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Resource Paper

South Asian Migration, Settlement, and Sociopolitical Incorporation on the North American West Coast

Prema Kurien

Abstract

There are large South Asian settlements in the larger Vancouver region of British Columbia in Canada and in Northern and Central California (from Yuba City to Fresno) in the United States. While the early migration patterns of Sikhs and Hindus to these two areas were similar, they subsequently diverged and the South Asian settlements in the two regions now exhibit very different profiles. This resource paper summarizes and analyzes the literature on factors shaping the migration, settlement, and incorporation patterns of Asian immigrants in these two regions. I argue that the parallels in early South Asian migration patterns to the North American West Coast were due to similarities in the economic and social profile of these regions, Canadian and U.S. policies toward Asian immigrants, and easy movement between Canada and the United States. The divergence between the two regions took place over time largely as an outcome of changes in regional characteristics (e.g., the development of Silicon Valley), differences in the group characteristics and networks of Sikhs and Hindus, and an increasing divergence in Canadian and U.S. immigration regulations (e.g., differences in family reunification, refugee, and H1-B visa policies). The final section discusses how these settlement patterns have led to differences in the identity formation and sociopolitical incorporation of Sikhs and Hindus in the two regions.

Introduction

Emigration is a selective process, and immigrant communities rarely, if ever, resemble the sociocultural and occupational distribution of the home societies. Emigrants respond to perceived opportunities in

host countries and, most of the time, emigration is facilitated by social networks that restrict international movement to certain groups and regions, creating a “culture of migration,” resulting in a self-perpetuating stream of migrants, even across generations (Kandel and Massey, 2002). The selective nature of out-migration in turn shapes immigrant communities, cultures, and identities in profound ways. Immigrant selectivity is a particularly important topic in Asian American studies. Scholars have spent a great deal of effort trying to combat the commonly held notion that Asian American success is due to Asian culture, showing instead that it is due to the highly selective nature of migration from Asian countries. Yet, we still do not have a clear understanding of all the factors that shape the immigration, settlement, and incorporation of Asian immigrants in North America. This resource paper draws on the literature to examine the forces influencing the development and change in two communities from India, specifically Sikhs and Hindus (around 2 percent and 80 percent, respectively, of the current population of India) in the Pacific Northwest, from the early 1900s to the present. This paper also examines how migration selectivity and the larger context shaped the self-identities, communities, and political mobilization patterns of these two groups.

South Asians are an important group to study in North America because they are the largest “visible” minority group in Canada, as well as the fastest-growing Asian group in the United States (South Asian Americans Leading Together, 2017, 4). Sikhs and Hindus from South Asia constitute the two largest religious minorities in Canada after Muslims, and are present in significant numbers in the United States. There are large Sikh and Hindu communities in the greater Vancouver region of British Columbia in Canada and in the greater San Francisco Bay Area of California (from Yuba City to Fresno) in the United States. There are also large Sikh and Hindu settlements in other parts of Canada (such as Toronto) and the United States (New York City, Texas, and several other regions). This paper focuses on the Pacific Northwest because the earliest large-scale South Asian migration was to this region and was very similar in both Canada and the United States. However, these migration patterns subsequently diverged sharply and the settlements in the two regions now exhibit very different profiles. By showcasing a North American region where there were great similarities in migration patterns from one sending country that then divaricated over a fairly short period, this paper hones in on the complex of factors that can shape Asian immigration, community formation, and integration

in North America, resulting in the creation of distinct ethnic profiles and cultures.

The parallels in early South Asian migration patterns to the North American West Coast were due to similarities in the economic and social profile of these regions, easy movement between Canada and the United States, cross-border networks between South Asian communities and between anti-Asian exclusionists, as well as a three-way relationship between Canada, the United States, and Britain. The divergence between the two regions took place over time largely as an outcome of changes in regional characteristics (e.g., the development of Silicon Valley), differences in the group characteristics and networks of Sikhs and Hindus, and an increasing divergence in Canadian and U.S. approaches to regulating immigration (e.g., differences in family reunification, refugee, and H1-B visa policies). The final section discusses how these settlement patterns have led to differences in the identity formation and sociopolitical incorporation of Sikhs and Hindus in the two regions. The paper is based on an analysis of secondary sources on the history of early migration from India to the Pacific Northwest region, as well as media articles. This synthesis of the current state of research was undertaken as part of a larger project examining the community formation and activism patterns of individuals of Sikh and Hindu backgrounds in Canada and the United States. Some information from that research project is also included.

Early Migration and Settlement, 1900–20

Between 1901 and 1910, 5,762 immigrants from Punjab in British colonial India arrived in northern California (Gould, 2006, 90). About an equal number, 5,179, arrived in British Columbia in Canada between 1900 and 1908. In both the United States and Canada, they worked in lumber mills and in railroad construction. Several Punjabis also worked in agriculture in the United States (Buchignani et al., 1985, 17–18; McMahan, 2001, 19). Punjabi communities in the two countries were close-knit and movement across the border between Canada and the United States was relatively easy. Described as “Hindus,” the ethno-racial term then used for inhabitants of India (which was also called “Hindustan,” or the land of the Hindus during this period), people of Hindu background were actually only a very small minority of this group. The overwhelming majority, around 85 to 90 percent of the Punjabi migrants, were Sikhs despite comprising only around 13 percent of the population of Punjab (McMahan, 2001, 10; Sohi, 2014, 8). Sikhs are members

of a religion founded in the Punjab in the fifteenth century. Many Sikh men, and some women, maintain their unshorn hair in a turban and carry a ceremonial dagger (in North America, this is usually small and hidden under clothing) as these are articles of faith in the Sikh tradition. Men also maintain unshorn beards and moustaches.

Sikhs dominated the early immigration to North America from British India (the colonial era lasted until 1947) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for three reasons. First, economic conditions in the Punjab had worsened under British colonial land policies (Oldenburg, 2002). The region also experienced droughts, famines, and epidemics during this period (Jensen, 1988, 24). The British were so impressed with the military skills of Sikhs that they designated Sikhs a “martial race” (Dirks, 2001, 178–80) and heavily recruited them into the British army.¹ Sikh regiments were considered to be an elite unit of the British army and served around the world. Consequently, Sikhs were strong supporters of the British Empire in the nineteenth century. A Sikh representative in Ottawa in 1908, described Sikhs in the following way: “We are British subjects, of proven loyalty. . . . With the name Sikh is linked up fidelity and loyalty to the Empire. . . . The Sikh has always been ready in the past to give willing service to the Empire” (quoted in Gill, 2014, 24).

The roots of the Sikh settlement in North America can be traced to the celebration of Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee in 1897, when a Sikh regiment based in India was sent to London to attend the rituals. In returning to India via Canada, they learned about the work opportunities on the Pacific coasts of Canada and the United States and some returned seeking work (McMahon, 2001, 9). The migration to Canada by Punjabis was also motivated by the belief that as British subjects, their rights would be protected in any country that was part of the British Empire.² Religious networks were the final factor that gave Sikhs an advantage over men of other religions from Punjab. Sikhs had *gurdwaras* (temples) all along the long route from Punjab to North America, including in Hong Kong where migrants had to break journey, often for weeks. The *gurdwaras* provided free lodging and one free meal a day that was useful for wayfarers (Jensen, 1988, 27).

A second, smaller group of migrants from India arriving in North America in the early decades of the twentieth century was comprised of educated anticolonial leaders, both Sikh and non-Sikh, who left India to escape British surveillance and to find safer bases from which to organize a nascent independence movement. Many came as students to the

United States to enroll in universities and learn about the U.S. political system (Sohi, 2014, 21–2). The University of California, Berkeley, was an important hub because the tuition was low, and it was possible to find work nearby (McMahon, 2001, 29).

Unfortunately, Indians arrived on the North American Pacific Coast just as it was in the throes of a strong anti-Asian mobilization. The Chinese Exclusion Act had been passed in 1882 in the United States, and a Chinese Immigration Act of 1885 imposing a substantial head tax on Chinese immigrants had been passed by Canada. Consequently, further Chinese immigration was prevented or greatly curtailed in both countries. A Japanese and Korean Exclusion league formed in 1905 in both San Francisco and Vancouver by white labor union leaders, renamed itself the Asiatic Exclusion League by 1907 to include Indians among the groups that it opposed (Jensen, 1988, 44). In 1907, a series of race riots directed against Indian immigrants by white workers took place across the North American West Coast. The first took place in Bellingham, Washington, soon to be followed by others in Seattle and Everett, Washington; Vancouver, British Columbia; and parts of California (Jensen, 1988). By 1908 a Continuous Journey Regulation in Canada (requiring migrants to arrive through a direct ship voyage, which in practice targeted Indians) banned Indian immigration altogether (Gould, 2006, 191). After this law was passed, several thousand Indian migrants moved down to the Pacific coast of the United States (Johnston, 2014, 18).

Early Community Formation and Mobilization

After the 1907 race riots in the Pacific Northwest, Indian immigrants began to form a variety of self-help community organizations in Canada and the United States. The Khalsa Diwan Society, a social organization that ran *gurdwaras* was the first to form. The Vancouver Khalsa Diwan Society formed early in 1907 and opened branches in Washington, Oregon, and California a few years later (Sohi, 2014, 50–1). Taraknath Das, an educated Hindu Bengali anticolonialist, who had arrived in Seattle from Japan, and then moved to Vancouver for a job with the U.S. immigration service formed the Hindustani Association in Vancouver later in 1907, the first overtly political organization of Indian immigrants in North America (Buchignani et al., 1985, 21). Indian leaders like Taraknath Das moved back and forth between Vancouver and San Francisco, trying to mobilize the Indian communities in North America to work for Indian independence from the British. Anthropologist Harold Gould (2006, 106) describes racism as “a made-to-order recipe for shar-

pening political consciousness” among Punjabis in North America. Anticolonialists started to link the discrimination that Indians were facing in North America with their colonial status in India to mobilize Indians against British rule, and to warn the British colonialists that racial discrimination experienced by Indians within the territories of the British Empire could foment revolution in India (Sohi, 2014, 34). British agents closely monitored radical Indians in North America and reported on their activities to the British government, but also the governments of Canada and the United States. Taraknath Das started an anti-British publication in Vancouver, *Free Hindusthan*, in 1908. Copies of *Free Hindusthan* were sent to India and to Indian communities around the world. Other anticolonial periodicals also emerged in Vancouver and Seattle and were distributed in India (Sohi, 2014, 52). One of the important goals of the anticolonial periodicals was to turn Sikhs in India against the British by letting them know about the Canadian exclusion acts targeting Sikhs (Johnston, 2014, 24; Sohi, 2014, 53).

The 1908 Canadian law banning Indian migrants emboldened officials in the United States to take measures against the “Hindu invasion” of Northern California (Jensen, 1988, 107). San Francisco immigration officials used a “likely to become a public charge” clause to exclude many Indians seeking entry into the United States beginning in 1909 (Jensen, 1988, 111). The effectiveness of this strategy can be seen by the fact that while there were 1,710 Indian immigrants into the United States in 1908, the number had gone down to 377 in 1909. Despite these small numbers, in 1910, the immigration commission issued a report on Indian immigrants, describing them as “the least desirable race of immigrants thus far admitted to the United States” and as “unassimilable” (cited in Jensen, 1988, 141). In 1912, American immigration officials were able to prevent Indian migrants from arriving by ship as Canada had done in 1908 by pressuring steamship companies to stop selling tickets to Indian laborers intending to travel to the American West Coast (Jensen, 1988, 147). The Asiatic Exclusion League, however, wanted legislative exclusion because they felt it would be a more reliable basis for keeping out Indian immigrants. But Congress was reluctant to pass a national law based on ethnicity for fear that overt discrimination would cause unrest in British India (Jensen, 1988, 139). Consequently, Denver S. Church, a Republican from California, suggested an exclusion bill based on geography. President Woodrow Wilson decided to define a “barred zone” based on an imaginary line drawn across the map of Europe that had been used by geographers to demarcate Asia and Europe

(Jensen, 1988, 152–4). Because laws had already been passed regarding Japanese and Chinese immigrants, and Korea was under Japanese colonial rule at this time, the U.S. Asiatic Barred Zone law, like the 1908 Continuous Journey law in Canada, was effectively directed against Indian immigrants (Jensen, 1988, 152–4).

By the 1920s, the Indian communities in both British Columbia and California comprised predominantly of older Sikh men because immigration restrictions in Canada and the United States prevented men from bringing their wives and children from India (Buchignani et al., 1985, 74; Jacoby, 2007, 73). In Canada, racial segregation kept the Sikh community socially isolated from the wider society, which meant that interracial marriages were almost impossible, while in California, anti-miscegenation laws were often a barrier to interracial marriages between Indians and white women (Buchignani et al., 1985, 76–7; Jacoby, 2007, 190). This resulted in the creation of a unique Punjabi-Mexican community in parts of California (mainly in Southern California) as some Sikh men married Mexican women (Leonard, 1992).

Delegations, Petitions, and Anticolonial Publications

Indian immigrants on the Pacific coast of both Canada and the United States united across language, religion, and caste lines around the unfair treatment meted to them and the restrictions on immigration that kept families apart (Jensen, 1988, 124–7). Sikhs were particularly active in this respect, keeping up a consistent pattern of mobilization through the Khalsa Diwan Society. Because Canadian laws banned Indians earlier than in the United States, this mobilization first took place in Canada. Indians in Canada sent Sikh representatives to England at community expense to marshal support for their cause in 1909, 1911, and 1912. The 1912 delegation went from London to India to approach the viceroy and the Indian National Congress to protest the treatment of Indians in Canada (Buchignani et al., 1985, 40–3). The group also informed people in Punjab about the situation in Canada and protest meetings were held where British rule was condemned.

Indians in the United States mobilized against the discrimination faced by their co-ethnics in Canada by developing a strong anticolonial movement from the United States. In 1913, Har Dayal, a Hindu nationalist from Punjab, along with other Indian nationalists formed the Hindustan *Ghadar* (Mutiny) Party for Indian independence in Oregon, with its headquarters in San Francisco (Sohi, 2014, 57). This was because Canada was part of the British Empire and a supporter of Britain, while there

were many in the United States who supported India's struggle for freedom because of America's history of fighting a war of independence against Britain. The *Ghadar* party, though based in the United States was active in Canada from the time of its formation (Buchignani et al., 1985, 51). The party aimed to get its message out through the weekly publication of the *Ghadar* paper, with its first publication on November 1, 1913 of 4,000 copies, mailed to every South Asian community in North America as well as in India (Buchignani et al., 1985, 51–2). The Ghadar movement received strong support from Indian immigrants in Canada where it was common to read revolutionary poetry from the newspaper at gurdwara gatherings (Buchignani et al., 1985, 52). An incident in 1914, when the 376 Punjabi (mostly Sikh) passengers of a ship, the *Komagata Maru*, sailing directly from India to Canada (to challenge the Continuous Journey Regulation) were not even allowed to disembark in Vancouver and were sent back to India, many to face death or imprisonment, angered Sikhs in Canada and the United States. This incident strengthened the Ghadar movement. Several thousand Ghadar supporters left North America for India. They planned an uprising in Punjab in February 1915 but were not able to mobilize regiments in India against the British because the British controlled the police, army, and also had several spies. Many Ghadar returnees were imprisoned or confined to their villages and forty-two were sentenced to death.

Citizenship, the Right to Vote, and Liberalization of Immigration Policies

Indians in the Vancouver region and in the larger San Francisco Bay Area continued to mobilize around the issue of citizenship and voting. Until 1947, when the Canadian Citizenship Act was passed, individuals born in Canada as well as naturalized immigrants in Canada were considered British subjects, rather than Canadian citizens. Even though Indian immigrants were British subjects, in British Columbia, "Hindus" were barred from voting by a 1907 law, which also meant that they could not vote at the federal level. At a 1921 Imperial Conference in London, a resolution was passed affirming the right of Indians in British Dominions to vote. Then Canadian prime minister, Arthur Meighen, agreed to support this resolution, however he was voted out of power shortly afterward. While there was support for the vote in the eastern portions of Canada, British Columbia remained unwilling to grant voting rights to Asians (Buchignani et al., 1985, 81). Beginning from the 1930s, when there were significant numbers of Canadian-born

or Canadian-raised members of the community, Indians in British Columbia started a major fight for the vote, supported by workers unions. When World War II broke out, Indians (later joined by Chinese) started a “no vote-no war” fight, asserting that they would serve in the war only if they could get the right to vote after the war. Despite being rebuffed repeatedly, the Indian community in Canada maintained its activism and finally received the right to vote at the provincial and federal levels in 1947 (Buchignani et al., 1985, 81–98).

In the United States, the racial status of Indians and, consequently, their eligibility for citizenship (then conferred only on migrants who were “free white persons”) was not settled until 1923—Indians argued that as upper-caste migrants from India, they were “Aryans” and therefore Caucasians, and consequently eligible for citizenship. Between 1908 and 1922, around sixty-nine Indians received citizenship in various states in the United States. In California, at least seventeen Indian men were granted citizenship during this period (Jensen, 1988, 255). However, on February 19, 1923, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that an Indian immigrant in Oregon, Bhagat Singh Thind, an army veteran from World War I, and a supporter of the Ghadar movement, was not eligible for citizenship. Justice Sutherland argued on behalf of a unanimous court, that while Thind, and other Indians might be Caucasian, they were not white, at least not in the way the term *white* was commonly understood in the United States. Consequently, Thind and other Indians were not eligible for U.S. citizenship (Jensen, 1988, 258). Many Indians in the United States were stripped of their citizenship after this court case. Since a 1913 California Alien Land Law prohibited “aliens ineligible for citizenship” from owning or holding long-term leases on agricultural land, Asian exclusionists in California took the opportunity to deprive Indians of the land they owned (Jensen, 1988, 265). Dalip Singh Saund, who became the first Asian American in the U.S. Congress (1957–63), was an early Sikh immigrant to California who was strongly committed to an independent India, and campaigned for citizenship rights for Indians in the United States. He formed an organization, the Indian National Congress Association of India, which financially supported activism in Washington, D.C., around both Indian citizenship in the United States and Indian independence from British colonial rule (Gould, 2006, 396). As in Canada, the outbreak of World War II proved to be turning point in this struggle. Indian leaders active in Washington could convince important American allies that the support of the people of India for America was “key to victory over

Japan" in World War II (Gould, 2006, 334). This led the Roosevelt administration to establish an India section of the Office of Strategic Services (predecessor to the Central Intelligence Agency) in 1943 to forge alliances with anticolonial leaders in India (Gould, 2006, 377). In 1946, they were also able to obtain the right to citizenship for Indians in the United States and a quota of 100 Indian immigrants was allowed in every year. In Canada, the ban on Indian immigrants was abolished in 1951, and a quota of 150 Indians was permitted per year. The quota increased to 300 in 1957 (Buchignani et al., 1985, 105).

The large-scale immigration of Indians into North America began after the liberalization of immigration in the United States and Canada, with the 1965 U.S. Immigration Act and the 1967 Canadian Immigration Act. Both acts lifted the racist restrictions on immigrants that had existed earlier and allowed immigration based on two criteria: job qualifications or skills that were required in the country (the "special skills" provision in the United States, and the "points" system in Canada based on education, training, and occupational experience), and immigrants who were sponsored by family members in the country (the "family reunification" provision in the United States and the "sponsored" immigrants category in Canada).

In this section, I have shown that there were striking parallels between the situation of Indians as well as their mobilization patterns in British Columbia and the Pacific coast states of the United States, and in particular, Northern California between 1900 and 1967. This was not a coincidence because the migration patterns to both countries were similar and there were also close connections between Canada, the United States, and Britain. Due to these factors, Canada and the United States developed very similar migration policies, exclusion laws, and eventually, the liberalization of immigration policies in the 1960s. Indian migrants in both countries were also closely linked and common organizations and leaders coordinated the resistance movements against racist local policies and against British colonialism in India.

Contemporary South Asian Migration and Settlement

The larger Vancouver and San Francisco regions continue to have large Hindu and Sikh settlements. However, the migration patterns of Hindus and Sikhs to the two regions have now greatly diverged, which has led to very different patterns of community and identity formation. Even though Sikhs only comprise around 2 percent and Hindus are around 80 percent of the population of India, there are now more

than four times as many Sikhs in Vancouver as there are Hindus (in the 2011 census, Sikhs numbered 201,110 while Hindus numbered 45,790). Sikhs also grew faster than Hindus (58 percent vs. 46 percent between 2001 and 2011). It is difficult to get accurate data on Hindu and Sikh settlement in Northern California because the U.S. census does not collect information on religion. However, from a variety of other data sources and indicators, it appears that the situation in Northern California area is the reverse of that in the larger Vancouver region. U.S. census data shows that Punjabis, most likely Sikhs, comprised more than one-fourth of Indian immigrants living in California, particularly in the agricultural belt comprising Yuba City, Stockton, Merced, and Fresno (Chakravorty et al., 2017, 120). According to the 2015 Pew Research Center figures, Hindus comprised 2 percent of California or around 776,000 individuals with concentrations in the San Francisco Bay and Los Angeles regions. Sikhs have not even been counted in the Pew Research Center study. Sikh groups estimate that their numbers in the United States could range anywhere from 500,000 to 1 million, with a large concentration between Yuba City and Fresno (the same region mentioned in the preceding text) in Northern California. U.S. census data shows that in Northern California, Indians are concentrated in Santa Clara County (comprising 6.7 percent of the total population). The densest areas of concentration are in Cupertino, Fremont, and Sunnyvale where they constitute between 15 to 20 percent of the local population (Chakravorty et al., 2017, 92). The city of San Jose was designated as “the most Hindu city” in the United States, with 2.5 percent of its population being Hindu (Barooah, 2012).

Several factors account for the big divergence between the numbers and the proportion of Hindus and Sikhs in the Vancouver and San Francisco Bay regions over time. There were two differences between the two regions even before the end of the 1940s which first led to this differentiation. First, many Indian students came to attend the University of California, Berkeley (and possibly Stanford University as well) because the migration of students was not restricted by the U.S. immigration acts, unlike in Canada (Buchignani et al., 1985, 72). Consequently, a small group of educated, professional Indians of different regional and religious backgrounds formed in the San Francisco Bay Area even before the passage of the 1965 Immigration Act. In Canada, however, the Indian community became more homogenous over time as most of the Hindus and Muslims left, leaving a community comprised primarily of Sikh working-class men (Buchignani et al., 1985, 83). Second, Canada provided for a higher quota of Indian immigrants than the United States

before their 1967 Immigration Act was passed. Sikhs in British Columbia were able to sponsor their relatives through this quota. The community increased from 1,937 in 1951 to 4,526 in 1961, and most of this number were likely Sikh (Buchignani et al., 1985, 105–6). The greater proportion of Sikhs in Canada versus the United States before the passage of the two immigration acts, likely created a multiplier effect over time (Buchignani et al., 1985, 128). In Northern California, the Sikh community remained very small and despite the quotas, few Indian immigrants entered the United States (e.g., between 1946 and 1950 only 219 Indian immigrants were admitted). Many returned to India and others died (Jacoby, 2007, 228).

The creation of Silicon Valley seems to be the most important factor in the big increase in the number of Hindus in the San Francisco Bay Area since the 1970s. Silicon Valley is the name given to a large region (originally the Santa Clara Valley including San Jose and surrounding region but now greatly expanded), in the southern end of the San Francisco Bay Area, which developed as the home of the high-technology industry, including several Fortune 100 and start-up companies. Annalee Saxenian (2005, 36) a scholar who has studied the rise of Silicon Valley, writes that the region developed rapidly between the 1970s to the 1990s by bringing in foreign labor. By 2000, there were around 20,000 Indians (and an equal number of Chinese). The creation of a temporary visa category H-1B by the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1990 has been particularly important for information technology workers from India coming to work in Silicon Valley (Saxenian, 2002, 22).³ Indians comprise the largest nationality entering the United States on H-1B visas, 70 percent of the 316,000 petitions in 2015 (Zong and Batalova, 2015). U.S. census data from 2010 shows that one-fourth of all Indian immigrants worked in computer-related occupations (Chakravorty, 2017, 109). In the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area, the number of people of Indian background grew by 53 percent between 2000 and 2010, to 244,493 and comprised 3.4 percent of the regions total population (Rodriguez and Fernandez, 2011). Rodriguez and Fernandez, the reporters of the article attributed the tremendous increase in people of Indian background in the region to the booming of Silicon Valley. One of the earliest Indian Americans to achieve success and recognition in Silicon Valley was a Sikh, Dr. Narinder Singh Kapany, known as the “father of fiber optics.”⁴ More recently however, it is mostly Hindus who have received recognition as CEOs and founders of some of the major companies in Silicon Valley. Jonathan Thaw, an undergraduate student at Boston University

found through his study that Hindus made up 83 percent of Silicon Valley's Indians in 1999 (Prothero, n.d.). However, Shalini Shankar's research (2008) describes a much more religiously diverse Indian group including Sikhs, Hindus, Christians, and some Muslims.⁵ But there is no doubt that large numbers of Hindus have moved into the region due to the rise of Silicon Valley. North Indian Hindi speakers but also South Indians speaking Tamil, Telugu, and Kannada dominated in this group (Chakravorty et al., 2017, 119, Figure 3.13).

Differences in the group characteristics of Hindus and Sikhs are another factor that seemed to have contributed to the changes between the Indian populations in Vancouver and San Francisco over time. Several Hindus and Sikhs that I talked to in both regions told me that Sikhs were more likely to sponsor relatives through family reunification compared to Hindus. This in turn was due to several factors. First, Sikhs migrants to North America hailed from a few regions in Punjab and were consequently a close-knit group, making sponsorship through family reunification easier. Second, Sikh immigrants from Punjab were generally likely to be less educated compared to Hindu immigrants from Punjab or other parts of India, making it more difficult for them to come to Canada or the United States as independent migrants. Finally, there were fewer jobs available in the Punjab, which meant that Sikhs from Punjab were more eager to migrate to find better economic opportunities. Hindu immigrants were much more likely to arrive as independent immigrants on the basis of their educational and occupational qualifications. Many Hindu immigrants in both Vancouver and San Francisco told me that many of their family members were well settled in India, which meant that they were not interested in moving to North America as sponsored migrants.

A final factor shaping South Asian settlement patterns in Vancouver and the San Francisco Bay regions are differences in the implementation of immigration and refugee policies in Canada and the United States. A middle-aged Indo-Canadian Hindu man who had worked in an immigration office in Vancouver in the 1990s, primarily with Sikhs, explained that processing times for extended family members in Canada was much shorter than in the United States, which meant that sponsored extended family members were able to migrate to Canada within three years, compared to seven to ten years in the United States at the same time. Again, Canada had a wider definition of extended family members who could be sponsored for immigration by a Canadian citizen, compared to the United States. Because of these two factors, he said that the

Canadian Sikh population was able to expand much more quickly than the local Hindu population and even the Sikh population in the United States. He also pointed to the fact that Canada had an embassy in Chandigarh (the capital of Punjab state), unlike the United States, to indicate that Canada had a much greater interest and investment in Punjab than did the United States. Some Hindus in Vancouver mobilized in 2006 to stop “fraud marriages” (which they thought was particularly used by Sikhs to sponsor friends and relatives to the country) to keep down the number of Sikh migrants to the area.⁶ In October 2012, the Canadian minister of immigration, Jason Kenny, announced new measures to curb marriage fraud.

While most Sikhs in the contemporary period got to Canada and the United States through family reunification programs, some also arrived as refugees, fleeing anti-Sikh violence in Punjab and in some other areas of North India from the second half of the 1980s (beginning with anti-Sikh riots in 1984) and continuing into the 1990s. Here again, differences in refugee policies between Canada and the United States permitted larger numbers of Sikhs to enter Canada as refugees compared with the United States, according to some of my interviewees. Canadian refugee policies permitted applicants for refugee status to remain in Canada for one to two years waiting for an immigration hearing (with a government-appointed lawyer); during that time, they had access to the national health care system and other benefits and could also look for employment. In the United States, by contrast, it was much more difficult and expensive to file a refugee appeal case. Canada was also more likely to accept the persecution claims of Sikhs, compared to the United States. Vancouver Hindu interviewees suggested that Sikhs were so well established and such an important vote bank in the region that they could game the system and get their claims of persecution accepted. Again, Canada permitted private sponsorship of refugees, which meant that community members and relatives could sponsor Sikhs who applied for asylum in Canada. A 2015 article by the World Sikh Organization (2015) described Canada’s reputation “as a refuge for those persecuted around the world” and acknowledged that many Sikhs in Canada had benefitted from Canadian refugee laws in the 1980s and 1990s (the article raised concerns about recent changes in the refugee law). Another article in the Indian magazine *India Today* in 2013 on Sikh refugee claimants arriving in Canada, took a more critical perspective, introducing the issue in the following way: “Droves of Sikhs have been arriving in Canada in recent months claiming to be victims of racial, religious and

political vendetta in India. Their objective: refugee status, which entitles them to special permits under Canada's libertarian laws" (Jain, 2013). The author, Suresh Jain, indicates that around twenty-five to thirty refugees were arriving every day in Canada and that Vancouver attracted the most number, with Toronto being the second most popular destination for Sikh refugee claimants.

South Asian Ethnic Formation on the Canadian and American Pacific Coasts

These differences in patterns of migration and, consequently, settlement have led contemporary Sikhs and Hindus to develop very different sociopolitical profiles in the larger Vancouver and San Francisco regions. Sikhs are a very visible part of the South Asian population in Vancouver. At present, South Asian social and political organizations in the Lower Mainland region are dominated by Sikhs. Sikhs are well-recognized socially in the wider society and there are many Sikhs in elected positions at the local and provincial level (and even national). For instance, Ujjal Dosanjh, a Sikh Canadian was Premier of British Columbia. Currently, there are four Sikh cabinet ministers in Canada including the current defense minister, Harjit Sajjan, a Sikh Canadian from Vancouver (earlier he was the commanding officer of the British Columbia Regiment). Some of my Canadian Sikh respondents pointed out that the presence of several high-profile Sikh cabinet ministers meant that Canadians from around the country were used to seeing turbaned and bearded Sikh representatives on television on a regular basis. Canadian Sikhs have also been very active around events in India. A separatist *Khalistan* movement for a Sikh state in protest against the violence and attacks against Sikhs in India received strong support from some Sikhs in Vancouver in the 1990s but that support has now declined.

This is not to say that Sikhs in Vancouver had no struggles for recognition or rights. For instance, Baltej Singh Dhillon had to fight for three years to be allowed to wear his turban as part of the uniform of the famed Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) enduring racist taunts and racist pins saying "Keep the RCMP Canadian." He finally succeeded in 1991. But Canadian Sikhs in Vancouver whom I talked to felt that the battles around accommodation for the Sikh turban and beard had been largely won by the turn of the twenty-first century. Canadian Sikhs further attributed the greater familiarity of Canadians to Sikh turbans and beards (when compared to the situation in the United States) to

Canada's multicultural policies (sometimes referring to the stereotype of the Canadian "salad bowl" versus the U.S. "melting pot" models) that made education about and services to Canada's religious, cultural, and racial minorities a central part of Canadian policy from primary school onward.

As a result of the dominance of Sikhs in the region, Hindus in the Lower Mainland region of British Columbia find themselves in the strange situation of being a "minority *within* a minority" as one respondent put it (i.e., a minority within the Indo-Canadian population). This is very unusual for Hindus anywhere in the diaspora. Practically every Vancouver Hindu interviewee referred to this position during the course of their interview, generally without prompting. Many talked about how they were often mistaken for Sikhs and Punjabis by members of the wider society. Being a minority within the Indo-Canadian population in Vancouver has led Hindus to sometimes attempt to distinguish themselves from Sikhs in a variety of ways. Vancouver Hindus also told me that the South Asian media in the region was controlled by Sikhs, which meant that Sikh issues in Canada, India, and other parts of the world obtained a great deal of coverage and that Indian issues were often presented from a Sikh perspective. Many of the programs were in Punjabi so Hindus who spoke Hindi (which is linguistically quite close to Punjabi) ended up listening to Punjabi programs to get their news from India. Vancouver Hindus agreed that local Sikhs were much more politically involved compared to Hindus and rued the lack of political engagement of Hindus.

The situation of Sikhs in the United States and even in the Northern California area is quite different. "Sikhs in Canada are light-years ahead of us here," a national Sikh American activist told me. This sentiment, phrased in different ways was repeated to me several times in the course of my interviews with Sikh Americans. Sikhs in the San Francisco Bay Area who had family and friends in Vancouver (as many did) often talked about the large Sikh community in Vancouver and how well recognized Sikhs in the Vancouver region of British Columbia were. They also talked about the number of Sikhs in the Canadian parliament and the cabinet.

The events of September 11, 2001 dramatically changed the context of reception for turban-wearing Sikhs all across the United States. They have been particularly vulnerable to hate crimes because they are often mistaken for Osama bin Laden followers. The first fatality of the 9/11 backlash in the United States was a turban-wearing Sikh

man, Balbir Singh Sodhi of Arizona who was killed on September 15, 2011 by a man who thought Sodhi was a Muslim. A 2013 national study conducted by a Sikh American advocacy organization, Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF) and Stanford University found that 70 percent of Americans could not identify a turban-wearing Sikh man as a Sikh and that about half believed that Sikhism was a sect of Islam. Even though there has been a Sikh presence in the San Francisco Bay Area for well more than a century, several Sikhs in the area told me that most people in the region are not aware of the Sikh religion and why many Sikh men wear turbans. Turban-wearing Sikh men have been victims of violent attacks and even murder in this region. Particularly after the recent Paris, San Bernardino, and Brussels attacks, hate crimes against Sikhs in the area have increased⁷ (two violent attacks in Fresno took place shortly after the Paris and San Bernardino attacks). In response, Sikhs have been organizing themselves to obtain recognition and visibility in the social arena (e.g., focusing on getting content on Sikhs in California textbooks), forming civil rights organizations to mobilize around hate crimes and the bullying of Sikh students in schools. National Sikh organizations such as Sikh Coalition and SALDEF are very active in the Bay Area around these issues but there are also local organizations such as *Jakara*, focusing on the second generation. Sikh Americans in Northern California have formed organizations such as the Sikh Caucus and the American Sikh Public Affairs Association to educate legislators and members of Congress about hate crimes against Sikhs in the United States. Bay Area organizations such as *Ensaaf* and *Saanjh* mobilize around discrimination and attacks against Sikhs in India. The Sikh Foundation, an organization founded in 1967 by Dr. Narinder Singh Kapany, has set up several Sikh chairs at universities in California, created a Sikh art gallery at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco, and published several books on Sikh heritage and children's literature, all with the goal of disseminating information about Sikh history and culture.

Hindu American leaders in the Bay Area corroborated that the region had the largest concentration of Hindus in the country. There are many wealthy, high-profile Hindus who have achieved fame and fortune due to the rise of Silicon Valley companies. Quite unlike the case of Hindus in Vancouver, Hindu Americans in the San Francisco region are politically and civically engaged. The national organization, the Hindu American Foundation, has a substantial base in the Bay Area (a cofounder is from the region) and is very active around educating

Americans about Hinduism and combatting stereotypes and misrepresentations. The presentation of Hinduism and ancient India in California school textbooks have been a particular focus of interest with major campaigns in 2006 and again in 2016. The organization has also been mobilizing around the rights of Hindu minorities in countries around the world where they are discriminated against. Hindu Americans in the region have also been active around U.S. electoral politics: The current U.S. Representative from Silicon Valley, Ro Khanna, is of Hindu background. Kamala Harris, who was elected to the Senate from northern California is also of Hindu background on her mother's side. Unlike in Vancouver, there is a great deal of support for Hindu nationalism in the Bay Area and particularly for the *Bharatiya Janata Party* in India and its leader, the current Indian prime minister, Narendra Modi. Northern California experienced a huge mobilization around Modi's 2014 elections. Many Hindus in the area contributed financially to support Modi and several information technology workers returned to India to work on his behalf. Others helped drum up support for Modi from their relatives and friends in India and also assisted with his online campaign. The strong Hindu nationalist movement in the region has even influenced local American election campaigns (Chitnis, 2014). Secular Hindus for their part are active in South Asian movements such as the Coalition Against Genocide and Friends of South Asia (where they ally with Sikhs and other Indian religious minorities) to counter Hindu nationalism.

Conclusion

This resource paper has presented a summary and synthesis of the literature on changes in the migration, settlement, and sociopolitical formation of Asian Indians from India in the greater Vancouver and San Francisco Bay areas over time. Between 1900 and the 1940s there were striking similarities between the patterns of Indian migration to the greater Vancouver region and the San Francisco Bay Area. The Indian communities in the two regions faced much the same forms of racial discrimination and exclusion, at around the same periods, and mobilized together to deal with these problems with the help of umbrella organizations such as the Khalsa Diwan, the Hindustan society, and the Ghadar Party. However, more recently, particularly since the 1990s, after the HI-B visa category was created, we see a big divergence between the religious composition and the socioeconomic profile of the Indian communities in the two regions. While the Sikh population continues

to dominate in Vancouver, the Hindu population is much larger than that of the Sikhs in Northern California. I have shown that the interaction between national, regional, and group characteristics was responsible for the development of these variations.

This difference has in turn meant that the Asian Indian communities in the regions now have completely divergent socioeconomic and cultural profiles. Their civic engagement and political mobilization patterns have also diverged. I have alluded to the fact that Sikhs and Hindus have different concerns around domestic and foreign policy issues several times. With respect to domestic issues, hate crimes and accommodation for Sikh religious practices and symbols of faith (particularly the turban) have been particular concerns for the Sikh community in the United States, but have largely been resolved in Vancouver. Hindus are much less affected by these issues. However, Hindus in Northern California have been involved in trying to change school textbooks to present Hinduism and Indian culture in a more positive light. Hindus in Vancouver, however, are interested in obtaining recognition as a group distinct from Sikhs. Hindu and Sikh groups in Vancouver and Northern California have also been active around India-based issues but here too have focused on very different concerns. Hindu Indian Americans in Northern California (and to a much lesser extent, in Vancouver) have often mobilized in support of the Indian state, particularly when the Bharatiya Janata Party has been in power, as at present. Sikhs in both Vancouver and Northern California, by contrast, have been very critical of how the Indian central government has treated their coreligionists as well as the state of Punjab. Consequently, in the contemporary period, the political activism patterns of the Asian Indian community have varied in Vancouver and California because of the big difference in the proportion of Sikhs and Hindus in each area.

This study of Sikh and Hindu communities on the North American Pacific coast and the changes over time in these communities is a stark reminder of how different the composition of immigrant populations can be from that in the home country and of the fluidity of ethnicity. It is important to remember that the composition of ethnic populations from the same country can be very different between regions as in the case of Indians in Vancouver and Northern California in the contemporary period. Sikhs are only 2 percent of India while Hindus are more than 80 percent. In Vancouver, however, the Sikh population is more than four times the size of the Hindu population. In California, Hindus are probably four times the size of Sikhs. These differences in turn

completely change the community dynamics between Hindus and Sikhs, and lead to tremendous variation in community structures, cultures, and political profiles.

Scholars argue that the perception of Asian Americans by the larger society oscillates between two stereotypes—“forever foreigner” and “model minority.” The patterns of racial discrimination and exclusion as “aliens” faced by early Indian (largely Sikh) immigrants in the Pacific North American coast were similar to those faced by Chinese and Japanese immigrants at that time. In the post-9/11 period, however, turban-wearing Sikhs have come under particular suspicion and, consequently, the turban has made them stand out and be treated differently from other Asian groups, not just as a “foreigner” but as a threatening religious group.⁸ Hindus in Silicon Valley, however, are sometimes lumped together with other Asian Americans in the “model minority” category (Jiménez and Horowitz, 2013). By focusing on the differences between populations from the same Asian country, this study makes clear that it is important not to homogenize the Asian American category, or even particular ethnic groups, but to recognize that ethnic groups are composed of many subgroups with different social, cultural, and economic profiles. These are cautions that Asian Americanists and ethnic studies scholars more generally would do well to highlight particularly in the contemporary period as racial, ethnic, and religious differences are again being reified and essentialized.

Notes

1. In fact, the British were able to defeat the first major anticolonial rebellion in India in 1857, primarily due to the support of Sikh regiments (Jensen, 1988, 6).
2. This was what Queen Victoria had promised as part of her “Proclamation Concerning India” in 1858 (Johnston, 2014, 3). At her Diamond Jubilee celebrations in 1897 she also promised to end racial discrimination in the empire (Jensen, 1988, 4).
3. In contrast, a large proportion of the Temporary Foreign Worker program in Canada is issued to low-skilled workers, primarily seasonal agricultural workers, and live-in caregivers (Orrenius and Zavodny, 2014).
4. In 1999, he was named as one of its seven “Unsung Heroes of the Twentieth Century” by *Fortune* magazine (Kanavi, 2009).
5. Nationally, only 51 percent of Indian Americans identify as Hindu and the Pew Research Center (2015) estimates that around 5 percent are Sikh.
6. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/petition-calls-for-end-to-sham-marriages-1.622652> (accessed August 15, 2017).

7. Including in Fresno on December 26, 2015 and January 1, 2016. More recently on July 31, 2017, an elderly man's body was found in a Fresno canal after he had been missing for five weeks. Another young Sikh man was shot and killed outside a gas station in Elk Grove, Sacramento on July 25, 2017. Earlier attacks included one on March 4, 2011, when two elderly Sikh men out for a walk were gunned down in Elk Grove, Sacramento.
8. Muslim Asian men and women have also experienced this treatment.

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