BREAKING THREE GENERATIONS OF SILENCE

A Translation of Racism, Sexism, and Classism, in the Lives of Three Punjabi Women in Canada

by

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From the margins of discourse, this autobiographical work disrupts the traditional HEGEMONIC narratives of THEIR INSTITUTIONS and challenges the conventional notions of the genre of autobiography through its form and content. It uncovers and upsets both WESTERN and Punjabi PATRIArchal definitions of THEIR/Their CULTure. Furthermore, it undermines linguistic norms by using a mix of English, Punjabi and some French. Through narratives, prose, poetry, transparent language/languages my words break the long kept silences of three Punjabi women living amidst racism, sexism and classism in THEIR/Their SOCIety.

Public and private HIStory of THEIR/Their CULTure, fiction and fantasy are juxtaposed through mixed genres and mixed codes, and the fragmented units are not necessarily presented as chronologically linear. Unlike typical autobiographies, I braid together the restrictive lives and painful experiences of my mother, my grandmother, and myself in an attempt to show how THEIR/Their oppressive HIStory and CULTure shape and have shaped our life/lives, our acceptance and our resistance. In doing so I begin to see parallels between the oppression of women and untouchables in Indian Society and the exploitation of minority women and minorities in CANADIAN SOCIETY.

My experiment with structure and typography helps me, a semi-trilingual, working/middle class minority woman and EDUCAtor, to construct and deconstruct my personal self and selves in a more meaningful way. This type of meaning making takes precedence over conventional stylistic or established structures. My identity cannot be separated from the languages, CULTures, in which I wander endlessly or...
from the oppressive conditions of those whose lives have shaped and continue to shape me. Despite the pressure, I cannot choose between these identities. As a result I am forced to continue to negotiate between my identities and live an intricate web of shifting power relations.

I realise that the non-contradictory self is impossible. Therefore I must go beyond and create something new. Something that is more than the mere bringing together of identities -- it is something in the beyond, kithe uther -- gahan. From my third space I call upon minority women, white women, EDUCators, readers and writers to also go beyond and find a THIRD Space from which to work together in order to reposition the positions of POWER that have been placed upon us through centuries of Oppression and EXPLOITATION.

Only by speaking out in my languages, my words, my experiences, my poet's voice, my storying voice, my minority woman's voice, my TEACHER's voice, my fragmented voices, will I begin to overcome the tradition of silence and continue the necessary resistance.
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Readers and writers, who in their re-reading and re-writing will allow my long journey, my long poem to continue its endless path.
Dedication

To Mummiji and Biji for their endless strength, courage, determination, guidance and love.
This journey is our journey.

and

To Dr. Carl Leggo
An Educator in the Beyond

Encouraging words and individuals to play, to sing, to dance,
to come alive, to engage and to be-come.

To create something new in the beyond.
In the Third Space.
Nan ayther Nan uther
Kithe gahan
Where they/we long to enter and yet cannot find the way.
Callous curtains of pre-determined pages,
finally withdrawn.
Allowing silences to be broken,
in the Beyond.
Breaking Three Generations of Silence
A Translation of Racism, Sexism, and Classism
in the Lives of Three Punjabi Women in Canada

Now we are the “betrayers of the lie.”
In our speaking and writing, we betray
What has harmed us and held us down.
We tell on those who hurt us. We give
away the truths of oppression, and we
betray our own denial by allowing our
art and literature, our often unconscious
internal creative processes, to express
what we ourselves have held in.

(Linda Hogan quoted in D. Soyini Madison, 1994, P. 431)

Surrounded by peach trees, lemon trees, mango trees and guava trees, in the bara, open veranda, I remember her kind face and imagine her slightly rounded pierced nose. She always wore a tiny gold nugget that shone out of the darkness of her face. She was a very slender woman and had long, thin, dark arms. She wore coloured plastic bangles not gold ones like mummiji. On that day, we were all making samia, thin wheat noodles, together. I was intrigued by the way she washed her arms when the work was done. She would pour water out of the bucket, and cup it first in her right hand and then hold her bent arms up by her chest and let the water roll down her left arm. Then she would do the same with her left hand. Finally when the arms were washed she would use the last bit of the water to wash her hands. She would pour the water out of the bucket. Her hands were not allowed to touch the water in the bucket. Again she would cup her one hand with water then the other. Watching, I was amazed at how many times the water went from one hand to the other without falling on the dirt in the open bara. As I tried to do the same my grandmother quickly rushed over to show me the proper way for our caste. It was in a separate bucket with cleaner, warm water.

It would only be years later that I would realise the meaning of this difference.
The *samias* were all hanging to dry. I was given the honour to place the last few on the string as Uthi turned the machine and the long snake shapes slowly made their way out.

That was one of the few times that Uthi had been allowed to help make food. Usually her jobs did not even allow her to be near the eating area.

Her job as a "choori," an "untouchable", was to scrub dishes with the ashes from the night before and then wash them with cold water. She also did the sweeping and cleaning of the house. Her Husband used to clean our bathroom areas. When we returned to India 13 years later the Husband had passed away and their daughter had assumed His role.

Shinthi, their daughter, would come every morning at 6:00 am before going to the school for the "untouchables" and take away what was necessary from the *kota*, the deck like construction upstairs where the open bathroom stalls had been built. This was before the toilets had been put in. I wonder even to this day where she took everything that had to be taken away and how long she had to bear the stink. The thought of her job makes me cringe now.

One of my first days back in India, Shinthi came to collect our clothes to take them to her mother for the daily wash. Collecting the pile, she stopped to admire a bra she saw. Foolishly I asked her if these kinds of bras were available in India. She laughed hysterically and said, "Don't you know that these pretty things are only for memsahibs like you. *Choorays* (untouchables) don't own such things".

I had always known of their different caste as a young girl, but I had never been aware of all the rules that were attached to that caste. Somehow being in Canada, I had imagined that these hierarchies had changed there, even though they had not here. The darkness of one's colour continued to devalue them as humans, even more so if the gender was female.
Uthi and Shinthi had always been part of our household to me. Like an auntie or a cousin. Only now had I noticed how differently they were treated especially by my grandmother and grandfather. Enclosed in their areas of work. Uthi in the area by the door and Shinthi upstairs on the kota. Now it began to make sense why, when I was downstairs one day and asked her to bring me the newspaper, she passed it to me arms extended from her area. Careful not to step over the lines. The invisible lines drawn to keep them in their places, just as the Men had lines drawn to keep Their women in their places.

Our house like most in the small village had a bara and a kota. Open areas designed to bring the outside in so that caged untouchables, women and children would have access to fresh air and be able to see the sky from within their differently invisible lines. This was not done for humane reasons. Light signified the beginning of the day of duty and darkness the end of that day. Voices of women echoed in the heat from kota to bara or bara to kota or kota to kota as they fulfilled their daily duties. Some women were allowed out into other kotas and baras so that they were able to converse with more ease. This however was not the case for my mother and even if it had been, there was never time for such leisure.

Our house in Canada, the one we finally bought with the pennies we saved from berry picking, was completely enclosed. No baras to breathe from. No kotas to see the sky from. There was the yard, but the door always got in the way. It was closed tightly after 3:30 pm or 4:00 pm and rarely opened until the next morning -- in time for school or work. It opened only occasionally on weekends when it was necessary to uproot the weeds. Closure for security and safety. To protect us from the hostile outer world of the NABOBS we were all told.

Complete closure also meant complete secrecy. So when alcohol took over the mind, what He didn't remember no-one else would either.
The first time I heard the cries of my mother was at age eight in Canada. My sisters and I were upstairs in our bedroom taking down posters that were inappropriate for “proper girls” to have up in their rooms. We weren’t sure if the sounds were of laughter or of fear until we ran into the kitchen downstairs and saw for the first time what we had never seen before. As my mother fell to the floor in her black shalwar kamiz with blue flowers, we were ordered back to our room. From inside, sitting cuddled together by the door, we took turns listening and peeking out. Hoping and praying that the thumping and pounding and cries would end.

They did end eventually and as mummiji came running up she changed out of her black shalwar kamiz, the one with the blue flowers, and went to bed. She cried herself to sleep that afternoon as we stood around her fearfully and helplessly.

After that day, that black shalwar kamiz with the blue flowers sat in the back of her closet until it would finally be thrown out years later.

Just as her daughter’s black and blue flowered dress would be years later. Not for the same reasons, but not for completely different reasons either. Not at age 13, but later. Much later.

Before the age of 13 the grandmother was sewing, knitting, weaving in the open veranda floored in brick. She was only 9 when the preparations for her wedding were well under way. She had heard that her eternal Husband was a good Man. The arrangements had all been made for her by her Father, her Uncles and her Brothers. Her name would now be different but her duty would remain the same - to continue to serve Them from under her veil. They expected only that she awake at 5:00 am to make Their morning meals. In the afternoon, have Their meals delivered fresh. And at night feed again and then be there when needed. The rest of the time was her free time to take care of the children and the in-laws, to sew, and clean. She could do almost anything as long as she remained in the confines of those Patriarchal walls and inside Their gate. And silent.

But before the age of 13 in the same open veranda on the same brick floor the mother
spoke out. She yelled and screamed and begged Them - the Fathers, the Uncles the Brothers to let her go away and continue her schooling. After much resistance They let her continue to grade 10, but after that Their fear of giving her too much knowledge -- fear of her thinking too much for herself, made them make the arrangements quickly. The slave trade of the touchable "untouchables" had to continue.

No longer on the open veranda, no longer on the brick floor, she thought she would escape. At 13 in another country she escaped the veil, she escaped the forced ignorance but not the violence. Invaded, violated, stolen from. Her loud cries of despair, of anger went unheard.

THEIR/Their RULEs, THEIR/Their CONTrol, THEIR/their ANGer, THEIR/Their VIOLence, THEIR/Their POWer they have endured it all in their three generations.
Purpose:  *Breaking the Silence Autobiographically*

This autobiographical research paints a portrait of the lived experience of many Punjabi women through the narratives, poetry, oral stories, and personal dialogue of one Punjabi female whose experiences are shaped by the dynamics of the lives of her mother and grandmother. My work attempts to help me -- a Punjabi woman of "colour" from a working class background to become more critically aware of the silent issues of racism, sexism, and classism not only in my life, but also in the lives of two very important women to me -- my mother and my grandmother. Through my work I question and attempt to come to an understanding of their and my silences in THEIR/Their CULTure (The Punjabi and CANADIAN CULTure) and THEIR/Their SOCIety (the Punjabi AND CANADIAN SOCIety). "These women have not been silent just silenced and not listened to" (Yee, quoted in Bannerji, 1993, P. 43).

The private narratives, poems, oral stories and personal dialogues that follow will break some of the long kept silences of three generations of women in my family. These experiences represent not only the racism, sexism and classism faced by my grandmother, my mother and myself but many Punjabi women of their/my generation. I do not replace the experiences of other Punjabi women with my own. I only claim to represent their experiences because I am and am not a part of those experiences -- part of the whole. In translating, retranslating and re-retranslating our stories, I begin to see parallels between the oppression of women and untouchables in Indian Society and the exploitation of minority women and minorities in CANADIAN SOCIETY. These women are part of a society which uses "power and the powerlessness as weapons to exclude non-white and poor people..." (Silvera, quoted in Bannerji, 1993, P. 255).
The written style varies from the functional writing of documentation to the expressive power of writing as an art form. In the reading of the text, other women especially Punjabi women may "self-consciously participate in the production of meaning" (Michael Fischer quoted in Clifford and Marcus, 1986, P. 232). As Fischer points out, "the characteristic of contemporary writing of encouraging participation of the reader in the production of meaning ... is not merely descriptive of how ethnicity is experienced, but more importantly is an ethical device attempting to activate in the reader a desire for communitas with others, while preserving rather than effacing differences" (quoted in Clifford and Marcus, 1986, P. 233).

Through the "braiding" of the stories of my grandmother, my mother and myself, I become increasingly aware that my discoveries of self are inextricably bound within the family's heritage. "It is only as we receive the metissage, the blended story, that we grasp how life, self and writing interact" (Braham, 1995, P. 118). In unveiling our painful stories, I hope to provide a greater understanding of the landscapes of many Punjabi females who live very isolated and often linear lives amidst their Patriarchal private worlds and who suffer from SYSTEMIC oppression, daily racism and classism on each occasion that they exit their homes. The experiences of my grandmother, my mother and myself are similar; however, the oppression and resistance of each generation is very different as a result of our different experiences of history, socialisation, displacement, contact with the DOMINANT culture and EDUCATION.

Michael Fischer writes "that ethnicity [and culture] are reinvented and reinterpreted in each generation by each individual and that it is often puzzling to the individual... Ethnicity is not something that is simply passed on from generation to generation, taught and learned; it is something dynamic - often unsuccessfully repressed or
avoided... ethnicity is a deeply rooted emotional component of identity" (quoted in Clifford and Marcus, 1986, P. 195). In this way, it can be said that what we experience and what we do depends on the various intersections that determine our cultural and social "locations."

In order to better understand the powerful barriers that Punjabi females face, I attempt to translate and transcribe our feelings and experiences into a language that can be shared. And when that language does not exist or is not enough, it is my poetry that creates it. What is left out or cannot be uttered, remains as significant as what is said. "Poetry is not only dream and vision, it is the skeleton architecture of our lives. It lays the foundations for a future of change, a bridge across fears of what has never been before..." (Audre Lorde in Braham, 1995, P. 143). The stories and poems presented in my work provide the necessary nourishment for writers and readers who, "in the process of writing and reading autobiographical texts come to understand their own lives better" (Braham, 1995, P. 144).

As I “read” my life, many readers will reread their own lives by association.

"Women's autobiography has always understood the need to compose a life from bits and pieces of the past marinated in memory, resurrected by the imagination and imbued with meaning..." (Braham, 1995, P. 3-4).

This created reality temporarily accepted as true on the page is further qualified by the reader who also understands metaphor as symbol or representation, memory as selective and relational and a sense of place as a construct, one employing imagination as surely as fact. The reader then becomes part of the discourse,
resignifying the meaning of the text returning, in Lacanian terms, from the realm of the 'Imaginary to the Real'... The reader becomes a collaborator in the truth content of the narrative by using the story as exemplum that enlivens and extends self knowledge. This synchronicity between the author's transcribed life and the reader's empathic engagement gives autobiography its peculiar power. If the story of one woman's life provides a script the reader enters, resignifies, and in some collaborative sense makes her own, then contemporary women's personal narratives chart rich new possibilities for the way women may want to live their lives.

(Braham, 1995, P.3).

The educational possibilities of autobiography have yet to be recognised. Despite the fact that autobiographical writing method including the use stories and poems to express ideas is "epistemologically sound and politically progressive" (Pinar, 1988, P. 151), it is not often encouraged in our traditional schooling. It is considered not academic enough, not valuable enough or not meaningful enough as a form of research. FORMAL EDUCATION, determines what should be read and what should be written, what should be learned and what should be told.

It was not until my graduate program that I was exposed to narratives through my course with Dr. Ted Aoki at U.B.C. And it was not until the summer of 1996, when I met Dr. Carl Leggo also at U. B.C., that I was given the opportunity to begin writing about myself and my life. It was not until then that I began living my own words, in my own languages, in my own stories. Dr. Leggo's open-minded, encouraging and creative spirit set me on a journey that I had never envisioned nor would have had the courage to undertake.
As I write I am constantly aware of the very personal nature of my work. I often wonder whether I should or should not write the true nature of my experiences or even write at all about some of my experiences. But how can I remain silent? Is this internal conflict from fear/hesitation to strength/boldness a result of my OPPRESSsions as a minority? Am I as a minority woman conditioned to feel this way?

As I write I debate constantly with myself whether to use the subject “I” or the subject “she” and whether to name the oppressor or use the subject “He”. Although I realise that I should have the courage to take the risk and state the names and use the appropriate subjects, I do not, at least not always. The use of the subjects “He” and “she”, as well as other ambiguities that the reader may find throughout my work, are necessary for me in my work at this time. These ambiguities allow me to distance myself from experiences that still continue to be too painful to approach more closely.

Other questions that are at the forefront as I write pertain to how others will perceive my work. As I speak out about the struggles of minority women and about racism, sexism, and classism, I fear that THEY will not understand or not want to understand. Will my non-traditional, very personally valuable work be considered publicly valuable as well? Realising the relevance of my work especially for Punjabi women, I wonder if I should have used a more “academic” research method to discuss such important subjects as racism, sexism and classism as THEY would want (if THEY would want them discussed at all). Will these issues be taken just as seriously by scholars in this type of work as they would be in traditional “academic” work? And finally, will having exposed myself in such a deep and personal way hold consequences for me in the future?
I do not hope to find answers to all these questions; however, this autobiographical work has given me the space and opportunity to reflect upon them. Now it is only through my writing that I will be able to learn, transform experiences, and understand where to go next as a minority woman and as a teacher in my life/lives. I hope readers will also gain insight and find opportunities to participate in dialogue.

Through my autobiographical work I disrupt hegemonic narratives..... Narratives that do not tell us of the work behind the scenes. Only through the unveiling of these silent, unheard stories can the awakening, resistance, and struggles take place.

Silence is heard only in the moment in which it is breaking and only by breaking the silence can we return to silence.
The Braiding Process and The Braid

I have chosen the braiding process and the braid as metaphors for the unfolding of my long poem of my journey, of our métissage complete and incomplete with stories of centuries of Oppression and EXPLOITATION.

In the Punjabi culture the braid was considered a sign of beauty in the past. More recently however, it has become a symbol of oppression for many women including myself. "Proper Punjabi women" are expected to wear their hair in a braid and live according to the rules of those in Power. Only through accepting Their rules, Their expectations, Their abuse, Their braids, Their veils, Their oppression, can they remain women of the highest form of Indianness.
The first stage in braiding begins with the combing of the hair. The hair is temporarily rid of all the knots so that the braiding process may begin.

As expected, my mother would take all the hair in her left hand and then with her right hand, try to get out all the knots without pulling too hard. She often wished as she combed that she could rid our hair forever of those knots, but she didn’t want to cause us too much suffering. She knew, however, (just as we did) that the pain was part of the process.

Our Past Is Our Present
As I sit with my Biji (grandmother) and Mummiji (mother), I become absorbed by their stories and the oral nature of my culture. The intensity and the emotion that I hear can never accurately be recorded on paper. The medium of oral history, says Derek Reimer, "is the recorded human voice which conveys meaning beyond the actual words.... [Oral histories have] a personal presence that no written record can match" (quoted in Jagpal, 1994, P. 10). Given the oral tradition of my culture, this is the case for the stories of my grandmother and mother. When translated there is a necessary loss of meaning not only as a result of being translated from one language to another, but also by being transformed from informal oral stories to formally transcribed translated ones.

As I begin to talk to my grandmother about her experiences in Canada with racism and sexism, I realise for the first time that I do not know the words racism or sexism in Punjabi. I begin to question the silence of this topic. How could my family have lived through decades of IMPERIALISM, COLONISATION, and INSTITUTIONALISED discrimination and remain so silent?! Furthermore, how can Punjabi women remain so passive amidst their often double PATRIArchy?! When will they break their heavy yet invisible chains?! Why is everyone so oblivious to the injustices that only I seem to be seeing? Why don't my people wake up and do something?!

The anger mounts inside me. I feel the unbearable heat rising through my body. My teeth clench as I think of the stories and the pain. I feel as if my head is going to explode. But instead the tears begin to pour down -- endlessly.
How could THEY,

(Aside: I want to scream, but I say this silently for my sister will be marrying into a BRITISH family this year),

have gotten away with so much injustice in the countries of ‘others.’ Didn’t THEY realise the damage THEIR COLONISATION was doing, not only to the oppressed but also to THEIR own CULTURE (Viswanathan, 1993). THEIR oppression followed my family across oceans and time.

The history which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than of a language: relations of power, not relations of meaning.
(Foucault, quoted in Bannerji, 1993, P. xxv).

Physical and spatial displacement transported us from one country to another but not without the treacherous history following behind. Translating differently, yet remaining the same.

**Pithaji’s Scrapbook**

As Biji opened Pithaji’s, my Grandfather’s, scrapbook of newspaper articles and pictures, she would start the stories. Recounting story after story of the hardships of life in Canada as an early “dirty, diseased, uncivilised Asian immigrant”. Stories of His almost two month quarantine before He could set foot on THEIR soil in THEIR country of hope and many opportunities.

Showing me a picture of the turbaned Gurdit Singh, on the Komagata Maru, she
remembers that he would laugh at how THEY called everyone from India "Hindus" in THEIR newspapers. Gurdit Singh was, according to newspapers, the "Hindu" who in 1914 paid for the journey of the 376 Sikhs (in the Japanese ship the Komagata Maru) wanting to immigrate to Canada. She remembers Him telling her about how these Sikhs had arrived in the Vancouver Harbour on the grounds of their BRITISH Citizenship and the fact that most of those on board were old Sikh soldiers. They travelled under the premise that They should be allowed to travel freely in the BRITISH Empire.

They begged and pleaded to be allowed to disembark. However, They were prohibited from entering along with those who were physically or mentally handicapped, beggars, idiots, imbeciles, epileptics, the insane, the dumb, aliens incapable of reading, alcoholics, persons with tuberculosis or any loathsome disease and criminals (The Canada Year Book, 1933 -1934). The preferred settlers were those who came from the U.K. and the U.S. "Next in order of readiness were Scandinavians and the Dutch who readily learned English and [were] already acquainted with the working of free democratic institutions -- Continental European Countries where population is ethical, nearly related to the British" (The Canada Year Book, 1927 - 1928, P. 221).

After Their ship lay in the harbour for 2 months, its "human cargo" was sent back. They had not come by direct passage from Their country of birth which translated for Pithaji and Biji meant, because They were East Indian. There was no direct passage from India to Canada at the time.

The CANADIAN GOVERNMENT adopted policies to stop all immigrants from India.
Immigrations Laws indicated clearly who was allowed into THEIR country. BRITISH Citizenship was for the sole purpose of exploitation. "British subjects by birth [not colonisation], or naturalisation in the U.K., Australia, New Zealand and South Africa and Citizens of Ireland, France, the Island of St. Pierre and Miquelon and Citizens of the U.S. were allowed in as long as they were of good health and character and had sufficient means to maintain themselves" (Canada Year Book, 1956, P. 179).

CANADIAN Citizenship was granted only to these people and not to East Indians or to Asians. Even in 1956, when Pithaji came to Canada, the immigration of Asians to THEIR country was covered by “Special Procedures”. The “colour bar” that was not lifted until 1962 limited, if not prevented, Asians especially East Indians from entering THEIR country.

As Biji turns the page, she shakes her head at how the undesirable “human cargo” was sent back. The goods returned because They were not pure enough for THEIR country which wasn’t THEIRS at all. She tells me that everyone aboard was charged with attempting to overthrow the BRITISH GOVERNMENT. When they arrived back in Calcutta, “troops opened fire on the unarmed men. Over fifty Sikhs died in the ensuing battle, the rest were imprisoned and tortured, many were hanged” (Jagpaul, 1994, P. 34). Unarmed Indian men were killed because Canada had to remain a “country as pure in the matter of race as possible” (King quoted in Agnew, 1996, P. 29).

This last story of course was not in THEIR newspapers.

Despite their discriminatory immigration policies, East Indians were allowed into THEIR country when They were needed. My Great Grandfather came to Canada
sometime in the 1930's. He was needed for THEIR work -- work that THEY didn't do (Just as in India “untouchables” were called in for work They/they didn't do). THEY needed my Great grandfather, but they didn't need nor want His wife or His children because that would have meant more wives and more children of their race. THEY needed His hardworking labour but feared His colour. They feared that His colour would pollute THEIR country and THEIR race. Therefore, men of my Great-grandfather's generation were torn apart from Their wives and children because “the exclusion of women [would prevent Indian men] from ‘defiling’ the land with their progeny” (Raj quoted in Jagpal, 1994, P. 29).

Turning to the picture of Babaji in front of the grocery store, biji remembers how THEY never allowed Them to touch anything in THEIR grocery stores. Babaji would enter and carefully point to what He needed. THEY would give Him what He asked for and demand that the money be put on the counter, never in THEIR hands for fear of Their diseases. They were not given bags either. They carried everything home in Their pala, (the bottom part of Their shirt held up) like the beggars and untouchables in India.

Biji turns to the picture of Pithaji without His turban. Her solemn look grows even sadder. She explains how Pithaji had to cut His hair and stop wearing His turban because THEY wouldn't hire any turbaned Sikhs. They also didn't allow turbaned Sikhs into many of THEIR establishments. Many beer parlours, theatres, and hotels would not serve Them. They had to sleep in barns with the animals when they first arrived here. Some buildings even had signs placed in entrance ways ordering Sikhs to stay out (just like the signs in store windows for dogs and cats). Their beards and turbans and colour labelled Sikhs as evil, as dirty, and as troublemakers.
Biji continues, "Your Pithaji finally gave in and cut His hair and put away His turban until He retired in 1979". It was only then that He was able to reclaim His identity in THEIR country. Only for about 13 years before He passed away in 1992.

As Biji closes the scrapbook, we try to forget the hardships, the struggles, and the pain, but the past is there in His every remain, as is the fear.

When my grandmother was unaccepting of my sister's marriage to a BRITISH MAN, my sisters and I accused her of being racist. Little did we understand that it was her fear. The fear that she would not know how to act or know what to say around the "NABOBS". Fear that there were ulterior motives involved. Fear that one day when we might all be thrown out of THEIR country my sister would be alone. Fear that history might repeat itself. Dar. Dar. Fear.

Often Punjabi people in CANADA are told not to complain about their horrible past because at least they are here now in this unblemished, "Multicultural" country - Canada, and because at least they weren't slaves. In fact, they as well as other immigrants, are even asked to simply forget the past despite the fact that the past is our present. THEY don't understand that we cannot erase it from our memory as easily as THEY have been able to erase it from THEIR texts, from THEIR HIStory.
The Pre-determined Partitions

This stage in braiding begins with the careful parting of the hair. Every hair has a specific place in one of the three sections that are pre-made and should not be found outside of that place.

My mother would take her comb and find the three predetermined parts in the hair. She would then smooth each hair into its proper section, using oil if necessary, to make it stay there should it ever try to change its place.

Patriarchal Punjabi traditions have been passed down through generations clearly defining the limits of women's lives in Their society.

Their Patriarchal Culture Acculturates Us.
Sexism in the Cultural Back Drop

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the sexism affecting the lives of my mother, grandmother and myself, a deconstruction of the Punjabi Culture is a very necessary step in my work.

Sexism is a part of the social fabric of Indian culture. From the day that women are born, they experience their devaluation, their inferiority. As they mature, elements of Culture and Religion keep them in their place of subordination. Despite their resistance, they are often forced into accommodation. Those in power are invested in preserving the status quo and the stereotype of the selfless Indian wife and mother, goddess of the home” (Mitter, 1995, P. 5).

Sexism in the Punjabi Language

Punjabi women of my grandmother’s and my mother’s generations never refer to their Husbands by Their name. Directly, they address Them with the respectful name “Ji” and the formal plural subject “Thousi” (You) rather than “thou” (informal you) which is normally the subject used for a child or a wife/woman. When talking about Them indirectly to others, they refer to their Husbands as “Mara Prona” (My Husband) or “Eanatha Daddy” (their - the children’s Father). The subject and verb normally used by respectable women is the plural Masculine form. For example, “o kanthay” (They are eating) in order to denote respect and acknowledge their Husband’s superiority over them. This form is used otherwise when talking about more than one Male or when talking about elders. When Men speak about their wives to others, They normally refer to them by name and the singular form of the verb and subject are used “o come karthi” (she is working). This form is used otherwise when talking about one female or a female child.
Furthermore, as in French, the Masculine is always dominant in syntax (Irigaray, 1993). For example, when speaking about one Male and a hundred females one would always use the Masculine form of the subject and verb “O suthio” (They are sleeping). “This grammatical mark, which erases the feminine, has an impact on the way subjectivity is experienced and the way it is expressed in and by discourse” (Irigaray, 1993, P. 30 - 31).

Irigaray also points out that in French, whatever has been valorised has been masculine in gender, whatever devalorised, feminine. For example *le soleil* (the sun) is masculine since it is thought of as the source of life, and *la lune* (the moon) is feminine since it is thought of as ambiguous, almost harmful, except by some peasants (Irigaray, 1993, P.68). Looking at the Punjabi language the same holds true. The Powerful originators of light, *Sooraj* (the sun) and *Chand* (the moon), are both masculine, but their products *chandani* (rays of the moon) and *kirani* (rays of the sun) are feminine.

The patriarchal cultures have reduced the value of the feminine to such a degree that their reality and their description of the world are incorrect. Thus, instead of remaining a different gender, the feminine has become, in our language, the non-masculine, that is to say an abstract nonexistent reality…. the feminine grammatical gender itself is made to disappear as subjective expression, and vocabulary associated with women often consists of slightly denigrating … terms which define her as an object in relation to the male subject. This accounts for the fact that women find it so difficult to speak and to be heard as women. They are excluded and denied by the patriarchal linguistic order….

(Irigaray, 1993, P. 20).
Sexism in Religion

Sitting in the Gurdwara as a young girl, I often wondered why there were never any women reading the Guru Granth Sahib. It must be very sacred and very difficult to read, I often thought to myself, as I sat through those long ceremonies understanding very little of the ancient Male produced language. At home mom would read from her Guru Granth Sahib almost daily. Coming to this realisation, I understood that it wasn't the difficulty of the passages that prevented women from reading it, it was just that the Men at the temple had arbitrarily decided that They would be the ones most suitable for this very important and central role at the Gurdwara.

The evidence of sexism in the Sikh religion is also apparent in the written words of the Guru Granth Sahib. As I was translating the marriage hymns for my sister's wedding ceremony, I realised that I found myself retranslating the sacred words of the Guru Granth Sahib in order to make them more comprehensible to myself, my sisters and the audience for whom they were being written. Therefore the line from the second nuptial round of the marriage hymns:

"And the Lord has made you to meet the True Guru"

(Gobind Singh Mansukhani, 1997, PP. 165-169)

was re-translated as the Lord has blessed the meeting of the couple.

The lines in the fourth round of the marriage hymns:

God seems sweet to me and I have become pleasing to my master. The Lord Himself becomes one with His holy bride,
While the heart of the bride blooms and flowers with His holy Name

(Gobind Singh Mansukhani, 1997, PP. 165-169).

were completely untranslatable for me and therefore were omitted altogether.

Experts of the Sikh religion and fundamentalists may disagree with my re-translations as well as 'nontranslations'. However, the ambiguities of the language, where one does not know exactly who the True Guru master or Lord is, prevented me from providing a simple direct translation. Many sections of the Guru Granth Sahib are written in such a manner that we are not always certain whether the hymn is referring to a divine or a human Male. Although in the Santh tradition the gender of God is supposedly irrelevant, hierarchy is always present. God is always conceptualised in Male terms and the one seeking God is always conceptualised in female terms. There seems to be little need for distinction between the two Males - the divine Male and human Male or Husband. Men are considered Gods whom women are to worship and serve. They are expected to sacrifice their very lives in order to remain ever faithful devotees.

The tradition of sacrifice is evident in the sati practice which still exists in India even to this day. Women who partake in the religious act of sati, which means good wife, are marked as exceptional and singular. Good wifehood of which sati is only one small part is glorified in the Indian religious tradition. The only other choice is a life of celibacy and isolation. Enclosed by wood and coconuts in a neck-high pyre, as my mummiji and biji recall, the fire is lit around her as she sits alive with her dead husband. It is coercion and haste, not choice as They tell us, that sets her on fire.
They and Their religion promises her an eternity of bliss for a few minutes of pain. It is murder not glorification. The women who scream and yell off the pyre are not shown.

While pain is everywhere presented, especially in the tradition of sati, it is no-where re-presented in Their religious scriptures.

How can a woman be expected to accurately translate and comprehend the production of the Male Elite without retranslation?
When I look through the art books on the shelves at home, again I am astounded at what I've never noticed before. Absent women, irrelevant women and eroticised women. Surely there must have been women who played important roles in Society or who contributed to Society in some meaningful way. Where are these women? Why are these role models absent from these books and from the eyes of the public?

In the 1500's, the Mughal Emperors maintained studios in which many artists were employed. The court painter was, among other things, a visual historian producing set-piece records of events and individual portraits. As a result, much of the great works of art during this time period are images of the great moments of the Mughal Leaders of the time. When one looks at these paintings, one would think that women did not exist during these times. Paintings of 1589 - 1600's show mainly the Mughal Emperors during their conquests or courageous feats, during moments of accomplishment or honour, or sometimes just at play or praying. Central to all these paintings is the Leader Himself or His Men who are working for Him, fighting for Him or serving Him. If one looks very closely one may see a woman or two somewhere in the background either holding a child, or sometimes carrying building material to the Men who are constructing the Emperor's projects, or sometimes they are seen entertaining Men through songs or dances. Occasionally one may even see a queen or princess painted in refined style looking out of a small window of her Husband's palace where she is adorned and 'imprisoned.' One painting undated, but probably completed sometime between 1628 - 1658 during the reign of Shah Jahan shows Shah Jahan and His favourite wife Mumtaz Mahal holding a flower for each other. One cannot help but think about why Mumtaz was fortunate enough to have her portrait painted
next to the Emperor who incidentally also had the Taj Mahal built in her memory. Could she have been His favourite wife because she was well trained in the ways of pleasing Men as written in the Kama Sutra?

With the decline of the Muslim Mughal Empire, Hindu art, especially of the God Krishna, His enticing women and His favourite Radha, became very popular as well as images of the Rajas; for example, Raja Balwant Singh and His feminine pleasures in the northern states of Punjab. In this Artwork from the late 1600's until British rule women regularly appear in most paintings. Their roles now are mainly those of eroticised servants of Emperors, Rajas or Gods, eroticised possessions of Emperors, Rajas or Gods or eroticised admirers (longing or waiting for their Men) of Emperors, Rajas or Gods. These eroticised images show women in saris with tiny sari blouses which are either transparent or are so short that their large rounded breasts with erected nipples are usually the prominent feature of their bodies. Eroticised images painted for the pleasure of the Male Rulers of the times.

Once again Male dominated production determined the roles and role models of women to publicise and the ones not to publicise.
Sexism in Literature

Similarly, the literature with which most Indian children grow up, devalues women and places them in a position inferior to Men. Not only do these texts show women in subordinate roles to men, they also expect women in Society to follow the role models presented in the books.

The story that my mother and grandmother remember from their childhood and the story that they still watch presented on T.V. is Ramayana - a Hindi epic tale originally written by the Sanskrit poet Valmiki in the 4th century B.C.

C. Rajagopalachari states: “To millions of men, women and children in India, the Ramayana is not a mere tale. It has more truth and meaning than the events in one’s own life. Just as plants grow under the influence of sunlight, the people of India grow in mental strength and culture by absorbing the glowing inspiration of the Ramayana” (quoted in Mitter, 1991, PP. 81 - 82). Every child is told this story at bedtime.

The story begins with the childless King Janaka who finds a baby girl while plowing His field. He decides to adopt her and names her Sita. She grows up to be a beautiful princess. Many Princes compete for her hand in marriage, but Rama is the only one who is able to bend, and snap in two, the golden bow that no other Man can even lift off the ground. Sita marries Rama. “The words intoned by Sita’s father at the wedding ceremony are repeated at Hindu marriage rites even to this day” (Rajagopalachari, quoted in Mitter, 1991, P. 82).
Rama, as the eldest Son of King Dasaratha, is the rightful heir to His Father's throne. But because of a pledge made by the King to the jealous step-mother of another of His Sons, Rama must be sent off to the forest for fourteen years. He urges Sita to remain comfortably at the palace until He returns. But she refuses, saying: "For a woman, it is not her father, her son, nor her mother, friends, nor her own self, but the husband who in this world and the next is ever her sole means of salvation. If thou dost enter the impenetrable forest today,... I shall precede thee on foot, treading down the spiky kusha grass. In truth, whether it be in palaces, in chariots or in heaven, wherever the shadow of the feet of her consort falls, it must be followed" (Shastri, quoted in Mitter, 1991, P. 82).

Accompanied by Rama's younger Brother Lakshman, they set off for the forest where they live as nomads helping righteous creatures that they meet by fending off monstrous demons. Eventually they meet the sister of Ravanna who is the Demon-King of Lanka. His supernatural powers come from His former state as a God. His sister tries to seduce Rama and Lakshman, but they reject her advances. Insulted and furious, she demands that her Brother take revenge.

Ravanna who has had His eyes on Sita for sometime devises a plan to kidnap her. He sends a demon in the form of a deer to roam near the hut where Rama, Sita and Lakshman are staying. Rama goes after the deer and when He shoots it, a loud call for help is heard from Him.

At the sound of the scream Sita asks Lakshman to go see what has happened and to ensure that Rama is safe. Lakshman refuses saying that His duty is to ensure her safety. He has made a promise to His Brother Rama to never leave her side. She
demands that He leave her in order to help Rama, otherwise she will take her life. Lakshman is compelled to go. Before leaving He draws a white circle around the hut in order to keep all evil out and warns Sita not to cross the white line.

As soon as Lakshman has gone Ravanna appears before Sita in the form of a holy beggar. Sita dutifully offers Him food and water and in doing so steps out of the safe circle drawn for her. Now Ravanna takes on His true satanic form and grabs her, throws her in his Chariot and takes her back to His palace in Lakna.

Sita becomes a prisoner in Ravanna's palace. He tries to court her and gain her love by offering to give up all His wives for her and by promising her all His wealth. (A previous curse prevents Him from taking Sita by force). She refuses and her response is exemplary: "You ask me to accept you. How foolish! Can the crow approach the swan? Can a heinous sinner be allowed near the sacrificial fire? I do not value life or body. Do you imagine I would wish to live despised by the world? Do not dream that out of fear or to save my life I shall yield to you (Rajagopalachari, quoted in Mitter, 1991).

Angry, Ravanna cages Sita in His garden. He tells her that she has twelve months to change her mind or be eaten alive by Him. He subjects her to many demons, threats and temptations in an attempt to break her will. Sita contemplates suicide, but her faith in her Husband sustains her. For Him she will endure anything (Aside: as should every women in Their Society).

The rest of the tale recounts efforts of Rama and Lakshman to locate and rescue Sita. With the help of the great monkey army of Hanuman and the assistance of the Gods,
They finally arrive in Lakna. Rama is armed with a special weapon given to Him by the gods to kill the ten-headed Ravanna. After the victory over Ravanna, Rama asks Sita to be brought to Them.

But it is not the reunion that one would expect. Sita greets Rama in the proper way for a wife of her class. "Aryaputra," beloved and noble one. But Rama is very cold in His response. He says, "By killing Ravanna, I have wiped away the insult to our family and to myself, but you are stained by dwelling with one other than myself. What Man of high degree receives back a wife who has lived long in another’s house? Ravanna has held you on His lap and gazed on you with lustful eyes. I have avenged His evil deed, but I am unattached to you; O gentle one, I am forced by a sense of honour to renounce you" (Rajagopalachari, quoted in Mitter, 1991, P. 85).

There are many different accounts of how the story ends. According to my mother's version, Sita, at this point, grows very angry and in attempts to prove her innocence and faithfulness, she demands the Gods to light a huge fire and she throws herself into the blaze. Agni, god of fire, forbids His flames to touch her since Sita is purity itself.

Having proved her innocence for all people to see, Rama, as King, happily takes Sita back. Many years later, however, after hearing some rumours and after seeing His two sons, Rama again asks Sita to repeat the ordeal by the fire. She refuses another trial and calls upon Mother Earth to swallow her up. The earth opens up and she disappears into the furrow from where she came.

"Sita’s great and eternal merit is held up for emulation by Indian women today. Sita’s qualities are praised in devotional songs; her name is
synonymous with purity, patience and self-sacrifice” (Mitter, 1991, P. 86). She continues to be the traditional idea of womanhood, and girls and women continue to conform to the images of Sita-like femininity entertained by their Culture.

The Sita ideal can also be found in *The Laws of Manu*, the most famous Sanskrit treatise on human conduct. Manu's laws were imposed in the eighteenth-century by COLONIAL governor Warren Hastings in consultation with Brahman Priests. These laws clearly exhibit the polarised Male perception of the female. The law applies a strict Brahmanic standard which legitimises inequality and protects the interests of Men and the Ruling class. Regarding women, nothing is left uncodified. “Marriage is indissoluble, divorce impossible, and widow remarriage never permitted to ‘respectable women.’ As for adultery - if the man involved is of base caste, the woman should be torn apart by dogs” (Mitter, 1995, P. 88).

She should do nothing independently even in her own house.
In childhood subject to her father, in youth to her husband, and when her husband is dead to her sons, she should never enjoy independence....

She should always be cheerful, and skilful in her domestic duties with her household vessels well cleansed, and her hand tight on the purse-strings....

In season and out of season
her lord, who wed her with sacred rites,
ever gives happiness to his wife,
both here and in the other world.

Though he be uncouth and prone to pleasure,
though he have no good points at all,
the virtuous wife should ever
worship her lord as a god.


Although Manu's laws were imposed as the Hindu Law code in the 18th century, these stanzas are still held to apply as can be seen in most households as well as in films such as Pathi Parmeshwar.
Sexism in Films

Pathi Parmeshwar

In most Hindi films, women are portrayed as wonderful subservient housewives, daughters, daughters-in-law and sisters. As housewives they cater to the Husband's every need. As daughters they take care of the parents and help the mother to serve the Males in the family. As daughters-in-law they slave over the In-laws while taking and accepting Their abuse. And as sisters they honour and provide for the needs of Their Brothers.

The film Pathi Parmeshwar is a very common Hindi film that my family as well as most Indian families have watched in the past. It is one of the many typical Hindi films that illustrates the role models women are expected to emulate in the Indian Culture and the high expectations that Society places upon them to live up to those ideal roles.

Pathi Parmeshwar, which was released in 1993, became a highly controversial film amongst feminists. It begins with the actress Rekha playing the part of the bride and Vijay as her Husband. Rekha's Father arranges Rekha's marriage to Vijay. After the wedding, as Rekha leaves for her Husband's home, the Father gives her the traditional "sekha", parting words of wisdom, telling her that she must forget her "mekha", her parents home, because her "Susral", In-laws home, is now her new home. He further explains that she should no longer praise her "mekha", but must do anything and everything to make her "Susral" into a heavenly place and praise it instead. She is to accept her In-laws as her new Family and do all that is necessary to make Them happy. She should abide by Their rules, do as she is told by Them and forgive Them for all their wrongful doings. She must never argue with Them. Her, "Pathi",
Husband, is her God and she should honour and respect Him, fulfil His every desire, forgive His every mistake and never do anything against His wishes. He reminds her of Sita, Sarsawati, Draupadi and Laxmi - - the ideal women of Their Literature and of Their Culture.

In her In-laws home, Rekha sits on the bed decorated with flowers for her honeymoon night. Vijay, her Husband, is out drinking with His mistress. While His bride patiently awaits His arrival, she is looted of all her jewels by her Mother-in-law and Sister-in-law. Vijay returns in the morning. He is drunk and falls on the bed and is instantly asleep. At that same moment the Mother-in-law enters their bedroom and orders Rekha to let Him sleep because He has had a long night of hard work. (She is aware of where he has been, but such acts are necessary for Men and are not spoken about or questioned by women.) She pushes Rekha out of the room so that she can start her daily chores of cooking, cleaning and serving. Rekha’s painful journey as a bride and daughter-in-law begins faster than she had ever expected or imagined.

Rekha tolerates daily physical and emotional abuse from her Husband and His family. She never complains or contemplates leaving. She accepts her destiny and continues to be the perfect "bahu", daughter-in-law, which involves personal sacrifices and much acceptance. She believes that if she is strong enough to endure all that her destiny puts before her, she will be rewarded by the Gods. She believes that if she has faith and prays daily the Gods will give her the happiness that she deserves.

Life for Rekha continues in much the same way. Serving by day and waiting alone at night. Her Husband continues to enjoy his evenings drinking in the company of His mistress (whom Rekha now knows) and all expenses are paid for by Rekha’s father.
Along with her duties as a wife and as a daughter-in-law, regular provisions of money to keep the Husband and In-laws happy are also considered the responsibility of the bride and her family.

Suddenly one day Vijay wakes up and finds that He is unable to stand or walk. He has in fact become paralysed. Rekha immediately begins to pray to the Gods to help her Husband. She begins her, "maran varath", fast-of-death. She will not eat anything until her wish is granted, and if her Husband should never walk again, she will die of hunger fasting for His life.

One night Rekha hears her Husband mention the name of His mistress in His sleep. She begins to feel badly that He is unable to visit her. She considers it her duty as His wife to fulfil His every desire -- even that of seeing another woman. So the very next day she makes arrangements for a wheel chair and takes her Husband to meet His mistress. Upon arrival at the house of the mistress, Rekha is introduced as Vijay's servant. Vijay and the mistress enjoy themselves in the house while Rekha waits outside to take her Husband back home.

This is the usual turning point in most Hindi films. The part where the hidden secrets and identities are found out. This film is not any different. We discover that Vijay's mistress is actually someone named Durga. Sometime ago Vijay had agreed to marry Durga but he had never seen her. On the wedding day Vijay demanded more money than Durga's Father could give and therefore decided not to marry her. From that day on Durga had promised herself revenge. Her plan involved having Him fall in love with her and then destroying Him. She was not aware that Vijay was married. When she learned about His marriage she decided to abandon her plan because of the
pain that it was causing Rekha. She now started to devise a new plan in order to make Vijay return to Rekha.

One day Rekha is very weak because of her “maran varath”, so she pays someone to take her Husband to go to see His mistress Durga. When Vijay arrives at Durga’s door, Durga asks Him to leave and never return. She tells Him that He no longer has anything to offer her. Durga complains that He cannot walk and that He has no money left. She tells Him that a women like herself is only with a Man during times of happiness and wealth. She is not a Sita-like wife, she explains, and cannot be expected to share in His bad times.

Shocked and upset, Vijay leaves Durga’s house. On His way home, He begins to think about all the wonderful things that Rekha has done for Him despite the horrible way that He has treated her. Suddenly His love for His wife is awakened. He rushes back to her in His wheelchair.

He finds Rekha in the temple praying to the Gods for her Husband. Suddenly Vijay is thrown off His wheel chair. This angers Rekha who is now determined either to have her wish fulfilled before she leaves the temple or to die before the Gods. Rekha begins the religious sacrificial dance. Just as she is about to give her life, the Gods send lightening from the sky. The lightening hits her Husband’s legs and suddenly he is able to walk again. He has learned His lesson and she has been rewarded for her pain, patience and “shakti”, strength.

Hindi films are the most common form of entertainment for Indian people in India as well as in Canada and therefore have a great deal of influence on their lives. This film
provides examples of Their idea of the roles and expectations of “proper” women in Indian Culture. Although recent films are beginning to show images of more assertive, less tolerant women, these images are hidden amongst the scenes of the traditional all accepting Sita-like women. Change is a slow process because those in Power determine which films should be seen and not seen. If women’s decisions are not directly Controlled, they are indirectly Influenced. A “proper” Punjabi woman should not be seen at the theatre where a movie that shows women acting in improper ways is being presented. Women’s fears of being labelled improper prevent “art films” of the leading feminist movie maker in India, Shabana Azimi, from doing well at the box office.

In fact if They had it Their way, these films would not be shown at all.

Although the women in Hindi films are imagined women, in my experiences and in the experiences of my mother and grandmother, these women are very real and very much alive in India as well as in Canada.
The First Strand of the Braid

In this stage in braiding, the braid begins to take its form.

As expected my mother would take the first strand with all its hair always changing and growing and pull it firmly into its appropriate place. As the first strand was shown the centre, the braid began to take its shape. It was a very linear predetermined shape.

My grandmother’s section is the first section of the "metissage." The dynamics of her very restrictive, linear life shaped by her past have shaped the lives of my mother and myself.

I have called this section a Translation of Stories from my Biji because much of what has been said by her and much of what I know of her I know in Punjabi. I have translated it here into the DOMINANT language with the necessary loss of meaning and gaps for non-Punjabi readers.

A Translation of Stories from my Biji
She was married off at age 9. All girls in those days had to be married by age 13. *Ma Pe tha poon si. Poon* is like giving to the poor when they are hungry. Giving away a girl for marriage complete with dowry without wanting anything in return was considered *poon* in the same way. "Good things" would come if the girl was given away before age 13; after that it was not considered *poon*. The sacrifice of a girl after age 13 would not bring the parents any rewards. Perhaps after that age she was considered too old to be moulded by the In-laws -- by those in Control.

The translations for the words racism and sexism were absent even in my Father's Punjabi dictionary. As I finally find the translated words for racism and sexism -- nasalwad and jinswad, I realise that my grandmother prefers not to talk about these things -- about her personal experiences -- probably because she feels that nothing is to be gained by bringing up the unpleasant aspects of the past. That perhaps not translating or remaining silent would erase the History, the anger and the pain. Talking about my Grandfather must also be very difficult for her now. Having lost him so recently must be more painful for her at this time than any past injustices that they've either endured together or alone.

"Things were fine when we came", she says. But she fails to mention her isolation and confinement. "While serving as a haven from the unwelcoming host society, 'home' gradually became a cage from which [women like my grandmother] rarely emerged. Isolation and loneliness were the price for their obligation to husband, children and community" (Nipp 1983, PP. 88-89 quoted in Agnew, 1996, P. 44). Furthermore, because "the family also served as an emotional buffer in a race-biased
society [it] created solidarity between men and women [of the Indian culture]” (Agnew, 1996, P.59). As a result, racism and sexism as well as cultural obligations hid women like my grandmother deeper and deeper in their cages. So deep that although “the work in the home and community [was] critical in integrating newcomers to their environment..., [they] have remained virtually invisible in the [translations] of Male scholars of immigration and ethnicity” (Agnew, 1996, P. 102).

My grandmother was considered a very lucky woman. Her Husband never beat her. He always sent her enough money to support herself and Their children while they remained in India waiting to join Him in Canada. He had remained loyal. He had worked hard and in 1967, when THEIR immigration laws finally allowed Their families to enter, He had saved enough money to pay THEM to allow His family to join Him.

When here, He made every attempt to protect His wife from the hostile society and its racist attitudes by keeping her locked up inside. Of course she was allowed to go out to buy food and clothes -- the necessities -- with the money He carefully counted out for her. But detours from her path would be unheard of and untolerated. It was only with Him that she was to visit relatives and friends if she was to remain a woman of proper upbringing.

Soon she would learn enough English to pay the cashiers and ask “how much?” Her contact with the outside world required no more from her and her duties inside the home permitted no less.

It was her Husband who endured the racism and the pain of the outside world. She should remain silent and consider herself lucky for being able to just stay inside away
from it all. And that was how her thinking was moulded by Him. She was thankful that
she didn't need to face His pain everyday and she was thankful for what He endured
for her and for His family. In return she would do anything and everything to serve His
every need and keep Him eternally happy. After all He was the one who faced the
humiliation of having to come home on the freight trains rather than the passenger
trains that all the other workers sat in because of the colour of His skin and because of
His turban. She only had to hear about the stories indirectly, and from her distance,
fear the outside world.

Slowly it would change. THEY would begin to allow them to enter THEIR trains, THEIR
shops, THEIR theatres, THEIR hotels. THEY would pass them their change directly
into their hands rather than from hand to counter to the supposed dirty, diseased, evil
other hand. But it was a slow painful journey. A journey that would involve many
sacrifices and even more silences, especially for my Biji.

Even though the imprisonment and isolation was not right, it was the way it had always
been for Their women. No one else was resisting and Biji had her reputation and her
Husband's to keep. Her only choice was alienation from her family and her community
into a community that already considered her an alien. The choice was not an easy
one, but it was also not a difficult one to make.

Every day in her three story house she would cook, clean and wash with her
daughters. Sometimes for 30 people who came over or were invited over
unannounced by the Husband. By midnight there were only sink-fulls of dishes left for
her and the daughters to clean and lunches to make for the morning for the Men and
Boys and themselves. Then they could sleep till 6:00 am. A whole 4 hours sometimes
before it was time to wake up and get the morning meals ready.

Other times they were lucky. They only had to serve their immediate family of 17 people. With the basement rented, finding a place to sleep was always an ordeal. The mothers tried to sleep with their Husbands and the children with their cousins. But occasionally the arrangements changed. A child here, a child there, a child everywhere. Mishaps took place as they would one day learn.

With the duties and expectations of a traditional Punjabi wife, the sexism of Their culture, and the racism of the EXTERNAL WORLD, there was little time or space for resistance for my grandmother especially in her isolated world. Any attempts at resistance were quickly turned into accommodation through their fear of those in CONTROL.

In her locked cage my Biji remained nameless, confined, and silent.
The great woman of beauty, strength, and wisdom,
   The silent pillar,
   Holding up the eastern and western kingdom.
   Your intense strength and loyal determination,
   deserves our deep, deep admiration.

   To uproot your entire world and start anew,
   without knowing what field it would lead you to.
   Never a moment’s silence in the displacement,
   Yet never a word of protest or of despair.
   If it was not the obstacle of a man,
   it was one of a family, woman, or child.
   Always reassuring, guiding, offering--alone.
   Serenely sedating storms on their each and every approach.
   Changing the destinies of the destitute to those of the opulent.

Even in your days of rejoicing,
   Your laps are full and your arms are rocking.
   Cultivating, yet once again, the journey of a grandchild.
   Embracing with kindness, tenderness, and eternal love.
   Never shall we forget your intricate, enchanting garden.
   Never shall we forget
   Your isolation and your pain.

*Marray Biji are the words “my grandmother” in English.
This poem, with some changes, was written for my grandmother on her 75th birthday.
The Second Strand of the Braid

In this stage in braiding, the braid becomes longer and more complex.

As expected, my mother would take the second strand with all its hair always changing and growing and pull it firmly into its appropriate place. As the second strand, supported by the first, was shown the centre, the braid began to get longer and more complex. The longer it got the more options there were as to how to braid it or how to wear it. The opportunity of having a choice was considered very lucky but the choice of not having a braid was not a choice at all.

My mother's section is the second part of the *metissage*. The dynamics of her life shape my life and the lives of my sisters.

I have called this section a Retranslation of Stories from my Mummiji because her stories in the memory of my mind are also in Punjabi intertwined with the stories of my grandmother. Her stories are not only retranslations braided with the translations of the stories of my grandmother, but also new stories of her new, more complex, always restrictive and ever changing landscape.

A Retranslation of Stories From My Mummiji
My grandmother’s role as a traditional and subservient housewife was to be inherited by my mother through the socialisation of gender roles. Gender roles are learned in a social context and children learn not only to be female or male but also to be the kind of male or female appropriate to their race or class. Although my mother learned what kind of female she needed to be in her Culture, her education and exposure to the MAIN CULTURE allowed her to see in greater detail, than my grandmother, the injustices of SOCIETY. She however, also like my grandmother, remained powerless to act because racism, sexism, and classism dominated her life. She saw very few feminist role models whom she could trust and with whom she could identify. The “first-wave feminist ideology enunciated for the first time the general oppression of women based on gender. But it assumed that the roles, values, and ideals of middle class Anglo-Saxon women were universal and that the condition of the lives of women from different class and ethnic groups were similar to their own” (Agnew, 1996, P. 46). This attempt to “unify the oppression of women of different racial backgrounds [was] not only absurd but impossible...because their racial histories [could not] be unified” (Brand, D. & Carty, L. quoted in Bannerji, 1993, P. 207). Furthermore, having never been given a platform from which to speak, or be heard, women like my mother often lacked the confidence to join women’s struggles thinking that their concerns for racism and sexism were/are not valid.

Isolated and alone, many Punjabi females continue to be victims of racism and of a very confined Patriarchal world where, as Carolyn Heilbrun points out, their “stories always end with marriage, with wifedom and motherhood” (p. 58). Heilbrun’s book, Writing a Women’s Life, in which she discusses PATRIARCHAL CULTURE that has defined the limits of women’s lives throughout the centuries, spoke quite loudly to me.
In reading her work, I re-read the experiences of my grandmother, my mother and myself. She eloquently states that we continue to live nameless. “[We are] not persons. [We are handed] by a father to another man, the husband. [We continue] to be objects of circulation, exchanging one name for another...” (p.58). Our Father’s name for a Husband’s. Our respect for our Parents, our lack of education, and our fear of Patriarchy and the OUTSIDE WORLD have held us in our long assumed place - underneath. Those of us who have tried to find our true voices have been quickly silenced by our conservative Parents/Patriarchy who do not “understand our wish to remake the world and discover the possibility of different destinies for women in it” (Heilbrun, P.119). What is the point of speaking when THEY/They will not listen or hear? What is the point of translating for THEM when our translations will not be valued, read or understood?

In her caged, and exploited existence, my Mummiji questioned but remained silent for she also was alone.
A Retranslation of Stories From My Mummiji

"Meinu both parnay the shoc see." Mummiji starts her story with the phrase, 'I was very interested in learning', that I've heard her repeat many times during my childhood and adult life. Every time she utters it, it makes my heart sink. The regrets, the anger and finally the acceptance and deep sorrow-- for there was no other choice.

As I translate my mother's words, they lose much meaning for me as well as for her. For how can one completely translate the grief, the bitterness, the Familial Hierarchy, and the repression. However, I realise that I must write her words in the language of the DOMINANT culture because it is also for that culture that these stories are being told. Despite the necessary loss of meaning it is a way of expressing and communicating when one is denied the right to speak. I must write because "giving voice through writing is one way of fighting back against the powerful forces which attempt to silence us" (Yee, quoted in Bannerji, 1993, P. 35).

The Dream of Being an Educated Independent Woman in Palahi, India. My mother "saw education as freedom from dependency on men as well as upliftment from the oppression of racism" (Briand, in Bannerji, 1993, P. 285).

"I was very interested in learning", she starts. I wanted to be really well educated and get a job and be someone independent - to make a difference. That was the only way I knew I would be able to do some of the things that I wanted to do in my life and get a good educated husband who would treat me well. Women weren't allowed to have an education because it was thought that if they learned too much they would begin to think for themselves and become too independent. They would want to do things their own way or get married to someone of their own choice. This was not considered a
good thing in those days and families tried hard to keep women “naray che”, ‘in the
dark.’

I was the very first girl in my village to get a grade 10 education. I was very, very
lucky. I had the help of my “Mammaji”, Uncle. He was a well-educated teacher in
Jeenthwal and They listened to Him. I worked hard and got very good grades in
school. After grade 10, I was very excited because I thought I would be able to go on
to college. I had the good grades but that was the end of my dream. “Manay both
bagabath kithi”, she shakes her head. ‘I fought and screamed’ and demanded to know
why I couldn’t go to school like my uncle had done. But it was useless. “Babaji”, your
Great-grandfather, had already decided my destiny. He was the oldest Male in the
house and no one ever dared to question His decisions. He ordered, “No more,
you’ve gone far enough! Grade ten is already too much!” For “Babaji”, women only
needed to be able to write a letter and an address; nothing more was needed in terms
of literacy. ‘They were not going to have a career after all’. “Nokri thoro tu karni” He
would say. He told my parents that I could not go any further in my schooling because
now it was time to get me married and to send me off to my Husband’s house. He
said, “biay karne wala rantha”, ‘marriage was all that was left to do. “Saday hatha thou
bar na ho jabe”, They worried. We have to ‘keep her in our hands’. They thought that
if I became too educated, I would become disrespectful and then it would be too late.
Women had to be very careful because they could get killed if they spoke to a Man
outside the home or did anything disrespectful like that. There was no room for
resistance. The preparations started for my arranged wedding.

Since I didn’t have any choice, I began to think that maybe getting married would
not be so terrible. That maybe I would be able to go to my Husband’s house and They
would let me continue my schooling there. I prayed that They would find me a Husband who would let me go to school. But in my prayers, I forgot “Marray Soray”, ‘my in-laws’.

**Dreams of an Education after Marriage**

It was a very traditional Punjabi wedding. They didn’t even show me His picture. But the other girls in the village knew who He was. They told me that He was very handsome and well educated. I felt so lucky that my Husband was “para likiaa”, ‘well educated’. I started to see some hope of fulfilling my dream of education.

When I went to my Husband’s house and asked if I could continue my education, “Marray Soray” laughed. Although my Husband was supportive, “Marray Soray” said, “ay than ho nay saktha!”, ‘That would be impossible! We didn’t get you married to our Son so we could spend our life providing you with an education! Your job here is to look after your Husband and your Husband’s family! For that your mother has trained you well. You don’t need any more schooling’. It was not long before their agenda became very clear to me. I began, unwillingly, to accept my reality for what was the other choice?

**The Shattered Dream and All Loss of Freedom to Think or Do**

My life became so busy that I no longer had even a moment to spare to do things that I wanted to do like reading a novel or even a newspaper. Once when They saw me reading the newspaper, They told me to put it away and get to work. My education was of little use for what lay ahead on “Marray Soray’s” agenda. “Babaji” had been right.
I would put the alarm on at 4:00 am. At that time, I would go and milk the cows and make the butter. This usually took till 6:00 am. Then I would make the morning meals for the whole family. Everybody wanted different things like in a restaurant. Someone wanted “thean and roti”, Someone else wanted “pinia” and Others wanted an “omelette”. Everyone’s menu had to be made separately and with extreme care. If ever things were not to Their satisfaction or if They were just upset, the food was kicked off the short stools and thrown to the ground. “Gevave thean thi hemith nay si”, she shakes her head again. ‘I was not strong enough to say anything back’. I would just clean-up the mess and start again. I was much luckier than most women, because at least I had a nice Husband. For His love I accepted everything.

Besides what could I do. My parents had taught me that once a woman got married, her Husband’s home became her new home. She was not allowed back to her birth house. My Husband’s Parents were supposed to be my new Parents and I had to learn to adjust to Their ways and serve Their needs as well as the needs of my Husband. The wife’s parents could come to visit their daughter in her Husband’s home as often as they wanted to as long as, with their visits came the goods. The daughter, however, could only go back to visit her parents if her “Sorays” and Husband both gave her permission and time off from the daily duties. We were told that the best woman, the kind that I was expected to be, was ‘one whose doli, goes to the In laws and dies there’. “Yeray car theri doli janthi, othowin theri arthi utni chaythi”. If ever I left Their home it would have been a great dishonour not only to me but also to my entire Family.

After the morning work was finished I started to prepare lunch and then it was time to start making dinner. We didn’t have stoves and fridges. I had to start the fire each time
and everything had to be made fresh each day. I made three meals daily, prepared tea and snacks three times daily and then made milk for Everyone before bedtime. I had to sit on the ground to do everything. It was hard work. Luckily I had the help of our “choori” (women from the untouchable caste) for the cleaning at home and at the “havali”, where the animals were kept. That poor woman worked so hard doing all the dirty work; the things that she wasn’t allowed to ‘touch’, I did. Some women in the village had to do everything on their own - at least I had some help. I was lucky. Between meals, I used to massage and bathe my Mother-in-law and warm up the water for the whole Family. I also had to sew clothes for Everyone in the Family. I remember one time I had a headache and stopped sewing for a few minutes. My Mother-in-law saw me and ordered me back to work, “Jakai see! Sar tha ethain thouk tha rantha otha kurtha seenay wala, jakai see”. She ordered, ‘Go sew! Headaches come and go, his clothes need to be sewn, go do it now’.

Cooking, cleaning, sewing - that was pretty well how my whole day was spent -- taking care of my Husband and his Family just as a good wife was supposed to do. Everyone else sat around and read novels or listened to music or just relaxed. No one worked. The land brought in more than enough money to live. My Husband was a well known poet, but He wrote for enjoyment, not income.

My Three Daughters Not SONS

By the third year after my wedding, I had all three of my daughters. I was lucky that “Marray Soray” were not unhappy when my daughters were born. Even for my Husband he didn’t see any difference between girls and Boys. Some In-laws and Husbands demanded a second marriage if the wife wasn’t able to ‘produce’ any Males. But my mother-in-law made sure that you three had good clothes to wear and good food to eat and she kept you clean and she would even feed you herself when I
was busy working. She even had 'dancers come to our house', "kusray nachay si", when her grand daughters were born and gave "lori", 'food and goods', to villagers on their birthdays. ‘Lori’ was normally only given when a Male was born so when my Mother-in-law gave it to celebrate her grand-daughters, it was considered very wasteful and unnecessary.

Other people in the village treated Boys and girls very differently. Girls and women were not always fed properly. They were usually not allowed to drink milk, or eat meat, eggs or butter. Some daughters-in-law were only allowed to eat leftovers and if there weren't any, they often did not eat at all. Food items, especially rare and expensive food items were stored only for the Men who supposedly worked hard and needed their daily nourishment. Women's work was not considered work at all -- it was wifely duty. Not only were women not fed, sometimes they were even killed if there were too many of them born to one family. Most Parents didn't have the means of providing a dowry for one girl let alone five. It never mattered how many Boys were born. They were desirable because They kept ownership of the Family name and the Family property and because They brought in wives (with the dowry that was demanded) to take care of the Families. Some Punjabi people even believed what the Hindus believe -- that if you didn't have a Son to light the cremation fire, you would go directly to hell. This is why the Hindus call Sons "Puthia", 'the one who saves you from hell'.

The rules for women/daughters-in-law were clearly laid out. Daughters-in-law had to sit on the ground below the In-laws and below the Husband -- at Their feet. They had to wear a “purda”, 'veil' at all times even in their own house, especially if there were Men or strangers there. In the presence of Men they were not even allowed to speak. Outside the home they were expected to always observe "purda" and walk behind
Men. One day my Mother-in-law got angry because I had always resisted wearing the veil. She told my Husband that people in the village were talking about how Our “boti”, ‘bride’, never wears the veil. That was the one time when my Husband was on my side. He told my Mother-in-law to call the women who had made the comment to the house. When the women arrived, my Husband spoke to her and she never uttered a word against me ever again. Soon after this incident other women in the village stopped wearing the veil as well. Not all “Sorays” were happy though, because to Them any decisions that women made against Their wishes meant a loss of Their Power. More of Their Power was lost if these decisions were supported by their Husbands. This is one of the reasons that wives could only go near or talk to their husbands at night. One time when my Husband was sitting beside me while I was cooking, my Mother-in-law came over angrily and told Him to go do something more productive. “Kitha pari ay bas ni kartha”. They feared the woman would somehow convince the Husband to take their side in matters against His mother and Father and in doing so would lessen the In-Law’s Power over the daughter-in-law and in the household.

But I knew my limits. That is what my Husband liked about me -- that although deep down I was rebellious and never gave up, I knew my limits. So even though I refused to stay uneducated, I refused to wear a veil, and I refused to let Others walk all over me, I accepted all the abuse that came from His Family. But what He liked the most about me was that I continued to enhance His Power by never threatening it and never allowing Him to feel any loss of control over me. I also refused to leave Him no matter what people said and no matter what I experienced with Him. I was His wife, the mother of His children, the saviour of His parents and His angel and servant for life. But deep down I was very bothered by the injustices I saw against women in our
village as well as most other villages in India.

Often the older women of the village would come over and cry when they sat with my Mother-in-law over how unfortunate it was that God had decided to give our Family only girls. It even happened the last time when we went to India in 1983. But I never let it bother me, it was to be expected. I loved my daughters, you were all so 'adorable and smart', "thousi both piaria or hashiar si", and I cherished every moment that I was allowed to spare out of my busy day to spend with you. Sometimes you used to cry, when you were little, for me to pick you up. It made me very upset when I couldn't because "roti" had to be ready on time-- "nay the manu patha si ki hona", 'I knew what would happen if it wasn't'. So as much as it hurt, I would have to turn my back and start the work. I was very lucky though, all three of you were taken care of very well compared to most of the other girls in the village.

**Hopes of Educating My Daughters**

I started to think about my daughters and their future. I was very worried. I wanted them to have a good education, but I knew this wouldn't be possible here in this village where the Schools only went up to grade 5. I didn't know if "Marray Soray" would allow me to send my daughters to school. I thought about speaking to my "Mammaji" who had helped me and I also thought of going to Canada where most of my family was by now. I was told that it was a good country and the education system was good there. One day I finally had the courage to discuss the matter with my Husband. Luckily, he was very supportive. He was an educated poet and could see the value of education for girls as well as Boys -- not like the other people in the village who only saw one role for women and another for Men. Your Father was very well known and respected in the village and so He was able to pay off some 'Big Officers' to get some
seats in a very good school for the three of you. That's the way everything works out there. If you have money and Power, you can get almost everything that you want, just like here in CANADA. Luckily your Father was able to do that for you girls because for me as a woman -- there wouldn't have been any chance. Whatever changes I tried to make in my life I had to do them silently or through Others. Women didn't have a voice in those days or their tongues would have been cut off.

The Government School was far and it made me sad to think that the one 'enjoyment', "kushi", of my day -- "merian kuria", 'my daughters', would be taken far away from me and that I would have to live all alone in that imprisonment with my In-laws. But I knew it was the only way for the three of you to get an education and find a way out of "pranay kiala tho" -- 'this darkness, this backward way of thinking.' I wanted to do everything I could to prevent the three of you from living in confinement as I had done.

In their birth home, the rights and actions of women were controlled by and performed for the Men in the Family. The Father and the oldest Son ruled the daily life of the women in the Family. Very few decisions were made without Their consent. Their word determined how the women of the family dressed and the kind of duties they performed or didn't perform. In the In-laws' family this Power was transferred to the Men and women of her Husband's Family. If the daughter-in-law was not serving her Husband or her Father-in-law, she was serving her Mother-in-law or Sisters-in-law. She was responsible for all duties that the women of the untouchable caste were not permitted to perform. Culture, Religion and class through Patriarchy necessarily determined and secured women's roles and legitimised caste divisions. There was little escape from one's destiny. Escape would be translated into alienation, isolation,
and eventual decomposition since, for a traditional woman of my mother and grandmother's generations, "Husband, home and heritage were considered the prime sources of identity and emotional fulfilment" (Mitter, 1995, P. 12).

*Mummiji left one cage for another and there she would remain for the next ten years of her life.*
Uneducated

Never unmarried.

Never childless.

Never an undutiful daughter.

Never an undutiful daughter-in-law.

Never an undutiful sister.

Never an undutiful sister-in-law.

Never an undutiful wife.

Never an undutiful mother.

Never an undutiful widow.

Thus she is instructed.

Thus she shall live.

As the highest form of woman.

Of Indianness.
Ji

HanJi.
NayJi.
KiJi?
AchaJi.
LaowJi.
CaowJi.

THOUSIJJI never thou,
unlike YOUJI.
Are YOU my HUSBAND
or my LORD?
Here's YOUR waterJl,
Here's YOUR roti and chaiJl,
Here's YOUR ironed clothesJl,
Here's YOUR shined shoesJl,
Here's YOUR massageJl,
Here's YOUR childrenJl.
Here's my earningsJl,
Here's my bodyJl,
Here's my soulJl,
Here's my lifeJl.

Is there anything else that YOU desire my LORD?

Before I go may YOUR servant ask your name?

*Ji is the word used by my mother and many Punjabi women of her generation to refer to her/their Husband. It is considered very disrespectful to call a Husband by His name since Men are like Gods to the women who marry Them.
Laws of Entitlement not Title

Laws declare that the land is their entitlement.

Sons and daughters are to equally inherit their fair share.

Her gender and Theirs, however, continues to keep her name effaced from Their will.

To have the family land in the name of a woman.

Such a practise is considered scandalous in India.

(Others in Canada).

The Father disapproves.

And after His death, the Brothers disapprove.

Certainly dharthi Matha (Mother Earth) would disapprove.

And so They continue to feed upon her,

Use her, and abuse her.

Selfish Vultures stripping her of her earthly possessions.

Leaving her not even the dignity of her own name,

Of her own gender.

Parth Matha (Mother India),

These are Their laws of entitlement not title.

Many Punjabi women including my mother must accept their “proper” parents’ will to leave all their assets of money and land to their Sons. The daughters receive nothing for they are to remain totally dependent on Men and only exist for Them and with Them -- never on their own. How can a title exist without a subject?
Canada and the Hopes of a Better Future

While education plans were still under way for the three of you in India, my Parents who were in Canada at the time, wrote me to tell me that THEIR IMMIGRATION LAWS had finally changed and that the letter that Grand-father had written to sponsor us in Canada had finally been chosen. We were so lucky. They said that they could now have us join them in Canada even though I was married! It was such wonderful news. I had felt so isolated in "Marray Soray’s" home since my family had left me there all alone.

I was happy not only because Canada meant escape from "Marray Soray" and a better life for my family, but also because I knew providing an education for my girls would be easier. Schools were free in Canada. I had only one wish now, that God willing, my girls would learn English quickly and do well in school in Canada. I worked hard toward this goal by teaching you the little English I had learned in school. I couldn’t wait to come to Canada. Everything in my life would be so wonderful now, I thought.

Canada, a Better Life?

The better life in Canada that I had heard about was not as I had expected at all. In 1970 getting a job was very difficult. We had to live with my parents where there were 17 people living under the same roof. In order to make ends meet, the whole family including the three of you went berry picking in the farms. We used to get about $.75 a ‘flat.’ The whole family usually filled about 2 flats in an hour. I would have to wake you girls up at 6:00 am and we would start picking berries at 7:00 am. We would work all day outside in the extreme heat or pouring rain sometimes till 9:00 pm. The “GORE”, ‘WHITE BOSSES’, told us that we had to work late or work in the rain,
because otherwise THEIR berries would rot. THEY told the bus drivers when to take us back home in THEIR buses so we didn't have any choice but to stay there and work. The buses were another story. THEY must have jammed at least a hundred of us into each bus everyday. Thinking back now, I don't know how we breathed in there. I was always scared that somebody would sit on one of you one day or step on you. All three of you were so tiny so you usually had to sit at people's feet in the aisle ways. I tried not to let you three out of my sight in those buses, but it wasn't easy. I guess that's why I never worried about breathing.

It hurt my heart to see the three of you working in the fields in that heat, but I had no choice. I had to take you with me just like all the other 'immigrant women' there. Sometimes we even ran out of drinking water and everyone would have to wait hours for THEM to bring us water. I hated seeing my daughters and all the other children thirsty. You all looked like you would faint. Sometimes children did die from dehydration or heat stroke. It was so awful. It was so different here. THEY treated us so badly. We had had people working on our farms for us in India but we never treated them like this. We always took them "roti" on time and took good care of them. Canada was not at all what I had expected.
We're going to the farm!

We're going to the farm!
We're going to the farm!

Hurrah! Hurrah!
I'll ride the horses,
I'll feed the cows,
I'll gather the eggs,
I'll jump in the wagon!
We'll play in the hay!

Like in India
and
Like they say,
in those books
we read at school
everyday!

Hurrah! Hurrah!

But when we arrived at the farm where we were to stay for our entire summer holidays in 1971, we didn't see any horses, or cows, or wagons or hay like in THEIR textbooks. We only saw sad, silent fields upon fields of strawberries, raspberries and blueberries waiting to be picked by our hardworking 'immigrant' hands. Fields saying "Welcome to the immigrant's life in Canada. Didn't they tell you? This is only the beginning. There's much more to come."
Starting our new life in Canada in 1970 was very difficult. We had nothing, not even a home. Your Dad started to get very depressed because His poetry and education was not valued here and He didn’t want to leave the house. He started drinking again. One time He ripped up a whole bag full of His published books of poetry and threw them out. Many years later when He felt more settled and wanted to start writing again, He would look everywhere to get copies of those books. Another time, He was so drunk that He started running around outside in the yard late at night screaming that there was an air-raid and wanting everyone to take cover. He just started to sink deeper and deeper into His depression.

I knew I had to be strong and work hard. I was very scared because I couldn’t speak English. I knew I had to find a way to do all the work at home and work outside doing whatever job I could get. I was lucky I could sew and eventually found a job as a seamstress in a factory close to home. This, however, was only after taking a sewing course. I showed THEM that I could sew but THEY still made me take a course. I remember the job interviews...the ‘gaze,’... and the horrible working conditions, she continues...

When I went for job interviews, THEY said “no thank you” even before I spoke. Occasionally THEY would actually take me in for an interview, but it was usually a very short one. THEY would ask that dreaded question: “Do you have any EXPERIENCE”? When I told THEM “No, but...” THEY never let me finish. I wanted to tell THEM, “no, but I have been sewing clothes almost every single day of my life for the last 33 years.” Even for dish washing they wanted EXPERIENCE.

Then I applied to MANPOWER and THEY sent me to do a sewing course at the...
Vancouver Vocational Institute even though I could already sew. After a month into the course, THEY finally realised that I really could sew so THEY sent me to a factory on Clark Street to start my first job. The pay in those factories was not very good so I was always looking out for better jobs, or jobs closer to home because taking a bus downtown by myself was very scary.

In 1971, I started working in a fish cannery close to home. This was probably one of the hardest jobs I had because I was vegetarian. I had to clean, cut and pickle fish eight hours a day. When I left the cannery I reeked and my clothes, the closets and even some areas of the house constantly smelled of fish. I started to notice that people never wanted to come too close to me after I started working there. THEY had always kept THEIR distance, but now people in the Punjabi Community were beginning to do so as well. It was a better paying job and it was close to home, but I knew I had to find something else.

In 1973, I found a job as a janitor at the Royal Centre Mall in Vancouver. It paid a little more than the sewing or the fish cleaning job. The job wasn't that difficult, but everyday that I went to work I felt like a "choori", 'an untouchable'. I was so embarrassed that I never told anyone in the Punjabi Community where I was working.

There were very few choices for me here in Canada because I didn't know English very well and because THEY only gave certain jobs to 'immigrant' women. I went back to another sewing factory and have been sewing in different factories since then. It wasn't and still isn't very good pay and THEY didn't always treat us very well, but at least I'm lucky because I have a job and at least I'm lucky that the factory I'm at now has a nice OWNER.
Some factories that I worked in treated THEIR workers so badly. Often yearly raises were not given at all or only to those women who THEY said worked hard. In one factory that I worked in there were about 75 'immigrant' women working together in very crowded and noisy conditions. There was only one bathroom with only cold water for all of us to use and we were only allowed to use it during our lunch break. So most of our lunch break was spent waiting in line. If we were ever late coming back from the bathroom they took those extra minutes off our pay cheques. We were not allowed to make or receive phone calls during working hours and if we did THEY made us pay for them as well. It was horrible and we all hated it, but no one ever spoke up because we knew what the consequences would be. Once a loyal worker who had been working there for years tried to organise a union amongst the workers. The next day when the MANAGEMENT found out, she was fired. After that we all kept silent. THEY knew THEIR POWER and so did we.

THEY treated us badly at work and OUTSIDE in the world it was just as bad. Walking in the streets or in stores THEY all stared at us and called us names. One day when I was walking home from work, a car of four people pulled up beside me. THEY rolled down the window and as soon as they were close enough THEY spat in my face and threw things at me. I was just walking home, I hadn't done anything to THEM. I walked home silent and alone. I never told anyone.
Little changed for my mother as she was transported, after her marriage, from her home to her In-laws home. Her transition from India to the berry fields in CANADA only transformed the source and added to her already existing OPPRESSsion. It was OPPRESSsion all the same. Her transfer into the work force meant some independence, even though she never saw a cent that she earned, but it also meant acceptance. The acceptance of not always understanding the DOMINANT language, acceptance of THEIR gaze, acceptance of THEIR horrible working conditions, acceptance of being deemed inferior as a woman and as a minority by THEM.

Working OUTSIDE the home and serving in the home translated into double the OPPRESsion, double the slavery, and double the acceptance.

Seeing herself as lucky masked the pain and misery of her unluckiness and forced her to accept. There was no other choice for her in her solitude.
Lucky for Being Luckier in THEIR/Their WORLds

Clothes on our backs not the heavy loads
Food in Their bodies and then in ours - only fatigued, used and abused.
Houses over our heads to replace the veil.
Education from THEIR schools
Jobs and opportunities appropriate for our race and class
Freedoms and rights of THEIR/Their will
Faces unseen.
Names unknown.
Voices unheard.
Lucky still
For being luckier.
Existing to Re-exist

I feel nothing.
I see nothing.
My mind grows numb,
As does my soul.

At home, never eating or sleeping,
Until the Earthly Lords have done so.
Accepting all that They give and take.
Existing for Them.
Existing for my children.
Never the right to exist for myself.

OUTSIDE, long monotonous hours.
OPPRESSIVE working conditions.
My eyes no longer seeing.
Somehow I manage to sew,
button after button in its proper place.
My lungs no longer feel anything.
Somehow I manage to breathe.
Coughing until all the ravelling exits my body.

Father knows best.
Husband knows best.
SOCIety knows best.
Self-denial, piety, hard labour
Affirming my place,
In the pattern of Karma.
That is my destiny.
Mari Kismat
Many 'immigrant women' who came to Canada in the 1960's - 1970's faced similar obstacles to my mother and grandmother. They were often isolated in their violent and restrictive homes and because of language and skill 'deficiencies' and racial discrimination, these homes were all they had-- they became their hell and haven. Those who had to seek work outside of the home did so mainly for financial reasons rather than as a career option. Most of these women found themselves in exploitive working conditions at the farms, in sewing factories and in fish canneries. In THEIR workplace, visible minority women were often treated differently. They would not be made to feel welcome or given a sense of belonging. They were constantly being watched on their jobs and had to constantly prove themselves by working twice as hard as their Fellow workers in order to keep their jobs (Agnew, 1996). Furthermore, when being interviewed for jobs they often faced SYSTEMIC racism such as the requirement of CANADIAN experience, and in the devaluation or non-recognition of Education and work experience acquired outside the COUNTRY. As a result, their job opportunities were limited to "either ... job ghettos for immigrant women or in the lower strata of 'female' jobs" (Agnew, 1996, P.79). Asian women are placed "on the lowest level in the scale of exploitation in Canada" (Bannerji, 1993, P. 179).

For financial reasons, many of these 'immigrant women,' like my mother were forced to work outside of the home as well as continuing all the domestic chores on their own. They were therefore "discriminated against as workers on the economic and social plane and as women on all three planes-economic, social, and domestic family" (Wong, 1991, P. 293 quoted in Agnew, 1996, P. 61).

Unlike my grandmother, my mother's Education and contact with the OUTSIDE world allowed her to question the injustices of the CANADIAN SOCIETY but the racism in the
larger SOCIETY forced her to draw back and remain within the moral and social confines of her Punjabi Family and Culture. Also, state-initiated programs for the settlement and adaptation of new immigrants failed to reach certain women like my mother and failed to meet their needs. Furthermore, the systemic biases of society that were the obstacles to their integration and settlement were often ignored by these programs (Agnew, 1996). As a result of cultural restraints and fear of the DOMINANT CULTURE, women with similar experiences to my mother were not actively encouraged to participate in major women's organisations. "Even as white-collar workers, they [tended] to be put in jobs that [did] not demand much public contact. This is the analogue, in practice, to our visual absence from the social space" (Bannerji, 1993, P. 179). In talking about the experiences of Chinese women, May Yee states: "But how do we individually cope with the pain.... So in certain terms we are forced to 'get used to' this alienation.... [We] are forced to rationalise and accept" (Yee quoted in Agnew, 1996, P. 70).

From her static doubled caged displacemen$t$, it was difficult for Mummiji to speak out as loudly as she would have wanted. Even now she continues to fly back and forth. Always returning home silently and alone in THEIR/Their WORId$s$.

We will only be able to compose new narratives of Punjabi women as well as other 'minority women' "when women no longer live their lives isolated in the houses and stories of men" (Heilbrun, 1988, P.47). New definitions and a new reality of these women must not only be lived but narrated. "It is time that someone wrote a new plot" (Heilbrun, 1988, p. 89)
Mummiji and Daddiji soon after their wedding in 1951.

My first experience with school in the village of Moranwali in India.

My only picture with Mummiji taken in India.

Our last family picture in India with our Great Grandfather.
Uthi (lancing in celebration of our arrival in India in 1983. I gave her money at Biji's request, as expected between castes.

Mummiji at work in a Vancouver sewing factory.

Uthi dancing in celebration of our arrival in India in 1983. I gave her money at Biji's request, as expected between castes.

Mummiji at my university graduation in 1986.

Mummiji in my classroom in 1996.
Mummiji with my sisters and I in 1995.

My parents, my sister, her husband, and his parents with Biji. She finally became accustomed to the idea of my sister marrying into a British family.

Biji with my sisters and I on her 75th birthday in 1995.

Mummiji, Biji and I at my sister's wedding in 1996.
Biji and Pithaji in 1967 when Biji was finally allowed to enter Canada. After many years apart, she was shocked to see Pithaji without his turban.

The last picture of Biji and Pithaji prior to his death in 1992. Soon after his retirement he reclaimed his turban, his identity.

Mummiji's In-laws and their relatives in India many years after we left them for Canada. They were alone and powerless with only our pictures on the mantelpiece behind them.

Mummiji's In-laws on their last and only visit to Canada. It was a wonderful visit with Mummiji finally being able to assert her strength in their presence.
Unveiling

Words that I know

Words that I can smell

Words that I understand

Words that I can laugh at

Words that I can feel

Words that I can touch

Words that are true.

Marray luvaz heard

Marray luvaz in print

Marray luvaz valued

Marray luvaz have meaning

Marray luvaz are unveiling.
The Third Strand of the Braid

In this stage in braiding, the braid continues to become longer and more complex.

As expected, my mother would take the third strand, supported by the first and the second, with all its hair always changing and growing and pull it firmly into its appropriate place. As the third strand was shown the centre, the braid began to get even longer and more complex. The longer it got the more options there were as to how to braid it, how to wear it or whether to un-braid it or non-braid it. More options meant more difficult choices and constant negotiating between choices. There was always the unexpected as well.

This section is the beginning of the third part of the *metissage*. The dynamics of my life are shaped by the lives of my mother and grandmother.

This first section about my life/lives is entitled: 1) A Re-retranslation of my Stories of Sexism and Identity. These stories are Re-retranslations because their shape comes from the braiding of the translations and retranslation of the stories of my mother and my grandmother. My Re-retranslations are written in words and language of my own creation. My new very complex landscape requires constant negotiating, creating and going beyond.

A Re-retranslation of my Stories of Sexism and Identity
"Each time a woman begins to speak, a liberating process begins, one that is unavoidable and has powerful political implications.... The stages of increasing awareness become clear when we begin to recount the story of our lives to someone else, someone who has experienced the same changes. When we write or speak about these changes we establish our experiences as valid and real, we begin to analyse, and that analysis gives us necessary perspective to place our lives in a context where we know what to do next" (hooks, quoted in Agnew, 1996, P. 136).

I wish I had started earlier. It has taken me too long to finally experience the private and painful written and oral stories of my mother, grandmother and other minority women. It has taken me too long to learn and unlearn in order to speak about my own stories of OPPRESSsion as a woman of ‘colour’. And finally, it has taken me too long to admit and come to realise the reality and validity of their/my claims. My EDUCATION never made these inequalities known to me. My COMMUNity, similar and unsimilar to that of my mother, also did not encourage me to value or participate in anti-racist, anti-sexist or anti-classist struggles. THEY/They had/have invested interest in keeping us ignorant and keeping us in our places underneath. Having finally become critically aware of the inequalities in SOCIety, I know now that it is my responsibility to work... to foster an understanding of the experiences of those who have been effaced in the dominant texts of culture, history and curricular knowledge” (Roman, 1993, P. 214). It is also my responsibility to speak out loudly (even if they say this is so uncharacteristic of you) and participate in struggles to help ‘immigrant women’ and women of ‘colour’ “overcome the multiple forces of history, society, and culture which press on [ them], often in the attempt to silence [them]” (Yee, in Bannerji, 1993, P. 44). And finally it is my responsibility now to encourage minority women to join dominant groups of white women through dialogue in order to change the inequalities of our society together.

We must create that ‘Third Space’ collectively.
Although I have become more consciously aware of the struggles in which I need to participate, I remain in confusion on issues of identity, place and voice in THEIR/COUNTRY and THEIR/CULTURE. I believe this is that ‘identity crisis’ that almost all non-white children grow up with” (Yee, in Bannerji, 1993, P. 30).

From my place of hybridity it will never and always be ‘easy’ or uneasy to find my identity, place or voice. It will always and never remain different and the same.

I continue ceaselessly to translate and negotiate my own space amidst two very different and similar cultures. “In the world in which [I am travelling], I am endlessly creating myself. And it is by going beyond... that I will initiate my cycle of freedom” (Fanon, in Bhabha, 1994, P. 9).

The ‘beyond’ is neither a new horizon nor a leaving behind of the past... Beginnings and endings may be the sustaining myths of the middle years; but in the *fin de siècle*, we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. For there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the ‘beyond’; an exploratory, restless movement caught so well in the French rendition of the word *au-dela*, hither and thither, back and forth.

(Showalter quoted in Bhabha, 1994, P. 1).

I continue to go from the past to the present, back and forth, East and West. Attempting to choose between the two identities, two voices, the two countries and the two cultures or it is more? Unable and unwilling to choose I remain displaced in both cultures and in the third and in neither or none. The third space in which I find myself “is unrepresentable in itself. [It] constitutes the discursive conditions on enunciation that ensures that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew” (Bhabha, 1994, P. 37).
Reflections from my childhood

Mirror
reflections of invisible, exotic, colour,
a pun/a hindu- passive, fearful, accommodating, subservient,
people questioning,
staring intrusively each time i exist,
ignorant of the pain, the suffering, the obstacles and the perplexity.
I am different, but I am like you.
I am not a stranger, i live in this soil.
Why do you not see me?

*Shisha
reflections of perfection-flawless, silent.
a princess-beautiful, sacred, pure, humble, obedient.
children admiring, curiously staring,
in the barred window frame,
in the foreign taxi --not limo,
in the driveway as I exit my tiny castle.
But i am not a vedette, i am not a stranger,
i am like you, i come from this soil.
Why do you not recognise me?

*Shisha is the word for mirror in Punjabi.
Sunday Mornings

It's Sunday morning. Half asleep I walk into the kitchen to have breakfast with mummiji. Quickly I am awake as I hear mummiji on the phone with biji.

"Well it's no fault of her own. It was the fault of those incompetent Doctors in India. Who would have imagined that she would become sterile during an appendix operation. And now this", says mummiji.

(aside: And nothing was done? Of course lawyers would have been too expensive especially to fight for a woman's cause.)

"Well we can't have her spending the rest of her life alone now that the Husband has left her and remarried. At least if He had told her and done it with her consent. She had already told Him that she would help Him find a new wife and bless the marriage so that He could be with someone who would have His children".

(aside: What! I retort.)

"He kept saying "no, no" and then this. Of course she doesn't want to see Him or talk to Him. What do you expect". Mummiji's voice is getting louder.

"Just because He left her the bigger and better house and forty thousand dollars doesn't make everything all right. Is that her compensation after 12 years of slaving over Him and working full time". Mummiji shocked.

(aside: Good for you mummiji!)

"I know she's divorced, but many divorced women get remarried these days".

(aside: I can't believe Mummiji is telling Biji this. The woman I see before me now is so much stronger than the one I knew in my childhood. The one who took those beatings secretly. The one who was silent when He entered. The one who watched her children trace T's on the kitchen table to secretly inform each other of the trouble that lay ahead as they smelled the alcohol make its way to the kitchen.)

"If she wants to get married", Mummiji continues, "Sis was telling me about her Husband's Nephew who is also divorced and who has no need for a child because He already has children. She says that He'll be happy with just a wife and mother for His children".

(aside #1: Just a wife and mother! Doesn't He mean sex and a slave?)
"Of course we'll make sure that He's a nice man and that He doesn't drink too much or abuse her. They say He's the gentle type and He has a stable income. He doesn't need anything just a wife and mother for His children. He says she won't even have to work if she doesn't want to."

(aside #1: That would be very convenient then she would be completely dependent on Him as Their woman in India have always been.)

(aside #2: So maybe He won't be asking for a dowry. Are there normally dowry demands during a second marriage? How could there be, that was banned in 1961.)

In two minds again or is it three? Thrilled at mom's strength to stand up for a women who wants to remarry. Shocked that even my mother and grandmother consider her less of a woman because she is divorced and can't bear children. Shocked that she would allow herself to go through another arranged marriage. Of course she probably doesn't have a choice, but she does! I'm going to make sure this doesn't happen! Knowing the reality is that her Brother has already arranged everything and is doing the best for her and He really believes that He is. Just as she really believes He is and His decisions are never to be disputed especially not by a sister. That's the way it's always been done and shall be this time as well.

* In the Indian culture, Brothers have a great deal of control over the lives of their sisters as well their mothers.
Rakhi Day (Brother's Day)

*Bhaji with this sacrificial Rakhi,
I wish for You much health, happiness and never-ending wealth.
For it is only by remaining in this completely fulfilled, nourished state,
That You may continue to protect and provide
For Your poor, helpless, dependent *bhan

As I tie this brilliant, colourful ornament around Your Godlike wrist,
You offer me Your hard earned money as a reminder
Of my servility and subordination.
For the whole world to see.

They have always glorified Your divine birth.
Now I celebrate Your life,
For it signifies my existence.

*Bhaji is the Punjabi word for Brother
*bhan is the Punjabi word for sister
Rakhi Day celebrates Brothers. Sisters customarily tie the Rakhi on their Brothers (or their Cousins if they are not ‘lucky enough’ to have any Brothers), and celebrate the birth and life of these important Males in their lives.

One year my sisters and I decided to “Boycott” Brother’s Day. We are all independent women and given that Sister’s Day was not celebrated, we felt that there was no need to celebrate Brother’s Day either.

The adults of our Family, especially my grandmother, were appalled by our protest. They were extremely upset. They did not understand at all and were not willing to accept our resistance. To Them we were only trying to break a very sacred tradition. They insisted that if anything terrible happened to Their Sons/Their Grandsons, we would be responsible. Out of fear, guilt and respect for our Elders, we went out and bought the formidable rakhis in order to honour our Noble Brothers.

Despite the fact that our Brothers/Cousins are too young to understand the significance/insignificance of this day, each year this age old tradition continues to shatter our already fragile self-esteem as women. The reality seems to be that no matter how independent we become or how much we contribute to Society, our gender will always prevent our existence from being recognised, celebrated, and honoured.

Guilt, fear and respect for our Elders transformed our resistance into acceptance. The fine line between breaking sacred Traditions and resistance is not easily translatable between Cultures and generations.
I stumble in and out of these two gardens surrounded by the splendour of colour, fragrance, beauty and the weeds of PATRIArchy.

The central gardens of my LANDscape

West
semi-uncovered
semi-"cultured"
watered regularly, cautiously
vacillating path
clamorous
distorted, detached weeds.

East
ENCLOSED
"cultured"
watered minimally
linear path
silent
undisturbed weeds.

Flying to the left, flying to the right
As a moth at night in search of the light
Camouflaging myself during the entire flight.
Are there two of me one acting and the other looking on?

WILL SOMEONE PLEASE LET ME OUT OF THIS RACIST, CLASSIST, DOUBLE PATRIARCHAL DOUBLY EXCLUSIVE DOUBLY INCLUSIVE WORLD!!

Knowing the RULEs and knowing the injustices of those RULEs. Off stage yet also in the play. Flying out momentarily, stabilising momentarily somewhere beyond and then returning. Only to begin again in the next act. In the next play.
The Keepers of the Unwritten Laws

Ensuring that the dark hair was kept oiled, braided and uncut as was for "proper" for acceptable Punjabi women. Their own hair no longer needed to follow any Religious Laws. These double standards were common in every aspect of Their lives. Home from school by 3:30 pm never later. Locked in the yard if not the house until dark. These were their Unwritten Laws for women only. If a sister dare be seen in a lane talking to a female friend (never a Male) at 3:45 pm or another in a restaurant having a coffee (never a cigarette) these stories were reported immediately to their overworked, underpaid, parents fighting to survive. Parents whose Indian Education did not count. Then the Keepers of the Unwritten Laws, usually the all knowing Uncles, waited at the door to collect their long awaited reward. The sight of the shame of the parents for having raised such uncontrollable daughters, for not having taught them the "proper female" ways. "What were they doing outside or in a volleyball tournament? They were supposed to be inside cooking, cleaning, and learning what "proper girls" were supposed to know before marriage". Having fulfilled Their savage need for victory -- victory over the daughters attempts at integration and victory over the parents' desire to allow some independence, They would exit. "Thank you" my mother would say for the undercover work. For spying from dusk until dawn. For the stories, the secrets the explanations. And then she would watch the beatings and the bruises that kept the family name from being shamed.

Eventually the dark hair lost it's oily shine and was cut despite Their Laws. Although their hair fit their new surroundings, they were considered unfit, improper for women of Their culture. Untraditional, evil, outcasts, prostitutes, witches to be burned. The Keepers of the Unwritten Laws began to use sneakier tactics to prove Their theories and to torture the daughters and the mother. It was only when the sisters finished UNIVERSITY that their mother felt a sense of relief and release from the Keepers of the Unwritten Laws. Their daughters were not witches and would not be burned at the stake. The flames would not touch them as they had never touched Sita.

All Their attempts to push her down to keep her underneath gave her even more strength to resist. To stand up and do what her mother herself had wanted more than anything. It became a war not only for the self, but for mothers and for women. It
became an obsession to defy all Their Laws of the roles of acceptable Punjabi women. Without realising it, the metamorphosis that was to come and her resistance to the Keepers of the Unwritten Laws would help her carve a more welcoming place in THEIR society. A place from which she would often question her ideas and actions in order to determine whether they were acceptable to THEIR or Their moral code. More often than not they were acceptable only to her moral code. A code that has changed and is ever changing from THEIRS to Theirs to somewhere beyond theM all. And the Keepers of the Unwritten Laws are also at a loss for they no longer know which Laws to keep and which Laws to keep unkept.
Tangled Translations/Retranslations/Re-re-translations

Tangled and trying to translate, re-translate and re-re-translate my own space, I am forced to live a marginalized existence in between two landscapes under the close scrutiny of two cultures and then the one beyond.

"It's really nice to see that you’re not like all those other Indian girls who just get married after finishing high school and depend on their Men for the rest of their lives. I'm glad you're going to continue your schooling and be independent."

"I can't believe that you're still living at home. You really need to move out, be independent and experience your own space. You don't want go from living with your parents to living with a Man when you get married."

"When friends come over tonight we'll sit together and share thoughts." I will have a drink and talk with the Men (unlike a proper Punjabi women). Accused of being too passive and subservient. Continuing to serve everyone as I should or shouldn't? No! I don't need to be this way here! They will all just serve themselves. Everyone here is equal or are they? Then assertive. They are shocked. Accusations of oversensitiveness.

Should one try to fit in/resist by being more assertive or remain silent and accommodate? What is the “proper way” to be for someone who is neither here nor there? Nan ayth Nan uther in this tug o war?

The ropes tug and pull from both sides. I stagger to the East. I stagger to the WEST. At last my feet find a temporary niche one to the WEST and the other to the East of the borders. How long can I continue to be Indo-canadian/Can-indian? How long before one of the ropes snaps and erases some half of me.

"What do you mean you're not ready to get married yet? You're a girl and almost 30 years old! I've had three proposals this week what am I suppose to tell them?"

"How can you even think of moving out?! Haven't we given you everything that you've needed? What will people think - - that their daughter just got up and left her parents. Is this the reward we get for educating you and giving you the freedom that traditional parents never let their children taste?"

"When the Banthay (the Punjabi word for people but often used to refer to Men)/Athmi come over, I'll see what Their needs are. They must be served on. They are Banthay, I am only a woman. I must serve them. I must not speak only serve. Cater to Their every demand and then silently exist." He wants more, the other one wanted this not that. Where is it He demands to know? Get it right now Don't you know anything? I do. If only They knew what I know but keep inside.
My older sister met a Man from Pakistan when she was living in Dubai. After many self-sacrifices my sister decided to marry Him. They decided to move to Canada and were planning a life for their future children. After a short visit in Canada He had to return to Dubai and wait for His visa there. A month later He called to inform her by phone that He would be marrying a second wife.

I Want to Marry You But...

Change your religion.
Change your identity.
Change your name.

Now you are Muslim.
Now you are mine.
Until I choose another,
to change in time.

Did I forget to tell you?
Polygamy here is fine.
Her wedding day

They call me over to help prepare a woman whom I hardly know for her wedding to a man she has hardly met.

As I help envelope her in silk
Lacing her hands with henna,
ornamenting her with jewels of gold
The dowry already in place
Shipped with her from India.

"I don't want to marry him" she sadly utters.

I fix the last froll on the sari.

"He's so different from me. I have no words to use with him. He can hardly read" she says.

Horrified at her parents' arrangement,
I start to run out to call the wedding off.

She pulls me back. She refuses.
She blocks the door, locking it.

"My parents have given all that they have for this wedding. They sent me here to get married.
When they chose him they thought they were doing the best for me.
Entrance into Canada. A decent family.
How were they to know he would be illiterate."

I nod. I understand. For her there is no other choice.
They cover her face with the veil.

They seal her up.
They send her away.
Selling her for their price.
For their name.
For THEIR/their country.

Daughters often feel a sense of responsibility to do as their parents ask. Perhaps it is fear of alienation or perhaps it is a sense of guilt and the knowledge of the pain their mothers have endured for them that prevents them from disobeying. They know that their defiance will cause their mothers much more pain internally and in many cases externally. It is in order to save their mothers from any further pain that they themselves relentlessly endure it instead. However, this cycle of pain must be ended for the continuation of the cycle will mean the continuation of the pains.
Knowing the Unknown

I had never before seen a Punjabi girl in a wheelchair. She rolled around quite happily in the Gurdwara (Temple) downstairs. She lined up like everyone else for her food and the Men serving her, mostly Uncles and Cousins gave it to her with extra pity on her plate for they knew her HIStory as well.

They all knew what everyone else in that cold tiled Holy room knew, but were never supposed to know so nothing was ever done because nothing had ever happened. In that room, knowing and not doing anything about nothing made the non-ignorance an even greater crime. The guilt weighed down on Them as the little girl wheeled past them unknowingly.

As she rolled past me I told her that I had known her mother. I talked to her about what a lovely person she had been and about how much she had loved her daughter. She smiled a thanking smile and rolled away to a place at one of the tables lined up in the suffocating room. As I watched her roll away for what would be the last time in her life too, my thoughts and watery eyes turned to the Murderer standing in the kitchen area with the other Men serving the food that the women had slaved over stoves cooking all day.

They all wore scarves on Their heads like halos to show Their holiness. Serving God as if They could never do any harm. Looking at Him, protected behind the Holy counter, no one would ever imagine that He was an Alcoholic and a Murderer. That He had killed his own wife and left her at one of the local mountains -- was it Seymour or Grouse? My memory fails me as I stare at this Man with immense hatred and anger. Killing her as a consequence for having produced, somehow on her own, a child with special needs.

I had noticed the fear in her eyes the last time that I had seen her. She was holding her young baby in her arms and cried to me her private pain in the public spotlight of
the old Temple. We were outside so dialogues were permitted.

Fatigued by the weight of her daughter who was two years old, she continued to hold her in her arms. He never held her because she was a female, but especially because there was something possibly wrong with her. Somehow not holding her would make the something become nothing. She said to me, “I hope there is nothing wrong with her legs. She still can’t walk”. Then. “I’m scared. I hope He doesn’t do something to her”.

Fearing for her daughter’s life, she never imagined that it was her own that was in danger. She was the culprit. She was the one who was producing females -- females who could not walk. Female who had no legs and therefore had no head either. Useless females produced by useless females. Both had to be rid of forever-- slowly and secretly.

And then. She disappeared. Her family far away in India was told that she got sick and had passed away. They would never question Them. Only bear their loss in knowing silence. The loss of yet another daughter. Loss, in exchange for Their price, Their name, THEIR country.

**No one else would question Them either for they never really knew what They all knew. All they really knew is what they know now -- the loss, the sorrow, and the guilt.**

Ignorance was safer. Silence was safer.
This poem discusses the alternatives for Punjabi women who choose not to endure the difficult lives of pain presented before them. These alternatives still hold true in many households even today, even in Canada. The previous story is a painful testimony of the other choice discussed.
The Silence of Something not Right

It was in the *badhai*, big, room as it was called. The one with very small windows up high. She had to climb the headboard to look out in order to see the world outside or to open the window to breathe. The old antique dresser with the huge round mirror that would finally shatter when her grandparents would move out years later. Erasing for a time that horrible memory and the sickness of something not right. Sitting on the cushioned bench in front she would see herself in the bed with her Uncle asleep beside her. Then waking up. Suddenly as she felt His Hands pull her hips to (even now the words do not come out) to His Manhood. Then moving down her back. As they would get there she would close her eyes tightly and try to sleep. She sometimes counted sheep like the girl in the monster story that her grade one teacher had read for them that year did. 1 sheep, 2 sheep, 3 sheep, 4 sheep..... And finally when the Hand withdrew, she moved away quickly and was asleep. It had only been a nightmare. It never happened. The grandmother knew, the mother knew, the Uncle knew and she knew. And they knew that no one else was ever to know.

In the house of 17, mishaps took place. Giving yet another silence to the mothers to keep locked up inside. Such perversions were never acknowledged let alone discussed. The damage and fear of disgracing the daughter, a family (not even the Man) was much too great. So the things that happened never happened even if they happened again and again and again.
The gaze
Entangled
The Em poisoned WHITE SPIDER** fast approaching
The entrance shut tight
The screams, yells unheard
Complete darkness
Her blood drained to the last drop
The awakening, the anger, the fear, the loss
The metamorphosis
The dead silence.

*Thirteen is considered a very lucky number in India. Had she stayed there would it have been a luckier year?
**His name was SPIDER -- a name that refuses to erase from her memory

Rape is considered a disgrace to an Indian family. If a woman is sexually assaulted it is always considered her fault. It is often said that she asked for it because of the way she was dressed or looked or because she was where she wasn't supposed to be. This has been and is still the common view in most Indian families. After her rape the woman is considered a second-hand commodity and should be married off immediately to the first available and willing Man if the family decides not to disown her or kill her off. Therefore the dead silence. The SPIDER however continues to roam along His path as He pleases waiting to trap the next victim.
Washing, Re-washing, Re-rewashing

And she would wonder years later why she thought that sex was dirty. Why she washed and rewashed and re-rewashed her hands and the light switches and the door knobs and herself over and over and over again. Why she didn't respond, why she had the look of the scared and the hunted in her eyes instead of the wildness of the savage, hungry hunter. Perhaps if He had known He would have understood.

The tests, the retests, and the re-retests. Trying to determine the damage the loss. The probing, the pain, the tear, the hatred, the anger.

In her Indianness and naivete at 13 thinking that no one would love her if they ever knew the truth. She was all things evil and dirty. She would be a disgrace to any Family any Man. Washing, rewashing, re-rewashing. Trying to scrape off from herself those horrible, dirty, filthy memories. Scrubbing herself until the colour of her skin cleared. Until her long dark braids were pulled out and hacked off. Until her lungs burst with the forbidden smoke and her blood drowned in the forbidden alcohol. Until every traditional fibre of her being was transformed and accepted by her new body, her new state, her new identity.

The metamorphosis complete - the new identity accepted. A stronger more bitter, fragile identity. An identity neither here nor there. Somewhere beyond. Constantly transforming and always waiting, watching, looking out for the next mishap lurking in the darkness.
Thinking toward the future that They were planning for her, she wondered what she would tell her husband to be. Maybe he just wouldn’t notice.

Her aunt’s husband had never noticed. Mom remembers when her sister used to sneak out to the fields to see one of the “choor Chamar”, ‘untouchables’ working for their Father. How could she possibly stand their smell and their sweat. How could she have touched His dark, dirty skin. That’s what they all wondered when she got pregnant. When her belly started to swell they took her to the same Uncle who solved all the problems and asked to have her hidden there until she was “cleaned”. They had her stay in the room upstairs after the “cleaning “ and no unmarried women was to go near her. So much as seeing a women who had been “cleaned “ was considered very unlucky for an unmarried women. For she was evil, and cursed. Only after she had recovered was she to be approached. Soon after, she was married off and somehow her Husband never noticed what they all knew and what the choor chamar knew. Lucky for Him, He remained untouched what they all knew and what the choor chamar knew. Lucky for Him, He remained untouched for the other Men were never told. Mummiji thought that maybe my aunt got lucky and had her period at the same time and that’s why no one found out after the wedding.

But what if He did notice? Would He believe me or would He think that I was a slut or a whore? Would He accept it or want me to leave? What if He asked me to leave? My Parents would be devastated. My mother...

Just then anger set in. I was not going to have an arranged marriage. I would have nothing to do with an Indian Man who had double standards. Men who want nothing to do with a woman unless she is a virgin, but who Themselves went around ridding women of their virginity. Then when ready for marriage They searched far and wide for a virgin. Like my Uncle, who refused to marry women He had slept with even when they tried to commit suicide. He often even snuck out and went next door and slept with her too. My grandmother knew and my Grandfather knew, but nothing was ever said. This need was different for Men as was the need for a virgin. Men who didn’t even want anything to do with a woman who was an unvirgin by no fault of her own. But then rape was always her fault. Either she dressed inappropriately, acted
inappropriately or was in an inappropriate place. What did she expect?

That is why Daddy rarely let us leave the house without a chador-like coat or wouldn't let mummiji make us sleeveless dresses. And maybe that's why my Uncle had my sister beaten when He caught her outside with the sleeveless vest on that hot spring day. The sleeveless vest that brought attention to her full bosom at age 14 and the tight stretch jeans that must have made Him harden. "How dare my parents let their daughter walk around like this and make Men harden", He demanded to know. My parents didn't dare say that she had changed after she left the house. The actress dressing for the other play. Beaten to prevent the family from shame and to rid Him of His shame. Beaten to help Him never feel Himself hardening again at the sight of her. For the next time He looked at her she would be fully covered.

The goal of the Keepers of the Unwritten Laws was to have them married off as soon as possible without an education preferably like their mother. Daily spying, daily stories to tell. Telling their crimes. Crimes that were punished through beatings for this was the only punishment that They knew to fit the crimes. Finding some way to corrode their Parents' view of educated women.

Hoping that if we didn't continue our education They could simply label us as pasoons - animals who didn't know any better. Education would give our rebellious attitudes, our different ideas, and our crimes more weight and may even get us some support. This was Their real fear. Fear of Their loss of complete control over us, over our bodies, over our lives.
She and she there with HIM

It happened at this restaurant in which she sits now. The name has been changed to protect the guilty it seems, but the silent, horrible memory remains. The strangeness of knowing that THEY are around the corner while she is here having fun with her party absorbs her. She knows that she must do something before it's too late. She must warn her for she does not have imagined such harassment. The idea would be completely foreign to her for her Culture has brought her up with the utmost respect for PROFESSORS. But couldn't she have sensed it when HE told her about the shine of her hair in the sunlight or the smell of her exotic perfume when they were in HIS office going over a paper HE had neither read nor cared to locate? But she was not used to being the subject around MEN in her doubled EXPERIENCES with THEM. She was always brought up to be seen and unseen but never heard and unheard. Why would this demented case be any different? But she never expected... But she should have known! When HE offered to discuss the paper over dinner and to go there in HIS WHITE car. It was dinner time, and she was hungry but if only she had known HIS real intentions.

And now she sits here just around the corner not knowing what only she knows. She must find a way to tell her. She knows that she'll be going to the bathroom soon. She must follow her and tell her. Is HE reciting Shakespeare to her, “Let me count the ways...”, but that wasn't part of her paper. What is going on! Wake up and do something instead of sitting there and taking all this abuse! When she will go to the bathroom she will contemplate not coming back but why does she? HE is her PROFESSOR; she must come back and she must talk to HIM about her paper; besides it would be very disrespectful to assume such things. This wasn't really happening.
She was just imagining it all and besides she should never have worn the short black and blue flowered dress that now sits stained in her closet. The shameful memories prevent her from wearing it ever again but the love that it was made with from scraps by her mother won’t let her throw it out. Even after several washings it remains tainted with the imprints of the dirt. She tells her mother that she no longer wears it because it suffocates her now. If only her mother knew as she knows now. But it is best that she doesn’t. For if she ever knew that her dreams of educating her children led to this she would never forgive herself. Besides she has already seen enough PATRIArchal pain in her own life; she need not hear of more.

She can still hear HIM reeling about her Boyfriend and marriage. What would her parents think if she married an OLDER MAN, HE demands to know? She evades HIS questions as a respectable silent woman who is seen and not seen and heard and not heard should do, but she really wants to tell HIM it’s none of HIS business and throw her plate in HIS face and insult HIM in front of everyone else in the restaurant!! Like the women she sees in films on T.V. and at the theatre. Do they really do this? She’s never seen anyone in her Family do anything like that to a MAN especially not a PROFESSOR. And besides who would side with her and believe her even if she did? She is the only ‘coloured’ woman in the restaurant. Surely if there was something wrong it would be because of her not HIM. MONSIEUR PROFESSEUR as I hear HIM telling the waitress. To show HIS POWER over her as well.

There she is! She is finally going to the bathroom! She sees her and leaves her party who is wondering why she’s been so distant all evening and she follows her. She starts walking but falls into a giant crater that was not there when she had arrived or it
was. She finally surfaces and rushes towards the bathroom to get to her before she goes back to the PROFANELY-PRESTIGIOUS PROFESSOR’S table. She hardly advances when she falls into another crater! And then another! And then another!! She’s tried to do this many times before and she knows that she never manages to get to her on time. She’s so naive to THEIR ways. You would think she would have learned and unlearned from her double PATRIArchal past experiences... But here she is again fearing for her life because she was thinking and acting from the other spaces instead of the ‘another’. She had wanted to say no I’m not hungry you PERVERT! Or simply no thank you, but the Power of her Refined Culture and the POWER of HIS POSITION forced her to accept. And now she sits at the beach where HE has pulled the WHITE car into the darkness so no-one would see. She sees only. The WHITENESS of HIS POWERFUL MASCULINE HAND coming towards her... And the look...

“A certain glassy-eyed white male look that does not see us but sees some kind of fantasy... The pervasive stereotypes of Asian women in Western culture as being submissive, exotic and easily sexually available...” (Yee in Bannerji, 1993 P. 26).
THEY and They are the **POWERful KEEPers OF THE UNWRITTEN LAws.** LAws kept not for the sake of keeping order, but kept for the sake of ensuring UNorder. THEIR and Their actions are guided by the fear of losing POWER -- POWER that keeps THEM and Them in THEIR/Their positions above them. POWER/AUTHORITY that THEY/They do not want to relinquish, because of THEIR/Their fear of being placed underneath the POWER. That place

under

neath,

be

neath,

or

be

hind,

is too powerless, too fearful and too unjust for THEM or Them to live in daily, but never for them.
The Third Strand of the Braid Continued

In this stage in braiding, the braid continues to become even longer and even more complex.

As expected, my mother would take the third strand, supported by the first and the second, with all its hair always changing and growing and pull it firmly in its appropriate place. As the third strand was shown the centre, the braid began to get even longer and more complex. The longer it got the more noticeable it became. Its shiny blackness would be mocked, pulled, and mistreated. Attempts to unbraid it and non-braid it changed very little, for it never made it any less visible. Negotiating between speaking or remaining silent about the abuse, I hoped that one day I would see the end.

This is the third part of the metissage continued. The dynamics of my life are shaped by the lives of my mother and grandmother.

This second section about my life/lives is entitled: 1) A Re-retranslation of my Stories of Racism and Identity. These stories are Re-retranslations because their shape comes from the braiding of the translations and retranslation of the stories of my mother and my grandmother. My Re-retranslations are written in words and language of my own creation. My very complex landscape requires constant negotiating, creating and going beyond.

A Re-retranslation of my Stories of Racism and Identity
This Realisation of Our Difference

How did THEY know that we were different? My cousins, sisters and I asked each other in our back lane after a long walk home with the usual harassment. We had newly arrived from India and were between the ages of six and seven.

Maybe it's our long, dark hair oiled with saro the thal (mustard oil) and combed neatly into braids.
But our hair is hidden under our hoods today.

No it's our proper pants. They're not jeans*. But her coat covers her pants and they almost look like jeans. They still bothered her.

No it's because there's too many of us walking home together.
But you two were sick the other day and the two of us still got bugged.

No it's our accent.
But, they've never heard us speak.

No, it's our skin it's different.
It is?
They are white and we're dark. See look!
OH!

*We were not allowed to wear jeans when we were young because our parents felt that they looked too ragged and were not proper, especially for decent Punjabi girls.
The three WHITE MEMSAHIBS: "Carry MY bag! Carry MY jacket! Give ME your money! Give ME your candy! Give ME your food! Sit! Stand! Run! Walk! Jump! Bark!" Wack! Boot! Ouch! They treated us like slaves. THEY treated us like the "untouchables" were treated in India, but THEY also stole from us.

Scratches, bruises, and tears forced us to tell our Parents. They gave us the best advice They could. "Just ignore them", They said. They tried to see it as kids bullying other kids. They didn't dare think anymore of it than that. What was the use? What could be done? What were THEY going to tell the school? This is racism? They could hardly speak any English, besides, They were too busy surviving in this wonderful country of many opportunities. They kept quiet and we tried to race home each day and hide our pain as best as we could. In grade seven They said it would be the end of it.

Until High school

The Canadian High School

PUN!
PAKI!
HINDU!
PUN JAB!
NIGER!
GO HOME!

YOU'RE NOT BRIGHT IF YOU'RE NOT WHITE!

Is it possible that I remember it all so vividly after 15 years. That phrase the very
moment, the very spot on the sidewalk of that school. The very grade 10 blond BOY who casually spat it in my face. Embarrassed, I looked away and tried to wipe the words from my face. Silence as my FRiend and I continued our path. She embarrassed by her WHITENESS and I by my unbrightness. But what did HE mean I wondered for an instant. How could I not be bright being a visible minority. Embarrassment changed to anger, anger to acceptance. This wasn't my COUNTRY. What else was there to do? At least HE could have said it a little more quietly or to me alone. Realising HIS disease for attention, I knew this would not have been in HIS favour. A laugh from HIS friend at the cost of my self-esteem. That was HIS only cure. But this was going to be the last time!

Until the next...

The Real Spit

This time the spit was real. The kind that was known to hit the "Untouchables" in India. That ELDER WOMAN on Granville Street. What harm was I to her? My eyes still swell up with tears as I remember the fear of when she yelled and screamed and spat at my sister and then me. Almost hitting us with her tightly clenched fists. My FRiend once again protected by her BRIGHTNESS. Blinded by the BRIGHTNESS of MEN, WOMen, ADolescents, CHildren all staring, immobile and silent. What did THEIR silence mean? We composed ourselves as our FRiends tried to console us saying how weird she was. SHE was like a mother, didn’t she have children? Running the red light we managed to escape - temporarily.

But the next time was really going to be the last.

Stabbed By a Six Year Old

HIS tongue pierced through my back. The non-existent teacher. Proud of having become a teacher. I was going to make change happen. I was not going to let what happened to me happen to others. Stabbed. Paralysed. Stabbed by a SIX YEAR OLD BOY in grade one in my second week of my very first job. Shocked! No this is
not supposed to be happening. Not to teachers. Not by STUDENTS at least. Hopefully only my class saw the disrespect. No one else noticed. Silence once again. As I approached HIM HE was aware that HE had done something wrong, but HE had no regrets. "I don't like coloured people", HE spat out. (You're just a dirty filthy untouchable - "gantha choor chamar" the words ring from my childhood.) "I have a right to my own opinion my Mom and DAD said so".

The next year HE left the school before HE could come into my class. THEY moved away I was told. (Usually in India it was the "untouchables" who had to leave.)

But, He is a Bit Different

1997 in an intermediate classroom while the teacher is out. I walk in unexpectedly.
Punjab
Wop
Hindu
Chink
He stinks
Go home
Stop! I yell. This is unacceptable! This is racism! I finally speak out.

When I discuss the problem with the classroom teacher after school, she says in her DOMINANT, loud, cold, icy voice, "you have to admit HE is a bit different and HE does have a funny smell. It's Their food. I think HE eats a lot of garlic at home and doesn't always brush His teeth", (like those "Untouchables" -- again the words ring from my childhood). Shocked! Horrified! I walk away in rage. I know I must do more, but where do I start?

Where is the end?!

The Public Teachers' E-mail Conference

Not on the teachers' public E-mail conferences and not in 1997. That was the year.
when I was called a “humourless individual” for speaking up against an 
EDUCATORS’ comments referring to sentimental movies supposedly designed only 
for the viewing pleasure of women as “chick flicks”. Somehow one is considered 
humourless when one does not understand the trivialising of labels such as chick 
flicks, pun and paki ... as jokes.

And it did not end in 1998 when I had difficulty staying quiet when the same and other 
EDUCATORS made some of the following narrow minded comments:

"...I wager that we are a lot less racist and sexist in Canada than other countries.... It is not a crime for 
women to speak out in our society (Lucky for me! as it may be in others”.

“We in Canada also do not eat pet animals such as cats and dogs -- a practise which may be considered 
quite common in other lands...." 

When I along with the support of my colleague responded by saying some of the 
following comments, we became involved in a full fledged war for which we were not 
at all prepared -- especially not against EDUCATORS.

Our responses to the above comments included:

“ How can we expect to eradicate these occurrences, or teach children to grow up free of them if 
we simply say it’s part of human nature, and at least we have less of it here? Unfortunately, 
less of something doesn’t make it any more acceptable. In fact, this tends to become a 
subconscious excuse for accepting these shortcomings...”.

“ We may not eat cats and dogs here, but we do eat pigs and cows which are sacred in many 
eastern countries”.

“Yes, you may be lucky, but you cannot speak for everyone as this is not the reality for all 
Canadian women. What about the many ethnic women who are being paid slave wages to work out 
of their homes sewing clothes, or working on farms picking berries because they need the extra 
money to survive, or the women who must stay home to raise children and want their work to be 
recognised as legitimate? Most dominant, white, middle class educated woman have many 
‘unearned privileges’ in this country and as a result they may not realise how difficult it is for 
others to speak out because of cultural restrictions, language restrictions or lack of education 
etc... Many ‘third world’ women have never been given the platform from which to speak or be 
heard”. Both our mothers worked all their lives in Canadian factories for slave labour. 
Knowing their reality and what we have faced individually as a result of not belonging to the
'dominant' culture we feel that your point about being lucky is not valid. You cannot and should not speak for these women because you could never imagine what it has been like for them. It will be a very long time before the voices of these women will be heard. Their silence is the result of many very complex oppressions”.

Responses to our responses continued to pour in and included some of the following:

“But in Canada we all have the right to vote, obtain an education, speak in pubic etc. There is nothing in Canadian law which prohibits this. We may not want or feel the need to express our opinions, but we have the right. If a Canadian Citizen who comes from another culture feels that she cannot express herself, this the fault of the country or the culture of origin. It is not Canada that is stopping her, but her own cultural fears or norms. There is nothing in Canadian Law which prohibits this”.

“You know, you are not the only people to have come from down trodden and underprivileged ancestors. My grandparents left everything behind in the Ukraine to work for peanuts and raise their children with as many advantages as possible. I may sport a "white Anglo Saxon" surname now but that does not mean I do not understand or have a family history of my own”.

I also fear that you have done yourself more damage with your "undeserved privileges" comment than you will know. All the best to you and Harjit.

Aside:
What is most shocking about these comments and these attacks is that these are EDUCAtors and this is in the years 1997 - 1998 in a society like CANADA which claims to be “Multicultural" and to treat everyone as equals. It's hard to imagine how difficult change must be in countries where no such claims are made.

Canadian SCHOOLS claim to be promoting “Multiculturalism"/Anti-racism, but in reality very little is actually being done to achieve this goal. EDUCAtors are expected to teach and know about anti-racist and anti-sexist pedagogy, yet there is not a single required course in Teacher Preparation Programs which deals with this topic or other important yet non-dominant social concerns.

Lack of training/experience often renders the responses/non-responses against
racism and sexism of the EDUCAtors towards students ineffective. Often when THeys do respond THeir response is simply a "Partial Addressal" as opposed to the more appropriate "Full Addressal" (Culhane & Yee, 1995, P.6). The Partial Addressal usually provides consequences for the PERPETRATOR yet the victim's feelings usually go unaddressed, un-understood, and ignored as if not valid. Furthermore, no direct opposition to the racist/sexist comments or actions are demonstrated by the EDUCAtor. How can TEACHERs be expected to prepare students for a more just society when THey THEMselves are not always adequately (if at all) prepared?

Explaining, re-explaining and re-re-explaining.

"unearned" not undeserved as mentioned in our earlier response is the term used in current feminist and anti-racist pedagogy. It refers to unfair advantages that a member of a group may have living in a society in which the majority of the people have the same or similar cultural background sexual orientation etc. As a result they may take for granted the systems/institutions of advantage that clearly operate to benefit the majority group. In no way does it refer to or negate the battles that have been fought by Canadians in the past (We believe this has been misinterpreted in this thread).

Why is it always up to us to inform THEM/Them? Should this not be the role of those in POWER, the role of the INSTITUTIONS who claim to be addressing the injustices, the inequalities?

In speaking up in a public teachers' conference, my intention along with my colleague's was to help raise awareness of the fact that racism, sexism, homophobia etc., exist even in Canadian culture, and in doing so we had hoped to make some small change toward lessening those injustices. However, instead of awareness and change, there was greater hatred. "Hate mail" and silence from EDUCAtors continued to pour in for months. We received very little support. What we realised from our experience is that promoting awareness and change, and speaking out about/against the DOMINANT and the DOMINANCE was much more difficult than we had ever expected. When should one speak? When should one remain silent? What will the cost of speaking be? What will the cost of remaining silent be?
In the past two years, after having begun my thesis work and after having taken Dr. Leslie Roman's very thought provoking, non-traditional course at U.B.C. on Anti-racist and Anti-sexist Pedagogy, I've gained the increased awareness, courage and sense of urgency to speak up against injustices and the OPPRESSIONS.

I can no longer remain silent as a minority, as a women, and especially as an EDUCAtor as I have been taught to do by THEIR immense INSTITUTIONS that confer advantage and dominance, but make us believe that THEIR teachings are neutral and universal and speak for all.
The minority teacher teaching minority programs

My work as a French immersion teacher, French as a second language teacher, and English Second Language teacher has proven to be more complex than I had ever imagined.

(Aside: Am I trilingual or semi-lingual? Maybe an Indo-Canadian, tri/semi-cultural, tri/semi-lingual language teacher???)
(Aside: Wasn't dealing with the the Patriarchy of the Punjabi culture, the racism and sexism of THEIR CULTURE enough for me. Why do I choose to try to be part of a third culture or other cultures when I don't even belong to the two in which I'm wandering and constantly negotiating???)
(Aside: Why as a minority would I out of choice teach in minority programmes?)

My experience as a minority teacher teaching minority programs has involved close scrutiny, and questioning by the MAJORITY. Somehow, being a minority THEY feel I have some invested interest that should be questioned. However, when catering to the needs of the DOMINANT CULTURE all questions already have answers. No extra questions are necessary, no extra permission is necessary, no extra votes are necessary, no extra information is necessary... before decisions are made. The steps are easy and everything is logical when one CONFORMS.

Often resentful, unfounded comments are heard about French Immersion students taking up extra money and extra space in THEIR schools or English Second Language students who drain THEIR system by requiring so much extra assistance. But nothing is ever mentioned about their contributions to THEIR society or THEIR economy in later years. Important contributions of money, ideas and hard work that always go unnoticed and unmentioned in THEIR INSTITUTIONS in THEIR TEXTS.

She opens her mouth and her powerful loud voice demands to know what I am doing with my teaching time. A colleague questioning my professional autonomy. “If I were an administrator (but you’re not, I want to scream), I would question how you are servicing the English Programme. Most of your time is going to service the French
Immersion Programme or the English Second Language Programme"? Despite the fact that the real administrator had the utmost confidence in my teaching ability and in my use of teaching time. Would this colleague ever dare attack a non-minority woman teaching a minority or even a non-minority programme in the same way?

But the teachers of the minority French programme must surely be on my side, or were they?

Sitting around the meeting table. Feeling my face go red. But I'm not alone this time. There are others and they are not even coloured. Somehow this makes it slightly better. This time I'm not being discriminated against for the colour that I am -- it's for what I am not. I am not Francophone. With their noses in the air their words still echo in my head. "Quand tu vas dans les classes des professeurs non-francophones les eleves parlent jamais en francais." Those non-francophone teachers never correct their students' errors. Maybe they don't know the correct answer themselves. Their students never speak French in class. It's because their first language is English. Mine is not I want to speak out. I want to yell, "Are we professionals here"? What kind of an example are we setting for students? May I remind you that every teacher hired to this school district must pass an extensive oral interview and must have the university credentials necessary to teach in French. Who are you to judge the professional decision of another colleague? I can't and shouldn't let this go on but I remain speechless, silent.

In my place of a semi-lingual, non-francophone visible minority teacher teaching minority programmes. I am triply or it is quadrupley doomed!
Negotiating Kali

In negotiating, translating, re-translating and re-retranslating my own space, I am forced to live a marginalized existence in between two or more conflicting and afflicting landscapes and under the close scrutiny of two or more opposing and imposing cultures.

I continue to fly to the East and West, West and East disoriented between two or more cages comme un oiseau *Kali qui ne dort jamais.

* Kali (Kalai) is the word for black in Punjabi. It is also the name that my father gave me when I was born because I was not as fair skinned as my older sister.
The Guyanese writer Wilson Harris quoted in bhabha, sees third space "as accompanying the 'assimilation and contraries' and creating that occult instability which presage powerful cultural changes" (bhabha, 1994, P. 38).

In negotiating and translating, retranslating, re-retranslating my third space, I am simultaneously moving apart and together in order to determine more clearly my direction in THEIR/Their/my society. Only from this third space will I be able to make and unmake the necessary and unnecessary changes in this equally and unequally dominant society.

I continue to travel ceaselessly
  between
  THEIR LANGUAGES and Theirs
  between
  THEIR POWER and Theirs
  between
  THEIR RULES and Theirs
  between
  THEIR CULTURE and Theirs
  between
  THEIR INSTITUTIONS and Theirs
  constantly searching for
    my body,
    my mind,
    my
    self
    Somewhere in the beyond
    Where I am not, and yet I am

Kithe uther

 gahan
Conclusion/NonConclusion:
In the past, during the generation of my grandmother, women have remained passive, not because they lacked a consciousness of their own oppression, but because the Patriarchal Punjabi Culture necessarily determined and secured women's roles and legitimised caste divisions. By clearly defining their restrictive lives, by not addressing or allowing them to address the specific conditions of their lives, and by not permitting them a voice to express their silences, They kept women and untouchables in their long determined places -- underneath. When in CANADA, restraints of their own culture, unfamiliarity with the language and fear of the ways of 'main' culture kept them dependent on their Families and the Men of their Culture. As a result of their confinement and dependence, they were prevented from questioning or acting in THEIR SOCIETY.

The later generations of women from Asia, such as my mother's began to have more contact with the outside DOMINANT culture and began to question the injustices that were/are prevalent not only in the Punjabi Culture, but also those in CANADIAN SOCIETY. They questioned, but were silenced for they also were enclosed and alone, weighed down by those in CONTROL of their minds, their bodies, their lives. Any attempts at resistance were quickly turned into accommodation, and so many of these women continue to live with double the OPPRESSION, and double the acceptance.

More recently, Asian women who have been fortunate enough to be empowered by THEIR EDUCATION, are beginning to speak out against racism, sexism and classism of THEIR INSTITUTIONS. "The exclusions, marginalizations and biased representations of the lives and experiences of women from Asia... have been exposed by middle-class women from Asia... This exposure is part of their struggle to overthrow the domination of race and gender and to empower women from their own ethnic and racial groups" (Agnew, 1996, P. 95).

As a working/middle class visible/invisible minority educated and uneducated woman of colour, I can no longer remain silent for my silence will mean the acceptance and continuation of the sexism, racism, and classism that entangles not only my life, but also the lives of many women such as my mother and grandmother. As I continue to
live and negotiate my place and identity in THEIR/Their CULTures, my work has
allowed me to come to the realisation that I must use my newly earned and unearned
privilege to speak with and help those who have worked hard through their pain and
struggles to help me earn it. It is my responsibility as a minority women and as an
educator to help empower the women who have helped me, but have themselves
remained essentially powerless.

As I come to the **beginning of the end** of the breaking of my silence and the
silences of my mother and grandmother, I am forced to ask whether readers will live
my writing as I have lived it? Will there be universal relevance gained from my
stories? Will my long poem contribute in any meaningful way to society? In short will
the braided stories of three Punjabi women seen through the eyes of one inform many
or any?

Growing up in Canada, I had always wished that someone at school, in the
community, or on T.V. would speak out or allow us to speak out about the
OPPRESsions in the lives of the women who surrounded me and defined me. No-one
ever did. THEY only spoke of OTHERS and only OTHERS spoke, because we were
not worthy of THEIR time, of THEIR energy, of THEIR space, just as we had not been
worthy with Theirs in India. The EXTERNAL silence forced us to keep a painfully
internal silence.

During those moments of painful silence, I would often take an imaginary journey back
to India to my great grandmother's secret garden. The special garden which became
a meeting ground for daughters, grand-daughters, and great grand-daughters. The
village of Jeenthwal prided in its internal beauty. The villagers could only walk by and
imagine, smell, and feel its secrets. They were never to enter. It belonged to my great
grandmother and only she held the key and the power. The shiny golden key, that
opened the huge golden padlock was secretly stored in the pocket of her jemper so
that no-one could ever steal the magic.

When she would lead us across from the house to her garden -- her secret garden, our
minds, bodies, and spirits began to live stories. Finally, after a careful, last, slow,
sideway stare, she would unlock the door with her shaky hands and hide the key. Breathless we momentarily dwelled in the silence, the smells, the sacredness, the splendour. Silent and still, we admired the freshness and the colours of the garden, of the guavas, of the pomegranates, of the mangoes, of the Kali, Jasmine, vines. Then as we found places to sit on my great-grandmother’s manjays we “indwelled”. The sound of savory chatter, laughter and secrets was creative, lively and loud, but it always stayed inside the garden for there was no other choice. The peaceful paradise of safe secrets. The meaningful meeting ground of four generations of women’s voices, of women’s internal silences. The sacred, secret garden of my great-grandmother.

This work has been the unlocking of the secret door of the internal silences of three generations of women. A work that has not had the opportunity of being, becoming, and living until now because of THEIR schools, THEIR curriculum, THEIR books. Always being asked to write about THEIR experiences through THEIR language and THEIR Structures in order to be approved in THEIR way by THEIR authorities in THEIR institutions.

My mother always made me believe in the empowerment of education in order to fight back against the OPPRESsions and the injustices. However, my experiences have lived a different reality -- empowerment through education has also revealed the POWER of educational INSTITUTIONS to teach learning selectively. Rather than opening doors to secret gardens of insight and dialogue, THEY have closed doors of creativity and meaning-making by forcing us to conform rather than allowing us to reform or re-reform.

One of the goals of my education has been to gain knowledge and strength in order to escape the restrictions that Patriarchal Power has placed on the lives of women like my grandmother and mother. Although the limitations placed on my life are different than those of my grandmother and mother, I see parallels here between Patriarchal Power in our personal lives and the HEGEMONIC POWERS in educational INSTITUTIONS. Just as They played a key role in determining the lives and places of women and untouchables in Indian Society, THEY and THEIR INSTITUTIONS play a key
role in determining the lives and the places of minority women and minorities in THEIR SOCIETY. These POWERS claim to know what is to know. These POWERS determine how much knowledge is to fill our minds and when to stop. THEY determine our actions and define our roles as women, as educators, and as students. In addition to the Power of the NABOBS, the Husbands, the Uncles, the Brothers and the Sons I have uncovered, through the reading and writing of my work, the POWER of the CURRICULUM MAKERS whose agenda is the DOMINANT curriculum, the DOMINANT knowledge.

After coming to Canada, the first time that I took the journey back to the garden of my great grandmother was in grade six when I discovered the book, *The Secret Garden*, by Frances Hodgson Burnett. Although it was not at all the garden of my great grandmother, it was the only book that I was introduced to at that time that spoke to me about India and came the closest to making any of my experiences as a child relevant. “Enfin j'ai trouve le vecu de mon enfance”. Through my reading of this book, I re-read and retranslated, and rediscovered the splendour and magic of my great grandmother’s secret garden. Although this was very empowering as a young girl, it is very shocking today.

Since grade six, this autobiographical work is the first piece of meaningful writing in my many years of EDUCATION. This work represents the first writing in my words about my experiences in order to make those experiences valid. It is written not only for myself, my grandmother, and my mother, but for many readers who may be able to share and actively construct reality from these experiences. It is my hope that these readers will re-read their lives and begin to write about those lives and I hope that EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS will not disrupt this process or prevent it from ever becoming as has been the case in the past and in my past.

The majority of the sea of texts that inform and govern students in schools continue to be written by CURRICULUM planners who “are, in a sense, condemned to plan for faceless people, students shorn of their uniqueness or for all teachers, who become generalised entities often defined in terms of generalised performance roles” (Aoki, 1992a, P. 5). Dr. Aoki, in his lecture at the Annual Conference of the Association for
Supervision and Curriculum Development in 1992, eloquently proposes an alternative to curriculum-as-plan. He states that "the lived curricula offers us a re-textured landscape populated by a multiplicity of curricula..." (P. 5). He continues by saying "I feel it will do well for curriculum developers and curriculum supervisors to heed thoughtful practising teachers that the privilege of the traditional C&E landscape may no longer hold, but must give way to a more open landscape that offers possibilities by, in part, giving legitimacy to the wisdom held in lived stories of people who dwell within the landscape" (P. 15).

The process of legitimising lived curriculum is beginning, but it will be a slow change before ALL begin to understand and accept its relevance in EDUCATION and in academia. As an educator and as a minority woman having lived my writing for the last two years, I realise the importance and value of the lived curriculum. As a student, however, the journey has not been as easy. Although I have broken three generations of silence of Punjabi women, my work continues to remain a silent reflection. I still continue to hide my writing even from close family members, friends and colleagues. I fear that my personally charged experiences will be too shocking for them. I fear that their knowledge of these experiences may cause them to somehow treat me differently. I fear that they will not consider my work "academic" enough, or meaningful enough, or creative enough, or good enough for a research thesis.

However, being in the position of a minority woman and educator, I cannot allow such fears to prevent me from speaking out. Longer silence will only translate into more injustices and more missed opportunities. I must take the risk in the hope that my work will enrich and in some way transform the lives of readers so that they also will be encouraged to participate in a personal and active manner by writing their own stories. The insight and knowledge to be gained from the writing of these stories far outweighs the risks and fears that may be involved in the writing process.

The writing of this autobiographical work has been a painful but enlightening journey. I have tried to create a text that reflects my personal world as a Punjabi female whose life of constant negotiating is braided with the PATRIARCHy and intertwined with the lived experiences of racism and classism of my mother and my grandmother. Having
been given this rare opportunity to write autobiographically has increased my awareness and understanding of issues of sexism, racism, and classism not only in my life, but also in the lives of my mother and my grandmother. It has also made me aware of the lack of credibility and value granted to autobiographical work. This research has been a very enriching and creative educational process -- one that I hope others will have the opportunity to experience earlier than I have learned and unlearned to do.

I believe that educators play a key role from their positions of POWER to encourage this type of meaning reading and meaning making. As EDUCAtors we cannot allow PATRIARCHAL reality to ignore women's stories especially those of minorities. Academic institutions must begin to give more importance to these stories in THEIR DOMINANT culture. CURRICULUM PLANNERS also need to be more willing to relinquish THEIR POWER (unlike the Keepers of the Unwritten Laws) and make way for the "lived curriculum" of the non-dominant. Furthermore, it is crucial that educators be prepared to take risks and reform rather than conform. And finally, readers and writers -- minority women and white women, need to form coalitions and be willing to work together so that effective change will be more POWERFUL. "Our identity and strength will grow out of sharing the struggle to fight that which has tried to dehumanise us and find the common ground that we share as women..., as decolonising people, as workers, as humans" (Yee quoted in Bannerji, 1993, P. 44).

Together from our collective "THIRD Space" we can take on the challenge of assuming the responsibility of repositioning the positions of power that have been placed upon us through centuries of Oppression and EXPLOITATION.
My Journey, my long poem, has been imprisoned within me. Impenetrable. Caged so securely that I was never even aware of its existence. A journey I never imagined that I would have had the courage to undertake. A journey that finally exploded from somewhere within the deep. This journey has been a journey in the waiting amidst an intricate maze of contradictions and silences.

**Journey in the Waiting**

Stories waiting to re-exist.
Events waiting to be re-called.
Emotions waiting to be re-experienced.
Histories waiting to be re-learned.
Oppression waiting to be re-exposed.
Images waiting to be re-projected.
Languages waiting to be re-translated.
Lives waiting to be re-presented.
Identities waiting to be re-negotiated.
Ideas waiting to be created.
Voices waiting to be heard.
Resistance waiting to arise.
Silences waiting to be broken.
A journey waiting to be-come.
Waiting in THEIR INSTITUTIONS
to finally be re-awakened by THEIR INSTITUTIONS.

By Educators willing to take risks
in order to allow such journeys to disrupt traditional narratives.

Educators willing to enter the beyond.
The THIRD Space.
We have come to what appears to be the end of the braid, however it is not. Hair continues to grow infinitely even after death, and as a result the braid/braids grow, change, and must re-braid and be re-braided and re-re-braided...

Reflections, re-reflections and re-re-reflections... by writers and readers will allow my long journey, my long poem, to continue its endless path. In living the metissage and the metissages, the life and lives, the story and the stories, I have lived only the beginning of the end because "the autobiographical story cannot end with ‘The End’; it must end with ‘Etc.’" (Leggo, 1998, P. 18)

The Beginning of the End
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