes they wear and very often, even adopting the Sikh faith (Preet 2007). Indeed, there used to be a great number of Nepali workers, who also came to Punjab to work in the service industries primarily, however these numbers have been decreasing as the years go by. We should also take into consideration the student populations, as many students from Kashmir, Ladakh and the *Eastern Sister States* come to study at very well-known and reputable universities such as Punjab University in Chandigarh, and Punjabi University in Patiala. The region has become increasingly diverse over my repeated visits. We notice this especially in the large urban cities like Chandigarh.

The purpose of this chapter was to provide important background information that will be helpful to the reader in understanding the underlying issues surrounding my research as they proceed through this dissertation. In the next chapter I will explore the themes of covenant, communism and inheritance in the context of my own familial relationship to the greater Punjab region, and my role as an artist and scholar in the context of the Kashmir conflict, which I will show to be inseparable from issues surrounding Sikh self-determination in Punjab.



## 4.5 BACKGROUND TO SIKH BELIEFS AND WAY OF LIFE

Just south of the Himalayan range and the valley of Kashmir, the greater Punjab is an area of vast abundance. The etymology of the name itself is Persian in origin and means essentially the “Land of Five Rivers” (Panj – Five, Aub – Water). The region has been the backdrop for numerous military conquests and has seen many reigning empires throughout its history.

Muslims from the Middle East are believed to have entered the region in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, and then again with the Mughal conquests in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Alexander is said to have gone as far east as Punjab, where his military conquests met against the power of the King *Porus*, a costly battle which eventually opened up the region to Greco-Roman influences.

Prior to the advent of Sikhism, the religion of the region could be said to be dominated by followers of both Islam and Hinduism. Through the various empires that ruled the region, from the Mughal (1526- 1799), the Sikh (1799-1849), and the British (1850-1947), the language and cultural customs of the territory have remained relatively constant. The culture of the area itself is as closely correlated to the religious elements as it is to the climatic and topographic realities. Being the agricultural hub of the subcontinent, Punjab was and is a farming region, which sees different crops planted throughout its landscape throughout the year. As such, the many cultural festivities coincide with key moments during the agricultural timeline (including *Vasakhi*, which along with being a wheat harvest festival also commemorates the founding of the *Khalsa*).

The founder of the Sikh religion, Guru Nanak, was born in 1469 in a town called Nankana Sahib, now located in Pakistan’s Punjab province. This is generally considered the year that the religion began, as the birth of the Guru during the night of the full moon in late October, or early November, marks the beginning of the new year for Sikhs, who like Muslims, follow a lunar calendar – referred to as the Nanakshahi Calendar. During Guru Nanak’s early life there were

many key events that suggested from a very early age, that he had been called by God to reveal a sacred path, and way of life, to his people. He was taught Islamic and Hindu theology as a child and teenager as well as Persian, Sanskrit, Punjabi, Arabic, and other significant languages that were influential in Punjab at the time. As I will show in a later section, many of the Guru's revelations were in a variety of different languages, including Persian. During his adult years he spent most of his time travelling by foot with his companion Mardana, a Muslim rubab player. He is understood to have gone on four major journeys including south towards India, east towards Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet, and west towards Afghanistan - and later to Iraq and then Saudi Arabia, which was a part of his final pilgrimage to Mecca.

Guru Nanak amassed many followers, teaching a form of strict monotheism, and the shunning of all forms of idolatry and superstition. Many of his followers would eventually become baptized Sikhs, forming an organized religion made up of adherents originally of Muslim or Hindu extraction. Though, the Guru was, and continues to be revered by Hindus and Muslims who have maintained their original religious identities throughout Punjab and Pakistan. Guru Nanak appointed his successor, Guru Angad, to carry on with his work - and thus began a period of discipleship and succession, which saw a total of ten gurus, including and proceeding from Nanak, and each subsequent Guru was considered the embodiment of the divine light of Guru Nanak.

After the fifth Guru, Arjun Dev Ji, was condemned to death through torture by the Mughal rulers of Punjab, as the Sikhs had come to be considered as blasphemous heretics for their incorporation of the writings of Islamic Sufi saints into their scriptures and theology, including Farid, Kabir and Ravi Das, the history of the religion took a drastic turn away from non-violent religious reform towards militancy and politic. These processes were formalized

when the sixth Guru, Hargobind Sahib, prioritized the arming and training of the Sikhs in order to engage in direct combat with the Mughals. From the time of Guru Hargobind, until the time of the 10th Guru, Gobind Singh, the Sikhs had established their own autonomous political and religious jurisdiction, including the amassing of a large army, a great number of fortresses throughout Punjab, massive popular support, and an abundance of wealth – which was demonstrated in the royal lifestyles of the sixth to the tenth Guru, who were all direct descendants of one another. The Sikhs showed defiance through their independent rule and their unwillingness to acknowledge the rule of the Mughals – with whom they remained engaged in constant armed conflict. It is generally understood then that the Sikh religion grew in response to religious and political oppression. Their autonomy as a religious and political entity was further formalized in 1699 when the 10th king of the Sikhs initiated the order of the Khalsa, a highly militarized religious community including both men and women. Guru Gobind Singh at this time commanded his followers to leave all the hair of the body, head, and beard (for men), completely unshorn - in other words, no hair of the person should ever be cut, this would represent adhering to the will of the one sovereign Lord of the universe, as well as the maintenance of innocence and purity. He further commanded his followers to cover their long hair with a turban and to never be in public with the head uncovered. He commanded that they remain absorbed in contemplation of the name of God at all times and to never make use of intoxicants including alcohol drugs and tobacco. His followers were commanded to take weapons training and to embody the spirit of a saint soldier being always prepared for combat. With the *Khalsa* then, the term used as a designation for the militarized Sikh community - from the Arabic *Khalis* – meaning *pure*, also mentioned in *Surah Ikhlas* in “The Holy Quran,” the Sikh community entered into a period of strict militarization. By establishing the *Panth* or *Qaum* (the Sikh community)

around a tradition of combat, the Sikhs prepared themselves to wage war with not only the Mughals, but later with the Afghan Pashtuns (including the infamous feud between the Sikhs and the Afghan ruler *Ahmed Shah Abdali*) as well as the British during the Anglo-Sikh wars, and most recently with centrally backed Hindu Nationalist organizations (see: Khilnani 1990)..

An initiated Khalsa is also known as an *amritdhari*, a baptized Sikh who has gone through the initiation (amrit) ceremony. This entails agreeing to the following conditions: for men to take the surname Singh, meaning “lion,” or for women - Kaur, meaning “princess”; to abstain from all intoxicants (including drugs, tobacco and alcohol); to not eat meat or eggs; to pray the daily prayers; to contribute one tenth of your income to the needy (*daswand*); and to at all times wear the Panj Kaakar (from the Punjabi word for “five” (panj) and the letter “K”). The Five K’s then are:

1. Kes – never to cut any hair from anywhere on the body and to keep the hair of the head covered - this represents adhering to the will of the creator.
2. Kanga – to keep a small wooden comb at all times on your person - representing cleanliness.
3. Kirpan – a small ceremonial sword to use in the assistance of anyone not capable of defending themselves - representing righteousness.
4. Kara – an iron bracelet to use as a weapon in the protection of the defenseless in any situation - it also represents restraint.
5. Kachera – a pair of linen or cotton shorts up to the knees worn under the clothing - representing sexual restraint and modesty.

#### 4.5.1 MASCULINITY IN SIKHISM

I would like to begin this section with a brief overview of Veena Das' (1992) explorations of the masculine self-concept in the context of Sikh militancy. She focuses on the construction of the Sikh militant discourse with an emphasis on the role of violence in this context. The author describes details associated with the Sikh militant movement in the 80's and early 90's, writing this article perhaps just as the movement had begun to lose its grip in Punjab. She describes the common rhetoric of the movement as exemplified in the following way:

In the most direct forms of speech, the aim of the militant movement is expressed in terms of an anxiety over the preservation of a separate Sikh identity. The greatest threat to this identity is seen to be the Hindu character and the state in India. Through a series of interesting slippages these come to stand for each other (121).

The movement for the preservation of Sikh identity is framed in a language which immediately places it in the context of modern nation states, for it is replete with references to the rights of minorities, international covenants, and the centrality of territory as a means of preserving identity. Yet, as I said earlier, this struggle is also represented as a continuation of a series of struggles that Sikhs have historically had to wage in order to preserve their identity. (121)

Das attempts to demarcate the technicality behind the oratory of the Sikh militant movement. Throughout her article, she describes how the Sikh comes to understand his role in light of not only his personal religious identity, but his relationship to the Hindu "other." Das articulates that the Sikh *masculine* is drawn in juxtaposition to the Hindu *feminine*, just as dichotomies are drawn between heroism, gallantry, pride and honour, described as Sikh characteristics, against the Hindu characteristics: sly and cunning, dishonest and arrogant. This is explained in the following way where the following features describe the Sikh militant oratory tradition in this era:

These features are: (a) the use of rigorous dualisms to define Self and Other; (b) the creation of contemporaneity between non-contemporaneous events; (c) the weaving of individual biography into social text through the use of local knowledge; and (d) the justification of violence with reference to both mythological motifs and contemporary political practices. (134)

Das further goes on to describe this relationship in the following way, alluding to the often quoted saying amongst Sikh militants, “Physical death I do not fear, death of conscience, is a sure death...”:

The danger to Sikh identity in the contemporary period is the danger that the masculine Self faces from a feminine Other. In confrontation with a masculine Other, militant discourse seems to postulate that the travails a Sikh faces may lead to physical extinction, but yet to an affirmation of the Sikh Self. The danger of the feminine Other, on the other hand, is the seductive possibility of becoming totally merged in the Other and being gifted with a false Self: hence palpable anxieties about the 'narcotic' cult of non-violence, and fears of merger in a nation which takes the feminine Mahatma Gandhi as its Father. (135)

#### *4.5.2 THE FEMININE FORM IN THE CONTEXT OF SIKHISM*

I wish to briefly address the role of contemporary women in Sikhism through two examples of the way female adherents to the faith express themselves in relation, as well as counterpoint, to Sikh men. The first would be through their style of dress, and the second through their involvement in militancy. I will do this to allow the reader to contextualize my discussion of the folk-romances of the Punjab through a broader lens of how women are understood in contemporary Sikh society.

Jakobsh (2015) explores the dominance of representation over Sikh normative aesthetics by Punjabi males through the use of symbols congruent with the average person's understanding of the faith, the turban and the beard. Although Sikhism is inherently a religion that emphasizes masculinity, especially in the form of the zealous adherent as a *Saint-Soldier*, Sikh women, who although completely equal to men, based on most scholar's theological interpretations, at this juncture have limited influence over personal physical symbolic representation in the public sphere – in other words, they do not visually tend to have identifiers that would mark them as Sikh women, making the feminine form disjointed from commonplace Sikh aesthetics. Traditionally, Sikh women would cover their heads with a *chunni* (headscarf), and most of them still do wear these when going to a *Gurdwara*. Jakobsh however, explores current trends in the exchange of visual images of contemporary Sikh women dressed in *bana*, or the religious symbols of Sikhism (blue turbans and clothing, as well as iron or steel weapons and ornaments), over social media and the internet. Women have also now re-appropriated the turban in the feminine form in increasing numbers over the last decade (in various colors and styles). Images of fashionable Sikh women, visually representing their faith through a feminized form of the turban, have become increasingly ubiquitous, contributing subsequently to the increased popularity of this expression of Sikh identity.

The article is important as it goes on to explore the deeper underlying issues behind these “fashion trends” as lending themselves to new understandings of feminine Sikh identity that do not use the ubiquitous Sikh masculine form as a qualifier or benchmark for their own portrayal. In some ways, contemporary understanding amongst Sikh women as to how to visually portray their faith are continuous with historical norms and understandings. Evidence of this is the

reference to the women of Sikh lore, such as *Mai Bhago*, as warriors, subservient only to *Akal Purakh* or the sovereign lord of the universe.

Gayer (2012) also discusses the role of women in the context of masculine Sikhism. He seeks to uncover the method by which hundreds of Sikh women during the period of Sikh militancy (1980-1995) experienced empowerment, and subsequently enacted their roles as contributors to the cause for greater self-determination and autonomy for Sikhs in their own lands. The author suggests that it was actually under a seemingly patriarchal command, and in relation to their male superiors that these women experienced liberation and enfranchisement. This seems to stand in counterpoint to traditional discourses relating to feminist empowerment, and also to the traditional Sikh teachings about equality between men and women. Gayer uses interviews with ten former female Sikh militants as his primary data in disambiguating information pertaining to the matter. He suggests that recruitment amongst women was not actively promoted by Sikhs during this time (unlike other militant groups in South Asia, predominantly in Sri Lanka and Nepal), but that one way women were able to join was by marrying another militant. However, he also writes that the majority of these women were widowed in the process, leaving them to live the life of a “pariah” in the aftermath of the movement. During the course of militancy, many of the women accepted death as a natural outcome of their involvement, but many did give birth to children as well. This critical work examines an area that has been little researched by Western academics and that continues to posit dangers for those seeking to uncover information in the locality, Punjab.

As I explore the significance of the love-stories of Punjab in creating positive social-health outcomes in the way women are represented and understood in the region, it will be important to



consider the paradox of gender equality as taught in traditional Sikhism with the more dominant patriarchal cultural milieu within which the majority of these women are reared familiarly.

#### 4.5.3 SIKH SHABAD KIRTAN

Kaur (2011) describes the centrality of music in the spiritual practices of Sikhs, but also as being the medium by which the message of the word of God was transmitted to humanity: “The Guru Granth contains not only the shabad texts of its authors, but also musical details of their shabad kirtan” (297). The canonized scriptures of the Sikhs have religious passages that are organized according to the *raag* (a musical scale), in which they were originally composed. The author suggests that there should be a return amongst practitioners of Sikh music, or *raagis*, to use the designated *raag* and to perform the *shabads* (hymns) in a manner that is in synergy with the historical function of the scripture. The author describes the importance of *raag* in the Sikh tradition in the following way:

One might ask why rag music was used by the Sikh gurus and specified in the Guru Granth. The answer is to be found in the meaning of rag, as given in the thirteenth-century treatise, *Sangitratnakara* by Sarangdeva, and quoted in Saxena (2002, 67): ‘*Muḱ-tidayakama na tu-ranjakam*’ (liberating, not entertaining). Rag is that which leads to spiritual liberation, not entertainment (301).

We can see here that the use of *raag* in Sikhism’s sacred scriptures is not simply achieved through the process of conjoining music with scriptural discourse, but rather that the two (music and scripture) are innately connected to each other, in the way that music was the medium of the revelation of the word of God, and for Sikhs, is the way to understand the essence of the *bani* (the word of God).

Van Der Linden (2011) explores possibilities for categorizing Shabad Kirtan as “world music,” in its academic study and dissemination, and in a pedagogical context. He approaches his analysis from an ethnomusicological perspective, and he examines the way contemporary movements for the transmission and performance of Shabad Kirtan are hindered by orthodoxy and an unwillingness on the part of many conservative Sikh groups to appropriate more recent advancements in pedagogical strategies. In spite of this, he describes how the institutionalization of Shabad Kirtan instruction took place during the Singh Sabha period which led to advancements in the professionalism of *raagis*:

In these fast changing social and cultural circumstances, then, *kīrtan* was increasingly taught in modern institutional settings – since 1927, for example, in the Shaheed Sikh Missionary College in Amritsar, under the auspices of the main modern orthodox Sikh organization, the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), which also made *rāgī jathas* (groups of professional singers of *kīrtan*) rotate from one historic gurdwara to the other. In fact, during the Singh Sabha period, *kīrtanists* not only became more professional but also began to give commercial public performances.

Van Der Linden uses a modern scholastic approach in his analysis and attempts disclosure to academic audiences about the significance and origins of Shabad Kirtan. It is possible that at this point in time, given our strategic position in the discipline, scholars like Van Der Linden are able to communicate ideas and discoveries to a large and diverse demographic audience and thereby elicit progression in the conservation of traditional music forms.

Cassio (2011) explores the tradition of Gurmat Sangeet and its relationship to Indian music. In particular, she explores avenues for the types of questions current scholars and students can potentially seek to answer with seminal research. She frames her discussion of Gurmat Sangeet through the veil of Hindustani classical, and uses this relationship as the background and

precursor to her analysis of contemporary trends in the research of Sikh music in University settings. She mentions that the “dramatic division of the Sikh territory into Pakistan and present-day Punjab brought the loss of a large number of musicians, and their musical inheritance” (315).

Cassio notes the influence of the early Hindustani Music scholars *Bhatkhande* and *Paluskar* on the way Sikh musicology has evolved. She mentions that although much of the approach to Sikh musicology has been highly influenced by the Indian Classical system, “unlike the Indian classical repertoire, however, the Sikh musical tradition is based on religious content and has been mainly transmitted within Sikh spiritual circles” (316). She then tries to answer the question as to what types of pedagogical approaches can be utilized when teaching Gurmat Sangeet in a foreign context. She mentions that “the adoption of Bhatkhande’s system in Gurmat Sangeet pedagogy facilitates teaching at an institutional level, providing a uniform knowledge supported by written notation” (320), but that research should also be done into the approach used prior to the implementation of the Bhatkhande system.

Cassio also mentions that in contemporary pedagogical approaches to the Gurmat Sangeet system, we are limited by many recent adaptations, including the introduction and present ubiquity of the harmonium (which does not allow for the use of micro-tones): “This is a very delicate issue and concerns a tradition which – in the case of the SGGS hymns – rather than being simplified, should be transmitted as closely as possible to the original *banī* (style), as performed at the time of the Sikh Guru’s” (326).

## 4.6 CONTINUITY BETWEEN SUFISM AND SIKHISM

Sufism in Punjab is by most scholars understood to have entered the region as early as the 8th century with the Islamic conquest of the subcontinent by invading Muslim armies under the command of Muhammad Bin Qasim.<sup>27</sup> The history as it is understood by Pakistanis and Indians shows a great deal of discrepancy as to how these invading armies from the middle East are understood. For example, most Pakistanis consider themselves to be descendants of these Arab, Turkic and Persian conquerors, whereas the majority of Hindus would tend to see these invaders as foreigners who had attempted to control and subdue the local and indigenous populations of India. Much of the discourse of right-wing Hindu-Nationalists sees the Islamic rulers of India, such as the Turks, Persians and Mughals, as having been cruel, unjust, and violent, towards the original inhabitants of the subcontinent. Of course, the opposite is true in Pakistan, where rulers like Aurangzeb are idolized and respected as great Islamic leaders.<sup>28</sup>

From a divisive Hindu nationalist perspective, Babur and Aurangzeb are to some degree interchangeable as oppressive Muslim conquerors. In this sense Aurangzeb stands in for an entire category of “orthodox Muslims” who are supposedly implicated in unsavory aspects of India’s past and, consequently, unwelcome in India’s present. It is not incidental that Aurangzeb is widely believed to have been the most pious of the Mughal kings. Aurangzeb thus typifies zealous Muslims overall—both past and present—who allegedly threaten Indian society by virtue of their religiosity (Truschke 2017, 6).

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<sup>27</sup> See: Schimmel, Annemarie. *Islam in India and Pakistan*. Brill, 1982.

<sup>28</sup> See: Truschke, Audrey. *Aurangzeb: The Life and Legacy of India's Most Controversial King*. Stanford University Press, 2017.

Truschke further goes on to explain how the vilification of Aurangzeb is often based on false-notions and attempts to strike up nationalist sentiment through the creation of “historical facts”:

Over the centuries, many commentators have spread the myth of the bigoted, evil Aurangzeb on the basis of shockingly thin evidence. Many false ideas still mar popular memory of Aurangzeb, including that he massacred millions of Hindus and destroyed thousands of temples. Neither of these commonly believed “facts” is supported by historical evidence, although some scholars have attempted, usually in bad faith, to provide an alleged basis for such tall tales (8).

She goes on to explain the basis for why he is viewed positively by many Muslims:

Aurangzeb organized his life as ruler of Hindustan around a few key ideals and preoccupations. He wanted to be a just king, a good Muslim, and a sustainer of Mughal culture and customs (9).

Lawrence, and his co-authors (Lawrence, et al. 2002) trace through the history of the Chishti order in the Indian Subcontinent from the twelfth century to the present day. He goes over much foundational information about Chishti lineage, spirituality and practice, as beginning with Abu Ishaq Shami (940–41) in Chisht Afghanistan, and making its way to India with Moinuddin Chishti (1142–1236) who established the order as a *tariqa*, or “school of Sufism,” in India.<sup>29</sup> They pay special attention to not only the concept of *zikr*, which is the remembrance of the name of God, but also to the practice of *sama*, or listening to music as a spiritual experience in the quest towards the attainment of *fanaa* (spiritual bliss or the *annihilation of the self*). The authors also emphasize that the Chishti faith is best not understood

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<sup>29</sup> See: Subhan, John A. "Sufism, its Saints and Shrines: An Introduction to the Study of Sufism with Special Reference to India and Pakistan. Rev. ed." *Lucknow: Lucknow Pub. House, 1960.*

as having gone through a period of intense interest (a golden age), followed by a subsequent decline, and then a revival, but that such notions exist amongst contemporary scholars because certain periods of Chishti history are simply not as well documented as others. Rather, they propose that Chishti spirituality has maintained a consistent presence throughout its history. The authors employ English translations of Urdu and Persian sources in their work as they attest that much of the existing English scholarship on the Chishtiya is focused on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. They also pay considerable attention to the current practices and breadth of Chishtiya spirituality, not only in an Indo-Persian context, but by way of the internet and media as a *global* faith movement. Subsequently, the Chishti remain one of the most well-established tariqas in Punjab, and throughout North India.

Sufism emphasizes the use of poetry and music as central to worship practices, and these have been shown throughout history to be powerful revolutionary tools. Punjab has seen countless indispensable figures throughout history who have used music and poetry to raise contention against oppression and tyranny. The great poet Waris Shah (1722-1798) was put to death for his unwillingness to abandon his Sufi faith which included singing and dancing as forms of *ibadat* (worship), both which were forbidden at the time during a period of strict Islamic reform in Punjab (see: Sharda 1974). Similarly, Guru Arjan Dev Ji, the 5<sup>th</sup> Guru of the Sikhs was put to death in 1606 by the Mughal government because of his own unique expression of faith for God which included compiling the hymns of Muslim and Hindu saints into the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the sacred scripture of the Sikhs, and the singing of these hymns as an expression of *ibadat* (see: Singh 1977). This demonstrates the fact that music is so powerful that, for centuries, authorities have felt it to be so threatening.

While the rule of the Mughals was generally favorable to Sufis, some of the emperors also persecuted them heavily – consider for example that the monarch Aurangzeb had banned all forms of music and dance, or further that Waris Shah was sentenced to death by his Mughal rulers, or that Bulleh Shah was denied a proper burial in an Islamic cemetery. Even Bulleh Shah was known to write poetry in which he accepts the designation placed upon him by his rulers as a *kafir*.<sup>30</sup>

Today, extremism continues to spread throughout South Asia on both sides of the Indo-Pak border. Conservative-Reformist Islam continues to threaten the fabric of Sufism that has been practiced for centuries in Pakistan. Sufis are being persecuted and seen as participating in *Shirk* (idolatry), particularly because of their various forms of spiritual practice like singing, dancing, drumming and whirling, along with worshipping at the graves of long-gone spiritual masters (like Sheikh Farid or Bulleh Shah).

In East Punjab amongst conservative factions of Sikhs there are those who criticize these same practices. Sikhs who go to a *dargah* or *mazzar* (the mausoleum of a Sufi saint) are also seen as going against the tenets of the Sikh faith, particularly if they perform *sajda* (prostration) at the place of worship towards the grave of the master – an act seen as blasphemous as bowing or offering worship to an idol.<sup>31</sup> In the *Rehat Maryada*, the official “code of conduct” for Sikhs, it states the following pertaining to this matter (Rehat Maryada, Chapter IV, Article V):<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> On my album *Ishq Kamaal*, I sing a song that includes the poetry of Bulleh Shah where he writes “teinu kafir, kafir akhde, tu ‘aho,’ ‘aho,’ akh,” which translates to “they say to you ‘kafir,’ ‘kafir,’ just reply ‘of course,’ ‘of course’.”

<sup>31</sup> The same can be said of many Islamic groups, like Salafis for example.

<sup>32</sup> See: *Rehat Maryada: A Guide to the Sikh Way of Life*. Sikh Cultural Society, 1971.

Making or installing statues, or idols inside the gurdwaras, bowing before the picture of the Sikh Gurus or elders - all these are irreligious self-willed egotism, contrary to gurmat (the Guru's way).

In Sikhism the only prostration a person can make should be in the direction of the scriptures that are believed to have their origin with the creator Himself, and thus are seen as the gateway to understanding His nature. The interesting question here then arises about prostrating at the *dargas* of Sheikh Farid, Kabir, Mian Mir or Mardana, all figures whose works are canonical for Sikhs. There is also the *kabar* (grave) of Guru Nanak at Nankana Sahib in Pakistan. It is also important to note here that many Sufis who have been formally initiated into, and educated in, *tariqas* may also see the performing of *sajda* in any direction other than that of the *qibla* as blasphemous, and that perhaps prostrating at the graves of Sufi teachers could be said to be a practice incorporated into the worship of *informal* Sufis, at a popular level.

#### 4.7 THEORETICAL AND HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THE SIKH/SUFI CONNECTION

Sufism is widely recognized as informing the development of Sikhism.<sup>33</sup> Poetry and music were very important to Sufi expression and devotion, so much so that the first Sikh Guru, Baba Nanak, used music in his spiritual discourses to promote a message of compassion and tolerance during his journeys throughout Central Asia and the Middle East in the 15th century. Baba Farid, a Sufi of the Chishti order revered by Muslim and Sikh Punjabis, is considered one of the primary influences upon the thought of Baba Nanak, and his hymnals are a central component of the Sikh canon. Bhai Mardana, a Muslim rubab player, was Guru Nanak's closest companion

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<sup>33</sup> See: Loehlin, C. H. "Sufism and Sikhism." *The Muslim World* 29, no. 4 (1939): 351-358.



and accompanied him on all of his journeys, including his fourth and final journey to Mecca. The *rubab* (see Figures 4-4 and 4-5), one of the most revered instruments of the Sikhs, is traditionally associated with the very similar Pashtun culture of Afghanistan. Today, it continues to be used in the performance of Sikh devotional music at *Darbar Sahib*, the Golden Temple at the very centre of Sikh religious geography. Since 1947's partition of Punjab, Sufi music has helped to help heal rifts, restoring something of the older cultural whole to the region. Some evidence of the continued importance of Sufism can be seen in the ongoing support for departments dedicated to Sufi studies at universities in East Punjab, the revivalism of Sufi traditions in West Punjab, and in substantial increases in the number of artists devoted to the performance of Sufi, folk and spiritual music in the region.



**Figure 4-4 Rubab of Guru Gobind Singh (Photo by Arsh Khaira – November 2017). Here is a photograph I took of the actual rubab of Guru Gobind Singh Ji at “Gurdwara Gobind Singh Ji,” in the town of Mandi, Himmachal Pradesh.**



**Figure 4-5 Rubab Used by Actor Arif Zakaria in “Nanak Shah Fakir.” Dubai, UAE (Photo by Arsh Khaira – October 2017) Here is another photograph I took of a rubab at the “Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara,” in Dubai, UAE. This rubab was used by the actor Arif Zakaria who played the role of Bhai Mardana in the movie “Nanak Shah Fakeer.”**

The connection between Sufism and Sikhism has been explored by many scholars including Loehlin (1939), McLeod (1968), and Ali (1971), among others. To better understand the historical basis for the contemporary revival, I will now provide a short summary of this relationship. If we explore the *Janamsakhis* (see: McLeod 1980), which is the documentation of the life and travels of the revered Guru Nanak, we can see the impact of Nanak’s exposure to *Sufism* and Islamic Mysticism. The effect is reflected in his renunciation of ritualistic Hindu practices and “superstitions,” and in his use of worship methods highly consistent with those in Sufism (e.g., music, poetry and ecstatic discourses). We should note the influences of the teachings of Faridudin Ganjshakar (of the Chishti Order) and Kabir, as well as Sheikh Bhikan, on the early upbringing and religious rearing of the young Nanak. According to the *JanamSakhi*, Guru Nanak also had an early childhood friendship with Sayad Hussain, and undertook religious education in Persian and Islamic forms of piety and selflessness drawn from *Sufi* methods.

Islamic theology was taught to Nanak from a very early age by the Imam, Qutab Ud Din. As Guru Nanak was born in 1469, and he left for his Udasis around the age of 27, it is purported that his training in Islamic theology and Persian would most likely have coincided with the time period of approximately 1475-1496.

We can examine the form and function of the strict monotheism taught by Nanak during his period of teaching and direct discipleship, as shown in the following passage:

*He is the truest of the true. To Him I sacrifice my life. He has no form, no color, no line; He manifests Himself through His Word divine (SGGS p. 597).*

This passage seems to suggest an aniconic understanding of God as manifest in Nanak's avoidance of idols or the worship of different incarnations of God as idolatry was common in Punjab at the time. In connection to this we can begin to see Abrahamic monotheistic influences in Nanak's writings, acknowledging some scholars' suggestions that the specifically Sufi concepts were perhaps Persian in origin. In line with the research of scholars such as McLeod (1968) and Ali (1971), we may explore the possibility that Nanak's religious beliefs were extensions of Islamic Sufism and were closer in their relationship to the beliefs of Islamic mystics already existing in the Punjab region at the time - the Chishtiyya for example had already established themselves as a known Sufi order in Northern India. Nanak's use of music and poetry as a method of extrinsic worship (or, the public practice of his faith beliefs), gives further evidence. We can also contextualize our understanding by looking at his pilgrimage to Mecca – The Hajj. This was Nanak's last journey (his 4<sup>th</sup> Udasi), and in many ways his final act of supplication. During this journey he wore a *chola* (cloak) with Quranic verses woven into the fabric. This *chola* is available for observation and devotion by devout Sikhs and Muslims in Northwest Punjab. These reasons along with much other evidence have led many Islamic

scholars to attest that Baba Nanak was a devout Muslim. For these reasons, Baba Nanak continues to be revered by many Muslims in West Punjab.

It is also appropriate to draw connections between the writings of earlier Sufi teachers including Farid, Kabir and Bhikan, as well as others like Moinuddin Chishti or Nizamuddin Auliya (of *Chishti* lineage). It is possible to see Nanak's philosophy as an extension of the Sufi methods of piety and transcendence, and even more particularly, of the Sufis' use of music and poetry to accomplish these means. We can see that the works and writings of Nanak are deepened and better understood by contextualizing them through the way he received his revelations: in a manner congruent with Sufi philosophy and teachings – by singing in raga with a *rubab*. I have mentioned Guru Nanak's travelling companion Mardana (See: "Mardana," in Bowker 2000). The fellowship developed between Nanak and Mardana was manifest in a deep and spiritual connection between the two. There is something very compelling about Guru Nanak's use of the *rubab* (note: it was an instrument also used extensively by the other Sikh Gurus), as well as in the methods of delivery of his discourses (ecstatic verses about love, selflessness and union with the beloved). It is important to recognize that this sacred instrument, which most people associate with the Pashtuns of Afghanistan, actually has a deeply entrenched relationship to the Punjab region, and to the Sikhs in particular. It is important to understand that the Punjabi concept of "Sanjh" also extends to the people of *Kashmir*, the *Khyber-Pass*, as well as *Eastern Afghanistan*. Throughout this dissertation, I will demonstrate examples of this "Sanjh," but here in the context of the Sikhs' use of the *rubab*, I turn to Purewal (2011), who explains the continuity expressed by this tradition in the following way:

The rabābī tradition of kīrtan is more the rule than the exception for what it represents in terms of the memory of a unified geographical Punjab, which has experienced a history of

religious and social rationalization that far predates, and shows more complexity than, the hegemonic, dogmatic approaches evident in the historicity of partition studies today (366).

Further examples of the way the *sanjh* of Punjab extends beyond the Khyber-Pass and into Afghanistan can be seen in not only Sikh music (Shabad Kirtan), but the later historical poetry of Bhai Nand Lal *Goya*, for example, in Persian. There are many great examples of the use of Persian language by not only the Sikh gurus themselves, but members of the Sikh *court*, throughout the historical development of the faith, and later. Consider the following example of a hymn of Bhai Nand Lal *Goya*, a Pashtun Sikh from Ghazni, Afghanistan, written in praise of the 10<sup>th</sup> Guru, Gobind Singh (see: *bhainandlal.com*):

Nasaro mansoor Guru Gobind Singh  
Eezad e manzoor Guru Gobind Singh  
Haque ra ganjoor Guru Gobind Singh  
Jumla faiz o noor Guru Gobind Singh

*Guru Gobind Singh is victorious and assists us to succeed in life;  
he is accepted by God as His own.  
Guru Gobind Singh is the custodian of God's treasure;  
he is the bestower of all gifts.*

Many of the Sufi saints of Punjab attested that in the pursuit of transcendence to a great and higher form of consciousness, there should not be seen any differences between a Muslim and non-Muslim. To a Sufi, all are to be seen as extensions of the one light of God. It is this yearning for a cosmic “union,” and the desire to escape the fetters of the illusions of mammon in which we see a very direct correlation between the Islamic Sufism of antiquity in the Punjab, and the teachings of Nanak:

*Kings and emperors owning properties, wealth, oceans and mountains,*

*Are not equal even to an ant, who in its mind never forgets God.*  
(Japji 23:3-4)

It is in the mortal's bondage to the illusion of materialism that he suffers his biggest defeat, and only through the grace of God can this be overcome:

*By God's will, freedom from bondage is achieved. (Japji 25:10)*

After disappearing for three days when leaving to bathe in the river *Bein* near his home in Sultanpur Lodhi, Nanak was found uttering the words “No ko Hindu, Na Ko Musalman” which means “there are no Hindus, there are no Muslims.” In the historical context of 15<sup>th</sup> century Punjab, this phrase can be seen to depict Nanak's dissatisfaction with the methods of both Hindus and Muslims. He may be suggesting that the true features of both faiths had by this time deteriorated to the point that neither adherents of Islam, or Hinduism, were practicing the true essence of their religion. However, we also see the universality of such a statement, primarily as it resonates with earlier Sufi philosophies (Sharda 1974, 37) , which propagated the necessity to rise above religious differences and to see all people as reflections of the eternal light of God, and the essence of all being contained in one “noor” (light) (Rizvi 1978, 241):

*First, Allah created the Light; then, by His Creative Power, He made all mortal beings.*

*From the One Light, the entire universe welled up. So, who is good, and who is bad? (Kabir, SGGS p. 1349-1350)*

For some Muslims, this light could reference the “Nur Muhammadi,” or the “Muhammadan Light,” as the prophet is considered the first of creation for many Sufis. Perhaps here, Kabir, who is a very important figure for Sikhs and Sufis in Punjab, is making reference to this concept. Still, we can see the powerful underlying message of his revelation that stresses equality and tolerance in light of religious differences. Consider how this resonates with the philosophy of other Sufis, such as Ibn Arabi:

Do not praise your own faith exclusively so that you disbelieve all the rest. If you do this you will miss much good. Nay, you will miss the whole truth of the matter. God, the Omniscient and the Omnipresent, cannot be confined to any one creed, for He says in the Quran, wheresoever ye turn, there is the face of Allah. Everybody praises what he knows. His God is his own creature, and in praising it, he praises himself. Which he would not do if he were just, for his dislike is based on ignorance.

To say that Nanak was often critical of many Muslims does not discount Sikhism's connection to Sufism; rather, I propose that it serves to strengthen it. Consider that in the course of Sufi history, particularly in Persia and South Asia, the mystics were often critical of those who called themselves "orthodox" Muslims. Many of the beliefs of the Sufis raised contention from the clerical authorities of the time, including the idea of "Anā al-Ḥaqq,"<sup>34</sup> (see: Gibb 1901, 365) which means "I am the Truth," an attestation of many Sufis referring to an experience of self-annihilation in divine unity. Further evidence towards the propagation of a religious ideal that stands in harmony with Sufism, while at once tearing at the very roots of idolatry, creating way for a new and revolutionized religion, is found in the following passage from the Sri Guru Granth Sahib revealed to Guru Nanak. The SGGS is full of references to Islam and Sufism, including a great deal of Persian scripture. In this verse, Guru Nanak addresses his Sikhs in the manner by which they can become *true* Muslims, and is perhaps suggesting that at this point in Sikh history, there was no difference between the two (*true* Muslim and *true* Sikh):

*Let mercy be your mosque, faith your prayer-mat, and honest  
living your Koran.  
Make modesty your circumcision, and good conduct your fast.  
In this way, you shall be a true Muslim.  
Let good conduct be your Kaaba, Truth your spiritual guide,  
and the karma of good deeds your prayer and chant.*

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<sup>34</sup> See for example: Gibb, Elias John Wilkinson. *A history of Ottoman poetry*. London, 1901. pp. 365

*Let your rosary be that which is pleasing to His Will. O Nanak,  
God shall preserve your honor. (SGGS pg. 140)*

Here the Guru suggests a turning inward emphasizing the spiritual connection of the Muslim, or the Sikh, to Allah, rather than emphasizing only the outward practices - including circumcision and namaz. But if we look to the history of the *Janam-Sakhi* themselves, we see that Guru Nanak himself prayed namaz regularly during his *Udasi*, or journey to Mecca. At this time he also wore a cloak with *Surah Ikhlas* woven into the fabric (the word *Khalsa* for the Sikh army comes from the Arabic *Ikhlas*). *Surah Ikhlas* is the 112<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Holy Quran and is primarily an attestation of *Tawhid*, or, the oneness of God. *Al-Ikhlas* itself means, “the purity,” and the designation given to baptised Sikhs who formed the armed militia of the Sikhs, is derived from this word *Ikhlas*, towards its Sikh theological counterpart, *Khalsa*, also meaning “the pure.” The baptised Sikhs were commanded to embody the persona of a *Saint-Soldier*, and were to be always armed and in a state of constant readiness. The *Nihangs*, Persian for “crocodiles,” are an ultra-militarized sub-group of the *Khalsa* who dress in full blue robes, with blue turbans, and a crescent moon upon their foreheads. The scriptural content of *Al-Ikhlas* is remarkable in its similarity to the cornerstone scripture of the Sikhs, the first verse of *Japji*, revealed to Guru Nanak:



Surah Al-Ikhlās:

Say: He is Allah, One.  
Allah.  
He begets not, nor was He begotten.  
And there is none comparable to Him.

Japji, Verse One:

There is one supreme being,  
the eternal reality (true name),  
the creator,  
without fear, devoid of enmity,  
immortal,  
never incarnated, self-existent,  
(known by) the grace of the Guru.

Further, the Janam-Sakhi narrates an instance where Guru Nanak was in the company of Muslims who were praying namaz: afterwards he asked them who amongst them had actually just prayed, to which they all gave their affirmation. But the Guru criticized them saying that none of them had actually just prayed as one person was thinking about his business, another about his farm, another about his livestock, and so forth. As a Guru, or as many Muslims in Pakistan believe, a *Saint* of God, Baba Nanak could understand the inclinations and desires of other's hearts: in this way he exclaimed to the Muslims that they were only outwardly praying, but inwards, they were not focused on God. In connection to this, during Guru Nanak's pilgrimage to Mecca, he recited the following shabad, which can be found in the B40 Janam Sakhi in the section that narrates Guru Nanak's presence near the Kaaba. The B40 Janam Sakhi is an English translation of the *Janak Sakhi Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji*, a collection of stories and sayings concerning the life of Baba Nanak. The B40 mentions that a *shabad* (verse) was revealed to Baba Nanak and sung by his companion Mardana after the Guru had performed a miracle at

the Kaaba. It narrates that Guru Nanak had fallen asleep with his feet facing the Kaaba (McLeod 1980, 52-53):

[When he reached the city] Baba [Nanak] lay down in the Mecca mosque and went to sleep with his feet towards the mihrab. A mullah, [who was] the mosque attendant, appeared and cried out, “[You blasphemous] fellow ! Why have you gone to sleep with your feet stretched out towards the house of God?”

“My friend,” answered Baba [Nanak], “Lay my feet in whatever direction the house of God is not [to be found].”

When the mullah placed Baba [Nanak’s] feet in a northerly direction the mihrab moved in the same direction. When he moved Baba [Nanak’s] feet to the east the front of the mihrab also moved in that direction, and when he carried Baba [Nanak’s] feet to the south the mihrab went the same way. Then from the cupola [of the mosque] there echoed a voice, mysterious and resonant. "Praise be to Nanak!" [it boomed], "Praise be to Nanak!" Baba [Nanak] recited a shabad in Raag Tilang [which] Mardana [then] sang.

*Merge [your] heart in the [divine] Heart, O mullah.  
In the heart the Creator Lord instils goodness and virtue.  
Within the heart is the assurance of faith  
and the fulfilment of this word's strivings;  
Within the heart is a rosary  
and all that one needs to reach the other world.  
Within the heart are sweetmeats, sugar, the sweet and the  
savoury. Within the heart is the seeker, the place of pilgrimage,  
and the faqir's abode;  
Within the heart is the path of continence.  
Within the heart dwell Hasan, Hussain, and Mistress Fatimah;  
Within the heart is the [one, true] Maulana.  
Within the heart are mercy, love, [and all the merits of] Medina;  
Within the heart is the tomb [whereat to worship].  
Truth and divine sanction, both are within the heart,  
whether one recognise them or not.  
Within the heart is knowledge, divine discourse, and worship;  
Within the heart dwell both God and His Apostle.  
Nanak the seeker has searched within the heart;  
thus has he won acceptance in the court [of the Most High].*

Purewal (2011) further explores the relationship of the Sikh adherent to the identity of “the Muslim” in the following way:

Sikh history, if we must speak in monolithic terms, has an integral relationship to the notion of the ‘Muslim’, both in terms of self-description and identity and in the perception of the Muslim ‘other’ over time.

Dr. Sheikh Ali in his essay “Sikhism and Islam,” further builds on these ideas when he writes:

“Sikhism is an outstanding example of the synthesis of these two (Hinduism and Islam) religions, a noble attempt to fuse in a single system elements drawn from two separate and largely diverse religions” (Ali 1971, 65). However, Sikhism is seen by most adherents to the faith as an entirely new and unique religion, and I suggest it can be understood as a return to an Abrahamic, or more specifically, *Islamic*, form of monotheism bequeathed by a line of *prophets* in a *jahil*, a term most commonly translated as “ignorant,” and corrupt society - similar to the calling of the Prophet Mohammed in an Arabian expanse dominated by idolatry and superstition. In this way, though the first Guru, *Nanak* was born into a “Hindu” family, so too the Prophet Mohammed was born into a society in which the majority of Arabs were polytheists. I talked earlier in this dissertation about the ideas of Mirza Ghulam Ahmed, the founder of the *Ahmadiyya* Muslim community, particularly with regard to the *Israelite* inheritance of many Punjabis. I suggest this extends especially to the *walis*, *fakeers*, *sheikhs* and *Gurus* who taught strict “tawhid,” though many were born into “Hindu” families. I am inclined towards the idea then that just as the *Pashtun* of Afghanistan were practicing idolatry, as were the *Kashmiris*, prior to “returning” to monotheism (in their context, *Islam*), or were “Hindu,” so too other Israelite tribes who had a strict monotheistic pre-disposition had also over the course of several centuries begun to practice the *local* religious traditions and customs in Punjab. I therefore suggest the view that Kashmiris, Pashtuns and many Punjabis who are zealously inclined to the

concept of *tawhid* or monotheism, are also of the “House of Israel,” whether Sikh, Sufi, Christian, Sunni or Shia.<sup>35</sup> In this way the “conversion” of the majority of Punjabis, Kashmiris and Pashtuns to strict *monotheism* (either in Islam, Sikhism or Christianity) should not be as such, but rather as a “reversion” back to their cultural predecessors. Mirza Ghulam Ahmed believed then that Jesus himself had led exiled *Israelites* to a land that had already been settled by earlier Israelite communities (Punjab, Kashmir and Eastern Afghanistan) during several mass exoduses from the *Promised Land*, and that Jesus himself is buried at *Roza-Bal* in Srinagar, Kashmir.

Dr. Sheikh Ali argues that Sikhism combines elements of Islam and Hinduism. He bases his review on the concepts of God, Prophet or Gurus and Society, particularly as they are exemplified in both Sikhism and Islam. He argues that the concept of God in Sikhism “comes nearer to the Islamic conception of Divinity, with God as the one, the sole, the timeless being, the creator, the self-existent, the incomprehensible, and the everlasting” (65). He further argues that Nanak “compares God to truth, which existed before the universe was created, which exists now, and which shall exist forever, as the ultimate idea or cause of all we know or behold” (65). He argues that in Sikhism, like Islam, there is no need to invoke any intermediary in prayer, though it is worth noting that many Sufis *and* Sikhs do invoke *Saints* such as Shahbaz Qalandher, Sheikh Farid, and Guru Nanak, among others, as intermediaries, but perhaps the *neeyat*, or “intention,” is different than that of polytheism in this context. Islam further demands that God “is the ultimate spiritual basis of all life, and loyalty to God virtually amounts to man’s loyalty to his own ideal nature” (65). He states that “the fundamental of Sikh belief about God is

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<sup>35</sup> See: Ahmad, Mirza Ghulam. *Jesus in India (English Version)*. Islam International Publications, 2016.

a clear-cut monotheism of Islam” (65), where both “Islam and Sikhism clearly declare that God is omnipresent and pervades the universe” (65).

Ali further draws on the Islamic concept of “God as Beauty,” propounded by Abu Ali Ibn Sena or Avicenna – though the latter was known to incorporate Aristotelean ideas into his philosophy. Avicenna argues that the ultimate reality is eternal beauty whose nature being self-expression has “itself reflected in the universal mirror” (66). Ali writes that, according to the dominant view of South Asian Sufism, “Love is the ultimate principle and the moving spirit of all life, and the very existence of this universe is delicately balanced in mutual attraction that is love.” He argues that the same idea is expressed in *Kirtan Sohila* (a specific Sikh prayer), where Nanak engages us with the idea that “only if we tune our souls to the things of living beauty around us, we realize that the divine spirit outside us speaks to the divine spirit within us, and everything in nature urges us to move towards truth, through avenues of beauty” (66). Ali further argues that Nanak was “steeped in Sufi lore,” was an “ideal Unitarian,” and that his “contention is the same as that of Islam, namely of God is one, all souls are from him and of the same essence” (66). Further, “mercy, grace, love, faith, hope and kindness are all used in the same context as the Islamic Sufis had done before” (66).

## 4.8 COUNTER-ARGUMENTS TO THE HISTORICAL SIKH-SUFI CONNECTION

I now wish to present some arguments of well-known scholars that seek to absorb Sikhism into Hinduism. It is important to see the zeal and determination with which these scholars have undertaken their assignments and perhaps in this process we can gain insight into why this has historically been, and still remains one of the most important tasks for hardline Hindu-Nationalists operating in India and abroad. One writer who argues that there is little connection between Sikhism and Islam is Sadhu Ram Sharda. In his 1974 work *Sufi Thought: Its Development in Punjab and its Impact on Punjabi Literature*, he argues that while Sikhism is a distinct entity of its own, it is predominantly the background elements of Vaishnava Vedantic Bhakti and Nathism which contribute to its development. According to Sharda, Sikhism owes nothing in its development to Sufism (Sharda 1974, *xiv*). Sharda bases his arguments on primarily an exegetical comparison of the discourses of Nanak (particularly *Siddh Goshti*) with those of the Nathic school of thought. He argues that the “Nathic elements of Nanak (are) very much on the lines of *Machhandra Gorakh Bodh* of the Nath school” (223).

Another writer, Dr. Gokal Chand Narang, does not reject the view of any influence of Islam on Sikhism, but he argues that Sikhism owes more in its development to Hinduism (Narang 1979). Narang attempts to show that it is evident upon a foray into the discourses of Nanak that both elements of Hinduism, particularly those of re-incarnation and liberation from the cycle of life and death, as well as Islam, particularly of an Abrahamic style of monotheism,<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> It is worthwhile to note that the style of monotheism found in the Sikh discourses, while owing much in its development to earlier Abrahamic forms, is somewhat different in that God is argued to be both transcendent and apart from creation, but also found to be imminent in creation (or even that God *IS* His creation). For reference see Japji: (Salok) “Air is the Guru, water is the father and earth is the mother. Day and night, are the two nurses, and the whole world is thus engaged in the great play.” Note that according to Dewan Singh (1981) this belief in both the transcendence and imminence of God is partial to Sufi thought, and in some ways those who believe that

exist at once, and it is the interplay between the two which has led to the overall formative style of Sikh theology as a whole. This synthetic view is supported by other writers such as Dr. Surindar Singh Kohli (1961) as well as Dr. Taran Singh in his work *Guru Nanak: Chintan te Kala*, in which he refers to the doctrine of *Raza* (God's will) and *Bhai* (Fear of God) as the most "probable traces of Sufism," but he admits categorically to the debt of "Indian traditional thought for the remaining doctrines of Gurmat philosophy" (Singh 1963; Sharda 1974, 214).

The view of Sharda that Nanak was mostly influenced by Vedantic thought is based primarily on his use of the central doctrine of Hinduism, *Karma*, which "regulates the re-incarnation and transmigration of the soul" (Sharda 1974, 230). Sharda argues that Nanak, and the Gurmat poets "hold identical views with the other sects of Hinduism of their period that the aim of the human volition is to attain liberation from the circle of deaths and rebirth caused by one's karma (actions)" (230).

Loehlin (1939), also chooses to traverse the middle ground stating that: "The question of origins (of the Sikh Faith) is especially elusive; but historical incidents, general tendencies, and some specific examples will be cited to show that Sufism was congenial to Sikhism, and exerted a pervasive, if somewhat vague, influence on it (351). " He goes on to say that: "although the foundation of Sikhism is Hindu, in that it everywhere assumes Karma and transmigration and accepts the Hindu pantheon; yet the super-structure is pervaded with Sufi materials which blend, on the whole, harmoniously with those of Hindu mysticism of the bhakti type" (Loehlin 1939, 66). Further, J.S. Grewal asserts: "on the whole therefore, we have no hesitation in suggesting that Guru Nanak's message was meant to transcend Islam, as it was meant to transcend

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Mohammed was the first Sufi also believe that he held centrality to this concept. See also: Singh, Dewan, *Guru Nanak and the Indian mystic tradition* (1981).

Hinduism” (Grewal 1972). Singh (1981, 58) mentions that it is important to note however that Baba Nanak was not after a synthesis or eclecticism but wanted to establish a new religion or dispensation.

It should be noted here that Sikh theology accepts the presence of angels and other supernatural beings in the expanse of the infinite universe. It argues that there are an infinite number of worlds and netherworlds and that there are countless beings of various form within creation. However, none of these beings (including those described in Hinduism such as Parbhati, Lakshmi, Sarasvati, Kali or Ram, among others) are worthy of worship (the Sikh scriptures even make reference to angels well known in Islam, such as *azrael* the “angel of death”). Sikhism teaches that only the one timeless creator and sovereign lord of the universe is worthy of praise, and that no entity is outside of his *hukam* (his “will,” or “command”). In this way, no angels or supernatural beings (including those described in Hinduism, or in the Semitic scriptures) should be invoked as intermediaries in prayer, and all praise should be directed only to God. Idols and images of supernatural beings are strictly forbidden. What Loehlin calls the “acceptance” of the Hindu pantheon is rather the acknowledgement in the Sikh scriptures that in the expanse of an infinite universe with countless worlds, netherworlds and planes of existence, there too exist countless forms of supernatural beings including angels, demons and beings such as those described in the Hindu and Semitic scriptures.



## 4.9 HOW TO UNDERSTAND THE CONFLICTING VIEWS

It can be argued that much of what the writers mentioned have tried to show is based on where they as individuals are coming from in terms of their own academic and personal backgrounds. Many Muslim theologians have tried to show the connection between Sikhism and Islam to be profound and deep rooted and in Pakistan - there are some groups that are of the view that Sikhs should be absorbed under the umbrella of their religion. On the other hand, many of the scholars coming from Hindu backgrounds have often argued that Sikhism and Hinduism share much more in common, in fact this presents us with one of the major concerns of the Sikh communities both in India and abroad that have lingered over the past several decades. There are several examples of prolific Hindu writers, journalists and politicians, who come from a Hindu-Nationalist stance that the Sikhs should be absorbed under the umbrella of Hinduism. For most Sikhs, this is a great cause for concern and has created much argument. In some ways, Hindu Nationalism created the conditions that led Sikhs to seek redress through mobilizing a Khalistani resistance movement during the 1980's and 90's which ultimately led to an invasion of the Golden Temple as well as many other Gurdwaras throughout East Punjab around June of 1984. The aftermath of Operation Bluestar saw thousands of innocent Sikhs mercilessly killed by the Indian Army and later during a subsequent genocide of Sikhs that followed after Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards in retaliation for the military operation. I will talk more specifically about this in a later section where I will also present the points of view of several other scholars.

A part of the ongoing struggle of Sikhs towards greater autonomy and self-determination is being recognized as a unique cultural and ethnic group and to stop the systematic attempts of pro-Hindutva organizations to absorb them into Hinduism. Some traces of these attempts in the

scholarly sphere can be seen in some of the earlier writings I have mentioned. In this instance it must be made clear that a sympathetic relationship between East (Sikh) and West (Muslim) Punjabis would not sit well with pro Hindutva or Hindu-Nationalist organizations in India, including the current government, nor with some of the more fundamentalist Muslim strains in Pakistan. The effects of mutual cultural interdependence could mitigate public support for open armed conflict between the nations and may instead promote tolerance and understanding. However, by playing either side against each other emotionally, both the governments of India and Pakistan effectively create the “perfect storm,” an atmosphere for demonizing the “other,” and for promoting a ruthless form of national patriotism that threatens minority groups like Sikhs, Ismailis and Parsis in India *and* in Pakistan. A part of the struggle for autonomy involves the objective exegesis of Sikh scriptures and customs as the basis for unifying the Sikh community and for promoting greater self-determination for Sikhs in their own historical lands.

## 5 POETRY AND MUSIC “IN SERVICE OF THE PEOPLE”: COVENANT, COMMUNISM AND INHERITANCE

Yes, peace is very much possible. Punjabis on both sides need to connect like real life neighbors and avoid the media hype.

- Auon Raza Naqvi, Punjab, Pakistan

I have a lot of Indian Punjabi friends... and I totally respect them in every regard because we are the same people.

- Hamood Mazhar, Punjab, Pakistan.

I come from a family with a communist revolutionary history. To struggle is in my blood. Both my grandmother<sup>37</sup> who left the predominantly Serbian region of Yugoslavia for Canada prior to its Balkanization, and my grandfather who was born near Sialkot, Pakistan and was forced to migrate to India during the partition, have spent their entire lives writing short stories and poetry in English as well as their mother tongues. My grandfather, even as he approaches the age of ninety has not abandoned his stance and continues to study Marxism in great detail. During my fieldwork experience in East Punjab, I also met with members of the communist community in Barnala. In this section I will talk about the relationship between communism, Sufi music and Punjabi mutual interdependence, as well as explore the theme of “inheritance” in the context of land, culture, ideology and music.

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<sup>37</sup> My genealogical grandmother died while my father was still very young.



Figure 5-1 Article from the “Times of India” on Darshan Khaira

## 5.1 JUNOON: SOUNDTRACK OF MY SPIRITUAL REPATRIATION TO PAKISTAN

In 1998 I was fortunate to visit a leftover fragment of the land of my ancestors, Punjab (East). In 1947 this fertile, agriculturally rich region was divided along religious lines leading to the formation of a Punjab province in Pakistan and a state by the same name in India. The events that would transpire during my visit to the “state” under Indian control would leave a lasting impact on my personal, spiritual and musical life. As a Canadian citizen, born and raised in Edmonton, Alberta, I brought along many preconceived notions about the land my parents came from during my journey. I experienced many wonderful things during this trip, growing accustomed to Punjabi food, acquiring fluency in the Punjabi language, and learning about the “culture” of the Punjabi youth.

In this context, I do not mean “culture” as it would typically be understood (as in “traditional Punjabi culture,” as an early anthropologist or orientalist might have understood it), but perhaps in the way we in the West understand the term “counter-culture.” I am talking about the Music Television generation, who grew up in Punjab, caught between the traditions of the region and the Western media influences of America and Great Britain. Juluri (2002) examines the music television culture of India and can help us contextualize here. This important era (the early 2000’s) set a precedence for the way that the next generation of Indians would be systematically exposed to music videos and mainstream media, and this would have a massive contribution to their own sense of self and identity conceptualization. Juluri argues that (at that particular time) there had been massive involvement of governmental and hegemonic forces in ensuring that the media broadcast on these channels (like MTV India, or Channel V for example) did not promote anti-national or anti-elder (generationally conflicting – like MTV America) behavior. It is suggested that perhaps because of music television in North America, an entire generation became disconnected from those before them - young people had a completely different sense of understanding themselves and where they fit into society than did the older generations. She argues that in India, a concerted attempt was made in the mainstream youth media to avoid such consequences and instead to promote a rhetoric of patriotic national sentiment.

I personally spent many hours glued to the television set during my trip to Punjab in 1998, watching MTV India and a unique South Asian music television station known as “Channel V.” One of the most fascinating bands I was exposed to during this time was *Junoon*, as they received considerable airplay on Channel V with their single “Sayonee.” I was immediately drawn to Junoon’s sound, particularly because of its uniqueness, incorporating

electric guitars, basses and rock style vocals with a Hindustani classical twist. They used *tablas* along with other South and Central Asian percussion, and ragas were employed by the vocalists that were distinctly recognizable, but the sound remained quintessentially pure “rock.” I recall being drawn to this music in a powerful way, but I acknowledge now that I could never have fully understood the poignancy of the message given the political situation at the time.

I was too young to have developed an interest in following the news and there was little sense in me that something could have been awfully wrong. I know now that the situation at the time between India and Pakistan was exceedingly tense. The backdrop to the *Kargil* war, which took place the following summer, was escalating, and Punjab, a Northwest Frontier state of India, sharing large borders with Kashmir and Pakistan, had become a hotbed of military activity. In retrospect, I can now understand the severity of the situation, and even more how poignant and perfectly timed the message of Junoon was. They were from Pakistan, but many of their fans were in India. They sang songs that were *Sufi*, but the music was really a fusion of rock’n roll and classical South Asian *ragas*.<sup>38</sup> They were branded a *Sufi Rock* band, the first of their kind. They incorporated the poetry of Bulleh Shah and Lal Shahbaz Qalandar, among others, and they sang about friendship and putting away arms and weapons in favor of coming together through mutual respect, love and compassion (common themes in Sufism). This marked the beginning of my own personal journey into understanding and incorporating Sufi teachings into my own life, and perhaps a milestone in the Sufi revival that has taken place over the past few decades.

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<sup>38</sup> Ragas represent a method of melodic delivery in the Indian classical system where notes are arranged into scales based on emotions and motifs, they are generally subdivided into moods that are employed at specific times of the day.

After Junoon's successful career, Salman Ahmad, the songwriter and guitar player for the band, released a book called *Rock and Roll Jihad* (Ahmad 2010), which explicated the possibility that for many young South Asians, *Sufism*, and particularly this new form that had been recontextualized for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, was a viable alternative to extremism. Ahmad traces his reader firstly through his childhood years growing up in Lahore, and then his move to New York as a teenager. His exposure in America to bands such as Led Zeppelin, and his re-introduction to Pakistani culture as a university student, led to an amalgamation of synthetic cultural affiliations and resonances, all of which Ahmad draws upon in his music. In this full-length reader, Ahmad talks about the intersection between music and politics, which is in synergy with many American musical movements that took place before his musical coming of age, including those of folk and hip-hop. The writer suggests that Sufi music presents a viable alternative to extremism and that it can be used as a powerful medium to portray political statements through creative expression, rather than through violence.

This auto-biographical account narrates Ahmad's return to Pakistan in the middle of General Zia Ul Haq's military rule and the conservative reformist Islamic push towards orthodoxy in the political sphere. Although the writer remained at odds with such brands of Islamic orthodoxy, he asserts that his music was a way of re-affirming his Islamic faith through the appropriation of Sufi poetry as one of the primary sources of the band's lyrical content. The message of Junoon was often highly politically charged, but the band always remained committed to advocating for the mitigation of escalating violent conflict through peaceful means. Ahmad explains his role as a Pakistani ambassador for peace, and the heights of fame he has been exposed to because of his music, while remaining focused on using his popularity to promote his cause.

The interesting thing is that Sufi music, whether “rock” or more “traditional” forms, resonates with people across religious divides in Punjab, including Muslim and Sikh. Although most of this musical tradition’s immediate audience, including the Muslims, are not strictly speaking “Sufis” (they may not have been initiated into a tariqa, may not have a spiritual guide, and may not practice daily worship), but still this music bears a deep sacred significance for many of its listeners. How could this be? How did members of different national backgrounds associated with different religious communities come to accept the same sacred music as an expression of a shared identity, despite its connection to a particular—Sufi Muslim—religious tradition? I will work to answer these questions as I continue to move through this dissertation.



## 5.2 THE KHAIRA FAMILY'S HIJRA FROM PAKISTAN

Eh Punjab vi mera ai, oh Punjab vi mera ai,  
Eh Satluj vi mera ai, oh Chenab vi mera ai.  
Hada jism mere de eh do tukre jod deo,  
Hada thorh deo, sarhadan thorh deo...

*This Punjab is mine, that Punjab is also mine,  
This Satluj river is mine, that Chenab river is also mine.  
Can you please put my broken body back together,  
I make my plea, please break this border...*

*- Hans Raj Hans "Eh Punjab te Oh Punjab"*



**Figure 5-2 My Great-Grandfather Labh Singh (left) With His Brother and Sister After Hijra to East Punjab from Pakistan (Unknown Date and Photographer)**

*SOWING SEEDS: INTERVIEW WITH NAZIA NAQVI*

One of the major reasons I chose to pursue this research topic - but I must mention my belief that this topic “chose me,” and not the other way around - is the fact that my blood has always cried out for Pakistan. I first began to realize this in my teenage years (and most definitely Junoon had a major impact on my spiritual repatriation), but as I forayed into adulthood, every cultural decision I made, including the books I read, the languages I chose to learn and the music I chose to listen to, was often a testament to my own bloodlines, even at an age when I could not personally and completely understand the depth of such ideas. I have always felt like more of a Pakistani than an Indian, though ultimately, being born and raised in Canada I am fundamentally Canadian. This has to do with the fact that Punjabi language and culture, as well as the birthplace of my religion “Sikhism” all currently are situated in the northern heartlands of Pakistan’s Punjab province – but also to the reality that my ancestral homeland is at Chak-Rehan village (Khairayan Di Kotli) near Gujranwala, Pakistan. This place that my grandfather left when he was fourteen years old to settle in India’s Punjab state during the partition ultimately holds a higher sentimental value to me than the land that was offered in exchange to my family near Nabha at a village named Bimbri in East Punjab. While attending a concert of Saeen Zahoor in Edmonton, at which an equal number of Sikhs and Muslims were present, I had the opportunity to speak to Nazia Naqvi from Lahore, who told me the *very similar* story of her father’s *hijra* from Gurdaspur (now in East Punjab) to an area near *Nankana Sahib* in the newly formed Pakistan:



**Figure 5-3 Informant Nazia Naqvi from Pakistan (Arsh Khaira - 2018)**

My grandfather had a lot of farmland in Gurdaspur (East Punjab), and when partition happened he was brought to an area near Nankana Sahib (the birthplace of Guru Nanak). He actually thought the exchange would only be for two or three months and that after that he would be able to come back home. Thirty-five years after partition, the family that was given our land in Gurdaspur came to Pakistan to look for him. That was a very emotional and fascinating thing for us – and my father called all of us to meet that family from India... and we still have a connection! Sometimes they call us, and sometimes we call them.

In 2013 my father requested if they could make a movie of his old farmland and home, and when he saw the video they had recorded he could still remember where everything was! He knew where his school was, where his house was... this was such an emotional time for us, and even now I really want to take my father back to East Punjab to see his home. I really feel there is no difference between us... between East and West Punjab. Whenever I go back to Lahore, I see more *maturity*, people are more accepting, there is no animosity or hatred amongst the public, it is all upper politics and politicians... they are dividing us! Otherwise, mostly everything about our cultures is the same, and of course, art, culture and music will always be the best way to connect between us.



**Figure 5-4 Saeen Zahoor and Me (Photo by Yaqoob Shah - 2018)**

As with most partition stories, the relocation of my family was actually an exchange – the Muslims of Bimbri left us their houses and their land, and we, the Sikhs of Rehan-Chak left other Muslim *muhajirs* who came from the far reaches of India our home and our lands in the newly created Pakistan. Briefly, the term *muhajir* essentially denotes anyone who has moved from one place to another to live, as in to make *hijra*, or migration – most commonly understood in the context of the Prophet Muhammad’s move from Mecca to Medina. It is also a term used by many Pakistanis, sometimes in a crude or derogatory sense, to refer to non-indigenous populations, or those who do not belong to one of the major ethnic groups of the country: Punjabi, Pashtun, Kashmiri, Sindhi or Balochi for example. It may refer to Pakistanis with origins in other parts of India like Gujrat, Bengal or Uttar Pradesh for example. Mohammed Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, was himself a muhajir from Guajrat.

I had been told many times that the land in Northern Pakistan was much better, more fertile and beautiful than the land that had been given to us in exchange by the British (Chak-Rehan was about 40km away from Sialkot in the foothills of the mountains of Kashmir). Even as my family has lived in Canada since the 1970’s, when questions arise as to whether we should sell our “ancestral” farmland in Bimbri, we always agree that if the price is right, we will immediately. This is not just a matter of what we would do with the land if we went back to *India*, but moreover, that at the end of the day our ancestral land was already taken away from us by the British – our fertile farmlands near Gujranwala and Sialkot, Pakistan, and perhaps we just do not feel a strong connection to the Indian land.





**Figure 5-5 Location of Former Khaira Family Village in Pakistan (Near Sialkot) – Google Maps**

### 5.3 YOU SAY YOU WANT A REVOLUTION: INQUILABI SANGEET (PROTEST MUSIC)

*SOWING SEEDS: BARNALA (MARXIST-LENINIST COMMUNITY MEMBERS)*



**Figure 5-6 Marxist Community Members of Barnala, PB (Photo by Arsh Khaira – October 2017) From right to left: Bika Minhar, Jagtar Singh Bains, Harcharan Singh Chahal, Prem Kumar, Narayan Datt, Jagjit Singh Dhillon, BIKR Singh Aulakh, Arshdeep Khaira, Dr. Inderjit Singh Dhillon.**

As the theme of this section suggests, Marxism was a powerful force in the development of Punjabi self-concept throughout the 60's, 70's and 80's, and despite a great deal of anti-communist propaganda, there are still many supporters of this ideology who remain active both in the locality as well as in the diaspora. My grandfather was one of the most influential leftist leaders amongst student groups during his time studying sociology and law in the 1960's, prior to immigrating to Canada in November of 1972. It is not uncommon still to find many East Punjabis, both Hindus and Sikhs, who still maintain strong affinities for Marxism and continue to struggle for this ideology through poetry, stories, lectures and other writings. Within my own family, I have several relatives, both of my grandfather's and father's generations, who admire

and closely follow communist philosophy and politics. The term *comrades* is used extensively by Punjabis to refer to the large number of men in the community who support Marxist ideations through not only intellectual struggle, but also through outward manifestations in their style of dress, as well as their physical appearance, including the keeping of a beard or moustache and either tying a turban or wearing “paper-boy,” or “fiddler” hats, perhaps even wearing either interchangeably given the social setting. My father will often refer to me as *comrade*, though he has also been known to call me by several other names including *Singh Sahib*, and *Khan Sahib*. Marxist Punjabis, also sometimes referred to as *Naxalites*, are also defined and understood through their leisure and cultural interests – which for many included smoking pipes and cigars, reading soviet literature, writing poetry and drinking fine scotch and vodkas. Some Punjabis will also “mock” self-professed comrades who they believe are only interested in “blowing smoke,” referring to those who are not interested in the intellectual struggle, but only in the “leisure activities of communist Punjabi men.”

My mother’s sister is married to one of my grandfather’s close followers, who is also a well-respected lawyer in Barnala, Punjab. I refer here to my uncle, Jagjit Singh Dhillon, an influential Marxist thinker maintaining close contact with other intellectuals who also adhere to communist ideologies. During all of my trips to East Punjab, I would stay at the home of my Jagjit *Masserji* (literally: mother’s sister’s husband) and would learn a great deal from him. He also was responsible for facilitating my travels throughout the region and for arranging many of my workshops by connecting me with significant people of interest. In October of 2017, Jagjit *Masserji* arranged a workshop for me with several influential members of the Marxist community active in Barnala, Punjab. During this workshop my informants and I engaged in a group discussion on the significance of Communist philosophy as a highly influential force in



developing the way identity is constructed in East Punjab, and the role this intellectual mode of thinking has played, and continues to play, in inspiring some of the area's most influential art, poetry and music.

Based on my life-long observations and analysis of my grandfather, Jagjit Masserji, other communist *uncles*, as well as through my detailed workshops, I have found that amongst these circles it is common to hear ideas professed about the communist philosophy deeply entrenched in the teachings of Guru Nanak, as well as in the Sikh religion, or for example that some Sufi saints, like Bulleh Shah, were also communist and revolutionary poets. The term used by Punjabis to refer to revolutionaries, particularly in the context of communism, is *Baaghi*, which was also a name given to my grandfather by his followers in the 1960's. The term essentially means "rebel," or one who engages in "insurrection." Communists in Punjab are also known to be avid followers of Sufi music and poetry, which they recontextualize their understanding of in a Marxist light. While such interpretations of Sufi philosophy are common amongst East Punjabi Marxist circles, they are not entirely alien to the thought of West Punjabi Muslims – and this has major implications for the process of reunifications between East and West Punjab, especially as it appeals to the educated literary classes of Sikhs and Muslims. Some of the most famous Sufi poets of my grandfather's generation, including Sant Ram Udasi from East Punjab,<sup>39</sup> as well as Faiz Ahmed Faiz<sup>40</sup> and the contemporary poet Baba Najmi, both from

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<sup>39</sup> See: Judge, Paramjit S. *Insurrection to Agitation: The Naxalite Movement in Punjab*. Popular Prakashan, 1992.

<sup>40</sup> See: Dryland, Estelle. "Faiz Ahmed Faiz and the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case." *Journal of South Asian Literature* 27, no. 2 (1992): 175-185.

Pakistan, were or are all strong followers of communist ideology. In the book *Insurrection to Agitation: The Naxalite Movement in Punjab*, by Paramjit Judge (1992), the writer suggests that communism had a significant impact on the way poetry was written in Punjab, playing a major role in the creation of an entire culture of Marxism centralized around intellectualism and literature:

The Naxalite poets had passed through blood and fire; some of them had suffered terribly and they knew first-hand what forms man's inhumanity towards man can take. Their poetry, therefore, has deep conviction, authenticity, almost crude realism, and they dream utopian dreams (154).

Marxists in Punjab also tend to reinterpret Sikh philosophy to emphasize the "humanitarian," or "people's service" components of the religion, while eschewing overly *theistic* interpretations. For this reason, it is still common in Punjab to find "communist atheist Sikhs" who still keep beards and wear turbans, perhaps in the same way we could expect to find "communist atheist Jews." Such Sikhs suggest that communism was a deeply entrenched component of the philosophy of Guru Nanak and of the Sikh religion. Many leftists in Punjab are so staunch in their positions, that I have even heard countless comments amongst this demographic that the most influential Sufi poets, including Bulleh Shah, among others, were "revolutionaries" trying to change the world by promoting humanism. Many *Khalistanis* also adhere to similar "humanitarian" interpretations of Sikhism, and suggest that the idea of *Khalistan* was an integral part of the teachings of Guru Nanak, and that it is central to understanding Sikh theology.<sup>41</sup> *Khalistanis* however tend to emphasize the *theistic* side of

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<sup>41</sup> See: Sooklal, Anil, and P. R. Pillay. "Guru Nanak, Sikhism and the clamour for Khalistan." *Journal for the Study of Religion*(1991): 45-63.

Sikhism – though it can be seen here how between these two groups there is a great deal of ideological overlap and malleability.

It is purported that Punjabi communist groups have been closely connected to other politically charged militant sects including *Khalistanis*. In a 1991 article by Sooklal and Pilay, the writers suggest that “in addition to the help that they get or may be getting from foreign governments the Sikhs also get active support for Khalistan from organisations abroad” (Sooklal and Pilay 1991, 53). The “foreign governments” most often referred to in the context of sympathy to the plight of Khalistanis usually includes China and Pakistan, with the latter contributing towards training, arming and funding Sikh separatist groups. However, in today’s contexts, this could also refer to the governments of countries like Canada and the UK,<sup>42</sup> which allow Sikh separatist groups to carry out their activities diplomatically on the surface, and perhaps more militantly in shadow operations. Sookal and Pilay write that a major contributor to the movement for Sikh separatism was from “The National Council of Khalistan founded by the former communist activist Jagjit Singh Chauhan in London on 12 April, 1980” (53). Though it is important to note that Khalistani and Communist militant groups have also engaged in violence against one another, with key figures from either side being killed by the other group. This was especially the case during periods of heightened militancy in Punjab during the 1980’s and 1990’s. Perhaps we can draw an analogy to the way militant groups such as ISIS and the Taliban also engage in periods of co-operation, as well as violence against one another in Afghanistan, as either group struggles to take control of territories in the region. The same can

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<sup>42</sup> See: Razavy, Maryam. "Sikh militant movements in Canada." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 18, no. 1 (2006): 79-93.

be said of Kashmir, with groups like Lashkar-e-Toiba and Hizbul Mujhaideen. Even amongst Sikh separatist groups like Babbar Khalsa or Khalistan Commando Force, or communist groups like Naxalites and Maoists in Punjab, there are often ideological similarities and differences that encourage or discourage co-operation, and perhaps sometimes these are superseded by working together tactically to achieve specific political and territorial goals.

During the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, many Punjabi communists (and perhaps some factions of *Khalistanis*), may have hoped for a decisive Soviet victory and for the Afghan-Communist party to maintain control of the country. Perhaps they saw in this a tactical hope for the proliferation of communist control further eastward, and possibly that the Red Army could assist with similar interventions in the Punjab plains (see Figure 5-7).



**Figure 5-7 Khalistani Sikhs With Soviet Flag (From the music video “Roose” by Channi Nattan - 2017)**

Communism is so deeply entrenched into the fabric of Punjabi culture, especially in East Punjab, that most Punjabis have a number of relatives directly or indirectly involved with the movement. We should note that Communism was also popular in Pakistan’s Punjab province, with several well-known writers and scholars such as Tariq Ali coming from families with well-vested histories of service to the communist cause, as Ali himself has written many well-known

works discussing the philosophy.<sup>43</sup> As I have mentioned, the famous literary figure Faiz Ahmed Faiz was also a very well-known communist figure in Pakistan's early history.

My grandfather often talked about the concept of the *Peoples War*, which was essentially a strategy where militant groups would work to control the country sides and then slowly circle around urban centres to engage in acquiring full control of the region. My grandfather loved travelling to Cuba and made several trips to the country (I myself was fortunate to travel to Cuba in 2012). Perhaps because of his admiration for Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, my grandfather saw reflections in Cuba of a relatively well-constructed communist society, similar to what he had and continues to envision for Punjab. Also, many communists in Punjab may admire the methods by which Guevara and his comrades took control of Cuba, and they may derive inspiration from the rebel insurrection that took place there. In relation to this, in October of 2010, I attended a joint event between the Sikh Student's Society and other groups active in Edmonton at the time including *Music is a Weapon*, and the *Palestine Solidarity Network*. The event was called "Inquilab and the Ernesto Che Guevara Party." At that time, the Sikh Student's Society had put on several events to raise awareness about the oppression of Sikhs as a minority in India, the Sikh genocide, and the struggle for Khalistan. I was asked to perform Sufi music at their main event "Inquilab," and received a great deal of admiration and support from members of this student group. The joint Inquilab/Che Guevara party was also held the following year.

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<sup>43</sup> See:

Ali, Tariq. *The Idea of Communism*. London: Seagull, 2009.

Ali, Tariq. *Fear of Mirrors: A Fall-of-Communism Novel*. Verso Books, 2016.

There were a number of Sikh artists at these events who appropriated “slam poetry,” or rap, into their music, to raise awareness about the plight of their community.

There are other synergies with Cuba that are worth exploring here. Peter (1990) is helpful as he looks at musical culture in the context of socialist Cuba. The relationship between Leninist/Marxist interpretations of political and social structure are drawn in correlation to the way societies who appropriate this form of government engage in creative and artistic expression. Manuel explores the way working musicians in Cuba earn their daily wage and often do not need to seek secondary employment outside of their area of expertise, as he asserts that nearly 90% of American musicians do. He explores the way musical identity has transcended beyond its employment and associations with micro-communities within Cuban society (such as *Afro-Cuban*). For example, certain forms of creative expression have moved beyond their ethnic identifiers and have come to be associated with the singular *Cuban* identity (the un-hyphenated distinctiveness). An example of this would be the *bata* drum, used in *santeria* music: “a hundred years ago this was an African drum, fifty years ago it was an Afro-Cuban drum, now it is a Cuban drum” (303). Peter primarily explores the way classical forms of creative musical expression operate within a socialist governance context. Cuba is used as a case study in his analysis, but contrasts are drawn against other communist countries such as China, where it is suggested that musical culture was more strictly repressed during the revolution.

Fernandes (2003) is also relevant here. She a well-known scholar who continues to work closely with ideas of Black identity, often in a Cuban context, but also in light of hip-hop resistance movements in the United States and elsewhere. This particular article focuses on power relationships in multi- ethnic Cuba through the lens of contemporary hip-hop movements

seeking to empower Black residents. Because of increasing racial disparity and a dire economic situation, many ethnic residents of Cuba have become increasingly marginalized and pushed to the fringes of society, now turning to hip-hop as a source to vent frustration, and to seek social change.

This music has also been highlighted by foreigners as a common identifying element of contemporary Cuban society and has raised global awareness about issues of racial disharmony and inequality. Underground or *conscious* rap in Cuba is shown by the writer to be influenced by similar movements of African-American rap music. The hip-hop culture is also shown to work in synergy with limited opportunities for employment in spite of increases in tourism to Cuba, lending itself to strategies of *hustling* amongst black hip-hop artists in the country.

We can draw synergies here to my earlier discussion of ethnic and tribal conflict within Punjab, as well as the damaging effects of a hierarchical caste system, which is a byproduct of the greater Hindu ideological domination in the country. I showed earlier how the Punjabi “caste” system is actually an ethnic or tribal system, and in the context of Sikhism, socially structuring racial hierarchies are forbidden. Many Marxists in Punjab also oppose racial hierarchical systems, and they are known to closely follow Cuban, and Chinese politics, admiring the way these countries have in their view, progressed forward in such matters. Leftist Punjabis will often say things such as “Mao will also be our ruler!” While Chinese, Cuban and Soviet communism were and are all quite different, most Marxist Punjabis while nuancing these allegiances continue to admire each of these nation’s political and cultural systems as reflective in many ways of what they desire for Punjab. It is worthwhile also to note that Soviet era themes and imagery are also deeply engrained in leftist Punjabi circles, including the use of Russian

names for Punjabi women. Names like Natasha, Anna, Nadia or Ivana are culturally accepted by most Punjabi families for new daughters.

For this particular workshop my informants included well-known thinkers such as Jagtar Singh Bains, a retired FCI officer (Food Corporation of India), writer of Punjabi poetry and short stories, and a revolutionary involved in the *Punjabi Suba* with Punjabi language and culture revivalism. I was also fortunate to have intellectuals such as Prem Kumar, a retired *master* (teacher), and political activist, as well as Narayan Datt, another well-known political activist, literary scholar, and Punjabi language revivalist currently with the Punjab Electricity Board, join the discussion. There was also Bika Minhar, a well-known musician and owner of a recording studio in Bathinda, Punjab, and Bikr Singh Aulakh, a retired *headmaster* (teacher) and literary scholar. Other important personalities involved in the workshop were Harcharan Singh Chahal a retired serviceman of the *Punjabi Lehar* revolutionary movement, Dr. Inderjit Singh Dhillon, a student, political activist and nephew of Jagjit Singh Dhillon – who I have already introduced. According to information I obtained from my informants, I found that this community believes strongly in the concept of art in the “service of the people,” exemplified in the following quote from one of my informants, Naryan Datt:

Much of the senseless music today, what is the point of it? To which *peoples' service* does it contribute? It is pointless. But still, there are artists even from the current generation like Sartaj and Raj Kakra who are worth listening to, and people follow them.

Unanimously, my informants agreed on the significance of establishing a close and interdependent cultural relationship with Muslims in West Punjab. But more so, this community also emphasized the economic side of things. The man seated to the far-right, Bika Minhar, was also a musician who had communist ideas, and he also talked about the importance of culture and music in proliferating hope for the people, especially in times of economic or political



unrest. It is important here once again to mention that even during the period of Sikh revolutionary activity in the 80's, led by Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale (a movement that struggled to increase the rights of Punjabis and empower greater ownership over control of Punjab's own future by its own people) many singers who sang what was perceived as vulgar music, usually called "chakme ghanne" in Punjabi, literally meaning "up-tempo songs," were not tolerated and some like Chamkeela, were even killed. But even during this time of innocence and increased desire for reclamation, *Sufi* singers were not only tolerated by the *khadkus*, but also promoted and encouraged by most factions of Sikh society, as Sufi music was seen by even the most ardent of religious conservatives as a deeply entrenched and important part of Punjabi culture.

My informant, Narayan Datt, explained the relationship of Sufi and folk music to communism and Punjab, and mentioned the importance of artists such as Raj Kakra, a very well-known songwriter and actor from the village of Kakra in the Sangrur district. He has written many hit songs for some of the most popular singers in the state, and his lyrics usually focus on political issues surrounding the Sikh community, often written from a revolutionary or "inquilabi" perspective. As an actor he has also appeared in several influential Punjabi films including *Kaum De Heere*, which was originally set for release in 2014 but banned at the time by the Indian government – though it was subsequently given permission for release in August of 2019. The movie depicted the lives of the two Sikh bodyguards of Indira Gandhi who assassinated her after the invasion and desecration of the Golden Temple by the Indian army in June of 1984.<sup>44</sup> Kakra plays Beant Singh, who along with Satwant Singh gunned down Indira Gandhi at her own residence in Delhi on October 31, 1984. Kakra also appeared in the movie

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<sup>44</sup> See: "1984: Assassination and revenge". BBC News. 31 October 1984  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/witness/october/31/newsid\\_3961000/3961851.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/witness/october/31/newsid_3961000/3961851.stm)

*Dharam Yudh Morcha*, also set around the events of 1984 and depicting the situation surrounding increased Sikh militancy in Punjab and the struggle for increased autonomy for the Sikh community. Singers like Raj Kakra, as well as others such as Harbhajan Mann, Amrinder Gill, Satinder Sartaj, Nooran Sisters and Kanwar Grewal also tend to be popular amongst left-leaning Punjabis, partially because they are not known to sing “chakme ghanne,” and usually have lyrics dealing with Sufi, or folk themes. Naryan Datt explained why some of these personalities are considered “important artists,” or “worth listening to,” from a communist perspective lens in the context of art for the “service of the people”:

Of today’s writers Raj Kakra is still very influential, we actually enjoy listening to his songs (which are usually sung by artists like Amrinder Gill and Harbhajan Mann). He writes about issues that are directly related to our mother tongue. When Satinder Sartaj sings songs, he still does attract the attention of the masses. If a very horrible singer like Cheema can become so famous, then definitely there is room for singers like Sartaj. Especially when it comes to a writer like *Kakra*, his songs are still very much appreciated by many. I was following one of his songs on social media that had to deal directly with our mother tongue, and it had already achieved more than eighty-seven thousand views. It doesn’t mean that only the vulgar singers are becoming popular, the folk and Sufi writers and singers are still very popular, it just depends on the demographic and especially the *generation* that is listening to them. Look at the poet *Baba Najmi* from Pakistan... the people here in East Punjab listen to him even more than the people of Pakistan, including the young and old. Historically, art has always been in the hands of the *elitist* and powerful factions of society, it has always been employed to service these groups, even the Sufis.

When you talk about the 11<sup>th</sup> century when Sufi movements were first beginning here in Punjab, even in those days the Sufis were writing to bring peace and understanding to ordinary people. But what kind of peace were the people after? Only that which the *elitist* groups were allowing them... even when we speak of *Baba Bulleh Shah*, he was a *baaghi* (revolutionary) poet, and that was the momentum of the times in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, there were revolutions taking place everywhere, especially when we look at places like France. In any era,

whatever types of groups are ruling over the people, that dictates the ebb and flow of the art, music and poetry that proliferates at the same time. When the *Russian Revolution* began and the *Naxalite* movement took hold in Punjab, at that time everyone was listening to Sant Ram Udasi (one of the major poets coming out of the *Naxalite-Communist movement of Punjab* towards the late 1960's). Today people don't listen to Cheema as much as they listened to Sant Ram Udasi. He never used to sing to music, he would sing *a cappella* wherever he was, even outside a bus stand, and when he sang, even the dirt below the peoples' feet wouldn't dare to move. The momentum of society will always push arts and culture, and this is dictated by the *elitist*. Even Sartaj, we cannot say he is a *Peoples' Poet* (in the way a communist would understand such a designation), but he is doing something different that is attracting the people.

Datt's view is highly representative of the majority of educated and left-leaning men of his generation, based on my experience and conversations with this demographic both in the locality and in the diaspora. It would not be difficult to find a very similar opinion amongst the social circles of my father for example, or many of my uncles. To build on this I turn to Rice, (2002) who suggests that as the socio-economic conditions in a state change, the musical culture is bound to undergo some type of transformation. The writer uses Bulgaria, particularly in its transition from a communist party state (1944-1989) towards its movement as a country "in a world of new possibilities, free of the constraints of the past" where citizens became involved in a new peaceful "political, ideological and musical struggle to redefine themselves..." (25). The paper looks at the way new forms of music designed to "serve the needs of a society in transition" have either appalled or enthused citizens of the country based on the music's amalgamation of classical, contemporary and ethnic forms of expression.

Rice suggests that during the rule of the communist regime, state music was constructed to be in direct contingency with the aims of the political parties in power. He exemplifies this

strict control primarily as it sought to suppress the musical cultures of Bulgarian Muslims, including Turks and Romas. These communities had their own traditions of song, but experienced a state-sponsored repression of their historical forms, which included the systematic changing of their names to more Bulgarian sounding ones, and the prohibition of certain cultural practices – especially those that emphasized their uniqueness in light of the dominant culture. The writer suggests that during the communist regime, Western classical music, and other forms of European stage music “exemplified the progressive goals of the Bulgarian state” (27). Increasing nationalism in the country led to the attempted assimilation or forced emigration of ethnic groups of Turks, Romas, Armenians and Jews (among others), and even more systematically to the prohibition of the public display of their cultural traditions. The writer explores the period post 2000, where mass media had again changed to reflect a comparatively culturally free society and their current musical tastes.

Goin back to Datt’s comments, I attended the mehfill of Baba Najmi, who I have already introduced as a leftist “people’s poet” from Pakistan, in Edmonton, and witnessed firsthand that the majority of attendees were from East Punjab and most belonged to Marxist circles. The event was even put on by the local Punjabi communist community. This goes back to the point that Narayan Datt is making about “music *of the people*,” or “poets *of the people*,” as this is a typical way of speaking amongst communist circles in Punjab: as in that which is “for the people,” or as we might describe as being truly *folk*. It is important here to mention the concept of *Lok-Geet* which is a popular genre of Punjabi folk music. It literally means “the peoples’ music,” or “music of the people.” This is the term Narayan Datt uses here to describe Sartaj, that he is not a “singer of the people,” in the way a leftist or a communist would understand this expression.

## 5.4 SONGS FOR KASHMIR: THE REGION'S DEEP-ROOTED CONNECTION WITH PUNJAB

My Shangri-La beneath the summer moon, I will return again  
Sure as the dust that floats high in June, when movin' through  
Kashmir...

- Led Zeppelin (Kashmir)

I wish to begin this section with a brief summary of how the Kashmir conflict and the Punjab region are deeply connected to one another. Webb (2015) engages in a cross-correlational comparison of two prominent separatist movements that have existed in India over the past several decades, those of the Kashmiris and Sikhs. He explicates his *modus- operandi* as such:

Through a comparison of the two movements, (I) shed light on the reasons why Sikh ethno- nationalism has largely been reconciled to Indian sovereignty while many Kashmiris still cling to the goal of *Azadi* (freedom from Indian rule).

At the time of the release of his article, Webb argued that the Sikh struggle for Khalistan had shifted to the periphery and no longer posed any immediate threat to the Indian government, while the struggle for Kashmir continued to resonate amongst its residents as a primary cause for concern, namely the consolidation of an independent Kashmiri homeland, or the merging of the entire Kashmir region into Pakistan. Although this may not necessarily be the case, as the movement for Sikh self-determination is peaking once again, however the strategies currently being employed are based primarily in the push for a non-violent referendum that would allow the Punjab state to secede from India. Webb suggests, in his 2015 article, that in the study of separatist conflict “the comparison of different instances of a phenomenon is a valuable method for identifying causal factors and the pathways by which these interact to bring about states of affairs is often employed to identify properties necessary, or sufficient, to mobilize public

opinion behind a separatist agenda and armed struggle” (124). He also employs an economic lens to his analysis, suggesting that neither Punjab nor Kashmir have historically faced the same levels of economic deprivation that many other Indian states deal with. Webb cites Pettigrew (1987) and suggests some of the many similarities between the Sikh and Kashmiri separatist movements in the following way:

Both faiths have a strong tradition of martyrdom and mixing of religion and politics that sits ill at ease with Indian secular nationalism. In addition to the much misunderstood Islamic concept of *Jihad*, there is the Sikh concept of *miri-piri* that joins the temporal and spiritual realms to sanction religiously-regulated political action (Pettigrew, 1987) (126).

The author’s analysis of the similarities and differences between the two most commonly referred to separatist movements in India takes into account historical, demographic (including religious and ethnic) qualifying information to attempt a cohesive and systematic correlational study. Webb argues that one of the reasons that Kashmir’s independence movement continues to propagate, while in his view Punjab seems to have returned for the most part to normalcy, which ascertains Indian sovereignty, is the fact that Kashmiris have an ethnic divide from the rest of India, and have throughout their history been isolated by mountains from the Hindu mainstream. They also comprise a majority Muslim region that adjoins a Muslim country, Pakistan:

To explain, because Sikhism originated in India during the sixteenth century, ethnic and sociological linkages with mainstream Hindu society remain. In contrast, many Kashmiris are descended from Mughals and Persians and engage in cultural, religious and social practices that are Central Asian or Persian in origin (125).

Conversely, he argues that Sikhs have historically and even recently been socially and economically mutually interdependent with Hindu society and that they have tended to be

amalgamated into a more pluralistic Indic society, easily accessible from the Gangetic Plains and not separated by natural physical barriers, like mountains. I will discuss the profound ramifications of statements such as these made by scholars like Webb, that further assist in the process of ethnic vilification in which some groups of conservative reformist Islamists engage in propaganda warfare to demoralize people of Indic origin. This results in notions of idealized whiteness based on concepts of Persian superiority, which creates feelings of worthlessness, self-doubt, and anxiety in many dark-skinned people in East Punjab.<sup>45</sup> The extremely close territorial and geophysical proximity between Sikhs and Kashmiris is devastated by propaganda that creates a massive psychological distance between the two communities based around theories of race and whiteness. I will continue to address this theme as I move through this section.

The separatist movement for an independent Sikh homeland, *Khalistan*, continues to grow in its influence, especially amongst diaspora Sikhs. While this movement is mostly non-violent and aims to liberate Punjab from Indian occupation by means of a referendum to be administered in November of 2020, with copious financial and human resources being delegated to its fulfillment, there have historically been elements of armed resistance amongst some *Khalistani* groups as well.<sup>46</sup> One scholar who has looked extensively at the role of Sikh militant organizations is Mariam Razavy. Her 2006 article examined the formation and functioning of what according to her research are three of the most well-known Sikh militant movements

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<sup>45</sup> See: Mishra, Neha. "India and colorism: The finer nuances." *Wash. U. Global Stud. L. Rev.* 14 (2015): 725.

<sup>46</sup> See: "Thousands Take to Street in Geneva to Protest Indian Brutality in Kashmir, Punjab," *Geo News Pakistan*, Khalid Hameed Farooqi, November 2, 2019. <https://www.geo.tv/latest/254190-thousands-take-to-street-in-geneva-to-protest-indian-brutality-in-kashmir-punjab>

operating in Canada. She focuses on the World Sikh Organization (WSO), the International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF) and the Babbar Khalsa (BK). She looks at questions of infighting as well as control over Gurdwaras in Canada. The writer explores the historical roots of militancy in the Sikh faith and the current state of affairs pertaining to this tradition:

While grievances still exist in India between Sikhs and a predominantly Hindu government, the planning, fundraising, and execution of military activities have shifted abroad (80).

Razavy makes explicit reference to the few groups known to be engaged in militant activities operating in the UK and Canada. She writes that the operations of such groups have become a major focus of national security agencies:

In Canada, Sikh militant separatist groups are now one of the two major areas in which the manpower of CSIS (Canadian Security and Intelligence Service) is deployed (80).

In her exploration of these major Sikh operational groups in Canada, she mentions that the ISYF has linkages to Islamic militant organizations, particularly in Pakistan:

Sources indicate that Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) is a longtime supporter of the ISYF. Allegedly, the ISI is responsible for providing training camps, large monetary funds, arms, and ammunition to members of pro-Khalistani groups, and the ISYF in particular. The ISYF also associates with Pan-Islamist terrorist groups such as Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LET), and LET's parent organization, Markaze- Dawat-War- Irshad. According to the South Asia Intelligence Review, ISI and Sikh militant groups such as ISYF often work together in an effort to build relations between Khalistani and Kashmiri militants, as they both share the common goal of carving out an independent state of Khalistan.

This article represents an area of her research that deserves critical analysis –it is a warranted look at how some of these cells operate in the diaspora, paying particular attention to Canada.



The call to arms for “Sikh Brothers” by Kashmiri militant groups is one way that Sikhs and Muslims engage in the process of mutual interdependence, in this case, through political activism and militancy. For example, Zakir Rashid Bhatt, also known as Zakir Musa, the former leader of Hizbul-Mujhaideen, who was killed in 2019, made several similar pleas to the Sikh community to join the struggle for an independent Kashmir. Prior to his death, he had been hiding in Punjab in complete Sikh dress, including a Sikh turban and beard.<sup>47</sup> Before joining the Kashmiri militant outfit, he had been studying Engineering at Punjab University in Chandigarh. According to an article in *The Times of India*, Musa was noted to have said the following:

Our Sikh brothers are requesting us to join Hizbul Mujahideen...We are with them on every front and God willing, we will try and make an exclusive group for Sikhs in the outfit.<sup>48</sup>



**Figure 5-8 Former Hizul Mujhaideen Leader Zakir Musa in Sikh Appearance (Zee News, Dec 6, 2018) - The Caption Reads “A Death Warrant Has Been Released for Zakir Musa and in Fear He Has Changed His Appearance.”**

<sup>47</sup> See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LIBd5R0DSgE>

<sup>48</sup> See: “Hizbul Mujhaideen Asks Kashmiri Pandits to Return to Valley,” in *The Times of India*, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/hizbul-mujahideen-asks-kashmiri-pandits-to-return-to-valley/articleshow/54936995.cms?from=mdr>

In line with this comment, many Khalistani organizations are trained and backed by Pakistani militant infrastructures. Though it is questionable as to whether Islamic militant groups such as those mentioned actually imagine themselves as sharing the same struggle with Sikhs, and that instead they may just choose to support Sikhs tactically because they prefer them over Hindus or perhaps see this as a way to undermine the Indian state. Pakistanis are unanimous that the creation of a Sikh homeland, *Khalistan*, would quickly lead to the liberation of Kashmir which is seen as being under Indian occupation. Indeed, many Sikh Punjabis also use the term “Indian Occupied Punjab” when referring to East Punjab.



**Figure 5-9 Kashmiris and Sikhs Protest Outside NRG Stadium in Houston During the Visit of Narendra Modi (September 27, 2019, from SikhsForJustice.org)**

I share here the joint activism between Sikhs and Pakistani Muslims to emphasize the following point: In examining the process of reconciliation and the recreation of an interdependent relationship between Sikhs and Muslims in Punjab, I observed that this

phenomenon occurs across all levels of social organization. Consider for example the following four areas:

- Secular
- Spiritual
- Political Activism
- Militancy

1) Secular: Where culture, language, traditions and folklore are shared to elicit feelings of mutual trustworthiness, interdependence and familial kinship bonds.



**Figure 5-10 A Video Still From the song: “My Neighbour,” by Bushra Ansari and Asma Abbas**

2) Spiritual: Where continuities between Sikhism and Islam create shared spiritual experiences manifesting in Sufi music, poetry and expression.



**Figure 5-11 Examples of the Shared Spiritual Relationship Between Sikhs and Muslims Including the Monument Constructed by the Government of Pakistan at Kartarpur Sahib Prominently Featuring a Sikh Rubab**

3) Political Activism: Where Sikhs and Pakistani Muslims mobilize together to protest the torture, mistreatment and genocide of their communities in India, and to seek increased autonomy – which would segue into full reconciliation between East Punjab, West Punjab and Kashmir – which along with KPK represent areas encompassing the “historical” or “greater” Punjab.

4) Militancy: Where groups such as Lashkar-e-Toiba, Hizbul Mujhaideen and Babar Khalsa, share resources, intelligence, training and infrastructure as well as joint missions in efforts to liberate Khalistan and Kashmir.

Through my own personal interventions into this work, I emphasize both the "shared spirituality" as well as the "political activism" components of this renewed relationship between Sikhs and Muslims. But it is critical to acknowledge that these groups do engage in mutually interdependent activities both at the lowest rung of politically motivated activism, which involves completely secular interactions and exchanges, as well as at the highest level of politically charged joint mobilization, including armed militancy. Similar to Ahmad's notion of "Rock n' Roll Jihad," (Ahmad 2010), I suggest that the engagement in "Musical Militancy," emphasized through shared spirituality by way of Sufism and through political activism, the potential for the achievement of increased autonomy for Sikhs and Kashmiris would mean reconciliation, reunification and the recreation of mutual interdependence between historically united communities, as was enjoyed by these groups during the Khalsa Raj.

Hemetek (2006) is relevant here as she gives insight into the various methodological strategies that can be adhered to in conducting applied ethnomusicological work, particularly when dealing with minority communities, which she presents through a case study on the *Roma* of Austria. It is worth noting that in our field several minority communities have received considerable attention over the past decade, as a great deal of research has focused on Roma traditions in the context of Eastern Europe, but also as pertains to the Kurdish and Tibetan people, among others. In her analysis of the *Roma*, the author writes that "in the process initiated in 1989 of claiming political recognition in Austria, the public presentation of Romani traditional music contributed enormously to proving that a group of people who had been discriminated against and who formerly were merely seen as a social minority, were in fact an ethnic one, with a distinct cultural heritage of their own" (35). She goes on to discuss "applied ethnomusicology" as described by Svanibor Pettan in the following way:



It would obviously be senseless and wrong to label the studies about musical universes of minorities, diasporas, ethnic groups, immigrants and refugees as ‘applied’ as long as there is no intervention on behalf of an ethnomusicologist and no expectation of change resulting from his or her intervention (Pettan 2006).

She further discusses the way applied ethnomusicology can be construed as a political act in some contexts, particularly when bringing to the forefront the plight of certain marginalized communities and creating viable methods to mitigate their continued struggles. There is potential then in the Sufi music revival, and initiatives such as “musical militancy,” to lead to open borders between areas encompassing the historical Punjab –and this is already happening to some extent due to our efforts (i.e., The Kartarpur Corridor). The struggle then for many activists from both sides of the border is to restore ”Sanjh,” to reunite Sikhs and Muslims with their historic lands, as well as to rekindle their kinship ties with each other.

#### *SOWING SEEDS: “KASHMIR” MUSIC VIDEO*

I had envisioned that my music videos would centre on the theme of a shared cultural reciprocity between East and West Punjabis, and that they would assist in the recreation of mutual cultural interdependence between Sikhs and Muslims (as well as address issues facing Punjab and their relevance for a global audience). I implemented an experimental group in my research design to determine if and to what extent my intervention material had an effect on changing attitudes. I observed and examined feelings towards my video(s) through comments that viewers posted on social-media.

In this section of “Sowing-Seeds,” I focus specifically on one of my music videos<sup>49</sup> that explored the primary reason for the hostility between India and Pakistan (that is the Kashmir

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<sup>49</sup> I talk about my other music videos with relevance to this project in later sections.

conflict) - and the role of the Punjabi communities in both East and West Punjab in mitigating the escalation of violent engagement because of this issue through reconciliation. As I write that one of the themes of this chapter is “covenant/inheritance,” upon reading the lyrics to the song it will become evident how this composition relates directly to my research paradigm, as well as to my own personal relationship to the Punjab and Kashmir conflict. I was gifted the lyrics of this song by a local poet named Laddi Soosawala. I have known Laddi as a member of my distant family from a very young age, and had performed with him a few times in the late 90’s. As Laddi knew about my paternal lineage and was well versed in the works of my grandfather, when I met with him to obtain lyrics to a song he chose this one, “Kashmir,” especially for me. The entire song deals with the ramifications of partition and speaks from the point of view of a person from the exiled generation making reference to his father’s lands on the far side of the border. Here I provide an example of some lyrics from this song (with the full lyrics later in this section):

*My grandfather planted a beautiful tree,  
In his home and birthplace on the other side of the border.  
After Punjab was divided, no one cared for the tree...  
And it too has dried and withered away.*

I turn here to Bohlman (2011), to help contextualize this component. He examines the way music and nationalism shape the way we understand Europe as a continent in its entirety today. He explores various forms of nationalist music in Europe, from folk-song, to patriotic army songs to more obscure traditions that reflect a unique concept of nationhood like the Roma’s, or the European Jews’ (nations within nations). He looks at the way music contributes to a sense of self-concept, particularly when drawing from a shared historical repository of lyrical content with others whom one may share a contained geophysical location (the borders of

a country), a common blood line (the borders of ethnicity), a shared language (the borders of language), or even religion with. In this way he looks at Europe as a multinational continent, which relies on some elements of shared identities to draw its inhabitants together, while other elements unique to a particular community can be used to divide communities apart (music to assert differences – eg. Northern Ireland or the Balkans; Protestants and Catholics).

Through the creation of a music video with original music and lyrics in the Punjabi language, and the distribution of this video on social media through East Punjabi and Pakistani circles, I was able to examine the reaction to my own creative outputs on my research paradigm. The video itself was shot deep in the Himalayan mountains of North India and explicitly depicted the violent conflict that has engulfed the Kashmir region since partition.



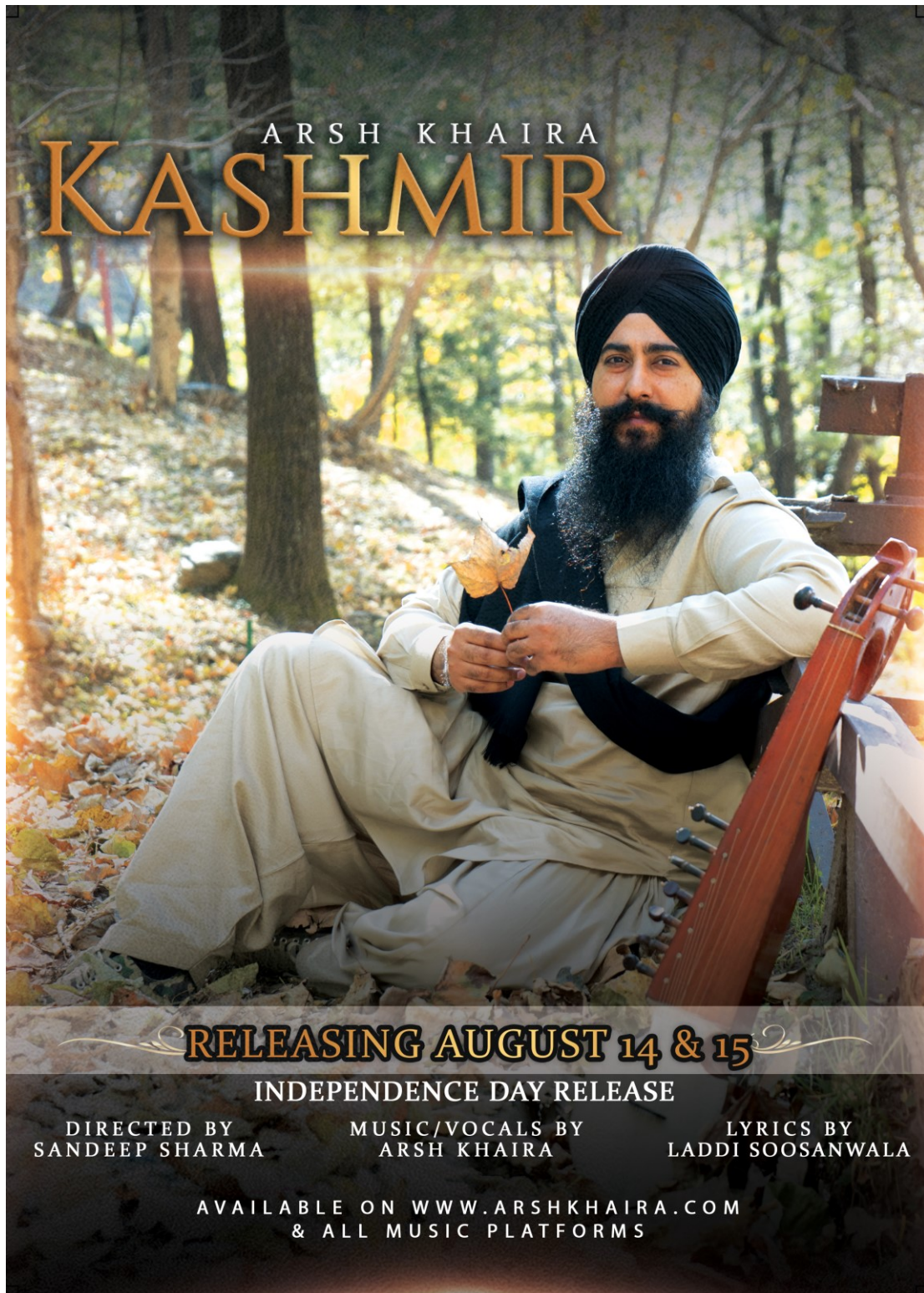


Figure 5-12 “Kashmir” Music Video Poster (Designed by Gurjot Sandhu – August 2018)

Figure 5-12 shows the poster for the music video (notice I am holding a maple leaf, as the video was filmed in the high mountains of Himachal during the Fall season prior to the heavy snowfalls of winter). It was also featured on many mainstream music and variety shows across Canada and received positive feedback from both sides of the Punjab border. In fact, the response of the Pakistani community was on par if not greater than that of the East Punjabi community in its positivity. The local Pakistani community centre in Edmonton displayed this poster on its walls for several weeks leading up to the release of the song. It must be noted here that Kashmiris, Sikhs and Pakistanis are mobilizing towards reunification on all fronts. I have already talked about how the Kashmir region is connected to Punjab, and that in fact it was one continuous territory prior to the systematic disruption of this unity by British colonialism. Further, the process of reconciliation occurs not only in the secular sphere, but also through the essence of a shared spirituality, and also, even in areas of non-violent political activism, as well as armed militancy. One of the goals of some factions of Sikhs, and Kashmiris is to establish the independent countries of Khalistan and Kashmir, however, even those groups interested in this task are also engaged in the process of cultural reunification amongst the Sikh, Kashmiri and Punjabi Muslim communities. However, in their case, the final fulfillment of this reunification process is intended to manifest itself in *azadi*, or “freedom,” from Indian occupation, and even further strengthened bonds, including open borders, between Khalistan, Kashmir and Pakistan.

An analogy may be drawn here, as Nasser (2002) describes, to the multi-ethnic musical collaborations between regional co-inhabitants in Israel-Palestine, which he discusses as facilitating unification between Jews and Arabs. He mentions that music has also been used for the converse, or, to solidify and polarize their identities against one another, depending on the historical period in question. The author argues that during the 1960’s and 70’s it was the latter,

but during a period of reconciliation and the promotion of a shared regional co-existence in the 1990's, by way of musical collaborations between Jewish and Arab musicians, music was used to promote peace. The author describes the movement towards religious co-existence in the following way:

By the mid-1990s, however, the harsh tone previously adopted by many on both sides had eased as they realised the necessity and inevitability of living side- by- side in the Holy Land. Faisal Husseini, one of the chief Palestinian negotiators, expressed his feelings: 'I dream of the day when a Palestinian will say "Our Jerusalem"' and will mean Palestinians and Israelis, and an Israeli will say "Our Jerusalem"' and will mean Israelis and Palestinians.'

In the same way, Pakistani, or Punjabi music, can be used to invoke feelings of interconnectedness, mutual trustworthiness and respect, but has also been used historically to polarize communities. We may consider the case of ultra-nationalist music, or even music that promotes violent jihad, which we can contrast to the types of music I focus on in this work as contributing to reconciliation. Still, many scholars today argue that the possibility of co-existence in Jerusalem, and indeed the entire of Israel-Palestine, remains simply a "utopian dream" that seems increasingly impossible in light of persistent armed conflict and the propagation of polarizing political rhetoric in the mainstream. Nasser traces through some requisite musical works in both Arab and Jewish cultural contexts that glorify Israel-Palestine, and especially Jerusalem, employing either a lyrical discourse that emphasizes mutual-reciprocity with other ethno-religious groups, or in a more conservative-nationalist fashion, the call to mobilize a community to consolidate control of an indigenous land. Indeed, we can learn much about the issues in Kashmir, Punjab and Pakistan by looking at the example of Israel-Palestine.





**Figure 5-13 Sikhs and Kashmiris Protest Together in Geneva at the United Nations for Independence from India (November 1, 2019, from SikhsForJustice.org)**



**Figure 5-14 Khalistani and Kashmiri Flags Fly in Unison During a Protest in Geneva at the United Nations (November 1, 2019, from SikhsForJustice.org)**



Figure 5-15 Sikhs and Kashmiris Protest to Raise Awareness About the Sikh Genocide in Geneva at the United Nations (November 1, 2019, from SikhsForJustice.org)



Figure 5-16 Sikh and Kashmiri Separatist Leaders in United Protest in Geneva at the United Nations (November 1, 2019, from SikhsForJustice.org)

While I composed the music and was primarily featured in the music video, the lyrics were written by Laddi Soosawala. The song also featured one of my Pakistani Kashmiri friends, *Yaqoob Shah* on the rubab. My friendship with Yaqoob is highly representative of my research paradigm (I speak throughout this dissertation about the significance of “Sanjh,” not just between East and West Punjabis, but also with Kashmiris, Pashtuns and Afghans). On one occasion, at his invitation, the two of us attended a movie screening for an East Punjabi film called “Chal Mera Putt,” which means “Let’s Go My Son.” It is based around the story of three young men from East Punjab who have newly immigrated *illegally* to England, where they find the company of three other men from West Punjab who have also done the same. The six of them all end up sharing a single bedroom to live in where they find themselves listening to each others’ stories of pain and separation, and they subsequently help one another find peace in their shared difficulties. Near the climax of the movie, after scenes of betrayal between the two groups, and then reunification, one of the West Punjabi men says:

We have already been divided once; if we betray each other and stay separated we continue to make those people happy who do not want us to be together. We cannot let that happen...

After a drawn-out emotional dialogue between both sides, Amrinder Gill, one of the most popular singers in Punjab, who plays the lead character from the East Punjabi side, concludes by saying:

God willing one day, from Delhi to the Khyber-Pass, we will once again live in a united Punjab...





**Figure 5-17 Amrinder Gill and Me (Photo by Gurdeep Khaira - 2012)**

For my music video “Kashmir,” a very important applied component of my work, Yaqoob also wrote some beautiful poetry in the *Wakhi* language, native to Northern Kashmir, that is included in the introduction of the song. The lyrics are as follows:

Intro poetry by Yaqoob Shah:

They have drawn lines through our paradise,  
And turned brothers into enemies...

Song lyrics by Laddi Soosawala:

Raat de hanerayan lai  
Jugnu vi muk gai  
Bhai - Bhai sarhadan uthe  
Khadde khadde suk gai  
Sanjh da suneha likhi  
Maut vale teer te

*For the darkness of the night,  
Now even the fireflies have disappeared.  
Brothers stand weak, tired and deprived,  
On both sides of the border.  
Now, attach a plea for peace and unity,  
On the last arrow from your crossbow.*

Layo koi boota yaaro  
Wagah de lakeer te  
Shan jeedee ho ve ja ke  
Aj Kashmir te

*My friends, let us plant a tree of peace,  
On the Wagah border (between India and Pakistan).  
This tree is our Punjabi brotherhood,  
And it will give shade to the people of Kashmir.*

Bar de zameen uthe  
Rukh bapu laya si  
Vandeyan to baad  
Oh vi rus ke sukaya si  
Sukhan vala rot vando  
Ja ke kisse peer de

*My grandfather planted a beautiful tree,  
In his home and birthplace on the other side of the border.  
After Punjab was divided, no one cared for the tree...  
And it too has dried and withered away.  
Let us make an offering, to the Pirs and Saints of Punjab,  
That we should again live in peace.*

Kisse naggari de palle  
Honke te chirag ne  
Muk chukke jiyan palle  
Vana valle rag ne  
Banu kive rakhri  
Koi muk chukke veer de

*Now in every village of Kashmir,  
There is the sound of crying mothers,  
And the dim light of candles of remembrance.  
Without the company of those now dead,  
There is only weeping and sighing.  
How can a sister tie a rakhi on her dead brother?*



Doven passe ragan vich  
Arsh, sanjh valla khoon ai  
Hoya ki ujjade pichon  
Das tu sakoon ai?  
Soosan vali sanjh Ladi  
Pugh ju akhir te.

*Arsh, you should know that on both sides of the border,  
The same blood flows through our veins.  
What happened after we were divided (the Partition),  
Tell me brother, have you found peace?  
Laddi Soosawala has faith that our brotherhood,  
Will again bring us together.*



**Figure 5-18 Video Still from “Kashmir” Music Video (Directed by Sandeep Sharma – October 2017)**



**Figure 5-19 Video Still from “Kashmir” Music Video (Directed by Sandeep Sharma – October 2017)**



**Figure 5-20 Video Still from “Kashmir” Music Video (Directed by Sandeep Sharma – October 2017)**

The video begins with myself seated at home watching the news on television late at night. As I flip through each channel I hear the same things repeated on each news station:

At the waga camp the special forces commando unit did not let the terrorists move \*static\*... three terrorists have been killed along with four army personnel \*static\*... a gun fight breaks out between terrorists and army personnel in South Kashmir, we understand that two or three terrorists are believed to be trapped in this locality \*static\*...

As all the news channels begin to distort and overlap each other, I hold my head and experience ringing in my ears which is then followed by pin drop silence as crickets chirp in the darkness of the night. I then turn my attention inwards and am taken in my dreams to Kashmir. The camera then cuts to beautiful shots of the mountains as I walk through the valley in the Fall with golden maple-leaves falling from the trees. As the introduction poetry begins I find myself at the Waga Border with my *rubab* in my hands, with heavily armed personnel on both sides, and I begin to sing. As the video continues it cuts from shots of myself at the Waga Border, to the mountains, rivers and valleys of Kashmir, interspersed with shots of war, protest, violence and mourning. At the end of the video I am back in my living room still lost in my thoughts of Kashmir as my two children come and wake me from my dreams.

The video also appeared on Danish Nazari's channel, in which she provided a reaction and commentary. Danish is an Afghan refugee who was raised in Pakistan. After her reaction, many viewers from Pakistan left positive comments. For example, Asad Khan from Pakistan wrote: "Respect for this singer from Kashmir!" While a company called Music Waves International responded to the video with the comment: "Respect and love from Pakistan." Other Pakistanis responded with equal enthusiasm including Ibrahim Khan, who wrote: "Great song with beautiful lyrics!" Shoeb Khan also replied to the video with the comment: "Great to see you again and thank you for uploading this kind of video – happy independence day!" Asim Mubashir wrote: "Much needed, great lyrics and composition!" And Muhammad Safder wrote: "Very good effort to spread love!" There was also positive feedback received from Punjabi Sikhs, including from Mandeep Purewal who commented: "Beautiful song with great message, a great performance!" As well as Mandeep Kaur, who wrote: "Beautiful song with great message. Also great performance." Comments were also received from Afghanistan, including from Ghazliyat, who wrote: "Great song and beautiful video!"

There was also some mudslinging that took place in the comments section between Indians and Pakistanis, which was to be expected, however the video itself was not the target of either side's criticism. For example, a poster by the name of Free Kashmir Group wrote: "Kashmir is a disputed area, but India occupied Kashmir and they are killing innocent Muslims and blinded people with pellets." Similarly, Mohsen Khan wrote: "Free Indian occupied Kashmir from Hindu India." The large majority of Pakistanis however showed enthusiasm and appreciation for the video, as did the Sikh Punjabi commenters.



**Figure 5-21 Video Still from Danish Nazari’s Reaction to “Kashmir” (Danish Nazari – August 2018)**

The video was originally released on August 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of 2018, while both countries were celebrating their independence. But after the events of *Pulwama*,<sup>50</sup> when a suicide bomber attacked a convoy of armored vehicles, killing forty Indian soldiers in Kashmir, I redistributed the video throughout my Pakistani circles and established social web. The case was shrouded in conspiracy,<sup>51</sup> though Sikh and Pakistani media agencies were able to decipher the incident and subsequent events in a very clear, transparent, and convincing way – suggesting again perhaps

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<sup>50</sup> See: “Kashmir Attack: Tracing the Path That Led to Pulwama,” in *BBC News* (BBC.com), May 1, 2019.

<sup>51</sup> See: Feyyaz, Muhammad. "Contextualizing the Pulwama Attack in Kashmir—A Perspective from Pakistan." *Perspectives on Terrorism* 13, no. 2 (2019): 69-74.

that like the Pathankot attack, that this too was an inside job by the Indian centre. The reason for this speculation is based partially on the reality that the event shortly preceded the re-election of the BJP and Narendra Modi to power. Feyyaz (2019) writes:

...why did Pulwama turn into something approaching national hysteria in India and a matter of socio-political security concern in Pakistan? The media, regional as well as international, have covered the event and its aftermath extensively. There have been numerous analyses by political dissidents, policy and security analysts published in foreign quality magazines and newspapers. In addition, the Pulwama incident significantly shaped the direction and mood of election campaigns in India (69)...

I performed the song “Kashmir” several times during my field experience in Punjab, as well as for the local Pakistani community in Edmonton. It should be made clear here that the response from the Pakistani community was equally if not more supportive than that which I received from the East Punjabis. Although this may not be surprising given the relationship between Pakistan and Kashmir, it is critical to note that in the video I clearly portray the appearance of a Sikh, including a turban and long flowing beard. Further, nowhere in the video, nor in the lyrics, do I openly propose a solution to the Kashmir conflict involving either the complete annexation of the region by Pakistan, or the creation of an independent Kashmiri homeland. Rather, the video and lyrics focus on the importance of the recreation of a Punjabi brotherhood that crosses the divide of Muslim and Sikh as a show of support for the people of Kashmir. The support of the Pakistani mainstream for the Sikhs is a point of significance when examining the process of reunification and reconciliation between the Muslim and Sikh communities. Further, as I have discussed, the mutual interdependence between these two groups transcends all levels of joint social mobilization from the secular, to the spiritual, to the political and militant fields. It is therefore highly likely that the majority of Pakistani viewers

and respondents were familiar with the increasing co-operation between Sikhs and Pakistani as well as Kashmiri Muslims, and perhaps saw this video as a testament to the promotion of furthering this movement.

## 5.5 IDEALIZED “WHITENESS” IN LIGHT OF THE KASHMIR CONFLICT AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PERSIAN INFLUENCE IN PUNJAB

In this section I will discuss the data I collected in connection with my applied intervention music video “Kashmir,” in light of some of the ethno-religious issues that drive this conflict.

A major component of data collection involved with the video was a survey which could be accessed via a link available on the music video channel ([www.ArshKhaira.com](http://www.ArshKhaira.com)), I provide the results of these surveys see Appendix A of this dissertation. Although this was a very effective method of collecting data from a broad sample group, especially in the context of my Pakistani informants, there were some limitations due to the fact that in order to complete the survey one would have required internet access as well reading and writing ability in English. Given that, there are some demographics that I could not access. For example, an illiterate Salafi Muslim, among others, would not have been able to complete this survey. This may have resulted in some filtering of the responses I received, perhaps limiting my informant base to individuals who speak English, and have access to a computer and the internet.

As this survey was a an important part of the music video, my creative intervention then was just as much a research tool used to elicit responses and to spark discussion, as it was a highly motivated project that I hoped would create a greater sense of solidarity between Sikhs and Muslims from Pakistan. I found my survey informants openly expressing solidarity with other Punjabis across a national divide, and it is likely that these emotions were not created by,

but rather their expression was encouraged by, my music video. Take for example the comment from Mahroz Shaid from Pakistan when asked how Pakistani Punjabis view Punjabis from India. He responded simply by saying: “They are my brothers.” Similarly, Hamood Mazhar, a Punjabi Pakistani living in Australia wrote: “I have a lot of Indian Punjabi friends here in Australia and I totally respect them in every regard because we are the same people.” An anonymous respondent from Pakistan also commented: “There is just a border separating us, otherwise we are all humans and we are brothers to each other.” And another Pakistani anonymously wrote: “They are no different than me.”

Some of my informants from Pakistan left comments that I see as aligning against the rampant propaganda, especially on social media, that continues to create a supremacist and racist rift between Indians and Pakistanis by the decreasing percentage of hard-line conservative reformist Islamists in Pakistan, or others who may have highly ethnocentric views, who make derogatory references to people of Indic origin, and see themselves as being of a superior Persian, or sometimes to a less extent as of *Arab* or *Turkic*, stock.<sup>52</sup> These theories of racial superiority based on the purported Persian and non-Indic lineages of the Pakistani demographic, brought to eminence by Jinnah, himself a converted Khoja Ismaili from the Banya Hindu caste, Iqbal, and other supporters of the “Two-Nation Theory,” have played a major effect on demoralizing Sikhs, along with other ethnic groups of India, racially, both historically and today,

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<sup>52</sup> See: Alavi, Hamza. "Pakistan and Islam: ethnicity and ideology." In *State and Ideology in the Middle East and Pakistan*, pp. 64-111. Palgrave, London, 1988.

And

Alavi, Hamza, and J. Harriss. "Politics of ethnicity in India and Pakistan." *Perspectives on Modern South Asia: A Reader in Culture, History, and Representation* 6 (2011): 87.

through the promotion of this artificially construed theory of race and ethnicity. If one explores online discussions regarding the Kashmir conflict, or even India-Pakistan relations in general, they would find that the common theme amongst Pakistanis is to demoralize Indians as being “dark-skinned,” and “ugly,” when contrasted to their “beautiful Pakistani neighbours.” This modified form of “white supremacism,” based on Persianized notions of “idealized whiteness,” is so pervasive, allowing these ideas to gain profound global influence, that for this reason all of the positive comments I received from Pakistanis regarding the relationship between Sikhs and Muslims have massive implications.

### **Ethnic Groups of Pakistan**

**From the CIA – Central Intelligence Agency website – [cia.gov](http://cia.gov)**

- Punjabi 44.7%
- Pashtun (Pathan) 15.4%
- Sindhi 14.1%,
- Saraiki 8.4%
- Muhajirs 7.6%
- Balochi 3.6%
- other 6.3%





**Figure 5-22 A map from the collection of the Perry-Castañeda Library (PCL) of the University of Texas at Austin illustrating the Major Ethnic Groups of Pakistan Including Punjab (East and West)**

The most critical of scholars though have always stressed that East Punjabis form a continuous ethnic group with the Punjabis of Pakistan (see Figure 5-22). But in light of the propaganda war on social media, the numerous comments from Pakistanis I received stating that Sikhs and East Punjabis are “no different,” or “completely the same” as Muslims in Pakistan, have major ideological and political ramifications, and even though some of these comments are just a sentence or two, they are not to be taken lightly. This is especially critical given the history of radical but highly influential Pakistani dogmatism that has demonized “undesirable”

Indians based on their ethnicity and their “Jahil” culture for decades. The massive ideological weight of these comments is further emphasized by the fact that these were responses gathered after informants had viewed my music video “Kashmir,” and because Kashmir would typically represent for Pakistanis the height of their superior Persian bloodlines, language and culture, based on the regions demographic – especially when contrasted in the massive propaganda campaigns Pakistan excises against India with regard to Kashmir on a global scale. In this way, when my informant Samir Hussain Khan from Pakistan writes: “We have the same bloodlines but different religions (which is everyone's personal issue),” this is not a comment that should be passed over ignorantly. When Muslims from Pakistan refer to having the same “bloodlines” as Sikhs in East Punjab, we must understand the rhetorical weight of such a statement, especially given the history of the creation of Pakistan, and the violence of Partition. I will talk more about the ethnic conflict surrounding Kashmir and Punjab, which is based on highly Persianized notions and ideas of race and idealized whiteness, as I proceed to further discuss the data I collected related to my applied intervention music video “Kashmir” in this section.

Continuing to cut right to the heart of the vile propaganda that attempts to sever the relationship between Sikhs and Muslims, my informant Inam Elahi from Islamabad, Pakistan succinctly writes: “East Punjab is just like our Punjab.” Though this is a very short phrase, it is highly politically charged and shows the depth of understanding and compassion that still exists amongst all classes of Pakistani Punjabi society. Indeed, the racism surrounding the conflict between India and Pakistan could be shown to be a great contributor to feelings of worthlessness as well as the inferiority complex that continues to affect many people with dark skin in East

Punjab.<sup>53</sup> The effect of Pakistani propaganda centralized around race and ethnicity has global ramifications. I have observed that many “westerners” from white American or Canadian backgrounds with interests in South Asia clearly buy into these stereotypes. For example, I have been asked numerous times by people of various backgrounds whether I am from Pakistan. Often when I reply, “no, my parents are from India,” rather than getting into details about my family’s *hijra*, partition, and so on, they would often say things to me like “then why do you look Pakistani?” Further, some of my white Canadian acquaintances will often refer to my mom, or to some of my “very light-skinned cousins” from my mother’s side as “looking Pakistani.” When in actuality, it is my paternal side, most of whom have dark olive tone complexions, that represent my bloodlines from the foothills of Kashmir near Sialkot in Pakistan, where they had their ancestral home for centuries. Many of my paternal family’s older generations still speak the Pakistani Punjabi language variant of *Potohari*, and only married with other Sikh “refugees” from their region of Pakistan even after they were relocated to India. They struggled adamantly to preserve their bloodlines, culture and language, yet to a “western” observer, as most of them have olive skin tones, they “do not look Pakistani,” which is a major misconception based on many absurd stereotypes perpetuated by mainstream media. My mom’s side actually never migrated to India from Pakistan in 1947, and had always lived near Sangrur in East Punjab, and yet, because of their “light skin,” many outsiders often say they “look Pakistani.”

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<sup>53</sup> See: Mishra, Neha. "India and colorism: The finer nuances." *Wash. U. Global Stud. L. Rev.* 14 (2015): 725.

And:

Harpalani, Vinay. "To Be White, Black, or Brown: South Asian Americans and the Race-Color Distinction." *Wash. U. Global Stud. L. Rev.* 14 (2015): 609.

These “colourisms” are deeply entrenched into people’s mindsets, and are the result of massive ethnic propaganda “warfare.” Harapalani (2015) talks about skin color as being a major distinguishing factor in how people perceive ethnicity and race in America, and how this has created an especially difficult situation for many South Asians based on the strict racial categories employed in that country. Consider for example that on the American census, individuals can report their ethnicity as only one of the following:<sup>54</sup> White, Black or African American, Asian, American Indian and Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, and Other Pacific Islander, or “some other race.” Further, the category “White” includes Europeans, Middle-Easterners and North Africans, and the category “Asian” includes people from the “Far-East,” Southeast Asia, and India. Based on these categories, Pakistani, Afghani or Iranian would be categorized as the “Middle-East” and subsequently they would be considered “White.” This intellectual fallacy has had massive demoralizing effects on a number of communities, especially in South Asia. This is because ideas of idealized whiteness have been cemented in South Asian societies for thousands of years, with Greek, Turkic, Central Asian and even White European (English, French, Portuguese) empires ruling over and subordinating “inferior” people and conditioning them to see fairness of the skin and features as physical attributes of the ruling classes. These same ideas are cemented in Hindu society with a caste system designed to preserve the pure Brahmin’s racial stock in light of their Aryan ancestry.<sup>55</sup> Because all of the

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<sup>54</sup> See: Snipp, C. Matthew. "Racial measurement in the American census: Past practices and implications for the future." *Annual Review of Sociology* 29, no. 1 (2003): 563-588.

<sup>55</sup> See:

Dumont, Louis. *Homo hierarchicus: The caste system and its implications*. University of Chicago Press, 1980.

groups I have mentioned that have ruled and subordinated India were “White,” the idea of “White Supremacy,” is deeply entrenched in the entire of South Asia, though it takes on various forms including Aryanism or Brahminism for Hindus, and White Arab, Persian or Turkic supremacism for Muslims, and perhaps for Sikhs as well. In this way, the idea of “whiteness” as representing the demarcation criterion by which one’s position in society would be determined actually predates colonialism in the subcontinent, as these notions were shaped and formed by earlier Greek, Turkic and Persian rulers. Though in our contemporary context these ideas were cemented through British colonial rule, and even more so through the creation of Pakistan as a country to isolate and preserve the ethnic, linguistic and cultural stock of the Islamic groups of South Asia, who according to supporters of the “Two-Nation Theory,” were superior to other Indians as they derived the basis of their ancestry from “White Muslims” (Arabs, Turks and Persians).

To touch on the global implications of “race propaganda,” especially in light of the highly divergent comments I received from Pakistanis with regard to my music video, I will mention that I have even heard many white Canadians with interests in South Asia say things about any number of Pakistanis with olive skin tones with comments like “he must be a muhajir.” In fact, I have observed that perhaps Indian and Pakistani communities themselves do less of a job perpetuating these false and absurd stereotypes than white Canadians, Americans, or other ethnic groups who have an interest in further cementing racial hierarchies based around “whiteness” as a demarcating factor of societal position and privilege. This has often led me to

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and

Pruthi, R. K., ed. *Indian caste system*. Discovery Publishing House, 2004.

question the basis of these artificially construed notions of race and ethnicity as being a major product of colonialism, but also perhaps that their continued propagation by the “white” mainstream could also be a project of maintaining “idealized white” social hierarchies and power dynamics at a global scale. However, these ideas may also be supported by other non-white communities where “colourism” dictates social hierarchies within their own groups, and subsequently they may benefit in terms of their own progression, or can “mobilize upwards,” at the expense of the demoralization of certain groups as “non-white” based on propaganda excised against them. Because of this, access to the benefits of “white-privilege” are limited to communities that society determines to be “categorically white,” or “white-passing.”

In an effort to further do away with these deeply entrenched biases, many of my other Pakistani respondents echoed sentiments of mutual trustworthiness and respect. M. Ghani, one of my older informants, aged seventy, from Sindh wrote: “We love each other,” and another anonymous Pakistani respondent commented: “It is only the border that separates us. I have Indian friends from Punjab, and they are no different from us except in terms of religion.” Ahmad from Pakistan stated: “We think we are brothers.” Other Pakistani informants gave milder statements, but still expressed similar sentiments, such as Muhammad Usama Aziz who said: “They are good people as far as I know and we have so much in common I think.” We can derive from a statement such as this that amongst some classes of Pakistani society there has been little personal social interaction with Sikhs from East Punjab, but amongst those with first-hand face to face interaction experiences, the comments were coloured with themes of friendship, comradeship, brotherhood and respect. Similarly, Satwat Zahra Bokhari a female respondent from Punjab, Pakistan commented: “We are more similar than different.”

A major point of significance is that all of these comments were collected after my respondents had watched the music video “Kashmir.” I cannot emphasize enough, that in the video I clearly portray a turbaned and bearded Sikh, though perhaps my character also represents a form of “suitable” or “acceptable whiteness,” based on the makeup and camera strategies employed. Still it is widely known that this particular conflict most often results in vile mudslinging and xenophobic responses between Indians and Pakistanis. Yet, the vast majority of all comments from Pakistani and Sikh Punjabis were deeply favorable to each other. An anonymous respondent from Pakistan retorted by saying that Sikhs are “great people, we always get along.” Jamal from Punjab, Pakistan wrote: “We are friends, we have the same culture, politics aside.”

The responses I gathered from Sikh Punjabis echoed the same sentiments as their Pakistani neighbours. Nidhi Singh, a female respondent from East Punjab commented: “They are just like us, it seems as if they are a part of us.” Another anonymous respondent wrote: “They are the same as we are.” Sukhbir Singh Dhillon wrote: “They are the same as Indian Punjabis and have similar rituals and culture.” Sarbjeet described a sense of feeling like the two communities “belong” to each other: “We think they belong to us and that they are good people. We would like to meet them if get a chance.” Here again we see that perhaps personal social interactions between both groups have not increased to the extent that they continue to hope for, especially in Punjab itself, where travel between the two territories is heavily restricted. In spite of this, many informants still emphasized what they feel is a “familial” relationship with each other, as Jagjit Singh describes in the following way: “All humans are the same in this creation of God - and all Punjabis are brothers.”

When I asked my survey respondents if they thought that peace was possible between India and Pakistan, and what role the Punjabi communities from the two countries would play in this process, I received a number of responses emphasizing the importance of a shared culture and language. An anonymous respondent from Punjab, Pakistan wrote:

Absolutely, peace is possible. And In Sha Allah, one day India and Pakistan would be close brothers. Punjabi people have a significant role in this because we have a Punjab here and we also have a Punjab there. We might be different in some ways but our roots are connected to each other and that bond can't be separated.

Another anonymous respondent from Punjab, Pakistan also emphasized the significance of a shared culture, and that Punjabis across the border have more in common than others in their own countries: “We have a shared culture and the most in common between the people of Pakistan and India, so they (Punjabis) can lead the peace process.” Similarly, Farasat Hasnain from Punjab, Pakistan wrote: “Yes, peace is quite possible. The role that Punjabi people have is that they should care for each other due to having the same culture.” Other informants from both sides of the border emphasized the importance of personal social interaction between groups. For example, Hamood Mazhar commented: “Punjabi people should campaign for open borders or easy visa conditions so that people can move around and see how similar we are.” In some ways, the processes towards creating a more relaxed border between Punjab has already progressed substantially with the opening of the Kartarpur Corridor. Auon Raza Naqvi from Punjab, Pakistan also states: “Yes, peace is very much possible. Punjabis on both sides need to connect like real life neighbors and avoid the media hype.” In the same way, Mohanpal Randhawa wrote: “More people to people contact is necessary between Punjabis.” Karim Gillani also made a similar comment: “We should exchange more culture, dialogue, share more goods,



trade, etc.” Two of my female respondents from Pakistan both emphasized the notion that people continue to remain “close-minded,” and that “openness” would be a major contributor to reconciliation. Satwat Zahra Bokhari from Punjab, Pakistan wrote: “Peace is possible. We need to be more tolerant and patient in the process, both sides should have an open mind and heart to let go of all the previous anger and hate.” Similarly, Ayesha from Kashmir, Pakistan when asked if peace was possible said simply: “Yes, we have to stop being so close-minded.”

Many of my informants used this as an opportunity to speak about the views of ordinary people as most often not being reflected in government policy. Some criticized the current Indian government, such as M. Ghani from Sindh who said: “Yes, Punjabis have a very important role, but Indian Politicians are a source of hate.” Another anonymous respondent from Punjab, Pakistan seemed to agree that renewing a Punjabi brotherhood would be a critical step forward in progression, but showed pessimism with the current ruling classes, he wrote: “Unless the governments pay heed to it, I am not sure we would be able to achieve peace.” Another anonymous respondent from Gilgit, Pakistan commented: “(Peace) may not be possible with Modi in power.” Others were more critical, blunt and to the point such as one anonymous respondent from East Punjab who wrote that the only way to achieve peace would be “The creation of Khalistan.” Still others such as Muhammad Wasim Haider from Punjab, Pakistan showed some optimism with the current governments and the potential for peace, he stated:

I assume if the governments of both countries think constructively, it is not far to observe peace between both of them. Punjabis with big hearts always welcomed each other in the past and also are hoped to do so in the future. Recently, on invitation of our PM Imran Khan who is living in Punjab, Navjot Singh Sidhu (former Indian cricketer and politician) visited Pakistan and participated in the Prime Minister’s oath taking ceremony - which is a glorious example of the relationship between Punjabis and their role in strengthening our friendship.

Nidhi Singh from East Punjab echoed the sentiments of Muhammad Haider, stating: “Yes, but both sides’ governments need to take some constructive congenial steps towards each other.” Inam Elahi from Islamabad also agreed stating that Punjabis need to work to share their bonds of brotherhood and friendship with others: “Yes, peace is possible, the role of Punjabis is to raise awareness about this.” Arshdeep Singh from East Punjab also agreed that the major onus of responsibility has always been on this community in strengthening bonds and resolving conflict, he states: “Yes, Punjabis are the main factor which built a connection between two countries.” Other informants emphasized the role of language, such as Muhammad Safdar, who said: “Language bindings play a really important role,” and Jagjit Dadwal who commented: “Yes, peace is possible. All the Punjabi people in both countries love each other, especially because of our shared Punjabi language.” In the same way, Sukhbir Singh Dhillon wrote: “Peace is possible between both countries. The role of Punjabi people in the peace process could be their relationship, language, culture and music.” Sarbjeet from East Punjab suggested actively using social media to spread a message of brotherhood and respect: “I hope so. Punjabi people can play an important role in this process. For example, they can post some videos on YouTube giving a message of peace.”

I wish to speak further here about the importance of Persian aesthetics, particularly as representative of the “high culture” of this entire geographic area and how this relates to the role of Punjab in the Kashmir conflict. Moreover, I would like this section to provide a frame of reference for the data I collected as a part of my applied intervention music video “Kashmir,” and to assist in allowing the reader to understand why the myriad of comments I received have massive ideological and political implications, and should not be passed over ignorantly. In

chapter nine I will speak further about the idea of “cultural capital,” however I want to briefly mention that in both the historical and contemporary contexts of the greater Punjabi geophysical expanse, Persian identity, including its cultural and linguistic components, has always represented the apex and “highest form” of identity construction with regard to the cultural, social and racial hierarchies of the region. This is one reason why on the basis of the “Two-Nation Theory,” Pakistan was created: to preserve and protect the ethnic, cultural and linguistic stock of the Muslims of the sub-continent who according to Mohammed Aly Jinnah and his supporters, represented a homogenous group that did not have the same “Indic” origins as the “Hindus” of the land. For this reason, Urdu, which is a highly Persianized Indic language<sup>56</sup> was adopted as the lingua-franca of the newly formed nation - even the national anthem of Pakistan is in *Persian*. It is worthwhile to note here however that even Jinnah was born into a Hindu *Banya* (merchant) family, and his father converted himself and his sons to the *Khoja Ismaili* sub-caste after being ostracized by his own Hindu community because Mohammed Jinnah’s grandfather had engaged in the sale of fish – as the Hindu community to which the Jinnah family belonged were known for being staunchly vegetarian. Jinnah himself was born in Karachi, but did not speak Urdu – though he was fluent in *Gujrati*.<sup>57</sup> These realities reflect that the division of the sub-continent was done based on artificially contrived notions of race, ethnicity, whiteness and superiority paradigms that were agreeable to and supported by British colonists. As Jinnah belonged to a Hindu sub-caste near the top of the racial hierarchical ladder in the context of the sub-continent, and therefore represented himself a form of idealized whiteness, in this context in

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<sup>56</sup> The base of Urdu is essentially the same language as Hindi - in fact, linguists classify both as dialects of a single language, "Hindustani."

<sup>57</sup> See: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Jinnah-didnt-know-Urdu-was-fluent-in-Gujarati/articleshow/4950044.cms>

light of his *Hindu Aryan* ancestry, it was easy for his family to “mobilize upwards” and embrace an alternative, and for them – *superior*, racial identity, *Persian*, upon which they were able to capitalize and amass great power and wealth.

Part and parcel with the “Two-Nation” theory, Pakistan proceeded over the course of its young history to persuade and propagate a militant distancing from Indian forms of culture, language and identity as representative of the lowest forms of the same in the social hierarchical ladder, and this mindset was highly influenced by the Islamic religion of the new country and its people. In the context of the greater Punjab, it was historically “The Persian” in all his glory (linguistically, racially, superficially and culturally) that represented the height of supremacy in all such categories, and not “The Brahmin,” or “The Aryan,” as it was in the context of the rest of Hindu India - and these ideas of racial, cultural and social categorization are as deeply entrenched in the Sikh community of Punjab as they are amongst Punjabi Muslims in Pakistan. In this context, the idea of “whiteness” is based around contrasts, as in fairness of the skin and features of one group in comparison to another, and these ideas were further cemented due to the British colonial history of the subcontinent, though they trace their origins as dispositional features of Indian psychology further back to thousands of years of “white” foreign rulers subjugating “inferior” locals. These included Greek, Turkic and Persian empires that deeply entrenched the idea into the Indian mind that whiteness and fairness of the skin were attributes associated with the ruling classes and powers. Perhaps this could be traced even further back in Hindu history with the Aryan conquest of the Sub-Continent. Ultimately, the concept of “White Supremacism” is genetically imprinted into the minds of all South Asians, resulting in strong manifestations of racism and xenophobia amongst those born into families that exhibit fairness

of the skin and features, or conversely, high levels of “inferiority complex,” for those with dark skin. Mishra (2015) describes this in relation to British rule in the following way:

Again, subsequent to the Mughal Empire, India came to become a colony of the British who had fair skin, different facial features, and claimed themselves to be a “superior” and “intelligent” race; consequently, they were born to rule the “inferior” and “black coloured” Indians who were more akin to crude animals than humans. Entry to restaurants and educational institutions was prohibited for “Black Indians” with entry boards clearly stating “Indians and dogs not allowed” (731).

As a result of being conditioned for centuries of British rule, or as we see with previous “White” rulers (Greeks, Turks and Persians) that perhaps this conditioning occurred over millennia, the South Asian subconscious is hard-wired to understand social hierarchies in light of “whiteness” as a demarcation criterion for privilege. Mishra further describes this in the following way:

At this juncture, lighter skin Indians were again given preference over their darker counterparts and hired more frequently. British individuals filled the higher administrative posts, and Indians were kept for doing menial jobs (e.g., Indians as Sepoys and British as officers). Skin tone prejudice was evident when the British Empire, ruling India at that time, kept light skinned Indians as allies, and gave them extra advantages over the rest of the “blacks” (731).

In this way, the majority of Kashmiris and Pakistanis still tend to see themselves as “white” - when compared to Indians - who many overly zealous Pakistanis will refer to as “black” people, and many equally conservative-reformist and supremacist Pashtuns see themselves as “white” in contrast to “black Punjabis” (Pakistanis) - it is important to note here that the superiority paradigms in South Asia are based on “whitenesses of contrast,” but we can see the relationship to how race was understood during the British colonial era. Much of the hate-speech and rhetoric that spews forth in online commentaries and social media from parties

involved in the Kashmir conflict is tied to ideas of race and “whiteness” (or “*Persian-ness*”) and the need to protect and preserve a supposed nation’s ethnic, cultural and linguistic stock from “undesirable” ethnic “others.” An example of this can be seen in one of the very few deliberately hateful comments I received in response to my music video “Kashmir” by a user named *King Speedy*, but it should be noted that such comments are very common on all platforms of social-media where the topic is the Kashmir conflict:

Kashmiris have nothing common with ugly endians interm of religion, culture, food, lang, ancestry etc.... Kashmiris have every thing common with Pakistanis...Kashmir will join Pakistan very soon INSHALLAH..

It is not hard to assert that some fanatical Pakistanis and Kashmiris may imbibe feelings of mutual trustworthiness and interdependence with Sikhs *partially* (at the least) due to the fact that Sikhs may represent for Pakistanis a pseudo-form of “desirable,” or “suitable whiteness” in contrast to many of their regional Indic neighbors. In this way the *Persian* racial concept is a form of “idealized whiteness” for Punjabis (Pakistani and Sikh) based in large part on it also a representing a form of “somewhat attainable whiteness” for these people groups as well, as opposed to “European whiteness.” For many Punjabis, to pass as *Persian* would mean to pass as “white,” historically and in our current social context, especially given that structures of racial hierarchy based on “whiteness” were cemented during British colonial rule, but remain just as relevant today. In the context of “upwards mobility,” the Persian form of “whiteness” is “somewhat attainable” for many Punjabis because of the close cultural and linguistic connections with Afghanistan, especially for those Sikhs who demonstrate recessive Greek or Persian genetic inheritance outwardly. Many studies show that Punjabis have the highest levels of Greek ancestry in South Asia, with the primary push of this genetic influence occurring after the conquests of Alexander the Great and the Graeco-Indian kingdom centralized around the Punjab

plains. Subsequently, a large proportion of this people group exhibits Greek ancestry at levels upwards of 15% composition: “it can be said that the Greek homeland (or European, more generally, where these markers are spread) contribution has been 0%–3% for the total population or 0%–15% for Punjab in particular” (Kivisild, et al. 2003, 329). While these are the highest levels in South Asia, even when compared to Kashmiris, in spite of this, many Punjabis still have olive or tan skin complexions due to centuries of adaptation to the highly temperate weather in the region, with cold winters, as winds blow into the plains from the snow covered mountains of the Himalayas, and scorching hot summers, with an absolute void of cooling coastal winds due to the region being deeply landlocked.

From an auto-ethnographic point of view, being born and raised in a predominantly “White-European” society, indicative of “unattainable” and “unrealistic” expectations of whiteness for most Punjabis, I always perceived the “White-Persian” identity as somehow within reach, as would be the subsequent benefits of “categorical whiteness” (pseudo white privilege) based on North American racial segmentation and categories even today. In fact, throughout my twenties, but to a lesser extent now, I was often mistaken for Persian or Pashtun on many occasions. In connection to this, my paternal grandmother is a Protestant Serb, although my genealogical grandmother died when my father was very young, the strategic employment of my own family composition would either hinder or contribute to some mild degree of “white-privilege” based on the particular situation in which I am either seen with her, or speaking about her, especially with regard to my career as a musician - I was originally a performer of English rock music having written, recorded and gigged extensively in this domain.

I will explain what I mean with some examples of musicians who have used ideas of categorical whiteness to their advantage by way of modifying their identities superficially.

Consider the case of John Roland Redd, a musician of mixed-race African descent who in the 1950's propelled his career forward by regularly tying a turban and portraying himself as "Korla Pandit." Similarly, for Redd, "East-Indian," or "Hindu" represented an attainable form of categorical pseudo-whiteness, and he leveraged this new identity to a level of fame that he openly attested would have been virtually impossible for a black man in that era. We also do not need to look further than Farrokh Bulsara, an Indian *Parsi* of Iranic descent, who passed as the "white" lead singer of Queen: Freddie Mercury. Even the Jewish born Robert Allan Zimmerman sky-rocketed to fame as the "white" Bob Dylan. But still, in the case of the latter two examples, each already belonged to "white-passing" if not categorically "white" groups: Persian and Ashkenazi respectively. The entertainment industry is full of examples such as these, where strict racial categories have been leveraged by actors and musicians who have often "changed" their ethnic identities to benefit their own career progression. It is not far to say that even in our contemporary context, and in all walks of life, the realities of superficial racial categorization with perceivable benefits for certain groups still exist.

In a similar way, the success of my music video for "Kashmir" amongst the Pakistani community could very well be partially influenced by the fact that in the video I am shown to have a very fair complexion because of the make-up and camera techniques used by the production crew. As I have mentioned there is often vile mud-slinging and rhetoric that spews forth in online commentaries around videos like this one, especially as many conservative-reformist Pakistanis will engage in hate speech against "black Indians" who they have "nothing to do with," and in this context we might look to the British colonial legacy of racism and colorism as still being very much alive in South Asia. Still, the striking lack of such comments for this video, and rather the overwhelming support from the Pakistani community can be



understood in the context of the fact that the character I portray is a turbaned and bearded Sikh, representing a community with whom Kashmiris and Pakistanis overwhelmingly express open solidarity, but also because my character represents an element of “acceptable whiteness” based on the extreme propaganda associated with the way Pakistanis are portrayed online and in the media. Indeed in Pakistan, and in India, for any artist to achieve a level of success, they must, to varying extents, be able to meet the deeply entrenched expectations of acceptable whiteness, or even better, idealized whiteness, as these notions exist in South Asia. We can see that colourism exists as a significant part of South Asian society, but in the entertainment industry the pervasiveness of this ideology, which has severely negative ramifications, is without comparison. Almost every actor and actress that appears in a Punjabi, Pakistani or Indian television show, movie, or music video, would undoubtedly possess extreme fairness of the skin, and this has led to a form of skin color racism, that subsequently drives a multi-billion dollar cosmetic industry that markets dangerous products, with massive negative health effects, to women and men.<sup>58 59</sup>

To better understand how this works I turn to Turino (1984) who explores the intermediary position of the Peruvian *mestizo* community, between the dominant *criollos* who are of Spanish heritage, and the dominated indigenous communities. In this intermediary context,

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<sup>58</sup> Shevde, Natasha. "All's fair in love and cream: A cultural case study of Fair & Lovely in India." *Advertising & society review* 9, no. 2 (2008).

<sup>59</sup> Adbi, Arzi and Chatterjee, Chirantan and Kinias, Zoe and Singh, Jasjit. “Women’s Disempowerment and Preference for Risky Skin Whitening Products: Experimental Evidence from India,” *INSEAD Working Paper No. 2019/18/OBH/STR; IIM Bangalore Research Paper No. 527*, (April 17, 2019).

he examines the Mestizo's use of the *charango* (a small lute-shaped guitar), sometimes associated with the indigenous peoples. The author suggests two primary forces that play out in terms of cultural appropriation or solidarity for dominated groups. Firstly, he suggests that if a cultural group "is dominant economically, socially and politically (they) will also dominate the cultural values and artistic orientation at least at the macro-level of society" (253).<sup>60</sup> He suggests that a major reason for this is that dominated groups will to some extent appropriate the "outward cultural manifestations of the dominant group as a part of their effort to join the elite" (253) and to facilitate "upward mobility." We can compare this to my own creative use of the *rubab* and the *Persian* language as critical components of my artistic pursuits, and in my own processes of personal identity and narrative construction. Though *Farsi*, and other Persian and Afghan cultural heirlooms, including the *rubab*, have long been fought over by Sikhs as central to their own historical narrative. Based on Turino's concept, this could be characteristic of the "dominated group" engaging in rebellious and defiant appropriation of the dominant group's cultural traits in concerted attempts to "mobilize upwards." This is in light of the fact that Persian speaking *Central Asians*, known as *Mughals*, ruled Punjab for many centuries. It was in this *defiant* spirit, that the Sikh courts during the time of the Gurus, and into the period of the *Khalsa Raj*, were highly "Persianized," with *Farsi* being the lingua-franca of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's empire, where it was understood by Sikhs as "their own language," and "the language of their Gurus." For observers of the Sikhs, as a community that engaged in warfare and rebellion against the Mughals, perhaps it would seem unlikely that they themselves would embody the Mughal culture and spirit so passionately when their own empire came to fruition, and many may have assumed that the expected response would have been to eschew all remnants of Mughal

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<sup>60</sup> This is similar to what Naryan Datt had commented in my earlier section on communism.

culture as representative of the violence and oppression directed against themselves. But instead, *The Khalsa Raj* was a Persian regime, as Fenech (2013) writes of the relationship of Persian culture to the Sikhs: “We see such acquaintance clearly within the Sikh court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, for example, the principal language of which was Persian” (239).<sup>61</sup> We can understand the reason for the complete and utter embracing of a Persian sense of self-concept by the Sikhs partially in light of Turino’s writings.

Perhaps we even see reflections of this same paradigm in post-colonial India, and movements towards British modes of life and thinking, especially with regard to racism and colorism across “whitenesses of contrast,” including from Pakistani’s to Indians, or from Pashtuns to Punjabis, or Punjabis to Sindhis, or from Hindu Brahmins to Dalits, for example. Similarly, in the Persian speaking country of Tajikistan, a former Soviet territory, the *Russian* language, as well as its related culture, have come to represent a “higher” form of “cultural capital” amongst all levels of the social strata, with Russianized family names being commonplace. Turino calls this the “hegemonic” factor. I build on this concept by suggesting that the “hegemonic” factor works to empower former subordinated groups to naturalize the culture of their “masters,” to the point that the dominating groups’ way of life becomes dispositional, inseparable and “native” to the now “free” once dominated group. The second factor, which Turino calls the “identity” factor, relates to Linton’s (1943) concept of *nativism*, where dominated groups “consciously draw upon symbols or cultural manifestations of their own group to buttress publicly their own unity, identity, and self-esteem in the face of oppression and

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<sup>61</sup> See: Fenech, Louis E. *The Sikh Zafar-namah of Guru Gobind Singh: A Discursive Blade in the Heart of the Mughal Empire*. Oxford University Press, 2013.

prejudice” (254). Turino explores these two factors in the context of the mestizo *charango* tradition in Peru. He mentions that the *charango* itself is in many ways considered an “‘Indian’ instrument of the rural sector,” (256) due to its appropriation by the campesino culture in Cusco and Puno, but its historical nature as a “hybrid” instrument suggests that it may be defined as “mestizo.” He suggests that because the *charango* can be socially associated with the dominated groups, many mestizos will rather play the guitar or mandolin because of its associations with the dominating *criollo* communities (suggesting upwards mobility). He explores this dualism of mestizo identity and the opportune appropriation of instruments such as the *charango* in light of the “hegemonic” and “identity” factors.

In a similar way, today many Sikhs may revert to Indic modes of musicality, culture and language in light of racism or xenophobic remarks made to them by other communities that undermine their own Persian origins, perhaps as Turino suggests, to re-assert their own self-esteem. I relate this to a concept in social-psychology known as “Identity Threat.” In other words, when a person’s central identity is threatened, they may then engage in activities that reinforce the component of their threatened identity, or eschew those same components in favour of less defiant, and socially constructed identity traits that conform to societal norms and expectations placed upon them as a subordinate group. In other words, the “defiant spirit” that propels the desire in an individual to “mobilize upwards,” is killed, and the individual becomes complacent, accepting of an identity narrative constructed on his behalf by a dominating group. In this way, for the Mughals, the Sikhs were “not” Persian, and thus were racially and socially inferior to them. But it was the *Persian* “spirit,” including the language Farsi, and the many *Bir-Rus*, or “warrior spirit” scriptures by the Tenth Guru in that vernacular, as well as non-canonical

Persian texts by members of the Guru's court, that mobilized the Sikhs' defiant insurrection, and claiming of their own uniquely Persian identity - and eventual freedom during the *Khalsa Raj*.<sup>62</sup>

There is an important article by Janson (1987) that is also relevant here, that traces the origins of Salsa and its decline and subsequent revival. From Cuba to the United States, this music epitomized the racial struggle of marginalized Latino communities, especially blacks. The writer suggests that the music became commoditized once it left the areas of impoverishment from where it flourished and found its way onto the stereos and dance halls of mainstream America. He suggests that there was a concerted effort to repackage the music in a high-gloss cellophane, but argues that by then the "soul" of the music had been removed.

The author discusses the music of Ruben Blades in great detail, suggesting that his *salsa* music was filled with political commentary and spoke to a wider Latino audience, spawning a number of imitators. As his songs dealt predominantly with the plight of Hispanic people (or, more specifically, Hispanic *men*) in America, he was able to capitalize not only on the rising popularity of Salsa music, but was able to take it in many ways back to its roots. The author also discusses the "purity" of Latino music, and the unwillingness at the time to use electronic music as an often more cost-effective, more accessible medium:

The very affirmation of ethnic identity in the face of a dominant, hegemonic culture led early and later *salsa* composers and arrangers to eschew electronic music and rely for the most part on traditional instruments with which they were more comfortable (156).

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<sup>62</sup> Many of the most militant and messianic scriptures of the Sikhs are still read by devotees today in classical Farsi.

The author argues that the history of *salsa* music has been characterized by a fluctuation between emergence and “co-optation by capitalism” (157). This article remains relevant today in studies of musical cultural appropriation and the use of cultural commodities as a form of resistance to political oppression.

## 5.6 FURTHER APPLIED WORK: MUSICAL MILITANCY THROUGH LIVE PERFORMANCE



**Figure 5-23 Adraak Band (Photo by Arsh Khaira – July 1st, 2019) from left to right: Moneeb Hussain, Arsh Khaira, Asim Mubashir, Saddam Hasan.**

*Adraak Band* has had several opportunities to perform for the local Pakistani community in Edmonton. We perform covers from Pakistani bands, as well as original Sufi Rock compositions using the poetry of Sheikh Fareed and Bulleh Shah (among others). We also perform music in Persian, and employ strong rock rhythms and melodies along with sonic influences from South and Central Asia. We have received an outpouring of support from the local community, and I personally have been invited several times to perform both with *Adraak* and as a solo artist for local events with the PCAE (*Pakistani Canadian Association of Edmonton*).



**Figure 5-24 Audience Interaction at Adraak Concert (Photo by Arsh Khaira – July 1st, 2019)**

One of my main observations from my performances with *Adraak* (and as a solo artist) for the Pakistani community is that I am often approached by members of the audience who specifically request that I sing the poetry of Bulleh Shah for them. Note, that in my survey I received feedback from a large number of Pakistanis who answered a question about finding Bulleh Shah and Sheikh Farid inspiring with an average score of 9/10.<sup>63</sup> As I have also performed extensively with very well-known Pakistani artists like Abrar Ul Haq, Bilal Saeed and Arif Lohar, the community has come to see me as a recognizable performer of *Sufi* music. During one of my performances in Calgary, the master of ceremonies introduced me in the following way:

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<sup>63</sup> For complete survey results see Appendix A.



We have invited an artist for you from Edmonton who sings in the *Sufiyana* style. As you know, the people who sing *Sufiyana Kalam* (“sufi poetry”) are also often very *Sufi* from the inside, but Arsh is also a *Sufi* from the outside!

Here, Jamal Raja, who was the MC at the event was making reference to my long hair and beard, which I have kept for well over a decade now. The Sufis of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) have often kept long hair as a sign of devotion to God. There is a specific sub-group of *Pashtuns* known as “Waziris” who also grow their hair long, showing off their tresses during dances like the *Attan*.<sup>64</sup>



**Figure 5-25 Myself Performing for the Pakistani Community in Calgary at the Genesis Centre (Photo by Gurdeep Khaira – Summer 2015)**

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<sup>64</sup> It is often alluded to that the Waziri name is derived from Naziri, which is a name from the Hebrew word “*Nazarite*” which was used to describe a “vow” taken by some Israelites in which they would not cut their hair or drink alcohol (among other stipulations). It is known that *Samson* had taken the Nazarite vow, and perhaps the Prophet Jesus likely had as well. I spoke about some of the continuities between Israelite history with the Sikh and Pashtun communities (with regard to the topic of this dissertation) in an earlier section.

## *SOWING SEEDS: WORKSHOP WITH PAKISTANI KASHMIRIS*

With regard to my video release for “Kashmir,” I was also able to conduct a special workshop with Kashmiri Pakistanis in which I shared with them this song and recorded their thoughts and views. As members of a community that has experienced persecution themselves they were explicit about their support for the political autonomy of the Sikh people. It should be noted here that Kashmiri culture and customs are highly continuous with the Punjab region. In much of Kashmir, along with the language of Kashmiri, which is a very unique language not related to other neighboring varieties, linguistic dialects of Punjabi are also widely spoken, and most of the leaders and members of Kashmiri militant groups come from Punjabi backgrounds. Also note that the entirety of Kashmir, as well as KPK, the *Khyber-Pass* and *Kabul* were included in the *Khalsa Raj* of Maharaja Ranjit Singh prior to annexation by the British.

When trying to understand why a song about Kashmir, performed by a Sikh in the Punjabi language would so broadly appeal to Pakistanis from both liberal *and* conservative-reformist backgrounds (recall that the Pakistani centre in Edmonton portrayed posters for this song on its walls for nearly a month prior to its release), I would direct my readers to note that even the most well-known leader of the Kashmiri militant group *Lashkar-e-Toiba* (also referred to as *LeT*), *Hafiz Saeed*, has been known to advocate for the revocation of *Urdu* as the national language of Pakistan, which he believes should be replaced by *Punjabi* (see Figure 5-26) based on the fact that only roughly 8% of the population of Pakistan speaks Urdu as their first language, while the dominant ethnic group in the country is Punjabis. Consider that according to the most recent census of Pakistan, nearly 44% of all Pakistanis speak Punjabi as their mother tongue, and in Punjab province this number jumps to 75%. Further another 10% of Pakistanis speak Saraiki as their mother tongue, which is a language highly derivative of Punjabi. In fact, I

have met with many Saraiki speakers, and their affinity for Punjabi poetry, especially that of *Bulleh Shah*, is unmatched even by many ethnic Punjabis.

**Languages of Pakistan:**

**From the CIA – Central Intelligence Agency website –  
cia.gov**

This entry provides a listing of languages spoken in each country and specifies any that are official national or regional languages. When data is available, the languages spoken in each country are broken down according to the percent of the total population speaking each language as a first language. For those countries without available data, languages are listed in rank order based on prevalence, starting with the most-spoken language.

- Punjabi 48%,
- Hindko (a Punjabi variant) 2%,
- Saraiki (a Punjabi variant) 10%
- Sindhi 12%
- Pashto (alternate name, Pashtu) 8%,
- Urdu (official) 8%
- Balochi 3%
- Brahui 1%
- English (official; lingua franca of Pakistani elite and most government ministries), Burushaski, and other 8%

*LeT* is very closely affiliated with *Al-Qaeda*, and Indian central agencies have denounced Hafiz Saeed as a terrorist who they believe has been involved in several key attacks on Indian soil.<sup>65</sup> In Pakistan, and especially for many Punjabis and Kashmiris, Saeed is a *freedom-fighter*, which is also how many people see the *LeT* organization.<sup>66 67</sup> The Punjabi language then is the

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<sup>65</sup> See: Sikand, Yoginder. "The Islamist Militancy in Kashmir: The Case of the Lashkar-e-Taiba." *The practice of war: Production, reproduction and communication of armed violence* (2007): 215-38.

<sup>66</sup> See: Tankel, Stephen. "Lashkar eTaiba: From 9/11 to Mumbai." From *Developments in Radicalisation and Political Violence*, a series of papers from the *International Centre for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence* (April/May2009).

<sup>67</sup> Jamat ud Dawah, or, JuD, is the political arm of Lashkar-e-Toiba, LeT.

primary lingua-franca used by militant groups operating in Kashmir and Pakistan like *LeT*, *Al-Qaeda*, *Hezbul-Mujhaideen* and a large proportion of the *Taliban* (who are also associated with the *Pashto* language in Southern and Eastern Afghanistan, as compared to the Afghan National Army which relies on the language *Dari*).

## Pakistan should have adopted Punjabi as national language: Hafiz Saeed

The JuD leader is pushing for Punjabi to be the main language of Pakistan. Punjabi is also the main language for the JuD and the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) recruits and there are frequent anti-urdu protests by the cadres of the Punjab based hardline groups.

Updated: Mar 06, 2016 11:04:46

By Hindustantimes



JuD chief Hafiz Saeed addresses his supporters at a rally in Pakistan. (File Photo)

**Figure 5-26 An Article from the Hindustan Times Explicating Lashkar-e-Toiba's Demands to Implement Punjabi as the National Language of Pakistan - <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world/pakistan-should-have-adopted-punjabi-as-national-language-hafiz-saeed/story-WLlnsWWnziuQxmbdQUdHuK.html>**

In a 2010 article, Ian Talbot argues that Pakistan's policies towards Sikh nationalism have varied from "embracing both covert support for militancy against the Indian state in the 1980s and the attempt to use Sikhs and East Punjab as a bridge between Pakistan and India in the post-2001 period of composite dialogue" (63). The dichotomy is drawn between the narratives of a mutually reciprocal brotherhood between Sikhs and Muslims that existed prior to the partition of the region, as based on the accounts of partition survivors. The author then contrasts this to the violence of the partition itself and what many Muslims see as the attempted ethnic cleansing of their community from East Punjab. Talbot then draws comparisons to later sympathies for the plight of Sikh nationalists by Pakistan during the 80's and 90's.

He also explores the way the division of Punjab has led to either side moving further away from the other from a cultural and social perspective, but that the love/hate relationship between Sikh and Muslims has promoted continued discourses of a unified cultural understanding in the context of their region. The author explores how "In the 1980s, (Pakistan) covertly supported (Sikh) militancy," and two decades later, "in the era of composite dialogue, it tentatively saw Sikhs as a resource in bridging the divide between India and Pakistan" (63). This aptly timed and critical exploration goes on to suggest the different ways Pakistan has implicitly or explicitly harboured sympathies with Sikhs since the country was formed in 1947.



**Figure 5-27 My Informants from Azad Kashmir Pose for a Photo with Me (Photo by Informant – Winter 2018)**

One of the only negative comments I received from Pakistanis regarding the renewal of an interdependent relationship between the two Punjabs was from one of my Kashmiri informants. During a discussion about Punjabi hegemonic control in Pakistan, he mentioned that Sikhs needed to be *wary* of Punjabi Pakistanis who are used to exercising their control over the rest of the nation (including Kashmiris, Sindhis and Pashtuns), mentioning that this would be something that Sikhs would need to keep in mind in their struggle to recreate cultural and *geophysical* interdependence with West Punjab. He mentioned that the Sikhs were actually more similar to Pashtuns or Kashmiris given their population size and the way they are treated in India.

I understand the basis for the comment about Punjabi hegemony over the Pakistani nation-state as rooted within the fear of minority communities who often struggle to maintain their own uniqueness and traditions under Punjabi control of most aspects of society. Again, this is a very important point to make note of as it represents a critical element in the establishment

and maintenance of a mutually interdependent relationship between East and West Punjabis. Namely, that Punjabi Pakistanis form a large and very influential majority in their country, while in India, Sikhs form less than 1.5% of the population and have throughout the history of post-partition India been subject to racism, genocide and vilification.

The converse is also true however, in that a large proportion of Pakistani Punjabis also feel their own culture is marginalized due to the superimposition of *Urdu* and some of the “social-stigmas” associated with their native language. Zaidi (2016) describes this in the following way:

In the maintenance of a language, social status and socio-historical status are two important factors and are closely related. People whose language has a low social status or who themselves have a low view of it are likely to shift to another language. On the other hand, a socially high status language is more likely to be maintained. If a language is supposed to have played a significant part in the past, it can still have symbolic value for its speakers in the present (3).

He goes on to say:

*Urdu* is a high language because it is regarded as a language indeed, the language with an ideological history which other languages like Baluchi, Pashto, Punjabi, and Sindhi do not have (Rahman, 2002; Jaffrelot, 2004). Thus, the claim: Had there been no *Urdu*, there would have been no Pakistan.

This has led to the mobilization of groups involved with the *Punjabi Language Movement*, in Pakistan, which aims to revive Punjabi art, culture and literature in the country. This is also associated with movements connected to the idea of *Punjabi Nationalism*, which in Pakistan hold that in spite of their domination over almost all sectors of operation in the country (including but not limited to agriculture, military, economic, trade, etc.) many Punjabis feel they

are victimized and receive disrespect from other ethnic groups with regard to their language, culture and traditions.<sup>68</sup>

Punjabis dominate Pakistan's major institutions: Though clear current statistics are not available, Punjabis have composed as much as 80 percent of the Pakistani Army and 55 percent of the federal bureaucracy. . . . Virtually since the country's birth, other ethnic groups in Pakistan have accused Punjab of seizing national spoils for its own benefit at the expense of others. Punjab is perceived to have —captured‖ Pakistan's national institutions through nepotism and other patronage networks (Ayres 2008, pp. 920).

The power of the Punjabis, however, is not reflected in the status of their language because the Punjabis are not supportive of it. Shah narrates a significant incident thus (Zaidi 2016, pp.6):

. . . when a resolution was moved in 1990 to make Punjabi the official language [of the province of Punjab], it was watered down by the ruling Islamic Jamhoori Ittehad (IJI)<sup>6</sup> government which, when not in office had claimed to be the champion of the Punjabi cause. This attitude towards their mother tongue might suggest a certain Punjabi indifference, or at least insensitivity, to their cultural identity (Shah 1997, pp. 128).

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<sup>68</sup> See: Zaidi, Abbas. "Ethnolinguistic vitality of Punjabi in Pakistan." *Linguistics and Literature Review (LLR)* 2, no. 1 (2016): 1-16.



*SOWING SEEDS: CHANDIGARH WORKSHOPS*

(Local residents from other states [Kashmir, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh] living in Punjab).

In this extended workshop I engaged with three individuals, none of whom were ethnically Punjabi but who had been living in the area for an extended period of time. There has been a major movement of non-Punjabis into the region made of primarily working-class laborers from Bihar, Uttar-Pradesh and parts of South India. As mentioned earlier, Punjab had long been one of the wealthiest parts of India, but after the events of the 1980's many Punjabis felt that along with the concerted attempts at demoralizing and degenerating their culture (cultural genocide), which goes side by side with attempts to fully absorb the Sikh *Qaum* into Hindu society (culturally, linguistically and religiously), there were also attempts to strategically repopulate the territory with a large foreign Hindu majority, thus ethnically and linguistically altering its demographic make-up. It is important here to understand the *Punjabi Suba Movement* of which I have spoken earlier in this work – which led to the creation of a small peripheral state on the basis of language, and cut off important natural resources from mountain ranges that are now in Himachal, and subsequently tried to disintegrate the language that formed the basis of this second Punjabi partition by India. This was, and is still, seen by many as a concerted effort by the central government to destabilize the local population.

It is also important to note that throughout Asia, strategic repopulation has long since been a strategy of several ruling regimes. The repopulation of the disputed territories of *Xinjiang* as well as *Tibet* by Han Chinese settlers not ethnically associated with the area, was a major push by the government to thwart any future non-violent attempts at the establishment of *Uighur* or *Tibetan* homelands that could come to pass on the basis of a referendum. Likewise, in Pakistan the same has been done with Azad Kashmir, towards which hundreds of thousands of non-

Kashmiri settlers including many *muhajirs* has also taken place. As a major movement for Kashmiri independence is based on the notion of implementing a plebiscite referendum, it now becomes highly likely for the altered Kashmiri demographic to side with joining Pakistan in their entirety rather than creating their own independent homeland. In the same way many movements are escalating for a similar plebiscite in East Punjab, which is a major reason for the government's offensive push to re-populate the area. This is especially important given the reality that Punjabis were the first settlers to leave India and come to Canada as early as the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (consider the case of the *Komagata Maru*). Another major push of immigration by Punjabis out of India occurred in the 60's and 70's (which is also when my grandfather arrived in Canada), and then again with many Sikh refugees fleeing persecution in the 80's and 90's.

Many Punjabis regularly use the expression "pindan de pind khali pai ai," which means "complete villages are now empty," with a large proportion of former residents now living abroad. This again becomes important because for a plebiscite to pass, there would need to be a majority of ethnic Punjabis willing to vote for political autonomy. It is worth noting that the same situation occurred in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. Here, there was a mass exodus of Kashmiri Pundits out of the region and into Punjab. The Kashmiri Pundits belong to the Brahmin caste, according to the Hindu racial hierarchical order system, and they have dwelt in the Kashmir valley for centuries. This exodus occurred on the basis of the Pundits fleeing the violence of Islamic fundamentalism that sought to, and to some extent still seeks to, rid the area of any Hindu presence (though they have inhabited the region for hundreds of years). I interviewed a refugee from this community who also had fled Kashmir and had settled in Punjab (see Figure 5-28). He mentioned to me instances where while studying at Punjab University in

Chandigarh, whenever there would be an assembly, none of the Kashmiri students (of whom there are thousands living and studying in Punjab) would rise for the Indian national anthem. He told me that a few times he did rise during the national anthem, but that some of the other Kashmiri students would take his hand and gesture for him to sit down. He said that knowing he was one of them, perhaps they could see beyond his religious identity as a *Pundit*, or perhaps they were simply acknowledging his ethnic identity as a Kashmiri (perhaps not knowing he is a *Hindu*).



**Figure 5-28 A Kashmiri Informant Akshay Tangori in East Punjab (Photo by Arsh Khaira – October 2017)**

My interview with this refugee was especially poignant as he could empathize very strongly with the plight of the Sikhs. I have mentioned earlier in this paper about the solidarity between Sikhs and Kashmiris, and how along with Pakistani media, the only other media channels and newspapers to discuss the Sikh genocide are the Kashmiri free press. This solidarity is further exemplified by the historical proximity they share between each other as well as their very closely related cultures. This presents another parallel for my own musical intervention, “Kashmir.” It is also worthwhile to note here that solidarity between Sikhs and Kashmiris is a

long-established relationship that emphasizes mutual respect and empathy, especially considering the geo-physical and cultural proximity of these groups as well as the history of violence perpetrated against them by the Indian government.



**Figure 5-29 A Bihari Informant Praduman in East Punjab (Photo by Arsh Khaira – October 2017)**



**Figure 5-30 An Informant from Uttar Pradesh in East Punjab (Photo by Arsh Khaira – October 2017)**





**Figure 5-31 Sitting with my Informants in Chandigarh, East Punjab (Photo by Ashampreet Sandhu – October 2017)**

These three young men were all residents of the Punjab state but had moved here from other regions (Bihar, Uttar-Pradesh and Kashmir [from left to right]). After interviewing each one of them we then engaged in a focus group session. I wish to emphasize how in spite of these great ethnic differences amongst the Punjabi groups, the music of the region, particularly the folk music, serves to unite all of these diverse peoples into a shared cultural context. Most parts of the world have seen great changes in their demographic makeups over the centuries, and Punjab is no anomaly to this. However, for a culture to survive, the language and customs become increasingly important. This continuity of language, customs, and music is perhaps one reason why there is still unity amongst the groups of Punjab. It is therein imperative that the diverse demographic groups of the Punjab continue to engage in discussion about and promote the cultural traditions of the region. This has indeed been the case for many regional constituents, although to preserve the territory's heritage, greater initiatives should be undertaken. Evidence of the great power of Punjabi culture is found when immigrants to the land adopt the local language, customs and sometimes even the dominant religion.

## 5.7 INSIGHT INTO THE PUNJABI MUSIC INDUSTRY: POLITICS AND JOURNALISM

### *SOWING SEEDS: INTERVIEW WITH JARNAIL BASOTA (PUNJABI JOURNALIST) – WITH SPEECH SONIC ANALYSIS*

I was fortunate during the course of my research to hold an interview with a very well-known Punjabi cultural journalist currently living in Edmonton, who was able to provide me with important critical information regarding my area of inquiry. The left-leaning Jarnail Basota has led a prolific career beginning with his work in Punjab, India around 1986, and to this day he continues to be involved with radio and print media internationally with the South Asian community. Prior to the formal interview we had a short casual conversation about how he got his start in journalism and some of the more noteworthy publications he has been involved in. We talked extensively about Indo-Pak relations and the role of music in the advancement of reconciliation. We also touched briefly on current political issues surrounding East Punjab and how culture and music could be used to combat some of the more difficult problems at hand.

Basota mentioned to me that while completing his MSc. in Mathematics he had the company of several prolific writers, musicians and artists. His father, an Army officer, tried adamantly to get him to enlist as well, however Basota felt he could equally engage in “People’s Service” through active journalism. His neighbor was also a journalist for *The Tribune*,<sup>69</sup> and this led to Basota’s peaked interest in the field. Basota said that as a student he was actively involved in theatre and was the captain of the Punjab University Bhangra team.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> [www.tribuneindia.com](http://www.tribuneindia.com)

<sup>70</sup> <http://puchd.ac.in>

At the same time that Basota began his career as a math teacher he began to write as a freelance journalist for The Tribune and other publications. In 1984 he became a regular teacher, and from 1986 onwards he became very active in journalism. He stated to me that during the period from 1986-99, though he maintained his role as a math teacher, very few people knew him as such, with most being more familiar with his press work. Shortly after beginning with The Tribune he shifted to the Ajit<sup>71</sup> newspaper and began to emphasize cultural news. Because of some opponents he had made during this time he soon shifted to JagBani.<sup>72</sup> He recalled that JagBani would translate all of his works into three languages dominant in the Punjab (Punjabi, Hindi and Urdu). During this time he began to create direct links with several eminent artists including Gurdas Mann and Sardool Sikander. He became very active and popular as a cultural journalist with all the major artists of the Punjab being in direct contact with him. During our interview, Basota recalled a fond memory of his time writing for *JagBani* when there was a *Sanjha* event that took place in East Punjab featuring several eminent singers from West Punjab:

One very emotional moment was when Shaukat Ali was singing in front of 50,000 people, in front of the stage, Mr. Charanjit Ahuja, music director, was sitting, Surinder Kaur was sitting behind him, Kuldip Manak was sitting behind him, Harbajan (Mann) was sitting behind him, Bhagwant and I were there. I was a very active journalist in those days, I used to write in *JagBani*. Shaukat Ali has a very high pitched voice. When he started singing “Challa,” upon listening to his voice, Charanjit Ahuja became so emotional, he stood up with tears of joy in his eyes. He went on the stage. He had a gold chain around his neck and rings in his fingers. He went up on the stage, took the chain from around his neck and placed it around Shaukat’s neck, he was so impressed. He looked into Shaukat Ali’s eyes and said:

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<sup>71</sup> <http://www.ajitjalandhar.com>

<sup>72</sup> [www.jagbani.com](http://www.jagbani.com)

Pakistan vale lutna chaunde ai  
Asi aj thode ton lute gai thodde pyar te mohabbat nal  
*Pakistan wants to rob us*  
*But today you have robbed us with your love*

Basota then went on to say the following.

*Odde nal lutegai na ke hathiyaran nal*  
*nal phir othe une kya si ka...*  
*Eh jai rishte ne, kallakaran de hathiyaran nal ne luatange.*

We have not been robbed with weapons and war but with his love.

What he was trying to say was...

The relationships of artists to the people cannot be severed with swords.

There was a BIG article that I wrote about this on the front page of the *JagBani*...

In 1999 Basota came in contact with one of the most popular Punjabi television channels at the time. According to him, it was broadcast in 54 different countries (including Canada, Australia, England, the USA, Russia, the UAE and others). Basota was directly involved in the production and direction of television programming on this station. He indicated that during this time the show *Lashkara* became incredibly popular.

Basota's impression is that in the 1970's and 80's the music of the Punjab across all styles and genres, in both East and West Punjab was very clean and peace oriented, in that the majority of songs could be listened to by both young and old with an almost complete lack of references to things like alcohol, drugs, or obscene comments about women. He mentions however that gradually this began to change. As people's musical tastes were changing, he recalled maintaining a strong foothold in the cassette industry with music companies. He pointed out that during the self-determination *Khalistan* movement of the 1980's, all singers seemed to disappear after 1984 with Operation Blue Star, the assassination of Indira Gandhi, and



the subsequent Sikh genocide.<sup>73</sup> Basota believed that during this time singers were afraid to sing, as many had been killed by militants (one notable singer who was killed in the 1980's by Sikh militants was *Chamkeela*):

Sardool Sikander and Gurdas Mann were also products of that period. On the other hand, during this period of the terrorist movement some singers were killed, like Chamkeela, he was assassinated because the terrorists thought he sang vulgar songs. He had become so popular during those days but he started to sing vulgar songs which couldn't be listened to amongst a family and the terrorists killed him because of this, and until today the culprits have not been brought to trial.

Because of this, the one form of music that emerged as socially acceptable by Sikh conservatives, *and the masses*, was Sufi music. There was little to no objection to this genre, and singers like Hans Raj Hans, Gurdas Mann, Sardool Sikander and Saber Koti began to rise in popularity.

During our conversation, Basota detailed that in the late 90's a shift came in the Punjab away from the Sufi music that had become popular during the *Khalistani* period, towards *pop* music, with music videos and more commercially viable varieties of song becoming mainstream. Many Punjabis I have spoken to echo the sentiments of Basota, they told me that this was encouraged by the Indian centre to divert peoples' attentions away from further revolutionary activity. This was also around the same time that *drugs* and *alcohol* began to proliferate in the region. Many Punjabis have told me that drugs became commonplace in the region as a result of a concerted attempt by the central Hindu dominated government to snuff out any remaining embers left smoldering from the *Khalistan* movement. This period followed shortly after the attack on Punjab by the Indian army, the assassination of Indira Gandhi, and the subsequent Sikh

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<sup>73</sup> See: Mahmood, Cynthia Keppley. *Fighting for faith and nation: Dialogues with Sikh militants*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.

genocide. At this time vulgarity was a big seller, which in the context of the Punjabi music industry refers to songs glorifying the use of alcohol and drugs, as well as the use of lyrics that objectify women - these themes are then openly shown in music videos that have scantily clad models, and often show alcohol being consumed openly and excessively. In Punjabi, these songs are usually referred to as “chakhme ganne,” which directly translates to “uptempo,” or “pick-up” songs. When people talk about chakhme songs, they usually compare them to music that does not deal with vulgar themes, and rather focuses on culture, or other positive aspects of society, which they refer to as “Sufi ganne,” or “Sufi songs.” But according to Basota the people soon began to take notice of this upsurge in materialism and excess, and around 2001 Sufi music re-emerged as the music of choice. Again, artists like Hans Raj Hans brought the poetry of Bulleh Shah and Shah Hussain to life. The Waddali brothers rose to popularity:

In the late 90’s again, the music took a twist from Sufi singing. A lot of new singers entered, like Harbajan Mann; they had money and lot of cassette companies came into existence. Some NRI<sup>74</sup> singers went to Punjab, they spent a lot of money, or *threw* a lot of money into the market, into advertisement and publicity, and essentially took their place (in the industry). In those times Harbajan Mann, Dilshad Akhtar, and other singers like Ravinder Grewal, they came around 2000. At that time from singing about Sufism, they came towards *pop* music.

Then with pop music came the videos, and in the videos they started showing the nude girls and all that.<sup>75</sup> Then again we criticized them. This started from *Kudi Gujrat Di* (The Girl From Gujarat Has Stolen My Heart) and Jasvir Jassi.<sup>76</sup> No doubt we started condemning them, but as a commercial product, they got a lot of money from it. Even after Jassi there were so many vulgar videos.

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<sup>74</sup> Non-Resident Indian – A term used by India to describe people of Indian origin living abroad.

<sup>75</sup> Basota here refers to vulgarity and scantily clad women as nudity.

<sup>76</sup> [https://youtu.be/2\\_wIPWCgQqQ](https://youtu.be/2_wIPWCgQqQ)

Then from pop to Sufi. Again in 2001 when there was a climax, people became fed up of the pop music. They wanted music that would give peace to their souls, which would sound impressive to the ears. Then again Hans Raj Hans gave a Sufi cassette, then Surjit Bhattar came out with a cassette.

I note here that although many Punjabis will refer to different genres of music in the region by names like pop or folk, that have counterparts in Western music, almost all music in Punjab incorporates traditional elements, including the use of local rhythms and instruments. Further, even in contemporary pop music, the style of dance used in music videos will often fuse traditional movements with others drawn from Western influences. Basota described to me a sort of cyclical pattern in the music of Punjab. After periods of intense and vulgar pop music, the masses would again shift towards an inclination for Sufi varieties. During our casual conversation, and later into the more formal interview, he talked much about these trends that emerged in the entertainment industry in Punjab, but insisted that all the while music had remained a central force in influencing the general cultural awareness of the people:

For pop music, Daler Mehndi was the first with *Bolo Tararara*, then came Jasvir Jassi with *Dil Lai Gai Kudi Gujrat Di*, so pop was a mixture of traditional music with some Western music. In those days the trend of music videos also began. Many Punjabi channels came into existence, like Lashkara.

But personally, I disliked pop music. When I would take interviews of artists, and when I would write articles in the papers, I would condemn pop music. Some singers would actually get quite angry at me, because I was one of the leading cultural journalists (in Punjab) at the time. Whether Daler Mehndi or Gurdas Mann, or any artist from Bombay, they just couldn't get away from me because I always had some odd questions regarding their singing (microtranscription follows).

With regard to the role of music in recreating mutual interdependence between East and West Punjab and in promoting reconciliation in the divided region, Basota had the following things to say (to see a full transcription of our discussion please proceed to **Appendix B**):

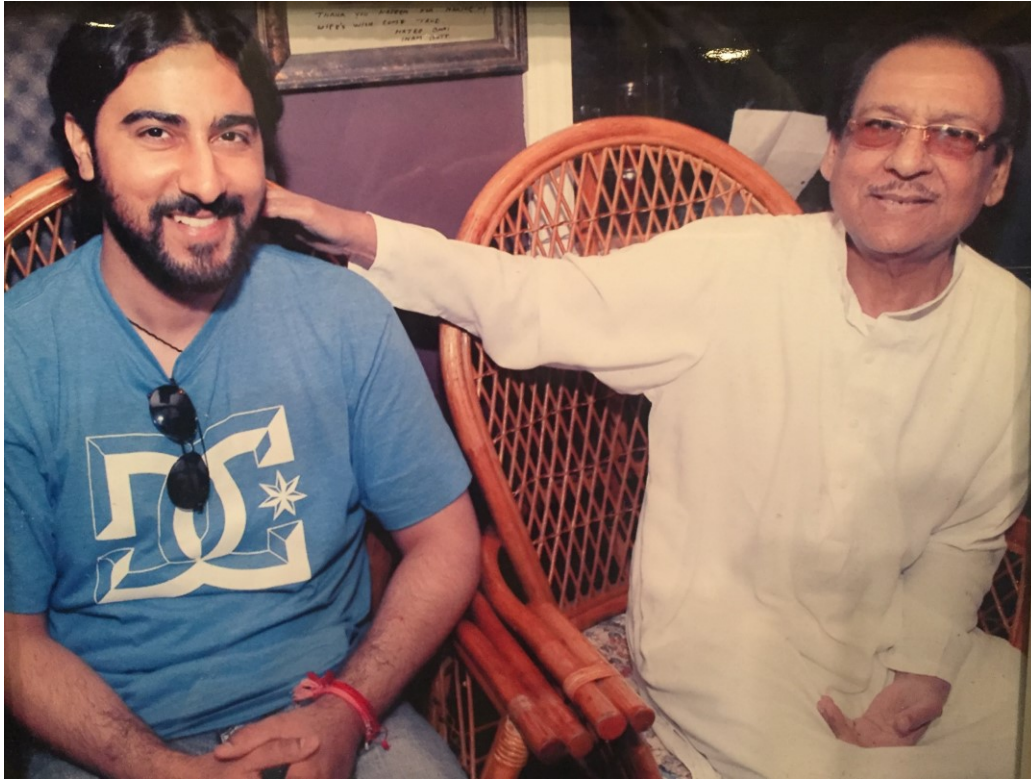
But when we talk of Sufism, it's a type of music that brings peace. This is essentially a type of music that the East and West can agree on (Punjab). Singing is essentially the only field, it's the only such thing that can bring peace amongst Pakistanis and Indians, removing the hatred from their hearts. When relations along the border weren't so good because of the politicians, we started efforts. In the early 90's we established an Indo-Pak Cultural Organization where we would invite artists from Punjab (Pakistan) who would give the message that "yes, we want a positive relationship," but the politicians did not want this.

People really want this cultural exchange, but the politicians are not allowing it. So the reason behind the Ghulam Ali program<sup>77</sup>... this was all the Shiv Sena, because they are against Muslims. After all, we are all human beings, he is singing and giving a good message of humanity, promoting peace to the souls of all people whether Pakistani, Hindu or other....

Here, Basota refers to the cancelling of a Ghulam Ali concert that was scheduled to take place in Mumbai in October of 2015. At the time, the RSS, a Hindu-Nationalist militant outfit associated with the BJP political party, had put increasing pressure on the organizers to cancel the show, or that they would disrupt the event. The RSS mentioned at the time that they would not allow any artists from Pakistan to perform in India. Ghulam Ali remains one of the most popular Ghazal singers in the world, with a large following in India.

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<sup>77</sup> See: "Pakistan singer Ghulam Ali's India show cancelled after protests," BBC.com, October 8, 2015. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-34472166>



**Figure 5-32 Ghulam Aly and Me (Photo by Nadeem Aly - 2009)**

## 5.8 SPREADING THE WORD

### *SOWING SEEDS: “BLOOD DIAMONDS” MUSIC VIDEO*

In order to raise awareness about the issues central to my research paradigm, I also wrote, recorded and released a song called “Blood Diamonds.” The music video was directed by Redd Angelo, a Canadian director and photographer of Filipino descent. He has directed music videos for many local artists, both in English as well as Punjabi. I was introduced to him by my cousin’s husband, Gurjot Sandhu, who is also a singer of Punjabi music and had one of his very popular videos, “Ishq Nachaya,” directed by Redd. The storyline of “Blood Diamonds” features performance shots interspersed with scenes of protest and violence. This aggressive rock song brings to light issues that continue to affect partitioned communities throughout the world. I

tried to write a song that would address many of the negative ramifications of both colonialism and imperialism, and the ongoing detrimental effects that continue to inflict communities with colonial histories across the world. I also attempted to bring to light issues of Western interference, particularly in the Middle-East, which some scholars also see as a form of modern imperialism. On April 24, 2008, Noam Chomsky gave a lecture at Boston University<sup>78</sup> where he explained the concept of imperialism as being one of the central founding doctrines of the United States. The following is from a transcription of this lecture by Steve Lyne:

The model for the founding fathers that they borrowed from Britain was the Roman Empire. They wanted to emulate it. I'll talk about that a little. Even before the Revolution, these notions were very much alive. Benjamin Franklin, 25 years before the Revolution, complained that the British were imposing limits on the expansion of the colonies. He objected to this, borrowing from Machiavelli. He admonished the British (I'm quoting him), "A prince that acquires new territories and removes the natives to give his people room will be remembered as the father of the nation." And George Washington agreed. He wanted to be the father of the nation. His view was that "the gradual extension of our settlement will as certainly cause the savage as the wolf to retire, both being beasts of prey, though they differ in shape."

As I mentioned in the introduction of this dissertation, I observe that a ramification of colonialism, is that strict borders were created to separate cohesive people groups into new and artificially construed concepts of race and nationality, as colonial powers "left," or "quit" the many countries they controlled. These boundaries resulted in the imposition of new national identities with strict categories defining specific groups. In an effort to promote healing for groups inflicted by the wounds of colonialism and to encourage reconciliation between

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<sup>78</sup> See: Chomsky, Noam. "Modern-day American imperialism: Middle East and beyond." *Boston University*, April 24 (2008).

communities that once represented flourishing and co-operative societies, I wrote the song “Blood Diamonds.” I chose this name, because the conflict surrounding the way diamonds have been sourced from West Africa is relatively widely known and represents an easily identifiable frame of reference to understanding other similar issues around the world.<sup>79</sup> Without specifically pushing the issue of Kashmir and Punjab, and to contextualize my primary research area to global relevance, my goal was to write a song that would be accessible and understandable by a universal, or English speaking, audience. Denisoff (1970) is helpful here, he demarcates a trend that developed through the 1960’s that is still as fascinating and relevant today as it was then – the use of music as a form of protest. The writer describes early in his report how Peter Yarrow of *Peter, Paul and Mary* once exclaimed in an interview “we could mobilize the youth of America today in a way that nobody else could” (807). Indeed, as Denisoff describes, music is one of the most effective mediums in eliciting a change in attitude formation amongst listeners, which can manifest itself in outward action based heavily on a sensory-perceptual experience. He suggests that at the time, it was predominantly folk music that acted as the most viable genre of music for transmitting messages about discontent with the political status- quo, or about the decisions made by the political ruling classes. Bob Dylan is mentioned a fair bit in this article as are *Peter, Paul and Mary*. The article also employs a study of university students that attempted to determine preferences for, and understandings of, protest music by way of a stratified sample survey.

With a song like “Kashmir,” then, it was possible that the primary audience would be limited to those with a knowledge of the issues at hand, or perhaps who understand Urdu or

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<sup>79</sup> See: Orogun, Paul. "'Blood Diamonds' and Africa's Armed Conflicts in the Post—Cold War Era." *World Affairs* 166, no. 3 (2004): 151-161.

Punjabi – but “Blood Diamonds,” was a way for me to engage in interventionist creative work to assist several affected people groups at once. The video demonstrates that the communities affected by colonialism, as well as Western “intervention” by means of military operations, capitalism, or economic “warfare,” have experienced massive harm including physical and psychological trauma. I suggest that there is a web of lies, manipulation, and modification of historical realities that have made it difficult for anyone to know what can be accepted as truth. I also mention that there is a vested interest in capitalizing on reclamation initiatives that take advantage of the pain of groups that have experienced violence and genocide, both physical and cultural, by ruling classes that use such opportunities to increase their popularity and appeal.

The book *Palestinian Music and Song: Expression and Resistance Since 1900* (Bursheh, et al. 2013) is relevant here, it examines the way Palestinian music culture has been utilized as a form of representation as well as resistance throughout the history of the nation and its people. The introductory section of this book explores the political facets of musical performance in a Palestinian cultural context. It also explores more contemporary forms of musical expression in the country, including the employment of Hip-Hop in the regional vernacular as a statement of intense political propensity. Several Hip-Hop artists who perform in this area are diaspora Muslims with an ethnic inheritance from the region in question. The writers also explore the role of diaspora artists in the mobilization of musical and cultural resources for the propagation of Palestinian autonomy in the origin of locality. The book is primarily focused on music as re-asserting a unique and indigenous identity in the context of the geo-physical Israel-Palestine.

Bohlman (1993) is also critical to contextualizing this component of my work. The author begins by discussing his personal experience in 1992 of being exposed on mainstream media to the beating of Rodney King, and the reaction of the young generation of Americans as



perpetuated by an ongoing dialogue about resistance on MTV. Rappers were widely sourced at this time as sources of political commentary about the wider issue of race- relations in the United States. Bohlman suggest that MTV became a viable alternative platform to raise contention about social issues in the United States, accessing an audience equally receptive to the medium and the message.

Bohlman contextualizes musical politics around the referent field of scholarship in musicology and suggests that writing about such activities could be considered an act of equal political propensity. He looks at the field with a critical lens and explores the possibility of politicizing musicology in a similar way the feminist scholars may do so in their respective fields. Bohlman describes that he prefers to “think of musicology as a reflexive process, a moving of music into discourse” (418), and in this way suggests that the field is suited now more than ever to mobilize resources towards engaging in socio-political dialogue.

Blood Diamonds  
Words and Music by Arsh Khaira

You rewrite the pages of all that went down,  
We can't state the facts, 'cause that's not allowed.  
Can't feed the hungry with all your lies,  
Drugs are your weapon in this genocide.

You've taken the lion's share of their pride,  
So we'll cast our votes for only your side.  
Losing their rights, I'm losing my mind,  
Can't break the chains you've tied on so tight.

All the lies  
They're telling you straight to your face,  
You believe it all.  
There's no place for the truth,  
In this game of black hearts,  
They're watching you fall.

I'm ready to believe, yeah,  
All's not lost and someday they will see.  
It's not enough for me, yeah,  
Drag you down and keep you from your dreams.

It's all for the taking, so quick in your act,  
Stealing the clothes right off of their backs.  
I couldn't help but forget the truth,  
Just like it was told in yesterday's news.

Your opium wars, and fake nationhood...  
Blood diamonds, they just look so good.  
"Post-partition-stress-disorder,"  
Bodies divided at your border.



**Figure 5-33 Video Still from "Blood Diamonds" Music Video (Directed by Redd Angelo – Summer 2018)**

In Figure 5-33, I appear on a platform, in a manner of public appeal, singing the lyrics to “Blood Diamonds.” Similar performance shots are interspersed throughout the video, with other images of protest, war, migration and mistreatment throughout the world.



**Figure 5-34 Video Still from "Blood Diamonds" Music Video (Directed by Redd Angelo – Summer 2018)**

In Figure 5-34, I appear within a cage singing the lyrics to the song. This shot in particular represents the idea of confining voices of protest within boundaries, and boxes, placed around

such agents, so as to give the appearance of a “right to opinion,” where the reality is actually that the ruling classes would prescribe the scope and limitations of such action.

## 5.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter explored the themes of *covenant*, *communism* and *inheritance* in the context of my own personal, cultural, political and familial relationship to Punjab in its historical geophysical contextual limits (including the Kashmir region). I showed how much of my understanding of the political issues affecting the area is shaped by my own experiences being born in Canada to immigrants from North India. My grandfather’s youth was marked by the devastating experience of leaving his homeland near Sialkot in the newly created *Pakistan* in the midst of the violence of *Partition*, which encompassed his entire family’s renunciation of the Sikh faith and the adoption of Islam (involving the cutting of all family members’ uncut hair), including the public proclamation of the *shahada* (and the embracing of Islamic names). This was done to protect the family during the horrible sectarian violence that had gripped the region at the time. I then showed how his embracing of *Marxist* ideology, his political involvement in Punjab, and his second *Hijra* to Canada formed the basis for my own childhood and upbringing as a *Sikh-Canadian*. Although his ideological viewpoints and personal stories of familial tragedy were not a major part of my youth, there was a residual element of innate traumatic stress that I believe was passed down inter-generationally.

In the context of my workshop with the Marxist society of Barnala, Punjab; later with my music video for “Kashmir;” and interventions with members of the Pakistani Kashmiri community. I demonstrated how the conflict in that region is inextricably connected to the territory of Punjab, and that the re-creation of mutual cultural interdependence between Sikh and Muslim Punjabis with regard to the Kashmir situation represents a powerful initiative that

reveals the potential to uplift both parties, and to assist in not only progression towards increased autonomy for these groups in their own lands, but to the self-empowerment of *individuals* through reclaimed cultural, linguistic and spiritual inheritance (the *autonomous mindset*). I gave an auto-ethnographic example of this phenomenon at play through the demonstration of my own “spiritual” re-patriation to Pakistan, and also showed that this occurs at the macro-level as depicted in comments obtained from my informants. I then demonstrated how music is used to assist in the re-unification process for divided survivors and their subsequent generations, which I will give further evidence of in the next chapter, and that the use of this approach by artists as a strategy to obtain commercial success has been highly effective. This is primarily because the message associated with “Sanjha” events resonates at a profoundly spiritual level for participants and actually does have immense convincing power to elicit transformations and changes in attitudes.

In the following chapter I will continue to build on this perceptual lens by exploring the theme of “brothers divided across borders.” I will show how Punjabi music from India continues to be popular in Pakistan, and that this assists in the transmission of cultural aesthetics and heirlooms across the national boundary. I will show how through the popularity in Pakistan of East Punjabi music, that has its roots in *Sufi* themes and traditions, we can witness the recreation of a mutually interdependent relationship between Sikhs and Muslims that represents historical continuity, in terms of language, dress, customs and indeed even *ideology* (though I will talk more about the “Shared-Spirituality” in chapter nine).

## 6 TO THE BEAT OF THE SAME DHOL: BROTHERS DIVIDED<sup>80</sup>

People don't say this is Pakistani Punjab and that is Indian Punjab. The educated and mainstream Pakistani people do not think or say this, they only consider the entire region as one Punjab.

-Kamran Taj "Kami" (Islamabad, Pakistan)

### 6.1 DEVELOPING MY NETWORKS IN PAKISTAN AND EAST PUNJAB

#### *SOWING SEEDS: ALLAH HOO MUSIC VIDEO*

Consistent with the Sufi idea of personifying the beloved, or one's relationship to Allah, through expressions of love between a man and a woman (or between a Sufi and his *murshid*), one of my major undertakings towards this project was the release of a musical album which included eight original songs encompassing this theme in a Sufi-Rock format. This album was called *Ishq Kamaal* which means "divine love." The single from this album was a unique version of the song *Allah Hoo*, which was released worldwide on social media. The song was released in Pakistan and received considerable airplay there. It was featured on a unique DVD including the top 20 singers of Pakistan. The music label was MusicWorld Pakistan run by Khaliq Chishti. The success of the album *Ishq Kamaal* and the single "Allah Hoo," allowed me to develop a presence in the Pakistani Punjabi music industry and to establish excellent contacts with several

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<sup>80</sup> The dhol is the sine-qua-non of Punjabi instruments. It is a double-sided barrel drum that is used in East and West Punjab, as well as Baluchistan, Kashmir, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Eastern Afghanistan.

very well known artists, promoters, and directors. The networks I created also allowed me to become well known amongst the Pakistani and East Punjabi communities in Canada which facilitated my research. Below you can see two of the posters created to promote the DVD in Pakistan in which I am prominently featured.



**Figure 6-1 Poster Created by Music Waves Pakistan to Celebrate the Release of Their Promotional DVD (I Appear in the Centre) - 2012**



Shahida Mini    Tariq Tafu    Alka Yagni    Malkoo  
 Sanam Marvi    Ali Abbas    Shafaq Ali  
 Amir Ghulam Ali    Afshan Zebi    Junaid Sami Khan  
 Sana Khan    Imtiaz Adam    Ashia Khan    Dr. Zahid Hussain    Nirmal Shah    Deeba Kiran  
 Hassan Azeedi    Nasir Beraj    J Azhar Butt    Majid Ali    Amir Azhar    Arsh Khaira

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Figure 6-2 Poster Created by Music Waves Pakistan to Celebrate the Release of Their Promotional DVD (I Appear in the Bottom Right) - 2012




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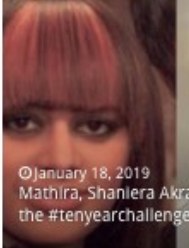
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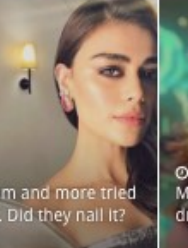
January 18, 2019  
Khaira is a multi-instrumentalist who writes and performs in Canada




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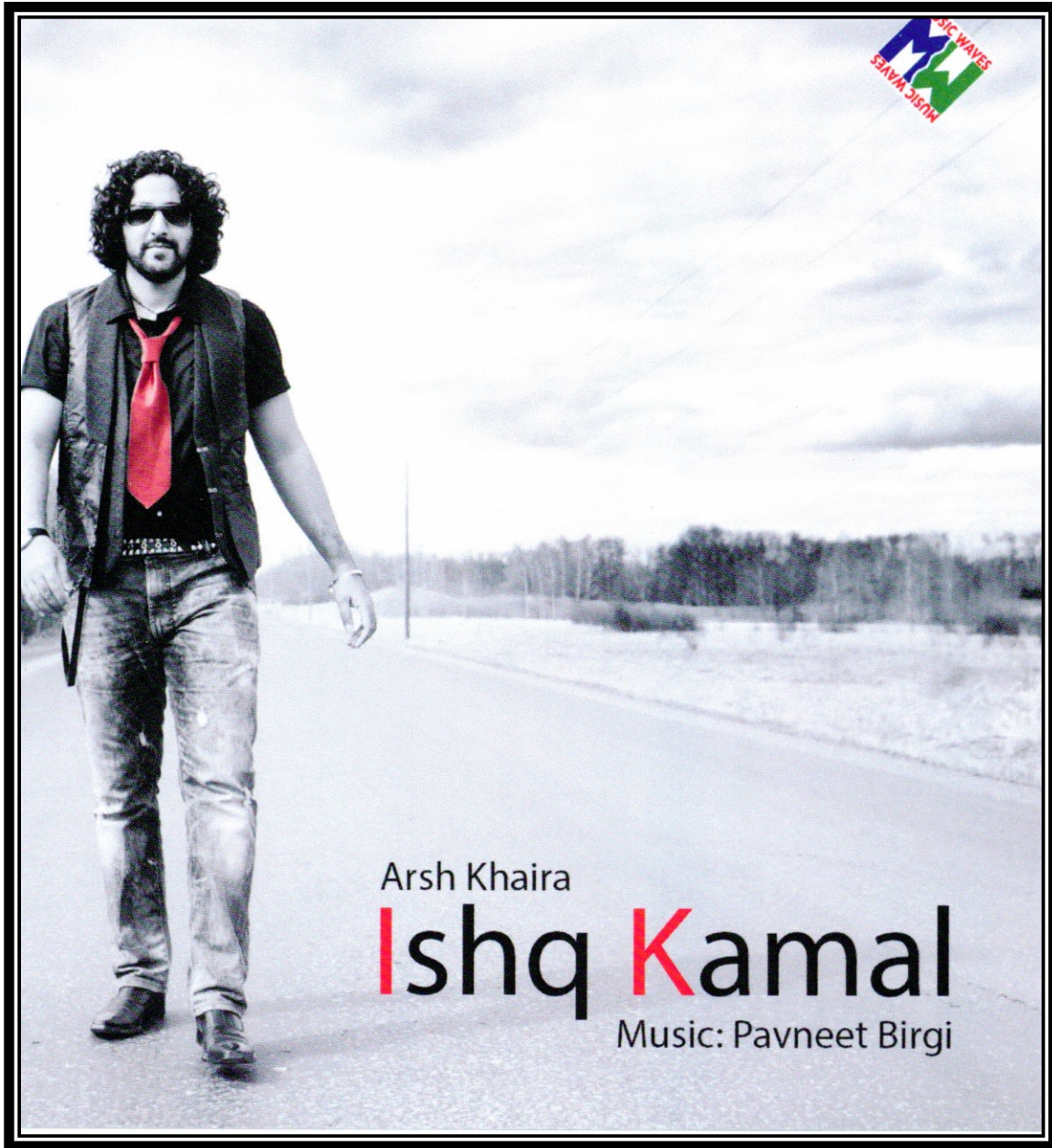


Young Saudi asylum-seeker arrives in Canada to official welcome

**RECENT MAGAZINE**



Figure 6-3 Screenshot from PakStar Media's Website Featuring My Photograph / Article – Summer 2019



**Figure 6-4 Cover Design for my Album "Ishq Kamal" (Designed by Music Waves Canada)  
- 2012**

The single itself for Allah Hoo was widely well received in Pakistan. Here are some stills from the video:





**Figure 6-5 Video Still from the Song "Allah Hoo" (Directed by Sandeep Sharma – November 2010)**



**Figure 6-6 Video Still from the Song "Allah Hoo" (Directed by Sandeep Sharma – November 2010)**



**Figure 6-7 Video Still from the Song "Allah Hoo" (Directed by Sandeep Sharma – November 2010)**



**Figure 6-8 Video Still from the Song "Allah Hoo" (Directed by Sandeep Sharma – November 2010)**



**Figure 6-9 Video Still from the Song "Allah Hoo" (Directed by Sandeep Sharma – November 2010)**

The video symbolically represented the tragic love-stories of the Punjab region. The premise shows myself and my beloved in the deserts and sand dunes of Rajasthan (similar to the plot setting of *Leila-Majnu*), and as I arise from below the sand to seek out my lover, we are again torn apart with my character ultimately returning deep below the sand again, leaving the object of desire in tears. The video is interwoven with images of re-unification, and then again, being torn apart, as Sufi dervishes whirl as expressions of *ibadat* in pursuit of *Fanaa*.

Because of the success of this album I was asked to join several famous Pakistani artists during their tours in Canada. I should note that many of the shows I did exemplified the *Sanjha Virsa* as they often featured prominent artists from both sides of Punjab performing together. After the success of my album *Ishq Kamaal* in both India and Pakistan – I seized this opportunity to establish contacts with many well-known musicians, journalists and media people in Pakistan. These connections as well as the reputation I had established amongst the Pakistani community



both locally in Canada and in the locality of origin later assisted me greatly once I moved into the primary interpersonal component of my data collection.



**Figure 6-10 Newspaper Article From East Punjab Demonstrating My Involvement With "Sanjha Virsa" Events Featuring World Renown Artists – Summer 2015**

This newspaper article appeared in Punjab, India with my picture in the top right with Abrar Ul Haque to my left, and Jazzy B to his left. It reads: “The ‘Sanjha Virsa’ Cultural Festival Brought Together Crowds from Both East and West Punjab.”

### *6.1.1 ABRAR UL HAQUE*

My social network with the Pakistani community in Alberta is now deeply entrenched, and I have had countless experiences which have given evidence to and justified the profound mutually interdependent cultural relationship that exists between East and West Punjabis. As mentioned, I have performed several times with Abrar Ul Haque, one of the most well known performers of Punjabi music in Pakistan, with several major hit singles in the country through the 1990's until today. His hit songs include "Kine Kine Janna Bilo De Ghar," or "who all wants to go the blue eyed girl's house," and "Tere Rang Rang," or "Your Colours," one of the most popular Sufi songs of all time.



**Figure 6-11 Abrar Ul Haque and Me (Photo by Gurdeep Khaira - 2015)**

### 6.1.2 BILAL SAEED

I have also performed alongside Bilal Saeed, who is again one of the most popular pop and contemporary bhangra artists in Pakistan. His songs are all in Punjabi and have also been incredibly successful in East Punjab. The music of Saeed is contemporary, but rooted in traditional themes, in other words, he uses driving beats and rhythms that are similar to those employed in American Rap, Hip-Hop and RnB music, but he often uses lyrics that have traditional undertones. One his biggest hits was “Bara Saal,” or “Twelve Years,” which refers to the amount of time that Ranjha looked after the cows on Heer’s farm. *Heer Ranjha*, is one of the most popular romances in Punjab, originating in Pakistan. Though Saeed sings in Punjabi, he has recently had songs featured in Bollywood films in Urdu.<sup>81</sup>



**Figure 6-12 Bilal Saeed and Me (Photo by Gurdeep Khaira – Summer 2015)**

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<sup>81</sup> See: “Punjabi Singer’s Song in Indian Film,” *Dawn News Pakistan*, May 2, 2015  
<https://www.dawn.com/news/1179492>



### 6.1.3 TARIQ TAFU

I have also performed extensively with Tariq Tafu, another very popular bhangra artist from Pakistan, whose hit single “Lahore Lahore Aye,” or “Everyone Come to Lahore,” is one of the most widely and easily recognizable songs in the country.



**Figure 6-13 Tariq Tafu and Me (Photo by PakStar Media - 2015)**

### 6.1.4 ARIF LOHAR

Other artists I have performed with include Arif Lohar, the son of Alim Lohar. Arif is a very well known performer of Punjabi music in Pakistan, and his father Alim is of legendary status. Alim Lohar, like Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, has also performed several Sikh Shabads, or “hymns,” including scriptures written by the Tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, like “Mitr Pyare Nu.” I have also been fortunate to share the stage with Saen Zahoor, a very well known Sufi artist from Pakistan, all of whose songs are also in Punjabi, including his world famous rendition of “Allah Hoo.” I have also been involved with a local Pakistani band “Adraak.”

### 6.1.5 *DILJIT DOSANJH*

As I was performing and developing networks within the music industry in Punjab, Pakistan, I was also as deeply involved in creating the same level of presence and connectedness in East Punjabi circles. During this time I performed with several well-known artists from East Punjab including Diljit Dosanjh, arguable one of the most well-known Punjabi singers in the world, who has now become a success in Bollywood as well, having appeared in several blockbuster films, including “Phillauri.”



**Figure 6-14 Diljit Dosanjh and Me (Photo by Gurdeep Khaira - 2012)**

### 6.1.6 *AMRINDER GILL*

I have also met Amrinder Gill on several occasions, and shared the stage with him as well.

Amrinder is another Punjabi singer who has an unparalleled level of fame and success internationally. He has released several ground-breaking and incredibly successful albums, and has also acted in several blockbuster Punjabi films.



**Figure 6-15 Amrinder Gill and Me (Photo by Gurdeep Khaira 2013)**



### 6.1.7 JAZZY B

I spent time with Jazzy B while developing my networks as well. I went shopping with him at West Edmonton Mall, and also shared the stage with him at a “Sanjha Virsa” concert, where Abrar Ul Haque also performed. Jazzy B is a superstar in the Punjabi music industry, and is incredibly popular throughout India and Pakistan.



**Figure 6-16 Jazzy B and Me (Unknown Photographer - 2015)**

### 6.1.8 *SATINDER SARTAJ*

Similarly, I spent time with Satinder Sartaj during one of his trips to Edmonton, driving around the city together in his limousine and talking to him about his music and his poetry. Sartaj has been a major contributor to the Sufi revival in Punjab. He holds a PhD in Music from Punjab University in Chandigarh, where he worked as a professor prior to his international success. Today, he remains one of the most critically acclaimed and popular performers of Sufi and Folk music in the region, as well as internationally. I introduced him to the audience at his sold-out concert at the Jubilee Auditorium, and he had mentioned afterward that he had never before had “such a flattering and beautiful introduction” at a concert.



**Figure 6-17 Satinder Sartaj and Me (Photo by Gurdeep Khaira - 2015)**

## 6.2 AMRITSARI TUNES IN LAHORE: THE END OF RADIO JAMMING

### *SOWING SEEDS – ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS WITH PAKISTANI NATIONALS (CURRENT RESIDENTS)*

In order to develop a more detailed understanding of the way people in Pakistan think about their relationship to their East Punjabi neighbors, I conducted a number of interviews over the phone with current residents of Pakistan.<sup>82</sup> This was a long process which involved countless nights staying awake in order to compensate for the roughly twelve-hour time difference between Pakistan and Western Canada. All of the interviews I conducted were with people with whom I had no prior relationship and who were suggested to me through snowballing and other contacts.

My informants for this component of data collection from Pakistan included:

#### 6.2.1 AHMED ALI BABBAR – LAHORE, PUNJAB



**Figure 6-18 Photo of Informant Ahmed Ali Babbar (Supplied Photo)**

- When I spoke to Ahmed he mentioned that he had travelled outside of Pakistan on a few occasions but had always lived and continued to reside in Lahore.

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<sup>82</sup> See: **Appendix C**

6.2.2 *KHURRAM KHAN – PUNJAB, PAKISTAN*



**Figure 6-19 Photo of Informant Khurram Khan (Supplied Photo)**

- Khurram was suggested to me by one of my contacts from the Pakistani community in Edmonton.

6.2.3 *AZHAR ALY – KARACHI, SINDH (ETHNICALLY PUNJABI)*



**Figure 6-20 Photo of Informant Azhar Aly (Supplied Photo)**

- Azhar was suggested to me by one of my contacts in the Pakistani music industry, Nadeem Aly, with whom I had previously worked on a Sufi album.

#### 6.2.4 KAMRAN TAJ “KAMI” – ISLAMABAD, PUNJAB



**Figure 6-21 Photo of Informant Kamran Taj (Supplied Photo)**

- I got in touch with Kami through one of my friends who also lives in Ontario. Kami is originally from *Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KPK)* and is currently residing in Islamabad.

#### 6.2.5 IRFAN ABBAS – LAHORE, PUNJAB

- Irfan was suggested to me by one of my contacts from the Pakistani community in Edmonton.

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I struggled to find anyone who embodied a *conservative-reformist attitude* amongst people accessible to me, and my informants clearly mentioned that such people make up a very small percentage of Pakistan’s demographic. Rather, the desire for a strong mutually interdependent relationship with East Punjab was clearly explicated by all of my informants as can be seen in some of the comments below in my phone interviews from Pakistan:

The dances are the same, the songs are the same... Most of our songs are their songs... The only thing that differentiates Indian Punjab and Pakistani Punjab is the name of the country.

-Ahmed Ali Babar (Lahore, Pakistan)



You know there is no place on earth like Punjab, I am talking about united Punjab. Like East Punjab and West Punjab, when they are united, it is such a wonderful place on earth.

-Azhar Aly (Karachi, Pakistan)

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I will now speak about the phenomenon of conservative reformist Islam in Pakistan (while comparing and contrasting the idea to information I received from my respondents) and how it *sometimes* acts as a splinter between the positive relationship that exists amongst the dominant political classes and other minority groups - especially Sikhs - both living in Pakistan, where Sikhs number approximately 20,000, most of whom come from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and *also* with Sikhs in East Punjab. It is important to note here that amongst mainstream society, Sikhs are still very well respected in Pakistan. Every year thousands of Sikh pilgrims visit the many sites of religious significance for their community there and come back with beautiful tales of the abundance of admiration they were offered. One of my informants, Khurram Khan, specifically pointed out that East Punjabi *Sikh* singers are listened to most widely during our phone interview:

You know many singers, especially the *Sikh* singers like Amrinder Gill and many others I can name, they like them *too much* (in Pakistan). In Lahore, the music of Indian Punjab is *very famous*, you can hear their songs in the roads of Lahore, in cars... in different places...

-Khurram Khan (Punjab, Pakistan)

To substantiate this comment from Khurram Khan, consider that one of my female survey respondents, Iqra from Kashmir, Pakistan, mentioned that her favorite Punjabi singers were Guru Randhawa and Jazzy B. This informant also gave scores of 10/10 on the following questions: “I wish to travel to India”; and, “The cultures of the two Punjabs have much in

common.” She also gave very high scores for other questions that emphasize Punjabi unity across the border. Similarly, Zamir Hussain Khan, an ethnic Baloch from Punjab Pakistan, and also one of my informants over the age of fifty, answered that his favorite East Punjabi singers were the Nooran Sisters, Daler Mehndi and Amrit Maan. He also answered that he identifies as Punjabi before he identifies as Pakistani. Like Iqra, he also answered with a score of 10/10 on questions about wishing to travel to India and about the shared cultures of East and West Punjab. Hamood Mazhar, from Punjab, Pakistan mentioned his favorite Punjabi singers are Sidhu Moosewala and Honey Singh, both Sikhs who sing very aggressive Punjabi rap music. He further asserted with a score of 10/10 on identifying strongly with his Punjabi roots, as well as on questions about preserving Punjabi culture, wanting to travel to East Punjab and feeling a strong sense of solidarity with East Punjabis. Muhammad Wasim Haider from Pakistan also mentioned his favorite East Punjabi singer as being Guru Randhawa. Nusrat Akhtar from Pakistan also mentioned his favorite Punjabi singers as being Gurdas Mann, Diljit Dosanjh and Sukshinder Shinda. Muhammad Usama Aziz from Punjab Pakistan stated his favorite East Punjabi singers as Amrinder Gill, Jasmine Sandlas, Jassi Gill and Neha Kakkar. Mahroz Shahid from Punjab, Pakistan’s favorite singer is Gippy Grewal, and my respondent identifying simply as “Khan,” who stated that he grew up at a village in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, mentioned his favorite East Punjabi singers as being Gurdas Mann, Daler Mehndi, Diljit Dosanjh and Jagjit Singh.

Another one of my informants, Ahmed Aly Babbar, further went on to state just how ubiquitous the zealous passion for this music is in the country during our phone interview:

Yes, and let me tell you that it is not just in Punjab, (East Punjabi music) is popular everywhere. Especially in Sindh and KPK. I have met people from Kashmir and Balochistan that live in Lahore and they love Punjabi music and Indian movies. It is only like 5% of the people I have met that say they have never watched Indian movies, but 95% of all the people I have met, they love it.

-Ahmed Aly Babbar (Lahore, Pakistan)

Pakistan has a history that has consistently been torn between those amongst the political classes who advocate for increased understanding and more liberal interpretations of Islam, and those that use the idea of Islamic orthodoxy to consolidate political control. Certain political groups in Pakistan, like the Bhutto family, or the Pakistani Peoples Party, and even the founder of the country, Mohammed Jinnah, often advocated for a pluralistic society and increased tolerance for minority communities. To see evidence of this, consider that in a BBC News article from 2013, by Shahzeb Jillani,<sup>83</sup> which explored transcripts of some of Jinnah's speeches, showed that Jinnah desired Pakistan to be a secular homeland, though with a Muslim majority, and guided by Islamic principles:

The archives of state-owned broadcaster, Radio Pakistan, also contain cranky old audio recordings of most of those speeches, except for one: his address to the Constituent Assembly in the port city of Karachi on 11 August 1947, three days before the creation of Pakistan.

For liberals in Pakistan, it was a crucial speech in which Mr Jinnah spoke in the clearest possible terms of his dream that the country he was creating would be tolerant, inclusive and secular.

"You are free. You are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place of worship in this state of Pakistan," Jinnah declared. "You may belong to any religion

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<sup>83</sup> Jillani, Shahzeb. "The Search for Jinnah's Vision of Pakistan," *BBC News Karachi*, September 11, 2013. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-24034873>

or caste or creed - that has nothing to do with the business of the state."

Documented evidence suggest that Mr Jinnah's words didn't go down well with the powerful and ambitious religious ideologues around him at the time, who then made sure the speech was virtually blacked out in the next day's newspapers.

Successive military governments in Pakistan were accused of attempting to downplay, even remove, the speech from official records.

It should be noted that the desire for mutual interdependence amongst Sikhs and Muslims exists today in all classes of Pakistani society, even amongst many hardlined conservative reformist groups,<sup>84</sup> but especially amongst the liberal educated strata, as Khurram Khan described to me during our phone interview:

Pakistani Punjabi people think there is no big difference between them and Indian Punjabis, there is only a border. But the people on the other side are just like Punjabis here. They also have a rich culture, strong traditions, they are brave people and they are *from us*. So, they never differentiate, they think that Indian Punjab and Pakistani Punjab have maximum similarities.

-Khurram Khan (Punjab, Pakistan)

There has been much back and forth in Pakistan between short periods of democracy and tolerance, to strict military rule backed by staunch Islamic extremism. Ullah (2013) argues that "Islamic parties (in Pakistan) exist on a spectrum... the sharia–secularism continuum—from those who believe that Pakistan should be governed by Islamic law, with little or no lay person's input, to those who believe that religious authority has no place in governance" (9). Amongst the majority of the population, attitudes towards East Punjab are very positive, with most educated classes understanding the high level of bureaucracy involved in leveraging identities against each

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<sup>84</sup> I talked about this in the section on my workshop with Kashmiri Pakistanis.

other in political warfare.<sup>85</sup> An example of this can be seen in the following statement by one of my informants, Azhar Aly from Karachi (who had visited New Delhi in India), which I obtained during our phone interview:

I did not find any difference between Lahore and Delhi to be honest with you. I have solid reason for that. Delhi is lush green, and Lahore is lush green. Secondly, both are very, very old historical places. Delhi had Jumma Masjid, Lahore has Badshahi Masjid. Delhi had Lal Killa, Lahore has Shahi Killa. There are so many things, the weather is the same, the food is the same, they wear the same clothes and they speak the same language. So, culture wise you don't feel any difference, the people are nice and warm.

With the forming of various American backed *mujahideen* militarized groups to combat the Soviets during the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, from which the Taliban emerged in the 1990's, Afghanistan and Pakistan entered slowly into a period of tight orthodox control, which could be epitomized by the Taliban's rule of Afghanistan from 1996-2001. Islamic conservative-reformist militants in Afghanistan, like many of the Taliban, predominantly comprise Pashtun Sunni's who form a dominant ethnic group, but have less sway in Pakistan, which has been traditionally politically dominated by Punjabis. In fact, the control of the Punjabi ethnic group over politics and economy in Pakistan is well documented and often the source of frustration for other ethnic groups like Balochis, Sindhis and Pashtuns. Siddiqui (2012) describes this dominance as explicated in Shah (1997) in the following way:

Mehtab Ali Shah brings into light the ethnic domination of the Pakistani state by the Punjabis, causing an increase in ethnic conflicts (42).

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<sup>85</sup> See: Khan, Adeel. *Politics of identity: ethnic nationalism and the state in Pakistan*. Sage, 2005.

In this scheme of things, Shah finds the Punjabis as the primary community which has shaped the destiny of the Pakistani state. Moreover, the state, controlled by the Punjabi ethnic group has tended to deny the existence and identity of peripheral groups like the Balochis and Sindhis (Siddiqi 2012, 42).

This sentiment was echoed by one of my informants named Kami from Islamabad (though he was originally from KPK) during our phone interview. Kami mentioned to me that the Punjabi language is still widely spoken throughout the country (contrary to what some popular media sources have suggested recently):

The primary push of people here is towards the English language and then after that towards Punjabi, *and then* Urdu and Pashto and other regional languages. In all of Punjab, Islamabad and even in KPK *Punjabi is spoken the most*. All of KPK is not Pashtun, most of the people there speak *Hindko* which is *also a dialect of Punjabi*. Punjabi is being spoken the most in Pakistan in every province. But people are most impressed with English and want to learn it for status and education. But Punjabi is still a major language and is spoken most widely, though the dialects change every 25 kilometers or so.<sup>86</sup>

Further, a recent popular press article on Parhlo.com, an online Pakistani media magazine, by Muhammad Souman Elah,<sup>87</sup> describes what the author calls a “hegemony” of Punjabi control over many elements of the Pakistani nation:

What I have found common in all these shows along with entertainment (jugtain) is the Punjabi hegemony -the imposition of Punjabi culture on the non-Punjabi Pakistani nation. Believe me, even most of the non-Punjabi nation would be unaware of the meaning of the word “jugtain.” Gramsci, an Italian Marxist, was the one who first came up with the word “hegemony.” It’s a

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<sup>86</sup> Note: Saraiki, Hindko and Potohari [and some others] are dialects of Punjabi.

<sup>87</sup> Elah, Muhammad Souman. “OpEd: Punjabi Hegemony – How Punjab is All Over the Culture, Politics and Economy of Pakistan.” *Parhlo.com*, June 30, 2017. <https://www.parhlo.com/oped-punjabi-hegemony-how-punjab-is-all-over-the-culture-politics-and-economy-of-pakistan/>

word used along the lines of ‘domination’ and ‘imposition.’ The words unparalleled to these lines are ‘marginalization’ and ‘subordination.’ According to this very logic, we find two concepts that are poles apart. One that depicts the nature of the dominant group; other throws light on the grievances of the dominated group.

Alavi (2011) writes however, that because Punjabis themselves control all levels of the social strata in Pakistan, perhaps they themselves downplay notions of race and ethnicity in a sort of subliminal and hypocritical way. He writes that in regional Pakistan in politics powerful landlords and tribal leaders have “much to gain from ethnic politics of the salariat because of the lure of power in regional governments...” But that “conversely, members of a privileged ethnic group who are in control of state power to the exclusion of others, as Punjabis in Pakistan, denounce ethnicity as parochial and narrow and appeal to larger categories such as the nation of the “Brotherhood of Islam,” in the name of which they seek to delegitimize ethnic demands.” In this way, as I show in my survey responses later in this work and also in the appendix, the majority of Pakistani Punjabis I collected information from identified as Pakistani first, and Punjabi second, whereas the majority of Indian Punjabis I asked identified as Punjabi first. This relates to Alavi’s point about the dominating group downplaying issues of ethnicity when they themselves control power. In India however, as Sikh Punjabis form a very small minority, they would fit into the earlier part of Alavi’s comment, especially in having much to gain from ethnic representation and politics in light of a country, India, dominated by a massive Hindu majority.

We should note that the term “hegemony” existed long before Gramsci, although he is the one who made it popular as an analytical term in the social sciences and humanities, as well as in political discourse. Subsequently for Sikhs, recreating mutual cultural interdependence with Punjabi Muslims through solidarity can also serve to strengthen their own community, as

Punjabis in India form less than 2% of the total national population, with Sikhs at less than 1.5%, consolidated to what many Pakistanis see as a small peripheral state with little sway in the national schema.

*LEAVING FOOTPRINTS: THE WAGA BORDER – AMRITSAR, PB*

Waghe de border te, Rah puch di Lahoran de...  
Painday door peshauran de, painday door peshauran de...  
Sanu sauda ne puk da oye, Sanu sauda ne puk da oye...  
Ravi ton Chenab puch da, ki haal ai Satluj da?

*At the waga border, she asks "which path leads to Lahore?"  
The road to Peshawar in long and winding...  
This deal (partition) has left us robbed...  
The river Ravi asks the Chenab, how is my brother the Satluj?*

-Gurdas Mann "Painday Door Peshoran De."

A major emphasis of my initial fieldwork trips was to draw lines of intersection between the current cultural state of affairs in both East and West Punjab. We know that historically the region was home to a great heterogeneity of tribal and religious communities, bound together by shared languages, etymologies and traditions. Today, common threads of traditional relevance exist but are projected forth through starkly different methods of ideological and religious propagation, further elucidating the mirage that as all elements, temporal and spatial cross the Radcliffe line,<sup>88</sup> they distort and are subject to static charges, shifting the way they are perceived, like trying to listen to an FM signal from Lahore in Amritsar. Although only some 30Km away,

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<sup>88</sup> This is another name by which the national boundary between India and Pakistan is often referred to, referencing Sir Cyril Radcliffe who was commissioned by the British to design and draw this border.



meticulous measures used to be in place to phase and oscillate radio frequencies so that transmission of cultural phenomena was nullified.<sup>89</sup>

Frustrated by Indophobia and Islamophobia, there are many Punjabi language and culture revivalists advocating for a resurgence of Punjabi mutual cultural interdependence, including the “Punjabi Language Movement,” or PLM, in Pakistan.<sup>90</sup> For such actors, diaspora communities become a stage for which to play out their most touching fantasies of a bygone era – and even more importantly, to breathe new life into an inheritance that will be bequeathed to future generations. I have witnessed numerous Sanjha Punjab (“Punjab Together”) festivities, and in the West (with Canada as my primary frame of reference), isolated from the militant demarcation of the divided state, there are an abundant number of initiatives dedicated towards promoting this cultural interdependence, again transcending all level of joint social mobilization, as I mentioned earlier, from secular, to spiritual, to political activism, and even to militancy. Such enterprises are most often based on the significance of a shared Punjabi history and include twenty-four hour radio and television stations.

To further understand the nuances of this incredibly sensitive and significant relationship between East and West Punjab, I travelled to the border between Punjab Province and Punjab State at Waga in Amritsar.

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<sup>89</sup> Today it is much easier to share media transmissions – in fact we used to listen to radio from Lahore in our kitchen whenever we would stay at my aunt’s home in Barnala, PB.

<sup>90</sup> “Punjab Wants Its Mother Tongue Back,” *Pakistan Today*, February 21, 2011.  
<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2011/02/21/punjab-wants-its-mother-tongue-back/>



**Figure 6-22 Checkpoint Soldiers and Me at the Waga Border (Photo by Gurdeep Khaira – February 2011)**



**Figure 6-23 Map Pointing to the Location of the Wagah Border (Google Maps)**

At the waga border people from Pakistan's Punjab province, and India's Punjab state, as well as others from all over both countries sit on opposite flanks of the armed perimeter. There are thousands of people who come to observe the *border retreat* ceremony regularly – and there is stadium style seating on both sides. While army servicemen from either homeland patrol the boundary there are large speakers which each country has positioned to point at the audience of the opposite nation.<sup>91</sup> Cusick (2006) can allow us to understand the deeper underlying motivations that we can perhaps see in these activities:

One of the most startling aspects of musical culture in the post-Cold War United States is the systematic use of music as a weapon of war. First coming to mainstream attention in 1989, when US troops blared loud music in an effort to induce Panamanian president Manuel Norriega's surrender, the use of "acoustic bombardment" has become standard practice on the battlefields of Iraq...

Cusick (2012) also asserts that "one of the most startling aspects of musical culture in the post-Cold War United States is the systematic use of music as a weapon of war." She describes the use of music in the field of war, to torture in prisons like Guantanamo, where it is used along with sensory-deprivation and sexual humiliation to get prisoners to release information. She describes the use of "acoustic weapons" at war and the extent of their deployment particularly in the current "war on terror." Acoustic weapons are also said by the author to have been extensively used in Gaza, to disperse crowds or to get enemy combatants to expose themselves. The weapon's effect feels as if being hit by a wall and subsequently being shaken inside. The

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<sup>91</sup> See: Cusick, G. S. "Music as torture/Music as weapon." *Transcultural Musical Review*, 10 (2006)

author also gives the example of the use of music in torture: “As early as May 2003 the BBC reported that the US Army had used Metallica’s ‘Enter Sandman’ and Barney the Purple Dinosaur’s ‘I Love You’ in the interrogation of Iraqi detainees, playing the songs repeatedly at high volume inside of shipping containers.”

At the Waga border, from the Pakistani side, nationalist music is blasted towards the Indian side, and vice-versa. It is important here to note that many, if not the majority, of songs played from the Pakistani side are in the Punjabi language. Here we can see that one of the underlying motivations for this may be to arouse strong nationalist sentiment, as the DJ’s choose songs that have been specifically created by their own artists. One of my informants, Kami from Islamabad, mentioned to me during our phone interview that Punjabi music, especially from *East Punjab* is again becoming incredibly popular in Pakistan:

In KPK, Punjab and also here in Islamabad people want to express themselves with more zeal and zest than in the past. For this reason they actually listen mostly to Punjabi songs. They are listening less and less to Urdu and classical music, they prefer Punjabi music. It is louder and it depicts the realities of daily life, for this reason people prefer Punjabi music.

There is only one section of this border that is open to the public, and this is where the majority of Sikh pilgrims enter when visiting Pakistan - thousands go every year, especially around the time of the birth of Guru Nanak to visit his final resting place in Northern Pakistan. Haroon Khalid (2017), a journalist for the online magazine *Scroll.in* who has written many articles about the significance of the relationship between Sikhs and Muslims across the Punjab border, writes about this cross-border exchange that takes place between East and West Punjab several times per annum. He describes that for Sikhs “Pakistan... is not an enemy country but the

home of Guru Nanak.”<sup>92</sup> He goes on to build an argument around the idea that peace between Pakistan and India can be fostered and built around the Sikh community as a liminal group with cultural ties to both countries. This may perhaps be more evident than ever now with the opening of the *Kartarpur Corridor*. Khalid goes on to mention that this pilgrimage of Sikhs to Pakistan is very important for the national well being of the country:

Perhaps these pilgrimages are more important for Pakistan than for the Indian Sikh pilgrims. It allows the country to reclaim some of the history it had to abandon after Partition. It reminds the country that it is home to diverse religious traditions, possibly paving the way for a multi-religious society some time in the future.

The author also mentions that the Sikh community bear the unnecessary burden of international politics, as every time the situation between India and Pakistan worsens, the number of Sikh pilgrims to Pakistan reduces drastically. This article is a recent example of an on-going dialogue in Pakistani and Kashmiri media that expresses solidarity with Sikhs, whether it be in relation to the events of 1984, or to more recent socio-political issues.

Besides the checkpoint from where Sikh pilgrims enter Pakistan, and now with the open passageway at Kartarpur, the rest of the border is heavily armed and cannot be trespassed, with dire consequences for anyone caught attempting to cross over. Still, the flow of illegal drugs, narcotics and weapons is rampant along this boundary. Recall here that my music video

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<sup>92</sup> See: Khalid, Haroon. “Pakistan’s Sikh heritage could be a bridge to peace, if not bound by its hostile ties with India.” *Scroll.in* (July 7, 2017)

intervention for the song “Kashmir” spoke of this very frontier in the chorus of the composition (see photographs below):

Layo koi boota yaaro, Waga de lakeer te,  
Shan jeedee hove jaake, aj Kashmir te...

*My friends let us plant a tree of peace on the Waga border,  
It will grow into a beautiful source of shade for the Kashmiri  
people...*



**Figure 6-24 Video Still from the Music Video "Kashmir" (Directed by Sandeep Sharma – October 2017)**



**Figure 6-25 Video Still from the Music Video "Kashmir" (Directed by Sandeep Sharma – October 2017)**





**Figure 6-26 Video Still from the Music Video "Kashmir" (Directed by Sandeep Sharma – October 2017)**

Further evidence of the deeply entrenched border and military culture of the Punjab state can be seen in the following picture I took posing with a captured Pakistani tank on display in Chandigarh:



**Figure 6-27 Ashampreet Sandhu and Me Pose with a Captured Pakistani Tank on Display in Chandigarh, East Punjab (Photo by Jagjit Dadwal – February 2011)**

## 6.3 GENERATION Z AND SUFI MUSIC

*SOWING SEEDS: WORKSHOP AT GURU NANAK NATIONAL COLLEGE, DOHRA,  
LUDHIANA, PB*



**Figure 6-28 I Speak to Students at Guru Nanak National College in Dohra, East Punjab  
(Photo by Ashampreet Sandhu – October 2017)**

In Figure 6-28 I can be seen during my lecture-demonstration to students from the departments of Music, History, Religious Studies and Political Science at Guru Nanak National College in Dohra, Ludhiana. A large group of female students is seated at the other side of the room not visible in the photograph as gender segregation is common. At Guru Nanak National College in Dohra, near Ludhiana Punjab, I worked closely with not only music students but others in related disciplines as well who were working towards developing a better understanding of Punjabi culture. During this time I also met with the department head and had a lengthy meeting with her as well as the dean of the university regarding these research issues. The department head had her own views on these matters partially shaped by her experiences being from the state of Uttar Pradesh and living in Punjab. When I told her that I was a student of Regula Qureshi she



became star-struck and began to express to me how fond she was of Regula's writings pertaining to Sufism and the culture of the Pakistani Qawwals.

I also participated in a workshop with students from the university who were deep in their studies of Punjabi Sufi music. The entire workshop was made up of male students, and they performed a number of Sufi songs for me. Through this workshop I was able to gain insight into how men in general perceive the issues at hand (in contrast to Punjabi University in Patiala where the majority of students in my workshop were women). During this time one of the students, Aly, one of the program's Muslim students, also joined us to perform a number of Sufi songs – many of which dealt directly with the love stories *Heer-Ranjha*, *Mirza-Sahiban* and *Leila-Majnu*. It was interesting to see the dynamic relationship between the students and Aly. At one point, Aly actually began crying when he expressed to myself how lucky he felt to be studying in that particular program especially given the economic background of his family. In Punjab, the music programs, especially those that emphasize Sufism place a much larger emphasis on the performative elements of research. In other words, most of the students are performers, and they prioritize their technical skills as singers and musicians. Compared to most ethnomusicology programs in Canada this represents a major difference in the way programs are organized and administered.



**Figure 6-29 I Engage in a Workshop with Music Students at Guru Nanak National College (Photo by Ashampreet Sandhu – October 2017)**

In Figure 6-29 I can be seen with students as well as one of the directors of the Department of Music during our focus group. I felt as though I received very honest answers and enthusiasm from the students and faculty who gave me the impression that they looked up to me as a scholar from Canada. They genuinely demonstrated interest in my work and the desire to contribute in whatever way they could to my field-work. Aly, the student I mentioned is seated in the left of the photograph wearing the blue and white shirt. I was fortunate to document the entire workshop and engage with the students by asking them questions about the role of music in recreating a historically accurate interdependent relationship between Muslims and Sikhs, exemplified by their own relationship to Aly. I was able to avoid leading questions by focusing on their views and opinions without inundating them with cues as to how they should answer. The students were well versed in the history of Punjab and had a strong sense of understanding on matters pertaining to the current socio-political situation in the region and the importance of preserving our shared Punjabi culture in increasing political and religious

autonomy for Sikhs as an oppressed minority in India. Again, all of the songs the students performed for me dealt directly with Sufi themes, many of which included references to the historical romantic ballads of Punjab..



**Figure 6-30 I Pose with Students and Faculty in the Department of Music at Guru Nanak National College (Photo by Ashampreet Sandhu – October 2017)**

In Figure 6-30 I sit next to the Principle of Guru Nanak National College in Dohra, Ludhiana along with students and faculty from the Department of Music and Sufi Studies during our focus group session. The principal serves in the same capacity as what we would call a *Dean* in Canada. He was incredibly kind and made sure that I was able to obtain as much information as I possibly could during my time at the University. I was a guest of the institution for the course of an entire day and was welcomed as a visiting speaker and given the utmost of respect by not only the students but the principal and the department heads.



**Figure 6-31 I Engage in Discussion with Faculty at Guru Nanak National College (Photo by Ashampreet Sandhu – October 2017)**

After the lecture-demonstration, workshops and focus groups I engaged in a lengthy conversation with one of the professors in the Faculty of Arts about the current state of affairs in the region and the role of music and culture in promoting a strong mutually interdependent cultural relationship between East and West Punjab (see Figure 6-31). I brought up issues of how Sikhs could better increase their own political autonomy as an oppressed minority forming a majority by a small margin in the state of Punjab, though the historian had some disagreements with me as to how we could best understand the position of Sikhs in the national game and sense of self concept in India.

## 6.4 ECHOES OF PUNJABI SONGS BEYOND THE KHYBER-PASS: THE ESSENCE OF “SANJH”

*Kabhi deewar hilti hai, kabhi dar kaanp jaata hai  
Ali ka naam sunkar, ab bhi Khaibar kaanp jaata hai*

Sometimes the wall shudders, sometimes the door shakes  
But upon hearing the name of Ali, even the *Khyber Pass*  
trembles

-“Aly Maula” (Nusrat Fateh Aly Khan)

The majority of Sikhs that currently live in Pakistan were not predominantly involved in the *hijra* (migration) of Punjabi Sikhs from West Punjab to East Punjab in 1947, because these were the communities who made up large local populations of the frontier regions of Pakistan, with the majority of these Sikhs being ethnically Pashtun, speaking Pashto as their mother-tongue:

The exact number of Sikhs living in Pakistan is unclear. Some estimates put this at 20,000. The main centre of Sikh population is in the Frontier region. This community has become increasingly vulnerable as a result of the rise of Taliban influence in the region. The Sikh community has grown here in the past couple of decades in response to the conflict in neighbouring Afghanistan (Talbot 2010, 75).

As Talbot mentions, there have also been recent waves of migration of Afghani Pashtun Sikhs into these regions of Pakistan due to civil unrest in Afghanistan. After the independence of Pakistan, the majority of Pashtun Sikhs remained in the country in areas such as Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, and eventually climbed to high ranks in the Pakistani army, police, media, medicine and other fields. However, because of increasing control of the Taliban in the remote areas of Pakistan, many have opted to move to urban centres like Karachi or Lahore, while still holding onto their Pashto mother-tongue, as well as their Pashtun traditions:



The Pakistani Sikh population was suffering as a result of the army's engagement with the Taliban in such areas as Buner and Swat, and from the attempts by the Taliban to impose the jazia tax on Sikhs living in the Orakzai Agency. Little had been previously written about the minuscule Sikh community in Pakistan, but international opinion had been alerted to the growing number of internally displaced persons who sought refuge in such historic Sikh gurdwaras as that of Panj Sahib in Hasanabdal. This was embarrassing for the Pakistan authorities, who in the previous few years had made propaganda out of the emergence of Sikhs in the army and police. The Pakistan government had also made play of the introduction of the Sikh Marriage (Anand) Act as evidence of the state's progressive response to the religious minorities (74).

It is also worth noting that the majority of Afghan Sikhs<sup>93</sup> exhibit fluency in not only Dari and Pashto, but also often in Urdu and Hindko (which is a dialect of Punjabi spoken in KPK) as well.

These points are critical to note as I have mentioned the significance of Sanjh between Sikh and Muslim groups who make up all of areas that encompass the greater Punjab. In this way, reconciliation with Kashmiris and Pashtuns, as well as Sindhis and Balochis, as communities that comprise the diverse ethnic demographic of the historical area of Punjab, is also a significant component of this movement. This can be seen partially in the way Sikh and Pashtun, as well as Kashmiri groups engage in mutual interdependence, culturally and politically, but also in my data, which demonstrates the reach of Punjabi influence into areas like Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Kashmir and Sindh. I will continue to explore the idea of Sanjh in the context of the greater Punjab region as I move through this dissertation.

## *NOTE ON AFGHAN SIKH REFUGEES IN INDIA*

Bose (2004) In this article from 2004, the writer discusses the plight of Afghan refugees living in India, predominantly in the capital of Delhi. Although the article is dated, it represents the beginning of discussions about the issue of accepting refugees from Afghanistan in India. To this day, the situation of Sikhs in Afghanistan is in dire-straits as a once thriving community of over 250,000 people, many business owners and economically affluent families, now live in extreme poverty, having had their homes and businesses seized from them by warlords. Many refugees entered India from Afghanistan over the past decade, and I have personally befriended several families that left Afghanistan and arrived as refugees in Delhi, but who now live in Canada.

He expresses concern over the indifferent attitude of the Indian government towards the acceptance of refugees. He proclaims that a country of over 1 billion people could easily absorb a few thousand refugees, yet the attitude of central agencies remains indifferent. Bose then discusses how this discourse functions in the context of the language employed by the centre:

Even the term 'refugee' is not without controversies. In some circles, Hindu migrants from Bangladesh are called refugees, while Muslim migrants are called 'infiltrators' and illegal migrants. The United Nations steers clear of these controversies by calling 'illegal migrants' as 'undocumented migrants'

Bose goes on to describe the derelict plight of Afghan Sikhs:

The Sikhs had lost everything, their property, money, and business and there was no question of going back to Afghanistan. There were eight gurdwaras of great historical value in Kabul, out of which seven were destroyed. The one gurdwara, which was functional, had over 800 Sikhs taking shelter in it. Manohar Singh describes their sad plight - for example, there were only four toilets to take care of 800 persons in the gurdwara.

The situation over the last decade has not improved, in fact it has become much worse as Islamic fundamentalists continue to threaten the existence of minority groups (including Sikhs, Hindus and Ismailis) in the country.

*SOWING SEEDS: INTERVIEWS WITH TWO POET LAUREATES OF PAKISTAN*

Shakespeare said the poet, the lover, and the lunatic are of the same breed. As a poet I see things differently than a painter or a scientist does, who use their art differently...

-Amjad Islam Amjad

In order to delve even deeper into the idea of love, lunacy, and our shared psychological headspace, I also interviewed two of the most well-known poets from Pakistan (for the consolidated interviews, please proceed to **Appendix D**). They came to Edmonton in 2018 for a very significant *mehfil* and I was able to track them down at their hotel the following day.

Amjad Islam Amjad and Anwar Masood are two of the most cited and read contemporary poets in Pakistan, and it would be difficult to find any Pakistanis who are not familiar with their work.

The significance of our *Sanjh* can be exemplified by the following quote I obtained from Amjad Islam:

When we are together we help each other so much, we understand each other's pain.

The very well-known poet had also travelled to East Punjab and had visited the *Golden Temple*.

He had the following to say to me about his visit:

I went to the Golden Temple and met with the Sikhs, our relationship with each other, our "Sanjh" is very important, it is a very big thing. Guru Nanak himself said "one person said, the other understood, Nanak said they are both Gianis (all knowing)." It is not only in sharing thoughts and feelings, but in *listening* that we achieve true wisdom. This was the Guru's message and we should think about it.





**Figure 6-32 Amjad Islam Amjad, Anwar Masood, and Me (Unknown Photographer - 2018)**

From left to right: Nusrat Aly Akhtar, Amjad Islam Amjad, Arsh Khaira, Gurdeep Khaira, Anwar Masood

I wish to note here that I have been studying the Persian language since 2005 and along with taking coursework, over the years I have committed myself with the utmost of zeal and determination at achieving as high a level of Persian linguistic and cultural fluency as possible. As a fluent speaker of the *Dari* dialect spoken predominantly in Afghanistan, I have been able to enrich my understanding of Urdu and Punjabi (with relevance to my knowledge of *Dari*) due to the reciprocal linguistic relationship of these three languages. My knowledge of *Dari* has also created many inroads into the Afghani community, and indeed I have witnessed an incredible “Sanjh” that extends beyond the geo-physical limits of Punjab and into the *Khyber* and *Kabul* areas. The idea of our cultural Sanjh can be exemplified in the following quote from Amjad Islam:

According to determinism of history some things happen that we should not argue with. But wherever love, peace and our “sanjh” can be protected, we should not let that disappear. For

each other's sake we need to think of one another as brothers and meet each other *regularly* with love.

I would like to include here a comment by Professor Baljinder Singh from Punjab University in Chandigarh, who during my interview with him also said something very similar to me about the concept of “sanjh” (I will talk more about my work with Professor Baljinder in the next section):

You will be surprised to hear that for the last seven years I have been travelling on my *Bullet* motorcycle. I remain travelling for three months of every year. I often travel through Kashmir and I see the *Dal Lake* the *Nishat Bagh* and *Verinag* – about which *Bhai Vir Singh* has written extensively, as he has about many other places in Kashmir, all of which I have gone to see. You must know that during the time of *Maharaja Ranjit Singh* and the Sikh Empire which included all of Kashmir (as well as the Khyber Pass and Kabul), the maharaja built more monuments than even *Jahangir*. This is all “sanjh” to me. Moreover, in the history of Kashmir, no Islamic crusade was ever undertaken by outsiders to convert the inhabitants of the region to Islam (as in India). Rather, the region became Islamic primarily due to the preaching of a particular Sufi saint. Much like many Punjabis say that it was “not by the sword of Aurangzeb but by the love of *Sheikh Farid* that we became Muslim.”

A music video of mine for a song from the album *Ishq Kamaal* featured one of the most well-known music promoters in Afghanistan, Hasib Sayed. It was during the shooting of this video for the song “Shama Paiyan,” that I also spent time with arguably the most popular female singer from the country, Aryana Sayeed. To understand more about the very important “Sanjh” that Punjab shares with *Afghanistan*, please see the “Background” section of this dissertation, as well as the section on “Sufism and Sikhism.” Further, during my interview with Anwar Masood he had the following things to say when I asked him about the relationship of the Punjabi people to the *Persian* language:

I grew up reading Persian books and poetry. Often, even if I could not understand all of it, I still obtained great enjoyment from this practice. Indeed, the relationship of Persian with the Punjabi people has a history over the last thousand years. Many

Sikhs have been great scholars of Persian as well. Even the word “Punjabi” itself is a Persian word. “Panj,” and “aubi,” meaning the land of five rivers.

When I asked him about his “taluk” (relationship) with these three languages – Punjabi, Urdu and Farsi, while suggesting that I personally feel these are like three brothers of the same family who each have their own unique identity but have the same bloodline and love for each other, he had said the following:

Indeed, many things are in common between them, but some things are different. But we need to tolerate the differences. Some people eat less salt, some eat more, some eat more sweets, some eat less, but we need to tolerate these differences.

We have been together for so long, even people from other parts of the world. Indeed, even *Arabic* is very closely related to our Punjabi traditions and culture. For example, the word “Rab” is the most common word used by Sikhs to refer to God. Even the root of this is in Surah Fatiha “Allhumdulilahi rabbi ’l’ālamīn,” now tell me what word can be bigger than this word “Rab”? We say the word “Shareef,” as in *Mecca Shareef* or *Medina Shareef*, and the Sikhs say “Sahib,” as in *Nankana Sahib*, *Panja Sahib*, *Guru Granth Sahib*. You say this out of respect, remember that even this word “Sahib” is an Arabic word.

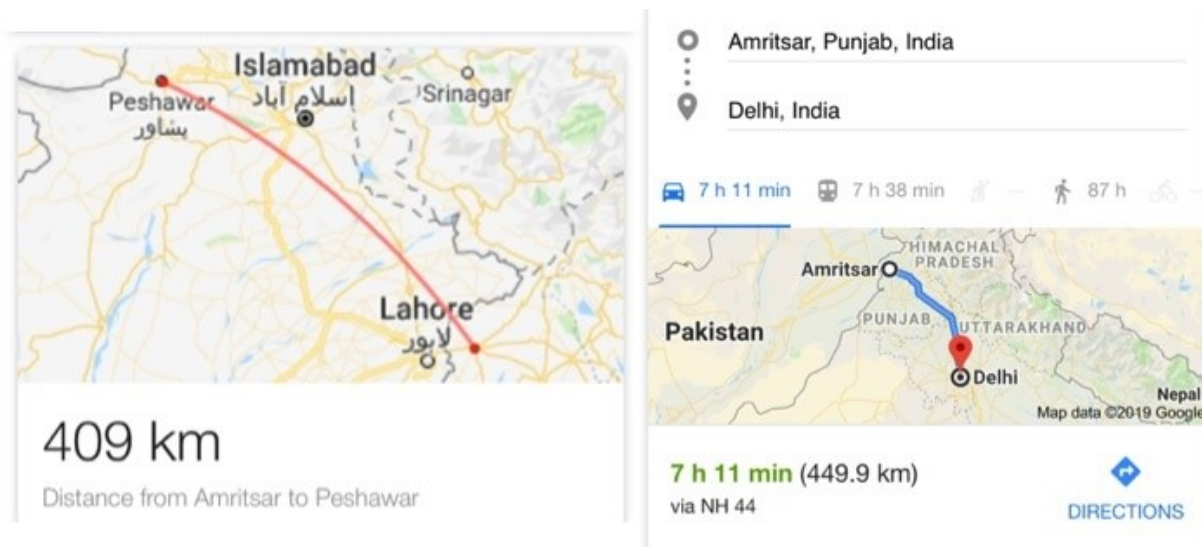


**Figure 6-33 Aryana Sayeed and Me (Photo by Saleem Sayed – Summer 2012)**



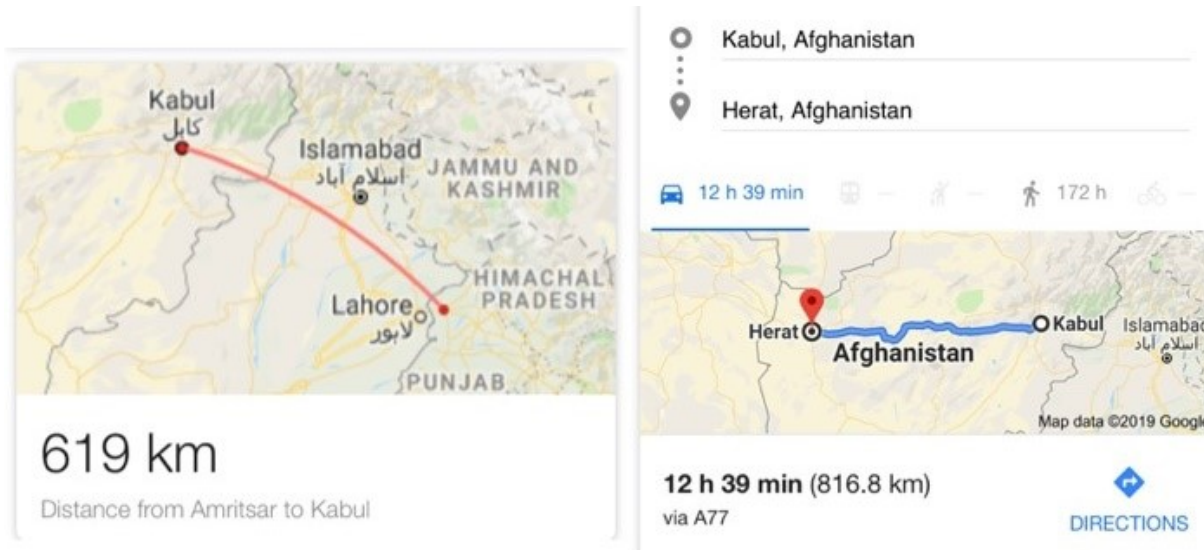
**Figure 6-34 Hasib Sayed and Me (Photo by Saleem Sayed – Summer 2012)**

To give further geo-physical evidence of the relationship between Punjab and Afghanistan, as well as the relationship that Punjab has with other parts of Western Asia (even in today's temporal context) please see the following maps for reference:

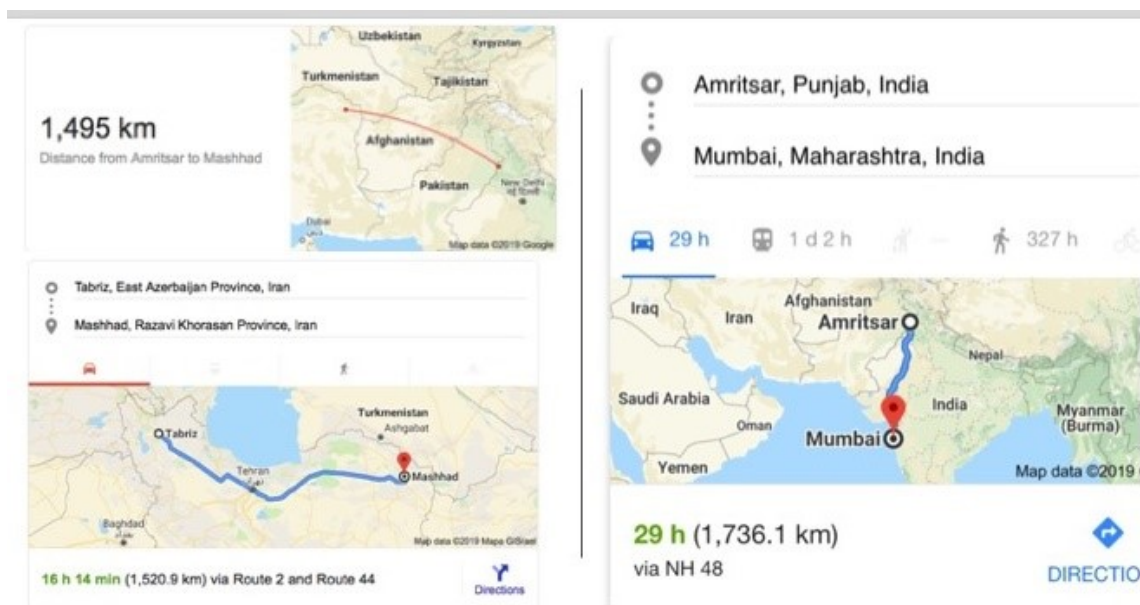


**Figure 6-35 Maps Demonstrating that Peshawar is in Closer Proximity to Amritsar Than Delhi (Google Maps)**





**Figure 6-36 Maps Demonstrating that Amritsar is in Closer Proximity to Kabul Than Herat Is (Google Maps)**



**Figure 6-37 Maps Demonstrating that Amritsar is Closer to Mashhad Than Amritsar is to Mumbai, and that Tabriz is Further from Mashhad than Amritsar is from Mashhad (Google Maps)**



**Figure 6-38 Maps Demonstrating that Amritsar is Closer to Tehran than Amritsar is to Chennai (Google Maps)**



**Figure 6-39 Maps Demonstrating that Amritsar is Closer to Baghdad than Amritsar is to Kochi in Kerala (Google Maps)**

## *SOWING SEEDS: SHAMA PAIYAN MUSIC VIDEO*

An important music video created as another applied element for this project was for the song “Shama Paiyan,” (which means “Night Has Come”) from my album *Ishq Kamaal*. Like “Allah Hoo,” this video also depicted a tragic love story, but in a more violent way indicative of the story *Mirza-Sahiban*. The video was centred around the story of a character played by myself, as the lead male protagonist, being coerced into malicious activities (for example: *dealing drugs*) by a group of individuals involved in such undertakings. I sing the song from the perspective of the female lover who patiently waits for my character, proclaiming: “night has come, and you are still nowhere to be found.” The main lyrical line “shama paiyan, tu na ayo dholna,” is a symbolic homage to another song by the same name performed by Nusrat Fateh Aly Khan during the 1980’s. My version recontextualizes the lyrics to a contemporary societal milieu that the current generation of Punjabis can relate to. The video is similar in some ways to a full-length feature film made titled “Mirza: The Untold Story” in which the actor Gippy Grewal portrays the violent and brooding *Mirza* in a contemporary remake of the historical ballad, or to Baz Luhrmann’s “Romeo and Juliet,” which was a cult classic released in the 1990’s.



**Figure 6-40 Video Still From the Song "Shama Paiyan" (Directed by Saleem Sayed - 2012)**



**Figure 6-41 Video Still From the Song "Shama Paiyan" (Directed by Saleem Sayed - 2012)**





**Figure 6-42 Video Still From the Song "Shama Paiyan" (Directed by Saleem Sayed - 2012)**

The video was very well received in both East and West Punjab as it featured a well-known model from the Pakistani community *Naomi Zaman*. It was directed by a popular *Afghan* filmmaker, Saleem Saeed, who has worked with many established artists from Afghanistan. A point I have mentioned at other places in this dissertation will be important to reiterate here, namely that I have in the course of this research attempted to demonstrate how the “Sanjh” of Punjab extends westward into places like the Khyber Pass as well as Kabul which are areas highly influenced by Punjabi culture and language, just as the “Sanjh” extends into Kashmir. Relating to this, the video featured a cameo by one of the most popular entertainment personalities in Afghanistan, *Hasib Saeed*, who is best known as the husband and manager for the world-renown *Aryana Sayed*.



**Figure 6-43 Professor Baljinder Singh from Punjab University, and Me (Photo by Ashampreet Sandhu – October 2017)**

I spoke at length about the situation in Punjab with Dr. Baljinder Singh who is currently a professor at Punjab University in Chandigarh. He has been involved with arts and culture for most of his professional career and has served as a host for several variety shows on one of the mainstream TV channels in East Punjab called *Alpha ETC Punjabi*. We talked about many of the factors involved in the way identity is conceptualized, and the role that religion, culture, spirituality, and language play in how we understand who we are as people. We discussed the role of regular engagement with Pakistani Punjab across cultural, creative, linguistic and artistic platforms as a necessary component for the advancement and preservation of Punjab's heritage traditions, and to preserve the essence of *Punjabiyyat*, which ultimately would have major positive outcomes for the social, economic and political health of the region.

After briefly mentioning his work with the television channel *Alpha ETC Punjabi*,

Professor Baljinder then went on to talk about the concept of “sanjh.” Here are examples of some of his comments:

**Professor Baljinder Singh:** One thing I noticed during all of my travels for the show is that our cultural “sanjh” is very strong. Not necessarily just between Islam and Sikhism, but in a major way the Punjabi language joins us all together. Pakistani music, literature, *jugtain* and stage shows<sup>94</sup> are very popular (so much so that almost all East Punjabi movies are derived from these stage shows). When you talk about “imagined communities”<sup>95</sup> or identities, there is a serious bureaucracy at play here. We can travel to *Bhutan* or *Nepal* without a travel permit and return at our own leisure, then why not Lahore or Pakistan?

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**Professor Baljinder Singh:** You may be surprised to hear that the most listened to Punjabi singer here is still Nusrat Fateh Aly Khan. After him, the *raga boys*, like Ghulam Aly Sahib and others of his guild. I myself have interviewed many of the West Punjabi singers who have come here, like the tabla maestro Tafu Khan Sahib – I interviewed him twice, as I have also interviewed Sheikh Muhammad Sadiq Sahib (a legendary poet of Pakistan of many of whose poems were sung by Nusrat Fateh Aly Khan). Whenever they come here they speak of the importance of language and culture and reiterate that we were never divided. Whenever it comes to politics however, they always stop themselves and do not say much. But still the message from all West Punjabis is that Punjab and *Punjabiya* are very much alive.

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**Arshdeep Khaira:** So in terms of recent trends in contemporary Punjabi music, are these increasing or decreasing our “sanjh”?

**Professor Baljinder Singh:** There are a few factors at play here. There are serious songs like those of Nusrat that are being covered, or those of Ghulam Aly or Muhammad Rafi, then on the other side there is the current trends in vulgar and violent music that many people are listening to here – this later variety does not have anything to do with our “sanjh.” There are still many modern songs though that are very important, for example the one that says “the material for my dress is from Karachi, or my surma (mascara) is from Lahore, or my shoes are from Kasoor.”

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<sup>94</sup> Here Professor Baljinder Singh is referring to the *very* popular Pakistani stage shows which are completely presented in the Punjabi language. They are so popular that there are TV channels devoted to airing these shows (and many of these channels broadcast in East Punjab as well). During my trips to Punjab I would often watch these channels for extended periods of time.

<sup>95</sup> See: Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. Verso books, 2006.

While Professor Singh here mentions that vulgar music does not create Sanjh, it is worth noting that several East Punjabi artists that sing what would be considered this type of music are incredibly popular in Pakistan, as are artists from Pakistan of this variety in East Punjab.

Perhaps in this context we might say that vulgar Punjabi music does not necessarily create Sanjh in the way we would typically understand the concept, but this type of music still contributes immensely to a form of unity between Punjabis.

I want to note here some details of the East Punjabi songs that Professor Baljinder Singh is referring to. One is “Lahore – by Gippy Grewal,” see some of the lyrics here:

Ho nakhra ae Lahore da  
Main aashiq teri tor da  
Chandigarh vich charcha ae  
Billo teri tor da  
*Your attitude is from Lahore*  
*I love the way you walk*  
*In Chandigarh everyone talks about*  
*The way the girl with the green eyes walks*

The second song he mentioned is “Jutti Kasuri – by Harshdeep Kaur”:

Juti kasuri, paeri na poori  
Hai rabba ve saahnu turna peya.  
Jina rahaan di maen saarna jaana  
Ohni raaheen ve sanu murna peya  
  
*In my beautiful shoes from Kasur, that fit my feet rather tightly*  
*Oh my Lord, I had to walk so far!*  
*The paths that I did not wish to take again*  
*Upon those paths I had to return*

In this song, Harshdeep Kaur sings about her shoes from the city of Kasur, just south of Lahore in Pakistan’s Punjab province. The song is generally about love and heartbreak, however the thematic aesthetic represents traditional Punjabi culture wherein the proximities between places like Amritsar and Lahore could once allow people to have breakfast in Amritsar, go shopping in Lahore, and return to Amritsar by lunch time.

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**Professor Baljinder Singh:** When we talk about these issues our “sanjh” becomes very deep. Whether we are talking about *Heer* from Jhang-Siyal, or *Ranjha* from Takhat-Hazara, or our rivers and our waters, as we used to say anyone who drank waters from the *Chenab* river would sing songs about love.

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It is important for me to mention here a song by the very popular Sufi singer Satinder Sirtaj who holds a PhD in music from Punjab University in Chandigarh. Though he has performed many songs that exemplify the concept of “sanjh,” the song “Hazare Wala Munda,” or “The Boy from Hazara” makes a particularly poignant statement insisting that the love of Heer-Ranjha still exists today and is reborn in every subsequent generation. In the video he shows pre-partition Punjab and the love story of a girl *Noor* from Jhang-Siyal (where Heer was from), and a boy *Sahib* who is from Takhat-Hazara (where *Ranjha* was from).

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**Professor Baljinder Singh:** Even in Bollywood they are referencing our Punjabi culture when they make references to Pakistan.

Here Professor Singh began to sing some lyrics from a very popular recent Bollywood song, “Ranjhan Da Yaar Bulleya” from *Ai Dil Hai Moshkel*, a very famous blockbuster film - the lyrics go:

Ranjhan de yaar bulleya  
Sun le pukaar bulleya  
Tu hi toh yaar bulleya  
murshid mera (murshid mera)

*Oh friend of Ranjha, Bulleh Shah*  
*Listen to my cry, Bulleh Shah*  
*You are my only friend, Bulleh Shah*  
*You are my “murshid” (teacher)*

Tera mukaam kamleya  
Sarhad ke paar bulleya  
Parvardigar bulleya  
Hafiz tera (murshid mera)

*Your destination, oh crazy one  
Is across the border, Bulleh Shah  
You take care of us, Bulleh Shah  
You are my guardian and my guide*

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**Professor Baljinder Singh:** And the references to our Punjabi culture in Bollywood songs are done in *very* popular songs, not just ordinary ones. These songs express the beauty of Punjabi culture and especially our “sanjh” with West Punjab. Indeed, even the songs of artists like Rabbi Shergill and Daler Mehndi in the same Sufi context are very popular. The two things we can achieve from reviving Sufi culture are an increase in our “sanjh,” and an increase in peace and solidarity.

For a full transcription of the interview, see **Appendix G**.

## 6.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter I delved deeper into the territorial realities that encompass the “greater” Punjab region, including issues surrounding contemporary boundaries and linguistic geo-physical influence zones. I further explored the concept of “sanjh” in the context of Punjab and Kashmir, but also with Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Eastern Afghanistan. I demonstrated how the citizens of this segmented area (one that was historically unified through the open movement and migration of people, language, culture, music and customs) envision the concept of “sanjh” and their relationship to each other especially in the setting of art and music.

In the next chapter I will continue to build on this perspective, digging deeper into issues of racial, tribal and social categorization in Punjab. I will demonstrate how mutual interdependence between Sikhs and Muslims now in the context of the historical vernacular and folk stories of the region (that have their origin in the local variant of Sufism) by way of their musical performance, dramatic re-enactment and recitation, can elicit further boons of progression in the uplifting and empowering of Punjabi women, as well as minority tribal and racial groups.



## 7 THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LOVE STORIES OF PUNJAB TO THE SUFI REVIVAL AND THEIR MAJOR IMPACT ON RECONCILIATION BETWEEN SIKHS AND MUSLIMS



**Figure 7-1 Photograph of the Exterior of the Leila Majnoon Mazar, Anupgarh, Rajasthan  
(Photo by Arsh Khaira – Fall 2014)**

I pass by these walls, the walls of Leila  
And I kiss this wall and that wall...  
It's not Love of the walls that has enraptured my heart  
But of the One who dwells within them...

- "Leila and Majnu" Nizami Ganjavi (1141-1209)





**Figure 7-2 Munni Begum and Me. Most of her songs deal with divine love from a Sufi conceptual point of view. (Photo by Gurpreet Khaira - 2012)**

It's a warning story (*Mirza-Sahiban*). This way, I don't think that was love. The way Leila and Majnu or Heer Ranjha loved each other, their love was kind of "true love," because they did not disobey or shame their parents... they did not run away. According to me, when people talk about true love and say they cannot live without that person... I think love gives you the strength to live... People should not try the wrong methods. They should care about society, and their parents, and not do things that even society does not approve of...

-Anonymous Sikh Female Informant

The Sufi love stories of Punjab continue to be incredibly popular amongst East and West Punjabis, as they are performed in contemporary musical remakes and retold in modern Punjabi cinema. As most of these stories have their origins amongst the Muslims of Punjab, and they take place in regions now contained within Pakistan's Punjab province, their popularity in East Punjab has implications for reconciliation between Sikhs and Muslims. In this section I will demonstrate why these stories are important to the movement for recreating cultural

interdependence between Sikhs from East Punjab and Muslims from Pakistan, and how they continue to inspire people of all generations from these communities, creating a shared psychological headspace, in-line with Benedict Anderson’s concept of “imagined communities.”

## 7.1 BACKGROUND TO THE LOVE STORIES

Kayi Sassiyan thallan vich rulliyan,  
Kayi Raanjhey Jogi hoye...

*There have been many Sassi's buried in the sand,  
And many Ranjha's have become lonely mystics...*

-“Rabba Sacheya” (Atif Aslam)

Punjab has seen a great history of folk narrative traditions, epitomized by the work of Waris Shah’s *Heer*, and through the course of Punjabi musical history these narratives have been eternalized by singers including Alim Lohar, Shaukat Ali, Gurdas Maan and others. The importance of these stories to the greater Punjabi milieu is apparent in the tenacity they have shown throughout the course of increasing modernization. This is evident in the creation of contemporary films like *Mirza- The Untold Story* (an East Punjabi film featuring predominantly Sikh actors), as well as other films that feature these traditional tales shot in the Punjab and abroad.

The legend of Leila-Majnu is of great importance to the Sufi traditions of Punjab, as are Shiri-Farhad, Heer-Ranjha and Mirza-Sahiban. These stories are also a part of the vernacular traditions of much of the Islamic world. They are often tragic, with lovers who yearn to be together in spite of familial strife, based often on tribalism and societal confounds. They also usually incorporate characters whose love is strictly forbidden due to class, caste or religious

differences. The great *paradox* then is that while these stories are deeply important to the overall aesthetic of Punjabi Sufism, with both male and female Muslims and Sikhs reading, exploring, and being made intensely emotional over them, most Punjabi families are very much afraid that a Leila or Shiri would be born into their own home.

The fact that the participants in these tragic love stories follow their own desires, often stating that it is outside of their own will of which they fall in love, and are subject to an almost unbearable madness (Majnun means ill or disturbed, a name given to Qais because of his love for Leila), and the fact that these stories are so revered, shows the importance of love as an institution itself in Punjabi society. Indeed, these stories often represent an escape by their overshadowing of the Islamic fundamentalism that aims to do away with many cultural features of regional societies - consider for example the beautiful dress customs of Islamic women in different regions, often discarded today in place of the niqab.

The tragic nature of many of these stories may also serve to instill fear in the hearts of young women from following their whims and desires in love. For instance, the fact that Mirza is killed by the brothers of Sahiban shows the intensely tribal nature of Punjabi Islamic culture – though it is important to note that there is no single Islamic culture, and Islam could be argued to be officially anti-tribal, but in this context I refer to the way the tradition was and continues to be understood for the majority of Punjabis. At the same time, the intense love between figures like Shiri and Farhad show the great power in following one's heart, in that for the sake of love one can traverse hot deserts and forsake all. This coupled with the intense Sufi feature of seeing God manifest in the one you love also embellishes these traditions.

The Punjabi Sufi poet Bulleh Shah writes:

Tere Ishq nachaiyaan kar key thaiyaa thaiyaa...  
*Your love has made me dance like mad...*

Tere Ishq ne dera mere andar keeta,  
Bhar ke zeher payala main taan aape peeta,  
Jhabde wahudi tabiba nahin te main mar gaiyaan,  
Tere Ishq nachaiyaan kar key thaiyaa thaiyaa.

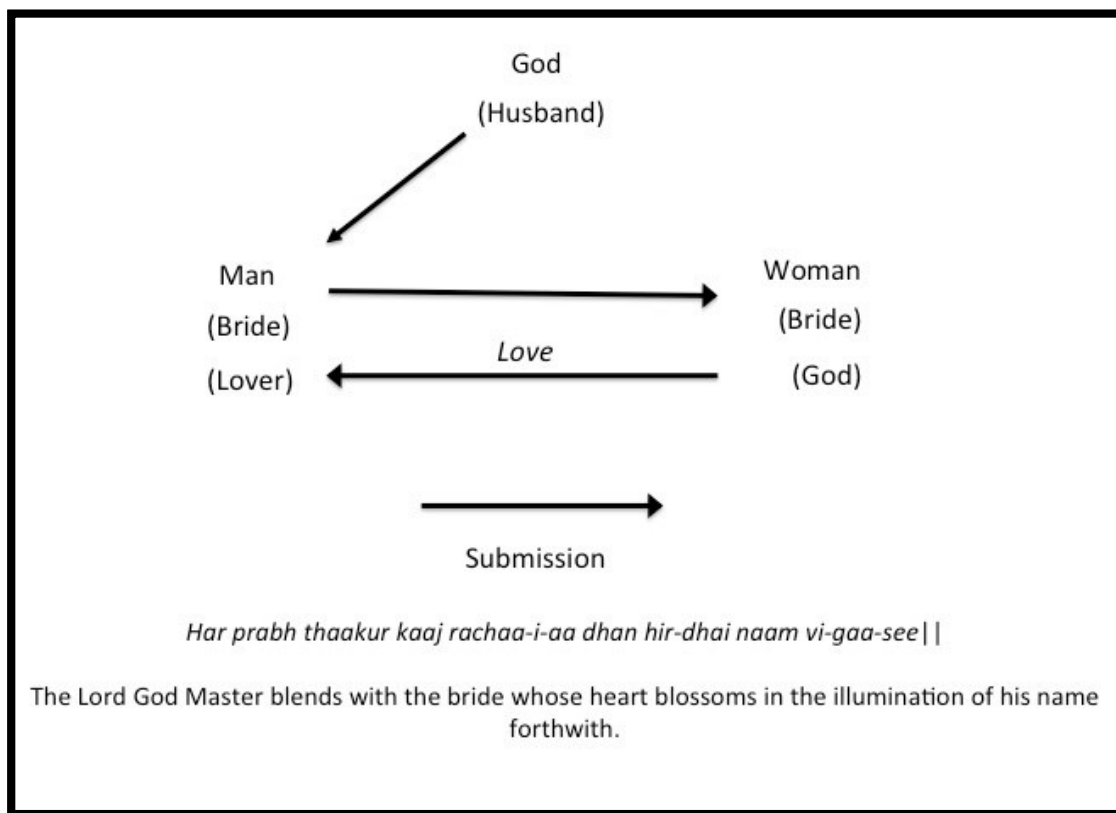
*Falling in love with you was like taking a sip of poison,  
Come my healer, forsaken, I am sad,  
Your love has made me dance like mad...*

In a poem that has been performed musically by several of the most well-known artists in Punjab, including Nusrat Fateh Aly Khan and Abida Parveen, to the extent where the majority of Punjabis would instantly recognize the lyrics and composition, Bulleh Shah equates his love for his teacher Shah Inayat with his love for Allah. This has become a predominant feature of the faith practices of Punjabi Muslims, however in line with many current trends in Islamic civil society, such stories have lost importance in light of moves towards fundamentalism. This poem also reiterates the point I am making in terms of the vernacular traditions of Islamic classical cultural society, and the veracity of these messages in light of current trends that place less importance on these features of culture.

In our contemporary social context, the stories of enduring love and sacrifice of lovers like Heer-Ranjha, Mirza-Sahiban, and Leila-Majnu serve as a basis for unity as they transcend religion and unite those who profess various faiths into a common spiritual context (see the section in this dissertation: *The Identity Behind the Music*). Though the very essence of these tragic love stories is interwoven through with a Sufi message that has at its very root the principal doctrine of Islam and the submission of the believer to the will of God, at the same time, they offer themes that transcend religious conservatism. These stories show the unfaltering

sacrifices of lovers immersed and intoxicated by love, and the unmatched zeal they have for their creator God, of whose reflection they see manifest in their beloved.

The love stories show continuity with the Murshid/Moureed tradition in Sufism (or the teacher and the disciple), as with Shah Inayat and Bulleh Shah / Waris Shah, or Faridudin Ganjshakar and Nizamudin Auliya, or *Shams* and *Rumi*, and also based on the following diagrammatic depiction of this relationship.



**Figure 7-3 Diagram Depicting Relationship Between Sufi and God, Mourshad and Moureed, Husband and Wife (Arsh Khaira)**

What we see is that through the veil of Sufi thought, the lover represents the entity worthiest of worship, as they manifest the divine light of God through their radiance. This is especially important when we consider the relationship of lovers like Leila and Majnu, particularly when we consider the fact that Leila was not said to be exceedingly beautiful, and because of her dark

complexion, which in a classical Persianized context would not represent a feature associated with beauty, many would accuse Qais of being mad, which was one reason why he came to be known as Majnu. We should also consider this relationship in light of the Sufi's connection to God, and himself as bound in matrimony to the creator by way of his submissive feminine form. In the diagram, the scripture reference is from the Sikh holy book, the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, and is used in the greater context of this research to demonstrate further resonances between Sufism and Sikhism. In this way we can see that the romantic folk ballads of the Punjab are indicative of a more liberal spiritual culture that pervades the region, giving way to more progressive forms of both Islam and Sikhism.

Exploring again the connection as outlined in the diagram, we see in this dynamic relationship that the Sufi comes toward God in his submissive form. The Sufi mystic declares that he is above all the wife of the creator Lord, and indeed Sufis like Bulleh Shah, Shah Inayat and Waris Shah, saw themselves in most ways as the feminine form manifest, especially in their poetic verses and in their relationship to God. While it can be argued that this embodiment of the feminine form was strictly metaphorical, as in coming unto the creator God as his submissive bride, in Punjab in particular, the Sufis would often manifest the *metaphorical* in the *physical*.

When Bulleh Shah says:

Kanjari Baniyaan Meri Izzat Na Ghat Di  
Mainu Nach Ke Yaar Manaawan De

*By dancing like a prostitute, I do not lose self-respect,  
Let me dance for the sake of my beloved.*

In this way, by tying the *chanjar*, or “dancing bells,” to his feet, the feminine form was actually outwardly expressed by the Sufi. Most, if not all of the Sufi music of Punjab throughout the 80's and 90's, and currently as well, was and is centralized around these themes. Many of the poems

of Bulleh Shah and Waris Shah about dancing for the “beloved,” which have been performed countless times and made very popular by the most admired singers in the region, were actually poems about the *moureed* dancing for the *murshid*, or Bulleh and Waris Shah dancing for Shah Inayat. Indeed, even Bulleh Shah would compare himself to Waris Shah’s *Ranjha*, the lover of *Heer*, in his own love for Shah Inayat:

*Tere jeha meinu hor na koi*  
*Doondan jungle bela roee*  
*Doondan ta mei sara jahan ve*  
*Verhe ah varh mere*  
There is no one else like you for me  
I have searched all the jungles and forests  
I could search the whole world  
Come to my abode

*Loghan de panne mei chak-majhiyan da*  
*Ranjha ta loghan vich kahee da*  
*Sadda tu deen iman ve*  
*Verhe ah varh mere*  
People think I am a lowly cow-herder  
They speak of me like Ranjha  
You alone are my worship  
Come to my abode

*Ma-pe chod lagi lad tere*  
*Shah Inayat Sayan mere*  
*Laiyan dee lajpal ve*  
*Verhe ah varh mere*  
I have left my parents and been betrothed to you  
Shah Inayat, my master  
I am forever a sacrifice unto you  
Come to my abode

It is this same relationship that the Sufi sees as manifest in his love for his earthly beloved, who in the case of many of the Sufis of the Punjab, like Bulleh Shah and Nizamuddin Auliya, was manifest in their sage or teacher - Shah Inayat and Faridudin Ganjshakar respectively. In a Punjabi context, the Sufi sees himself as submissive to his murshid, who

essentially is a manifestation of God in earthly form. In the case of the romantic vernacular folk traditions, I argue that it is the same paradigm presented herein, especially in terms of the male lover seeing the manifestation of the divine light of God in the female. Again, as we correspond this to the diagram shown, this presents an interesting dichotomy through the veil of Sufi Islam. If we harken this allusion through the case of Qais and Leila, we see that while Qais, who was known to be a very devout Muslim, is firstly obedient and submissive to the will of the creator God, in that he is essentially a manifestation of the feminine form before Him, or the wife of the Lord. Then, he also sees the manifestation of the divine light of God in his Leila. In this way he becomes submissive to the will of Leila as she represents God manifest for him. But if he is only submissive to the creator God by way of his feminine form manifest, then in what way do we interpret the relationship of Leila toward him?

It seems evident that herein lies the greatest reciprocity of unabashed love unto one another where the crux example is laid for couples under allegiance to Islam. The groom is submissive to God, but only because it is understood that the wife is to be submissive to the groom, here is the inequality, but in the case of Qais and Leila, or Mirza and Sahiban, the bride becomes equal to God. Mirza is not only submissive to God, but also unto Sahiban as she represents the divine essence for him. This marks the God-Like reciprocal nature of undying love, which may be one key reason why these stories are so important, and why these lovers are seen in the Punjab as equal to Saints worthier of veneration.

This is where we begin to see the importance of these folk ballads in the greater context of increasing orthodoxy in the region. The women in these ballads are given status equal to God indeed, but then the manifestation of the feminine form by the male with regard to his



relationship to the sovereign Lord balances out the equation in that both the bride and groom become equal before Him (God).

## 7.2 SONG FOR SAHIBAN: PEOPLE OF ALL GENERATIONS CONTINUE TO BE INSPIRED BY PUNJAB’S LOVE STORIES – THIS CONTRIBUTES TO RECONCILIATION

### *SOWING SEEDS: “SAHIBAN” CASE STUDIES AND INTERVIEWS*

In this section I will demonstrate through interviews I conducted with male and female informants of various ages from East Punjab, as well as through information I collected from Pakistani informants during my interviews and online surveys, that the Sufi love stories of Punjab continue to be highly influential narratives that still shape to some extent the way society is structured in East and West Punjab. This is especially with regard to what are considered traditional values and norms amongst both Sikhs and Muslims. I will show that because these stories are so influential, and because they form a critical component of Sufi spirituality in Punjab, their ongoing relevance in today’s context is a major contributor to creating a shared psychological, social and familial headspace for both communities. The primary way these stories are heard and understood is through musical performance. The most well-known artists from Pakistan and East Punjab have performed songs that narrate sometimes a portion of one of the tales, or the entirety of a story, or they will thematically incorporate imagery from a number of the love stories. In our contemporary context, artists, musicians and film-makers, continue to re-interpret these stories to make them more interesting to younger generations.

To understand the significance of these stories, I asked my informants to tell me how they understand the primary female protagonists, paying special attention to Sahiba - as hers is the story of the greatest defeat and bloodshed (of her and her lover at the hands of her brothers). I

developed much insight into whether these female protagonists serve as exemplary role models, in terms of the message of sacrificing all for the sake of love, and elevating the status of the beloved to the apex of divinity manifest, as in the Sufi teachings of seeing the divine light of the creator God reflected in the face of the beloved, or conversely if they serve as a warning to the dangers of breaking traditional familial and cultural bonds. All of my subjects were familiar with the stories and had very interesting things to say about their perspectives on this matter. Note, that I have maintained the anonymity of my participants as per their requests. For the complete transcriptions, see: **Appendix F**.

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The Greater Punjab is a region of the world where the value of the girl-child is still diminished, and families are known to celebrate only the birth of a son, and where unwanted infant girls are still buried alive. In East Punjab, while women have more freedom (compared to West Punjab), in the tribal areas they are still not looked to as equal to their male counterparts, and forced marriages are still common. At the same time, the caste system of the region is still rampant. The depth of this system can be seen in the following quote from one of my older male informants regarding the idea of *caste* in *Mirza-Sahiban*:

Sahiban was from a typical Jatt family from a village of Punjab, and she was raised up from a typical Jatt parents' point of view. Because at that time and still now, Punjabi culture was and is a conservative culture. In this conservative culture, parents and community expect from a woman to be a subservient and obeying daughter of her parents. She is supposed to follow the tradition, which in a conservative Punjabi Jatt family, a daughter must accept the suitable match chosen for her by her parents. Sahiban violated the traditional and cultural values of a traditional Punjabi family. She fell in love, which is natural, but, by custom and tradition, she violated, and in a way *rebelled*, against the Punjabi conservative traditions. In this way, she cannot be a role model for traditional Punjabi families' girls.

What we need to understand, is that unlike the *Hindu* caste system, the Sikh “caste” system is not actually a caste system at all, but rather a tribal system where different ethnic groups have proliferated mainly amongst their own groups for hundreds of years (*in-group endogamy*). While many have come to equate the traditional occupations of these “castes” as being indicative of just that, in actuality, these are different ethnic groups (see: Rose 1919). In Sikhism, the principle is that there is no caste system, and indeed this is actually very true, if we consider a caste system as representing a hierarchical division of groups. There was to be complete equality amongst the different *tribes* of the Sikh faith. Even in historical Sikhism, the different tribal groups would join together in warfare, or through marriages and allegiances. The quest to maintain tribal and ethnic purity does not necessarily immediately allude to superiority/inferiority paradigms. This is because Jatt’s are actually ethnically different than those of the Khatri tribe, as are the *Ramgharias* from the *Rajputs*. These differences have been strengthened over time through high rates of in-group endogamy, but over time, the word Jatt itself became synonymous with *farmer*, and the *Ramgharias* or *Tarkhans* with *carpenter*, leading many to believe these were “farmer” or “carpenter” castes. Indeed, when looking at works like Rose’s (1919) *A Glossary of the Castes and Tribes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province*, we learn much more about this matter. In an Islamic context, Wadud (2003) for example also calls for respecting Muslims’ diverse cultural heritages and not assuming that Arabs alone represent Islam. We can also see the significance of this ethnic and tribal classification system in the following insight I gleaned from one of my informants, though it is important to note that this is a laypersons point of view and therefore cannot be understood as the demonstration of a historical fact:

(Mirza-Sahiban) is a warning. Warning in the sense that Punjabi families, especially Jatt families, during those days and now, whether it is a Punjabi Jatt family in East Punjab or West Punjab, they want to choose a husband for their daughters who is family oriented and who has a guarantee that he would be a good husband to provide the living situations for their daughter and financially he is OK, or his family is OK. The families look into the situation that when daughters are rebelling against their parent's decision, it becomes a warning not an inspiration. To run away means the violation of family values... and Punjabi families don't like that because they are still under the old values and traditions.

Initially there was no inequality between these different tribes, and they all joined together under the Sikh banner in warfare and allegiances. Today, the Jatt tribes have proliferated and come to dominate in most spheres (political and economical) in both East and West Punjab. This is one reason why many argue there is inequality amongst the Sikh "castes" in Punjab. The same is true of Pakistani Punjab, where Jatts form a powerful majority. This is very similar to the Pashtun/Hazara/Tajik/Uzbek/Turkmen paradox in Afghanistan. As Pashtuns have their own unique culture apart from the other tribes of the region, they have come to dominate in most affairs, although in Afghanistan, Pashtun is not a "caste." It is only because of Indian Dharmic philosophical influences, that in East Punjab the various Sikh tribes have come to be known as "castes." Essentially, the Sikh "caste system," which is actually a ethnic/tribal system, does not even fit into the framework of the Hindu Brahmin/Kshatriya/Vaish/Shudrah structure, but has been appropriated as a caste system in the greater regional context of Hindu India nonetheless. Tribal autonomy, self-determination and purity were never contested issues amongst the historical Sikhs at and shortly after the time of Guru Gobind Singh, as inequality was not a necessary by-product of this, and this can be seen in the organization of *Misl's* or "military units" by tribal lineage under the direction of Baba Deep Singh's *fauj* or "army."

It is worthwhile to note that the same paradigm exists in the Quran:

O you who have believed, let not a people ridicule [another] people; perhaps they may be better than them; nor let women ridicule [other] women; perhaps they may be better than them. And do not insult one another and do not call each other by [offensive] nicknames. Wretched is the name of disobedience after [one's] faith. And whoever does not repent - then it is those who are the wrongdoers.

O you who have believed, avoid much [negative] assumption. Indeed, some assumption is sin. And do not spy or backbite each other. Would one of you like to eat the flesh of his brother when dead? You would detest it. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is Accepting of repentance and Merciful.

O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted.

-Quran 49:11-13

Amina Wadud is one of the principal researchers of race and ethnicity in an American Islamic context, as seen best in her work *Progressive Muslims* (2003). She suggests that while at the same time feeling somewhat alienated from *immigrant* Muslims, many African-Americans consider their plight in the greater context of American history, and couple their long drawn out pasts in the country with their Islamic ancestries. Acknowledging that Islam has been in their regions of origin in Africa since the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and that they are in many ways the initial progenitors of the religion in America, Wadud asserts that they continue to be mistreated in Muslim circles, or at least, misunderstood. She argues that African American Muslims are often subject to immigrant Muslims, or native speakers of Arabic, stereotyping them or engaging in concerted efforts to *educate* them in matters of their own *deen*. The history of African American Islam is interesting in its account. Many of the people taken into slavery from Africa were

Muslims, and it is important to note that none of them wanted to be enslaved and taken to America. Later, they did not "abandon" their Muslim identity shortly after the abolishment of slavery—but were forced to become Christians while living in slavery.

Wadud argues much in favor of the hyphenated identity. She argues that the Quran itself speaks of the beauty that is so apparent in the differences between the various nations and tribes of the earth. It is written in the Quran, that if God did not want these subtle character differences between us, He would not have made them so, or as Wadud puts it: "Since the Quran recognizes these aspects of identity, they are significant to human beings' social purpose and well-being" (274). In this way, she seems to argue in favor of the cultural mosaic that makes up the religion of Islam. She also recognizes that such differences do not connote notions of superiority or inferiority amongst the nations and tribes, and if indeed such notions do exist, they are a lesser fallible creation of our own doing. This is indeed the very same ethnic paradigm that exists in the smaller microcosm of the Punjab, where various tribal groups have lived for centuries, uniting under a common cause in plights of warfare.

Nonetheless, the tribal system of the greater Punjab, which I see is analogous to the concept of nation and tribe in Islam, and the greater superiority/inferiority paradigm (the "lesser fallible creation of our own doing") is another reason that many young women are seemingly oppressed in the region. Though, similar to the way the *niqab* and *hijab* are understood by many Muslim women, not as formative of *oppression* but rather as an external manifestation of their own faith and values, in the same way many Punjabi women very much value the honor system of traditional family structure as can be seen in the following quote from one of my female informants (age 30):

I feel that girls should respect the honor and dignity of their parents in society and that if you like somebody you should talk about it with your family rather than revolting and taking such an extreme step, like running away with a person, that's not the solution. Nowadays, even with increases in education, in India we are still bothered by what society will think of us... and if the kids bring dishonor to the family, that is wrong. If you like someone, you should talk to your parents about it, rather than taking such an extreme step.

In Punjab today if a woman wants to marry outside of her tribe she will likely see criticism (to varying degrees) from her family. This is true in both sides of Punjab (East and West), as well as amongst these communities in the diaspora.<sup>96</sup> Even still, it can be argued that the poetry of the Sufis and the romantic ballads of the region argue against marrying only based on tribe, as many of these love stories incorporate romances that cross societal divides. While *Mirza and Sahiban* are both Jatt, and *Heer and Ranjha* also belong to the same Jatt tribe, it is true however that Heer's family believes Ranjha to be a lowly cow-herder, when in actuality he comes from a rich family, but this remains one principal reason why Heer's family does not condone her love with Ranjha. Indeed, even today, when couples marry against their parents will, they are quickly labeled as modern-day equivalents of the historical lovers. The intensity of these disputes is not to be ignored, as honor killings are still common amongst both the Sikh and Muslim communities of the Punjab.<sup>97</sup> The way this is understood in the context of *Mirza-Sahiban* can be

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<sup>96</sup> See: Zaidi, Arshia U., and Muhammad Shuraydi. "Perceptions of arranged marriages by young Pakistani Muslim women living in a Western society." *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 33, no. 4 (2002): 495-514.

<sup>97</sup> See: Chesler, Phyllis. "Worldwide Trends in Honor Killings." *Middle East Quarterly* (Spring 2010): 3-11.

seen in the following quote from one of my older female case study subjects:

I don't know the whole story, but I think her parents should have listened to her. But in those times, and even today, such drastic measures should not be taken. She was very bold, but also yes, if she was going to do what she did... she took drastic steps, running away with Mirza without her parents' knowledge. If she had taken that step she should not have broken or hidden his arrows... she essentially became the reason for his death. If she hadn't done that, neither Mirza, Sahiban or any of her brothers would have died.

The tribal paradigm is a predominant motif in these stories:

Karam sharaa de dharam batawan, sangal pawan perin.  
Zaat mazhab eh ishaq na puchda, ishaq shara da vari.

Their time-worn norms are seldom right,  
With these they chain my feet so tight.  
My love cares not for caste or creed,  
To the rituals faith I pay no heed.

-Bulleh Shah

In this context we can clearly see that the romantic folk ballads have a great figurative and symbolic ability to influence the primary derivative thought patterns of the region, while being an inseparable component of the local variant of Sufism – contributing to a shared spirituality that dictates the same cultural and traditional norms for Muslims and Sikhs across the Punjab border. Perhaps though today it is mainstream media, Bollywood films and Western momentum, that are eliciting the greatest change in society. In Pakistan, movements are towards ultra-conservatism, and similar to China's cultural revolution, traditional heirlooms of Pakistan are disappearing in place of forms of dress, language, religion and customs more in line with the Islamic Middle East, particularly proliferated by Saudi backed theological infrastructures

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(Wahhabism). Yet the Sufi love stories still continue to be important hallmarks of traditional Pakistani Punjabi culture. Consider that my survey respondent M. Ghani, aged seventy from Sindh, Pakistan answered the question “Heer Ranjah and Mirza Sahiba are Punjabi folk-tales that have emotional significance for me,” with a score of 8/10, similarly, Zamir Hussain Khan, aged fifty, from Punjab, Pakistan, answered the same question with a 10/10. Karim Gillani from Sindh answered with a 9/10, and Nusrat Akhtar from Punjab answered with an 8/10. Jamal from Punjab also gave a score of 8/10, and Haider, a twenty-two year old from Punjab gave a score of 10/10. Ahmed from Punjab also gave 10/10, Mahroz Shaid from Punjab gave 9/10, Inam Elahi from Islamabad answered with 10/10, Muhammad Safder answered with 9/10. One of my female informants from Kashmir, Pakistan, Ayesha, aged eighteen, also answered this question with a score of 10/10. Ayesha similarly answered that preserving Punjabi culture is very important (8/10), and that she finds Bulleh Shah and Sheikh Farid very inspiring (9/10). She also answered with a 10/10 on her love for Sufi poetry, and on her desire to travel to East Punjab. Further, all of these informants also emphasized that a mutual culturally interdependent relationship between East and West Punjab is not just a desire they have, but a felt necessity.

In East Punjab, cultural commodities are disappearing in place of ultra-liberal mind sets, as can be seen in the following quote from one of my female informants (age 30), keep in mind that the story itself has its origin amongst the Muslims of Pakistan, and that this is a Sikh woman speaking:

Well, I think today women are more practical, they just don't fall in love right away, not like a Mirza-Sahiban or Heer-Ranjha type of love, that type of love doesn't exist anymore. Most women go for a practical way of life, seeing if the person is established... will he be able to afford her living? Or, along those lines... then they go ahead and make the decision accordingly, at least most of the women.

Also, see the following quote from another female informant (age 35), also Sikh:

With respect to these tales, it's an altogether changed scenario now. There's not much commitment... we don't live there anymore, that's what we hear. Relationships are not as serious as they used to be. Relationships are taken more as options... that is where we are moving towards now... but then again it depends, there are different classes of people in Punjab. People in villages may have different perspectives than smaller and bigger cities.

An influential segment of Punjabi society works adamantly to push its people back temporally, not for the sake of positive cultural ramifications, but rather to emphasize inequalities between the rich and the poor and between men and women. In West Punjab, the issue is the greater identity crisis amongst the larger nation-state and separating and branching away from the “Indian Other” (the same can be said however of East Punjab, as many constituents of society work to de-Indianize and reclaim the true essence of *Punjabiyyat*). In Pakistan, there is constant dilution and deterioration of dispositional culture, because it is perceived to be too Indian, in place of orthodox Islamic initiatives that resonate at a completely different wavelength from the past several centuries. Even during the Sikh Empire, the region was a majority Muslim state, and Islam has never been disassociated or separate from the territory since its arrival, however it was most often an Islam that emphasized the regional vernacular and customs. Still with Punjab being the most prosperous, and largest province of Pakistan, a notable positive is that many customs and traditions that were once unequivocally Punjabi, have now become Pakistani customs and stories (I talk about the idea of *Punjabi Hegemony* in Pakistan in other sections of this dissertation), and there are still many events and initiatives taking place regularly there that continue to work to revive historical folklore (a newspaper article in the Pakistani Express

Tribune on January 10, 2015, made a headline of a theatre drama depicting the tragic tale of Mirza and Sahiban).

These points are again important, particularly when we consider the paradigms of love and marriage. This can be seen in the following quote from another one of my female informants (age 30) when talking about whether *Mirza-Sahiban* is an inspiring story, or a warning:

Not inspiring, obviously it's a warning. That even though society has changed in today's times, in the old days people thought more about what society thought... there were societal deaths over sins like this... that's why they killed both of them. Nowadays people don't go to these extremes... they think "if that's what they think is best for them... let them live their lives." At most, families will cut off relationships with their kids. Even in today's society, it hurts parents, but they won't go to such extremes... but they will "kill" the relationship. Girls should think that it's kind of like... killing one relationship to make another one. Marriage is not about breaking one relationship and making another one... it's about bringing a person into the family, rather than breaking all ties with the family by going against their wishes. How can people who have loved you for your whole life become meaningless in place of someone you hardly know. Even down the road, the people will realize that what they did was wrong. Because you don't realize what your parents are saying until you yourself become a parent.

### *SOWING SEEDS: “PYAR” MUSIC VIDEO*

In this music video directed by the world renown Sandeep Sharma (Satinder Sirtaj, Waddali Brothers, etc.) the story of two lovers who come from different religious and cultural backgrounds is depicted in the beautiful setting of the North-Eastern Himalayan range. I play a character that is definitively *Sikh*, with a long flowing beard and a turban indicative of the *Amritsari* style. The woman who I am in love with is from the mountains of North-Eastern India, and throughout the video the story is told of how the two characters meet years after being torn apart due to social, tribal and religious differences.

The video begins as I ride my motorcycle through the mountains and come across a woman who has just fallen from a tree from which she was collecting firewood. As I help to lift her to her feet, we both recall that we were once lovers. After this a dream sequence begins in which we both reminiscence how years ago we had fallen in love in these same mountains, but that her family had forced her to move away, as the lead-male protagonist who I play is a *Sikh* from Punjab, and does not belong to the same ethnic or religious extraction as her.

This video depicts the reality of Punjab, where many different cultural and tribal groups exhibit very high levels of pride when it comes to their own lineages. When it comes to marrying outside of one's own community however there is often strong resentment and push-back from one's own family, and often from society as well. In this part of the world the value of a woman's *izaat*, or “honor,” is highly dependent on her family and her own bloodlines. During partition, there are stories of young women who jumped into deep wells and took their own lives to protect losing their own honor, as Sikhs and Muslims were engaged in violence against one another which included killing entire families, including women and children. The same is true during the events of 1984, when during the *Sikh Genocide*, many women who were

taken in by the *Punjab Police*, would quickly take their own life at the threat of being raped by these antagonists to the Sikh liberation movement.



**Figure 7-4 Video Still from the Song "Pyar" (Directed by Sandeep Sharma – October 2017)**

The two lovers meet on a mountain road...



**Figure 7-5 Video Still from the Song "Pyar" (Directed by Sandeep Sharma – October 2017)**

The dream sequence begins where they recall their past affair...



**Figure 7-6 Video Still from the Song "Pyar" (Directed by Sandeep Sharma – October 2017)**

The lead female character recalls her strife with her family over her affair...



**Figure 7-7 Video Still from the Song "Pyar" (Directed by Sandeep Sharma – October 2017)**

She is forced to leave and move away...





**Figure 7-8 Video Still from the Song "Pyar" (Directed by Sandeep Sharma – October 2017)**

She leaves home...



**Figure 7-9 Video Still from the Song "Pyar" (Directed by Sandeep Sharma – October 2017)**

My character watches from nearby...



**Figure 7-10 Video Still from the Song "Pyar" (Directed by Sandeep Sharma – October 2017)**

The video is interwoven with performance shots in the mountains.





**Figure 7-11 Article Outlining My Research in Punjab from Regional Hindi Newspapers in North India – October 2017**

After my workshop at Punjabi University in Patiala, the regional newspapers in North India made mention of my research and my travels through Punjab. In this photo I pose (third from left) with faculty from the Department of Music and Sufi Studies. From left to right: Dr. Nivedita Uppal (Professor), Dr. Jyoti Sharma (Assistant Professor), Arshdeep Khaira, Dr. Yashpal Sharma (Professor), Dr. Rajinder Singh Gill (Head of Department), Dr. Alankar Singh (Assistant Professor), Dr. Ravinder Kaur (Assistant Professor)

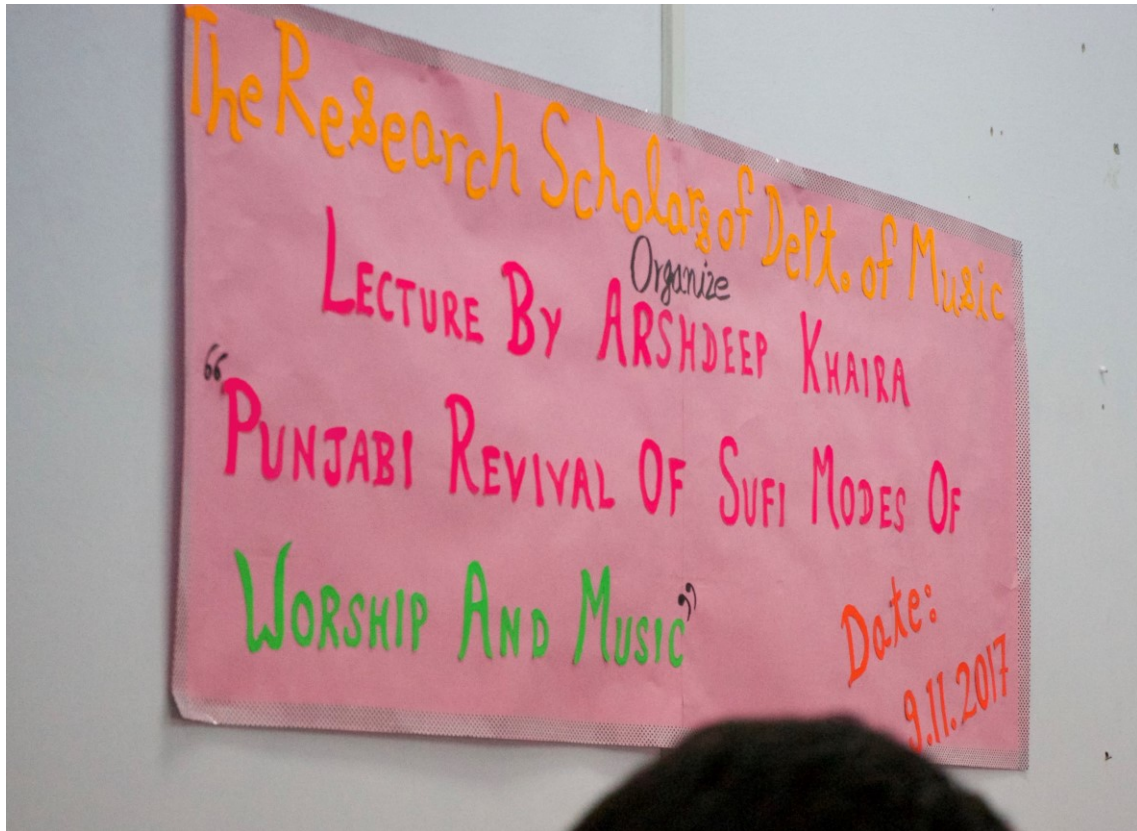
**Independent Variable:** Participation in an extended workshop including music as well as focus group discussions, small-group conversations, and a lecture.

**Condition:** Subjects participated in a workshop, which included a public presentation of my own music as well as presentations of the students' own Sufi music compositions and arrangements.

**Participants:** A stratified sample of students (graduate and undergraduate) from various demographic groups.

**Dependent Variables Examined (examples):**

- Attitudes towards West Punjab.
- Gauging preference for different styles of music I performed.
- Effect of my own music on changing attitudes.
- Overall awareness of Punjabi culture and Sufism.



**Figure 7-12 Poster Created by Students in the Music Department at Punjabi University Patiala to Welcome Me as a Distinguished Guest (Photo by Arsh Khaira – October 2017)**

In Figure 7-12 you can see the poster designed by students in the Department of Music at Punjabi University in Patiala for my workshop. I was given a warm welcome at this very well-known university. I had the opportunity to lecture and present my research to the students after they had welcomed me with a rousing Sufi and qawwali music performance, led by a female student (see Figure 7-13). Indeed, the majority of students and participants in the workshop were women, and we discussed in great detail the importance of Sufism, and the recreation of a necessary mutually interdependent relationship between the two Punjabs,.



**Figure 7-13 Students from the Department of Music and the Baba Farid Centre for Sufi Studies at Punjabi University Patiala Sing Qawwali to Welcome Me (Photo by Arsh Khaira – October 2017)**

The students came from varied demographic backgrounds (the woman singing centre stage in the violet dress was a Sufi Muslim from the lineage of the Chishtiyya - much like the student Aly at the Dohra college [see the section on *Dohra College*]). The pieces they performed to welcome me emphasized the concept of divine love for God, but also as it can be seen as manifest in the *beloved*, as the *murshid* (teacher), or the *lover*.





**Figure 7-14 Photograph of Me Delivering My Lecture-Demonstration to Graduate Music Students at Punjabi University (Photo by Ashampreet Sandhu – October 2017)**

As you can see in this photograph, after the performances of the students I engaged in my lecture-demonstration. During this presentation I discussed my research as well as the important role of Punjabi musicians, singers, scholars and historians in promoting and increasing the interdependence of East and West Punjabis, and why this is not only important for increased Sikh autonomy, but also for the sake of the maintenance and preservation of Punjabi culture.



**Figure 7-15 Students at Punjabi University Listening to My Lecture (Photo by Ashampreet Sandhu – October 2017)**

In this picture, students from the Department of Music and Sufi Studies at Punjabi University in Patiala listen to my lecture and demonstration prior to moving into a focus group discussion.



**Figure 7-16 Students and Faculty at Punjabi University Begin Their Discussion Session With Me (Photo by Ashampreet Sandhu – October 2017)**

During our focus group we engaged in critical discussion about socio-political issues impacting Punjab. Dr. Nivedeta Uppal (seated to the far-right in the yellow dress) made several key points stating “it is important that we recognize that we as Punjabis have a very significant counter-part in West Punjab.” She also stated that the weakness of Punjabis in exercising their own political and cultural autonomy and instead deteriorating into an abundance of drug and alcohol abuse, as well as the prevalence of vulgar music, was all a concerted attempt on the part of the central Hindu dominated national government at tearing at the roots of Punjab. We discussed together the idea of the Sufi concept of *divine love* as epitomized by God (*Allah*,) or by the object of expression and desire (the beloved romantic counterpart), where we could see a number of themes emerge that are characteristic of the Sufi revival. These themes are demonstrated through Sufi teachings found in both Sikhism as an organized religion, but also in the historical vernacular ballads and love-stories of the region.

We also discussed why in Punjab at any government centre, including hospitals, courts or universities - all notices, street signs and discussion was always in Hindi. This was especially important given that the mountains of the newly created Himachal state were taken away from Punjab, as well as the inroads to Delhi, by way of the newly created Haryana state, all on the basis of creating a Punjab state that would have all administration centred around the Punjabi language (*The Punjabi Suba*). This was done on the basis of a referendum where the populations of Himachal and Haryana listed Hindi as their mother tongue in a concerted attempt to reduce the size of Punjab. So even though Punjab was diminished drastically in size, and had its mountains cut off, Punjabi still does not have sway in government or administration in the state.

Dr. Nivedita Uppal reiterated over and over again that the degradation of Punjabi culture towards songs about alcohol and women, as well as the incessant drug abuse problem were all

done on purpose by the central government. She specifically said, “the government does this because it suits them.” She further went on to say that “the government wants Punjab, but they want it to be a devastated state. They didn’t like how rich the region had become, and they made concerted attempts to bring it down.” There is much truth in this statement as in the 70’s anyone who would have gone to Punjab would have seen it to appear to be twenty to thirty years ahead of the rest of India in terms of the amount of wealth in the region, also in terms of the infrastructure and agriculture industry. The state was always called the “bread-basket” of India. After the 1980’s and *Operation Blue Star* as well as the Sikh genocide, the area deteriorated in terms of its cultural and geophysical health. Now many people say that the state struggles at least a decade behind the rest of the country.

During this workshop as well as the workshop at Dohra I also recited the song I had composed specifically for this project titled “Kashmir.” I have spoken specifically about this song in an earlier section, especially with regard to the music video I created for it. But I will note here, that at both of these workshops, as well as when I went to Malerkotla, every time I would recite this song people would tell me about feeling chills and goosebumps and being overwhelmingly supportive of the initiative. After performing this song for the students and faculty, Dr. Rajinder Singh Gill raised an important question to me. He mentioned that he had been to Kashmir many times, and that while music and culture are incredibly important at assisting in the mitigation of violent conflict, in Kashmir “the people are just not ready to listen.” This segued our seminar into the discussion period. A short transcription of some of the comments of Dr. Nivedita Uppal follow (for the full transcription of the discussion with all faculty and students see **Appendix E**):

Arsh, you definitely have a point here... You said that in Canada, Punjabi people from India and Pakistan live in “sanjh,” you have also given the example of the same phenomenon amongst people from West Africa, but is it not so that the reason they are living in this way is because the government allows them to do so? If so, isn't the reason that such things are not happening here is because the political system does not allow it? This is the simple reason. Even as Dr. Gill and Dr. Sharma had spoken... when partition happened did they ask anyone? It was a completely political decision. The *ahvam* (laypeople) did not say to do this, but they had to run for their lives at the last minute. But we should come to the following conclusion: as artists, as academics, as scholars, as musicians, as music lovers, we are doing a lot. When Pakistani artists come here, I think we treat them with even more love and respect than they get back home because of the nostalgia of the situation.

There is one very significant thing you said that I really appreciate. As Punjabis we need to make sure we realize that we have a very big counterpart in the neighbouring country, but we are forgetting this, and that suits the government just fine. The day the entire Punjabi community unites, the government will be in fear again. Because we have always been a very strong community, we *are* a very strong community, and we are a global community, there is no doubt about any of this. Punjabis are such a community that the government needs very badly, but they cannot give us too much freedom either. We have become such people for them (the Indian government). They want Punjab, but they do not want it to be *too good* (stable/free, both economically and politically) either, this is the situation.

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**Figure 7-17 I Pose for a Group Photo with Graduate Music Students from Punjabi University (Photo by Ashampreet Sandhu – October 2017)**

Me and students from the Department of Music and Sufi Studies at Punjabi University after the workshop.

### 7.3 REGIONAL CONTEXT: THE HISTORICAL BALLADS OF PUNJAB - WHY THEY ARE SO IMPORTANT TO THE SUFI REVIVAL

In both East and West Punjab there exist sites that many claim are the actual graves of some of the tragic lovers of these folk traditions. The graves of Heer-Ranjha are said to be located in the Jhang region of West Punjab, and the graves of Mirza-Sahiban are said to be located in Danabad in the Jaranwala tehsil. I myself have been fortunate to visit the purported graves of Leila-Majnu near Anupgarh in Rajasthan, India.<sup>98</sup> Every year, thousands upon thousands of people visit these graves - though, I want to briefly mention that there are movements of Islamic conservative-reformism in Pakistan that seek to “bury” very important cultural institutions in the region, including Sufism and Sufi shrines, as well as regional languages like Pashto, Punjabi and Saraiki (however, even Punjabi cannot be qualified in the same way that Saraiki is, because Saraiki is a derivative language dependent on Punjabi).

Many artists still continue to use the lyrical discourses of the Punjabi vernacular traditions, especially Bulleh Shah, Waris Shah and of course the love stories we have been talking about through this section, but in spite of using these very exclusively Punjabi themes and stories even in contemporary works there has been a slight degradation in their intensity and ubiquity. In East Punjab while the problem is clearly *Westoxification* (see: Ahmad 1983) and a movement towards western norms, as well as the influences from India (in terms of religion, culture and the Hindi language), in West Punjab it is Islamization, the Urdu language, and movements towards conservative reformism. It should be noted here that many hardline Islamist militant groups in Pakistan actually desire the cessation of Urdu as the national language of the

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<sup>98</sup> See: *Times of India*, “It’s Official,” 2009

country and the adoption of Punjabi in its place. This includes Kashmiri militant groups like *Lashkar-e-Toiba* (led by Hafiz Saeed), and others like the *Punjabi Taliban*, who in Pakistan are made up by a majority of ethnic Punjabis.

I must mention that the initial vision of Pakistan was also indeed that it would be an inclusive country, and prior to partition even Sikhs were assured that they would be safe there. However, after the violence that ensued, the majority of Sikh families left. After the Soviet conquest of Afghanistan, Pakistan also moved to Islamize their affairs. It was General Zia Ul Haqq that led to the state becoming increasingly influenced by Islam and the subsequent mistreatment of minority communities. When Sikhs left the region, they left behind some of their most important holy sites, including the birthplace of Baba Nanak. Many other holy sites for Sikhs have fallen into disrepair, particularly outside of the Punjab, like in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, however, the government has taken many good initiatives to preserve the most significant locations, and Sikhs visit these places by the thousands every year.<sup>99</sup>

As I have mentioned, in East Punjab, the deterioration of culture is indeed due to *Gharbzadegi* (Persian) or, *Westoxification* (Ahmad 1983). The traditional dress is nearly extinct in the younger generation, and men and women try to be as much like the people in the West as they can. Nowadays, most of the music coming from East Punjab is depicted in vulgar music videos. One might suffice to say that at least in West Punjabi music, the vulgarity is not there to the extent that it is in East Punjab. Many would argue that this vulgarity and indecency is an incredible threat to the cultural well-being of the region.

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<sup>99</sup> See: *Times of India*, “Pakistan Sikhs Want Gurdwara Act...” 2014

*LEAVING FOOTPRINTS: THE GRAVES OF THE LOVERS – LEILA AND MAJNOON –  
ANUPGARH, RAJASTHAN*

With relevance to this element of my research, I reach out of the explicitly religious (the Sufi and the Sikh) and into the romantic (or “folk”) narratives of the region - another boon to which we can hold onto mercilessly so that all those ties that bind are not further severed giving way to more aggressive stances on the differences between “them” and “us.” This part of my research took me literally into a battlefield, where gunning stations and sand dunes were just meters away from me. In the midst of this torrential landscape was the small town of Anupgarh, in the Northwest region of Rajasthan where the subjective truth of the locals explicitly draws attention to the final resting place and purported graves of the tragic lovers *Leila and Majnu*. Only a few kilometers away from the border, right across from the city of Pakpattan in Pakistan I paid obeisance to these two darlings who have been elevated to the status of saints in our shared cultural narrative – lying cold and lifeless in their graves in the midst of one of the primary combat theatres between the two oft-warring nations. Fitting, given the context of the deaths of the two companions who too were torn apart by social and class differences.

I wondered as I bowed my head in respect to the lovers who lay in their graves beneath me how many Leilas and how many Majnoons must have walked or frolicked atop the very ground upon which I stood. Or, how many soldiers from both countries must have lost their lives in this very area during the course of several drawn out wars between the nations. One of my brothers-in-law from a first cousin-sister also remained stationed as a tank commander for the Indian Army just a few hundred kilometers south in this same arid region in the town of Jaisalmer right on the border across from Pakistan’s Sindh province.



**Figure 7-18 Paying My Respects at the Graves of Leila and Majnoon (Photo by Gurdeep Khaira – Fall 2014)**



**Figure 7-19 Map Pointing to the Location of the Graves of Leila and Majnoon in Close Proximity to the Border with Pakistan (Google Maps)**





**Figure 7-20 Conversing With Locals at the Graves of Leila and Majnoon (Photo by Gurdeep Khaira – Fall 2014)**

With relevance to the Sufi concept of divine love and ecstatic liberation, even at the graves of Leila and Majnu, devotees, newly-weds, and others come to pay their respects to the tragic couple who have since been elevated to the status of Saints. The ability of *Qais* who came to be known as *Majnu*, or *Majnoon* which means “crazy,” or “mad,” to see the divinity of Leila has come to be understood as his ability rather to see the divine manifestation of the eternal light of God. There are many narratives which speak of the reality that Leila was indeed not very beautiful, as she has also been referred to as having dark skin and curly black hair (which in a historical “Persian” context were not considered desirable or attractive traits for women). But still the stories of Majnu wandering through the deserts in a daze after her remain just as poignant today. One of the most intriguing stories often referenced by Islamic clerics and Imams

during Qutbas or sermons,<sup>100</sup> refers to the moment when Qais stood in line for hours to receive a free meal from Leila who was distributing food to the poor. When Qais finally came before Leila, rather than pouring food into his bowl, she hit his bowl with great anger after which it fell to the floor in pieces. As the others looked on, Qais began to dance ecstatically. Referring to him as “Majnoon,” the others asked why he had reacted in such a way when clearly Leila had disrespected him. He replied that he was ecstatic that she had treated every single man in a similar way, but he had been treated differently than them. At one point while speaking to a graduate student at the University of Alberta about Leila and Majnoon, the student told me the following short phrase repeated often by Persians - believed to have been spoken by Majnoon in reference to the beauty of Leila:

Shouma faqat muye Leilee mituneen bebineen, man har peech  
muyesh mitunam bebinam.

*You can only see the hair of Leila, but I can see every beautiful  
curl of every strand.*

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<sup>100</sup>See for example:

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

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BbaFVw8KYsA>

## 7.4 MAMA, PUT MY GUNS IN THE GROUND: SUFISM AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO EXTREMISM

It is possible that in Pakistan (shattered at its very core by extremism), where Sufism is so deeply engrained into the soil and the beliefs of the people (as it has developed in the region over the course of several centuries) that an emphasis on these teachings can continue to create much progress. Ideas pertaining to this reality were shared with me by Khurram Khan from Punjab, Pakistan:

The extremist elements in India and Pakistan were dominating for the last few years, but I think the future of both countries is linked with peace and definitely Sufism will play a major role in creating this peace.

We can see that through the *triune* relationship between the believer and his God, as outlined in the diagram shown earlier in this section, Sufism presents a beautiful alternative to the extremism currently proliferating. Furthermore, at their very essence, the nature of the Sufi is actually not quite different from the nature of the extremist, as both require a level of material blindness, an ability to be consumed by one's complete desire to be absorbed in God. For the extremist, this desire manifests itself in violent Jihad and oppression of women, as the extremist believes that this is the only way to attain God's pure mercy. But for the Sufi, the Jihad is of the heart, and the violent battlefield is one's thoughts, manifesting purity in one's selfless actions. When we consider the role of women in contemporary Punjabi society, we see that indeed, Sufism presents a beautiful play of reciprocal fairness in relationships, particularly when we see the submission of the believer to the beloved. When we examine the vernacular folk traditions of the region, we see that they are not completely "secular," but are colored with the religious



discourse languages of the Punjab, and that they present individuals with further insight into understanding the covenant between man, woman and God.

As evident in the use of these love stories in theological discourses, we see that they are an indispensable part of the “psychological headspace” of the territory. Further, cultural similarities (with regard here to the “love stories”) between the Eastern and Western portions of Punjab can continue to be revived to promote understanding and progression. Indeed, by emphasizing unity through the perspective veil of Sufism and its similarities with Sikhism, and also by way of the vernacular folk traditions of the region, including their shared etymological and linguistic links, the Punjab in its entirety has already witnessed boons of progression. Because indeed, the majority of the population desires peace and the promotion of their unique cultural identity as Punjabis, but in the face of religious extremism these things sometimes do not carry as much rhetorical weight as political mudslinging (as most movements away from progression in Pakistan, and also in Indian Punjab, are due in large part to socio-political strife and power struggles).

## 7.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter I demonstrated how the historical vernacular folk traditions of the Punjab region, the “love-stories,” represent a component of the Sufi revival that contribute immensely to the process of reconciliation between East and West Punjabis. They continue to influence various elements of social structure in the region, including the way traditional values are understood.

As this takes place both in East Punjab and Pakistan, this results in a shared set of cultural norms, values and practices – and this assists in the process of reconciling Sikhs and Muslims. While the two communities do not experience the level of face-to-face interaction that they desire in South Asia, though in the diaspora they do, they are able to participate in a shared spiritual, cultural and social headspace, living similar lives dictated by values that while mainly derived from their faith systems, are also molded in large part by a shared spirituality, including Sufi poetry, music, and Sufi love stories.

## 8 “MIRZA” - EXPLORING HOW A PUNJABI IDENTITY THAT CROSSES THE DIVIDE OF MUSLIM AND SIKH IS REPRESENTED THROUGH MUSICAL PERFORMANCE OF THE ROMANTIC BALLADS

In this chapter I will continue talking about the Sufi love-stories of Punjab, however I will now engage in an auto-ethnographic analysis of my own experiences with these tales, and how they contributed to my own process of spiritual reclamation. I will demonstrate how Punjabi songs associated with these folk romances contributed to my own form of identity-conceptualization that crossed the divide of Muslim and Sikh. I want to make note of an important point at this juncture: *Mirza-Sahiban*, *Heer-Ranjha*, *Sassi-Punnu*, *Leila-Majnu* and *Shiri-Farhad*, are all critically important romances to the Punjab region, and they all involve stories centralizing around young *Muslim* lovers. However, the stories are just as important in the context of *Sikh-Punjabi* culture (as can be seen by the sheer number of Sikh artists, both male and female, who have incorporated themes from the historical ballads into their songs). The narratives represent a component of Punjabi character that is rooted in *Sufi* themes and continuities (I have demonstrated this in the previous chapter), but that transcends beyond religious dogmatism in terms of identity conceptualization.

I will show in this section that the “love-stories” of Punjab when cited in folk, contemporary, and modern music, elicited a powerful effect on myself as I grew into adulthood, and that this had numerous outcomes on how I understood my own identity. I will demonstrate this effect firstly through analysis of how I understood the lead male protagonists of the love-stories, and secondly through by taking into account my own artistic and interpretive experiences with the ballads. I will show that the continued popularity of these stories and their

incorporation into contemporary music and film, can continue to increase mutual interdependence between Sikhs and Muslims.

In this section, I focus specifically on how these ballads, when used in a musical context (either folk, *lok geet*, qawwali or contemporary pop and *hip-hop*), contributed immensely to my own process of Punjabi identity reclamation, that transcended Sikhism and Islam. Essentially, the musical delivery of these historical stories acted as the principle methodological agent by which the narratives achieved their primary efficacy in terms of their abilities to inspire, promote reconciliation, and educate, on maintaining cultural heirlooms while being socially progressive. This component then will also scatter some light onto our understanding of the traditional Punjabi vernacular folk, as well as contemporary and modern, musical traditions.

## 8.1 MUSICAL REPRESENTATION OF THE “VIOLENT” MIRZA AND THE “PASSIVE” RANJHA

I would like to start by exploring what the primary characters of the romantic folk traditions *represented* to me as I matured intellectually. The most popular musical pieces dealing with the “love stories” that have been recorded over the last one hundred years often take into account the way the characters within them are envisioned and interpreted. If we begin with the tale of Mirza-Sahiban, we know that Mirza is interpreted as a dark, brooding, and *violent* character. His marksmanship as an archer, and his unparalleled swordsmanship count heavily towards his character evaluation. He rides a black mare which he calls *Bakkiye*, adding to the mystical sheen that surrounds him as a person. In Punjabi MC’s rendition of *Mirza*,<sup>101</sup> Surinder Shinda sings

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<sup>101</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NfQTPf-\\_r4k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NfQTPf-_r4k)

about the young protagonist mounting *Baki* to go steal away Sahiban as she paints her hands with henna in preparation for her wedding to another suitor against her wishes, but by the command of her father and brothers:

Bakkiye hava de naal, karade tu aj gallaan ni...  
Jatti marjugi je, mai nazari nah aaya...

*Bakkiye, ride like the wind...*  
*My Jatti will die, if she does not see me...*

Although Mirza is a Muslim Jatt from Punjab, the Islamic underpinnings of this story were never a focal point of mine, in fact, I do not think I even knew this was a Muslim story until I became much older. But the Islamic themes interwoven throughout this tale, as well as in renditions of songs about Mirza and Sahiban, including for example the fact that the two lovers are cousins, were being imprinted into my subconscious from the young teenage years that I began to listen to these songs. Indeed, this particular story is one of the most violent of the four great romance narratives of the Punjab, which sees Mirza slain by the brothers of Sahiban. As Mirza steals his lover away from her home as she prepares for her wedding, Sahiban's brothers give chase on their horses with swords and other arms. The chase carries on for hours until Mirza and Sahiban are at a safe distance away. As they stop to rest under a tree, Mirza falls asleep. When Sahiban sees her brothers coming, she knows Mirza can kill them all from a distance because of his skill with the bow and arrow (*Teer Kaman*), so she breaks all of his arrows. Mirza is then forced to fight Sahiban's brothers armed only with his sword, and eventually falls to them in battle. After he dies, Sahiban kills herself with Mirza's knife.

Because of the violence associated with this tale, it has taken on a role as one of the more tribal of the romantic ballads. Consequently, Mirza is seen by many young Punjabi men as a role model for his aggressive nature, and indeed, the name Mirza itself is still especially common for

Punjabi boys, being just as popular with Sikhs as it is in West Punjab among Muslims. The musical arrangements telling the story of Mirza and Sahiban often speak highly of Mirza's mystical and brooding nature. One particular composition performed by Kuldeep Manak regularly throughout his career, "Mirza Yaar Balaunda Tera," shows the softer side of Mirza as he tells his *Massi* (maternal aunt) Bibo, to go tell Sahiban that he is coming:

Tu Maasi Bibo ni, le ja ik suneha mera,  
Ja keh de Sahiban nu, Mirza yaar bulaunda tera...

*Massi Bibo (Mirza's massi from Sahiban's village), go take this news of mine,  
Go tell Sahiban, that Mirza is calling...*

Kall Karmu Bahman nu, Danabad'on jatt bulaya  
Mainu saddya jatti ne, Bakkiye le siyalan too main aaya

*I have called the Pundit Karmu from Danabad (Mirza's home town),  
Jatti has called me, I am coming with Baki from Sial (territory in Jhang Pakistan).*

Khiwe di dheer bajhon, mainu disda jagg hanera  
Ja keh de Sahiban nu, Jattiye yaar aa gaya tera

*Other than the daughter of Khiwe, the whole world is dark for me,  
Go tell Sahiban, that jatti's lover has come...*

Ghar sadd ke apne ni, Maasi gallan ajj kara de  
Ho gai muddat milya nu, jatti nu do pal kol baha de

*Massi, go call Sahiban to your house, and let us meet for a while,  
It has been so long since we have met, please call her...*

Kevain bol ke dassan ni, aaonda rann da pyar bathera  
Ja keh de Sahiban nu, Mirza yaar bulaunda tera

*I don't know how to say it with words, I am so in love with her,  
Go tell Sahiban, Mirza is calling her...<sup>102</sup>*

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<sup>102</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qg\\_cs8rzPaE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qg_cs8rzPaE)

Ranjha as opposed to Mirza is completely non-violent and takes on the role later in his life as a *Jogi*. He is a well-mannered *chak* of the *majjiyan*, or “herder of cows.” His quiet and peaceful disposition is reflected well in Junoon’s video for *Heer*.<sup>103</sup> Although he comes from a wealthy family, he does not toil at all in his early life because his father favors him over his other brothers. He spends all of his time playing the *bansari* or flute. Later in life, his brothers drive him away from their home out of jealousy and he ends up wandering aimlessly until he finds work in Heer’s village where her father offers him work tending to the cattle. For twelve years he takes care of the cows on Heer’s farm, and during this time the two fall deeply in love. Meeting secretly for many years, they are eventually caught by Heer’s jealous uncle, Kaido, and parents Chuchak and Maliki. Heer is then betrothed forcefully to marry another man Sayed Khera. The heartbroken Ranjha wanders the Punjab and eventually meets a Jogi *Goraknath* of the *kanphata* (pierced ears) sect of jogis. Ranjha also renounces the world, pierces his ears and becomes an ascetic jogi himself. Meandering pointlessly, he eventually finds the village where Heer now lives (Duggal 1979; Dhillon 1998; Gill 2003).<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bY-3ztGbHs>

<sup>104</sup> See link to whole story in *Links of Interest*.

Kadi a mil Ranjhan ve, mein luk luk neer vahaman,  
Ithhe sab mere vari ve, keinu apna haal sanavan...

*Please come see me Ranjha, I am hiding myself and crying,  
Everyone here is my enemy, who can I tell of my suffering?*

Meri akhiyan vich hanere, kenj vekhan supne tere,  
Mera hor khayal no koi, bas dard vanda la mere...

*All I can see is darkness, how will I see you in dreams?  
I have no other thoughts, just come take my pain away...*<sup>105</sup>

It is said that anyone who tries to sing Waris Shah's *Heer* must be technically brilliant and sing from their very soul. Some vocalists who have performed *Heer* include Hans Raj Hans and Gurdas Mann and indeed, the recitation of this particular ballad as written by *Waris Shah*, serves most effectively to unite Punjabis into a common cultural context. It may become necessary for us to say that *Heer*, when sung in the classical rendition (especially in its entirety), is the most distinctive musical work when considering all of the romantic ballads of the Punjab.

The two characters I have discussed in this section (Mirza and Ranjha) have taken on predominant roles in terms of colloquial language contexts in contemporary Punjabi and diaspora societies amongst young men. It is common for elders to say to young Punjabi men: "Ah tu ki Ranjha jya banya firda?" of which the rough translation is "Why are you becoming like a Ranjha?" a comment which is often directed towards young men with wandering eyes, or even those with pierced ears. The colloquial context of Mirza is also often used to "salute" or

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<sup>105</sup> Noor Jehan (Kadi Aa Mil Ranjha – From the Pakistani Film *Heer Ranjha* 1970):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tcl4q0dOh7o>



reference boys and men who exhibit *hyper-masculinity* (as in: “kive ai Mirziya?” or “how’s it going, *Mirza?*”), particularly because of the violence associated with him - and he remains a mystified character that many male Punjabis look towards with pride. At the same time, the female characters of all of these stories are often also somewhat similar to each other: strikingly beautiful (with the exception of Leila who was said to be very dark skinned and not as beautiful) and stricken with love (see the earlier section for perceptions of *Sahiban*).

## 8.2 THE MUSIC OF THE HISTORICAL BALLADS: A CASE STUDY IN PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

The love-stories of Punjab have remained ever poignant throughout a changing temporal landscape, and from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century until now, the ballads have held their place at the forefront of the Punjabi *Lok-Geet* traditions. There are several reasons for this. Not only do the romantic folk tales of the Punjab tread what appears as secular territory, when in reality they represent an important component of Punjabi Sufi spirituality, but they are so deeply engrained into the soil of the land, that they come forward forming a dispositional part of the Punjabi peoples’ psychological and spiritual composition. From a very early age, young Punjabis, Sikhs and Muslims, are taught these stories, at the very least hearing them from the older generations, but most often in modern *remixes* composed by artists such as Punjabi MC (<http://www.pmcrecords.com>). I recall being in London for a three day lay-over on my way to India in 1998 and hearing for the first time his version of *Mirza*,<sup>106</sup> which seemed to be on a continuous loop in the car of my distant relative and host, who at the time might have been in his

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<sup>106</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NfQTPf-\\_r4k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NfQTPf-_r4k)

early 30's. The intoxicating rhythmic beat, looping over a more traditional *Dholki*<sup>107</sup> and *Bansari*<sup>108</sup> pattern was incredible to hear, and may have formed a sort of basis for the self-discovery which was about to take place into the culture of the birthplace of my parents. This song essentially was the definitive marker for my first journey back to Punjab since childhood, as it coupled traditional sounds with a driving *hip-hop* beat as well as a *rap* segment with the following lyrics:

It was late last summer, my blood coloured the sky,  
When I heard you break your swear,  
Punjab in my eye.  
Never had I cried before,  
Never had my steel heart died before,  
But know I felt the raw blast  
True love forever last,  
But you can't feel my body  
then you I cast.  
Die for my woman,  
My woman is my mind,  
My destiny she speaks through her every freaky line,  
Her body movement is the way I survive,  
When I am on the battle field, staying alive,  
Staying alive my arches (i.e.: *enemies*) is that 249 mcs on  
horseback,  
So I pull out my steel to fight back,  
Pull out an ounce of desi from my rice sack,  
*Walked across the five rivers*, one hundred degrees,  
My body burns, my mind cease.

Indeed, Punjabi MC as well as a great number of other highly influential music producers and singers have originated from the British Sikh diaspora. This could be due to several factors that have influenced the process of acculturation for this community over the past several

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<sup>107</sup> Two sided Punjabi drum, a smaller version of the *dhol*, played with the hands.

<sup>108</sup> Punjabi flute.

generations. Hall (2004) helps us understand this, she defines *culture* in the context of this article as “the beliefs, values, identities and traditions that individuals and groups possess and, as they acculturate, choose to retain or to leave behind” (109). She then goes on to examine the ideas that have shaped Sikh attitudes in Britain in light of their ethnic identities. She examines the way Sikhs have acculturated to British society, forming a group that migrated in waves beginning in the 1960’s from India and into the 1970’s and 80’s also from East Africa (where they made up a Sikh diaspora in a racially divided African social structure).

The writer goes on to examine the way Sikhs have distinguished themselves by maintaining their religion, language and cultural practices, while assimilating other elements of their identity into the greater British milieu. She describes the way some minority communities can assert their liberal rights by making claims against their host government “under the cloak of liberalism’s principles of fairness and equity for ‘all’” (117). In this way, Sikhs have made concerted attempts to petition on behalf of the British government for increased recognition as a unique ethno-religious group, and even for reprimands and justice on behalf of the victims of the genocide of 1984.



**Figure 8-1 Aman Hayer, a Very Well Known Producer from the UK, and Me (Photo by Gurdeep Khaira - 2008)**



**Figure 8-2 RDB a Very Well Known Producer from the UK, and Me (Photo by Gurpreet Khaira - 2015)**

Being born in Canada, and having spent my whole life in Edmonton, Alberta, I have always remained somewhat detached from my ancestral homeland, but have found this in my adult years to be a great source of strength, and a contributor to my zealous passion to better understand the land of my mother, father, and wife's birth. My voyage to Punjab in 1998 was a major milestone in my life - I was in grade eight at the time and had already embarked on my own journey of musical self-discovery as a sort of prodigy on the electric guitar, drum-set and in song-writing. By this time I had already been playing the electric guitar for some five years and had delved deeply into writing my own songs, even having formed a band with two classmates which would end up staying together well into University. However, the majority of my musical training and interests had developed in *grunge*, as well as to some extent in the *rock* and *pop* music I would hear on the radio as my parents would drive me to school, to band and music classes, and to hockey. Most grunge music emanated from the Seattle scene of the early 90's and included bands influenced by *that* "Seattle" sound, like Nirvana, Soundgarden, Alice in Chains and Pearl Jam (see: Shevory 1995; Prato 2009).

That summer in 1998 I was hooked to *Channel V*. Channel V was a mainstream music channel, just like Muchmusic (see: Pegley 2008) in Canada, that played the latest hits, mostly rock music, but also Indian and Pakistani music. As the geographic region of the Punjab is just south of the Himalayan Range, and because it is a landlocked territory, the weather in the region is highly temperate. Unlike the southern parts of India, where coastal currents and warm tropical winds keep the weather pleasant year-round, in Punjab, the winters are cold. Cool air from the mountains keeps winters chilly, particularly when houses do not have internal heating. On the other hand, summers are even hotter than in the South, again because the region is land-locked. Punjab sits at a latitude of 30 degrees north, which is the same latitude as Central Afghanistan

(Amritsar and Kandahar are at the same latitude, and also the city of Esfahan in Iran). Because of this, that summer in 1998 was *very hot*. While I spent a lot of time frolicking outdoors, in spite of my mother's warnings, I also spent a lot of time in the air-conditioned TV room, drinking *Fanta* and watching TV.

It was during these long summer days watching Channel V, that for the first time, I heard Junoon's *Yaar Bina* – a song featuring a brilliant music video (considered by even today's standards) that coupled “my own” grungy rock music with Punjabi dholki, percussion and lyrics. Ali Azmat sang with ferocious energy and Salman Ahmed was a real guitar virtuoso. One of the most notable tracks off Junoon's debut album, “Azaadi,” was titled “Heer,” which was an instrumental track composed by Salman Ahmad (see: Ahmad 2010).<sup>109</sup> This track featured magnificent sustaining electric guitar leads incorporating Hindustani ragas and scales, coupled with a spectacular tabla pattern. The first time I heard this song, I could not believe that such striking South Asian melodies could come out of a distorted electric guitar. Although the song was instrumental, it told the story of Heer-Ranjha, and the extraordinary video showed magnificent images of Pakistan, Sufi dancers and Salman himself playing alongside the tabla, while at the same time narrating the tragic story of the lovers (see: Gill 2003). The music itself sounded as if a guitar player from one of *my* favorite bands (ex. James Iha, *Smashing Pumpkins*, Kim Thayil, *Soundgarden*, Kurt Cobain, *Nirvana*, or Mike McCready or Stone Gossard from *Pearl Jam*) had taken lessons from a Sarangi or Sarod maestro from India. This was the first time that I realized such things could be done musically, and indeed, Junoon has been credited with themselves founding the *Sufi Rock* genre. The fact that this mesmerizing track included the

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<sup>109</sup> Ahmad has been one of the most influential Muslim and South Asian rockstars of all time. He has written a book *Rock and Roll Jihad*, and currently teaches as a professor of South Asian and Sufi music at Queens College in Flushing, NY.

theme of Heer-Ranjha is a real testament to the everlasting nature of these chronicles. The video allowed Junoon to situate themselves in a Punjabi regional setting, while at the same time introducing young people throughout the territorial expanses of India and Pakistan to rock music, and possibly *implicitly* the magnificent culture of the Northwestern plains. This band from Pakistan later released the video for the single *Sayonee* during the same trip – so I made haste to the *bazaar* in our small town of *Barnala*, and I bought “Azaadi,” Junoon’s debut album, on cassette tape. Needless to say, the seed had been planted in my heart, which would continue to grow until today.

When I got back to Canada, I did not delve immediately into Punjabi music, though I had started to listen sporadically to music produced by RDB or Aman Hayer, both from England, and also some of Jazzy B’s early music, but I continued with great zeal and passion to pursue my love of English rock music. My band continued to gain momentum and from the years 1999-2004 I wrote, recorded and gigged heavily. I was head first in the driving momentum of a rock band (see Figure 8-3). Playing loud and heavy shows, opening for well-known Canadian rock acts and dreaming big (see: McDonald 2013). In 2001, I again returned to India, then again in 2004, and after that, every year up to and including 2017, sometimes returning twice in a year. I continued to record English rock music, performing and touring extensively with my band, releasing well-received albums in 2003, 2007 and 2009. However, I fell head-first into the dynamic energy of Punjabi Sufi music as I matured intellectually and musically, releasing my first full length Punjabi album in 2011,<sup>110</sup> which I recorded in Mohali, Punjab.

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<sup>110</sup> *Ishq Kamaal* - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d8zPkDERaoc>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8r6gBs2BWUw>



**Figure 8-3 Photograph of My Band "Warning Signs" Circa 2004 (Unknown Photographer)**

As I recollect, it must have been hearing Punjabi MC’s *Mirza* that started the ball rolling for me, in terms of reconnecting to my roots. Second, I would credit Junoon’s *Heer* in this regard, especially in terms of my being influenced by the song’s composition and “chordal and rhythmic structure.” Both of these quintessential tunes in my personal and musical development dealt directly with the tragic romances of the Punjab. We find in this, that there may be something about the institution of *love* itself in Punjabi society that elicits esoteric, mystic and sometimes mysterious “comings of age” for much of its youth. As I learned more from my parents and grandparents, and came to really grasp the language, the culture resonated deeper



and deeper into my being. I slowly began to place the weight of my social identity on being Punjabi first, of course with the intersection of my Canadian birth and upbringing.

To better understand this complex, I turn to Hoene (2014), who explores how music relates to the construction of post-colonial South Asian identity. She looks at various forms of music, from classical to contemporary, and the extent of their employment amongst South Asian musicians. She also examines the way the performative act seeks to re-affirm, or undermine, various elements of identity. Partial to this is the understanding of the imagined community, or the way in which diaspora South Asians contribute to their own understanding of history through the employment of musical themes either consistent with, or in counterpoint to, hegemonic historical narratives about who they are as people. She explores the way music can be used to assist in the creation of one's own personal or group identity, and that for many South Asians, it contributes to the process of re-writing colonial history. She also addresses issues of cultural-hybridity amongst South Asian diaspora musicians through her analysis of several novels that feature music as a central component of their plot narratives. Hoene also examines the repercussions of global imperialism in light of current increases in cultural globalization.

Personally, I saw in my mind the vision of Mirza mounting his black mare to go and steal away Sahiban as she painted her hands with henna preparing for her betrothal to another man, as a poignant and powerful image. He rides with his rifle or *bandook* in his hands as his sister screams to him to not go. I began to see in this type of imagery that the tribal cultural context of Punjab was now being reflected in the contemporary lives of young people of marital age, and also for their families, in our diaspora society - sometimes manifesting itself negatively in *gang violence*, or *drug abuse*.

These stories tread the liminal space between the secular and the religious. I identify first-hand with Mirza because he was a Punjabi Jatt of the Khera tribe and Sahiban was a Jatt of the Sial tribe. I identify with the story of Heer Ranjha, because Heer (also a Jatt) was later betrothed against her will to a man of the Khera Jatt tribe which originated in the *Jhang* region of Pakistan. My paternal side hails from an ancestral village “Chak Rehan,” in the northern part of West Punjab, near the city of Gujranwala now in Pakistan. However, there are cities that go by the name of Khaira or Khairabad throughout Pakistan and Afghanistan. The dialect of Punjabi that my grandfather’s generation from my paternal side, six brothers and one sister, and all of their husbands and wives speak is unequivocally *Majhayal*,<sup>111</sup> and bears closest resemblance to the *Potohari* tongue. Anyone from Northern Punjab in Pakistan would recognize their parlance as charmingly placed in that area, and they worked to maintain this identity even in their new home in the village of Bimbri near Patiala in East Punjab, by marrying only with other *refugees*. But what do these things mean to me today? Definitely our accents have changed with time, but there are things in my family that are dispositional Khaira traits – and this was a question I grappled with throughout the course of this research.

It is possible that the love stories of Punjab could eventually become buried in history as markers of a great folk tradition that once united a common people, or they could actually *continue* to serve as powerful symbols of unity between a divided community that shares more in common in terms of language, culture and context than other ethnic groups in their *own* countries. The likelihood is that Mirza will remain an epic warrior of sorts in the Punjabi

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<sup>111</sup> Derived from the word for the geographic region of Punjab known as *Majha*, encompassing the far northwestern territories of East Punjab including Amritsar, Gurdaspur, Taran Taran and Pathankot, and from West Punjab including Gujranwala, Sialkot, Lahore, Nankana Sahib, Faisalabad and Sheikhpura.

tradition, and young people hearing of the beauty of Sahiban or Heer will continue to draw on these images for inspiration. Even today the names associated with these stories are common in both Sikh and Muslim Punjabi families.

I strongly believe that other versions of these songs, like Hans Raj Hans' *Heer*<sup>112</sup> for example, left a considerable and lasting impact on my development as a person and musician. In the midst of so much chaos ensuing from the Punjabi music industry (particularly in the East), singers like Hans (and others like Gurdas Mann or Harbhajan Mann) have remained ever-poignant shimmering reflections of light. It is therefore important to understand the relationship East and West Punjab share through cultural and etymological links to each other in terms of interpretations of the vernacular folk traditions through musical performance. We can see this in the way these ballads are construed and then performed by classical, traditional and contemporary Punjabi artists:

Classical:

Yamla Jatt (East), Alim Lohar (West), Ghulam Aly (West)

Traditional:

Gurdas Mann (East), Abrar Ul Haq (West), Tariq Tafu (West),  
Satinder Sirtaj (East), Saeen Zahoor (West)

Modern:

Gippy Grewal (East), Bilal Saeed (West), Diljit Dosanjh (East), Amrinder Gill (East)

Related to this are Yamla's renditions in the classical folk tradition of *Tumba*<sup>113</sup> and *Dholki* of Mirza Sahiban and Heer Ranjha, as well as Alim Lohar's very similar renditions. Gurdas Mann then as a living testament to Punjabi culture shares resemblances with Abrar Ul Haq, and this can

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<sup>112</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AalKGYTtW5I>

<sup>113</sup> Single stringed traditional Punjabi Instrument.

be observed in light of their renditions of the romantic ballads of the region. Lastly, Gippy Grewal and Bilal Saeed have both extensively incorporated the tragic love tales of the Punjab into their works, especially with *Mirza: The Untold Story*, and *Bara Saal*, respectively.

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I suggest that the romantic ballads represent a very important part of Punjabi culture, in that they can be transmitted through re-enactment and theatre, through film and through song (they have remained a staple form of the greater literatures available to singers and actors in the region). Furthermore, the way in which these ballads have been written is continuous with the religious traditions of the region. What I mean by this is that for a singer to perform the entire of Waris Shah's *Heer*, it would take nearly one hour of continuous recitation for the whole of the composition - in this way, listening to the original *Heer* is very similar to listening to a prayer. Furthermore, the symbolic sainthood of these lovers is more than apparent when visiting their graves and observing that because of their undying love they have been elevated to the status of *Pirs*. Indeed, even today, many young people look towards the romantic ballads for inspiration in their own matters of love and life.

I hope that the Information contained in this section has served to enrich our understanding of the shared cultural links between East and West Punjab, as I have shown firsthand how one element of the vernacular folk traditions of the region, that is the romantic ballads, can serve to cohere the masses in the assistance of reconciliation. This is especially relevant in light of existing idiosyncrasies amongst the demographic groups of the territory, and with increasing diversity (as people generally move towards the regions of greatest abundance), to seek to preserve its cultural landscape. In this way, continued proliferation of the romantic historical ballads can serve to promote and protect cultural and political stability.

### 8.3 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter I have demonstrated historical and contemporary Punjabi music that deals with the popular romances of the region, can have a positive effect on creating reconciliation between Sikhs and Muslims. This is because they allow listeners to transcend religious differences and unite into a shared psychological headspace that is deeply connected to the folk, vernacular and cultural history of Punjab. Further, these are all stories centralized around Muslim characters, and Islamic themes and aesthetics – however this does not diminish the zeal with which Sikh performers and listeners attach themselves to these narratives.

In the next chapter I will engage in a critical case study that will allow for the macroscoping outward of the mind's eye, further contextualizing my primary research paradigm to West-Africa. The purpose of this is to show the universal implications of my theory and how the regions of Punjab and West Africa have been inflicted with fundamentally the same pains as a result of colonization. This includes the division of historically interdependent communities through the creation of new national boundaries based on artificially created conceptions of race and ethnicity. I will show parallels between how both communities recreate mutually interdependent relationships amongst divided partition survivors and their future generations through the use of shared spirituality emphasized by musical exchange.

## 9 (CASE STUDY) PUNJAB AND WEST AFRICA, SHARED PARTITION HISTORIES: HEALING INTER-GENERATIONAL TRAUMA THROUGH MUSIC AND RENEWED CULTURAL INTERDEPENDENCE

When you find yourself in an environment where you get to interact with so many different kinds of people, your perspective on things changes.

- (Andrew Ahiabu – University Student and Member of The Church of Pentecost).

### 9.1 THE FLUID RE-CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE PRIMARY RESEARCH PARADIGM FROM PUNJAB TO WEST AFRICA

In this section I will demonstrate the extent to which the primary theory I have developed in this thesis has global implications. I explore in this dissertation the possibility that music can help communities with partition histories recreate mutually interdependent relationships with others from which they were forcibly separated by means of superficially construed concepts of nationhood, race and people by colonists. These ideas of how nationhood was to be understood were imposed on African people who themselves formed a multi-ethnic, tribal society in which different groups also experienced centuries of inter-ethnic cultural interdependence also exemplified by a flourishing people. These alliances and tribal way of life were disrupted and damaged by the colonization of the region. When the ruling nations including the British, French and German, among others, left the territories in what appeared to be the achievement of independence, lines were drawn to separate newly formed nation-states dividing ethnic groups from others with which they had centuries of historical exchange – there were even regions

where the same micro-communities were divided from their own people by means of the newly created borders.

In this critical chapter then I will draw connections between these two areas, the first being the *Greater Punjab Region*, which as I have discussed in the context of my research includes East and West Punjab, Himachal, Kashmir, the North West Frontier Province and Eastern Afghanistan, and the second being West Africa including the countries of Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Ghana and Liberia, among others. I will demonstrate how amongst the local diaspora community of West African Christians in Edmonton, AB, the recreation of mutual cultural interdependence between groups divided by partition is again facilitated through the use of spiritual music, which in this case is represented by *Gospel*. I will show how members of different West African nationalities converge as a Christian collective in their Pentecostal church, where they share, learn and perform cultural activities that represents historical continuity with the way their people groups interacted amongst each other prior to colonization.

As two of my Doctoral committee members maintain interests in the region of West Africa, I found it natural to gravitate towards this particular community to enrich my own research paradigm. Though travel to the region itself would have been a great boon to my work, time constraints lent themselves better to a detailed study of the local community. I immersed myself within one particular congregation of Pentecostal West Africans in a church located in North West Edmonton. I was fortunate that several faculty members in neighbouring Humanities disciplines at the University of Alberta had experience with the region or were direct descendants of one of the many ethnic communities that make up West Africa.

I began attending The Church of Pentecost Canada, Edmonton Division, initially being reared into the cultural setting by Wisdom Agorde, a Professor of English and Film Studies from the University of Alberta whom I had been fortunate to work with in the past. At first, I was overwhelmed by the level of spirituality emanating forth during the services. Anyone familiar with the Pentecostal tradition will know of the religious experience of murmuring, or *glossolalia*, or as it is most commonly known “speaking in tongues.”<sup>114</sup> My initial reaction to the experience was on how simply fantastic it was to observe. Having instructed Religious Studies classes and having been academically reared in this tradition, as my intellectual coming of age was celebrated in Biblical and Christian Studies, I was incredibly excited to step first-hand into this world of esoteric religion. My best regards are to the community itself in Edmonton who welcomed me most whole-heartedly into the congregation and were flexible with my requests to document the activities at the church. Pastor Richard, Elder Sowah, members of the choir, as well as the congregation as a whole were the greatest of hosts and supported the endeavour with enthusiasm. My documentation involved photography, videography and audio-recording, which was done while attempting to be as un-invasive, and inconspicuous as possible. I also conducted a series of interviews with choir members, musicians and members of the congregation, the results of which I will present in this chapter.

The multi-faceted nature of my research meant that I could engage in the documentation of audio, video and photography during my attendance at the church services. I quickly became familiar with the customs of the congregation and got to know many of the participants more formally as time progressed. I noticed a number of interesting phenomena taking place at the

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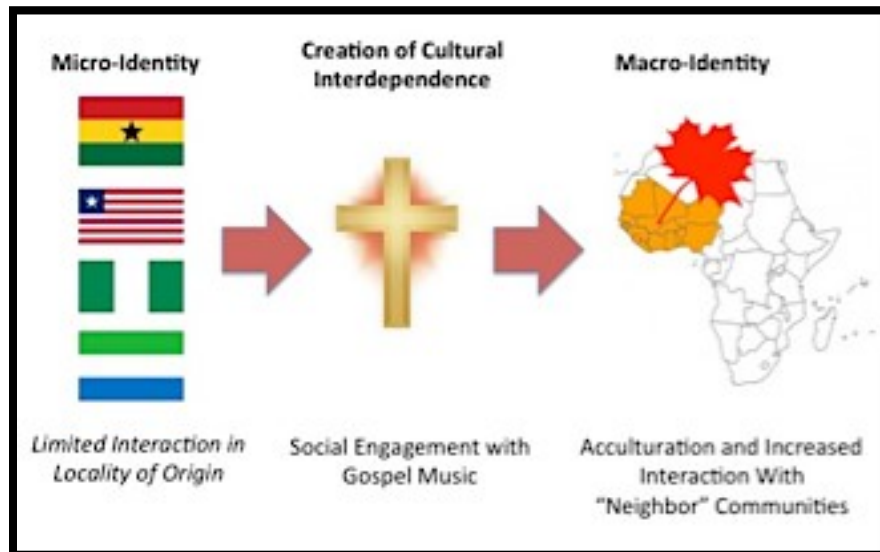
<sup>114</sup> See: Macchia (1992) and Goodman (2008)



cultural level during these church services. Not only would the women come dressed in their finest traditional attire (the men often donning suits and ties, more reminiscent of Western traditional church practices), but the socializing that took place during the services both before and after the formal events was spectacular to witness. While the primary focus of the majority of conversations during the more socially oriented time frames was still religious, I found the church to be a hub of social engagement, much like the religious places of gathering for many other communities throughout the world.

Through my primary point of contact, or my *liaison*, I was able to interact directly with other church participants that I was later introduced to. These included members of the congregation, but also musicians, choir members, ushers and others involved directly with the happenings of the church. Enoch Aboagye was one individual that became a good help to me during my research later introducing me to several other church members. I quickly found that the social networks at the church were very much indicative of a typical social web, where not everyone knew everyone else, but everyone was connected to everyone else through intermediaries or layers of connection.

## 9.2 ANCIENT TRIBAL BONDS REVIVED



**Figure 9-1 The Recreation of Cultural Interdependence Amongst West-Africans (Arsh Khaira)**

With relevance to my primary research paradigm, in which the Punjab region is the principle focus, I discovered that the West African community, a very diverse ethnic and demographic group, are able to engage culturally with one another because of shared ties. This level of engagement may have been virtually impossible in the locality of origin, namely the various countries in West Africa that members of the Church of Pentecost hail from, primarily because of border restrictions, as well as ethnocentrism or nationalistic tendencies akin to their country of origin. Some examples of these particulars can be seen in the following quote from two of my informants, Andrew Ahiabu and Juliette Max-Peters:

A typical example of a stereotype would be when an Ashanti marries someone from the Ewe tribe. Some reasons given for an Ashanti man not marrying a woman from the Ewe tribe from a Christian point of view are very trivial, but these are views that have been carried down for generations.

- Andrew Ahiabu

Our grandparent's generation had some biases to the other tribes, for example they wouldn't allow you to marry from amongst them... there was a bit of a "we are better than you" attitude. It wasn't what people did or didn't do, it was just the fact that you were from another tribe. Our generation is working very hard (to get rid of these biases), but old habits die hard, and for the older generation it is even more difficult (to get rid of the biases).

- Juliette Max-Peters

In other words, Ghanaian nationals, who are comprised of an equally diverse demographic group including (but not limited to) the Ewe, Ashanti and Akan, may have been exposed to a very limited cultural engagement with ethnic groups from neighbouring countries when living in Ghana. As a part of the acculturation process as new Canadians different communities from West Africa, now living in Canada naturally gravitate towards one another, now conceptualizing their cultural identity at a greater macro level (as regional West Africans). This phenomenon became further apparent and evermore substantiated through my participation at The Church of Pentecost, where the congregation formed a mix of Ghanaian, Liberian, Nigerian, Sierra Leonean and other West African nationals. What became equally evident through my interviews was that the uniquely West African nature of the services was something highly valued by participants. This further substantiated my main research paradigm with data that could be contextualized to my work in Punjab from a global perspective. An immediate parallel here is drawn to the way Kashmiris, East and West Punjabis, as well as Pashtuns, all inhabiting territories encompassing the *Greater Punjab*, or *Historical Punjab*, as demonstrated in the Sikh Empire and the Khalsa Raj of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, a flourishing civilization prior to its annexations by British colonialists, recreate mutually interdependent cultural relationships with one another through music, as I have explored in detail in this dissertation.

My research paradigm in the context of West Africa then can be understood in the following way: the conceptualization of social identity for acculturated West African Canadians occurs primarily at the macro-level (see Figure 9-1), and to live out this type of social identity conceptualization is outside the scope of the abilities of West Africans in the locality of origin, who may be more used to micro-level identity conceptualization. This can be evidenced in the following quote from one of my informants, Ivan Jackson, a musician at the Church of Pentecost, as well as Daniel Dompseh, the music director at the church:

In West Africa, there are different tribes, there are a lot of similarities, but we do things differently. In order to get along you have to adjust with what somebody is used to, if you're not used to it, you just have to understand and adjust to it. It's the same thing when you come to Canada... so many things we do back home are not being done here, once you are here you have to adjust to the way things are done here.

- Ivan Jackson

Africa as a continent has a really rich musical culture. We all have different styles of music, and we use different musical equipment. You might see one type of musical equipment being used in a country like Somalia, but you might not see it in Ghana. When you bring all of these people together, with their different backgrounds and different experiences with music, that blend is magnificent. It brings out a lot of culture and a lot of uniqueness, bringing all of these people together as one... music is a language, so we have different languages being blended together, it's unique, it's phenomenal

- Daniel Dompseh

By macro-level social identity conceptualization I am referring to the ability to engage socially with members of ethnic groups from the greater West African region to an extent not feasible or possible "back home." This social engagement lends itself to mutual cultural-interdependence,

which was exemplified in numerous examples in the interviews I conducted. See, for example, the following quote from Enoch Aboagye, a member of the church:

In spite of our different backgrounds, we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. So when I get to go play soccer with one of my brothers from Nigeria for example, I have a lot of fun... We are all a family, when a person comes to church we don't think about their background, we see each other as one.



**Figure 9-2 Informant Daniel Dompseh (Arsh Khaira – Summer 2016)**

I also shared the following conversation with Daniel Dompseh who had the following to say about these issues:

(Daniel) Our cultures are very similar, we might not speak the same languages, but even in a tribal system, the way things are done are pretty similar... we all eat the same staple crops. I think relating to people from the various West African countries is a little easier because we have a lot of things in common. If I see a fellow Nigerian in Church I can easily relate, I can go to their house and feel comfortable and eat whatever they eat, because we do the same basic things. Even with music, I feel African music has evolved so much that it cuts across the continent. You might go to Ghana and Nigerian music will be playing, and people enjoy it equally...

(Arsh) So even at Ghanaian weddings or parties, Nigerian music might be playing?

(Daniel) Yes. And the kind of dancing we do... (Arsh) You copy each other a little bit?

(Daniel) You might have some Nigerian music playing at a Ghanaian wedding and a person from Ghana will be copying the Nigerian dance.

(Arsh) So you have an understanding, you hear something, some music, and you know it's Nigerian...

(Daniel) A Nigerian man will have a very thick accent. Yes even the way we talk. If I hear a Nigerian person talking I immediately know they are from Nigeria. There are a lot of little things... If I see the stature of somebody I can even tell, if I see somebody really tall or well built I might think they are from Nigeria or even Sierra Leone... Even the skin color, if they are really dark they might be from Sudan.



**Figure 9-3 World Renown Performer Noble Nketia Performs at Pentecost (May 1st, 2016)  
(Arsh Khaira)**

Building on this idea, one interesting phenomenon I was able to personally witness during the performance of Noble Nketia at the church was this fantastic cultural engagement between different ethnic people of the greater West African region. As singers in many parts of the world are able to act as human bridges between different cultures, it is not uncommon for many of them to sing in different related languages. Many Afghani singers will sing in Dari, Pashto, Tajik, Hazargi and Hindi for example during their shows to access a broader demographic fan base, while also acting as a human bridge between people from bordering

regions. The ability to speak several related languages then is commonplace in parts of the world, like Central Asia for example, where the cultural and linguistic influences stretch out across regions and histories. I have mentioned earlier that my paternal grandmother is a Protestant Serb, and even she speaks Hungarian, Serb and German, and I also profess fluency in Punjabi, Urdu and Dari. I noticed quickly through my fieldwork and interviews that the same phenomenon exists in West Africa as evidenced through the following discussion I had with Juliette Max-Peters:

(Arsh) When Noble Nketia came to Pentecost, he sang in a couple different languages...

(Juliette) It's a very smart thing to do, if you want to sell your CD (singing in different languages), I'm not going to buy a CD that's all Ghanaian... I have his CD (Noble Nketia's), because I knew it had English songs in it... every song went Cri (a dialect of Ghana), English, Cri, English...

Many members of the congregation that I interviewed mentioned that they could speak several languages that were spoken amongst the different ethnic groups in their country of origin, but many could also speak languages spoken by cultural peoples in neighbouring countries, as can be seen in the following quote from Andrew Ahiabu:

I speak Cri, Ewe, a little bit of Fante. (Andrew can understand several Ghanaian tribal dialects). I have a lot of friends that speak Gha... What I do is when they speak I try to see exactly what they are saying (Andrew Ahiabu).

In fact, many of my interviewees expressed that they had actively begun to learn and speak these other related languages from other cultural peoples in the region after their participation at The Church of Pentecost. This was partially based on the liturgical traditions of the church, in that the choir would often sing in different Ghanaian, Nigerian, Liberian, Togolese and Sierra Leonean

languages. Even for those that found difficulty learning and speaking the languages of their regional neighbours, they still had a great fondness for the music of other communities in the region. In Punjab we see evidence of the same phenomenon with many Punjabi Muslims also speaking Urdu, Hindi, Pashto, Sindhi, Balochi and Kashmiri among other languages. For example of this phenomenon as I witnessed it amongst West Africans at the church, see the following quote from Juliette:

(Arsh) Has your interest in Ashanti, or Akan, or languages from different regions sparked a little bit? Are you interested in listening to their music and maybe even learning their language?

(Juliette) The music for sure, I have some that I will listen to, and my son says to me “you don’t even understand what they are singing,” to which I reply “it’s the one God.” But to hold a conversation (in another West African language) is hard.

Although the majority of church participants’ parents, or they themselves were born in Ghana, a good number of members were also from neighbouring countries. In most of my interviews I discovered that their religious identities as Christians, as part of the greater “Body of Christ,” often took precedence over other layers of identity including their culture, ethnicity or and nationality. Several members mentioned to me the importance of emphasizing that the church was open to all, regardless of race or culture, but that it was also important to them that the cultural heirlooms of their greater West African heritage be featured in church services in an effort to preserve and promote their rich traditions - as evidenced in the following quotes I obtained from Andrew Ahiabu and Enoch Aboagye:

The beauty of it is that even though we all come from different lands, once we come here, we are all one (Andrew Ahiabu).

We are all Africans coming together as one people. We are pretty much the same, even though we do a few things that are



different, but for the most part we are together as a family and we are all united as one (Enoch Aboagye).

This was evident in many ways to me as I observed and participated at the Church of Pentecost. I noticed many cultural traits, some very conspicuous and easily seen, others subliminal and indicative of the engagement between members (including formalities, or lack thereof).

### 9.3 THE EXCHANGE OF CULTURAL HEIRLOOMS AMONGST TRIBES



**Figure 9-4 The Choir Performs at Pentecost During the Akan Service, Sunday, June 26th, 2016 Note: Traditional Dress (Arsh Khaira)**

Most of the women would attend church services in the traditional costume of their tribe or ethnic group from their particular nation of origin, while men would come attired in their Sunday best (usually suits and ties). There were very few members of the entire congregation who were just there to observe, as almost every member had some role, major or minor, as a member of the choir, an usher, an administrator, a musician in the band, a Bible-study facilitator or even Pastors, Ministers or a word used perhaps because of the West African cultural connotation,

“Elders.” Church services were offered in English as well as “Akan,” a language spoken by the tribe of the same name in Ghana, but also widely understood by members of other Ghanaian tribes like the Ashanti and Ewe, even members of other nations were often versed in the language. It is important to note here that even the national physical lines of demarcation, dividing for example Ghana from Togo are not so black and white as they may seem. Here it is fitting to draw further similarities with other former British and French colony countries throughout the world where post-independence the partition of these regions was often done senselessly leading to generations of conflict and the imposing of superficial and very artificial national identities. Ghana and Togo for example both share large populations of the tribal group *Ewe*, who seem to straddle the border. What this elicits is the many shades of grey where identities are not so easily black and white.



**Figure 9-5 Enoch Aboagye (After our interview on Wednesday, May 4, 2016) (Arsh Khaira)**

## 9.4 DIVERSE TRIBAL REPRESENTATION THAT CROSSES BORDERS

Most of the congregation at Pentecost was either born in Ghana or had parents who were born there, however there were also members of the church whose ancestry could be traced back to other West African countries. In all of my interviews I found that nearly all participants were interested in maintaining the uniquely West African cultural element to the services. I should note here that every Sunday a service is held in English from 10-11:30am and then in the traditional Akan language, belonging to the people of the tribe of the same name from Ghana from, 12-2pm. Many participants that I interviewed expressed that they had a deep interest in learning the languages and customs of their neighbours. Some members shared with me that they had already begun to study the languages of the tribal peoples not of their own but perhaps from the same country, or even from another country, who were connected to the church:

Back in Ghana we do have other countries represented (in church), but it is extremely limited, it is still mostly Ghanaians (Andrew Ahiabu).



**Figure 9-6 Andrew Ahiabu After Our Interview (Arsh Khaira – Summer 2016)**

Again, the role of the singer as a cultural intermediary between peoples was emphasized as West African performers will often sing in a number of indigenous languages in an effort to unite the peoples of the vastly rich demographic of West Africa. This enthusiasm for each other's cultures was nearly ubiquitous across all of my interviewees.

## 9.5 KRIOS FROM SIERRA LEONE AMONGST GHANAIS: RESTORING ANCIENT KINSHIP TIES

One of my interviewees, Juliette, mentioned that being from Sierra Leone (and there being so few members from that particular country at Pentecost), she was initially very anxious about living in Canada. She mentioned that when she came home after having one of her children, her home was filled with members from the church (predominantly of Ghanaian ancestry), but that the feeling she had was no different than it would have been had she been surrounded by people from her own ethnicity. She mentioned to me that the way the Ghanaian community interacted with her and her family culturally was exactly the way members of her own *Krio* tribe would have done:

Church of Pentecost is predominantly Ghanaian, maybe 80%. But I feel very good about the fact that it is rooted in West African traditions. The languages are different, but there are some things rooted in the culture where you don't even need to speak the same language, we just know how to be with each other. For example when I gave birth to my daughter, when I came back from the hospital I was treated the same way I would have been treated by Sierra Leoneans. You're tired when you come home.... I came home to a lot of food in my house... we just naturally do that. That was one example that really surprised me, because I thought it was just a Sierra Leonean thing, but I realized it was more of a West African thing.

Similarly, Juliette's husband also shared with me the following comment:

For one thing I feel at home (at the Church of Pentecost). Our languages are different, but just being there, the way we do things in West Africa... there's a common way of doing things... it makes you feel at home, even though the majority of participants are Ghanaians (Ivan Jackson – Who is of Krio descent, born and raised in Sierra Leone, but having lived in Ghana as a young man for 8 years).

Juliette and I talked at length about the negative effect of the partition of West Africa into a number of countries. We talked about the imposing of superficial nationalist identities that was not a traditional part of the African way of life. People from surrounding regions, or from different tribes had a rich and storied history of interaction and cultural mutual interdependence that was shattered after the colonial powers left Africa - this does not necessarily mean that there were never warring factions or enmity between different tribes though. Later, these superficial (or as Juliette and I called them *artificial*) national identities served the basis for the polarization of peoples spearheaded by state authorities with the ultimate aim of acquiring and controlling the rich natural resources of the region. Juliette talked to me about the civil war in Sierra Leone that she said actually began in Liberia, but was brought to her country when amongst the thousands of refugees coming in, militant groups also hid themselves as refugees and eventually spread violence into the country:

Things are very rough in the country, things have gone down hill (after the civil war). Music is not supported.... (Juliette).



**Figure 9-7 Juliette Max-Peters (Arsh Khaira – Summer 2016)**

Juliette's husband, Ivan Jackson, who I also interviewed left Sierra Leone as a young man and spent eight years living in Ghana. Both Ivan and Juliette mentioned to me that Ghana has a reputation as a developed country that had (or has) the ability to assist other West African nations, be it by taking in refugees or otherwise:

(Arsh) A lot of the Ghanaians are excited to learn the languages of their neighbours. It would be great to have singers from different regions represented at Pentecost.

(Juliette) Ghana is more developed than most of the other African countries. They have a lot of musicians that are already established.

I found in my interviews that Sierra Leoneans predominantly listen to music from many other countries like Ghana, Nigeria, Togo and others, because the local music industry is just not supported (a repercussion of the civil war), whereas Ghanaians predominantly listen to their own music. Certain extremely popular forms of Gospel music like *High Life* (see: Nketia 1957; Collins 1976) were conceived and popularized in Ghana, while certain types of Gospel music, like *Socca*, are found predominantly in Sierra Leone:

Socca music is in a few of the West African countries, but it is very huge in the Caribbean. You won't find it in all of the West African countries, but you will find it in Sierra Leone (Ivan Jackson).



**Figure 9-8 Ivan Jackson – Musician (Arsh Khaira – Summer 2016)**

The role then of spiritual music, or *Gospel* music in particular was of tantamount importance to all of my interviewees. This only served to strengthen my observations from The Church of Pentecost. In many ways, because of Gospel music, and because of communal participation as a West-African *macrocosm* of cultural peoples facilitated by a shared participation and life in a western democratic country, this shared mutual cultural interdependence is being once again experienced by all participants at The Church of Pentecost:

There's a way of praise and worship that we are used to, even though we bring in the Western way of worship into our services once in a while (Ivan Jackson).

## 9.6 THE GATHERING OF SCATTERED SHEEP

"At that time I will bring you in, Even at the time when I gather you together; Indeed, I will give you renown and praise Among all the peoples of the earth, When I restore your fortunes before your eyes," Says the LORD.

- Zephaniah 3:20

In some ways, by being acculturated as Canadian nationals, and through the veil of a religion still relatively new to the region of origin, an ancient practice has been revived in a completely new and different setting (see: Parrinder 2014). To give evidence of this, I not only point to artists I observed like Noble Nketia, or the church choir, singing in different tribal languages from the region, but to the renewed enthusiasm amongst participants of the congregation like Enoch, Juliette or Andrew to learn the customs, traditions, practices and languages of their neighbours:

(Arsh) Singing a song of a regional dialect of Nigeria, is this something you're doing more of now that you're here in Edmonton, or were you doing this back home in Ghana as well?

(Andrew) We do it more here, because the church is so multi-national.

Andrew also mentioned that now that he is here in Edmonton and is a part of a multi-national West African church, he has more interest to learn the cultures of his neighbours. Something that is not at all an unnatural experience, but completely fluid in practice as it may have been in pre-colonial Africa. Much as the *Silk Route* created a great exchange between the Middle East and the Orient, with the peoples of Central Asia incorporating the foods, customs and linguistic peculiarities of their neighbours to the East and West, creating an amalgamation of culture and indeed a mutual cultural-interdependence between Arabs, Persians, and Asians, my research into West Africa lent itself to similar reciprocities between the many ethnic groups and micro-



cultures in the region. It is important to note that singing in English is also something given much importance by Gospel music artists from the region, especially by artists who want to access a broader fan base outside their own micro-community:

A lot of the songs (From Sierra Leone) will have parts in English and parts in Krio... It's the one God, people are really trying to come together (Juliette).

## 9.7 THE GHANAIAIAN WEDDING

In connection to the fieldwork component of my research I was fortunate to attend the wedding of a local Ghanaian Pentecostal couple on Saturday, April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2016. The wedding was held at the North Pointe Community Church on a beautiful Spring afternoon. I was given prior permission to document my observations, which included taking pictures and video of my experiences. The wedding service itself was immensely beautiful and seemed to grandly incorporate elements from both the Christian religion as well as elements of Ghanaian culture. The bride and groom were both dressed in the typical Christian wedding fashion, however some women from the family and friends came adorned in traditional Ghanaian or tribal dress. The choir was also dressed as according to Western or American style customs. There were elements of Ghanaian culture incorporated into the ceremony especially with regard to the music selections and dancing style incorporated at the reception. One notable phenomenon was the incorporation of “High Life” music, a style popularized in Ghana but now well received throughout almost the entire of West Africa. High Life music is essentially music that is rooted aesthetically in hip-hop but is lyrically more closely related to Gospel music. That is the “beats” are driving like hip-hop songs (the music can be danced to), but the lyrical theme of the music is quintessentially Christian. The wedding reception that took place in the Gym of the North Pointe

Community Church had a DJ situated in one corner of the room near the dance floor who was playing a varied selection of High Life, as well as secular Ghanaian popular music.

In noting the absence of the visual aesthetic of Ghanaian culture for the most part from this particular wedding, I imagine that this is most essentially the by-product of acculturation to Western norms and practices that may come hand in hand with a globalizing Christian community and the unification of “Christian” cultural norms and practices. I have mentioned that there was indeed a noticeable absence of traditional tribal costumes, whereas in almost all of the church services I attended, the tribal dress was the preferred choice of most of the women who happened to be in attendance. Although many of the male church participants would wear silk shirts that incorporate the ethnic patterns of the different groups of Ghana, the preferred style of dress for men still seemed to be suits and ties, as we use the colloquial phrase “come dressed in your Sunday best.”



**Figure 9-9 The Choir Performs at the Ghanaian Pentecostal Wedding (Arsh Khaira – Summer 2016)**



**Figure 9-10 Male Members of the Choir Perform at the Wedding (Arsh Khaira – Summer 2016)**



**Figure 9-11 The Arrival of the Bride (Arsh Khaira – Summer 2016)**

## 9.8 THE PENTECOSTAL TRADITION

One of the first things you will notice when attending a Church of Pentecost service is how dynamically the energy in the room can shift almost musically from dramatic highs and swells of group prayer and glossolalia phenomenon into sudden lulls of silence and pastoral led prayer. The energy of the room simply flows towards the pulpit as the congregation switches from being seated in silence, to standing, sometimes raising their arms and speaking in tongues, towards actually moving closer to the pulpit to accept blessings from the priests and pastors or even dancing between the church pews. The musicians at the Edmonton division are situated most often towards the front left corner of the room when facing the pulpit from the pews. Choir members then would most often be next to the musicians towards the left and gravitating further towards the center. Priests, pastors and other church leaders would be situated upon the stage approximately two feet above ground level (see Figures 9:12-16).



**Figure 9-12 Communion During the Service on May 1st, 2016 (Arsh Khaira)**



**Figure 9-13 The Assembly Is Seated, June 26th, 2016 (Arsh Khaira)**



**Figure 9-14 The Assembly Rises, June 26th, 2016 (Arsh Khaira)**



**Figure 9-15 The Assembly Moves Towards the Stage, June 26th, 2016 (Arsh Khaira)**



**Figure 9-16 The Choir Performs at the Front of the Room, June 26th, 2016, (Akan Service).  
Note: Traditional dress, position of priests and elders upon stage, musicians to the left  
(Arsh Khaira)**

The Pentecostal tradition, especially as it is practiced by this particular church (the headquarters are in Ghana but there are offices throughout the world), is characterized by a dynamic modality of expression during communal services. The congregation will begin seated, perhaps with a Bible study, and then move into a sermon, and all of this so far is quite characteristic of all Christian communities when considered at the pan-denominational level. These Pentecostals then move into prayers that are often “invoked,” by one of the leaders of the congregation (this could be a pastor, priest, or even a member of the choir). The leader at the front of the room will ask the congregation to pray along with him at which point in time the entire room breaks out into their own unique prayers, often in their own unique language:

Everyone worships God in their own different way. Sometimes in church someone might be praying in a language from Nigeria or Liberia, but I see that as all unique and special. If everyone prays in one language, they wouldn’t be able to express themselves as well (Enoch Aboagye).

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We all have a different way of worshipping the God we have come to believe. I'm Christian, I believe in the one true God, if a fellow Nigerian is Christian, they will believe in the same one true God, but we all have different ways of worshipping. For example, a Ghanaian man when worshipping might dance around, a Nigerian man might do something similar but in a different way. A Nigerian woman out of appreciation for what God has done for her might just lay on the floor and just keep rolling, that is something that is in their culture. The truth of the matter is that we have different people, from different backgrounds doing the same thing. For some reasons, I don't know why, it seems to blend, we all accept the different ways people worship God...

We also have the PIWC, which is strictly in English. However, we have people from different cultural backgrounds and they are allowed to express themselves using English as the main language, but they can express themselves the way they want to based on their cultural background. So the songs we might sing, we might pick from let's say Liberia or South Africa or even Canada. We don't want to restrict ourselves to just Ghanaian music, so we try to incorporate music from other places, because a Ghanaian will appreciate music from South Africa as much as from Ghana (Daniel Dompok).

To an observer, *glossolalia* at first sounds completely unintelligible with every individual in the room praying their own prayer, in their own words, at their own pace, in their own language. To further heighten the spiritual efficacy of this fantastic moment known for the tradition in the Gospel of the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples of Jesus who all began "speaking in tongues," members of the congregation then begin to "murmur," speaking in strange languages and voices, invoking the Holy Spirit (Book of Acts 2:1-6, Meyer 2004; Robbins 2004). Couple this with cymbal washes and a swirling organ and what you experience ultimately is a cacophony of sound that creates a trance like state in participants (and possibly in observers). As the speaking in tongues and prayers begin to swell, the leader then asks the congregation to join them in a gospel song, which is usually projected on the screen.

In many ways, the practice of “speaking in tongues” resembles some forms of Sufi Zikr, and it is one of the primary experiences that enables the creation of a shared psychological headspace for the various ethnic groups in attendance - this also assists with the process of reconciliation between them. In this way, the same phenomenon that allows for the communities that make up the greater Punjab region, especially Sikhs and Muslims, to recreate mutual cultural interdependence through shared spirituality and musical exchange, also can be seen to take place amongst the different ethnicities and nationalities of West-Africa. This community also experiences many of the same difficulties in the origin of locality that results from limited face-to-face interaction as a result of national boundaries and highly militarized borders. However, as my informants have shown, the exchange of cultural phenomenon, especially *spiritual music*, in this context *gospel*, still occurs and facilitates the rekindling of ancient kinship ties.

## 9.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The benefits of this undertaking were far reaching as the project allowed me to contextualize my primary theory which emphasizes the role of music in the re-unification process for partitioned peoples. This process of reconciliation occurs in a similar way for several communities affected by colonized histories - which for most parts of the colonial world resulted in the division of newly formed nation-states along perceived tribal or religious lines of demarcation. People that have been displaced by partition<sup>115</sup> histories have a similar story and have by and at large been able to reap the benefits of participating in the acculturation process into Western democratic nations like the United States and Canada, wherein they are once again able to participate in

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<sup>115</sup> Though the word “Partition” refers specifically to the division of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, I use it here as an archetype for the similar division of other regions of the world by colonial powers.



social engagement, either at places of worship or in secular environments, with other displaced generations from their origin of locality. In this way there are countless similarities between the peoples of West Africa and the tribal groups of the Punjab who were forcibly separated along religious lines in 1947.

The significance of Gospel music to the church members at Pentecost as exemplified by my interviewees in their answers can be seen to be far reaching with very positive effects on social identity conceptualization as well as on acculturating to a new multi-faceted identity, something that happens rather implicitly when contrasted to the deep and profound nature of Gospel music on the faith of Pentecostal adherents:

*(Arsh) What does Gospel music mean to you ?*

*(Andrew) It means everything to me... I see it this way, there are certain songs that people have been inspired to sing, maybe they were going through certain situations. I may be going through certain challenges or difficult times, but when I sing that song I sing it with the understanding of what the singer was going through at that time.*

A short piece Andrew sang for me:

*I will praise you all my life,  
I will sing to you with my whole heart, I will trust in you,  
My hope and my health,  
My saviour and my faithful God.*

*Oh, faithful God,  
My faithful God,  
You gave me life,  
And you uphold my cause. You gave me life,*

*You dry my eyes,  
You are always near, You are a faithful God.*

The traditions that make up the various micro-cultures represented at The Church of Pentecost seem to seamlessly engage with each other into a beautiful mosaic of culture during the church services. All of the participants I spoke to expressed great joy in the way services are organized, with some members from the less-represented communities like Liberia or Sierra Leone hoping for greater incorporation of their own cultures into the programs – including possibly inviting singers from other less-represented countries.

I understand that the level of engagement taking place between several different micro-communities from the greater West African region, lends itself to a dynamic display of something in many ways unique to the Canadian experience. I found that once I had begun to theorize that perhaps the level of engagement between the peoples of these micro-cultures was very limited in the origin of locality, and this was indeed a phenomenon unique to the Western democratic world, or at least to countries that are built on traditions of immigrant settlers (like Canada, for example), I then began to question the possible benefits (or even detriments) of this occurrence. On the positive side, and as substantiated by my interviews, members of this particular congregation feel uplifted and a greater sense of belonging to a larger community. The support they receive from their church is immense - as characterized by my conversation with Juliette and the other interviewees. Churches such as The Church of Pentecost in Edmonton play a major role in the acculturation process for new Canadians, and the preservation of “home” cultures is something also commonplace in Canada, which is typical of a “mosaic,” rather than a “melting pot” society, where immigrants are encouraged to embrace and preserve their cultural uniqueness. In the same way, many “Sanjha” events and initiatives take place in Canada that are not possible in the Punjab locality because of national boundaries, as well as the political situation. Consider that exile of Israel to Babylon brought forth some of the greatest prophets in

their history, including Daniel and Isaiah – similarly, the opportunity to rest, reconnect, and *mobilize* communities all exist strategically in “exilic” contexts. However a detriment to these processes of reunification could be that certain historically connected communities are shunned, perhaps for example like the Muslim communities of West Africa.<sup>116</sup>

In the next chapter I will explore the deeply entrenched historical continuities between Sikhism and Islam as they are revealed and represented to us in contemporary forms of “shared spirituality” and worship. It will be important to understand that the culture of Punjab and the religion of the Sikhs were not developed in the context of a *vacuum*. Rather, it is the amalgamation of hundreds of years of history, countless kingdoms (Greek, Persian, Mughal, etc.), and geographic proximities to neighboring people groups (Afghan, Kashmiri, Turko-Mongolic, Tibetan, Central-Asian, etc.) that has dictated the historical ebb and flow, as well as the current religious context that we find ourselves at this juncture.

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<sup>116</sup> See: Sanneh, Lamin. *Piety and Power: Muslims and Christians in West Africa*. Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2015.

## 10 THE IDENTITY BEHIND THE MUSIC: THE IMPORTANCE OF SUFISM IN THE MAINTENANCE OF PUNJABI SELF-CONCEPT

The thing is that the Sufis of Pak-o-Hind they all talked about love and about mitigating differences. They all wrote poetry saying that in emphasizing dissimilarities or arguing there is nothing to be gained. They all talked about love, friendship and peace, and if this message can again reach the common people this will be very good for everyone. But at least with a new fashion (i.e.: contemporary musical styles like “rock”) these messages of the Sufis are reaching the youth of today...

-Irfan Abbas (Lahore, Punjab)

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In this chapter I will discuss how *Sufism* contributes to a sense of Punjabi identity that, while rooted in spirituality, eschews the dogmatism associated with hardline religious conservatism. In this way Sufism allows Sikhs and Muslims from East and West Punjab to coalesce into a cohesive group bound together through a collection of shared worship practices and beliefs.

Consider, for a moment, the idea of Pakistan as a nation administered by Islamic principles. Originally, it was conceived as what would be a secular society open to practitioners of any faith (by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, an *Ismaili* from Gujarat), but a nation that would depend on the teachings of Islam for guidance and direction. The lines of demarcation that have been created over the past seventy years have resulted in a new-found dependence on Saudi theological teachings that dictate the ebb and flow of the conservative-reformist branches of Pakistani society (with a longer standing debt to *Deobandi* forms of conservative Islam – and perhaps even earlier to the teachings of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab). Indeed, we have come to see the propagation of a new brand of orthodox Islam amongst militant organizations that internalizes mistrust for other religious populations (Ismailis, Sikhs, and Christians for example),

as well as ethnic minorities (Pashtun, Balochi, Sindhi and Kashmiri) and practitioners of Sufi Islam. The *Punjabi Taliban* is an association that was at one point active in the country (serving to provide further evidence for Punjabi domination of the nation) with claims by some media agencies that they had carried out human rights violations directed towards minority communities such as the Pashtun, Sindhi and Baloch.

Today, the idea of a national-unity is far reaching in Pakistan and we see evidence of this in the decline of regional languages in favor of the lingua-franca of the educated classes, *Urdu*. This process of *nationalizing* (or, homogenizing) Pakistan has been mostly successful save for certain regions that wish to maintain some element of regional and cultural autonomy (the *Balochistan* “problem”). The same phenomenon is rampant on the other side of the border as *Hindu-Nationalism* propagates throughout the many states of India, with little room left for the rights and cultural autonomy of the Assamese, Kashmiris or Punjabi Sikhs, for example.

The treatment of minority communities is an ever-lasting question of debate, particularly in the Middle East and South/Central Asia (i.e., Hazara, Kurdish, Tibetan, Sikh, Kashmiri, Balochi, etc.). It is insufficient to pass these issues off simply as the unwillingness of micro-communities to be absorbed into an artificial (and colonial) idea of what should constitute a national-unified identity. The issue echoes the sentiments of West Africans, for example, who have a similar colonial history and are now locked in generations of conflict. The Ewe for example are found in several different neighboring countries, and have since been subject to the imposing of different, and arguably *artificial*, colonially structured national identities (Ghanaian, Togolese, Nigerian, etc.).

I suggest in this thesis that one solution to issues of inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflict in the greater Punjab can be found in the local variants of *Sufi* music. The Sufi tradition

is deep-rooted in the soil of Pakistan and represents the historical legacy of Islam making reference to some of the indigenous traditions that predate its arrival in the region. It should be noted here that Sufism has been a part of Islamic tradition since long before it came to South Asia, and some even say since the beginning of Islam - seeing Sufism as the true essence of the faith. Sufism tends to be very flexible and often tends to re-contextualize regional referents that were not originally part of the Islamic tradition. This, however, does not make the type of Sufism practiced in Pakistan less Islamic, as Islam has always tended to be localized wherever it has been.

For Punjabis, the Sufi poetry of Sheikh Farid or Baba Nanak shows just how spiritual discourse can literally cross religious divides. We may see that such poetry is able to transcend religious differences, however, the interesting phenomenon is that these are in-fact *sacred* treatises. What I mean by this is that while Farid is one of the most revered Saints of the Chishtiyya, but his hymns are *literally* canonized in the Sikh Scriptures. This is no small matter, as we know the significance of a canonized text for Christians, Jews or Muslims and the authority these writings are given. Although Farid was a Sufi poet, his Saloks are not canonical for Sufis, in other words they do not comprise one of the four revealed texts including: the Torah (Tawrat), revealed to the Prophet Moses (Musa), The Psalms (Zabur), revealed to the Prophet David (Dawud), The Gospel (Injil), revealed to the Prophet Jesus (Esa), and The Quran, revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. Yet Farid's Saloks, or "scriptures," are canonical for Sikhs, as they are literally contained in the authoritative text of the Sikhs, the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*.

## 10.1 THE “SANJH” OF SHEIKH FARID AND “SHARED” SPIRITUALITY

*LEAVING FOOTPRINTS: GURDWARA TILLA (CHILLA) BABA FARID – FARIDKOT, PB*

In order to understand the essence of the shared identity between East and West Punjabis and to what extent this is emphasized through a common secular or spiritual sphere (or a combination of the two) I travelled once again in near proximity to the border between East and West Punjab to a city known as Faridkot. It was at Faridkot where Farid first met Nizammudin Auliya who later became his disciple and spiritual successor in the Chishti order. I visited this beautiful and archetypally Punjabi city, and documented my experience at the Gurdwara *Tilla Sahib*, where Baba Farid remained in meditation for forty days before proceeding to Pakpattan (Pakistan). I documented the Shabads as they were performed here, and examined for continuity with not only the classical methods of delivery of Shabad Kirtan as prescribed by the authoritative scriptures of the Sikhs, but also for clear similarities with Sufism based on methods of delivery and other qualitative and subjective measures which I observed first hand. Faridkot is in the South West corner of East Punjab and the outskirts of the small city are only about ten kilometers away from the Pakistan Border. A few kilometers away from this Gurdwara is another site of significance which is representative again of the fact that the delineation between the shared identity between East and West Punjabis and especially between Sikhs and Muslims is not so easily categorized in terms of religion, spirituality or culture. I will now briefly talk about this second site, and then move into a discussion of what I observed at these two locations.

*LEAVING FOOTPRINTS: GURDWARA GODARI SAHIB – FARIDKOT, PB*

I documented and assessed the Shabads as they were performed here and spoke with Granthis (Priests) to develop further insight. I also conversed with devotees who had come to worship. I visited this site to better understand the practices of worshippers and to examine for continuities between Sikhism and Islam. It can be clearly ascertained from the photographs I provide below that there are strong spiritual and religious similarities represented between the two religions at both sites of historical significance. As a canonized prophet in the Sikh scriptures and one of the most revered Saints of the Chishtyya tradition, Sheikh Farid is honored at these two Gurdwaras through the laying of Islamic *chadors* imprinted with the deeply esoteric Islamic insignia of “786,” (the alpha numeric code for the *Bismillah* – “Bismillah al Rahman al Raheem”) and through the lighting of *chirags* or oil lamps and through the invocation of *dua*. Note the style of invocation by devotees at the Gurdwara with the hands outstretched in the Islamic manner when offering *prayers*. The pilgrims’ heads are covered and oil lamps burn below the *chador* laying upon the bark of the tree where Sheikh Farid remained in his meditative *zikr* for forty days. Further, the *Quran* of the revered prophet and saint is kept alongside his *godari* (jacket) for *bandagi* and worship by devotees.

Many Muslims also are involved as caretakers and an even greater number arrive at the Gurdwara as worshippers. In the photographs below you can also see many of these men and women including Kashmiris. Notice also the manner of dress of the devotees at the Gurdwara. In the months from November to February, the Punjab region becomes very cold and everyone is dressed warmly in multiple layers and very modestly and conservatively. The Kashmiris wear their own dress as it is designed to keep them warm in the upper Himalayas, from where the cold winds come down into the Punjab plains area.





**Figure 10-1 Map Showing the Location of Faridkot, Outlined in Red, in Close Proximity to the Pakistan Border (Google Maps)**



**Figure 10-2 Photograph of Me Purchasing an Islamic Chador with the "786" Insignia for Worship at Gurdwara Baba Farid (Photo by Gurdeep Khaira – Fall 2014)**

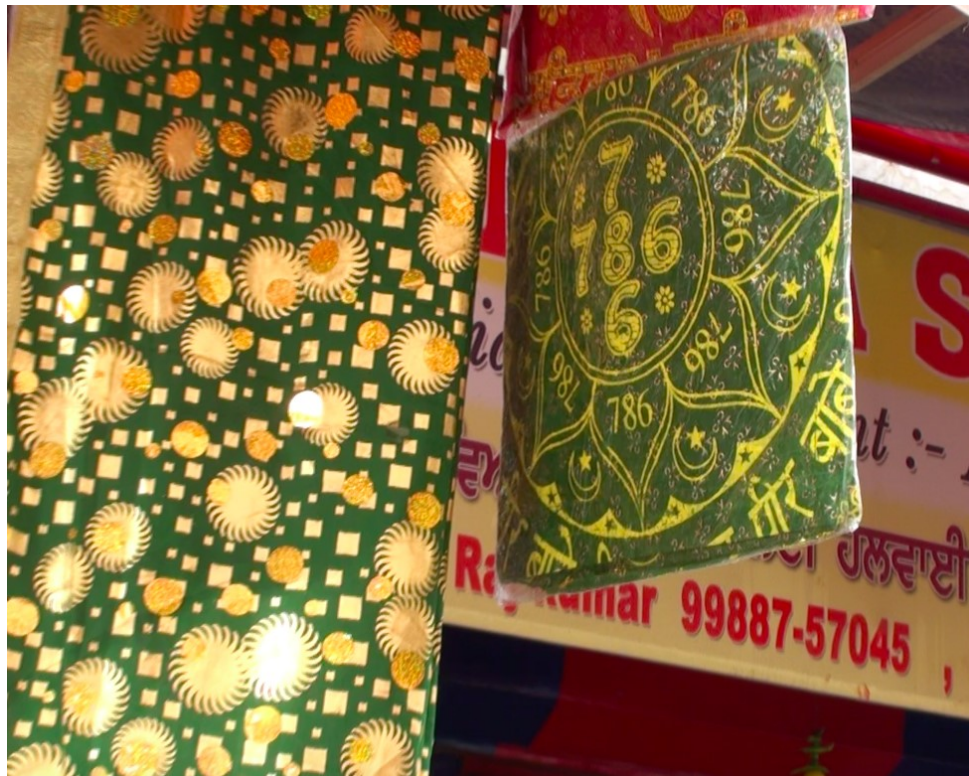


**Figure 10-3 A Kashmiri Muslim at Gurdwara Baba Farid (Photo by Arsh Khaira – Fall 2014)**





**Figure 10-4 Young Kashmiri Muslims at Gurdwara Baba Farid (Photo by Arsh Khaira – Fall 2014)**



**Figure 10-5 Islamic Chadors for Sale at Gurdwara Baba Farid (Photo by Arsh Khaira – Fall 2014)**





**Figure 10-6 Photograph of a Young Sikh Woman Lighting "Chirags" After the Laying of an Islamic Chador at Gurdwara Baba Farid (Photo by Arsh Khaira – Fall 2014)**



**Figure 10-7 A Young Sikh Girl Offers Prayers as I Lay an Islamic Chador for Baba Farid at a Gurdwara in His Name (Photo by Gurdeep Khaira – Fall 2014)**



**Figure 10-8 A Photograph of Me Lighting "Chirags" for Baba Farid (Photo by Gurdeep Khaira – Fall 2014)**



**Figure 10-9 A Man Worshipping at the Baba Farid Gurdwara (Photo by Arsh Khaira – Fall 2014)**





**Figure 10-10 A Devotee Distributes Sweets (Shakkar) For Worshippers at the Baba Farid Gurdwara (Photo by Arsh Khaira – Fall 2014)**



**Figure 10-11 Photograph of a Young Woman Offering DUA at the Baba Farid Gurdwara (Photo by Arsh Khaira – Fall 2014)**





**Figure 10-12 The Entrance to Gurdwara Godari Sahib (Photo by Arsh Khaira – Fall 2014)**



**Figure 10-13 The Darbar at Gurdwara Godari Sahib (Photo By Arsh Khaira – Fall 2014)**



I note here that the traditional architecture of Gurdwaras is very closely related to the design of a Mosque.<sup>117</sup> Both include a *gumbad*, which is the onion shaped dome that sits on top of the building (see Figure 10-14 below). Chahal (2012) helps here. His article traces the significant place of *Gurdwaras* (Sikh houses of worship) in the context of the geophysical Punjab, as exemplified by their unique architecture. The authors look back to the history of the first Gurdwaras, many of which were single room places of worship built to house the Sri Guru Granth Sahib (the sacred scriptures of the Sikhs), to today's more contemporary and lavish multi-room and multi-story buildings. The article notes that during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the period of the Sikh Empire, many new, large and beautifully decorated Gurdwaras sprang up throughout the empire in the regions that Sikhs inhabited. The authors also look back into the significance of the Gurdwara, not only as a place to house the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, but also often built in memory of a particular historical event.

Historically, Gurdwaras have been built in memory of martyrs, known as “shaheeds” in Sikh lore, or for other significant figures in Sikh history. The writers note that many of the Gurdwaras in Punjab were built during the second part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the early 19<sup>th</sup> century when Sikhs had gained significant political power in Punjab. Many Gurdwaras also have considerable tracts of land in their proximity under their jurisdiction, which evidences the association of the historical practice of farming with the Sikh religion. Many nobles would often

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<sup>117</sup> See: Chahal, Karamjit Singh, Sandeep Dua, and Sulakhan Singh. "Architectural Evolution of Gurdwaras: An Overview." *IUP Journal of Architecture* (2012).

give considerable portions of land to allow for the building of Gurdwaras and the farming of the lands in the immediate vicinity to support the *langar* (free kitchen).



**Figure 10-14 Gurdwara Singh Sabha in Edmonton (Photo by Arsh Khaira 2015)**



**Figure 10-15 The Entrance to Gurdwara Godari Sahib (Photo by Arsh Khaira – Fal 2014)**



**Figure 10-16 The Nishan Sahib at Gurdwara Godari Sahib (Photo by Arsh Khaira – Fall 2014)**





**Figure 10-17 A Devotee Distributes Parshad at Gurdwara Godari Sahib (Photo by Arsh Khaira – Fall 2014)**

Note\* *Parshad* is a sweet and soft, doughy food, that is given to everyone who comes to a Gurdwara. This is done to nourish the individual and sustain them so they may focus on the scriptures being recited there.



**Figure 10-18 The Quran and Cloak of Sheikh Farid at Gurdwara Godari Sahib (Photo by Arsh Khaira – Fall 2014)**





**Figure 10-19 The Quran and Cloak of Sheikh Farid at Gurdwara Godari Sahib (Photo by Arsh Khaira – Fall 2014)**

The question we must ask here then is: in the context of these similarities between Islam and Sikhism, does it remain fair to say that Punjabis are connecting based on some notion of a unified secular component of their identity? Or instead, that this is actually a *religious connection*? Does the mutual-interdependence I demonstrate in this research between Punjabis actually represent a shared notion of “religious identity”? Or, perhaps we can suggest a far more conceptually radical alternative—a shared *spiritual* tradition that predates and transcends all three of these modern categories (secular, religious and cultural). Although the categories of *secular*, *cultural* and *religious* have become relevant in recent times, that does not necessarily mean they exhaust the possibilities of human solidarities. Scholars such as Saba Mahmood (2005) and Talal Asad (1996), among others, have increasingly questioned the neutrality and universality of secularism as the solution to coexistence in multi-religious, multi-ethnic, and multi-cultural societies. For many conservative-reformist Muslims (i.e., Salafi or Deobandi) or even some factions of conservative Sikhs, the idea that Sikhs and Muslims have a shared historical religious connection would be called “shirk.” But for many others, this idea of a

shared *spiritual* connection *would* make complete sense and resonate with them. Such questions of coexistence are vital at a time when religious identities are increasingly invoked to divide communities that otherwise share interests and cultural values. We can gain insight into these questions through the works of Talal Asad, who does not take for granted that religion even exists as an objective category or domain of practice.

Asad questions the idea of how religion can be spatially conceived to be in its own sphere, or able to exist by and at large as a phenomenon in itself. Essentially, he frames his discourse around how we can begin to conceptualize religion as an entity (self-sufficient) on its own. We know that the Sufi discourses that unite Punjabis are definitely of a *spiritual* nature, but are Sikh and Muslim Punjabis connecting with each other in a shared religious experience? When Asad goes on to describe the lines of demarcation indicative of contemporary, or what he calls “modern” society, where the secular public realm of operation is assumed to be separated from the private, religious realm, he is allowing us to touch on the broader issue of identity. In this context, which component of Punjabi identity is activated and triggered through a shared “appreciation” of a contemporary Sufi song? In recent Coke Studio episodes, when Gurdas Mann and Diljit Dosanjh sing “Allah Bismillah teri Jugni” (which means: “in the name of God, I acknowledge your spirit of life”) in the song “Ki Banu Duniya Da?” (literally: “what will become of the world?”), and the same verses are sung by Abrar ul Haque and Saeen Zahoor in a West Punjabi collaboration, this elicits shared enthusiasm from East and West Punjabis. However, what is framed here as a shared secularism is actually deeply rooted in religious rhetoric and tradition. It also represents an interesting dynamic between spiritual discourses in a secular context.



Early in his work, *Genealogies of Religion*, Asad critiques the idea that there is a category of phenomena that we can call “religion” that exists cross-culturally. He says that most 20th-century anthropologists conceive of it as a “distinctive space of human practice and belief which cannot be reduced to any other” (27). Durkheim, for example, argues that we can find the basis of “social organization” in religion, in that it is derived from primitive and elementary forms of “the sacred.” Asad goes on to argue against this idea, stating that “there cannot be a universal definition of religion, not only because its constituent elements and relationships are historically specific, but because that definition itself is the product of discursive processes” (29). There is no such thing as *religion in itself* for Asad—there is only “religion as a category” that some people talk about.

Asad goes through these processes of defining our understanding of religion and how it cannot be understood as “simply a primitive and therefore outmoded form of the institutions we now encounter in truer form (law, politics, science) in modern life” (27). He agrees that many anthropologists now challenge this notion (although it should be noted that this is not his main point, as he moves on to dismantle the very idea of religion as a universal category, which in some ways undermines some earlier anthropologists’ claims). This process of delineation takes place in part because Asad is of the view that today, many of the anthropologists who study Muslim beliefs and practices “will need some understanding of how ‘religion’ has come to be formed as a concept and practice in the modern west” (27).

Anthropologists like Asad often talk about how “modernity” (itself a very complex and internally differentiated notion) has affected various parts of the world. The question then is, what role does *modernity* play in this connection that seems to transcend *religion* (Islam and Sikhism), offered in a secular packaging, but actually steeped deeply in religious discourse?

Even the use of “traditional” instruments and ragas in the context of this revival cannot simply be qualified as “traditional.” In fact, it was important to me in the context of this research that dichotomies like “traditional” versus “modern” should be avoided. Much of what we think of as traditional has been deeply influenced by modernity, so whenever we see something that looks traditional, it’s important not to assume that it’s pre-modern. In his book *Formations of the Secular* (2003), Asad hints that modernity itself may be conceived as a project of power that certain people aim to achieve.

Asad acknowledges that the advent of modernity occurred at a particular time in European history and represented a shift in the status quo of those societies. For us to try to apply this concept to people from different histories may not be well conceived. We can acknowledge that there are “traditions” and “modernity,” but they are not binary opposites. What is traditional is often a product of modernity, even if it doesn’t look like plain Western modernity. This is especially true of the various forms of “folk” musical performance, especially in the context of the Sufi revival. By peeling through the layers of connection between Punjabi people, we can begin to see that the Sufi revival is a by-product of a deeply entrenched shared historical narrative but is just as much a by-product of modernity. This goes back to the idea that the new contemporary “Sufism” that is creating inroads, or literally rebuilding “bridges,” cannot simply be understood outside the context of a shared religious narrative, or simply as something secular that “we can all enjoy.”

Asad also argues that the situation is not black and white, but very grey. We cannot just choose one or the other, modernity or otherwise. He makes the case of Middle Eastern countries, which we should make a concerted attempt to understand, particularly in the way modernity interacts with traditional religious practices in the public domain. The idea is that traditional

cultures do not automatically conform to the expectations placed upon them of modernity, instead they are pushed by dynamic energies to elicit these changes. Based on Asad's critique of the use of religion/religious as a cross-cultural category, we should also ask whether there are alternatives that avoid the implications of the term "religious" (which usually suggests a particular religious tradition, not spiritual ideas that transcend a single religious tradition). For example, rather than explicitly setting aside attempts to label these songs as "religious" or "secular" (since we have shown that this divide is a modern, Western construct), perhaps instead we can speak of something like "spirituality," which participants may recognize as an aspect of this type of music and poetry.

When the band at a Punjabi concert plays "Dam A Dam Mast Qalander," this elicits a shared appreciative response from Ismaili Muslims, Sunni and Shia Muslims and Sikhs. A religious narrative in this process has been reframed into a secular context, but does this undermine the *spiritual* component of the message? Are communities that have been severed by partition narratives and forced to qualify their sacred stories into clearly defined differences between Sikh and Muslim literally afraid to acknowledge their shared religious discourses that are being re-appropriated into mainstream music? How difficult will it be for these communities to look beyond the high-gloss cellophane sheen of the product before they can openly acknowledge that there is something very powerfully *spiritual* taking place?

## 10.2 THE DRUMS OF MUHARRAM: SHIA AND SIKH SIMILARITIES

### *LEAVING FOOTPRINTS: AJMER SHARIF*

To bring this question to light, I offer the following examples from some of my field-work journeys. While collecting data, I travelled to the holy city of Ajmer and the dargah of Moinuddin Chishti, the founder of the Chishtiyya school of Sufism in India. It is important to note that this group had already existed as an order in Afghanistan, specifically in the region of Chisht, from where Moinuddin was originally from, later travelling to India and settling in Ajmer. Many Muslims in India believe it was because of Moinuddin (who they also call *Gareeb Nawaz* – “protector of the poor,” coincidentally also the name used by Sikhs to refer to the 10<sup>th</sup> Guru, Gobind Singh) that Islam was able to gain a strong foothold in South Asia - not by the edge of the sword but by love and devotion. Many of the Chishtiyya believe that *Gareeb Nawaz*’s message of tolerance was able to single-handedly spread Islam more than any invading army ever could. Although I was not allowed to take my camera into the darga with me, when I was staying at a nearby hotel I was able to perform with some local musicians. This was also one of my first experiences with the Afghan community as two bus-loads of students from the country were staying at the same hotel visiting Rajasthan. It was here that I performed a rendition of “*Dam a Dam Mast Qalander*” for these students and others:



**Figure 10-20 I Perform "Mast Qalandher" with Local Musicians Near Ajmer, Rajasthan (Photo by Gurpreet Khaira - 2009)**

My visit to this darga, which is one of the best-known Islamic sites of significance not only in India, but in all of South Asia, coincided with the Shia holy days of *Muharram*. The interesting thing about this trip is that we had originally planned to travel to Maharashtra by train to visit the Sikh Gurdwara in Nanded Sahib, the place from where it is generally believed that Guru Gobind Singh Ji left his earthly abode. After some of the final battles involving the handful of Sikhs that had been left over after massive genocides excised against them by Aurangzeb, the 10<sup>th</sup> and final King of the Sikhs fled to the Jungles of India, all the way to Maharashtra in order to salvage what of the scriptures he could from memory. As by this point, every reference to Sikh scripture, history and culture had been all but eradicated.

From Barnala, we had journeyed all the way to the train station in Chandigarh only to not be able to find seats to travel to Nanded. From there we made a quick re-route and instead went

to Rajasthan. When roaming specifically throughout the Islamic areas of Ajmer we were greeted with incredible crowds, the banging of loud drums and smoke bombs going off in each direction. As the Shia Muslims celebrated *Muharram*, we slowly worked our way through the narrow alleys leading up to the Darga. I wish to note a very significant point here, namely that the Shias of South Asia had historically been allies with Guru Gobind Singh and his Sikhs, to the point where this spiritually and religiously interdependent relationship I am writing about here between Sikhs and Muslims is best exemplified by the *Shia* community. There are many sources which explore this relationship in great deal, even to the point where some scholars like Francisco José Luis (2006) have concluded that Sikhism is highly continuous, and has many similarities, with Shia Islam – and subsequently with Sufism, which is most widely considered a branch of the Shia school. Indeed, even the sword of Hazrat Aly, the *zulfiqar*, is believed to be currently housed and available for *bandagi* and worship by devotees at Sri Kesgarh Sahib Gurdwara in Anandpur Sahib, Punjab. The sword was given to Guru Gobind Singh as a gift by Bahadur Shah the First. See the following quote regarding this matter from a *Shia* website (<http://muharramheritage.blogspot.com>):

It is generally believed that he (Bahadur Shah) presented the *Saif* to Guru Gobind Singh during their meeting because thereafter they did not meet each other. It is a well-known fact that Mughal Emperors had inherited holy relics linked with Panjatan from their ancestor Amir Taimur who is credited with introducing tazias in India. It is also a well-established fact that Guru Nanak always spoke highly about the position of prophet Muhammad and his son-in-law and spiritual successor Hazrat Ali. Guru Gobind Singh also respected the followers of Panjatan and his love for peer Buddhu Shah symbolizes his leaning towards Ahle-Bait. It is quite natural that Bahadur Shah who had ascended the throne of Hindustan would have gladly presented him the *Saif* knowing his unbound affection for prophet's progeny as Guru Nanak's true successor.

The word *saif* here means “sword,” and is most commonly used in the following expression uttered by Shia Muslims worldwide, but also commonly contributed to memory by Sikhs as well:

La fitah illa Aly, La *Saif* illa Zulfiqar...

*There is no warrior equal to Aly, and no sword equal to the Zulfiqar.*

The expression then usually continues with:

Himmat e ada karo, oh madadgar,  
Aap hee ho kuwatein, parvadgaar.  
Shah e mardan, Sher e yazdan  
Jan fida tum pe, *Maula*.  
Aly Maula, Aly Maula, Aly Maula...

*Give me strength O benevolent (helper of all) Lord!  
You are the most powerful, O sustainer of all!  
O King of all Men, Lion of the Merciful, my life is on you Oh  
Lord!!  
Oh Lord Aly... Oh Lord Aly...*

The article by José Luis further goes on to explain the significance of the *Nihang* or militant sub-group of Sikhs who dress in blue garb and wear a crescent moon upon their similarly blue turbans. There is scriptural evidence within Sikh theology that examines this close relationship with Shia Islam, and the proclamation of the *Nihangs* as the “Jaysh al Mahdi,” or the army of the coming *Mahdi*. To demonstrate incident with this idea, upon speaking to my Iranian informants I have found there is also in-depth theorizing and discussion pertaining to the *Sikh* origins of Ayatollah Khomeini<sup>118</sup> and the current Shia clerical rulers of Iran, as well as the fact that the traditional flag of Iran was replaced with a symbol with remarkable similarity to the *Khanda* (see article below). Whether this is hearsay or if there is proof to the matter does not

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<sup>118</sup> Many conservative-reformist Muslims who are opposed to the rule of the clerical regime in Iran will often refer to Sikhs as the “co-patriots” of Khomeini.

negate the fact that it is an important topic of discussion that reveals further underlying possibilities:

اگر کمی به نشانی که فریب به سی سال است نشان ما بر بروی پرچم ایران است و در تمام دنیا ما را معرفی می‌کند، برگرفته از نشان فرقه‌ای در هندوستان است به نام سیک. مذهب سیک، محصول اختلافات مذهبی سده ۱۵ میلادی است و مدعی است که چکیده نخستین آموزه‌های گورو نانک (پيامبر سیک‌ها زاده ۱۴۶۹ میلادی) است. او کوشید یک دین تلفیقی از اسلام و هندوگرایی به وجود آورد. بر اصول مشترک این دو مذهب تأکید کرد و از موارد جدایی و اختلاف بویژه در آیین‌ها و نیایش‌ها دوری نمود.



#### **! آرم پرچم جمهوری اسلامی بر درب ورودی مغازه يك سیک هندی**

سعی شده این آرم بنام الله الفاء شود. در حقیقت با توجه به هندی زاده بودن خمینی این آرم سیک‌های هندی می‌باشد که بر پرچم جمهوری اسلامی نقش بسته است و آن را به دروغ و برخی نادانسته آرم الله می‌نامند.



#### **آرم پرچم رژیم ایران و آرم سیک‌ها**

آرم پرچم رژیم مبارک الله نمی‌باشد و طبق هیچ رسم الخطی لفظ الله به این صورت نوشته نمی‌شود بلکه این آرم برگرفته شده از آرم سیک‌هاست و هر دو یک چیز هستند.

حالا می‌توانید نشان سیک‌های هند را با نشان پرچم ایران مقایسه کنید.



**Figure 10-21 Farsi Article Exploring the Origins of the Current Clerical Rulers of Iran and the Iranian Flag (Contingency With the Symbol of the Sikhs)**

<https://persianfacts.wordpress.com/2011/06/03/چرا-از-خمینی-هندی-الاصول-و-خامنه‌ای-عرا/>



اینجا قضاوت بر عهده شما. می‌توانید تصور کنید که تمام تمدن و تاریخ کهن و فرهنگ چند هزار ساله خود را به یک هندی فروخته اید؟

**! آیا خمینی واقعا یک هندی زاده بود**



Figure 10-22 Graphs from a Farsi Article Demonstrating the Origins of the Flag of Iran

<https://persianfacts.wordpress.com/2011/06/03/چرا-از-خمینی-هندی-الاصل-و-خامنه‌ای-عرا/>

Further, the *Janam Sakhis* as well as other historical accounts of the lives of the Gurus share that Guru Nanak was gifted the emblem of the crescent moon when on his final journey to Mecca. He received the gift in Baghdad where he prophesied that he would not wear this emblem until his tenth incarnation as a *mujahid* or “saint-soldier” of God.<sup>119</sup>

With this, I have contextualized the significance of my arrival at the Ajmer Shareef Darga during the days of Muharram, when my *neeyat* or “intention” was to pay *bandagi* to “Sacha Pateshah, Bahdshah Darvish, Guru Gobind Singh Maharaj,” (essentially, I believe my coming here was contingent with the very essence of my true *neeyat*). There is a well-known *qawwali* sung by the *Sabri Brothers* called “Ajmer Jaane Ki Tamana Hai,” as well as many other beautiful *qawwali* renditions that exclaim the beauty, significance and overwhelming spirituality at Ajmer Shareef.

As we entered into the dargah we were quickly spotted by a local shopkeeper who guided us inside and introduced us to the Imams there. In spite of the massive crowds of Muslims and Sufis, the mullahs made an offering for us and we were able to lay a new *chador* onto the grave of Moinuddin Chishti (similar to the *chadors* I spoke of earlier used at Gurdwara Tilla Sahib, and Gurdwara Godari Sahib in Faridkot). Moinuddin Chishti was the founder of the Chishtiyya school of Islam, and Sheikh Farid is also one of his spiritual descendants and one of the main Imams of this school. At the darga I also observed other turbaned Sikhs offering dua. I also purchased a *taveez* here which is worn around the neck that contains within a small locket a passage from the Quran. This *taveez* also includes the name of *Gareeb Nawaz* on its inscription

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<sup>119</sup> I encourage anyone to read this article as well as many other sources which further explore this important connection between Sikhism and Shia Islam.

as well as the hand of *Panjetaan* or the “House of the Prophet” (also sometimes called the “People of the Cloak”). There is also a local mosque in Edmonton just a few hundred meters away from the *Gurdwara Millwoods* which also has the hand and green flag (*Parcham e Sabz*) of the insignia of the *Panjetaan* flying proudly outside. I have been fortunate to visit this mosque on several occasions.

### 10.3 THERE’S MORE TO THE MUSIC: CONCEPTUALIZING PUNJABI IDENTITY IN LIGHT OF RELIGIOUS SIMILARITIES BETWEEN SIKHISM AND ISLAM

A major question that must be asked at this junction is to what extent we can accommodate various modes of thinking in the public sphere without undermining some people’s traditions and cultures? Has the mainstream appropriation of Sufi literature in contemporary music hurt anyone’s sentiments? Is the Muslim as hesitant about connecting with his Sikh neighbor over a song that has such a profound religious message, as relevant to Islam as to Sikhism? Is the culture being misappropriated and commoditized? I spoke earlier about the significance of Junoon around the time of the Kargil war. Indeed, we are again at a cross-roads and the situation looks bleak. Now more than ever with Hindu-Nationalism and Conservative-Reformist Islam threatening the heterogeneous tapestry of South Asia, a cultural, religious, or *spiritual* revival again seems to offer a viable solution that would be able to speak to the masses. It may be true that many enthusiasts of the revival on either side of the border would not be able to see beyond the secular aesthetic. However, one might wonder whether the message would resonate at a higher level of spiritualism for many devout Sikhs and Muslims.

Founding figures of sociology such as Weber, Durkheim, and Mauss understood that religious practice is fundamental to how humans in most times and places have related to their

community. Indeed, they all describe religions not just as products of society but as producing society. An Analysis of Asad’s work with my observations of the current Sufi Revival in Punjab suggests that we must revise the ideas of scholars such as Durkheim, Mauss, and Weber even if we accept the central place they assign to phenomena we now come to identify as “religious.” There are several pertinent questions that arise here – and answers that can be framed around Asad’s theories on modernity and the introduction of sacred elements into seemingly secular spaces.

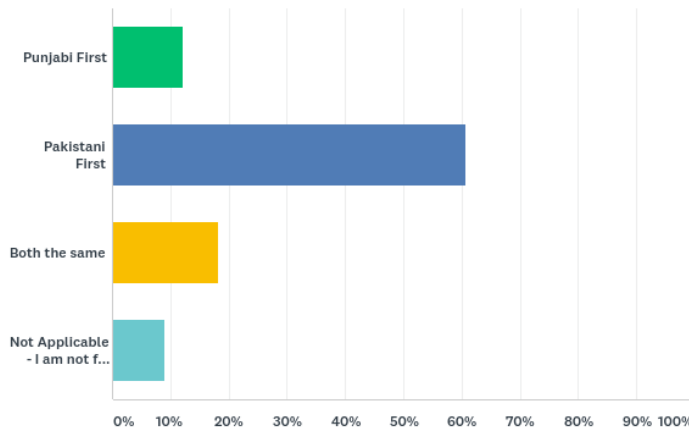
As the situation in the border regions of Punjab and Kashmir deteriorates further, it is important for me as an investigative researcher to develop an understanding of the many dynamic energies at play in the area. During my time in Punjab this involved understanding the various demographic groups that make the territory their home and how these various peoples envision the concept of *Punjabiyyat*, and the resonance of Punjabi traditions, language, customs and heritage to these communities. Further, questions of *Identity* remained of central importance. Weber’s insights into group identity provide some nuance into the question of which kind of identity—religious, ethno-linguistic, national, or other—comes to act as one’s primary identity. Most scholars today would agree that people have many different identities and that political circumstances influence which identity becomes more salient at any particular time.

To build on this idea, I ask whether East and West Punjabis are actually relating to each other in the context of the Sufi-revival in a shared *spiritual* identity. Looking back to Asad, much of this spiritual-unification seems to take place in the secular sphere (at concerts for example).

Some scholars take the perspective that in Pakistan’s Punjab province, the essence of *Punjabiyyat* is ever-diminishing. They believe that there is little left of the historical language of

the region, and the heritage associated with the Punjabi people, who even today make up proportionally the largest ethnic group in Pakistan, is quickly being replaced by a new national sense of self-concept – however as indicated in much of the data I collected during my field-work, this may not be the case. According to my data (see *Survey Results*), in India, Punjabis still more readily identify with their regional culture, whereas in Pakistan, the majority of Punjabis would tend to conceptualize their identity as Pakistani nationals (see charts below [Q26: N ≈ 50 || Q27: N ≈ 40 ]). One of the reasons for this may be that Punjabis only make up around 2% of the ethnic composition of India (with Sikhs at around 1.5%), whereas in Pakistan they make up almost 40%, and as a small and oppressed minority in India, they may feel the need to emphasize their distinctiveness. It is well known that Punjabis in Pakistan dominate in the political arena, and thus they hold a much greater sway over the entire country, whereas in India, outside of the Punjab state, Punjabis have little sway in the national political game and are often even vilified as terrorists.

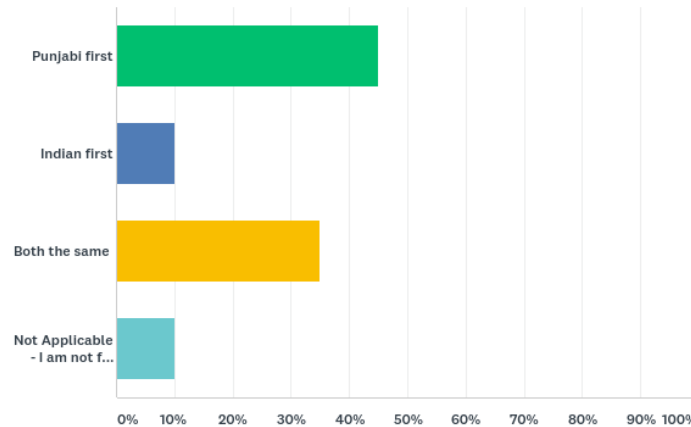
Q26 If you are from Pakistan, do you identify more with being Punjabi or Pakistani?



**Figure 10-23 Pakistanis Respond to a Survey Question About Punjabi Identity (Arsh Khaira)**

N ≈ 50 (Pakistani Respondents)  
 For complete results see: Appendix A

Q27 If you are from India, do you identify more with being Punjabi or Indian?



**Figure 10-24 Indians Respond to a Survey Question About Identity (Arsh Khaira)**

N ≈ 40 (Indian Respondents)  
For complete results see: Appendix A

In light of these differences in the way East and West Punjabis seem to conceptualize their identities, we can understand the immense power of music in facilitating reconciliation between both sides. I have shown earlier just how popular East Punjabi music is in Pakistan, and I demonstrated in previous chapters that in spite of Pakistani Punjabis usually associating first and foremost with their national identity, this is because they are not only a majority, but as an ethnic community they control almost all aspects of Pakistani society, they maintain strong emotional connections to their Punjabi roots. For this reason, they often downplay their own regional culture, in favour of the national sense of self-concept in which they have the greatest influence. However, based on my survey responses, all of my Pakistani informants answered the questions about relating strongly to their Punjabi roots with a score of 8/10 or higher.

To better understand the situation, I ask: to what degree is Punjabiya and the Sanjha Virsa, a connection that exists between East and West Punjab, a religious connection, a secular connection, a cultural connection, or based on the discourses employed, a *spiritual* connection? If indeed we can acknowledge that this is a spiritual connection, which we can see more explicit evidence of in the performances of Alim Lohar or Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan (a very popular Pakistani Sufi singer who actually performed the hymns of the Sikhs in a Sikh Gurdwara) and maybe in a more implicit way in the works of more recent artists like Abrar Ul Haque or Gurdas Mann, we can set a much stronger precedence for understanding (and “growing”) the revival which would have numerous implications for assisting with reconciliation in the region. The open acknowledgement of a shared spiritual tradition, emphasized through Sufi musical performances, would be a direct threat to the rapid growth of Hindu Nationalism as well as Conservative-Reformist Islam. However, it means that Punjabis first have to acknowledge a shared identity in this context, spiritual, sacred or otherwise... and how ready are they to do that? I believe I uncovered the answer to this question through the various forms of data I collected during this research, which with almost unanimous consensus is a resounding “ready as we’ll ever be.”

Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* explicates this phenomenon very well. Anderson defines an imagined community as a community that exists in spite of limited or no face-to-face interaction between members. A simple decision to speak a certain language at home or socially can reinforce the connection an individual has to other members of their “imagined community.” In the same way, choosing *not* to speak a language would have the opposite effect – primarily in differentiating ourselves from perceived ethnic “others.” I have witnessed the appropriation and commoditization of Punjabi in specific situations on Pakistani

media. In situations of comedy, or music and poetry, Punjabi will be employed and very often in its purest form. Some scholars assert however that the lingua-franca of Urdu has replaced all other regional languages as being spoken as the day-to-day vernacular of choice – however the data I collected did not necessarily support this claim, rather I found many Pakistanis openly attesting that Punjabi is still very widely spoken and along with its dialects (Hindko, Saraiki, Potohari, etc.) remains the preferred language for a large portion of society. Anderson describes that coinciding with the age of nationalism in Europe, if “we consider the character of these newer nationalisms which, between 1820 and 1920, changed the face of the Old World, two striking features mark them off from their ancestors. First, in almost all of them ‘national print-languages’ were of central ideological and political importance...” (67). Herein we see the importance of language in developing a sense of nationhood or self-concept, but this is only one facet of identity construal among many others discussed in this detailed exploration by Anderson. The way we define, or deconstruct *nationality*, then, is of importance, and in these processes, works such as Anderson’s provide much needed insight into how the concept of *nation* itself has varied across time and geographical place, and continues to be an idea equally capable of uniting people and mitigating escalating violence, to the reverse, wherein it contributes to war and conflict.

In a seminal article, several major figures of ethnomusicology wrote that the study of folk music underwent a paradigm shift in the 1950’s and 60’s (Pegg, et al. 2010):

In the USA Charles Seeger and Bruno Nettl theorized new approaches during the 1950s and 1960s. Folkmusic was no longer idealized as universal, but was investigated as a domain of cultural practice allowing local and regional groups to express uniqueness and difference. Ethnicity became the primary factor



for North American folk-music scholars... (“Disciplinary Revolutions,” in section *III. Post 1945 Developments*).

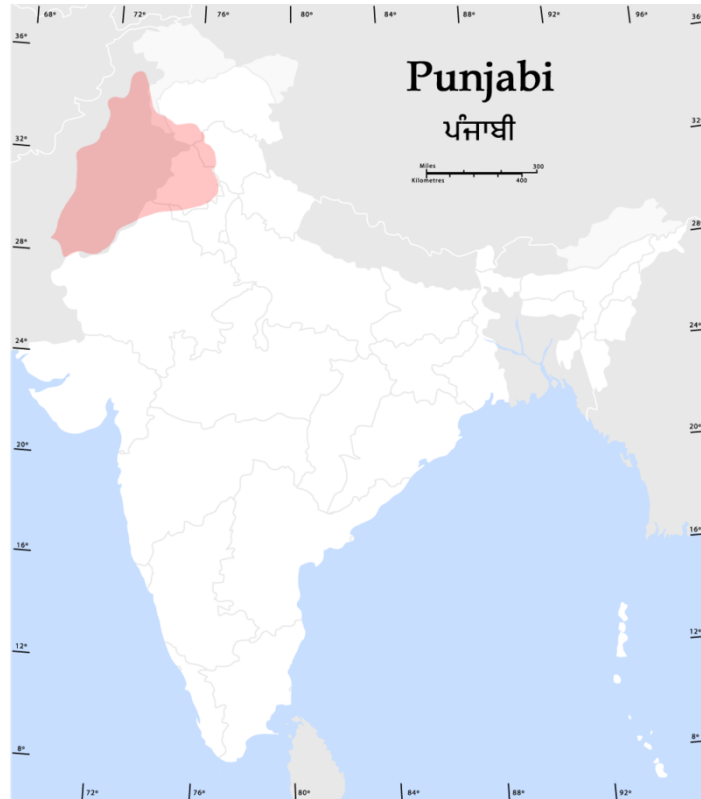
The writers essentially suggest that folk-music has been a technology for nationalism, and this remains one of the primary motivating factors behind university departments dedicated to its study in many countries. The writers go on to describe the way the study of *nationalism* operates within the context of ethnomusicology:

Firstly, inspired by Hobsbawm and Ranger’s notion of nation-states as ‘invented traditions’ (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983) and Anderson’s analysis of the relationship between print-capitalism and the emergence of national ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson, 1983), ethnomusicologists have attended to the ways in which national musics have participated in the construction of a national imaginary, with some stress on the artificiality and alien nature of the musical elements that were assembled to constitute new national styles. Others have consistently stressed the class dynamics of the encounter between bourgeois nationalists and their working-class or regional others.

We should also step back again here to emphasize the significance of the use of the *Punjabi* language (along with its dialects) in this Sufi revival, and not mainly Urdu or Hindi (the national languages of Pakistan and India). If this is coupled with a resurgence in Punjabi newspapers and print-media in Pakistan we could see further benefit to mutual-interdependence. Indeed, my observations give evidence to the fact that the Punjabi language, although it has limited employment in business, government and schools, remains romanticized by Pakistanis and employed *heavily* in the context of this revival as well as in socializing (particularly amongst men). In Pakistan, nearly all of the West Punjabi Sufi songs by the most popular artists are sung in Punjabi, as with a large proportion of their secular music. I also discovered that Punjabi music remains one of the, if not the, most popular styles of music *throughout* the country, especially music with its origin in East Punjab. *This* could have to do with the “folk” and “roots” of the

tradition, whereas other forms of “high” music, like *ghazal*, are sung predominantly in Urdu. The use of Urdu poetry and music in the Sufi music of this revival also plays a major role, however it is the efficacy of the Punjabi language in being best able to elicit feelings of mutual reciprocity and obligation amongst East and West Punjabis that accomplishes this task in a way that Urdu (superficially associated with Pakistan, though there are more Urdu speakers in India), or Hindi cannot, especially because the Punjabi language is clearly and profoundly connected to the *Punjab* itself.

A short foray into the topic of “language” in Pakistan on the internet or in an article search will offer up more resources than one would know what to do with. Many scholars suggest that this is a highly debated topic in the country and one in which the significance of regional languages, especially Punjabi, is advocated by a small revivalist minority – though I found evidence through detailed data collection that Punjabi is neither at risk, nor diminishing, but rather that it continues to dominate in Punjab and in other provinces, especially *KPK* and *Sindh*. A simple question of language then leads into a much larger discussion about conceptualizing identity. Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper’s article “Beyond ‘Identity’” also grapples with this issue. The authors describe that “‘Identity’ is a key term in the vernacular idiom of contemporary politics,” and that “social analysis must take account of this fact” (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, p. 2). However, in the process of understanding exactly what this term connotes, they argue that we are not required to “use ‘identity’ as a category of analysis or to conceptualize ‘identities’ as something that all people have, seek, construct, and negotiate” (2).



**Figure 10-25 Native Punjabi Speakers Distribution Map (Schwartzberg 1978)**

Brubaker and Cooper further show that one of the key traditional uses of the term “identity” is to denote a degree of “sameness.” They assert that the term suggests a “fundamental and consequential sameness among members of a group or category. This may be understood objectively (as a sameness “in itself”) or subjectively (as an experienced, felt, or perceived sameness)” (7). They further show that in the traditional sense of the word “this sameness is expected to manifest itself in solidarity, in shared dispositions or consciousness, or in collective action” (7). It is true that the Punjabis of Pakistan continue to show considerable attention to the plight of Sikhs as a minority community in India. The media regularly covers the human rights violations committed against Sikhs by the Indian government and paints a strong picture that exemplifies an interdependent relationship between the Sikhs of East Punjab and the Muslims of West Punjab. The mainstream media outlets have shown some Pakistani Punjabi

politicians, or other members of the community as advocating on behalf of the Sikh community. Many atrocities committed by the Indian government against Sikhs that are never broadcast in India can only be learned about through Pakistani media. How then does “collective action” transpire on behalf of Punjabis? How can this be used to progress towards eliciting social change and towards greater self-determination for Sikhs who have experienced increasing marginalization under the Hindu-Nationalist stance of the Indian government? More importantly, how does this benefit Pakistan?

Queue Salman Ahmad’s “Rock and Roll Jihad.” Sufi music again emerges as not only a viable alternative, but “the” alternative to extremism, but is it as effective? Can we accomplish a task that is politically charged through music? In this context, the Sufi revival has strong political implications. The cultural, or as we have argued, the *spiritual* or *sacred* link between Sikhs and West Punjabi Muslims is under a systematic attempt by the Hindu-Nationalist government of India, *as well as* some proponents of Salafi,<sup>120</sup> or other forms of conservative reformist Islam, in Pakistan, to be suppressed. It is worthwhile to note that Pro-Pakistani sentiments in Punjab and Kashmir are a great threat to the current Indian Government’s agenda at unifying the country under a Hindu umbrella. But at the same time, aligning oneself with the plight of Punjabi language preservation, or to express autonomy with Sikhs is seen as an equally “anti-national” act by a *small but influential* minority in Pakistan. For some, the acknowledgement by Sikhs that they share religious, cultural and linguistic ties to West Punjab

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<sup>120</sup> In this context I use the term *Salafi* to refer generally to puritanical, conservative reformists of Islam, acknowledging that there has been a great deal of Saudi (and thus Salafi) influence on Pakistan. I also recognize that South Asian Islamist movements trace back to Deoband and that today perhaps not all conservative Islamists in Pakistan refer to themselves as *Salafi*.

and Pakistan, is seen and directly translated as the rhetoric of “separatists,” “extremists,” or “terrorists”— the common term used by Indians here is “desh-drohi,” or “gaddar,” literally “betrayers of the state.” Examples are rampant of key Sikh Punjabi figures crossing the border and sharing hugs with powerful military leaders in Pakistan. On one occasion, General Bajwa, a leading commander of the Pakistani army was met by a Sikh contingent with whom he shared words of re-assurance in the midst of a celebratory exchange of gifts. Even recently, the opening of the Kartarpur corridor has been met with unanimous celebration by Sikhs, but through vile jeering by Hindu Nationalist groups in India as well as their supporters.

Cynthia Mahmood’s work *Fighting for Faith and Nation* (2010) is one example of research that looks at Sikh self-determination, and she does talk about the role of Pakistan in this struggle. As an Anthropologist her strategy is much admired by many in the field. Being able to ascertain such significant information from sources that are quite difficult to reach required an entire strategy of earning the trust of her respondents. This had both positive and negative repercussions for Mahmood. On the one hand she was able to get close to several Commanders and Generals involved with the Sikh liberation movement, and because of this she was able to include very sensitive information in her account. However, the downside of this is that she came to be seen by some in the field as being in “close cahoots” with “terrorists.” By giving “terrorists” a forum to voice their views through open dialogue she quickly found herself at odds with the Indian Central Government Agencies. Further she is dismissed by some scholars as being “partial” to the plight of Khalistanis and in direct opposition to other scholars of Sikhism, who many conservative factions of Sikhs, including Khalistanis, are also vehemently opposed against.

One of the main grievances of many Sikhs is that much of current scholarship seems to seek to absorb Sikhism into the broader Hindu-Nationalist policy of the Indian Government. The Sufi revival is not militancy, although it is worthwhile to note that during the rise of Sikh militancy in Punjab in the 1980's and 1990's, commercial Punjabi artists who performed Sufi music were for the most part allowed to perform their music publicly, while those performing music that was vulgar were often openly chastised for their practices (some even killed – see: **Appendix B**). Today the music industry in Punjab reflects an ongoing concern amongst many about the deterioration of culture in the region. There is an absurd drug abuse problem (see: Jain and Singhal 2012), and the music and television industry is filled with vulgar and violent music. In this context Sufi music does take on an almost militant and messianic role (Woody Guthrie's guitar "kills fascists").

To further build our perceptual lens, consider for a moment Weber's 1922 *Economy and Society*, especially the section on race and ethnicity, where Weber demarcates an understanding of how race, nationalism and tribal identities function in the contemporary age. This work provides a backpack full of technical methodology that can be adhered to by anthropologists who are attempting to understand a particular nation's people, or their relationships with perceived ethnic "others." In "Ethnic Groups" (Chapter 5), Weber gives examples of peoples separated by religious and national lines of demarcation that are otherwise one ethno-linguistic group (i.e., Serbians and Croatians), he also shares that collective ethnicity is often based on qualifiers like a common language, but that the idea of a *nationality* as the basis for ethnic qualification is ill-founded.

This is primarily because many ethnic peoples share less in common with others of their nation than may be typically understood: "In reality, of course, persons who consider themselves

members of the same nationality are often much less related by common descent than are persons belonging to different and hostile nationalities” (395). Punjab as a region divided between India and Pakistan may fit this criteria aptly so. Primarily because Punjabis share more in common, especially based on the analysis of this phenomenon by Weber (with emphasis to shared genetics, language, culture, food, clothing and customs) with each other than they do with the other peoples of their respective nations (India and Pakistan). However, like Serbs and Croats the hostility has been created by way of the partitioning of peoples based on religious allegiances. By emphasizing that the *religious* discourses employed lyrically in this Sufi revival have profound *spiritual* or *sacred* implications for East and West Punjabis, we are able to take the revival beyond its secular packaging and acknowledge its very essence. This undermines both Islamic Conservative-Reformist and Hindu-Nationalist positions and re-affirms a strong reason for openly expressing solidarity with one another.

Pierre Bourdieu’s work, *The Logic of Practice*, also provides a toolkit of theory that I incorporated into my own method. One of the key concepts of this work includes the idea of various forms of *capital*, including *cultural capital*. Bourdieu describes that “just as economic wealth cannot function as capital except in relation to an economic field, so cultural competence in all its forms is not constituted as cultural capital until it is inserted into the objective relations set up between the system of economic production and the system producing the producers”(124). The relationship herein described represents the reciprocity between the acquisition of cultural capital, which can lead to the acquisition of economic capital based on the merits of the cultural capital an individual possesses, which cycles back into the acquisition of further cultural capital.

Cultural capital is described as being multi-faceted and representative of many elements that make up the abilities of an individual. This could include the number of languages they speak, the number of degrees they have, the type of car they drive, so on, and so forth. Cultural capital is difficult to acquire by many individuals, but those that have acquired it can also contribute more efficiently to the acquisition of cultural capital by their children. Further, the relationship between cultural capital and economic capital is simple in that through the acquisition of cultural capital (degrees, language fluency, etc.) one can more easily acquire further economic capital.

In Pakistan, where Punjabi is spoken as a first language in rural areas, knowledge of *Urdu* would be seen as representing a significant boon towards acquiring work in urban centres. I actually discovered during my fieldwork that the general desire amongst the majority of the population is to learn *English* and this language is preferred by the growing population of educated classes. Punjabi then is still reserved for the songs and dances of wedding celebrations (the ubiquity of which is far-reaching), or even for poetry, but the assertion by some scholars that it may be unjustifiably seen as an inferior language to *Urdu* by many Pakistanis may not be completely true. My informants and my vast social network web in Pakistan suggested a different answer, namely that Punjabi and its dialects are actually still preferred by many Pakistanis (especially the majority of men) in not only Punjab, but in other provinces as well. Still, many passionate literary figures and poets have worked tirelessly to revive the language of the Punjabi people, but amongst some groups (mainly *Muhajirs*) the superficial and vain stereotypes still exist that try to put down the language. But the reason that many *Muhajirs* themselves may eschew the Punjabi language is because most of them have origins in *Urdu* centres of India – like Delhi, Lucknow, Agra and Hyderabad. The suggestion of *some* scholars



that many of the Punjabi language revivalists are seen as either explicitly or implicitly harboring solidarity with Sikhs, particularly because of the close connection between the Punjabi language and Sikhism may not be true – as my data did not support this claim. One of the visible benefits of the Sufi revival is that Punjabi has experienced a resurgence of usage in the context of song and stage in Pakistan.

In East Punjab, a detailed knowledge of Punjabi is still related to the acquiring of Cultural Capital in the Weberian sense. However, many of the Hindus of the region see *Hindi* as their “high” language. In Pakistan religious education is still highly valued, however there is diminishing return for being able to recite Waris Shah’s “Heer,” which decades ago was seen as the hallmark of a cultured individual or artist. Hindi, Urdu and especially *English* represent languages that are seen as refined and that open up a world of opportunity for speakers.

*SOWING SEEDS: MALERKOTLA – MUSLIM CENTRE OF EAST PUNJAB*  
(Multi-generational Muslim residents including elders, youth, politicians,  
writers, religious leaders and musicians).



**Figure 10-26 Muslim Residents of Malerkotla During Our Workshop (Photo by Arsh Khaira – October 2017)**



**Figure 10-27 Muslim Residents of Malerkotla During Our Workshop (Photo by Arsh Khaira – October 2017)**

I spoke in detail with Islamic leaders in the community about the interdependent relationship that Sikhs and Muslims have had for centuries. As Malerkotla was one of the only cities from which the East Punjabi Muslims did not make *hijra* (migration, as in *mohajir* – migrant) to Pakistan, this city to date remains vibrant and blessed with the sounds, architecture and culture of Punjab as it once was. The predominant styles of building construction, as well as the artistic and aesthetic qualities of the township, are deeply entrenched in Islamic tradition. This was not actually my first trip to the area as I had travelled once prior in 2008. I had fond memories of my first exposure to the beauty and vibrancy of the area as in some ways it was similar to the predominantly Muslim areas of Uttar Pradesh to which I had also previously travelled. In Uttar Pradesh (UP) there are areas such as Agra, Lucknow and Muradabad which are still populated mainly by Muslims. It is unanimously agreed upon by historians, anthropologists and contemporary scholars that the origins of the Urdu language are in these areas of UP. Many linguistic revivalists in Pakistan assert that the Urdu language is in fact a *Muhajir* language<sup>121</sup> that was brought by the millions of Muslims who migrated from these areas of UP into the urban areas of Pakistan's Punjab province, as well as to other centres such as Karachi. It is still attested that the Urdu spoken in these areas of Uttar Pradesh, especially in cities like Lucknow, is purer in its form than that which is spoken in Pakistan, in other words it encompasses a greater usage of Persian and Arabic loan words and expressions, the extent of usage of which often designates the cultural "height" of the Urdu being spoken.

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<sup>121</sup> Even the most recent census of Pakistan states that Urdu is only spoken as a first language by roughly 8% of the population of Pakistan, primarily in places like Karachi and Hyderabad, with the first languages in other areas being primarily the indigenous languages of those regions (Sindhi, Balochi, Pashto, Punjabi, Hindko). There are actually more native speakers of Urdu in India than in Pakistan.

Some contemporary scholars and journalists like Tarek Fatah assert that the regional languages of Pakistan are at risk of elimination, though these are the mother-tongues of the original inhabitants who remain in Pakistan today, those who did not make *hijra* from India. For these original dwellers of the region, languages like Sindhi, Balochi, Pashto, as well as the various dialects of Punjabi like Saraiki, Hindko, Potohari, and those dialects spoken in Kashmir, are the original idioms of the area. Fatah believes that with the adoption of the “language of Lucknow and Agra” into the Pakistani mainstream, educated people today choose not to speak their regional dialects, especially those of the *Punjabi* family in public, for fear of looking like “villagers” or illiterates.<sup>122</sup> Fatah has been known to argue that Urdu is a language that has been transported to Pakistan and adopted as a lingua-franca at the cost of regional languages. He has also suggested numerous times that the indigenous poets of the predominant geo-physical areas of Pakistan (with Punjab encompassing the largest area) are actually Punjabi poets like Sheikh Farid, Bulleh Shah and Shah Hussein (in other areas they are poets such as Shah Latif or Hazrat Lal Shahbaz Qalandar who are both Sindhi poets). He believes it has been made to appear with the adoption of the Urdu language that the poets of Pakistan are Ghalib and Khusrow, though this is not historically accurate to the regions of inhabitation nor of the original languages of the Pakistani area that existed and thrived for hundreds of years prior to the creation of the nation state.

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<sup>122</sup> See for example:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ofSljRcv9s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XK5v-ZzVEjI>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h14kQDZmjIE>

Though Malerkotla has a fundamentally Islamic aesthetic, it is important to note that it is *Punjabi* Muslim culture that envelops the area. The zones of UP I speak of where Urdu dominates in daily usage are even larger in terms of their Islamic scope and population, but the people are culturally fundamentally different. Here, you can see a picture I took in UP in 2008 of a woman dressed in full *niqab*. It is common to see women dressed this way in UP:



**Figure 10-28 Muslim Woman from Uttar Pradesh in Niqab (Photo by Arsh Khaira - 2008)**

I also saw a similar style of dress amongst the women of Malerkotla especially during my first visit to the township in 2008. It is common for people in Malerkotla to have relatives who live in West Punjab, especially from their extended families. As I mentioned earlier, during Partition, of which the violence and bloodshed is widely known, there were no acts of such manner or any killings in Malerkotla, and this goes back to the edict issued by Guru Gobind Singh. For this reason, the majority of Muslims in the township stayed in the area and did not make *hijra* to Pakistan.

During my first trip to Malerkotla I experienced personally the Islamic underpinnings of Punjabi culture which are at the root of all the traditions, language and folklore of the region. In Figure 10-29 you can see a picture of the *Eidgah*<sup>123</sup> I took at that time in 2008. Much like at the *Rauza-Sharif* which I will speak of in more detail later in this section, I was overwhelmed by the friendliness of the local Muslim community. At the time we arrived at the *Eidgah* the sun had nearly set and the hour of *maghrib* had almost completely finished. The *Eidgah* was actually locked, but when the local Muslims saw us lingering at the gate they quickly called the local *Imam* who then rushed to obtain the keys to the gate and show us the magnificence of the place:



**Figure 10-29 Eidgah in Malerkotla at Maghrib (Photo by Arsh Khaira 2008)**

Although the sun was setting, the beauty of the minaret and prayer areas can still be appreciated by this picture that I took.

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<sup>123</sup> A place where Muslims gather on special occasions to offer prayers.

During my second journey to Malerkotla in October of 2017, I went with a specific purpose in mind – to obtain as much data and conclusive evidence as I could about the deeply entrenched interdependent cultural relationship between Sikhs and Muslims in Punjab. When I was met enthusiastically by the local leaders, we entered into an important discussion about this very thing. One of the local Imams was actually in the process of completing his own compelling research on a book that outlined this very essential and historical relationship between the two religious communities. In Figure 10-30 you can see him holding a pamphlet which outlines the basic premises of his study. In fact, this Imam further went on to say that Sikh history had become completely corrupted by the national Hindutva based organizations to the point that very basic facts had been completely changed and distorted. This concerted attempt on behalf of the Hindu nationalist organizations that control the country is well understood by many, if not the majority of, people who identify as Sikhs. It was during the desecration of the Golden Temple in June of 1984, that the Indian army set fire to the library housed in the vicinity that contained manuscripts and historical writing that were hundreds of years old, many of which would have continued to be used today to shed light on these fundamental issues.

The Imam went on further to say that the history of the Sikhs had been corrupted to the point that many of the killings that the Sikhs believed they suffered at the hands of the *Mughals* was actually violence perpetrated against them by the Hindu nationalist regimes of that time. He specifically spoke of the martyrdom of the 5<sup>th</sup> Guru Arjan Dev Ji in this manner. He further reiterated the point that the goal of the Hindu nationalists was then and is today to divide Sikhs and Muslims and to seek to absorb Sikhs into Hinduism. This is further attested by the reality that India is the only country in the world that does not officially recognize Sikhism as a unique



religion. Sikhs are labelled Hindus; their marriages are registered as Hindu marriages and they are foregone any opportunity to change these designations at the national level. Even today, most of the discourse levelled against Sikhs any time they make claims for increased political or religious and cultural autonomy is that they themselves are Hindus, or that they originate from Hindus, and they should not claim to have their own unique origin or history. This attempt at cultural genocide further builds on the physical genocide committed against Sikhs in 1984 which was a holocaust that was backed, sponsored and endorsed by the Hindu nationalist regime.



**Figure 10-30 Muslim Residents of Malerkotla and Me Hold Pamphlets about Sikh and Muslim Solidarity (Photo by Gurdeep Khaira – October 2017)**

In Figure 10-30 I can be seen holding pamphlets compiled by the local Imam, seated second from left, about how the history of Sikhs, especially Sikh martyrdom at the hands of the Mughal rulers has been corrupted by Hindutva organizations. The Imam's pamphlets further went on to argue about the importance of interdependence between Sikhs and Muslims. Seated to my left



was the local leader of the township who facilitated my research in the area. I spoke to other locals about the importance of Punjabi culture and music rooted in Sufi traditions and also attended a sermon at one of the mosques.



**Figure 10-31 A Musician in the Bazar of Malerkotla (Photo by Arsh Khaira – October 2017)**



**Figure 10-32 Muslims Greet Each Other in the Streets of Malerkotla (Photo by Arsh Khaira – October 2017)**



**Figure 10-33 Mosque Minaret in Malerkotla (Photo by Arsh Khaira – October 2017)**





**Figure 10-34 Vendors Selling Chirags for Worship in Malerkotla (Photo by Arsh Khaira – October 2017)**



**Figure 10-35 A View of the Bazar in Malerkotla (Photo by Arsh Khaira – October 2017)**



**Figure 10-36 A Qutba (Sermon) is Delivered in Arabic at a Mosque in Malerkotla (Photo by Arsh Khaira – October 2017)**

I took the photograph in Figure 10-36 while attending a *Qutba*, or “sermon,” at one of the mosques in Malerkotla. I also have video of the sermon which was delivered in Arabic. In fact, when working my way around the city I was offered greetings by several men in Arabic as well.

During the time of Guru Gobind Singh, the nawab of Malerkotla was a wealthy Muslim who protested vehemently against the trial and execution of the Sikh Monarch’s two youngest sons. Though the children were condemned to death, the Prophet-King of the Sikhs proclaimed that Malerkotla would always be the centre of Islamic study and culture in Punjab. In spite of the majority of people from other Muslim dominated cities in East Punjab such as Jalandhar and Ludhiana leaving for Pakistan in 1947, the bulk of the Muslims from Malerkotla stayed and were protected by Sikhs, and as a symbol of pride for the people of East Punjab, today the large city remains a hub of Islamic learning and tradition.





**Figure 10-37 Young Muslim Residents of Malerkotla That I Spoke With (Photo by Arsh Khaira – October 2017)**

*LEAVING FOOTPRINTS: THE SIKH MOSQUE – HARGOBINDPUR, PB*

Part and parcel with my exploration of the theological continuities between Sikhism and Islam, I must make reference to a trip I took during my initial field-work journeys where I visited a Sikh mosque, making a special journey to the northern part of Punjab to do so. Below I share pictures of my visit to the *Guru Ki Maseet* which is a mosque that was built by the 6th Sikh Guru, Hargobind Singh, in the early 17th century. This mosque was built by the Guru for the local Muslim community during his rule. After partition, most of the Muslims left the area and the Mosque began to fall into disrepair. Over the last two decades a great effort has been made to restore the mosque to its original condition, and many amazing events have taken place here such as the performing of Namaz by East Punjabi Muslims.



**Figure 10-38 Sign Showing Directions to the Sikh Mosque (Photo by Arsh Khaira – Fall 2014)**





**Figure 10-39 I Stand Outside the Main Door to the Sikh Mosque (Photo by Gurdeep Khaira – Fall 2014)**



**Figure 10-40 A View of the Exterior of the Sikh Mosque (Photo by Arsh Khaira – Fall 2014)**

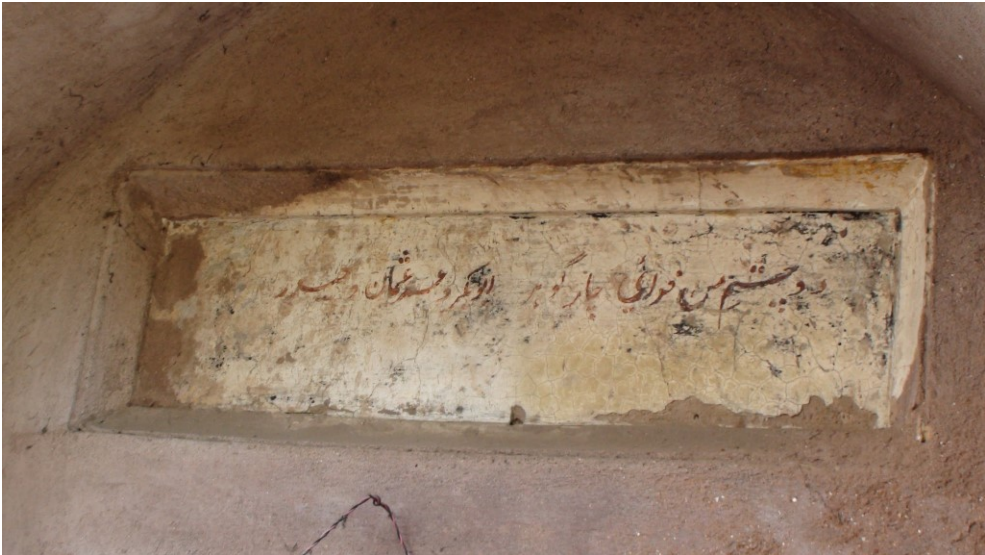




**Figure 10-41 A Devotee I Spoke With at the Sikh Mosque (Photo by Gurdeep Khaira – Fall 2014)**



**Figure 10-42 The Exterior Gate to the Sikh Mosque Garden (Photo by Arsh Khaira – Fall 2014)**



**Figure 10-43 Preserved Persian Script in the Inside of the Sikh Mosque Referring to the Four Rashidun: Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Aly (Photo by Arsh Khaira – Fall 2014)**

The script in the picture reads:  
*Do cheshme man fedae chehar goohar,*  
*Abu Bakr, o Umar, o Usman, o Haider...*  
My two eyes are a sacrifice for the four gems,  
Abu Bakr, Umar, Usman and Aly...





**Figure 10-44 The Guru Granth Sahib Inside the Sikh Mosque (Photo by Arsh Khaira – Fall 2014)**



**Figure 10-45 Devotees Outside the Sikh Mosque (Photo by Arsh Khaira – Fall 2014)**

## 10.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter I aimed to demonstrate similarities between contemporary Sikh and Islamic forms of spirituality. I did this through the collection of empirical evidence obtained by documenting first-hand the methods of worship, comments, views and opinions of people from varying backgrounds in the Punjab region. I also gathered photographs from sites of historical significance (that I travelled to personally) which exemplify the close relationship in the orthopraxy of these two communities. An example of the evidence I collected would be the photograph of the inscription within the *Guru's Mosque* written in Persian proclaiming an immense love for the four *Rashidun* (or “rightly guided caliphs”).

I presented in this section a compilation of sound proofs, all of which were collected through personal ethnographic fieldwork, that thoroughly supplement and strengthen the primary arguments of this dissertation based on data collected and disseminated in earlier chapters (from my interventions, surveys, workshops and interviews).

# 11 CONCLUSION

To create a perceptual lens, I began this dissertation by engaging in a reflective auto-ethnography where I demonstrated how I envision myself as a personification of my research in action. In this section I turned inwards to understand the source and inspiration of my pursuit – encompassed in a sequential process of self-discovery that begins with *pain* and *bondage*, but that manifests itself in *liberation* and *freedom*. I acknowledge that my position as an “insider” in the context of this research both freed as well as perhaps limited me in some ways. My local knowledge, language fluencies and family background contributed to my ability to develop deeply entrenched networks into the Sikh and Pakistani communities. My own experiences contributed to a process of self-discovery, and this became a way by which I could connect issues in my research related to the pain and trauma felt by these communities back to myself.

In this work, I explored some of the basic issues surrounding the current political situation in the “greater” Punjab region, including the events that transpired after Partition, then again after the Sikh Genocide in 1984, and currently with the situation in Kashmir. I also traced through some of the theological continuities between Islam and Sikhism to allow the reader to situate themselves contextually - allowing for a more informed understanding of my investigation. I have witnessed during my annual travels to Punjab for the past twelve years that the revival of a push to recreate a cultural, spiritual and *familial* interdependent relationship between its Eastern and Western portions is clearly underway. I have encountered countless newspaper articles, radio broadcasts, concerts, and academic seminars, all which suggest there is a strong desire to reclaim the heritage of Punjab, a major part of which is the performance of Sufi music with its roots in the local language and Islamic and Sikh traditions. During each of my annual trips, from 2004-2017, I tried to immerse myself in the regional culture and to document

the extent to which this revival had progressed. Through my detailed fieldwork I am able to assess the extent to which the Sufi traditions of Punjab shape the identities of its people. I ask the reader to note the dynamic contrast at play in the region between the push to “westernize” attitudes, versus movements to protect, preserve and reclaim heritage traditions.

My core research methodology involved the use of two primary intervention components, one called “Sowing Seeds,” which emphasized person to person interaction, and the second “Leaving Footprints,” which centred around my own experiences at key sites of significance. I utilized both a quantitative as well as a qualitative approach to collect the data necessary to demonstrate the effects of spiritual music, exemplified by Punjabi Sufi aesthetics and traditions, on assisting with reconciliation between the Sikhs and Muslims of East and West Punjab. My primary research paradigm centred on a concept I envisioned involving the recreation of mutual cultural interdependence amongst divided partition survivors and their future generations primarily through the promotion and performance of music that centres around shared cultural and linguistic traditions. I explored the role of a common spirituality that crosses the divides of Muslim and Sikh as centred on *Sufi* themes, and the way these idioms lead to a form of identity conceptualization for many Punjabis that eschews religious dogmatism, without becoming completely *secular*.

I examined my personal relationship to the Kashmir conflict, as well as issues affecting Punjab, including movements for autonomy and self-determination, through the themes of *covenant*, *communism* and *inheritance*. I assessed my role as a *Sikh-Canadian* in the context of this work and continued to develop the perceptual lens that envisions my life in Canada as an “exile” amongst the spoils and riches of Babylon. I introduced the concept of “spiritual-repatriation,” which I argue is an important notion that acts as a liberating force for people with

colonized histories in their ability to construct their own narrative about their identities. The thematic underpinning to this narration was how the music of *Junoon* contributed to my own spiritual repatriation to Pakistan.

Continuing with my analysis of the inextricable connection between the Kashmir conflict and the Punjab region, I demonstrated the use of several interventions, including a music video “Kashmir,” that served its form and function in this capacity. I also discussed issues of Marxism as they pertain to the territory, particularly with regard to ideas of “cultural hierarchies,” and how certain ideologies are often employed to antagonize and demonstrate defiance in the face of oppression. In this context, oppression is the colonial legacy in terms of the infrastructure and dogma with which the central government of India operates, and for many Punjabis, the force used to defy (and eventually *liberate* – though this has not yet been the case) is *communism*.

I continued to examine the idea of “Sanjh,” not only conceptually, but in its function as an initiative that garners consistent attention from musical artists, industry people, as well as listeners on a regular basis. I used first-hand information collected from my informants in Pakistan to show the reality of the current situation with regard to the popularity of East Punjabi music in their country, as well as the ubiquitous use of the Punjabi language there. I explicated the intricacies of “Sanjh,” namely that it contains and represents many elements that serve to cohere a historically singular continuous area and its inhabitants, now divided across borders created by colonists based on superficial and contrived notions of race and religion. In-line with the way colonialism cemented ideas of racial hierarchies amongst the people of South and Central Asia, I engaged in a discussion of the significance of *Persian-ness*, and *idealized whiteness*, as representative of the height of the cultural-hierarchical ladder of this territory, encompassing all of its features (language, race, music and identity). I showed how even though

I was born and raised in Canada, ideas pertaining to the way race and “whiteness” are understood both in the context of the West, and in Punjab, are central to the way I continue to comprehend my own position in society.

Based on Sufism as a catalyzing force in the process of recreating mutual cultural interdependence between Sikhs and Muslims, I demonstrated how the historical folk-vernacular love stories of the territory (that have their origins in the local variant of Sufism), serve to not only assist in bringing Sikhs and Muslims together, but offer possible benefits to creating positive representation for women in the region. I showed how much of my own music is based around thematic depictions of these love stories’ messages, and that a consequence of this style of art form being proliferated is the increased participation of women in academia, performance and scholarship, associated to Sufism and its’ study.

I addressed the way a form of hyper-masculine identity conceptualization is reinforced by Punjabi music that deals with the actions and feelings of the primary male protagonists of the historical romantic ballads. I showed how this assists greatly in the process of reconciliation - because the form of masculinity is deeply connected to the Sufi aesthetics of the region (as the love stories have their basis in this tradition) and yet it crosses the divide of Muslim and Sikh. Males from both communities imbibe the attitudes associated with characters like *Mirza*, *Majnoon* and *Ranjha*, particularly as they are described in contemporary Punjabi music sung by male singers who also come from both religious groups. The fact that these are stories that deal with Muslim lovers and Islamic aesthetics does not diminish the veracity and zeal with which Sikh artists perform or encapsulate feelings of empathy and relatability to the characters. Not only does this form of masculine identity conceptualization transcend religious differences, and assist in reconciliation between the two communities, but it lends itself to positive social health



ramifications for the territory, again with regard to the positive representation of women. An example of the way this occurs was shown in the context of the male protagonists having the ability to see the manifestation of the divine light of God in their lovers, so becoming *Majnoon* (crazy) and subservient to her person.

I presented a significant case-study in which I *globalized* my primary research paradigm by showing how my core theoretical concept has universal implications. I did this by demonstrating that there are several regions throughout the world that have colonized histories where the ultimate consequence of *the illusion of independence* was the division of historically continuous territories and peoples along artificially created lines of *race, religion and ethnicity*. Specifically here, I drew a comparison to West Africa. I explored how the various ethnic groups that make up this territory also recreate mutual interdependence with one another, and engage in a process of reconciliation, through the use of spiritual music, in a manner that is fundamentally the same as I demonstrated takes place amongst groups connected with the *greater Punjab region* – including Kashmiris, East and West Punjabis, Sikhs, Muslims and Pashtuns. I would note that my research for this section involved the West African diaspora community in Edmonton, AB – that being said, I witnessed the phenomenon of reunification between different groups in a Canadian context. By attending and experiencing programs at the *Church of Pentecost* in Edmonton, Alberta, for several months, and through interviews with church attendees from different national backgrounds, I was able to show that reunification between divided groups is possible in a major way through the concept of shared spirituality, emphasized by musical exchange.

I examined through the collection and dissemination of empirical evidence that even in our current contemporary context the Sikh and Islamic faiths demonstrate remarkable similarities

in the outward orthopraxy of adherents, continuing further with my exploration of the essence of “shared spirituality.” Among the proofs I presented were photographs of not only the *Quran* of Sheikh Farid at *Gurdwara Godari Sahib*, but also a Persian inscription at the *Guru’s Mosque* making reference to the *Four Rashidun*, or “rightly guided caliphs.” I also presented an exploration of my vast data collections amongst the Muslims of East Punjab, particularly in the city of *Malerkotla*. The purpose of this was to demonstrate that current movements towards reconciliation between Sikhs and Muslims perpetuated by Sufi forms of worship, aesthetics and music, represent contingency with hundreds of years of co-existence and mutual interdependence between these two communities, disrupted and damaged deliberately through colonial interference.

## 11.1 FUTURE AREAS OF RESEARCH

I hope to continue to explore issues affecting communities with colonial histories. I will carry on my research and work with groups that have experienced division from others with whom they shared long histories of mutual cultural interdependence, due to the creation of nation-states based on superficial notions and constructs of ideas pertaining to race, culture and religion - ideas superimposed on the *colonized* by the *colonizers*. I will also continue to explore these ideas in light of the possible negative effects that music can have, in terms of breaking down certain identity barriers at the cost of creating new ones. As an educator, I hope to frame my discourses around the idea of how we can deconstruct the concept of “nationhood,” using music, culture and language to reconcile tribes, as well as religious and ethnic groups that were interdependent for centuries and perhaps now locked in conflict with one another due to decades of nationalist propaganda. By sharing my research I aim to empower others to neither box themselves in, nor box-in others by catering to the idea and concept of *identity* as it was

understood by colonial regimes (and that has subsequently affected popular categorizations of race and ethnicity that are most commonly used today). I do note though, that there are also local concepts of identity that also lead to conflict, and this is an area that I hope to explore further.

As a performer and an artist, I will continue to use music to raise awareness about the ongoing damaging effects of colonization, and demonstrate that concerted efforts must be made to reverse the harm inflicted by ruling regimes on people with colonized histories. We cannot accept the determinism of history, but rather, as artists we must pro-actively engage in deconstructing and reversing the trajectory of the new *post-colonial* world, to reclaim an inheritance that was stolen, which includes ideas of “spiritual repatriation” to *ancestral* or *promised* lands, and “recreating mutual cultural interdependence” between divided groups and their future generations. This also involves acknowledging that people with colonized histories have the right to construct their own narratives about their “place of origin,” whether or not that place continues to exist, or was destroyed and dissolved by colonial powers, as well as their own ethnic, cultural and linguistic identity.

## 11.2 THE CONTINUING SIGNIFICANCE OF “SANJH”

Research for this dissertation involved over a decade of annual trips to India and detailed data collection that led me to many significant locations far “off the beaten path.” I established many important connections with influential persons of interest in both East Punjab and Pakistan. I have developed a deeply entrenched relationship with the local and international Pakistani community that continues to open doors for me to share my research with audiences affected by the issues and outcomes I study. As a scholar I have worked ardently to disseminate critical information about the significance of renewed mutual cultural interdependence between Sikh and Muslim Punjabis through seminars, presentations, lectures and workshops. Some of the ideas I discussed in this dissertation pertaining to this include the “shared spirituality” between the two faiths, as well as the highly convergent and contingent histories and theologies they have in common. I continue to work to examine and relay the positive benefits of reconciliation initiatives between East and West Punjab, which as a revivalist and *artist* involves the sustained creation of creative musical outputs including music videos and performances.

In the same light, my music video “Kashmir” is continuing to receive an outpouring of support from both sides of the border, and although there has also been some push-back and criticism, it has been minimal in its extent. I see this video as further endorsing not only reconciliation and understanding, but the mutually interdependent cultural relationship that all of my informants are yearning for. I believe my research has uncovered potential benefits to the social and political health of the region by way of reviving Sufi music and culture. Perhaps other scholars, speakers and artists will use my work to assist in the design and implementation of initiatives to encourage the revival. Possibilities could include incorporating cultural and Sufi studies in schools and universities and increased funding for raising awareness of the same by

way of music, theatre, poetry, dance and other creative art forms. Perhaps there will also be a resurgence in the physical proximity of East and West Punjabis by way of the creation of a controlled but porous border passage. One example that such policies are already being implemented is the opening of a corridor between Dera Baba Nanak in the Northwest border area of East Punjab, and Kartarpur Sahib in Pakistan, to Sikh pilgrims without requiring a visa. The current Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan, has finalized the process of creating an open pilgrimage zone to the resting place of Baba Nanak in the Northeast of the Punjab province without having to obtain permission or travel clearance from the Government. He has also committed himself to rededicating other sites of historical significance for Sikhs in Pakistan, as the community continues to visit the country by the thousands every year.

This project has explicitly shown that a strong push for reconciliation between East and West Punjab amongst people from different levels of society is underway and continues to be a primary focus for creative persons including poets, musicians, writers, journalists and academics (in the locality *and* the diaspora). The greater Punjabi community remains enveloped in an air of optimism regarding hopes for cultural, spiritual and *familial* reunification. The significance of “Sanjh” then becomes its ability to engage directly against the following antagonists:

- 1) The conflict in Kashmir (which continues to serve the nationalist machine);
- 2) Hardline Hindu nationalism (which continues to propagate in India);
- 3) Conservative Reformist Islam (which continues to gain an increasing sway amongst militant groups in Pakistan);
- 4) East Punjab’s engrossment in conflict - as disenfranchised youth turn to drugs and intoxicants and forget their cultural legacy.

The onus of the responsibility is now on finding and implementing active peaceful solutions, such as those involving the use of music as I have described in this dissertation, and disseminating detailed information about their effectiveness in an effort to allow the greater region to maintain its cultural integrity and not fall further into disrepair:

*Today, I call Waris Shah, "Speak from your grave,"  
And turn to the next page in your book of love,  
Once, a daughter of Punjab cried and you wrote an entire saga,  
Today, a million daughters cry out to you, Waris Shah,  
Rise! O' narrator of the grieving! Look at your Punjab,  
Today, fields are lined with corpses, and blood fills the Chenab.*

-(Amrita Pritam<sup>124</sup> 1919-2005)

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<sup>124</sup> Amrita Pritam is one of the most read contemporary poets of Punjab. She was born in the same locality as my grandfather, Gujranwala, now in Punjab province, Pakistan, and left for India during the partition. She is admired in both East and West Punjab, as her poems deal with the realities of the pain and trauma that Punjabis were faced with before, and shortly after independence.

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

- BJP – Bharatiya Janata Party: A political party with extreme Hindu-Nationalist views, led by Narendra Modi, that currently rules India.
- East Punjab – One of the smallest states in the far Northwestern plains region of India, bordering Pakistan to the West and Kashmir to the North.
- East Punjabis – An ethnic group making up less than 3% of India.
- Haji – A person who has completed the *Hajj* or pilgrimage to Mecca.
- Hijra – Migration from one place to another. The term is often associated with the movement of the Prophet Mohammed and his family from Mecca to Medina.
- Hindutva – An ideological view held by groups such as the BJP and RSS that sees Hindu culture and religion as superior to all others.
- Historical/Greater Punjab – A term designating the territories that made up the Punjab region, especially as it existed as a cohesive area during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the *Sikh Empire*, or *Khalsa Raj*. Including present day Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Kashmir, East and West Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, and Haryana.
- Islamic Conservative-Reformists – Puritanical conservative Muslims, many of whom have their roots in *Salafi* ideologies - acknowledging that there has been a great deal of Saudi (and thus Salafi) influence on Pakistan. Many South Asian Islamist movements trace back to the Deobandi school as well, and today perhaps not all conservative Islamists in Pakistan identify as Salafi.
- Kashmir – A mountainous territory bordering Punjab to its north, that currently has sections administered by Pakistan, India and China. It is a conflict zone that is the primary focal point of a long and drawn out regional war between the three controlling countries, with Pakistan and China representing each other as allies in this context. It was a part of the *Historical Punjab*.
- Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa – A region to the west of Punjab, made up of primarily Pashtun populations, but with large numbers of ethnic Punjabis.
- Khyber-Pass – A mountainous pass in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan that leads into Afghanistan. This is the primary route into, and out of, the subcontinent from Afghanistan.

- Mohammed Ali Jinnah (December 25 1876 – September 11 1948 ) – The founder of Pakistan. Was himself born into a Gujrati Hindu *Banya* (merchant) family, but his father converted himself and his sons to the *Khoja Ismaili* sub-caste after being publicly ostracized by his own Hindu community, because Mohammed Jinnah’s grandfather had engaged in the sale and distribution of fish – while the *Hindu Banyas* of Gujrat were considered to be strict vegetarians. Jinnah himself was not fluent in Urdu, but rather spoke Gujarati and English assuredly.
- Muhajir – A person who has migrated from another place. Often used to refer to Pakistanis who moved to the country from the interior of India and places like Uttar Pradesh, Bengal, Gujarat, and Delhi, among others. It usually does not refer to Muslims who migrated from East to West Punjab.
- Namaz/Salat – One of the five obligatory pillars of Islam – specifically, prayer. It is meant to be performed five times per day at the hours of Fajr, Zohr, Asr, Maghrib and Isha, which coincide with the time periods: sunrise, early afternoon, early evening, sunset and night.
- Operation Blue Star – The name of the operation given to the Indian army’s invasion and desecration of the Golden Temple, the holiest site of Sikhism, from June 1-8, 1984.
- Partition – The division of the subcontinent in 1947 on the basis of the Islamic “two nation theory” supported by Mohammed Ali Jinnah and others asserting that the Muslims of British India formed a unique ethno-cultural people group with non-Indic origins that should be entitled to their own nation. On this basis, Pakistan was carved out of the western section of the subcontinent, dividing the Punjab region in half and forcing millions of Sikhs to leave their ancestral lands to re-settle in India.
- Pashtuns – An ethnic group that makes up around 15% of Pakistan.
- Pir – A Muslim saint.
- RSS - Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh: A right-wing Hindu-Nationalist volunteer paramilitary association that has nearly six million members aimed at assisting the BJP to create a Hindu Rashtra, or Hindu Nation, through militancy and propaganda. They demonstrate intolerance towards minority communities and engage in efforts to refabricate the history and theology of groups like the Sikhs in order to absorb them into Hinduism.
- Sanjha – A Punjabi word meaning “united,” or “together.”



- Sanjha Virsa – “Shared culture” in the context of the *Greater* or *Historical Punjab*.
- SGGS – Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the authoritative and canonical text of the Sikhs.
- Sikhs – An monotheistic ethno-religious group that makes up less than 1.8% of India, but who are a majority in East Punjab at around 60%.
- Sufi – A person who follows the mystical path of Islam.
- Udasis – The journeys of Guru Nanak.
- West Punjab – The largest province of Pakistan in the Northeastern plains, bordering Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) to the West, Kashmir to the North, Punjab (India) to the East, and Sindh to the South.
- West Punjabis – The dominant ethnic group in Pakistan, making up more than 45% of the population.

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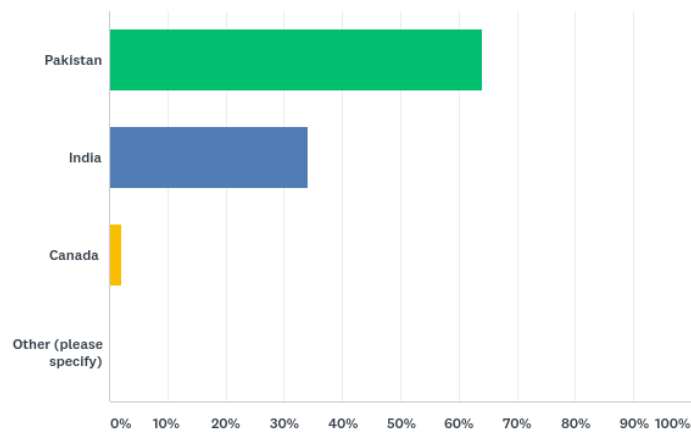
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## APPENDIX A – RESULTS OF SURVEYS

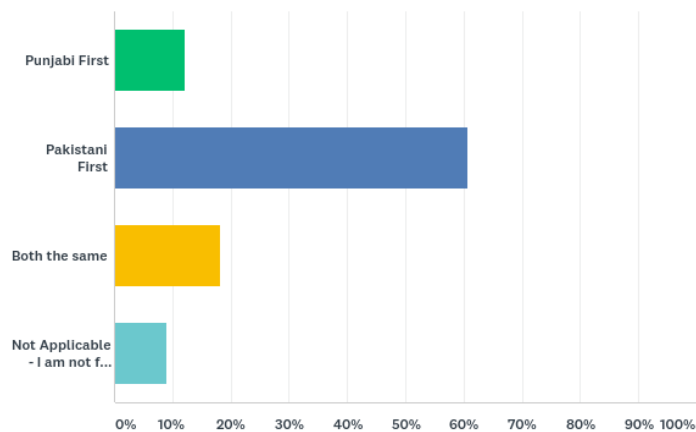
Here I will focus on the answers I received to specific questions that are most pertinent to this project, and will also provide a brief summation of the reasons my respondents gave the answers they did – based on my knowledge of the political and cultural situation of the region.

First, examine the responses to the following questions:

Q1 Which country are you originally from?

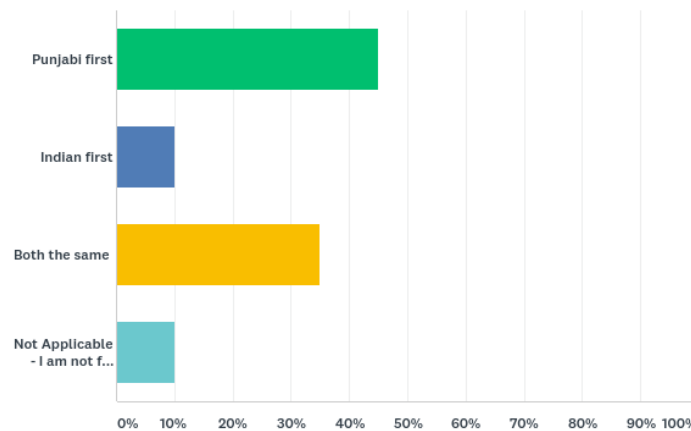


Q26 If you are from Pakistan, do you identify more with being Punjabi or Pakistani?



Now, look at the East Punjabi response:

Q27 If you are from India, do you identify more with being Punjabi or Indian?



Here, the reality of the political and cultural situation of the divided Punjab becomes painfully clear. Punjabis are the largest ethnic group in Pakistan, in fact they represent almost half the population of the entire country. As I have shown in earlier sections, the country is dominated by the Punjabi ethnic group, from all levels of government, to the army, to the entertainment industry. For this reason, Pakistan is often described in a colloquial term as being “under the foot of the Punjabi.” It is not surprising then that due to Punjabi domination, the strong majority of Pakistani Punjabis see the country as their own, and identify with being a Pakistani first and foremost. Please compare this to the situation in East Punjab (India). Punjabis in India make up only 2% of the national population (with Sikhs at 1.5%), and they are often marginalized and discriminated against in spite of making up the largest proportion of the Indian Armed forces. It is no surprise then that in India, a nation that has committed numerous human rights violations and atrocities against the Punjabi (especially Sikh) people, that the Punjabis in this country overwhelmingly identify as being Punjabi first. It would not come as a surprise if communities that are dominantly Hindu (like Gujratis and Bengalis) would easily identify as being “Indian First.”

Now, see some of the answers received to the following question:

How do you view your cross-border neighbours in the other Punjab? (For Pakistanis, what do you think of Indian Punjabis? For Indians, what do you think of Pakistani Punjabis?)

- We have the same bloodlines but different religions (which is everyone's personal issue) - Zamir Hussain Khan, Punjab, Pakistan.
- I have a lot of Indian Punjabi friends here in Australia and I totally respect them in every regard because we are the same people - Hamood Mazhar, Punjab, Pakistan.
- They are no different than me – anonymous respondent from Punjab, Pakistan.
- We are all the same due to our common language - Karim Gillani, Sindh, Pakistan
- We love each other - M. Ghani, Sindh, Pakistan
- We are friends, we have the same culture, politics aside – Jamal, Punjab, Pakistan
- There is just a border separating us, otherwise we are all humans and we are brothers to each other - anonymous respondent from Punjab, Pakistan.
- We think we are brothers – Ahmad, Punjab, Pakistan
- They are good people as far as I know and we have so much in common I think - Muhammad Usama Aziz, Punjab, Pakistan
- They are my brothers - Mahroz Shahid, Punjab, Pakistan
- East Punjab is just like our Punjab - Inam Elahi, Islamabad, Punjab, Pakistan
- They are the same as we are – Anonymous respondent from Punjab, India
- We have the same behaviour but we are from different religions. - Arshdeep Singh, Punjab, India
- All humans are the same in this creation of God - and all Punjabis are brothers. Jagjit Singh Dadwal, Punjab, India.
- We think they belong to us and that they are good people. We would like to meet them if get a chance. Sarbjeet, Punjab, India
- We are more similar than different. - Satwat Zahra Bokhari, Punjab, Pakistan
- It is only the border that separates us. I have Indian friends from Punjab, and they are no different from us except in terms of religion. – Anonymous respondent from Punjab, Pakistan.
- They are the same as Indian Punjabis and have similar rituals and culture. - Sukhbir Singh Dhillon, Punjab, India
- I think all Punjabis are my people - Gurdeep Singh, Punjab, India
- Brothers - Ashampreet Singh, Punjab, India
- Great people, we always get along. – Anonymous respondent from Punjab, Pakistan
- They're cool and it's good that we can speak the same language. – Anonymous respondent from Punjab, India
- They are just like us, it seems as if they are a part of us. - Nidhi Singh, Punjab, India
- These are just some examples of the responses I received, however not a single respondent had anything negative to say about their cross-border neighbours in either East or West Punjab.

Now, see some of the responses I received to the following question:

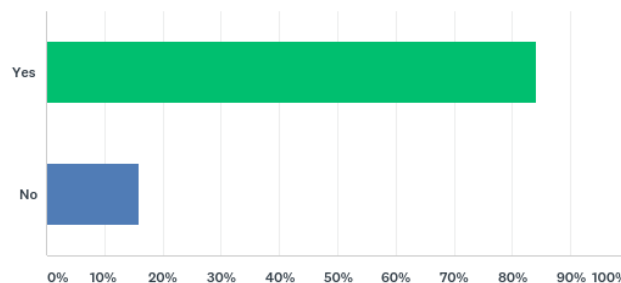
Do you think peace is possible between India and Pakistan? What is the role of Punjabi people in this process?

- Punjabi people should campaign for open borders or easy visa conditions so that people can move around and see how similar we are. - Hamood Mazhar, Punjab, Pakistan
- I assume if the governments of both countries think constructively, it is not far to observe peace between both of them. Punjabis with big hearts always welcomed each other in the past and also are hoped to do so in the future. Recently, on invitation of our PM Imran Khan who is living in Punjab, Navjot Singh Sidhu (former Indian cricketer and politician) visited Pakistan and participated in the Prime Minister's oath taking ceremony - which is a glorious example of the relationship between Punjabis and their role in strengthening our friendship. - Muhammad Wasim Haider, Punjab, Pakistan
- We have a shared culture and the most in common between the people of Pakistan and India, so they (Punjabis) can lead the peace process. – Anonymous respondent from Punjab, Pakistan
- The creation of Khalistan. – Anonymous respondent from Punjab, India.
- We should exchange more culture, dialogue, share more goods, trade etc. – Karim Gillani, Sindh, Pakistan
- Punjabis have a very important role in this process. – Anonymous respondent from Punjab, Pakistan
- Yes, Punjabis have a very important role, but Indian Politicians are a source of hate. – M. Ghani, Sindh, Pakistan
- Absolutely, peace is possible. And In Sha Allah, one day India and Pakistan would be close brothers. Punjabi people have a significant role in this because we have a Punjab here and we also have a Punjab there. We might be different in some ways but our roots are connected to each other and that bond can't be separated. – Anonymous respondent from Punjab, Pakistan.
- Yes, peace is possible, the role of Punjabis is to raise awareness about this. Inam Elahi, Islamabad, Punjab, Pakistan.
- Yes, Punjabis are the main factor which built a connection between two countries. – Arshdeep Singh, Punjab, India.
- Yes peace is possible. All the Punjabi people in both countries love each other, especially because of our shared Punjabi language. – Jagjit Dadwal, Punjab, India.
- Yes peace is quite possible. The role that Punjabi people have is that they should care for each other due to having the same culture. - Farasat Hasnain, Punjab, Pakistan
- I hope so. Punjabi people can play an important role in this process. For example, they can post some videos on YouTube giving a message of peace. – Sarbjeet, Punjab, India.
- Peace is possible. We need to be more tolerant and patient in the process, both sides should have an open mind and heart to let go of all the previous anger and hate. - Satwat Zahra Bokhari, Punjab, Pakistan
- Unless the governments pay heed to it, I am not sure we would be able to achieve peace. – Anonymous respondent from Punjab, Pakistan.

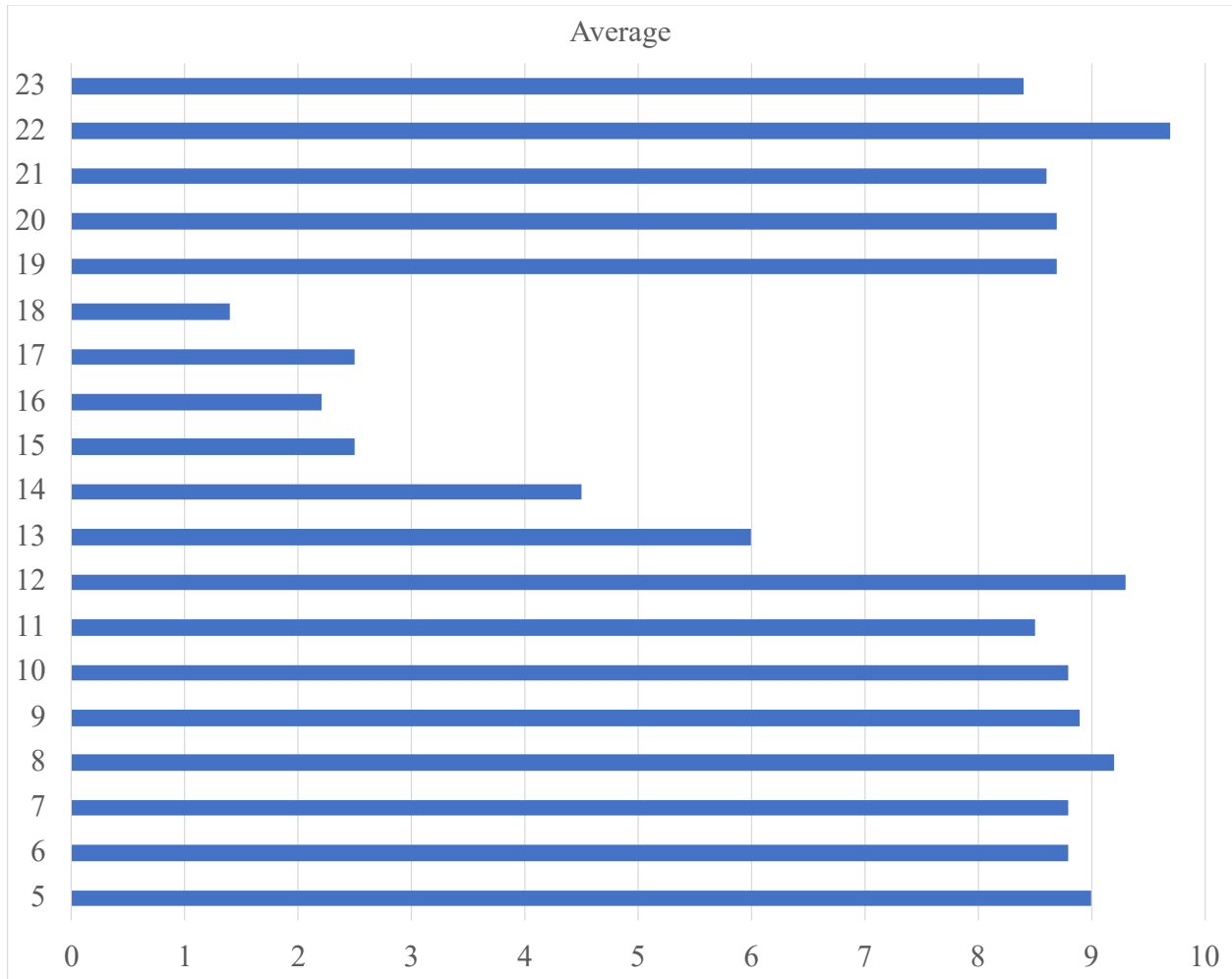
- Yes peace is very much possible. Punjabis on both sides need to connect like real life neighbors and avoid the media hype. - Auon Raza Naqvi, Punjab, Pakistan
- Peace is possible between both countries. The role of Punjabi people in the peace process could be their relationship, language, culture and music. - Sukhbir Singh Dhillon, Punjab, India.
- Language bindings play a really important role - Muhammad Safder, Punjab, Pakistan.
- Yes – Punjabis can act as bridge between the two countries. – Anonymous respondent from Punjab, Pakistan.
- More people to people contact is necessary between Punjabis. – Mohanpal Randhawa, Punjab, India.
- This may not be possible with Modi in power. – Anonymous respondent from Gilgit, Pakistan.
- Yes, we have to stop being so close-minded. – Ayesha from Kashmir, Pakistan
- Yes, but both sides governments need to take some constructive congenial steps towards each other. – Nidhi Singh, Punjab, India.

The ubiquity of listening and appreciating Sufi music and culture was also exemplified by the following average response rates:

Q4 Were you born in Punjab? (Pakistan OR India)







Questions 5-23

All questions were based on a ten-point Likert scale:

1(Completely Disagree) || 10 (Completely Agree)

5. Sufism is an important part of Punjabi culture.
6. I enjoy Sufi music.
7. I like Sufi poetry.
8. Bulleh Shah and Sheikh Farid are Punjabi figures that I find inspiring.
9. Heer-Ranjha and Mirza-Sahiba are Punjabi folk-tales that have emotional significance for me.
10. I relate really strongly to my Punjabi roots.
11. I feel a strong sense of solidarity with Punjabis on the other side of the border.
12. Preserving Punjabi culture is important.

13. Answer if you are from Pakistan: The Indian government is an enemy of Pakistan.
14. Answer if you are from India: The Pakistani government is an enemy of India.
15. Answer if you are from Pakistan: Indian people are enemies of Pakistan
16. Answer if you are from India: Pakistani people are enemies of India.
17. Answer if you are from Pakistan: I feel anger towards India.
18. Answer if you are from India: I feel anger towards Pakistan.
19. The cultures of the two Punjabs (Pakistan and India) have much in common.
20. Answer if you are from Pakistan: I wish to travel to India
21. Answer if you are from India: I wish to travel to Pakistan.
22. I hope for peace between Pakistan and India.
23. I know quite a bit about Punjabi culture on the other side of the border (this means if you are from Pakistan, you know quite a bit about Punjabi culture in India, and if you are from India, you know quite a bit about Punjabi culture in Pakistan).

When mentioning their favorite Punjabi singers from Pakistan, the following artists appeared to be most popular:

- Shaukat Ali
- Arif lohar
- Alam Lohar
- Nusrat Fatah Ali khan
- Mehdi Hassan
- Ghulam Ali
- Reshma
- Noor Jahan
- Abrar Ul Haq
- Ataullah Khan Niazi
- Bilal Saeed
- Atif Aslam
- Fareeha Pervez
- Rahat Fateh
- Abida Parveen
- Atta Ullah Khan

- Esakhelvi
- Lukhwinder Sahir
- Ali Bagga
- Sanam Marvi
- Imran Khan
- Mesha Shafi
- Qurutulain Baloch
- Shazia
- Hadiqa Kayani
- Farhad Humayun
- Sain Zahoor
- Inayat Hussain Batti
- Shaukat Ali
- Mansoor Malangi
- Naseebo Lal

From East Punjab, the following singers were most popular:

- Kuldeep Manak
- Gurdas Mann
- Delair Mehdi
- Satinder Sartaaaj
- Surinder Kaur
- Sukhwinder Singh
- Diljit Dosanjh
- Jagjit Singh
- Harbhajan Mann
- Kanwar Grewal
- Shiv Kumar Batalvi (lyricist)
- Gippy Grewal
- Amrinder Gill
- Jasmine Sandlas
- Jassi Gill
- Neha Kakkar
- Guru Randhawa
- Arijit Singh
- Shinda
- Honey Singh
- Sidhu Moosewala
- Nooran Sisters
- Amrit Maan
- Jazzy B
- Sukhwinder

# APPENDIX B – TRANSCRIPTION OF INTERVIEW WITH JARNAIL BASOTA

## Transcription of Interview With Jarnail Basota

The following transcription begins with our movement towards a formal interview with audio recording.

**A: Arshdeep Khaira**

**J: Jarnail Basota**

A: So, in the early 90's after the Khalistan movement had started to settle down a little bit we saw the emergence of Sufi singers. Because Sufi music was still acceptable in that cultural context, especially in light of the militancy. So, singers like Hans Raj Hans, Saber Koti...

J: Sardool Sikander and Gurdas Mann were also products of that period. On the other hand, during this period of the terrorist movement some singers were killed, like Chamkeela, he was assassinated because the terrorists thought he sang vulgar songs. He had become so popular during those days but he started to sing vulgar songs which couldn't be listened to amongst a family and the terrorists killed him because of this, and until today the culprits have not been brought to trial.

In the late 90's again, the music took a twist from Sufi singing. A lot of new singers entered, like Harbajan Mann, they had money and lot of cassette companies came into existence. Some NRI singers went to Punjab, they spent a lot of money, or *threw* a lot of money into the market, into advertisement and publicity, and essentially took their place (in the industry). In those times Harbajan Mann, Dilshad Akhtar, and other singers like Ravinder Grewal, they came around 2000. At that time from singing about Sufism, they came towards *pop* music.

For pop music, Daler Mehndi was the first with *Bolo Tararara*, then came Jasvir Jassi with *Dil Lai Gai Kudi Gujrat Di*, so pop was a mixture of traditional music with some Western music. In those days the trend of music videos also began. Many Punjabi channels came into existence, like Lashkara.

A: So you joined Lashkara right around the time that Pop music and music videos were just starting to become popular?

J: Yes. But personally, I disliked pop music. When I would take interviews of artists, and when I would write articles in the papers, I would condemn pop music. Some singers would actually get quite angry at me, because I was one of the leading cultural journalists (in Punjab) at the time. Whether Daler Mehndi or Gurdas Mann, or any artist from Bombay, they just couldn't get away from me because I always had some odd questions regarding their singing.

*[Interview continues]*

When Daler Mehndi's *Bolo Tararara* came out, I was the person who wrote a lot of articles against him. *Bolo Tararara* is meaningless! What is the meaning of *Bolo Tararara*. It has no sense actually.<sup>125</sup>

Then with pop music came the videos, and in the videos they started showing the nude girls and all that.<sup>126</sup> Then again we criticized them. This started from *Kudi Gujrat Di* (The Girl From Gujarat Has Stolen My Heart) and Jasvir Jassi.<sup>127</sup> No doubt we started condemning them, but as a commercial product, they got a lot of money from it. Even after Jassi there were so many vulgar videos.

Then from Sufi to pop. Again in 2001 when there was a climax, people became fed up of the pop music. They wanted music that would give peace to their souls, which would sound impressive to the ears. Then again Hans Raj Hans gave a Sufi cassette, then Surjit Bhattar came out with a cassette.

Seeing the trend, several singers came. Even surviving singers started to change their colours.

A: So even singers who were singing vulgar pop music started singing Sufi music?

J: Even other singers like Wadalli Brothers became popular.

A: So a lot of these Sufi singers became popular once people started becoming fed up of the vulgar brand of pop music?

J: Yes. But even at the height of the pop music period, even great singers like Sardool Sikander started to sing pop music. He gave a vulgar pop cassette. Even Hans Raj Hans gave a pop cassette. However, commercially these were not as successful.

A: Maybe because these Sufi singers were unwilling to go that extra distance (in vulgarity) to be commercially successful in pop.

J: Yes. After that, then a trend of duet singing came.

A: So around 2001 there was a little spark of Sufi singing.

J: Yes, for about 2-3 years. During the pop period when Hans Raj Hans gave the cassette *O Vekho Sardka Te Ag Turi Jandi Ai* (Look at the fire walking on the road – symbolizing a

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<sup>125</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Ay500xRTTE>

<sup>126</sup> Basota here refers to vulgarity and scantily clad women as nudity.

<sup>127</sup> [https://youtu.be/2\\_wIPWCgQqQ](https://youtu.be/2_wIPWCgQqQ)

beautiful woman walking down the street) I wrote a big article about him condemning his approach and we were not on speaking terms for some time. This was around 2004-2005.<sup>128</sup>

A: So Sufism sparked a little bit around 2001 in East Punjab representing a kind of cycle which was proceeded again by duet singing and pop singing with vulgarity kind of entering again around 2004.

J: Yes, and during those days around 2004. But from the mid 90's until the early 20's there was a real boom in the audio market. But again, this faded out when the big companies started piracy. Before coming to the market, albums would be sold throughout the world. I as an artist, have spent so much money on the music and the video, but now I am the loser. During those days cassette companies started misusing the artists, because of piracy. I as an artist if I have spent 10 lakhs on an album, I won't even see 10 rupees for that. Then the trend came that cassette companies started asking for money from singers. "Alright, you record your cassette, you record your video, give it to me and we'll release it throughout the world." This started happening around the early 20's when piracy was a real problem.

A: So companies started asking artists not only to fund their own music and recording, but to pay them (the company) on top of that to distribute and release their music?

J: Yes! Then because of YouTube the music industry has also been damaged. Recently now the trend is towards the *single track*. You just record one song, put it on YouTube, it is ok, then you will start to get stage programs, but you won't find any cassettes (a colloquial expression in *Punjabi* meaning "full albums" or *CD's*).

Around 2006-2007 Pooja started the trend of Glamour music, basically meaningless and useless pop music. This became *action-full* singing, and not singing on the bases of the voice. Singing which was popular because of the actions on the stage. More acting, less singing and loud music.

But when we talk of Sufism, it's a type of music that brings peace. This is essentially a type of music that the East and West can agree on (Punjab). Singing is essentially the only field, it's the only such thing that can bring peace amongst Pakistanis and Indians, removing the hatred from their hearts. When relations along the border weren't so good because of the politicians, we started efforts. In the early 90's we established an Indo-Pak Cultural Organization where we would invite artists from Punjab (Pakistan) who would give the message that "Yes, we want a positive relationship," but the politicians did not want this.

A: Who were some of the artists you brought to India.

J: Shaukat Ali, Reshma, Akram Rahi.<sup>129</sup> The person behind all of this was Fakhir Zaman who was the cultural minister during Benazir Bhutto's time. In East Punjab it was Harnaik Singh a

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<sup>128</sup> [https://youtu.be/j4jiL7\\_suQ8](https://youtu.be/j4jiL7_suQ8)

<sup>129</sup> <https://youtu.be/J8X1LNcY5NQ>

minister at the time. At that time we spent a lot of time and money on this initiative and we got a lot of help from the government because of Mr. Harnaik Singh, he announced a lot of grants so that the functions could be organized in a proper way. Unfortunately, after many programs were organized, within a month the government flopped. Another government came in and all of the funding was dropped.

A: Around what time did this happen?

J: Around 95-96

A: So was this a peaceful time between India and Pakistan? Kargil happened a little later...

J: There was tension, but the artists wanted to promote peace. Even our artists like Hans Raj Hans went to West Punjab.

A: So this was all a part of the cultural exchange involving Fakhir Zaman and Harnaik Singh?

J: Yes. Zaman was a cultural affairs minister in Benazir Bhutto's time.

A: So prior to Parvez Musharaff's time?

J: Yes.

A: Can we say that at that time there was still a willingness with the Bhutto family and Zaman and the Congress party in Punjab with Harnaik Singh to engage in cultural exchange?

J: This followed the period of the Khalistan movement, shortly after Beant Singh was assassinated. Harnaik Singh was the minister at that time.

A: The emphasis at that time was to create a cultural exchange, towards peace, bringing artists from West Punjab like you did with Shaukat Ali and Reshma and sending our own artists like Hans Raj Hans... did any other artists go?

J: Yes, Sarbjit Kaur and Sardool Sikander, Harbajan Mann, Bhagwant Mann.

A: What kind of music were they singing?

J: There was a touch of Sufism, but it was predominantly cultural and folk Punjabi music. Music that was family oriented and talked about the values and lifestyles of Punjabis.

A: What was the people's reaction to this?

J: They used to like it.

A: So when the Pakistani artists came to India you said there was around 50,000 people there.

J: There was a very good response. They had great voice qualities. They were *Sureele*. Pami Bhai was there. One very emotional moment was when Shaukat Ali was singing in front of 50,000 people, in front of the stage Mr. Charanjit Ahuja, music director, was sitting, Surinder Kaur was sitting behind him, Kuldip Manak was sitting behind him, Harbajan (Mann) was sitting behind him, Bhagwant and I were there. I was a very active journalist in those days, I used to write in *JagBani*. Shaukat Ali has a very high pitched voice. When he started singing Challa, upon listening to his voice, Charanjit Ahuja became so emotional, he stood up with tears of joy in his eyes. He went on the stage. He had a gold chain around his neck and rings in his fingers. He went up on the stage, took the chain from around his neck and placed it around Shaukat's neck, he was so impressed. He looked into Shaukat Ali's eyes and said:

Pakistan vale lutna chaunde ai  
Asi aj thode ton lute gai thodde pyar te mohabbat nal

*Pakistan wants to rob us  
But today you have robbed us with your love  
(Basota then went on to say the following).*

*Odde nal lutegai na ke hathiyaran nal  
nal phir othe une kya si ka...  
Eh jai rishte ne, kallakaran de hathiyaran nal ne luatange.*

We have not been robbed with weapons and war but with his love.  
What he was trying to say was...  
The relationships of artists to the people cannot be severed with swords.  
There was a BIG article that I wrote about this on the front page of the *JagBani*...

*[Interview Continues]*

J: I also became very emotional at this time. There were articles in those days about the severed relationship between Pakistanis and Indians, and on the other hand the person in front of my eyes is saying such things.

A: So based on that example that happened, and where we are at today in time with what is happening in Punjab, what is happening in Kashmir, what is happening between India and Pakistan, are these kind of things still happening back in Punjab (shared cultural events)? I have seen them happening here (in Canada) with Sanjha events, but recently in India Ghulam Ali was not allowed to perform... What's happening, is this kind of cultural exchange still taking place?

J: People really want this cultural exchange, but the politicians are not allowing it. So the reason behind the Ghulam Ali program this was all the Shiv Sena, because they are against Muslims. After all, we are all human beings, he is singing and giving a good message of humanity, promoting peace to the souls of all people whether Pakistani, Hindu or other.



Now the situation is different if we talk about Hindustan or Punjab. The main problem is the employment. People are worried about that. The future of Indians, whether they are Punjabi, Hindu or other. I being a father, if I am staying in Punjab my first desire will be to secure the future of my children. When I see thuggery, corruption, the water is dirty and very poisonous for the health, no jobs, no democracy. Even look at me, I have been a poor journalist. All political parties used to respect me, now in the beginning of February I am going to India just for the marriage of my son. Now even in my heart and I do want to go there, but I am scared for that situation, because on the radio here, in the newspaper, I talk about the Badal government, I talk about Modi as a terrorist. Because I talk in favor of humanity, whether Muslim or otherwise. So, every Indian, every Punjabi is unsafe in Punjab. That's why the people want change. They disliked Congress, they disliked Akalis, they disliked BJP. The only way is AAP, if they can do something. SO we wish where we live there should at least be peace. Whenever we go on our own land, we should be safe. So this is the reason, so nowadays Singing has totally failed, because no one has any money to pay to artists.

If you are an artist, you are living in Punjab, you want to record your cassette, that is beyond your reach. Audio recording is very costly. But the music director is right in his own place because he has to earn bread and butter from his profession, so he will charge a lot of money. Then for promotion there are so many ad rates. Then video, there are so many directors who will ask for a minimum of 10 lakhs for each single track. After spending between 40-50 lakh, what are you going to get? You are ultimately going to get nothing because the piracy is there. Singers are not getting programs in Punjab, so they have started doing other jobs. They have sold their houses, they are under debt. We have seen this for example with Lab Janjoa, he died in frustration. Other good singers, but during these times they have lost their name and fame, they have increased their expenses, needs and deeds have increased, but they are killing themselves. On the one hand, farmers are killing themselves, on the other hand artists are killing themselves.

A: If there is a solution and if music and culture plays a role in that solution towards bringing Punjab back, bringing the youth out of drugs, creating peace between India and Pakistan, creating change... what role does culture and music play in that? If you destroy the culture, you destroy the music, that's the lifeblood, the heartbeat of the people. Maybe now, because things are so bad in Punjab, we read every day in the papers that things are so bad there, maybe now more than ever people need the language, the culture and the music to make them strong again... do you think this can happen?

J: Yes. Instead of making these temples, Gurdwaras, instead of spreading religion and religious institutions. I read a report today that there are 9 countries of the world who have discarded religion, they have come out of religion. Because the entire problem is arising because of religion in one form or the other. In place of religion and religious places, if we have more music academies to teach good music, then the good message can be given. But again there is a problem. I want to do this but I don't have the resources to do it. Similarly, other people are interested, but they don't have the resources either, and the government is not helping. The only way is through private organizations (see following microtranscription of section), or for the people who have money to come forward with this. Because this is the only alternative left.

Religion will not solve this problem, politicians will not solve this problem. Preachers will not solve this problem.

Music is a *Mithi Puddi* (a sweet dish) that in our hearts can plant a beautiful seed and have a strong impact on the minds of the people. It then hardly matters whether you are Hindu, Muslim Sikh or other. Music, especially Sufi music is the only remedy at present which is known as the *Mithi Puddi* which can resolve the present scenario in different ways in different countries. See today, the Paris problem... what is ISIS? This has emerged out of religion. It is nothing but religious hatred. So, whether country A or country B, if we take the music of that country, it will give entertainment, it will give moments of joy, peace and harmony.

A: So music then, the way it brought together people from India and Pakistan in the 90's, you talked about the concerts of Reshma and Shaukat Ali, it has the power to heal and to make people strong and to create vibrancy. So even today, with the way things are deteriorating not only in Punjab but in the whole world, it can still create that kind of peace. But part of the reason behind these differences, behind the hatred and the problems, is politics and religion.

J: Yes, these are the two factors. To get rid of this we need good music. I mean not the present music, or this remixed music which is killing the soul. We need good music which touches the heart, the mind, gives relief and leaves an impact on the minds of different communities. It could be in any language, but it should be meaningful. It should give entertainment, bring peace and leave an impact on the minds of the people.

### Reflections on the Interview

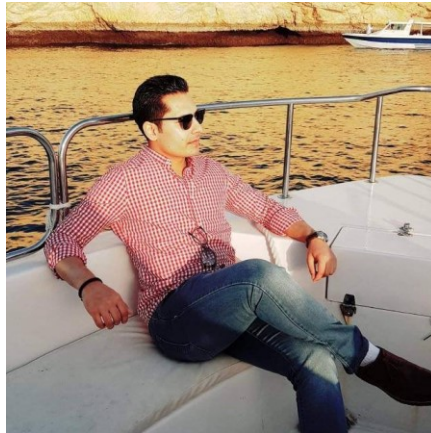
I began the interview with the informal component with open dialogue and conversation, no recording and no taking of notes. The details of this conversation formed the basis for the introduction to this analysis. During this component we were both very relaxed and informal. Indeed, it was difficult to memorize all of the details that he had mentioned to me during this time. A benefit may have been that I mentioned to Mr. Basota prior to beginning to the interview the basic format that I would be following (starting with an informal conversation and then moving into the recorded formal interview).

Once moving into the formal interview and conversation I indeed noticed that the presence of technology made the interview more difficult for the both of us, however it may have led towards more in depth answers for some of the questions. I also noticed that Mr. Basota felt more engaged at times in the dialogue after employing the audio recording technology as he often would tilt his face to project his voice in the direction of the microphone (see diagram on first page).

Mr. Basota seemed to be happy and impressed by my enthusiasm, and equally excited to be a part of this project, after thanking him several times, he mentioned to me over and over again that he too was interested in this topic. At the beginning of the interview he mentioned to me that I had come to precisely the right person to acquire this information. Prior to undertaking the interview I mentioned to him what the information would be used for and the basic details of my research. Afterwards, I had him sign a release form agreeing to allow me to use his information in my work. He mentioned that he did not wish to remain anonymous and that I may use all of the information acquired from him during this interview in my research, including public presentation of the information.

## APPENDIX C – CONSOLIDATED TRANSCRIPTS OF INTERVIEWS WITH PAKISTANI NATIONALS

Ahmed Ali Babbar – Lahore, Punjab



**Figure C-1 Photo of Informant Ahmed Ali Babbar (Supplied Photo)**

When I spoke to Ahmed he mentioned that he had travelled outside of Pakistan on a few occasions but had always lived and continued to reside in Lahore. He said things like:

1. “A lot of my friends are from Punjab in India...”
2. “The dances are the same, the songs are the same... Most of our songs are their songs... The only thing that differentiates Indian Punjab and Pakistani Punjab is the name of the country.”

When I asked him the following question: “*What about Indian Punjabi music, how popular is it in Pakistan?*” he replied in the following way:

3. “Very popular, very (*emphasis*) popular... In every wedding there is Punjabi music, in every event, we listen to it whenever we want have fun.”
4. “Yes, and let me tell you that it is not just in Punjab, it is popular everywhere. Especially in Sindh and KPK. I have met people from Kashmir and Balochistan that live in Lahore and they love Punjabi music and Indian movies. It is only like 5% of the people I have met that say they have never watched Indian movies, but 95% of all the people I have met, they love it.”



**Figure C-2 Photo of Informant Khurram Khan (Supplied Photo)**

I then spoke to Khurram Khan who said the following:

1. “Pakistani Punjabi people think there is no big difference between them and Indian Punjabis, there is only a border. But the people on the other side are just like Punjabis here. They also have a rich culture, strong traditions, they are brave people and they are *from us*. So, they never differentiate, they think that Indian Punjab and Pakistani Punjab have maximum similarities.”

I asked: *What about singers from Indian Punjab, do people in Pakistan like these singers as well?*

2. “Yes, too much! You know many singers, especially the *Sikh* singers like Amrinder Gill and many others I can name, they like them too much. In Lahore, the music of Indian Punjab is very famous, you can hear their songs in the roads of Lahore, in cars... in different places.”
3. “The extremist elements in India and Pakistan were dominating for the last few years, but I think the future of both countries is linked with peace and definitely Sufism will play a major role in creating this peace.”

Azhar Aly – Karachi, Sindh (Ethnically Punjabi)



**Figure C-3 Photo of Informant Azhar Aly (Supplied Photo)**

I got in touch with Azhar through one of my musical contacts in Mississauga. Azhar was quite a bit older than my other informants and had even travelled to India. He described the relationship between the two countries in the following way:

1. “I did not find any difference between Lahore and Delhi to be honest with you. I have solid reason for that. Delhi is lush green, and Lahore is lush green. Secondly, both are very, very old historical places. Delhi had Jumma Masjid, Lahore has Badshahi Masjid. Delhi had Lal Killa, Lahore has Shahi Killa. There are so many things, the weather is the same, the food is the same, they wear the same clothes and they speak the same language. So, culture wise you don’t feel any difference, the people are nice and warm.”
2. “You know there is no place on earth like Punjab, I am talking about united Punjab. Like East Punjab and West Punjab, when they are united, it is such a wonderful place on earth.”



**Figure C-4 Photo of Informant Kamran Taj (Supplied Photo)**

I got in touch with Kami through one of my friends who also lives in Ontario. Kami is originally from *Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KPK)* and is currently residing in Islamabad. He said the following:

1. “In KPK, Punjab and also here in Islamabad people want to express themselves with more zeal and zest than in the past. For this reason they actually listen mostly to Punjabi songs. They are listening less and less to Urdu and classical music, they prefer Punjabi music. It is louder and it depicts the realities of daily life, for this reason people prefer Punjabi music.”
2. “Indian Punjabi singers like Hans Raj Hans, Jassi, Jazzy B, Guru Randhawa, Sukhbir, Babbu Mann and others are listened to very much.”
3. “The primary push of people here is towards the English language and then after that towards Punjabi, and then Urdu and Pashto and other regional languages. In all of Punjab, Islamabad and even in KPK Punjabi is spoken the most. All of KPK is not Pashtun, most of the people there speak Hindko which is also a dialect of Punjabi. Punjabi is being spoken the most in Pakistan in every province. But people are most impressed with English and want to learn it for status and education. But Punjabi is still a major language and is spoken most widely, though the dialects change every 25 kilometers or so (Note: Saraiki, Hindko and Potohari [and some others] are dialects of Punjabi).”
4. “People don’t say this is Pakistani Punjab and that is Indian Punjab. The educated and mainstream Pakistani people do not think or say this, they only consider the entire region as one Punjab.”
5. “Definitely the one main thing that can bring people from these two countries is art and culture. Because the armed forces and other entities will only support their own point of view, but that is not the point of view of the regular people.”

Irfan Abbas – Lahore, Punjab

I also spoke to Irfan in Lahore who had the following things to say:

1. “In Pakistan today people are listening to Punjabi songs the most. Punjabi music that has a little western touch to it is being appreciated widely.”
2. “The thing is that the Sufis of Pak-o-Hind they all talked about love and about mitigating differences. They all wrote poetry saying that in emphasizing differences or arguing there is nothing to be gained. They all talked about love, friendship and peace, and if this message can again reach the common people this will be very good for everyone. But at least with a new fashion these messages of the Sufis are reaching the youth of today.”



## APPENDIX D – CONSOLIDATED INTERVIEWS WITH AMJAD ISLAM AND ANWAR MASOOD (POET LAURREATES OF PAKISTAN)

### Amjad Islam Amjad



Amjad Islam Amjad seated to my right.

1. When we are together we help each other so much, we understand each other's pain.
2. Artists become the voice of ordinary people, what the people feel but can't say, that is when the artists become their voice.
3. I went to the Golden Temple and met with the Sikhs, our relationship with each other, our "Sanjh" is very important, it is a very big thing. Guru Nanak himself said "one person said, the other understood, Nanak said they are both Gianis (all knowing)." It is not only in sharing thoughts and feelings, but in *listening* that we achieve true wisdom. This was the Guru's message and we should think about it.
4. Ghalib said, "don't look at the beauty of the words employed by the speaker you are listening to, and when I learned this, I understood that his words are too the words of my heart." It is important to see happiness through others' eyes!
5. According to determinism of history some things happen that we should not argue with. But wherever love, peace and our "sanjh" can be protected, we should not let that disappear. For each other's sake we need to think of one another as brothers and meet each other *regularly* with love.
6. With time things change. Life never goes in a straight line. The waves are ever changing. Sometimes things meet, sometimes they divide. We need to follow this pattern to learn to adjust in life.
7. Shakespeare said the poet the lover and the lunatic are of the same breed. As a poet I see things differently than a painter or a scientist does, who use their art differently.
8. The purpose of life is to stay in balance, nothing is good in extremes. Even the things you love to eat will make you throw up if you eat them too much. The river is in between the trees.
9. The beauty of fine arts is that they bring out the true emotions of people and bring them together

## Anwar Masood – Poet Laureate of Pakistan



Anwar Masood seated in the left of the picture (I am seated far-right).

Here is a short transcription of some parts of the conversation I had with Anwar Masood.

*You mentioned your love of Persian, can you tell me about this?*

I grew up reading Persian books and poetry. Often, even if I could not understand all of it, I still obtained great enjoyment from this practice. Indeed, the relationship of Persian with the Punjabi people has a history over the last thousand years. Many Sikhs have been great scholars of Persian as well. Even the word “Punjabi” itself is a Persian word. “Panj,” and “aubi,” meaning the land of five rivers.

*I wanted to ask you about your “taluk” (relationship) with these three languages – Punjabi, Urdu and Farsi. I personally feel these are like three brothers of the same family who each have their own unique identity but have the same bloodline and love for each other.*

Indeed, many things are in common between them, but some things are different. But we need to tolerate the differences. Some people eat less salt, some eat more, some eat more sweets, some eat less, but we need to tolerate these differences.

*Yes, I feel these languages each have their own opportune moments as well, they suit certain events. For example, if you are very happy you might start speaking “jugtain” in Punjabi. Sometimes when people are sad, then definitely Urdu suits the passionate and heartbroken character, and indeed when we want to make “zhikr,” or “dua” to God, we are best suited to speak in esoteric Persian.*

We have been together for so long, even people from other parts of the world. Indeed, even Arabic is very closely related to our Punjabi traditions and culture. For example, the word “Rab” is the most common word used by Sikhs to refer to God. Even the root of this is in Surah Fatiha “Allhumdulilahi “Rab” eel al ameen,” now tell me what word can be bigger than this word “Rab”? We say the word “Shareef,” as in *Mecca Shareef* or *Medina Shareef*, and the Sikhs say “Sahib,” as in *Nankana Sahib*, *Panja Sahib*, *Guru Granth Sahib*. You say this out of respect, remember that even this word “Sahib” is an Arabic word.

Iqbal says “Khayma had yak juda,” that even if the personalities are different, the heart should be one. The things that are “Sanjh,” that we share we recognize immediately. What is the difference between a flower and another plant? God made some people white, some black, some

tan. Some people love the dark disposition. One white man came here after visiting Bengal and he said that “many roads lead to Bangladesh, but there are no roads out,” he meant this referring to the beauty of the darker skinned women, and the love for tan skin. Their big eyes, their beautiful hair, indeed every race has beauty, but we should recognize their beauty and appreciate it. (Reciting poetry) *I remembered your jalwa (enchantment) and then I remembered your savla pan (tan skin).*

...Qaid E Azam (Jinnah) spoke that in the creation of Pakistan I had love for both parts (East and West Pakistan).

...The Sufis are travelers on the path of love. The motor of their bus is “love,” and *Sufism* is a path to God upon which we are led by love.

...I also saw that last night at the *Moshaira* you really enjoyed yourself, and you supported our cause for ICNA relief whole heartedly. *Inshallah*, Allah will keep you always happy and content.

## APPENDIX E – TRANSCRIPTION OF WORKSHOP DISCUSSION AT PUNJABI UNIVERSITY

**Dr. Rajinder Gill:** You sang very beautifully, but I have a personal experience to share with you. I have been a director for three years with the Government of India and I have established two or three offices in Kashmir. The problem in Kashmir is that there are some moderate people, but when it comes to religion there is no room for adjustment, they are not ready to listen to anything. This desire that you have is commendable, and many songs and movies have been made about this, but how will we proceed further? This is my question for you.... When it comes to music and arts, many Indians are very sympathetic, but the situation is degrading day by day (in Kashmir), what can we really do?

**Arshdeep Khaira:** Actually, when you look at it from one perspective, Kashmir is a multi-billion dollar industry. Wars are usually supplied on both sides, in terms of arms and funding, by the same companies. It's possible that the Rothschild family has funded both sides of most wars for many decades. At the grassroots level ordinary people have an obligation. I do not know much about you or your views, but I can speak from my own experiences. Back home we have no disagreements amongst ourselves (East and West Punjabis), we sit together, we eat together, we have "Sanjha" events. But ultimately, power is in money and in government, ordinary people like us, what can we do? This is a very critical question that you have asked. As far as I can say, we should raise our voices, we should promote arts and culture, we should not be ashamed or afraid of our real identities, we should not be afraid of *Punjabiya* or of being Punjabi... possessing the qualities of kindness, brave-heartedness, and optimism. I am not a political person, I don't know exactly what we can do, but I look around and I see at least thirty powerful voices in this room. If those voices raise, through music, through song, through culture and through embracing one another... because the greatest enemy is ignorance, when we don't know, we are afraid. When the other person looks different from us, we feel fear. When it comes to uncovering the truth, we stay back. Especially these days there is a lot of a push from social media, but we have to be very careful, we have to mobilize together as a Punjabi community, as a *Sanjha* community (East and West), and not by emphasizing our differences.

**Dr. Rajinder Gill:** I appreciate your answer, but there (in Kashmir), when religion is threatened there is no forgiveness, this is the reality in Kashmir. We used to do shows in Kashmir, we used to print posters. The first few would go well, but when the information would be leaked we would get intelligence saying "don't do it, today there could be a problem."

**Arshdeep Khaira:** We can write papers, we can publish in journals, we can do research, we can add a political element to our research and look at the way we can bring communities together and create social good and positive social health. But obviously we have to clean the garbage in our own backyard first... we have a big drug problem in Punjab, we have racial inequality between the different ethnic and tribal groups here, they tend not to get along. So we have to fix ourselves first. I think that's what this song ("Kashmir") is about, that's what the message is. If we can shine a bright light on our Punjabi brotherhood and promote interdependence, that becomes the tree that gives shade to them (Kashmiris – referencing the lyrics of the song). If they (Kashmiris) see that we (Punjabis) are doing it, Amritsar-Lahore, Rawalpindi-Multan-

Jalandhar, the land of “five” rivers, our “sanjh” and our love for each other becomes the tree that gives the Kashmiris shade. This way there could be a positive effect. Because we are not Kashmiris, there may be some Kashmiris in the room, but we are Punjabi and we have our own history. Kashmir has always been different, and Punjab is different, but we have to emphasize our powerful culture and the connection between East and West Punjab, and this way we show the Kashmiris that in the darkness there is a burning *chirag* (oil lamp/candle). That’s what my research is about, “Punjab,” we think about ourselves and who we are, emphasize our collective identity, reclaim our lost inheritance, and in emphasizing this the other communities see that. If we as Punjabis go and start interfering with their (Kashmiris) problems, what right do we have to do that? We should be thinking about ourselves and our Punjabi brotherhood.

**Dr. Rajinder Gill:** Yes, Punjab too has seen many hard times. Punjab, by luck and by God has gotten better, but the times that we have seen, there was no hope, we didn’t even know what was happening.

At this point, Dr. Yashpal Sharma also had some comments to make, as he spoke the following:

**Dr. Yashpal Sharma:** One thing, you have talked about the relationship between Sufism and Islam. Although Sufism is a reaction to the rigidity of Islam. Because, the entire scenario is changing due to globalization, as you mentioned that you who live abroad (East and West Punjabis) celebrate everything together...

**Arshdeep Khaira:** Yes, we come here and see the situations as well. I can’t really say I can understand completely and fully what is happening here (in Punjab)... which is why I am here.

**Dr. Yashpal Sharma:** The essence of singing and dancing, which was considered *haram* in Islam... how are things changing? Can you come at this question from the angle of your position as a Canadian?

**Arshdeep Khaira:** I can come at this question from my own experiences and perhaps you can get a sense of what our life (as Punjabis) is like in Canada. In Canada we have complete “sanjh” (in this context: “unity” between East and West Punjabis). Perhaps you have heard things about the situation in the UK for example (between Sikhs and Muslims), but in Canada, Pakistani Punjabis and Indian Punjabis do not have issues, we live together, we eat together, we call Pakistani elders “chacha jan” (a Punjabi term for “father’s younger brother”).

**Dr. Rajinder Gill:** You even eat their food?

**Arshdeep Khaira:** Yes completely!

**Dr. Rajinder Gill:** Even *halal* meat?

**Arshdeep Khaira:** Yes, though personally I do not eat meat as I am a vegetarian, but if I go to a *mushaira* I will definitely be able to have some chickpeas, *naan* (bread) or salad! When you come here, you may be impressed or surprised, you may see what you did not expect, but it will make sense to you when you see it. We have a very strong community, especially in terms of the

*Punjabi* community, but at the micro-level the kids are friends with each other (East and West Punjabi), but even at higher levels, at the *scholarly* level, at the research level, the relationship between *chad-dhe* and *lehn-dhe*<sup>130</sup> Punjab is very strong and very powerful. Basically, a lot of things are happening in the *West* that have some “filter-down” effect on the locality. When West-Africans come to Canada, whether they are from Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia or Togo... in their origins of locality they have very limited interaction with each other, some of their borders are as heavily patrolled and fortified as our own, without a visa you cannot cross many borders, in some ways they are even more restricted than here, as even here we can still travel to Pakistan with clearance. But when they (West-Africans) come to Canada, even their “sanjh” increases drastically. I also have written a paper on “Cultural Interdependence Amongst West-Africans Through the Use of Gospel Music in Canada.” I attended their church for three months, and I witnessed their “sanjh.” They had their own languages, their own clothes, amongst the different *nationalities* that were there, but they were learning each others languages, they were together, they celebrate their “sanjh” because at one time, they also were together.

Here, Dr. Nivedita Uppal also had some comments to make:

**Dr. Nivedita Uppal:** Arsh, you definitely have a point here... You said that in Canada, Punjabi people from India and Pakistan live in “sanjh,” you have also given the example of the same phenomenon amongst people from West Africa, but is it not so that the reason they are living in this way is because the government allows them to do so? If so, isn’t the reason that such things are not happening here is because the political system does not allow it? This is the simple reason. Even as Dr. Gill and Dr. Sharma had spoken... when partition happened did they ask anyone? It was a completely political decision. The *ahvam* (laypeople) did not say to do this, but they had to run for their lives at the last minute. But we should come to the following conclusion: as artists, as academics, as scholars, as musicians, as music lovers, we are doing a lot. When Pakistani artists come here, I think we treat them with even more love and respect than they get back home because of the nostalgia of the situation. But there is one very significant thing you said that I really appreciate. As Punjabis we need to make sure we realize that we have a very big counterpart in the neighbouring country, but we are forgetting this, and that suits the government just fine. The day the entire Punjabi community unites, the government will be in fear again. Because we have always been a very strong community, we *are* a very strong community, and we are a global community, there is no doubt about any of this. Punjabis are such a community that the government needs very badly, but they cannot give us too much freedom either. We have become such people for them (the Indian government). They want Punjab, but they do not want it to be *too good* (stable/free, both economically and politically) either, this is the situation.

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<sup>130</sup> *Chad-dhe* and *lehn-dhe* mean “rising” and “setting” respectively, and are designations used by Punjabis to refer to *East* and *West* Punjab (respectively). This is a symbolism which suggests that the sun “rises” in East Punjab, and “sets” in West Punjab.

## APPENDIX F – COMPLETE TRANSCRIPTIONS OF “SAHIBAN” CASE STUDIES

All names are assumed as interviews were anonymous, but the ages are correct.

SURINDER (Female, Age 57)

**Arsh:** How do you see Sahiban?

**Surinder:** I don't know the whole story, but I think her parents should have listened to her. But in those times, and even today, such drastic measures should not be taken. She was very bold, but also yes, if she was going to do what she did... she took drastic steps, running away with Mirza without her parents' knowledge. If she had taken that step she should not have broken or hidden his arrows... she essentially became the reason for his death. If she hadn't done that, neither Mirza, Sahiban or any of her brothers would have died.

**A:** Can Sahiban be a role model for young women in Punjab?

**S:** No. According to me, she should not be a role model.

**A:** How do you see Sahiban's disobeying of her fathers and brothers orders?

**S:** I see it as totally wrong.

**A:** What do you think of the state of young Punjabi women in Punjab (East) today?

**S:** Not all of them, but some are taking very drastic steps. When I talk about them, I don't mean all of them... I mean some of them. I see them as not having self-respect. Many of them are not in love with only one person! In some areas, yes, they are not treated well either, but there the parents are wrong, when they forcefully marry young girls to older men, or women are abused and used. But when I talk about the girls who are themselves doing wrong, I mean the extreme liberal girls in the bigger cities who think they are very forward, progressive, advanced and modern. They take the meaning of modernization or being advanced the wrong way. Some of them have no self-respect, no respect for their parents or for society.

**A:** What can young Punjabi women learn from Sahiban? Can they learn anything from her (good or bad)?

**S:** Well, the bad is definitely there. Running away with boys is not the solution, they should have stood up and tried to convince their parents. If Sahiban's love was true... I mean, Mirza did not respect her either, if he was that strong he could have won over her parents. Today all the young boys think they are Mirza... "If the parents don't consent, then I will run away with her..." My observation is that they cannot be role models.

**A:** Is the story of Mirza Sahiban an inspiring one, or a warning?

**S:** It's a warning story. This way, I don't think that was love. The way Leila and Majnu or Heer Ranjha loved each other, their love was kind of "true love," because they did not disobey or shame their parents... they did not run away. According to me, when people talk about true love and say they cannot live with that person... I think love gives you the strength to live... People should not try the wrong methods. They should care about society, and their parents, and not do things that even society does not approve of.

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What we can see in these answers is that the story of Mirza Sahiban can also provide women with the strength to voice their opinions to their families. As times change, and women are experiencing increasing degrees of freedom, they may choose to continue to hold onto the value system of the region, without compromising their equalities.

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PRITAM (Female, Age 30)

**Arsh:** How do you see Sahiban?

**Pritam:** Although I think she wasn't real, as far as from the stories I have heard she was a beautiful girl.

**A:** Can Sahiban be a role model for young women in Punjab?

**P:** No, I don't think so.

**A:** Why not?

**P:** Because, I don't see her as being a good influence on young girls. Firstly, it's not about being in love that's bad, but running away from home and betraying your family, that's wrong. If you cannot stand up to your own family, because you grow up with them for 19-20 years, then you meet a random guy for a few months, then you run away with him, that's definitely not a good thing, for a girl or boy. I mean not just for girls, but for guys too.

**A:** How do you see Sahiban's disobeying of her fathers and brothers orders?

**P:** I see it as a bad thing to do. The reason being, how can you betray your family? If you can betray your family, you can definitely betray your husband. If you can't be loyal to your family, how can you be loyal to somebody else?

**A:** What do you think of the state of young Punjabi women in Punjab today?



**P:** Well, I think today women are more practical, they just don't fall in love right away, not like a Mirza-Sahiban or Heer-Ranjha type of love, that type of love doesn't exist anymore. Most women go for a practical way of life, seeing if the person is established... will he be able to afford her living? Or, along those lines... then they go ahead and make the decision accordingly, at least most of the women.

**A:** What can young Punjabi women learn from Sahiban?

**P:** I think they can learn what not to do in life, and, yeah maybe to some extent, if you are really in love with somebody, maybe one should stand up to put across ones point of view towards it, at least in front of the family, at least this is one thing they can learn from Sahiban. If she ran away and then didn't support him fully, see that's what I was talking about... she couldn't be loyal to her family, and in the end she wasn't even loyal to Mirza, if she took that step in the first place she should have supported him. They should learn not to regret their decisions (they way Sahiban did).

**A:** Is the story of Mirza Sahiban an inspiring one, or a warning?

**P:** I think it's an inspiring one, in the sense that it inspires us, like I said, that one should learn from their mistakes... at least in that way its inspiring.

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MANPREET (Male, Age 35)

**Arsh:** How do you see Sahiban?

**Manpreet:** Sahiban, was a nice girl. She was beautiful.

**A:** Can Sahiban be a role model for young women in Punjab?

**M:** She could be. Because she took the side of her brothers ultimately.

**A:** So does that mean she regretted running away?

**M:** I don't think she regretted, but she didn't want... maybe she didn't foresee the situation going that bad. Or maybe she made the decision in haste.

**A:** How do you see Sahiban's disobeying of her father's and brother's orders?

**M:** So, she was in love... in that case, maybe she was wrong on her part. On the marriage day she decided to run away... maybe it should have been earlier... then at the end moment she wanted to talk to them about her love... it should have been done earlier.

**A:** What do you think of the state of young Punjabi women in Punjab today?

**M:** In what respect?

**A:** The way they are treated, their sense of respect and morality...

**M:** With respect to these tales, it's an altogether changed scenario now. There's not much commitment... we don't live there anymore, that's what we hear. Relationships are not as serious as they used to be. Relationships are taken more as options... that is where we are moving towards now... but then again it depends, there are different classes of people in Punjab. People in villages may have different perspectives than smaller and bigger cities.

**A:** What can young Punjabi women learn from Sahiban?

**M:** One thing they can learn is that whenever you make a big decision, you need to sit down and think of the consequences, rather than making a haste decision and then living with it. She decided to run away with him, she should have supported him. She asked him to take her away, then at the end of it she went in favor of her brothers. You cannot be this side or that side, you can't make a decision like that and then back out of it.

**A:** Is the story of Mirza Sahiban an inspiring one, or is it a warning?

**M:** It's both, it's inspiring as well as warning. Mirza was brave, that is the inspiring part. But with bravery you also need to have the brains to think about the consequences, that's the warning part.

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SUKHDEV (Male, Age 79)

**Arsh:** How do you see Sahiban?

**Sukhdev:** I see a Punjabi girl from a village of Pakistan, from a Jatt family.

**A:** Can Sahiban be a role model for young women in Punjab?

**S:** No.

**A:** Why?

**S:** Sahiban, was from a typical Jatt family from a village of Punjab, and she was raised up from a typical Jatt parent's point of view. Because at that time and still now, Punjabi culture is a conservative culture. In this conservative culture, parents and community expect from a daughter to be a subservient and obeying daughter of her parents. She is supposed to follow the tradition, which in a conservative Punjabi Jatt family, a daughter must accept the suitable match chosen for her by her parents. Sahiban, violated the traditional and cultural values of a traditional Punjabi family. She fell in love, which is natural, but, by custom and tradition, she

violated and in a way rebelled against the Punjabi conservative traditions. In this way, she cannot be a role model for traditional Punjabi families' girls.

**A:** How do you see Sahiban's disobeying of her father's and brother's orders?

**S:** She was from a Muslim family and she could have married her cousin Mirza. And Mirza's father Vanjhal had 5 sons, while Mirza was the youngest one, and what I perceive is that he was... a rebel, doing things on his own, and in a Jatt family the first born or the last born are the most favorite, he was the most favorite son of his father Vanjhal, and he was a spoiled young man. So Sahiban's family, her parents and brothers did not want to marry her with Mirza, because in a Jatt family they see first whether her chosen husband is in a position to provide livelihood, is he hard working and family oriented? Mirza was not hard working, so they refused to marry her to Mirza, although being a Muslim, she could have married her cousin Mirza. The wedding ceremony was there, and she was going to marry her chosen husband who was of Chandar caste, but then they ran away over night. By running away with her lover, she completely violated the Punjabi traditional family values, especially in a conservative Punjabi culture. At that time, and still today Punjabi culture as far as girls are concerned is still a conservative culture.

**A:** What do you think of the state of young Punjabi women in Punjab today?

**S:** With the education, the Punjabi girls either in East Punjab or West Punjab, they are liberated... they have more freedom. Up to a certain extent, they can choose their partners... not so often, but they have some say. Now parents are tolerating if they are rebelling in certain situations. During Sahiban's day, and today, there is a big difference, because of education and because of the influence of Western education and Western values. Now they are liberated... not as compared to Western countries and Western girls... they are going to colleges and universities, so they are open minded and their outlook is broader than hundreds of years back.

**A:** What can young Punjabi women learn from Sahiban?

**S:** Basically, there is nothing to learn from her... as in relation to the Punjabi traditions and Punjabi culture. They can learn one thing, that is not to run away from their parent's house when their marriage party is already in the village. Because, what she did, she destroyed the honor of her parents and family... that their daughter ran away. These days too, girls run away... but it is not that much dishonor as used to be before.

**A:** Is the story of Mirza Sahiban an inspiring one, or is it a warning?

**S:** It's a warning. Warning in the sense that Punjabi families, especially Jatt families, during those days and now, these days, whether it is a Punjabi Jatt family in East Punjab or West Punjab, they want to choose a husband for their daughters who is family oriented and who has a guarantee that he would be a good husband to provide the living situations for their daughter and financially he is OK or his family is OK. The families look into the situation that when daughters are rebelling against their parent's decision, it becomes a warning not an inspiration.

To run away means the violation of family values... and Punjabi families don't like that because they are still under the old values and traditions.

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MANDEEP (Female, Age 30)

**Arsh:** How do you see Sahiban?

**Mandeep:** I have heard from Mirza and Sahiban that she was Mirza's lover and that she was from a good Punjabi rich family. She was immature... her decisions reflect immaturity.

**A:** Can Sahiban be a role model for young women in Punjab?

**M:** No.

**A:** Why?

**M:** I feel that girls should respect the honor and dignity of their parents in society and that if you like somebody you should talk about it with your family rather than revolting and taking such an extreme step, like running away with a person, that's not the solution. Nowadays, even with increases in education, in India we are still bothered by what society will think of us... and if the kids bring dishonor to the family, that is wrong. If you like someone, you should talk to your parents about it, rather than taking such an extreme step.

**A:** How do you see Sahiban's disobeying of her father's and brother's orders?

**M:** I feel that that wasn't the correct thing to do on her part especially in those times, where honor and dignity mattered even more than nowadays. It was like a societal death for the family when she did that. It became a matter of life and death for her family, that someone in their family took such an extreme step. If she would have been a mature and understanding person she should have thought about the pros and cons of the decision. She should have been mature enough to know the reasons why they did not approve of her love with Mirza. If the reasons were substantial, then she in her heart could believe somewhere that this was true, even then running away was not the solution, she should have made them understand that whatever they were thinking about Mirza was incorrect... that indeed he was the right person for her.

In the old days and even today, for girls, it wasn't just about the guy, or the way he looked, but it was about the whole family, how good the guy was financially... would he support his wife, kids and family emotionally? Would he never leave her? Would he keep the relationship for life. That was the thought back then and also now.

**A:** What do you think of the state of young Punjabi women in Punjab today?

**M:** There are two extremes. There are the girls in the cities, the ones who are more liberated, more free... and there are even the girls in the villages or towns... it's not that they don't have

freedom or liberty... like the right to education... they have these rights... including equality. But still in parts where parents are uneducated or illiterate, they don't think that way. It depends on the parents, how much liberty of freedom they want to give to their kids. The parents who are not that exposed to the new world, still stuck in the conservative mindset, they feel that girls are not equal to boys. In those families, girls don't have that much freedom, liberty, equality, or the right to education. In most of Punjab people are becoming more educated and girls have the right to education, expression, freedom, etc.

**A:** What can young Punjabi women learn from Sahiban?

**M:** Nothing much, except for maybe just one thing... that whether it was the conservative society of hundreds of years back, or our liberated modern society, that still follows the conservative mindset... what society thinks still matters. Even though everything is more or less the same. What she did was totally wrong. If you like somebody, you should come and tell your parents about it and listen to why they don't approve of it... are those reasons believable? Are they actually for your benefit? If you feel what they are saying is right, you should go by what your parents say. Running away with a person is not the solution. If you really feel a certain way about a person, try to convince your parents how good he is, how he will support you, how he really loves you. Whether it's a girl or boy, they should always think that parents never want anything bad for their kids, they always want the best for their kids.

**A:** Is the story of Mirza Sahiban an inspiring one, or is it a warning?

**M:** Not inspiring, obviously it's a warning. That even though society has changed in today's times, in the old days people thought more about what society thought... there were societal deaths over sins like this... that's why they killed both of them. Nowadays people don't go to these extremes... they think "if that's what they think is best for them... let them live their lives." At most, families will cut off relationships with their kids. Even in today's society, it hurts parents, but they won't go to such extremes... but they will "kill" the relationship. Girls should think that it's kind of like... killing one relationship to make another one. Marriage is not about breaking one relationship and making another one... it's about bringing a person into the family, rather than breaking all ties with the family by going against their wishes. How can people who have loved you for your whole life become meaningless in place of someone you hardly know. Even down the road, the people will realize that what they did was wrong. Because you don't realize what your parents are saying until you yourself become a parent.

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## APPENDIX G – TRANSCRIPTION OF INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR BALJINDER SINGH

**Professor Baljinder Singh:** One thing I noticed during all of my travels for the show is that our cultural “sanjh” is very strong. Not necessarily just between Islam and Sikhism, but in a major way the Punjabi language joins us all together. Pakistani music, literature, *jugtain* and stage shows<sup>131</sup> are very popular (so much so that almost all East Punjabi movies are derived from these stage shows). When you talk about “imagined communities” (Benedict Anderson) or identities, there is a serious bureaucracy at play here. We can travel to *Bhutan* or *Nepal* without a travel permit and return at our own leisure, then why not Lahore or Pakistan?

Nankana Sahib is travelled to regularly by Sikh pilgrims but even then their passports are stamped with a Pakistani entry permit – when this happens, many Sikhs then cannot subsequently receive permits to travel to countries like America.<sup>132</sup> But, all of these things are connected and over the past thirty to forty years the concept of visiting (or *returning* to visit) Pakistan has been increasing. The generations after 1947 have an immense sense of nostalgia, and because of Facebook, WhatsApp and other social media it continues to increase immensely. I have friends from Pakistan on social media who are in places like Lahore or Kasoor, as do most Punjabis, who we are constantly in touch with even though we may not have met face to face. Our language, our “sanjh,” our Waris, Bahu and Bulleh,<sup>133</sup> they are bringing us together and I see a great deal of positivity in this. There are debates between Christianity and Islam, as well as Europe and Islam, in this context Sufism is a great boon that speaks of love, compassion and tolerance. The extent to which Bulleh Shah spoke against *shariat* I do not think any Muslim has ever spoken.

The message that Sufism gives about tolerance, love and connecting amongst ourselves is very important. There is some debate however that when a Pakistani writer writes about the history of Punjabi culture or literature, they often do not include the history of the Sikh gurus. But when a Sikh historian does the same, they sometimes do not include as much about the Muslim poets. But when it comes to *geet* and *ghazal* or singing in general, then we Punjabis feel an incredible sense of closeness.

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<sup>131</sup> Here Professor Baljinder Singh is referring to the *very* popular Pakistani stage shows which are completely presented in the Punjabi language. They are so popular that there are TV channels devoted to airing these shows (and many of these channels broadcast in East Punjab as well). During my trips to Punjab I would often watch these channels for extended periods of time.

<sup>132</sup> As I mentioned earlier in my methodology section, one of the primary reasons I conducted the Pakistani component of my research “via satellite” is due to the very phenomenon that Professor Baljinder Singh speaks about here. Once the passport is stamped with a Pakistani entry permit, travelling for Sikhs becomes especially dubious, regardless of their nationality due to the political nature of the relationship of Sikhs to Pakistan (especially in light of demands for increased sovereignty by the community). Historically, Sikh separatist groups have been trained, funded and equipped by Pakistan, and the Pakistani media has always shown solidarity with Sikhs.

<sup>133</sup> Waris Shah, Sultan Bahu and Bulleh Shah were classical Punjabi poets.

You may be surprised to hear that the most listened to Punjabi singer here is still Nusrat Fateh Aly Khan. After him, the *raga boys*, like Ghulam Aly sahib and others of his guild. I myself have interviewed many of the West Punjabi singers who have come here, like the tabla maestro Tafu Khan Sahib – I interviewed him twice, as I have also interviewed Sheikh Muhammad Sadiq Sahib (a legendary poet of Pakistan of whose many poems were sung by Nusrat Fateh Aly Khan). Whenever they come here they speak of the importance of language and culture and reiterate that we were never divided. Whenever it comes to politics however, they always stop themselves and do not say much. But still the message from all West Punjabis is that Punjab and *Punjabiyyat* are very much alive.

You talked about the Punjabi language. I observe that the value of Punjabi is once again going up (in Pakistan and East Punjab).

**Arshdeep Khaira:** So, the revival I am studying, you see this as clearly underway?

**Professor Baljinder Singh:** Yes! Before, because of the border there was very little interaction, but now because of social media there is a great deal of interaction (between East and West Punjab). You can easily translate *Shahmukhi* to *Gurmukhi* (West and East Punjabi alphabets, respectively) and our books are being published there, as their's are here. Through social media we speak directly to each other. I have a friend who interviews *partition survivors*, people who came from Pakistani Punjab as *mohajirs* to India, they were fourteen or fifteen years old at the time, but now they are in their nineties. He asks them what the name of their village was, what the names of their Muslim friends was, who they played with, what their “sanjh” was like. When these interviews are seen in West Punjab, people from there write about their own villages in East Punjab and where they were originally from. They say things like “in our town there was an old masjid, and a market...” and then people from East Punjab send back to them saying “the masjid is still there, but the markets have changed...”

Based on these factors, in time our “sanjh” will become even stronger. Of course there is political beauracracy and many other factors at play. But in Pakistan, some 70% of all politicians are Punjabi.<sup>134</sup>

**Arshdeep Khaira:** So you see that the grassroots level the revival is underway but there are factors outside of our control like the media and the government.

**Professor Baljinder Singh:** All of the media is not wrong, but we definitely have a problem here in India when it comes to their representation of religious affairs. Things are very one-sided. They have been speaking much about Hinduism and they use this in their own beauracractic systems. But as educated secular people we have to see beyond this. All of the time I spent in the media here, I went to so many *mazzars*, *dargas*, *macbaras* and *masjids* in places like Batala, Amritsar and Sirhand. I feel that as long as our language, our history and our literature is alive, our “sanjh” will stay strong. Many modern issues are pulling us apart...

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<sup>134</sup> It is worth noting here that many very influential Pakistani people have their ancestral origins in East Punjab, including for example Nawaz Shareef whose ancestral links are in Jati Umra village in Amritsar district of East Punjab, as well as Imran Khan who has his maternal home in Basti Nau and Basti Danishmanda area of Jalandhar in East Punjab.

**Arshdeep Khaira:** So in terms of recent trends in contemporary Punjabi music, are these increasing or decreasing our “sanjh”?

**Professor Baljinder Singh:** There are a few factors at play here. There are serious songs like those of Nusrat that are being covered, or those of Ghulam Aly or Muhammad Rafi, then on the other side there is the current trends in vulgar and violent music that many people are listening to here – this later variety does not have anything to do with our “sanjh.” There are still many modern songs though that are very important, for example the one that says “the material for my dress is from Karachi, or my surma (mascara) is from Lahore, or my shoes are from Kasoor.”

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I want to note here some details of the East Punjabi songs that Professor Baljinder Singh is referring to. One is “Lahore – by Gippy Grewal,” see some of the lyrics here:

Ho nakhra ae Lahore da  
Main aashiq teri tor da  
Chandigarh vich charcha ae  
Billo teri tor da  
*Your attitude is from Lahore*  
*I love the way you walk*  
*In Chandigarh everyone talks about*  
*The way the girl with the green eyes walks*

The second song he mentioned is “Jutti Kasuri – by Harshdeep Kaur”:

Juti kasoori, paeri na poori  
Hai rabba ve saahnu turna peya.  
Jina rahaan di maen saarna jaana  
Ohni raaheen ve sanu murna peya

*In my beautiful shoes from Kasoor, that fit my feet rather tightly*  
*Oh my Lord, I had to walk so far!*  
*The paths that I did not wish to take again*  
*Upon those paths I had to return*

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**Professor Baljinder Singh:** When we talk about these issues our “sanjh” becomes very deep. Whether we are talking about *Heer* from Jhang-Siyal, or *Ranjha* from Takhat-Hazara, or our rivers and our waters, as we used to say anyone who drank waters from the *Chenab* river would sing songs about love.

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I want to mention briefly here a song by the very popular Sufi singer Satinder Sirtaj who also holds a PhD in music from Punjab University in Chandigarh. He has sung many songs that exemplify this “sanjh” that we are speaking about here, but I make reference to one specific song



“Hazare Wala Munda,” or “The Boy from Hazara.” In this song Satinder Sirtaj shows that the love of Heer-Ranjha still exists today and is reborn in every subsequent generation. In the video he shows pre-partition Punjab and the love story of a girl *Noor* from Jhang-Siyal (where Heer was from), and a boy *Sahib* who is from Takhat-Hazara (where *Ranjha* was from).

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**Arshdeep Khaira:** So our “sanjh”... I want to ask you two questions about this. Do you think that without this “sanjh” we actually risk losing our identity?

**Professor Baljinder Singh:** Yes, without this, it doesn’t exist.

**Arshdeep Khaira:** And secondly, if we do not promote this “sanjh” then we also put reconciliation between East and West Punjab at risk?

**Professor Baljinder Singh:** Definitely! You see, the sanjh of our Waris, Bulleh, Bahu, and the sanjh of our grandparents has a strong *civility* and *respect* contained within it. *Difficulty* also always brings people together. Every religion, every community, we are all faced with difficulties, and somewhere within this, when we return to our roots, we find solutions. Even between East and West Punjab, we are united by our “sanjh” but we are also united by our shared difficulties. Partially due to capitalism and American intervention, most religious and ethnic groups are under some deal of pressure. Every religion and every language also is under pressure right now, but even in spite of this, when we return to our roots, we are united under these pressures and difficulties. When Sikhs were faced with very difficult times during the rule of the *Mughals* we were very well united. Difficult situations always find ways to unite communities, but in prosperity we often find ourselves divided, both at the community level and also at the psychological and mental level – we become absorbed in showing off and materialism.

**Arshdeep Khaira:** Most movements start at the grassroots level, and amongst the *ahvam* and the ordinary folk, there are no inclinations towards hatred.

**Professor Baljinder Singh:** I will tell you that in 1947 Islam was divided (taken) from us and the Muslims left for Pakistan, but in spite of that my mother and my grandmother still pay *ibadat* to Haider Sheikh and they burn *Chirags* for the Panj Pirs.<sup>135</sup> At the local level, Islamic and *Semitic* influences still play a very big role in the worship and *ibadat* of ordinary people, and even this is uniting us (with West Punjab).

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<sup>135</sup> The *Panj Pirs* or “five great saints” and the locations of their *Dargas* are: Khwaja Moinuddin Hasan Chishti (Ajmer Shareef, Rajasthan, India); Khwaja Qutubudin Bakhtiar Khaki (Mahroli, Delhi, India); Sheikh Baba Farid Ganjshakar (Pakpattan, Punjab, Pakistan); Baha’ud Din Zakariya (Multan, Punjab, Pakistan); Lal Shahbaz Qalandhar (Sehwan, Sindh, Pakistan).

**Arshdeep Khaira:** And that is all Sufism...

**Professor Baljinder Singh:** *True* Sufism! Sufi means just that, *flexible, simple*. I feel immense love myself whenever anyone talks about Kasoor, or Sarghoda, or Lahore, the hairs on my arms stand up.

**Arshdeep Khaira:** You also must have heard many things from your grandparents.

**Professor Baljinder Singh:** Yes, and the difficulties we were faced with. We were divided in 47 and then again in 66 with the *Suba* movement (Punjabi Suba). But I continue to travel on my motorcycle, I have been to Bhutan, Nepal, I have been to Ladakh six times, I often travel through Kashmir. I often travel through the *Poonch* and *Rajouri* sectors of Kashmir, and you would be surprised maybe to hear that when I go there everyone speaks Punjabi!

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**Figure G-1 Map showing the location of the Poonch sector of Kashmir (Google Maps)**

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**Professor Baljinder Singh:** And you see, in my books I see references to the *Majha*, *Malwa* and *Doaba* variants of Punjabi, but I see no reference to the Punjabi I am hearing in Poonch and Rajouri!<sup>136</sup> Wherever I go in Kashmir I hear people speaking Punjabi, but the mainstream Punjabis make no reference to this area.

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<sup>136</sup> I interviewed Pakistani nationals from Khyber-Pakhtunkwa who told me the same thing. That even in KPK and Kashmir, Punjabi is spoken very widely. In KPK they refer to it as *Hindko* which is a variant of Punjabi.

**Arshdeep Khaira:** Yes, *Potohari, Saraiki, Hindko...* these are all dialects of Punjabi spoken in Pakistan.

**Professor Baljinder Singh:** Yes, even Pashto to some extent. Even when I look at our relationship to *Balocistan* I feel the same way, that in some way even that area has a deeply entrenched relationship with the Punjabi people. Our culture, our literature, yes – even our swear words! When we watch the Pakistani cricket team we can easily identify that they are speaking in very aggressive Punjabi complete with all of the foul language we use. But in spite of all this, I only see a “sanjh,” I do not see religions at play in this matter.

**Arshdeep Khaira:** Yes, even Sufism is “beyond religion” in many ways...

**Professor Baljinder Singh:** Even in Bollywood they are referencing our Punjabi culture when they make references to Pakistan. (*Here he began to sing some lyrics from a very popular recent Bollywood song*).

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In the song “Ranjhan Da Yaar Bulleya” from *Ai Dil Hai Moshkel*, a very popular blockbuster Bollywood film, the lyrics go:

Ranjhan de yaar bulleya  
Sun le pukaar bulleya  
Tu hi toh yaar bulleya  
murshid mera (murshid mera)

*Oh friend of Ranjha, Bulleh Shah  
Listen to my cry, Bulleh Shah  
You are my only friend, Bulleh Shah  
You are my “murshid” (teacher)*

Tera mukaam kamleya  
Sarhad ke paar bulleya  
Parvardigar bulleya  
Hafiz tera (murshid mera)

*Your destination, oh crazy one  
Is across the border, Bulleh Shah  
You take care of us, Bulleh Shah  
You are my guardian and my guide*

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**Professor Baljinder Singh:** And the references to our Punjabi culture in Bollywood songs are done in *very* popular songs, not just ordinary ones. These songs express the beauty of Punjabi culture and especially our “sanjh” with West Punjab. Indeed, even the songs of artists like Rabbi Shergill and Daler Mehndi in the same Sufi context are very popular. The two things we can achieve from reviving Sufi culture are an increase in our “sanjh,” and an increase in peace and solidarity.

**Arshdeep Khaira:** I want to ask you an important question. We talk about Sufism as joining us together, but the origins of Sufism are intrinsically in Islam, what would you say about this?

**Professor Baljinder Singh:** Yes! Indeed the origins are in Islam. If we look at Sheikh Farid, if he had been preaching to pray *namaz* five times a day and to keep *roza* alone, perhaps the 5<sup>th</sup> Guru Arjan Dev Ji would not have made his (Sheikh Farid's) salok *canonical* texts for the Sikhs (contained in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib). Sheikh Farid (also one of the *Panj Pirs* and one of the main Saints of the *Chishtya* tradition) was speaking about something beyond these extrinsic acts of worship. He was speaking about *life*. "My bread and sustenance is significant because it removes my hunger, oh Farid, the one who eats *battered* bread will suffer greatly." Perhaps these teachings in some ways were above and beyond the necessities of *Namaz*. And we meditate deeply on the teachings of Farid, for many Sikhs, it is easier to understand and contemplate upon the teachings of Farid than it is for Guru Nanak's teachings, we find the *bani* of the *Ten Gurus* difficult, but the canonized texts of Farid are easy for us to understand.

**Arshdeep Khaira:** But the message is the same...

**Professor Baljinder Singh:** Yes, it's the same message! I will explain one thing simply: Aurangzeb had banned music as *haram*, he said that whoever would perform would have his hands and feet cut off... but Bulleh Shah was singing, dancing, reciting poetry and was openly talking about dancing like a *kanjri* (prostitute). Aurangzeb said nothing to him because of how close Bulleh Shah's message was resonating with ordinary people. The biggest push of any message is how well it resonates with ordinary people, for this reason the Punjabi variant of Sufism continues to be so widely accepted. Even the large more *organized* religious traditions (who we might call "orthodox") are not gaining as much traction. In East Punjab today people still say "he who has not seen Lahore has never been born," and a major reason the majority of people feel an emotional attachment to West Punjab is because of their spiritual and religious lives and the way they are rooted in the Sufi traditions of Punjab.

**Arshdeep Khaira:** I want to mention that Farid is second in the lineage of *Chishtya* Sufi Saints, after Moiuuddin Chishti, he is a very important Sufi figure for many Muslims and he is canonized in the Sikh Sri Guru Granth Sahib...

**Professor Baljinder Singh:** Yes, if we consider him an outsider, external, or somewhat different from Sikhism that is a great discredit to the faith. *Mian Mir* laid the foundation stone of the *Golden Temple*, he was a great Sufi Saint, even when Guru Gobind Singh Ji left during the *Battle of Chamkaur* he went upon high ground, blew his horn and shouted "*Peer-e-Hind mirawad*" (the *Peer* of Hind is leaving). Who is a peer? Who were *Saeen Mian Mir*, *Peer-e-Hind*, and *Peer Budhu Shah* (an ally of Guru Gobind Singh)? They were all *Sufis*. We should not associate Sufism with conservative-reformist Islam, our *Baba* (Guru Nanak) was influenced most heavily by Sufism. Recently there was some debate on social media about why some Sikh singers were singing *Islamic* songs about these *Peers*, but these people do not know the history! We should not forget the history and connection of Sufism with Sikhism. *Baba Budhu Shah* sacrificed hundreds of his own family and followers while assisting Guru Gobind Singh Ji's army, and he was killed by the Mughals because of this, he was a great Sufi *Fakeer* (saint).

**Arshdeep Khaira:** Yes, definitely as we sit here at the University (Punjab University, Chandigarh) and have this discussion, even in mainstream society people are thinking these things as well. I have seen the way people perform *ibadat*, I know this message is resonating as well with regular people throughout Punjab.

**Professor Baljinder Singh:** I will give you a simple example. Recently there have been two types of very popular singers that have come into the mainstream. On the one hand you have singers who sing songs about violence and about racism (racial superiority of specific groups), but on the other hand you have very popular singers who sing songs about *ibadat* and Sufism. For example Satinder Sirtaj and Kanwar Grewal are two singers who have very beautifully and accurately blended Sikh thought with Islamic philosophy and concepts. For example Kanwar Grewal sings “Mast kara dhen ge Beeba, Nachan la dehn ge Beeba...” (trans.: “The Sufis will make you *mast* [drunk] with spirituality, they will make you dance...”) and he also sings about *Guru Nanak*. This is a very positive thing...

**Arshdeep Khaira:** Is it historically accurate?

**Professor Baljinder Singh:** Music and singing are never methodologically, historically and philosophically a hundred percent historically accurate!

**Arshdeep Khaira:** Agreed!

**Professor Baljinder Singh:** There are often many tales and stories associated with the forebearers of religious traditions that share deep similarities with one another. For example, the story of the cobra giving shade to Guru Nanak as he slept, and other stories about him grazing cattle are the same stories associated with *Kabir*, some even with the Prophet Muhammad, and some with *Gautam Budh*. There is so much history that has not been recorded that it is often hard for people of any faith to conclude what is historically accurate and what is *myth*. A lot of traditions and history have been passed down through *Oral History*.

**Arshdeep Khaira:** In the same way we cannot clearly differentiate between tradition and modernity, the lines that separate the two are not always so clear, sometimes things that appear traditional are products of modernity.

**Professor Baljinder Singh:** It’s like a water pump with water coming in one side and going out the other. It is hard to say which water is fresh... we can’t always say “this is right, that is wrong...”. Look at the Punjabi language, there are so many words: “mobile; download...” but at the same time words like *maze* and *kursi* are Arabic, the word *Rab* for God is Arabic, there are so many Persian words. Singers use a lot of English words in their songs, but this is contributing to the richness of the language. Flexibility is important, this is one reason *Sanskrit* disappeared, there was so much rigidity around the language with people saying “no, it must be spoken in *this* way.” Even *Gautam Budh* abandoned pure Sanskrit and spoke in the dialect of the people, *Pali*. Sanskrit today is a language found in museums, it does not exist in daily usage. There needs to be flexibility, and this contributes to the richness of the language and traditions. We burn

*chirags* at home, but this concept is not derived directly from conservative Sikhism, it comes from the traditions of the *Dargas* and *Mazars*, from the *Panj Peers*.

**Arshdeep Khaira:** “*Char chirag tere balan hamesha, panjva mei balan, jule lalan, damadam mast Qalandher...*” (here I recite words from “Mast Qalandher” about Hazrat Lal Shahbaz Qalandher, one of the *Panj Peers* and a great Sufi saint from Sindh, Pakistan. The translation is as follows: “The four oil lamps burn for you always, and for you Shahbaz Lal Qalandher, I burn the fifth...”).

**Professor Baljinder Singh:** Even the concept of the *Dastar* or “turban” comes from Islam, and the men here still wear *Salwar Kameez* as their regular dress. It’s not that simple... we can’t say “this is pure, this is supposed to be this way.” Moreover, as you are studying music you would see that there are so many symphonies, so many lyrics, so many melodies, people take these from one place or another. You may think you have composed a completely new melody, but I assure you that melody must have been sung hundreds of times before in history. Addition, deletion, dilution... the water that stays standing still often begins to smell foul, but flowing rivers often have the purest, cleanest water.

**Arshdeep Khaira:** So, in some ways this is not just a “Sanjh” between East and West Punjab we are talking about, but also with Punjab and Kashmir, Western China, Balochistan, Sindh, Afghanistan...

**Professor Baljinder Singh:** You will be surprised to hear that for the last seven years I have been travelling on my *Bullet* motorcycle. I remain travelling for three months of every year. I often travel through Kashmir and I see the *Dal Lake* the *Nishat Bagh* and *Verinag* – about which *Bhai Vir Singh* has written extensively, as he has about many other places in Kashmir, all of which I have gone to see. You must know that during the time of *Maharaja Ranjit Singh* and the Sikh Empire which included all of Kashmir, the maharaja built more monuments than even *Jahangir*. This is all “sanjh” to me. Moreover, in the history of Kashmir, no Islamic crusade was ever undertaken by outsiders to convert the inhabitants of the region to Islam (as in India). Rather, the region became Islamic primarily due to the preaching of a particular Sufi saint. Much like many Punjabjis say that it was “not by the sword of Aurangzeb but by the love of *Shekh Farid* that we became Muslim...”

**Arshdeep Khaira:** Like Moinuddin Chishti did in Rajasthan...

**Professor Baljinder Singh:** Yes... All of the Sufis were like this. In Kashmir, it was *BulBul Shah* (Syed Abdul Rehman Shah – a Turkish Sufi who is credited with bringing and spreading Islam through Kashmir), there are so many songs about him, especially by *Habba Khatoon* who is one of the most famous female Kashmiri singers of all time who also sang Sufi songs. The songs are in Kashmiri but they all encompass the same themes around *BulBul Shah*: *prem, ishq, mohabbat, preet, apanat, sidq, raza, shukar, mehar...* even here the word *mehar* comes from Islam, and look how much we use it. Every morning when my grandmother wakes up she says “Data, mehar kari,” the word “data” does not come from there but “mehar” does. The word “kirpa” comes from Hindu mythology and means the same thing, but we hardly use it, we use “mehar.” We say “shukar” for “thanks,” these are all “sanjh,” they represent our language and

they make sense, there are references to culture, history and religion, and all of these are interconnected with us as people, they are “inter-disciplinary.” They are deeply connected and they are not going anywhere anytime soon – it doesn’t matter what the politicians say or how they try to change our culture and history, nor does it matter what the people in “offices” are trying to do and change. If the men in my neighbouring village are speaking the language a certain way and there are powerful similarities with Arabic, Persian and Kashmiri, this cannot be changed by people. Even the fear that Punjabi is diminishing and fading away, I do not find this true, I feel it is gaining a stronger foothold. And when the difficulties come (like now with the government and pro-Hindutva organizations) we become more aware and pay more attention to these things (to preserve them). I often tell my children: “we don’t learn as much during our good days as we do during hard times.” If this difficult situation is upon our Punjabi community right now, we will only become stronger, Punjabi is such a rich language, it wasn’t made in one day. So many communities came together, so many singers, writers, poets... even if the Bombay (Mumbai) industry people misrepresent our language and take advantage of our culture in their songs, even this will enrich our language, because it reaches farther. You must know that even Kashmiris love Punjabi music, Punjabi music plays in every car of Kashmir...

## APPENDIX H – MUSICAL EXAMPLES REFERENCING THE HISTORICAL BALLADS

SURINDER KAUR - TILEY WALEYA MILA DE RANJHA HEER NU

In this beautiful performance the late Surinder Kaur narrates the tale of Heer Ranjha in the traditional Punjabi folk style, accompanied only by a harmonium, a dholki and a Punjabi mandolin. The singing style is the traditional Punjabi female vocal sang with a Malwai accent in the upper middle female register with nasal overtones. The lyrical content

Tera kivrha mull laggda oye mull laggda,  
Paa Ke mundrahn tu bhaj deh faqeer nu,  
Tera kivrha mull laggda oye mull laggda,  
Tera kivrha mull laggda oye mull laggda,  
Ajje takk na jhannah da kandda bhulleya,  
Jitheh ranjhey de bullhan chohn hassah dulleha,  
Agg lagih see jhanah de thandey neer nu,  
Tera kivrha mull laggda oye mull laggda  
Tera kivrha mull laggda oye mull laggda,  
Dhuroh likheeyan tatti de paes pae gayee-yan,  
Koseh hanjhuyan nu palkahn ne khah gayee-yan.  
Kaun mait sakkey likhi taqdeer nu-----  
Tera kivrha mull laggda oye mull laggda  
Tera kivrha mull laggda oye mull laggda,  
Tera kivrha mull laggda oye mull laggda-----  
Tilley waleya mila de ranjha heer nu----  
Tera kivrha mull laggda oye mull laggda,  
oh mull laggda-----  
oh mull laggda-----  
oh mull laggda-----

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xyu8-t372Fg>

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KULDEEP MANAK – CHARHDE MIRZE KHAN NU

Jatt charde mirze khan nu,  
Waddi bhabhi lendi tham,  
Ve mein kade na deor wangariya,  
Jatta kade na aayio kam ve.....

Je tu chalya viah krwaun nu,  
Mere peki le chal jann ve,  
Tenu aap to choti viah dwa,  
Jatta roop jatti da dhan ve.....

Ho saiba kedi padmni,  
Oh v ranna wargi rann,  
Ve tu akhe lag gal man vairiya,  
Bakki mod tabele ban ve.....

Ve menu khaas sunaha ghalya,  
Ki oh khan jinna di dhee,  
Deve pyala zehr da,  
Te M mirza jawa pee....

Je oh barchi khich k ,  
Mein kade na krda si,  
Apne maut-e mein mara,  
Bhabhi nal asa de tenu ki.....

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FVceTjzDJ-Q>

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## KULDEEP MANAK – MIRZA YAAR BULAUNDA TERA

Tu Maasi Bibo ni, le ja ik suneha mera Ja keh de SahbaN nu, Mirza yaar bulaunda tera  
Gall Karmu Bahman nu, Danabano jatt bulaya Mainu saddya jatti ne, Bakki le siyalaN toon main  
aaya Heere di dhee bajhoN, mainu disda jagg hanera Ja keh de SahibaN nu, Jattiye yaar aa gaya  
tera

Ghar sadd ke apne ni, Maasi gallaN ajj kara de Ho gai muddat milyaN nu, jatti nu do pal kol  
baha de KevaiN bol ke dassaN ni, aaonda rann da pyar bathera Ja keh de SahbaN nu, Mirza yaar  
bulaunda tera

Le jani ChandhraN ne, tarkay parh tu nakkah ni qaazi Jatt mirza kharlaN da, Maasi jitt ke har  
gaya ni baazi Jhang dushman jape ni, beri ban gaya char chafera Ja keh de SahibaN nu, Jattiye  
yaar aa gaya tera

Ajj tak jo meri si, ho ju hor kisse di pal nu TarsooN mu dekhani nu, Maasi main SahibaN da kal  
nu GallaN howan jalal di, devda phire dolda jehra Ja keh de SahibaN nu, Jattiye yaar aa gaya tera

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qg\\_cs8rzPaE&list=RDqg\\_cs8rzPaE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qg_cs8rzPaE&list=RDqg_cs8rzPaE)

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## NOOR JEHAN – MIRZA JATT

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H94D1PAKnak>

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## PUNJABI MC - MIRZA

Kade nah Ranjha kann parwonda,  
te Heer khabaundi choori nah  
Mirzay ne pherr marna ki si  
jai hundi majboori naa  
Khon karenga yaad Sassi nu  
jai thaal vich hundi poori nah  
Ishq ne yaaron marjana si  
jai aashiq charde sooli naal  
Jai khatt oh ni si, te khatt aaj vi nahi

Menu darse wallan da, ohse vellay hojana  
Menu darse wallan da, ohse vellay hojana  
Jaake jad sahibaan nu, mai seenay naal laya  
Jaake jad sahibaan nu, mai seenay naal laya

It was late last summer, my blood coloured the sky  
When I heard you break your swear  
Punjab in my eye,  
Never had I cried before

Never had my steel heart died before,  
But know I felt the raw, blast  
True love forever last,  
But you cant feel my body  
then you I cast,  
Die for my woman  
My woman is my mind,  
My destiny she speaks through her every freaky line,  
Her body movement is the way I survive  
When I am on the battle field, staying alive  
Staying alive my arches is that 249 mcs on horseback  
So I pull out my steel to fight back  
Pull out an ounce of desi from my rice sack  
Walked across the five rivers one hundred degrees  
My body burns, my mind cease

Baggiye havaa de naal, karade tu ajj gallaan ni  
Baggiye havaa de naal, karade tu ajj gallaan ni  
Jatti marjugi je, mai nazari nah aayaaaa  
Jatti marjugi je, mai nazari nah aayaaaa

Sada janam janam tak saath nibuga baggiye ni  
Sada janam janam tak saath nibuga baggiye ni  
Bekay kol khuda de, jatt ne lekh likhaaya  
Bekay kol khuda de, jatt ne lekh likhaaya

Tann mann taja hojau, sarey dukh tutt jann ne  
Tann mann taja hojau, sarey dukh tutt jann ne  
Dekhi jadd mey saibaa, tann baar leyaya  
Dekhi jadd mey saibaa, tann baar leyaya  
Uppala dekh renaal ne, Geet gauana Shinday tauuu

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NfQTPf-\\_r4k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NfQTPf-_r4k)

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## LINKS OF INTEREST

<http://heerranjha.blogspot.ca/p/heer-ranjha.html>  
Story of Heer Ranjha

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gpoJLJEB8WM>  
Gurdas Mann Sings Heer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZOzQOdeWxsQ>  
Timur Afghani Sings Heer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v5m1CwnO8dI>  
Muhammad Ramzan Shakoori Sings Entire Heer

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_Mm7Bv4QOw0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Mm7Bv4QOw0)  
Gulam Murtaza Sings Heer