

## **Transnational Educational Fundraising in Punjab: Old Practices, New Readings**

**Margaret Walton-Roberts**  
*Wilfrid Laurier University*

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Since the early 1990s social scientists have highlighted the involvement of immigrants in homeland development projects. In particular we have seen a reassessment of the importance of immigrant remittances, and related to this, an interest in transnationalism; the idea that immigrants create dense social, economic and political networks that transcend source and host nations. In this paper I argue that rather than a recent development, such activity has in fact been ongoing in parts of Punjab since the early twentieth century, and affects many elements of society, not just emigrants and their families. I illustrate this with an overview of two examples of educational investments involving overseas Punjabis. This paper illustrates how Punjab, especially the Doaba region, can be characterized as a transnational space that has been produced through both national and local discourses. Such active involvement of NRIs in educational development, however, may be interpreted as both facilitating and reacting to the retreat of state investment in the provision of universal education.

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### **Introduction**

Issues of development have increasingly become linked to immigration (Skeldon 1997, Kearney 1986), and since the 1990s analyses of the connection between immigration and development have directed attention to variables such as remittances and immigrant-led trade and home-based development projects (Jones 1998). A well-developed comprehension of such processes has emerged through the literature on immigration and transnationalism (Vertovec 1999). Punjab provides an important site to examine through this lens of transnationalism because of the region's rich history of international out-migration (Kessinger 1974), and the strong cultural, political and economic bonds that have been maintained by emigrants, or Non Resident Indians (NRIs).

In this paper I utilise a transnational approach in order to consider educational development and NRI Punjabis generally, and focus on two cases of educational development in particular. I review the two cases, both from the district of Nawanshahar, in order to make the following points. Firstly, that practices we would today consider as transnational have in fact long been evident in Punjab. Secondly, transnational behaviours such as fundraising and development initiatives encompass a wide range of actors, not just those who are mobile migrants; to this extent practices we deem transnational must be examined from the perspective of

communities that connect across national boundaries, even if all elements of the 'community' do not themselves cross these borders. Thirdly, the historic dimensions of such activities suggest that ongoing immigration creates new cohorts of potential transnational actors; perhaps mitigating concerns expressed about the sustainability of immigrant-led development projects. And finally, that despite the strength of immigrant-led fundraising initiatives in the education sector, the role of state remains vital in building effective educational infrastructure, and that it is not the lack of immigrant involvement that poses the greatest sustainability concern, but the inability of the state to co-ordinate and augment such energies in order to derive the greatest benefit for the people of Punjab and India.

### **Transnationalism**

As globalization processes have accelerated and the technologies of time-space compression have made interactions across vast distances easier, faster and more frequent, the dominance of corporate and state actors in conceptualizations of global change has been countered by an awareness of transnational networks shaped by individuals, especially immigrants. These conditions have led to the development of a concept of transnationalism that is more grounded and individualized, networking people, communities and places rather than solely corporations and capital. Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Christina Szanton Blanc (1992) are responsible for one of the first systematic and comprehensive studies of such transnational practices. They contend that the major analytical frame dominating perspectives of immigration envisions individuals only as labour power and not as social and political actors. They argue that social science interpretations of migration that focus solely on incorporation into the host nation are inadequate for capturing the reality of migrants "who live their lives across borders" (1992, ix). In a later study they define transnationalism as,

the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multistranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement. We call these processes transnationalism to emphasize that many immigrants today build social fields that cross geographic, cultural and political borders. (Basch *et al* 1994, 7).

Basch *et al* (1994) develop a framework for their transnational migration theory based on four premises. Firstly they argue; "Transnational migration is inextricably linked to the changing conditions of global capitalism and must be analyzed within the context of global relations between capital and labour" (Basch *et al*, 1994, p.23). The authors acknowledge that transnational connections are not new, but argue that they have intensified as an outcome of globalization processes. They argue that the interpenetration of capitalism into more and more regions of the world marks new migrant experiences, and that global restructuring has damaged economies of the developing world, further intensifying the need and desire for migration. Secondly

the authors contend, “transnationalism is a process by which migrants, through their daily life activities and social, economic, and political relations, create social fields that cross national boundaries” (p. 27). The authors feel, however, that much of the literature in relation to this remains “evocative rather than analytical” (Basch *et al*, 1994, 28). Basch *et al* (2004, 29) want to consider the *outcomes* of such transnational networks by viewing “migrants as active agents in a process of hegemonic construction”. Thirdly they argue that, “bounded social science concepts such as ‘ethnic group’, ‘race’ and ‘nation’ can limit the ability of researchers first to perceive and then to analyze the phenomenon of transnationalism” (p. 30). These bounded concepts have been taken for granted, and in their place the authors encourage an awareness based on a sense of the processual and historical in order to examine how migrants re-territorialize their practices between and across places. This re-territorialization involves complex intersections between real and imagined nation building projects as transnational immigrants:

find themselves confronted with and engaged in the nation building processes of two or more nation-states. Their identities and practices are configured by hegemonic categories, such as race and ethnicity, that are deeply embedded in the nation building processes of these nation-states (Basch *et al* 1994, 34).

Since the emergence of this early work on transnationalism in the 1990s, related literature has burgeoned, with contributions from anthropologists, sociologists, geographers, and others.<sup>1</sup> Although differing contexts shape the transnational literature, common themes include questioning how the meanings of space, citizenship, community and identity are reconstructed and reordered as a result of immigrant-led transnational activity. Various practices are examined in the literature, including political networking and mobilization (Rajagopal 1997), new citizenship practices (Ong 1999) economic transfers (Jackson 1999, Bhachu 1996) social networks and cultural production (Mountz and Wright 1996, Appadurai 1996, Bhachu 2004). While the popularity of transnational approaches to understanding immigrant behaviour has created a plethora of studies, it is still arguable that the spatial aspects of transnationality have been under examined. As Jackson, Crang and Dwyer (2004, 4) argue:

transnationality is a geographical term, centrally concerned with *reconfigurations in relations with place, landscape and space*. Because this is so obvious, there is a danger that the vocabulary of transnationality operates as a simple geographical cipher opposed to the national. (Emphasis in original).

Jackson *et al* argue that the spatial significance of the term has been overlooked in much of the literature, which tends to focus more intently on *social* practices to the neglect of related *spatial* transformations. This emphasis upon the geographical aspects of transnationality counters some of the intellectual attempts that have been

made to delimit what can be considered transnational. For example Portes *et al* (1999, 219) have made the argument that certain criteria must be employed in order to classify something as transnational behaviour:

For purposes of establishing a novel area of investigation, it is preferable to delimit the concept of transnationalism to occupations and activities that require regular and sustained social contacts over time across national borders for their implementation.

Portes *et al* (1999) define as transnational only those who sustain links through regular trans-border mobility. Using this criteria we erase sensitivity to the way class and gender, for example, might alter behaviours with transnational meanings and significance. Take for example an elderly Sikh immigrant woman, who may move infrequently, if at all, between source and home location, but her unpaid labour in the form of childcare is vital to the ability of her husband, son or daughter to move frequently between places of transnational business; or the family whose daughter or son have emigrated overseas, but social contact is maintained through other forms of exchange, such as the telephone. Or consider the local village official who plays a central role in coordinating immigrant financial contributions to transnational fundraising schemes, but who rarely transcends borders due to restrictive state immigration regulations that - despite the popular notions of a borderless world - are still highly constraining for certain people. While some are excluded from the regular and sustained practice of physically crossing borders due to class, gender or age, they may well engage in other behaviours that bring them into transnational networks of exchange (for example religious meetings, tours, news distribution, fundraising etc.), and they therefore inhabit, and play a vital role in creating, a transnational space.

To delimit who we classify as a transnational actor, therefore, not only desensitizes us to the meanings and consequences of such transactions, which cannot be read merely through frequency of movement, but also results in us ignoring how spaces; homes, villages, areas of immigrant settlement, are reconfigured in the process as Jackson *et al* (2004) maintain. These concerns are particularly relevant when we consider immigrant-led development projects in sites like Punjab. In these cases immigrants can have an important impact on communities in the source region without necessarily engaging in frequent and sustained border crossings, but by being part of wider transnational networks that facilitate the collection and transfer of resources. In this way emigrants can create significant material and symbolic change in the source region without constantly crossing borders.

In this paper, in addition to enlarging the notion of who or what can be considered transnational, I also expand the typical chronological framework employed in much of the transnational literature by relating a historic example of such practices. In effect I argue that Punjab - particularly the Doaba region<sup>2</sup> - is an

example of a space thoroughly shot through with transnational connections and characteristics, and that these characteristics have long been evident in the region.

### **India, Punjab and the Transnational Field**

Emigration and its potential development impact are increasingly seen as viable and valuable contributors to India's economic development (Lessinger 1992, Saxenian 1999). In 2001 an Indian government appointed High Level Committee (HLC) on the Indian diaspora gave official prominence to the role of Indians overseas through the dissemination of its report, and offered various policy recommendations to facilitate NRI investment in India. In considering how various Indian States interact with their NRI populations, the report drew extensively on Punjab as a region with substantial experience in dealing with a significant Non Resident Indian (NRI) population (HLC 2001, Walton-Roberts 2004a). Considering the numerical and political significance of these non-resident Punjabis - estimates suggest there are over one million Punjabis overseas (Tatla 2004) - there have been relatively few studies of the transnational impact of this emigrant population on Punjab beyond a focus on the political issues of Sikh separatism and the hybrid and globalized nature of Sikh/Punjabi culture (Tatla 1999, Axel 2001, Singh and Thandi 1999). A few scholars have examined the wider impact of immigrant fundraising and financial exchange, and considered the social and economic ramifications for community development (Helweg 1983, 1984; Dhesi 2000a; LaBrack 1989; Mehta 1990). While these authors have not employed the terminology of transnationalism *per se*, the linkages are obviously implied, and the issue of NRI fundraising and community development certainly demands greater attention. Employing the lens of transnationalism in this endeavour sensitises us to the multiple influences and affects of such activities at the scale of both structure (institutions and states) and agent (individuals, families, communities).

In developing frameworks that examine the wider impact of immigrant investments on the source community, Mehta's (1990) fieldwork on out-migration from the Bist Doab or Doaba area of the Punjab is valuable. Mehta focuses on what she terms active and passive impacts of migration. Active impacts include the formation of new channels of contact between places for information and resources to be shared. Remittances are a part of this, but based on her fieldwork Mehta argues they had little direct influence on agricultural development and - in line with the conventional view of remittances such as those described by Choucri (1986) - are more likely to be used for household and luxury goods. Mehta's research in the 1980s found remittances in both urban and rural locales were mostly used for household goods, renovating residential structures, the construction of new houses, luxury goods, and the purchase of land.

While Mehta construed this 'active' impact as 'non-productive', she did offer some important observations on what she termed the 'passive' impact of migration on educational institutions and enrolments. Mehta argued that overseas migrants

during the 1960s, though they had low educational levels, recognized the value of education once in their destination country. As well as informing friends and families of the importance of gaining education and professional training, overseas migrants made donations to educational facilities and created educational scholarships. This positive endorsement from emigrants, coupled with the elevated standard of living for families with relatives overseas, encouraged families in the source area to prioritize educational attainment as a means to secure overseas migration and enhanced social respect:

in order to realise their dreams for a foreign jaunt many of them educated themselves, or supported others in their circle (morally and financially) to go in for education in a big way. It was clear that emigration made a multipronged impact on the people in the region, but the impetus it gave education was far stronger than the amounts received in donations by the educational institutions would suggest (Mehta 1990, 157).

Mehta's study is significant in identifying the concrete influence of international migration and related fundraising on source regions, even if she considers the impact 'passive'. Mehta's observation, that social practices in the source region change in reaction to the behaviour of the emigrant population, supports the assertion I have made that transnational practices can have socio-spatial transformative effects, even if the majority of people involved are not construed as actively mobile transnational subjects in the terms Portes *et al* (1999) advocate. It also highlights Basch *et al*'s (1994, 29) point that migrants are 'active agents in a process of hegemonic construction', because migrants have played a role in encouraging greater societal desire for education. I contend, therefore, that educational development in Punjab offers a fertile topic to examine through the lens of transnationality.

### **Education, Development and NRIs**

In the age of the global economy the importance of an educated workforce has become a mantra that many governments have pursued, and for India the creation of a highly educated section of the population has become fundamental in creating a hi-tech class of worker that operates globally (Chakravarty 2000). Educational development needs to be understood as an important emblem of modernity and progress, and in the case of India such advancement through science and technology has become a powerful symbol of a distinct, yet contested, national identity (Prakash 1999). However, such advances have come at a cost:

[A]s the nation acquires a global look with the circulation of international capital and commodities, the latest phase of globalization - now carried out without colonial and imperial domination - widens the proverbial gap between the rich and the poor. As India transforms and expands its horizon and brings under its purview hitherto isolated regions and peoples, the

elitism of modern India is brought to the surface ever more clearly (Prakash 1999, 235).

Such elitism is evidenced by India's approach to higher education, which has been nurtured at the expense of primary education (Tan and Mingat 1992). For example the commitment to universal primary education for children between 6 and 11, as specified in article 45 of the Indian Constitution, has increasingly been watered down to the point that successive governments have promoted the rhetoric of 'rising literacy levels' through various short term projects as opposed to tackling the need for universal, free, elementary education (Surya 2000).

Such slippage between universal compulsory education and short-term literacy programs has been encouraged under the guise of globalization, as funding from supranational organizations such as the World Bank entrenches the dual processes of curtailing social spending, while attempting to demonstrate some limited distribution of the benefits of economic globalization. This seems to be working, since even when increased education does not lead to greater employment outcomes, it is still valued as a form of social capital that can advance social mobility and community standing for certain ethnic groups in India. The work of Jeffrey *et al* (2004, 961) identifies this process in Uttar Pradesh:

Education is of central symbolic importance to the identities of educated young people excluded from secure salaried work. Against the grain of much recent research in postcolonial settings, we demonstrate that educated Dalit and Muslim young people in rural north India have responded to a crises in employment opportunities by affirming rather than rejecting ideas of progress through education.

Even as education is seen as reproducing social differentiation, as Jeffery *et al* (2004) demonstrate, the variable quality of education available to different castes and classes still operates as a vehicle for the replication of India's elitism.

Anil Sadgopal (2000), professor of education at the university of Dehli, has unwaveringly detailed the decline in basic education in India and bemoaned the state of government schools. Sadgopal argues that India's own elite are part of the problem as they resist widening universal education to India's poorest, thereby permitting the reproduction a large pool of poor, uneducated and politically weak labour. While state funding and delivery of quality public education has been undermined, demand for education has increased.<sup>3</sup> The outcome of these two processes is a landscape of variable and often poor quality education, resulting in some communities exhibiting drop-out rates as high as 72%.<sup>4</sup> Such high rates of failure are worrying, but even when retention rates are high, the actual skills children develop are questionable, since classrooms are overcrowded, teacher training is substandard and the number of teaching days are reduced as teachers are deployed to work in other areas such as census collecting (Ramchardran 2004). The dire situation of basic education in India is a fundamental concern when one realises

the potential returns that can be recouped from basic educational investment (World Bank 1998), particularly in the development of social capital at the family and community level in rural areas (Dhesi 2000c).

While primary education in India has been neglected by the government, advanced training is celebrated as an important component of India's globalization, both through its creation of the flexible and hyper mobile IT worker, and as a profitable and expanding form of business in and of itself. Across India private investment in schools, colleges and universities is courted, and in a pattern similar to emerging and advanced economies, education is increasingly subsumed into the neo-liberal marketplace. The decline in the quality of government regulated public education, coupled with the attraction of education as a business, has resulted in the proliferation of 'teaching shops'; private schools both with and without government funding that pander to the demand for education, especially in English, but that range widely in basic infrastructure and the quality of teaching (Krishnakumar 2004).

In Punjab concerns about the increased commercialisation of the education system have been voiced (Tribune 2002). Despite the Punjab government's attempts to increase the number of government-run schools, educational standards are deteriorating as the number of teachers and total student enrolment figures have declined over the last ten years, despite an increase in Scheduled Caste enrolment (The Hindu, August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2004). As the reputation of government schools spirals downward, the state has turned to encouraging educational provision at all levels to be increasingly privatized (Singh 2003). For example the government of Punjab's Department of Information Technology, which now oversees education, has expressed its intention to create a chain of 'Adarsh Schools' where the private sector is invited to invest in the provision of education in exchange for incentives such as cheap land grants.<sup>5</sup> One of the potential by-products of this is that education is reduced to a system of technology training, where the outcome is measured by the quantity of teaching outlets and equipment, and private delivery is seen as the best method to create this. Concerns have also been raised with reference to the relative devaluating of higher education, as the number of colleges and institutes of higher learning increases and the demand for young people to have higher education creates a process of 'defensive investment in education' for middle class families concerned with the employment prospects of their children (Dhesi 2000b, 767). Combine this with a nation-wide mismatch between higher education that increasingly stresses flexible training and self-employment, and wider societal preference for stable government service employment, and you have a scenario where India's social elitism is set to continue recreating itself.

As governments at all levels increasingly turn to private sector investment to enhance education, the NRI has been seen as a potential benefactor in two ways. The reservation of seats in higher education institutes for NRIs and their children has been pursued as one route for increasing enrolment revenues, although the practice has been highly controversial (Tribune July 2001, August 2003). Another more



direct route to educational development has been through NRI donations, but while successful emigrants do contribute to their hi-tech alma maters, there has been little progress in encouraging more concerted investment initiatives, especially for primary education (Dharker 2004). BJP government attempts at creating a central educational investment board or *Bharat Shiksha Kosh* (BSK) to direct and monitor all educational donations was poorly received, and NRIs in particular refused to donate money via a government body rather than contribute directly to the institute or project of their choice. The BSK has since been abolished by the Congress-led government, who heeded the complaints many NRIs and educational institutes made regarding the suppressing effect the BSK had on their ability to raise funds overseas (The Hindu July 28<sup>th</sup> 2004, Misra 2003). Despite these diversions, the impetus emigration and emigrant transnational fundraising can deliver to educational development should not be minimized. As Mehta's (1990) work proposes, the intersection between immigration and education can be shaped both by example - overseas success and elevated status at home - but also more directly through fundraising, and it is this latter point that I examine in more detail in this next section.

I draw upon two examples of educational projects in district Nawanshahar derived from a larger research project on immigrant networks between Vancouver Canada and the Doaba region of Punjab.<sup>6</sup> I highlight first, how transnational behaviours have a historical precedent in Punjab, and second how such educational investments, despite their transnational nature, are firmly structured by a *nationalistic* discourse. Though it is transnational networks and processes that permit resources for such developments to emerge, it is a national or local attachment to place that form the motivation behind such initiatives, and it is this characteristic that has endured over the eighty years that separate these two examples.

### **Old Practices: Khalsa Middle School, Khankhana.**

Despite the energy and relative novelty of transnationalism, neither the word nor the practices associated with it are themselves new creations. The term was initially used in relation to international corporations and their global networks of influence, but its usage as regards the cultural practices of immigrant groups also has various historical precedents (Foner 1997). In a prescient article published in 1916, for example, the word 'trans-national' was used in a discussion regarding immigration and related societal transformations:

America is coming to be, not a nationality but a trans-nationality, a weaving back and forth, with the other lands, of many threads of all sizes and colors. Any movement which attempts to thwart this weaving, or to dye the fabric any one color, or disentangle the threads of the strands, is false to this cosmopolitan vision (Bourne 1916, 96).<sup>7</sup>

The awareness of such interweaving in the early twentieth century is important to highlight in the case of Punjab, because at this time the region (particularly Doaba) witnessed a significant dispersal of male migrants to various destinations in North America, South-East Asia, Europe and Australia (Kessinger 1974). Many migrants were initially sojourners who intended to return to Punjab in order to buy land and consolidate family holdings. Their attachment to Punjab was deeply rooted, and emotional bonds encouraged the formation of various linkages that we can now interpret as evidence of an early form of transnationality. Raising funds for the development of the homeland was then, and is now, an important example of transnational immigrant activity, and various project sites in Punjab attest to the longevity of such activities. For example there are several examples of schools that were set up by North American-based Sikhs in the early nineteen-twenties.<sup>8</sup> One particular example of such fundraising is the Khalsa Middle School in Khankhana.

During fieldwork in 1999 I was able to visit the Khalsa Middle School in Khankhan, Nawanshahr, through the assistance of contacts at the Guru Nanak Mission Hospital in Banga (which is itself a fascinating example of NRI-led development).<sup>9</sup> The school was established in 1923 to provide a good standard of schooling in the Punjabi language. A number of Sikhs residing overseas at the time sent 6,000 rupees each to establish the school, which was eventually handed over to the Government in 1952. Despite the government's participation, until 1967 members of the village and various NRIs continued to cover all the schools costs. The school continued to receive funds from Punjabis overseas through the work of an ex-teacher, Bhagwan Singh, who in 1987 contributed 1 lakh, 50,000 rupees (over \$3,000) and 7 lakh (over \$15,000) in 1992.<sup>10</sup> NRI educational donations are hardly unique, as this paper indicates, but in the case of Khalsa Middle School Khankhana, there is evidence of a long tradition of private investment in education that demonstrate an interesting history when examined through the trope of transnationalism.

During discussions with one of the school's teachers regarding NRI investment, I was presented with a 1932 report that indicated the school had been the recipient of significant funding from the Sikh American Educational Society of Stockton California. The amount donated to the school between 1927 and 1932 through this Stockton-based society is indicative of how the symbolic emotional ties sustained with the homeland can result in material transformations. The document's introduction indicates the emotional ties immigrants maintained with their homeland, and their recognition of the value of education as part of a project of nation building:

We all know that education is essential for the development of any nation, only education is the way which can open the doors of progress. We were compelled to close Khalsa Middle School Khankhana in the session 1923-1924 due to financial burden. When some American Sikhs saw the scene of a closed school, they decided to collect money from the Sikhs residing in America. I [Jawala Singh] and Basant Singh,

first donated ten and twelve thousand rupees respectively from our own pocket, and then requested other people to contribute for this cause. Where we went to collect money nobody refused to pay. I am grateful to everyone and take pleasure to publish this report.<sup>11</sup>

The report lists close to 600 names of people who made donations in the 1920s ranging in size from \$1,724 each made by Jawala Singh and Basant Singh, to donations of \$2.50 (the average donation was around \$10). The final page of the report lists the total amount collected at \$11,399 (over \$600,000 at current values)<sup>12</sup> with the following closing statement:

I regret if the name of any person has been missed in this public report. The next report will be published soon. I again request all concerned to donate more money for this common cause. I want to tell all the public that this school is the first of its own kind in the district. This is due to the staff and headmaster Mr Bunta Singh, BA (hons), S.A.V. [teaching degree]. There were some deficiencies in the management committee, but with some alterations the management committee is now doing well. I pray to God that he might help the Sikhs for donating more money for this noble cause of education.

The report was signed by Jawala Singh, “President of the Educational Society Khankhana, California”. This alignment of Khankhana with California, places thousands of miles from each other, indicates an interesting spatial convergence. Also indicative of the convergence of these two regions was the recording of the home village in Punjab of each donor, despite their residence in North America. Such recognition attests to the powerful resilience of the complex socio-spatial identities maintained by these Stockton Sikhs. As Leonard (1992) has demonstrated so well, these men imagined and actively reconstituted the fertile soils of the Sacramento Valley into their ‘land of the five rivers’ in North America, and in so doing they reinforced, rather than abandoned, their identification with their homeland. In the 1930s, however, the distance between California and Punjab still presented a significant spatial and regulatory barrier, since in addition to having to fund a long and arduous sea voyage, migrants would have to overcome various government regulations aimed at preventing Indians from entering or re-entering North America (La Brack 1999).

Despite these barriers the spatial bond is clearly presented in this document, and is therefore indicative of how these migrants imagined themselves inhabiting a spatially and socially unified field, despite regulatory barriers to the contrary. I suggest this convergence was both real and imagined; the knowledge Jawala Singh revealed with regard to the school’s management committee, and the first hand knowledge ‘American Sikhs’ attest to having of the school’s condition, is suggestive of a contingent of men who were physically moving back and forth between Punjab and California. Considering the economic hardships Sikh immigrants faced during

this period (Jensen 1988), the amounts donated suggest a strong commitment to the development of India and Punjab, and indicate an extensive system of organization within the Sikh immigrant community of Stockton, California. Such conviction can be read through the tone of the report's wording; education is presented as the key to 'progress' and 'nation'.

This example in and of itself is fascinating, but if we place it within its relative geographical and historical context we can see a number of ways in which it illustrates the point that transnational actors are embedded in political *nation*-building projects, both 'at home' and overseas. As Juergensmeyer (1981) has identified, the combination of discrimination overseas and colonial rule at home were seen to reinforce each other, thereby forging a deep nationalistic sentiment among Sikhs in North America. The nation that many Sikhs in North America at this time desired, therefore, was one free of British rule, and educational investment can be seen as an important outcome of this situation as Sikhs sought to promote the independence of their homeland.

In the early part of the twentieth century Stockton-based Sikhs formed an important part of the movement for Indian independence through their support for the *Ghadar* movement; an organization that advocated for Indian independence through a violent revolt against British rule (Fraser 1978, La Brack 1999). Stockton was an important node in the development of the Ghadar movement after Har Dayal, the individual credited by many for the founding of the movement, met with Sikh farmers in and around Stockton in 1912. Juergensmeyer (1981, 56 fn 18) cites a Jawala Singh as the "potato farmer near Stockton, California, [who] helped finance the movement." Harish Puri (1983, 66) states that a Jwala Singh later became the vice president of a working committee of the Hindi Association of the Pacific Coast (considered a precursor or umbrella organization of the Ghadar party), and he is mentioned as having played a role in coordinating Ghadarite volunteers who returned to India in 1914 aboard the Japanese ship the *Korea* (Puri 1983, 152; Mathur 1970, 75). Though it cannot be verified that the president of the Stockton Educational Society was the same Jawala Singh who was so prominent in the formation of the Ghadar movement in California, there is enough similarity to suggest he may well be.

Regardless of the veracity of this personal link, it is clear that educational development was always a central element of the Ghadr movement and its nationalistic aims. In 1912 when Har Dayal first met with the wealthy Stockton farmer Jawala (Jwala) Singh, their discussions about advancing Indian independence resulted in the institution of Guru Gobind Singh Scholarships to fund Indian students to come to the USA (Puri 1983, 57). In reference to these scholarships Mathur (1970, 23) argues: "One of the aims of bringing students from India to the States was to afford opportunities to young Indian revolutionaries to visit the States in the disguise of students." In her work on Punjabi-Mexican Americans in California, Karen Leonard (1992, 83) identifies the interweaving of religion, nationalism and education in the presence of the Doaba Educational Society, which

“often met at the Stockton Gurdwara in conjunction with Ghadar party meetings.” Leonard (1992, 130) also recounts one interview with a Punjabi wife from Yuba City who described the Stockton convention, a meeting held every January, as, “a three day sequence of meetings, with a meeting of the ‘Indian Lady Educational Society’ or Doaba Educational Society on the first day, a Ghadar party meeting on the second day, and then the celebration of the birthday of the tenth guru, Guru Gobind Singh, on the third day.” The connection between Stockton Sikhs, Indian nationalistic sentiment and educational societies is therefore well documented.

These historical references make it clear that Sikhism, education and Indian independence were powerfully interwoven in the minds of North American Punjabis. Furthermore, according to the reprinted accounts of Indian Police agents Isemonger and Slattery (1998, 9), one of the main Indian organizations in North America at the time, The Sikh Khalsa Diwan, was headquartered in Stockton and key members of the Stockton Gurdwara gave active support to Har Dayal’s movement by promoting his revolutionary aims. By some accounts the tri-coloured flag of the Ghadar party was also first unfurled in Stockton in 1914 (Mathur 1970, 56), and one of the first meetings after the start of World War I, where Indian immigrants in America were encouraged to return to India and fight the British, was also held in Stockton (Mathur 1970, 73). The revival of the Ghadar movement post WWI was also focused on Stockton with a new committee formed there in January 1922 (Mathur 1970, 132).

The connections between the political goals of the Ghadar party and those of Sikh educationalist were therefore not incompatible. Education can be seen as one-way Sikh immigrants could contribute to the development of India without their work appearing seditious and incurring the attention of various colonial authorities. This offers an interesting insight into the complex cultural scripts that circulated between India and the west, as multiple agents advanced the project of ‘modernizing’ India through education, but with each imagining contradictory results. The historical significance of the Sikh American Educational Society of Stockton California document clearly makes the case that Punjab has long been a ‘transnational space’ where social identities and places were reconfigured as a result of the spatial connectivity channelled through diasporic networks. Such networks incorporated various people and landscapes, precipitating transformations at numerous scales, from the individual to the nation. Such individuals did not, however, have to physically transcend boundaries on a regular basis in order to contribute to these transformations.

The case of Stockton and its links to the Khalsa Middle School in Khankahan offers an important illustration of the transnational imaginaries constructed by immigrant communities and demonstrates how such imaginaries offer both symbolic and material geographical transformation. As well as having important spatial consequences, such processes are also continuous over time, and in order to validate the argument of Punjab as rich transnational space, it is necessary to link these early

examples to more contemporary cases of transnational fundraising and their connection to projects of nation-building.

### **New Readings: Amardeep Singh Shergill Memorial College, Mukandpur**

In 1968 Gurcharan Singh Shergill left Mukandpur in Nawanshahar for Britain. In a story common of many Punjabi immigrants to Britain in the 1960s, Shergill was relatively uneducated, but gained economic success through his own entrepreneurialism, eventually establishing his own travel agency in Birmingham. His only son, Amardeep, surpassed his father's educational aspirations by attending the London School of Economics, but then died suddenly when only nineteen years old. In an attempt to honour his son's memory and channel the family's grief the Shergills decided a college should be built in Mukandpur in Amardeep's honour. For Gurcharan Singh Shergill this was partly a cathartic process to mourn the loss of his son, and a reflection of his respect for education. But it was also reflective of a global landscape of uneven development (since his financial status would certainly preclude such a development in Britain), and the resilience of his transnational links, since Shergill was able to mobilize social capital in Mukandpur almost two decades after he first left the region.

The social capital Shergill called upon in his drive to construct a college included his uncle, the *sarpanch* of Mukandpur, who donated 10 acres of land for the project. Other land donations followed and provided 21 acres in total. In order to co-ordinate college fundraising an overseas committee was formed as contributions came from not only the Shergill family and their friends, but from a wider circle of overseas Punjabis. In December of 1998 Amardeep Singh Shergill Memorial College was opened to; "provide value based education to the rural youth by inculcating in them the virtues of hard work, self discipline, dignity of labour and love for knowledge so as to make them responsive and responsible citizens."<sup>13</sup> The college has over 1,000 co-ed students, 31 lecturers, 6 instructors, and 22 non-teaching staff, and courses range from arts and commerce, science, to various vocational training courses. Students are drawn from surrounding rural villages, and the college is affiliated to Guru Nanak Dev University for the granting of various Bachelors degrees.

A significant part of the college's funding depends upon a collection over seventy-five overseas patrons, sixty-eight in the United Kingdom and seven in Canada, each of whom contributes \$5,000 pounds sterling for life membership.<sup>14</sup> Contributions from Canadian and UK NRIs resulted in the construction of sport facilities, a gym complex and a stadium, and the college subsequently developed a reputation for success in various sports, particularly *kabbadi*, a popular Punjabi style of wrestling.<sup>15</sup> Not only was the funding of the college formed through these networks, but also further academic linkages were being pursued as the board investigated the potential of collaborating with many colleges in the country's where their donors were located.<sup>16</sup> The delivery of vocational, arts, science and computer

courses, together with strong cultural amenities such as sports facilities and a *Gurdwara* are showcased by the college trust as evidence of the superior quality of education delivered by the institution and its ability to produce “capable and responsible citizens of India” and “‘graduate entrepreneurs’ who do not...run after minor jobs, rather become job providers instead.”<sup>17</sup> The college is clearly articulating a desire to address the training-labour market mismatch Dhesi (2000b) identifies by promoting the importance of self-employment to replace the widespread expectation of public employment. In this way the college is engaging in the new economic realities emerging from India’s encounter with the global economy.

The pedagogical goals and objectives of the college are clearly a product of the vacillations and unevenness of the contemporary global economic landscape. As I have suggested earlier in this paper, private educational institutes are becoming the normal standard in India and Punjab as neoliberal tendencies pressure the state of India in its attempts to engage with the global economy. The very fact that Shergill could initiate such a project is also itself a consequence of this landscape of uneven development. Shergill’s position is a product of a history of colonial articulation between Britain and India that manifest itself in the episodic transfer of immigrant labour. Parts of this immigrant population entered a segmented labour market as ethnic entrepreneurs to find success not only in their own enterprises, but also later in their ability to exploit the same uneven global economic landscape as they utilized the disproportionate purchasing power of their British pound sterling incomes in India.

Intersecting with the structural economic context, the *emotional* origins of this project are clearly articulated. In a discussion with one of the college’s teachers, she stated that Mr Shergill created the college because he wanted to “see Amardeep’s face in the students at the college” and she commented that the institution had now become like his son; “he is happy when the college does well, he has found a direction for his grief.”<sup>18</sup> Despite the symbolic power the college has for the Shergill family, the fiscal realities of running an educational institution with over a thousand students were clearly expressed. The college relies upon student fees (4,000 rupees per student, less than \$100) and income raised by the fundraising committee. While staff suggested that the college could run for perhaps another ten to fifteen years, it was stressed that eventually government financing would be needed because the ability of the overseas committee to keep fundraising was doubtful; as one teacher expressed it, “once this generation passes on, the second generation will not take over the running.” Also, if the college were to expand it was felt that the government would eventually need to take control and provide the necessary funding.

Amardeep Singh Shergill Memorial College provides an interesting contemporary example of educational fundraising by overseas Punjabis. Its contribution to enhancing the educational opportunities for Punjabi rural youth are clear, and the cultural pride associated with its sports teams and expanding facilities have enhanced the social capital of the region, as well as developed the potential for economic advancement. The contributions from Punjabis overseas, even if they

themselves do not often visit the region, clearly contribute to reconfiguring the local economic development of Mukandpur and its surrounding villages by connecting the education of its current youth, to the dispersed communities of earlier generations. There are numerous other examples of similar educational initiatives, especially in the Doaba region. Indeed in a report from the NRI Sabha of Punjab on the role of NRIs in social development projects, over half of the fifty examples cited involved schools, colleges or computer centres.<sup>19</sup> The role of education as a developmental conduit for transnational communities is clearly evident, and spans the decades that separate these two Nawanshahar examples.

### Conclusions

From these two seemingly distinct examples, there are some important common observations to draw and some overarching conclusions to be offered with regard to transnationalism, NRIs, educational investment and development. Firstly, Mehta's characterization of the effects of immigration on education as 'passive' neglects the direct and active processes of development immigrants have participated in since the early part of this century. In this regard Mehta's assessment of the 'passive' impact of educational investment needs to be re-evaluated.

Secondly, the historical evidence of immigrant-led fundraising for education is indicative of transnational practices that have long shaped and reconfigured Punjab's socio-cultural and economic landscape. In building a historical view of these transnational practices though, we must locate them within wider contextual process of change, be it colonialism or globalisation. As Basch *et al* (1994) advocate, we must interpret transnational migrants as active agents capable of playing a role in building new hegemonic realities (an independent India) or reinforcing existing ones (the privatization of education). In the case of Punjab there are ample historical and contemporary examples of these practices.

Thirdly, we need to recognize the spatial effects of transnationalism, where many people are affected by the flow of information, ideas and resources, not just those who physically transcend national borders on a regular basis. The organizational commitment made by various parties as they donate funds, share information and dedicate themselves emotionally, as well as financially, to the success of such endeavours must be recognized. The Punjabi youth who attend such colleges, and the villages that benefit from the presence of these institutions need to be seen as part of larger transnational collectives. Multiple points of origin - such as Birmingham and Stockton - need to be conjoined with the outcomes of these transnational investments. Those outcomes range from the more abstract; such as nation building and the economic advancement of rural youth, to the more intimate assertions of emotional belonging to place and the honouring of family and home.

Fourthly, the *continuous* nature of such investments over time suggests that concerns regarding the sustainability of immigrant interest in development projects - as expressed by the teacher at Amardeep Singh Memorial College and raised in



other forums - needs to be re-evaluated.<sup>20</sup> Evidence suggests that for most of the last century members of each new emigrant cohort, each with their own emotional connection to their homeland, have contributed to various community improvement projects. Throughout the last century educational projects in various guises have been a major element of this process. In the first example the issue propelling the development of effective elementary schooling in Khankhana, given the political activities evident in the North American Sikh community at this time, can be seen as a desire to contribute to the progress of an independent Indian nation. In the second example the desire to see the creation of an educated, yet culturally grounded, workforce able to propel Punjab forward into the new global age is clearly articulated through the work of overseas Punjabis whose efforts are in part inspired by the power of honorific values associated with their village, their family and their children. The examples I have conveyed in this paper stress this continuity of emigrant involvement in India's nation building. From efforts to utilize education to create an India free of colonial rule, to contemporary projects to facilitate Punjab's engagement with changing labour markets, emigrants have utilised their resources and mobilized them transnationally to aid the advancement of their nation. Rather than be concerned about the *sustainability* of immigrant fundraising then, scholars need to turn their attention to what factors and contexts motivate new immigrants to retain attachment to their origin societies, and the structural processes that constrain or advance their ability to convert such attachments into material transformation.

Fifthly, and finally, the more significant point to elaborate upon with reference to development in Punjab is to critically assess the role of the state in these ventures. In both of the cases highlighted in this paper the state was expected to eventually step in and assume responsibility for the delivery of educational programs, in this regard it is the state that we need to look toward to play a greater role in the *sustainability* of such vital social programs. Government funding, or the lack thereof, forces institutions to focus on developing higher education for a select monied few, rather than investing in universal primary schooling as a development tool, and NRIs are implicated in these processes as both consumers and providers of education. The presence and continued attention devoted to NRI-led fundraising, in both policy and academic circles, may disguise the extent to which the state has abdicated its responsibilities in this area. In contexts where neoliberalism is increasingly infiltrating state-society relations, transnational philanthropy may act as a 'shadow state' (Mitchell 2004). But in the case of India, where the state's ability to efficiently manage financial resources is viewed with suspicion, attempts to build a government role in co-ordinating NRI donations, as in the BSK, has been roundly rejected.

Although immigrants from Punjab have undoubtedly played an important role in the initiation of various educational developments throughout the last century, the state is still seen as the body that eventually needs to contribute to long-term educational funding. In that respect we need to understand that NRI Punjabis can play a vital role in identifying needs and trends in education and in contributing

infrastructure and initiating development, but long term socially equitable progress can only be secured with the active involvement and contribution of the state. Such efforts, however, have failed as the government's ability to manage such initiatives, such as with the BSK, has been greeted with significant suspicion and resentment by parts of the NRI community. Therefore, despite the long tradition of transnational fundraising where earlier generations of emigrant Punjabis contribute to the advancement of current generations, the long-term challenges of effective educational and social capital development in India remain.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The range of journals with an interest in transnationalism that have emerged in the last decade or so, such as *Disapora*, *Public Culture*, *Global Network*, is indicative of the growing interest in this field.

<sup>2</sup> The Doaba region contains the districts of Kapurthala, Hoshiarpur, Jalandhar and Nawanshahr.

<sup>3</sup> In a report on basic education in India over 90% of parents agreed it was important to send their children to school (PROBE 1999; Krishnakumar 2004).

<sup>4</sup> This rate is for Rajasthan grades 1-10, see Ramachandran (2004).

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.doitpunjab.gov.in/hredpl.asp>, accessed October 20<sup>th</sup> 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Initial immigrant respondents with active linkages to development projects in Punjab were contacted and interviewed in Vancouver between 1998 and 1999. Several of these provided contact information and introductions to their counterparts in India, and from this a network or snowball sample provided further contacts in Punjab, where between November of 1999 and March 2000 I interviewed over seventy-five NRIs, government officials and community leaders, and visited over thirty projects involving NRI funding consisting variously of hospitals, village development projects and educational establishments. Aspects of this research have been discussed elsewhere (Walton-Roberts 2001, 2004b).

<sup>7</sup> My thanks to Richard Wright for drawing my attention to this article.

<sup>8</sup> For example Khalsa High School at Bundala, Khalsa Girls Middle School for Girls both in Jalandhar district, and at Mahilpur (Hoshiarpur district). My thanks to Autar Dhesi for this information.

<sup>9</sup> The visit occurred on November 25<sup>th</sup>, 1999, and my guide and interpreter was Raghbir Singh.

<sup>10</sup> 1 lakh equals 100,000 rupees, conversions to US \$ at 46 rupees per \$1.

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<sup>11</sup> "Report of Sikh American Educational Society, Stockton, California." Translated by Gurmant Singh Palahi.

<sup>12</sup> Calculation made using John J. McCusker, "Comparing the Purchasing Power of Money in Great Britain from 1264 to Any Other Year Including the Present" Economic History Services, 2001, <http://www.eh.net/hmit/ppowerbp/> (accessed August 2004).

<sup>13</sup> Amardeep Singh Shergill Memorial College information pamphlet provided by the college, November 1999.

<sup>14</sup> Information from an interview with the College's Principal, November 1999.

<sup>15</sup> The college has won various Kabbadi awards (College Magazine, 1999). Interview with the college Principal November 1999.

<sup>16</sup> Information from an interview with the College's Principal, November 1999

<sup>17</sup> Chairman S.S. Johl's message, Amardeep Singh Shergill Memorial College magazine, 1999, page 7.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with the political Science teacher, Amardeep Memorial College, November 1999.

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.nrisabhapunjab.com/nri/statistics.htm> (accessed 27 July 2004).

<sup>20</sup> For example see Dhesi, A. "Some issues in rural development" remarks from 'The International Seminar on Rural Development', Punjab University, March 2004.

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