

**‘INDO-CANADIAN’ EXPERIENCE: A PERFORMANCE OF VOICES OF A
SOCIALIZATION PROCESS OF A ‘BROWN’ MAN IN CANADA**

by

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ABSTRACT

This critical, creative, nonfiction text captures what it means to be a ‘brown’ man in ‘Canadian’ society; many of ‘us’ find ‘our’ socialization process traumatic, leading to alienation, low self-esteem, internalized racism, anger, crime and even outright violence. The complex nuances of ‘Sikh’ racialization are revealed by creating a bricolage of literary styles and forms. I employ bricolage because a multivariate approach enables me to better explore and reveal the complexities, nuances and contradictions of being a ‘brown’ man.

My personal experiences of racialization are embedded throughout these works of poetry, prose and creative non-fiction. This collection of texts examines the shortcomings of ‘Canadian’ multiculturalism and their impacts on the socialization of ‘Indo-Canadian’ men by focusing on themes of racism, history, violence, immigrant labour, internalized racism and racial profiling. In doing so, this research focuses on two inter-related questions: 1. “What kinds of discursive and structural dimensions of ‘multicultural’ Canada maintain cultural stereotypes and forms of racism that I have experienced personally?” 2. “How can I better understand and come to terms with my alienation as an ‘Indo-Canadian’ male in relation to how ‘brown’ violence has been constructed by the media and in turn understood by the general public?” This thesis encourages the reader to acknowledge and examine his/her (mis)perceptions of ‘Sikhs,’ and in turn, to acknowledge and examine how his/her actions and inactions contribute to the sociological challenges that confront ‘Indo-Canadian’ men.

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INTRODUCTION

Here I am

**the great-grandson of Bidhi Singh Atwal,
the Sikh revolutionary who resisted the British
...not prison, nor lashing, nor broken fingers
prevented him from the ultimate act of passive resistance
—*to obey the law!***

**nothing steered him off course from testing colonial waters
...crossing the Pacific only to realize that
he was “much too savagely to understand the complexities of modern European law”
of course, the gunfire upon his return ‘home’ was meant to tame him**

Here I am

**The great-grandson of Bidhi Singh Atwal
the Lion who stood Six-Foot-Three,
his height bolstered by a few extra inches of turban,
...whose charisma, authority and integrity moved villages to spin their own cloth,
the Singh who roared about freedom and civil disobedience**

...

**the Sikh revolutionary who lived the True Sikh way:
social justice and community service
yet, his grandson wasn’t allowed to stay on this soil either
“they were only hiring the white people”
but at least my father was allowed to walk the very shores that Bidhi Singh only looked
at
... progress, I guess,
or maybe *multiculturalism* is the right word
...as fear of beards, swords and turbans continues
how do I respond?**

The space of the in-between is the locus of social, cultural and natural transformations: it is not simply a convenient space for movements and realignments but in fact is the only place—the place around identities, between identities—where becoming, openness to futurity, outstrips the conservational impetus to retain cohesion and unity. (Grosz, 2001, cited in Irwin and Springgay, 2008, p. xx)

I write this for everyone in my life, friends, colleagues, students, professors and any other member of our society who cares to take the plunge, but most of all, I write this for myself. I am striving for the catharsis that sharing through writing can bring. I suspect that at times we all will be annoyed, disturbed and perhaps even insulted, by the emotional upheaval that I hope will be embraced as a means of exploration and growth. I am striving to create a dynamic collage of texts which calls into question the concept known as '*Canadian multiculturalism*'. I hope this thesis helps the reader question how our nation's multiculturalism (mis)educates us, with special attention to the limitations, failures and negative consequences of this notion.

This exploration weaves a path through 'my Indo-Canadian experience' by focusing on certain themes: racism, history, violence, immigrant labour, internalized racism and racial profiling. Through these themes, each of the works within this research aims to answer two inter-related questions: 1. "What kinds of discursive and structural dimensions of 'multicultural' Canada maintain cultural stereotypes and forms of racism that I have experienced personally?" 2. "How can I better understand and come to terms with my alienation as an 'Indo-Canadian' male?" I will actively engage these questions by utilizing three literary forms: narratives, poetry and expository prose. Narratives allow the writer to encourage learning through stories. In doing so, this research reflects McArthur-Blair's notion (2004) that narrative inquiry is "a quest to represent the concept of the inner life as told by the [writer] and a quest to understand that inner life [in relation to the public sphere]" (p. 41). The narratives that I have chosen examine the aforementioned themes through the lived experiences of characters. Creating different characters welcomes a diversity of experiences and perspectives which enables the reader to feel much more engrossed in the

text, in the multicultural exploration. In contrast, expository prose limits the text to two primary voices, mine and the one in the reader's mind, the quotes being the secondary voices. However, I do utilize expository prose as well since it enables a more 'direct' argumentative approach to revealing my 'Indo-Canadian experience.' In addition, I find poetry necessary because it enables me to pry open the bars inside my being and free all those things that I have learned to lock away as a 'brown' man in Canada. In particular, I write poetry that is very conducive to live/life performance because I find this form of self-expression and education incredibly rewarding. These three literary forms, narratives, poetry and prose, lead the audience through a critical examination of 'my Indo-Canadian experience.' The artist statements, the titles and subtitles throughout the narratives will guide you, like a cabaret host leading the audience through an array of performances. As your host, I will tell you some essential information in order to make the experience more enjoyable, but I will not provide too much contextualization for fear of limiting the effectiveness of the stories, of the empty spaces on the page. I try to play with the space on the page as a tool of exploration, as a means of learning for you and for me. There are no directions such as, *she replied, he said, he enters stage left*, etc., because I want us all to reflect on the space on the page; for instance, *What is happening here? What was going through Bob's mind when he wrote this? How does this situation implicate me and my family, and Bob and his family?*

What is presented in this thesis are fragments of my experience, reflections and understanding of who I am in this multicultural society. My goal is to provide a deeper understanding of 'my Indo-Canadian experience' by incorporating "a variety of ways of seeing and interpreting in the pursuit of knowledge" through bricolage (Denzin and Lincoln,

1998; Kincheloe, 2001, p. 682). I am using a range of literary forms to foster a range of perspectives because I believe that “[t]he more perspectival variety a researcher employs...the more dimensions and consequences of a text will be illuminated (Kellner, 1995, cited in Kincheloe, 2001, p. 682). I am compelled to use a methodology that embraces the nuances of being a hyphenated ‘brown’ ‘Canadian’—the diversity within my identity calls for a diversity within my research. This work will create “a new angle of analysis, a multidimensional perspective on a cultural phenomenon” (Dicks & Mason, 1998, Foster, 1997, cited in Kincheloe, 2001, p. 686). Specifically, I will explore the “different perspectives of the socially privileged and the marginalized in relation to formations of race, class, gender and sexuality” (McLeod, 2000, Pryse, 1988, Young & Yarbrough 1993, cited in Kincheloe, 2001, p. 687).

I am displaying fragments of my experience, reflections and understanding of who I am in this multicultural society. In fact, I believe that all cultural knowledge is fragmented, whether it be cultural knowledge of ‘our’ own ethnicity, or the ethnicity of ‘The Other,’ and as such, our multicultural society is fragmented. In other words, my ‘Indo-Canadian’ socialization has instilled a view of our nation as being composed of separate, incongruent swaths of fabric, not a tightly woven mosaic—our country is all about gaps, which is why fragments are so useful. An integral part of fragments are the spaces in between them; the gaps **within each text** and the gaps **between each text** encourage a highly creative, interactive experience.

As previously mentioned, what follows is a diverse collection of texts; beginning with a prose discussion of media theory since my socialization has been significantly shaped by the limited and racist manner in which journalists construct ‘Sikh’ identity: as being defined by

violence. After the media piece there are two narratives and then two letters. In addition, the terms “our,” “we” and “us” refer to how ‘the Indo-Canadian community’ sees itself in relation to the larger ‘Canadian’ society—these terms are not meant to be divisive, they are meant to illustrate how many of ‘us’ with ‘brown’ skin see ‘ourselves’ and others. Moreover, I have provided further understanding of my ‘Indo-Canadian’ socialization by including poetry in various, bolded fonts. Lastly, the titles in the outline, such as *Expository Prose One* and *Expository Prose Two*, layout a map for the reader to navigate through this bricolage of texts.

EXPOSITORY PROSE ONE

Media Theory

This chapter aims to explore how media (mis)representations of ‘Indo-Canadian’ identity and culture continue to obscure the issue of domestic violence, while other sections of this work focus on the related themes of history, immigrant labour, racism, racial profiling, internalized racism and violence more broadly. In particular, the discourse of a recent forum on domestic violence, along with related *Vancouver Sun* articles about domestic violence, will be analyzed as a means of better understanding how (mis)representations of ‘Indo-Canadian’ identity and culture impede an accurate view of spousal abuse.

Key Terms

Before delving into the details of how the media reports distort the issue of domestic violence, it is important to discuss some of the key terms used in this work. The terms *domestic violence* and *spousal abuse* are used interchangeably to denote violence against women within the home. Also, there are quite a few ‘ethnic’ labels for those of us whose ancestry lies in India. ‘*Indo-Canadian*,’ ‘*East-Indian*,’ ‘*Indian*,’ ‘*South Asian*,’ ‘*Sikh*’ and ‘*white*’ (‘white’ meaning a ‘Sikh’ who is seen as being ‘too assimilated’) are among the most commonly used; individuals throughout ‘Canadian’ society use such terms not only to identify themselves, but also to identify ‘the other.’ This critique uses ‘Indo-Canadian’ and ‘Sikh’ since these are the two most common terms in the media and the overall multicultural space in which ‘Indo-Canadian’ identity is constructed by ‘Sikhs’ and ‘non-Sikhs.’ I use these labels and the term ‘the community’ in quotations because I believe doing so encourages the reader to consider the diversity within cultural groups more actively, along with the potential inaccuracy of these words. Furthermore, my hope is that it stimulates a

critique of these words, which will result in a much clearer vision of domestic violence, regardless of one's cultural background. Moreover, being critical of these cultural labels adds context to this media pedagogy analysis by nurturing an awareness of how identity struggles are commonplace for many 'Indo-Canadians.' In other words, viewing this research through these labels offers insight into the often tumultuous socialization of 'Sikhs' in 'Canadian' society, or what I refer to as '*the Indo-Canadian experience*,' in which the media plays a key role.

The current media messages surrounding 'Sikh' domestic violence require taking Stuart Hall's (Jhally, 1997b) views on representation into account; in understanding 'Indo-Canadian' domestic violence we must all keep in mind that "representation does not occur after the event, representation is constitutive of the event; it enters into the constitution of the [event] that we are talking about" (part 2) as does the knowledge of media consumers. In other words, the manner in which incidents of domestic violence are reported shapes their understanding, as does the particular socio-political backgrounds of readers of *The Vancouver Sun*, producing a diversity of understandings of spousal abuse in 'the Sikh community.' Some 'Indo-Canadians' disregard reports of spousal abuse because they see the issue as media sensationalism run amuck. Other 'Sikhs' are relieved that such intense scrutiny of this social atrocity has finally emerged. Some 'non-Indo-Canadians' see blatant commonalities between 'Indo-Canadian' spousal abuse and abuse in 'their own community.' The most dominant perspective, which is the main focus of this paper, stigmatizes 'Indo-Canadians' as individuals whose social norms perpetuate spousal abuse, a misperception that is produced by allowing 'exotic' cultural representations to colour understanding. Of course, this list of perspectives is far from exhaustive, not to mention that it is incredibly binary and

carries inherent limitations; nevertheless, the point here is simply to illustrate how Hall's view illuminates media representations of 'Indo-Canadian' domestic violence—a journalist's framing of a story along with a reader's perspective on 'Sikh' culture coalesce, producing a diversity of understandings of 'Indo-Canadian' domestic violence. Clearly, the range of understandings is incredibly limited by media organizations such as *The Vancouver Sun* who have the power to widely publicize and instill a single understanding, leaving competing understandings by the wayside. Hall (Jhally, 1997b) explains this aspect of media pedagogy:

[w]henever you see those people, you will assume that they have those characteristics, whenever you see that event, you will assume that it has [those] political consequences... That's what ideology is intended to do, that's what power in signification is intended to do, to close meaning, to close language, to stop the flow. (part 2)

As a result, the negative stereotyping of 'Indo-Canadian' culture and identity has become commonplace as *The Vancouver Sun* continues to assert the dominant belief that 'Sikh' culture is solely responsible for 'Sikh' spousal abuse.

This media pedagogy perpetuates the lack of understanding of 'Sikh' culture throughout 'Canadian' society; in fact, the terms '*Indo-Canadian*' and '*Sikh*' themselves have come to signify a cultural background that is 'deficient' in its oppression of women. The manner in which 'Sikh' culture is understood through the media illustrates Bannerji's (2003) claim that "[t]he problematic of tradition versus modernity has become an invisible but incontestable way of conceptualizing ['Canadian' society]" (p. 169). We are told that 'us' 'Sikhs' maintain violent social norms that encourage spousal abuse; in Durkheim's terms, 'Indo-Canadian' culture suffers from "anomie" (Lemert, 2006, p. 11). Of course, we cannot escape 'ethnic' labels since clearly we need them in order to address 'Canadian' social issues; nevertheless, the danger is that they encourage static definitions of identity that foster

misperceptions, and in turn ineffective responses to domestic violence. In other words, labels such as ‘Sikh’ and ‘Indo-Canadian’ are necessary because “you need discourse i.e. the frameworks of understanding and interpretation to make meaningful sense of [social issues]” (Jhally, 1997b, part 3). Simply put, we need labels to facilitate discussion, yet, as a society we must actively seek out a diversity of explanations of domestic violence which requires constantly challenging media representations of ‘Sikh’ culture.

A defining element of ‘my Indo-Canadian experience’ is the media’s tendency to racialize ‘brown criminals’ and deracialize ‘white criminals’; this is done by emphasizing the ‘ethnic’ background of the former with labels and de-emphasizing the ‘ethnic’ background of the latter with an absence of labels. We are socialized into being ‘the criminal other’ by these media messages, a kind of representation that Fleras and Kunz (2001) interrogate in a compelling way:

[w]hen Paul Bernardo tortured and killed two young women, no one in the media asked, “What’s wrong with the blue-eyed, blond-haired men of Italian descent?” When people of colour commit a crime, including the widely publicized shooting of a white woman in the Just Desserts Café, collective responsibility is imposed on an entire race. Meanwhile, white criminal violence is a matter of individual responsibility; with the result that the “race” card stays in the deck no matter how horrific the crime. (p. 31)

Yasmin Jiwani (2006) explains the nature of discriminatory media pedagogy by referring to the case of Sharon Velisek; a ‘white’ woman whose ex-boyfriend took his own life after attempting to take hers with a gun. Jiwani writes,

[t]he absence of a cultural explanation as a cause of violence in the Velisek case may have to do with her unmarked appearance—she is not a racial minority belonging to a community or religious tradition that constitutes the popular and common-sense notion of a cultural Other. Rather, she embodies the stereotype of the dominant culture that remains invisible to scrutiny. But if we are to use a culturalized explanation, Sharon Velisek’s experiences of violence could be seen as emblematic of Canadian culture. The media did not advance such a viewpoint on the probable grounds that it would reflect negatively on the dominant culture, thereby making visible the patriarchal powers entrenched in it. (p. 96)

Jiwani points out a key aspect of this paper, namely that spousal abuse throughout ‘Canadian’ society is misunderstood and unchallenged by discriminatory media practices.

‘White Crime:’ Mayor Scott Young

Of course, the recent case of Port Coquitlam Mayor Scott Young concisely illustrates how ‘white’ crime is not seen as being rooted in the cultural background of the perpetrator because ‘Canadian’ culture is far *‘too modern, too superior’* to be the cause of violence against women. *The Vancouver Sun* tells us that “Mayor Scott Young has temporarily stepped aside [because he] is the subject of a police investigation... for allegedly harassing an ex-girlfriend” (Fowlie, 2007, p. B1). There is no mention of his ethnicity since clearly Young is a member of mainstream ‘Canadian’ society—he is not the ‘exotic other.’ The article goes on to reveal that “[i]n 2002, he was charged with the assault of his then-wife Wendy Young” (Fowlie, 2007, p. B1). The Mayor is not a ‘foreigner,’ he is a common ‘Canadian’ who offers a common explanation for his previous crime:

I think most people are aware of the challenges facing busy working couples with young families... We can, at times, miscommunicate and even overreact to situations... What occurred between my wife and I was a misunderstanding which we both find most regrettable.” (Fowlie, 2007, p. B1)

Later, we are informed that the Mayor “will face trial in February on seven charges including assault and break and enter, criminal harassment and three counts of breaching a release order...[t]he charges relate to incidents alleged to have occurred Feb. 18 and April 4 involving a former girlfriend” (Fowlie, 2007, p. B1). Young’s apparent lack of ethnicity and his un-interrogated explanation reinforce Jiwani’s claim that ‘white’ crime is regarded as a matter of “individual responsibility.” His culture is never examined because, unlike ‘Sikh’ culture, ‘white’ cultures, being more ‘modern,’ **do not** encourage domestic violence.

The Vancouver Sun news stories, among others, that stigmatize ‘Indo-Canadian’ culture and identity have saturated our society, a situation that is reflected in the title of the Langara College forum (2006): *Domestic violence and the media: Indo-Canadian Perspectives*. After noticing *The Vancouver Sun*’s tendency to highlight ‘Sikh’ ethnicity (Armstrong, 2006; Bolan, 2006, October 31; Bolan, 2006, November 3; Leung, 2006), I wrote to journalist Kim Bolan to find out why she feels the need to mention ‘Indo-Canadian’ ethnicity. She responded:

In this case, I believe [ethnicity] is relevant because we have the third young woman killed in four months—do we have a serial killer preying on Indo-Canadian women? In that regard we have reported that more than half of Pickton’s victims were First Nations women. If the cases turn out to be domestic violence as the cause, is it not relevant to ask if enough services are available for minority women? Certainly the Indo-Canadian community has made that an issue and a very important one. I think it is incumbent on us to report it. (K. Bolan, personal communication, February 9, 2007)

I agree that it is important “to ask if enough services are available to minority women,” but I have yet to see any article that has mentioned the possibility of “a serial killer preying on” ‘Sikh’ women. In addition, it is important to be critical of the term *community* since “[communities] are contested grounds of socio-cultural definitions and political agencies” (Bannerji, 2000, p. 157). Many ‘Indo-Canadians’ do not see spousal abuse as a key issue; moreover, even though many of us do, we find it unjust to emphasize our cultural background while the cultural background of ‘white’ spousal abuse victims and perpetrators is invisible—an approach to domestic violence that is echoed by our former Attorney General. At the forum at Langara College, Wally Oppal (2006) continued to reinforce the stigmatization of ‘Sikh’ culture and identity:

Why is this so prevalent in the Indo-Canadian community...The attitudes, the inequality that exist between girls and boys starts at a very early age. Why is it that

so many fathers in our community feel compelled to give their sixteen year old son a brand new Mustang for the great task of passing into grade ten...better not do that to the girls, let's keep them at home...they come home from school and they cannot go out at night.

I completely agree that there is a substantial amount of gender inequality within 'Sikh' cultural norms, but 'Indo-Canadian' culture hardly has a monopoly on gender inequality. Wally Oppal also stated at the public forum (2006) that "less than fifty percent of our cases go ahead in conviction because at the last minute, women victims of violence don't want to go ahead with the trial." The Attorney General has taken strong criticism for this assertion in the past since he is essentially blaming the victim; as a result he did defend his position with the words, "we will prosecute every man who's ever committed an act of assault if we get the cooperation of victims...and I am not blaming the victim when I say that. I know there are horrible things that take place and that the system is not always friendly to victims, I know that" (Oppal, 2006). In order to defend the judicial system, Oppal uses the example of a woman in Surrey chastising the prosecutor for imprisoning her abusive husband. His aim is to point out 'Sikh' social norms that perpetuate domestic violence in the form of an unwillingness of victims and their families to stand up in court. However, in doing so, he not only puts the burden on the victim, but he fails to recognize the complexities of 'Indo-Canadian' spousal abuse. Perhaps, the woman in question is not financially independent and her husband's imprisonment has left her impoverished, a facet of domestic violence which is common regardless of ethnicity (Strube and Barbour, 1983). Also, it is possible that the current government policy orientations impede this woman's ability to be financially self-sufficient. We cannot know the true aspects as to why this abused woman resisted the incarceration of her perpetrator, but clearly the entire 'Indo-Canadian' spousal abuse issue would greatly benefit from meticulously analyzing such cases, an examination which must

be based on a vast diversity of considerations, critiques and solutions. With the hopes of encouraging a deeper analysis, at the forum I responded to Oppal's claims:

Mr. Oppal, you have a tendency to focus mainly on...the victims, and on Indo-Canadian culture and I understand that some of that might be justified, but I wonder if you have yet considered the larger social policy frameworks that exist in our province, things such as welfare rates, the issue of foreign credentials...daycare funding, medical benefits, law enforcement biases, etc.

His response was simply to divert the focus away from government policy by claiming that spousal abuse issues "are not political issues" (Oppal, 2006). The Attorney General's position reinforces the media's stigmatization of 'Sikh' culture which hinders an effective understanding of domestic violence. This media pedagogy hides the patriarchal structures of our country by demonizing 'Sikh' culture. By focusing on 'Indo-Canadian' culture, attention is diverted from gender power relations and our province's social policy orientation, such as provincial government cutbacks to women's organizations. We need to ask ourselves what role the lack of funding plays in disempowering women, instead of dwelling on cultural norms. This is where understanding the current 'Sikh' domestic violence discourse "immediately involves the question of power, who has the power, in what channel, to circulate which meanings to who?" (Jhally, 1997a, part 3)

NARRATIVE ONE

Please De-Sardar Yourself at the Door

This fictional narrative illuminates 'the Indo-Canadian experience' by focusing on 'our' pressures: education, career, marriage, racism, low self-esteem, status symbols, emotional and physical abuse. The play centers around Mukhen who left a village in Punjab, India in the late 1960s to come to a small, sawmill town in Canada. Mukhen's relationships and interactions with his family, friends and the rest of 'Canadian' society show some of the specific realities of our country's multiculturalism as 'Sikhs' strive to become 'real Canadians.'

Sardar: refers to a baptized 'Sikh' who wears a beard, turban and knife. In this context, to de-*Sardar* means to remove the above symbols in order to facilitate assimilation.

Mukhen: the main character

Sonia: Mukhen's wife who is also from Punjab, India

Mandeep: Mukhen and Sonia's son who was born in Comox, British Columbia

Lyle: Mukhen's 'real Canadian' friend whose grandfather came to Canada from England

Surjit: Mukhen's 'Sikh' friend who is overwhelmed by the failings of Canada's multiculturalism

Parmjeet: Mukhen's friend who has learned better ways of managing the failings of Canada's multiculturalism than Surjit

Monica: Sonia's cousin who lives in India and awaits her chance at the 'Canadian Dream'

**Please de-*Sardar* yourself at the door,
no turbans, beards or swords allowed here,
De-*Sardar* yourself, please.**

**De-*Sardar* yourself if you want a union card
De-*Sardar* yourself, please.
Turbans, knives strange and dangerous,
hardhats, brooms familiar and safe...cool
...cool like island salmon**

**So, pleeaase de-*Sardar* yourself,
I will teach how to dress,
because, honestly,**

I worry you will cut my throat

...

**Okay, you fear my knife, so I take it off,
yours is safe, or so you teach me,
you say “it’s only for a little cut throat”...cutthroat trout, I hope.**

**My turban is too high for the low legion doorway.
Because it is like a hat you say,
Little do you know how I wore my turban in wars for the Queen, your Queen
And that I even protected her with it,
but I think I understand, this is a new modern country and we should leave our
traditions behind, you say I should leave them far, far behind,

but, why don’t you?**

Those who did make it to Canada found themselves in a hostile environment facing institutional racism and discrimination, in the social, economic, political spheres. In their daily lives they often faced personal ridicule and social segregation because of their ‘appearance’ and national origin. (Basran & Bolaria, 2003, p. 107)

“Normal Canadians” (meaning White) see themselves as different from those who are saturated by culture (meaning ethnic)...One consequence of this popular discourse is that specific groups, in this case Sikh students, are perceived as saturated by culture and symptomatic of “the problem of all these cultures.”...this impression produces the perception of the “multicultural wars” and beliefs about “them” imposing “their” culture on “us”...Culture, in this sense is seen as pathological and infectious, though the cultures of others can also be objects of desire for those who see themselves as “normal” or “without culture” (Yon, 2000, pp. 76-77).

This situation becomes doubly ironic because those who talk about the need to celebrate difference, as in cultures and races, frequently see themselves as the “normal Canadians” [they] either “lack culture” or keep it private” (Yon, 2000, p. 77).

This country is fucked up, it is not for us. I can't live under the *goras* anymore, I just can't do it. They are worse than Hindus! At least *Buman* don't hate **everything** about us.

Yaar, relax, not all of them are like that, look at our Lyle here.

I mean come on, not only is it almost free to see a doctor, but if you stay in the hospital overnight, they actually give you food, even in jail they give you food!

Mukhen enjoyed the power of life experience, it made him feel respected with each question that a new arrival would ask, and of course, the offerings of whisky and cigarettes were never under-appreciated—the whole scene was relaxing since it reminded him of Punjab.

Yaar, don't worry about it, Mukhen is right, I know you had to borrow money to come here, but once the money starts flowing, once you get a lot of overtime, you will get used to it.

Unlike Surjit, Parmjeet was gregarious which helped him adapt to life in Canada; he could make anyone laugh, the 'brown' guys, the 'white' guys, even the foremen. Parmjeet relished being able to be 'a man,' which of course meant being able to support his family on two continents. His talent for making *parantas* made his place, **the place** for bunkhouse 'Sikhs,' and the odd 'white' guy. Two inter-related aspects of 'Canadian' society defined who his guests were: racism and the incessant Punjabi spoken around the hotplate.

paranta: a
layered
flatbread

So, what is the union all about, aren't they supposed to help us? Isn't that why we pay them? Can't they make the foremen respect us?!

Mukhen smirked, tapped a cigarette and let out a gentle laugh, remembering that he had also wondered the same years ago. Mukhen reached for his glass, looked Surjit in the eyes and spoke with authority.

Don't **you ever** go to the union or you can forget about any chance at easier work. And, don't worry about the union dues, they are nothing compared to how much you will make even after sending money to your family, these *goras* don't know how good they got it.

Suddenly Surjit became quiet as his mind fled to Punjab; he knew that coming here was a good thing for him, but being called *Paki* was too much. In the village, Surjit was part of the majority; he was 'Jhut-Sikh,' which meant that his life until recently, had been about being the oppressor, not the oppressed. In his mind, his oppression of lower caste 'Sikhs' in India was just the way life was because they weren't as good.

'Jhut-Sikh':
the 'highest' caste
in 'Sikh' culture, a
social category
which contradicts
the anti-caste
foundation of the
'Sikh' religion

They actually marry their own cousins!

Surjit's hatred was justified, unlike the contempt that many 'real Canadians' held for him and 'his noble, hardworking' kind; his anger

pulsated beneath his eyebrows. Struggling with his friend's silence, Mukhen used his most reassuring tone.

Don't worry so much about cutting your hair, it is the best thing for you and your family.

I don't even know how to tell my family what I've done!

You seemed so sure yesterday, remember? You were saying that the jokes and insults were getting too much, and you went on and on about the rednecks in the lunchroom.

Rednecks, or 'Rednecks'?

How red is your neck?

Come on, be honest, your neck is red too.

**You say rednecks are uneducated, hunting, fishing, trailer park types,
...that they have rednecks from manual labour in the sun, like working the fields.**

**But, don't many 'Sikhs' do the same work,
more importantly,
don't so many of us 'true Sikhs' overtly disrespect 'The Other'?**

You say

**"white, narrow-minded people are rednecks!"
But, aren't many of us 'brown' people narrow-minded as well?**

Bob, stop being coy.

We don't drive pickup trucks with gun racks.

**Are you saying that 'brown' people don't hate other cultures?
Are you saying that 'white' people dominate discrimination, too?
...that they have a monopoly on hate?**

**Please, how can you award them with even more privilege?
Are you saying that 'white' people get to have this area, too?**

Those fuck'n bastards! Telling me that my *dhal* looks like cat food!

Surjit, relax. Of course it is insulting, but they are just kids being kids.

dhal: cooked lentils often eaten with a flat bread or rice

Parmjeet sat back in his chair and let out a whisky-lentil-cigarette sigh and started sharing his stories, situations which made him proud of his social survival skills, he liked to think of himself as a cross-cultural crusader—armed with laughter that could vaporize any insult! India had prepared Parmjeet for the shortcomings and failings of The New World. Growing up, he faced the toxic tongues of high-caste 'Sikhs' and 'Hindus.' In

comparison, the toxic tongues of ‘Canadian’ rednecks were manageable; in fact, they were so manageable that the expression *toxic tongues* seemed an exaggeration to him.

So listen, Surjit, one day I was walking down Riverside Road on the weekend, Sarb’s son had just been born, do you remember that party, Mukhen?

Are you kidding? The man waited through three daughters before finally having a son, I never knew someone could *Bhangra* so badly, not to mention that he cracked the trailer floor.

Ha, ha, ha....Sarb certainly is a big boy, hey Mukhen?

Oh yeah, the trailer was actually shaking the whole time he was dancing, but he just kept on going, even after his pants fell off.

A grin cracked the tension in Surjit’s teeth and spurts of spit-soaked laughter sprayed the card table.

He didn’t stop? What about all the people there? Wasn’t he embarrassed in front of the *boetees*?

<i>boetee</i> : wife

They were all in the other trailers, it was just us men there and some of the kids. So, like I said, I was walking along the river going to the party, well-dressed of course, and suddenly my turban landed next to me... a child on a bike knocked it off my head, and there it lay between my shiny brown shoes and the rowdy ‘Canadian’ river.

Surjit’s jaw dropped.

So what did you do?

I started chasing the little fucker of course, but then I just stopped running. I mean what was I going to do if I caught him, beat him? He was just a child.

Parmjeet continued with the story and a few other examples of his talent for overcoming hatred. He thrived on the idea of people wanting to be like him, but as usual, Parmjeet made no mention of how occasionally he would cry in the arms of Johnnie Walker.

If we really want to do well here, I mean really do well here, we can’t worry so much about all these stupid little things. People everywhere are racist, it doesn’t matter which country you are from, right? At least it is better than the old days, at least they pay us on time now, and don’t keep our passports anymore, I mean look at this place; you pay \$75 a month for food and they clean the place for you... I know it is not perfect, but it is better than India, think about how you felt before you came here, driving taxis for hippie tourists...here you work just as hard, sometimes not even as hard, but you make a sack full of cash. So, the best thing to do is to just work even harder than they do and beat them at their own game. They want us to work for them and keep us down, well, look at my brother-in-law, he came here

with nothing and now he has his own cleaning company, and he even has *goras* working for him!

Shh, keep your voice down.

What are you worried about Mukhen? They don't know what we are talking about.

Just because we are speaking Punjabi doesn't mean people don't understand us. I am sure a lot of them know that *gora* means them, just like we learned *Paki* means us.

Ok, maybe you're right Mukhen. So, look Surjit, like Mukhen said, they are just kids. Who cares what they say about us.

It's not just them, how am I going to tell my parents about my hair, especially my mother?

You will tell them in the 'Canadian' dollars that you will send.

What am I supposed to write them?

Just fill the aerogram with some *gupshup*, it really doesn't matter right now—once the money starts coming, you'll feel a lot better.

<i>gupshup</i> : chit chat

That is easy for you to say, you are already Canadian and so is your family, what if they don't let me bring them here...my cousin couldn't bring his family because his daughter is in a wheelchair, the *gora* government doesn't want disabled people, they want people who can work.

Surjit, trust me, I know what I am talking about, everyone is confused and pissed off at first, but it does get better, besides, there is talk that this Trudeau is really going to make things a lot easier for us.

Parmjeet jumped to offer his political insight, words that he had heard in the planer mill on smoke break.

He is right, they say that this Pierre Trudeau likes us, and wants us to stay.

Do you really think that I am stupid, or are you just drunk? He wants us to work and do all the dirty jobs so he and his *gora* friends can live the highlife.

Mukhen reached out, put his hand on Surjit's knee and continued to be wise, or at least that is how he saw himself.

Surjit, that is just it, it really doesn't matter why they want us here, it is up to us to make our new lives here. So, some of them hate us, so some of them only want us to cut their trees, drive their taxis and wash their toilets, it really doesn't matter.

The fourth *peg* was beginning to saturate Surjit's heart, allowing his pain to ooze and his heart began pumping out the pain. Surjit's eyes were locked on the bottom of his glass, he could see his identity melting with the *Canadian Whisky* and ice, creating a watered down slushy mixture. Surjit Singh Grewal was now Surjit Grewal. For the first time in his life, he was no longer a *Sardar*-ji.

peg: an alcoholic drink

What would the *Gurus* say about me cutting my hair?

Trust me, I know that you are right, the *goras* have always been very good at controlling us and keeping us out, but, listen to me, we are not *Gurus*, we are simple men trying to take care of our families, we are doing what the *Guru Granth* says, besides, don't forget that *pugs* came late in Sikhism, the first nine *Gurus* didn't preach The *Khalsa* only the last one did.

pug: turban

This was hardly the first time that Mukhen tried to comfort a friend with the *we are not Gurus* speech. In doing so, he relied on his mother's way of curing sadness, with doses of food and drink because he hated to see people cry, especially grown men.

Look *paaji*, it is better to keep your head down.

paaji: brother, aside from siblings, used for any male of the same generation

The truth, which only his wife knew, was that Mukhen was fairly relieved to de-*Sardar* himself, shedding his turban, beard and hair had invigorated Mukhen. In Punjab, he didn't have the guts to do it because the pressure was too severe, but in Canada Mukhen had just reasons; he was doing it for his family. Mukhen let out another sigh as he realized that after months of persuasion, Surjit was finally starting to see things his way—at least Surjit's drunken rants were becoming fewer and far between. Mukhen decided that it was an ideal time to take a piss, hoping that Surjit would recover his wit upon his return—meanwhile, Surjit rambled off his usual litany of 'Canadian' injustices.

I just don't like it here! I wish I could have gotten a job in Vancouver, at least then I could have lived near a *Gurdwara*!

Gurdwara: temple

As Surjit whimpered on, Lyle started having flashes of when he and Mukhen first met. Lyle remembered that time, when both of them lived in the bunkhouse before buying trailers, and then houses. The two men met at the mill office when Lyle graciously offered to help Mukhen with his job application. Mukhen struggled with his English upon arriving in Canada and secretly asked his wife to read important documents and fill out forms, but the man in the hiring office said if he filled it out immediately maybe Mukhen could begin the following day. With no time to consult his wife, Mukhen began scanning the application, he could only understand a few words on the sheet of paper between his sweaty fingers; *name*, *address*, and *phone number*, but the rest was a mystery. Lyle picked up the pen that Mukhen had dropped and noticed the sweat running down his razor burned skin, Mukhen stood there, stared at the page, and began scratching the cuts on his new chin.

Here is your pen, do you need a hand with that?

And then, Lyle took a shot at calming his new friend.

Surjit, I remember when Mukhen first came to Canada, it was hard for him too.

Lyle sucked hard on his *Pilsner*, started rolling a pinch of *Drum* tobacco and allowed his mind to wander back and forth between the present and the past. Images of him and Mukhen working and living side by side were glorified by time, and that male sort of drunken passion for a good time through good stories.

I remember the time that Mukhen rolled a tow-motor—the look on his face...

Of course, out of respect for Mukhen, he never mentioned to anyone about all those nights that Mukhen cried for his wife and the rest of his life in Punjab.

Lyle was an exception because he thoroughly enjoyed *subji*, *Bhangra* and other ‘Sikh’ things. In fact, since Lyle’s stomach was so resilient, the only ring of fire that he was familiar with was the one that Johnny Cash sang about. While other ‘white’ guys would get bored and understandably, annoyed, with the lack of English, Lyle actually learned quite a few key Punjabi expressions over the years—the macho-vulgar aspects of Punjabi being the easiest to pick up since he heard them so often. He also learned quickly that the gods with all the arms were of no concern to these peasant farmers turned millworkers, he noticed Mukhen’s unease years ago when he had shown off a Christmas gift from his brother, Jimi Hendrix’s *Band of Gypsies* on vinyl, leaving Mukhen to think, *typical hippie fascination with everything Indian!*

<i>subji</i> : mixed vegetable dish usually eaten with flatbread or rice
--

They got to know each other on the graveyard clean-up shift, pushing sawdust and occasionally snow; Lyle would constantly sneak off for a smoke since the foremen were scarce at night, but Mukhen would never dare break the rules for fear of being fired. Mukhen, like most ‘Sikhs’ he knew, was envious and resentful of the *gora* social position; *if only India could have united before the British arrived, then we could have changed history.* (Post)colonialism had taught Mukhen a great deal about what his father called *white freedom* and what his children would know as *white privilege* (Media Awareness Network, 2010). He often found himself thinking, *wow, these goras have a real sense of entitlement everywhere, not just in India.* Mukhen would even hold his piss until coffee break, unlike Lyle who would not only go anytime, but anywhere in the mill: off the docks, behind the stacks and especially enjoyed inscribing sawdust.

Aside from spitting and chain smoking, Lyle had the ‘uncivilized’ habit of drinking water out of his hardhat; Mukhen was oddly mystified by the image of this ‘civilized’ man pushing the dirt aside with his free hand, and then submerging his lower face into the sweaty, hairy, sawdust-speckled water. Lyle’s accident-free sticker on the side of his hardhat seemed misleading and disingenuous, *how could safety be an issue if so much of the work day was spent avoiding work?*

Later,

One early Sunday morning there was a knock on the door, Mukhen knew it wasn't the usual Jehovah's Witnesses because sacred interruptions were much more diplomatic. Sonia walked to the door humming to the Spiderman theme song that the constantly blaring TV had forced her to learn. At first she found the song annoying, but over time realized that she was no different than television super heroes, with her sharpened intellect and the her various roles: dutiful wife, insatiable lover, community leader, and the least mask worn of all, artistic, academic.

Sensing Sonia's usual condescension, Surjit spoke quickly.

Is Mukhen-Ji awake *panji*?

panji: sister, aside from siblings, used for any female of the same generation

Sonia broke her usual glare, asked Surjit to come in and led him across the red shag carpet to the couch as Mukhen walked in knuckling the sand in his eyes. Realizing that his friend was just waking up, Surjit spoke in his most apologetic tone. Sonia was ecstatic when she heard the news because to her Surjit was a whiner, someone who just couldn't see all the possibilities of being 'Canadian,' someone who chose to live in the past, trying to re-create India in Canada. *Why can't he just stop complaining about everything and just accept our place.* His persistent complaining about life in Canada, along with his profuse alcohol and cigarette habits made it easy for Sonia to hate him. At least Mukhen quit smoking, well, except for the occasional drunken moment of weakness. Aside from Surjit being a bad influence on her husband, he was evil incarnate in her mind—Surjit was an abusive alcoholic, just like her father. It was easy to justify her disgust for Surjit for all of these reasons, or at least that is what Sonia told herself, it was much easier to believe that Surjit deserved her contempt than it was to recognize how she, just like the 'backward, traditional Sikhs' she looked down on, Sonia had also brought the caste system with her from India. Deep down, Sonia knew the truth; she saw Surjit as a low caste *taxi-walla*. In her eyes, he didn't belong in modern Canada because all that his people are good at is uncivilized things like drinking, smoking and gambling. He was no different than all those lecherous cab drivers on the dusty streets of Jalandhar, spending their days pushing aside clouds of *beedi* smoke to leer at ignorant tourists and passing women.

beedi: a popular cigarette in India

I'm very sorry to wake you up Mukhen-ji, but I have great news! My brother in Vancouver said that he has a job in his mill; it will be part-time clean-up, but it shouldn't take me long to get full-time work, maybe even move up to buttons, you know that my brother's mill is already modernized, so there is no green chain, it is all buttons, sorters and conveyor belts. The schools are better in Vancouver, and, and my sons are eager to play hockey, and who knows, with a little luck, they might even play for the Canucks!

Mukhen chose not to spoil his friend's moment with what he had learned from Howie Meeker and Dave Hodge; professional hockey players often start skating before

kindergarten. There was no need for the truth today, especially since this was the happiest he had ever seen Surjit.

Later,

Sonia had no problem maintaining her groom's façade of intellect, especially since he was constantly encouraging her to take more courses, not to mention that he always brought home whatever newspapers and magazines he could find lying around the mill, except for, of course, the countless *Playboy* and *Hustler* magazines that seemed to be all over the mill, in lunchrooms, in forklifts, in control booths, and various other places. Her tenth anniversary gift from her Mukhen was precious: two correspondence course packages, one on drawing and one on creative writing.

Soon you'll be able to draw and write like the professionals!

Of course, guests would mainly see Punjabi and local newspapers not the Hindi and Urdu poetry, nor the trashy romance novels. Sonia's English only improved with all the reading and TV watching; she had intimate knowledge of all the characters on *Dallas* and *All My Children*. Such a funny title for a show she often thought, *it should be called 'All My Rich White Children' since the kids on the screen shared no similarities with my kids. Bollywood worships Hindus and Hollywood worships goras.*

**As a child I was fair,
But now, only stares.**

So, I study the codes,

**No Salwaars
No Saris,
No Bindis
No Bungha**

salwaar: long top
and baggy pants
commonly worn
by women

bungha: bracelet

**Oh, and I must learn,
That my man is Oppressive,
that your man, and, his drunken violence is liberating
You say,**

“Arranged marriages!

How could anyone marry a stranger?!”

Sonia vehemently agreed with her friends that their husbands shouldn't drink, but secretly Sonia didn't mind, especially since Mukhen rarely drank a lot and it allowed him to share his passion for life. She had become accustomed to two possibilities when her husband was late, either Mukhen had managed to get some overtime, or he was coming home smelling of cigarettes and whiskey—very early in their marriage, she loathed the latter possibility

because it reminded Sonia of her father's drunken-ness, but she quickly realized that Mukhen was **not** her father. He had a temper and a right hook that he often used to teach the *goras* about equality, but Mukhen's violence was never directed at his family, well, aside from the odd spanking for the children. Sonia knew that the bunkhouse tended to be safer than the bars and the Legion so she regularly sent her husband to work with extra *pakor*as, *samosas*, *subji* and whatever other leftovers she could spare.

The last time he went to the Legion, Mukhen couldn't hold himself back from defending a turban-wearing friend.

What is wrong with you people, don't you read history books! We wore our turbans in the First and Second World Wars **aaaaand** the Korean War!

In the ensuing brawl, Mukhen made sure that the portrait of Queen Victoria was 'accidentally' shattered. In the early years, Mukhen occasionally came home from work with raccoon eyes and skinless knuckles.

That's right, kids, the skin came off just like fried chicken, which is what remains of the *gora*. You have to defend the weak kids, just like the Gurus said.

Needless to say, Mukhen never revealed to his children that, even though he enjoyed being clean-shaven, Mukhen was largely acting out of guilt for having de-*Sardared* himself--standing up for his *Sardar* friend made him feel as though he was regaining the respect of the Gurus, and more importantly, his own self-respect. The children enjoyed the version of their father who had bloodshot eyes because he was so rambunctious and enthusiastic about everything 'Sikh' and in particular they enjoyed the stories about their father the child farmer running crops between Jallandar and Himachal Pradesh.

When my Dad was a child, he used to race up and down the Himalayas on an ox cart!

But, as Mukhen's son Mandeep explained to his sister, one thing that definitely didn't need to be shared with 'real Canadians' was the lack of toilet paper and the collecting and molding of cow dung,

I can't believe mom actually touched cow shit!

Coming to Canada forced Sonia to test herself constantly, in particular, she dramatically realized that her English was horrible. In Jallandar, her language skills seemed strong, she even taught English, but Sonia never heard real *goras* talk, instead all Sonia heard regularly were those trying to be 'white.'

Prankly my deer, I am not gibing a dam.

Not surprisingly, her children both did very well at school, having a school teacher for a mother had its obvious advantages. In particular, Sonia liked all the novels, not just the

reading, but all the writing and discussing. She loved *The Rats of Nimh*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Owl in the Family* and almost every other book her children brought home.

You mean, you mean Indira Gandhi is like the pigs in *Animal Farm*?

Sonia felt herself becoming more and more confident with each passing year in Canada. As her awareness of 'Canadian' society grew, she felt increasingly more at home, but she was always aware of her 'brown-ness,' that she was a '**brown**' 'Canadian' woman, not a 'real-Canadian' woman. Sonia knew not to 'subject' her 'white' neighbour to the 'stench' of *saag* too often, which meant that Sunday was the day of worship, one household paid homage to the United Church steeple while the other paid homage to the steaming pressure cooker, another 'brown' thing that her son found embarrassing.

What a fuck'n shitty smell!

In grade one Mandeep quickly became friends with the Jehovah's Witnesses, the same 'real Canadians' who didn't like him, didn't like them. The 'white' outcasts thoroughly enjoyed coming over for *roti*, *dhal*, and *subji*. Mandeep's first meal in a 'white' home was all about fancy forks, knives and placemats, and what Mandeep found to be the oddest thing of all was that they waited for others before eating, they didn't just start! And then there was the food itself, corned beef, but he became very familiar with it since he saw it twice, once slugging down his throat and once spraying out of his throat. The puddle of puke, the convulsions, and most of all, the stunned faces engraved an image that he would never forget.

Mandeep, do you want to study?

Mandeep found the stories interesting, there was a garden, a man, a woman and another one about a strong guy with long hair and one more about a small guy with a slingshot fighting some giant. They were invaluable friends to have because they were not only athletic, patient coaches, but they were also tough and more than willing to defend their 'brown'-skinned friend. Mandeep's friendships with 'real Canadians' were usually tenuous, requiring a constant effort to overlook, forgive and even downright ignore certain things.

Look, your family's God is high-fiving us!

Mandeep hid his discomfort since he knew how his parents would react to anyone disrespecting Guru Nanak-Ji; elementary school had instilled a stoic poker face.

Why do you always cry? That's why they keep teasing you because you keep crying, so stop crying and they will stop...look Deepu, coming home in tears is not an option, nor is beating up every white kid on the playground...and we both know that teachers don't really care, we are the foreigners, it is up to us to fit in, it is up to us to change not them.

Before school, Mandeep lived and was socialized within 'the Indo-Canadian community,' aside from his preschool classes and some playing with the 'Chinese-Canadian' neighbours.

He loved to sing along to the Punjabi folk music that his parents played on the reel to reel, but the ‘Canadian’ education system quickly taught him which music was ‘the right’ music. Soon, Mandeep hated everything about being ‘brown,’ the food, the language and most of, his skin colour—which is why in elementary school he would periodically try to scratch the ‘brown’ off and make himself ‘white,’ or at least more of a ‘real Canadian.’ By high school Mandeep had become an expert at hiding two things: his ‘brownness’ and his feelings.

So, a ‘chink, a ‘paki’ and a ‘pollack’ walk into a bar...

His ‘friend’ paused, noticing his audience’s discomfort as all eyes turned to Mandeep. In the background John Fogerty’s (1969) voice sang out, “when I was just a little boy, standing to my Daddy’s knee, my papa said son, ‘don’t let the man get you, do what he done to me, cuz he’ll get cha.’”

Oh, don’t worry, Mandip is cool, he doesn’t care, he knows we aren’t racist, right Mandip?

Don’t burry ju silli bite boy!

Mandeep replied in a thick Punjabi accent and suddenly laughter dissolved the testosterone-laced tension.

Later in India,

Monica’s cousin Jeet was the *bachola*.

<i>bachola</i> : matchmaker

He comes from a good *jhut* family with a lot of land.

I
don’t
know
what
is
wrong
with
you,
their ~~land~~, their *jameen*
is
not
very
big
at
all!

Jeet was prepared this time.

I am the one who knows him, not you! I met his brother, Juggi, at the Tata shop near the bus station, their family owns it. Juggi could have gone to Canada too, but he couldn't get a good job there.

That's what he says, but the truth is that he got sent back for driving drunk and almost killing someone, his brother probably drinks a lot too.

Don't listen to her, don't worry Monica; he's an accountant, has an apartment, has a house and plays with stocks.

Then turning to his sibling, Jeet blasted back,

Do you think people who drink can run businesses?! Look, we don't have time for your Mummy-ji impression, we have to be at the restaurant soon. Monica, can you get my dark blue *pug* ready while I have a shower?

Monica, who was already tying Jeet's best *pug* to a doorknob, waited for her Jeetu to be safely out of earshot before defending her favourite cousin.

Don't be so hard on him, he is just really insecure; so, it makes him feel powerful to have something to say, what's the harm in it? Besides, he doesn't really lie, he just likes to share the truth in a creative way. Jeetu is very sensitive and sweet, imagine if more men were like him, what would India be like then?

Sima sighed, took the *pug* off the door and started helping her *Didi* pull and crease the fabric. What Monica never revealed was that her father and brother had crystallized a deep seated fear of men in her heart; her Jeetu was the only man in Monica's life that gave Monica hope, although, many of the women weren't much better.

<i>Didi:</i> endearing term for older sister

OH BROWN WHOA-MAN!

**You are quick to define our women as weak, uneducated and weak,
all the time forgetting about all of our brown women,
Yasmin Jiواني, Sunera Thobani, Indira Prahst, Sushma Dhutt, okay, okay, they are
not all 'Sikh', but come on, be honest, you can't tell the difference, can you?
and let me never forget my mother, who has not only overcome brown patriarchy, but
also white patriarchy.**

**Brown woman I know that I continue to oppress by my very existence,
I am constantly reminded of the privilege the testicles carry
I have learned to chop vegetables, and continue to appreciate your guidance in the
cooking.**

I am sorry that my male obnoxiousness has oppressed you, I am sorry for being so pushy in trying to make you more progressive, like me....how ironic, I push you to be more progressive like me, but in doing so, I become more traditional like you.

There was a time when I thought brown women were too docile, too conservative, too brown for my black sheepness, my ‘Indo-Canadian’ socialization taught me a few things:

All brown people are conservative, therefore I should stay away from them.

**Brown culture is inferior to white culture,
and most importantly, as the son of immigrants, I should be forever grateful for growing up in Canada.**

She rose early in the morning to instruct, supervise and at times, chastise the *noekers*.

noeker:
servant

I don’t want you boys sleeping until all the *ghuna* is brought in and make sure that those children don’t take even a single cane!

ghuna: sugar
cane

This was Monica’s approach, no different than her grandmother, to use fear to control people. The *noekers* knew that she wasn’t talking about the children at the public boys’ school next door, Sonia was warning **them** not to steal; she knew that they would, and they knew that she knew that they would. It was hard to find good labourers, as it was hard to find good farms to work. The men from Tamil Nadu were grateful to be working for Monica’s family. They had lots of land, a large *haveli* and an even larger surplus of goods: old shoes, torn books, dying radios, the *noekers* took it all graciously.

haveli: rustic
farm house

Monica received masterful training on how to hide feelings and secrets; her grandmother was the perfect mentor, while her mother did her best to assist in shaping her into the ‘perfect’ wife. As the marriage approached, Monica became increasingly nervous about living with her mother-in-law; it would be worse than living with her own family since she would be expected **to do everything**, unlike now. Being the second daughter-in-law was not the easiest path in life, especially in a foreign country away from her family and everything familiar.

But, luckily for Monica, her new sister-in-law was tolerable. All she had to do was feed her regular compliments on her appearance and cooking, the latter of course less so as time went on and Monica enthusiastically took over the meals. Monica’s new family even encouraged her to drive since it made things like shopping and taking the kids home from school a lot easier. Their neighbour Dhana, who owned a furniture shop across from the school, drove Monica’s niece and nephew to school on his scooter. However, since he always worked late, Monica drove them home in the afternoon, always making the all-important stop for *kulfi* with the children.

kulfi: ice cream

So, this is what it is like not to live in fear of everyone around you.

As a teacher, but seldom as a wife, Monica passionately criticized the caste system at every opportunity.

We have to follow Gandhi-ji's example and respect everyone, including those who work for you! And, what do you think Guru Nanak-ji would say about poor people in Jalandhar? He would say that we are all equal—no matter what!

Of course, her activism was confined to the classroom, at home she was 'just' a wife. Unfortunately, Sonia's in-laws were of a different sort of mindset; they had to constantly remind everyone, including each other, that they were '*Jhut-Sikhs*.' However, their social 'backwardness' was tolerable since she felt a calm washing over her eyes like rain over sunflower seeds, not worrying about being yelled at, slapped and abused was energizing. Of course, Monica struggled with intimacy, her self-esteem and her sexuality. The sexual abuse ended long ago when she was a young girl, but Monica still lived her days in trauma, and struggled with how to convince her family.

Look, *beti* don't worry anymore, it is all over now. Your *Chucha* is never going to do those things again. He has never been right since the tractor accident...your other Uncles will teach him a lesson and then we must not talk about it anymore, okay?...okay?...are you listening to me?

Bibi-ji went on, and on, but her granddaughter's faith in her words had been crushed long ago, when Monica learned an ugly truth about her 'dear' grandmother; she kept Monica's cousin-brother, her first grandson, away from his mother for the first three years of his life—*no wonder Ranjit is so screwed up!* Monica couldn't help it, she did the one thing that her grandmother hated more than anything, she cried.

What is it now? Don't worry, it is all over now?

Over?! Over?! What *Bibi* is over? Nothing is over! He did those things to me and nobody said or did anything!

Monica's head jerked back and her *chooni* fell onto the cutting board as a familiar hand tried to set her straight. She was not surprised of course, Monica knew better than to disrespect her elders and she did drop the *ji* when addressing her matriarch, 'her role model,' but she just didn't care; it was worth it. For the first time in years, Monica felt the kind of liberation that only comes from bellowing the truth.

Why didn't you say anything!?

Monica closed her eyes and waited for the impact; this time she watched her tears join the *chooni* on the cutting board.

beti:
affectionate
term for girl
child

Chucha:
paternal uncle
who is
younger than
your father

Bibi:
grandmother

chooni: scarf,
often used as
a head
covering

*What is this feeling, it's so strange...is this it? Is this strange feeling it? It is it, isn't it? I don't feel strange, I feel **good!***

Her mumbling to herself turned into a warped, tear-drenched grin, leaving her so-called *Bibi-'ji'* dumbfounded.

You can't hurt me anymore, you have already done too much, what more do you think is left?

What is wrong with you! We didn't raise you to be such a horrible child!

Her grandmother continued to verbally lash out in desperation realizing that violence was not working.

Then, Monica's lips quivered out a few words.

I, I, I want to make a report with the police.

I see, let's wait for your father, and we will all see.

Bibi-(ji) waited by the window for her son to come home and then intercepted him at the door.

You need to fix her, she is talking about the police!

Don't worry *Bibi-ji*, I will talk to Monica and she will understand.

Talk, too much talk-shalk, you need to teach her a lesson.

Later her father would properly socialize her.

Look sweetie, if people find out about this it will shame all of us, it will hurt my business and none of you will get married: not you, not your brother, not your sister and not your cousins.

Back to Monica's matchmaking

She felt an almost overwhelming feeling of relief when she first saw his face; the man was fair. However, immediately, the relaxation was quickly replaced by shame and guilt as she was forced once again to recognize a truth about who she was—
Monica wanted a light-skinned man. She had struggled with this 'backward' part of her culture, of her upbringing, of herself; Monica realized once again, that she was not as 'modern' as she liked to believe. Her expectations of him were completely off the mark since there was nothing impersonal, solemn and awkward about the whole introduction.

darjan: love
interest

Fixo: beard
gel

Monica was pleased to see that he trimmed his beard because in Monica's mind it meant that her potential *darjan* was 'modern,' but she was a little put off by the stiffness in his whiskers—the *Fixo*-cemented beard told Monica that he was a 'typical Sikh,' that and all the jewelry draped over him signified everything about 'Sikh' culture that she detested: the vanity. They approached the man patiently waiting next to a table and Jeet proudly, yet nervously stammered.

This is my sister Monica, and this is my friend, _____ Singh.

Fortunately, the man's personality was not as rigid as his facial hair; in fact, he was incredibly boisterous; his constant cackling laugh allowed her to notice his perfect teeth, a quality that was very important to Monica. From what she could gather, Jeet had not been very creative at all with the facts—*is my bachola growing up?* The man ordered *kulfis* for everyone and then asked Monica about her interests before moving onto history, politics and social change—they agreed that Nehru, Indira and the Mahatma had sold out Punjabi 'Sikhs.' She found it very liberating to disobey her mother's advice by looking _____ Singh in the eyes, which hardly went unnoticed by him.

He was also relieved to see that Monica was not like his mother, sister and grandmother, *she is definitely a modern woman, but hopefully not too modern.*

Later in Canada,

Sonia loved their trips to Vancouver for family events: especially the wedding receptions since there was always an open bar which meant that her husband would truly relax by showing off his singing and dancing. Eventually, he would even cajole the *Bibis* and *Babas* to dance and if they resisted, Mukhen would simply pick them up and carry them to the middle of the *bhangra* circle.

She still wasn't sure what had happened and Mukhen's memories were of little use, since like all the other men, his recollections were drenched in *Crown Royal*.

Manpreet and I were just talking about how much Punjab has changed and that *sathdayee mulvae* sitting next to us just started yelling at us.

That's it? He just came over and attacked you guys for no reason...come on, what really happened?

She looked into his eyes with her deepest stare, in that way that always freed the truth.

You mean, you weren't talking about politics or how good it is to be

Baba:
grandfather

sathdayee: stupid

mulvae: a
common slur
directed at 'low'
caste 'Sikhs'

Khalistan: the
independent state
sought by many
'Sikhs'
worldwide,
support for which
declined
drastically
following the
bombing of Air
India Flight 182 in
1985

jhut.

His *boetee* said that he always gets drunk and blathers on about *Khalistan* and how much Gandhi, Nehru, Indira and Mulroney screwed us.

What does she know, she was way across the hall!

What does, she, know?! What do, **you**, know?! She was at the table when the fight happened and you were hammered, you just don't remember!

Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale was a controversial 'Sikh' leader who many believe was covertly encouraged and supported by the Indira Gandhi government to divide and conquer the 'Sikh' community, a situation that culminated in the Indian army invading and desecrating the holiest 'Sikh' shrine: the Golden Temple.

Look dear, we may have been talking a little about Bhindranwale, but that's it and it wasn't a lot.

We've talked about this before—it is never a good idea to talk about politics when you are drunk, especially around a bunch of strangers—who knows who could be there! She said that you and Sukhi were arguing about whether or not Bhindranwale was to blame for that attack on the Golden Temple; apparently the man you call a stupid *mulvae* was on your side against Sukhi.

You know I was right, if he hadn't taken those guns into the Golden Temple, the government would not have invaded.

Sonia sighed, and sighed again because Mukhen was doing what he always did when he had broken a promise, when he had done something wrong—he was going off on an unimportant tangent.

Who are you talking to right now? You know that I agree, that some of us 'Sikhs' are to blame for that attack because we allowed Bhindranwale to take guns into the temple, but the issue today, right now is your drunken stupidity! What if something happened to you?! You never know who is a *Khalistani* extremist, or what they might do!

I know, but you know how those people are, always interfering, we, we weren't really arguing until he jumped in.

Your own son said that when he looked over, that you and Sukhi were yelling at each other, then, he walked over and told Sukhi that he was wrong because Bhindranwale never should have taken weapons into the Golden Temple and that the 'Sikh' community was also to blame for allowing him to do so...

NARRATIVE TWO

Gangs, Families and being 'Brown' in 'our' Town

Let's look at an example of 'the Indo-Canadian experience,' a collection of snapshots which show us some of the socio-economic pressures and complexities of being 'brown,' in 'our' town. In particular, the next performance centres around Dan and his sister Raj, a couple of students in Vancouver. These characters confront us with the troubling nuances of being young 'Sikh' adults in Vancouver.

Dan: an undergraduate who struggles with life while attending Langara College

Raj: Dan's sister, a graduate student who struggles with life while attending UBC

Harv: Dan's cousin who is conflicted by his 'criminal lifestyle'

Tina: Harv's sister whose sexual orientation has exiled her

So, relax, take a deep breath and take in these words: marriage, alcoholism, racism, homophobia, education, status symbols, mental illness and crime... The performance begins with a spoken word found poem.

When he was a younger man,

Jagdeep Mangat used to set out to Whytecliff Park,
marveling at West Vancouver's luxurious homes with spectacular ocean views

as he droooooooooooooove byyyyyyyyyyyy.

Breathing in
the fresh salt air
as he stood on the park's rugged beach,
where he watched yachts gli-----de

a-----cross the water,
the East Vancouver born youth would start to dream.

He, too, would make it big one day.

(Pablo, 2007, para.1)

Referring to both Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservative government and Premier Gordon Campbell's B.C. Liberal government, Mangat argued that there is a reason why governments

with a "right-wing agenda" typically respond to gang violence by moving to impose tougher laws and longer prison sentences...The right-wing agenda has no way of explaining what's going on on the streets other than describing it as a matter of individual choice...It doesn't look at the social context out of which gangs arise, the demand for their products arise, and the social motives that gang members have. (Pablo, 2007, para.16-17)

Some of the diasporic challenges is parents that come to Canada, they don't have their [professional] credentials recognized, therefore they're working two to three cheap jobs to make ends meet...The experience of racism, the experience of marginalization that parents have experienced, instills very, very, very powerful pressure on kids. What some of the youths have told me is they feel they're failures. Because their parents want them to be doctors, they want them to be lawyers, they impose a career on them. Not every kid is academic material. You're forced into this college or university, and you're doing poorly, so they want to make quick money. (Prahst, cited in Pablo, 2007, para. 28)

Dan was driven to impress his family; living up to their expectations was everything to him. Grade twelve ended with the promised reward for all of his efforts to make the honour roll: a fully-loaded BMW. His parents hoped that the car would improve their heir's marriage choices, which is why it was always one of the cars they drove to the *Gurdwara*. The car carried Dan into the next stage of life, which he called *manhood*. *Now, I am finally becoming a man, finally I have my own car and finally I have some real freedom. College is going to be a lot sweeter driving around in this. Driving to the Gurdwara is quite the scene with everyone eyeballing us. They know I am single and that my parents are looking...I'm not sure that I wanna get married right now, but I guess it is not a bad way to get some, besides, it is not like my Dad will ever listen, just have to enjoy it all as much as possible.* Dan loved the college scene, the girls, the sports, the drinking, but he was constantly fearful of being put on academic probation. Commerce just didn't seem to fit, with all the numbers, graphs and long-winded lectures on maximum utility. Unfortunately, Dan's second year at Langara was a tumultuous rite of passage, his *Baba* died suddenly, a childhood friend was shot and 'he' decided to move out, or at least that is what people were told.

Dan wondered if he would ever be able to sell insurance; "the plan is for him to get an education and take the insurance company into the future!" his father would say to anyone who would listen. Unfortunately, for his father, Dan enjoyed sports more than anything else in his life, aside from girls of course. He was never quite fast enough to play amateur much less pro, but nothing stopped him from daydreaming of being a famous athlete. The questions that often rang through Dan's mind were, *what if I could run my own fitness club, maybe even a chain? What if I could really make some money at it?* Sadly, his father would

have none of that nonsense! His father wouldn't hear of it since it meant deserting **The Dream**. And then it happened, Dan decided to tell his father about his academic and career choices, not even the term *sports medicine* could diffuse the anger.

sportsmedicine!

...SPORTS, MEDICINE?

What the hell is that?!

I want to study Kinesiology and maybe open up some fitness clubs.

Do you think I am stupid, that was Kulwant's daughter's major and now she is working at the community centre gym and if she is lucky, she helps people exercise...Is that what you really want to do, help lazy bite hippies in Kitsilano tighten their buttocks!

He took a deep breath, approached his son, extending a stiff, threatening finger and spoke sternly, in that tone that meant, *everybody better shut the fuck up and listen!*

If you want to waste ~~your money~~ my money on those stupid courses—you're out of the house. Take your things and get out, and leave the car keys on the table.

His father lowered his finger and stormed off to his nightly jacuzzi and Johnnie, tonight's stress would justify the good stuff, the Blue Label. Meanwhile, putting down the X-box controller, Dan's sister, Raj, tried to comfort him.

Hey, don't look so serious, think about the "bite hippies," do you want to ruin their groove?

Dan shook his head and started laughing along with Raj, the two siblings loved to make fun of their parents' accents--it was a gold mine of jokes. Needless to say, their parents had little appreciation for it, but usually tolerated it because hearing their children laugh was usually worth it. They never forgot the look on their mother's face the night they mocked her accent in front of a bunch of bigwigs: lawyers, developers and Liberal Party backbenchers. Burinder did not need her children to remind everyone of her low-caste, uneducated upbringing.

I know, he comes up with some pretty funny stuff when he's pissed. The more pissed off he gets, the worse his accent gets and the funnier it is. Remember the rental business, "But sir, jew are having to pay pour thde damage becoze jew broke thde ban bindow!" I mean how funny is that? I guess Jewish people like to break van windows, is it written in the Koran?

Wrong book genius!

I mean, the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, John and Luke.

What are you talking about? Isn't that the New Testament?

Dan's voice lowered as he struggled to maintain his superiority over his sister, Dan wanted nothing more in life than to be thought of as special, which is why he liked to think of himself as 'the smart one,' but they both new different.

How do I see me?

How do the police see me?

How do I, and the police, see me?

*How do the police **teach me to see me?***

Have you been drinking?

No, not at all, why did you stop me?

License and registration.

Here's my license, but I am not sure about the registration, let me check.

Why are you not sure? Whose car is this?

It is my friend's car.

Dan fumbled through the contents of the glove compartment and noticed the other officer circling the car. He felt anxiety rage through his body in a familiar way—the panic that Dan always suffered around police officers. Even if he were completely innocent, Dan simply did not feel at ease around law enforcement, unfortunately, he wasn't sure if his fear was justified or not, *did Mike take his backpack out of the trunk? Is there anything in it?*

Step out of the car and put your hands on the hood.

Why? I have done nothing wrong, I wasn't speeding, I haven't been drinking and you still haven't told me why you pulled me over.

You fit the description of a suspect, so either you get out, or I will make you get out!

Dan stood there in the west coast rain, staring into the redness of the hood; with his eyes he traced the contents of his pockets, which had been laid out on the hood, a coping mechanism that he learned in elementary school detention, and like then, he simply gave into the punishment, *why resist? Just like Jaktar Uncle says, we are brown and we always will*

be brown—we will never be respected, so we just have to make our money, be successful and spend time with our own kind!

Okay, you're free to go now.

Dan could see the disappointment all over the officer's face, no drugs, no guns, no stolen property, simply nothing. Then, as the officers started to walk back towards their car, Dan's frustration erupted.

So what is the description of the suspect, a brown guy in an expensive car?!

Suddenly, one of the officers rushed towards Dan and immediately regret surged through his veins. *Fuck, why did I say that, what is wrong with me? Just keep your mouth shut or you are gonna end up like Malkit and Steve.*

Look you little piece of shit, we stopped you because we are the police and we know that you're a gangbanger, we know...

Later,

VOICES

So, so many voices in my life

Some voices come from other people, others are within me, they all make up my 'Indo-Canadian' socialization.

**"The term 'visible minority' has no meaning any longer because there are so many South Asians in Canada now"
But my skin is still 'brown' isn't it?**

**"We should not use hyphenated labels, we should just use 'Canadian.'
Well, for me the hyphen is the most meaningful.**

**"Eventually we are all going to be mixed and skin colour won't matter."
That's what people said about Brazil in the 60s, but darker Brazilians are still disadvantaged, besides, future demographics are not today's demographics.**

"Surrey Sucks!"

When I hear this I often wonder if the speaker is put off by the 'brown' elements of Surrey, that it is full of immigrants who isolate themselves from 'real Canadian' society—they actively resist assimilation...makes me wonder, what is the meaning of multiculturalism? Doesn't it include the freedom to live how we choose to live?

“But, all immigrants should at least learn English in order to be good citizens, so that they can vote?”

There is news in numerous languages which means English fluency is not necessary to understand city hall, Victoria and Ottawa.

“Have you ever been to India?”

Your question, regardless of your skin colour, is meant to assess my credibility, my ‘brown-ness,’ then, you might tell me that you’ve been to Goa, to Delhi and to the Himalayas.

“You went to India and you didn’t go to the Ganges?”

**I struggle to squeeze into ‘the real Canadian’ vision of me,
I mutter that The River has nothing to do with my family, my background,
“I did go to The Taj Mahal,”
my tension-riddled tongue whips out.**

“Ethnic Food”

This Superstore sign reminds me that my food is not mainstream, it is not part of ‘real Canadian’ food, the stuff that needs no special aisle.

**“Ethnic gangs are brazen, while the Hell’s Angels are easier to manage.”
Really, they look the same to me.**

**“How come you never see a Sikh guy all liquored up beggin’ for money?”
Good question, maybe ‘monster’ homes are not so bad.**

“Unless you or your loved ones want to be shot by stray bullet, you much support having more police, stronger laws and more prisons....gang prevention? What is gang prevention?”

How sad, that you rarely hear of any talk about preventing gangs, just a lot about imprisoning gangs.

“Knives in schools?! Are you crazy?!”

**What if another child steals the knife from the Sikh child and hurts someone!”
Has it ever happened? So, after years of teenagers carrying *kirpans*, suddenly there is concern, strange. *Kirpans* are not easily accessible, not even to the ‘Sikh’ carrying one: however, scissors, knives and baseball bats are accessible in every school.**

Fuck them! They let the white guys no problem, but they stop me and Sonny! *The Shot* wouldn’t let us in at all, and the other place had to pat us down first! Those bouncers think they are so cool.

Why do you even go to those places?

What, because I’m brown I can’t go out and party!

No, no, that's not what I mean, of course you have the right to have fun. What you're experiencing is the realities of *white privilege*, the freedom and power that 'white' 'Canadians' are awarded because of their skin colour (Media Awareness Network, 2010). 'White' people don't have to worry about being harassed by security guards and police officers; they don't have to worry about racial profiling.

Whoa, this isn't racial profiling, they were just checking for guns, that's it, they weren't checking to see if we were terrorists.

It's all the same, it is all racial profiling—it's not just at the airport, it is the way people look at and react to us throughout society. It is how we are constantly reminded of being 'brown.' Here is a good example, the other day I was having coffee with my friend Mary and we are talking about how 'Chinese' people, older 'Chinese' people, will sometimes push you on the bus.

What do you mean? I hardly ever take the bus, but when I do, it seems like everyone is always pushing, especially on the SkyTrain in the morning.

True, and I know it sounds kinda racist, but, some older 'Chinese' people on the Main bus will actually push you when they are getting on and off, it's like in India, it's the same, people don't line up for the bus like they do here. In India, China, various other countries, people on the buses are quite aggressive.

Right, right, like the trains in India, shit, I'll never do that again, buy the cheaper ticket to be with 'real Indian' people, they just swarm the train all the time.

So, Mary says that she gets really pissed off when they push her, "I was born here!" she wants to say... Do you get what I mean?

Uh, I think so, we say *I was born here* to prove that we are Canadian, but your friend Mary says it to assert her, her, what you call it? *White power*?

Privilege, white privilege. Crazy isn't it? We tell people that we were born here to prove that we are 'Canadian,' while they tell people the same to solidify their power. What she is really saying is, *I am a 'real-Canadian' so I deserve real respect, you should be grateful to me for letting you into my country!*

Mary? She is the hairdresser, isn't she?

Yeah, you met her at my birthday party.

She seems really nice, she didn't seem racist.

She's not, that's not what I am saying, Mary is really cool, really progressive and open-minded, but racism is like that, it is very, very subtle. She is not overtly racist, but she probably feels very justified in her views, which embodies white privilege.

Did you ask her about it?

No, I just let it go, I wasn't in the mood to get into race stuff, believe it or not, even I need a break once in awhile.

I know, but we have talked about his before...I do think you worry about racism too much, it is not like it used to be.

Are you telling me that you don't ever experience racism?

No, of course not, I am just saying that people in Vancouver do get along even though there are so many cultures here, it is not like when our parents and grandparents came here. History is important, but we also have to leave all of our traditional stuff behind and make a new life here; we can't have an equal society if we have nothing in common, if we refuse to let go of our differences instead of focusing on our common culture.

Sure, but what is our common culture? Does it include 'Sikh' cultural capital or only 'white European' cultural capital? (Bourdieu, 1986/1997)

What? What is *cultural capital*?

It is all the cultural things that most 'Canadians' know, like knowing about people like David Suzuki, Wayne Gretzky and Leonard Cohen.

Leonard who?

Leonard Cohen, you don't know him? He's a 'Canadian' artist slash musician, the guy is an icon, anyways, it doesn't matter. Look, in the States if you don't know about Lincoln and slavery you lack certain cultural capital, meaning it is hard to fit into society because you are lacking some key 'American' knowledge.

So, you think that's what happened today...when co-workers mocked me for not knowing that Jesus wasn't in the Old Testament?

Exactly, that's it, so how did you feel when that happened.

I felt really small, especially since I am still new at work, it was like everyone knew something except me and some of them were actually laughing at me. It really pissed me off to be totally honest! I remember thinking, *I took two courses on Christianity, one on the Old Testament and one on the New Testament, so I mixed it up a little, how many of you have read any Sikh scripture?*

So, you do understand the idea of *cultural capital* you just don't know the words, it is easier for them, especially those who were raised Christian because they don't really have to try to be 'real Canadians,' they are, 'real Canadians.' Jesus is part of what it means to be 'Canadian' even for those who consider themselves atheist. Lately, I have been hearing all

this talk about the importance of preserving our ‘common’ ‘Canadian’ culture, but, what is our ‘common’ ‘Canadian’ culture? I think that what most people think of when they talk about *common Canadian culture* is ‘European’ culture. Look at *CBC Radio* and the whole orchestra debate.

What debate, what are you talking about?

A few months ago, the CBC radio bagged their orchestra because they want to fund more multicultural programs. People against the idea said that Canada is losing *our common Canadian culture*, but let’s be honest. When most ‘Canadians,’ myself included, hear the term *classical music*, who do we think of? I bet most of us think of ‘European’ composers, we don’t think of ‘Indian’ classical composers, or ‘Chinese’ classical composers, do we? As far as I know, they weren’t playing ‘Asian’ or ‘African’ music, they were playing ‘white’ music. I can’t even name an Indian classical composer, can you? Canada has always taught its citizens to worship everything ‘European!’

Okay, okay, you’re right, but we can’t worry about what happened fifty or a hundred years ago, that is the past and we are here in the present. It is better for us than it was for the older generations, look at how many brown people are in the media these days.

You are right, but history is always important.

Hoping to impress his sister, hoping to be seen as smart like her, Dan responded passionately.

Like the stuff that *upna* guy and that *cheena* guy wrote in their book, Canada is a vertical mosaic, and you know what, I want to be at the top of it—not working minimum wage at the bottom of it.

I see you’ve been paying attention in your sociology class, I think you are talking about *Racial Oppression in Canada* by Bolaria and Li (1988). But real life is not that clean-cut, it is not that simple.

Is there anything that you really like, can’t you just support me for once?

Danny, you know I am always on your side and I do agree with you; it is just that *vertical mosaic* is a very modernist idea, it needs a post-modern twist, but I do think that it is a useful idea because it makes us think about the past in relation to today.

upna: denotes a male of Indo-Canadian origin

cheena: a racial slur denoting a Chinese male

You and your post-modern-whatever! No one talks like that, and no one cares! The world is about profit not theories! You can’t tell me that a gang is any different than any of the major corporations! You’ve seen *The Corporation*, you know what I am talking about? Like in those Michael Moore movies, is Harv any different than a Canadian or American soldier fighting in Iraq? At least gangs don’t hurt innocent people, well, not usually. How is a gang

any different than an insurance company scamming sick people, at least gangs don't pretend to be your friend.

Danny, I love you, you are my brother, forget about all the social, political shit, I just don't want to see you in jail, or worse.

Later,

Can you believe he used to wear one of those trainer turbans? He just wanted to look normal, and all they could do was freak out. It's impossible to fit in if you run around with a doily on your head!

Trainer turban, ha, ha, when did you come up with that one? I know what you mean though, I can't believe his parents were so unreasonable—they guy actually faked being lynched by Skinheads, told his family they ripped off his turban and slashed his hair.

Why are you so surprised? A lot of Sikh families are backward, traditional people who live their lives in Little India—how can you live here for 30, 40 years and not speak English!

But Danny, what does equality mean? What does multiculturalism mean? Doesn't it mean that we have the right to choose who to associate with? It is part of 'Canadian' rights and freedoms isn't it?

Yeah, but how can you live with other cultures if there is no common language? How can you understand the country, much less vote?

Well, think about how much Punjabi media there is these days, we used to only have that newspaper that Dad still gets, but now we have radio stations, TV shows and websites.

Okay, but how many illiterate Sikhs use the internet?

Probably you're right, most of them probably don't, but just because you can't speak good English, it doesn't mean that you can't access a website. And, you don't need English to use a TV or a radio. The bottom line is that you don't need English to understand politics—you don't need to speak English to understand what is going on in city hall, Victoria and Ottawa. You can't tell me that 'Canadians' who know English actually know more about politics than our parents, uncles and aunts.

Later,

I'm not even sure why I came here.

Sometimes I just feel nothing but dread, I feel like a zombie, numb, always putting on a happy face. I know I have so much to be grateful for, I know I am lucky, lucky to be born in Canada, lucky to have all these rights and freedoms, not like my mom growing up in India, but I just don't care.

How long have you been feeling like this?

I dunno, awhile I guess...the...the other day, I had a fight with my father,

After, I, just

could
n't
breathe

The
'White' Walls
Came
In
On
me

The thoughts came
again and again,
Marriage,
Self-Hate
Patriarchy,
Career...I wonder if she gets it, it's so weird telling someone about all this...
Domestic Violence,
Student Loans,
Race Rage,
Wounds,
Terrorism,
Overweight,
School,
Gang violence,
...'White' Walls, always these 'White' Walls.

It sounds like a panic attack, if you don't mind, I would like to explore what you mean by *white walls*, you have used that expression before a few times.

Aren't I supposed to lead this session, why are so worried about stupid words!

I apologize if I am being too pushy, if you don't want to talk about it right now, we don't need to, but let me explain myself. Words are important because they have an impact on how we feel about ourselves, they can empower us, or they can destroy us, words can

Okay, okay, you're right, you're right,...maybe I'm being defensive. 'White' walls, is how I see...see myself.

Accepting a tissue, Raj pushed on, trying her best to stabilize her quivering jaw.

All my life I have felt these white walls all around me, limiting me, scolding me and always trying to re-create me...

Do you feel discriminated against here in Vancouver?

Do I have to teach my counselor, again?

What, are you suggesting that there is no racism in Vancouver? You don't really mean that do you?

Let me guess, we are the traditional ones because we have arranged marriages, but what most people don't know is that the current notion of marriage, the notion of love and romance is only about a hundred years old, before that it was much more common to marry for political and/or economic reasons. Look at how many so called '*modern, westerners*' are obsessed with the Royal Family and the Kennedys, those families are all about marrying for political and economic reasons.

Raj let out her usual sigh of racism-related frustration...as her counselor went on, as she listened to her counselor respond in the usual way, her mind drifted between absorbing her counselor's words to the thought of starting again. *Is she gonna be another counselor with who I have to be an anthropologist with, do I have to teach about what it means to be a minority in Canada? She has it too, that denial, that lack of awareness. But, but she does seem sincere...maybe I am, too, sensitive.*

Raj, where are you right now, what are you thinking?

I am thinking, maybe I am too sensitive. Being socialized into being 'Indo-Canadian,' means having conflicting perceptions and definitions, and being aware of these contradictions makes life complicated. When is 'Sikh' culture really traditional versus, it appearing traditional because of my 'European-Canadian' education system? And, when does my racism-related pain distort my understanding of myself, Canada, India, and the world.

So, how does this make you feel?

What? I am talking about how I feel.

I am gonna remind you that for, you, theorizing about your feelings is a lot easier than expressing your feelings, than, feeling, your feelings. I am not trying to offend you, I just want to know how you.

I can't deal with this kind of denial here too. You said you wanted me to feel comfortable and safe, well, saying that there is no racism in Vancouver sure doesn't help! I have to deal with that mentality everywhere in my life, do I have to deal with it here too!?...sorry...I must admit, sometimes I do wonder if all this reading about feminism, racism, history, politics and whatever else, sometimes I wonder if it is programming me to feel more inferior, but it's hard not to see how meaningless everything is. The world is so fucked up, our species is just a bunch of animals...life is such a big struggle. Last week, remember I told you about that meeting with that Prof, I was gonna ask him for his advice on my thesis?

Of course, you said you were really looking forward to it, and that you finally were able to get time off from work.

Well, he stood me up again! The same Prof who talks about empowering minority women students didn't show up. And later, he emailed me and said that he was sick, but only after I had emailed and called him. Why not tell me earlier that day? I told him that I check my email all the time! That is life, people love to talk big, but when it comes down to it, we all just care about ourselves. The university is supposed to be this place of equality, where everyone supports you, nurtures your educational growth, but it is just a bunch of shit like the rest of society...most Profs are just interested in what you can do for them, and the good ones, well, they are so loaded down with responsibilities that they don't have time for you anyway—I mean, the other day, I saw an article about how most Profs don't even have enough time to read, to read! They call themselves academics, but they don't even read! What am I thinking, wanting to be a Prof?

How do you feel when you write a paper? How did you feel when you presented that paper at the conference? Tell me about...

Is it almost over yet, I can't see the clock from here, I almost want to look at my watch, but, it's so rude. I can't wait to have some wine with the girls. I felt amazing, I told you, it was cathartic for me to finally share the pain that I have kept silent for all these years. You are right, I mean I know what you are hinting at, my research is good for me, but like I said, sometimes I feel reading that stuff, and being around activists encourages a victim mentality.

I'm sorry, our time is almost up, and before you go, we need to talk about your medication and our next session.

Krazed Drug Dealer
Ostentatious Home Builder
Male Chauvinist
Air India Bomber

Gangster
Aggressive Soldier
Terrorist
Abuser of Women

Counselling
Counselling

MODERN MAN
ADMIRABLE CITIZEN
RESILIENT
UPSTANDING SOCIAL ACTIVIST

Later,

So Harv, is there any chance you can help get some work? Maybe I could drop something off for you every now and then.

Look, the truth is, I have been kinda waiting for you to ask me, I knew that someday you would.

I would have asked a lot sooner, but you know how my family is.

I know what our whole family is like, I wish I didn't, but I do, always looking down on each other, my parents have always looked down on you guys, somehow a crooked accountant has more honour than an uneducated taxi-driver slash mechanic, and your family looks down on us because we move some drugs around, but your Dad has no problem being a slumlord with a talent for evicting poor people.

He brags about the status of wearing a suit to work every day, but we both know that his hands are dirty...so I guess you heard, him and some other developers are being looked at for payoffs.

Actually Danny, I haven't seen the family in awhile, so I didn't know, but I can guess, they probably paid off Gordon Campbell for some land, or something.

Your father is the good son who became a successful accountant and my Dad is the drunk taxi-driver slash janitor. If it weren't for my Mom selling insurance, my father's drinking and gambling would have taken the house years ago. My father lived pay cheque to pay cheque until the drunk driving charge which is what he needed, a telephone pole at Main and 25th to really knock some sense into him.

You mean, right by the coffee shop where Cam works.

No, a little more towards downtown, a little closer to *Nirvana*, hitting that telephone pole really helped him see the light!

Ha, ha, very funny.

That was it, hitting that pole really did it.

I am sure your sixteen year old frame didn't hurt either, well, I guess it did hurt your Dad, didn't it? Actually, the way I heard it was that our Auntie Sonia, you know the one on the island?

I was only 14.

Noticing the confusion in Dan's eyebrows, Harv reminded his cousin,

You know the one who is married to *Bhangra* Uncle.

Right, Mukhen Uncle, I like how you still call him Bhangra Uncle, he's the only semi-cool Uncle and Aunt we have...why don't they come here anymore?

I think they don't like the politics.

How could our fathers be related to those people?

Well, they aren't really related, they are just from the same village.

Really, I thought they were...were cousins or something, actually I don't know, *upnae* have so many relatives. Right, I kind of remember now, she was being coached by our aunt for years, slowing becoming more 'Canadian' and less traditional, and then one day the moment arrived—your mom finally knew who she was independent of her marriage. She was a woman who would no longer enable your Dad to harm her and her children.

Dan offered his cousin a cigarette and with a smirk on his face snorted,

Wow Harv! You are a regular Dr. Phil, aren't you?

You think that over the years I haven't learnt some shit...trust me, I have even been to a couple of interventions and don't forget about my brother's shit too.

Harv sighed and continued,

I know Dan, I know its kinda cheezy, but you became a man during that time. Taking care of your mom through all the police, lawyer and social worker interviews put some hair on your chest.

I definitely showed some balls standing up for my Mom against the relatives on both sides. Everyone just wanted it all to go away for the sake of family respectability, the interviews, the court dates, the news stories, all of it. I could actually see me and my mom getting stronger. I still remember her face when she first saw the police at the door, “another drunk driving charge, oo, oo, ooorrrr has he been killed?” I’ll never forget the way she said it, almost as if she was hoping he was dead, and to be honest, at the time I kinda felt the same way, we were all just sick of his shit...actually, I don’t know what was more effective, the drunk tank or the family embarrassment, boy were his brothers pissed off.

They are just a bunch of spineless hypocrites, the usual Sikh thing...you know, they brag about Guru Nanak’s beliefs about women’s equality, but in real life figure out devious ways to oppress them, like the time....

When you gut labour standards,
you know,
for god's sake
legitimate way

when you cut the minimum wage like,
for teenagers a job is \$6 an hour,
there's no positive incentives to make money in a

(Pablo, 2007, para.19)

Harv’s sister had run away to Toronto with her girlfriend after their father had tried to beat the homosexuality out of her. Everyone in ‘the community’ knew all the ‘disgusting’ details which meant that the family attended very few social events, but nothing could ever keep Harv from visiting Tina regularly—the fact that his father saw his trips to Toronto as a betrayal, was an added bonus.

I know how much family means to you, it’s worth getting in a little shit with Dad...I am always here for you, we are blood, that’s all that matters.

Harv would often reassure her when, in fact, Harv needed to see his big sister every now and then to break the tension. Tina was the only real relationship that he had ever known—most of his friends were afraid of him and/or saw him as a precious ‘business’ associate. And of course, there was the added benefit of being in Toronto, Harv could be anonymous—he didn’t have to look over his shoulder, but Harv did anyway, *you never know, you just never know.*

When are you going to get it!? How many times do I have to show you these?!

He pulled up his shirt to display the gunshot wounds.

I know, I know! You don't have to show them to me again!

Harv was stunned—his baby cousin never yelled at him, not until today. *Since when do you get in my face? Last time I saw you, you were giving some waitress a hard time, please don't turn into one more angry brown guy, there are already enough of us.*

Hey, relax Danny, relax.

Sorry Harv, I didn't mean to freak out on you.

What am I supposed to do? Keep working at Best Buy? I'm never gonna get anywhere working there...and you know my Dad he'll never let me do what I want unless I bow down to him, to his vision, I can't survive on minimum wage.

Dan's words were laboured, desperation that did not go unnoticed; lowering his voice, Harv continued his persuasion.

I know it is hard these days, it is not like when our parents came here and there were lots of good jobs, but you gotta believe me, this life seems a lot cooler than it really is...come on, you know what I am gonna say...except for Randy, everyone I came up with is dead, in jail, or in a wheelchair.

Dan shook his head, exhaled loudly and sucked hard on the cigarette while Harv went on with his 'sermon.'

Look, working minimum wage is fucked up, there is no question, the fuck'n politicians in Victoria gave themselves a huge raise but they screwed the rest of us!

What do you mean, 'us,' when was the last time you had a minimum wage job?

Hey, I did work at McDonald's when we first moved here.

But, Dan continued to pressure his cousin.

Yeah, but for how long, a month, or so? Big deal...come on, 'just let me do some deliveries for a little cash until I find something better.

That's what I mean, you don't get it...there is no end to it. Once you make enemies you must have a crew to watch your back or your dead, you can't just walk away. What? You think you'll be able to find a job and move shit around? Forget it, your whole life is it, always looking over your shoulder, checking and checking and checking...look, how about I get you a job doing construction, the pay is better than minimum wage, but you're gonna have to work?

Even though Dan wasn't good with his hands in that carpenter sort of way, he sheepishly agreed since at least it was something, besides he knew that his cousin would not budge, at least not today.

Later,

I've told my parents and some friends about internalized racism, about my ingrained inferiority complex, about my depression, but they just don't get it—they think that I should just get over it and take advantage of being 'Canadian.' My father is part of that generation that took off their turbans, so for them, dealing with his pain, if you can call it *dealing*, means only one thing: alcohol. Even my so-called *educated* friends don't get it, people always jump to the generation gap, that all of what it means to be a brown woman in Canada can be reduced to my parents being of a more traditional era. Don't get me wrong, of course there are generational challenges within immigrant families, or new 'Canadian' families or whatever you want to call us, I guess a lot of people call me a second generation immigrant, anyways, the point is, my life is defined by 'Canadian' society in its entirety—not just my family's brown characteristics... I never felt safe at home, at school, not anywhere the whole time I was growing up, there was always some conflict, just like a lot of white families. I know my parents love me, and don't get me wrong, there were lots of good times too, there would be periods of happiness, but I always knew that it would not last, that eventually...that eventually...

She paused, caught a tear off of her chin, and looked over the salty fluid on her finger tip.

When does the taste of tears become foreign to me, when do I get to be normal. I just want to stop crying, when am I going to stop crying. I've even been trying to make things work with Sukhi, but it just feels weird, it is like dating my brother or something. I don't want to be with a brown guy, white guys are so much easier.

Why do you think that is? Why is it easier to be with white guys?

I don't know, you're the counselor! ...sorry, I didn't mean that.

It is okay, remember what I told you, you are free to express yourself in any way that you want, including anger.

But, I have so much anger...I, I am scared if I let it out that I will never stop...I just can't do it.

Why do you think being with Eric is so easy for you? How do you feel when you are with him?

It is not just easy, it is just fun, I don't have to prove that I am brown enough, sure he doesn't know anything about our culture, but who cares! And, he doesn't think about political things, he is a pretty simple guy. At UBC there is all this talk about white guys exoticifying

brown women, but what is wrong with that? What is wrong with a white guy liking the colour of my skin?! I just don't know about feminists, they whine when *goras* hate our skin colour and they whine when *goras* like our skin. Oh, *gora* means white people.

I understand your logic, but, tell me how you feel when you are with him.

And on some level, I guess I like the rush, like a lot of women, I like bad boys, I like defying my parents...they love to see me as this docile, little brown girl, if they only knew, well, my mom has her suspicions, she did find the e. She seemed to believe me when I said the drugs weren't mine, I can't believe that she just ate it all up, she actually believed me when I told her that they weren't mine, that I took them away from a friend—it is amazing how gullible she is, what a role model for me, a woman who has no backbone—always living to please a man and his family.

Are you still wearing different clothes around them?

Um, yes, I know what we talked about, but it is a lot harder than I thought, all through high school I lived a double life, and living a double life means that you have to have double the outfits. I was gonna talk to them like we agreed, but I just couldn't do it.

Later,

People my age the gang members in the 1980s and 1990s when we were young men, they were the children of people who came during the late '60s and early '70s [...] My parents in India were both lawyers. In Canada they were nothing. (Pablo, 2007, para.29)

For young men at that time—that every day being called Hindu, Paki, sometimes by your own teachers in school for us this was a form of,
'You know what? From now on, nobody's gonna fuck with us, because if somebody fucks with us, they're fuckin' gonna get it.
(Pablo, 2007, para.31)

Later,

In high school, Randy was one of those kids who “just didn't apply himself,” few knew the details of Randy's childhood trauma, Harv being one of those people. In early high school, they started drinking and smoking together, comparing 'dysfunctional' family horror stories. These days, Randy's was much more expressive of his pain than in childhood, even screaming at and chasing other drivers, especially if there were any threat to one of his cars.

Randy loved his mustangs, but most of all, he loved being **the man** at the bar: **the man** with **the table** with **the girls**.

Look, we aren't like the old gangs, we actually work together; we're powerful because we fight together, Vietnamese, Chinese, Filipinos, us and a few white guys. We aren't like those stupid brown pride bitches, thinking that they're Sikh warriors or something; they don't know shit about Sikh warriors because they are just high school punks, being punks, whoa, check her out.

Marla, her name's Marla, yeah she's got skills.

You know her?

She was in my Economics class.

You ever, you know?

No, not yet, still working on her.

Don't forget what I said, white girls are good to have fun with, but you don't want to marry one.

Shit, is that a cop car!

Relax, we have nothing on us except a couple of joints, they don't care, and look, it is not even a cop. You gotta learn to relax, you gotta stay cool and sharp or either the cops will get you or your enemies...so anyways, you know what to do right?

Later,

Dan, why do you keep hanging out with those guys? You know that they are into a lot of serious shit.

Relax, we just do a little e and weed when we're partying, it's not like they are big dealers or something. Weed is almost legal in Vancouver, everyone smokes it these days.

I don't.

Right, and you have never done e either.

Listen to yourself, you are justifying it now. Our cousin is not like us Danny, he's dangerous, really dangerous; I told you about the *gora* in the bar, right?

I know, I know, *sigh*, after the guy was down, they pummeled him with snooker balls, and the bouncers were too afraid to do anything.

And, what about Jassi and his wheelchair?

The guy was heavy into coke, besides he never stood a chance from the get go since his father abused him, and his mom did nothing about it. You gotta stop seeing me like those other guys, I am different, I am smarter...I am, I am smarter...what do you want me to do?...keep working at Best Buy and hope for a promotion? Society already treats us like criminals, like gangbangers, terrorists and girlfriend bashers...did I tell you, I had one more date, one more interrogation, had to answer the same stupid questions; Are you traditional? Are your parents traditional? Do you cook? White guys don't have to answer the same stupid questions, and a lot of them are sexist, macho guys!

Look, I understand your anger, we both know that white guys don't get asked those questions, well, they probably do get asked about cooking. But, that doesn't mean that we have to play into the stereotypes, if we become the stereotype, we justify the stereotype. Don't let the post-colonial, racist elements of your socialization go unchallenged.

What are you talking about? We are not in a classroom right now. Who cares about racist this and post-colonial that, I just want to make some money and maybe get some respect—what does being a nice guy get you?.

Respect, you think having your own table in a bar means that you are respected? It just means that people are afraid of you. Look at Randy, he is such a poser, thinking that he's some sort of bigshot gangster; people don't respect him, they just don't want him to go psycho, and in the future Randy will be in jail or he'll be dead, and the next brainwashed, 'Indo-Canadian' guy will take his place... I know it is hard being a brown man, you think it is easy being a brown woman? We always have to try harder, but giving up and living out negative stereotypes is not the answer.

Yeah, well you don't get barred from nightclubs do you? No, you just have to wear the right clothes and you can jump the line, listen to yourself, you think life is all about academic theories, who cares about stereotypes, I just want to make some cash and what is the point of following the rules when no matter how hard I try, I am still a brown man in a white country. Like in high school when I was accused of raping that little girl, her and her white parents mixed me up with some other brown guy and accused me of raping her, and then it turned out it wasn't a brown guy at all, it was her father.

Later,

Dan drove along Marine Drive thinking about whether or not last April was as hot as this April. Suddenly, he became aware of his heart pounding, and palms sweating. The voice in his head reassured him, *the adrenaline rush is what it is all about, it's easy money, and like*

Randy said, all I have to do is drop it off, get the money and go back, that's it...oh my, nice walk. With his eyes followed the curve of her jeans up to her exposed lower back, as Dan tapped the brake, he mumbled,

Turn around, turn around so I can see what else you got.

Suddenly, his jaw convulsed as he choked on his cigar while the woman fumbled to put on her sunglasses—it was his sister! *How could this be, all the talk about dangerous friends and here she is, with that coke dealer Eric, I guess my sister is not different than all women; she loves her bad boys. All women love bad boys, teachers and the police going on and on about “good character” and “hard work”...get real. Most women like a little danger and they sure like the money, cars and jewelry, which is why I have no girlfriend—I have none of those things, not really. But, I have something that teachers and parents call “a good work ethic,” and I know how to “be considerate to others,” all the qualities that women find sexy, yeah right, “You are such a good friend, you are like a brother to me—you’re so nice.” Nice, I am so sick of being told how NICE I am!*

EXPOSITORY PROSE TWO

Dear Janet

The next piece is something I wrote for a Sociology class, which is written as a letter to a close friend about my particular, 'Indo-Canadian experience' at that time in my life. I enjoy using a letter format because I find it very conducive to expressing those thoughts, feelings and experiences that I otherwise keep hidden.

Oh brown man and brown woman, why, why?

**Why are you so persistent,
Is it not enough that we have united your kingdoms?
It is not enough that we have brought civility to you in need.**

All of the wealth of these kingdoms is heavenly...

**I love the view of the Himalayas from my hill station terrace,
I know you see me as you did Mughal and Hindu rulers, but do not fret,
for I am truly different, I will civilize you and raise you into the Industrial
Age, I will help you turn havelis, into factories.**

**I waited patiently for you to leave, but you just would not do so,
so you forced me to send in the Navy.
I sent in the Navy because I thought, why not escort you, well, maybe, push
you straight through the Georgia Strait, straight back to the geographical
niche that best suits your stage in the process of evolution—to the
environment that is most conducive to your growth through the process of
evolution!**

**Yes, being a British Subject, you may travel to other Mother England
colonies, but please, please do not take this privilege for granted.**

Hello Janet, how have you been?

So, my thesis is coming along nicely, but you know me, I always wish I was further along than I am, my old habit of being a little too hard on myself lurks, like a ghost; it takes the form of the type of inferiority complex that accompanies racism (Fanon, 1967, p. 11). I know that it is hard for you to understand why I would struggle with such an inferiority

complex when researching spousal abuse in ‘the Indo-Canadian community,’ so let me explain it to you by using Himani Bannerji’s (2000) book, *The dark side of the nation: essays on multiculturalism, nationalism and gender*.

This book, which takes an antiracist, feminist position on ‘Canadian’ multiculturalism, offers a lot of insight into how ‘Indo-Canadian domestic violence’ is perceived, explained and managed. Let me share some personal experiences along with the arguments of other social thinkers in explaining to you why this book is valuable to ‘us’ “Sikhs” in Canada—in fact, I find that there is very, very little in this book that I cannot agree with.

Like some of the ideas that I hear within ‘the Indo-Canadian community,’ at times I find Bannerji’s points ‘too extreme’ and ‘too divisive.’ When I talk about discrimination, people usually think about intolerance from ‘white’ people, but as you know, I have never really felt comfortable around ‘brown’ people either—I am too ‘white,’ no that’s not quite right, I am **TOO WHITE!** I do not think Bannerji would ever make such a violent statement to me, but from an anxiety-ridden perspective, she is a highly revered ‘brown’ person whom I would hate to disappoint. And of course, this is where reading Fanon comes in and helps me understand that my inferiority complex colours how I see her: I know, I know, it is a bad pun, for me to talk about how my perceptions are “coloured,” but it is true. I do see colours all the time, and I think about colours all the time. The colours of food, clothing, political parties, and let’s not forget the colours **of** the media, and the colours **in** the media that are everywhere. For instance, when I saw her at the RACE conference, there was no need for me to keep my distance from her for fear of her saying, “what do you know about ‘brown’ feminism? You are part of the problem, not the solution!” Now that I understand my anxiety, my inferiority complex, the ‘extreme’ ideas in her book have become facts; in other words, embracing my anxiety issues has allowed me to become more accepting of ideas that I once considered ‘too extreme’ and ‘too divisive.’

Bannerji’s overall position on social change is incredibly difficult to resist because I see so much discrimination throughout society. People say that Canadian multiculturalism has come a long way, but clearly news reports of domestic violence perpetuate negative stereotypes. We are told that us ‘Sikhs’ maintain violent social norms which encourage spousal abuse; in Durkheim’s terms, ‘Indo-Canadian’ culture suffers from “anomie” (Lemert, 2006, p. 11). Obviously, Bannerji’s (2000) social remedy for a new vision of ‘Canadian’ society is more than warranted:

Antiracist and feminist class politics must be its articulating basis.

It is this which would prevent this popular multiculturalism from falling prey to colonial, racist discourse or to those of ethnic nationalisms. Such a popular framing of culture would not engage in fetishized and essentialized traditions. It would speak to multiplicities of tradition and power relations between them, marking the internal power-inscribed differences within the space of the nation, as well as in multinationalities. We could leave behind the Weberian paradigm of tradition-modernity and a facile post-colonialism which threatens to become a form of culturalism. (p. 5)

However, even though these words are appealing, my inferiority complex is immobilizing—I don’t want to be called ‘a sensitive minority’ forever. Telling people that I am interested in antiracism is a powerful political statement, which is why I sometimes I prefer the term

critical multiculturalism. I am tired, downright exhausted at times of feeling alienated from others. I know that it sounds spineless, but I really don't want to dwell on the margins forever—can I be as 'extreme' as Bannerji? At the RACE conference she was in the room when a panel of professors vehemently declared that being an academic of colour is an incredibly alienating experience. I do fear being an alienated academic of colour, but, in order to really deal with my inferiority complex I must, as she says, challenge "colonial, racist discourse" like the current stigmatization of 'Sikh' culture.

Bannerji's advice is alluring because challenging such racist arguments will help me "free [myself] of the arsenal of complexes that has been developed by the colonial environment" (Fanon, 1952/1967, p. 30). I can continue to find the term "antiracist" uncomfortable, like when I downplayed my critical, 'brown' perspective at a barbeque last year in order to fit in, but to do so would continue my self-deprecating quest for "white approval" (Fanon, 1952/1967, p. 51). I must simply keep in mind that the current media pedagogy hides the societal structures that contribute to 'Indo-Canadian' domestic violence by focusing on 'Sikh' culture as the root cause. Obviously, Bannerji's words are quite accurate in her claim that I must act to "prevent this popular multiculturalism from falling prey to colonial, racist discourse or to those of nationalisms." The ongoing domestic violence discourse continues "to engage in fetishized and essentialized traditions." Avery Gordon (2004) echoes these words by explaining how social issues are distorted to the point that there is an "automatic attribution of criminal behavior to people of color" (p. 45). As you know, I tend to like the term '*Indo-Canadian*' but these days I am not so sure because it has almost become a racist term: "who are Indo-Canadians? Oh, right, those people who are always so violent."

Bannerji's critical approach (2000) to 'ethnic' labels is definitely what is missing throughout 'Canadian' society; she writes:

I should mention at the outset that, whereas the discourse of multiculturalism with its core concepts of diversity or difference, has a general cross-border or transnational appeal, the related agentic expression "women of colour" is primarily North American. Its use is not common in British feminist vocabulary, for example, where "black women" or "black and Asian women" are terms of choice. Also, women with African or aboriginal backgrounds do not readily respond to this name, as they consider themselves to have highly substantive cultural histories and special claims to the politicized notions of blackness and aboriginality. (p.16)

Bannerji's (2000) critical stance on the expression "women of colour" is attractive since I have never been sure what to call myself; she says that we should not use such expressions in any manner that takes focus away from societal power structures of our country. I am sure she would agree that I should show the same care with '*Indo-Canadian*,' '*Sikh*,' '*Indian*' and '*South Asian*.' Yet, I have noticed that it is primarily us academics who are overly concerned with critiquing 'ethnic' labels. As I told you before, when my cousin was attacked, her concern was not which label to use; her main struggles were about personal safety and how to go about testifying in court. Yet, perhaps I am splitting hairs because I suspect that Bannerji would agree that academics, teachers, counselors and other policy players need to be the ones more concerned with 'ethnic' labels. In my thesis I will use 'Indo-Canadian' and 'Sikh' because they are the most common ones in the media. However, I agree that I must do this carefully because otherwise I will simply reinforce the "Weberian

paradigm of tradition-modernity;” I will simply reinforce that “Indo-Canadians are those violent people.”

Clearly, the recent comments made by Bruce Allen in which he chastised numerous minority groups, re-affirm Bannerji’s (2000) assertion that countless ‘Canadians’ see immigrants as a threat to ‘common Canadian culture (p. 5). Obviously, Bruce Allen and his supporters are “displaying signs of feeling threatened by these ‘others,’ who are portrayed as an invasive force” (Bannerji, 2000, p. 5). I am sure that Bannerji would agree that Bruce Allen’s claims reflect the same shortsightedness that she charges Charles Taylor with (p. 128). These men, who fail to recognize the importance of history, are trying to protect ‘a common Canadian’ culture that is really ‘white’ European culture, a definition of ‘Canadian’ that places ‘Indo-Canadian’ culture in an inferior position of ‘the other.

Bannerji (2000) succinctly explains ‘Sikh’ otherness by identifying two inter-related results of being ‘brown’ in Canada; first, our ethnicity is blamed as the root cause of domestic violence, and second, there is a lack of socio-political action to deal with minority social issues like ‘Indo-Canadian’ domestic violence because it is seen as just that, *Indo-Canadian* domestic violence,’ **not Canadian** domestic violence (pp. 64-5). As you can imagine, these points are very troubling to me—when do we get to be seen as real people! As I said before, people encourage me to focus on the positive achievements of ‘Indo-Canadians,’ but the current discussions about domestic violence only exacerbate my inferiority complex because the main argument is that *we are too traditional*. According to Bannerji, because ethnicity continues to be blamed as the root cause of ‘Indo-Canadian’ domestic violence, the state fails to effectively deal with spousal abuse because ‘Sikh’ culture is the cause, not society as a whole. This is where my perspective as ‘an academic of colour’ is valuable, which brings me to one central question, how can I use Bannerji’s arguments to develop praxis that reduces the stigmatization of ‘Indo-Canadian’ culture?

Bruce Allen: a well-known music promoter in Vancouver who was chosen to assist in organizing Olympic entertainment; many ‘Indo-Canadians’ vociferously complained about his being chosen since he publicly made a racist comment: “He also said, inferentially, to Indo-Canadians, ‘Shut up and fit in or leave this country. There is the door. If you don’t like the rules, hit it,’” said Allen. “We don’t need you here. You have another place to go. It’s called home. See ya.” (Mair, 2007, para.1)

EXPOSITORY PROSE THREE

Dear Satnam-Ji

Similarly, the last piece also reveals some of my personal struggles in ‘the Indo-Canadian’ experience, written approximately a year after the previous letter.

Old Friends How have you been?

We have had this dysfunctional relationship for a long time now,
haven’t we?

Do you recall when we first met, I mean when we first really got to know each other?
India wasn’t even India then, it was just a bunch of kingdoms
...and you, you wanted them all!

Only our Maharaja Ranjit Singh stood in your way,
you feared and respected his intelligence, his charisma and his military might.
But in the end, your greed was relentless, so you said,
“Now that he is finally dead, we can have all the kingdoms!”
And of course, unfortunately for me, some of us were all too willing to help you—those
turbaned traitors, those *marmukhs*!

Do you recall how you ridiculed me for standing up for my country, for my des?
Do you recall our Bidhi Singh, the 6 foot 3 true Saint Soldier who moved villages to spin
their own cloth.

The Singh, the Shere who roared about freedom and civil disobedience,
the Sikh revolutionary who resisted the British,
...nor prison, nor lashing, nor broken fingers
prevented him from the ultimate act of passive resistance
—to obey the law!

Even though he obeyed the law, even though he was a good honourable British subject,
you discontinued his passage, and sent him Strait into gunfire.

Bidhi Singh escaped, the holy book in hand, only to be arrested in his Khudpur home,
and to have his hands broken once again.

You were only trying to do the civilized thing, you knew that too many of us savagely
Sikhs would soil your soil.

Do you recall our Bhagat Singh?

“This troublemaker needs to be dealt with immediately!”

You called him a “terrorist” while others called him “a thinker, a revolutionary, a
son.”

Yes, he threw a bomb into the parliament, but was anyone hurt?

No, of course not, can the same be said for your General Dyer?

What’s the matter? You look uncomfortable...don’t like to remember do you?

Bhagat Singh made a few politicians quiver and run, while Dyer turned a well into a tomb for men, women and children.

But don't worry, I know everything you have always done, has always been for my own good, that is why you made me crawl down an Amritsar street on my belly, by snaking through the dirt, the unruly, anti-social tension in my turban was supposed to be released.

So I dragged myself through the dust and was confused, but my chest is getting darker! I was becoming browner, not whiter. I was confused, because I thought white skin was civilized not brown skin,

...and then later, I was even more confused when I saw you tanning, saw you staining your skin, first in Himachal Pradesh, then in Goa, and then in the backyards of Kitsilano.

But don't worry, like I said, I understand that everything you do is for my benefit. That is why you do everything you do, because you want me to be educated.

Do you recall the way you wouldn't pay me for weeks and months, making me live in lice infested squalor?

Remember how you starved me and hid my passport?

I especially appreciate you not burdening my primitive brain with the complexities of democracy,

only once I had further developed, in 1948, did I have to vote.

But don't worry, I understand, it is all part of my education, my social evolution into modern-man,

That is why you have always tried so hard to control my numbers, for my own good,

The cynics call it racism, they call it trying to preserve a white nation,

It is not because brown hands steal white jobs that you do these things,

You simply want to help me.

And finally, after years of education, I got it,

Even though I wore my turban in those wars,

turbans are too high for low Legion doorways.

Finally, I learned the truth, your truth,

that Sikhism is bad.

So, you let me in, and Trudeau said I could stay.

I traded my turban and beard for a hardhat and a union card.

The hardhat was useful in the west coast rain,

but the union card did nothing but fill the back of my wallet,

with its foreign, cold, white, stiffness, I couldn't even use it.

I am here today because you have helped me evolve, but clearly my evolution is far from over.

Because our men are still too violent, and our women are still too weak,

that is why we suffer from spousal abuse, from gang violence and terrorism, modern Canadian society has no part in these traditional Sikh problems.
But, maybe my sarcasm is too sensitive, maybe I am too sensitive.

Because, when I push my shopping cart through Superstore aisles,
I allow myself to be reminded of who we are,
we are ethnics, which is why our food is in the ethnic aisle.
I am too sensitive because we have come a loooong way.
Mendhi, yoga and chai are everywhere now, oh pardon me,
There are Chai Tea Lattes everywhere now,
gotta say the word “Tea” and gotta say the word “Latte.”
There is even a brown guy on the Canucks, well, almost on the Canucks.
We are everywhere, we are journalists, we are professors,
and like you, we have even become slumlords!
Yeah, slumlords just like you, real progress!

We have gone from being indentured labour to Liberal Party backbenchers.
How? Not because we persevere, and we are strong,
but because of your education, because you have always taken care of us.
That is why you stop me now and then for driving a sports car, or bar me from
nightclubs, that is why you see me as a wife beater, a gangster, a terrorist, as a cultural
oddity—because we have come a long way, because multiculturalism is working!
Because multiculturalism is working!

Or is it?

Do you recall our Reena Virk?
You burnt a bindi into her forehead with a cigarette and then told us that it couldn't be
a hate crime because the attacker comes from a good family.
Once again, I must be too primitive to understand modern Canadian law,
because what is a “good” family, and does that mean only bad families can be racist?
But come on, we both know they wouldn't have burnt a bindi into her forehead if she
were white.

So here we are, and our dysfunctional relationship continues.
Our dysfunctional relationship, also known as
Mono, I mean, multi, multiculturalism.

Oh ‘White’ man and ‘White’ woman,

how great it must be,

How great it must be to be stereotype-free!

How great it must be to live without constantly defending your culture!

**How great it must be,
How great it must be.**

Dear Satnam-Ji,

How great it must be to be not to deal with the constant stereotyping of your identity, how free 'white' men must feel to not worry about their skin colour, except those times when they travel, or they are in a Vancouver 'immigrant ghetto,' surrounded by 'The Other.' Only then can he understand what it means to be 'The Other,' to have his "white privilege" neutralized, or perhaps *dampened* is a better word since my 'white' brothers in Vancouver always have the option of re-establishing their white privilege; they just need to leave the 'immigrant ghetto' and return to 'real Canada,' surrounded by 'real Canadians'--how nice it must be to have that option. At my upcoming wedding, there will definitely be quite a few of these awkward, curious, overly-polite 'real-Canadians' milling about and realizing what it means for your cultural background to hold you back socially.

I suspect that some of my 'white' friends would say, "But Bob, you can do the same by being around other 'Sikhs.'" While this is true, not unlike many other 'brown' men, I do feel uncomfortable around other 'brown' people at times as well. What it means to be a 'brown' man is much more complicated than being a 'white' man for various reasons. Of course, I can't possibly capture all of the diversity encapsulated by the 'Indo-Canadian' experience in this letter to you, but let me explain a few nuances just to prove a point, to reveal a few facets of how 'our brown-ness' is seen, talked about and understood.

Lately, I have been considering being baptized, but the truth is that I just don't know if I have what it takes to wear a turban and beard, to "[look] white people in the eye" (Razack, 1998), but, maybe the truth is that it is about me looking myself in the eye, having the confidence to wear the symbols, but I will not take all the responsibility for my weariness because my society is what it is—no person can deny that a turban and beard can limit you socially and professionally.

Last year I was offered a government job which required a security background check; I had to go through the RCMP and prove to the government that I have no criminal record. After the general security check process, I was informed that it wasn't enough and that I had to go through a more comprehensive process, involving fingerprints. Such a security check is supposed to take a maximum of three months, but as the months went past three, I started to wonder, *Is this racial profiling? Why is it taking so long? On the news they said that the RCMP's records are incredibly disorganized, that since 911 they have been collecting all this information on people, but have created no system to organize it, is that it? Is that why it is taking so long? Is it because there are other Kuljinder Singh Atwal's out there so it takes longer to make sure who I am? Is there some connection to Air India?* I wondered if I was being paranoid, *Maybe this is a case where I am thinking about race too much.* But, then, friends, 'white' friends started making similar comments, "maybe they think you are a terrorist, or something?" As I am sure you can understand, Satnam-Ji, the funny thing is that when 'white' friends bring up race-related worries, I tend to take them more seriously, *if 'white' people are thinking about racism, then it must be a stronger possibility, it can't be me just being 'too sensitive.'* To add fuel to the fire, recently UBC came out with a study that shows individuals with 'white' names have a forty percent better chance of finding

employment (Proudfoot, 2009). Of course, the hardest part of racialization is always trying to figure out if it is real; I could ask the RCMP why it took so long, but we both know people are seldom honest about these types of cross-cultural matters, a social reality that I thought would have been minimized by moving to the mainland, but clearly I was wrong, which is why the other day, I removed *Kuljinder Singh* from my resume—Canada’s labour market prefers *Bob Atwal* because I am never just a man in Canada, I am a ‘brown’ man in Canada. Hey, let me do a little aside on my name, I am sure you are wondering why, why “Bob”?

You know, when my parents and brother came to Canada, he was only three, and of course like most children, my brother learnt English very fast. When I was two weeks old, he came home from school and said, “Bobby, it’s a good Canadian name, let’s call him Bobby!” My mom jumped on it since she wasn’t able to choose “Kuljinder,” her domineering mother-in-law chose my ‘real’ name. To be honest, and at the risk of sounding ‘non-Sikh,’ there have been many times in my life when I have been very grateful for “Bob/Bobby,” and I have also learnt over the years, it takes a lot of work to implement “Kuljinder.” Here is a common, very common conversation that I have had as a social science major with well-intentioned colleagues:

So, why don’t you use your real name? It is really important to stand tall and be proud, you shouldn’t bow down to assimilation anymore, you should use your **REAL NAME**!

I understand what you mean, but, to me “Bob/Bobby” is my real name.

This is where the person, whether they are ‘brown’ or ‘white,’ may reach out, touch my shoulder, and start speaking softly,

It’s okay, you can be yourself, you are among friends, there is no need to be white, you can be who, you really are, you can use your **REAL NAME**.

But, what you’re missing is that no one, not even my parents call me “Kuljinder,” they say “this is our younger son, Bobby.” In fact, when I was heavy into Karate, my Sensei was the only person who called me “Kuljinder,” why?...because there were too many “Bobs” in the room, and even then it often got reduced to “Kul,”...I guess 3 syllables are hard when you’re sweating like a pig!

But, if you want to, you can encourage people to use it?

To be honest, it is not as if I discourage it.

Okay, I am going to call you “Kuljinder!” From now on I will not use “Bob” at all.

And guess what happens Satnam-Ji, usually it will last a few days, and then, the person goes back to “Bob,” once in undergrad, a friend actually went TWO weeks, it was amazing—of course, all of this name stuff really draws attention to the way I see myself in relation to how people see me.

A poem about a social interaction I had in East Van

“I like your head covering”

A brown guy finds a table in a restaurant on Main,
A white guy stops playing the piano and takes his
seat, with his friend at their usual table...
The white guys reach out, in that warm kind of way
people do when they are trying to build community,

“I like your head covering.”

*How funny, he called it a head covering,
I guess they think I’m Muslim, but Muslims don’t
cover their heads like this, do they?
Or maybe they just don’t know what I am,
or what,
...I... c...o...u...l...d... b...e
And if I asked them,
maybe they couldn’t even explain it:
explain the ‘brown-ness’ in their eyes,*

“It’s not a religious or cultural thing,
I just wear it to keep my hair out of my eyes when I’m working out.”

So, Satnam-Ji, you know I have always kind of looked up to you because of your wisdom and patience with me. You are the only ‘Sikh’ elder I know who is a good combination of scholar and regular guy; so let me tell you what I have been going through since I moved to Vancouver, B.C.’s ‘Mecca’ of multiculturalism. Over the past ten years, I have been having the same conversation with everyone I know, family members, colleagues, friends and others, something like,

Well, Bob, if it is not the culture, then why have there been so many ‘Indo-Canadian’ deaths in the last few decades?

Few, decades, I think you mean, two decades.

Whatever, does it really matter if it’s two, three, or four? Dead is dead and there have been a lot of them.

Maybe, others can learn from this as well.

I know that my old dream of ending racism is unattainable, that perhaps nirvana is easier, so all that I can really do is try to make a small dent, just make a few people reflect, re-

consider, and maybe help a few others find some perspective and comfort. I guess little has changed since your time on earth, 'Sikh' culture is still vilified, a fact that is abundantly clear at any public forum on 'Indo-Canadian' violence.

At the last gang forum I went to, I was confronted with the typical misguided comments, the *Sardar-ji* (turban-wearing 'Sikh') cop who does a slide show presentation showing 'violent' 'Sikh' images, guns, gold and gurus with a Punjabi soundtrack, an uncle makes the point that the lyrics of the song are not violent, therefore, they do not reinforce the accusation that 'Sikh' culture is barbaric. The typical misrepresentations and oversimplifications fill the auditorium; 'brown' families worship status symbols and encourage violence. The message was clear, 'brown' parents should be better parents by not worshipping status, oh, and of course, we should teach our children not to be violent, a notion that is somehow foreign to our immigrant 'primitive' mind. As usual, a bunch of people who over-emphasize our culture and symbols and overlook the historical, economic and socio-political context of 'our' violence, and make practically no mention of prevention. But, I must be aware of my own emotionality in order to enhance this revelation to you. Truth, there are a lot of macho, angry, violent 'Sikhs,' out there, but what people often miss is that those guys are part of every culture.

I bet you want to remind me that we are all equal, that we waste our lives worrying about differences that don't really exist, like there is no difference between a 'Sikh,' a 'Hindu,' a 'Muslim' or a 'Christian,' there is no difference between 'white' and 'brown, we are all the same. But, the truth is, these colours are real and the misunderstanding and the trauma that goes with them is real! Look at how we are talked about, even by people of our own culture! Should I live my life quietly and not draw attention to these matters because I am 'dwelling on' distinctions that don't really exist? I can't just sit by when I know that there are differences between 'real' and 'non-real' 'Canadians,' the divide between 'brown' and 'white' is based on the idea of white privilege.

I would never say that race and racism are the only causes of gangs, but how can it not be part of the equation; I mean, you have 'brown' kids growing up around all these negative messages trying to build their identities. Truth is, almost anytime 'brown' violence occurs, 'brown' culture becomes the focus of discussion, but it is not the same for my 'white' brothers and sisters because they have 'no' culture; they are just 'Canadian.' But for 'our' crimes, it is all about the culture, the labels and the 'brown' skin. In media studies, it is called "double standard" and "defending an ideology" (Fleras & Kunz, 2001, p. 52). Articles rarely read, *'Irish-Canadian' male*, or *'Scottish-Canadian' male* when the perpetrators are 'white,' yet the ethnicity of minorities is overwhelmingly emphasized; our criminals have hyphenated cultural labels, while 'white' criminals are simply 'Caucasian.' Even the ethnicity of one of the most notorious and longstanding Canadian 'gangs,' the Hell's Angels goes unmentioned. A local theatre company sums up the situation in the following panel display,

The Chinese community is over 600,000 strong. How many are involved in organized crime? Maybe less than 1000 – less than .017 per cent of the community population. Why then there is so much hype about "Asian gangs" and "Asian crime"? Sure there is organized criminal activity by persons of Asian descent – but is the person's ethnicity relevant at all? Was Clifford Olson's ethnicity relevant? (Wong, 1992)

Satnam-Ji, I know what you are thinking, you have always encouraged calm, conviction, but I have to be honest, it started wearing me down. I think I started wondering if I was too defensive of ‘our’ brownness, of our ‘Sikhness.’ I knew that other cultures are also violent, but I also was aware of the ‘traditional,’ macho elements of our culture; I know what you are thinking, don’t worry; I said “macho elements of ‘our’ culture,” not “macho elements of ‘our’ religion.” I know better than to call Sikhism a violent religion. I understand why you are so defensive, I feel it too. Bottom line, most people, including many ‘Sikhs,’ see violence as one of your teachings, they don’t know that the *kirpan*, came long after you walked the earth; In English they say *sword*, which I think is part of the problem because it carries such a violent connotation. The term *sword* carries the idea of attack, it does not include the ‘Sikh’ principle of defending the weak, of being a Saint Soldier. Most people are just not that educated about Sikhism which is why it is perceived to be, a violent belief system, a religion that has brought the world *Air India*, domestic violence and gangs.

Actually, sometimes I am so defensive that I screen what I tell people about Sikhism. I have to find the right words for each occasion, for each teachable moment. Maybe I don’t mention that your pilgrimages went as far west as the Middle East, because, I suspect that such information might make them think, “see, he probably was influenced by the violence in Islam!” We both know that such a charge is as ridiculous towards us as it is to our ‘Muslim’ brothers and sisters—wow, as I write this a new thought emerges.

Over the years, there have been countless times that I told people about you borrowing some Muslim teachings; what if by doing so I inadvertently marred Sikhism with the same distaste that western society has towards Islam? I know that I can’t worry about it to such an extreme degree, that I am not responsible for the (un)education of others, but it is an interesting consideration. As Said (1997) has well documented, Islam has always been misunderstood, misrepresented, and even feared in the west; and to the ‘uneducated,’ it is all the same, it is all the same beards, turbans and temples. I am certain that the same fear of Islam surrounds Sikhism which blurs the way people look at gangs.

So, a fairly wide cross-section of ‘Indo-Canadians’ came together to look at the gang issue, they formed the task force dubbed *the Group of 10*, and the thrust of their government sponsored report was that ‘Indo-Canadian’ violence comes from “[a] learned belief that violence is acceptable, and culturally-sanctioned, means of resolving disputes” (Canadian Heritage, 2006, II. Analysis, B. Preconditions, Family, para.1). I must admit, like other ‘Sikhs,’ I struggle not to allow the ‘negative’ aspects, or at least the perceived ‘negative’ aspects of ‘Indo-Canadian’ culture to destabilize my cultural pride—it is just downright insulting. One of ‘our’ newspapers, *The Link*, ran a critique of this report and similar ones that view parts of the ‘Indian’ worldview as contributing to violence; Dhillon (2006) expresses disgust for the overlapping findings,

[the] Indo-Canadian Taskforce on Gang Violence has produced a report, which they seemed to have copied from a previously flawed report, also commissioned by Heritage Canada, which blamed parents, cultural beliefs for gang violence and other problems in the community.

He goes on to refer to the government findings as “moronic at best and [an] absolutely useless analysis. The culture does not condone violence of any kind and neither does the Sikh religion” (Dhillon, 2006). While I do agree with his response, I suspect that unchecked

emotions have clouded the writer's analysis, especially since I **know** that a **handful** of 'Indo-Canadian' families do embody the government sponsored assessment. How can a writer for a popular 'Indo-Canadian' paper not at least acknowledge the real meaning of diversity? This is what happens to 'brown' guys growing up in Canada, we get emotional about how we are perceived. I know these reports have unintentionally insulted many 'Indo-Canadians' because of their lack of sensitivity and cultural awareness. In order to understand 'the Indo-Canadian experience,' I think it helps to separate cultural awareness into two forms, *general cultural awareness* and *deep cultural awareness*, enables a clearer understanding of this sort of knowledge and the lack of it.

General cultural awareness refers to knowing the superficial details of a culture, while *deep cultural awareness* refers to knowing the nuances of those superficial details. In other words, *general cultural awareness* means having only a few fragments of cultural knowledge to play with, while *deep cultural awareness* means having numerous fragments of knowledge to play with. The first entails knowing that the Ganges is important to people from India, the second means knowing that the Ganges is **not** important to everyone from India. *Deep cultural awareness* incorporates Dolby's (2001) idea that,

[individuals] construct [culture] as a discourse of taste (Bourdieu 1984), whose coordinates are situated within the parameters of popular culture. I use the concept of taste, instead of the more familiar idea of culture, first to signal my move away from the commonsense trappings of "culture"...By using taste, I do not jettison the specific context of [Canada] and the cultural fields in which ['Indo-Canadians'] maneuver. Instead, I mean to signal that [culture] is significantly (though not entirely) divorced from a specific and narrow geographical place: instead, [culture] is formed through the global/local nexus of taste practices. (p. 10)

In other words, *general cultural awareness* sees culture as static, while *deep cultural awareness* sees culture as dynamic, a difference that is embodied by 'Indo-Canadian' challenges.

'Indo-Canadian' turmoil

There are numerous forms of cross-cultural and intra-cultural turmoil that many 'Indo-Canadian' families face on an ongoing basis. Actually Satnam-Ji, the Group of 10 report does offer some valuable historical context,

Early arrivals to the Lower Mainland from South Asian experienced regular incidents of overt racism and discrimination. Incidents seemed to increase during the 1970s and 1980s, when large numbers of new immigrants arrived in the Lower Mainland. Racist remarks were commonly made toward South Asian immigrants and, in particular, South Asian youth. South Asians also experienced many forms of systemic racism. Barriers were encountered that restricted the personal and professional growth of many South Asians in their newly adopted country and community. For instance, opportunities to work in the professions achieved in their home countries were blocked in many cases by barriers put in place by mainstream Canadian society. Discriminatory practices left many South Asian families struggling to maintain

harmonious and financially-secure lives in Canada and the Lower Mainland of British Columbia...Complicating our integration into Canadian society, many South Asian families tried to maintain the cultural practices and traditions they followed prior to immigrating to Canada, even though some of these practices conflicted with the norms and values practiced by the dominant culture in Canadian society (e.g., clothing, religious practices, marriage traditions, roles of males and females in the family and community)...These experiences left many South Asians, and, in particular, South Asian youth, feeling uncertain about their place in Canadian society. Although the amount of overt racism appears to have been reduced in recent years, both systemic and direct racism then and now has contributed to continued marginalization, stereotyping as well as mistrust by many South Asians of mainstream society (Canadian Heritage, 2006, II. Analysis, A. Background, History, para.1-3)

Also, in understanding the 'Indo-Canadian' experience, it is important to keep in mind that many 'Sikhs' tend to overtly regulate potential spouses based on the accumulation and maintenance of status symbols and family reputation. Image is very important which is why many youth find themselves living double lives, wearing different masks for different people in their lives. To me, it has always seemed harder for girls since they are the ones who are more likely to wear one outfit on the way to school and another outfit while at school. Yes, it is true that European cultures follow suit, but usually there is less overall pressure and scrutiny on the entire family in individual-focused, or what this anthropologist Robbins (1997) calls "egocentric" cultures (p.136). Of course, there are well documented cases in Europe that appear identical to the 'Indo-Canadian' worldview, such as, British nobility; nonetheless, 'Sikh' children often have the added pressure of maintaining group-focused, or what Robbins (1997) calls, the "sociocentric" principle of respect (pp.136-7). I have yet to meet any 'white' person who has ever been subjected to this sort of forced conformity. Of course, I am willing to acknowledge the limitations of my personal life experience, but I highly doubt that many 'Caucasians' face the same type of restrictions in regards to sibling marriage possibilities; I'm sure you agree Satnam-ji, I must push people to look at this 'Sikh' social reality so that we can reach a better understanding of the forces that **sometimes** attract **some** young people towards a 'criminal lifestyle.'

Harjit Singh, who is also one of the Group of 10, argues that the very nature of the 'Indo-Canadian' social experience contributes to crime; he states,

[o]ther aspects of Indian culture also influence the high-profile and sometimes murderous violence for which Indo-Canadian gangs have become known...There are cultural issues related to image, status, and respect ...There's a high sensitivity to disrespect and insult, which can lead to violence. The community is like a bubble in many ways — it's self-regulating and closed off. And peer pressure can have a huge effect...Throw in a lucrative role in the marijuana trade that fuels the gang economy and the potential for rip-offs and financial and turf disputes, and you have a recipe for violence, mostly within the gang subculture itself as gangs attack each other in spiraling revenge killings. (Singh, 2006, para.7)

Obviously, this earlier research makes the same causal connection between ‘Indo-Canadian’ beliefs and violence as the newer, Group of 10 report. While I agree with many of these arguments, they truly need to consider that other ‘ethnic’ groups around the globe have similar ‘gang’ issues: “from the United States to the Caribbean to Central America, from Europe to the Middle East, from Asia to Melanesia and Australia” (Duffy 2004, p. 9). However, I am rather sheepish of overly critiquing this website excerpt since I have not been able to find a complete version of this particular research. On the other hand, these social scientists might consider employing a little more tact since the summary of their work, that I assume they posted online for the masses to read, will be controversial for many readers. Also, their work contributes to the negative stereotyping ingrained in the term, ‘*Indo-Canadian*,’ which makes young ‘Sikhs’ feel even more alienated. You know Satnam-Ji, I believe that the situation is so bad that a young man’s psyche is damaged by calling himself ‘*Indo-Canadian*.’ A ‘brown’ man might use the label as a source of empowerment, while a teacher, a customs officer and the RCMP might use the same term to identify someone who may be potentially dangerous. This kind of societal injustice is much more dangerous than those that employ the traditional racial classification model; the oppressive aspects of these words are extremely subtle because members of ‘The Other’ also use the same expressions. Identifying ‘The Other’ with ‘The Other’s’ terminology assists in cloaking inequality in cultural awareness. So, to minimize the alienation of young men, they need to de-emphasize the cultural backgrounds of ‘Indo-Canadian’ gangs. By focusing on non-cultural elements of crime, they will avoid picking at racism-related wounds and in turn, create a better dialogue. In other words, by being more sensitive and including a thorough international comparison, they could reduce the defensiveness and resistance to their research and in doing so, achieve their main purpose—to stimulate societal transformation.

Social change is hindered by picking out and dwelling on particular elements of a culture’s worldview; therefore, cultural critiques need to be sensitive—they could emphasize the fact that there are, not only numerous positive aspects of ‘Indo-Canadian’ culture, but also that many other ‘ethnic’ groups share similar and at times, identical ‘gang’ producing characteristics. For me, it is the lack of this sort of sensitivity sums up the main of these research studies; of course, in this letter to you, I am focusing mainly on the Group of 10 report since I have it in its entirety, not to mention that it holds a more significant position in the current ‘Indo-Canadian gang’ debate. It is puzzling for me that individuals, who clearly exemplify a *deep cultural awareness* of ‘Sikh’ culture, would overlook that their results will be controversial and even downright blasphemous for some—if you know that “[t]here is a high sensitivity to disrespect and insult,” why not demonstrate “a high sensitivity” when publishing controversial results? Nevertheless, it is unfair, and unproductive to disregard the entire Group of 10 report because of the rather obnoxious delivery of its conclusions. For instance, the government findings are definitely correct in mentioning,

[t]he marginalization of South Asian people by mainstream society...resulting in feelings of anger and despair, and desire to fight the mainstream...This marginalization has also had the effect of increasing tensions within the South Asian community, which in turn can be viewed as contributing to violence within families and the community. (Canadian Heritage, 2006, II. Analysis, B. Preconditions, Historic, para.1)

It is integral to understand how the sociocentric nature of ‘Sikh’ culture continues to be challenged in its Canadian egocentric context.

The ever-changing ‘Sikh’ culture

‘Sikh’ culture in Canada has been undergoing a volatile transformation as these two worldviews confront one another. As you might expect, younger ‘Indo-Canadian’ generations often have an affinity for both of these conflicting beliefs and practices, a reality that for many of our elders is incredibly difficult to understand, respect and encourage. The older generations’ worldviews tend to more closely resemble their original social context of India, but not just India today, but India, or the village/city that they emigrated from, at a particular time in history. I wish to emphasize this last point because it is the source of considerable resistance to cultural change. It is very common for first generation immigrants in any country to maintain glorified visions of life in “the old country;” even though their country of origin has experienced substantial, and at times, extreme cultural transformation. Of course, it is unfair to solely lay the responsibility for this cultural misperception on the shoulders of our elders as many of us have made a habit doing. Clearly, being further removed from traditional ‘Sikh’ culture, as we are in general in comparison to our elders, does not innately instill ‘progressive’ perceptions of culture. Yes, and I’m sure you would agree that elders must take more responsibility due to their power positions in families, however, it would be foolish, inaccurate and counterproductive not to recognize that they are not alone. The fact is that many of us younger, ‘more modern’ generations also try to enforce static cultural definitions; “Indo-Canadian parents teach their kids to be violent by hitting them, white parents don’t.” These allusions of the ‘Sikh’ worldview often encourage elders and some younger ‘Indo-Canadians’ to become cultural preservationists, a facet of the ‘Sikh’ diaspora that needs constant, conscientious, analysis, and opposition. The resistance to cultural change that these preservationists exude embodies the clashing of the sociocentric and egocentric worldviews—they fear that we are becoming ‘too white.’ Ironically, by being so rigid, these cultural authoritarians inadvertently drive many ‘Indo-Canadians’ away from the culture entirely; as a result, their cause of maintaining pristine ‘Sikh’ culture is threatened further as their supporters dwindle. On this point, the Group of 10 have made a valid observation,

[there is a l]ack of healthy attachment and connection between some youth and their parents [along with a lack of healthy attachment between youth and the rest of the community], formed by a lack of emotional support, an authoritative environment and an absence of open and honest parent-child communication in some South Asian families. This environment does not allow youth to explore their individual and cultural identities and develop a positive sense of self within the broader Canadian community. (Canadian Heritage, 2006, II. Analysis, B. Preconditions, Family, para. 2)

Even though I agree with much of these words, it is extremely important to amend this quote in the manner that I have; we must acknowledge that alienation can emerge not just between youth and their immediate elders, but also between youth and the rest of the ‘Indo-Canadian community.’ For example, some of us make conscious choices about where we shop

because we fear gossip, condescension and ridicule, or we simply attempt to keep the transactions less intimate by not speaking Punjabi. Many preservationists take our use of Punjabi as an invitation for assessment; in other words, our experience differs from that of 'real-Canadians' since it is rare for shopkeepers to ask them questions, such as, "what is your father's full name?", "What village are you from?" and "Why aren't you married?" It is often quite emotionally challenging to be interrogated by a complete stranger while simply wanting to buy a few samosas; especially, since many of us wish to maintain our heritage and community through food, language and social interaction; like I said before, sometimes cultural authoritarians inadvertently fragment 'our community' through their misguided preservationist goals.

Those of us who explore cultural identities are incredibly troubling for those who prefer to compartmentalize culture(s); the 'Sikh community,' as does the rest of 'Canadian' society, needs to embrace the premise that many of us ascribe to more than one identity. Unfortunately, rigid notions of culture and identity persist which is a very challenging reality for many of us. This social friction leads younger generations to rely on a multitude of coping strategies. There are literally countless ways, as one would expect in a diverse culture, that we 'Indo-Canadians' make sense of our position in 'Canadian' society. We manage the cultural nexus in which we live by making positive and negative lifestyle choices. Among the healthier ones are sports, academics, art, music, religion/spirituality, and community work, while cigarettes, drugs, alcohol, theft, and unfortunately, serious crime, are among the 'dysfunctional' ones, the latter of which are often sensationalized by 'Canadian' society as a whole. I'm sure you would agree Satnam-Ji, all of us in Canada need to stop being over-dramatic about gangs and focus on how we can support young men in avoiding crime.

**Please, please 'brown' man,
You must overcome the resentment,
the isolation,
the rage at society.**

**You cannot afford to wait,
to hope that society will reach out and save you,
it is up to you, it is up to us.**

**It is up to us to chase dreams,
to Set Goals,
to Achieve Goals,
and to Make New Ones.**

**You cannot afford to wait,
you can't afford to hope that society will hold you and nurture you.**

**So, go!
Don't cower!
Go! Build relationships! Build confidence!**

**It is up to you, it is up to us.
Please ‘brown’ man, please.**

Misguided ‘Saint’ Soldiers

I whole-heartedly agree with the Group of 10 in their claim that there is a “[l]ack of accurate understanding of religious history and the true meaning of Sikhism, resulting in misguided perceptions regarding the acceptability of violence” (Canadian Heritage, 2006, II. Analysis, B. Preconditions, Cultural, para. 6). Some young ‘Indo-Canadians’ misinterpret our religious beliefs; particular, the ‘Sikh’ warrior elements are a source of confusion. Most people I know, regardless of ethnicity, have no idea that Guru Gobind Singh-Ji created the order of baptized ‘Sikhs’ (The *Khalsa*) in response to religious persecution; they have no idea that the sword and all of the military aspects of Sikhism exist in order to defend the weak. Clearly, young macho ‘Indo-Canadians’ are not defending the weak by plastering their sports cars with ‘Sikh’ religious symbols; in fact, their actions could not be any more ‘un-Sikh,’ at least in the manner in which the Guru created the *Khalsa*. Of course, it is unfair to solely blame young ‘Indo-Canadians’ for misunderstanding ‘Sikh’ doctrines. Most ‘Sikh’ parents in Canada do encourage their children to pursue certain status symbols, like cars, jewelry and expensive homes—which is why many of us just do not feel comfortable at *Gurdwaras* (temples). Like last weekend at the *paat* (wedding prayer blessing); I’m in the temple, trying to relax, to meditate, but I am constantly distracted by the social implications of my presence there.

THE WARRIOR BENEATH

**Always trying to uncover the warrior beneath,
who has been bruised and battered by multiculturalism,
the warrior who submerges and emerges,**

--who rises and embraces cross-cultural friction:

**Calmly,
Patiently,
and most of all:
MINDFULLY.**

A Multicultural Remedy

**So, you agree, we must both work on this.
We both, must strive, act and move.
We all must make an effort to improve ‘Canadian’ multiculturalism.
Me, I am willing to study it, explore it, and extend it.
Me, I am willing to challenge myself and others to be real practitioners of
multiculturalism, I encourage myself and others to look deep within, to look at our
negative stereotypes, to look at those things that we keep to ourselves, we must all look**

the discrimination that lies within us all in the eye and the misperceptions of ourselves and others that fosters the discrimination within us.

Me, I think real multiculturalism is not simply about having a few ethnic friends, it is about looking at how we see our ethnic friends in relation to ourselves and others.

Me, I think, NO--I know I must actively educate myself, what about you, what do you think?

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