

Crossing Borders, Raising Voices: Sikh Holy Places in Pakistan

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Introduction

Anand Vivek Taneja reflects, “If we cannot remember the ways in which the past was different from the present, we cannot imagine any other present than the one we live in, or any other futures than the grim, inexorable one we seem to be heading towards.”¹ The study of Sikh holy places in Pakistan is one way to conceive of the process of remembering the physical, spiritual, and human ways in which the present differs from the past. My research is original in that it addresses the understudied relationship between Sikh holy places, Pakistan, and the history of Partition. In 1947, the former “British India” was divided into India and Pakistan, two independent entities. Before Partition, Sikhs represented 12-13% of the total population in Punjab, a region now divided between Pakistan and India.² Though the years leading up to 1947 were fraught with rising intercommunal tensions, Partition led to sudden and chaotic displacement of Sikh people from modern day Pakistan into India. Today, Sikhs make up less than 1% of the population in Pakistan. Over 150 gurdwaras and shrines, reminders of a by-gone past, remain within the borders of the Pakistani state, including the birthplace of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism.³ Since Partition, various actors—the Pakistani state, Sikhs living outside of Pakistani, and Muslim scholars within Pakistan—have sought to document and discuss Sikh holy places in Pakistan.

In this paper, I show that studying Sikh holy places in Pakistan is an act of crossing geographical, societal, and religious borders, and that these borders are testaments to the ongoing nature of Partition. I argue that through their focus on physical place, Pakistani state and scholarly sources silence Sikh voices. In contrast, Amardeep Singh, a Sikh journalist and

¹ Taneja, Anand V. “A City Without Time.” *The Indian Quarterly*, January-March, 2015.

² Shah, Safdar Ali, *The Sikh Heritage of Pakistan* (Lahore: Mansoor Rashid, 2012), 1.

³ *Ibid.*

pilgrim, attempts to assert Sikh voices in an account of a shared regional past through his work, which is characterized by nostalgia.⁴ The few existing studies of Sikh holy places in Pakistan lead to vastly different conclusions about the past, and I reflect on the importance of future studies in shaping our understandings of a regional present and future.

Crossing Borders

Studying Sikh holy places is an act of border crossing. Sikh pilgrims and scholars are required to cross political borders between India and Pakistan to commemorate holy places on the Pakistani side. Most Sikhs live in India, and to return or travel to Pakistan requires crossing the geo-political border created in 1947, one of the most militarized borders in the world. *Sikh Pilgrimage to Pakistan: An Illustrated Guide* provides descriptions of Sikh holy places in Pakistan, and the authors (who are both Sikhs in the diaspora, educated and living in Britain) focus on the logistics of border crossing and entering Pakistan, a different state. In this source, published in 1985, crossing the border into Pakistan is not tantamount to entering an unwelcoming territory to Sikhs. The authors describe the Sikh exodus from Pakistan during Partition, but then assert; “The Sikhs to this day continue to visit their holy sites in Pakistan, where they are received as warmly as Guru Nanak would have received his Lord.”⁵ The guide encourages Sikh pilgrimage to Pakistan. Amardeep Singh’s *Lost Heritage to Pakistan* is a memoir of one such journey. Singh, a Sikh from Singapore, crosses to Lahore from Amritsar, and writes, “Stepping into Pakistan, the land that beheld the glorious era of Sikh history, my first

⁴ I use the term “regional” to refer to the Punjab. Though Punjab is both a state in India and a province in Pakistan, I refer to Punjab as not a political unit but a cultural region, which is today divided between the two states.

⁵ Singh Choudry, Anup and Singh Chowdhary, Hardip. *Sikh Pilgrimage to Pakistan: Illustrated Guide* (London: Gurbani Cassette Centre, 1985), 4.

reflex was to bow in respect to the soil of our ancestors.”⁶ Like the authors of *Sikh Pilgrimage*, Amardeep does not see Pakistan as an entirely foreign country. The purpose of his visit is informed by his belief in a personal and spiritual connection to Pakistan. To cross the geopolitical border between India and Pakistan is a return to ancestral land.

Just as Sikh pilgrims and scholars traverse geo-political borders, Pakistani Muslim scholars cross religious boundaries as they document Sikh heritage because entrance to Sikh holy sites is often limited to Sikhs alone. Religious and social limits on Pakistani Muslim scholars result from divisions between religious communities and fear of violence towards Sikhs in Pakistan. Gurdwaras in Pakistan are closed to Muslims, while in the rest of the world, any individuals (regardless of religious background) may enter a gurdwara. Haroon Khalid, a contemporary anthropologist, studies Sikh gurdwaras and celebrations, but has difficulty gaining access to the spaces. He interviews Muslims who also revere Sikh holy sites but can no longer access these sites because of their religion. In this context, religion is a social demarcator, and not a matter of personal faith. Individuals belong to the religion they are born into, regardless of their personal and spiritual beliefs. At Nankana Sahib, a gurdwara near Lahore, visitors must prove they are not Muslim. If they are proven as Muslim, they are sent away and all pilgrims are given an ID card which they must exhibit to enter.⁷ Gaining access to gurdwaras is relegated to those with established relationships with the gurdwara authorities, usually elite Sikhs from Pakistan’s small Sikh minority. For example, Iqbal Qaiser, a Pakistani scholar of Sikh history, can enter gurdwaras where other Muslims cannot because of his connections to Sikhs who maintain these spaces. On the other hand, Pakistani Sikhs frequently live within gurdwaras, and

⁶ Singh, Amardeep. *Lost Heritage: The Sikh Legacy in Pakistan* (New Delhi: the Nagaara Trust, 2016), 16.

⁷Khalid, Haroon. *A White Trail: a Journey into the Heart of Pakistan's Religious Minorities* (Chennai: Westland ltd, 2013), 215.

are unable to leave for security reasons and thus secluded from the surrounding Muslim majority community. This arrangement creates another boundary based on membership in a religious community.⁸ Just as Muslims cannot enter the gurdwara, many Sikhs cannot leave its premises. In their origins, gurdwaras are envisioned as a shared religious space—langar, a meal served daily, is vegetarian and meant to be accessible to all visitors. In Pakistan, gurdwaras are strictly for Sikhs, and for Pakistani Muslims, entering them is an act of crossing into a space belonging to a religious minority.

The boundaries between religious spaces and the geopolitical border between Pakistan and India are reminders of a long and ongoing Partition. Zamindar introduces the concept of a “long Partition,” studying the lengthy and disruptive process of creating political borders and constructing nation states. She writes, “The Partition of 1947 in many senses is not over; it is not behind us,” citing the destruction of the Babri mosque in Uttar Pradesh in 1992, and violence towards Muslims which followed.⁹ Through Zamindar’s analysis, Partition can be studied as a series of events and experiences which extend beyond the violence of 1947 and in some ways, are ongoing today. The legacy of Partition lives on in the highly militarized border between India and Pakistan, in boundaries regarding who can enter Sikh holy places, and in social expectations which discourage interaction between people from different religious communities. These divisions remind scholars and pilgrims that Partition is not limited to a historical moment in 1947—the legacy of Partition surrounds and divides us in the present moment.

Pakistani State and Scholarly Narratives

⁸ Ibid., 242.

⁹ Zamindar, Vazira. *The Long Partition and Making of South East Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 237.

In the context of a long and ongoing Partition, both Muslim and Sikh scholars document the presence of Sikhs in regional heritage through their work. Iqbal Qaiser, a Pakistani Muslim historian, catalogues over 200 gurdwaras and illustrates the variety of ways gurdwaras have been appropriated to new uses since Partition. Gurdwaras have been transformed into schools, homes for refugees and settled Gujjar families, mosques, and government offices. Others have fallen into disrepair or nature has reclaimed them, especially gurdwaras in rural areas such as Gurdwara Shikargarh Sahib in District Lahore.¹⁰ Most of these sites are not marked as former gurdwaras, and their transformation erases this former purpose as the religious and social center of Sikh communities. For example, Gurdwara Gara Fateh Shah, in District Jhang, was abandoned between 1947 and 1990 and then was turned into a mosque by building minarets.¹¹ By recording physical evidence of Sikh presence in Pakistan, Qaiser shows the unmarked nature of these sites—they are all around, but their Sikh origins are not recognized by people who frequent them in the post Partition era. In his archeological survey, Khan, a representative of the Pakistani state, focuses on physical remnants of Sikh holy places and establishes Sikh history as a part of a greater state history of Pakistan. He writes, “a study of the life, events of Gurus and the large number of monuments sacred to them will, however, reveal how deeply all the Sikh Gurus are associated with Pakistan.”¹² In the act of documenting these monuments, both Qaiser and Khan call attention to the former Sikh presence in Punjab. In the context of Pakistan, a majority Muslim state, the histories of minority religious communities remain relatively understudied as compared to histories of high politics. Qaiser and Khan attempt to address this gap in the historical record, yet both scholars silence Sikh voices through their approach to history.

¹⁰ Qaiser, Iqbal. *Historical Sikh Shrines in West Pakistan* (Lahore: Punjabi History Board, 1998).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 364.

¹² Khan, Mohammed. *Sikh Shrines of West Pakistan* (Karachi: Government of Pakistan Department of Archeology, 1962), Preface.

The work of Qaiser and Khan is limited in that neither scholar documents interactions with Sikhs at the time of writing or discussions of the Sikh communities of the past and in doing so, they silence Sikh voices. The only humans discussed in the text are Sikh gurus, who lived several hundred years ago. Who lived within and around these holy spaces? What did gurdwaras and shrines offer to these mixed faith communities? The reader is left with these questions—surrounded by a multitude of descriptions of Sikhs shrines, but lacking Sikh voices of the past or present. The authors produce knowledge about Sikh holy places while simultaneously excluding the perspectives and experiences of Sikh people. Discussions of Sikh exodus from Pakistan are similarly limited: Qaiser makes no reference to Partition, while Khan only mentions that the care of Sikh shrines was “disrupted” in 1947.¹³ In accounts that lack exploration of the human dimension of these religious sites, Sikhs are rendered invisible to history once again, even as their holy sites are given increased visibility.

A more recent government source, *Sikh Gurdwaras in Pakistan Past and Present State*, takes a similar approach to Qaiser and Khan, and extends the pattern of leaving out Sikh voices.¹⁴ The Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (PSGPC), made of Pakistani Sikhs, took over the care of gurdwaras in Pakistan in 1999. Produced by the PSGPC, *Sikh Gurdwaras in Pakistan Past and Present State* profiles the transformation of gurdwaras in Pakistan since 1999, and the changes made with the support of the Pakistani state. Although produced by Pakistani Sikhs, the voices of Sikhs are not a focus of the narrative—instead, the writers emphasize state support for the care and keeping of gurdwaras. They write, "Within a very short period of two years of its existence, the PSGPC has undertaken complete renovation,

¹³ Khan, *Sikh Shrines in West Pakistan*, Preface.

¹⁴ Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (PSGPC), *Sikh Gurdwaras in Pakistan: Past and Present State*, (Lahore: Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, 2002).

face lifting and rebuilding of all the holy shrines spending over 150 million rupees, as a result of which the Gurdwaras wear a bridal look."¹⁵ The study serves to highlight the significantly improved condition of gurdwaras, and creates a narrative in which the Pakistani state, along with the PSGPC, is responsible for these changes. Even the Pakistani Sikhs who make up the PSGPC are not credited as autonomous actors in the improvements--most mentions of the PSGPC are accompanied by an acknowledgement of the Government of Pakistan's role as well. The PSGPC fits neatly into the arms of the Pakistani state, and among Pakistani Sikhs today, is often regarded with suspicion. Madan Singh, a former head of the PSGPC, comments, "The PSGPC are cronies of the ETPB (Evacuee Trust Property Board) dominated by the Muslim community [...] I resigned as the head of PSGPC because they would not let me work independently."¹⁶ The PSGPC produced book presents the state as the central actor in the care of gurdwaras, absorbing the stories, struggles, and contributions of Pakistani Sikhs, such as Madan Singh.

The lived experiences of Sikhs are further silenced through state and scholarly narratives of Sikhism's place in regional history. Khan integrates the history of Sikh holy places into the history of the state. He names the importance of their gurus and holy places to Pakistan, although when these gurus were alive, the state did not exist.¹⁷ By integrating Sikh history into state history, Khan erases the experiences of this minority group—their history is swept into that of the state. Even in a work which is focused on Sikh holy places, Sikhs are forced into the shadow of Pakistani state history. Similarly, Qaiser absorbs Sikh history into state history, laying claim to Sikh holy leaders. He writes "Out of the Gurus...and other great Sikh personalities, holy places...are lying around in our motherland as monuments of the past. These are part of our

¹⁵Ibid., Preface.

¹⁶ Khalid, *A White Trail*, 283.

¹⁷ Qaiser, *Historical Sikh Shrines of Pakistan*, 14.

history.”¹⁸ Qaiser references Pakistan as the motherland—but to whom does “our history” refer? Who lays claim to the history of Sikh holy places as “their” history? By claiming Sikh history as part of wider state history, these sources deny Sikhs a past which is distinctly informed by their lived experiences in the region. The PSGPC produced source erases the struggles of Sikhs in Pakistan, commenting: “In accordance with the teachings of Islam and the provision of the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, minorities are given complete freedom in the practice of their religion.” In this narrative, no space is given to the particularity of Sikh experiences as minorities in the Islamic Republic.

Denial of a unique Sikh narrative is one way in which Sikh voices are silenced in Pakistani state and scholarly sources. However, the othering of Sikhs in these same sources furthers their exclusion. Qaiser makes a distinction between “my nation” and “the Sikh nation” his dedication.¹⁹ Just as Qaiser distinguishes between two nations, Khan emphasizes the difference between Islam and Sikhism. He writes “as it happened in the case of all religious orders of the sub-continent, except Islam, Sikhism also absorbed elements of Hinduism.”²⁰ Khan characterizes his record of Sikh history as a memoir, locating Sikh people and their heritage firmly in Pakistan’s past. In focusing on the distinctions between Sikhism and Islam, the Sikh nation and the Pakistani nation, Khan and Qaiser establish Sikhs as “the other.” By locating this unknown “other” in a historical moment, as opposed to a present moment, these sources erase the importance of Sikh voices.

While Qaiser and Khan both focus on physical reminders of Sikh presence in Pakistan, Haroon Khalid, an Islamabad based anthropologist, concentrates on the ways in which the post-

¹⁸ Qaiser, *Historical Sikh Shrines of Pakistan*, 8.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁰ Khan, *Sikh Shrines in West Pakistan*, 13

Partition era threatens shared practices of Sikh and Muslim communities. For example, at Gurdwara Panja Sahib in Hassan Abdal, Baisakhi, a Sikh holiday, has historically been celebrated with a procession around the city. Prior to Partition, Muslims joined Sikhs in the celebration, but today the procession only takes place within the premises of the gurdwara.²¹ Khalid also describes Lohri, the indigenous Punjabi festival, which has died out since the creation of Pakistan.²² These celebrations are mentioned in the poem "Husna." In this poem, Javed, a man living in post Partition India, writes to his lover on the other side of the border, asking about life in Pakistan. He describes Baisakhi and Lohri: "the lamps of Diwali and the clouds of Baisakhi [...] / the smoke from the Lohdi fire which lit up our hearts / O my Husna, does the smoke of the Lohdi fire still rise like it did during that time?"²³ Javed recalls these shared festivals as symbols of pre-Partition relationships between communities. Similarly, in describing the changes to these festivals, Khalid recalls a past in which Punjabis celebrated together despite religious difference. He writes, "The strict compartmentalization of religious practices and identity of which Pakistan is a product leaves no room for the historical religious syncretism that was once part of this land's religious traditions."²⁴ Khalid's work adds a living and human dimension that is missing in Qaiser and Khan's work, delivering a somber answer to Javed's question to his lover Husna—the fires of Lohri do not still burn like they used to. In focusing on human communities, Khalid calls attention to how these sites' post-Partition uses depart from their pre-Partition uses. His interviews with Pakistani Sikhs and Muslims, as well as Sikh pilgrims, integrate a plurality of perspectives into the narrative he shapes.

²¹ Khalid, *A White Trail*, 231

²² *Ibid.*, 267

²³ "Husna (Coke Studio): Lyrics and Translation," <https://krithya.wordpress.com/2012/08/19/husna-coke-studio-lyrics-and-translation/>, last modified August 19, 2012.

²⁴ Khalid, *A White Trail*, 229

Sikh Voices and the Creation of a Shared Past

In contrast to Pakistani academic and government sources, Sikh scholars and pilgrims raise their voices through their work to assert their place in a shared regional past. Prior to Partition, Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus contributed to a shared Punjabi society. In her book *The Social Space of Vernacular Culture in Colonial Punjab*, Farina Mir explores Punjabi literary culture. In this sphere, Punjabi people produced a rich and shared tradition of epic and romantic literature.²⁵ This tradition, which transcended divisions between religious communities, is one aspect of the shared past in which Sikh writers attempt to locate themselves. The authors of *Sikh Pilgrimage to Pakistan* describe the Sikh's relation to Pakistan: "The Sikhs always look forward to visiting their holiest shrine in Pakistan, and it is hoped that this guide will provide some useful information as to their proposed visit to the Nanak's homeland."²⁶ Though they write to an audience which lives outside of Pakistan, the authors envision Pakistan as the homeland of the Nanak, the cradle of Sikhism, and through this assertion, lay claim to the place of Sikhs in Pakistan. Amardeep Singh's journey to Pakistan is a way for him to as a Sikh to affirm his connection to country. He writes, "facts of history cannot be suppressed by creating barriers for people."²⁷ From his understanding, the "facts of history" are those which support the social harmony of the Punjab, a type of cohesion which is missing in Punjab's modern division between India and Pakistan. Beyond affirming his personal place as a Sikh in the Punjab through his work, Amardeep Singh celebrates the legacy Ranjit Singh, known as the Lion of the Punjab,

²⁵ Farina Mir, *The Social Space of Language: Vernacular Culture in British Colonial Punjab*. (University of California Press, 2010), <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/davidson/reader.action?docID=582034>.

²⁶ Singh, C., *Sikh Pilgrimage to Pakistan*, 6

²⁷ Singh, A., *Lost Heritage*, 30

a leader who he views as a unifying force across religious communities.²⁸ Ranjit Singh was the founder of the Sikh kingdom in the Punjab, and commanded an army of Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs to fight against Pashtuns who sought to take over the territory.²⁹ Amardeep Singh's personal connection to the Punjab, coupled his celebration of Punjabi Sikh heroes like Ranjit Singh, serve as evidence of the Sikhs' place in the region and reclaims the historical role they played in the region.

Through his focus on the communities surrounding gurdwaras, Amardeep Singh grounds his study of holy places in their human dimensions. His work seeks to reclaim a place for Sikh perspectives in regional history. While Qaiser and Khan integrate Sikh history into narratives of Pakistani state history, Amardeep Singh finds that Sikh history is skipped over in broader histories of Pakistan. He stumbles into a university textbook store, and finds that the medieval history section skips from the Mughals to British empire, bypassing Sikh history.³⁰ Similarly, Khalid calls attention to the erasure of Sikhs from historical narrative, commenting "Pakistani historiography discards Hindu and Sikh narratives from its discourse."³¹ By focusing on the human dimension of Sikh holy places, Amardeep Singh's work aims to establish his community's roots in Pakistan, and reclaim a lost part of history.³²

In his attempt to assert Sikh voices in history, Amardeep Singh evokes a deep longing for a shared regional past. He expresses nostalgia³³ for society prior to Punjab's division—during a visit to a mausoleum, he reflects, "I imagined the days prior to partition, when people of all faiths

²⁸ Ibid., 30.

²⁹ Singh, Khushwant. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. "Ranjit Singh." Encyclopedia Britannica, inc., 2015. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ranjit-Singh-Sikh-maharaja> (accessed December 8, 2017).

³⁰ Singh, A., *Lost Heritage*, 101.

³¹ Khalid, *A White Trail*, I.

³² Singh, A., *Lost Heritage*, 4.

³³ Nostalgia is a sentimental way of recalling the past, expressing a positive view of a period that has passed.

would have been frequent visitors here.”³⁴ Amardeep Singh’s work focuses on holy places which were once shared between Punjabi people, and his work is characterized by mourning for this society. Referring to the haste with which British boundary commissions drew the borders on the map, he comments “it wrenched my heart to observe the colossal loss of the glorious heritage, with just a stroke of Radcliffe’s pen.”³⁵ Amardeep Singh recalls Punjab prior to Partition as a space where people of all religions lived in social harmony, and he does not delve into the intercommunal tensions which existed prior to Partition. Nostalgically remembering this past allows Amardeep Singh to claim his place and connection to modern day Pakistan. His documentation of Sikh holy places is rooted in the belief that Pakistan was not always as it is now, and that many of these holy places were open to and frequented by people of many religious backgrounds. While Sikh people are missing in Khan’s and Qaiser’s accounts of gurdwaras, Amardeep Singh’s work populates holy places with the stories of Pakistani Sikhs, Sikhs living in Punjab before Partition, and Pakistani Muslims. In doing so, he gives gurdwaras and other holy places meaning as physical evidence of the coexistence that he believes once characterized the Punjab.

Amardeep Singh’s narrative of a pre-Partition Punjab united in religious pluralism must be situated alongside the narratives of Sikhs who lived in the region during Partition. Ian Talbot’s collection of oral histories *Amristar* offers interviews with Sikhs who migrated from Punjab during Partition. These oral histories reveal a more complex portrait of pre-Partition society. While many interviewees recall friendly and close relations with neighbors of other faiths, they also call attention to pre-existing divisions within Punjabi communities and tensions leading up to Partition. Sardar Jagdish Singh, who was 14 at the time of Partition, recalls that

³⁴ Singh A., *Lost Heritage*, 111.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 108.

there was much commonality between Muslims and Sikhs in his community. He explains, “we shared much. There was much coming and going, and meeting each other. There was certainly no enmity.”³⁶ However, referring to Muslims, he notes, “they kept a certain distance from the Sikhs.”³⁷ Sardar Kuljit Singh Khurana who was six at the age of Partition describes a physical separation between religious communities in his village: “the Muslim houses were quite separate from ours.”³⁸ These first-hand testimonies reveal that life in the Punjab was characterized by multiple types of communal relations, and suggest that the narrative built by Amardeep Singh is grounded in a certain kind of nostalgia, a mixture of stories and evidence from the past. The title of Amardeep Singh’s book, *Lost Heritage: The Sikh Legacy of the Punjab*, suggests that Sikh heritage has vanished into Pakistani history, but his work also seeks to reclaim a shared Punjabi heritage which transcends religious boundaries. What does it mean to memorialize a history that is rooted in nostalgia? Amardeep Singh is one generation removed from Partition, raising the question—how are these ideas of the past, which feels real and personal, created and passed onto future generations? In the context of the ever-increasing divisions between religions in Pakistan, what vision of the past will modern day Pakistanis pass onto their children?

Escaping the “Endless Present”

The way we remember the past informs our vision of the future, as Anand Vivek Taneja reminds us. Just as Taneja sees Urdu literature as a way for Delhi to engage with its pre-Partition past, I argue that Sikh holy places provide a similar opportunity within a Pakistani context. In “A City Without Time,” Taneja writes of the loss of Urdu literature in Delhi following Partition.

³⁶ Talbot, Ian. *Amritsar: Voices from Between India and Pakistan* (London: Seagull Books, 2007), 112.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 111.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 230.

He argues that without the city's once rich literary tradition, Delhi can no longer remember how it once was, prior to 1947. Without the memory of literature, "there is no possibility of nostalgia, because we don't even know what we have lost," and we are trapped in what Taneja calls an "endless present."³⁹ The approaches of Qaiser, Khan, and Amardeep Singh informs their understandings of the past and present Punjab in different ways. By interacting with communities surrounding Sikh holy sites, Amardeep Singh imagines these sites as shared between multiple faith groups in a pre-Partition Punjab. The silences towards human communities in Qaiser and Khan's work presents Sikh holy places remnants of a religion from a far-off past, not of a people who once shared the space that is now Pakistan. Through studying these holy places and the transformations since Partition, scholars can bring the pluralistic past of the Punjab onto the historical record and challenge notions of Sikhs and Muslims as fundamentally different communities. By acknowledging and learning more about Sikh heritage in Pakistan, we begin to escape from the "endless present" and consider the aspects of past societies that we have left behind.

However, by focusing on physical place, Qaiser and Khan forgo the opportunity to integrate Sikhs into the historical record and investigate the pluralism of pre-Partition Punjab, while Amardeep Singh embraces the changing human communities inhabiting these physical spaces. By avoiding engagement with the communities that once surrounded Sikh holy places, Sikhs remain invisible, just as they are in much of official Pakistani history. Amardeep Singh's focus on the pluralistic aspects of pre-Partition society offers a vision of the past that is vastly different from the present moment. In bringing this past to the forefront of his work, Amardeep Singh asserts his place, as a Punjabi Sikh, in a regional history. Amardeep Singh's work is

³⁹ Taneja, "A City Without Time," 1.

informed by nostalgia for the social harmony of pre-Partition Punjab, and an examination of oral history interviews reveals nuances and complications in his portrayal of pre-Partition social harmony. Oral histories give a space in the study of history for voices which have been left out the official record, such as those of Sikhs who witnessed Partition. Yet oral histories do not provide an unchanging and clear snapshot of a past moment—memories are shaped as years past and circumstances change. The unreliability of memory inherently affects the study of oral history, an approach which relies on personal memory. Knowing this, how should we go about understanding the blurry and largely unknown past? This question is particularly crucial in the study of Sikh communities in Pakistan, which Partition affected dramatically.

Lasting Questions

As Taneja suggests in his exploration of Urdu literature in Delhi's memory, if we do not engage with understanding the past as different from the present, we are unable to envision changed futures for ourselves and our communities. The silence of Sikh voices in the work of Qaiser and Khan leaves readers unable to conceive of Sikhs as active participants in a shared regional past. To truly understand how the past differed from the present, we must interrogate silences in the historical record and engage our sources in conversation with each other. In studying the Sikh gurdwaras of Pakistan, scholarly work leads to us to vastly different conclusions about the future. Qaiser and Khan exclude Sikhs from their studies of history, leaving the reader with the lingering notion that Sikhs do not have a place in the past, and making it impossible to imagine Sikhs as actors in a pluralistic future in the region. In contrast, Amardeep Singh's nostalgic account of his time in Pakistan leads the reader to believe that the

people of the Punjab once coexisted in shared spaces that were not defined by the boundaries that criss-cross the region today.

Through this investigation of Sikh holy sites, I have discussed the conclusions that can be drawn based on the limited sources discussed. However, my analysis of these sources has equally raised questions for future studies: how do Pakistani Sikhs create and define holy spaces in communities which are often hostile to them? With little representation in history books, how do Pakistani Sikhs pass on an understanding of their past to younger generations? These are questions which are largely left unanswered in academic studies today. How could a study of Sikh holy places in Pakistan, in their human and physical dimensions, take shape? Such a study, like those discussed in this research, would inherently be forced to interact with both geo-political and social borders. Yet, a comprehensive study of Sikh holy places in Pakistan would also call for research methods which move beyond divisions in the study of Partition history, categories such as Muslim/Sikh, Pakistani/Indian, pre-1947/post 1947. In doing so, a multi-dimensional, transnational study of Sikh holy places in Pakistan could provide us with a better understanding of a regional past where these categories did not define communities in the ways they do today and open the space to consider a regional future which transcends these boundaries.

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