Are Airplanes Shooting Stars:
A Visual Vocabulary of Punjabi Migrant Desires

Prabhnoor Kaur
Department of Art History and Communication Studies
McGil University, Tiohtià:ke/Montreal
April 2024

A thesis submitted to McGill University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree Masters of Arts

Table of Contents

Abstract

This thesis examines the prevalence of airplane imagery across the northern Indian state of Punjab. By looking at these airplane motifs in *phulkaris* and *durries*, model planes offered as votives at the Talhan Sahib Gurdwara, and sculptural water tanks atop rural houses, I argue that airplanes form a visual vocabulary through which this ubiquitous desire for migration is articulated. I frame each of these object types as scenes from my fieldwork, centering an autoethnographic approach. Each scene arises out of different facet of Punjabi culture, highlighting how the dream to move abroad spans generations and demographics. The *phulkaris* and *durries* explore the uniquely feminine desire for class mobility, and by extension migration, through marriage and piety. The offering of the toy planes at the Talhan Sahib Gurdwara is a relatively new phenomenon that speaks to an ever-growing desire to leave Punjab because of a lack of foreseeable future in the state. Finally, the sculptural water tanks act as family crests, trophies of successful migration. Looking out onto a Punjabi village dotted with these water tanks, we see a map of migration. Over the course of this paper, I argue that diaspora, and the desire for migration, are not a unilateral force. In other words, the object of diaspora studies is not just what happens when someone leaves their homeland for a new place but also the force of this desire in shaping the culture and very landscape of a homeland.

Résumé

Cette thèse examine la prévalence de l'imagerie aérienne dans l'État du Pendjab, au nord de l'Inde. En examinant les motifs d'avions dans les *phulkaris* et les *durries*, les modèles d'avions offerts comme votifs au Talhan Sahib Gurdwara et les réservoirs d'eau sculpturaux au sommet des maisons rurales, je soutiens que les avions forment un vocabulaire visuel à travers lequel s'articule ce désir omniprésent de migration. Je présente chacun de ces types d'objets comme des scènes de mon travail de terrain, en centrant une approche autoethnographique. Chaque scène découle d'une facette différente de la culture pendjabi, soulignant à quel point le rêve d'immigrer à l'étranger traverse les générations et les données démographiques. Les *phulkaris* et les *durries* explorent le désir typiquement féminin de mobilité de classe et, par extension, de migration, à travers le mariage et la piété. Les offrandes d'avions jouets au Talhan Sahib Gurdwara sont un phénomène relativement nouveau qui témoigne d'un désir toujours croissant de quitter le Pendjab en raison du manque d'avenir prévisible dans l'État. Enfin, les réservoirs d'eau sculpturaux font office d'emblèmes familiaux, trophées d'une migration réussie. En regardant un village punjabi parsemé de ces réservoirs d'eau, nous voyons une carte de migration. Au cours de ce mémoire, je soutiens que la diaspora et le désir de migration ne constituent pas une force unilatérale. En d'autres termes, l'objet des études sur la diaspora n'est pas seulement ce qui se passe lorsqu'une personne quitte son pays d'origine pour un nouvel endroit, mais aussi la force de ce désir dans la formation de la culture et du paysage même d'un pays d'origine.

Acknowledgements

My sincerest gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Kenji Praepitamongkol; his patience and thoughtful feedback has been integral to this thesis taking shape. I am always in awe of his rolodex of references.

A big thank you also to my secondary examiner, Dr. Pasha Khan, whose feedback helped sharpen this paper within the context of the field.

This paper would not have been possible without the conversations I have had over the course of my fieldwork. Thank you to Thukral and Tagra, Rajesh Vora, Surabhjeet Kaur, Babbal Singh, the Asia Art Archive-India team, and the Foundation of Indian Contemporary Art team.

To my cohort, I am glad it was all of you. You have made these two years a joy. In particular, I would like to thank Sam Lirette, who has read some version of this paper more than anyone else. I would not be here without your editorial notes or the warmth of your friendship.

ਮਮਾ, ਮਿਸਟੀ, ਤੇ ਛਤਿਹ: You are the wind beneath my wings. I couldn't ask for anything more.

List of Figures

“ਸਾਰੇ ਬਾਹਰ ਜਾ ਕੈ ਜਹਾਜ ਦੇਖਦੇ ਐ
ਸਿਰਫ਼ ਤੂੰਹੀ ਹੈ ਜੋ ਬਹਾਰੋਂ ਆਕੇ ਜਹਾਜ ਦੇਖਦੀ ਐ”

“*Everyone looks at planes, hoping they'll take them abroad.*
There's only you who will come back from abroad to look at planes."
- my *chacha*[1]

Introduction, or Cold Open

"Why do you think people want to move abroad?" My question got skeptical looks from every person I asked. What kind of question was that, after all. The irony of the situation was not lost on me. I could see in the way they looked at the sunglasses perched on my head, the Converse on my feet, and iPhone in my hands taking notes. People want to move abroad so that they have time to ask questions like this. Beyond the borders of Punjab, the myth goes, there is endless possibility. The dream of leaving Punjab is as old as the state itself.

This paper pulls apart the naturalization of this dream to move abroad, asking why this desire is so ubiquitous. I argue that airplanes form a visual lexicon through which this desire for migration is articulated. Using the three scenes from my fieldwork, I search for airplane motifs in *phulkariyan* and *durriyan*, the ritualized offering of model planes at the Talhan Sahib Gurdwara, and sculptural water tanks atop rural houses. Each scene arises out of different facet of Punjabi culture, highlighting how the dream to move abroad spans generations and demographics. The *phulkariyan* and *durriyan* explore the uniquely feminine desire for class mobility, and by extension migration, through marriage, piety, and dowry. The offering of the toy planes at the Talhan Sahib Gurdwara is a relatively new phenomenon that speaks to an ever-growing desire to leave Punjab because of a lack of foreseeable future in the state. Finally, the sculptural water

[1] *Chacha* refers to your father's brother – in this case, my father's best friend.

tanks act as family crests, trophies of successful migration. Looking out onto a Punjabi village dotted with these water tanks, we see a map of migration and phantom places. Using an auto-ethnographic approach, I consider the way my position as someone that has grown up and now lives outside of India shape my research and fieldwork. Over the course of this paper, I argue that diaspora, and the desire for migration, is not a unilateral force. In other words, the object of diaspora studies is not just what happens when someone leaves their homeland for a new place but also the force of this desire in shaping the culture and very landscape of that homeland.

In 1947, when the sun was setting on the British Raj, the colonial officers created two independent nations: India, a Hindu-majority country, and a Muslim-majority Pakistan.[2] They sliced right through the state of Punjab. *Punj-Aab,* meaning five rivers. In Indian East Punjab, we have only Sutlej, Beas, and half of Ravi. The other half of Ravi is in Pakistani Punjab, along with Chenab and Jhelum. The same can be said of family trees. As power sifted out of the hands of the British and intercommunal tensions heightened, somewhere between 12 to 17 million people packed up their lives and moved across fresh borders.[3] In 1966, Punjab was divided further: the state of Haryana was created while the northern hills with a predominantly Hindu population became a part of Himachal Pradesh.[4] The Sutlej-Yamuna Link (SYL) canal was created to divert water from Punjab's river to the newly created state and surrounding territories. Punjabi sentiments soured; the separatist Khalistani movement garnered more and more favor. What happened next is what Sandhu calls the watershed moment in Punjabi history. In 1984, The Indian Armed Force's Operation Blue Star was an attack on the Golden Temple where the leader

[2] K. Hill et al., "The Demographic Impact of Partition in the Punjab in 1947," *Population Studies* 62, no. 2 (2008): 156.
[3] Hill et al, 156.
[4] Amandeep Sandhu, *Panjab: Journeys Through Fault Lines* (Gurgaon, Haryana: Penguin Random House India, 2022), 119.

of the Khalistani movement was thought to be hiding out. In response, Khalistani militants assassinated Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. As news of her death broke, riots broke out in Delhi, the start of a ten day long anti-Sikh pogrom.[5]

Punjab's list of grievances only continues to grow: following the liberalization of India came the Green Revolution. In an effort to maximize production, India imported the American agricultural method from the Rockefeller Foundation, Ford Foundation, and the World Bank.[6] At a newly established Punjab Agricultural University in Ludhiana, a new strain of the Mexican dwarf wheat was created and distributed to local farmers to cultivate.[7] This new crop was extremely responsive to fertilizers; Punjab was producing 70% of all the grain in the country.[8] However, with no regulation on the use of these fertilizers, the soil and water of the state soon became contaminated, resulting in widespread illness. A "cancer train" runs from the city of Bathinda, where there is the highest concentration of cancer cases, to Bikaner, Rajasthan, where treatment is relatively more affordable.[9] With only a few farmers owning the land and costs associated with farming, such as medical treatment, rising, the bleaker a life of farming seemed.[10]

The dividing and quartering of Punjab is imagined as the first domino leading the state to where it is today; the specter of Partition continues to loom large in the Punjabi imagination. In psychoanalytical terms, Partition is the cut – the break that produces the symbolic order,

---

[5] Sandhu, *Panjab: Journey Through Fault Lines,* 120.
[6] Jashandeep Singh Sandhu, "Green Revolution: A Case Study of Punjab," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 75 (2014): 1192.
[7] Sandhu, "Green Revolution", 1193.
[8] Sandhu, "Green Revolution", 1195.
[9] Sandhu, *Panjab: Journeys Through Fault Lines,* 40.
[10] Punjab has the highest rate of suicide in India; most of whom are farmers that were not able to pay back their loans. In August 2020, the government passed three more bills allowing corporations to create private contracts with vendors, creating a more monopolized market and pushing smaller vendors out. This resulted in the largest worker strike in history, lasting over 450 days.

disrupting a signifier from what it signifies. In Lacan's words, "This cut in the signifying chain alone verifies the structure of the subject as discontinuity in the real."[11] Partition is what makes the idea of Punjab. The condition of being Punjabi is characterized by a longing for another place, a pre-Partition whole. In this imagined Punjab, the average person can live unencumbered by the state violence, flourish in their farming, and imagine a future for generations to come. Unable to go back, this desire is projected outward. Leaving the state seems like the only option and, as a part of a colonial empire, no place seems more desirable when it comes to securing a stable future than the West.

Given the rivers and the flat landscape, Punjabi culture has always been linked to the land, with most of the population being farmers. Like the rest of India, Punjab has its own caste system. Despite this being against the tenants of Sikhi, the *Jat*, a member of the dominant farming caste, has come to be conflated with the Punjabi identity.[12] At the time of Partition, many farmers who had been living in West Punjab had to give up their land in exchange for another parcel located on the Indian side. The quality of the land was not always consistent, leading some farmers to sell the given land and seek other vocations.[13] The people of Punjab had been used to migrating abroad. Given the physical labor required in farming, plenty of young Punjabi men were obvious recruits for the British army since the 18th century. Since then, joining the army has been a central aspiration for Punjabi youth and a viable means of accruing respect and financial security for your family. Under the British colonial project, people migrated to East Africa as indentured laborers. The focus of 20th century migration, however, has been the Global

[11] Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection, 1901-1981*, 1 vols. (London: Routledge, 2020), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003059486, 331.
[12] Nicola Mooney, "The Rural Imaginary," in *Rural Nostalgias and Transnational Dreams: Identity and Modernity Among Jat Sikhs*, 1 online resource (317 pages) vols., Anthropological Horizons (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), https://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=4672816. 177.
[13] Mooney, 182.

North, which has long since been the locus of power.[14] Fed up with life in Punjab and with new opportunities presented to them, Punjabi people began to view migration as a means to upward social mobility unlike what they would be able to access if they stayed in the country.

As Jasbir Puar outlines in *Writing My Way Home,* "Diaspora can be contingent upon very specific static notions of these two terms, home and travel, utilizing a linear teleology from origin to Other, East to West, third world to first. This is one interpretation. Diaspora may also function as a threat to certain homes while becoming the construct of home for certain Others."[15] For the people of Punjab, the home they do have is perceived as being under threat, continually diminishing. As a result, new homes must be sought out, ones that provide stability where futures are imaginable. As a result, the hopeful migrant looks to the core of the power: Britain and its former Western colonies are imagined as new potential homes where nothing bad can happen. While scholars and writers such as Salman Rushdie and Homi K. Bhabha theorize the diasporic individual as 'translated' or in an 'interstitial space', respectively, the focus remains on what happens once someone has left their home.[16] According to these theories of diaspora, the migrant is a liminal space upon entering a new country. Borrowing the words of Alice Correia, "To be diasporic, or to live in a diasporic condition is to have experienced transnational movement and retain some form of attachment to an original home (through for example language, religion, and/or cultural practices). It is also to share an experience of being positioned as an outsider

[14] Atinder Pal Kaur, "Impact of Migration on Gender Roles: Study of Left behind Wives in Rural Punjab," *Indian Journal of Health and Wellbeing* 11, no. 7–9 (September 2020): 408
[15] Jasbir Puar, "Writing My Way Home: Traveling South Asian Bodies and Diasporic Journeys," *Socialist Review* 94, no. 4 (1994): 75–108.
[16] Salman Rushdie, "Imaginary Homelands," in *Imaginary Homelands* (London, England: Granta Books, 1991), 17;. Chandrima Karmakar, "The Conundrum of 'Home' in the Literature of the Indian Diaspora: An Interpretive Analysis," *Sociological Bulletin* 64, no. 1 (2015): 81.

within the place of relocation."[17] Following this definition, for the people of Punjab, an attachment lingers to a previous place, a pre-Partition Punjab. Living under the thumb of an increasingly oppressive Hindu-nationalist government, language and culture diminish. Without transnational relocation, the average Punjabi feels like an outsider in a country that is supposed to be their own.[18] In other words, as the idea of the previous place dissolves into the harsh realities, the Punjabi person is left-stranded in a no man's land where they are not in an original home and yet they have been made an outsider from within the nation.

Further work in the field of diaspora studies, such as Sara Ahmed's *The Promise of Happiness,* outlines the idea of migrant melancholia, where melancholia speaks to "getting stuck in bad feeling" produced by holding on to loss.[19] Through looking at films like Gurinder Chaddha's *Bend it Like Beckham,* Ahmed argues that the 'happiness' said melancholic migrants aspire to is to cut ties with the loss and be assimilated into the new nation. This extends from the history of 'happiness' as a project of empire, where the ultimate 'happiness' brought to colonized people served as an excuse for its violence.[20] In these assimilation aspirations, the "migrants as would-be citizens are thus increasingly bound by the happiness duty not to speak about racism in the present, not to speak of the unhappiness of colonial histories, or of attachments that cannot be reconciled into the colorful diversity of the multicultural nation."[21] Ahmed's argument can be stretched beyond the experience of the first or second-generation migrant: the distance that the would-be citizen creates between their lived reality and their happy fiction is then shared on to would-be migrants. In the case of Punjab, these prospective migrants are caught in their own

[17] Alice Correia, "Diasporic Returns: Reading Partition in Contemporary Art," *Third Text*, To Draw the Line: Partitions, Dissonance, Art – A Case for South Asia, 31, no. 2–3 (November 2, 2017): 321–40, https://doi.org/10.1080/09528822.2017.1371917, 323.
[18] Sandhu, *Panjab: Journeys Through Fault Lines,* 6.
[19] Sara Ahmed, "Melancholic Migrants," in *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham [NC]: Duke University Press, 2010), 138.
[20] Ahmed, 130.
[21] Ahmed, 158.

melancholia, holding on to the loss of a whole and complete Punjab. The aspiration to escape this stuck-ness comes in the shape of a plane – which Ahmed calls as a conversion point.[22] The would-be migrant must tell themselves that leaving offers something up and away from the seemingly predetermined futures that await them in Punjab. As the myth of happiness has been communicated from those that have immigrated to those still in the homeland, the prospective migrant too buys in. The people of Punjab orient themselves towards this migration dream.

Building off the work of aforementioned scholars, this thesis contributes to the diaspora studies by making the case that the moments before migration physically occurs are equally within the purview of this field. I argue that the introduction of a better place, the sowing of the migrant dream, renders the homeland liminal before any physical movement takes place. Already built into the Punjabi imaginary is a sense of fracture from Partition. Given the state's tenuous relationship with the nation, there is an aching to go and the knowledge that this is not possible. When the dream of migration becomes a possibility, this desire morphs from longing for reunification and community to chasing personal prosperity. The notion that the migrant will move overseas and 'make it' is the communication of the American Dream through a game of telephone. Distance from the realities of life in America, Canada, or the UK allows for a migrant's optimism. They write a fiction of this other place they will go, filling it with fantasies of how they will be made whole again in a new way. With this fantasy in mind, the Punjabi person reframes themselves from someone that is stuck within the state's circumstances to someone that is in waiting to escape. They might not have left yet, but they will eventually. Punjab is then transformed into a holding space for migrants to be.

[22] Ahmed, 145.

Scene 1: Desire, Duty, and Dowry

In 2006, my family and I lived in Yangon, Myanmar, where we didn't get international cable. As a result, my media diet consisted exclusively of Tom and Jerry and Punjabi albums on DVD. On a collection of the past year's biggest hits, I watched as oversaturated blues and yellows flickered to open Babbu Maan's "*Mittran Di Chattri*". In the first scene, a white limo drives down a narrow village road while a farmer gawks from the field as the car breaks down. Out steps a woman in a trench coat and dark sunglasses. As the synth swells, the video cuts rapidly from Maan in the fields to this woman to flashbacks of the two of them together where Maan is in jeans and a brown leather jacket while the woman wears a white cotton *suit*.[23] The music video cuts to present: Maan rides his tractor down the same road with a rope to help tow his former lover's car. Maan begins crooning, "ਫੁੱਲ ਕੋਈ ਵਲੈਤ ਵਾਲਾ ਲੈ ਗਿਆ, ਗੁੱਡਦਾ ਮੈ ਰਿਹ ਗਿਆ ਕਿਆਰੀਆਂ."

"Someone from abroad picked the blooms while I was tending to my fields." After an inexplicable rap break – in English, no less – we see memories of Maan and his lover again. They meet at the steps of an old building, where she has a surprise for him. She covers his eyes as Maan's next lines echo on the soundtrack. She pulls out a handkerchief with the Canadian flag. The camera zooms into the text reading "Canada", cutting rapidly between that and a close up of Maan's resigned face as he drives the tractor. (Figure 1) On the track, Maan wonders "ਪਤਾ ਨਹੀਂ crazy ਕਿਉਂ ਵਲਤ ਲਈ, ਸਾਰੀਆਂ ਪੰਜਾਬਚ ਕਵਾਰੀਆਂ?" "Why are all the bachelorettes in Punjab crazy about moving abroad?" Much like Maan, I had been wondering the same thing.

Two summers ago, I was working as a researcher at the artist duo Jiten Thukral and Sumir Tagra's studio. It was there that I first heard about airplane designs that women would

[23] Suit here refers to *salwar kameez* – a typical Punjabi outfit of a long shirt and loose pleated pants, along with a muslin drape (*dupatta).*

weave into traditional textiles like *durriyan* and *phulkariyan* that formed their dowry. My first tasks at the Thukral and Tagra Studio was to add English subtitles to their short film, *Q*, which tells the story of a newlywed bride waiting for her NRI husband to send her visa-papers so she can join him abroad.[24] Over lunch, Jiten told me about how the film was inspired by a family friend who had a similar experience. This is not a unique story by any means. In an article for The Irish Times, journalist Rahul Bedi estimates around 15,000 brides who have been abandoned in Punjab after their NRI husbands disappeared.[25] In the ten or so years since Bedi's piece, I am sure that number has only risen exponentially. In Punjab, where marriage is viewed as an economic venture, it is not surprising then that there are those who try to scam the system. I believe a part of why such a scam exists in Punjab is due to the economic incentive of dowry built into marriage rituals as well as the pervasive belief that migrating abroad is the way to ascend in social class.

Since the culture of Punjab prioritizes manual labor and takes pride in its martial history, men are seen as torchbearers for the legacy of a family. Women on the other hand are seen as strangers in their own homes from the moment they are born. As marriages within Punjab are patrilocal, from the moment a girl is born into a family, they expect that she will one day leave to join her husband. Marriage is always on the horizon for a girl and as a result daughters simultaneously bear the weight of carrying the family's honor to the point where any misstep is a scarlet letter while being conceived of as a financial burden. In this rigid patriarchal structure of Punjab, a good marriage is amongst the highest order of women's achievements. A good marriage promises financial and social security that they would not be able to access without a

[24] NRI refers to Non-Resident Indians.
[25] Rahul Bedi, "Punjabi Wives Abandoned to a Life in Limbo," *The Irish Times*, August 1, 2009, https://www.irishtimes.com/news/punjabi-wives-abandoned-to-a-life-in-limbo-1.711002.

husband. As such, marriage was not about love but rather a business proposition, in which a woman is a liability.[26] As lawyer Mallika Kaur Sarkaria writes, "Girls – whose vulnerable modesties must be protected, wedding dowries must be paid, and socio-economic positions are insufficient to ensure parents' economic stability or security – are seen as burdens and liabilities for their families."[27] She continues, tracing the state's gendered violence through its history of femicide. While there are laws against sex-selective abortions and dowries have been outlawed, both continue to be practiced. The bride's family prepares for her marriage from the moment she is born, saving up to build her dowry so that she may find 'a good match' in the future. On the groom's end, marriages and dowries that came along with them offered an increase in familial wealth, the promise of heirs to carry on the family name, and the passing on of domestic labor from his aging mother to the young bride.

By marrying an NRI groom, the dream of moving abroad seems within reach. Canada, in particular, is often figured as the ideal, as depicted in Maan's music video. Canada allows for migration through family class sponsorship, meaning people can apply to become permanent residents if they have a family member who is a citizen. A marriage abroad could mean the gateway to moving an entire family overseas. Requirements such as a test of civic knowledge, interviews with judges, and language requirements are all waived for immigrants over 55 admitted under this policy.[28] As Nicola Mooney notes in her article for the *Global Networks* journal, "Migration […] is a highly strategic process one might liken to forging links in a chain

[26] Sandhu, *Panjab: Journeys Through Fault Lines*, 100.
[27] Mallika Kaur Sarkaria, "Lessons from Punjab's 'Missing Girls': Toward a Global Feminist Perspective on 'Choice' in Abortion," *California Law Review* 97, no. 3 (2009): 906.
[28] Nicola Mooney, "Aspiration, Reunification and Gender Transformation in Jat Sikh Marriages from India to Canada," *Global Networks* 6, no. 4 (October 1, 2006): 389–403, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-0374.2006.00151.x, 390.

of movement and settlement."[29] Mooney goes on to illustrate the exponential rate at which a family can migrate on the basis of a singular marriage. The incentive for Canada for such a policy is to discourage international remittances as immigrants working in the country will send back a portion of their income to support their family in the homeland. Allowing an entire family to migrate through this family sponsorship scheme encourages the money earned to circulate within the country's economy. Mooney argues that the power this lends a bride transforms her into an 'agent of citizenship' as she becomes a central resource in facilitating the fulfillment of her familial migrant dreams.[30] I find this argument tenuous: it is true that a successful migration and naturalization grants a woman power within her familial structure, however not all migrations are successful. I am not interested in what happens once someone migrates but rather everything that goes into constructing that migration as the dream. All dreams serve to address a lack. Based on the sense of what is missing, a myth is constructed in which achieving said dream will return the person to being whole. For women within the unyielding Punjabi patriarchy, the thing that is lacking is a sense of agency. A transnational marriage presents possibilities of power that are a siren song.

Given the power that such a union avails the family, brides may often marry overlook a groom's shortcomings. As grooms who travel from overseas are often in India for short periods of time, the marriages are arranged and carried out quickly, facilitated by a family member or a friend. As Kaveri Qureshi examines in her two case studies, families may agree to a marriage without having a close look at the groom because of the trust they have in the matchmaker.[31]

---

[29] Mooney, 391.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Kaveri Qureshi, "Shehri (City) Brides between Indian Punjab and the UK: Transnational Hypergamy, Sikh Women's Agency and Gendered Geographies of Power," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 42, no. 7 (May 27, 2016): 1216–28, https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2015.1068107, 1220.

Once the marriage is finalized, all the rituals and ceremonies are complete, the groom will return to his life abroad with promises to arrange all the paperwork to help his new wife join him. However, as Atinder Pal Kaur and Vivek Thakur outline in their study on wives abandoned by their NRI husbands, "very frequently, this doesn't happen, and she waits indefinitely only to discover that she has been sexually, economically and socially exploited and has been dumped in home land forever."[32] Their status as an NRI places these men at a privileged position which they readily exploit. The wives abandoned in Punjab are, in the eyes of their society, still married and continue to fulfill their duties as daughters-in-law, running the marital household. Several case studies like the ones by Rahul Bedi and Kaveri Qureshi note how prevalent abuse can be within this dynamic.[33] Since divorce is not commonplace, especially in rural Punjab, along with the societal ostracization of leaving a marriage, these newlywed brides remain trapped in their lives. Often, the incentive for such marriages is purely financial: a groom's family knows that their son's non-Indian citizenship means they can levy a higher dowry and brides and their families who are eager to change their station in life will meet their demands.

The dowry is seen as a final price the bride's family must pay to a groom's, as a passing on of responsibility for their child. Today, dowries consist of family heirlooms, jewelry, and appliances like washing machines and televisions. The practice of dowry originated with the intention of being a gift from the wealthier family, but under the pastoral patriarchy of India evolved into a bride price. Dowries historically consisted of objects that would add to the wealth of the married household, such as jewelry, clothing, furniture, and the bridal *bistra* (bedding

[32] Atinder Pal Kaur and Vivek Thakur, "Psycho-Socio, Economic Conditions of Left behind Families by NRI Groom's," *Indian Journal of Health and Wellbeing* 4, no. 3 (March 2013): 536.
[33] Bedi, "Punjabi Wives Abandoned to a Life in Limbo."
Qureshi, "Shehri (City) Brides"

set).[34] I am interested in two textiles included in the dowry: the *phulkari* and the *durrie. Phulkari* is the craft that has come to be synonymous with Punjab. The word comes from *phul*, meaning flower, and *kari,* craft. A piece of fabric covered in *phulkari* is called a *baagh* (garden). As the name suggest, the designs are most often inspired by flora and fauna, though not exclusively. Other designs include geometrical patterns, animals, human figures, and vehicle motifs – the latter being my particular interest, though they are uncommon.[35] During our conversation about holiday wives, Jiten Thukral had also told me about how people started to embroider airplane designs into *phulkariyan*. We did a cursory Google search and came up short; he swears he had seen once before. Historians Rajinder Kaur and Ila Gupta write, "Different types of vehicles [as motifs] like a railway train, motor car, and *ratha* (chariot) had also been embroidered in *phulkari* art," leading me to believe that an airplane motif does exist.[36]

While less ubiquitously Punjabi, *durriyan* are a longstanding regional craft and central part of the dowry. A *durrie* is a flat-woven cotton textile most often used as a rug. Generally, a *durrie* can be woven by anyone for personal or commercial use; "bridal *durries* are however strictly personal, woven by women and carried to their new homes as part of their dowry."[37] *Durriyan* are typically woven in the house courtyard on a horizontal ground loom, a simple rectangular wooden frame with a fixed heddle.[38] Ann Shankar and Jenny Housego write, "A bar is secured across each of the two short sides at about 15cm from the ground and the warp is

[34] Ann Shankar and Jenny Housego, *Bridal Durries of India* (Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India: Mapin Publishing Pvt. Ltd, 1997), 18.
[35] Rajinder Kaur and Ila Gupta, "The Implementation of Phulkari Embroidery Pattern in Interior Decoration," in *Understanding Built Environment : Proceedings of the National Conference on Sustainable Built Environment 2015*, 1 online resource (xii, 291 pages) : illustrations (some color) vols., Springer Transactions in Civil and Environmental Engineering, 2363-7633 (Singapore: Springer, 2017), 171–86, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-2138-1, 174-175.
[36] Kaur and Gupta, 175.
[37] Shankar and Housego, 10.
[38] Shankar and Housego, 48.

wound continuously back and forth between these two bars."[39] Threads are then individually attached to the heddle rod to form the rest of the warp while the weft is wrapped into bundles and woven through the warp by hand. Using a metal comb called the *panja*, weavers will beat the weft down.[40] They continue this process until the *durrie* is complete. While the finished textile can vary in size, the bridal *durrie* is a standard one by two meters.[41]

Phulkariyan and *durriyan* find their motifs and subject matters from the world around them, with the latter borrowing designs that became popular in *phulkari*. As aforementioned, the *phulkari* focuses on floral motifs, but not exclusively.[42] Shankar and Housego explain that *durrie* weavers used the medium to document rural concerns and daily life. Given the agrarian culture of Punjab, crops, vegetables, and fruit are recurring themes throughout. However, they note, "Irrigation, which has so altered the face of Punjab, is not forgotten: there are designs called after the great Bakhra Dam that harnesses the Sutlej river. Even small water tanks and channels are remembered."[43] This trend continued with designs such as the Maruti car, electric fans, and tube lights featured on *durries*.[44] Along with depictions of simple pleasures like biscuits and tea-sets, these *durries* trace the rural Punjabi imagination of a good life.[45] (Figure 2) Within the context of the dowry, these textiles embody what the new bride hopes this new chapter will bring her. *Phulkariyan,* with their sprawling floral gardens, have long since been associated with marriage, femininity, and fertility.[46] She carries it with her to her marital home to bring auspiciousness in. Placing this in conversation with the long history of transnational marriages, I presume that the

[39] Shankar and Housego, 49.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Shankar and Housego, 10.
[42] Kaur and Gupta, 174.
[43] Shankar and Housego, 53.
[44] Shankar and Housego. 52.
[45] Shankar and Housego, 151.
[46] Mooney, "A Wedding Phulkari and Other Gifts," 208.

plane motif on *phulkariyan* and *durriyan* evokes the presumed prosperity that a move overseas could bring. I imagine that as these designs were being woven and embroidered into the textiles, the maker was dreaming of what a life elsewhere would look like.

After reading about these textiles, I was curious to see some of these more unique designs for myself. Yet, everywhere I looked, I came up short; most of the textiles I saw looked the same. Furthermore, these textiles were not made by hand as per tradition but rather by machine. Textile historian Cristin McKnight Sethi points to an 1888 article in the *Journal of Indian Art* by novelist and British colonial resident of India, Flora Annie Steel. In this article, Steel praises *phulkariyan* to her British readership and outlines methods to identify ones of good quality.[47] Steel includes plates and figures throughout her article, pointing to certain p*hulkariyan* as examples of what to look for while other images illustrated what to avoid. According to her, good *phulkari* should be made in shades of yellow or white silk floss embroidered on hand-spun cotton.[48] The worst *phulkariyan* "are the result of *phulkari* artists 'tempted by' the aesthetic influence of the West."[49] Steel was not solely responsible, of course, but her article pointed to a greater interest in the textiles of Punjab. Exports increased and production changed to meet these demands. *Phulkariyan,* as well as *durriyan,* shifted from a domestic craft into consumer goods. Catering to European audience, prevalent designs on the market were no longer unique representations of the maker's world but standard patterns. With these textiles readily available for purchase and the demands of daily life increasing, Punjabi people too started buying these commercially made *phulkariyan* and *durries*.

[47] Cristin McKnight Sethi, "Women's Work: Phulkari, Flora Annie Steel, and Collecting Textiles in British India," in *Women, Gender, and Art in Asia c. 1500 - 1900*, ed. Melia Belli Bose (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 173.
[48] Sethi, 172.
[49] Sethi, 174.

A family friend had heard about my research trip; when I asked her if she knew anyone that still made *durries* by hand, she put me in touch with someone she knew tangentially. A Whatsapp number was shared and a tentative meeting date was set. Rajpreet lives in Chak Kalan, a village in the Nakodar Tehsil of Punjab, about a two hour drive from my grandparents' house in the city of Ludhiana. I had informed Rajpreet that I would be visiting with my mother, as per her suggestion, from the village of Ludhiana so Rajpreet and her family wouldn't feel like they were opening their home to just anyone. On the Friday before we were supposed to go, I asked Rajpreet for an exact location and confirmed the time of our visit. Her responses to my messages seemed really clipped to me, and I began to wonder if I was strong arming my way into this interview. Perhaps they didn't want to have this conversation yet felt obliged since I had asked. I felt awkward and imposing, self-conscious of how my role as researcher might make me alien.

On the drive to Chak Kalan, I was talking with our driver, Babbal Singh. I had already asked him to pull over a couple of times so I could take photos of the sculptural water tanks on top of houses and IELTS/TOEFL advertisements so of course he was curious.[50] I felt like my inquiry of these objects that had been so naturalized into the Punjabi imaginary immediately marked me as an outsider. I asked him if he knew anything about the *durriyan* we were going to see, specifically about the airplane designs. He had heard of them vaguely. When I asked him why he thought these durries were made, he thought for a second. "In the days before TV and computers, parents needed to find ways to keep their children busy. Idle girls cause trouble, so their mothers would give them some handiwork to do." I pressed on asking about what the plane design had to do with anything. He told me about how often the act of embroidering or weaving was coupled with the act of praying. Since the purpose of the *phulkariyan* and *durriyan* would be

[50] IELTS refers to International English Language Testing Center while TOEFL is Test of English as a Foreign Language.

to create a sizeable dowry for young girls to go into their married homes with, much of the rumination while working on these textiles centered around marriage. It struck me how much importance he placed on the discipline these textiles encouraged.

When we finally arrived at Rajpreet's family home, we were welcomed with open arms. My nerves slowly eased away. They had prepared an impressive spread of tea and snacks, including home-made barfi. It turns out that our conversation over Whatsapp had been terse because Rajpreet wasn't the one who made the durries – it was her mother, Surabhjeet. Rajpreet had simply been helping her text. Due to the heavy rains and flooding in the state they had to put the loom away, they explained. After a few minutes of polite conversation, I ask Surabhjeet if I can record our conversation.

> N: Can you tell me a little bit about how you learned to make *durries*? Where did you find a love for this?
> S: My mother used to make these *durries*. All women used to make these as dowry for their children – *durriyan, pakhiyan,* bedsheets, things like this. They used to weave these all by hand, on the loom. Whenever my mother used to weave, I would always come back from school and join her. Just by watching her, sitting with her, I learned.
> N: And you still make these by hand? Most people use machines nowadays?
> S: I still make these by hand, though it's a tradition of the past. You can't get those types of *durries* anymore – they are a bit lighter, thinner. Anyway, no one really uses them anymore [to sleep on]. People use mattresses and bed. I thought I would still make them for a hobby; I can give them to my daughters when they married. They can be a reminder when I'm gone. It will be like their inheritance… sometimes things are all we will have left of our parents. That 'my mother gave these *durriyan* to me; I have this even if I don't have her.' So that's why I think that I'll just give each of my daughters two or three, how many ever I have made. Also, they can learn from me, so this knowledge gets shared.
> N: Right! Otherwise, these things just disappear.
> S: Yes, it's all forgotten. You won't know how it was woven, how these things get made. So that's why we started and put up the loom. Also, we had free time, we were bored. The girls had school holidays so I thought might as well.
> N: Do you know how in the older *durriyan* there used to be different designs? Like flowers and plants? Can you tell me a bit about the *jahaj* design? Why do know why people would have made them? How did this start?
> S: No, I don't know *why* but I definitely know that people would make this design. They used to make all kinds of designs; I've heard of people making dolls as well. Personally, I've mostly done floral designs.

Surabhjeet directs her daughters to bring the *durriyan* out of the storage trunk. *Durrie* after *durrie* is laid out on the *manji*[51] we were seated. The work is extremely neat, with borders added with crochet. I have never seen *durries* in such vibrant colors: bubblegum pink, cerulean, and of course, saffron. I was particularly taken by one that depicted a jujube motif on plum background. (Figure 3) My mom was in awe as well: "I have *durriyan* that my *nani* made that I got at the time of my marriage but that is just a simple blue and white stripe design, this is something completely unique." She then asks Surabhjeet if she's ever thought of selling her work to which she gets a resounding 'no'. Surabhjeet says she only creates these for hobbies, for her own sake, and for her kids. I get the sense that this question was a bit offensive to her. In the past, it was understood that *durriyan* were to be made with love, not for profit. My mom keeps pressing, saying that perhaps if she shared her craft on social media, she would automatically get inquiries. Selling the work seemed to sully it in Surabhjeet's mind. It seems to me that preserving the tradition and continuing a personal matrilineal lineage were more important to her.

For Surabhjeet, the primary function of the *durrie* is not as a commodity that can be sold, but rather a piece of herself and her wishes that her daughters will carry into the future. With each generation, as the textiles are passed down from mother to daughter, so are the dreams of abundance that the *durrie* holds within itself. It is the loving wish that from generation to generation, the amount of wealth, prosperity, and power that the lineage has grows exponentially. As Rajinder Kaur and Ila Gupta note, "This craft was not done for earning money earlier, but it was merely a result of love."[52] Throughout our conversation, Surabhjeet emphasized how one day these *durriyan* will be all that her daughters will have left of her. That

[51] *Manji* – literally "small bed", more commonly known as charpoy. A light wooden frame, usually just smaller than a twin bed, woven with jute ropes.
[52] Kaur and Gupta, 175.

and the memories, the time they spent sitting at her side, watching her weave. Much like Surabhjeet learned from her mother and carried on the tradition, she hopes that her daughters do the same. Rajpreet nodded, affirming her mother's wishes. From our conversation, it was clear that the time spent in front of the loom was a central part of creating an unbreakable bond between women across generations. These textiles allowed women to carry a piece of home with them even after marriage, finding a way to honor and maintain matrilineal ties within a patrilocal familial structure. It's not just the final product of *durriyan* and *phulkariyan* that implicate them as objects of marriage rituals but the very process of making them. *Durriyan, phulkariyan*, and heirlooms at large function here as technologies of matriarchal intimacies. The making of these objects provide the context in which mother-daughter relationships are cultivated as wells as becoming the vessels through which these intimacies endure.

With a *durrie* and *phulkari* made by their mother's hands, a bride can never leave behind her love. A real *durrie*, then, is not one that if made to be sold but rather made with love. As Shankar and Housego put it, "the work is done with great pride and affection, for the dowry will be her life-long treasure."[53] Similarly, Flora Ann Steel's article for the *Journal of Indian Arts* emphasized that a good *phulkari* is one that is made in a woman's leisure time. Scholars such as Michelle Maskiell point out the work of making these textiles doesn't get conceived of as labor because of the emphasis self-appointed connoisseurs like Steel placed on leisure. While this is certainly true, I wonder how much of the making of these textiles is about the making of Woman.[54] "Accordingly *phulkari* production becomes deeply connected to a specific image of femininity: patient, quiet, busy wives, mothers, and daughters whose *leisure is productive.*"[55]

[53] Shankar and Housego, 19.
[54]

[55] Sethi, 186.

What Babbal Singh had said to me on the drive over echoes the same sentiment. An idle woman is dangerous and unbecoming. An ideal woman is dedicated, able to spend hours and hours embroidering and weaving. In creating these textiles sitting with her mother, a daughter learns all this – to be patient, to be virtuous, to be a wife. Young girls are daughters, who are wives in waiting. The only way to be legible is to be a daughter or wife. I felt this acutely throughout my research trip. When I was messaging with Rajpreet to organize my visit, my mom reminded me to tell them I would be visiting with her. "To make them more comfortable," she said. When I would ask to stop the car along the road to talk to people, I could feel their hesitation in answering my questions. When my mom stepped out of the car behind me, their demeanors changed, their responses punctuated with *'beta'* (a term of endearment for a child).

If a wife is all you can be, then you can only dream within its confines. Like everyone else in Punjab, they dream of leaving – marriage offers the vehicle. The two become intrinsically linked within the context of Punjab, forming what Sarah Mahler and Patricia Passer call "gendered geographies of power." They offer this a "framework for analyzing people's social agency – corporal and cognitive – given their own initiative as well as their positioning within multiple hierarchies of power within and across many terrains."[56] The cognitive agency of imagining a better future is implicated within the patriarchal structure that shapes these women's lived realities in Punjab. To attain the social capital that will transform them into "agents of citizenship", as Mooney puts it, women in rural Punjab must gamble their agencies in the race for transnational marriages.[57] Mooney's coinage focuses on how a transnational marriage makes the bride becomes the fulcrum for her family's migration. It is a citizenship passed up, as

[56] Sarah J. Mahler and Patricia R. Pessar, "Gendered Geographies of Power: Analyzing Gender Across Transnational Spaces," *Identities* 7, no. 4 (January 1, 2001): 441–59, https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2001.9962675, 447.
[57] Mooney, "Aspiration, Reunification and Gender Transformation in Jat Sikh Marriages from India to Canada," 397.

opposed to the textiles passed down. A transnational marriage and subsequent acquired power are the fulfillment of a desire that has been passed down matrilineal family lines, whether through an explicit airplane motif or a more generally articulated desire for abundance through the *durriyan* and *phulkariyan*. While Mooney focuses on women who have successfully migrated, for the scope of this paper, I must question how the agency of women who are unable to migrate is constructed. If we understand agency here as the power to transform the self or another – in this case, from migrant to citizen – how is a prospective bride transformed if she doesn't migrate? I argue that the transformation lies in the desiring itself. When a bride weaves planes into her *durrie,* she does so to dream of a future she can't see in her waking hours. She sees herself as someone that is lacking power, but also sees herself as becoming whole and powerful through this migration. The desiring transforms her from a static subject into a subject of possibility. Central to the dream of migration is the belief that things will be better there. Part of the export of the "American" dream is painting a picture of a world of social liberalism. In rural Punjab, where most households hold joint families that a new bride would be responsible for tending to, moving abroad offers the opportunity to live within a nuclear family structure. Abroad, a bride dreams, she will be the head of her household. When and if the rest of her family can join her overseas, they will be entering her domain, they will be there to support her. Of course, as we see through the various case studies, it doesn't always play out like this. However, in the embroidering of *phulkariyan* and the weaving of *durriyan*, it is this dream that is ruminated upon. Through this rumination, the bride sees herself becoming a different version of herself. Regardless of whether that self is achieved, there is a plurality introduced through this dream of migration, pushing the prospective bride into a space where she is both and neither.

Scene 2: Leaving on a Toy Plane

It was a Sunday when we drove two hours from my grandparents' house in Ludhiana to the village of Talhan, just 45 minutes outside the city of Jalandhar where I was born. The drive was as expected: the lush green fields, the cacophony of traffic, and the innumerable signs advertising IELTS and TOEFL coaching centers. (Figure 4) On this day, a few roads were blocked due to the non-stop rain and subsequent floods the state had been experiencing over the past week. Still, rain or shine, people from all over the state came to this specific gurdwara to place a toy plane offering in the hopes of immigrating abroad. The large SUV we were in inched along the narrow village road, until my mother and I decided that the car was more of a nuisance than a convenience. We decided to walk the rest of the way, about half a kilometer. Every fifty steps or so, we came across a vendor selling plastic toy planes. The planes were roughly all the same: blue and white (though there were a few orange and white ones), Boeing passenger planes, wrapped in cellophane. They came in three different sizes, with the smallest costing 100 rupees, the medium going for 200, and a large for 500. The closer we got to the entrance, the more stalls and wares we saw, with one selling a plane that was about a foot and half long for 1000 rupees. Most *gurdwaras* have vendors in the complex and the surrounding neighborhoods, but these usually sell scarves so visitors can cover their heads and other religious paraphernalia. (Figure 5)

When we made it to the entrance of the *gurdwara*, a little girl comes up to me with her best sales pitch: "*Didi,* buy this plane so when you go abroad you can make *lakhs* of dollars!" I couldn't help but smile at her. She said 'when' you move, not if. She knew that the dream wasn't just about leaving, but leaving so you could make it. I shuffled towards the gates to enter the *gurdwara* with the rest of the crowd, an old woman begged for money: show some goodwill and God will respond in kind by ensuring your visa comes through. The inside of the *gurdwara*

complex looked more like a fair than a place of worship: there were several food stalls, shops selling scarves with Sidhu Moose Wala's face, and booths dedicated to household goods.[58] Of course, regardless of what they were selling, each stall was also selling toy planes. I bought a modest blue and white Airbus A380 for 100 rupees to understand the intricacies of this offering. We finally made it inside and stored our shoes at the *jodaghar.* The marble floors were hot under our bare feet as we followed the crowd, all clutching their own planes to their hearts. After a bit of confusion, we were in line to enter the *gurdwara* building.

Usually, when you enter a *gurdwara*, there is a long carpet leading up to the holy text, the *Guru Granth Sahib*, placed at the front of room. When you reach the *Guru Granth Sahib*, you are supposed to bow down, touching your forehead to the ground in a gesture of humility. After you bow, you place money in a box in front of you. Since the *gurdwara* runs all their programing including *langar,* a free daily meals service open to all, with money sourced from the community, this offering is expected. At this *gurdwara*, we were all packed together like sardines in the line. I couldn't see the front of the room which meant I had no idea how other people were offering up their planes. When I was the second person in line, the *Bhaiji* reached over and took the plane from me. He turned to do the same from the woman standing next to me, but she protested. She wanted to be the one offering up the plane, performing the ritual for herself. He looked at her, gesturing to a pile of planes off to the side, "It's going to be me that moves the planes anyway – what difference does it make?"

[58] Sidhu Moose Wala was a popular Punjabi rapper whose music addressed issues like censorship under the Modi government ("295") and the diversion of Punjab's rivers to other parts of the country ("SYL"). Moose Wala immigrated to Brampton, ON as a student, where he began his music career. He was murdered in gang-related violence, after the Punjab government had decreased his security the day before. There was an outpouring of love following Moose Wala's murder, with political leaders like Bhagwant Mann and musicians like Drake calling him a cultural icon.

It seemed inconsequential to the *Bhaiji* whether the person offering the plane engaged with the ritual in a particular way. For him, the priority was to ensure everyone got to participate in the ritual in some capacity. As I bowed and looked for a place to sit with the *sangat*, I thought of the growing pile of blue and white toy Boeings. Eventually, these planes would be taken and redistributed to the children in attendance. It was impossible to keep track of which plane was mine and where it ended up. (Figure 6) My mother, ever the skeptic, was convinced that the planes would leave the hands of the kids they were given to and circle back to the vendors, only to be resold as new the next day. It's almost as if the ritual isn't personal: what I do is as much for you as it is for me. As such, this ritual can't be conceived of as an individual offering but a collective one.

As religious studies scholar Catherine Bell outlines in her book *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, the study of ritual has often been conceived of as the relationship between belief and practice. She writes, "Ritual is first differentiated as a discrete object of analysis by means of various dichotomies that are loosely analogous to thought and action; then ritual is subsequently elaborated as the as the very means by which these dichotomous categories, neither of which could exist without the other, are reintegrated."[59] In other words, belief informs the practices while practices strengthen the belief. In the case of the toy planes, the offering affirms the belief that the future that migration offers is desirable over the kinds of futures possible in Punjab. When my cousin was waiting for his student visa to come to Canada, he too went to this *gurdwara* to offer a plane. While he didn't necessarily believe that this offering was going to be the reason his visa got accepted, he didn't want to take the chance that *not* participating in this

[59] Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1992), 21.

ritual could cost him a better life abroad. By participating in this ritual, he had done everything he could to ensure his migration. The rest was up to God.

This anecdote points to the social function of ritual here. In a society where everyone is clamoring to leave, the dream can't come true for everyone. Ritual here offers a way to make sense of the migration process that is largely obscured to average person, even more so to someone from rural Punjab. As Janet Gunn writes in an article about adaptions of rituals within the Hindu diaspora, "For these women, *puja* works because the doing of it effects a shift in their conceptual framework- performing *puja*, in whatever way one has established as "normal," if not normative, takes one's problems and puts them in a new frame of reference in which the gods now share responsibility for providing a solution."[60] Even for a non-believer like my cousin, by participating in this ritual, you are absolving yourself of the total responsibility for your future. Once all the paperwork is filled out, getting the official permission to immigrate seems like luck of the draw. The ritual provides a way to make sense of what is more or less senseless. From the perspective of the migration officials, the individual's dreams and motivations for migration are irrelevant. Each immigration application is fungible with the next.

As Bell argues, ritualization involves producing a distinction between a regular daily activity and a ritualized practice. However, the choice of the ritual strategy must be symbolically dominant and, I assert, symbolically legible.[61] Bell uses the example of taking eucharist: the ritual could have been constructed in another way, say with a large feast. Similarly, I question why this migration ritual takes on this form. It very well could have been that a statue of a plane was erected where people place offerings of food or wash the statue with care. However, within

[60] Janet Gunn, "Ganesha and the Chocolate Almonds: Ritual Innovation and Efficacy in Diaspora," in *Ritual Innovation*, ed. Brian Pennington and Amy Allocco (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2018), 242.
[61] Bell, 90.

the preexisting framework of ritual of Sikhism, the offering of the plane is the most natural form. As aforementioned, a regular visit to the *gurdwara* entails the offering of money to help run their operations. If a family wants to celebrate an occasion or have a service in their name, they can cover the costs of *karah parshad.* This is an integral ritual of attending the *gurdwara*; it must be received with a bowed head and pair of cupped hands in a gesture of humility. Made from a mixture of equal parts of *ghee*, flour, and sugar, *parshad* is a symbolic underscoring of the tenants of Sikhi. Served from the same bowl and in equal portion to each member of the *sangat*, this represents the equality of all people beyond gender and caste lines.[62] The balance between sweet and savory in the *parshad* speaks to the Sikh directive of keeping a balanced spirit through the daily turbulence of life. Just as *parshad* is shared with the entire *sangat*, our joys and sorrows should be as well. In other words, what is experienced is not individual, but collective.

When I spoke with vendors outside the *gurdwara,* I asked them about how long this practice of offering planes had been going on at the Talhan Sahib. While the planes specifically are a phenomenon of the past twelve to fifteen years, people had been coming to this *gurdwara* for decades prior to make comparable offerings. Plastic houses were also available for purchase from these vendors and would be offered when people were hoping to buy a house of their own. Additionally, boy baby dolls were also sold at these vendors. These, of course, were for when a family was hoping that their next child would be a boy. Given this established schematic of rituals, we can trace the lineage of this modern offering of toy planes. What I am curious about is why the planes are generic and not specific to the person.

If we consider the plane a votive, where does its ritual potency lie? In Christopher Wood's work on 15th century woodcuts from southern Germany, Wood emphasizes the role a

[62] A significant dimension of maintaining the caste system in India is forbidding the sharing of meals and spaces across castes.

votive can play within a religious context. While votives could ornamental, they were also evidentiary offerings, working as testimonials of the votary's belief and the Gods' powers to grant their wishes.[63] Churchgoers could look at an offering made by someone and they would know that "someone with means had dedicated resources to his relationship with the Virgin Mary" and subsequentially be in awe of their piety.[64] Within this context, the potency of the object is contingent on its craftsmanship and thereby the recourses that a patron dedicates to the votive. There is also a performative dimension to this offering as the display of devotion is not solely for the Gods but also for the other church goers. Building on this notion of evidentiary offerings, the planes at Talhan Sahib act as testimonials of the *sangat's* belief. The belief of one person is strengthened by the participation of another. All the planes laid out at the front of the *gurdwara* show a prospective migrant that they are not alone in their desires and the method through which they are trying to fulfill them is vouched for by others. Since there are only a limited number of options for the types of planes you can offer – one person's devotion can't be that much greater than anyone else's. Given that the planes are just mass-produced toys, the beauty of the object is a non-factor.

It seems that the operative factor in this ritual is not any qualitative dimension of the practice, but simply the action of participation as a way of reaffirming belief. You participate because others do; you believe because others do; you desire because others do. While there maybe individual reasons that shape the nature of the desire to migrate, a large part of this dream is born from seeing others around you achieve it. Borrowing from theorist René Girard, this

[63] Christopher S. Wood, "Public and Private Dimensions of Votive Giving," in *Agents of Faith: Votive Objects in Time and Place*, ed. Ittai Weinryb (New York, NY: Bard Graduate Center Gallery, 2018), 69.
[64] Christopher S. Wood, "The Votive Scenario," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 59/60 (2011): 224.

desire, as all desire, is mimetic.[65] It is through this reproduction of desires that the self is dissolved as there lacks an opposition in what is desired by which the self can be differentiated, and thus, distinguished.[66] I return here to the *Bhaiji's* question of "Why does it matter who places the plane?" If the planes themselves are interchangeable and the action of offering can be performed by anyone, what is the relationship between the practioner and the practice? In their paper "History, Structure, and Ritual", anthropologists John D. Kelly and Martha Kaplan trace the development of ritual studies as a discipline, highlighting a shift in focus from the religious context of ritual to understanding it as a method of social organization and cultural production. They write, "Alterity (self/other) theory provides one general model of differentiations and dynamics that bridges individual and society, system and history. In alterity theory, asymmetries of power at many levels are analyzed as instances of a general model of psychosocial life, inherently a dialectical or reflexive relation between powerful and subordinated, between self and other. Rituals then become one of many vehicles for making and expressing these self/other relations."[67] Alterity theory offers ritual as a way of negotiating the self within structures of power. In the offering of these model planes, the self is subsumed into the larger worshipping body, or the *sangat.* If an individual's desire for migration is embodied through the plane they bought as an offering and that plane is then placed amongst a sea of others where it is rendered anonymous; the desire is no longer individually identifiable either. My plane could be yours, and your desires could be mine. When the planes are redistributed to the children of the *sangat* at the end of a service, there is an implicit passing down of these migration dreams as well.

---

[65] Luca Di Blasi, "Within and Beyond Mimetic Desire," in *Mimesis, Desire, and the Novel: Rene Girard and Literary Criticism*, ed. Pierpaolo Antonello and Heather Webb, 1 online resource vols., Studies in Violence, Mimesis, and Culture (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2015), http://site.ebrary.com/id/11091505, 44.
[66] Di Blasi, 47.
[67] John D. Kelly and Martha Kaplan, "History, Structure, and Ritual," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19, no. 1 (October 1, 1990): 119–50, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.an.19.100190.001003, 132.

Within this ritual, the self is not understood as the individual person, but rather a collective Punjabi self. It is through participation in this ritual that the collective self is trying to become an Other. The imagined Other here is someone that was able to escape the future that Punjab has to offer and instead was able to make it abroad. The unquestioned idea that becoming this Other is something we, as Punjabi people, should aspire to underscores how immoveable Punjab's place in India feels as well nodding to the North American project of exporting the American Dream. No one questions why everyone should want to move abroad; it is taken for granted because of the firm belief in the idea that life will be better there. The hopeful migrant sees pictures of suburban houses and new cars and takes the American dream at face value. Of course, the realities of the immigrant experience and the inaccessibility of basic needs like healthcare aren't ever considered. From an Indian perspective, there seems to be no hope of an India where a Punjabi future is possible. Given the current political climate of India, there is no future in farming. The average young person finds themselves out of work and looking for something. Then there is the funneling of drugs into Punjab, leading to the current drug and alcohol epidemic, and the increase in gang violence. Parents don't want their kids to stay in Punjab because they don't want them to fall into these habits.

Shortly after my visit to the Talhan Sahib Gurdwara in August, someone tried to offer a plane at the Golden Temple. This was immediately shut down. To perform such a ritual in the holiest of Sikh sites was affronting. The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC)[68] issued a statement decrying this as inappropriate. Not only was this practice to be banned at The

[68] The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee is responsible for the management of *gurdwaras* across the states of Punjab and Himachal Pradesh as well as in the union territory of Chandigarh.

Golden Temple, but strongly discouraged at all *gurdwaras*.[69] Sikhi strictly forbids idolatry, though people throughout Punjab have interpreted this in their own way for years.[70] Since the religion is relatively young, most of its practitioners were Hindu or Muslim converts. Additionally, Sikhs form only 2% of the Indian population. While this results in a practice of the religion that draws rituals from other cultures, it also creates a sense of *dharam da sankat*, or crisis of religion. As Sandhu notes, through the history of Punjab and Sikhism, the tally of offenses from Partition to 1984 all affirm this belief.[71] The SGPC perceived the act of offering planes at *gurdwaras* as a participation in idolatry, thus a tarnishing of a Sikh holy place. The perceived belief in these model planes from the Punjabi population underscores the SGPC's fear of Sikhism diminishing, even from within. It's all quite circular: the diminishing sense of future in Punjab drives hopeful migrants to offer these planes at the gurdwara; the offering of these planes erodes, according to the SGPC, the tenants of Sikhi and, consequentially, of Punjab.

Scene 3: Migration Trophies

On the third day of my fieldwork in the Doaba region, I found myself standing atop the roof of a stranger's house. The fields seemed to glow with the dew that lingered after weeks of heavy rains. Dotted throughout the landscape were houses crowned with sculptural water tanks, or *tankiyan.* While the first *tankiyan* built in this tradition often housed the water tanks inside, the sculptures now sit on top of the water tank, with the top of the tank forming a podium. Concrete water tanks had been the commonplace, however, proving difficult to clean, they had been replaced by plastic Sintex tanks. The sculptures can now be placed in front of or beside these

[69] FPJ Web Desk, "Top Sikh Body SGPC Bans Offering Toy Aeroplane In Gurdwaras After Akal Takht Sahib's Directive," *The Free Press Journal India*, August 13, 2023, https://www.freepressjournal.in/india/top-sikh-body-sgpc-bans-offering-toy-aeroplane-in-gurdwaras-after-akal-takht-sahibs-directive.
[70] Sandhu, *Panjab: Journeys Through Fault Lines,* 67.
[71] Sandhu, *Panjab: Journey Through Fault Lines*, 68.

plastic *tankiyan*, concealing them from view. As we drove through Jalandhar and its surrounding villages, I stopped at roadside workshops that were working on building these sculptures. First, an armature is constructed out of rebar. (Figure 7) It is then covered in concrete to create the general shape and later sanded down to add the details. The completed sculpture is painted with a concrete slurry to fill in any gaps and create a smooth surface to paint. Oil based paints are most common as they offer both vibrancy and longevity to the completed sculptures. The tradition of these sculptural water tanks endured and evolved: upon initial conception, the form followed function. However, the form outlives the function, or rather the form becomes the function. What I mean by this is that as these *tankiyan* became objects of status, their function was located in not what they could, do but rather in what they could be. Each iteration aspired to be more ostentatious than the next. At the height of this practice, these "*tankiyan*" became large rooms in the shape of planes or ships, meant to be able to host people inside.

It was my search for these objects that had brought me here, knocking on the doors of people I don't know. In the village of Dhaliwal, the owner of a house had seen me lingering outside, taking pictures, and invited us in to get a better view. He showed me up three flights of stairs, passing rooms that were locked shut, to the flat rooftop ubiquitous to Punjabi homes. From here, I was able to take pictures of a *tankie* on the neighboring house. The plane was not to scale, its body too short horizontally, too tall vertically. (Figure 8) Bottle green glass created windows and a small set of stairs allowed people to enter. There was seating inside, I was told, so people could host a small gathering. The white paint on sculpture was fading, indicating that no parties had been hosted there recently. The text on the side had faded to grey and was barely legible. It read 'Air Canada.' (Figure 8 Detail) This *tankie* was inspired by one we had seen earlier in a village just outside the village of Uppal Bhupa, though that one was monumental, taking up the

entirety of the mini-mansion's roof, with Air India painted neatly on its side. (Figure 9) When I had knocked on that house's door, I similarly got no response but was allowed to take photos from the neighbor's roof. This smaller, misshapen airplane in Dhaliwal was built after news got around about the spectacular counterpart got around, because the family did not want to be outdone. As historian Steve Taylor notes, "NRI houses are an omnipresent symbol and reminder to the Indian residents of NRI distinctiveness and wealth."[72] The owners of the house needed to ensure that those that were left in their village in Punjab knew that they had not left for nothing. It was because of the life they were able to build overseas, the wealth they were able to accrue, that they could have such a mansion in Punjab. Their mansions and the crowning jewel of the *tankiyan* served as a testament to the truth driving the Punjabi dream for migration. Through this display of their wealth, the family not only underscores their own success, but also enshrines the desire for migration in the eyes of those that have not left.

After I was done taking pictures, we went back downstairs to where my mom and Happy Singh, our driver for the day, were waiting. My mom was making pleasantries, lamenting the rain. Of course, like at any proper Punjabi household, we were offered tea. As we sat, hands around our glasses, the owner told us how most of the houses in the village were vacant. "Even our house," he said, "you can see that most of the rooms are locked. For the two of us, this is enough; everyone else is abroad." Such was the case with the other houses I visited – the owners of the house with the large plane were visiting from the United Kingdom that month but had gone into the city that day. The neighbor who let me on his roof to photograph the plane told me that the family usually only visits for the winter, the rest of the time they leave the place in his guardianship. Each mansion and its respective *tankie* mark the wealth and status of a family,

[72] Steve Taylor, Manjit Singh, and Deborah Booth, "A Diasporic Indian Community: Re-Imagining Punjab," *Sociological Bulletin* 56, no. 2 (2007): 230

collectively marking the wealth of a particular village. Each *tankie* is a monument to the family's successful migration. They also act as a map of absences, noting which villages inch towards becoming ghost-towns after their inhabitants had been seduced by the dream of migration. The mansions themselves loom large on the landscape, with forms imported from American architecture, signifying a worldliness on the part of the owner. Gautum Bhatia, who coined the term, Punjabi Baroque to describe this, writes:

> "The well-to-do Indian after all, is coated in dream and memory; he thinks of places he has lived, places that have nurtured his hopes and dreams, places like Hoshiarpur and Bathinda; and he thinks of places far away where he wants to live, places that require green cards, places like Birmingham and Vancouver. And deep from within his psyche, from the darkness of his architectural recesses, he withdraws the images of a verandah, a colonial portico and American log cabin. For they are the features that will ultimately help him make a home."[73]

Aspiring migrants have all associated these features with success and now the NRI is able to show off to those around him in an architectural language they speak. Further, the NRI marks their own distance from the local inhabitants by proving they now have the means to fulfill their dreams. They are able to bend distance, bringing the West to Punjab.

There are a couple of different stories about how this practice of making these sculptural water tanks started. Balwinder Singh Kaul, of Kaul Statues & Co, is responsible for installing over 1000 plane water tanks across the district of Jalandhar. While there are other artisans who work on building these tanks, Kaul is the best business. His shop proudly boasts over 50 photographs of *tankiyan* he's built and several newspaper articles featuring his business. (Figure 10) According to him, this trend first started when people started asking for customized manhole covers in their homes. It was quite common in Punjab for people to steal manhole covers and resell them as scrap metal, so families wanted the covers in their house to declare their name,

[73] Gautam Bhatia, "Punjabi Baroque," in *Punjabi Baroque and Other Memories of Architecture* (New Delhi ; Penguin Books, 1994), 32.

hoping to ward off theft. These customized covers then became a matter of pride and way to show off wealth, Kaul explained. Eventually, this practice evolved into customizing the water tanks on houses, giving each house its own ubiquity. However, artist and photographer Rajesh Vora traces a different history. In a conversation published as a part of his monograph of portraits of these *tankiyan*, Vora is interviewed by curator Keith Wallace. Vora notes that this phenomenon started somewhere in the 70s, when modern plumbing and development made the water tank a necessary part of every household. These water tanks took a form similar to a *matka*, or clay pot that had been used to keep water cool.[74] According to Vora, one of the first sculptural water tanks was built by a contractor by the name of Gyani Mahendra Singh Makh, who built "a reinforced concrete cement water tank that not only visually announces a sculpture of an army tank, but also has TANK spelled out across its side, prominently positioned on top of his four-storeyhouse."[75] Inspired by Makh's ostentatious display, other families began to follow suit, proverbially puffing their chests through the construction of these *tankiyan*. The *tankiyan* act as a proxy for the family's identity, staking a claim to the land, regardless of whether they still reside there.

Rajesh Vora had been on assignment for COLORS Magazine in 2013, documenting the planes offered at Talhan Sahib when he heard about these *tankiyan* for the first time. Curious to see for himself, he found that these sculptural water tanks were not limited to planes but featured designs like bodybuilders, eagles, and revolutionaries.[76] (Figure 12) "Before I understood their purpose, these sculptures first brought to mind the different turbans that people in India would

[74] Rajesh Vora and Keith Wallace, "The Rooftop Sculptures of Punjab," in *Everyday Monuments: Rooftop Sculptures of Punjab* (Vancouver, BC: Figure 1 Publishing, 2023), 146.
[75] Vora and Wallace, 146.
[76] These monuments take on a distinctly masculinized persona, underscoring again the deep-rooted patriarchal structure of the state. Since these *tankiyan* act as stand-ins for the family and their status, they transitively function as emblems of the patriarch himself. It marks the house and the wealth it represents as fruits of his successful migration.

have adorned themselves with," he notes.[77] Just as people take pride in their turban, these *tankiyan* became a source of pride for the house. In rural villages with no strict urban planning, these *tankiyan* became a marker to identify the house, standing in for the family. Over six trips from 2014 to 2019, Vora has photographed hundreds of these water tanks. When I had the opportunity to speak with him, he told me how the process of creating this body of work was really a process of searching. There was no directory of these *tankiyan*, so the finding these houses all happened through word of mouth. "It wasn't easy," he recounts, "sometimes you might find something but there's no access to photograph it because I like to photograph from them from the same perspective. So, I used to climb up on the opposite building, to the first or second floor, so it was more like a portrait." To him, framing the pictures like this was his way of bestowing respect to these sculptures, and in turn, the families. He goes on to liken these photographs to Bernd and Hilla Becher's *Water Towers*, a series of nine silver gelatin prints of water towers, in that "it is difficult to situate these sculpted water tanks in the realm of contemporary art."[78]

The Bechers had used the term "anonymous sculptures" to describe their subjects. They photographed industrial architecture on its way to functional obsolescence, leaving an excess of form in the object, rendering them into sculptures.[79] Architectural historian Maroš Krivý conceptualizes this as the negativity of architecture which "stands for what comes 'before' and 'after' what is commonly understood as architecture."[80] In the case of the *tankiyan,* however, the initial function of these water tanks became obsolete while the objects themselves endure. Unlike

[77] Vora and Wallace, 141.
[78] Vora and Wallace, 148.
[79] Maroš Krivý, "Industrial Architecture and Negativity: The Aesthetics of Architecture in the Works of Gordon Matta-Clark, Robert Smithson and Bernd and Hilla Becher," *The Journal of Architecture* 15, no. 6 (2010): 827–52, https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2011.533549, 845.
[80] Ibid.

the Bechers' water towers, these *tankiyan* cannot have an excess of form as the form becomes the function. Since their new function is symbolic, it is evergreen. What I mean by this is that since these *tankiyan* are purely decorative, their form is the function. As long as the object has a form, it will have a function. If a *tankie* is abandoned and left to rot as some of Bechers' water tanks were, the function still remains: it tells the story of the family's migration and their absence. If a *tankie* hasn't been maintained, the onlooker can assume there is no one around to look after it. Perhaps the entire family has migrated abroad or the people that had been looking after the house had passed away. Where a well-maintained *tankie* signifies a proud family with financial means, a decrepit *tankie* could mark a family's destitution. In either case, form *is* the primary function and therefore cannot be in excess.

The Bechers' choice of perspective in photographing these industrial water tanks is to abstract their context. By framing the water tanks head on, without the pictural reference of the factories giving them name and definition, the water tanks are reduced purely to their form, thus making them anonymous.[81] The same framing does the reverse in Vora's work; by focusing the *tankiyan* straight on, he captures the relationship between the houses and the sculptures that crown them. The *tankiyan* are a central part of the house, not simply additive. The *tankiyan* are the subject because they stand in for the family and household, asserting an identity even in the absence of the house's inhabitants. The *tankiyan* offer a way for NRIs to stake a claim to their homeland even when they are not there while simultaneously broadcasting their status as people of the world. In other words, these *tankiyan* stand as a testament to the completion of migrant desires. Steve Taylor explains this with reference to Pierre Bourdieu, writing, "we are witnessing here the way in which capital has a 'multiplier effect', with economic capital being converted into

[81] Ibid.

'symbolic' capital and vice versa."[82] The *tankiyan* mark the houses of those that have made it, showing those that look upon it that those dreams are within grasp.

Just as the desire for migration articulates itself in Punjabi visual culture, completed migrations also alter the homeland. These *tankiyan* highlight that the relationship between the homeland and the place of migration that is dialectic. They exemplify the reason that people in Punjab want to migrate: to be able to earn more and send money back to their families to elevate their social standing. Since the space where the labor is performed is obscured through distance from the place of consumption, the fantasy of the West as a place of unlimited opportunity and prosperity remains intact. The hard work performed in rural Punjab could never bring in the income that working abroad could – the proof is in the pastoral panorama of palatial homes nestled between the fields.[83] Further, as land is bought by NRIs and these mansions are erected, the cost of land increases exponentially. Coupled with the declining value of agriculture, these inflated costs make it close to impossible for resident Punjabis to own land in their villages. Taylor's 2007 study notes that areas with "a long history of migration to the West, the price of land is currently three times that of villages with little to no NRI investments."[84] In the fifteen-odd years since then, this situation has only been exacerbated. We see this in the almost 500 days that the farmers protested in 2020. We see this in the consistently rising rates of farmer suicides. We see this in the levels of addiction amongst the Punjabi youth. The flow of money from the West to Punjab inextricably binds the state to the dream of leaving. It offers the West as a place where a future is possible while simultaneously stifling those possibilities in Punjab.

[82] Taylor, Singh, and Booth, 230.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Taylor, Singh, and Booth, 231.

Conclusion, or Stinger

The genesis of my thinking was Lauren Berlant's notion of 'cruel optimism', where they argue that optimism requires "sustaining inclination to return to the scene of fantasy that enables you to expect that this time, nearness to this thing will help you or a world to become different in just the right way."[85] In the case of Punjab and its diasporic dreaming, the fantasy is that life will be better, happier, and more prosperous in the West. What makes this affective attachment to fantasy cruel is just that – it is a fantasy. It is a projection born out of dejection with the state around them. The fantasy works as a salve to the suffering of the dreamer's current circumstances. Writing within an American context, Berlant introduces the fantasy of 'the good life' as integral to sustaining American capitalist structures. This posits that through enough hard work, the average person will be able to reap the fruits of their labor. As they put it, "The internal tensions between capitalism and democracy seem resolved as long as a little voting, a little privacy, and unimpeded consumer privilege prevail to prop up the sense that the good-life fantasy is available to everyone."[86] Fundamental to preserving this fantasy within domestic borders is the export of this dream. Punjabi migrants must believe that a better life is possible in the West to survive their local conditions; the West needs migrants to believe so the upper echelons can live that better life.

Accounts from people that have migrated and didn't find this 'good life' serve as evidence to the fiction of migrant desires. For instance, Kaveri Qureshi's conversations with transnational brides highlights how the fantasy of riches fades with long hours of laboring and high costs of living.[87] The fantasy sustains itself with what Berlant names as "misrecognition".

[85] Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 2.
[86] Berlant, 194.
[87] Qureshi, 1221.

They write, "fantasy recalibrates what we encounter so that we can imagine that something or someone can fulfill our desire: its operation is central to the state of cruel optimism. To misrecognize is not to err, but to project qualities onto something so that we can love, hate, and manipulate it for having those qualities - which it might or might not have."[88] Steve Taylor recounts his conversations with NRIs that imagine Punjab as a place they cannot return to, because it is "doesn't have the same amenities" and is "filled with rubbish."[89] Much has been written about the tenuous place of new migrants in the Global North where they first encounter racism and social alienation, so I will not delve further as that is beyond the scope of this paper. However, this is to say that the sheen of opportunity is blinding. When the fantasy of the West and migration falls flat, a recalibration is necessary. If the reasons of leaving Punjab were a lack of opportunity and feeling of hopelessness and the same persists across borders, a new relationship to the homeland must be formulated to justify the migration. So begins the shift in desire from simply wanting migration to wanting assimilation.[90] This recalibration has long been the focus of the field of diaspora studies, but I assert that initial framing of desires is equally significant as an object of this discipline.

Over the course of this paper, I have framed my encounters as scenes because each of these objects is implicated in this performance of migrant fantasy. The textiles, model planes, and *tankiyan* are all actors; as am I. There is no way for me to place myself outside of the framework of these desire and feign objectivity. In Ludhiana, at my *nanu*'s house, I gently float the idea of returning to work in India after finishing my education. He discourages me emphatically, his eyes watering. "There is nothing left in this country, especially in Punjab." We

[88] Berlant, 122.
[89] Taylor, Singh, and Booth, 236.
[90] Ahmed, 128.

eat summer fruit and watch the news about another village without light, another highway flooded, another farmer's suicide. When I talked people over the course of my fieldwork, they could tell that I was visiting from somewhere. They could also tell that I was from there. It is because of my position as an insider that I was given frank answers and warm welcomes. It's my othering that allowed me to ask these questions.

Scene 1 searches for a plane motif in *phulkariyan* and *durriyan*, asking what the presence of such a design does in a dowry. It argues that these textiles offered a way for women to express their desires for migration and lay claim to the Punjabi dream. In a society structured by their relationships to their fathers and husbands, the making of these objects asserted a matrilineal lineage. Marriage and migration are inextricably linked in a woman's aspirations of social mobility. Scene 2 looks at the contemporary rituals of migration that people in Punjab engage in, regardless of whether there is a vested belief in the practice. Building on the work of scholars of ritual studies, I argue that the proliferation of this ritual expresses a desperation for a way out of what feels like a dead-end. In the push-back against this practice, the same sentiment takes form: there is an anxiety there that a true Punjab will disappear from beneath our feet. The final scene formulates the mini mansions and their crowning *tankiyan* as trophies of migration, broadcasting to the rest of the village an image of success. The presence of these *tankiyan* serves to reify dreams of migration by putting on a display of the wealth accrued in the West. This projection doubles down on the fantasy of a better life elsewhere while simultaneously exacerbating the feeling of despair in Punjab. While the focus of diaspora studies has long been the condition of the migrant in their new home, these scenes strive to showcase how migration is not unilateral. Further, I argue that the diasporic journey is not one that begins with a migrant leaving their homeland but rather in gestation of that desire within the homeland. The culture of Punjab is

shaped just as much by those who have left as it is by those who wish to leave. Dreaming of a better life elsewhere is central to the condition of being Punjabi. It is an expression of the Punjab's history and future, where to be Punjabi is to be at odds with the realities of Punjab shaped by India. Each airplane, woven, offered, and built, is a manifestation of that dream.

Figures

***Figure 1*:** Babbu Maan, "Mittran di Chhatri." Distributed by T-Series. 2005, 4:26. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IifPaKjkMAc

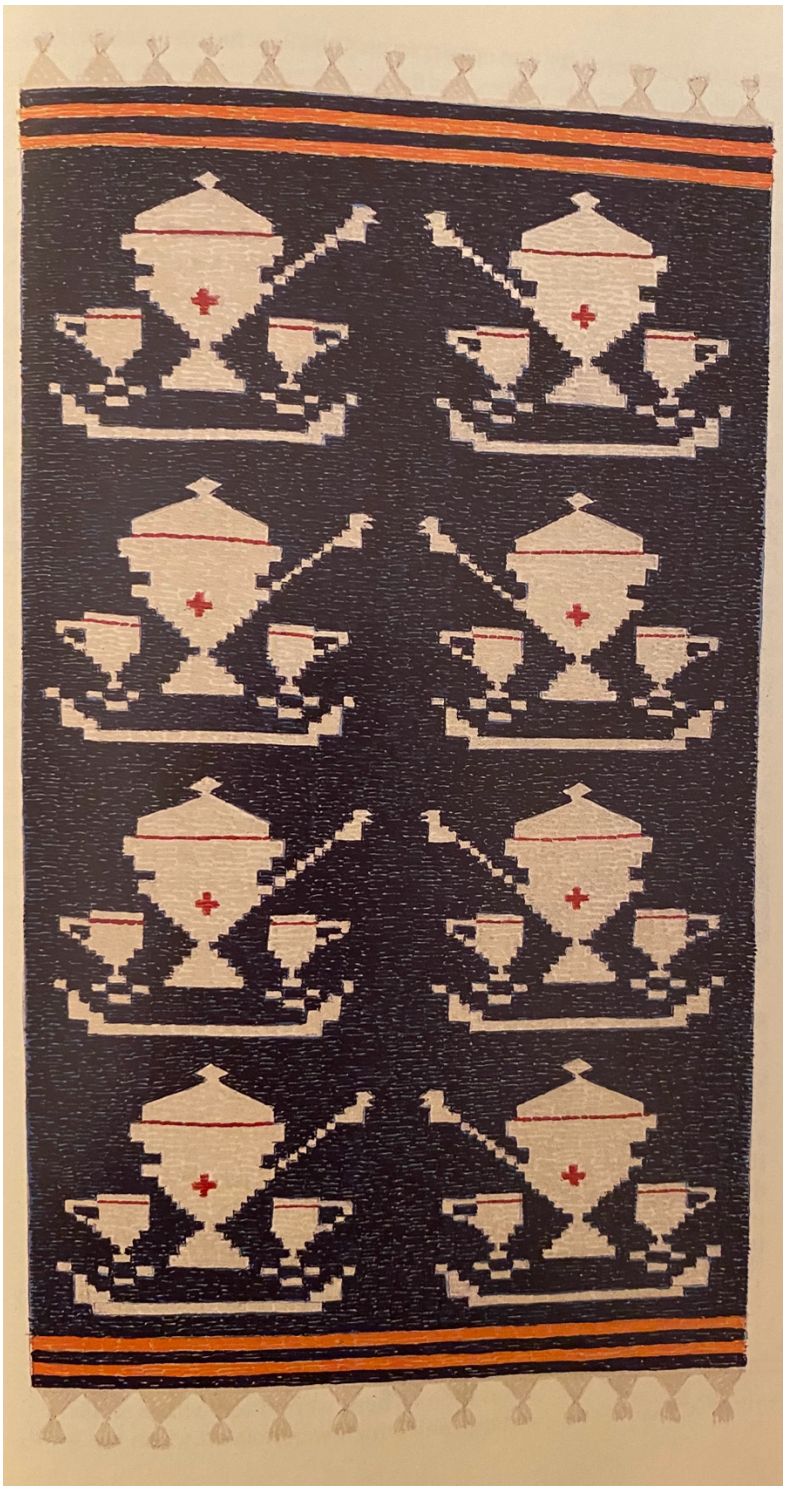

***Figure 2**:* Ann Shankar and Jenny Housego, *Durrie with rows of teasets*, Dayerha village, Patiala District, Punjab. In *Bridal Durries of India* by Shankar and Housego, 1997, p. 159.

Figure 3: Prabhnoor Kaur, *Photograph of Surabhjeet Kaur's purple durrie with jujubes*. July 29, 2023. Author's personal collection from field work.

Figure 4: Prabhnoor Kaur, *IELTs and TEOFL advertisements in Jalandhar*. August 1, 2023. Author's personal collection from field work.

***Figure 5**:* Prabhnoor Kaur, *Plane vendor at Talhan Sahib Gurdwara, Talhan.* July 30, 2023. Author's personal collection from field work.

Figure 6: Rajesh Vora, *Inside the "Airplane Temple" Gurdwara of Talhan, Punjab, India*. January 2014. COLORS Magazine #002 Immigration. http://www.colorsmagazine.com/en/archive

Figure 7: Prabhnoor Kaur, *Making of eagle tankie at Kaul & Co, Jandiala*. July 31, 2023. Author's personal collection from field work.

Figure 8: Prabhnoor Kaur, *Air Canada plane tankie and room,* Dhaliwal. July 31, 2023. Author's personal collection from field work.

Figure 8 Detail

Figure 9: Rajesh Vora, *Airplane, village of Uppal Bhupa*, 2019. In *Everyday Monuments: The Rooftop Sculptures of Punjab* by Vora, 2023, p. 130 - 131.

Figure 10: Prabhnoor Kaur, *Balwinder Singh Kaul with his previous works, Jandiala*. July 31, 2023. Author's personal collection from field work.

Figure 11: Rajesh Vora, *Airplane, village of Bahua*, 2019. In *Everyday Monuments: The Rooftop Sculptures of Punjab* by Vora, 2023, p. 83.

Bibliography

Ahmed, Sara. “Melancholic Migrants.” In *The Promise of Happiness*. Durham [NC]: Duke University Press, 2010.

Antonello, Pierpaolo, and Alessandra Diazzi. “Introduction: Intersubjectivity, Desire, and Mimetic Theory: René Girard and Psychoanalysis.” *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* 26 (2019): 1–8. https://doi.org/10.14321/contagion.26.2019.0001.

Axel, Brian Keith. “Diasporic Sublime: Sikh Martyrs, Internet Mediations, and the Question of the Unimaginable.” *Sikh Formations* 1, no. 1 (n.d.): 127–54. https://doi.org/10.1080/17448720500132532.

———. “The Homeland.” In *The Nation’s Tortured Body : Violence, Representation, and the Formation of a Sikh “Diaspora,”* 197–223. Book Collections on Project MUSE. Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2001. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822398448.

Babushahi Bureau. “SGPC Bans Offering Toys Including Aeroplane in Gurudwara after Akal Takht’s Directive.” *Babushahi Punjab*, August 18, 2023. https://www.babushahi.com/view-news.php?id=169748&headline=SGPC%C2%A0bans%C2%A0offering-toys-including-aeroplane-in-Gurudwara-after-Akal-Takht%27s-directive'.

Bains, Satwinder Kaur. “(Re)Making Home Away From Home: Memory, Bravado, and Belonging.” In *Everyday Monuments: Rooftop Sculptures of Punjab*. Vancouver, BC: Figure 1 Publishing, 2023.

Bedi, Rahul. “Punjabi Wives Abandoned to a Life in Limbo.” *The Irish Times*, August 1, 2009. https://www.irishtimes.com/news/punjabi-wives-abandoned-to-a-life-in-limbo-1.711002.

Bell, Catherine. *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1992.

Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011.

Bharadwaj, Prashant, Asim Khwaja, and Atif Mian. “The Big March: Migratory Flows after the Partition of India.” *Economic and Political Weekly* 43, no. 35 (2008): 39–49.

Bhatia, Gautam. “Punjabi Baroque.” In *Punjabi Baroque and Other Memories of Architecture*. New Delhi ; Penguin Books, 1994.

Correia, Alice. “Diasporic Returns: Reading Partition in Contemporary Art.” *Third Text*, To Draw the Line: Partitions, Dissonance, Art – A Case for South Asia, 31, no. 2–3 (November 2, 2017): 321–40. https://doi.org/10.1080/09528822.2017.1371917.

Dempsey, Corinne, and Sudharshan Durayappah. “Recasting Sexuality, Gender, and Family through Contemporary Canadian Ritual Innovation.” In *Ritual Innovation*, edited by Brian Pennington and Amy Allocco, 241–58. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2018.

Di Blasi, Luca. “Within and Beyond Mimetic Desire.” In *Mimesis, Desire, and the Novel : Rene Girard and Literary Criticism*, edited by Pierpaolo Antonello and Heather Webb. Studies in Violence, Mimesis, and Culture. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2015. http://site.ebrary.com/id/11091505.

FPJ Web Desk. “Top Sikh Body SGPC Bans Offering Toy Aeroplane In Gurdwaras After Akal Takht Sahib’s Directive.” *The Free Press Journal India*, August 13, 2023. https://www.freepressjournal.in/india/top-sikh-body-sgpc-bans-offering-toy-aeroplane-in-gurdwaras-after-akal-takht-sahibs-directive.

Gunn, Janet. “Ganesha and the Chocolate Almonds: Ritual Innovation and Efficacy in Diaspora.” In *Ritual Innovation*, edited by Brian Pennington and Amy Allocco, 241–58. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2018.

Hill, K., W. Selzer, J. Leaning, S. J. Malik, and S. S. Russell. “The Demographic Impact of Partition in the Punjab in 1947.” *Population Studies* 62, no. 2 (2008): 155–70.

Jodhka, Surinder S. “Caste and Untouchability in Rural Punjab.” *Economic and Political Weekly* 37, no. 19 (2002): 1813–23.

Judge, Paramjit S. “Caste Hierarchy, Dominance, and Change in Punjab.” *Sociological Bulletin* 64, no. 1 (2015): 55–76.

Kapur, Geeta. “Globalisation and Culture.” *Third Text Asia* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2008).

Karmakar, Chandrima. “The Conundrum of ‘Home’ in the Literature of the Indian Diaspora: An Interpretive Analysis.” *Sociological Bulletin* 64, no. 1 (2015): 77–90.

Kaur, Atinder Pal. “Impact of Migration on Gender Roles: Study of Left behind Wives in Rural Punjab.” *Indian Journal of Health and Wellbeing* 11, no. 7–9 (September 2020): 407–11.

Kaur, Atinder Pal, and Vivek Thakur. “Psycho-Socio, Economic Conditions of Left behind Families by NRI Groom’s.” *Indian Journal of Health and Wellbeing* 4, no. 3 (March 2013): 536–39.

Kaur, Rajinder, and Ila Gupta. “The Implementation of Phulkari Embroidery Pattern in Interior Decoration.” In *Understanding Built Environment : Proceedings of the National Conference on Sustainable Built Environment 2015*, 171–86. Springer Transactions in Civil and Environmental Engineering, 2363-7633. Singapore: Springer, 2017. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-2138-1.

Kelly, John D., and Martha Kaplan. “History, Structure, and Ritual.” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19, no. 1 (October 1, 1990): 119–50. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.an.19.100190.001003.

Khadria, Binod. “India and Contemporary Emigration: Retrospective Culture, Futuristic Economy,” n.d. Accessed July 27, 2023.

Krivý, Maroš. “Industrial Architecture and Negativity: The Aesthetics of Architecture in the Works of Gordon Matta-Clark, Robert Smithson and Bernd and Hilla Becher.” *The Journal of Architecture* 15, no. 6 (2010): 827–52. https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2011.533549.

Lacan, Jacques. *Écrits: A Selection, 1901-1981*. 1 vols. London: Routledge, 2020. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003059486.

Loomba, Ania, and Suvir Kaul. "Introduction: Location, Culture, Post-Coloniality." *Oxford Literary Review* 16, no. 1/2 (1994): 3–30.

Mahler, Sarah J., and Patricia R. Pessar. "Gendered Geographies of Power: Analyzing Gender Across Transnational Spaces." *Identities* 7, no. 4 (January 1, 2001): 441–59. https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2001.9962675.

Maskiell, Michelle. "Embroidering the Past: Phulkari Textiles and Gendered Work as 'Tradition' and 'Heritage' in Colonial and Contemporary Punjab." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 58, no. 2 (1999): 361–88. https://doi.org/10.2307/2659401.

———. "Social Change and Social Control: College-Educated Punjabi Women 1913 to 1960." *Modern Asian Studies* 19, no. 1 (1985): 55–83.

Mathur, Saloni, ed. *The Migrant's Time: Rethinking Art History and Diaspora*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011.

Mooney, Nicola. "A Wedding Phulkari and Other Gifts." In *Rural Nostalgias and Transnational Dreams: Identity and Modernity Among Jat Sikhs*. Anthropological Horizons. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014. https://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=4672816.

———. "Aspiration, Reunification and Gender Transformation in Jat Sikh Marriages from India to Canada." *Global Networks* 6, no. 4 (October 1, 2006): 389–403. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-0374.2006.00151.x.

———. "The Rural Imaginary." In *Rural Nostalgias and Transnational Dreams: Identity and Modernity Among Jat Sikhs*. Anthropological Horizons. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014. https://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=4672816.

Nazir, Pervaiz. "Origins of Debt, Mortgage and Alienation of Land in Early Modern Punjab." *Journal of Peasant Studies* 27, no. 3 (2000): 55–91. https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150008438740.

Patel, Geeta, and Anjali Arondekar. "Area Impossible: Notes Toward an Introduction" 22, no. 2 (2016). https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-3428687.

Poshyananda, Apinan. "Desparately Diasporic." In *Over Here: International Perspectives on Art and Culture*, 286–90. Spain: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 2004.

Puar, Jasbir. "Writing My Way Home: Traveling South Asian Bodies and Diasporic Journeys." *Socialist Review* 94, no. 4 (1994): 75–108.

Qureshi, Kaveri. "Shehri (City) Brides between Indian Punjab and the UK: Transnational Hypergamy, Sikh Women's Agency and Gendered Geographies of Power." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 42, no. 7 (May 27, 2016): 1216–28. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2015.1068107.

Rahman, Mahbubar, and Willem van Schendel. "'I Am Not a Refugee': Rethinking Partition Migration." *Modern Asian Studies* 37, no. 3 (2003): 551–84.

Rushdie, Salman. "Imaginary Homelands." In *Imaginary Homelands*, 9–21. London, United Kingdom: Granta Books, 1991.

Sandhu, Amandeep. *Panjab: Journeys Through Fault Lines*. Gurgaon, Haryana: Penguin Random House India, 2022.

Sandhu, Jashandeep Singh. "Green Revolution: A Case Study of Punjab." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 75 (2014): 1192–99.

Sarkaria, Mallika Kaur. "Lessons from Punjab's 'Missing Girls': Toward a Global Feminist Perspective on 'Choice' in Abortion." *California Law Review* 97, no. 3 (2009): 905–42.

Sethi, Cristin McKnight. "Women's Work: Phulkari, Flora Annie Steel, and Collecting Textiles in British India." In *Women, Gender, and Art in Asia c. 1500 - 1900*, edited by Melia Belli Bose, 172–98. New York, NY: Routledge, 2016.

Shankar, Ann, and Jenny Housego. *Bridal Durries of India*. Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India: Mapin Publishing Pvt. Ltd, 1997.

Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. London, United Kingdom: Penguin Random House UK, 2019.

Soomal, Sajdeep, and Rajesh Vora. "Reproductive Rooftops." In *Everyday Monuments: Rooftop Sculptures of Punjab*. Vancouver, BC: Figure 1 Publishing, 2023.

Stasch, Rupert. "Ritual and Oratory Revisited: The Semiotics of Effective Action." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 40 (June 29, 2011): 159–74.

Taylor, Steve. "'Home Is Never Fully Achieved … Even When We Are In It': Migration, Belonging and Social Exclusion within Punjabi Transnational Mobility." *Mobilities* 10, no. 2 (2015): 193–210. https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2013.848606.

Taylor, Steve, Manjit Singh, and Deborah Booth. "A Diasporic Indian Community: Re-Imagining Punjab." *Sociological Bulletin* 56, no. 2 (2007): 221–42.

Toufic, Jalal. "Transit Visa to Postwar Lebanon!" In *Over Here: International Perspectives on Art and Culture*. Spain: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 2004.

Virdee, Pippa. "Remembering Partition: Women, Oral Histories and the Partition of 1947." *Oral History* 41, no. 2 (2013): 49–62.

Vora, Rajesh, and Keith Wallace. "The Rooftop Sculptures of Punjab." In *Everyday Monuments: Rooftop Sculptures of Punjab*. Vancouver, BC: Figure 1 Publishing, 2023.

Wong, Winnie Won Yin. "After the Copy." In *Van Gogh on Demand: China and the Readymade*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013.

Wood, Christopher S. “Public and Private Dimensions of Votive Giving.” In *Agents of Faith: Votive Objects in Time and Place*, edited by Ittai Weinryb, 67–85. New York, NY: Bard Graduate Center Gallery, 2018.

———. “The Votive Scenario.” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 59/60 (2011): 206–27.