

## The Punjabi Mexican Americans: Why Did This Community Develop?

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### Introduction

How and why did the Punjabi-Mexican community develop in southern California and elsewhere in the American southwest? As shown by attempts to downplay this early bicultural community and by attempts to explain it by inaccurate claims about non-citizens gaining access to citizenship or land by marrying Mexican and/or Mexican American women, this is indeed an important and controversial topic.

This topic of the Punjabi Mexican community is clearly important to the history of the Sikhs in America because it shows them, as in the Ghadr party, working closely with Punjabi Muslims and Hindus in their early years here. I just spoke, in July, at the Ghadr Memorial Foundation of America annual event in Sacramento, where I saw the grave of Muhammad Barakat Ullah, a Muslim of international political importance whose final resting place reflects his activity in the Ghadr movement. He died in 1927 in San Francisco and was ultimately buried in the Sacramento cemetery. He is celebrated today by the basically Sikh organization that annually celebrates the Ghadr party there.

And the topic of the Punjabi Mexican community is certainly important to the relatively recent efforts to recast this early Punjabi diaspora as a Sikh diaspora, placing the emphasis on religion rather than language or occupation. Comparing the early pre-1965 and the later post-1965 Punjabi diasporas to the U.S. helps us understand why the Punjabi pioneers married Mexican and Mexican American women and produced a bi-ethnic community then known as Mexican Hindus (and now relabeled Punjabi Mexicans). This comparison illuminates the ways in which migrants define and represent themselves and their experiences over time and in

different contexts. I argue here that the earlier Punjabi diaspora reflects a lingering cosmopolitan Mughlai or Indo-Muslim culture in South Asia, while the more recent Punjabi Sikh diaspora reflects modern independent India and shows slippages, or possible slippages, into communities narrowly based on religion.<sup>1</sup>

The two Punjabi diasporas took place in distinctly different historical periods. In the early twentieth century, a few hundred speakers of the Punjabi language in India's northwestern region migrated to the US, to be followed after the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act by many thousands of Punjabis in the late twentieth century. Followers of the Sikh religion were prominent in both movements, although the first diaspora consisted primarily of farmers, rural men who settled in the farming valleys of California and adjacent western states, while the second diaspora featured well-educated professional people moving in family units to cities all over the U.S. This second diaspora calls itself a Sikh diaspora, not a Punjabi one, and it comes almost entirely from India's Punjab state (Punjabi speakers from Pakistan identify as Pakistanis).

### Theory

To capture the meanings of these diasporas and compare them to each other, certain theoretical insights have been crucial. I am employing translation theory as developed by Gayatri Spivak, Tony Stewart, and others in this paper.<sup>2</sup> However, I'll keep the theory light (it's mostly in endnotes) and concentrate on the lived experiences of the early Punjabi Mexicans. What should be kept in mind is that I am using the word "translation" to discuss the way people dealt with cultural worlds rooted in different places and times, rather than the words syncretism or synthesis<sup>3</sup> as I analyze the Punjabi Mexican community.<sup>4</sup> Authors like Gayatri Spivak emphasize translation as a process, one that looks to societies evolving over time<sup>5</sup> or, more disruptively, located in different places. To write well about people migrating, James Clifford

believes, one needs to know the markings of their places of origin, the “peculiar allegiances and alienations” associated with their homelands.<sup>6</sup> These markings are remembered, rejected, or reinvented to suit the destinations of the migrants; they are, in other words, translated, and the receiving society helps determine the translations.<sup>7</sup> As applied to the two sets of Punjabi immigrants, the words used then and now to identify and locate self and other in these two shifting diasporic landscapes testify to significantly different translations.

As strong and confident Punjabi pioneers made the best of their new world and founded bi-ethnic families in farm towns and valleys in the American southwest, their acts of translation related South Asian traditions of pluralism or secularism to America’s developing traditions of pluralism or multiculturalism.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, I am claiming that these pioneer men and their wives and families reflected cosmopolitan rather than transnational orientations: cosmopolitans being people who familiarize themselves with other cultures and know how to move easily between cultures, transnationals being people who, while moving, build encapsulated cultural worlds around themselves, most typically worlds circumscribed by religious or family ties.<sup>9</sup> One might liken cosmopolitanism and transnationalism to more and less successful processes of translation, or, alternatively, processes of translation that do not or do narrowly emphasize religion, one’s own religion, as a core element of identity in the diaspora.

What is the role of religion in the analysis, when looking at the early and post-1965 Punjabi immigrants to the U.S., looking at them principally from the perspectives of the Punjabis themselves?<sup>10</sup> I argue here that the earlier Punjabi Sikhs were part of a cosmopolitan Punjabi diaspora and that religious law and the exercise of religious authority were unimportant domains for these pre-1965 Punjabi Sikh, Muslim, and Hindu immigrants. But today the tendency to emphasize the Sikh religion narrows the migrants’ identity to a transnational Punjabi Sikh one,

provoking intra-Sikh conflict that continues to orient migrants strongly to the homeland.<sup>11</sup> In post-1965 Punjabi Sikh culture and its reformulation in the diaspora, religion has become central to the more organized or vocal groups among the post-1965 immigrants abroad.<sup>12</sup> But since I am focusing on the Punjabi Mexican community, let me go ahead and do that, and leave you to think about what I am suggesting for the newer Punjabi Sikh immigrants.

### Formation of the Punjabi Mexican Community

I am going to discuss how early Punjabi pioneers lived their lives in California and parts of Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico, in the decades before 1946. These early Punjabi-speaking farmers were making their way on new agricultural frontiers, working hard to succeed despite discriminatory laws that affected both their work lives and their personal lives. The prejudicial context also worked to unite all Punjabi-speakers as they worked for political goals in both colonial India and in the United States.

The discriminatory laws with respect to immigration and marriage crucially shaped the Punjabi Mexican community. The Barred Zone act of 1917 and the National Origins Quota Act of 1924 meant that they could not bring their wives from India and could not return to the U.S. themselves if they went back to visit their homes and families in India. Those Punjabis who were doing well in the U.S. and wanted to stay, if they wanted families in the U.S., had to find new marriage partners. But just as in the American south there were so-called anti-miscegenation laws prohibiting marriages across racial lines (laws not lifted until 1948 in California). I titled my book Making Ethnic Choices,<sup>13</sup> but that was an ironic title, because the pioneers were not free to make choices. With respect to marriages, a couple appearing in the county record office requesting a marriage license had to be of the same race in the eyes of the county clerk issuing the license. A man and woman could be “white/white” or “black/black” or

“brown/brown” or, in the 1930s, “Indian/Indian,” and it was the latter two categories that a Punjabi man and a woman of Mexican heritage best fitted. And some 378 men did marry non-Indian wives in America, with patterns that varied by region depending on the women available to them (see the Xeroxed charts handed out, to be referred to again later).

The other major constraint concerned the mens’ access to citizenship. The pioneer immigrants from India and the Punjab initially had access to this, some 69 of them achieving it before 1923. But in that year they were denied it by the U.S. Supreme Court. The 1923 Third decision termed Asian Indians aliens ineligible to citizenship on the basis of race; they were judged to be Caucasian but not white in the popular meaning of the term. As aliens ineligible to citizenship, they then fell under the Alien Land Laws in California and elsewhere and they were unable to lease or own agricultural land. Loss of access to citizenship, then, put the very livelihoods of these hard-working and increasingly successful farmers in jeopardy. In the Imperial Valley and elsewhere some friendly farmers, bankers, and judges helped them get around these laws by fronting for them. They were also able to acquire land and put it in the names of their American-born and citizen children - in the names of their children, notice, not their wives. In fact from 1922-1931 American citizen wives lost their citizenship when marrying non-citizens, so marriage to a female citizen was NOT the motivation for these marriages as some new immigrants from India like to allege. South Asians were awarded access to citizenship again according to the Luce-Celler Bill of 1946, and this meant that they could journey back to India or Pakistan and sponsor relatives to immigrate to the U.S., although relatively few of the pioneer Punjabis did visit their homelands or bring relatives over. At least relatively few of those in the Mexican Hindu or Punjabi Mexican community did this, because they had American-born children, especially sons, who had worked for their fathers and earned

the right to inherit the land that the family had acquired.

### Understanding the Earlier Punjabi Diaspora

The so-called Punjabi and Punjabi Sikh diasporas, as the alternative names indicate, are really two: the Punjabi diaspora that flourished in the early twentieth century in California was interrupted and then renewed in a very different way after 1965. The two diasporas featured radically different understandings of the migrating group and its identity abroad. The first Punjabi diaspora reflected the Punjab's late nineteenth century plural society, where occupation and language were more important than religion, as work by Farina Mir, Harjot Oberoi, and David Gilmartin (among others) persuasively demonstrates.<sup>14</sup> The early twentieth century male emigrants from the Punjab were leaving a regional culture based on the Urdu and Punjabi languages, languages that still strongly reflected traces of Indo-Muslim or Mughlai culture. In India's Punjab, the homeland culture was breaking down primarily because of political pressures stemming from British colonial rule and missionary activities in the late nineteenth century. The Singh Sabha movement, its groups competing with each other, tried to dominate Sikh discourse at the end of the nineteenth century, but before that, "Sanatan Sikhs" were known for their pluralistic approach and they often allied with Hindus and Aryas. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, the centralizing Chief Khalsa Diwan dominated Sikh politics. Its leaders, drawn from business, the professions, and the intellectual elite, used English as well as Punjabi to reach new audiences. They promoted a Sikh identity based on amritdhari (initiated, observing the 5 Ks) leadership but tried to compromise with narrower Tat Khalsa (Lahore's Singh Sabha) attempts to purify Sikhism of Western and Hindu influences.<sup>15</sup> Hindus, Christians, and Ahmadiyya and other Muslims conducted fierce religious and social reform debates in the Punjab, and the Indian nationalist movement gathered momentum in the early twentieth century.

The Punjabis who emigrated while these struggles were beginning, however, were relatively uneducated farmers, and the traces they carried were those of the disintegrating plural society. Common languages, spoken Punjabi and written Urdu, linked them; Urdu was the language (written in Arabic/Persian script) on the gravestones of Punjabi Muslims buried in California's farm towns, in what were termed "Hindu" plots in the cemeteries. These men gave up the use of external religious markers, notably the beard and turban worn by some Sikhs, since those markers were negatively received in the American West.<sup>16</sup> As reviewed above, the pioneer Punjabi farmers experienced considerable discontinuity and disruption in their lives, caused primarily by America's racist policies governing immigration, citizenship, and marriage. The predominantly working class communities the Punjabis built under very difficult conditions were characterized by hybridity and mixture, by the need for translation and cosmopolitanism.

Significantly, the early Punjabi immigrants were called Hindus, a term now used primarily in a religious sense but used then simply to mean someone from Hindustan or India. Since the name was not understood as a divisive or religious one by either the American public or the Punjabis themselves, and since a shared language and peasant status were more important in both Indian and American contexts at that time, the early pioneers also called themselves Hindus. This was somewhat surprising since 85 to 90% of the Punjabi pioneers were Sikhs, a religion self-consciously differentiating itself from Hinduism since late medieval times in India. Yet in interview after interview in my research in the 1980s and 1990s on the Punjabi men married to Mexican and Mexican-American women in California's Imperial Valley, speakers used Hindu simply to mean someone from India.<sup>17</sup> (That was the meaning for English-speakers in Australia and New Zealand as well in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and it is still the primary meaning for Spanish-speakers.)

Thus the early pioneers were called Hindus and their families, their wives and children, were called Mexican Hindus. These usages characterized all the Punjabis and their descendants until the 1947 partition of India, when the term Spanish Pakistani was invented for Muslim pioneers from what had become Pakistan and their families. Please see the charts (Xerox copies handed out) showing the structure of the Punjabi-headed families developing in California's three major agricultural regions. The marriages started in the Imperial Valley along the border with Mexico, where Mexican women and children displaced by the Mexican Revolution of 1910 were coming to California and working for Sikh farmers in their fields. Another chart shows the large numbers of children being born to these bi-ethnic families, again with regional differences due to the slow movement to northern California of Mexican men and women as migratory laborers. Finally, on the reverse I have placed three charts showing the spousal patterns for men and women of the first generation and for members of the second generation.

Constrained by laws that denied them citizenship, prevented them from bringing wives or brides from India, and limited their marriage choices in the U.S., the Punjabi men could not be transnational and became cosmopolitan. Unable to retain strong and continuous Indian religious or familial networks, they turned, overwhelmingly, to women of Mexican or Mexican-American background and built bi-ethnic families, as the charts show. They remained themselves Sikh, Muslim, or Hindu, but most of these men were not well schooled in their religions and they made no effort to retain connections with sources of religious authority in India. Since most of the wives were Catholic and they raised the children, the children also were mostly Catholic (although some claimed to be "Catholic and Muslim" or "Catholic and Sikh"). The post-1965 new immigrants from South Asia and confrontations with them spurred these men and their Mexican Hindu families to recognize their own bi-ethnicity and use it to claim a mainstream

American identity.

Although political events since 1947 have pushed Punjabis from both India and Pakistan to emphasize religious differences in the diaspora and many newer immigrants have adopted external religious markers, “Hindu” continues to designate people from South Asia in California’s farming valleys. Non-Indian residents and descendants of the pioneers alike distinguish between “old Hindus” and “new Hindus,” the old Punjabis and the post-1965 newcomers from both India and Pakistan. People have recently become aware of the term’s religious meaning, but they use “Hindu” in both senses: I’ll illustrate here with a couple of anecdotes from the 1980s. I remember sitting in the bar of a steakhouse in El Centro with the owner, Omar Deen – his father was a Punjabi Muslim and his mother was from Mexico. Omar spoke Spanish and English and was a Catholic; he had named the steakhouse Chavella’s (the nickname for Isabella) after his Mexican American wife. He told me proudly, “My dad was a Hindu; he came from the Poonjab. His name was Mohammed Deen, and I’m a Hindu too.” Others of the second generation told me they were “Catholic and Sikh” or “Catholic and Muslim,” contending, as their fathers had done, that all religions ultimately addressed a single divine force or figure.

The third generation was at an even greater diasporic distance from the Punjab. When I spoke at the Holtville Rotary Club about Punjabi history and the immigrants to the Imperial Valley (the son of a Punjabi Sikh father and a Mexican American mother had asked me to talk about “how the Sikhs beat the British,” itself a mistranslation), another speaker at the meeting was the granddaughter of an early Punjabi-Mexican couple. I’ll call her Jennifer Singh, and after my talk she excitedly accosted me. “I know I’m a Hindu, and I’m proud of that,” she said, “but I didn’t know about those three religions. Tell me, was my grandfather a Sikh, Muslim, or

Hindu?” She bore a name that clearly identified her as the descendant of a Sikh in India’s religious landscape, but she did not know its meaning.<sup>18</sup>

Then I remember vividly the strong reaction to my paper about the Mexican-Hindus at the 1986 Sikh Diaspora Conference at Ann Arbor, Michigan; that first reaction was denial. This was a surprising and shocking usage to new Western-educated immigrants from the Punjab and to Punjabi Sikhs in India. By the last decades of the twentieth century, Punjabi Sikhs everywhere knew that the majority of the Punjabi pioneers in the American West had been Sikhs (some 85-90%), and they had recast the diaspora as a Sikh diaspora (as the 1986 conference title attests). They viewed it through late twentieth century lenses heavily tinted by the Khalistan movement and tensions among Sikhs, Muslims, and Hindus in South Asia. Also, when I spoke in Amritsar at Guru Nanak Dev University in 1991 about the Mexican Hindus or Punjabi Mexicans, a young man with beard and turban rebuked me fiercely: “Madam, they could not have let themselves be called Hindus, and they could not have called their gurdwara in Stockton a temple, temples are for Hindus.” But I had a 1947 photograph with me showing the Stockton building with its sign reading “Sikh Temple.” (Also, we were sitting in a classroom near Amritsar’s Golden Temple, but no one thought of that.)

All the evidence shows that the Punjabi pioneers did not identify primarily as Sikhs or Muslims but as “Hindus,” meaning Hindustanis. People speak of their fathers, themselves, and others as Hindus quite naturally in Jayasri Hart Majumdar’s film, Roots in the Sand, made in 1995. Yet, although most of the pioneer Sikhs discarded the external markers so meaningful in India, this did not mean that they had discarded their religion. Rather, they maintained that external markers were unimportant, that religion was in the heart. The men were hardly able to practice or transmit their religions, being largely illiterate, without religious training, and even

without copies of the Granth Sahib or the Quran. However, they honored each other's religions as well as the Christian faiths followed by their wives and children. These are just facts, and their enunciation is not intended to show disrespect to the pioneers' religions. In fact, their children and grandchildren take great pride in their heritages of Sikhism, Islam, or Hinduism, as they learn about them and sometimes reclaim them today.

The pioneer Punjabis' religious differences were bridged by farming partnerships and marriage or godparent relationships. Typically, sets of Mexican or Mexican American sisters married men who could be Sikh, Muslim, Hindu, and perhaps Mexican Catholic as well, thereby constituting sets of religiously diverse men related by marriage. Men also served as godfathers in the Catholic church to each other's children without regard for religious differences among themselves. Religious law was not important to the pioneer Punjabis. Legal traditions and customs grounded in Sikhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Catholicism were often transgressed or ignored (for example, godfathers in the Catholic church should have been Catholic, and sometimes the men were renamed in those documents, Miguel instead of Maghyar, for example).

These early immigrants did use the American legal system, however. The British Indian legal system had prepared these early immigrants to deal with laws governing property leasing and ownership and economic relations, and the pioneer Punjabis engaged heavily in such litigation. They also used the courts for divorce cases and to obtain guardianship of their children, the latter a strategy to continue farming by evading the Alien Land Law. Rarely did a legal case in America refer back to India, although in a few cases a spouse or relative in the Punjab applied to inherit property in California's farming valleys upon the death of a Punjabi in America.

### The State, Religion, and Law

The role of the state has been implicit but central in the discussion of the homelands from which Punjabis emigrated and of the U.S. to which they migrated. In the U.S., the earlier discriminatory laws have been struck down, and the new immigrants are being as strongly shaped by their current context as the pioneers were shaped by their time and place. The post-1965 Sikh and other South Asian immigrants are largely well-qualified professional people drawn from all over India and Pakistan, people encouraged to immigrate to America. The newcomers do not face anti-miscegenation laws and can marry whom they chose, although most come as families or can easily return home for a bride or groom. Furthermore, the new immigrants have encountered no race-based barriers to becoming farmers or professionals and they can apply for American citizenship upon arrival.<sup>19</sup> Many of these new immigrants have been very interested in maintaining exclusivism and purity, and, with their high socioeconomic profile,<sup>20</sup> they are far more able to do that than were members of the old diaspora.<sup>21</sup> But perhaps translations, as in the old diaspora, will overtake the attempts to retain exclusivism and purity.

Also, British India in the late nineteenth century and independent India in the late twentieth century were very different contexts, with India and other modern independent South Asian nations increasingly highlighting religious identities and conflicts at both national and regional levels. The religious pluralism still lingering at the time of the early Punjabi immigrations abroad has now given way, in the late twentieth century, to an emphasis on the Sikh religion at home and in the diaspora for the sake of identity. The American legal system plays a role in this post-1965 reframing of the Punjabi diaspora as a Sikh diaspora by western educated, professional immigrants. It also offers a mode of recognition, and while the early Punjabis used the American legal system for farming and domestic disputes, the post-1965 Sikhs

have used it to establish independence from religious authorities in the homeland and to adjudicate disputes over control of gurdwaras in America. These recent legal assertions of identity fit the transnational rather than the cosmopolitan model.

The roles of the state and of religion in the civic arena in the U.S., the receiving nation, have also changed over the course of the twentieth century. Euro-American Protestantism, male-dominated, prevailed from the founding of the country. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Catholics and Jews became part of the mainstream religious culture, the national civil religion, and Muslims now aspire to this as well.<sup>22</sup> Other ideological and organizational changes in the American religious landscape have taken place in recent decades. Most significantly for this discussion, the public dimensions of religious culture in America, despite the separation of church and state, have grown in importance, as specialists in religious studies and American history testify.<sup>23</sup>

By the late twentieth century, then, America's religious landscape definitely encouraged more overtly political understandings of religion and this is certainly helping to push Sikhs and others toward religious identities. Religious beliefs and practices are often clearly central to immigrants' lives, confirming the failure of the secularization paradigm that informed recent decades of social science research and encouraged scholars of migration to overlook religion in their inquiries.<sup>24</sup> Sikhs and other religious groups increasingly use external markers and the legal system to achieve recognition as well as to resolve internal conflicts.<sup>25</sup>

The effort to invoke religious law in the diaspora is not just an exercise in textual movement and translation but one involving institutional structures and electoral politics that change the meaning and practice of religious law in the new context. Sikhs have followed American laws concerning tax-exempt, nonprofit religious institutions, setting up gurdwaras with constitutions governing decision-making processes and dues-paying congregations.<sup>26</sup> Legal

incorporation involves concepts of membership and participation different from those prevailing in the homeland. Constitutions, by-laws, and, in the case of most gurdwaras, financial requirements for leadership roles, set frameworks for competition and conflict as often as for harmonious observance of religious rituals by a newly-constituted congregation.

Religious law and attempts to use it to control communities in the diaspora both locally and from abroad are important to the post-1965 Punjabi Sikhs. Among the post-1965 Sikh immigrants, American law is being actively deployed, and the focus now is most often control of gurdwaras. Increasing struggles since the late 1970s in the Punjab over leadership of the Akal Takht (traditional center of Sikh temporal authority in Amritsar), and the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (the SGPC, the major Sikh religious and political body) find echoes and influences in the diaspora, not least in North America.<sup>27</sup> Whether Sikhs are amritdhari, keshadhari, or sahajdhari, (those who have been initiated, those who keep the hair long and wear a turban but may not have been initiated, or those who follow the gurus and Granth Sahib but do not maintain the 5 Ks), whether they are Jats, Khatri, or Chuhra, whether they are Doaba, Majha, or Malwa, all these religious, caste, and regional distinctions as well as new socioeconomic ones based on status in America influence gurdwara governance.

Conflicts often center on the appropriate sources of religious authority, such as hukmnamas or pronouncements from the Akal Takht jathedar, the Rahit Maryada (a document detailing Sikh rituals and ways of life emerging from the Singh Sabha movement) as promulgated by the SGPC, or the use of panj piarie or five outside referees to mediate local disputes.<sup>28</sup> American legal decisions usually find that Sikh gurdwaras have historically been decentralized and are not subject to authorities based in Amritsar. As Legrand's words (in endnote 25) anticipate, Sikh and secular scholars alike must deal with "silences to be addressed,"

domains in which the “original” may not speak or speak easily to issues encountered abroad. The meanings of the Rahit Maryada, for instance, are not settled in the Punjab either.<sup>29</sup>

Legal conflicts engaging Sikh authorities in India and the diaspora go beyond gurdwara governance. In 2004, while NRI or non-Resident Indian Sikhs wanted to be represented on the SGPC, the SCPC decided that Sikh clergy could no longer go on foreign tours without SGPC clearance.<sup>30</sup> In 2005, the Akal Takht jathedar sent word opposing the Canadian Parliament’s legalization of same-sex marriage, but the World Sikh Organization of Canada testified in favor of the Civil Marriage Act, presenting itself as a nonprofit human rights organization taking a pluralistic approach. The WSO, representing over 60 Canadian Sikh societies and organizations, explicitly opposed the jathedar’s sangresh or admonition, carefully pointing out that it was not a hukmnama.<sup>31</sup> The strongest conflicts have often focused on women’s roles, with diaspora Sikhs from the U.K. and the U.S. generally supporting proposals of the SGPC in 2005 increasing the participation of amritdhari Sikh women in ceremonies and services; the proposals were rejected by all five priests of the Golden Temple and were referred to the Akal Takht jathedar.<sup>32</sup>

Scholars and activists are trying to distinguish between positively-valued hybridity and dangerous or transgressive hybridity, issues discussed for Sikhs by N. Gerald Barrier.<sup>33</sup> Much of the conflict over, for example, the roles of women in both private and public Sikh arenas in the U.S. can be discussed in this framework and that of translation studies, with external markers and legal systems being deployed to achieve recognition in the new contexts. Disputes draw on differences among Sikhs from the Punjab and negotiate a transnational arena of religious interpretation and practice; the small white Sikh convert population, small in numbers, does not play much of a role. This closely bounded field of legal sources and participants probably helps make the contests bitter.

The points made briefly here about religion and religious law in the diaspora for Sikhs reinforce those made about the early and later Sikhs. Transnationalism is the antithesis of cosmopolitanism and these two strands, the early Punjabi and the later Punjabi Sikh diaspora, exemplify one or the other in ways that may appear surprising. I have argued that the earlier, rural, and less educated Punjabis were more cosmopolitan than the later, more educated Punjabi Sikhs. I have stressed religion and religious law as aids to the contemporary denial of pluralism or secularism in India rather than the translation of the plural society or cosmopolitan identities from the Punjabi past.

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the ideas and material presented below draw from a longer article comparing Hyderabad Muslim and Punjabi diasporas published in *Sikh Formations* in 2007; they have been substantially reworked and augmented in this article.

<sup>2</sup> The idea is perhaps most useful when analyzing Hindu-Muslim issues. Tony Stewart's 2001 article and Finbarr Flood's 2009 book best present challenges to current notions of bounded and incompatible "Hindu" and "Muslim" worlds in South Asia.

<sup>3</sup> Stewart (2001) argues against applying academic models of hybridity and syncretism to encounters between 'Hindus' and 'Muslims', models assuming the production of things new and different from either 'original part', things usually thought unstable and inferior to the highly idealized and rigidly bounded 'originals'.

<sup>4</sup> Anthropologists have long discussed "translation" as part of their disciplinary enterprise, seeking to understand and explain contemporary cultures to each other: see the essays in Palsson 1993. Gisli Palsson suggests the term "cultural dyslexia" to describe the inability to read the alien, cultural worlds of other people," discussing not only ethnographic but transnational political attempts at translation in the contemporary world: 23-24. Ulf Hannerz, in the same volume, discusses mediation across cultures, likening cultures to languages.

<sup>5</sup> Gayatri Spivak writes of the difficulties of translating the Bengali language prevalent before her time, one replete with Arabic and Persian words and resonances. Arabic and Persian were the languages of the courts and of law in the late Mughal empire and the corresponding Nawabate in Bengal, and traces of them lingered in the Bangla of the Bangladeshi activist-poet Farhad Mazhar's *Ashmoyer Noteboi (Untimely Notebook)*, a text Spivak was translating into English (Spivak in Bermann and Wood 2005). Spivak reflects on societal and linguistic changes under British rule, as "the fashioners of the new Bengali prose purged the language of the Arabic-Persian content until...a Sanskritized Bengali emerged (2005: 98)." Noting that a corresponding movement to purge Arabic-Persian elements from India's national language, Hindi, followed India's independence in 1947 and that there is a move underway to restore those components to Bangla, the national language of Bangladesh, she reviews the name changes of the Bangla/Bengali language and its homelands under British and Pakistani rule and under the modern Indian and Bangladeshi nation-states.

<sup>6</sup> Clifford 1989, 185.

<sup>7</sup> Rey Chow called translation "the traffic between two languages," a process that calls for the reexamination of the notion of the original and its derivations (1995, 183-84). Such a process would honor the receiving language and its meanings at least equally. Sandra Bermann writes that "translation is a temporal art, one that can contribute to the action of history itself, and to the ongoing 'conversation' that gives it a meaning and a future (2005, 272)."

<sup>8</sup> Anna Bigelow recently noted that in South Asia "secularism" is closer in meaning to pluralism or multiculturalism in the United States, meaning not separation of religion and state but equality

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in terms of state patronage and the absence of religious favoritism. Bigelow 2009, 435, note 1; see also Bigelow 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Ulf Hannerz, Jonathan Friedmann, and Pnina Werbner reflect on migration and citizenship, providing useful definitions of cosmopolitanism and transnationalism. See Werbner 1999, 19-20, and Hannerz 1992, who defines cosmopolitans as “willing to engage with the Other” and transnationals as frequent travellers who carry with them meanings embedded in social networks: 252. Friedman shows the encapsulation of cosmopolitans as well: 1997, 84-85.

<sup>10</sup> I turn again to Gayatri Spivak, who, speaking about the Bengali saint Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, states: “Islam took its place among his imaginings and his iterations of the self...these moves acknowledged the imperative to translate rather than its denial for the sake of identity... (2005, 103).” I see an openness to other religions, a willingness to translate in the sense Spivak indicates, as an indicator of cosmopolitanism, while the denial of such translation emphasizes one’s own religion, circumscribes one’s identity as in the definition of transnationalism above.

<sup>11</sup> The cosmopolitanism of India and the U.S., particularly with respect to religion, can certainly be questioned, but there is no space here to examine the decline of secularism and the rise of Hinduism and Christianity respectively in the civic religious spheres in the two nations.

<sup>12</sup> Only among the post-1965 Sikh immigrants are there efforts to relate religious law and authorities in the homelands to religious law and authorities in the diaspora communities.

<sup>13</sup> My 1992 book, Making Ethnic Choices: California’s Punjabi Mexican Americans, provides full historical details. These details were obtained in interviews with men, women, and children in this community but also in county record offices, looking at written records relating to marriages, deaths, births, and divorces, to land and numerous partnership and other disputes resolved in the courts.

<sup>14</sup> Mir’s 2005 paper on late nineteenth century Punjabi society and her 2010 book evoke that declining Indo-Muslim culture; see also Oberoi 1994. David Gilmartin quotes British officials asserting that “tribe,” by which they often meant caste, rather than religion was at the heart of rural Punjabi identity: 1988, 30.

<sup>15</sup> Barrier 2003.

<sup>16</sup> This argues against the interpretation of. Vijay Mishra, who, focusing on the older migration of Indian workers to the West Indies, a movement somewhat analogous to that of the Punjabi farmers to the American West, views that migration to the West Indies as a culturally “continuous” diaspora of “exclusivism and purity,” in contrast to the “new” Indian diasporas that he views as “discontinuous” ones of “borders,” of mixture and hybridity: Mishra 1996.. Mishra’s theory, built as it is upon literary works, is a “diasporic imaginary,” and he calls it this himself. His analysis resonates with assumptions about middle- and upper-class cosmopolitan knowledge and mutating culture and rather parochial and working-class transnationalism.

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<sup>17</sup> The material in this and following paragraphs comes from Leonard 1992.

<sup>18</sup> One might say, following Maxine Hong Kingston's final sentence in Woman Warrior (1976), it had not translated well (but it had, according to Spivak 2005, 103).

<sup>19</sup> It is true that since some home governments (India, for example), prohibited dual citizenship, the move towards U.S. citizenship was slow but has now become the majority trend among South Asian immigrants.

<sup>20</sup> Leonard 1997, 77-81, 88-96, 131-143.

<sup>21</sup> Mishra 1996b proposes the opposite, that, over time, "the first diaspora of exclusivism will in time collapse into that of the border: 190. I do see a class difference here, as those without resources or legal status are led to make occupational, residential, and marital choices in the directions of hybridity and mixture, and one might point to the contemporary patterns of lower and upper class Bangladeshis to illustrate this: in downtown Los Angeles, young men who are members of the city Bangladeshi association are marrying Korean and Salvadoran women, while the doctors, engineers, and computer professionals in Orange County have established their own, separate, dues-paying association and are not marrying out.

<sup>22</sup> Some have written about this in terms of race: how the Irish became white, how the Jews became white: Ignatiev 1995, Brodtkin 1998. Others have written about it in terms of economic and social strategies: Catholic immigrants built a separate subculture that became strong enough to earn recognition and political power, while Jewish immigrants empowered themselves through mainstream educational institutions to achieve recognition and respect: Casanova 1994. For Muslim aspirations, see Leonard 2003.

<sup>23</sup> There were three other important changes. First, denominations, so important in the mainline Anglo-Saxon Protestant world, have become less significant as people become more highly educated, intermarry, and move to new neighborhoods with different local churches. Christians now change their denominational or church affiliations relatively easily. Second, despite male domination of religious structures and dialogues, women arguably constitute the majority of participants in American Christian religious activities and institutions, and they have increasingly exercised moral authority in religious and civic institutions. Third, as denominations have declined, special purpose religious groups organized along conservative and liberal lines have developed, leading to the passionate mobilization of political coalitions on issues in the public arena like homosexuality and abortion. See Tweed 1997, especially Braude's article, and Wuthnow 1988.

<sup>24</sup> See Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000, Warner and Wittner 1998, and Leonard, Stepick, Vasquez, and Holdaway, eds., 2005.

<sup>25</sup> Writing about the translatability of law, Pierre Legrand states (2005, 37): "What happens when a legal rule is formulated or reformulated in one legal culture on the basis of a legal rule prevailing in another is, indeed, closely analogous to the act of literary translation. In both

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instances, texts are intentional and relational. In both instances, the meaning of the original is assumed not to reside wholly within the original itself. In both instances, there are silences to be addressed.”

<sup>26</sup> Barrier 2002, 31-32; Leonard 2003, 107-08.

<sup>27</sup> Barrier 2002.

<sup>28</sup> See Barrier 2002 for significant court cases, and Barrier 2004b for the burgeoning internet discussion groups of legal and other identity issues in India and abroad.

<sup>29</sup> Legal matters in India continue to engage Sikhs: the Akal Takht jathedar's interference in the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management committee was rejected in February, 2006. More significantly, the Indian Supreme Court in August, 2005, as part of a ruling against a Bombay High court order asking that the Union Government notify Jains as a minority community, opined that Sikhs and Jains were part of the wider Hindu community. This renewal of an old conflict has brought strong replies from Sikh institutions and organizations.

<sup>30</sup> India Journal, July 23, 2004, A34; India Journal, Oct. 8, 2004, A30.

<sup>31</sup> N. Gerald Barrier forwarded materials from the Internet to me about this.

<sup>32</sup> London Sikh women tried to perform service in the Golden Temple in 2003: Vijaya Pushkarna, in India-West, March 21, 2003; for 2005, see India-West, September 9, 2005, B13; India Journal, September 23, 2005, A33; India Journal, September 30, 2005, A32.

<sup>33</sup> Barrier 1999; Barrier 2004a.