

REPRESENTATION OF GENDER, MARRIAGE, PUNJABI DIASPORA AND THE  
HOMELAND IN PUNJABI CINEMA

by

REETINDER KAUR

B.Sc., Panjab University, 2007

M.Sc., Panjab University, 2009

Ph.D. Panjab University, 2013

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The following individuals certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies for acceptance, the thesis entitled:

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the degree of Master of Arts

in Asian Studies

**Examining Committee:**

Dr. Sunera Thobani, Professor, Department of Asian Studies, UBC

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**Supervisor**

Dr. Gurinder Mann, Lecturer, Department of Asian Studies, UBC

---

**Supervisory Committee Member**

Dr Tsering Shakya, Associate Professor, Department of Asian Studies, UBC

---

**Supervisory Committee Member**

Dr. Christopher Rea, Professor, Department of Asian Studies, UBC

---

**Additional Examiner**

## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the construction of gender, marriage, homeland, and diaspora in three transnational Punjabi films set in Indian Punjab, Canada and the United Kingdom. Three major themes emerge from the films under study: construction of masculinities and femininities; imagined and embodied homeland; and desires to 'return' to the homeland within diasporic communities. The discussion relevant to the broader themes of migration, marriage, homeland, and the diaspora are presented under each of these themes.

## **Lay Summary**

This thesis examines the construction of gender, marriage, homeland, and diaspora in transnational Punjabi cinema as well as how Punjabi and diasporic masculinities and femininities are constructed at the intersection of gender and marriage.

## **Preface**

This thesis is the original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Reetinder Kaur. The Punjabi to English translations (example, film dialogues, songs) used in this thesis are my own.

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## **Dedication**

To my family



## Chapter 1: Introduction

The emergence of transnational Punjabi cinema<sup>1</sup> can be traced to the early 2000s with the release of films such as *Jee Aayan Nu* (2003), a film set partly in Punjab<sup>2</sup> and partly in Canada.<sup>3</sup> This movie made it more common to include diaspora and diasporic spaces in Punjabi cinema. Gill (2012) refers to this as a ‘Non-Resident India (NRI) genre’ of Punjabi cinema.<sup>4</sup> This genre differs significantly from transnational Hindi cinema as it focuses on reproducing histories, Punjabi culture, dominant caste identities, and interrelationships, while highlighting the issues and factors pertinent to Punjab and the Punjabi diaspora.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, the emergence of this cinema parallels the ‘revival’ of peace<sup>6</sup> in Punjab and emphasises the importance of NRIs ‘return’ to Punjab in maintaining this peace.<sup>7</sup>

The transnational Punjabi cinema features the homeland and the Canada- and UK-based diasporas; their connectedness to the homeland is represented through

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term transnational Punjabi films or cinema to refer to the films that represent the interactions between Punjabi and diasporic characters as well as showcase both the homeland and the diaspora through real locations and circumstances. In the context of the films under study, *Munde UK De* is the only exception where the UK is not portrayed in any of the film’s scenes; however, there are significant references in the film that situate the characters in the diasporic space relevant to the UK.

<sup>2</sup> I use the term Punjab to refer to Indian Punjab or East Punjab. All the films under study, too, are set in Indian Punjab or East Punjab.

<sup>3</sup> Harjant Gill, “Masculinity, mobility and transformation in Punjabi cinema: From *Putt Jattan De* (Sons of Jat Farmers) to *Munde UK De* (Boys of UK),” *South Asian Popular Culture*, 10, no. 2 (2012), 114.

NRI is a popular term used in India to refer to the Indian diaspora.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>6</sup> I use the term peace to refer to the late 1990s and early 2000s in Punjab, when the government of Punjab announced the revival of peace after Sikhs-State conflict that led to the international migration of Sikhs from Punjab.

<sup>7</sup> Tribune News Service, February 24, 1993; Tribune News Service, April 19, 1994.

storylines, dialogues, locations, artefacts, and cultural exchanges. These films introduce the transnational element by shooting in a country outside of India to represent either a real or artificially created transnational space, through a storyline that encapsulates the themes from both worlds, or by representing the characters who embody, and exhibit traits closely related to the diaspora. Prior research on Punjabi cinema has largely concentrated on the representation of masculinities (Gill, 2012; Abbi, 2020; Chopra, 2015), the representation of diasporas (Nagra, 2011), emerging trends in Sikh identity politics (Chopra, 2015; Abbi, 2020), and the emergence of Sikh middle-class male protagonist (Abbi, 2020). There is a limited focus in Punjabi cinema on how the diaspora and homeland interact at the intersection of marriage and migration in the homeland as well as in transnational spaces.

This thesis aims to explore the construction and representation of gender, marriage, homeland, and diaspora in transnational Punjabi cinema. I analyze the three films *Jee Aayan Nu* (2003), *UK Munde De* (2009), and *Guddian Patole* (2019). These films were selected to answer the following research questions because of their popularity and diverse transnational content: (i) How are gender, marriage, diaspora, and homeland constructed in transnational Punjabi films? (ii) How are Punjabi and diasporic masculinities and femininities constructed at the intersection of gender and marriage? The films under study are analyzed using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Bateman, 2017).<sup>8</sup> CDA involves a detailed analysis of the film scene-by-scene, focusing on the actors, locations, artefacts, conversation between actors, and content of

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<sup>8</sup> John A. Bateman, "Critical discourse analysis and film," in *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Discourse Studies*. ed. John Flowerdew and John E. Richardson (London: Routledge, 2017), 612-624.

the conversation to unfold the structure of the multilayer film discourse (Bateman, 2017). Using CDA allowed me to link these films to their larger social, cultural, economic, and political contexts. The data is categorized into major themes and presented thematically.

I analyze the films from the positionality of a Punjabi Jat Sikh immigrant woman with lived experiences of marriage in Punjab and migration to Canada, as well as the performance of the roles assigned to women within this community in Punjab and in Canada.

### **1.1 Overview of the Films**

*Jee Aayan Nu* (2003) revolves around the 'return' of a diasporic family to Punjab, including the father, Jasbir Grewal, played by Kanwaljit Singh, his daughter, Simar, played by Priya Gill, and his wife, Kuldeep, played by Navneet Nishan. Simar meets Inder, played by Harbhajan Mann in Punjab, and both fall in love. However, the lack of clarity about where this couple will reside after their wedding leads to confusion, and the families call off the engagement. Simar and her family leave for Canada, and Inder follows them. In the end, Inder convinces Simar to 'return' to her homeland. The film portrays the struggles of life in Punjab and Canada.

The story of *Munde UK De* revolves around two diasporic men, Roop, played by Jimmy Shergill, and DJ, played by Gurpreet Ghuggi, who visit Punjab for the first time to meet Roop's grandfather. Roop's father migrated to the UK and was never able to 'return' to his homeland. As he dies in the UK, Roop decides to pay a visit to his grandfather to see where his father belonged. As grandfather and grandson develop a

closer relationship, the grandfather thinks that the only way to keep Roop connected to his 'roots' is through his marriage to a Punjabi woman. Roop meets Reet, the female protagonist of the film, through a cousin and begins to like her. She refuses to marry Roop at first and later regrets her decision. Meanwhile, Reet's father fixes her marriage to Jagjot, the parallel male lead played by Amrinder Gill, leading to conflicts in the lives of Roop and Reet. Both try to resolve this with the help of Jagjot and their female friend from the UK. This chaos ends, and both marry.

In *Guddian Patole*, Manjeet, a Canadian woman, receives a letter from her family in Punjab after twenty years. Her family invites her to a birthday party. She is apprehensive about visiting them and instead requests her daughters Nicole, played by Tania, and Kashmir (alias Kash), played by Sonam Bajwa, to visit the family on her behalf. The reason for her apprehension is her unsuccessful interracial marriage. The older daughter Kash lives with her father, stepmother, and stepbrother, while the younger daughter Nicole lives with her. As Kash is a 'misfit' within her White family, her father, too, suggests she go to Punjab and take it as a 'trip.' Both the sisters embark on this journey to Punjab and build a strong relationship with their maternal grandmother; both come across three men who are actively trying to woo them to marry and migrate to Canada. Kash, finally, decides to marry Amreek, played by Gurnam Bhullar, who is their cab driver, and remain in Punjab. Amreek, too, leaves his desire to migrate to Canada to live with Kash in Punjab.

The ending of *Guddian Patole* is interesting in the context of the ongoing separatist conflict in Indian Kashmir and the debate regarding which country has a claim over Kashmir: India or Pakistan. Using the name Kashmir and an ending suggestive of

the idea that Kashmir belongs to India, the filmmaker tries to link Punjabi identity to Indian national identity – an idea that may lead to wider acceptance of this cinema beyond the Punjabi audiences.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, the previous films, *Jee Aayan Nu* and *Munde UK De*, represent the silence of transnational Punjabi films about the Sikhs' conflict with the State and the reasons for international migration from Punjab in the late 1980s and 1990s. Through these attempts, the transnational Punjabi cinema tries to dissociate itself from the politics of Punjab and the Sikhs-State conflict and focuses on the 'return' of the diasporic characters to Punjab and the 'revival' of peace.

Another interesting aspect of transnational Punjabi cinema is the centrality and portrayal of caste relations specific to Punjab, with its focus on the land-owning Jat Sikh community. It is important to note that the caste system is often associated with the Hindu religion; however, it is integral to religions and communities that are minoritized within India, the Hindu-majority nation, as well. Punjab's economy depends upon agriculture and the allied sectors, and the land-owning Jat Sikh community is a 'dominant caste' in Punjab – ones who are numerically higher in number as well as control the economic resources.<sup>10</sup> The films under study represent the dominant caste narratives within Punjab similar to the Hindi cinema that "upholds the prominence of Brahmanical order"<sup>11</sup> and underrepresents the marginalized voices including those who are socially constructed as 'lower' castes or the economically marginalized migrants

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<sup>9</sup> Arti Singh and EP Abdul Azeez, "Caste in contemporary Bollywood movies: An analysis of the portrayal of characters," *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 49, no. 2 (2021), 94.

<sup>10</sup> Steve Taylor, "Punjabi Dalit transnational mobility: Challenging caste inequalities," in *Provincial Globalization in India: Transregional Mobilities and Development Politics*. Ed. Carol Upadhyya, Mario Rutten and Leah Koskimaki, (London: Routledge, 2018), 124.

<sup>11</sup> Suraj Yengde, "Dalit cinema," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 41, no. 3 (2018), 506.

from other parts of India. To understand the caste relationships in the context of these films, I will highlight and analyze the caste relationships at the intersection of gender, marriage, diaspora, and the homeland throughout the thesis.

## 1.2 The Jat Sikh community

In India, Sikhs are a minoritized religion, at 1.7% of the country's population.<sup>12</sup> In the State of Punjab, Sikhs constitute 57.69% of Punjab's population, while Hindus constitute 38.49%, followed by Muslims (1.93%) and Christians (1.26%), according to the Census of India (2011).<sup>13</sup> Among the Sikhs, Jats are a dominant caste<sup>14</sup> group who are largely involved in agriculture and allied sectors. One of the important features of the Jat Sikh community is its dominance and control over the economic resources and political leadership as well as their larger population in Punjab.<sup>15,16</sup> Additionally, there is a history of international migration from this community, with a boost to the migration of men specifically in the mid-1980s to the late 1990s (Chopra, 2015)<sup>17</sup> as well as ongoing migration that creates a platform for transnational Punjabi cinema to grow.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Census of India, 2011 <https://www.census2011.co.in/data/religion/4-sikhism.html>

<sup>13</sup> Census of India, 2011 <https://www.census2011.co.in/data/religion/state/3-punjab.html>

<sup>14</sup> Hindu Varna/caste system represents the caste hierarchies that situate Brahmins (the priestly caste) at the top of this system, followed by Kshatriyas (warrior castes), Vaishyas (trader castes), and Shudras (the 'lower' castes who socially serve the three castes). Dalits are situated outside of this caste system, and they are often assigned tasks that are not performed by all the four caste groups in the Hindu Varna system. Although this caste system is largely described within the Hindu religion, it can be observed in minoritized religions and communities in India.

<sup>15</sup> <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/punjab-jat-sikhs-and-their-political-dominance/articleshow/89882577.cms>

<sup>16</sup> Abbi, n.d. <https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/sikh-formations-podcast/2022/03/02/sharpening-caste-and-religious-identity-politics-in-the-punjab-elections/>

<sup>17</sup> Radhika Chopra, "Ziddi Munde: Political asylum, transnational movement and the migrations of men," in *Migration, Mobility and Multiple Affiliations: Punjabis in a Transnational World*. Ed. S. Rajan, V. Varghese and A. Kumar Nanda (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 136.

<sup>18</sup> Gurbachan Jagat. "Punjab's exodus without an end," *The Tribune* 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019.

Consequently, all the male and female protagonists of the films under study identify as Jat Sikh,<sup>19</sup> embodying the dominant caste identity both in Punjab as well as in diasporic spaces. Interestingly, this narrative is different from the Hindi cinema that presents the dominant Hindu caste, where “Brahmins and allied castes have actively imposed their hegemony on the medium of mainstream cultural expression.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, in this thesis, I position transnational Punjabi cinema as different and separate from transnational Hindi cinema.

Some of the important characteristics of the Jat Sikh community that I will highlight in this thesis include caste endogamy,<sup>21</sup> village exogamy,<sup>22</sup> relation to ancestral agricultural land, patriarchal inheritance of traditional agricultural land,<sup>23</sup> desire for international migration, and transnational marriages. These characteristics have implications for how gender, marriage, diaspora, and homeland are constructed in the transnational Punjabi films under study. In addition, I will also highlight the inter-caste relationships portrayed in these films.

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<sup>19</sup> Throughout the thesis, I will use the term Jat Sikh instead of Jat as the latter term is widely used in India as synonymous with farming communities and may not solely represent the Sikh community in Punjab.

<sup>20</sup> Suraj Yengde, “Dalit cinema,” *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 41, no. 3 (2018), 506

<sup>21</sup> Caste endogamy here refers to the expectation of marrying within one’s caste group.

<sup>22</sup> Village exogamy here refers to the expectation of marrying outside of one’s village, as everyone in one’s village is considered a brother and sister, an uncle, and an aunt.

<sup>23</sup> Within the Jat Sikh community, the traditional or ancestral agricultural land is inherited by sons only and not daughters. The only exception to this norm is when a family only has a daughter or daughters; then it may decide to distribute the land among the daughters or may give away the complete or partial share to a nephew. The one who inherits land is expected to take care of the parents. I have observed that the women who inherit agricultural land have an added value attached to their social status in comparison to ‘other’ women who do not inherit the land. This added value may help them find a spouse with a higher social status.

The following three chapters of the thesis discuss the major themes presented in the films. Chapter 2, “Construction of Masculinities and Femininities”, highlights the characteristics and roles assigned to men and women in Punjab and in the diaspora and discusses how these characteristics function at the intersection of marriage and migration. Chapter 3, “Imagined and Embodied Homeland and the Diasporas”, focuses on the construction of homeland and diasporic spaces at the intersection of gender, marriage, caste, class, and migration. Chapter 4, “Desires – to ‘Return’ and Migrate”, aims to highlight two contrasting processes of ‘return’ of the diaspora: the desire to migrate among Punjabi men and women, and explore the underlying reasons for the same.



## Chapter 2: Construction of Masculinities and femininities

In this chapter, I focus on the construction of Punjabi<sup>24</sup> and diasporic<sup>25</sup> masculinities and femininities<sup>26</sup> at the intersection of migration and marriage under two sub-themes: (i) ‘protectors’ of culture and (ii) ‘heirs’, ‘caretakers’ and economic ‘providers.’

### 2.1 ‘Protectors’ of Culture

There are several examples from the films where men act as ‘protectors’ of cultural values in both diasporic spaces as well as in Punjab.<sup>27</sup> The culture is defined and imposed by men upon women, representing the power dynamics and differentials among the Jat Sikhs, a community overrepresented in the films. One of the significant examples is Jasbir Singh Grewal<sup>28</sup> from *Jee Aayan Nu*, a diasporic Jat Sikh man who is introduced as someone “*who kept his culture and tradition alive in Canada through his*

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<sup>24</sup> For purposes of this analysis, I will use the term ‘Punjabi’ to refer to individuals born and raised in Punjab and those who currently live in Punjab in the context of the film. It is important to note that the use of the terms Punjabi identity or nationalism is not synonymous with Indian nationalism specifically in the context of transnational Punjabi cinema as (i) Sikhs represent only 2% of India’s population and are a minoritized religion; (ii) because of the Sikh genocide in 1984 onwards and the Sikh-State conflicts and desire for Sikhs to separate from the Indian nation-state.

<sup>25</sup> I use the term ‘diasporic’ for the individuals who may be born or raised in Punjab but currently live outside of Punjab. I will use the term ‘homeland’ to refer to Punjab.

<sup>26</sup> It is important to note that gender is represented as binary in all three Punjab films under study, except for the representation of one transgender character in *Munde UK De*. This character is one of the popular characters from the comedy team *atro chatro* played by two male Punjabi artists who act as women in films, television programs, and stage shows. Much is not known about their gender identity.

<sup>27</sup> Purnima Mankekar, “Brides who travel: Gender, transnationalism, and nationalism in Hindi film,” *Positions*, 7 no. 3 (1999), 739.

<sup>28</sup> Jasbir, a university professor based in the capital city of Punjab, Chandigarh, migrated along with his wife and daughter to Canada in the 1980s. The reason for his migration is not discussed in the film. However, the timeline of Jasbir’s migration as well as the release of this film is interesting in the context of the Sikh genocide of the 1980s-1990s and State’s announcement on the revival of peace in the late 1990s.

*Punjabi radio and television channel.*” This diasporic man’s efforts to “keep his culture alive” translate to his family as well. His daughter Simar<sup>29</sup> associates herself closely with his work among the Punjabi-speaking community in Vancouver, and she accompanies him on a ‘trip’ to Punjab to capture the folk dances for his television channel. Jasbir sees this ‘trip’ as an opportunity for him and his family to reconnect with their homeland.<sup>30</sup> This ‘trip’ acts as an opportunity for Simar to engage with Inder, Jasbir’s friend’s son, whom she likes and desires to marry. Inder, too, reciprocates the feelings, and both families agree to their marriage. Inder and Simar’s relationship is an example of an ‘arranged love marriage,’ a concept explained by Uberoi (1998) whereby a romantic choice already made is endorsed by parental approval and treated thereafter as an ‘arranged marriage.’<sup>31</sup> Uberoi suggests that this type of marriage is an ideal solution to the conflict between arranged and love marriages specifically as it addresses the expectations of caste endogamy<sup>32</sup> as well as individual freedom of choice.<sup>33</sup> This concept may also address the stereotype of arranged marriage imposed on Indian as

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<sup>29</sup> Simar is a diasporic woman born in rural Punjab and raised in Canada who visits Punjab after 15 years.

<sup>30</sup> I use the term ‘homeland’ to refer to Indian Punjab throughout the thesis.

<sup>31</sup> Patricia Uberoi, “The diaspora come home: Disciplining desire in DDLJ,” *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 32, no. 2, 306-307.

<sup>32</sup> Caste endogamy, here, refers to the expectation to marry within one’s caste. Among the Jat Sikh community, there is an expectation of village exogamy and caste endogamy. All the men and women within the same village refer to each other as brothers and sisters or uncles and aunts, and marriage within one village is taboo. Kang notes that the idea of village exogamy extends to diasporic spaces as well. Citing an example of ‘Hitchin exogamy’, Kang states that Punjabi community members who grew up in Hitchin (England) consider each other brothers and sisters; they generally find a spouse from outside of their close-knit community in Hitchin. Also see Qureshi 2016, p. 1218.

<sup>33</sup> Patricia Uberoi, “The diaspora come home: Disciplining desire in DDLJ,” *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 32, no. 2, 306-307.

well as diasporic Indian communities.<sup>34</sup> As Simar chooses Inder, who is from the same caste and equivalent class, her father immediately agrees to the alliance. As limitations are set on who can be a spouse<sup>35</sup> specifically for women,<sup>36</sup> the social compatibility of caste and class between Inder and Simar is accepted by both families despite the differences in their citizenship status. However, question “*where will Inder stay after the wedding?*” sparks debate at the engagement function, leading both families to call off the engagement. Following this, Jasbir and his family return to Canada. Inder, too, follows them to persuade Simar into marriage.

During his ‘trip’ to Punjab, Jasbir chooses to remain silent about another daughter, Anna, as he disapproves of her live-in relationship and the decision to move out of the family home without marriage, an institution highly valued both culturally and socially in the context of the film. As Anna ‘returns’ home in a drunk condition<sup>37</sup> and is helped by Inder and his friend, Jasbir asks Anna, “*I had told you not to come to ‘my’ house. Now what have you come here for?*” He slaps her and tells her to call the police

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<sup>34</sup> Neelu Kang, “Inter-generational tensions and cultural reproduction in a Punjabi community in England,” in *Migration, Mobility and Multiple Affiliations: Punjabis in a Transnational World*. Ed. S. Rajan, V. Varghese and A. Kumar Nanda (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 366-367.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 366-367. Kang notes that a matrimonial alliance with a Muslim or a Black person is not accepted. Women are expected to take caste endogamy more seriously than men. Kang further notes that some of the men in Hitchin were married to British, Italian or Hindu women and quotes a woman suggesting that “*if a daughter marries outside, she will have to adopt her husband’s culture.*”

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, Kang suggests that the women in the diasporic communities are expected to follow the caste exogamy more strictly than men (p.367). Further, Kang argues that the diasporic communities may be liberal in accepting love marriages; however, they actively participate in the ‘reproduction of caste norms’ by imposing restrictions on one’s romantic choices (p.366).

<sup>37</sup> As none of the women characters in the film *Jee Aayan Nu* are represented as alcohol consumers, Anna’s character is ‘deviant’ in this context. Not only through her live-in relationship, but she also challenges cultural values and norms through the consumption of alcohol, which is constructed as an important aspect of the performance of both Punjabi and diasporic masculinities.

to make a complaint against him. In this scene, Jasbir's wife, Kuldeep comes to her daughter's rescue and pleads, "*Who hits a daughter like that? She has come home after so long and is saying sorry. Give her one opportunity.*" Jasbir lashes out at his wife as well and makes it clear that "*there is no place for Anna in 'his' house.*" Kuldeep further requests, "*where will she go at this hour in the night?*" However, Jasbir pushes Anna away. Finally, the older daughter, Simar, convinces her father to 'allow' Anna to stay at 'his' house. In this scene, Jasbir subjects Anna to violence as she challenges the cultural expectations of virginity and marriage. This is similar to transnational Hindi film's construction of the West as a site where an Indian woman's virginity is constantly under threat and the diasporic man guards their cultural purity.<sup>38</sup> Likewise, Jasbir's sense of loss of 'control' over Anna is directly linked to her loss of virginity and Jasbir's inability to protect her sexual purity, which he sees as synonymous with her cultural purity. Inder, too, tries to protect Simar's modesty as he tells her to "*give a name to their unnamed relationship*" through marriage, which is socially acceptable.

Through his claims of ownership rights over his Canadian house, Jasbir extends the traditional patriarchal idea of inheritance and ownership<sup>39</sup> to his Canadian family. Women, too, accept the violence as Jasbir's 'right' and normalize the patriarchal claims of ownership. Further, Simar describes this familial conflict as "an outcome of cultural and generational differences" and not as gendered violence. However, at another

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<sup>38</sup> Purnima Mankekar, "Brides who travel: Gender, transnationalism, and nationalism in Hindi film," *Positions*, 7, no. 3 (1999), 739.

<sup>39</sup> All the films project the idea that the "traditional agricultural land belongs to men" in the Jat Sikh community and that the land is inherited by men and not women.

instance in the film, Simar supports Jassi,<sup>40</sup> a recent immigrant, who has been subjected to violence by her husband and mother-in-law, and helps her understand her legal rights in Canada. Simar's character embodies this dichotomy, where she views gendered violence within her home differently in comparison to similar violence perpetrated against Jassi. This suggests that Simar, too, embodies the desire to 'protect' cultural purity in the diasporic space, like her father. This is an interesting example of how women are deeply connected to the patriarchal structures of authority within Punjab as well as in diasporic spaces.

To resolve her father's conflict with Anna, Simar tells him, "There are huge differences in how he and Anna think" and requests that he understand the situation. She, too, talks to Anna about relationships and marriage expectations within their community. Anna tells her, "*I don't understand why dad took it [the relationship] so seriously.*" Simar argues that she has stayed in Punjab for a few months and "*over there, such a thing is not thinkable,*" and to which Anna responds, "*I haven't stayed in Punjab. I don't know anything about Punjab. How do I know how life is over there?*" Anna's character, here, is subjected to patriarchal and cultural expectations that she is not aware of; however, her father is raised with such expectations, and in the diasporic space, he acts as a 'protector' of these cultural values. In addition, none of the family members talk about the incident outside of their family, a phenomenon noted by Kang

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<sup>40</sup> Jassi is a confident young woman who was raised in rural Punjab by her father, a marginal farmer, along with her two sisters. She lost her mother when she was young. As someone interested in Indian theatre, she moved to the city to find training and work opportunities in the field. She has a close and flirtatious relationship with Inder, whom she loves dearly. As Inder develops closeness towards Simar and Jassi's father shares their financial situation with her, she decides to marry a Canadian man to support her family.

among the Punjabi families in Hitchin where violence within the family unit is often hidden owing to ideas such as family honour and shame.<sup>41</sup> Further, the film projects the complex hybridity<sup>42</sup> of Anna's life, where she struggles to understand the complexities of the 'traditional' and the 'Western.' Kang suggests that second-generation women may face an identity crisis when the 'out-group' culture influences and shapes their attitude and behaviour in the diasporic space, and they may de-idealize their parents and the community during their adolescent years and may value the family and community later in life.<sup>43</sup>

In *Munde UK De*, Roop 'returns' to Punjab, his grandfather Gurdit Singh feels that marriage to a Punjabi woman would keep him connected to his homeland. Roop's family approaches Reet's family with a marriage proposal, however, Reet refuses to marry him, although her father is keen on this transnational marriage. She mistakes Roop for someone who is looking for an "*obedient Punjabi wife*." Later Reet regrets her decision as she meets Roop through her friend and finds him to be a nice man. Reet's father does not approve of this love affair and tells her, "*This isn't vilayat*."<sup>44</sup> *This is Punjab*," stressing the cultural expectations of them to maintain social boundaries with men before their marriage. Through this construction, Reet's Punjabi father, too, constructs her as a site of cultural preservation and himself as a 'protector' of the culture and cultural values. Consequently, he arranges Reet's marriage to a Punjabi man,

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<sup>41</sup> Neelu Kang, "Inter-generational tensions and cultural reproduction in a Punjabi community in England," in *Migration, Mobility and Multiple Affiliations: Punjabis in a Transnational World*. Ed. S. Rajan, V. Varghese and A. Kumar Nanda (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 368.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 370

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, 363-364.

<sup>44</sup> The term *vilayat* is often used to refer to England, and in postcolonial India, this term is used to refer to spaces where the South Asian diaspora has migrated.

Jagjot, to 'protect' his family's honour, which is threatened by Reet's relationship with Roop. There is an interesting conversation between Roop and Reet:

Roop: *You mean to say that your father fixed the engagement with someone without your approval, and you didn't say anything? You just stood there and watched it happen?*

Reet: *What else could I have done, Roop?*

Roop: *This is your life. It's the question of your life, Reet. Who is he to decide about your marriage?*

Reet: *He can do anything.*

Roop: *How can he do anything? Okay, let's go and get married in court.*

Reet: *I don't know about you, but they will kill me.*

Roop: *What? They are so cruel. He doesn't care about his daughter's happiness. What kind of man is he?*

Reet: *This is how it is over here, Roop. They can kill for us [daughters], and they can kill us [daughters] as well.*

Roop: *I can't leave you in this situation.*

In this conversation, Roop is surprised at how marriages are arranged in Punjab, solely by fathers and brothers, without considering a woman's wishes. Further, he is amazed at Jagjot's decision to marry Reet merely by looking at her photograph. Roop

feels frustrated with the situation and asks DJ, *“What type of system exists here? They fix the marriage without the girl’s consent. Shocking.”* Roop further compares the Punjabi families in Punjab and the UK and shares that the families in the UK have become more open and accepting of love marriages. He further shares with Reet, *“People go from here to the UK; why don’t they have any objections [to the love marriages] there? The families feel happy if the [diasporic] Punjabi men and women marry each other. They feel relieved that their children are not marrying Whites or Blacks. Sometimes they agree with that too.”* This conversation suggests that the Punjabi families in the diaspora ‘protect’ the culture by accepting love marriages that conform to caste, race, and religion. This phenomenon is noted by Kang among the diasporic Punjabi families, who tend to protect the ‘Punjabi social identity’ by defining the norms for love marriages and relationships. Further, Kang notes that marriage with someone who is a Muslim, Black, or White is not accepted.<sup>45</sup> This is noted to be specifically more important concerning women, as *“if a daughter marries outside [of the community], she will have to adopt [her] husband’s culture.”*<sup>46</sup> Despite this limited acceptance of interracial marriages within the Jat Sikh community, there are two prominent examples of such marriages in the films under study.

In *Jee Aayan Nu*, Inder’s Canadian friend Iqbal is married to a White woman who has immersed herself in Punjabi culture through her language, dress, and the change of her English name to a Punjabi name.<sup>47</sup> This example represents an easy transition of a

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<sup>45</sup> Neelu Kang, “Inter-generational tensions and cultural reproduction in a Punjabi community in England,” in *Migration, Mobility and Multiple Affiliations: Punjabis in a Transnational World*. Ed. S. Rajan, V. Varghese and A. Kumar Nanda (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 367.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 367.

<sup>47</sup> Ranjanpreet Kaur Nagra, “British by Raj, Punjabi by Heart,” *Sikh Formations*, 7, no. 2 (2011), 165.



White woman to a Punjabi diasporic family. However, Manjeet and Johnson's interracial marriage in *Guddian Patole* presents some complexities, including divorce, custody of the children, and the broken relationship with Manjeet's family in Punjab, who did not accept the relationship. The film represents this interracial marriage as Manjeet's "biggest mistake." This is in favour of Nagra's suggestion that transnational Punjabi films present little to no opportunity for interracial romance, and romance, if any, is for comic relief.<sup>48</sup> Even as Manjeet finally reconnects to her mother after twenty years, she questions her: "*you probably thought that your father would get you married to someone dark and ugly. So, you find someone as fair as milk for yourself. I am sure that gora [White man] wouldn't love you more than me. Did you never miss me?*" Manjeet's mother refers to her former husband by his ethnicity and not his name, as she shows her disinterest in him, possibly because he is an 'outsider' in terms of race and ethnicity.

In *Munde UK De*, Reet's father opposes her relationship with Roop and attempts to 'protect' the family's honour and culture by fixing Reet's marriage to Jagjot. Despite her father's opposition, Reet decides not to go against him. Both Reet and Roop tell Jagjot about their relationship and request that he call off the engagement. Jagjot asks Reet "*What would you do if I don't call off this engagement?*" She responds, "*I will then sacrifice my happiness, but I won't go against my father's wishes. I will remain faithful to the one whom I will marry.*" Here, Reet embodies a woman who supports the decisions made by men in the family. Jagjot is surprised at how 'modern' and educated Punjabi women are expected to sacrifice their happiness and desires to fulfill their father's

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<sup>48</sup> Ranjanpreet Kaur Nagra, "British by Raj, Punjabi by Heart," *Sikh Formations*, 7, no. 2 (2011), 164.

wishes and to save the family's honour. His expectation of a 'modern' and educated Punjabi woman is to take a stand for herself rather than submit to the family's wishes.

In *Jee Aayan Nu*, Jassi's alcoholic Canadian husband, Jagga, physically abuses her. In a scene, Jagga's mother tells him to keep Jassi in 'control' as they fear that she may have an extramarital relationship. In response, Jagga pushes Jassi outside their home and tells her to leave. Here, Jagga, too, attempts to 'protect' the culture and his family's honour by subjecting Jassi to violence as well as claiming ownership rights over the house where they live. Simar helps Jassi understand her rights in Canada, which makes the situation better for her. In all the examples provided in this section, men act as 'protectors' of culture; however, it is through women that they attempt to 'protect' the culture both in Punjab and in the diasporic spaces. The examples of Anna and Jassi suggest that women may be subjected to violence to 'protect' the culture and that violence may be justified in the name of cultural preservation in the diasporic space.

## **2.2 'Heirs', 'Caretakers', and 'Providers'**

Men, both unmarried and married, act as 'caretakers' and economic 'providers' for their families through fulfilling familial responsibilities as well as financial contributions towards the family. As the films revolve around characters who identify as Jat Sikhs, a land-owning dominant caste group in Punjab, the major source of their income is agricultural land. Within this caste group, the traditional agricultural land is inherited by men only and not by women. Thus, the role of men as 'providers' is supported by the social structure that favours men through the inheritance of financial resources. Further, the construction of men as 'caretakers' of their parents is deeply

linked to the property rights ascribed to them and recognized both socially and legally, irrespective of their migration status. The example of Jasbir and Roop from the films *Jee Aayan Nu* and *Munde UK De*, who are citizens of Canada and the UK, respectively, is significant in this context. Both are accepted as 'heirs' of their family's agricultural land and their ancestral home in Punjab, and this property has been maintained by their kin group for around two decades in the case of both Jasbir and Roop. As Jasbir visits his ancestral home with his wife and daughter, it looks clean and well-maintained. Roop, too, is welcomed as *ghar da varis* (family's heir) by his grandfather, who makes him aware of his inheritance.

On the contrary, women are not constructed as 'heirs' of the family. In *Guddian Patole*, the real reason for inviting Manjeet to a birthday party after twenty years of disconnect was to initiate the conversation around the distribution of ancestral agricultural land. However, as she sends her daughters on her behalf, the uncles, Ajaib and Labhu, initiate this conversation with Nicole and Kash:

Ajaib: *Daughter, brother Labhu wants to talk to you.*

Labhu: *Daughter, I have been thinking for the last few days about whether to discuss this with you or not. You know how we are a big, happy family. We all live together peacefully. We don't fight over land like others. But who knows about the future? See, our mother has aged. My health has not been great lately. We all sat together and decided that we should all take our shares now. We don't want our kids to fight in the future.*

Ajaib: *And then, daughter, all of you are well settled in Canada. Right? As for us, we are bound to suffer here. I thought that you are already here. Why don't we take our shares and end this matter? And you know this is what has been happening for ages: the land always belongs to the sons.*

Aunt: *We had invited your mother, but she sent you two.*

Kash: *Let us know what you want to do.*

In this conversation, the uncles explain to their nieces the cultural 'rules' of land inheritance, whereby men are the sole inheritors and women have no rights over their parental agricultural land. Kash, who has an expressive and outgoing personality, chooses to stay quiet as if she has accepted the idea presented by her uncles. Later, the grandmother rebukes her sons for getting the land transferred in their name; however, she clarifies, "*It is your land. She [your sister] won't be coming here,*" as she assures her sons that the land belongs to them.

Although all men are constructed as 'heirs' to their ancestral land and home irrespective of their migration status, there were important differences in how the Punjabi men constructed the masculinities of the diasporic men and the way they distinguished themselves from these diasporic men. Jasbir's friend Arjun Singh, who wears a turban, looks at him and says, "*No beard, no moustaches, no turban, you have turned into a complete vilayati babu (Englishman),*" pointing towards his haircut and clean-shaven look. This has been noted by Garha in their ethnographic work, which suggests that the clean-shaven men are often constructed as "effeminate and less masculine" by the men who conform to the patriarchal hegemonic rural Sikh masculinity.<sup>49</sup> Gill (2022) notes that a Sikh man who wears a turban is seen as a 'complete man.'<sup>50</sup> However, in *Munde UK De*, DJ's character receives criticism over his

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<sup>49</sup> Nachatter Singh Garha, "Masculinity in the Sikh community in Italy and Spain: Expectations and Challenges," *Religions*, 11, no. 2 (2020), 6.

<sup>50</sup> Gill, Harjant S., "Transnational hair (and turban): Sikh masculinity, embodied practices, and politics of representation in an era of global travel," *Ethnography*, 23, no. 2 (2022), 233.

UK-style turban as Roop's grandfather tells him, "*Son, change your outlook. Dress as locals. Wear a turban like me, you will look very handsome.*" DJ, too, realizes that he would not be able to find a partner in Punjab if he did not change his dressing style and outlook. Interestingly, there is a lot of discussion in the film around DJ's masculinity and the way he is 'different' from the Punjabi men. His outlook is referred to as 'weird' in one of the songs in the film. One of the possible explanations is his lack of fluency in the Punjabi language, and the construction of his social class as a college dropout and as someone unable to trace his ancestral land or inheritance in Punjab.

In the films, the responsibilities of parental care were largely associated with men. Jassi's character in *Jee Aayan Nu*, who belongs to a marginal farming family, is an exception. She marries a Canadian man to support her sisters' migration to Canada. Her father calls her Jassa (a male version of her name, Jassi) as she rises above her father's expectations and *becomes* a son. Another example of a woman character who acts as a 'provider' is Inder's sister, Kuljeet. There is a limited discussion around her at the beginning of the film; however, later in the film, her character shapes as a dutiful Canadian wife who works hard to support her husband in debt and has never had an opportunity to visit her parents in Punjab since she got married. The parents, too, never tried to meet her until Inder paid a visit and learned about her financial condition. This example highlights the cultural expectation of women to support their spouse in all adverse situations and to distance themselves from their parents and siblings after their marriage. On the contrary, men exhibit their closeness and affection for their parents and unmarried siblings openly. The two prominent examples include Jasbir and Inder from *Jee Aayan Nu*. Jasbir expresses guilt and sadness over his inability to meet his

parents and attend their last rites after he migrates to Canada. The reason, however, remains unclear. Inder, too, exhibits closeness to his parents. His father describes him as a *mithra meva* (sweet dry fruit), a common expression attached to a male child. Likewise, Inder calls his mother a dense, shady tree in a song:<sup>51</sup>

*I have not seen a tree as dense as a mother* (lines 1 and 2).

*God has taken the shade from her to create heavens* (lines 3 and 4).

One of Inder's Canadian friends asks him about his concerns regarding migration to Canada. He responds, "*There is no problem. But I am very happy at the place where I live [Punjab]*" and suggests that his parents would not be able to reside with him in Canada and he cannot live away from them. He also makes it clear that "*if Simar wants to stay with him, then she'll have to stay in Punjab.*" At another instance in the film, his mother, too, expresses that she would not be able to leave the lifestyle she has in Punjab to restart a life in Canada. For both Inder and his mother, these ideas are deeply rooted in patriarchal expectations of the son to take care of his parents and the wife to support her husband and live wherever he is or wants to be.

While most of the men in the film are portrayed as economic 'providers' for their families and caretakers, two diasporic men are presented as 'deviants.' Inder's brother-in-law, a diasporic man based in Vancouver, is not able to provide enough for his family. As a result, his wife Kuljeet takes on the responsibility of supporting him to pay off his debt, and she decides not to meet her family in Punjab to avoid any additional financial burden on her family. His consumption of alcohol to relieve stress contrasts with the

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<sup>51</sup> This excerpt in the song is borrowed from a poem ਮਾਂ (mother) written by Professor Mohan Singh.

construction of alcohol consumption as fun and celebratory by the Punjabi men and the diasporic men who visit Punjab. Punjabi men are presented with free time, and they often sit with their peer group to play cards, or have conversations, or consume alcohol. However, in diasporic spaces, the consumption of liquor is often undertaken alone and is not portrayed as a social activity, in contrast to Punjab.

In summary, transnational marriages are considered an important way of 'preserving' culture by both diasporic and Punjabi characters. Specifically, transnational marriages that conform to the culturally expected caste, class, race, and religious endogamy are accepted well, in contrast to interracial marriages or marriages across class differences. Men are represented as 'protectors' of culture, and they try to protect culture through 'control' of women in Punjab and in the diasporic space. This 'control' may manifest itself through the non-acceptance of 'certain' relationships or through the perpetuation of violence towards women. The gender roles of men, such as economic 'provider' and caretaker of the family, are deeply rooted in the inheritance rights recognized for men and their construction as 'heirs' of the family irrespective of their citizenship status.

In the next chapter, I will focus on the imagination and embodiment of the homeland and the diaspora by the characters in the films.

### Chapter 3: Imagined and embodied homeland and the diasporas

All the films included in this study begin with the 'return'<sup>52</sup> of the diasporic characters (often two or more) to their homeland<sup>53</sup> Punjab.<sup>54</sup> Each film, however, progresses differently, and each represents significantly different backgrounds and storylines as characters make sense of the space, culture, and artefacts, and interact with 'others' who embody and/or imagine Punjab and/or the diaspora.

In *Jee Aayan Nu*, a family of three, including Jasbir Singh Grewal, his wife Kuldeep, and daughter Simar, 'returns' to Punjab after an unexplained hiatus of 15 years.<sup>55</sup> Their 'return' to their homeland evokes memories and emotions, specifically in Jasbir, who remembers his parents and the moment he left for Canada. Jasbir imagines his homeland as a place where three generations of his family, including his parents, him and his wife, and their daughter Shamo<sup>56</sup> lived together. He remembers what his mother told him, "*See to it, son, I don't go away from this world without seeing you again.*" He feels sad as he could not attend his mother's last rites. However, the film remains silent on why he migrated to Canada and why he was never able to visit his parents.

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<sup>52</sup> 'Return,' here, refers to the visit of diasporic individuals or families to Punjab. I prefer to use the term 'return' as most of these characters either attempt to have an extended stay or have a greater continuity of their interaction with their homeland through marriage. For example, Jasbir in *Jee Aayan Nu* desires to get his daughter married in Punjab so that he can come more often.

<sup>53</sup> Homeland, here, refers to Punjab, to which most of the characters relate or trace their family lineage.

<sup>54</sup> Punjab, here, refers to Indian Punjab only.

<sup>55</sup> Both *Jee Aayan Nu* and *Munde UK De* keep silent over why men and families migrated to Canada or UK in the 1980s and 1990s and do not provide context to the audience.

<sup>56</sup> Shamo is a name given to Simar at birth, and later in Canada, the name gets changed to Simar.



In Canada, Jasbir runs a Punjabi-language radio and television channel to keep his “culture alive.” His daughter Simar, too, associates herself closely with her father’s work among the Punjabi-speaking community in Vancouver, and she accompanies him on a ‘trip’ to Punjab to capture folk dances for his television channel. She embodies Punjab through her language, Punjabi, which she speaks fluently, and this helps her establish a closer link with Punjab and communicate with individuals around her.<sup>57</sup> She imagines Punjab mostly in terms of cultural artefacts (examples include traditional clothes and embroidery), folk songs, and folk dances. The diasporic interest in the folk dances of Punjab has been noted specifically in the context of Bhangra (Leante, 2004).<sup>58</sup> However, Inder introduces Simar to regional and gender diversity within the performance of folk dances as well.

There is an interesting conversation between Jasbir and Simar where he helps her reimagine and reconnect to her ancestral home:

Jasbir:            *Daughter, do you remember anything about this house?*

Simar:            *No, dad, I don’t remember anything.*

Jasbir            *Look carefully. I am sure you will remember something.*

Simar:            *(With curiosity), Dad, there used to be a mud house. Where I used to go and hide.*

Jasbir:            *Yes, yes*

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<sup>57</sup> Ranjanpreet Kaur Nagra, “British by Raj, Punjabi by Heart,” *Sikh Formations*, 7, no. 2, (2011), 162.

<sup>58</sup> Laura Leante, “Shaping diasporic sounds: Identity as meaning in Bhangra,” *The World of Music*, 4, no. 1 (2004), 109.

Simar: (In a joyful mood) *And mom used to catch me by my ear and take me out of that house.*

Jasbir: (In a joyful mood) *Yes, yes. That's right.*

Simar: *What is that called?*

Jasbir: *Daughter, that is called hara (a traditional cooking space).*

Simar: (Runs in excitement), *There used to be a swing. This is the one (pointing towards a tree) where I used to swing.*

As father and daughter look extremely happy in this moment of reimagining and reconnecting to their ancestral home, Simar's mother, Kuldeep, covers her mouth with a handkerchief. Throughout the film, she constructs Punjab as a 'dirty' and 'unclean' place with limited access to electricity, clean drinking water, and hygienic living conditions and embodies anxiety around visiting rural Punjab. She carries bottled water and mosquito repellants along with her as she visits her husband's *pind*.<sup>59</sup> In contrast to her mother's fixed ideas about Punjab, Simar is eager to see and explore Punjab, specifically her father's ancestral home, where she was born. She does not have a clear memory of this place until she visits her ancestral home, where she recalls some of the old mud structures that no longer exist. This association of memory with traditional mud structures is interesting in the experience of these diasporic characters, as the 'modern' Punjab is unrecognizable to them, and their imagined Punjab or *pind* is deeply rooted in their past memory or their interaction with others who are part of the Punjabi diaspora.

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<sup>59</sup> *Pind*, here, refers to a village. The majority of Indians and Punjabis live in villages and migrate directly from villages, thus, *pind* is an important part of identity formation among the Punjabi diasporas.

This means that members of the diaspora may ignore the dynamic processes at play in their homeland.<sup>60</sup> In a scene, Kuldeep compares Punjab and Canada, constructs Canada as *swarag* (heaven), and views Punjab as 'less progressive.' Below is the conversation between Kuldeep and Daljit, Inder's mother:

Kuldeep: *Sister, you never went to Canada?*

Daljit: *We never got an opportunity.*

Kuldeep: *Canada is full of Punjabis. You don't have any relatives there?*

Daljit: *Why not, by God's grace, our eldest daughter, Kuljeet, is married in Vancouver.*

Kuldeep: *Then you should go there to meet her. The paradise where you have gotten your daughter married...at least go and see that heaven.*

Daljit: *Heaven?*

Kuldeep: *Yes, all the desires of one's heart are fulfilled after going there. People here die having dreams of big cars.. Those dreams come true as soon as you go there. Go to a dealership, fill out the form, and the car will be standing outside of your home. That's it.*

Daljit: *Really? This is amazing.*

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<sup>60</sup> Steve Taylor, "The diasporic pursuit of home and identity: Dynamic Punjabi transnationalism," *The Sociological Review*, 62 (2014), 276.

Kuldeep: *Sister, I'll give you an idea. Sell your house, land, and property. And then move closer to your daughter in Vancouver.*

Daljit: *That is okay, sister. We will sell everything and move to Canada, but we can't leave our servants and go. We cannot stay without them, not even for a moment.*

Here, Kuldeep constructs Canada as a popular choice for the Punjabi community<sup>61</sup> and as a 'land of opportunities.' However, Daljit, a 'high-class' Punjabi woman, is happy with her lifestyle in Punjab, where she can hire house help to support her with cooking, cleaning, and managing her household work.<sup>62</sup> She is, also appreciated by her husband for her work, in contrast to Kuldeep, who is not appreciated. Interestingly, Kuldeep fails to recognize the impact of social class on the status of women in Punjab as she constructs Canada as a 'land of opportunities' for all. Further, she fails to recognize and share her struggles as a woman in the diasporic space where she is expected to fulfill the cultural and gendered expectations of 'caretaking' of family and home as well as the added expectations of financially contributing towards the family.

In *Munde UK De*, DJ constructs Punjab as a highly populated place with huge traffic and road jams, where sheep and elephants wander on roads and the drinking

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<sup>61</sup> Kumool Abbi, "The visibility and arrival of the transnational new Sikh middle class in the cinematic experience of the turbaned hero Diljit Dosanjh: Its implication for emerging Sikh identity politics," *Sikh Formations*, 16, no. 3 (2020), 315. Abbi suggests that the Punjabi ethnic enclaves in Vancouver and Surrey serve as a site for the construction of urban Jat Sikh identity.

<sup>62</sup> These house helps include both men and women, representing migrants from different parts of India as well as those who belong to 'lower' castes in Punjab.

water is unclean. This imagination of Punjab is closer to Kuldeep's imagination; however, there is one significant difference between Kuldeep and DJ's imagined Punjab. Kuldeep is born, raised, married, and gives birth to her daughter in Punjab. DJ, on the other hand, was born and raised in the UK, and this is his first visit to Punjab. Jasbir's character helps to understand why diasporas construct their homeland indifferently. In one of the scenes, Jasbir tells his friend, "I was living in the memory of 15-years-old Punjab" as he returns from a golf session, and his friend responds, "no, no, Punjab has changed a lot." In another instance in the film, Jasbir and his wife Kuldeep are amazed to see the house and lifestyle of a friend with all its 'modern' infrastructure. These examples suggest that if the homeland or the imagined Punjab is seen as 'static' or 'unchanging' by the diasporic characters, their imagination is far from the current realities of life in Punjab. Further, this imagination of the homeland as 'traditional' and the diasporic spaces as 'modern' is a significant aspect of all the films studied, except *Guddian Patole*, where Nicole and Kash take their maternal grandmother to Chandigarh and introduce her to the 'modern' luxuries of life unimaginable to this old woman, including newly built hotels, malls, and services. These 'modern' infrastructures and services available in the urban areas of Punjab are no different from the diasporic spaces that are often constructed as 'modern.'

Further, this interaction of diasporic characters with the Punjabi characters in contemporary Punjab in the film leads to the development of romantic relationships and opens the possibility of transnational marriages. Examples include Inder-Simar, Roop-Reet, and Kash-Amreek. For the diasporic characters, Simar and Roop, one of the important parameters of their choice of a partner is their education, although this has

not been significantly verbalized in the films. However, through the inclusion of university and college spaces as a background to their interactions and conversations, it is evident that educational hypergamy<sup>63</sup> is an important criterion for the transnational marriages of these two diasporic characters.

Further, the diasporic characters' memories of Punjab include traditional vegetarian foods and traditional non-commercial liquor.<sup>64</sup> Local liquor is often constructed by the diaspora characters as a part of culture and masculinity, except for Kash in the film *Guddian Patole*. "It's been 15 years, I haven't tasted it [homemade liquor]," Jasbir states as he makes a demand for the local liquor. In *Munde UK De*, Roop asks for *desi daru* (local liquor) and describes it as "something he has never tasted," but it features as an integral part of his imagined Punjab. Jasbir and Roop represent the Canadian and UK diasporas, respectively, and the similarity in their requests for local liquor presents an interesting example of how diasporas across the world imagine Punjab. Further, these two characters consume liquor in the company of other men, women's presence, if any, is meant to be conversational and not as co-consumers of liquor. Kash, in *Guddian Patole*, makes an uncommon shift when she asks for *desi daru*. However, she consumes the liquor alone, and her alcohol consumption is seen as a 'Canadian way of life,' and she faces little resistance from the men or women around

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<sup>63</sup> Kaveri Qureshi, "Shehri (city) brides between Indian Punjab and the UK: Transnational hypergamy, Sikh women's agency and gendered geographies of power," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 42, no. 7 (2016), p.1218. Qureshi refers to education hypergamy as the consideration of marrying someone more educated than oneself.

<sup>64</sup> Traditional non-commercial liquor is a local liquor largely produced in open areas such as fields by men or by local liquor-producing companies. The input or prices of this liquor are much lower than those of commercially produced 'branded' liquor. Although this type of liquor predominantly features in the memory and imagination of diasporic characters, it is not permitted to be produced by individuals, and some local varieties are available from local liquor vendors.

her except her maternal grandmother, who equates consumption of alcohol with alcoholism and domestic abuse. Her grandmother is worried that women would turn aggressive and violent, like men, if they consumed alcohol. All these diasporic characters construct homemade liquor as integral to their imagination of Punjab. Of them, Jasbir is the only one who has consumed it before. Roop and Kash possibly learned this as part of their socialization within the Punjabi diaspora in the UK and Canada, respectively. Nagra presents an interesting comparison of how diasporic characters negotiate their religious and cultural identities in the context of liquor consumption.<sup>65</sup> All the characters in the films are Sikhs and Jats, and their construction of alcohol consumption as central to their cultural identity suggests that they embody and portray their cultural values more often than their religious values. Inder's father, Arjun Singh, who is a turbaned Sikh, consumes alcohol in the company of his diasporic friend Jasbir, who does not wear a turban. Both the characters, despite the differences in their outward projection of Sikhism and embodiment of the Sikh identity, relate to each other in the context of what they identify as part of their cultural identity.

Further, the diaspora's interest in Punjab and its people as the subject of their historical or cultural imagination is portrayed in both *Jee Aayan Nu* and *Munde UK De*. In *Jee Aayan Nu*, Simar visits Punjab with her father to capture the folk dances of Punjab, and Inder helps her understand and capture the diversity of folk dances that she is not able to recognize or appreciate. In *Munde UK De*, DJ aspires to capture the lives of people in Punjab as well as learn history through videography and photography. In a scene, a woman asks DJ, "*if the Non-Resident Indians must carry a camera?*" To

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<sup>65</sup> Ranjanpreet Kaur Nagra, "British by Raj, Punjabi by Heart," *Sikh Formations*, 7, no. 2 (2011), 168.

which DJ responds, *“I like Punjab’s history a lot. I wish to know what our background is.”* All the men and women look at him indifferently and make fun of him. As DJ could not trace his ‘belonging’ or inheritance in Punjab, his masculinity as well as his interest in Punjab are little valued in comparison to Simar, whose social class is ascribed through her father’s inheritance of land and ancestral home. Thus, the social class assigned to each diasporic character becomes an important marker of how they are constructed and treated by individuals around them. None of the men from Roop’s grandfather’s village make fun of him, his outlook, or his Punjabi accent; however, they make fun of DJ’s looks and his Punjabi accent. One of the possible reasons includes the consideration of Roop as an ‘heir’ of his ancestral agricultural property, and consequently, he is accepted as one of their own. On the contrary, DJ does not exhibit any of these characteristics. Further, women specifically are less accepting of DJ’s hybrid British-Punjabi identity<sup>66</sup> embodied through his anglicized Punjabi<sup>67</sup> and his clothing style. Nagra suggests that Gurpreet Ghuggi, who plays DJ, intends to “mimic a diasporic male character, but ends up mimicking a typical diaspora singer who is mimicking a *native* Punjabi singer.”<sup>68</sup> In one of the songs in the film, a woman looks at DJ and sings:

*“Although these men are Punjabi, they have a ‘weird outlook.’*

*These boys [men] from the UK (chorus).”*

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<sup>66</sup> Ranjanpreet Kaur Nagra, “British by Raj, Punjabi by Heart,” *Sikh Formations*, 7, no. 2 (2011) 168.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 169. Nagra quotes Bhabha: “the colonial subject aspires to become Western or British by mimicking the language, clothing, and culture of the Empire, but never becomes fully Western; as they mimic, they can never be authentic.”



DJ, too, realizes that he would not be able to find a partner if he did not change his outlook according to the social and cultural expectations in Punjab. Outside of his village, Roop too faces criticism over his outlook and Punjabi accent. A group of young Punjabi college students look at Roop and DJ and point out that *“no matter what, these men have a style. You can recognize them from a distance,”* followed by a burst of sarcastic laughter. They call them the ones *“who mix and match, and wear anything”* referring to their clothing style, specifically their choice of red and yellow colours in their dress, the colours that are rarely a part of Jat Sikh men’s attire, although these may be seen in the case of the turban. In a conversation between Roop and his cousin Deepi, she tells him that *“he needs to change himself, especially the way he speaks and dresses, as this seems strange to Reet.”* For both DJ and Roop, their outlook mattered the most in the context of finding a spouse in Punjab.

In the song *Munde UK De*, Roop, and DJ get an opportunity to share their viewpoint. They argue that *“they are Punjabi at heart, and they have not forgotten about their culture despite their upbringing in a country outside of India.”* They explain that the reason for their ‘return’ to their homeland is to find a spouse. This viewpoint is opposed by the Punjabi women, who argue that these diasporic men *“want a Punjabi woman to get married and look after their home.”* Both Roop and DJ again defend their visit to Punjab as ‘homecoming’ and argue that they are not ‘outsiders.’ While women are not convinced by their argument, they tease them that they would *“return empty-handed to the UK,”* suggesting that they would not be able to find a wife in Punjab.

The expectation of marriage within one’s caste is an important characteristic of most Punjabi as well as diasporic characters in all the films. In *Munde UK De*, Punjabi

women suspect that Roop and DJ “*have had romantic relationships with many White women*”<sup>69</sup> and they express their disinterest in them. Thus, interracial relationships feature in the Punjabi women’s imagined diaspora in this film. *Guddian Patole* makes a shift from *Jee Aayan Nu* and *Munde UK De* and portrays an interracial couple where a Punjabi woman, Manjeet, married a White man, Johnson, and they had two daughters, Nicole and Kashmir/Kash. This couple separates after a few years of marriage, and Manjeet never ‘returns’ to her homeland or visits her family, as this interracial marriage is not accepted by her family, and she feared that her separation would further fuel the stigma. However, as the daughters Nicole and Kash visit Punjab, they are accepted well by their maternal family, except for their maternal grandmother, who questions Manjeet over the phone, “*did that White man love you more than me?*” As the grandmother begins to like Kash and Nicole, she wants at least one of them to get married and stay in Punjab. This desire to reconnect diasporic men and women to their homeland through marriage is also expressed by Roop’s grandfather, who is extremely happy over Roop’s decision to get married to Reet. Jasbir, too, wants his daughter Simar to get married to his friend’s son Inder and settle in Punjab.

The diasporic characters, especially women, embody Canada in many ways. Kuldeep represents a limited sense of ‘belonging’ to Punjab, and embodies the Canadian-ness, which she sees as ‘progressive’ in comparison to Punjab which she sees as ‘static’ and ‘less developed.’ The other reason can be the lack of social

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<sup>69</sup> Neelu Kang, “Inter-generational tensions and cultural reproduction in a Punjabi community in England,” in *Migration, Mobility and Multiple Affiliations: Punjabis in a Transnational World*. Ed. S. Rajan, V. Varghese and A. Kumar Nanda (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). Kang reports that interracial marriages are not accepted within the Punjabi diaspora.

recognition of women's property rights in Punjab, which forces them to embody Canadian-ness – an identity that provides them with recognition of their rights. Her daughter, Simar, too, points out that *“this is a country where women's rights are well-recognized.”* There is an interesting conversation between Simar and Inder about Jassi:

Simar: *This is a big problem with Indian girls. They keep on tolerating everything. Why don't they stand up against injustice?*

Inder: *This is in our nature. If you come to Punjab, you'll know.*

Simar: *No matter where I stay, I will never tolerate injustice. I learned this in Canada.*

The character of Simar embodies a Canadian woman who is aware of her legal rights and states, *“no matter where I stay, I will never tolerate injustice”* about Jassi, who is facing domestic abuse at the hands of her Canadian husband and mother-in-law. In this scene, Simar dissociates herself from the 'Indian-ness' that prevents women from speaking up for their rights and establishes her Canadian identity in comparison to a recent immigrant named Jassi, who lacks the courage to confront her husband – an attribute that Jassi has embodied throughout the film.

Imagined Canada is different for Simar, who is aware of her legal rights, while in the same Canadian space, first-generation immigrant woman Jassi is threatened by her husband and in-laws, who try to 'control' her. She is silent about domestic violence and abuse. Even as her husband pushes her to leave the house, she requests that he take her in, saying as she says, *“in this country, I know nobody, where would I go?”* Jassi, here, represents a woman who migrated to Canada based on her marriage to a diasporic Canadian man and is subjected to 'control' and abuse in the diasporic space

where diasporic women like Simar feel safe. As Simar learns about Jassi's life in Canada, she argues, *"if so much is happening with her, why is she tolerating this all? She is an educated, wise woman. If she wants, nobody can point a finger at her."* Simar reminds Jassi that Canada *"favours the rights of women and supports them, and nobody can raise a finger at her."* She also reminds Jassi of her legal rights over her husband's property. This awareness of her legal rights in Canada leads to Jassi's family's improved behaviour towards her.

Importantly, the sense of 'belonging' to the homeland is easier for men to establish as they link it directly to their socially and legally accepted property rights, even when they are citizens of a country outside of South Asia. For example, Jasbir's ancestral agricultural land and home have been maintained by his kin group for 15 years on his behalf. As he 'returns,' he is welcomed by them, and there are no questions asked about his absence, his inability to attend his parents' death rites, or any expectation of any contributions towards the maintenance of property rights. Roop's grandfather accepts him as the "family's heir" at his first visit to Punjab, and Roop, too, accepts the grandfather and his social circle as his own. Abbi suggests that "the old grandfather's *haveli*,<sup>70</sup> which is highly opulent, apart from being linked to nostalgia, is also seen by the young grandson [Roop] as a place of lucrative assets and investment."<sup>71</sup> Roop asks DJ, *"why my dad leave all this property, such a nice place, and go to the UK. When he got married and had earned enough, why didn't he return?"*

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<sup>70</sup> Haveli is a traditionally built large house.

<sup>71</sup> Kumool Abbi, "The visibility and arrival of the transnational new Sikh middle class in the cinematic experience of the turbaned hero Diljit Dosanjh: Its implication for emerging Sikh identity politics," *Sikh Formations*, 16, no. 3 (2020), 313.

as he begins to recognize his ownership rights over the ancestral land. As Manjeet is not a socially recognized 'heir' to her ancestral property, the only thing that evokes her memory is the story of the *bootian wala suit* (a traditional Punjabi suit with small flower patterns or embroidery patterns), as she shares that the only time her mother beat her was when she wore a *bootian wala suit*. Her mother did not like the style of the suit and found it to be inappropriate for her daughter.

Further, there is no discontinuity in the transition of characters from the diaspora space to their homeland,<sup>72</sup> specifically men. Simar, Roop, and Nicole's transitions into their first-ever seen homeland take place with ease because of their language fluency as well as their understanding and acceptance of the culture. However, characters such as Kash from *Guddian Patole* and DJ from *Munde UK De* are the least accepted characters within their homeland. In the case of Kash, it is specifically her clothes, including crop tops and baggy bottoms, and her loud voice and tone that set her apart from other women in Punjab. She is projected as a 'deviant' in comparison to the Punjabi women who dutifully fulfill their gender roles. She challenges the patriarchal norms openly in two instances in the film: at first, she challenges the norm of men eating before women while they cook or wait for men to finish their meals; later, she rebels against the idea of women cooking at family functions and men enjoying themselves at the party. Out of all the three films under study, she is the only character who challenges the Punjabi men for their patriarchal expectations of women. Kash's Canadian-ness works as a privilege in her favour, as her maternal family is a marginal

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<sup>72</sup> Kumool Abbi, "The visibility and arrival of the transnational new Sikh middle class in the cinematic experience of the turbaned hero Diljit Dosanjh: Its implication for emerging Sikh identity politics," *Sikh Formations*, 16, no. 3 (2020), 313.

farming family, and they accept Kash's 'deviance' as the 'Canadian' way of life. This is another important shift from *Jee Aayan Nu* and *Munde UK De*, where Punjabi farming families are 'high-class' and diasporic characters are impressed by their lifestyle and interact with these characters with greater ease. In the case of DJ, his dressing style and his lack of fluency in Punjabi make him 'different' from diasporic men as well as Punjabi men.

In *Munde UK De*, diasporic and Punjabi characters compare Punjab and the UK as they interact with one another. In a discussion around India and the UK's education systems, DJ comments that "*you are 50 years behind us.*" However, when Reet asks him if he studies at Oxford, he shares that he is a university dropout because he finds it difficult to work and study at the same time. He mentions that a lack of support from his father led him to drop out of university. On the one hand, DJ mentions the top universities in the UK, and on the other hand, he shares the inability of many immigrant parents to support their children in achieving higher education. This is interesting as none of the university- or college-going Punjabi characters had to work to support their education as they were all supported by their parents. In another scene, Roop and DJ accompany Reet and her friends on a college trip. Roop tells Reet that he finds the place beautiful. Reet sarcastically tells him that "*it can't be compared to the scenery abroad.*" "*Why can't it?*" Roop asks, adding, "*it's different that people here don't maintain it. They keep loitering.*" In another scene, Roop tells DJ that it is difficult to find anything sugar-free here. To this DJ responds, "*here they add sugar over the top of everything.*" One of Nicole and Kash's uncles is diabetic; however, he consumes foods generally prohibited for him and keeps on consuming medicines all the time. These examples

suggest that characters based in Punjab are constructed as less conscious of their health, hygiene, and well-being. On the contrary, Simar's mother, Kuldeep, makes a vegetable salad for herself in one of the scenes when she is in Punjab. In contrast to this imagery of Punjab, *Guddian Patole* largely presents Punjab as synonymous with a healthy lifestyle, sustainable living, and the consumption of organic, fresh, and home-cooked foods. Kash, too, tells her grandmother, "*if I had been born in this land, I wouldn't have ever touched liquor. I would have lived a healthy life, everything organic.*" One of the reasons this film constructs the lifestyle in Punjab as sustainable and natural is the marginality of Kash and Nicole's maternal family. Thus, their lifestyle is simple, and they consume homegrown and cooked foods. This experience contrasts with Simar and Roop, who live with, and experience, rural Punjab through the lens of a 'high class' family.

In summary, this chapter highlights that the diasporic and Punjabi characters contrast and compare Punjab and the diasporic spaces not only in terms of language and culture but in a variety of ways, including the educational system, lifestyle, and eating habits. The diasporic characters display their interest in folk dances, folk songs, and cultural artefacts, with little knowledge of the diversity that exists within these performances and artefacts. The diasporic interest in traditional foods and local liquor is evident in all the films as well. Despite the diasporic interest in the category 'cultural,' they construct their homeland as overpopulated, less developed, and less progressive, specifically in terms of infrastructure. However, the film *Guddian Patole* tries to challenge this idea of a static homeland and presents the 'modern' infrastructure and

services available in the urban areas of Punjab that represent the dynamic nature of the homeland.

The films highlight that some of the factors that attract diasporic men and women towards Punjabi men and women in the context of romantic relationships and marriage are their educational status. Punjabi men and women are generally constructed to be more educated than the diasporic characters. This is an important factor leading to the desire for transnational marriages among the diasporic characters in the films.

In the next chapter, I will focus on the desire to 'return' and migrate among the characters in the films to understand the interlinkages between the diaspora and the homeland in greater detail.



## Chapter 4: Desires – to migrate and to ‘return’

The interrelationship between the Sikh community and international migration is complex and longstanding. Some of the common reasons for migration include the Sikh genocide and the conflict between the Sikhs and the State,<sup>73</sup> reducing income from agricultural lands, and the desire for upward social mobility. Canada, the United States, and the UK have been popular destinations for migration among the community. In this chapter, I will explore the desires to ‘return’ and to migrate among the Punjabi and diasporic characters in the three films.

### 4.1 The Desire to ‘Return’

Jasbir: I hadn’t left my country’s soil and came so far that my children would be so far away from their land that they wouldn’t even like to stay there [in Punjab]! What did I achieve after coming over here? I have lost one daughter, and the other one is slipping out of my hands. I have lost everything. I have lost everything.

Here, Jasbir embodies a deep sense of loss of ‘control’<sup>74</sup> over his daughters and attempts to reclaim this ‘control’ through Simar’s marriage to Inder. He believes that this marital alliance would help Simar reconnect to her ‘real’ roots. Inder, too, takes responsibility to help Simar ‘return’ to her homeland. Both Jasbir and Inder act as

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<sup>73</sup> Radhika Chopra, “Ziddi Munde: Political asylum, transnational movement and the migrations of men,” in *Migration, Mobility and Multiple Affiliations: Punjabis in a Transnational World*. Ed. S. Rajan, V. Varghese and A. Kumar Nanda (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 133-155.

<sup>74</sup> Nachatter Singh Garha, “Masculinity in the Sikh community in Italy and Spain: Expectations and challenges,” *Religions*, 11, no. 2 (2020), 6. Garha notes that the Sikh diasporic men equate the level of their masculinity to the ‘control’ they have over women in their family, particularly their wife, sister(s), or daughter(s).

'protectors' of the culture, and Simar acts as a site where the 'preservation' of culture takes place. Below is an example of a conversation between Inder and Simar:

Inder: *I had told uncle [Simar's father, Jasbir] as soon as I came here [to Canada] that I had come here to take Simar 'back.' And I was trying to explain that to you. Maybe I couldn't make you understand that our 'real' house is in Mullanpur village, Simar.*

Simar: *If this is the case, then you will go alone. I will not go with you. I 'belong' here [in Canada].*

Inder: *This is wrong Simar, you stay here, but you 'belong' to Punjab. And not only you, but everyone staying here 'belongs' there [to Punjab]. This is the truth, which if we forget, we will break away from our roots and not be able to see what lies ahead of us.*

For both Inder and Jasbir, Simar's Canadian-ness is temporary, and 'return' to Punjab would be easy for her if she accepted her 'real' identity as a rural Jat Sikh woman. In addition, Jasbir extends this idea of 'belonging' to include the patriarchal expectations of women. A conversation between Jasbir and Simar is an important example.

Jasbir: *Daughter, how should I make you understand that women 'belong' to the place where their husbands reside? And you want to remove him [Inder] from his house and settle him in your house? If he doesn't want to stay here [in Canada], we cannot force him. You 'belong' to that house [in Punjab] where Inder wants to stay.*

In the conversation highlighted above, Jasbir expresses a patriarchal expectation that an unmarried woman 'belongs' to her father's home, and after her marriage, she 'belongs' to her husband's home. This is an important reason why he does not accept

Anna upon her 'return,' as she lived with a man without marriage and her father's approval. Jasbir equates Anna's loss of virginity to a loss of culture and his failure to protect his culture. However, Anna and Simar blame their father for not connecting them to their culture and homeland. Similar intergenerational conflicts have been noted by Kang in a study where the second-generation Punjabi women in Hitchin argue: "If you [parents] had to protect us from the western influence, which is so unnatural, why didn't you continue living in India."<sup>75</sup> Simar's response to her father below is an example of a similar intergenerational conflict.

Simar: *What are you saying dad? I came over here 15 years ago. I don't remember anything about that place. If you wanted to link us with that culture, then you should have taken us there when we were small. I would have known about my relatives. I would have made some friends. If I had my friend circle over there, then maybe I wouldn't find it difficult to settle there. You have given me this environment, dad. It is not my fault. And then Mom also came from there. She always says bad things about that place. She always jokes about it. You couldn't make her understand. There is a vast difference between your thinking and our thinking, dad. You still belong there, but we don't remember anything about that place. How can we belong there? Don't blame me, dad.*

A similar disconnect of the second-generation diasporic women with their homeland is noted in *Guddian Patole* as Nicole asks her mother and Kash asks Nicole, "what will I do there [in Punjab]?" However, Manjeet sees this as an opportunity to reconnect her daughters with her family in Punjab. Nicole and Kash's maternal

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<sup>75</sup> Neelu Kang, "Inter-generational tensions and cultural reproduction in a Punjabi community in England," in *Migration, Mobility and Multiple Affiliations: Punjabis in a Transnational World*. Ed. S. Rajan, V. Varghese and A. Kumar Nanda (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 364.

grandmother, too, feels that one of the sisters must get married and stay back in Punjab to correct their mother's 'wrongdoings' referring to Manjeet's interracial marriage.

In *Munde UK De*, Roop's grandfather Gurdit Singh and aunt Preeto, too, feel that the only way to keep him connected to his homeland is through his marriage to a Punjabi woman. The latter tries to convince Roop through a comparison between diasporic and Punjabi women and suggests to Roop that marriage to a Punjabi woman is a better option for him. She constructs the diasporic women as 'free' and 'out of control' and suggests that the Punjabi women are 'docile,' 'obedient,' homemakers whose primary role is caregiving and taking care of their family. "*They* [the Punjabi women] *dance to the tune that you play.*" Reet, the female protagonist of the film, challenges these gendered expectations of Punjabi women and reminds Preeto of the changing times and opportunities available to women through education and employment that make them equally 'free' and 'independent' as men. DJ, Roop's friend too, stresses gender equality and the financial contributions made by women in the diasporic Punjabi communities in the UK.<sup>76</sup> Both Reet's and DJ's viewpoints are rejected by Preeto, who sees DJ as 'different' and Reet as a 'rebel.' Interestingly, her daughter is quiet in this situation, as she says that "*women have to follow the path created for them by their parents.*" Preeto's characterization is interesting, as she embodies patriarchal values and functions to fulfill patriarchal expectations. This suggests that some women may embody characteristics that favour the men within the patriarchal social structure, and thus, these women may be part of gender politics and

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<sup>76</sup> Here, DJ makes an important shift in comparison to Jasbir from *Jee Aayan Nu* who fails to recognize the financial contributions made by his wife and daughters.

help in maintaining the patriarchal social structure in Punjab as well as in diasporic spaces.

In *Jee Aayan Nu*, Simar accepts her 'real' identity as a Punjabi woman and 'returns' to her homeland, where Inder is surprised to see her as his bride. She tells Inder and his family:

Simar: I had forgotten the fragrance of this [Punjab's] soil. You all [Inder and his family] together made me remember this fragrance again. See, today your Simar has become Shamo again.

Using the name Shamo, provided to her at the time of her birth in Punjab, Simar symbolically leaves her Canadian-ness and accepts the Punjabi identity, and showcases loyalty towards her homeland.<sup>77</sup> Through the adoption of Punjabi national identity, Simar, a "freethinking feminist, changes to a loyal participant in Punjabi nationalism"<sup>78</sup> as she decides to settle in her homeland forever. Simar's 'return' to her homeland is interesting in the context of the time, as this coincides with the moment when the government of Punjab announced the revival of peace in Punjab post-Sikh genocide and Sikhs-State conflict that continued for nearly two decades. The characters of Jasbir and Roop from *Jee Aayan Nu* and *Munde UK De*, too, 'return' to their homeland after a hiatus of two decades. The silence of the films over why Jasbir and Roop's father migrated to Canada and the UK suggests the desire of the filmmakers to stay away from controversial political topics and focus on diaspora-homeland

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<sup>77</sup> Ranjanpreet Kaur Nagra, "British by Raj, Punjabi by Heart," *Sikh Formations*, 7, no. 2 (2011), 170.

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*, 170.

interactions and interfaces to appeal to wider audiences. However, the focus of these films on the 'return' of the diasporic characters to Punjab, too, is an ideologically loaded message.

Simar's father, too, embodies a desire to 'return' to his homeland as he questions, "I hadn't left my country's soil and came so far that my children would be so far away from their land that they would not even like to stay there. What did I get after coming over here?" He feels a sense of 'loss' of his Punjabi identity and 'control' over his daughters. All these factors together lead to his desire to 'return' in the film.

One of the ways he thinks he would be able to reconnect to his homeland is through Simar's marriage to Inder, as this will create an opportunity for him to visit Punjab more often. The comparison of diaspora spaces with the homeland and consideration of the homeland as superior in terms of resources strengthens the desire to 'return' among Jasbir. He questions Simar: "what thing do you think is missing over there [at Inder's home in Punjab]? All the luxuries of life are available there. More than over here [in Canada]."

Jasbir projects a sense of 'loss' of patriarchal authority over his two daughters in the diasporic space, one of whom left home to live with her lover, and the other is unwilling to 'return' to Punjab. In both situations, his daughters initially rebel and challenge his patriarchal authority; however, the film's treatment of the subject is in Jasbir's favour, as both the daughters feel guilty about their decisions and follow the path shown to them by Jasbir. This idea is deeply embedded in Munde UK De, where Roop's aunt cites it as an important characteristic of Punjabi women.

Jasbir's wife, Kuldeep, does not echo his sentiment or desire to 'return' in *Jee Aayan Nu*. The migration to Canada was not her decision or choice, as she migrated with her husband. However, as a diasporic woman, she feels a sense of fulfillment of her dreams, as she stresses, "all the desires of one's heart are fulfilled after going there [to Canada]."

The grandmother in *Guddian Patole* also feels that it will be better if either of the sisters marries a Punjabi man and stays back in Punjab, and she sees this as a way to reduce the chances of interracial marriage for these sisters. At the end of the film, Kash decides to marry Amreek and settle in Punjab. Kashmir or Kash's decision to return to the 'original' homeland, India.

#### **4.2 Desire to Migrate**

In a conversation between Jassi and her father in *Jee Aayan Nu*, her father insists, "*Do men coming from Canada have a shortage of girls? This alliance is happening because we know them. Otherwise, people are ready to pay lakhs of dowry to such men,*" he said stressing the importance and value attached to the diasporic Canadian men. Jassi's father requests that she act like a son and consider the marriage proposal of the Canadian man, who could change their family's economic condition by supporting their migration to Canada. This Canadian man is constructed as a 'rescuer' and his Canadian-ness is viewed as a way to rescue the economic marginality of Jassi's family. A similar argument is made by Roop's aunt in *Munde UK De*, where she tells him that there is no scarcity of women for a [diasporic] man like him. She says, "*who will say 'no' to a handsome [diasporic] man like you?*" She stresses that "*in Punjab, women are*

*running behind* [the diasporic men] *to settle abroad. Point your figure at any woman, and I will make her your wife.*" Thus, there is a strong desire for international migration among the men, women, and families in Punjab. This is in addition to previous work that describes international migration as a 'male longing that penetrates all aspects and genders of the family and the larger society.'<sup>79</sup> In addition to this simplistic conceptualization of international migration as a desire of men solely to seek upward mobility, social issues such as dowry<sup>80</sup> must also be considered as push factors for migration among women.

Interestingly, the desire to migrate has been shown to be stronger among those who are marginalized by class or caste. Jassi's father and Reet's father, both of whom are constructed as marginal in contrast to other Jat Sikh families around them, fuel the desire to migrate among them. In *Guddian Patole*, the desire for international migration emerges as a consistent theme throughout the film, especially among the rural Jat Sikh men, who are marginal farmers as well. These men desire to achieve this through marriage with a woman who holds citizenship in the desired country. Canada is represented as their favourite target destination. Amreek, the cab driver and male protagonist of the film, advises Nicole and Kash to "*not tell anyone that you have come from Canada. People here are as crazy about Canadians as Discovery Channel is about snakes.*" Later, Amreek himself gets interested in marrying either of the sisters to get an opportunity to migrate. There are two other men, one of whom is a distant

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<sup>79</sup> Diditi Mitra, "Success, masculinity and international migration: the case of Punjab, India," *Sikh Formations* (2019), 4.

<sup>80</sup> Among the Jat Sikh community in Punjab, the dowry payments made by the bride's family are around two lakh Indian rupees per acre of land that the groom inherits. This is based on my observations in rural Punjab.



relative of Nicole and Kash's maternal family and another from the village, who wish to marry either of the sisters. Their primary motive is to move to Canada, and they are open to marrying any Canadian woman. All these men judge Nicole and Kash based on their clothes and habits; however, they are ready to accept them in any way to facilitate their international migration. This is an important representation of how power and privilege are assigned to these women by these Punjabi men based on their country of citizenship and their ability to help some of these men migrate to Canada through marriage. This is similar to the privilege assigned to Jassi's Canadian husband by her father and suggests that the country of citizenship is constructed as an important determinant of one's social status within their homeland.

Nicole and Kash's cousin, whose family is a marginal farming family with limited resources, is a nursing student. Her choice of discipline ensures her migration to Canada once she finishes her studies. Another much younger daughter, too, has a desire to move to Canada once she is an adult. She requests that Nicole take her along to Canada when she is old enough to migrate.

In addition, the films showcase the migration from across India to Punjab as well. These non-Punjabi characters also speak Punjabi with the influx of Hindi language.<sup>81</sup> This is an interesting representation, as Punjab is both a site from which migration takes place and a destination to which migrants come from across the country, as it provides employment opportunities in agriculture and allied services. These non-Punjabi

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<sup>81</sup> Hindi is one of the most widely spoken languages in India as well as an official language.

characters, mostly men, embody a desire to migrate outside of India with the help of the diasporic characters with whom they interact at their workplaces in Punjab.

Caste, thus, emerges as an important push factor for migration<sup>82</sup> specifically for the Jat Sikhs, who have been predominant in international migration from Punjab, facilitated by their caste dominance and the resources available to them in the form of agricultural land.<sup>83</sup> However, the desire to migrate and actual international migration have been noted by Taylor (2018) among the Dalit castes in Punjab as well. Dalits represent 30% of Punjab's population<sup>84</sup> and their proportion to the total population is the highest in Punjab. In *Munde UK De*, grandfather Gurdit Singh's house help Khoji,<sup>85</sup> too, has a desire to migrate abroad. He sees an opportunity in Roop and DJ, the UK citizens, who may help him migrate abroad. He showcases a strong desire to change his social class and construct 'abroad' as a site where one lives a luxurious life. To achieve this desire, he makes himself "*available for their [Roop and DJ's] service for 24 hours.*" Roop, however, tries to share the reality of life in the UK, but Khoji still insists that he wants to go abroad and never 'return.' The house helps represented in *Jee Aayan Nu* are a mix of 'lower' caste migrants and Punjabis, mostly men, but also one woman. As Kuldeep visits Arjun Singh's house, she confuses a house help with Arjun Singh's wife. The reason is that this house help wears the altered clothes of Arjun Singh's wife. This is true for male house

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<sup>82</sup> Steve Taylor, "Punjabi Dalit transnational mobility: Challenging caste inequalities," in *Provincial Globalization in India: Transregional Mobilities and Development Politics*. Ed. Carol Upadhyya, Mario Rutten and Leah Koskimaki, (London: Routledge, 2018), 123- 141.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 124

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 125

<sup>85</sup> Khoji's caste identity is not mentioned in the film; however, his work status as a house help possibly suggests that he has limited economic resources.

helps as they too wear clothes and shoes provided to them by the men for whom they work.

The films also introduce the characters that help fulfill the desire to migrate. One such character is Ghuggi from *Jee Aayan Nu* who has run a travel agency since the mid-1990s in various cities in Punjab. He is represented as someone who takes advantage of people's desire to migrate and dupes them of their money. Once his deception is discovered by the public, he frequently switches offices and cities. It is interesting to note that all his clients are men who wish to immigrate to countries such as Dubai, the United States, Canada, and the UK. He often attracts new clients by bragging about his close relationships with NRIs and placing fake pictures of them in the background. He advises these men to relocate by marrying a woman who is a citizen of a different country as one of their options.

In summary, transnational marriages are seen as an important way of reconnecting the diaspora to the homeland in all the films. As the desire to 'return' is central to these films, the transnational marriages offer a solution to diasporic and Punjabi characters who have this desire to 'return' themselves or for their children or grandchildren. In contrast, there is a stronger desire to migrate among the Punjabi characters who are marginalized by caste and/or class.

## Conclusion

This thesis attempts to understand how gender, marriage, homeland, and diaspora are constructed and represented in transnational Punjabi cinema, as well as how Punjabi and diasporic masculinities and femininities are constructed at the intersection of gender and marriage. The common and diverging themes that emerge from the analysis of the films have been presented in chapters 2, 3, and 4.

One of the prominent themes of the films under study is the 'return' of the diasporic characters to Punjab and their interaction with the Punjabi characters in urban and rural spaces, where each of these characters constructs the 'other.' *Jee Aayan Nu* and *Munde UK De* remain silent on why Jasbir and Roop's father migrated abroad. On the one hand, these films provide no context to the audiences about why these men migrated to Canada and the UK, respectively. On the other hand, these films build a strong connection between the diaspora and the homeland by constructing the desire to 'return' and transnational marriages as central to these films.

The representation of 'arranged love marriages' that follow race and caste endogamy is common in all the films. As parents and grandparents seek to discipline the romantic choices of their diasporic children or grandchildren,<sup>86</sup> they tend to help and support them in finding a spouse in Punjab. In *Jee Aayan Nu* and *Guddian Patole*, Simar's father and Kash's grandmother help Inder and Amreek, respectively, to gain the trust of the women. Only two interracial marriages are portrayed in the films. One,

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<sup>86</sup> Patricia Uberoi, "The diaspora comes home: Disciplining desire in DDLJ," *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 32, no. 2 (1998), 308.

where a White woman completely immersed herself in Punjabi culture. Second, the marriage of a Punjabi woman to a White man turned into a divorce. Even in the case of interracial marriage, often the non-Punjabi partner is a White person. This is in line with previous studies that suggest that marriages with Muslims and Blacks are uncommon and restricted within the Punjabi diasporas. Further, *Guddian Patole* makes a shift within transnational Punjabi cinema as interracial marriage is central to the storyline in contrast to *Jee Aayan Nu*, where interracial couples are represented as funny and serve the purpose of making the audiences laugh.

Another common theme in *Jee Aayan Nu* and *Munde UK De* is the portrayal of men as 'protectors' of cultural values as well as economic 'providers' for the family. However, in *Guddian Patole*, this theme changes, and the character of Kash is shown as 'deviant' from Punjabi and diasporic women's characterization in the films. Unlike Anna, she receives support for many of her actions, including the consumption of liquor, from men around her. As Kash is a mixed-race woman, her femininity is constructed differently in comparison to Punjabi women, and her consumption of liquor is seen as a 'Canadian way of life.' Other significant differences lie in the social class of the families portrayed in *Jee Aayan Nu* and *Munde UK De* and the marginality of Kash's maternal family. Thus, restrictions placed on women may also be different in the context of their social class and racial identity.

The films present an important interrelationship between caste, class, and the desire to migrate. The desire for international migration is represented to be more common among the individuals and families marginalized by caste and class. In *Guddian Patole*, three Punjabi men compete to impress Kash and Nicole, representing

a stronger desire for international migration among the Jat Sikh men, specifically those who have limited resources in Punjab. In addition, international migration and seeking citizenship in a country outside of Punjab are seen as a privilege. Thus, many characters in the films constructed international migration as a way to improve one's quality of life and social class. The films also represent the migration of men from various parts of India to Punjab for work. This further suggests that Punjab is a dynamic place in contrast to its construction as static by many diasporic characters whose knowledge about the homeland is based either on their memory or on their experiences or interactions within diasporic spaces.

Both *Jee Aayan Nu* and *Munde UK De* present interesting examples of how diasporic men continue to claim ownership rights over their ancestral land and home despite their citizenship status. This necessitates researchers to think beyond the idea of citizenship, as the sense of belonging to one's homeland is important for diasporic Jat Sikh men as they inherit agricultural land and their kin groups maintain the land on their behalf. This agricultural land may not produce enough output to sustain the quality of life available to these men in Canada or the UK. However, this land is constructed as a part of one's masculine as well as cultural identity. The women's ideas of 'belonging' to their homeland, however, may be different depending upon their place of birth, interaction with their homeland, and economic opportunities available to them in the diasporic space or homeland, if any. The imagined and embodied homeland and diaspora differ for the characters in the films based on their place of birth, gender, and migration status. For example, Simar constructs Canada as a place where women's rights are valued;

however, a new immigrant named Jassi feels unsafe and is subjected to violence in the same space.

Further, the acceptance of the diasporic characters in the films, specifically within their kin groups, depends upon their inheritance or their father's or brother's inheritance. Simar and Roop from *Jee Aayan Nu* and *Munde UK De* enjoy acceptance within their close networks based on their social class and inheritance, in the case of Roop and Simar's father. In contrast, DJ, who is a diasporic character with no inheritance in Punjab, has great difficulty getting accepted in Punjab. Overall, the films present more acceptance for the Canadian diaspora in comparison to the UK diaspora and a greater desire to migrate to Canada. Both Roop and DJ are referred to as 'weird' in various instances in *Munde UK De* signifying the limited acceptance of the diaspora from the UK. Further, the Canadian diaspora is represented as closer to the Punjab through the embodiment of culture through their fluency in the Punjabi language and their easy transition into both urban and rural spaces in Punjab.

In conclusion, transnational Punjabi cinema offers great insights into the constructions of gender, marriage, homeland, and the diasporas in the Punjabi and diasporic communities in Canada and the UK at the intersections of caste and class.

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