



**RIVERSIDE**

Department for the Study of  
Religion

# 9th Dr. Jasbir Singh Saini Chair in Sikh Studies Conference

**PRECARIOUS FUTURES:  
Sikhs and *Sikhi(sm)*  
in an Uncertain World**



**MAY 9-10, 2025**



**9:00 AM**

**CONTACT US**



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**Dr. Pashaura Singh  
Kanwarpreet Singh**

# Conference Program

## Friday, May 9th

\*Note: All panels will be in the Interdisciplinary Building Symposium Room, INTS 1113\*

**7:45 am Hotel Pickup Begins**

**8:30 am Registration and Tea/Coffee**

**9:00 am Welcome** – *Rabab* Performance by Jasvir Kaur Rababan

**9:10 am Introduction** – Dr. Pashaura Singh, Distinguished Professor & Dr. J.S. Saini Chair in Sikh and Punjabi Studies, University of California, Riverside, CA, USA

**Keynote Speech I** – “A Sikh History of the Sikhs: *Gurū -Panth Prakāś* and History” – Dr. Louis E. Fenech, Professor of History and Sikh Studies, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA, USA

**10:00 am Panel # 1: Politics, Gender Marginalization and Precarity**

Chair: Dr. Verne A. Dusenbery, Professor Emeritus, Department of Anthropology, Hamline University, Saint Paul, MN, USA

“Politics of Religion and Gender Marginalization: Enabling the Voices of Sikh Women in Pakistan” – Dr. Khola Iftikhar Cheema, Assistant Professor and Head of Department of Pakistan Studies, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan

“A Precarious Existence: Sikh Community in Kashmir” – Dr. Komal JB Singh, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India

“*Izzat* or *Haumai*: Sovereign Violence and Sikh Feminist Resistance” – Gurkirat Sekhon, Doctoral Student, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

“From Migration to Marginalization: A Data-Driven Examination of Anti-Sikh Crimes in the United States” – Fadime Apaydin, Doctoral Student, Department for the Study of Religion, University of California, Riverside, CA, USA

**11:30 am Tea Break**

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### **11:45 am Panel # 2: Sikhs and Transnational Repression – Roundtable Discussion**

Chair / Moderator: Dr. Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair, Professor and Tara Singh, Balwant Kaur Chatha, Gurbax Singh and Kirpal Kaur Brar Professor of Sikh Studies, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

Panelist 1: Harman Singh, Executive Director of Sikh Coalition, New York, NY, USA

Panelist 2: Dr. Tejpaal Singh Baniwal, University of California, Riverside, CA, USA

Panelist 3: Dr. Anneeth Kaur Hundle, Associate Professor of Anthropology and Presidential Chair in Social Sciences to Advance Sikh Studies, University of California, Irvine.

Panelist 4: Dr. Harjeet Singh Grewal, University of Calgary, Alberta, Canada

### **1:10 pm Lunch**

### **2:00 pm Panel # 3: Artificial Intelligence (AI), Art, Poetry, History, and the Sikhi**

Chair: Abhinandan Banerjee, Doctoral Student, Department for the Study of Religion, University of California, Riverside, CA, USA

“Sikhi and AI: Navigating Ethics and Spirituality in an Automated Future” – Dr. Jasjit Singh, Professor of Religion and Global Engagement, University of Leeds, UK

“The Painter and the Poet: Amrita Sher-Gil and Amrita Pritam” – Dr. Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh, Crawford Family Professor of Religion, Colby College, Waterville, ME, USA

“Advancing Sikh Presence in the West through Lessons of History: *Saruktavali* and the Anandpur Court” – Satnam Singh, Independent Researcher and a Senior Consultant to Danish Authorities, Denmark

“Toynbee’s Prophecy & the Precarious Path of Sikhi” – T. Sher Singh, Independent Scholar, Journalist, and Lawyer, London, Ontario, Canada

### **3:40 pm Tea Break**

# Conference Program

## Friday, May 9th

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### **4:00 pm Panel # 4: Oral History, Kirtan, De-turbanisation, and Town-Gown Cooperation in Sikh Studies**

Chair: Kanwarpreet Singh, Doctoral Student, Department for the Study of Religion, University of California, Riverside, CA, USA

"Oral History Narratives of Partition" – Dr. Guneeta Singh Bhalla, Founder of The 1947 Partition Archive, Berkeley, CA, USA

"*Kirtan* as Empowering Practice in the Diaspora: A Sound Response to the Exploitation of Sikh Workers in Central Italy" – Dr. Francesca Cassio, Sardarni Harbans Kaur Chair in Sikh Musicology and Chair of the Department of Music, Hofstra University, NY, USA

"The De-Turbanisation of the Sikh" – Dr. Harkeerat Singh Dhillon, Board of Advisors, UC Riverside School of Medicine, CA, USA, and Dr. Opinderjit Kaur Takhar, Associate Professor and Director of the Centre for Sikh and Punjabi Studies, University of Wolverhampton, UK

"Sikh Studies Association of Michigan and its Role in Establishing Endowed Professorship in Sikh Studies at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor" – Raman Kaur Singh, Plymouth, MI, USA



# Conference Program

## Friday, May 9th

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**6:00 pm Reception Dinner at Alumni Visitors Center**

**6:30 pm Special Remarks**

Dean Daryle Williams, College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (CHASS), UC Riverside, CA, USA

Dr. Melissa Wilcox, Chair, Department for the Study of Religion, UC Riverside, CA, USA

Dr. Harkeerat S. Dhillon, Board of Advisors, UC Riverside School of Medicine, CA, USA

**6:50 pm Dinner**

**7:30 pm Keynote Speech II** - Dr. Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair, Professor and Tara Singh, Balwant Kaur Chatha, Gurbax Singh and Kirpal Kaur Brar Professor of Sikh Studies, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

### Honorees

Dr. Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair, Professor and Tara Singh, Balwant Kaur Chatha, Gurbax Singh and Kirpal Kaur Brar Professor of Sikh Studies, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

Dr. Amritjit Singh, Langston Hughes Professor Emeritus of English & African American Studies, Ohio University, Athens, OH, USA

Dr. Khola Iftikhar Cheema, Assistant Professor and Head of Department of Pakistan Studies, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan

Dr. Jasjit Singh, Professor of Religion and Global Engagement, University of Leeds, UK

Dr. Guneeta Singh Bhalla, Founder of The 1947 Partition Archive, Berkeley, CA, USA

T. Sher Singh, Independent Scholar, Journalist, and Lawyer, London, Ontario, Canada

Raman Kaur Singh, Sikh Studies Association of Michigan, Plymouth, MI, USA

# Conference Program

## Saturday, May 10th

**\*Note:** All panels will be in the Interdisciplinary Building Symposium Room, INTS 1113\*

**7:45 am Hotel Pickup**

**8:30 am Tea/Coffee in Conference Room**

**9:00 am *Shabad Kirtan* by Jasmeet Kaur**

**9:10 am Panel # 5: Home and Diaspora: Sikh Institutions, Sikh Youth and Sikh Identity**

Chair: Dr. Karen Leonard, Professor Emerita of Anthropology, University of California, Irvine, CA, USA

“No Longer *Watno Dur*: Continuing Challenges of Diasporic Communities in North America” – Dr. Amritjit Singh, Langston Hughes Professor Emeritus, Ohio University, OH, USA

“Images of Ambivalence and the Photography of Unbelonging: Sikh Spaces and Communities in Contemporary California” – Dr. Guriqbal Singh Sahota, Associate Professor and Aurora Chair in Sikh and Punjabi Studies, Department of Literature, University of California, Santa Cruz, CA, USA

“*Gurdware*, Sikh Youth and “Being Sikh”” – Dr. Opinderjit Kaur Takhar, Associate Professor and Director of the Centre for Sikh and Punjabi Studies, University of Wolverhampton, UK

“Tower Hamlets and Southall: A New Understanding of Diaspora” – Asa Willoughby, Doctoral Student, Department of Asian Languages and Cultures, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

**11:00 am Tea Break**

**11:15 am Panel # 6: Roundtable on Gurmat-as-Therapy in an Age of Psychic Debilitation**

Chair: Dr. Amritjit Singh, Langston Hughes Professor Emeritus of English & African American Studies, Ohio University, Athens, OH, USA

Panelist 1: Dr. Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair, Professor and Tara Singh, Balwant Kaur Chatha, Gurbax Singh and Kirpal Kaur Brar Professor of Sikh Studies, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

# Conference Program

## Saturday, May 10th

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Panelist 2: Davinder Singh Panesar, Founder of Gurmat Psycho-Spiritual Therapy, London, UK

Panelist 3: Manvinder Kaur Gill, Doctoral Student in Social Work and Anthropology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

Panelist 4: Dr. Manpreet Kaur Singh, Professor of Psychiatry, University of California, Davis, CA, USA

**1:00 pm Lunch**

**2:00 pm Panel # 7: Revolutionary Love, Storytelling, Music, Martial Arts, and Sikh Doctrine**

Chair: Jasvir Kaur Rababan, Doctoral Student, Department for the Study of Religion, University of California, Riverside, CA, USA

“Revolutionary Love Tour: Reimagining Resilience through *Sakhi, Shabad*, and *Sangat*” –

Panelist 1: Valarie Kaur, Sikh American Activist, Author, Documentary Filmmaker, Lawyer, Educator & Faith leader, Los Angeles, CA, USA

Panelist 2: Dr. Nirinjan Kaur Khalsa-Baker, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, CA, USA – Jori-Pakhawaj

Panelist 3: Gurkirat Sekhon, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

“Exploring the Idea of *Sant Sipahi* in Modern Context: Reviving Sikh Martial Spirit for Contemporary Challenges” – Vikass Hothi, Sikh Activist & Expert in Martial Arts, UK

“Conceptions of God and the Divine: Pre- and Post-Colonialism with Emphasis on the Singh Sabha Movement” – Jasleen Kaur Clair, M.A. in Sikh Studies, York University, ON, Canada

**4:00 pm Tea Break**

# Conference Program

## Saturday, May 10th

**\*Note:** All panels will be in the Interdisciplinary Building Symposium Room, INTS 1113\*

**4:20 pm Panel # 8: Roundtable on Preservation, Power, and Moving Beyond the Ghosts of the Past: Learning From Our Ancestors**

Chair / Moderator: Dr. Tejpaul Singh Bainiwal, Department for the Study of Religion, University of California, Riverside, CA, USA

Panelist 1: Johanna Ogden, Independent Scholar, Portland, OR, USA

Panelist 2: Navneet Kaur, Sikh Representative, Portland, OR, USA

Panelist 3: Dr. Sharanjit Sandhra, Sessional Faculty, University of Fraser Valley, Vancouver, BC, Canada

Panelist 4: Dr. Amrit Deol, California State University, Fresno, CA, USA

**5:50 pm Vote of Thanks: Dr. Harkeerat Singh Dhillon**

**6:30 pm Dinner at Punjab Palace**





# Conference Organizers



**Dr. Pashaura Singh** is a Distinguished Professor and Dr. J.S. Saini Endowed Chair in Sikh and Punjabi Studies in the Department for the Study of Religion at the University of California, Riverside. He is the author of four Oxford monographs, including *Life and Work of Guru Arjan* (OUP 2006), which was on the "Best Sellers List" in India (*The Tribune*, August 6, 2006) and his *A Dictionary of Sikh Studies* was launched on Oxford Quick Reference on April 15, 2019, to commemorate Guru Nanak's 550th Birth Anniversary. He has edited / co-edited eleven volumes, including *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies* (OUP 2014) and *The Sikh World* (2023) for the Routledge Worlds series. He is the founding co-editor of *Routledge series on Sikh Literature, Culture, and Society*. His most recent fifth monograph, *The Routledge Companion to the Life and Legacy of Guru Hargobind: Sovereignty, Militancy and Empowerment of the Sikh Panth* (Routledge 2024) was released on August 9, 2024.



**Kanwarpreet Singh** is a second-year Ph.D. student in the Department for the Study of Religion, focusing on the role of Sikhs in the military. His research explores the historical and contemporary contributions of Sikh soldiers, including their engagement in various military systems from the post-Sikh empire era to modern times. He is also interested in exploring Sikhism within the US Military System. Additionally, he has been an active service member in the Army National Guard, aiming to become the first Sikh Chaplain in the US Military. Currently, he is working on the archives of enlisted and commissioned officers who joined before 1984 (the ban of eliminated the exception for Sikhs and others who wore "conspicuous" items of faith)



**Abhinandan Banerjee** (He/Him) is an international, second-year PhD student at the Department for the Study of Religion. Abhinandan holds a double Master's in History from Jadavpur University, Kolkata. His research interests include Religion in Early South Asia, Jainism, Gender, and Medical Humanities. Abhinandan's current research focuses on the emergence and popularization of the term "Jainology" in the Early Twentieth century. Abhinandan is a Graduate Fellow at the Health Humanities and Disabilities Justice (HHDJ) Lab at UCR. He has also been awarded the Mohini Jain Presidential Chair in Jain Studies Best Graduate Essay Prize in 2024.

# Conference Organizers



**Hunter Hill** is a second-year Ph.D. student in the Department for the Study of Religion at the University of California, Riverside. His research focuses on traditions and intersections of yoga, bhakti (devotionalism), and asceticism in South Asia from a textual, historical, and ethnographic perspective.



**Jasvir Kaur Rababan MBE** is a first-year Ph.D. student in the Department for the Study of Religion, exploring the transformative potential of Kirtan as medicine. Her work examines the intersections of music, neuroscience, religion, and leadership, with a vision to further Guru Nanak's message of universal love and unity through innovative approaches to mental health and trauma healing. Honoured with the Queen's Award in the UK for her services to the Sikh community. Widely regarded as the leading female rabab player of our times, Jasvir has spearheaded a global renaissance in Sikh spiritual music over the past two decades. Her groundbreaking work focuses on the decolonisation of Sikh musical heritage and the education and preservation of original Sikh instruments. She is also the executive producer of the award-winning documentary Sikh Musical Heritage - The Untold Story.



# Keynote Speaker - 1



**Dr. Louis Fenech** is a Professor of South Asian History and Sikh Studies at University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls. He has focused his entire academic career on understanding the history of the Sikhs, with a special focus on the period of Guru Gobind Singh and the hundred years after his death. To this end he has written a number of books and articles. All his four monographs have been published by the Oxford University Press and his recent one, *The Cherished Five in Sikh History*, was published in 2021.

# Keynote Speaker - 2 & Honoree



**Dr. Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair** is Director of Graduate Studies and Professor in the Department of Asian Languages and Cultures at the University of Michigan, where he holds the Tara Singh & Balwant Kaur Chatha and Gurbax Singh & Kirpal Kaur Brar Endowed Chair in Sikh Studies. His most recent book publications include: *Violence and the Sikhs* (2022); *Sikh Philosophy: Exploring Gurmata Concepts in a Decolonizing World* (2022). His forthcoming books include: *Event and Revelation: Philosophical Reflections on the Śabda-Doctrine and Geophilosophical Encounters*. His earlier books include: *Religion and the Specter of the West: Sikhism, India, Postcoloniality and the Politics of Translation* (2009) and *Sikhism: A Guide For the Perplexed* (2013). He is a founding editor of the journal *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture and Theory*, and he is founding co-editor of two book series: *Routledge Critical Sikh Studies* and *Routledge Studies in Translation and Religion*.

# Honorees



**Dr. Amritjit Singh** is Langston Hughes Professor of English and African American Studies at Ohio University. Past President of MELUS and SALA, he received the MELUS Lifetime Achievement Award in 2007 and the SALA Distinguished Achievement Award in Scholarship in January 2014. Singh has published over 15 books in African American and South Asian Studies. In 2017, Fairleigh Dickinson UP published a festschrift titled *Crossing Borders: Essays on Literature, Culture, and Society in Honor of Amritjit Singh*.



**Dr. Khola Iftikhar Cheema**, Assistant Professor/HoD Pakistan Studies at IUB, Bahawalnagar, specializes in Sikh Identity in Colonial Punjab. She has worked internationally at UBC, Canada, and SOAS London. Her research on Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Sikh Identity Politics, and Sikh Gender has been published widely and recognized by outlets like BBC Punjabi. She founded Lyallpur Young Historians Club and chaired the Dhahan Prize Jury 2021.



**Dr. Jasjit Singh** is a Professor of Religion and Global Engagement at the University of Leeds, specialising in the religious and cultural lives of Sikhs in Diaspora. His research focuses on religious and cultural transmission, representations of religious minorities, and digital religion. Prof. Singh has contributed significantly to policy making, media, and community engagement, and has held prestigious positions, including Visiting Professor in Sikh Studies at the National University of Singapore. He is a recognized expert on Sikhs in diaspora and has been an academic commentator on Sikh affairs in mainstream media.

# Honorees



**Dr. Guneeta Singh Bhalla** is the founder of The 1947 Partition Archive, an organization that documents oral histories from survivors of India and Pakistan's 1947 Partition, also known as the world's largest mass refugee crisis. After a 2008 visit to the oral testimony archives at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial she was inspired and began interviewing Partition witnesses in 2009. Previously, she was an experimental condensed matter physicist who completed her tenure as a post-doctoral researcher at the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory and the Department of Physics at the University of California at Berkeley



**T. Sher Singh** has had multiple careers: author, lecturer, litigation lawyer, police commissioner, editor, publisher, and journalist, including stints as a national current-affairs columnist, travel writer, television host and radio commentator. He was a regular columnist and current affairs commentator on media (newspaper, radio, TV and online) and has hosted several TV shows as well. He is the founder of The Centennial Foundation and Annual Vaisakhi Gala, The Spinning Wheel Film Festival, the annual Guelph Lecture On Being Canadian, and the online magazine sikhchic.com. Author of three books of essays, he is an avid world traveler. Canada has been his home for 54 years.



**Raman Singh** is the Executive Director of the InterFaith Leadership Council of Metropolitan Detroit. She is the Co-chair of the Board of Trustees of Mata Tripta Gurdwara Sahib in Plymouth, Michigan. She is the Secretary of the Library Board of the West Bloomfield Library Board. She is a lifelong resident of Michigan, trained as an Automotive Engineer, former small business owner. She is married to Dr. Heminder Singh and has two sons Simren Singh (married to Guneet Kaur) and Kabeer Singh.

# UC Riverside Administrators



**Dr. Daryle Williams** (he/him/his) serves as UC Riverside's Dean of the College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences. His academic training is in Latin American history with a specialization in modern Brazil with degrees from Princeton and Stanford University. He has been awarded grants and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities, Fulbright, the Ford and Rockefeller foundations, and the Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities. Most recently, his research has largely involved Atlantic slavery and emancipation in Brazil, with a strong focus on the methods and tools of the digital humanities. He is editor of the *Journal of Slavery and Data Preservation* and has taken the lead on several collaborative initiatives about enslaved peoples' experiences and black digital humanities, supported by more than \$7 million in awards from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities, among others. With the lead support of the Mellon Foundation, his work to build the Enslaved.org online database has won widespread national media attention.



**Dr. Melissa M. Wilcox** (any pronouns) is Professor and Chair of Religious Studies at UC Riverside specializing in the study of gender, sexuality, and religion in the Global North/Global West. Dr. Wilcox's books include *Coming Out in Christianity: Religion, Identity, and Community*; *Sexuality and the World's Religions*; *Queer Women and Religious Individualism*; *Religion in Today's World: Global Issues, Sociological Perspectives*; *Queer Nuns: Religion, Activism, and Serious Parody*; *Queer Religiosities: An Introduction to Queer and Transgender Studies in Religion*; and (with Nina Hoel and Liz Wilson) *Religion, the Body, and Sexuality*. Dr. Wilcox's current research is on spirituality in leather and BDSM communities

# UC Riverside Sikh Chair Supporters



The **Dr. Jasbir Singh Saini** Endowed Chair in Sikh and Punjabi Studies is the result of generous contributions given by the Saini Foundation, the Sikh Foundation, and by a number of individuals and the University. The title of the Chair honors the memory of the late Dr. Jasbir Singh Saini, who was a cardiologist in Phoenix, Arizona.



**S. Dilmohan Singh Chadha** is the President of The Sikh Foundation, a non-profit organization that conducts programs in publishing, academics, and the arts. He is the CEO of Integrated Resources Group, Inc which imports, markets, and sells marble, granite, and other stone from around the world. After graduating with his MBA from the University of Kentucky in 1979, Mr. Chadha set forth into the world to become a leading businessman in the San Francisco Bay Area. The IRG Group now has three office-showroom-warehouse locations (Brisbane, Sacramento, and Dublin) and is the premier stone supplier in the Bay Area. Prior to opening his own business, Mr. Chadha was the vice-president of the commercial lending group at Wells Fargo.



**Dr. Harkeerat Singh Dhillon**, MD, FRCS, MSc Orth., is an Orthopedic and Hand Surgeon at the Riverside Medical Clinic (Riverside, CA, USA). He and his wife have established the Harkeerat and Deepta Dhillon Research Award – Sikh and Punjabi Studies in the Arts and Humanities at UC Riverside. He was a Trustee of the University of California, Riverside Foundation from 2004 to 2019 and chaired the Campaign for Sikh Studies at UC Riverside. Dr. Dhillon is the Founder and President of the Riverside International Film Festival and the Producer of a feature film, *Beyond Honor* (2004). Additionally, he is the author of *Invisible Hands: A Book of Poetry* (2011), *Misty Darkness: A Book of Poetry* (2015) and *Cell You a Theory, A Study of Life* (2020). Currently, he is on the Board of Advisors for UC Riverside's School of Medicine.

# Speakers



**Fadime Apaydin**, a first-generation college student, is a Ph.D. student in the Department for the Study of Religion at the University of California, Riverside, and holds an M.A. in Religious Studies from the University of South Florida. Her research centers on the intersection of religion, migration, and cultural adaptation, with particular attention to Muslims in the United States. In addition to co-editing a volume on sustainability and religion, she has co-authored book chapters on the role of faith-based organizations in disaster response, media representation of religious minorities, faith-based diplomacy in climate negotiations, and religion and political legitimacy. She has been serving as co-chair of the Asian Religions Unit of the American Academy of Religion-Western Region.



**Dr. Tejpal Singh Bainiwal** is a scholar of Sikh American history, merging his research focuses on Sikh and Asian American history. He has more than a dozen publications including a book in Punjabi on *Sikh American history: A Brief History of Sikhs in America* (2023). Tejpal is a researcher/historian for the historical Stockton Gurdwara and co-founded the Sikh American History Project.



**Dr. Francesca Cassio** is an ethnomusicologist and the Sardarni Harbans Kaur Chair in Sikh Musicology at Hofstra University (NY), where she also serves as Full Professor of Music and Chair of the Music Department. Her scholarship introduced a decolonial approach to the study of Sikh musical literature, heritage repertoires, and contemporary kīrtan practices. She authored a book on dhrupad and has published several essays in academic journals as well as in edited volumes, including *The Sikh World* (2023). An accomplished singer of dhrupad and Gurbānī kīrtan, Dr. Cassio has lectured and performed in the USA, Canada, Europe, India, and Bangladesh.



# Speakers



**Jasleen Kaur Clair** is an educator and researcher focused on community building. Holding an M.A. in Humanities with a specialization in Sikh Studies from York University, her work delves into Sikh intellectual traditions, colonial histories, and theological discourse. She's actively involved in philanthropy and seva, organizing community programs, educational initiatives, and youth mentorship. As the lead organizer for the local Gurmat camp and Misl, her work centers on making Sikh history and philosophy accessible, and at this conference, she will share insights on the colonial legacy left behind during the Singh Sabha Movement.



**Dr. Amrit Deol** is Lecturer in the Anthropology and Asian American Studies Department at Fresno State. Prior to coming to Fresno State, Deol received her PhD in Interdisciplinary Humanities from the University of California, Merced. Her current book project *Waves of Revolution: Interrogations of Sikh Political and Spiritual Subjectivities in Punjab and the American West, 1900-1928*, explores the intellectual history of non-secular traditions in the anticolonial Ghadar Party. More broadly, she is interested in race, religion, and empire in relation to anticolonial movements in Punjab and its diaspora.



**Manvinder Kaur Gill** is a PhD student in the Joint Program for Social Work and Anthropology at the University of Michigan. Her research focuses on substance use in Punjab, India and Vancouver, Canada. Before joining the program, she worked in Chandigarh as a research associate for J-PAL South Asia on a project focused on opioid addiction prevention in collaboration with the Punjab state Department of School Education.

# Speakers



**Dr. Harjeet Singh Grewal** teaches courses in Asian Religion, Sikhism, and Critical Religious Philosophy at the Department of Classics and Religion at the University of Calgary and MacEwan University, Edmonton, Alberta. His research is driven by hermeneutical questions from Critical Religious Philosophy, Philosophy of Language, and Religious Literature discourse and focuses on the Sikh tradition. Dr. Grewal's doctoral dissertation examined the epistemological connection between Janamsakhi literature and early Sikh traditions of Katha, which expands the meaning of verses from the Sri Guru Granth Sahib.



**Sifu Vik Hothi** is a renowned martial artist, educator, healer, and author with over 30 years of expertise in the martial arts world. His achievements have been recognized by esteemed institutions across Europe and China, where he trained rigorously and collaborated with world-class masters. As a national and world champion in multiple disciplines, Sifu Vik has built a reputation as a competitor, coach, instructor, and academic. His dedication and contributions to the field were honoured with his induction into the International Martial Arts Hall of Fame in 2021.



**Dr. Anneeth Kaur Hundle** is an Associate Professor of Anthropology and Presidential Chair in Social Sciences to Advance Sikh Studies at the University of California, Irvine. She has held appointments at UC Berkeley, UC Merced, and Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda. Professor Hundle has recently published *Insecurities of Expulsion: Afro-Asian Entanglements in Transcontinental Uganda* (Duke University Press, 2025), and she has published in a number of peer-reviewed journals, including *American Anthropologist*, *Public Culture*, and *Critical Ethnic Studies*. She currently serves as Associate Editor of the journal *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture, Theory*. She can be reached at [ahundle@uci.edu](mailto:ahundle@uci.edu).

# Speakers



**Navneet Kaur** is an educator passionate about preserving cultural heritage. She raises awareness about East Indians' history in Oregon, highlighting its significance in our collective narrative. She has collaborated with historian Johanna Ogden on incorporating this history into K-12 curricula and co-organized Ghadar commemorations in Astoria.



**Valarie Kaur** is a renowned civil rights leader, lawyer, educator, award-winning filmmaker, founder of the Revolutionary Love Project, and bestselling author of *See No Stranger* (2020), *Sage Warrior* (2024), and the children's book *World Of Wonder* (2024). A daughter of Punjabi Sikh farmers in California, Valarie earned degrees at Stanford University, Harvard Divinity School, and Yale Law School, and holds several honorary doctorates. In 2022, Valarie was honored at the White House in the the first-ever Uniters Ceremony. In Fall 2024, Valarie launched the Revolutionary Love Bus Tour to 45+ cities across the U.S., sharing Sikh stories and sacred music calling us to wisdom and courage



**Dr. Nirinjan Kaur Khalsa-Baker**, is Senior Instructor, Theological Studies at Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles and the first female exponent of the Sikh drumming tradition from the Guru's court, the Amritsari baaj on the jori-pakhawaj. Her teaching, research, and publications use a decolonial and embodied lens to approach loss, recovery, and resilience in memory, pedagogy, and practice. Dr. Khalsa currently serves global Sikh and interfaith initiatives through various academic, advisory, and artistic roles including Co-Chair Sikh Studies AAR, LMU SSA, and musician on the Revolutionary Love Tour.

# Speakers



**Johanna Ogden** is an independent historian based in Portland, Oregon. Her 2024 book, *Punjabi Rebels of the Columbia River: the Global Fight for Indian Independence and Citizenship* (OSU Press) traces the entwined Oregon roots of Ghadar, the WWI revolutionary independence movement, and Bhagat Singh Thind's era-defining U.S. Supreme Court citizenship case.



**Davinder Singh Panesar** is the founder of Gurmat Psycho-Spiritual Therapy. He has developed the Gurmat Health Framework, a model that fuses ancient practices with contemporary science to address both psychological and transpersonal needs. This framework has proven highly effective in managing depression, anxiety, and stress, as well as guiding individuals through spiritual emergence and spiritual emergencies—facilitating profound personal transformation and healing. As one of the earliest UK pioneers of mindfulness-based health interventions, Dav Panesar's approach integrates consciousness-based methodologies into both the public and private sectors.



Author of *Late Colonial Sublime: Neo-Epics and the End of Romanticism* (Northwestern UP), **Dr. G.S. Sahota** is currently writing his second book on the question of identity through investigations into the history of Indo-German cultural exchange and its ramifications for transnational method. He teaches in Literature at UC Santa Cruz, where he holds the Aurora Chair in Sikh and Punjabi Studies. His work has appeared in *boundary 2*, *Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, and *Sikh Formations*, where he serves on the editorial board. More about him and his work can be found at <https://gssahota.sites.ucsc.edu>.

# Speakers



**Dr. Sharanjit Kaur Sandhra (Sharn)** is a Historian, educator, storyteller, and founder of Belonging Matters Consulting. Her PhD looks at the affective experiences of museum visitors through a critical race theory lens. Sharn is a passionate activist, building bridges between community and academia through museum work, who has been featured in the Knowledge Network series "*B.C: An Untold History*," is a published author, and has been featured on local, and international podcasts and media.



**Gurkirat Singh Sekhon** is a PhD Candidate in English and Women's and Gender Studies at University of Michigan - Ann Arbor. His research interests lie in transnational feminisms, queer and woman of color critique, and postcolonial theory as his dissertation explores how izzat/honor is mediated through ordinary and spectacular registers of violence in contemporary Sikh women's cultural production.



**Harman Singh** is the Executive Director of the Sikh Coalition, the largest Sikh civil rights organization in the United States. Prior to joining the Sikh Coalition, Harman worked in higher education as a PhD Program Coordinator and Academic Advisor. Harman earned his B.A. in History, M.Ed. in Educational Psychology, and M.A. in Dispute Resolution from Wayne State University.

# Speakers



**Dr. Komal JB Singh** is an early-career researcher. She holds a PhD from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi where her research centered on the evolving Sikh identity in Jammu and Kashmir. Born and raised in the culturally rich region of Kashmir, Dr. Singh's academic journey has been shaped by her experiences as a Kashmiri Sikh woman living through both personal and political upheaval. Her work has been published in journals and various media platforms. A passionate advocate for academic outreach, Dr. Singh is also committed to engage with people through social media, where she believes in the power of digital platforms to bridge the gap between scholarly research and public knowledge.



**Dr. Manpreet Kaur Singh** is a Professor of Psychiatry and holds the Robert H. Putnam Endowed Chair in Bipolar Research and Treatment in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, School of Medicine at the University of California, Davis, researching the neurological basis of childhood onset mood disorders and mechanisms underlying adaptation to stress.



**Dr. Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh**, the Crawford Family Professor of Religion and chair of the Department of Religious Studies at Colby, always wanted to be a teacher. Her father, Professor Harbans Singh, was chair of the religious studies department at Punjabi University in India, where she grew up. She is the author of *The First Sikh: The Life and Legacy of Guru Nanak* (2019).

# Speakers



**Satnam Singh** is the author of *'The Road to Empire'* on Sikh sovereignty and political education in the late 1600s (published by the University of California Press, 2024). Satnam is a keen student of intellectual Sikh history and is professionally employed as a senior consultant to Danish authorities in the prevention of honor-based violence against women.



**Dr. Opinderjit Kaur Takhar MBE** is an Associate Professor of Sikh Studies and Director of the Centre for Sikh and Panjabi Studies at the University of Wolverhampton, UK. In January 2022, she was elected as President of 'Theology and Religious Studies UK' (TRS-UK). Her research is widely disseminated in the British Sikh community through projects such as raising awareness of organ donation amongst Sikhs, on developing Panjabi digital tools and on addressing Gurdwara Governance when exploring the younger generation's engagement with Sikhi and the Gurdwaras.



**Asa Willoughby's** research focuses on South Asian diasporas in the UK, Germany, and the US. He is interested in new understandings of diaspora as posed by scholars including Bibi Bakare-Yusuf and Rey Chow, specifically how these understandings can be applied to South Asian diasporic settings. He works between area studies and anthropology, using ethnography to frame cultural enclaves as a site of identity formation. He is particularly interested in diasporic expressions of language, religion, and performance.

# Moderators



**Dr. Verne A. ("Van") Dusenbery** is Professor Emeritus of Anthropology and was the founding chair of the Global Studies Department at Hamline University in Saint Paul, Minnesota. In 2017, for his research with Sikhs in North America, Southeast Asia, Australia, and Punjab, he received a Lifetime Achievement Award for 'Contributions to the Study of the Sikh Diaspora' from The Dr. Jasbir Singh Saini Endowed Chair in Sikh and Punjabi Studies at the University of California-Riverside. He came to Sikh studies via research he first conducted in the 1970s with 3HO/Sikh Dharma.



**Dr. Karen Isaksen Leonard** is an historian and anthropologist who taught at the University of California, Irvine. With a 1969 Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin on the history of India, she has published on the social history and anthropology of Hyderabad State, and on Punjabi Mexican Americans, South Asian Americans, and Muslim Americans. Her books include *Making Ethnic Choices: California's Punjabi Mexican Americans* (1992), *South Asian Americans* (1997), *Muslims in the United States: the State of Research* (2003), and *Locating Home: India's Hyderabadis Abroad* (2007), a multisite ethnography of the diaspora from Hyderabad to Pakistan, the UK, Australia, Canada, the US, and the Gulf states of the Middle East.





# Kirtan Performer



**Jasmeet Kaur** is a Sikh Practitioner and Gurbani Keertan enthusiast with a passion for string instruments (especially Dilruba). Her journey in Gurbani Kirtan began at home, where she was initially trained by her parents, instilling in her both technical skills and spiritual devotion from an early age. She later refined her musical knowledge and Kirtan practice during her formative years at Akal Academy, Baru Sahib (India). She does volunteer Keertan on different occasions and works Full-Time as an IT Analyst at Kaiser Permanente.

# Staff Organizers



**Josie Ayala**  
(Financial and Administrative  
Officer)



**Geneva Amador**  
(Event/Admin Assistant)



**Kasondra Lopez**  
(Budget Analyst)

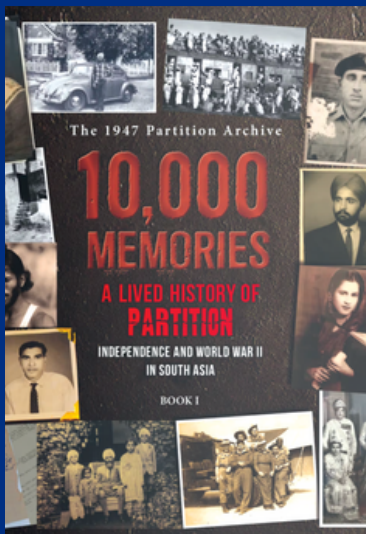
# Special Attendee



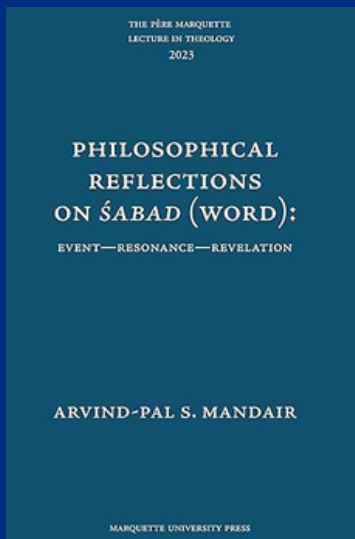
**Dr. Parvinder Jit Singh Khanuja M.D.** is a practicing medical oncologist, founder and managing partner of Ironwood Cancer Centers, based in Phoenix and is one of the largest cancer care provider in the United States. He also serves on the board of Select Medical, a Fortune 500 health care company. He is on the board of Dasvandh Network and 5 Rivers Foundation (family foundation), committed to helping and growing Sikh related causes. He is an avid art collector, has endowed a permanent Sikh art gallery at Phoenix Art Museum where he is also on the board of trustees, and has recently published a book on Punjab heritage and art in association with Smithsonian, edited by Paul Taylor. Dr. Khanuja supports our Graduate Students working in the field of Sikh Studies.



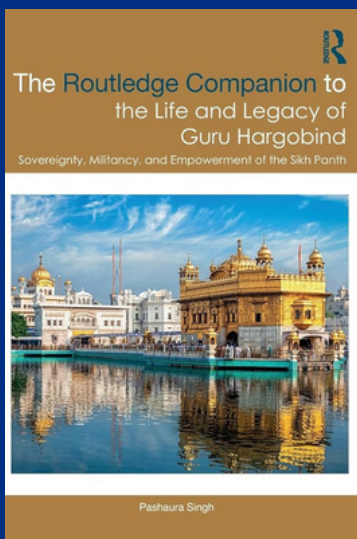
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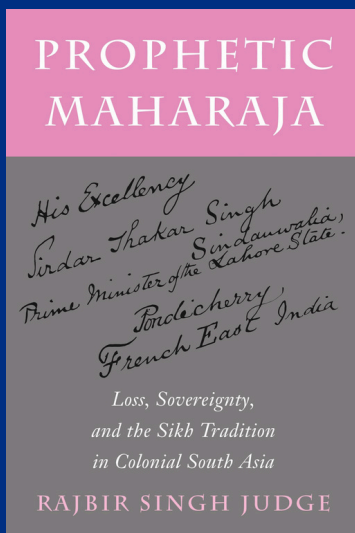
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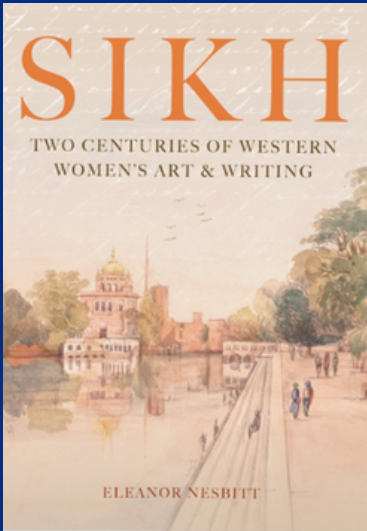


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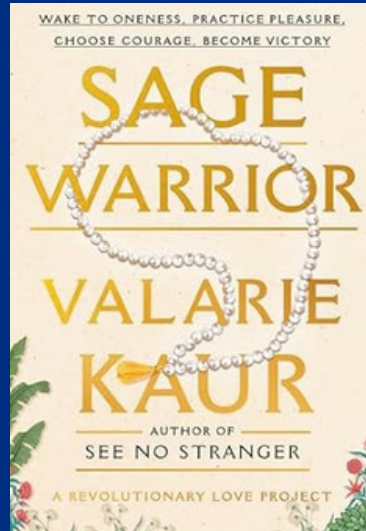


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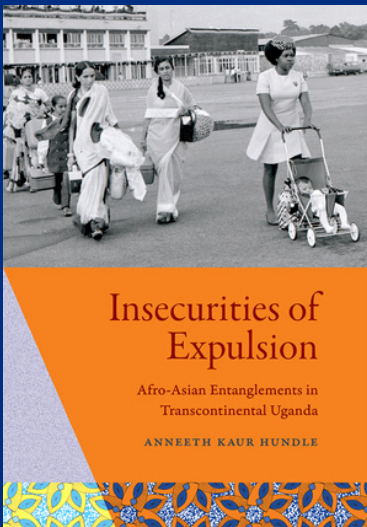
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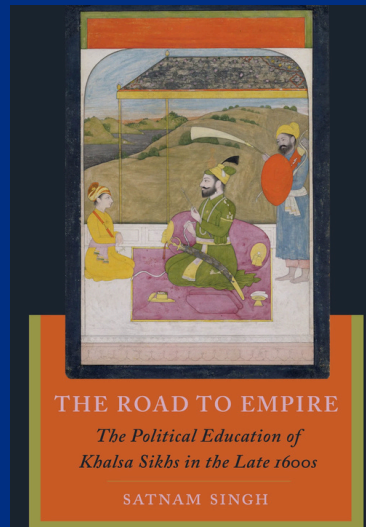
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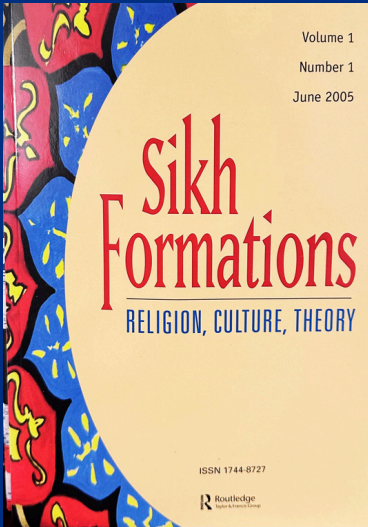
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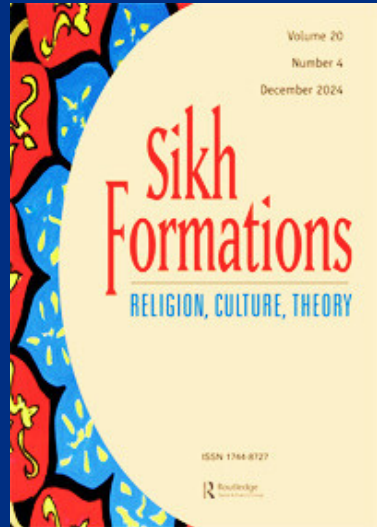
October 2024

# Sikh Formations

Celebrating 2 Decades of Flagship  
Journal in Sikh Studies



June 2005



December 2024





**RIVERSIDE**

**Department for the Study of  
Religion**



The Department for the Study of Religion at the University of California, Riverside offers a wide range of courses covering all of the major religions of the world and exposing students to a wide variety of methodological and theoretical approaches to the academic study of religion. The Department offers undergraduate Majors and Minors in Religious Studies and Master of Arts and Ph.D. degrees in Religious Studies. Students at all levels have the opportunity to explore in depth the diverse social, intellectual, ethical, and theoretical issues that arise when studying the manifestations and impacts of religion today and throughout human history.

Faculty members in the department are active scholars in the field of Religious Studies and command a broad spectrum of scholarly approaches to a wide range of religious traditions. Throughout the year, the Department hosts an active calendar of lectures, colloquia, conferences, and other events centered on the academic interdisciplinary study of religion. Currently, the Department has 4 chairs: The Holstein Family and Community Endowed Chair, The Dr. Jasbir Singh Saini Endowed Chair in Sikh and Punjabi Studies, The Maimonides Chair in Jewish Studies, and The Shrimad Rajchandra Endowed Chair in Jain Studies. These chairs have been actively hosting lectures, conferences, and various events throughout the academic year.

**Program by: Kanwarpreet Singh**