PUNJAB RESEARCH GROUP

Momentous events: 1984 and beyond

VENUE: The Buttery, Wolfson College, University of Oxford, Linton Rd, Oxford, OX2 6UD

DATE: Saturday 25th October 2014, 10am-5pm

DIRECTIONS: Please go to the end of this document for full details.

10:00   Registration

10:15   **Pritam Singh, Oxford Brookes University**
India and the Sikhs since 1984: mapping the fault lines

11:00   **Radhika Chopra, University of Delhi**
A coincidence of commemoration

11:45   Tea/Coffee

12:00   **Nardina Kaur, Radical Philosophy**
Deleuze and communalism: heuristic, therapeutic and preventive practice

12:45   Lunch at Wolfson College

2:00   **Nuzhat Abbas & Alison Street, Parents Early Education Partnership**
Working with Punjabi speaking families to support mother tongue through songs, rhymes and stories: challenges and opportunities

2:30   **Amar Sohal, University of Oxford**
Seeking a voice: the demand for Azad Punjab

3:15   Tea/Coffee

3:30   **Prabhsharandeep Singh, University of Oxford**
Violence and Poetic Resistance: (Re)locating the Origin of 1984 Attacks

4:15   **Iqtidar Karamat Cheema, Institute for Leadership and Community Development**
Evolution of Sikh nationalism and state-led repression in Indian Punjab

5:00
onwards   Social gathering for those who can stay around for a drink.

Convened by Pritam Singh, Iftikhar Malik and Kaveri Qureshi
If you would like to attend, please email kaveri.qureshi@anthro.ox.ac.uk.

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Abstracts

Pritam Singh, Oxford Brookes University
India and the Sikhs since 1984: mapping the fault lines
The distinctive identity of the Sikhs as a people with a self-view of themselves as 'sovereign' and their homeland as Punjab has had a long history of tension with Delhi-centred powers. The region-based Punjabi nationalism with Sikhs as an influential and sometimes the driving component of that nationalism clashed and collaborated with three state forms in their over 500 years history i.e. the Moghul state, the British imperial state and the Indian nationalist state. This history also witnessed the 50 year interlude of Punjabi and Sikh sovereignty in the form of the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh from 1799- 1849. The late 19th century text Hum Hindu Nahin Hain written by a Sikh scholar and ideologue Kahan Singh Nabha conceptualised forcefully the Sikh identity as distinctive from the Hindus, and this conceptualisation further strengthened the tension between the Sikhs and the Hindu majoritarian Indian nationalism. This tension between the Sikhs and the idea of unified Indian nationhood went through various mutations in the post-colonial India with questions of language, rights over natural resources such as water and fiscal federalism emerging at different points of time as the main issues over which the tensions between the Sikhs and the centre/India) manifested themselves. The accumulation of these tensions took a qualitatively different turn when the Indian state used its armed power to enter the Golden Temple complex in 1984 to subdue the dissident Sikh armed groups housed in the complex. This caused a violent rupture between Sikh subjectivity and Indian state's ideological paradigm. Every event since then is the arena of contestation. This paper will explore those fault lines- the strength, durability and the fragility of those fault lines, and will attempt to map out the future scenario of these fault lines.

Radhika Chopra, University of Delhi
A coincidence of commemoration
Histories of dislocation and violence have shaped the politics of Punjab across time and location. A coincidence of commemorations of these events in 2014 seems to suggest that we might find 'affiliations' between diverse memories and memorialisation. But 2014 also gives us a chance to reflect on the ascendancy of some events and their memorialisation over others. In India, commemorations in Amritsar and Delhi centre on 1984. My paper will look at the narrowing of what constitutes memories and remembrance of 1984. The prominence given to remembering the 'life and death' of Bhindranwale has literally re-shaped spaces within the Darbar Sahib and in the Kendriya Sikh Ajaibghar, the museum in the sacred complex. The insistent emphasis on remembering Bhindranwale— particularly in the city of Amritsar, but also in Delhi- has overshadowed the destruction of the Akal Takht as a key in narratives of Operation Bluestar. In Delhi, memorials and commemorations of those killed in the Delhi riots have now emerged as a way of shifting the focus. Or is this, I ask, a way for the state [despite its complicity in the riots] to permit memorialisation of a troubled past in an effort to overshadow the 'Bhindranwale effect'?

Nardina Kaur, Radical Philosophy
Deleuze and communalism: heuristic, therapeutic and preventive practice
The paper will deal with eye-witness responses to Partition taken from the books by Urvashi Butalia and Ishtiaq Ahmed, Amrita Pritam's famous 'Aj aakhan Waris Shah nu' poem and the silent protests of Sikh women after the pogrom of 1984, as analysed by Veena Das in her book 'Life and Words'. Butalia's increasing sense of being Sikh and Das' instinctive perceptions will be discussed as well as the material they discuss to show that there is an ongoing process

involved. Perspectives from Deleuze's work will be introduced and used throughout, specifically his philosophy of the event, his notion of a complexified identity that remains porous to the flux from which it emerges and the idea that sympathetic action can be elicited by a life at a point below the level of identity. Using Jean Fautrier's 'Tête d'otage' paintings which are about Gestapo torture victims as a template, the subcontinental material will be interpreted as a possible 'Deleuzian' practice of working through, involving highly intuitive, non-representational responses based on disjunctive pure affect and percept not governed by normal conventions of identifiable figures and identification. It will be argued that this practice can be an essential supplement to causal, positivist history and human rights based on parity of individual identities at an abstract level, without of course denying the importance of both. Nevertheless, Deleuze's philosophy of the event helps one to understand the erupting from nowhere quality of the actual moment of commmunalist violence rather than its longer-term causes and so helps to heal the trauma that arises from it, and his ideas on the multiple and connective self can counter the exclusivist, inimical identities associated with communalism that are not necessarily prevented by rights based on discrete identities.

Nuzhat Abbas & Alison Street, Parents Early Education Partnership
Working with Punjabi speaking families to support mother tongue through songs, rhymes and stories: challenges and opportunities
This paper contributes to the growing body of research in intercultural practice. It focuses on recent action research projects with South Asian families in the south Midlands that have supported parents with their young children's early learning through sharing and promoting women's remembered songs and stories. First, we draw on the ecological theory of Bronfenbrenner to elaborate on these memories. Then we explore how the ORIM conceptual model, based on Hannon, can be applied when engaging with families who have English as an additional language. The ORIM framework is used by PEEP to support parents with their children's early learning at home. With reference to a case study, we explore how some South Asian parents value their home languages, their feelings about expressing themselves and how they might be perceived by others. When families do not use English, their situation is often regarded as problematic by early childhood settings and services rather than as an opportunity for dialogue and learning. Implications are drawn about the powerful role songs and stories can play in parents' everyday lives with their children and about the challenges for practice in listening to and being open to voices that are all too often ignored.

Amar Sohal, University of Oxford
Seeking a Voice: The Demand for 'Azad Punjab'
From 1931 to 1947, the Shiromani Akali Dal, the principal Sikh party in a religiously fractured India, made a demand for dividing the existing Punjab into two provinces. To date, historians have argued that this was a Machiavellian reaction to the gathering momentum of the 'Pakistan' scheme. This paper reclaims the integrity of the 'Azad Punjab' demand, so that it can be placed alongside late colonial India's most pertinent political ideas. The Akalis reasoned that if they conceded Muslim supremacy in western Punjab, the Sikhs would be the kingmakers of an eastern province in which no community would have a majority. They would be lifted from a position of numerical, and thus political, weakness, to one from which they could exercise meaningful influence. I argue that this enabled the Akalis to finally exorcise the Sikhs' historically informed fear of 'Muslim Raj', whilst safeguarding their interests in the western province by way of the 'hostage theory'. The Akalis, hoping to add cogency to their demand, drew on religious and political history as well as Sikh economic prowess to claim the Punjab for their community. Its fate, they reasoned, should thus be left in Sikh hands – especially since an 'Azad Punjab' was merely positing the reestablishment of the 'Punjab proper'. I conclude by suggesting that, for a while in 1946, the scheme offered the most realistic solution to the Sikh-Muslim entanglement.

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Prabhsharandeep Singh, University of Oxford
Violence and Poetic Resistance: (Re)locating the Origin of 1984 Attacks
1984 Indian army attack on Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar and several other Sikh Gurdwaras is an event that has questioned the very locatedness of Sikh subjectivity both within and beyond the boundaries of modern Indian nation state. Political and sociological accounts of 1984 often view the event in relation to the economic, political, and cultural developments in Punjab in the years preceding the army attacks. Such approaches represent theoretical models that go hand in hand with both the formation and the functioning of a modern nation state such as India. Theoretical agencies of knowledge production in both colonial and post-colonial India have aimed to construct a new language, which tried to produce a new cultural space and subsequently a uniform national identity. This linguistic space has marginalized previously existing languages, and as a result cultures and literatures that those specific languages produced. In order to trace the origin of violence against the Sikhs in India, to question the very authority of the Indian nation state to exercise such violence, and to critically engage with the knowledge production agencies that constitute the idea of the modern India, alternative languages need to be explored. The current paper will offer a reading of Harinder Singh Mahboob's poetry to analyze how literature provides an alternative approach to prevailing language of theory. Mahboob, one of the most prominent Sikh poets during twentieth and early twenty-first century, wrote a series of poems about the 1984 attacks, compiled in the collection titled *Shahid Di Ardas* (*The Martyr's Prayer*) (1990). Mahboob's poetry not only depicts several shades of violence, but also attempts to reconstruct the linguistic space that has been absent in most of the modern Punjabi literature. I'll try to analyze how Mahboob's reenacting of the 1984 event in his poetry offers a different sense of both history and time, where poetry, in addition to an alternative representation of the event in question, itself becomes a new event.

Iqtidar Karamat Cheema, Institute for Leadership and Community Development
Evolution of Sikh Nationalism and State-led repression in Indian Punjab
Indeed, of the religious communities in India, the Sikhs probably possess the strongest sense of their own identity and community. This Sikh communal consciousness is the result of a social movement among the Sikhs in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first decades of twentieth century which reformulated Sikh identity. Between 1981 and 1984, Sikh political leaders led a series of mass civil-disobedience campaigns against the Indian government for fulfilment of a set of demands which included greater autonomy for the state of Punjab. This paper will reflect on evolution of Sikh identity and communal consciousness and its impact on the social and political activity. The main issue discussed is that Sikh community got frustrated in their constitutional struggle and rose in revolt against the Indian suppression to preserve their ethnic identity. This paper will also explore the characteristics of state-led violence committed by Indian government and its army against the Sikhs.

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How to get to Wolfson College, Oxford

Wolfson College is located at the end of Linton Road, off Banbury Road in North Oxford, OX2 6UD.

It is about a half-hour walk from Oxford train station or from Gloucester Green Coach station.

Parking in designated areas is available for a maximum of 3 hours. Parking restrictions exist in the roads adjacent to the College.

When you arrive at the college, please go to the porters lodge and they will direct you towards The Buttery. Signs will also be posted around college to direct you towards the workshop.