

volume ੧

ਬੇਗਮਪੁਰਾ ਕੋਲੈਕਟਿਵ begumpura collective

E Editor's Note

*Begumpura ('city without sorrow') is the name of the city
Where there is no place for suffering, pain, or anxiety.
There are no taxes or tolls, nor property ownership there,
There is no fear, terror, criminalization, or torture there.
Oh, dear sibling, I've found an excellent nation,
Where there is eternal care, safety, and peace. Pause.
Firm, stable, and eternal is divine sovereignty,
There is no second or third class citizenship; all are one there.
Abundant and eternally famous
Where all live contented and in abundance too.
All have the agency to walk as they please,
Even in strolling through the Divine' palace, no one blocks their way.
Says Ravidas, from the shoe-maker caste abolished and set free,
Whoever is a citizen there, is a friend of mine.
([Raag Gauree, Padas Of Ravi Daas Jee, Gauree Gwaarayree ANG 345](#))*

Begumpura (ਬੇਗਮਪੁਰਾ) is a poetic articulation of a city in resistance to the two millennia-old violences of brahminism. Revered and respected by some Sikhs as a Guru and revered and respected by some Sikhs as a Bhagat, Ravidas Ji is a Dalit caste-oppressed renowned figure within Dalit, Sikh, and Ravidassia communities and they articulated this imagination of Begumpura in the 1400s. Embodying what we could today describe as projects of abolition (caste, prison, property), decolonization, and self and communal sovereignty, Begumpura represents a set of physical, emotional, spiritual, temporal, and political relations based in agency, liberation, and kinship. It represents a city outside the confines of current spatial and temporal relations that transcend any and all borders. Begumpura represents a collective invitation, partly born out of deep heartbreak and grief from the shifting forms of brahminical violence, while also rooted in desires to feel and build liberatory worlds.

This zine has been our attempt to cultivate an engagement and relationship-building within the Sikh quam (or more broadly, sovereign community) through visions of Begumpura. Begumpura is explicitly named within Gurbaani on ang 345 of the Guru Granth Sahib, and as Sikhs, we begin and end with Gurbaani as a guide. Following a Sikh praxis, for us, meant that when we were looking for models of liberation and emancipation, as editors we began with one given to us that is already centuries upon centuries old. It is such a powerful model that our Guru Sahibs saw no need to revise the imagination of Begumpura. Instead, we were told to look at this model and prioritize it, uplift it, and make it into reality for our spirit's and other spirits' time-being on this earth.

E Editor's Note

Sikhs have made guidelines time and time again across Sikh history—theologically and practically – that point us towards what our spirit's journey should be, and where we are meant to go. Whether that is through the language of Begumpura, Halemi Raaj, or Khalsa Raaj, these visions point us towards a political-spiritual state materializing through a divine-sovereign articulation. Amongst these potential visions, as we engage with them while attending to our dominating caste backgrounds, we intentionally centralize Begumpura in this zine as an ethics and orientation to center a commitment to caste abolition. Begumpura allows us to hold the other articulations of a sovereign “state,” while also moving towards caste abolition and considering the many necessary forms this movement requires. As part of our rehat for our spirit’s journey, Begumpura reminds us that it is our spirit that requires protection, cultivation, and prioritization while we exist in this time and this is consistent with what Gurbaani tells us about our relationships with the Guru. While we exist materially embodied in these human bodies, Sikhi tells us that we are meant to use these bodies to attain spiritual emancipation from the constant cycle of returning to the material. That means that any other potential models of collectivizing in Sikhi that are not consistent with Begumpura can be – and likely are in some way – a product of our investment in this material world.

We started this process by inviting contributors to consider how Sikhi (ਸਿੱਖੀ) has been used and is a vehicle for imagining and building towards anti-oppressive futures on this planet, drawing on Gurmat (ਗੁਰਮਤ), abolitionist, decolonial, debrahminized, and queer and trans Sikh (ਸਿੱਖ) approaches for their imaginative work. It is our ardaas that as you engage with their contributions, it sparks, supports, and furthers your own commitment and investment to building Begumpura—both spiritually and temporally. The contributors to this zine do not all agree on what Begumpura means in their lives or through their interpretations of Sikh histories. Yet, they each take time to consider how Begumpura could be a more central part of their efforts towards spiritual emancipation. In sharing their thinking and processes of reflection, we hope that it may spark new ways of thinking about these topics and new ways of materializing the liberatory politics of Begumpura and Sikhi.

Bhul Chuk Maaf.

manmit singh and prabhdeep singh kehal

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Jagdeep Raina **Heaven**

In the blink of an eye, my Ruby massi died
She was a piece of heaven for me
Taught me about the birds and the bees
Mom and dad killed, so massi was heaven for me
All these debt collectors screamed, we want your zameen
I was left alone, broke with no home
So Massi took me in, made me feel seen
The first day on the new job was hard, but she trained me
taught me how to wear fishnets, makeup, red jewelry
I was a man, who learned how to be a woman
I was pleased, found home in the brothels of Delhi
I danced and I dreamed, finally made money
We called massi our goddess, she was our queen
We, proud rats of the low caste, who finally found heaven
With massi we visited temples during the day, at night we
ruled the brothels of Delhi. She was heaven for me.

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Bunga Sikh Virsa

Beyond language, a further place

Begampura, the sorrow-free town, has been popularized for followers of Guru Granth Sahib Ji through Bhagat Ravidas Ji's divine poetry ([Omvedt 2008](#)). In this town, Bhagat Ravidas Ji imagines no taxes or commodities, no inherent division based on social or material status, and a population liberated from fear and anxiety. Through our consciousness-raising group, Bunga Sikh Virsa, we engaged with Ravidas Ji's shabad to consider, 'what are the steps for building a Sikhi- or Gurmat-inspired place?' We humbly offer both our interpretation of the shabad, as well as some possible responses to such a question. For full text of the shabad, please reference ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ, ਅੰਗ ੩੪੫ (Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, Ang 345). [You can do so digitally here.](#)

Sorrow-free/carefree is the name of the town; pain and worries do not reside here. Nor do any troubles, taxes, and commodities. No fear of mistakes, nor fear, nor deficit. ||1||

I now live in this beautiful place/homeland; there, happiness is everlasting, my brother. ||1||Pause||

The ruler of this place is forever stable and secure. There is no second or third status; everyone is first. This inhabited land is always renowned. There, live the wealthy and satisfied people. ||2||

They are able to walk around however they wish, for they know the secret of Vaaheguru's palace/presence, so no one blocks their way. Says Ravidas, the liberated shoe-maker, whoever resides in that city is a friend of mine. ||3||2||

Vichaar/Reflection

A lot of times, we really struggle as a community to understand how to apply these ideas in an actually Gurmat-inspired way, instead of letting it be interpreted through our own frameworks. But this ideal city that Bhagat Ravidas Ji speaks about, this is basically him saying 'this is the Gurmat city.' In the final line, Ravidas Ji firmly locates himself in his socially-constructed and -assigned caste, chammaar (shoe-maker). In gaining cultural and historical context from some of our parents who were raised in Punjab, and or India broadly, we learned more about the visceral and sensory-based separation created based on occupation and social status. Simrnjit & Ivraj's mom shared that in Punjab, they traditionally make shoes out of animal skin. A lot of times, you wouldn't even kill the animals; it would be dead animals you'd find and then you would then take those animals and make shoes out of them. Obviously that's very smelly; it's a dead animal in your household!

As a result, if a shoe-maker came to your house, you wouldn't even let them into your house because you don't want that smell (here, we can think about the commonly used term 'untouchable' in many saakhis). We discussed how, then, beyond just an assigned social status, this became connected to other cultural notions around cleanliness and purity that were further cemented through Brahmanism. We can think here about the deep anxieties around food sanitation, which Guru Nanak Dev Ji challenges in Asa Ki Vaar (Ballad of Hope) as a false focus on worldly impurities over spiritual and action-based ones. This makes it even more significant that, in the shabad, these are the people – or person – specifically being called out as being included in this city because, historically, they're not even allowed to live in this city. They have to live outside of it and even a little bit further. In the shabad, it's not even just that they're being included, but that's the person who's imagining that kind of place.

“These ideas of embodied imagining of Oneness from the shabad really speaks to a lot of our movements today – it's often the people who are most oppressed that can build the most beautiful versions of society.”

With that, harnoor singh found it hard not to consider the shabad as a reflection on lived experience and imagining a manifestation of ੴ from that particular social and political location. Bhagat Ravidas Ji had experienced casteism most severely, as well as the violence that occurs through capitalism or classism or the unequal hoarding and distribution of resources. Considering all the contributions in Guru Granth Sahib depict a mindset of realizing ੴ/Oneness/Vaaheguru, it's fascinating that a lot of the features of Begampura are very much focused on those experiences or statuses that would not be afforded to someone of a subjugated caste status. One obvious example is the line discussing that there is no possibility for shortage, there are no commodities, none of these kinds of things. That these things based on class and status would not be there, therefore, you would have no worry of any caste or status. And that no one is second, no one's third. Everyone's the same.

These ideas of embodied imagining of Oneness from the shabad really speaks to a lot of our movements today – it's often the people who are most oppressed that can build the most beautiful versions of society. They are the ones who fully understand what it means to need something different. Aiming to develop a tangible framework of Sikh sovereignty has to start with such reflections, turning towards Gurbaani as our primary archival source on Gurmat-inspired living.

As we reflected on how Begampura could be manifested today, and both the ways in which Ravidas Ji's imagining felt tangible and intangible, Ivraj offered, “is [Bhagat Ravidas Ji] also just trying to use the language in the description of his current politics? And does that mean that – is our end vision of Begampura something that is maybe not describable by even his language? And do we have to go further?”

How do we go further?" One can hear Ivraj's insistence to "go further" as reaching towards the intangibility or immateriality of Truth-seeking. This is not unlike Simarpreet Kaur's interpretation that, "Vaaheguru's Unseenness means that They can be seen in all; they don't have a solid form, so we can't say that someone is more worthy or deserving than another to follow the Path." In a sense, we grappled with the idea that, while intangibility is fruitful for pushing beyond material limits of worldly relationality, it also pushes against the tensions of **ੴ**-centric imagination, where one is attempting to rebuild relationality through a framework made illegible through material violences. In placing the Begampura shabad in conversation with the Anandpur Sahib Resolution – a list of demands to the Indian state made by Sikh politicians in 1973 – harnoor singh saw a parallel to the prison abolition and the movement to defund the police:

People are saying, okay, you don't want that? What do you want though? What are we going to do to replace it? And, kind of lending from the abolitionist movement, this freedom of imagination, like a new reality...it's really impossible to imagine Begampura existing, which is why I was really moved by, maybe this parallel of like, okay, let's define what the collective would look like, which I think this document does really well. Like what would a collective look like? What do we want our collective to be like? And then from that collective, can we imagine what a radical new future is?

Such radical new futures often seemed out of reach when manifesting imagination into reality – as Mehr Kaur said, "you would have to change the whole world." However, perhaps it is this thrusting into the imaginary of Oneness that is necessary to reckon the world with this framework of Truth.

We came to no solid conclusions, except that a Sikh place is never solely defined by its physical location; the immaterial is as crucial as the material. For Ravidas Ji to have realized ("ab mohi khoob") such a beautiful place speaks to the ideal possibilities and capacities of an imagination enraptured with Naam and Oneness. Gurbaani being an action-oriented poetic form requires that we not simply consider Begampura as the Disneyland of Gurbaani, but as a simultaneously tangible-aspirational dreamland that is shared with us through the temporal rupture that Gurbaani provides.

Seerat recalled that, while manifesting such an ideal place feels far from our particular histories and locations in the contemporary occupied land known as the United States, we are reminded constantly by Guru Sahib that such manifestations require daily practice, a discipline, a maryada. Simarpreet Kaur considered how Ravidas Ji's dream of Begampura rejects a capitalist scarcity mindset and instead turns us towards abundance. There is always enough to go around and everyone can benefit from such a system. This is the vision of what our community can be.

Bunga Sikh Virsa is a consciousness-raising group that first convened from April-October 2020, in large part for the facilitator's (Harleen Kaur) dissertation research. Original participants were Baani Kaur, harnoor singh, Ivraj, Jaskirat Singh, Mayher Kaur, Mehr Kaur, Ravjot, Seerat, Simrnjit Seerha, and Simarpreet Kaur. This contribution was developed out of recordings from those Zoom meetings and written reflections.



Sonny Dhoot

Reflections on Begumpura:

Meditations on Illegalization and Dispossession

Many have written on the radical futures found within Guru Ravidas' Begumpura (see for example P. 2021; Bharti; 2019; Ram 2011; Omvedt 2008). Writers have appraised how the concise poem offers one of the most important critiques of the Indian subcontinent's economic, political, social and geographical orderings, most notably through stratifications of caste, feudal (zamindar) and patriarchal systems. In support of these critiques, I consider how Begumpura anticipates a borderless (and stateless) place, which can be instructive for Sikhs today in prefiguring Begumpura. By prefiguring, I refer to the actions and practices engaged by Sikhs to bring about Begumpura. Taking up critiques of the border, I consider how the radical imaginings of Begumpura offer critiques of borders, states and citizenship, as institutions that commit both physical and psychic violences. I contend that the vision of Begumpura as a place of free movement ("agency to stroll just as they please") and free from institutions of citizenship ("no second or third status") is incompatible with our contemporary realities of borders and statism.

Though I focus on borders, I want to be clear that I recognize and support Begumpura as first and foremost a call for the eradication the subcontinent's (and now diaspora's) caste systems, which order life along varna, class, gender, sexual, race and citizenship stratifications. Thus, this piece is a meditation on extending the critiques offered by Guru Ravidas, to consider what a Sikh ethics grounded in Begumpura can offer on this conversation.

This, I argue, is especially important when Sikh belonging and inclusion often risks being predicated on revisionist exceptionalism that attempts to distinguish anti-Sikh violences (as unacceptable) from other forms of state violence against Indigenous peoples, other people of color and migrant peoples that have been figured as acceptable (Hasan et al. 2019; Upadhyay 2013; see also Thoabni 2013).

I begin by considering the work of Gloria Anzaldua's poetic words on the violence of borders and thinking through her metaphors for the US/Mexico border (una herida abierta). I consider how the 'no borders' movement where I currently reside, articulates a politics that connects with ideals that are articulated in Begumpura. I then complicate this discussion by considering how Sikhs' calls for Begumpura, including my support for an end to borders, must come about relationally with Indigenous demands for sovereignty. Here, I tread carefully so as not to fall into frameworks that have attempted to assert 'no borders' through a (neo)colonial praxis of Indigenous erasure, disappearance or removal (Dhamoon 2015). I forward that in order to build Begumpura, we must engage an ethics of relationality where Sikhs understand our relationship with multiple other groups inhabiting the same space.

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Before beginning, I must position myself on this topic. I understand and live Sikhi as an instructive and guiding philosophy on matters of injustice, resistance, and liberation, rather than a “religion” as with many Abrahamic faiths or something to advance my own, individual well-being or salvation. For better or worse, in my upbringing, the Guru Granth Sahib and the teaching of Gurus were always taught as a deeply political and rarely spiritual scripture. Second, while I write on Guru Ravidas’ work alongside work on the violences of border crossings, I make clear that I do so as a caste-privileged Sikh, who experiences relative freedom in cross-border movement and has lived on thefted lands across Turtle Island. Thus, I write on borders, not from an experiential position, but instead, as a (secular and politicized Sikh) scholar committed to the abolition of borders, citizenship, caste (brahminical, Sikh or otherwise) and settler (white brahmin, or otherwise) control of lands.

The Border Is a Wound

‘The U.S.-Mexican border es una herida abierta [is an open wound] where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture. Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants.’ (Anzaldua 3)

Borders have become naturalized as a part of our world despite borders forming increasingly disjunctive relations across what could be an otherwise interconnected world. Anzaldua’s (1987) work articulates this disjunction at the US/Mexico border as an open wound that “splits” lands and peoples, both literally and psychically (2-3). The border, as a hemorrhaging wound, provides an allegorical imagery for the actual murders, disappearances, human cagings, rapes and premature deaths produced by the formation of the US/Mexico border (Falcon 2006; Hernandez 2010, 2017). Anzaldua’s description encapsulates other border projects such as those cutting through Palestine and Kashmir and through detainment/deportation in order to maintain an “unnatural boundary,” “distinguish[ing] us from them.”

These divisions are further cemented through co-constitutive inclusionary and exclusionary institutions of citizenship and statehood that cut across racial, sexual, gendered, caste, (dis)ability and class lines (Alexander 2006; Walia 2021). For these reasons, Harsha Walia (2021) describes borders as “regimes.” They are more than fixed objects or spaces; they are ideological practices implanting themselves into the earth and ordering bodies into hierarchies of value and non/sub-human. Conversely, Guru Ravidas’ teachings reject structuration that seek to delineate differential categories of humanity: ‘illegal’, surplus, disposable, expendable or otherwise less human.

To make a direct connection between Begumpura and the demand for a world without borders, I want to briefly reflect on the undocumented moment based in the US, and their demand for undocumented people to 'live without fear'. Fear among undocumented people is most often articulated as a fear of deportation and separation, by those who are without or no longer with papers/citizenship or for those it could be discovered that they or their parents had at some point crossed the disjunctive "1950 mile-long open wound" (Anzaldua 2). The UndocuQueer movement elaborates and complicates this fear. UndocuQueer challenges "what it means to be LGBTQ and undocumented, the political visibility of undocuqueer immigrants destabilized false notions of collective identity within LGBTQ and immigrant rights frameworks" (Cisneros 2018, 1422). The frameworks challenge how national belonging is constructed through cisheteronormative conceptions of citizenship, which exacerbates circuits of fear for queer undocumented people (Cisneros and Gutierrez 2018; see also Lubheid 2002). Likewise, gendered and sexualized citizenship constitute border and state ideologies of belonging (Alexander 2006, 1991). Further, these circuits of terror continuously spread by creating additional fears of state violence for those who attempt to help undocumented people (No More Deaths n.d.). Experiences of fear with citizenship, borders and detention/deportation are not isolated to the U.S. but stretch across colonial and neocolonial geographies (see for example Ealom 2021; see also Alexander 2006). Looking beyond the naturalization of uneven geographies of movement today, Begumpura calls for free movement as an alternative and necessary re-imagining of space.

The conception of strolling/walking freely for Guru Ravidas was rooted in the reality that caste oppressed people were disallowed from free movement in the region at that time (Omvedt 2008, 18). Dalits are still today restricted in their movement within and between pinds and cities, often through fear of physical and sexual violence. Thus, fear and terror that exists in the relationship between the varna systems and unfreedom of movement (and freedom for caste privileged people) is very much entwined with the unfreedom of movement under ideologies of citizenship, states and borders. I contend, as Begumpura guarantees the ability to 'stroll and walk wherever and with whoever' in a place without fear, suffering or pain, then what it envisions is a place without borders, a place without a wound in the earth wrapped in barbed wire.

“I contend, as Begumpura guarantees the ability to ‘stroll and walk wherever and with whoever’ in a place without fear, suffering or pain, then what it envisions is a place without borders, a place without a wound in the earth wrapped in barbed wire.

Decolonizing Sikh Struggles

In her archival work on US immigration controls and human caging, Kelly Hernandez (2017) explains how state practices of detention and deportation against Chinese and Mexican immigrants are rooted in the project of white settler usurpation and control over Indigenous lands. I draw on this point to forward that how we as Sikhs talk about migration and free movement, in creating Begumpura, must grapple with addressing the settler colonial occupation of lands often as a precedent to this illegalization of migrant people's movement. In their call for decolonizing Sikh Studies, Katy Sian and Rita Dhamoon (2020) write, "Sikhs must consider our ongoing participation and complicity in Indigenous dispossession and settler sovereignty, whether it is intentional or not" (54). This consideration is not isolated to Turtle Island. I am reminded of the interlocking violence of anti-Muslim state violence in India, through the 2019 Citizenship 'Amendment' Act, simultaneous with anti-Indigenous violences against Adivasi peoples. Attending to multiple forms of violence, occurring simultaneously, and thus generally co-constitutive, is not new and is important across multiple contexts and issues. I am particularly concerned, however, about a Sikh envisioning of Begumpura as borderless at the risk of subverting Indigenous sovereignty claims; and, perhaps more dangerously, as a caste-privileged, educated South Asian scholar in the diaspora, engaging in queer and feminist politics, which could carelessly situate migrant justice in opposition to Indigenous sovereignty; which itself is a state strategy under neoliberalism (see Hong and Ferguson 2011; Puar 2017). Indigenous sovereignty requires ending systems of violence, even those non-Indigenous people might benefit from, which maintain multiple systems of dispossession and interconnected violences (for more in-depth discussions, see Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill 2013; Tuck and Yang 2012; Moreton-Robinson 2015).

A 2012 article, "A World Was Waiting to Be Born," published on the Sikh Research Institute website (and republished on SikhNet.com), evokes Begumpura in calling on Sikhs to confront divisions along the lines of class, ethnicity, race, gender, immigration and the environment (Singh 2012). The explication of "immigration" could be extended to the critiques of citizenship and borders, but notably absent are issues of caste and issues of land/sovereignty justice. It can be argued that other identities or oppressions are also absent (e.g., sexuality and disability); however, the absence of Indigenous sovereignty is stark in the concept of building Begumpura on Indigenous territories (both Sikh Research Institute locations are on Turtle Island) and omitting the issue of caste while evoking an anti-caste text. The largest population of diasporic Sikhs are in Canada, followed by the UK, US, and then Australia; thus, many Sikhs reside within white settler states, or in the case of India, a state seeking the elimination of Adivasi peoples from the lands. While I mainly agree with the spirit of the Sikh Research Institute's call to build Begumpura, I find it necessary to problematize any Sikh calls to build Begumpura that can collude with neo/colonial fantasies of states.

Returning to the call to decolonize Sikh studies, Sian and Dhamoon write, “when members of the Sikh diaspora make claims to the State for further inclusion and multiculturalism [...] we are assuming the legitimacy of the State to grant our claims [...]” (54). Here, the authors submit a political orientation on Sikh praxis, wherein, those who call for Begumpura cannot seek to bring it about through the state, including via liberal rights, which is predicated on a division between groups deemed deserving because of how they contribute to capitalism and settler statehood, or devalued because they fail to contribute to these projects (Indigenous/Adivasi people, refugees, disabled people, etc.). They go on to write, “when we build our Gurdwaras and Sikh schools on native land, we are naturalizing our property rights to settle on land that is unceded or ruled by disregarded treaty rights” (54). In extending the move to decolonize Sikh studies, and I would add Sikh politics, I want to end by briefly reflecting on transnational feminist calls for relationality in our various movements in response to the uneven effects of globalization on peoples and lands across capital, race, sexuality, gender, and caste.

To build Begumpura, we must evoke an ethics of relationality, rooted in what transnational feminist Jacqui Alexander (2006) calls “collective fluency in our particular histories” to become “fluent in each other’s struggles” (293). For me, becoming relational is to become fluent in the histories of conquest across North America including, but not limited to, understanding how white settler governments in Canada celebrate Sikhs as ‘good’ immigrants while claiming that Tamils fleeing ethnic cleansing are ‘bad’ migrants, knowing how unaddressed Jatt-dominance reproduces casteism in Sikh diasporas and langars, and grasping how to prefigure the end of borders which commit violence on the land and against all migrants and Indigenous nations. This model of justice, I suggest, is an itinerary to produce Begumpura, but not as a single, homogenous framework anchored in the borders of post-partition (or pre-partition) Punjab, nor anchored in one diasporic place (Canada or UK). For instance, there are over 8000 Sikhs across the Nordic countries. What does a Sikh responsibility look like to Sámi peoples and relationality to the colonization of Sápmi? The work to bring about Begumpura will be rooted in the local contexts for each Sikh, and simultaneously part of a larger, cross-border praxis.

I draw on this point to forward that how we as Sikhs talk about migration and free movement, in creating Begumpura, must grapple with addressing the settler colonial occupation of lands often as a precedent to this illegalization of migrant people’s movement.

Conclusion

Growing up, I often relegated political responsibility to the liberal state that ‘guaranteed rights’, which was the general understanding of older Sikhs. However, when I came to the realization that states are often implicated in the violence, particularly in the case of colonial and border violence, I understood that we (Sikhs) cannot offload our duties. Sikhi calls for Begumpura and justice must explicitly prefigure the end of borders as well as the restoration of Indigenous sovereignty. While the issues I have framed have largely to do with borders and Indigenous sovereignty, as interdependent issues, we must be prepared to grapple with how and if our Sikh’s calls for Begumpura are meant to bring about justice for multiply oppressed groups on a material level, and seriously consider what structures must necessarily be abolished to make Begumpura possible.

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Rita Kaur Dhamoon

A Place With No State

A Place with No State

Where hierarchy, property, caste, capital, gender, authoritarianism is disappeared by
Ardaas,

Where decisions are collectively consensus-based.

This is a place where bodies and minds are free, not imprisoned,

Free to dream in sangat

Free to be with, and in, Akal Purakh.

Practicing in this sacred state of being

Without borders,

Or surveillance

Or discipline and punish.

The divine in me that is in you that is in them,

in this anand

With the timeless and formless,

Doing seva

Living as Sant-Sipahi

Sharing through vand chakko

(Redistribution before Marx and Engels!).

Building loving communities

that are free to move

or stay,

In harmony with the soil,

rocks

sands

rains

minerals

For these relatives,

Kin who live in sangat

articulated by miripiri

with poetry,

in song and vibrations of all the worlds,

stars and moons,

In a place where spiritual and social liberation is not even necessary,
For everything is free.

This place where humans are in harmony with air

Water

Earth

Sky.

Dancing flying bulbuls

Singing simmal trees

Fragrant mangoes for all,

The prickles of castor plants embraced by sandalwood.

While kirat kimai produces blossoms on acacia trees,

And daddu's teach us ways to see beautiful lotuses,

Bamboos bend to Bani,

Where naam showers the divine in me and all that is

Connected,

Like saffron that is draped in the sweetness of Ikk Onkar.

Where all are nourished by kanaka and sarson,

Transformed

As palmyra is transformed when the words of Bani shower all life

And death,

Lavished in the sunlight of Guru

Transformed into mors and hans

By pyaar for Gurmat

Repeating ardaas for sarbat da Bhalla,

In chardi kala.



manmit singh

Arriving at Begumpura in the “Here and Now”:

Notes on a Politics of Death and Unbodiment

Historically preserved in the Guru Granth Sahib, the vision of Begumpura saw social and political revival because of Mangu Ram Mugowalia.¹ Mugowalia was a Punjabi Dalit revolutionary who migrated to what is now known as the United States, where he was heavily involved in the anti-colonial Ghadar Party situated in California fighting against British imperialism.² During his time in California, Mugowalia faced both racial discrimination from white settlers and caste discrimination from Ghadar Party members, composed largely of Punjabi Sikh jatts.³ Disillusioned by both the Ghadar Party and Sikhi's promise of freedom due to these experiences, Mugowalia returned to Punjab to establish the caste abolitionist Ad-Dharmi movement and faith that understood “real liberation [as] freedom from both white imperialism AND brahminism” and significantly elevated Guru Ravidas and his vision for Begumpura in the larger public discourse.⁴ I start this paper by evoking the visions and attached histories of Begumpura because they serve as key sites of rupture that exposes the intersections of brahminism, white settler and other colonialisms, and imperialism.

Tending to these ruptures is important as they ask me to question my relationship to Begumpura as a non-Black, non-Indigenous, and oppressor (jatt) caste person. They raise the question of where and how do I/we build a Begumpura when the soil is seeped in blood, tears, and sweat from ongoing histories of genocide, dispossession, slavery, rape, and exploitation in which I/we (as non-Black, non-Indigenous, and oppressor caste peoples) are both explicitly and implicitly implicated. Too often, futures are envisioned by non-Black, non-Indigenous, and oppressor caste peoples as sites of reconciliation and resolution. However, it is important to understand that settler and caste innocence do not exist and it is impossible to undo or resolve thousands of years of violences. Given the impossibility of reconciliation and resolution, where do we situate Begumpura, and how do we (specifically, non-Black, non-Indigenous, and oppressor caste Sikhs) negotiate our place in Begumpura?

“Too often, futures are envisioned by non-Black, non-Indigenous, and oppressor caste peoples as sites of reconciliation and resolution. However, it is important to understand that settler and caste innocence do not exist and it is impossible to undo or resolve thousands of years of violences.”

I hope to meditate further on this impossibility and irreconcilability, turning to Sikhi to argue that this impossibility and irreconcilability is a symptom of *dubidhaa* that defines our separation from Waheguru. The suffering induced from sitting in this place of impossibility and irreconcilability is generative in that fills us with *bairag*, and offers us a glimpse of Begumpura in the “here and now.” Sikhi teaches us to transverse this *dubidhaa* through investing in a politics of death and unbodiment, whereby we invest in Self annihilation through investing in the death of our *haumai* (ego).

It is through Self annihilation that we dispel *dubidhaa*, unite with the Divine, and arrive at Begumpura.⁵ Here, I must make clear that the politics of death and Self annihilation should not be reduced down to merely physical death. Instead, I am operating with Guru Sahib's reframing of death beyond physical death, under which the fear and centrality of physical death is deprioritized. Physical death is positioned as temporal death, a fact of life and merely the cyclical return of elements back to their origins from which the body is constituted. Instead, Guru Sahib teaches us to fear spiritual death, and work towards a "death freedom" through committing to a death of *haumai* (ego).⁶

To understand our separation from Begumpura, I borrow from José Esteban Muñoz's description of queerness. Muñoz describes queerness as that which is "not yet here." Muñoz writes that queerness is that which we can never touch, but can "feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality." Queerness is that which prompts us to "think and feel a then and there," it is a "longing" because "this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing." Queerness is, as Muñoz summarizes, "essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world." Borrowing from Muñoz's articulation, I'm sitting with how Begumpura represents this rejection of the "here and now" and an insistence on a "then and there" beyond the violences of overlapping and intersecting histories of ongoing violence and domination, including brahminism, anti-Blackness, anti-Indigeneity, Islamophobia, queerphobia, transphobia, capitalism, ableism, etc.

Underlying queerness—and the imagining of Begumpura—is a constant and inevitable state of pain, disappointment, and suffering, a result of constant uprooting from the "here and now" in promise and deep longing for a horizon that is impossible to reach. For non-Black, non-Indigenous, dominating caste Sikhs, the "here and now" is always marked with complicity in some form with brahminism, Islamophobia, anti-Blackness, and anti-Indigeneity, and the "then and there" is often read alongside a linear axis of the temporal whereby we imagine a Begumpura where our complicities are transcended. However, Sikhi troubles our relationship and claim to a "then and there." I argue that Sikhi introduces another axis--the axis of the spiritual--that runs parallel to the axis of the temporal, in an antagonistic and uncollapsible relationship, that can help us rethink the horizon in which we place futures as an illusion itself. Through rethinking a "then and there" outside of the illusionary temporal axis, and instead within the space of uprootedness and suffering that indexes the uncollapsible distance between the temporal and the spiritual, I argue that this liminal space can serve as the basis for an ethical and liberatory Sikh self and communal reflexive praxis. The rejection of the "here and now" marked by temporal and spiritual violence requires one's commitment to ending that temporal violence and building towards that "then and there" alongside the temporal axis, while simultaneously interrogating and constantly shedding attachment to the temporal "then and there," thereby living in a constant state of uprootedness, longing, and suffering for our true home that is outside the temporal and accessible only through constant death and Self annihilation.

“In other words, understanding both our temporal and spiritual relationship to a Begumpura brings us to the questions: what does it mean to build towards a Begumpura while knowing that we temporally may not exist there, and how can we arrive at a Begumpura in the “here and now” given that Begumpura isn’t confined to the temporal?”

Guru Hargobind Sahib’s offering of miri-piri helps articulate the relationship, and separation, of the temporal and spiritual. With “miri” meaning political ruler and signifying temporal or material power, and “piri” meaning saint and signifying spiritual power, Guru Sahibs articulated a philosophy that tied together the temporal and spiritual in an interconnected and antagonistic relationship. To better understand miri-piri, I take guidance from the labor of Harleen Kaur and prabhdeep singh kehal, who, in defining miri-piri and the essence of Sikhi, write:

We ground our reflection (ਵਿਚਾਰ) in a praxis of Miri-Piri (ਮੀਰੀ ਪੀਰੀ): a discipline of consciousness-refining meditation (ਮਿਭਾਅਸ) that cultivates worldly action (ਦੁਨਆਵੀ ਕਰਮ) for the realization of Naam (ਨਾਮ). Sikhi (ਸਿੱਖੀ) – as an embodied commitment to practicing Gurmat (ਗੁਰਮਤ) – enlightened a people. Sikhs (ਸਿੱਖ), practitioners and followers of Sikhi, were to be simultaneously rooted in challenging and abolishing structural practices of oppression, like caste and sati, while investing in the truest form of liberation through the experience of and union with Vaaheguru (ਵਾਹਗੁਰੂ).⁷

Sikhi understands both spiritual and political liberation to be interconnected, a realization of which requires constant effort in both the temporal and spiritual domain--in the form of constant meditation and reflection--that guides our actions and organizing in this temporal world.

In thinking with miri-piri, it is important to understand the antagonism between miri and piri that Sikhs must constantly negotiate, all in pursuit of realizing Naam. Rajbir Singh Judge analyzes that “in the Sikh tradition, the spiritual (piri) is intimately bound within the temporal (miri) as the Gurus denied their separation while recognizing they remained in antagonistic relation to each other.”⁸ Citing Kapur Singh, he notes that “the Guru does not assert that this perpetual dichotomy and antagonism of the Church and the State must be resolved, or even that it is capable of being resolved, by the suppression or subjugation of the one by the other.”⁹ Instead, “what we find then is not a reconciliation within a shared space or a firm grounding of sovereignty, but a tense space of conflict.”¹⁰ The spiritual and the temporal, in an antagonistic relationship, resist stability, but that uprootedness and constant contestation are at the root of Sikhi.

The irreconcilability of miri-piri can help us make sense of, and build our capacity to sit with the irreconcilability of complicities in the “here and now,” as miri-piri recognizes instability and irreconcilability as the generative site of conflict that moves us towards the realization of Naam. Navigating contradiction and uprootedness are placed at the heart of practicing Sikhi, through which irreconcilability can’t serve an immobilizing purpose, but instead is centered as

a site of action. Employing a miri-piri praxis to hold complicities, then, moves us away from an urge to resolve complicities, to an urge of constant reflection and action that seeks to make and remake sense of complicities without trying to do away with them and claim a space of settlement marked by caste or settler innocence. Thinking through miri-piri's relationship, one's individual complicities, or the lack thereof, is inseparable from communal and systemic complicities in violences, that intersect and contradict in multiple ways to bind us together in a web of accountability and responsibility to and for oneself, each other, and the Divine. Instead of trying to collapse antagonism, Sikhi accepts instability and irreconcilability as both a condition of temporal living, and the modality to practice spiritual living because irreconcilability is positioned as a site of wisdom and spiritual knowledge.

It is for this reason that the Guru Sahibs condemned the brahminical practice of sanyaas within which upper caste Hindus would renounce the temporal world and adopt a life in the forests removed from society in search of liberation. Guru Sahib's requirement to engage with the temporal to work towards liberation, and condemnation of practices that understand liberation removed from the violences of the "here and now," are practices of a miri-piri praxis that resist the urge to collapse or separate the political and spiritual. A miri-piri praxis then questions not only the ways that complicities in conquest and violence becomes means for our Self actualization, but interrogates how turning away from complicities also serves as a means for our Self actualization. Such an interrogation calls for a coming to terms and a reflexive engagement with complicities and irreconcilability as a means for Self annihilation in pursuit of the Divine.

Here, I must point out that acceptance of the irreconcilability of complicity is not an acceptance of complicity itself, or to become comfortable with violence. Instead, the acceptance of irreconcilability as terms of engagement evokes a sense of inescapable suffering that becomes the basis of action, where that suffering is another iteration of the suffering of separation from Waheguru—what Guru Sahib terms as bairag. Guru Sahib positions this bairag as a generative and liberatory feeling—that exposes the illusory nature of this temporal world and offers a glimpse into Begumpura on the spiritual axis. Positioning bairag as terms and basis for action, the miri-piri praxis is a militant commitment to political and spiritual liberation through a commitment to undoing oneself in servitude to political liberation as a means to cultivate spiritual liberation.

I am proposing for us to read this desire to undo ourselves as a glimpse into Begumpura itself. Such a desire to undo our very existence in deep pain of separation from our ultimate home with the Divine is a blessed moment—and a practice of Naam Simran itself. The bairag induced from sitting with impossibility and irreconcilability is itself a reminder of our separation from the Divine, a reminder that there is no place of innocence and comfort outside our spiritual belonging with the Divine, a reminder that our temporal investments are illusory and disposable. This bairag is a call to action—to spill outside the confines of our own bodies, relations, and investments, in pursuit of the Divine—a pursuit that is fulfilled through the death of our Self (haumai).

So much so that Guru Sahib positioned investment in death as a condition of practicing Sikhi, writing:

First, accept death, and give up any hope of life. Become the dirt of everyone's feet, and then, you may come to me. ||1||

Sikhi argues for a politics of death and unbodiment that embraces Self annihilation as central to the annihilation of the projects of caste, prison, and property. Guru Sahib calls for us to unfix all the ways that we have come to constitute and know the Self in this temporal world, which within an anti-Black, anti-Indigenous, Islamophobic, and brahminical order is through complicity in conquest and violence embodied in all our relations, modes of life, and ways of thought and knowing. Such a politics of death requires a commitment to undoing moh by destabilizing all the gridpoints that underpin one's existence—including the categories and relations of caste, race, gender, religion, etc. By doing so, Guru Sahib centralizes the place of grief and suffering—or bairag—and calls for an investment in our own death and unbodiment.

As I reflect on the lives of the ten Guru Sahibs, they engaged with, and constantly worked to unfix, these categories and the relations in which they are based. Guru Nanak Sahib's protest against caste-based and gender-based violence, for example, was not merely a call for solidarity and allyship with caste and gender oppressed peoples. Instead, Guru Sahib actively challenged their own sense of Self, and all the ways that their sense of Self is composed. In challenging caste, they let go of their own family, occupation, and any relation or entity that provided any sense of stability. As Gurbani shows, the Guru Sahib became a bride desperately awaiting and grieving her separation from Waheguru, and in doing so, continued to destabilize our inherited temporal understandings of gender. Guru Gobind Singh Sahib, in their fight for liberation, personally prepared their sons before sending them off to the battle, and without any hesitation, accepted the death of all their sons as Waheguru's hukam.

“In meditating on what is Sikhi, and what does it mean to be a Sikh, the word “Sikh” translates to a “learner” or a “student.” I am arguing that to be a Sikh is to learn how to die.

How can we learn how to die through turning to our Guru Sahibs, given that the very objective of a Sikh is to become Guru-like. The Guru Sahibs sacrificed everything dear to them, becoming traitors to their caste and gender, and not held back by any commitments to any categories or relations inscribed at birth. In meditating on what is Sikhi, and what does it mean to be a Sikh, the word “Sikh” translates to a “learner” or a “student.” I am arguing that to be a Sikh is to learn how to die. Because it is through death—specifically the death of the Self (haumai) that for non-Black, non-Indigenous, and dominating caste Sikhs is composed through complicity and violence—that we arrive at Begumpura.

Endnotes

1. Balbir Madhopuri, "Building Begumpura," Indian Express, September 8, 2019, <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/guru-ravidas-poems-punjabi-begumpura-society-5975930/>
2. Dalit History Month, "Mangu Ram Muggowalia and the Ad-Dharm Movement," Medium, April 2, 2017, <https://dalithistorymonth.medium.com/mangu-ram-muggowalia-and-the-ad-dharm-movement-b552d66f2222>.
3. Dalit History Month, "Mangu Ram Muggowalia."
4. Dalit History Month, "Mangu Ram Muggowalia"; Madhopuri, "Building Begumpura."
5. I am indebted to the scholarship of prabhdeep singh kehal, Rajbir Singh Judge, Jasdeep Singh Brar, and Karminder Singh whose work has allowed me to better understand Sikh concepts of dubidhaa, haumai, and bairag.
6. Sikhi-Vichar Forum, "Sikh Concepts Part 2 Death," YouTube, November 26, 2020, https://youtu.be/GdpMMT_f55o.
7. Harleen Kaur and prabhdeep singh kehal, "Sikhs as Implicated Subjects in the United States: A Reflective Essay (ਵਿਚਾਰ) on Gurmat-Based Interventions in the Movement for Black Lives," Sikh Research Journal 5, no. 2 (2020).
8. Rajbir Singh Judge, "Reform in fragments: Sovereignty, colonialism, and the Sikh tradition," Modern Asian Studies 56, no. 4 (2021): 1129.
9. Kapur Singh, "The Church and The State," in Pārāśaraprasna: An Enquiry into the Genesis and Unique Character of the Order of the Khalsa with an Exposition of the Sikh Tenets, (eds) Piar Singh and Madanjit Kaur (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1989), pp. 192–201; cited in Rajbir Singh Judge, "Reform in fragments."
10. Rajbir Singh Judge, "Reform in fragments," 1133–1134.

manmit singh (they/them), also known as sahiba, is a Sikh scholar-activist in the PhD program at University of British Columbia. Their investments are in their Guru Sahib's directive to be a sant sipahi, translating to "saint-soldier" or "sage-warrior." They aspire to be an ethical and grounded sant-sipahi committed to both spiritual and political liberation.

Armaan Singh Fuck the Binary

"Fuck The Binary" is a bilingual rap song that was released on Jun 24, 2022. This song is a collection of anger, and pain that I have to endure navigating this binary world. The concept of binary is chosen for us as normal, and all of our humanity that does not fit into these fixed identities is questioned, and mocked. Our Sikh community uses this colonial system in subtle violent ways- I was policed for how I walked, talked, and sat. I was trained to not be free in my own body. This poem is about owning our anger for the harm inflicted on us, and finding pride in being able to break the barriers of binary. My queerness is a reflection of my Queer Guru, and this song is bringing all of these moving pieces together. I hope this song inspires you to question the current state of our faith, to challenge it and then let the truth you find lead you home.

Love,
Armaan Singh



[Listen on Spotify](#)

Fuck The Binary

Rab ne liki meri taqdeer
Tod di main har ek zanzeer

Rab ne liki meri taqdeer
Tod di main har ek zanzeer

Koi kudi koi munda na
pyaar da koi gender ni
Na sharam na koi parda
Karna main jo dil kardaa
Jethe mere rab vada

Fuck the gender binary
Mere rules meri journey
Faltu ethe jag lada
Azad roohan ton darda

Kyun darda

Nal ling ne jana ni
Sach ton ute bana ni
Gender norms pinjre ne
Jag nu main manana ni
Daso rab da gender ki
Sach hona hun sensor ni

Sikhi pyaar da kisa c
Pyaar jo mainu dikhda ni

Aj di sikhi khula hate (today's sikhi is open hate)
Sadi life kehnde debate (my life they think is debate)
Calling me names, then they pray
Sikhi aient the hate you say
Get the fuck outta my way

Fuck the gender binary
 Mere rules meri journey
 Faltu ethe jag lada
 Azad roohan ton darda

Nanak said clear my friend
 Hate don't help in the end

Kudi munda farak rakhde
 Khud ni phir sikh dasde
 Dekho aj de halaat sade
 Kaum de rakhe garror karde
 Queer sikhs te launde ban
 Nanak da daso ki c stand
 Behthe taktha te jo aap
 Abuse de vehlde, kyun chup chaap

Bethe taktha te jo aap
 Gurugharan vi hunde paap
 Kadva sach jande taal
 Sikhi da aj hai bura haal
 Gay hona ena li gal
 Choti soch band dimaag

Fuck the gender binary
 Mere rules meri journey
 Faltu ethe jag lada
 Azad roohan ton darda

Rab ne liki meri taqdeer
 Tod di main har ek zanzeer

Nal ling ne jana ni
 Sach ton ute bana ni
 Gender norms pinjre ne
 Jag nu main manana ni
 Mere rab da gender ni
 Jhooth da oh inventor ni
 Mere rab da gender ni
 You can't fucking censor me



[Listen on Spotify.](#)

Armaan Singh is a Disabled TransMasculine Artist, Comedian and Survivor. Armaan uses his art to tell stories, break generational habits, and center survivorship. He believes his life's purpose is to leave the world better than he found it, and it is his heart that drives all his work.



Jagdeep Raina

Earrings of Patience





Sophia Kaur

Femme-inist Futures:

Examples from Sikh Praxis

Sometimes, I am in awe of how the stars align in the most beautiful way and you don't really understand how or why things happen the way they do until you notice the brief moment of synchronicity. When editing this essay for the third time to try and bring disparate ideas together in such a way that is readily coherent without having to fully introduce each topic and showcase the string that ties it all together, I was becoming a bit despairing. It just seemed nearly impossible to build all the concepts in a single essay for a zine for everyone who reads this with varying knowledges. Luckily, on Tuesday 2 May, 2023—a day after I submitted further clarifying edits to prabhdeep and manmit—Soror Mystica, a podcast that I listen to which unpacks modern spirituality through feminist mysticism, beautifully illuminated a missing piece from a secondary source. In this episode, Mariana, cites the Enlightenment as how we got from the primal structure of the Moon to “lunacy and women are crazy because they have periods.”¹ Cristina tells us that she happened to come across an out of print book while at the library researching for her master's thesis, and has not been able to find it since. But she was able to relay a quote from the book written by historian Phyllis Mack² which provides a summary of the Enlightenment perspective on the Sun and Moon, and femininity and masculinity stating:

‘Because a woman menstruated, her nature was viewed as similar to that of the Moon and the tides which shared her monthly cycle. And since the Moon shone only the cold and reflective light of the Sun, so women by nature were cold, moist, and passive. They could also be sinister just as the Moon was linked to night and mystery; so women had a special affinity with the forces of malevolence that lived in darkness. Men, on the other hand, were thought to be like the Sun which radiates life-giving energy. They were clear-headed, rational, hot, and dry.’

This summary shows the ways the cosmos has been gendered, and how femininity and masculinity goes beyond what is seen. The Moon, as Cristina poignantly states, has negative connotations placed on it because it is mysterious and cannot be understood. The connection between what was then known as ‘energies’, what was known as energies prior to the Enlightenment in various cultural contexts (e.g. yin and yang, feminine and masculine energies in traditional Chinese medicine that pre-dates the Enlightenment, and did not denigrate femininity—instead upholding the importance of both parts to create the whole.³ Similarly, in Sikh literature, women are centred as the connective tissue between parts).⁴

Knowing this connection between femininity and the Enlightenment, I'd also like to bring your attention to even further disparate but connected ideas between how the Enlightenment led to colonisation,⁵ how the Enlightenment also led to the formations of States with centralised power under the guise of European peacemakers,⁶ and that the colonial encounter that shaped our current paradigm pre-dates the Enlightenment altogether.⁷⁸ What was peace for one was domination for others.

And yet, the wars continue to seem endless, and we continue to find various ways that the State fails us. We continue to see how State violence is patriarchal violence—and is connected to domestic and intimate partner violence. That is, the very violence the State uses for its domination is the same violence that disproportionately affects women and femmes⁹ because of its inability to provide care no matter how many laws are passed as overcorrections to its own failures. And when woman and femmes are harmed at the hands of the men in their lives, they are being harmed by State violence too. Said another way, we enact systems of oppression to harm people—be it knowingly or not—we are doing so from a place of being cogs in the machine of the State apparatus.

“That is, the very violence the State uses for its domination is the same violence that disproportionately affects women and femmes because of its inability to provide care no matter how many laws are passed as overcorrections to its own failures.”

Time and time again, we see the failure of the State¹⁰ in being able to respond to crisis, especially as it colludes with capitalism to perpetuate its own chronic insecurity in order to justify its existence. We see this through the ongoing (mis)handling of the pandemic that led to a series of lockdowns and deaths that are enacted through rash policymaking by politicians through the State apparatus, to now just leaving disabled and vulnerable people by the wayside as those who dominate wish to “open society back up”. It’s important to note here that it is seductive to think that States are different simply because different people inhabit them. But, we can see an overarching trend across the globe of who and/or what is the recipient of State violence. As Sylvia Wynter states, “if we see this category of the damnés that is internal to (and interned within) the prison system of the United States as the analog form of a global archipelago, constituted by the Third- and Fourth-World peoples of the so-called ‘underdeveloped’ areas of the world...a systemic pattern emerges”.¹¹ States have been created by people, by us, to dismember the land and water as we have been dismembered.

If we continue in this way, we continue to uphold the illusion of the State and its necessity.

Similarly, we continue the illusion of disconnection, despite being dis-connected. That is, to be simultaneously separated and connected at once, with no real ability to distinguish and differentiate between the two, and instead only able to engage in relation to and with. We can only embrace the liminal space that we are in, the in-between space between here and there, between you and me. Similarly, Katy Pal Sian and Rita Kaur Dhamoon ask us to decolonize Sikh Studies “by dwelling at feminist intersections of postcolonial studies, decolonial studies, and decolonization studies...to inhabit an explicit political orientation of insurrection and subversion”¹². In particular, they highlight eight points of action: “gendering Sikh Studies; de-policing intimate desire and the diversity of relationships; disrupting Eurocentric knowledge production; de-territorializing diasporas; challenging caste politics; disrupting Islamophobia; undoing our roles in contemporary colonialisms; and fostering care and responsibility for the nonhuman world”¹³. Though, I did not read either of

these articles when I originally wrote this piece, I feel quite lucky in finding both Wynter's, and Sian and Dhamoon's article since I have been integrating these teaching through being in conversations with those who are feminized in various ways and profoundly aware of it, as well as reclaiming what I believe has been lost through the colonial encounter, and still feeling quite isolated while doing so. Finding these articles—or having them find me—reminded me of the community that has and is being built, waiting for me to join it if I choose. A community that does not necessitate the reliance on colonial systems to support itself, and instead exists outside of colonial approaches and systems wherever it can, wherever it is possible, and for however long it can survive. And when it is found and consumed, it starts (or continues) the process until it outlives the colonial system itself. For this reason, as you read on, I may jump between Punjab and the diaspora. I may even jump through time.¹⁴ But, as a non-linear thinker thanks to my particular neurodivergence,¹⁵ the importance isn't the time or the territory in which these related incidences happen—it's the relation between these instances itself that I am highlighting in this essay. This isn't to strip the unique, nuanced context that occurs within specific time and space which are important in their own right. Instead, it is to disrupt the dismemberment perpetuated by the temporal framework instituted by the colonial encounter to highlight the pluriversal threads across time and space of the feminized. If you, as the reader, make further connections that I haven't explicitly named here, or if I manage to leave you in the dark as I jump across my neurons, I encourage you to explore those connections and/or darkness in relation to and with my essay here. To me, this is the feminized way. I am not simply writing knowledge to be consumed. I am writing here, for you, for us, to relate. I hope you take me up on this offer. Or, as Cristina had said on her podcast after I wrote this,

'...When we're speaking of the feminine in this space, especially with the conversation of the Moon. it's not so much about—it really has nothing to do with the gendered experience at all.¹⁶ It's completely about this tension between rationality, consciousness, understanding everything, knowing what to do with it. intellectual motivation all the time versus moving in rhythm with things, and taking time to process, and not understanding. And letting the not-understanding actually be the thing that offers the solution. And being in a more intuitive space with ourselves, and the world, and nature, and that lunar energy which is so much more present, and receptive, and fertile.'¹⁷

It is on the basis of these various understandings that I write this essay. Most important to me, is to highlight the connections between the patriarchal State, its violence, and Sikhi to disrupt the trajectory of our current paradigm that does not seem to overtly question anti-femininity and its foothold in the global landscape that we navigate. I attempt to do that here, and ask that rather than engaging with further consumption, there is a commitment to push up against the liminal space between where my words end and where your own knowledge starts—because there is most certainly overlap and we just need to find where it is to open up opportunities of further disruptions.

In this vein, while States maintain their borders, we can see how marginalized people from both sides of the hemisphere fill the gap across borders. Sometimes this means solidarity within and for a community in the diaspora and the homeland. Other times, this means internationalists reaching across borders to provide support and solidarity in material ways like raising the voices of those who go unheard or providing supplies. Forms of care always come to the forefront, and generally led by feminized people for feminized people—who are not always femmes.

According to the Oxford Language dictionary, *Femme*, a French word meaning 'woman', primarily means "a lesbian whose appearance and behavior are seen as traditionally feminine." The question then becomes, when we think of 'traditionally feminine', what behaviors or actions do we assign 'feminine' to? And does this limit our understanding of femme to only reify the very same binary that disproportionately oppresses Black [and Dalit] transgender folks who experience further marginalizations like caste, class, ethno-religion, and so on? By centering a power analysis and refusing to maintain the ways we have been dismembered, even metaphorically, after the colonial encounter^{18,19,20} we can start the journey to understanding that everything is constantly in relationship with each other.

In fact, if we consider the center of what we deem 'feminine', we realize that care and any form of care work has been feminized. This includes care for the land and water, care for our disabled kin, care for each other. By shifting our understanding of what it means to be feminine, we can understand that being gendered as a woman does not just feminize women, but also feminizes men who are marginalized under patriarchy in various ways. In fact, anti-femininity is directly connected to heterosexuality²¹—where men are perceived to be more feminine because they are taking on care work or feminised roles, they are compensating by asserting the importance of heterosexuality. Cis-men who engage with feminised actions (like care work) are somehow seen as less-masculine. By feminising women – thereby saying women can only ever be feminine and never masculine – men are then having to also contend with patriarchal violence and make themselves legible to patriarchy by creating distance from femininity. This has the effect of disproportionately affecting women and femmes.

There's hardly ever room for anyone to be both under this system as it is always in constant negotiation with the system, and men's proximity to rigid masculinity (and their performance of) further oppresses and exerts violence onto those who are rigidly feminised. The system projects and replicates these norms over and over again despite the agency we have to signal otherness by engaging with femininity—including the supposed irrationality of insurgency²² while simultaneously denigrating it. Femininity is demonised due to patriarchal violence, so it is only ever negative –for both men and women (and any non-human entity, being, kin e.g. land needing to be 'dominated' instead of 'in relationship with'; or waterways needing to be controlled instead of in relationship with –especially when you consider the pronouns we choose for land, water, cars, boats, etc).

In this vein, Johanna Hedva said it best in their essay titled 'Sick Woman Theory', which I quote at length:

'To take the term 'woman' as the subject-position of this work is a strategic, all-encompassing embrace and dedication to the particular, rather than the universal. Though the identity of 'woman' has erased and excluded many (especially women of color and trans/nonbinary/genderfluid people), I choose to use it because it still represents the un-cared for, the secondary, the oppressed, the non-, the un-, the less-than. . is an identity and body that can belong to anyone denied the privileged existence—or the cruelly optimistic promise of such an existence—of the white, straight, healthy, neurotypical, upper and middle-class, cis- and able-bodied man who makes his home in a wealthy country. whose importance and care dominates that society, at the expense of everyone else. The Sick Woman is anyone who does not have this guarantee of care. The Sick Woman is told that, to this society, her care, even her survival, does not matter.'

This visible binary of wo/man includes the marginalization, feminization, and erasure of the invisibilized transgender people who do not fit into this oppressive binary. As Hedva poignantly states, 'the Sick Woman is anyone who does not have this guarantee of care.' It cannot be overstated that women and femmes disproportionately experience patriarchal violence, which is bound up with state violence.^{23, 24, 25} As Julieta Paredes has contended, "gender oppression did not only begin with the Spanish colonizers...it also had its own version in pre-colonial societies and cultures. When the Spanish arrived both visions came together, to the misfortune of we women."²⁶ Similarly, we can quote Guru Nanak's own recognition of the patriarchal violence women endured prior to the colonial invasion of the Indian subcontinent by Portugal in 1505. Femme, ultimately, is that which we have long rejected, but which we are so empty without. Femme is the traits that we suppress to make ourselves legible as worthy to a patriarchal society. Femme is the unseen, the unknown, the moon, the mystery. Femme is what we collapse into when we can no longer be productive, when we can no longer 'grind' for capitalism (also known as 'burn out'). We were born in darkness; the darkness of the womb, the water of our caregiver holding us safe as they nourish us with blood, and our ancestors' blood, all the way back until we can't even remember—though our bones do.

Femme is the absurdity of the world that we perpetually try to control thinking that by controlling and suppressing it, it will bring us meaning and happiness.²⁷ As Mignolo contends,

'Dispensable women invented by Human/Man were witches; necessary women were wives whose function was to secure the regeneration of the species. The difference between the ideas of women and witch lay in the behaviour Man attributed to them: the former complaisant, the latter disobedient. In the New World, however, neither Indian women nor African women belonged in the same cosmology as European women. Indian and African women were not properly considered women by Christian men, so that the women versus witches opposition that applied in Europe did not pertain in the New World: Indian and African females could be witches, but they could never be women.'^{28, 29}

Femme is what has been secured, tamed, cut down. Femme is all that is policed. It is the fruit trees that are kept from the public domain so we cannot freely feed ourselves. It is the food we share, the care we give and receive to nourish life. It is the ways we embody reciprocity, the way we push for borders to ebb and flow like the waters that Man has enforced submission onto. It is the darkness of our skin as we bask in the masculine Sun—the balance of dark and light, feminine and masculine. Femme has been genocided against and rendered untouchable, for fear that if those in power were to look into the faces of the darkest, untameable, wild one of us, something would awaken in them that would bring the whole world that they built down to a screeching, crashing, burning, halt. It would make it crumble into darkness. And who isn't made to fear the dark? The darkest-skinned amongst us across ethnicities and borders knows what it means to be so unequivocally feared, that they are rendered non-human. To care for them would mean to embrace the feminine; and in a world cultivated by patriarchal violence, that cannot happen.

When the overwhelming global population is feminized in various ways under white supremacist patriarchy that necessitates fascistic solutions, another world persists simultaneously as a reminder of the world that once was, and continues to be. Like flowers that grow in the cracks of the cemented roads, these lifeways are a

constant reminder of the hopeful futures we can build together. In this way, we can have a new understanding of those who are needing care especially when the State renders them acutely insecure and vulnerable. We can understand care as something that is necessary, something that is not just a response to the Statist ways of being, but something that is intrinsic to our lifeways; to our teachings that resist the patriarchal violence of being.

For me, as a person who is constantly (re)connecting to Sikhi, I have seen the many ways that we continue to care for each other in the only way we know how—in the way that Guru Nanak intended. In the same way he was taught by his own sister who provided care for him and his family—her family— while he was traveling across the northeastern hemisphere, gradually being known as a Guru. If it were not for Bebe Nanakiji, Guru Nanak would not have been able to travel far and wide because he would have had to stay home and rear his children.³⁰ When he was an adolescent, he would not have been able to explore his thoughts and radicalism that later grew into Sikhi. Really, we talk about Bibiji as Guru Nanak’s biggest supporter—as if she wasn’t also, simultaneously, his teacher. We forget that she is both a Gursikh and the one who nurtured Guru Nanakiji. To be clear, Bebe Nanakiji is both the teacher and the student. As such, Guru Nanakiji is both the student and the teacher. Yet, we’ve relegated Guruji to only the teacher, and Bebe Nanakiji to only the student. We give into the patriarchal ideal that minimizes, erases, and dismembers her care work from something sacred and radical, to something that was only done in service to Guruji. We’ve constructed and perpetuated the idea that Guruji could only ever give knowledge, and Bebe Nanakiji could only ever receive knowledge. This act of ours is the legacy of patriarchy, caste, and the violence of the colonial encounter.

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We don’t need to travel back in time to see these practices, however. We can see them in just the past couple of years alone. As Sikhs know, and it may be news for those who aren’t aware of Sikhs, we are known for our “free food”. Langar³¹ can be found wherever Sikhs go, from gurdwara³² to the streets of Delhi while everyone protests. But in a world where food is incredibly politicized for centuries, our seva³³ goes much deeper than that, rooted in Guru’s hukam of vand ke chakna.³⁴ It is the intrinsic way that we know how to live, to continuously provide the means that we have with others so we can share in resources with no one being left without. This care work is something Guru Nanak witnessed his sister provide for him, through the sheer love she had for him. It was something sacred, something only a feminized person could provide—because our experiences as feminized people are rooted in the invisibilized work and foundation we create for life to take place.

We see the legacy of Bibiji’s care work in how we provide for and fill the cracks in the institutions to nurture lives. During the height of the pandemic, Sikhs were praised in “keeping the hungry fed” from across the so-called U.S.³⁵ to the so-called United Kingdom.³⁶ The State did not hesitate in orienting Sikhs as a model minority that so graciously fed the very same people that the State could not provide for—and in this way, depoliticized

the very act of doing so for the State's own purpose. However, while the State can orient our seva as a service to the State, we also know that providing food is subversive since it does not rely on centralized power to do so. It is a reminder that we are all we have, and that without each other and sharing in these resources, we are leaving ourselves to the mercy of a violent institution that utilizes centralized power: the State. While providing "free food" is all the external world sees, it is deep care work that goes straight back to Bibiji and all she provided. It's washing the dishes, cleaning, serving the food—all of these individual sacred acts make up the incredibly, deeply politicized sacred whole. It is making sure that bellies are full, that people are nourished, that they are cared for and held, as a community that picks up all of the small pieces along the way. Langar is meant to be a place that does not embody systemic distinctions that leave people othered. Everyone's contributions are just as important as the next person's. This is the foundation our practice is built upon.³⁷

While Sikhs filled this crack in the western hemisphere, Sikhs in their homeland set up what's now being called the "oxygen langar". With the failing infrastructure, the State was unable to provide care for people due to the sheer volume of those who were in need. A gurdwara, again, became and occupied a space where it was a place of refuge for people to be able to breathe—or at least ease their difficulty breathing while they waited, hoped, prayed for their families to find an available bed in a hospital. To be clear, langar does not have to be positioned and boundaried within a gurdwara—langar knows no boundaries, it can be deterritorialized. But, a territorialized gurdwara, a site that is specifically a Sikh space, is the tether that connects us from one place to another. People

in the area came together to orchestrate the level of care that was needed. People sourced oxygen cylinders, others helped move them, and others took care of patients—coming together for the common cause of caring for one another. In this way, Bibiji's care work travels with us. It, too, is not territorialized to a single time or space. It is feminized in the most subversive way, and finds itself being replicated again and again as we struggle against the State.

Before the pandemic, anyone could come to a gurdwara and eat when they were hungry, or even if they weren't, it was still a place for people to find refuge of any kind. Through the pandemic, we were able to witness how quickly Sikhs can mobilize in times of need, giving *tyar bar tyar*³⁸ a multidimensional meaning. We usually understand this only in the very visible way of armed defense, but being ready to fill the gap that is exacerbated in a crisis through care work is just as important. Unfortunately, focusing on the masculinized notion of *tyar bar tyar* only further invisibilized the subversive, yet foundational, care work that Bibiji provided to Guruji. Due to the feminized nature of care work, we minimize and invisibilize the sacred and subversive act of embodying care in a world that prioritizes violence. The way we love every soul that crosses our paths by filling the crack that systems have left behind is the small glimmers of hope we can find and cling to in the times of darkness.

To me, though, the tragedy is that while we provide and fill the gaps in a way that is of service to the State—where the State can attempt to co-opt and depoliticize such a sacred action—when we use these same mechanisms to inoculate ourselves from the full depravity of State violence, it invites the ire of the fascist regime along with those who still believe in statist politics. This is not to imply that simply because Sikhs engage in seva, that means that they

should get something in return, as mentioned that's not seva at all. It does not mean that Sikhs are owed communal support, love, or community building. Instead, the engagement by Sikhs is a dedication to the reciprocity between and amongst individuals and communities. For Bibiji, it was to create the foundation for Guruji to reject the *janeu*—without Bibiji, Guruji would not have been able to continue his work. Guruji recognized how deeply connected his work was to Bibiji's care work, and the inability to separate one from the other—to know where one started and the other ended. And in reciprocity, he honored that importance by further subverting the normalized institutions that sought to uphold the dismemberment of our lifeways, our communities, ways of being and living. The tragedy lies in the fact that when people can blatantly see that a State cannot provide for all the people within its borders, they still reason that maybe if the State is fixed in some way, that it should be able to. Somehow, Sikhs still find themselves begging and pleading with those who have privilege and/or power to give communal support—instead of the silent understanding that the reciprocity will not be answered. This is only magnified for dark-skinned Sikhs and those who are further marginalized by caste, sex, gender, and so on. But, the State is in constant, ongoing collusion with capitalism which necessitates the prioritizing of only those the State deems worthy of existing.

Despite filling the gap in one place within one major event, another gap emerged over the height of the pandemic: the farmer's protest in Punjab. In September 2020, three farm acts were passed in the Indian Parliament where it absolved the State of the responsibility to ensure fair prices for farmers, citing that by "cutting out the middleman" (read: the State), farmer's could deal with big corporations directly.³⁹ Quite literally, where the State could provide some form of security in a world that has increasing food (in)security,⁴⁰ the State all but overtly stated that it wanted to wash its hands of the same responsibility the Enlightenment promised it would take on—only showcasing the perpetual failures of it.⁴¹

In response, unions began to hold protests that were mostly in Punjab and Haryana. While the faces of the farmers were visibly Sikhs, others (Sikhs included) would ask why this was turning into a "Sikh issue".⁴² But, for many Sikhs, farming was more than just our way of life.⁴³ It was a sacred act, a connection with other beings that nourish us after we nourish it by tilling the soil, planting it into the ground, watering it with the sweat of our brow, and then sharing the fruits of this labor. Caring for the land, under state patriarchal violence, was and is a feminized act. Further, with Punjab being known as the "bread basket of India", being a farmer is tied up in what it means to be a Sikh⁴⁴--and for some, dating back even farther than Sikhi itself.⁴⁵ The care work of Bibiji extends beyond humanized individuals to span across generations, species, and nonhuman kin. So, people with all variations of beliefs with regards to the State attempted to work together to begin a movement where tens of thousands of farmers marched towards Delhi.⁴⁶ Alongside images of farmers being brutalized, it was at the borders of the city that we really saw Bibiji's practices flow into the cracks like water—filling each gap and rounding out the sharpness of the rocks. These protests sparked protests around the world in solidarity with the farmers, from the Central Valley in California, to Southall, United Kingdom, Sikhs held demonstrations to signal back to the motherland—the land that birthed us all—that She was not alone.

While some farmers were setting up camps at the protest sites, others were setting up places to provide langar. Blankets and warm clothing were distributed to keep farmers warm, Sikh academics organized

learning spaces for the farmers in both the diaspora and in Punjab, both young and old, to read, debate, and discuss together; as well as creating a makeshift school for nearby children who did not have access to government-run schools due to classes going virtual because of the pandemic. Various health centers were also set up, and run by Punjabi volunteers. Finding ways to provide care is intrinsic to the work that feminized people do to fill the gap that the fascistic masculinized violent structures create. Yet, they are the ones who are rendered invisible. We find Bibiji over and over again in our practices and how we fill the void left behind, and yet Bibiji is not referred to as anything other than a receiver when we recall her. Despite her acknowledged central role by Guruji, we have perpetuated the practice of invisibilizing the feminized role that she occupied. The violence is in the invisibilization of the feminized role and its importance; of needing, receiving, and giving care and its subversion to the casteist, patriarchal, colonial ways we have inherited over centuries.

To make it clear, women and feminized people were at these protest sites. But their work was, and is, so undervalued that the Chief Justice of India encouraged lawyers to implore feminized people—the elderly and the women, and those who were also Dalits^{47,48}—to leave the protest sites suggesting that women were just care workers “providing cooking and cleaning services at these sites”. Stripping women of their farmer identity, the State does what it does best: flatten someone’s identity, collapsing it, dismembering it, and desanctifying the complex nature of what it means to live and provide life. To provide the foundation upon which men, even feminized men, can be seen as protesting, be seen as farmers, be seen as agitators that also do feminized care work, femmes are invisibilized and rendered silent. Despite the fact that femmes are also on the field toiling and stewarding the land, they are invisibilized as farmers and relegated as mothers, sisters, aunts, and so on. Their importance, their role, their resistance, even their losses, are completely written out of the story entirely. But without them, feminized men would not fully know what embodying care looks like. The same way that Bibiji provided the foundation for Guru Nanak, Sikh femmes provide the foundation for cis-male Singhs (and the world) today.

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We tend to strip femmes, in particular, of their complex natures to suit our own needs, especially when it gives us some sense of pride—something to fuel our own egos. Femmes, under the global patriarchy, are deemed worthy only by their utility to the one who dismembers. During these protests, we can see the dismembering of identity by those that provide care in Nodeep Kaur’s contribution. As a Sikh, she also experiences casteism living in a brahmanical society that enforces assimilation (either by State force or by the invisibilized violence of the caste hierarchy). Yet, when she spoke about the experiences of Dalits⁴⁹ alongside raising the voices of farmers, her identity quickly became a free for all. To be clear, the critique I’m making here, in an ironic turn of events, is not about Nodeep’s own understanding of her identity. But about how we, the collective ‘we’, dissect Nodeep’s identity for ourselves—showcasing how a feminized person in multiple ways through the prism of various identities like caste, ethnoreligion, class, and so on, cannot define herself in a way that remains intact. Instead, it is constantly up for discussion, for dismemberment, to suit the narrative for those feminized by the

State, but still push against that feminization to reach for the promise of centralized power—which the State would never hand over. To some she was only Dalit and reduced her to her caste experience, to others she was only Sikh as if her caste experience had no influence over her connection to Sikhi.⁵⁰ Either way, to the State, she was a threat. While people perpetuated the violence of the State by dismembering Nodeep's identity for themselves, she was soon jailed and brutalized.⁵¹ But even in being jailed, her care work knew no bounds despite the overt patriarchal violence she endured by individuals who represented the State.⁵² She requested her sister Rajveer Kaur to bring clothes, and cups to the inmates she was in jail with, and arrange lawyers for each of those inmates as well.

This is the spirit of femmes. While her physical body was being brutalized by the State, and her identity brutalized by her peers, she continued to provide seva where she could.

In reality, we are lucky to know of Nodeep's seva. In a perfect world, in a utopian world, we wouldn't need to ever hear of Nodeep's seva because we would see—literally and figuratively—all the Nodeep's around the world in their complexity, and all they provide for us. The world would no longer be given broken promises of health, or "good times"; but instead a promise of commitment to one another, to keep growing, and changing—together. A commitment to nurture life. Rather than being invisibilized, care would be seen as the normal thing to do, the only thing to do.

“For Bibiji, it was to create the foundation for Guruji to reject the janeu—without Bibiji, Guruji would not have been able to continue his work. Guruji recognized how deeply connected his work was to Bibiji's care work, and the inability to separate one from the other—to know where one started and the other ended. And in reciprocity, he honored that importance by further subverting the normalized institutions that sought to uphold the dismemberment of our lifeways, our communities, ways of being and living.”

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9. 'Femme' should not be considered synonymous with 'women' for this essay. 'Women' includes transwomen and all those who are sexed as women, and 'femmes' include all those whose gender expression is feminine and who are gendered as feminine.
10. According to the Oxford Languages dictionary, 'State' is defined as "a nation or territory considered as an organised political community under one government." It is being used in this essay in the same way. Nation-states across the globe are struggled against by various marginalised groups across various political standpoints—some emancipatory with the goal being to dismantle it, and some wishing to seize the centralised power. Either way, there are various examples of the ways in which the State, as an entity made alive being developed by the 'buy-in' of the many, but run by the few, fails in providing the safety and security it promises to those most marginalised amongst us. As with all things, complete separation between individuals, communities, and ultimately the State, is not possible. The State is alive because we are alive and give it life. It evolves as we evolve, and it will live as long as we continue to believe it can. Similarly, while each State has its own unique history, the trends of how State violence manifests remain the same: those who can be placed in closer proximity to Blackness are marginalized, while those placed in closer proximity to whiteness maintain their inherited hold on centralised power. Humans talk through the State through understandings of 'National Security', in whatever form that manifests (including food security, climate security, and so on). We look to the State to provide us rights, even though it's people who sign them into law, and it's people who vote for the politicians in the first instance. It's important to understand that our relationship with States is the one that we have created and made real, and will continue as long as we continue to animate it. In short, we are all collectively, and individually, Dr. Frankenstein. And the State is our monster—the disembodied, abstract being. If we were only to understand the State as only a disembodied concept, we lose the nuance of our both the co-dependent relationship and struggle against the State. It is always both, and is asserted as such here.
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14. Hunfeld, K. (2022). The coloniality of time in the global justice debate: de-centring Western linear temporality. *Journal of Global Ethics*, 18(1), 100–117. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449626.2022.2052151>

15. About. (n.d.). The Octopus Movement. <https://www.theoctopusmovement.org/manifesto>

16. Integrating Cirstina's analysis, I'd push further to say that the gendered experience comes out of this tension as this tension becomes gendered and placed onto people. This connection between the micro and the macro becomes perpetually denied through the disconnected and disparate understandings of how this tension becomes gendered and placed onto beings. For instance, it can be argued that the State itself cannot engender gendered norms because it is an inanimate, amorphous object. Doing so, in my view, distorts the ways the State had been created concurrently with institutionalised notions of what it means to be feminine, and therefore a 'woman', and how to control that femininity, that 'womanhood'. This 'womanhood' goes beyond the normalised understanding of a binary biology of sex characteristics, so too must our understanding of femininity—and therefore our understanding of the patriarchal system that seeks to dominate it. Doing this allows us to see the bigger picture of how the patriarchal institution affects all those who survive under it, and how it affects women and femmes (note: to be clear 'femmes' is not a synonym for 'women') disproportionately so. It gives us a bigger picture of the myriad of ways women and femmes are dominated on the material plane, as well as the metaphysical, mental, and emotional plane—and how this occurs on every level. For those who articulate this through systems theory, it can be regarded as happening through interpersonal actions (micro), spiritual and community institutionalisation (mezzo), and Statist paradigms (macro).

17. Louis, M & Farella, C. (Hosts). (2023, May 2). The Symbol of the Moon (No. 10) [Audio podcast episode]. In *Soror Mystica*. Spotify. <https://open.spotify.com/episode/6FgY9hVSm3F7jTQYIHRTi?si=bf148d8bb7a54684>

18. Most scholars take the period of the Enlightenment from late 17th century to the end of the 18th century as the period of colonialism, while others place it in 1492 with the European invasion of what is currently known as Latin American and the Caribbean. I take up the decolonial theory's viewpoint in this essay as I am convinced by scholars and indigenous peoples that this was the catalyst to our current paradigm. This is nuanced by the fact that each area will have its own 'start date' of the explicit, physical colonial encounter, but that the world-system, as Wallerstein (1976) called it, was imposed by Europe after the invasion of so-called Latin America.

19. Wallerstein, I. (1976). *The modern world-system: Capitalist agriculture and the origins of the European world-economy in the Sixteenth Century*. New York, NY: Academic Press.

20. Ford, Derek R. (ed.) (2019). *Keywords in Radical Philosophy and Education: Common Concepts for Contemporary Movements*. Boston: Brill.

21. Falomir-Pichastor, J.M., Berent, J. & Anderson, J. Perceived Men's Feminization and Attitudes Toward Homosexuality: Heterosexual Men's Reactions to the Decline of the Anti-Femininity Norm of Masculinity. *Sex Roles* 81, 208–222 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-018-0985-6>

22. Defining Terrorism and Insurgency: Beyond Morality | Small Wars Journal. (n.d.). <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/defining-terrorism-and-insurgency-beyond-morality>

23. Boesten, J. (2012). The State and Violence Against Women in Peru: Intersecting Inequalities and Patriarchal Rule, *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 19(3) pp. 361–382.

24. Mignolo, W. D., & Walsh, C. E. (2018). *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*. Duke University Press.

25. Noott, D. (2019). Gender and Security: Redefining the 'State' and a 'Threat.' *E-International Relations*. <https://www.e-ir.info/2019/09/28/gender-and-security-redefining-the-state-and-a-threat/>

26. Mignolo, W. D., & Walsh, C. E. (2018). *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*. Duke University Press.

27. I am primarily referring to the philosophical viewpoint of absurdism here, "which holds that the efforts of humanity to find meaning or rational explanation in the universe ultimately fail (and, hence, are absurd) because no such meaning exists, at least to human beings. The word absurd in this context does not mean 'logically impossible', but rather 'humanly impossible'", according to the New World Encyclopedia, and this overlap with the understanding of the unknown being feminised. Further, when we consider that Life is personified as a woman and mother, it also connects the gendered experience to absurdity. In addition, in various instances, be it in films or in real life, we see women and femmes portrayed as 'crazed' and needing to be molded, shaped, and controlled.

28. It should be noted that "Indian" here, from Mignolo's standpoint, likely means all people who are considered Indian. I cannot be sure, but I am inferring this knowing that Mignolo primarily speaks from what is now called Latin America and how it was from here that the global world system came to be. This would mean that "Indian" would include Indians from both sides of the Atlantic—and around the world. I would like to add that it shouldn't be forgotten that the "New World" was originally thought to be the Indian subcontinent. Upon arriving to the "New World", the indigenous people of the so-called Americas were homogenised with those from the Indian subcontinent. The mistake was never corrected from the coloniser's viewpoint (see: "American Indians"). Therefore, I believe it opens the understanding that 'Indian', as the homogenised 'Indian', became a shared experience. However, a shared experience should not mean that it is collapsible to a homogenised experience—just simply one that can evoke resonance between different ethnic groups.

29. Ibid.

30. This story is known in Punjabi folklore and explained in the Suraj Parkash. A comprehensive blog about Bibi Nanaki Ji can also be found on allaboutsikhs.com.

31. Langar is a persian word that has been incorporated into punjabi translates to "kitchen" in english. But, it should be noted that translating words that are used for practices in Sikhi strips words of their spiritual, political, anti-caste, and otherwise othered philosophy. For Sikhs, langar is not just a kitchen, but the Universe's heart. The food that is made in this kitchen is not just food, but the Universe's nourishment. The Universe, in Sikhi, is both the wider Universe in the spiritual sense, as well as the cosmos that creates us since we are made out of the same materials as the Universe. Similarly, the nourishment that is provided can take many forms, like knowledge, health, and so on.

32. Gurdware translates into the plural form of "Sikh Temple", with gurdwara being the singular. Similar to "langar", translating it into english relegates it to *only* a place of worship. This bordered thinking limits the idea of what these spaces mean to Sikhs as it is also the place we learn, eat, and even take care of the sick. These actions cannot be separated from "worship" in the way it is in

english.

33. Seva is translated into “selfless service”. Sikhi, the practice of being a Sikh, encourages us to care for people in whatever ways the marginalized needs without the thought of reward. Due to the legacy of othering, this does not always happen in practice. But, when one was practicing Sikhi, this is what they are encouraged to work towards.

34. One of the three main pillars that create the foundations of Sikhi where Sikhs are encouraged to share what they have and consume it together as a community. This can mean anything from wealth, to food. The three foundations of Sikhi have equal importance to one another, and are not to be privileged over the other. For the purposes of this essay, however, I will be focusing on vand chakko since the acts that can neatly fall into this category get depoliticized, bordered, and dismembered—both “within” the community, and “outside” of the community—due to their hypervisibility and inability to be completely assimilated into the hierarchical order.

35. Simko-Bednarski, B. E. (2020, July 9). US Sikhs tirelessly travel their communities to feed hungry Americans. CNN. <https://edition.cnn.com/travel/article/sikh-pandemic-food-support/index.html>

36. Mann, A. S. (2022, October 8). Cost of living: Sikh community is serving up hot meals to more people than ever. Sky News. <https://news.sky.com/story/cost-of-living-sikh-community-is-serving-up-hot-meals-to-more-people-than-ever-12713552>

37. It should be noted that while this is the practice Sikhs are encouraged to live up to, there is a lasting patriarchal, casteist, colonial legacy. Sikhs are affected in the same way that any other group is affected by and internalizes systems of oppression. This, of course, does not reflect the entire community of Sikhs, but denying that this occurs within our community is erasing the very real violence those—both within and outside of—our community face by Sikh individuals that make up the majority. For instance, though gender distinctions are not meant to enter Sikh spaces, we still sit separately based on assigned gender. Some say that this is just tradition, but I urge people to consider the patriarchal legacy that is laced throughout this “tradition”.

38. Tyar bar tyar translates to “ready all the time”. This is generally only understood to refer to shastars (meaning weapons, but again, this includes the sacredness of a weapon since spirituality is tied up in Sikh practice) whenever this is discussed.

39. It should be noted that these bills are being passed with the knowledge that farmers were already being paid low incomes, and experiencing high suicide rates because farmers could not pay loans that were mostly taken from private landlords and/or banks. These issues are exacerbated by added systems of oppression like gender and caste.

40. (In)security is written in part in parentheses because not everyone experiences insecurity or security. Systems of oppression plays a role in who is (in)secure, and it is an ongoing negotiation and relationship between the two. Under the State, and under oppressive hierarchy in general, in order for some to feel or be made secure, others need to feel or be made insecure.

41. Osiander, A. (2001). Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Westphalian Myth. *International Organization*, 55(2), 251–287. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3078632>

42. With nearly 60% of the Sikh population being in the farming sector, the farming bills seem to disproportionately target the Sikh population. It should also be noted that in 2017, Tamil Nadu

farmers also protested the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) that later passed the farm laws in 2020. They demanded a waiver of their farm loans, providing security over their waterways, as well as price security. These demands are similar, if not the same, as the demands that later came up in 2020. In the same way that Sikhs provided langar across the world in times of need, the Delhi gurdwara did the same in 2017 for the farmers of Tamil Nadu.

43. Without spending too much time traveling into this discussion since this essay is about the ways we provide care for each other, these protests, for Sikhs, are linked to the uprising in the early 1980s where they revolted against the State, and asserted Sikh sovereignty over our lifeways, waterways, and ways of being.

44. Shepherd, K. I. (2020, December 28). Why the farmers' protest is led by Sikhs of Punjab. ThePrint. <https://theprint.in/opinion/why-the-farmers-protest-is-led-by-sikhs-of-punjab/574065/>

45. Jones, R. C. (2021, September 26). Young Sikh Farmers in California Keep Up a Long Tradition. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/11/us/sikh-american-farmers.html>

46. It should be stressed that caste still played a large role in the farmers protest. Regardless of the reaction to deny casteism, caste plays a role in who owns land to farm in the first place, as well as who gets invisibilized during the protests. Some say it has nothing to do with caste since people across caste have protested, as well as the added nuance of Jat caste that belongs to those who are not Sikh and the Jatt caste of those who are Sikh. This, however, does not erase the very real, material ways that people are affected by casteism with regards to how they are treated by the State and within the hierarchy. Sometimes, this leads those who experience casteism to side with the State—which upholds casteism—with the hopes of being provided security.

47. Kaur, A. (n.d.). Dalits of Punjab - Dalit Women and Their Struggles. Velivada. Retrieved January 14, 2023, from <https://velivada.com/2020/11/21/dalits-of-punjab-dalit-women-and-their-struggles/>

48. Moudgil, M. (2019, August 8). Fist For Farm: How Punjab's Dalits Are Fighting For Their Right Over Common Land. IndiaSpend. Retrieved January 14, 2023, from <https://www.indiaspend.com/fist-for-farm-how-punjab-dalits-are-fighting-for-their-right-over-common-land/>

49. Dalits are people who are relegated to the lowest caste in the Indian State

50. Nodeep's younger sister Harveer has been quoted saying, "Being Dalits, we have always faced caste discrimination and because we are women, we've also faced gender issues. Then we are poor. Nodeep has always been very sensitive to these issues."

51. Nodeep was arrested for multiple charges, some of which are extortion, attempt to steal official documents and a firearm from a police officer, and attempt to murder. Harveer, her sister, has been quoted saying, "We knew there would be repercussions for standing up to the state, but we never thought she would be accused in fake cases or assaulted...All she was doing was trying to help workers get their dues, but she's been charged with attempt to murder and extortion."

52. Kaur, P. (n.d.). Nodeep Kaur, Who Fought for Workers' Rights, Faced Custodial Torture, Alleges Family. The Wire. <https://thewire.in/rights/dalit-activist-who-fought-for-workers-and-farmers-rights-faced-custodial-torture-alleges-family>

Sophia Kaur is a queer neurodivergent Sikh researcher and writer whose work focuses on (de)coloniality through the prism of security, silence, and trauma. They are currently a PhD student at the University of Glasgow and hold two Masters: Social Work and International Relations. Learn more about Sophia here: www.sophiakaur.org

Jagdeep Raina

I'll take care of you



Jagdeep Raina is an interdisciplinary artist and writer from Guelph, Ontario, Canada. He holds a Masters degree from the Rhode Island School of Design and was a 2021 Paul Mellon Fellow at Yale University. Raina currently lives and works in Houston, Texas, USA

Armaan Singh Queer Sikhs

"Queer Sikhs" is a bilingual rap song that was released on Jul 13, 2022. This song began forming itself when I was targeted on my social media platforms with homophobic & transphobic slurs. I could say such bigotry does not impact me, but it does. It festers within me, and feeds off of the self hating ideologies I was always taught about my queerness. It was this very hate that drove me away from mainstream Sikh spaces- that teach us shame & guilt towards our humanity. In this song, I question the current practices of Sikhism- the misogyny and homophobia we have claimed are normal practices of our faith. But most of all, I remind myself and my queer siblings & friends that there is a more kinder Guru- one that we meet through our queerness and not away from it. Queer Sikhs is a poem that started from heartbreak, but found itself deeply in love with all of my identities. And I hope this song does the same for you.

Love,
Armaan Singh



[Listen on Spotify](#)

Queer Sikhs

Queerness nu kehnde crime
Hate be on their mind
World be so unkind
To those who can't be confined
Those who live with cuffs
Tend to just hate on us
Those preaching fear in faith
That's no Sikhi but disgrace

Sikhi sadi queer aa
Gal dil di e clear aa
Sanu na koi fear aa
Rab jad sade near aa

Queer sikhs exist & thrive
Light in us, be our guide
All their curses we will break
Guru made no mistake
Find your truth, let it shine
Built for this by design
Take with you, this one line
Queerness aient no crime

Homophobia ain't a thing
Misogyny don't make a king
Guru nanak said in fact
We anti hate anti caste
Transphobia has no place
If you give love a taste

Gur nanak said it in fact
We anti hate anti caste

Sikhi sadi queer aa
Gal dil di e clear aa
Sanu na koi fear aa
Rab jad sade near aa

Queerness is not a crime
We are power & divine
When they say you are wrong
Listen & sing along
You are worthy you are love
Even if people judge
No shame to stand alone

Your voice is your home

Everything they ever said
Was to play with yo head
Haters say hella shit
Gotta envy our grit
Gift is a queer soul
World of pennies, we be gold

Queerness is not a crime
We are power & divine
When they say you are wrong
Listen & sing along

Sikhi sadi queer aa
Sanu na koi fear aa

Queer sikhs exist & thrive
Light in us, be our guide
All their curses we will break
Guru made no mistake
Find your truth, let it shine
Built for this by design
Take w you, this one line
Queerness aient no crime



[Listen on Spotify.](#)

Armaan Singh is a Disabled TransMasculine Artist, Comedian and Survivor. Armaan uses his art to tell stories, break generational habits, and center survivorship. He believes his life's purpose is to leave the world better than he found it, and it is his heart that drives all his work.

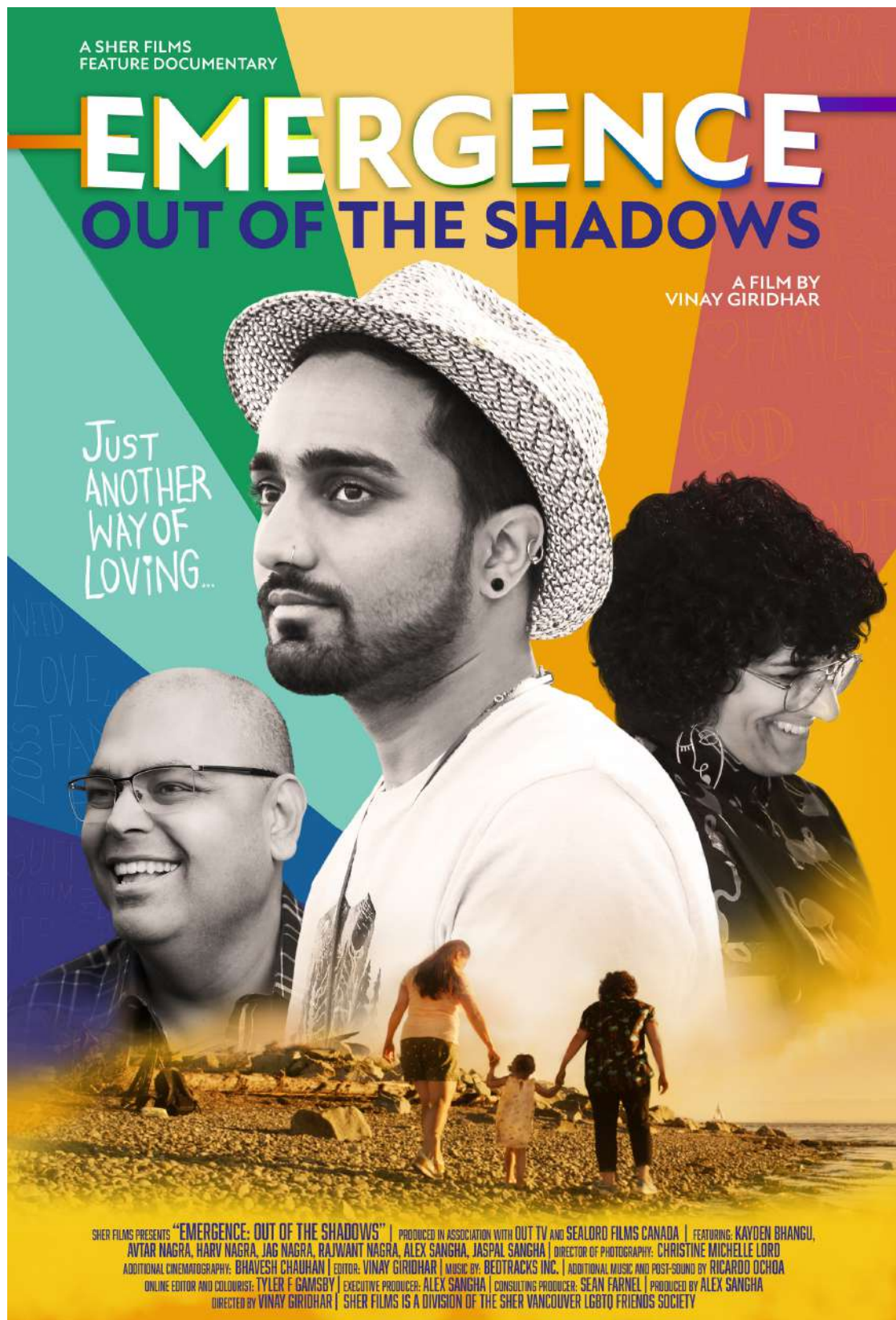
Sher Vancouver

Emergence: Out of the Shadows

Synopsis: For Kayden, Jag, and Amar, awakening to and expressing their sexuality within conservative South Asian families was a lonely and terrifying experience. Denial, shame and despair haunted their youths, even threatening their lives. Yet, they've emerged. In the gripping feature documentary *Emergence: Out of the Shadows*, the disparate journeys of Kayden, Jag and Amar candidly converge around a shared sense of compassion and healing as they bravely convey their often heart-wrenching stories. Confronted with tradition and taboo in their Punjabi Sikh cultures, resisting silence, Jag's parents and Amar's mother choose love over rejection, offering courage and inspiration to individuals and communities struggling with acceptance. Tender, thoughtful and teary, *Emergence: Out of the Shadows* asserts a potent and transformative voice in support of marginalized queer youth and their families.

Official Website:

<https://emergencefilm.net/>



Alex Sangha is an award-winning social worker and documentary film producer based in Metro Vancouver, British Columbia. He produced a short documentary, *My Name Was January*, about trans women of colour and a feature documentary, *Emergence: Out of the Shadows*, about coming out in the South Asian community and the reactions of the parents.

volume ੧

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