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South Asian Diasporas in Canada

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Special issue of *South Asian Diaspora* on South Asian Diasporas in Canada.

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In May 2011 over 60 scholars gathered in Canada for a conference on; 'Assessing the complexities of South Asian Migration'.[1] This special issue of *South Asian Diaspora* on South Asian diasporas in Canada emerges from this event, and contains papers by scholars from multiple disciplines drawing upon various research methods and theoretical frameworks. As a collection the papers demonstrate the mature and evolving nature of research on Canada's various South Asian immigrant communities (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and the Maldives). This geographical diversity comprises what is termed 'South Asia', according to this journal's aims and scopes at least, but there are several other territories commonly captured by the term 'South Asia'. The diversity, and problematic construction, of the categorization 'South Asian' in Canada is explicitly examined in the first two papers by Sandeep Agrawal and Sutama Ghosh. Subsequent papers explore particular subsets of this diasporic community that are framed by national (mostly Indian) and other identity markers. Either implicitly or explicitly each paper considers identity not as fixed, but intersectional, and shaped through a recursive exchange between family, home, community, economy and state.

Before introducing the papers in this collection, let us first begin with an official version of the South Asian community in Canada using various Statistics Canada reports. Such formal efforts to define *a* South Asian community often rely on a confusing array of ethnic, linguistic as well as national markers.[2] In 2006 Canadians of South Asian background represented the largest visible minority group nationally at 1.3 million people, or about 4% of Canada's total national population.[3] At the metropolitan scale South Asians represented 11% of Toronto's and 8% of Vancouver's population in 2006 (Lindsay 2007). In 2001 South Asian Canadians were fairly equally divided between Hindu, Muslim and Sikh religious adherence, but linguistically English and Punjabi, followed by Tamil, were the most common mother tongue or language spoken at home (Tran etal 2005, 23). While 88% of South Asian Canadians stated they had a strong sense of belonging to Canada (higher than any other visible minority group) (Tran etal 2005), over a third indicated they had experienced discrimination (Lindsay 2007, 16). Within the

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[2] For example Lindsay's (2007, 8) report on South Asian Canadians states: "This profile is based on people who reported an ancestry that originates in South Asia, including those reporting their origin as at least one of Bangladeshi, Bengali, East Indian, Goan, Gujarati, Kashmiri, Pakistani, Punjabi, Nepali, Sinhalese, Sri Lankan, Tamil, or South Asian". Another report based on official data (Tran *etal* 2005, 21) included as South Asian those "with Bangladeshi, Bengali, East Indian, Goan, Gujarati, Hindu, Ismaili, Kashmiri, Nepali, Pakistani, Punjabi, Sikh, Sinhalese, South Asian, Sri Lankan and Tamil ancestry. South Asians may have been born in Canada, on the Indian sub-continent, in the Caribbean, in Africa, in Great Britain or elsewhere."

[3] Statistics Canada, "Canada at a glance 2012" http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/12-581-x/2012000/pop-eng.htm#c03

South Asian community India (47%), Sri Lanka (13%) and Pakistan (11%) are the top countries of birth, this compares to 61%, 2% and 7% for the same national groups before 1971 (Tran etal 2005). The dominance of Indian nationals in the South Asian diaspora in Canada is clearly evident, and this overrepresentation is also reflected in the papers in this special issue. While South Asian diasporas in Canada are still overly Indian in composition, there has been diversification over the last 50 years, driven in part by changes in Canada's immigration policy and external geopolitical events.

　　The first paper by Sandeep Agrawal explores the diversity of economic experiences South Asian-Canadians face. He suggests that of all South Asian sub-groups Bangladeshis and Pakistanis have the least returns to their human capital post migration, and that this may point to religious discrimination. His paper suggests that policy makers and researchers have to be more attuned to such distinctive economic experiences, but he also implies the need to examine how immigration policy constructs the diaspora, particularly in terms of those who enter via targeted labour market streams such as the Provincial Nominee Program. Agrawal's paper indicates the need for further research that explicitly highlights how Canada's changing immigration policies (such as increased selectivity and temporariness) shape South Asian immigration flows.

　　The second paper by Sutama Ghosh also focuses on the broader South Asian Canadian community, but theoretically challenges the very term 'South Asian'. Ghosh argues that the colonial *territorial* construction of South Asia has become *racialized* in Canada, and this is most evident in census data collection methods. Ghosh offers us some insight into this terminology's transmission from a place to a race based articulation based on interviews with immigrants in Toronto. The complex issues addressed in Ghosh's paper encourage us to consider how the use of the term 'South Asian' might vary between different national, religious, regional, linguistic and class based groups. Moving beyond critical interrogation of the term, we might ask ourselves if there is any strategic value to using South Asian as a collective identifier. Might it be used to forge some kind of post-national social justice collective that escapes territorial, xenophobic and political conflict rooted within the sub-continent itself? These questions notwithstanding, these two papers open the special issue by highlighting the diversity of experiences captured under the category 'South Asian'. Using different tools of theory and method they both encourage us to be mindful of the social and spatial complexities embedded in what is considered the 'South Asian' diaspora in Canada.

　　The nature of this diversity is nowhere more evident than in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), one of the most ethno-culturally diverse metropolitan regions in the world. It is no longer technically correct to refer to ethnic *minorities* in the GTA, since in many areas visible minorities are the ethnic majority (Javed and Keung 2008). These demographic transformations are already being politically exploited; as the recent Conservative government's seemingly successful strategy of courting the 'ethnic vote' during the 2011 election suggests (Shane 2011). It even appears to now have transatlantic resonance as the Conservative Party in the UK explores it replication (Boswell 2012). These trends alone demonstrate the importance of understanding in finer detail the socio-cultural and political shifts that are underway in Canada's urban centres. Kataure and Walton-Roberts address this need by focusing on generational change and residential location in Brampton, one of the larger suburban communities in the GTA that is home to a large South Asian, or specifically Indian Punjabi Canadian community. Based on phone

surveys with second generation South Asians, the authors reveal that life course residential settlement models only partially fit with this specific populations' residential location intentions. The experiences and intentions of second generation immigrant communities must be explored if we are to understand current and future changes underway in Canada's largest and fastest growing suburban and urban regions.

The next paper highlights another important and relatively under explored generational issue, that of the social reproduction role taken on by grandmothers in immigrant families. The historical emergence of a large Punjabi-Canadian community formed through family sponsorship is critically assessed by Pramila Aggarwal and Tania Das Gupta through the trope of grandmothering. While the context is specific to Indian immigration to Canada, their engagement with literature on care and neoliberalism permits comparison with other national/cultural examples of transnational mothering and the global care chain. Their paper demonstrates that grandmothering allows new immigrant families to cope with the precarious and difficult working conditions they face in Canada. Their broad conceptualization offers a forceful argument from both a culturally specific (Punjabi-Canadian) as well as structural (immigrant labour market) context. Canada's recently announced moratorium on parental sponsorship restricts this family reunification process, but the planned introduction of multiple entry 'super visas' that allow extended visits, but with no access to health care and social benefits, enables a privatized system of transnational intergenerational care. This policy trend highlights one means by which responsibilization masks abandonment of the immigrant family (Clarke 2005) through the privatization of social reproduction and intergenerational care.

Lina Samuel continues the focus on social reproduction and gender relations within the diaspora by focusing on changing marriage practices for Canadians from south India. She argues that women are rejecting some elements of marriage (dowry), while demonstrating variable acceptance of others (arranged introductions / marriages). Samuel suggests that these cultural practices are co-produced through the tensions created by diverse cultural and generational traditions. Marriage practices allow us to examine specific transcultural transformations within the diaspora; it provides a realm of study for critiquing transnational forms of patriarchy, but also to carefully examine how the state assists in constructing the conditions under which the diaspora reproduces itself.

Preet Kaur Virdi continues this assessment of sites of tension immigrant women face as they access rights and resources by examining Sikh immigrant women's understanding of and adherence to *izzat* (honour), and how this intersects with access to Canadian legal systems. Virdi's focus on patriarchal practices surrounding *izzat* suggests that immigrant women interpret its relevance to their life in various ways, some of which entail their active reproduction of *izzat's* significance for themselves and their families. Her paper illustrates how women overwhelmingly carry this burden of family honour, but they can also rationalize its role and necessity in their life. *Izzat* thus operates as a type of culturally constructed gender performativity that mediates internal and external patriarchal structures. Both Virdi and Samuel's papers explore the diaspora as a complex transnational site for the reproduction and contestation of gendered subjectivities and relations of power. *Izzat* is a complicated cultural phenomenon, but sometimes it is used as an explanation that masks powerful structural factors. Virdi's assessment of *izzat's* intersection with Canadian law indicates how we might escape culturalist stereotyping, but without invoking vacuous cultural relativism.

Maitra's focus on female immigrant entrepreneurs also considers how being 'in diaspora' changes women's subjectivities. Maitra's paper examines the experiences of South Asian immigrant women who face classic blocked mobility in their settlement experience. Her interviews reveal how some women developed collective approaches to advance their self-employment efforts—such as working together and sharing domestic tasks. These strategies are important to explore in more detail; are they practices carried over from pre-migration contexts, or are they new responses to the challenges of being an immigrant in Canada? Maitra connects with other papers in this special issue by examining diverse and intersecting forms of patriarchy and neoliberalism in Canada, but she also adds detail to the economic experiences Agarwal's quantitative analysis presents.

The final paper in this collection by Krishnamurti highlights elements of the political construction of a different part of the South Asian diaspora in Canada. Focusing on Sri Lankan Tamils, she reveals the discursive means by which a community is defined in the Canadian political and popular imagination. Her paper indicates the internal heterogeneity masked by the generalism of the term 'South Asia' diaspora. She also explicitly exposes the role of government policy and media discourse in constructing the figure of the 'deserving immigrant', as well as the supposed hardening of Canadian attitudes toward asylum seekers. In some ways her paper speaks to Ghosh's interest in 'mainstream' construction of the South Asian diaspora. However, this focus on differences in the class of immigrant, specifically asylum seekers, raises a question not yet addresses in work on the South Asian diaspora—how do difference classes of immigrant conceptualize each other, and how does the discourse of the 'deserving immigrant' inform such interpretations? Based on recent Canadian Conservative political success in wooing certain immigrant communities, we might want to ask uncomfortable questions about who actually comprises the Canadian community that is hardening its attitude against asylum seekers in Canada? Krishnamurti thus takes us back to the first two papers of this collection, in that socio-cultural differences within the South Asian diaspora must be assessed, and this is sometimes an uncomfortable place for the immigration researcher to position themselves. For example both Ghosh and Agrawal comment on religious differences between South Asian Muslims and Non Muslims. Canadian Research on the South Asia 'community' must critically assess these divisions by placing them within the political context of current immigration policy change and the resultant processes of identity construction, belonging and exclusion.

There are clear absences in this special issue that merit some comment. The dominant heterosexual nature of family formation is clearly evident in the papers of this collection, but some attention to querying South Asian diasporas is an important field of critical transnational/ diasporic theorizing that has seen relatively little engagement in Canada (see Shah 1991 for an early exception). There is also little explicit consideration of the experiences of twice or thrice migrants in Canada; those of Indian origin whose family histories of migration from India to East Africa and/or the UK have contributed to the formation of distinctive migrant subjectivities (Bhachu 1985). These noted absences (and there are of course more), reinforce the argument that any analysis of South Asian Diasporas in Canada is, and must continue to become, more attentive to the socio-cultural, economic and political heterogeneity of such social formations; as well as the regulatory forces that variably structure their settlement experiences and subjectivities.

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