



Transnational geographies: Indian immigration to Canada

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Immigration from the Asia and Pacific area now accounts for over 50 percent of all Canadian immigration. Therefore, any consideration of Canada's linkages with Asia must address this issue. While much work has debated the impact of immigration in Canada's urban centres, less has been directed to understanding the transnational nature of such population movements, or their specific transnational geographies. In this paper, I consider the geography of immigration from India to Canada. Immigration from India has traditionally been tightly regionalised, with the majority of immigrants originating from the Doaba area of Punjab. Settlement in Canada is also highly concentrated at the provincial, metropolitan and suburban scales. Drawing upon a range of qualitative and quantitative data collected in both India and Canada, I illustrate the geography of immigration from India and highlight some of the processes that contribute to creating transnational networks between these sites.

Actuellement, l'immigration en provenance d'Asie et de la zone Pacifique représente plus de 50 % de toute l'immigration canadienne. Il serait donc bon de prendre en compte l'ensemble des liens existant entre le Canada et l'Asie pour traiter ce sujet. Tandis que de nombreuses recherches ont étudié l'impact de l'immigration sur les centres urbains au Canada, très peu se sont penchées sur la nature transnationale de tels mouvements de la population ou sur leurs géographies transnationales spécifiques. Dans cet article, j'examine les flux migratoires de l'Inde vers le Canada. L'immigration en provenance de l'Inde a été naturellement très localisée, la majorité des immigrants provenant de la région de Doaba dans le Pendjab. L'établissement au Canada est aussi très concentré aux niveaux provinciaux, métropolitains et suburbains. En m'appuyant sur différentes données qualitatives et quantitatives publiées en Inde et au Canada, j'illustre l'immigration de l'Inde d'un point de vue géographique et mets en lumière quelques-uns des processus qui contribuent à créer des réseaux transnationaux entre ces sites.

Introduction

Immigration has played a central role in Canadian nation-building, not only in providing labour, but also in forging international political, economic and cultural connections. The rising global influence of various Asian economies since the 1960s has resulted in immigration patterns that have profoundly influenced Canada's largest urban centres and reoriented aspects of the nation's political, economic and cultural focus towards Asia (Hiebert 1994, 1999). Several geographers have considered the influence of wealthy immigrants from parts of Asia (see, e.g., Mitchell 1993; Ley 1995, 2000; Olds 1998; Rose 2001). In this paper, I interpret the geography of immigration from India, a less-examined part of Asia.

India-Canada linkages have historical significance borne of complex colonial networks linking Britain, Canada and India. This tripartite relationship vacillated between discourses of 'intact' empire and diplomatic pressures that resulted in the fraying of this image of unity. One element behind this fragmentation was Canada's restrictive immigration regime regarding Indian immigrants, supposed subjects of the empire, which fuelled active resistance against colonial subjugation in India (Brown 1982; Mongia 1999). This paper contributes to our consideration of Asia-Canada linkages by exploring the historical and geographical nature of Indian immigration, a large component of Canadian immigration that has not attracted the same attention as movements from Hong Kong and Taiwan. I argue that India-Canada immigration patterns are overwhelmingly shaped by social linkages that are transnational in nature, since communities, families and individuals maintain and reinforce connectivity between sending and receiving regions through a variety of processes.

I begin my argument with a selected review of the literature on Canadian immigration and identify the importance of understanding immigration as a transnational process. I then present a methodology section, followed by a quantitative profile of immigration from India, with reference to its specific geographies. I finish by presenting some individual migration stories that are illustrative of the transnational processes that shape immigration decisions and settlement patterns and that exemplify how immigration flows are structured over long time periods, forging multiple connections across space.

Research on Canadian Immigration and the Emergence of a Transnational Framework

The nature of Canadian settlement and economic and social development has been significantly shaped by the waves of immigrants settling in Canada. The historical importance of immigration to Canadian nation-building has been well documented by scholars such as Valerie Knowles (1997), Ninette Kelley and Michael Trebilcock (2000) and Gerald Tulchinsky (1994), and the deeply racialised nature of immigration policy and processes have been addressed by Vic Satzewich (1992) and Peter Ward (1978), to name a few. A major lacuna in our current understanding of how immigration has shaped Canadian society has recently been addressed by Cole Harris's (1997, 2001) work on the effects of European migration on Canada's First Nations. More recently, there has been a great amount of attention directed at the shift of immigration from European to 'nontraditional' sources, especially Asia (Laquian, Laquian and McGee 1998; Halli and Dreidger 1999). We have also witnessed dissatisfaction with neoclassical migration theory and its limited ability to convey how migration is shaped by social factors, specifically gender (see Willis and Yeoh 2000 for a review). The role of social connections—as represented by family reunification, spousal immigration and other noneconomic criteria—is evidence that human mobility cannot be comprehended through the language of economic rationale alone, but must be interpreted as involving socially grounded processes imbued with thick cultural meaning.

Despite the wealth of literature produced on immigration to Canada, we still lack detailed investigations of the subnational geography of specific immigrant flows, especially ones that employ a transnational lens, as developed by Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Cristina Szanton (1992), through which the nature of immigration is placed within its broad geographical and historical context and interpreted as an ongoing and recursive process of connection, not just a singular linear movement. The use of a transnational lens enhances our understanding of the specific nature of various immigration flows to Canada, because it demands that we contextualise our investigations across multiple spaces as well as across various scales, from national systems of governance to

local processes of settlement. In addition, a transnational approach emphasises the social and *processual* nature of migration, rather than just highlighting the numerical existence of such flows. Geographers interested in immigration matters are increasingly considering the transnationality of migrant movements, where immigrants 'through their daily life activities and social, economic and political relations create social fields that cross national boundaries' (Basch *et al.* 1994, 27). This is an important trend, since it forces us to alter our spatial concepts in light of the connections, circulations and transformations that international migration has introduced into Canada's urban landscape. We need to embrace the realisation that immigrant settlement within Western cities has always been shaped by engagement with other, often distant places. Scholars such as anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1996) have tackled these ideas at an abstract level. Appadurai theorises the links between nation-states and circulating populations that struggle to reterritorialise their identities across the uneven landscapes of global modernity. This uneven landscape of difference operates at numerous scales, from the micro-scale of the body—race, gender, class and sexuality—to the regional urban/rural scale and the national developed/underdeveloped scale. Geographers are eminently positioned to make a contribution to this debate, but have been slow to develop an explicitly transnational focus. Scholars such as Alison Mountz and Richard Wright (1996) and Katharyne Mitchell (1997) reveal how everyday relations are shaped transnationally. In Canada, Jennifer Hyndman and Margaret Walton-Roberts (2000), Johanna Waters (2001), Madeleine Wong (2000), Catherine Nolin Hanlon (2001), Thomas Owusu (1998) and Daniel Hiebert (2000) illustrate the nature of transnational linkages that immigrants maintain and explain how these connections play a role in everyday decisions and interactions.

This article contributes to this literature by illustrating the recursive and durable nature of immigrant networks between India and Canada, a transnational connection that has been relatively underexplored. I will illustrate this connectivity with various forms of evidence. First, I demonstrate the specificity of the spatial and social composition of India-Canada immigration. I then illustrate the deeply social nature of such

circulations through the use of selected interview material and fieldwork observations from both India and Canada. Before moving to this more detailed analysis, I explain my methodological approach.

Research and the Transnational Field

Any argument that elicits the transnational nature of a relationship must, by definition, engage multiple sites and scales. My research approach was an inductive exploration of immigrant, capital and trading networks between India and Canada, which began in Vancouver in 1998 with detailed interviews with Indian immigrants and Canadian government officials, who then directed me to potential respondents in India. Using a network or snowball sampling approach, I then interviewed contacts in India from October 1999 to March 2000. In total, I was able to conduct over 70 interviews with various individuals in India and Canada linked to immigrant, trade and capital networks. In each case, the questions asked varied depending upon the type of transmission the individual was involved in and the particular position held by the respondent. In addition to interviews, I also made over 30 field visits to various development projects in Punjab directed by Indians now residing in Canada, as well as in the United Kingdom and the United States. These included several hospitals and medical clinics, schools and colleges, village developments and infrastructure projects such as roads and bridges (Walton-Roberts 2001b). My methodological approach was flexible in order to capture the diverse transnational nature of immigrant networks between India and Canada and reveal the social and spatial basis of recursive relations between these diverse geographical sites. Intent on building transnational sensitivity, my research comprises material collected across multiple field sites—Vancouver, Toronto and various sites in India, mainly Punjab and Delhi—and both qualitative and quantitative sources, from government data to interviews and participant observation with government officials, immigrants and their families. In this paper, I have selected a range of examples I consider representative of my general qualitative research findings regarding immigrant circulations between Punjab and Vancouver.

India-Canada Immigration and Its Social and Spatial Characteristics: Creating a Transnational Field

The history of Indian immigration to Canada

In 1995, John Paynter, then the Canadian high commissioner to India, delivered a speech on Canada-India diplomatic relations in which he stated that '[T]he bedrock of our relationship—political, social and economic—is, and must be, its people-to-people dimension' (Paynter 1995, 42). In March 2001, Immigration Minister Elinor Caplan announced her trip to India by stating that 'This visit will reinforce the importance that Canada places on its people-to-people links with India' (CIC 2001).¹ This open admiration of Canada's relationship with India through immigrant networks contrasts with Canada's position a hundred years earlier, which was based on the active exclusion of Indian migrants. Under Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier, the decision to exclude Indian nationals from Canada was a prominent factor in early attempts at dominion nationalism (Fraser 1978). Early relations with India were characterised by immigrant exclusion, illustrated most obviously by the 1908 continuous passage Order-in-Council (Dutton 1989; Walton-Roberts 1998). This discriminatory law was challenged in May 1914 by the journey of the *Komagata Maru* from India to Vancouver. The events surrounding the *Komagata Maru* are too complex to review here, but the incident resulted in Indian immigrants forming important early transnational political connections between the Pacific Northwest and India that were used to advance the independence of India from colonial rule (Fraser 1978; Johnston 1988).²

1 Minister Caplan led a Canadian delegation to New Delhi, Chandigarh and Bangalore. She was accompanied by a number of members of Parliament (MPs) whose ridings are home to large Indo-Canadian communities.

2 In brief: the boat was chartered by Gurdit Singh, a Sikh businessman from Punjab, and provided passage to 376 Indians, mostly from Punjab. The majority of passengers were denied the right to land, and the boat was forced to remain anchored for two months in Burrard Inlet, before being eventually escorted out of the area under federal military control. The Ghadr party is an important example of the political linkages formed in part as a response to this discrimination. It was a party formed by Indians overseas to pressure the British out of India; it promoted an active violent rebellion based on Indians overseas raising funds and returning to India to advance independence (see Brown 1982).

The geography of Indian immigration to Canada
Early immigrants from India were mainly Jat Sikh sojourners from Punjab, drawn to British Columbia to work in the province's resource industries (Johnston 1984; Sampat-Mehta 1984; Dutton 1989). Due to the restrictive immigration policies and anti-Asian sentiment evident in early twentieth-century Canada, community formation was marked by close intraethnic social interaction and segmented integration (Chadney 1989). By the 1950s, as immigration rules eased and permitted limited family immigration from non-European sources, the population slowly developed, resulting in a community dominated by immigrants from Punjab. The majority of Indian immigrants in Canada at this time hailed not just from Punjab, but primarily from one region within Punjab, known as Doaba (Johnston 1988) (Figure 1). Under colonialism, the transformation of Doaba's agricultural economy resulted in thousands of young men migrating overseas as a strategy to raise financial resources and maintain family land holdings (Kessinger 1974).

The legacy of this tight regional migration process is evident in the composition of the Indo-Canadian community today. In the 1970s, John Wood (1978) suggested that approximately 70 per cent of Indian immigrants in Canada were from Punjab, and in the early 1990s, Paynter (1995) gave the same figure. Other Indian immigrants have commented on the dominance of Sikh Punjabis in Canada and suggested that non-Sikh or non-Punjabi-origin Indian immigrants are often deemed not *apna*, or not 'our own', by Sikhs, leading to an insular vision of the Indian immigrant community on the parts of both Canadian Sikhs and the 'mainstream' (Kurl 2000). While this intensely concentrated geography of Indian immigration has been anecdotally obvious to the Indo-Canadian community and immigration officials for decades, hard numerical evidence of this flow has only been systematically collected by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) since 1998. This information has been gathered in response to the demands of Indo-Canadians who argue that Canada needs to open a full-service high commission in Chandigarh, the capital of Punjab and Haryana, in order to service potential applicants from the region. Therefore, details of the actual numbers have immense political ramifications

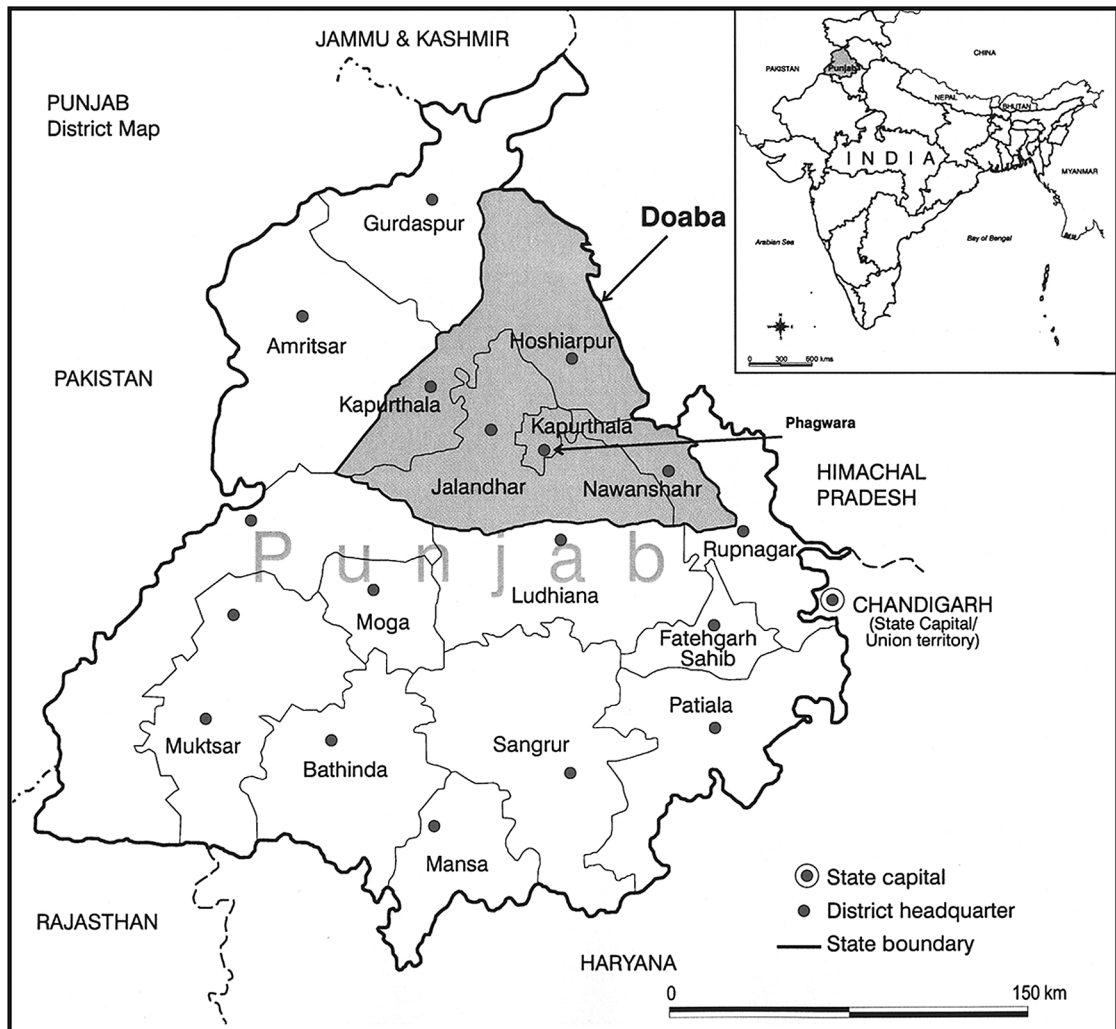


Figure 1
Map of the Doaba region of Punjab, India. SOURCE: <http://www.mapsofindia.com>

(CIC office manager, Delhi, interview 17 December 1999).³

While movement from India to Canada has exhibited a dependence on Punjab, it also exhibits a specific geography of settlement in Canada, with over 80 percent of the South Asian-origin population in Canada residing in Ontario or British

Columbia. This regional concentration across Canada becomes sharper as we move to the scale of the three largest census metropolitan areas (CMAs), Toronto, Montréal and Vancouver, and then to specific communities within these CMAs, as Tables 1 and 2 and Figure 2 indicate. The intensity of settlement patterns suggests the potential for transnational circulations with Punjab, and I will return to this point in the final section of the paper. Intense social interaction across this

³ State categories used for data collection combine the states of Punjab and Haryana.

Table 1

South Asian–origin population in Toronto, Montréal and Vancouver census metropolitan areas (CMAs)

| | South Asian–Origin Population | As Percent of Provincial South Asian–Origin Total | As Percent of National South Asian–Origin Total |
|-----------|----------------------------------|--|--|
| Toronto | 329,840 | 85% | 49% |
| Vancouver | 120,140 | 75% | 18% |
| Montréal | 46,165 | 97% | 7% |

SOURCE: Based on Statistics Canada 1996 census community profiles

Table 2

South Asian–origin population in selected communities within Toronto and Vancouver as percent of other South Asian–origin totals, 1996

| | South Asian–Origin Population | As a Percent of CMA Total | As a Percent of Provincial Total | As a Percent of National Total |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Surrey (Vancouver CMA) | 49,805 | 41% | 31% | 7% |
| Scarborough (Toronto CMA) | 75,395 | 23% | 19% | 11% |
| Mississauga (Toronto CMA) | 61,525 | 19% | 16% | 9% |

SOURCE: Based on Statistics Canada 1996 census community profiles

spatially distended landscape is also supported when we consider the social composition of migration.

Composition of immigrant flows from India

The tight spatiality of immigrant source and destination is an important factor in explaining the social composition of migrant flows from India; similarly, the policy framework has also played a major role in shaping immigrant community development. Restrictive immigration laws against South Asians were in place until the middle of the twentieth century. The Immigration Act of 1953 strengthened the bias against Asian immigrants by granting clear preferential support to white immigrants. It was not until 1967 that immigration policy eliminated discrimination based on race, religion or national origin, moving instead towards a points system based on various qualifications. South Asian immigrant numbers changed only slightly throughout the 1960s, as Figure 3 illustrates, due in part to institutional impediments: there was only one immigration office for the whole of India, compared to six in the U.K.

(Sampat-Mehta 1984). Not only did the restrictive immigration policies of the early twentieth century create a distinctively narrow geographical and social community, but they also reinforced gendered patriarchal norms of mobility by granting men the power to initiate the movement of women to Canada through marriage. This gendered power imbalance has been reinforced over time (Das Gupta 1994; Sharma 1997), and the ongoing importance of unequal gender relations with regard to marriage and family formation in Canada has been revealed by Gurpreet Bal (1997), Helen Ralston (1998, 1999), Karen Ai-Lyn Tee (1996) and Christine Fair (1996) among others.

In the case of family class immigration, Punjab continues to exercise a strong influence, accounting for 80 percent of all applications in 1998, but it drops to just over 55 percent for all classes.⁴ These differences highlight the need to interpret immi-

⁴ Information regarding the rate of acceptance based on state origin was not provided, nor were the details regarding other states, although I was informed that Gujarat was rated as the second largest source of applications (interview, CIC Delhi 17 December 1999).

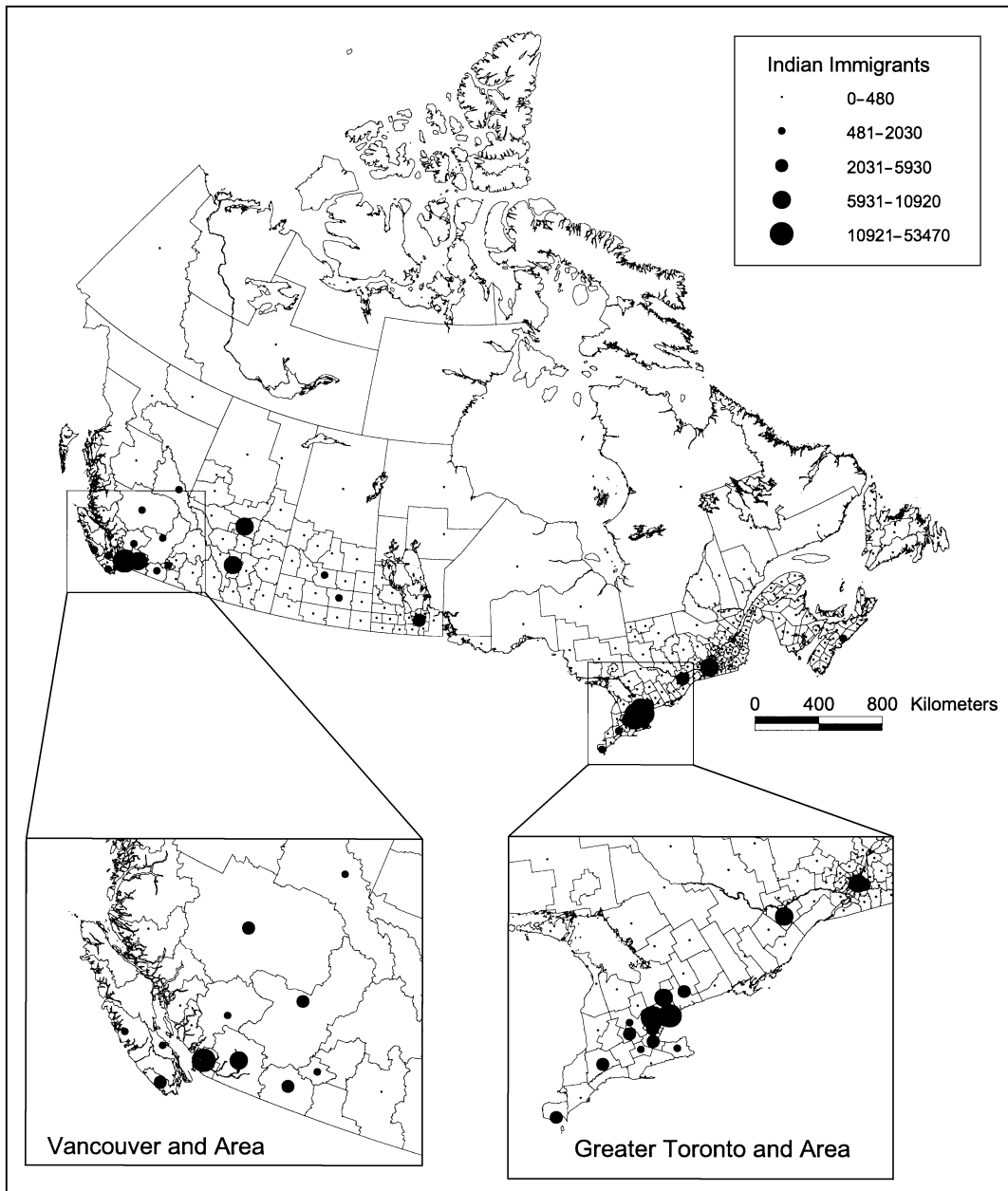


Figure 2
 Indian immigrant settlement across 288 census divisions in Canada. SOURCE: 1996 census data, <http://www.statscan.ca> (community profiles)

gration from India by the type of immigration channel used: refugee, skilled worker, business or family class.

Refugee class: Little scholarly work explicitly focuses on Indian refugees and their settlement experiences in Canada. Recorded refugee numbers

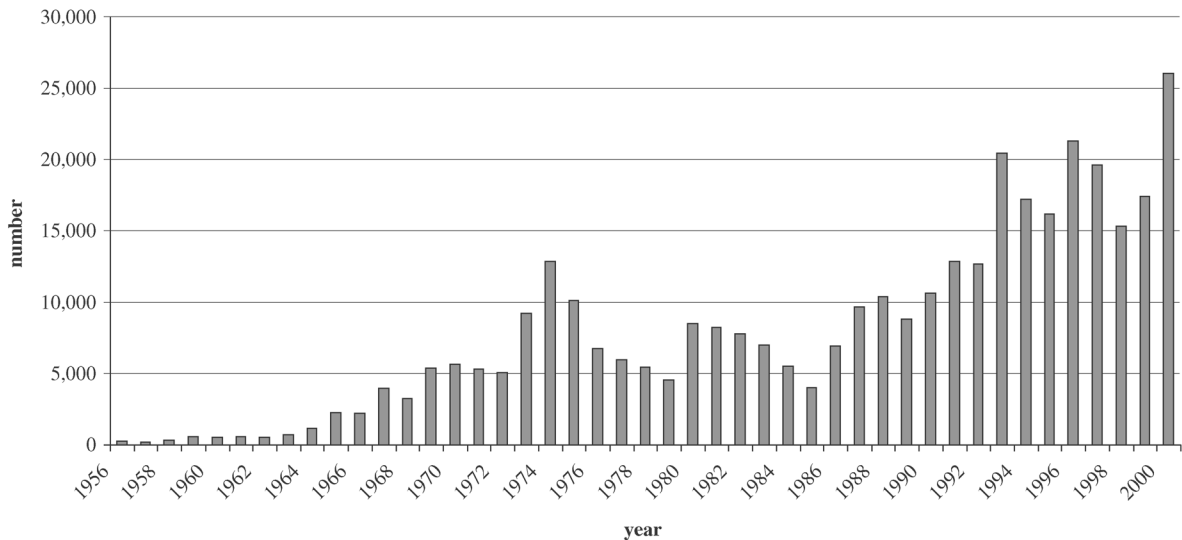


Figure 3

Indian immigration to Canada, 1956–2000. SOURCE: Cansim matrix X100649 and D125590, <http://www.statscan.com>

from India in the 1980s and 1990s exceeded 1,000 only in 1996, when 1,241 were admitted.⁵ Refugees from India at this time were primarily interpreted as escaping the violent unrest linked to the politics of Khalistan and Sikh separatism, which saw the Indian military storm the Golden Temple of Amritsar, the holiest of Sikh places, in 1984. Following this event, Sikh bodyguards assassinated President Indira Gandhi, and the public retaliated by attacking and murdering Sikhs in violent riots across the country, especially in Delhi. One of the most famous Indian refugee incidents in Canada around this time was the arrival in 1987 of the *Amelie* off the coast of Nova Scotia with 174 Sikhs onboard. The Conservative government in power at the time used the incident to justify tightening immigration and refugee regulations, which received opposition from numerous groups (Knowles 1997, 180). A number of those aboard the ship, however, were granted refugee status and settled in the larger urban centres, where Indo-Canadian communities were well established. During the height of the Punjab troubles in the mid-1980s it was suspected by the Indian consul

in Vancouver that 15 to 20 percent of all Indian immigration to Canada was undocumented (quoted in Unna 1985, 30). It has also been suggested that the influx of these Sikhs, who were primarily young, into the established Sikh Canadian community caused some tension, especially with reference to how the Sikh religion was practiced (Unna 1985).

Skilled-worker class: The skilled-worker category contains those immigrants selected through the points system as outlined in the 1967 immigration policy. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, immigration policy changes had begun to be reflected in the increased numbers of skilled Indian immigrants. Researchers who have traced the evolution of Indian immigration since the late 1960s highlight the religious, geographical and social diversity this changing immigration pattern introduced (Buchignani 1987; Buchignani and Indra 1989; Sharma 1997). This class of immigration from India has been rising steadily in the last decade and is increasingly incorporating individuals from regions other than Punjab, especially Gujarat and Maharashtra (CIC office manager, Delhi, interview 17 December 1999). This change in the nature of immigration has been coupled with an increase in the role of immigration consultants. One consultancy based in Chandigarh, with offices

⁵ In 2000, just over a thousand refugees from India arrived in Canada, and a large number of these were actually from Afghanistan (CIC office manager, Delhi, interview 17 December 1999).

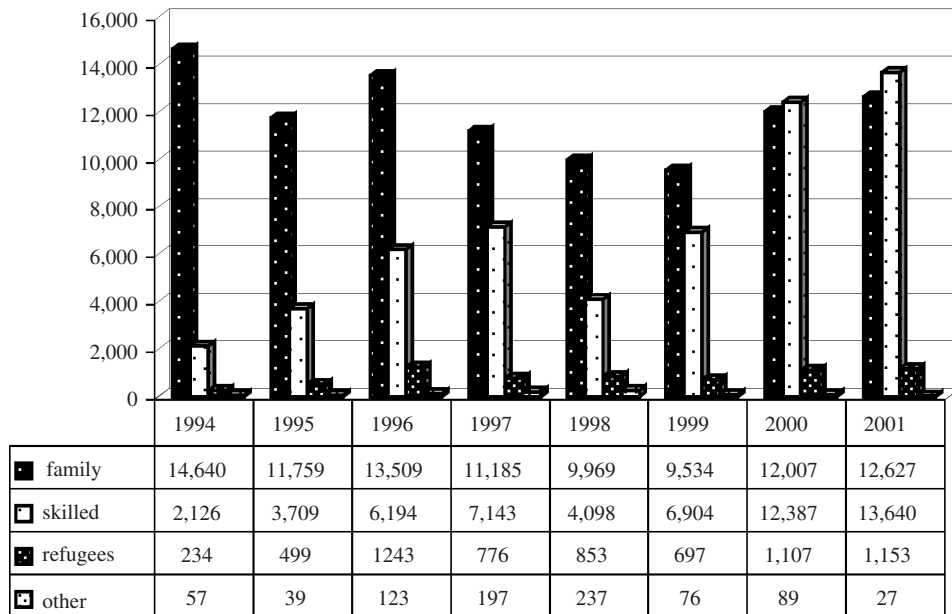


Figure 4
Immigration to Canada from India by class, 1994–2001. SOURCE: CIC (1998, 1999, 2000, 2001a)

in 24 Indian cities and in Mississauga, Ontario, claims to have filed 2,500 applications since 1994, with 3,000 currently in process (*Punjab Tribune* 2000). Their figures indicate that in 1998, their clients received close to one-quarter of the total visas CIC issued to independent immigrants from India.⁶ This suggests that as this class increases, consultants will exercise a powerful influence over the geography of immigrant source and destination.

Business class: Canada's business category includes the self-employed, entrepreneurs and investors. Entrepreneurs are expected to have a net worth over Cdn\$300,000, and investors must invest \$400,000 in Canada. Unlike immigrant trends from Southeast Asia, business immigration from India has tended to be fairly insignificant. This was due, in part, to the limited convertibility of the Indian rupee, which made it legally impossible for potential Indian business immigrants to transfer the required capital into Canada. Since

January 2000, however, this mode of immigration has been positively affected by changes in India's foreign-exchange regulations.⁷ Between 1999 and 2000, the number of principal business-class immigrants from India more than doubled, to 122, moving India's ranking as a source region for this class of immigrant from 12 to 7 (CIC 2002). Despite this increase in skilled and professional-class immigration in the last few years, family class still represents almost half of all Indian migration, as Figure 4 indicates.

Family class: Hugh Johnston (1988) noted that the sponsorship process played a central role in community formation for Canadian Punjabis in Vancouver in the 1970s and 1980s, and this type of immigration is still evident, since India represents the largest source of family-class immigrants to Canada by a significant margin (Table 3). Family-

6 The consultancy is World Wide Immigration Consultants. In an interview in December 1999, the owner advised me that in 1998, the consultancy's offices had successfully secured 526 independent visas; CIC issued 2,054 (CIC 1999).

7 In 2000, India's Foreign Exchange Regulation Act was replaced by the Foreign Exchange Management Act, which employs civil rather than criminal charges against violators and allows convertibility of capital in the current account (but not fixed assets or capital assets such as land). In addition, in July 2002, the Reserve Bank of India announced it had liberalised the capital account, allowing some capital transfers from the sale of land (see <http://www.rbi.org.in>).

Table 3

Top source regions for family-class immigration to Canada—number of landings

| Country | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 |
|---------------|--------|--------|-------|-------|--------|--------|
| India | 13,496 | 11,190 | 9,969 | 9,534 | 12,007 | 12,627 |
| China | 4,265 | 4,935 | 5,059 | 5,560 | 5,743 | 6,472 |
| Hong Kong | 5,296 | 3,985 | 1,795 | 1,058 | 1,182 | 898 |
| Philippines | 4,958 | 3,742 | 3,254 | 4,031 | 3,381 | 3,395 |
| United States | 3,163 | 2,497 | 2,600 | 2,948 | 3,167 | 3,601 |

SOURCE: CIC (1998, 1999, 2000)

class immigration includes various subcategories: spouses, fiancé(e)s, parents (grandparents in the place of no parents), children, orphans and adoptions. Within the family-class category, the most significant components are spouses and parents (see Figure 5). This class of immigration has been the main impetus for immigrant community-building from India, and it provides the mechanism whereby individuals can reconstitute the extended family in one place. The importance of family networks and the common practice of arranged introductions and marriages, as well as the traditional importance of the eldest son in caring for his parents (Hershman 1981), have created a strong social field between the two regions that strengthens the practice of family sponsorship. Such processes are grounded in transnational networks of interaction activated especially during processes of marriage and family sponsorship (Bal 1997).

Numerical evidence supports the assertion that India-Canada immigration has been shaped by specific source and destination geographies and through processes of family migration. What is missing from this numerical overview is an illustration of the factors that contribute to this process of migration.

Building Transnational Spaces

'Independent' immigrants and the role of social networks

As recent data suggest, an increasing amount of immigration from India is comprised of skilled workers—independent immigrants selected for their human capital. The impression created by immigration critics is that this category of immi-

grant is more economically desirable than the family-class category (DeVoretz 1995). Such commentaries create a distinction between the individuals who constitute these categories; the very language is indicative of this differentiation—'independent' versus those who are 'sponsored'. Yet the impression that individuals who are selected as independent immigrants are autonomous in their mobility is a false one. In a study of motivational factors for independent immigrants to Canada, based on data from the Canadian High Commission in Delhi, Diana Winchie and David Carment (1989) found that the most frequently cited reason for choosing Canada as a destination was the presence there of family members or friends. The significance of this finding is that the mobility of *economically* defined subjects is actually shaped by pre-existing *social* factors.

To illustrate the role of social networks in immigration decision-making, I refer to an interview with Sukhjeet Singh,⁸ an engineer who, in late 1997, filed an application to emigrate to Canada. Sukhjeet's younger brother moved to Vancouver with his Hong Kong-born wife in the early 1990s, and one of his cousins moved to Canada as an independent immigrant in 1995. Sukhjeet claimed that he had always wanted to emigrate, but he had to wait until he gained qualifications and work experience. Meanwhile, his Canadian-based relatives encouraged him to apply for permanent residence in Canada, and in late 1997 he applied and paid \$3,000 to one of the largest Indian immigration consultants. When interviewed in early 2000 about his decision to apply, he stated that he was fully aware of the job situation in Canada facing new immigrants, but he was confident that he 'will adjust to the situation... I am capable of finding a job'. The irony here, of course, is that Sukhjeet worked towards the qualifications and expertise he needed to apply for immigration, but is fully aware that they will probably not be fully utilised in Canada. He mentioned that if they moved to Canada, his wife Joyti would have to find work, since '[M]ost ladies in Vancouver are working', and he commented that his wife was ready to work, possibly as a beautician with his brother's wife. Rather than the purely economic gains, it is the quality of family life Sukhjeet sought to

8 Pseudonyms are used throughout this section. Interview, Patiala, Punjab, 13 February 2000.

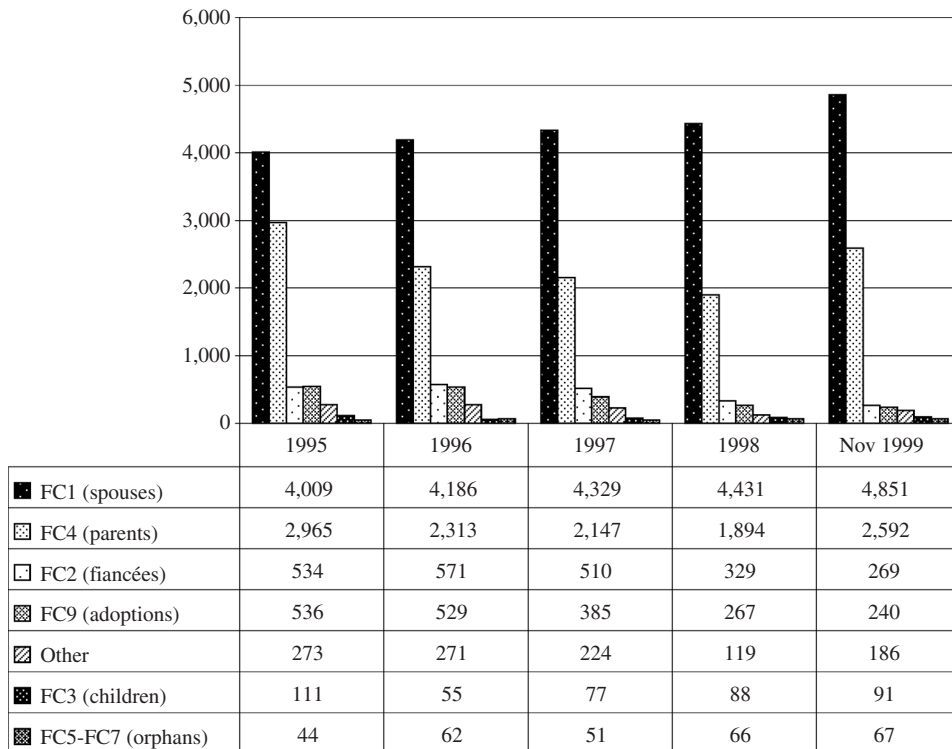


Figure 5

Composition of family class immigration from India, 1995–1999. SOURCE: Data from CIC Delhi

improve; '[F]amily life would be better in Canada because men and women do things together... [C]ouples become more dependent on each other'. But aligned with this, Sukhjeet also admitted that such a move would be difficult for his wife, since she would be leaving her parents behind. To alleviate this doubt he had tried to persuade Joyti that moving to Canada would benefit their two young sons. Sukhjeet worried that if they stayed in India, their sons would face difficulty finding government employment because of the problems of favouritism and corruption. Sukhjeet explained that those who want good government appointments need to pay large bribes—up to \$15,000 for a junior government position. Sukhjeet considered this concern for the occupational future of children to be one reason why so many middle-class, skilled Indians choose emigration.

At the time of the interview, Sukhjeet's application had taken over two years, but this long wait

for a decision is not unusual in India. The pressures on his family and his career, however, were immense:

My work is suffering, my attention is focused on whether I get immigration... I don't want to make investments here, so I don't buy new things, like a television.

Not only were career and household investment decisions put on hold, but more extended family migration strategies were also suspended, depending upon the result of Sukhjeet's application. At the time of the interview, Sukhjeet's parents were in Canada for a month, and he commented that his brother wanted to get permanent status for them, but that they 'would not feel comfortable unless both sons were there'. If Sukhjeet did move to Canada, his brother would apply to sponsor their parents because 'how can they stay alone here, we are only two sons, who will look after them?'

Sukhjeet was eventually granted an immigrant visa in mid-2000.

This interview illustrates the intense forms of connectivity that permeate all immigrant classes, and how, though we may consider that each class comprises distinct processes, they are, in fact, intimately linked. We cannot easily define immigration into distinct categories and classes with a desire to control numbers over time without recognising the social and emotional disruption this causes to families whose migration strategies evolve over years, if not decades. Any assessment of immigrant community and family development must be cognisant of this temporal and spatial complexity.

Reconstituting family through marriage strategies

The exogamous nature of Sikh marriage customs contributes to creating a geographically extensive system of relations (Ballard 1990), and processes of arranged marriage sustain cultural meanings and practices for many Sikhs overseas. Matrimonial matches are subject to number of pressures emerging from family needs, status, and the desire for suitability in matrimony; therefore, the marriage process becomes vitally important when issues of family relocation and migration are factored in (Walton-Roberts 2001a). Applications for spousal immigration to Canada amount to approximately one-quarter of all Canadian immigration from India, and over 60 percent of applicants are female.⁹ While stories of marriage and migration successes and failures are common in Doaba, the story of Malkeet and Simran Singh Basi is particularly revealing, since it indicates the variability of attempts to reconnect family within a regulatory context that controls who moves and how.

Malkeet Basi is the principal of a middle school in a village in district Karputala, Punjab, which is centrally located in the Doaba area and is the site of the most intense out-migrations from Punjab over the last century. As an ex-military man, Malkeet Basi is well respected in the region, and has several years of experience in education. He has two sons who are both married with children. The younger son, Ravinder, lives in Canada and is a teacher, while Jagpal remains in Punjab. Ravinder successfully migrated to Canada through mar-

riage, using family contacts and friends to find a suitable wife in Surrey, British Columbia. With Jagpal, however, attempts at finding a suitable match in Canada continually failed, and as he become older, the family became concerned that his prospects in the marriage market would be compromised. After waiting for several years without securing a match overseas, Jagpal eventually married a woman from Punjab. Though it was a disappointment for the family that Jagpal would not be able to move to Canada through marriage to join his brother, they were very happy with the woman he married, and considered her a good match. In 1995, Malkeet Basi and his wife, Simran, visited Ravinder in Vancouver, and Ravinder 'insisted' that they come to retire in Canada and help look after his two daughters. Ravinder was successful in his application for their sponsorship, and Malkeet and Simran moved to Vancouver, but after the move Malkeet failed to find a useful occupation or volunteer opportunity. He began to regret leaving his job as school principal, and eventually decided to return to Punjab. His wife Simran initially remained in Vancouver, but a month later she chose to return to Punjab to be with Malkeet, where they are now permanently residing. Though they regret not being close to Ravinder and their grandchildren, they feel that Jagpal and his family have a greater need for their help, because his economic position is not as secure as his brother's.

My conversations with Malkeet about his geographically dispersed family indicate the complex social processes that accompany marriage and family sponsorship arrangements, but they also reveal the stress that accompanies these decisions, as families are forced to negotiate immigration regulations and controls that curtail their efforts to remain spatially intact. Though they were able to move between India and Canada, and between their two sons between whom they feel equally torn, the disjuncture of family and the lack of a meaningful role for Malkeet led to the Basis's decision to rescind their Canadian permanent-resident status. This also has ramifications for Ravinder and his family in Vancouver, since the assistance of his parents with childcare would have provided important relief for him and his wife. This childcare function is never recognised when immigration is valued in purely economic terms, causing family-class immigrants to be mis-

9 Landing Immigrant Data System (LIDS), CIC 2001 data. Thanks to Harald Bauder for providing this data.

leadingly cast only in terms of a possible drain on the Canadian economy. The economic function of older family members who take on major childcare roles is as economically significant as it is culturally mediated and is a major influence in determining strategies of family migration.

Malkeet's story indicates that migration can be a recursive process, with individuals moving back and forth between locations to maintain family integrity, and in this case leading to the termination of permanent residence in Canada in favour of more temporary sojourns. Indeed, CIC figures indicate that numerous Canadian permanent residents return to India for extended periods, during which their status expires. Between 1995 and 1999, for example, 7,789 people applied for returning resident status, and 6,476 were granted it (CIC Delhi office data, interview 17 December 1999). This suggests that contacts are resilient over space and through time, proving that migration is not a single act leading to a permanence of settlement divorced from sites of origin. It also offers some indication of the flexibilities demanded of Canadian citizenship and residence status in an era of increasing social diversity and transnational mobility, and how immigration regulations enforce the transnational practices of immigrants.

Maintaining transnational identities

This recursive movement between sites is an important component of transnationality. In the case of Vancouver, such transnational flows are evidenced by the mobility of Indo-Canadians, given that scheduled flights from Vancouver to Delhi (via both London and Singapore) are often fully booked in the winter months (Air Canada official, interview October 1998). Visa applications for Canadian citizens to visit India are also indicative of the extent of traffic, with the Indian consul issuing 30,000 visas annually to Canadians of Indian origin across western Canada (India Consul General, Vancouver, interview 15 October 1999). While this number represents 14 percent of the total South Asian-origin population in the western provinces, a Vancouver survey of 3,500 South Asians suggests that approximately one-third of those sampled reported traveling to India in the previous year (Ethnimark 1997). These attachments to India are renewed each year, most often during the winter months, as Indo-Canadians exer-

cise their fluid mobility and visit their hometowns and villages, in many cases assisting with the maintenance of family homes and development projects (Walton-Roberts 2001b). The presence of those migrants returning to Punjab is important, in that it creates an ongoing awareness of the bonds that comprise this transnational field and contributes to constructing forms of transnational identities in both Canada and Punjab.

In Punjab, the depth of this connection and the intimate knowledge possessed by people thousands of miles from Canada is surprising. The thick social connections between these distance places contribute to a well-developed knowledge of overseas sites of settlement. In numerous conversations with people in villages such as the one in which Malkeet Basi works, comments about Canada were met with responses such as '[M]y *cha cha* [uncle] lives 132nd and 80th Ave', indicating the fine scale of geographical awareness Punjabi residents possess of the transnational field of Doaba and, in this case, Surrey, British Columbia. For the vast majority of people in rural Doaba, the areas where Sikhs have settled abroad in Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States become material and imaginary extensions of their home in Punjab.

Not only do those people remaining in Punjab retain an awareness of their community as part of a wider transnational field, but many immigrants in Canada also construct their identities in ways that retain associations with villages, districts and even former colleges in Punjab, even if they are unable to physically cross these borders on a regular basis. One main process that reinforces this connection is fundraisers, at which project directors and other visiting dignitaries appeal for assistance from immigrants who still retain a strong identification with their home villages. One example of such a fundraising group is the Phagwara Association of Surrey, British Columbia. The association was formed by a number of immigrants from Phagwara and surrounding villages, many of whom had attended similar colleges and who migrated to Canada in the late 1960s and 1970s. Most regularly visit their town or village in Punjab once every year or two, and many are motivated to raise funds for their colleges and villages. At the annual gathering on 9 December 2001, held in Surrey, speakers from both Punjab and British Columbia offered news from Guru Nanak College

Phagwara and canvassed for donations to build more classrooms and to purchase a school bus. The literature on each table included a profile of the college and a letter outlining funding needs to 'philanthropist NRIs (Non-Resident Indians)':

'Under the able leadership of a visionary... college management, the NRIs, old students and residents of the historic village Plahi have always patronised the college. The dedicated [president] is presently abroad and we are sure that our patrons will definitely respond to our financial requirements for further modernising the college so that we can make it a model institute'.

These events provide an important opportunity for key community actors to reinforce the commitment of other immigrants to their home communities. Some immigrants retain the hope that they will be able to have an impact in their home village in other, more direct ways, as Ajit, an alumnus of Guru Nanak College living in Surrey, told me in a November 1998 interview in Vancouver:

I want to go back when my children are settled here, which we are already close to now, I would say 5 to 6 years. ... What I want to do there, if I ever get to do what I want to, is to open a library and a research centre, and have it accessible to everybody, those who never been able to access those things, and help somebody to achieve the goal I once wanted to achieve but was not able to achieve. ... I wanted to be in the academic educational field, and change the educational system that exists back in India... so maybe, I probably will stay 6 month back there, and 6 month here.

Ajit migrated to Canada in the early 1970s, yet he holds onto his hopes of a more effective transnational existence where he can actively work for change in India and still protect and maintain his family's position in Canada.

Conclusion

Indian immigration to Canada has traditionally exhibited a particularly distinctive geography and social composition centred on the migration of Jat Sikhs from the Doaba region of Punjab in north-west India, and has been a major element linking the two nations of India and Canada over the last

one hundred years. My research on transnational communities between Canada and India offers a useful alternative to transnational studies centred on the United States and reveals how immigrant-led transnational practices are the outcome of complex colonial historical processes. The composition of immigration illustrates its social basis, in that family-class migratory networks have been the fundamental shapers of these circulations. Though independent immigrants from all over India are increasingly entering Canada, the regional bias is still evident in this class of immigrant and is not necessarily socially separated from those immigrants already here. In the case of India-Canada immigration, human mobility is overwhelmingly built around the extended family, a larger social unit that contradicts the fantasy of an atomised singular body moving to satisfy the capitalist needs of nations. It complicates our simple imaginaries of separateness, distance and distinct 'flows' of people identified by the abstractness of our immigration-policy language. Immigration from India is a significant component of total immigration to Canada, yet merely registering the numerical weight of this movement does not reveal the distinct sociospatial processes embedded within it, or the consequences of this on wider Indo-Canadian community development. Using a transnational approach, which recognises the ongoing movements and relations immigrants perform across these spaces, highlights the deeply cultural basis of this process. Sukhjeet has joined his brother and will no doubt eventually see his parents join them as well, but Malkeet and Simran Basi remain in Punjab, developing long-distance connections with their son in Vancouver. Ajit remains committed to the homeland he left more than twenty years earlier, dreaming of a time when he can revisit his home village and contribute to its cultural development. Thousands of others are involved in similar but equally unique experiences of the transnational. These stories are important because they humanise everyday experiences of separation, loss and desire and indicate the complexity of immigration, immigrant settlement and transnational connections that span diverse spaces.

Acknowledgements

Funding for this research was provided by the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, the Indo-Canadian Shastri Institute and the Vancouver Centre of Excellence for

Research on Immigration and Integration in the Metropolis. I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the principal and staff of Palahi Rural Polytechnic, Punjab, for the invaluable research assistance they provided. Thanks also to Daniel Hiebert, Alison Mountz, Phil Kelly and three anonymous referees who offered helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper, and to Pam Schaus for cartographic assistance.

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