

INVITATION FOR AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
ON
THE PUNJABI DIASPORA'S LINKAGES TO HOST SOCIETIES

The Department of Punjabi at Punjabi University has planned a three day conference on the Punjabi Diaspora on January 20-22, 2015. This will be a third such gathering of scholars with the main theme of this seminar will be an exploration of the Punjabi Diaspora's interaction with host societies. The last two conferences were devoted to [a] Punjabi Diasporas' linkage with Punjab as its 'homeland' [b] The first conference had a general theme while trying to map various aspects of the Punjabi Diaspora. This third conference, like the previous two, will be spread over three days. Scholars are invited to contribute on any of the topics falling under the main theme of the Punjabi Diaspora's interaction with host societies which is elaborated below.

THE PUNJABI DIASPORA'S INTERACTION WITH HOST SOCIETIES

It is now well over 150 years since the first Punjabis started settling abroad. Over this long period and in different locations, Punjabi immigrants have interacted with the local people in a variety of conditions, circumstances and contexts. Each Punjabi has something to say of his experience of settlement abroad, opinion of local people, its institutions and the state of the country they have eventually made their homes. However, we know little of such interactions apart from rather cliché-ridden stereotypes. Indeed, how often do we hear of similar complaints and judgements upon overseas Punjabis' alienation and insularity from host societies? Such luminaries as Mukherjee, Anderson and others have made incisive comments upon Sikhs' 'separate lives' abroad.

Is that the wholesome portrait of overseas Punjabis lives? Have they not contributed to their new countries of settlement, to their neighbouring communities through participation in civic life, local institutions and in other ways? Alternatively, have they not been influenced by host societies' institutions, attitudes and the social and economic environments?

In order to make some sense of divergent experiences of such interactions across the Punjabi Diaspora we have chosen this major theme for exploration for the third Punjabi Diaspora conference. We wish to review such diverse experiences of the Punjabi Diaspora with their different trajectories of settlement in various countries, to see various dimensions of such Punjabi-host societies' interactions? We hope various contributors will allow us to go beyond general impressionistic observations, indeed current largely negative stereotypes and clichés and establish some sound basis to make judgements.

Considering this theme in broad terms, we are seeking your contributions from the following areas:

1. The Economic Dimension

We invite papers from someone looking at the broad range of occupations among the Punjabi Diaspora -what Cohen and others have observed, that it is or was until recently a proletarian Diaspora -as against say the Gujarati Diaspora which can be classified as traders-Bania Diaspora. Contributors can examine either a comparative analysis of the Punjabi Diaspora or more specific case study of a country or indeed even more usefully a detailed experience of work in a particular occupation by Punjabis. we want to hear from Marxists or left oriented writers of the class configuration within the Punjabi Diaspora and how this has impacted upon their struggles in host society -be it the formation of Canadian Farmworkers Union or Indian Workers Associations' support say for Miners Struggles in the 1980s in Britain, or experiences of Punjabi cart-drivers of

Malaya working for their Malayan/Chinese landlords. An economist, an oral historian, and a social history specialist are welcome to suggest titles of their papers.

2. The Political Dimension

The political space for minorities among host societies has created opportunities for power-sharing for overseas Punjabis. How have they used their right to vote, or led the campaign to seek voting right in case of Canada which denied them until 1948? What is emerging scenario at local levels in various countries where several Punjabis are now part of local political institutions and representatives? How have they fared and integrated with major political parties of host societies? More specifically what are the demands which Punjabis have placed upon the host societies? Is it true that they have been demanding rights while providing in exchange nothing to host societies? In particular the Sikhs, as dominant part of the Punjabi Diaspora been asking for right to wear turban in many overseas locations, any such case studies shedding light on the kind of interaction that pervades with the host society? Then there are issues arising of the 1984 tragedy when overseas Sikhs demanded attention of political leaders of host states and international bodies to represent their grievances to the Indian state and help them in their demand for a secure homeland. How was such demand seen by host societies? its political parties or ordinary people who observed many such mobilisations in major cities from Singapore, New York, London and Vancouver among others.

3. Social interactions

What kind and levels of social interaction exists in different countries? Is East African experience of Punjabi Diaspora mingling with local people same as that of UK, Canada or the US? Also what about South East Asian places? Are there many Inter-marriages of Punjabi and Canadians for instance? What are the perceptions of host societies among the Punjab Diaspora? Do local people forge relationship with Punjabis settled amongst them, if so what shape it takes? Are there voluntary local associations of such mixing?

4. Interaction through literary imagination

From *Maluka's* narrative of Punjabis interaction with Canadian whites, many kinds of interactions are provided through fiction with the latest humorously put by Daljit Nagra in his *We Been Coming to Dover* in his poetry. Not only Punjabi writers have tried to portray such interactions with the host society, there is emerging field of host society's writers telling of their Sikh or Punjabi neighbours and their interactions. Through such literary imagination, what portraits emerge of such encounters? How true are these to the reality, what kind of ideological baggage such images are embedded in?

5. Cultural Interaction

Have Punjabis marked any significant mark on the cultural scenario of their host societies? How have they contributed to host societies' cultural, artistic or say theatre or cinema expressions? We often have heard of the popularity of the Bhangra phenomenon, that it created a niche among western societies, what kind of interaction is this? How has the Bhangra changed as it has responded to host societies' musical expectations and tastes? What are the inter-community socialisation implications of such sharing of the music among the second generation Punjabi adolescents and many young men and women of host societies? How this has impacted upon the Punjabi identity in particular locations?

6. The *Punenglish* or Linguistic Interaction

What are the language exchanges within classrooms of Punjabi children and their fellow pupils of host societies in primary and high schools and then in higher education? As children switchover to English in western countries or to specific dominant languages of host states in other countries, what are the specific issues and difficulties they face? How have parents of Punjabi pupils made their transition from Punjabi speaking to a mix of languages and see the attitude of their neighbours in

this regard? Have host society institutions responded to such linguistic diversity in specific ways and what are those?

7. The Religious Dimension

How have Punjabis with different faiths and religious traditions have interacted with host societies' religious institutions? Have there been many conversions –from Sikhs/Hindus to other faiths or vice-versa? We know American Sikh converts have been in the news for a long time! Some such dimension of religious dialogue, interactions or case studies exercises will be welcome.

For all of the above issues and you will find many more within these broad topics, we are inviting the attention of scholars. Please write to us with a short summary of what you want to discuss. It is hoped you will be able to send us a completed paper before the conference in order to circulate it for productive discussion. Our plan is to issue a volume arising from this conference.

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