

Post-Partition Sikh Immigrant Experiences in the United States

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## I. Introduction

The population of Sikh immigrants coming into the United States has begun to increase in recent times. Just like after the Partition, there has been an increase in anti-Sikh sentiment in India as of late. In response, many Sikh families are having to emigrate out of India in order to stay away from social, economic and political discrimination. Although Sikh families are being pushed out of India, they are not being allowed into the United States with ease, similar to what happened after the Partition. Studying past waves of migration, especially ones with a very similar atmosphere, can help uncover what the migration patterns and experiences of the future might look like.

The Sikh community has been treated differently ever since the British colonized India. From the beginning of British occupation, they were disproportionately included in the military. While Sikhs only made up two percent of the overall population in India, they made up twenty percent of the Indian Army.<sup>1</sup> During the Partition in 1947, Pakistan's border was drawn to include Nankana, the birthplace of Sikhism, and Lahore, the capital of Punjab, the state where most of the Sikhs in the world resided. Again, the Sikh community was being treated differently than other ethnic groups. The conflict between Sikhs and other ethnic groups was exacerbated during British occupation and was solidified after the borders were drawn. The Sikh community has been systematically treated differently ever since the creation of India, and even before that. How has that treatment effected their feelings and actions? How has their immigrant experience helped to shape who they are today?

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<sup>1</sup> Doris Jakobsh, *Sikhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2012), 85.

The Sikh Diaspora is well covered by many scholars; however, a majority of historians use a macrohistorical lens in their approach. Most scholars categorize the Sikh Diaspora into three different periods: the colonial period, post-1947 Partition Era, and the period after the 1984 riots in India. It is evident that in all three periods, the Sikh population was treated as a separate ethnic group, rather than a part of the broader India. Most scholars tend to generalize the Sikh immigrant experience, not including many personal experiences. Instead, they use a broader lens to study the political, social and economic reasons for Sikh emigration out of India, and in some cases, how those immigrants were assimilating to their new countries.

The Sikh population has been receiving differential treatment ever since the British first colonized India. Scholars like Michael Hawley, Manjit Kaur and Paramjit S. Judge focus on the way Sikhs have been treated by the British and Hindu governments in power.<sup>2</sup> As Judge and Kaur argue, “The history of the Sikh community is inseparably linked with the policy of the British towards the Sikhs which, in certain ways, was unique in comparison to other religious communities in India.”<sup>3</sup> When Punjab was finally annexed by the British in 1849, Sikhs were the dominant power in the region. It was not until the sepoy mutiny turned into India’s first war for independence in 1857 that the British began to give special treatment to the Sikh community in order to keep peace.<sup>4</sup> The British established canal colonies and revitalized rural areas of Punjab to help boost the economy.<sup>5</sup> While Sikh communities in rural Punjab were receiving preferential treatment, other ethnic groups in the area were not, which helped divide Sikhs and other groups. While arguments like these tend to focus on the earlier period of Sikh emigration,

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Hawley and Himadri Banerjee, “The Other Sikhs: Bridging Their Diaspora” in *Sikh Diaspora: Theory, Agency and Experience* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 170. Paramjit S. Judge and Manjit Kaur, ““The Politics of Sikh Identity: Understanding Religious Exclusion.” *Sociological Bulletin* 59, no. 3 (September-December 2010): 351.

<sup>3</sup> Paramjit S. Judge and Manjit Kaur, “The Politics of Sikh Identity,” 351.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 352.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 349.

they can help me contextualize the ways in which the Sikh community was systematically “othered” over time. In addition, it solidifies the idea the idea that Sikhs, and Punjabis, have never been a part of the broader “India.” Most historical writing on the topic argues that the special treatment the Sikh community received helped fuel conflicts between Sikhs and other ethnic groups.

For this essay, I want to focus on the periods of emigration after the Partition in 1947 and before the 1984 riots. During this period, scholars like Brian Axel, Darsham Tatla and Verne Dusenbery all tend to focus on the Sikh’s tremendous loss of land and material wealth as a driving force for them to emigrate out of India.<sup>6</sup> They argue that the “Sikh Surrender” played a large role in how the Sikh community saw themselves in the nation of India.<sup>7</sup> With their reduced fortunes, many families had to send family abroad to find better economic opportunities. Axel, Tatla and Dusenbery all generalize the Sikh’s experience, not giving any personal narratives or stories. They tend to focus on the experience of the Sikh community as a whole, rather than giving specific details. For example, Tatla and Dusenbery summarize the period of Sikh emigration after partition in two parts: “First, the uncertainty and dislocation caused by the Partition itself induced further emigration, as some displaced families gambled their reduced fortunes to send a family member abroad. Second, new destinations opened up for settlement, more or less coinciding with the Partition.”<sup>8</sup> While this approach can be helpful in giving the reader a good historical background, it doesn’t provide any personal experiences. In addition, scholars like Tatla and Dusenbery don’t discuss the experience of immigrants once they get

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<sup>6</sup> Brian Keith Axel, *The Nation’s Tortured Body: Violence, Representation and the Formation of the Sikh Diaspora* (Duke University Press, 2000), 33-36. Verne A. Dusenbery and Darsham Tatla, “Diasporan Philanthropy,” in *Sikhism in Global Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 148.

<sup>7</sup> Axel, *The Nation’s Tortured Body*, 35.

<sup>8</sup> Dusenbery and Tatla, “Diasporan Philanthropy,” 149.

outside of India. For example, they only briefly mention that the United States barred Asian immigrants from coming to the United States, never giving details about what acts were put into place.<sup>9</sup> Most scholarly writing tends to focus on the experience of Sikhs in India, and the possible reasons for them wanting to emigrate out, failing to describe their experience after leaving.

While most scholarly writing is based around the Sikh experience in India, there is some historical writing that covers their early years in the United States. Scholars like Lawrence Wenzel and Karen Leonard focus on the Sikh immigrant experience in the United States, and specifically Yuba City.<sup>10</sup> Although they tend to generalize the immigrant experience, some of their literature has studies done on recently arrived populations. For example, Wenzel provides hard statistics when discussing the Sikh immigrant experience in Sutter County. In his article, he mentions that out of the 140 Sikhs in the phone book, 100 were on the county's agricultural mailing list.<sup>11</sup> Most of the early immigrants that came over were single men looking for work. In a traditional Indian family, male children are more coveted and therefore given more opportunities. Rather than send their daughter to the United States, most families would send their sons to find work or be educated. Leonard and Wenzel tend to focus on the assimilation process that most of these men experienced, while also discussing the different citizenship laws that were being put into place. For example, they detail how Sikh immigrants weren't able to become United States citizens until 1949, and this had a large impact on how they operated in their daily lives. Leonard and Wenzel focus on the immigrant experience, and the process they

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<sup>9</sup> Dusenbery and Tatla, "Diasporan Philanthropy," 149.

<sup>10</sup> Lawrence A. Wenzel, "The Rural Punjabis of California: A Religio-Ethnic Group." *Phylon* 29, no. 3 (1968): 251. Karen Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices: California's Punjabi Mexican Americans* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 52. Karen Leonard. "Punjabi Farmers and California's Alien Land Law," *Agricultural History* 59, no. 4 (October 1985): 552.

<sup>11</sup> Wenzel, "The Rural Punjabis of California," 251.

went through to become assimilated into American society, but not how immigrants' experience in India helped to shape them.

While some scholars focus on the reasons for Sikhs emigrating out of India, some examine the different experiences had by immigrants. In this essay, I focus on the post-independent India, briefly touching on the social atmosphere of British India. In addition, I use my grandparents' personal experiences to guide the reader through a more personal immigrant story. Using the existing historical writing to contextualize my grandparent's oral history can be a new take on the Sikh immigrant journey. Rather than generalizing all Sikh immigrant experiences into one story, I want to use a microhistorical approach to detail three people's journeys to the United States. My two grandfathers came during a time when only one hundred Asian Indian immigrants were allowed into the United States per year. That policy was in place until the Immigration and Nationality Act in 1965. Because the period between 1949 and 1965 is not very well documented, focusing on the immigrant experience during this time illuminates the differences between immigrants that came before and after 1965.

While some scholarly writing focuses on the assimilation process taken by some Sikh immigrants, they don't discuss how this process could have affected their feelings toward India. India was a newly created nation, something that had never been seen before in the region. Although independence was a major accomplishment for the nation of India, it came with a heavy price tag for Sikhs. From the moment India was created, the Sikh community lost large amounts of land and wealth. In addition, they faced horrific violence, discouraging them from feeling like India was their home. Sikh families were forced to send family members abroad, where there were better economic and educational opportunities. My grandparents' personal narratives illustrate how varied Sikh immigrant experiences were. In addition, they

help to display the many different social, economic and political experiences had by Indian immigrants coming to the United States. Rather than map my grandparents' experiences onto the wider population, I argue that they help us uncover the intersectionality of immigrant experiences. All three of their immigrant experiences are influenced by their race, class and gender. Having darker skin, being wealthy enough to be sent to the United States, and even being male or female all played a large role in their immigrant narratives. Their experiences in India helped shape who they became in the United States.

## II. Sikh Experience During British Colonial Rule

Before the British arrived in Punjab, there had never been clear-cut normative identities among Punjabis. Most people moved in and out of different identities, never having to completely distinguish themselves from one another. Rather than being Hindu, Muslim or Sikh, many in Punjab would most likely call themselves "Punjabi" before basing their identity solely on their religion. Upon their arrival, the British were concerned with keeping an accurate census for administrative purposes. The British distinguished the local population by two factors: occupational genera (which for British purposes becomes reified as "caste") and worship genera (which for the British becomes "religion").<sup>12</sup> The British began to fix identities to sub-populations, from "martial" or "non-martial" and "cultivating" or "non-cultivating." In addition, Punjabis were forced to declare themselves Sikh, Hindu or Muslim. As Verne Dusenbery argues, the British did two things by fixing identities to the local population: "First, they imposed

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<sup>12</sup> Verne A. Dusenbery, "A Sikh Diaspora? Contested Identities and Constructed Realities," In *Nation and Migration: The Politics of Space in the South Asian Diaspora*, edited by Van Der Veer Peter (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 20.

conceptual boundaries and structural rigidity on a fluid interpersonal and intrapersonal transactive space. Second, the British made caste and religion increasingly salient political categories around which the local population might organize and be organized.”<sup>13</sup> The British desire to categorize the Punjabi people, created boundaries between the different identities, which led them to organize into separate groups.

The British idea of clear normative identities led them to favor certain groups. The British gave preferential to the Sikh community, because they were so difficult to conquer.<sup>14</sup> The British recognized Sikhs’ martial value and in turn, established canal colonies that worked to rehabilitate large rural Sikh communities in Punjab.<sup>15</sup> In addition, Sikhs were disproportionately included in the military during colonial rule because they were known for their military prowess. While Sikhs only made up two percent of the overall population of India, they made up twenty percent of the British-controlled Indian Army.<sup>16</sup> As a result, many Sikh families emigrated out of India, following their patriarch on colonial assignments. Rather than just sending the officer or soldier away on an assignment, the whole family would move to another British colony with their father or husband. Sikhs were able to emigrate out of India, through the British Army, into other places in the British Empire like Burma. My maternal grandmother, Kulwant Bains’s paternal grandfather held an important position at the Viceroy’s office in Burma while he was in the British Army. His position allowed him the financial stability to send his four sons to college in either the United States or the United Kingdom. While my grandmother’s family history is not applicable to the majority of Sikhs in India, it may be representative of the Sikh families that benefitted from colonial rule. Some Sikh families, mostly ones involved with the military, gained

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<sup>13</sup> Dusenbery, “A Sikh Diaspora?” 21.

<sup>14</sup> Jakobsh, *Sikhism*, 85.

<sup>15</sup> Judge and Manjit Kaur, “The Politics of Sikh Identity,” 352.

<sup>16</sup> Jakobsh, *Sikhism*, 85.

access to opportunities to help improve their family's quality of life, while a lot more were constantly being exploited by colonial rule.

Although some in the Sikh community benefitted from preferential treatment, it worked to further divide them from other local ethnic groups like Muslims and Hindus. Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus had begun to separate into their different groups since the British began their occupation. Different religious groups in the area had experienced conflicts in the past, but they were never solidified into law or policy by an outside force. They had fought with each other for power, but now people in Punjab were being ruled by an outside force and treated differently because of their ethnic background. The British newly established identification process was a large contributor to the horrific violence during the Partition. While some groups partly benefitted from the British, some groups were being overly-exploited. In consequence, they continued to divide the region (physically and socially) and were in part responsible for the ethnic conflicts that arose during Partition.

### III. The Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947

In the aftermath of World War II, the British began to slowly let go of colonial holdings overseas. The crown jewel of the British Empire, India, was one of the countries to gain independence in the years following World War II. In the process of decolonization, British officials played a large role in creating the borders of the country. In 1947, "The Radcliffe Line" was created by British architect Sir Cyril Radcliffe, and it serves as the Indo-Pakistani Border on the west side of India.<sup>17</sup> The Radcliffe Line allocated a majority of Punjab (at the time) to

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<sup>17</sup> Gopal Singh, *The History of the Sikh People: 1469-1988* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1993), 650.

Pakistan. Punjab was home to a diverse population of people, with the majority being either Hindu, Muslim or Sikh. In addition, many of the cities in Punjab were heterogeneously composed, containing large populations of all three major groups. On August 15, 1947, Punjab was officially partitioned, and the western two-thirds, the regions containing hundreds of Sikh sacred shrines, including Nankana (the birthplace of Sikhism) were allocated to the new Islamic state of Pakistan.<sup>18</sup> The British officials gave cities like Lahore and Nankana Sahib to Pakistan mostly because they had a majority Muslim population.<sup>19</sup> The British did not have the knowledge to understand the cultural significance that some of these religious sites had.

When looking at the Partition through a macrohistorical lens, it is evident that thousands of people lost their land, wealth, and in the worst case, their lives. During this period, many people were trying to cross the border, one way or the other, in order to reach a safe space. Muslims in Punjab were trying to move across the border into Pakistan, while Sikhs and Hindus were trying to make their way into Punjab, India from the newly formed Pakistan. While some scholars estimate around 250,000 people were killed during the Partition, others argue that it could be closer to 600,000.<sup>20</sup> Bryan Axel describes this partition of Punjab as the “Sikh Surrender.”<sup>21</sup> Axel is referring to the Sikh population in Punjab “surrendering” their lands and wealth to a stronger power in the British and Hindu populations. Most of the Sikh families that were living in what is now Pakistan were forced off of their property and out of Pakistan.

The tremendous loss of land and material wealth was a major hit to the Sikh population economically, political and socially. In consequence, more and more Sikhs were drawn to the

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<sup>18</sup> Darsham Tatla, “Sikh Diaspora,” *Encyclopedia of Diasporas*, ed. Melvin Ember, Carol R. Ember and Ian Skoggard (Boston: Springer, 2005), [https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.calpoly.edu/10.1007/978-0-387-29904-4\\_27](https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.calpoly.edu/10.1007/978-0-387-29904-4_27).

<sup>19</sup> Nankana Sahib is the birthplace of Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh religion. In addition, it is regarded as a holy Sikh site because it is where he first started preaching, marking it as the birthplace of Sikhism. Robert Trumbull, “Protests Stoppage Hits New Delhi,” *New York Times*, July 9, 1947.

<sup>20</sup> Tatla, *The Sikh Diaspora*, 58. Gopal Singh, *The History of the Sikh People*, 711.

<sup>21</sup> Axel, *The Nation’s Tortured Body*, 23.

idea of emigrating out of India, leading some families to send a family member abroad with their reduced fortunes.<sup>22</sup> Similar to what happened during colonization, Sikh families were being displaced by an outside force. Steve Taylor argues that, “the loss of land, incomes and settled family life, plus the conflict and bloodshed, which accompanied partition, exacerbated a Punjabi willingness to leave the state.”<sup>23</sup>

In the aftermath of the Partition, families were displaced all over India. My paternal relatives, along with my grandfather, moved from their homes in Punjab to Uttar Pradesh, in Northeast India. Although their agricultural lands were taken in Punjab, they were able to be granted land in Uttar Pradesh, something not many other displaced families could attain.<sup>24</sup> Like many other families displaced during this time, my grandfather and thousands of others began their journey, by train, away from their ancestral homes. Uttar Pradesh, unlike Punjab, is a more mountainous area, where there were not many Sikhs. Moving to Uttar Pradesh actually provided my grandfather, Jarnail Dhaddey, with more educational opportunities. Jarnail’s father was a large influence on his educational goals. Even prior to attending Saint Joseph’s, a Jesuit school in Uttar Pradesh, Jarnail already knew a little bit of English. From a young age, his father hired a tutor to come to their farm in Punjab and help him learn English. Although his father did not have any formal education, he spoke Chinese and in turn was able to successfully find work in places like Singapore.<sup>25</sup> Jarnail’s father understood that there were opportunities outside of the newly formed country of India. Rather than speaking strictly Punjabi or Hindi, his father was

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<sup>22</sup> Dusenbery and Tatla, “Diasporan Philanthropy,” 148.

<sup>23</sup> Steve Taylor, Manjit Singh and Deborah Booth, “A Diasporic Indian Community: Re-Imagining Punjab,” *Sociological Bulletin* 56, no. 2 (May-August 2007): 225.

<sup>24</sup> Jarnail S. Dhaddey, interview by author. April 1, 2019.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

able to use a new language to find success in another country, leading him to push Jarnail to learn another language.

Some families in Punjab were able to retain their homes and property. My grandmother, Kulwant, was living in a small village outside of Ludhiana, Punjab during the time of Partition. Recalling those horrific events, she recalls, “in those days [before 1947], we had Sikh, Muslim, and Hindu populations. But in 1947, Muslims were in danger. So, my maternal family helped as many Muslims as they could safely move into Pakistan. Until very recently, there had been no Muslim population there since.”<sup>26</sup> A lot of the immediate violence happened in the larger cities of Pakistan and Northern India, where the populations of Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs were more segregated than in the villages. Some villages were more integrated, with all three ethnic groups living side by side.

Although Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* (1956) is a fictional work, it is based on historical evidence. He was a prominent Sikh intellectual who served in the Upper House of the Indian Parliament and was able to draw from his own as well as other people’s experiences. Rather than focus on the politics of the Partition, he examines the different relationships that people experienced in the smaller, more integrated villages of Punjab. On the border of Pakistan and India lies the fictional village of Mano Majra, India.<sup>27</sup> For centuries, Sikhs and Muslims have lived in Mano Majra peacefully. In this village, they were not very well-connected with the rest of India, so when the widespread violence from the Partition started, they were unaware. One day, a train arrives, full of dead refugees, and they are shocked by the scene. While they have been living in peace, many places surrounding them are intertwined in a civil war. The Muslims in the village are being forced to go to Pakistan or die by angry mobs. As one Muslim asks his

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<sup>26</sup> Kulwant K. Bains, interview by author, March 31, 2019.

<sup>27</sup> Khushwant Singh, *Train to Pakistan* (New York: Grove Press, 1956), 5.

Sikh friend, “What do we have to do with Pakistan? We were born here. So were our ancestors. We have lived amongst you as brothers.”<sup>28</sup> Although it is fiction, it can work as a representational statement. While many people in Punjab and Pakistan were murdering and raping, there were also families that felt obligated to help the people they had lived next to for generations.

Meanwhile, in the post-war era, the United States had emerged as a global superpower. When asked about the motivation to immigrate to the U.S. Joginder Bains, my maternal grandfather, states, “it was the curiosity to go and see the ‘best country in the world.’”<sup>29</sup> His father was a teacher in their local village and one of only three people in the village who had received a college education and his mother, although uneducated, saw the value in higher education. In turn, his older brother went to the United States to attend the University of Nevada, setting an example for Joginder. As he recalls, “My mother also was always encouraging us to get as much education as possible, though it was very hard to send all three boys to college on a teacher’s salary. I stayed at home and walked to school from home from Kindergarten all the way until I completed my four-year college degree.”<sup>30</sup> Although it was difficult for them to send my grandfather and his brothers away to school, they understood that the United States could offer them more opportunity. His parents believed it to be a “dream country, where everyone wanted to go,” so in 1953, after he graduated college in India, he and his parents decided it was best for him to go to the United States and receive further education.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> K. Singh, *Train to Pakistan*, 126.

<sup>29</sup> Joginder S. Bains, interview by author, March 31, 2019.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

#### IV. Initial Immigrant Experiences

Although most Asian Indian immigrants coming to the United States arrived after the Partition in 1947, there were some earlier waves of Asian Indian immigration into the United States. From beginning of the twentieth century until the start of World War I, around six thousand Asian Indian immigrants made their way to the United States.<sup>32</sup> Many of them were able to find mundane jobs in the agricultural sector and were paid low wages while limited to certain occupational endeavors. In 1923, Asian Indian Immigrants were officially barred from becoming citizens with the Supreme Court case “Bhagat Singh Thind vs. The United States.” One major consequence of the “Bhagat” case is that after 1923, the California Alien Land Law Act was also applied to Asian Indians, which barred non-citizens from owning land, which helped limit their occupational liberty.<sup>33</sup>

Bhagat Singh Thind was a Sikh immigrant who had come to the United States as a student to attend the University of California at Berkeley. During World War I, he left his studies to join the war effort, becoming the first turbaned Sikh to serve in the U.S. army. When he was honorably discharged after the war had ended, he was granted citizenship, only to have it revoked a few months later. Thind’s lawyers argued that “as a high-caste Hindu of the Aryan race from north India, Thind was of Caucasian descent and therefore eligible for U.S. citizenship.”<sup>34</sup> In 1923, British-born Justice George Sutherland delivered the unanimous Supreme Court decision that though Thind might be Caucasian, he was not white as commonly

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<sup>32</sup> Juan L. Gonzales Jr., “Asian American Immigration Patterns: The Origins of the Sikh Community in California,” *The International Migration Review* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 48.

<sup>33</sup> Karen Leonard, “Punjabi,” 550.

<sup>34</sup> Prema Kurien, “Shifting U.S. Racial and Ethnic Identities And Sikh American Activism,” *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 4, no. 5 (August 2018): 87.

understood in the United States and Western Europe and was therefore not eligible for citizenship. Asian Indian immigrants that had been able to retain citizenship prior to 1923 saw their naturalization rights disappear overnight.

In addition, they faced social hardships when trying to assimilate into the American public. Asian Indian immigrants were constantly dehumanized by media outlets, creating a sense that they could never be fully assimilated into American society.<sup>35</sup> They were also not allowed to marry interracially, barring them from producing a second generation. As Edwin Harwood argues, the cultural and racial prejudices that had led to the enactment of the restrictive national origins quotas in the early 1920s, and that important elite leadership groups shared in common with the mass public, were augmented in the 1930s by economic worries.<sup>36</sup> During the interwar period in the United States, Asian Indian immigration was slowed to almost nothing. The United States was going through the Great Depression and the wartime attitude produced an anti-immigrant sentiment. During this fifty-year period, almost 7,000 Asian Indian immigrants were either deported or “voluntarily” left the United States.<sup>37</sup>

While members of the first wave of immigration were an economic success, they were unable to assimilate into American society, nor were they able to establish families and produce a second generation. As Juan Gonzalez argues, it was the failure to produce a second generation that affected the assimilation of Asian Indian Immigrants during the first waves, because it is the second generation that usually serves as the bridge between the first generation and their new society.<sup>38</sup> Unable to have children who would be born and raised in the United States, Asian

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<sup>35</sup> Associated Press, “Riots Sweep Punjab Capital.” *The New York Times*. August 14, 1947. “Muslim Slaughter By Sikhs Reported.” *The New York Times*. August 25, 1947.

<sup>36</sup> Edwin Harwood, “American Public Opinion and U.S. Immigration Policy,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 487, (September 1986): 203.

<sup>37</sup> Gonzalez, “Asian Indian Immigration,” 48.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

Indian immigrants were forced further and further into social isolation. In consequence, they were an easy target for the United States to push out of the country during poor economic climates.

During the World War II, India, because of their allegiance to the British crown, helped the Allied forces in their military efforts. In 1944, India was the largest volunteer army in the world with over two million soldiers and had sent over 500,000 men to fight for the Allied forces.<sup>39</sup> Although Asian Indians were barred from becoming citizens after the 1923 Bhagat Singh Thind vs. United States Supreme Court case, their aid during World War II helped them gain credibility in the United States. Clare Booth Luce, a congresswoman from Connecticut is credited with bringing forth the first bill which helps to naturalize Asian Indian Immigrants. In 1944, she began to introduce the Luce-Cellar Bill by stating, “One way America can show it is not entirely blind to the effort and sacrifice of the Indian people for our common cause is to accord them the same equality we extend to the Chinese by permitting a limited number of Indians to come to our country after the war.”<sup>40</sup> Although the bill did put a quota on the number of people allowed to enter per year, opening up paths to gain citizenship was a step towards helping Asian Indian immigrants successfully assimilate into the United States. The bill was not passed until 1946, after World War II had ended, but it aimed to show the change in attitude towards Asian Indian immigrants, specifically by lawmakers. Although Asian Indian immigrants had been working long hours in low-paying jobs in the United States for decades, they were able to display their value to the American people by helping the Allied forces defeat the Axis powers.

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<sup>39</sup> “India Bids America Naturalize People.” *The New York Times*. April 3, 1944.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

The second major wave of Asian Indian immigration came after the passing of the Luce-Cellar Bill in 1946 and lasts until the passing of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965. After 1946, Asian Indian immigrants now had a path to citizenship and were able to sponsor family members in their naturalization process. Although the United States began to liberalize their immigration policies following World War II, there were other factors that led to increased Asian Indian Immigration to the United States. Specifically, the newly drawn border between Pakistan and India fueled violence and caused families to lose tremendous land and wealth. In order to escape the political and social turmoil in India, many families sent their children to the United States to be educated or to find work.

My paternal grandfather, Jarnail Singh Dhaddey came to the United States in 1960 on a student visa. After he graduated from Saint Joseph's, his father wanted him to attain his higher education in the United States. When asked if there were viable education opportunities in India, my grandfather simply answered, "No."<sup>41</sup> Although his attitude cannot be mapped onto all Indian citizens of the time, it represents an important population of people who saw the United States as the only place they could find educational success. The United States had begun to liberalize its immigration policies in the aftermath of World War II, allowing for more immigrants to enter the country and eventually gain citizenship. In addition, the student visa program in the United States required immigrant students to keep a C-plus average in their classes in order to keep their visa valid.<sup>42</sup> Jarnail's father saw the requirement as a way to keep his son on task.

Jarnail obtained his student visa in India and was legally allowed to stay in the United States in order to receive his higher education. For the first year and a half, Jarnail lived in

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<sup>41</sup> Jarnail S. Dhaddey, interview by author.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

Fresno County and attended Reedley College.<sup>43</sup> In Mendota, California, he lived with four other Indian immigrants who were also on student visas. During this time, he mostly spent time with the other immigrant students living around him, which helped him keep cultural norms. For example, they would all convene for dinner and each one would take turns cooking traditional Indian food for the rest of the group.<sup>44</sup> Similar to the experiences of agricultural workers in the earlier waves, newly arrived immigrants would fall into ethnically homogenous groups.

Although Asian Indian immigrants still partook in Punjabi cultural practices, they also took steps to assimilate into American society. In Sikhism, some practicing members do not cut their hair. Prior to coming to the United States, Jarnail had never shaved or cut his hair. Upon my grandfather's arrival in Mendota, all of his roommates urged him to cut his hair and beard in order to look "more American."<sup>45</sup> Although it was a religious practice that my grandfather had followed his entire life, he cut his hair before he began his first day of school, not wanting anyone in his new classes to see that he kept turban or long beard.

Although arranged marriages were very popular in traditional Punjabi culture, my paternal grandparents' marriage was not arranged. They met through family friends and got married in Victoria, Canada, where my grandmother was born and raised, in 1963.<sup>46</sup> After they got married, they moved to Moscow, Idaho to attend the University of Idaho and finish their schooling. Moscow, already being a small college town in rural Idaho, only had one other Indian student living there at the time. Although my grandfather had been in the United States multiple years, he had resided in a house with other immigrant students, never fully being immersed in

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<sup>43</sup> Jarnail S. Dhaddey, interview by author.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Perminder Kaur Gill Dhaddey, "A Life Uncommon," In *Zhindagee: Selected Stories of Our First Daughters*, edited by Mahinder Kaur Doman Manhas, (British Columbia: M.K. Doman, 2009), 115.

American culture. In Moscow, he had to learn how to socially operate in a space with no other Punjabi people present. His landlord in Mendota had been a Sikh immigrant pioneer, who made his way over to the United States in the 1920s. Sikh immigrant pioneers served as mentors in many places across California, helping the transition of the new generation of immigrants into the United States.<sup>47</sup> The landlords in Idaho were not as empathetic when it came to the helping immigrants assimilate more comfortably. In an autobiographical account, my grandmother recalls how some property owners refused to rent to any Indian tenants because they had heard of the “smell the Indian food leaves.”<sup>48</sup> While this might seem blatantly prejudice today, these experiences predate the different Civil Rights Acts put into place during the mid-to-late 1960s.

In contrast, my maternal grandfather, Joginder Singh Bains, was surrounded by other Sikh immigrant students during his early years in the United States. Most of the early immigrants from India to the United States were from the state of Punjab.<sup>49</sup> In Punjab, many people are from castes and communities involved in farming, whether as a landowner or a laborer. In turn, many of the early Asian Indian immigrants gravitated towards California’s large agricultural valley as a place for settlement. In 1955, some 13,000 acres in California were listed as owned by Punjabis, and most of these old men had farmed those very acres for decades.<sup>50</sup>

When my grandfather arrived as a student in 1953, he first settled in Yuba City, California. Yuba City, being a prominent agricultural town in Northern California, was a place where many Punjabi immigrants settled. As he explains it, “I spent my first 19 years of my life in a village of a few hundred people in India. So, coming to a small community of less than 8,000,

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<sup>47</sup> Wenzel, “The Rural Punjabis of California,” 254.

<sup>48</sup> Dhaddey, Perminder Kaur Gill. “A Life Uncommon.” In *Zhindagee: Selected Stories of Our First Daughters*, edited by Mahinder Kaur Doman Manhas, 113-131. British Columbia: M.K. Doman, 2009.

<sup>49</sup> Leonard, “Punjabi Farmers and California’s Alien Land Law,” 550.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 562.

instead of going to a city, helped. It was and is a farming community just like Ganeshpur [village in Punjab] and the weather is almost the same.”<sup>51</sup> Communities like Yuba City helped ease the transition into the United States for my grandfather, and many other immigrants, because it was similar to their home. They were able to continue with the jobs they might normally do at home, but instead, they can earn a wage and live in their “dream country,” the United States.<sup>52</sup> While attending Yuba College in Marysville, he lived with four other immigrant students. Similar to other immigrant experiences, Joginder also spoke highly of what they refer to as the “pioneers” or first wave Asian Indian immigrants who had lived in the United States for years. When discussing his transition from India to the United States, he recalled that the pioneer families would always invite the students over and cook for them. As he describes it, “it was like an extended family for me, in another country, and those families became my lifelong friends.”<sup>53</sup> Rather than being forced to completely assimilate into American culture from the start, he was able to have a smoother transition into the U.S. by being around people with similar experiences.

While my grandparents immigrated to the United States within 10 years of each other, all three of them have vastly different modes of gaining their citizenship. Both of my grandfathers were on student visas, which only allowed for them to be in the country if they were enrolled in school.<sup>54</sup> As discussed previously, Jarnail attended college in the United States and was able to apply for residency after his student visa had expired and he had graduated. After receiving his diploma, he was allowed to work in the United States for eighteen months while his residency application was being processed.

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<sup>51</sup> Joginder S. Bains, interview by author.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid; Jarnail S. Dhaddey, interview by author.

Joginder, my maternal grandfather, had a different path to citizenship. He came to the United States on a student visa to attend college. In order to speed up his citizenship process, he and three other friends decided to join the military, rather than wait eight to ten years to gain full citizenship. An act passed May 9, 1918, allowed aliens serving in the U.S. armed forces during "the present war" to file a petition for naturalization without making a declaration of intent or proving 5 years' residence.<sup>55</sup> Although the "Bhagat Singh Thind vs. the United States" case was in 1923, by the time of my grandparents' arrival, policies had been amended.

In 1957, my grandfather joined the U.S. Army and was sent to Germany for two years.<sup>56</sup> As he describes, "going to the Army helped with learning an American accent and humor, because I was around Americans all the time."<sup>57</sup> Instead of being with people with similar experiences, he was now with people much different than him, which allowed him to learn a variety of new things about American culture. Although he had joined the army, he was still in the United States on a student visa. In consequence, he was informed that since he was not enrolled in any classes in the U.S., he and his three friends would be deported as soon as they got back to the United States. In order to change their status from student visa holder to permanent resident, congress had to approve them one by one. A congressman named John Moss, from California, helped my grandfather and his three acquaintances get their statuses changed.<sup>58</sup> In 1961, he was granted full residency in the United States, and five years later he was granted citizenship. While a lot of Asian Indian immigrants take a more linear path to citizenship, some had very unorthodox experiences.

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<sup>55</sup> Meher K. Master, "United States Citizenship," *The International Lawyer* 5, no. 2 (1971), 325.

<sup>56</sup> Joginder S. Bains, interview by author.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

During the 1960s, the United States began to drastically liberalize their immigration policies. Specifically, in 1965, the Immigration and Nationality Act was signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson.<sup>59</sup> The act served to abolish quotas for immigrants based on national origins. Instead, it replaced with a system based on immigrants' family relationships with U.S. citizens, permanent residents and in some cases, their skills.<sup>60</sup> In consequence, the demographic makeup of the country dramatically changed. For example, in 1965, only five percent of the U.S. population was foreign-born, whereas in 2015, the foreign-born population accounted for fourteen percent.<sup>61</sup> After 1965, immigration from India into the United States increases dramatically. An INS report estimates that between 1900 and 1965, only 15,013 Asian Indian immigrants were living in the United States.<sup>62</sup> In contrast, between 1966 and 1981, the INS estimate that 215,640 Asian Indian immigrants made their way to the United States.<sup>63</sup> During this wave of immigration, it is evident that more and more immigrants were arriving in the United States highly educated, with the ability to work professional, skilled jobs. In 1981, a study done by the INS showed that out of all Asian Indians who had become naturalized that year, half of them worked in professional, technical or kindred occupations.<sup>64</sup> After 1965, the immigration policies favored highly-skilled, educated immigrants, creating the stigma of Asian Indians as a "model minority." A model minority being the popular belief that Asian immigrants are more

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<sup>59</sup> Also known as the Hart-Cellar Act. Charles B. Keely, "The Development of U.S. Immigration Policy since 1965," *Journal of International Affairs* 33, no. 2 (1979): 249-263. Edward M. Kennedy, "The Immigration Act of 1965," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 367 (1966): 137-49.

<sup>60</sup> Kennedy, "The Immigration Act of 1965," 145.

<sup>61</sup> Muzaffar Chishti, Faye Hipsman and Isabel Ball, "Fifty Years On, the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act Continues to Reshape the United States," *The Online Journal for the Migration Policy Institute* (2015).

<sup>62</sup> Gonzales Jr., "Asian American Immigration Patterns," 50.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 51.

hardworking and successful than other minority groups in the United States.<sup>65</sup> While this can be seen as a positive stereotype, it works to reinforce high expectations of Indian immigrants. Indian immigrants are expected to be smarter and worker harder than immigrants from other countries.

My maternal grandmother, Kulwant Kaur Grewal, came to the United States immediately after the INS Act of 1965. In 1966, she left her home and immigrated to the United States. Unlike my grandfathers, Kulwant received her permanent residency almost immediately upon entering the country. The INS Act allowed for new immigrants to apply for, and be granted much more easily, permanent residency. While it took five years to be granted full citizenship after she had received permanent residency, she was able to become a citizen years quicker than my grandfathers.

Kulwant, like many of the post-1965 immigrants, was highly educated before she came to the U.S.<sup>66</sup> In India, she received four different college degrees, ranging from pre-medical to political science. Similar to my grandfathers, Kulwant's parents were a large influence on her attitude towards education. Her father had three different engineering degrees from a University in Bombay and her mother had been to school in the village, something that did not happen too often for women. My grandmother had dreams of becoming a doctor and working in remote regions of India. After studying pre-medical science, she was accepted into three different medical schools. Although her parents wanted her to receive a good education, she says, "being a girl, those colleges were too far for my mother to get to me in case of an emergency. It was not

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<sup>65</sup> Sundari Balan and Ramaswami Mahalingam, "Good Asian Moms: Engendering the Model Minority Myth among Indian Immigrant Working Women," in *Gendered Journeys: Women, Migration and Feminist Psychology* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 104.

<sup>66</sup> Kulwant K. Bains, interview by author; Pawan Dhingra, "Just Getting a Job Is Not Enough: How Indian Americans Navigate the Workplace," in *Contemporary Asian America: A Multidisciplinary Reader* edited by Min Zhou and Anthony C. Ocampo, third edition (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 224; Gonzales Jr., "Asian American Immigration Patterns," 51.

possible, so she put her foot down and said no.”<sup>67</sup> My grandmother was not allowed to attend those medical schools because her mother believed it to be too far. In contrast, her older brother was teaching in Africa.<sup>68</sup> She was unable to attend schools in India that were within twenty-four hours away, while her brother was able to go to Africa to pursue his career. Traditional Indian cultural practices are very patriarchal in that the women are expected to stay closer to home while the men are allowed to pursue their desires. In all three of the personal narratives discussed, it is evident that loyalty and obedience to the family is important.

Although my grandparents’ stories represent Asian Indian experience on a microhistorical level, all three of them have vastly different immigrant experiences. Their personal narratives work to represent different Asian Indian immigrant experiences in the United States. For example, immigrants who settled in agricultural areas of California, immigrants who got educated in the United States, or immigrated after the U.S. liberalized its policies.

## V. Post-Partition Conflict Exacerbating Events

While some immigrants saw the economic and educational opportunities in the United States, others did not want to raise their family in a post-Partition India, where anti-Sikh sentiment is a cyclical issue that still affects people today. In the years following Partition, Sikh separatist groups were advocating for their own independent state, or “Khalistan.” The Indian government saw this as a problem because similar to what California is to the United States, Punjab provides a majority of India’s domestically grown food. In 1984, the conflict between the Indian Government and Sikh separatist groups escalated to its height. During what is known as

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<sup>67</sup> Kulwant K. Bains, interview by author.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

“Operation Blue Star,” the Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi ordered an attack on Harmandir Sahib (The Golden Temple), where she believes supporters of the Khalistan movement were hiding.<sup>69</sup> The pro-Khalistan group was killed, and the temple was partially destroyed in the process. The assault on the Temple, in particular, was interpreted as an act of sacrilege against the Sikh religion.<sup>70</sup> In response to “Operation Blue Star,” two of Indira Gandhi’s Sikh bodyguards assassinated her, throwing all of India into a tailspin. Because of Indira Gandhi’s Hindu roots, many saw this as a religious and ethnic conflict between Hindus and Sikhs.

The combination of separatist groups and the assassination of Indira Gandhi led India to become divided. Pritam Singh argues that the Sikh population had “never before in their history been so alienated from Hindus and from India as they were after Operation Blue Star. Never before had anti-Sikh sentiments among Hindus been unleashed as powerfully as they were after 1984. The level and intensity of the military confrontation between the Sikh combatants and the Indian state had no parallel in post-independent India. This operation was the first of its kind in India in which seven divisions of the army were deployed and all three wings of the armed forces—the army, the navy and the air force (though the latter two on a lesser scale)—were brought in to suppress an internal rebellion.”<sup>71</sup> The Indian Government had used their full force to attack a Sikh place of worship, subsequently shocking the Sikh community. In the days following Indira Gandhi’s assassination, more than 3,000 Sikhs were killed in anti-Sikh riots.<sup>72</sup> The public, widespread violent anti-Sikh outbreak turned many Sikhs, ones living in India and

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<sup>69</sup> The Golden Temple, or Harmandir Sahib, is located in Amritsar. It is recognized as the holiest place of worship for the Sikh religion, similar to the Vatican for the Catholic population.

<sup>70</sup> Huzan Dordi and Margaret Walton-Roberts, “Unpacking the (Diasporic) Nation: The Regionalized and Religious Identities of the ‘Indian’ Diaspora,” *Diasporas, Development and Governance* 5 (2016): 93.

<sup>71</sup> Pritam Singh, “The Political Economy of the cycles of Violence and Non-violence in the Sikh Struggle for Identity and Political Power: implications for Indian Federalism,” in *Third World Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (2007): 561.

<sup>72</sup> Barbara Crossette, “India's Sikhs: Waiting for Justice.” *World Policy Journal* 21, no. 2 (2004): 70.

ones overseas, against the state of India. The events that took place in 1984 discourage Sikhs from moving back to India. The anti-Sikh sentiment of the 1980s worked to push Sikhs out of India, while also keeping them in places like the United States.

In addition to the Sikh genocide that took place in 1984, the Indian prime minister election in 2014 was monumental. The prime minister elected, Narendra Modi, has a long history of Hindu Nationalism and being anti-Muslim and anti-Sikh. Modi belongs to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a party rooted in the idea of Hindutva.<sup>73</sup> In short, Hindutva is an ideology seeking to establish the hegemony of Hindus and the Hindu way of life.<sup>74</sup> During his time as Chief Minister in Gujarat, India, he is thought to have allowed, and even incited, horrific violence to be carried out against the Muslim population. In 2005, the U.S. State Department refused to issue Modi with a visa for a planned visit and cancelled another visa issued earlier.<sup>75</sup> Although he was never found guilty of inciting violence, many believe he fueled the violence in order to become a hero of the radical Hindu Right.

A 2013 *Economic and Political Weekly* report done cited that Modi had not once nominated a Muslim to stand for election to the state assembly on behalf of the BJP and not once in his recent campaigns [for Prime Minister] has he specifically called on all groups and classes to join him in a journey to build a better nation.<sup>76</sup> Some scholars argue that Modi is the most aggressive face of Hindutva that an elected holder of constitutional office has ever exhibited.<sup>77</sup> Although Modi is most hostile towards the Muslim population, he is anti-Sikh in that he wants everything to be the Hindu way of life. He wants the national language of India to be Hindi and

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<sup>73</sup> Danish Husain, "Modi: The Vanity of a Tyrant," in *Strongmen*, ed. Vijay Prashad (New York: OR Books, 2018), 30.

<sup>74</sup> Husain, "Modi," 31

<sup>75</sup> Andrew Wyatt, "India in 2014: Decisive National Elections," *Asian Survey* 55, no. 1 (2015): 45.

<sup>76</sup> "Illusions and Disillusionment: The Beautification of Narendra Modi Needs To Be Resisted," *Economic and Political Weekly* 48, no. 50 (2013): 7.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

the national religion to be Hinduism. This is extremely problematic because India has the second-largest population of Muslims in the world and the largest population of Sikhs.<sup>78</sup> While making Hindi and Hinduism national practices could be symbolic, Modi's past actions suggest that it is not. He has a long history of radical Hindu Nationalism that is a threat to non-Hindi ethnic groups in India.

Modi's nationalist attitude has forced many to leave the country. Similar to the atmosphere in 1947 and 1984, Sikhs are made to feel as if they are not welcome by the Indian Government. In the current moment, Sikhs and Muslims are being forced to move because they face political and social prejudice brought on by Modi's policies. In addition, in 2018, job creation was the slowest it has been in the past seven years.<sup>79</sup> As the economy gets worse and worse, social divisions get more exacerbated. While social and political discrimination is a large reason for non-Hindu ethnic groups to leave, economically, India has been performing poorly since Modi took office. In response to the many factors, there has been an increase in Asian Indian illegal immigration to the United States as well. In 2018 alone, the United States apprehended almost 9,000 Indian Citizens attempting to cross the U.S.-Mexico border.<sup>80</sup> This was a 200% increase from 2017 and the fourth largest number of apprehensions only following Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras.<sup>81</sup> Modi's tenure, characterized by his Hindutva philosophy, is just one of many different periods in India where the minority groups are given differential treatment. From the time of colonial rule, through Partition and the genocide of 1984, Modi has continued the narrative that Sikhs and Muslims are not welcome in India.

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<sup>78</sup> James M. Rubenstein, "Religions," in *The Cultural Landscape: An Introduction to Human Geography*, 12<sup>th</sup> ed. (New Jersey: Pearson, 2015), 190.

<sup>79</sup> Husain, "Modi," 28.

<sup>80</sup> Rupam Jain, "Polarised Politics: How Two Teenagers Will Vote After Surviving 2002 Gujarat Riots," *Reuters* (2019).

<sup>81</sup> Jain, "Polarised."

## VI. Moving Back to India

Although my grandparents all moved to the United States at a fairly young age, they were all still attached to their homes. My maternal grandmother, Kulwant, still feels a strong connection to her home. When I asked her if she had ever thought about moving back to India, she said: “The first two, three years were very hard. I wanted to go back. I do not think I ever thought of starting my life there, I just wanted to go back. Starting a life there never entered my mind. I think if we had money and we could go back to visit after a year or so it would not have been that hard. I think it was the helplessness that I cannot go back. I will never have enough money to go back. It took us six years to take our first trip back to India for two weeks. It was not because of my personal life, but just because life was really different. There, I was the center of my parents’ life. I felt protected. Here, I had to take over their role and face the world. My heart is still there, but my life is here.”<sup>82</sup> My grandmother had been educated in India and had lived with her parents up until then, so for her, moving to the United States was a shock. In addition, she had to learn how to navigate married life and also had her first child in 1968, two years after she arrived in the U.S.<sup>83</sup> In Punjab, she had been taken care of by her parents. In the United States, my grandmother was faced with being a first-time wife and parent, while also trying to assimilate into American society. She also cites her financial worries as a reason for her discomfort. As an immigrant in a new country, she felt as if she would never be able to get out if she was not economically successful.

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<sup>82</sup> Kulwant K. Bains, interview by author.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

When I asked my paternal grandfather, Jarnail, if he ever thought of living in India again, his response: “There was only one time. I was working for Boeing [in Everett, Washington], with three little kids. My dad wrote to me and said, ‘Come back and help me, I will pay you what you’re getting there.’”<sup>84</sup> As he begins to explain the reasons why they did not go, his voice begins to change to a slightly melancholic tone. “If we had went, I would’ve put my sons in the same school that I went to, and my daughter in the all-girls Catholic school close-by.”<sup>85</sup> In the end, my grandparents decided not to move back to India, and although my grandfather will always wonder what it would have been like to raise his family in India, he concludes his story by saying, “In a way, I am glad we did not go.”<sup>86</sup> My grandfather’s personal account can be a representation of how other Asian Indian immigrants felt. While they had a strong urge to return home and continue their lives with their relatives, they had a duty to their children and newly created family to provide the best possible quality of life for them.

In contrast, my maternal grandfather, Joginder, never thought of moving home. When I asked him if he had ever thought of moving back to India, his response was a stern, “No. I did not want to move back to continue my life there. India was still a big part of my life. My parents were there, my brother was there, my school and college friends were there, so I made trips back.”<sup>87</sup> It is evident that Joginder had no intention of moving back once he was settled in California. While he does cite his family as a reason for going back, he goes on to explain how, “living here [United States] made me think like Americans, confident like Americans. Learn how to make my own financial and personal decisions, which is something I would not have done in

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<sup>84</sup> Jarnail S. Dhaddey, interview by author.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Joginder S. Bains, interview by author.

India, where family comes to influence all of your decisions.”<sup>88</sup> Throughout this essay, it is evident that family has played a large role in my grandparents’ lives. Early on in their lives, they made decisions based on their parents’ wishes. Once they immigrated to the United States, they were able to grow into their own individual people, not worrying about familial obligations.

One main difference between Joginder and the other two personal narratives, is that he was in the military. His exposure to patriotic themes and American culture was much greater than my other two grandparents. Although he was stationed in Germany, he was surrounded by American soldiers, as well as the post-war attitude of America as a global superpower. As previously stated, he began “think like Americans, [act] confident like Americans.”<sup>89</sup>

## VII. Conclusion

Being the world’s fifth largest religion, Sikhism continues to spread to different areas of the world.<sup>90</sup> The Sikh community in the United States has continued to grow year after year, increasing when there is political or social turmoil in India. Historical scholarship continues to focus on the immigrant experience with a macrohistorical lens, leaving out personal narratives in the process. My grandparents’ personal narratives illustrate just a few of the many different paths that Sikh immigrants took on their way to the United States. Although my grandparents immigrated decades ago, it is important to understand the different ways people assimilate and adapt into the United States. In 2017 alone, the United States net migration was over 4,500,000.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Joginder S. Bains, interview by author, March 31, 2019.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Jakobsh, *Sikhism*, 15.

<sup>91</sup> The World Bank, “Net Migration,” [https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SM.POP.NETM?name\\_desc=true](https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SM.POP.NETM?name_desc=true) (accessed June 13, 2019).

While anti-immigrant sentiment continues to be popularized in the United States, it is important to understand why immigrants continue to come to the United States, and in the case of my grandparents, how those immigrants were able to eventually think of themselves as “American.”

From my research, it is evident that there are no universal push and pull factors for Asian Indian immigrants leaving India to come to the United States. My grandparents display a variety of push and pull factors just in their own personal narratives. In both of my grandfathers’ cases, their families acted as push factors for them to move to the United States. The pull factors for them were universities and greater economic opportunity in the U.S. In contrast, my grandmother was highly educated in India and moved to the United States and started a family shortly after. My grandfathers were able to assimilate more slowly, with other single immigrant men. My maternal grandmother arrived in 1966 and had her first daughter in 1968. She had to learn how to navigate a new country, while also being a first-time mother. Regardless of the decade, immigrants from around the world go through similar processes when immigrating into a new country, and it is vital that we understand their personal experiences within the broader context. Rather than dismissing immigrant issues we must continue to interpret the different causes for their migration.

Indian immigration into the United States has seen an increase in recent years. Most media outlets discuss issues regarding migration from Latin American countries, rarely speaking on things like the 200% increase in the detention of Indian citizens at the border in 2018.<sup>92</sup> It is crucial that American citizens understand the push factors for Indian immigrants. Informing them of events like the Partition, the genocide in 1984 and the current administration under Narendra Modi can help U.S. citizens empathize with Sikh immigrants. Contextualized personal

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<sup>92</sup> 200% increase from 2017 to 2018; Jain, “Polarised.”

narratives humanize immigrants, decreasing anti-immigrant sentiment in the process. Instead of looking at all immigrant experiences of an ethnic group as one, personal narratives help to illustrate the diverse experiences, even within the very specific timeframe of post-Partition India.

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