BhangraNation
New Meanings of Punjabi Identity in the Twenty First Century

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Punjabi identity, *punjabiyat*, has been fissured several times by religious, linguistic and national boundaries in the last century or so. Historians, anthropologists and religious studies scholars have turned their attention in the recent years to recover the meaning of punjabiyat in the everyday lives of people. Their research has uncovered a shared Punjabi place differentiated by region, religion, and caste with porous, fluid, multiple boundaries. The construction of formal religious boundaries, reinforced by linguistic, resulted in their closure, which was completed through the division of Punjab in 1947. Even though a literal return to the shared Punjabi place might not be possible, ordinary Punjabis have resisted its reinscription and division through new cartographies by returning to the memory of the Undivided Punjabi place. Advanced travel and communication technologies have opened new possibilities of contact between dispersed Punjabi groups enabling virtual, if not real, reconstructions of *punjabiyat* in cyberspace.

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Introduction

Those of you who do not belong to my generation will live to see Punjab's identity overcome the effects of the religious divide of 1947 and enjoy the fruit of a prosperous and happy Punjab which transcends the limitation of a geographical map.
(*Khizar Hayat Tiwana,* Minister of the Punjab Union 1947, in 1964[1])

Several attempts to carve out a distinctive Punjabi identity have been made before and after the 1947 Partition, including ethno-linguistic constructions such as Azad Punjab and Punjabi *suba* movements or ethno-religious ones such as the movement for Khalistan or the Sikh Nation. This paper examines the new global imaginings of *punjabiyat* and the Punjabi nation to propose an ethnocultural and ethnospatial definition of the Punjabi nation by examining the new meanings of *punjabiyat* and communities produced in relation to Bhangra performance. BhangraNation is similar to the Sikh Nation in being a deterritorialized transnational *topos* of community that invokes primordialist objects to interrogate nationalist cartographies. But it is an inclusive narrative, which not only erases but also extends boundaries to transform the meaning of *punjabiyat* in the global village. My contention is that the self-fashionings in BhangraNation cross national, linguistic and religious boundaries to converge on cultural contiguity. At the same time, they point to future elective identities

where commonality of concerns and interests rather than birth will be community producing.

I

The homepage of *Punjabi Network,* a Punjabi website*,* appears to voice the shared Punjabi nostalgia for the ethnolinguistic community splintered by nationalist cartography in 1947.[2] The collectivity invoked on the site is disengaged from territory and made to converge on an ineffable primordiality located in speech, consciousness and customs in turns. Language and culture are privileged over location and religion in a desire to recover the undivided Punjabi memory prior to its compound fractures.

Punjab?

> Punjab - is a state of mind.
> You may live in any part of this earth but if your mother-tongue is
> Punjabi you are a Punjabi. Punjab is wherever a Punjabi lives! It
> has nothing to do with any religion or belief.

Having defined Punjabi in quasi mystical terms, the website continues by inviting Punjabis of all hues, classes, castes, nations and sects to reconstruct the lost ethnocultural community.

Global Punjab?

> Global Punjab has more than 150 million people worldwide with
> majority living in Pakistan and India and rest scattered over in
> Africa, Europe, Asia and North America.
>
> In Global Punjab - all are welcome. There are no biased
> restrictions nor any fundamentalist ideas about life. Punjabi culture
> is so ancient that having seen so many invasions, so many heavy
> mistakes and tragedies, Punjabis have become more global than
> any other community. Their globalness may not be very apparent
> at first, but inside every Punjabi is a global citizen, striving to
> *make it* in this life.
>
> We are *attempting to unite* all Punjabis and not dividing them by
> classes, castes, religions or nationalistic systems, which have been
> means to screw us up[sic] in last thousands of years. Enough of all
> that! That has only made us poorer, ignorant and a rural lot.

Senior Punjabis lament for the lost homeland, invariably expressed as a question, mourn the multiple fissures suffered by the region eponymously named after its five rivers (*Punj* five *aab* water). The rhetorical question, *Punjab reh kithe giya?* (What remains of Punjab?), interrogates Indian history's

unfathomable silence on the Partition experience. If taxonomy could be used as a guideline to Punjab's sacred cartography, how can the region retain its name with two rivers left behind in another nation? Only three of the rivers (Sutluj, Beas, and Ravi) remain in the territory of present day Indian Punjab, the other two having gone to Punjab Pakistan. But traces of the old Punjabi place, superscripted by national cartographies, are still clearly visible in Punjabi markings of the homeland. Unlike the self-imaginings of other Indian regions, these homeland memories are disloyal to national borders as they follow the passage of the five rivers flowing in total contempt of national barriers. The imagery of overflowing rivers washing down frontier checkpoints and controls connects these primordial attachments to the contemporary globalizing wave that has put the national constellation into question.

What accounts for the appeal of this originary narrative of an organic community? Edward Shils' answer is that social bonds such as those of blood, religion, language, and race are taken as 'given' and natural and evoke stronger emotional loyalties than the instrumentalist ones mobilized in the formation of civic nationalisms. Clifford Geertz concurs that the 'overpowering' and 'ineffable' coerciveness of ties believed to be primordial creates 'conflicting loyalties between primordial ties and civic sentiments' threatening the unity of the nation state.[3] Anthony D Smith testifies to the persistence, change and resurgence of *ethnies* in the nation state and mentions the emotional appeal of the ethnic past in shaping present cultural communities, particularly in the formation of post-colonial nation states in non-western societies. What role can primordialist self-definitions play in the postmodern, post-colonial constellation? While some see little space for sub-national identities in the post-industrial nation state, others discern a distinct resurgence of sub-national and ethnic movements fostered by electronic networks. What are the factors propelling the new ethnolinguistic or religious 'tribes' in the postnational constellation? Whether primordial identities will have a place in the global world and whether they would provide fixity, as Melucci maintains, or create further fragmentation, it seems unlikely that the ethnic myths of descent and ethnic heritage will cease to have impact. If it is true that *ethnies* have always been fissured and have permitted multiple identities, does the representation of Punjabi difference in postmodernity require the mobilization of a monolithic ethnic essence or can it accommodate conflicting narratives and accretive identities? Will Punjabi difference be articulated in interstitial diasporic spaces or would it be translated in the sending areas through hybridity to reinscribe the metropolis and modernity? Arguing that the shared performative cultural heritage of the Punjabi speech community including music and dance remains the sole resisting space for interrogating the multiple splintering of *punjabiyat*, the Punjabi identity, this paper will focus on the reconstruction of a new *punjabiyat* in relation to the Bhangra revival of the eighties.[4]

Bhangra was rediscovered and appropriated in the articulation of two forms of cultural difference, the one signaled by what Hall calls 'the end of the innocent notion of the essential black subject' and the second by the end of, what one might call, the essential Indian subject.[5] Ethnic loyalties to village,

family, place, or clan subsumed in the symbolic construction of 'a people' in the making of the nation-state returned through the hyphenated, in-between spaces of British Asian music groups splitting the marginal space of blackness in Britain and the dominant narrative of Indianness in India. The musical production of British Punjabi youth reintroduced ethnicity into the identity politics of the marginalized, destabilizing identarian constructions based on nation and race in Britain as well as India. In the process of producing a unified Punjabi identity to oppose an essentialist blackness with Asianness, Asian youth subcultures helped to produce global *punjabiyat*.

Though the *punjabiyat* so produced was appropriated in diasporic Sikh separatism, it paradoxically enabled the reconstruction of a unified Punjabi space. The linguism of the Sikh demand recovered the Punjabi speech community from the palimpsest of Hindi and Urdu. Similarly, the summoning of 'core' Punjabi values in the constitution of the Sikh diaspora made them available to the entire ethnos. This happened for the simple reason that the pastoral Punjabi past that was mobilized in the construction of *punjabiyat* has never been exclusively Sikh. The dancing Bhangra body, consecrating the Sikh nation's primordial wholeness in the *amritdhari* bodily iconicity, also put together the unbroken Punjabi body. The performance of Punjabi identity through shared cultural rituals like Bhangra released the Punjabi ethno spatial space for reclamation by Hindu and Muslims in addition to Sikhs. As Punjabi harvest ritual, Bhangra revived the unified 'village', bioregional identification before its sectarian and nationalist cracks. A separatist movement, invoking a pre-given ethnic essence in its self definition, therefore, inadvertently led to ethnospatial restoration and reunification.

II

Arjun Appadurai, in *Sovereignty without Territory*, examines new nationalisms in relation to the problematic of sovereignty and territory and concludes that 'territory is still vital to the national imaginary of diasporic populations and stateless people of many sorts'.[6] It is interesting that Appadurai should cite Khalistan as an example of the 'new postnational cartography' of the post Westphalian model, which borrows the spatial discourses of the nation. This view of the Sikh nation as a 'deterritorialized' nation without a state is shared by Verne A. Dusenbery, who maintains that 'the Sikhs, in managing to maintain a collective ethno-religious identity without a sovereign homeland, have come to constitute almost a 'paradigmatic example of a transnational community'.[7] Though the nation might be imagined differently from the territorial nation-state, calls to solidarity in postnational constellations continue to be made in the name of the nation.

BhangraNation is the name of the most prestigious Bhangra event held in Toronto every year with Bhangra bands from the world over competing for the first position.[8] A Punjabi folk dance competition conducted in a diasporic location, boasting of participation from groups from the homeland and the diaspora, might well serve as a metaphor for the collectivities clustered around

Bhangra performance in real and virtual places. BhangraNation's *topos* of national identity resembles that of the Sikh nation in being a *topos* of community that contests the *topos* of the nation and national cartographies. But BhangraNation is as an inclusive, ethnospatial narrative permitting porous, intersecting boundaries opening out to all Punjabi and non-Punjabi *ethnies* in opposition to the exclusivist, reactive, ethno-religious Sikh nation. Imagining Punjab as an ethnospatial rather than ethno-linguistic or ethno-religious complex conforms to Harjot Oberoi's notion of the ethno-territorial community in *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*.

I view BhangraNation as recalling the memory of the Punjabi ethnospatial complex overwritten by religious and scriptural identifications. Oberoi's definition of Punjab as a geographical as well as a cultural area, which he opposes to humanly constructed political and religious boundaries, meets the postmodern concept of the bioregion conceived by Peter Berg and Larry Dasmann in the 70s, referring to 'both a geographical terrain and a terrain of consciousness.'[9] Emphasizing the interpretation of the Punjabi places of culture, healing and worship at the level of popular village religion and everyday practices, Oberoi shows how they were overwritten by formal religions. Peter van der Veer places this rupture at the turn of the twentieth century in the emergence of *tomb* cults signaling the region's Islamization, which were followed by the birth of Islamic and Hindu nationalism.[10] While the intersection of Sikh with Hindu boundaries was fairly common knowledge, the collapse of Sikh and Hindu with Islamic boundaries uncovered by Oberoi adds new dimensions to the understanding of Punjabi identity.[11]

John Connell and Chris Gibson, in examining the relationship of music with space and identity, show that musical cartographies cannot be read outside political and social cartographies. Bhangra's generic classification reflects the fluid, porous boundaries of the old Punjabi place. Bhangra performance illustrates the complex interweaving of Hindu, Muslim and Sikh strands in Punjabi identity, which were separated in the emergence of sectarian and linguistic nationalisms. Though certain genres might have a sectarian provenance in being attached to specific Sufi, Sikh or Hindu practices, participation is dictated by the rules of performance rather than by concrete identities. Like all other aspects of Punjabi identity, Bhangra is not the exclusive legacy of any particular group but forms a part of that shared ethnospatial past, which resisted sect, language and nation based boundaries.

The contemporary Bhangra space retains Bhangra's traditional boundary crossing feature though it collapses further boundaries to enable non-Punjabi participation. A visit to this performance space returns one to Oberoi's Punjabi pastoral insensitive to nationality, geographical location, religion or class. Even where visible markers might provide a clue to location, their porousness prevents the fixing of identities. Performing on a transnational network in a music album produced by a local company, the Bhangraplayer could be located on any site on the BhangraNation. The alphabetical arrangement of Bhangra artists on a Bhangra website crossing several boundaries illustrates the transnational character of the contemporary Bhangra map. Neither the artists'

names, nor those of companies can provide reliable clues to their sectarian, national or locational coordinates.[12]

A.S. Kang
Abrar U1 Haq
Achanak
Alaap (photo)
Amar Arshi
Amar Singh Chamkila (photo)
Amrit Saab
Anakhi
Apna Sangeet
Atul Sharma
Avtar Maniac
B21 (photo)
Babu Mann
Bally Sagoo
Balwinder Safri (photo)
Bhinda Jatt (photo)
Bhupi
Bikram Singh
Bobby Jahol
Daler Mehndi
DCS (photo)
Didar Sandhu
Diler Begowalia
Dilshad Akhtar
Dippa (Satrang) (photo)
Dolly Singh

Gurdas Maan (photo)
Gursewak Mann
Hans Raj Hans (photo)
Harbhajan Mann
Harbjan Shera
Hard Kaur
Hard-E
Heera Group
Inderjit Nikku
Jagmohan Kaur
Jasbir Jassi
Jassi Premi
Jaswinder Kaur Brar
Jazzy Bains (photo)
K.S. Makhan
Kuldip Manak (photo)
Kulwinder Dhillon
M Saddiq
Madan Maddi
Malkit Singh (photo)
Manjit Pappu
Manmohan Waris
Maqbool
Meshi Eshara
Mohammad Saddiq
Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan

Pargat Bhagu
Parminder Sandhu
Premi
Punjabi MC
Ranjit Kaur
Ranjit Mani (photo)
Sabar Koti
Sahotas
Sangeet Group
Sarabjit Cheema
Sardool Sikander
Satwinder Bitti
Satwinder Bugga
Shamsher Sandhu
Shazia Manzoor (photo)
Silinder Pardesi
Sukhbir
Sukhdev Sukha
Sukhshinder Shinda (photo)
Sukhwinder Panchi
Surinder Shinda
Surjit Bindrakhia (photo)
Surjit Gill
XLNC (photo)
Yamla Jatt

As Urdu names are as common in Punjab as Hindi, how is one to conclusively prove if an artist is Hindu, Muslim or Sikh? Even if Sikhs dominate the Bhangrascape, the beard and the turban do not function as definitive identity signifiers for there are as many clean shaven Sikhs as there are bearded Hindus. Is the clean shaven Gurdas Mann a Sikh and the bearded Hans Raj Hans a Muslim?[13] The popular cultural compulsions of creating powerful brand images complicates bodily semiotics further. Apache Indian and Jazzy Bains use Punjabi lyrics but, with names evocative of the Wild West, they could be from anywhere.[14] Sikh Muslim imbrication occurs even in Sikh names through the appendage of the *ustad's* name as in Daler Mehndi's case.[15]

Not only concrete identities but also their discursive representation reflects the interpenetration of Hindu, Muslim and Sikh boundaries. Since Bally Sagoo's remix of Malkit Singh's *gud nalon ishq mitha* inserted the inimitable Sikh in the visual narrative of a Hindu wedding, it has become customary to dissolve Hindu

Sikh boundaries in Bhangra music videos.[16] Jassi Sidhu's *virji vyahon chalya* with the Sikh performing at his Hindu brother's *sehrabandhi* is particularly evocative of the Hindu Sikh kinship destroyed by separatism. Similarly, Hans Raj Hans's adoption of the Sufi idiom in the *julli* genre has the bearded Hindu rehearsing the Muslim gestures at the *pir's* tomb resurrecting the shared spaces of Punjabi worship. Despite their deep commitment to the Sikh cause, Sikh Bhangra artists have reserved their commitment to *sikhi* in their devotional rather than Bhangra albums. Given such frequent border crossings, it comes as no shock when the Muslim Sabri brothers compare the beloved to God, using the Punjabi term *rab* (not *Allah*), or when the Sikh Harbhajan Mann invokes His Islamic name, *Wallah*, to warn against lovesickness.

BhangraNation's character as a transnational virtuality was brought home at the first Punjabi popular music award in 2004. A young Sikh, Jassi Sidhu, received the Best Newcomer award at the first ETC Channel Punjabi Awards in 2004 for his Punjabi album. His location was revealed only when he peppered his pure Punjabi 'thank you' speech liberally with Cockney asides.[17] When pure Punjabi is as likely to be found in Birmingham and British Columbia as in Jallandar and Lahore, *punjabiyat* ceases to be anchored to geography. I see the Bhangra cartography as reinscribing the geographies of nation states to construct a translocal Bhangrascape with specific local inflections. While studies of specific Bhangra 'scenes', particularly from Bhangra's new British capitals, have been particularly helpful in illuminating Bhangra's participation in local cultural politics, I wish to call attention to the translocal identity spaces formed in relation to Bhangra that reveal a complex negotiation with local identities.[18]

<center>III</center>

Steven Grosby, in 'The Inexpungeable Tie of Primordiality', explains that though primordiality might be socially constructed and largely 'an affect issue', human beings 'do make classifications of the self and the other in accordance with such criteria'.[19] Grosby holds that ineffable attachments and ties to certain objects depend on beliefs about these objects. Bhangra participates in the construction of global *punjabiyat* through the activation of cultural resources to which 'primordial sentiments' are attached. Whether the primordial return is possible or not, Bhangra texts celebrate an *apriori* Punjabi ethnicity in romanticized narratives of the Punjabi homeland. The objects mobilized in the construction of Punjabi ethnicity include consanguinity, religion and language but also common territorial origin, conspicuous biological features as well perceptible differences in the conduct of everyday life. In my opinion, the attachment of affect in Bhangra texts to territorial location, customs and culture rather than to religion rescues it from the ethnic absolutism and exclusivism of the Sikh nation.

Bhangra texts repeat a rap like nostalgia for a primordial *punjabiyat* captured in the trope of return. The myth of return undergirding Bhangra texts grows stronger in inverse proportion to the impossibility of return, literal and

metaphoric. The text invariably opens with the protagonist's returning home, often accompanied by a westernized partner, and concludes with his reintegration into an exoticized Punjabi sociality. Though the return trope underlies most texts, some articulate it more unambiguously than others. The unofficial anthem of the BhangraNation by the Punjabi poet laureate Gurdas Mann needs to be quoted in detail as an introduction to the objects to which primordial sentiments come to be attached though the use of the conditional might hint at the impossibility of return.[20]

Apna Punjab hove	To be in our own Punjab
Ghar di sharaab hove	Where homemade liquour flows free
Ganne da danda hove	A sugarcane
Baan da manja hove	A string cot
Manje ute baitha jat	And the peasant reclining royally
Oye Banya nawab hove	on the string cot
Pehle tod vari vichon	In the very first gulp
Duja peg lava hoye	downing the second peg
Gandala da saag	*Gandalan* greens
Vaddi bebe ne banaya hove	cooked by grandmother
Muhn de vich rakhde e	The taste of raw spices
masale da swad hove	tickles my tongue as I put it in my mouth
Saron de saag vich main	To mustard greens
Ghyo te ghyo paayi javaan	I keep adding dollops of butter
Makki dian rotiyaan noon	Countless homemade maize corn bread
Bina gine khayeen javaan	I go on eating
Khoon te jaake ganne choopan	I saunter across to the well suck fresh sugarcane
Oye ghar da kabaab hove	Oh for homemade kebab

The rap remix of the song translates the song's centrality to Bhangra's 'return to roots' identity performance in the diaspora. A deep male voice announces 'We are now returning to the roots', before playing the soundtrack peppered with Jamaican patois. Other Bhangraplayers share and repeat Mann's '*makki di roti*' nationalism revealing an emotional attachment to everyday items and rituals. Malkit Singh's new album echoes Mann's homeland yearning, once again translated as food.[21]

Vekh Li Valait	I have had enough of foreign lands
Yaaro Vekh Li Valait	Friends, enough of foreign lands
……………………..	
Mera Maa De Hata Diyan	
Pakiyan Rotiyan Khaan Nu Bara Hi Dil Karda	
I ask for nothing more than bread made by my mother's hand	

The song trails off with the protagonist being escorted back to India by family. Other examples of homeland nostalgia abound.

More often than not, this mystical, elusive Punjabi essence translates into a female iconicity comprising the mother, the sister and the beloved. As in Indian nationalism, the Punjabi woman's body becomes the site for the negotiation of Punjabi modernity. The female body is draped or undraped to inscribe quintessential Punjabi values. The veiled Punjabi woman apotheosized as virgin or mother is set in opposition to the *mem* or the westernized urban or diasporic woman, whose journey back home must parallel the male protagonist's for her to transform into the beloved.

Br-Asian Bhangra artists first apotheosized the virginal Punjabi woman to tease Punjabi difference out of essentialist blackness. Since Apache Indian's romanticization of the 'gal from Jullundar' in *Arranged Marriage*, the *sohni kudi* has fed reels of Bhangra homeland nostalgia.[22] The village belle, or *jatti Punjab di*, has conquered many an urban male heart as much by her fabled beauty as by her personification of a valorized Punjabi rusticity. The fetishization of the *sohni*, virginal but coquettish, sublimates the Punjabi male desire for the homeland.

Alternatively, the homeland may be visualized as mother. If the *sohni* is made to serve the Punjabi male fantasy of pristine sexuality, the *bebe*, or *ma,* is made to conform to the idealized image of the selfless, nurturing mother who nourishes the male without demanding anything in return.

Eis Duniya Vitch Jine Risthe	All worldly relationships
Sab Juthe Te Beroop	Are false and ugly
Maa Da Rishta Sab To Sachcha	The only authentic bond is with the mother
Maa Hai Rab Da Roop	Mother is the very image of God[23]

While the representation of the homeland as maternal is characteristic of romantic nationalism in general, the Punjabi male's mother fixation invests the image with a particular emotive appeal. Both the *sohni* and *ma*, embodying the primordial tie with the rustic homeland, are contrasted with the westernized temptress or the *mem* who must be socialized into essential *punjabiyat* before being accepted into the Punjabi fold.

It figures directly as place as well, albeit a place constructed as much by ecology as by practices of everyday life. Bhangra's originary location in the *doabas*, or deltas, of Punjab's five rivers, customarily invoked in the *boliyaan*, enables Punjabi subjectivity to be grounded in concrete, material reality. Along with reconstructing Punjabi topography by retracing Bhangra genres to their originary *doabas*, Bhangra texts also rebuild the cultural and sacred geographies of undivided Punjab around built spaces.

These texts close in to fix a specific locus with the result that the homeland they return to is an extremely small place, a province, a town or a village reflecting the longing for the face to face community displaced by the new imaginings of collectivities in nationalism or globalization. Though a few Bhangra texts name a specific region or city, the locus of *punjabiyat* in contemporary Bhangra texts is the Punjabi village, a *pind*, illustrating the mapping of transnational Punjabi identity on a rural Punjabi imaginary. They

retrace the topography of the five rivers and their deltas to recount the history of multiple erasures and recoveries older than those affected in the making of nations.[24]

Eh Punjab vi mera ve	This Punjab is also mine
Oh Punjab vi mera ve	That Punjab is also mine
Eh sutluj vi mera e	This Sutluj is also mine
Oh chenab vi mera e	That Chenab is also mine
Sara jism	Of the broken body
Tukre jod deyo	Put together the pieces
Hatthan jod deyo	Join hands
Sarhadaan tod deyo	Break all borders

IV

Biological difference is recognized another object of primordial attachments. The body has turned into a key codifier in the iconicity constructed to produce Punjabi identities. From the stereotyped portrayal of the Punjabi in the popular Indian imagination as all brawn but no brain to the materialism ascribed to Punjabi core values, the body comes to acquire a centrality that might be useful in the understanding of the production of Punjabi subjectivity in the present. Bodily icons and signifiers construct a particularly masculine ethic centered on labour, battle and pleasure. The beautiful virginal or nurturing maternal female body is juxtaposed against the laboring or warrior male body.

Punjabi subjectivity has traditionally employed the body and bodily signifiers as the site for representing difference. As Brian Keith Axel has pointed out, the iconicity of the male Sikh body was constructed to separate Sikh identity from other Punjabi ethnicities.[25] Similarly, the female body has inevitable served as the site for marking or invading boundaries between different Punjabi groups. The celebration of physical strength and energy in *jatt* self-definitions converges equally on the body and bodily signifiers.

An imagery is generated in relation to the body in Punjabi ascriptions and self descriptions equating the body with the body politic. Bodily markings and coverings, such as hair, beard, or headdress merely signify Punjabi identity-in-difference before the rupture. The rupture is signified through images of the bruised, dismembered broken male bodies and violated female bodies in narratives of Partition and of anti-Sikh riots. The Partition violence, the nightmare of burnt, torn, bleeding, dismembered bodies, aids the representation of the division of Punjab as a physical rupture. The images of bleeding, wounded broken bodies return post 1984 in Sikh nationalism but are now contrasted with the wholeness of the *amritdhari* Sikh body.

The dancing Bhangra body returns against the backdrop of the bleeding Punjabi body offering glimpses into the vision of wholeness before the fragmentation. In Bhangra performance, the body stands unadorned and unburdened by visible identity markers signifying difference. Shorn of facial or head hair, or other identificatory marks, the body signifies similarity rather than

difference. Casting away divisive identity markers, it dons the peasant Bhangra costume to return to the Punjabi life-place. But the dancing Bhangra body plays on differences of caste, class, region or gender without unifying them into an unchanging Punjabi essence. In performing Bhangra moves, Punjabis cast aside all other identity markers to reclaim the *habitus* they were dislocated from to perform a *punjabiyat*, located in body language and movement.

Bhangra is the harvest ritual that Hindu, Sikh, Muslim Punjabis may perform to reenact a peasant memory. Bhangra belongs to the living-in-place *habitus*, to particular ways of doing or saying things, which bind members of the community together. Bhangra body and bodily movement, embedded in the tribal Punjabi place, offer an elusive unifying moment in which a shared *punjabiyat* might be performed transcending all barriers. The body and its movements, ritualized in Bhangra performance, mark out individuals as Punjabis. In performing stylized Bhangra movements, shared across differences, Punjabis reinhabit the lost place. Through the performance of shared kinesics, it attempts to resist the splitting of the Punjabi memory further. The shared knowledge of the rules of performance about when to say what, where, to whom, in what manner, reaffirms a tribal solidarity enabling them to shed, at least during the performance moment, their new identifications overwritten on the older bioregional memory.

Bhangra's boundary crossing space enables all concrete Punjabi identities to perform their *punjabiyat* in dance and music.[26] 'We only have to start singing Heer Waris Shah from our border post at the Wagah and let's see how the fellow on the other side responds'. Ishtiaq Ahmed, agrees. Bhangra's performance and speech nationalism enables Punjabis to congregate crossing all boundaries in contrast with ethno-religious nationalisms predicated on scriptural difference. The Bhangra performance space alone offers a commingling of Punjabis of all complexions, classes, castes, religions, nations, locations and gender that interrogates the imaginings of nations, secular and sacred.

V1

The myth of return to the Punjabi homeland dramatized in several Bhangra texts might suggest organic identifications. But the impossibility of return, literal or metaphorical, disables an uncategorical affirmation of *punjabiyat* as the Punjabi memory itself reveals deep gashes. Heated discussions on Punjabi culture on the website foreground multiple claimants to *punjabiyat* speaking in the name of language, religion, culture and class. Most chats conclude in vituperative exchanges nipping the dream of a global Punjab in the bud. As the confusion of categories defining *punjabiyat* on these website reveals, *punjabiyat* is still under construction. It would be more pertinent to inquire, therefore, what imaginings of *punjabiyat* are produced in the mobilization of various identity spaces in Bhangra texts and how the Punjabi subject is transformed in assuming that image. The problem of Punjabi identification can certainly not be the 'affirmation of a pre-given identity' but 'the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image'.

Bhangra's identity politics reveal the negotiation of several aspects, such as religion, nation, class, language, generation or ethnicity, which might overlap as well as contradict. The collective experience of Punjabi nationness may be negotiated in the interstices, in the overlap between Hindu, Sikh and Muslim difference. The Punjabi difference represented at these intersections can be produced in relation to a Punjabi anteriority that accommodates the experiences of invasion, displacement and migration. The 'unhomeliness', which Bhabha marks 'the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural' constructs a Punjabi homeland defined in relation to displacement and migration.

Following Anthony D Smith, T K Oommen regards the notion of homeland as the 'irreducible minimum for a nation to emerge and to exist'. 'In the case of nation formation, territory is the first requisite'; he declares rejecting the claims of both language and religion to nationhood. The new *punjabiyaat* destroys the isomorphism between place, space and nation that has been noted in nationalist organizations of space illustrating the non-contiguous places enabled by global connectivity. The absence of an originary Bhangra location in the context of its multidirectional flows interrogates and challenges essentialist, universalized or fixed identities. At the same time, the desire to fix a homeland in a specific locus reflects the pull of primordial ties. In the absence of territorial materiality, the reconstruction of the lived place in the memory can produce only an image. Though the BhangraNation returns to the physicality of place to root itself firmly, the place can exist only in the imagination, corresponding to the real place but not quite the same. The attempt to reconstruct the old place in new lands in changed environments and settings results in recovering the semblance of the place without its sensuality. Arjun Appadurai's distinction between territory as soil, the ground of emotional attachment, and territory as a civil arrangement shows how post-Westphalian nations can exist without territorial sovereignty. BhangraNation proves that the nation can exist outside the territory but not the soil.

In the process of engaging with the variety of subject positions it unfolds, *punjabiyat* is transformed. The Punjabi identity constructed in relation to Bhangra disengages ethnicity from nation and religion and returns it to language, region, culture, and the body. Unlike Sikh nationalism, which mobilized religion and language to appropriate *punjabiyat* for *sikhi*, BhangraNation manipulates primordial ties attached to the bioregion, biology and everyday conduct and rituals in reaffirming an inclusive *punjabiyat*. The realignment of the ethnocultural identity along these lines might be disjunctive with allegiance to national or sacral solidarities unless the new imagining of community can accommodate contradictory multiple narratives of the self. The recall of the Punjabi ethnospatial place in Bhangra texts can produce a new non-essentialising imagining of *punjabiyat*, which enables multiple tenancies of language, religion, caste, gender and location.

Notes

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[1] Tiwana , one of the staunch critics of the two nation theory, was the leader of the Punjab Union as the Indian subcontinent was being divided and died broken hearted in exile. Incidentally, Tiwana belonged to a caste that has Hindus as well as Muslims.

[2] Punjabi Network. http://www.punjabi.net/punjab/1index.htm. 24th February 2004.

[3] Clifford Geertz. 'Primordial Ties'. *Ethnicity*. (ed) John Hutchinson and Anthony D Smith. Oxford: OUP 1996. 42-43.

[4] Bhangra is a specific beat and dance genre but is loosely used today to denote Punjabi dance genres. I extend the term to include Punjabi music which strictly does not fall under Bhangra. The concept of *Punjabiyat* or Punjabi identity emerged and was debated for years prior to the Partition. It was resurrected in the construction of the Sikh diaspora in the eighties. It has resurfaced globally in the new millennium in the reconstruction of a unified non-exclusive ethnolinguistic Punjabi identity. The call for a Punjabi nation was renewed at the Second World Punjabi Congress in British Columbia in 2002. In the first week of December 2004, artistes and sportspersons from East and West Punjab congregated for the first time in 57 years in Patiala to 'revive the spirit of Punjab, Punjabi and Punjabiyat'.

[5]Hall, Stuart. 'New Ethnicities', *Critical Dialogues in Culture Studies(*ed) David Morley & Kuan G Chan, (London: Routledge 1996), p 443.

[6] Arjun Appadurai, 'Sovereignty Without Territory', 1996, 50.

[7] Verne A Dusenbury. 'Nation or World Religion? Master Narratives of Sikh Identity' in Pashaura Singh and N. Gerald Barrier (eds.), *Sikh Identity: Continuity and Change,* 1999, p. 138.

[8] Bhangra Nation is a weeklong celebration comprised of several events, with the participation of over 10,000 people. After 7 years, Bhangra Nation has established a prominent role as a promoter of cultural awareness. Bhangra Nation's philosophy is to enhance and promote the concepts, history and symbolic representation of Bhangra.
 http://www.realbhangra.com/BhangraNation8.htm, *Bhangra Nation. Com* http://www.bhangranation.com/terms.htm.

[9]Richard Evanoff. 'Bioregionalism Comes to Japan. An Interview with Peter Berg' http://www.sustainable-city.org/intervws/berg.htm The first published definition of a bioregion is, 'Geographic areas having common characteristics of soil, watershed, climate, native plants and animals that exist within the whole planetary biosphere as unique and contributive parts...The final boundaries of a bioregion, however, are best described by the people who have lived within it, through human recognition of the realities of living in place...there is a distinctive resonance among living things and the factors that influence them which occurs specifically within each separate part of the planet'.

[10] Peter van der Veer notes 'the creation of a regional identity around the symbolic cluster of a tomb cult as that of Faridudin Chisti in Punjab. He asserts

that the establishment of Baba Farid's shrine was instrumental in the transformation of this region from a non-Islamic to an Islamic one. He offers an insight into the fracturing of a regional identity into a sectarian identity, particularly in Punjab. He mentions that the change in names from Punjabi secular to Islamic, which disappear completely by the early nineteen century reveals a very slow homogenization of the identities of the followers of Baba Farid, which he compares to Hinduization or Sikhization. Veer, Peter van der. *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India*. (Berkeley: University of California Press. 1984).

[11] The separation of Sikh from Hindu identity is extremely problematic considering that raising the eldest son as a Sikh and offering prayers at *gurdwaras* was a fairly common practice among Hindus in Punjab. ''WAH Dutt sultan, Hindu ka dharma, Musalman ka iman/Wah Dutt sultan, adha Hindu, adha Musalman.'' Here's a saying still prevalent in parts of undivided Punjab, eulogizing the remarkable sacrifice of Rehab Singh Dutt, a Hindu Punjabi who fought on the side of the Prophet at the Karbala in 681 AD, in which seven of his sons were killed on the 10th day of Muharram. Wracked by grief, Rehab Singh returned to Lahore, and ever since the Dutts of Lahore have also been known as the Hussaini Brahmins', 'Reviving Ancient Bonds across Border'. *The Indian Express*, Wednesday March 3 2004.
 http://iecolumnists.expressindia.com/full_column.php?content_id=42209

[12]   http://www.punjabonline.com/servlet/entertain.gallery?Action=Main,   27th July 2004.

[13] Gurdas Mann is a folk singer, a lyricist, composer, singer and choreographer, whose album *Dil da Mamla* introduced Bhangra to a non-Punjabi audience. A true legend, he has twenty seven albums to his credit and is looked upon by younger Bhangra artists as a role model. 'A name synonymous with Punjabi folklore and Sufi songs, Hans Raj Hans is as Punjabi as they come - donning a beard and long curly hair, he is the epitome of the rural Punjab village youth. Guru Ustad Puran Shahkoti Sahib, his guru who trained him, bestowed his surname 'Hans' on him.' http://www.musicindiaonline.com/MIO-Artists/IndiPop/Pages/HansRajHans.html 26th July 2004 'Classical poetry and music take up much of this time and his extensive research into the workings of the Sufi poets and saints such as Baba Farid, Baba Bulle Shah, Shah Hussain, Hashmat Shah & Waris Shah have contributed immensely in winning the Fellowship bestowed on him by the Washington University for Folk Music and Sufiana Gaiki, a rare distinction for any Punjabi singer.'

[14] Apache Indian is an artist that has linked traditional Asian sounds with influences from mainstream Pop, Reggae and Hip Hop. Born in Handsworth (Birmingham, England), Steven Kapur AKA Apache Indian has been recognized for linking different cultures through music, and becoming the first true International Asian Pop Artist. http://www.karmasound.com/artists/apache/. 26th July 2004.

[15]Born on August 18, 1967, into a family of musicians, Mehndi is the typical lion-hearted Leo. He was named after the character of a dacoit, Daku Daler Singh. He left home at the age of 14, to study under the legendary Rahat Ali Khan Saheb of Patiala Gharana at Gorakhpur'. The Dalermania began 'when Magnasound was quick to realize his multi-platinum potential. It not only signed him for a release next year, but such was his pre-release popularity that the label gave Mehndi top billing'! Daler Mehndi is the first Bhangra artist who made the national crossover by selling more than a million albums in Kerala

[16] Malkit Singh, Punjabi folk artist now based in Birmingham, was already a celebrity when Bally Sagoo remixed his *gud nal ishq mitha* for a new generation and turned him into an international star.

[17] Jassi Sidhu, ex B21 artist, came into limelight with his winning an award in the first ETC Channel Punjabi award.

[18] Baumann, G. (1990) 'The Re-Invention of Bhangra. Social Change and Aesthetic Shifts in a Punjabi Music in Britain' in *World of Music* 32(2): 81-95; Bennett, A. (2000) *Popular Music and Youth Culture: Music, Identity and Place* (London: Macmillan).

[19] Steven Grosby. 'The Inexpungeable Ties of Primordiality', *Ethnicity*, op.cit., p 74.

[20] Gurdas Mann, *Apna Punjab hove*, http://www.apnaorg.com/music/punjab/

[21] Malkit Singh, *Maa.*

[22] Apache Indian, *Arranged Marriage.*

[23] Malkit Singh. *Maa*. http://www.desitunes4u.com/Song_Lyrics.htm.

[24] Hans Raj Hans, *Ai Punjabi wi mera ai*, http://www.apnaorg.com/music/punjab/

[25] Brian Keith Axel. (2001). *The Nation's Tortured Body: Violence, Representation, and the Formation of a Sikh Diaspora*. Durham: Duke University Press.

[26] Harbhajan Mann is a popular Sikh Canadian Bhangra artist.

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