

# **CASTE AND VIEWS TOWARD MARRIAGE AMONG TWO SIKH GENERATIONS IN GREATER VANCOUVER, CANADA**

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By

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## ABSTRACT

My research explores the relevance of caste in marriage and how the importance one places on caste is influenced by intersections of age, gender and level of education. Focusing on the Sikh population in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, I examine how the Sikh religion influences perceptions of marriage in relation to the caste system. I ask about attitudes toward marriage among a sample of married and unmarried people. The Sikh religion was formed to promote a particular vision of equality and I contend that this foundation may have shifted due to the organizing cultural framework of the caste system in India at that time. Over the years the caste system became a part of Sikhism but it is a system that creates a divide amongst people. If caste is still of central importance to people's marriage, my research lays the foundation for asking, *Why and how does caste still matter in modern times and to the Sikhs, particularly those in the diaspora?* In this study, 20 interviews were conducted of Canadian born Sikh children (aged 22-30) and Sikh immigrant parents (with children aged 22-30). Based on these interviews, three themes emerged: (1) The way that Sikhism is practiced and interpreted differs from the teachings of the religion (2) Caste is not always taught but is a concept that can be socially engrained and transmitted intergenerationally (3) Conversations of caste arise around discussions of partnering and marriage, but beliefs concerning the caste system vary from family to family. Given that there is a large Sikh immigrant population in Canada that has Canadian-born Sikh children, I intend for this study to contribute to knowledge development in the field and to shed light on the struggles or conflict that Canadian-born Sikh children may face as they contemplate marriage.

**Keywords:** Sikh; caste; marriage; intergenerational; diaspora; couple formation

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Dedicated to my mom and dad.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Marriage is a milestone in an individual's life; it is a union between two people and their families. Practices around marriage are important for the retention and transformation of cultural practices in migrant identities within the diaspora (Samuel, 2013, p. 91). Migrant's attitudes towards marriage are related to their experience of moving to Canada and adapting to the Canadian society and culture (Samuel, 2013, p. 103). In society, social norms are a guide to how a member should behave but these social norms can clash and give rise to tensions when the members are trapped between two different cultures. My thesis aims to explore the relevance of caste in diasporan Sikh marriage today, and how one's generation, gender and level of education influence the importance one places on caste in the context of marriage. The two generations that I consider are first-generation immigrant parents and their second-generation Canadian-born children. My research is specific to Sikhs because it aims to understand what kind of impact the Sikh religion has on perceptions and practices of marriage and the caste system. I am focusing on both because I believe views and opinions of marriage in relation to the caste system will affect who will be considered a suitable potential marriage partner for the younger Canadian-born generation (Dhar, 2013, p. 2). I conduct my research within a particular geographical location: the Lower Mainland in British Columbia. I chose this location because according to statistics by Statistics Canada (2016) there is a visibly large Sikh population in this area. This context is helpful because I believe the larger the population, the more diverse my participants will be. Also, in this case, having a large Sikh population can help to illuminate whether being an immigrant and living in a place with lots of similar immigrant people affects the way one assimilates into their current society as compared to living in a more western and diverse society. "The ways in which diasporic identities are constructed is dependent upon how 'traditional' culture is incorporated and how the group itself is inserted into the country of settlement" (Samuel, 2010, p. 95). Being around similar people can either help to better integrate them into the new culture, or it can deter assimilation because one is comfortable with the people around them and they may feel that they are not required to change.

A discussion of relevant theoretical frameworks is important to inform the present study. Discussing cultural identity amongst Sikh diasporic communities is important in an attempt to

negotiate and maintain certain cultural practices, which can be central to their identity in Canada (Samuel, 2010, p. 97). Netting (2011) uses the modernization-assimilation model to study how young Indo-Canadians negotiate between the possibilities of arranged marriages and love marriages, and how their discussions and decisions bring about cultural change. I chose this theory as a framework for my work because it explains changes in Indian families living in North America. The theory also helps one to understand possible intergenerational conflict that may occur in Indian households when the topic of marriage comes up. It gives insight into how first and especially second-generation immigrants can draw on different, sometimes contradictory cultural and value systems depending on the needs of the situation. This links to intersectionality theory which provides an understanding to how “individuals are not only limited by [the] structures of power, but further how resistance is articulated through life choices” (Samuel, 2010, p. 96). Structures of power can be familial, religious, and cultural. The theory argues that identities are attached to individuals but they are also affected by structures of power, which can confuse and complicate their daily lives (Samuel, 2010, p. 97-98). In addition, the writings of Stuart Hall also guide the discussion of diasporic identities by stating that cultural identity is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as ‘being’ (Samuel, 2010, p. 98). Migrant identity is always changing and susceptible to social forces and that’s why “identity and identification reflect multiple points of positioning and multiple loyalties” (Samuel, 2010, p. 98). For example, this can be evident when observing differences between how one speaks, including the language and ways of addressing friends and coworkers vs. family members.

In traditional rural India, shared values were of great importance and reflected in the traditional family system (Netting, 2001, p. 129). People used to live in multigenerational households where the elders would guide the children regarding religion, occupation and an arranged marriage (Netting, 2001, p. 129). However, once the traditional economy started to change these old values tended to weaken and children began to make their own life decisions (Inkeles & Smith, 1974; Nolan & Lenski, 1999). Over time families slowly start to lose control over their children. Based on the assimilation theory, this change takes place faster when immigrants move to modern North America (Driedger, 1989). Netting states, “Adults may hold onto old beliefs, but children quickly adapt to the standards of their new surroundings” (2001, p. 130). This may help explain the differences in how immigrants of different generations relate to caste and its

importance when it comes to marriage.

Netting's (2001) study built as a relevant source for my current research because she researched love and arranged marriages amongst Indo-Canadian youth in BC. Nayar (2004) and her study of the Sikh diaspora is also pertinent because she discusses intergenerational communication patterns in Vancouver, Canada. I hope that my study will contribute to knowledge development in the field and bring up for discussion the topic and the struggles or conflict that Canadian-born Sikh children may face as they contemplate marriage, or the tensions they may have faced during their marriage. They may have these struggles or conflicts, as they are nervous to tell their parents about a potential spouse because he/she is of a different caste. Or they may have to deal with the backlash that they receive after telling them.

My research lays the foundation for asking, why and how do ideas and practices of caste across two generations still matter in modern times? Individuals may have a tendency to hold onto caste as a marker of distinction (Casier, et. al., 2013, p. 464), i.e., an “us vs. them” differentiation; caste may also be a source of unity among people who identify with the same caste (Kumar, 2012, p. 225). This begs the question of whether, in certain social contexts—namely marriage—people tend to feel more inclined to homogamy and endogamy. The underlying themes that I explore include understanding why and under what circumstances people are holding onto the importance of caste as a social marker in the context of marriage—in terms of married people living out marriage, unmarried people thinking ahead toward marriage, and young people who have recently gone through the process of choosing a marriage partner.

The following is an outline of how this thesis is presented in the following chapters. The chapter after the introduction and literature review is the research methods section which highlights how the research was conducted, including the dependent and independent variables, and the limitations of the research method employed. It then discusses who the participants are, how they were recruited and the way data was gathered and analyzed. My research is qualitative, giving me in-depth data, but limited in its ability to be generalized. In terms of data analysis, I use the data from the interviews to test my hypothesis that people with lower levels of education

and who are older in age are more likely to place higher value on the caste system in relation to marriage, than people who are more educated and younger.

The thesis then goes into the similarities and differences between the teachings of Sikhism and its practice, as illustrated by the data analysis. In this section, I delve deeper into how the way Sikhism is practiced and interpreted often differs from the teachings of the religion itself, as evident in scriptures. For one, there is a unanimous agreement amongst participants regarding caste and that it goes against the principles of equality and fairness that are central to Sikhism. In this way, the dissonance between what Sikhism preaches and what Sikhs practice is brought to light. We see this particularly with participants from the older generation, who often acknowledge that caste does not exist in Sikhism yet they still follow some aspects of it, especially as it pertains to marriage. On the other hand, the younger generation participants tended to emphasize that equality is a big part of the Sikh religion and are more likely to question their elders as to why caste still matters to them.

Next the thesis discusses the significance of caste in relation to marriage and honor. It appears that conversations of caste arose particularly around the discussion of potential partners and marriage. This must be validated by the observation that beliefs concerning the caste system vary from family to family, and are influenced by one's upbringing as well as socialization beyond the private domain. Although this is not openly stated, it appears that the older generation was expected to marry within one's own caste and to adhere to this firmly. They likely had the impression that this was not up for debate and not fulfilling the expectation of marrying within one's caste may have serious consequences, including ostracization from society and possibly family as well. For the older generation, caste seems to function as a durable cultural framework for organizing their thoughts and behaviors, and not an adaptable structure that can be moulded for changing times and ideologies (Roy, 2011, p. 93). In contrast, for the younger generation, many participants expressed struggling with pleasing their parents, who may have the expectation that their children, like them, will marry within the same caste. Participants also reinforce that equality, including along the lines of gender, is an important principle of the Sikh religion. This stands in contrast to the literature which shows caste affects women more

acutely than men and women's experiences of having to uphold the burden of honor is not only for themselves, but also for entire families (Viridi, 2012, p. 112).

My research further suggests that access to education and opportunities are important factors in how open minded one is. Participants of the younger generation, having been educated in Canada and often raised here, are critical of buying into the caste system without questioning, and tend to have views that differ from the older generation in this regard. The younger generation is known to challenge traditions, especially around marriage, which can mean that they have the ability to make meaningful changes amongst migrants (Samuel, 2013, p. 103). Studies such as mine assist in understanding these changes and how they affect the older and younger generations.

This is followed by a discussion of caste and its interaction with immigration, globalization and mass media. Here we see that caste is not always taught but is often a concept that becomes almost ingrained and intuitively known, if not practiced. Even within the diaspora, people continue holding onto the caste system and the way it is practiced in India in principle, even if this is not always enacted. For instance, people still ask each other about what caste they belong to, perhaps as a means of identifying each other. Even in cases where the younger generation might not be taught about the caste system at home, from immediate or extended family, they are still aware of it due to exposure in other environments, such as through school, friends, and forms of mass media and social media, newspapers and music videos.

This is followed by an exploration of the different experiences of caste that participants shared. A topic that comes up across some participants is the ways in which different forms of media reinforce the concept of caste; for example, Punjabi songs that highlight *jatts* being a superior caste. This leads into the conversation about caste and class and how belonging to a certain caste may be associated with more power and privilege than other castes. In attempting to understand caste today, participants note that perhaps caste served a purpose and thus had reason to exist at some point in the past, but that it has no relevance today.

All of the above then leads me to return to my research question to consider how the findings address it. Overall, since it is a multi-layered research question, this study provides useful insight into many complex ideas when one considers caste and its importance. Following a description and analysis of the findings, I wrap up the conclusion with a brief summary of findings and considerations for future research. It appears that the reason that the caste system still seems to exist outside of India is because of the extensive immigration of Sikhs from India to Canada who have not assimilated fully to their new communities (Nayar, 2004, p. 78-79). They do not feel the need to adapt or assimilate because they immigrate into a society, such as the greater Vancouver area that is highly populated with other Sikh immigrants. Caste is also symbolically powerful and provides meaning and structure to thinking about and living out marriage, which can be important for Sikh immigrants (Samuel, 2010, p. 95). They were raised with these values and this is how they know the marriage process to exist.

I would like to suggest that my research is innovative to the field of generational and religious diaspora studies. This project focuses mainly on caste and marriage. It focuses on views and beliefs of the Sikh religion and how caste is a concept that still gets intertwined with the religion regardless of the religion's teachings. During immigration, assimilation and integration or lack of may not assist in shedding these views about caste, especially in relation to marriage. This project lends a hand in breaking down these concepts to better understand them. My research and research question, unlike previous projects on caste and marriage, are a collaboration of multiple concepts: Sikh religion, marriage, caste, diaspora, and generations. Caste and marriage have not exclusively been studied together in a research project, especially with focus on two different generations. This project helps to provide an understanding of the first generation's views of the caste system and how that affects the second-generation Canadian born children – a big effect is on the concept of marriage and decision making of a potential partner.

In the past two years, India has been one of the top countries of recent immigration to Canada, representing 12% of Canada's recent immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2016) and so inquiring about the South Asian diaspora "is an important field of critical transnational/diasporic theorizing that has seen relatively little engagement in Canada" (Walton-Roberts, 2013, p. 4). Since marriage practices and gender roles are an integral part of the immigrant experience and

how their identities are constructed across social boundaries, my research will elaborate on how they impact one another (Samuel, 2010, p. 95). Tensions between the younger generation wanting to address (and to a certain extent) respect their parents' concerns while having power and autonomy of their own. I anticipate that my research will assist in filling the gap of some of the absences in any studies of the South Asian diaspora where they are not being more attentive to the forces that structure their settlement experiences and subjectivities (Walton-Roberts, 2013, p. 4). Samuel sums up the importance of studying this topic when she states, "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" (Walton-Roberts, 2013, p. 3). The complexity of studying marriage, caste and religion within the diaspora is that immigrant cultural retention and identity construction relies on multiple and multi-directional forces (Samuel, 2010, p. 96). My thesis can serve to better understand this complexity and address the struggles and apprehensions that the first and second-generation of the Sikh diaspora may experience.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

Religious teachings and practices within any given religion vary widely. We need to account for discrepancies between religious ideals and doctrines and the practiced versions of these beliefs, forms and practices that also constitute religion and religious identities. This highlights the intricacies inherent in a research topic that focuses on religion. Research suggests that even as religion continues to be a central aspect of collective identity, religious practices and beliefs do change and evolve (Rai & Sankaran, 2011, p. 5). The varying environments that diasporic communities find themselves in make it likely that members of religious groups adapt their religious practices and beliefs in response to external factors (Rai & Sankaran, 2011, p. 8). Nonetheless, in practice we do see that caste continues to play a central role in the way Indian society is structured in the motherland and in diaspora (Scott, 2014).

In light of the continuously changing practices that constitute religion, it is no wonder that religion gets messy. Since religious texts are sources of religious teachings, they require continuous interpretation in order to comprehend them. This is because meanings revolutionize according to different socio-historical conflicts as well as contexts that shape the interpreters' worldviews (Rai & Sankaran, 2011, p. 9). The social location of interpreters, their notions and experiences of class, gender, place of origin, caste and sect, disrupt any presumption of a homogeneous Sikh discourse (Rai & Sankaran, 2011, p. 9; Roy, 2011, p. 90).

### **2.1 Caste**

The caste system functions as a hierarchy-based social stratification system; it ranks individuals into categories that are associated with particular beliefs and values. The caste system depends on four dimensions to exist; birth and that this determines profession, marriage within one's own caste, the idea that individuals need to stay segregated because some are pure and other polluted in relation to each other, and finally, cultural systems that propagate this sense of distance and the importance of hierarchy maintenance (Smith, 2008).

The caste system divides the entire society into a large but finite number of hereditary groups that are differentiated and connected by separation, division of labor, and hierarchy. *Varna* and



*jati* are two terms commonly used in literature on caste; the former denotes the four categories into which society was divided according to *Manusmriti*, an ancient Brahmin text. The *varnas* are “*brahmana* (priest), *kshatriya* (warrior), *vaisya* (trader), and *sudra* (peasant)” (Smith, 2008). Afterwards, a fifth classification was added, the “untouchables”, alternatively called *harijans* or *dalits*, who are considered to be out of the caste system (Smith, 2008). On the other hand, *jati* is the term used for hereditary groups that members from a profession must limit themselves to, when choosing a marital partner. It is worth noting that there are many different *jatis* and the order in which they are stratified differs from place to place (Smith, 2008).

While the origin of *jati* is tied to the structure of *varnas*, *jati* defines the social status once is accorded, based on their birth and family line, even though it was initially more closely associated with profession. It is easy to see that *jati* and *varna* intersect at multiple points and in some cases, have varied from their original classification scheme (Bowker, 2000). “The caste system is one of the most commented upon features of the Indian society. It is an ancient historical legacy linked closely with Hinduism that is still dominant” (Dhar, 2013, p. 2). Even though the caste system was initially a Hindu system, it has influenced other religions (Samuel, 2010, p. 99).

### **2.1.1 History of caste**

The term caste comes from ‘casta’, which means pure in Portuguese (Johnson, 2009). The word has come to be associated largely with Indian society. In Sanskrit, the accurate description is denoted by *varna* or by *jati*, and both terms are described above. While *varna* adheres to the ideal hierarchy established by Brahmanism, *jati* denotes the multi-faceted actuality that includes not only castes, but also divisions within each caste (Johnson, 2009). These divisions arose during the settlement of early Aryans in Northern India; Rg Veda states that the divisions “were created by the gods from the body of Purusa, the first man” (Bowker, 2000).

To a large extent research states that it is difficult to trace the exact origin of the caste system. Historically, however, it is believed that around 1500 BC the Aryans came to India and began the caste system (Deshpande, 2010). There are many theories behind the genesis of the Indian caste system, some religious and others biological. As described above, the caste system is a

classification of people into four hierarchically ranked castes called *varnas*: *Brahmans*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas* and the *Shudras*. While some consider the fifth category mentioned above, of the “untouchables” as part of caste, others contextualize this only within the Sudra domain of clean vs. unclean (Bowker, 2000).

[The *varnas*] are classified according to occupation and determine access to wealth, power, and privilege. The *Brahmans*, usually priests and scholars, are at the top. Next are the *Kshatriyas*, or political rulers and soldiers. They are followed by the *Vaishyas*, or merchants, and the fourth are the *Shudras*, who are usually laborers, peasants, artisans, and servants. At the very bottom are those considered the untouchables. These individuals perform occupations that are considered unclean and polluting, such as scavenging and skinning dead animals and are considered outcastes. They are not considered to be included in the ranked castes (Deshpande, 2010, p. 3).

Given that *varna* implies color, the caste system can be seen as favoring the fairer Aryan conquerors from the north, over darker indigenous residents (Bowker, 2000). Reiterating the point made earlier, each *varna* contains myriad *jati* that constitute fairly are small endogamous groups, defined by a profession and often hailing from a particular locality. Caste has been used as a catch-call for both *varna* and *jati*, suggesting that perhaps something is lost in translation (Scott, 2014). While *varna* categories offer values to adherents, *jati* serves to organize the system functionally. In terms of mobility, one may mimic the ways of those belonging to a higher *varna*, and this can lead to promotion within, but not between *varnas*. This is known as Sanskritization (Scott, 2014). In other words, people are born into a certain caste and thus become members by birth. They then acquire the appropriate occupation according to their *jati* (Deshpande, 2010, p. 3). As Deshpande (2010) states, “there were, and still are, rules that are laid down concerning appropriate occupational pursuit, appropriate behavior within and between castes, as well as rules related to marriage” (p. 4).

The Aryans came from southern Europe and Northern Asia. “Unfortunately, the Aryans completely disregarded indigenous local cultures and began conquering regions all over Northern India” (Deshpande, 2010, p. 19). They had a particular standard of social ordering called *Varna Vyavastha*, which was based on the four hierarchical divisions of function in society: religious and educational functions, military and political functions, economic functions, and menial functions (Velassery, 2005, p. 2).

Another validation of the caste system comes from the philosophy of Karma. A popular understanding of the reasoning behind Karma is that in their past life, people of the lower castes had bad Karma and they only have themselves to blame for their troubles (Deshpande, 2010, p. 14). One of the main beliefs in Hinduism is that the consequences of your decisions in your past life determine your present state. Due to this, reincarnation was put forth as an idea by the Aryans to substantiate the oppressive behavior that was imposed on the natives and to ensure that people would not rise up against the system. Reincarnation supports caste oppression because it justifies injustice and suppresses hope for progress from this life to a next life (Deshpande, 2010, p. 14). Rising (or falling) between *varnas* is only possible through rebirth; adhering to the caste system can reward one with higher karma and hence a higher *varna*, with non-adherence leading to the opposite (Scott, 2014).

One of the most essential features of India's social structure is the division of castes. In Hindu society, caste divisions play an important part in both, social interactions and in the ideal system of values as proposed by religion. Not only does caste divide people into ascribed categories, but it also defines rules of acceptable behavior; across castes, individuals are expected to interact with those of other castes in a more reserved or more subservient manner, depending on where one falls in the hierarchy. The notion of pollution and purity is the basis for caste-based segregation. This influences practices of preparing and consuming food, rules around marriage and even social interaction. This spatial segregation on the basis of caste is a given feature of the system, one that is governed by a caste court (Scott, 2014). Those belonging to castes higher up the ladder may expect to be treated as figures of authority in comparison to those who are on the lower rungs. Of course, another ideal value proposed by the caste system is to propagate its maintenance by marrying within one's caste. Each caste is given a particular function that is integral to society as a whole (Johnson, 2009). In practice, we see that members of the influential upper castes can enforce adherence to caste in their villages in much of present-day rural India (Smith, 2008).

Within each caste, there has also historically been the expectation to adhere to the career choices that one's caste is associated with; not only does this limit professional options but can also hinder social mobility, which is often influenced by one's occupation. As Louis Dumont argues,

the caste system relies on ideas of purity and impurity to maintain itself (Johnson, 2009). The system serves to protect the perceived inherent purity, and hence, superiority of the Brahmins. It does so by delegating impure tasks, like handling corpses, laundering as well as barbering to lower castes. Members of lower castes, particularly the “untouchables” as being beyond the realm of caste and yet essential to its very existence, due to their stark contract with Brahmins (Johnson, 2009). Many from this *dalit* or “untouchable” caste continue to be landless, with only their work to make a living off of (Smith, 2008). The segregation of labour is evident for both men and women, with women from lower castes often relegated to disposing waste, midwifery and washing dirty laundry. They also provide gendered services such as hair styling (Smith, 2008). Like for their male counterparts who frequently work as sweepers and scavengers, caste and class intersect for these women, with many in the tribal regions engaging in pottery, weaving and preservation of food (Smith, 2008).

These professional demarcations serve to reinforce the caste system and vice versa, as lower castes bear the pollution of excretion, other bodily functions and even death for those above them (Johnson, 2009). Their occupational options are limited because they considered impure by birth. In other words, there can be no purification by means of engaging in different forms of work; being born into it, the only way they can escape their caste is through death. Coming full circle, since impurity is inherent, changing work does not change the impurity a caste is accorded and the pollution, or lack thereof, it is associated with (Johnson, 2009). People of different castes are expected to act differently and to have different values and ideals (Béteille, 1965, Kumar, 2012). Hinduism is “as much of a social system as a religion...Its social framework has from very early times been the caste system, and this has...become...increasingly identified as Hinduism as such” (Smith, 1994, p. 9). The sense of belonging derived from one’s religious community serves to strengthen the interlinkages between religion and society at large. Integral to many religious belief systems are rituals that bring people together, reinforcing a sense of community within fellow believers. Thus religious practices often have a strong social aspect to them; this is further evident in that much socializing tends to happen at religious events in Hinduism and beyond.

The caste system became more complicated to maintain with the arrival of the British in the 1850s and the colonization of the nation up until 1947, when it gained independence. The British, as Christians, did not have much understanding of, or compassion for the Hindu institutions. They also brought their own traditional form of government with them (Ghurye, 1969, p. 270). And yet, The British exploited caste identity for their own needs, pitting castes against each other more intensely than before. Following independence in 1947, the Indian government is trying to wear down caste barriers and enhance access to various opportunities for the “untouchables”, now termed *dalit* (Scott, 2014).

The belief in the caste system is internalized through socialization within immediate and extended family life, through neighbors, friends in schools, workplaces and other public spaces as well as through forms of government and mass media. Some theories propose the caste system as merely an occupation-based classification that is not harmful? Many others attribute the strengthening of the caste system as a negative social force to British colonization. This latter position suggests that during the colonization period, the caste system was used as a tool to further a divide-and-conquer way of thinking. Hardening divisions along the lines of caste meant that people could be divided internally, making it more difficult to unite over a singular focus, such as challenging colonialism.

### **2.1.2 Caste bleed-through into Sikhism**

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the caste system began as part of the Hindu religion but has influenced other religions as well. “The Hindu Sikh boundaries appear to have been particularly permeable until the formal organization of Sikh religious practice by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699 with the formation of the Khalsa” (Roy, 2011, p. 92). Despite the fact that Sikhism claims equality for all as a central principle of the faith, this permeability between the two religions meant that caste came to be incorporated into Sikhism. As the more established religion, Hinduism influenced Sikhism in its early days, Sikhism adopted practices and beliefs from Hinduism. These practices and beliefs, including the caste system, have since then come to be closely associated with the Sikh religion, having been passed down from generation to generation. As with other religions, there was a wide gap between the “doctrinal principles and social practice” (Puri, 2003, p. 2693) of Sikhs. The development of the Sikh community

progressed through “complex dynamics of interaction among religious principles, tribal cultural patterns of the dominant caste of *jats* and their power interests” (Puri, 2003, p. 2693). This caused the caste system to ‘migrate’ into Sikhism so a Sikh caste hierarchy could be created, different from yet comparable to the Hindu caste system (Puri, 2003, p. 2693).

### **2.1.3 Difference between caste and class in Hinduism**

Differentiating between class and caste is integral to my research. These terms are sometimes interrelated in both Hinduism and Sikhism and as early as the 18<sup>th</sup> century caste has been associated with class consciousness (Kumar, 2012, p. 216). Yet, it is important to understand that these are two different forms of social stratification. This distinction is important in sociology because, “Castes...are a special form of social classes which in tendency at least are present in every society. Caste differ from social classes, however, in that they have emerged into social consciousness to the point that custom and law attempt their rigid and permanent separation from one another” (Cox, 1944, p. 139). So if we examine these situations more closely, we should recognize that the structure of a class is categorically different from that of the caste.

There are overlaps between the two; both caste and class work within a system of hierarchy. Both influence the life chances one has in terms of education, occupation, access to wealth and opportunities and more; however one is ascribed (i.e. caste) while the other can be achieved (i.e. class). However both impact individuals’ and families’ lives in a set way; the higher up the ladder of caste or class one is, the more privileged one is likely to be, keeping all other factors the same. Delving more deeply into the definition of class, here it refers to the socioeconomic status one belongs to; this is commonly loosely categorized as lower class, middle class, upper middle class and upper class. The purpose of mentioning these categories is not so much to offer definitions of each, but to highlight the hierarchical nature of class, not unlike the caste system. Caste comes from religion and culture even though it is based on occupation; class is based on economic factors and then social factors rather than religious ones (Kumar, 2012). However, since occupation can still be based according to your caste, it can affect your class; in the diaspora this is not the case. While this upward class mobility is limited by practical constraints of education, place of residence and employment and the formal and informal networks that are

built in these domains, class nevertheless does allow for individuals to transcend these boundaries and move from a lower class to a higher one, and vice versa.

Class hinges upon or is determined by, perhaps in a limited manner, the notion of achievement of status, rather than its ascription. By contrast, caste in its purest form is an entirely inherited status; it does not allow for any upward social mobility simply because “you are born into it” and, theoretically, that is where you are meant to stay. While there are various definitions of caste presented, one such definition that may suffice for our purposes is that of caste as “a small and named group of persons characterized by marriage within a group, hereditary membership, and specific style of life such as... a particular occupation” (Dhar, 2013, p. 3). According to Brahmin teachings, as evident in the *varna* classification method, Indian society is divided into a complementary hierarchy wherein each caste performs specific duties to keep the system, and society, as a whole up and running (Johnson, 2009).

According to some scholars, caste as a social construct has undergone various changes. One such change, mentioned earlier as well, termed Sanskritization<sup>1</sup> by M. N. Srinivas, denotes the possibility that a lower caste group can move up the ladder. In doing so, Srinivas suggests that the social ramifications of caste are malleable and that caste itself may not be as rigidly limited by notions of purity and pollution, as we may believe (Kumar, 2012, p. 215). Therefore, academic scholarship has long challenged the idea that caste is an unchanging system. A more basic caste consciousness is very widespread in South Asian society and, because it is perhaps the only way most Indians understand how social status is derived, it retains its symbolic importance (Kumar, 2012, p. 225). It is this consciousness that seems to encourage social groups and individuals to use caste as criteria for marriage for their children.

#### **2.1.4 Caste today**

It is commonly accepted in academic circles that caste divisions are unique to Indian society and have stayed fairly consistent over the years. In more recent times, scholars have come to believe

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<sup>1</sup> “Sanskritization is a particular form of social change found in India. It denotes the process by which castes placed lower in the caste hierarchy seek upward mobility by emulating the rituals and practices of the upper or dominant castes. According to M.N. Srinivas, Sanskritization is not just the adoption of new customs and habits, but also includes exposure to new ideas and values appearing in Sanskrit literature” (Charan, Sharma & Rajni, 2015, p. 1).

that the caste system took several centuries to come into being and the apparent permanence of caste is a fairly new phenomenon, arising during colonization (Smith, 2008). Scholars have noted a general tendency among current younger generations of Sikhs i.e. Millennials, to not be worried about the influence of caste on marriage prospects or as a prerequisite to entering religious priesthood. The younger generation or Millennials here, ranging from ages 21 to 37 (born 1981-1996) as of 2018, constitute the Canadian-born children of immigrant parents or Baby Boomers, ranging from ages 54 to 72 (born 1946-1964) in 2018. Even as Canadian-born children hold onto certain practices of caste, such as their last names continuing to be caste names, they are advocating for a more liberal lens with which to view caste (Kumar, 2012, p. 216). This exemplifies the ways in which attitudes toward caste and its impact on social life can be fluid and adaptable, while still allowing for a basic sense of religious or Punjabi identity. Boundaries between various *jatis* are to some extent controlled by rules regarding commensality and marriages: the latter, which are usually arranged between the families, should be either endogamous (between a man and a woman of the same *jati*) or, in some cases, hypergamous (the woman marrying into a higher *jati*) (Johnson, 2009). But the precise balance of the relationship between members of different castes and subcastes depends on the context, and the nature of the particular interaction—whether it be ritual, economic, or political (Johnson, 2009). Castes, and various caste groupings therefore identify each other through their relationships, rather than through self-definition. Since it is important to distinguish between caste and class, I asked my respondents questions about both caste and class, to encourage them to tease out these complicated, inter-related concepts. It was of interest to note not only the differences between caste and class as indicated by interviewees’ responses, but also how they view the two as being linked and the influence that caste and class may have on their perceived access to opportunities.

## **2.2 Sikhism and the principle of equality**

Despite the migration of caste as a valued social marker within Sikhism, the religion started in reaction to the inequality that caste created. Sikhism is a religion based on the teachings of its founder Guru Nanak, which emerged in Punjab in Northern India in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Puri (2003) states that, “the teachings of the Sikh Gurus, the religious institutions of ‘*sangat*’ and ‘*langar*’, the absence of a caste-based priesthood, and the respect for manual labor, all these were together aimed at creating a caste-free Khalsa Brotherhood” (p. 2693). As Kirpal states in *Two-*



*Lives, One Partner: Indo-Canadian Youth between Love and Arranged Marriages*, “the whole point of Sikhism was to abolish the caste system and have everyone equal, and yet we [still] believe in the caste system...” (Netting, 2001, p. 140).

The rejection of the caste system by Guru Nanak, the first Guru of the Sikhs, appeared unconditional. One of the most widely quoted of his ‘*sabads*’ is: *Fakar jati phakar nau, Sabhana jia ika chau* (Worthless is caste and worthless an exalted name; For all mankind there is but single refuge) (Puri, 2003, p. 2694). Another composition is: *Neechan andar neech jati, Neechi hun ati neech Nanak tin ke sang sath, Vadian siyon kya rees Jithe neech sanmalian, Tithe nadr teri bakhshish* (I am the lowest of the low castes; low, absolutely low; I am with the lowest in companionship, not with the so-called high. Blessing of god is where the lowly are cared for) (Puri, 2003, p. 2694). For believers, Guru Nanak’s main pursuit is for salvation, union with god. As Grewal (1994) explains “Guru Nanak does not conceive of equality in social and economic terms” (p. 118). However, its social implications were evident. “Just as every human being was equal before god so every individual who accepted the path of Guru Nanak was equal before the Guru and all his followers were equal before one another” (Puri, 2003, p. 2694).

As per the 10<sup>th</sup> Guru’s command, there was to be no living Guru after him and the words of the 10 Gurus and saints would be contained in the holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib. “Every Sikh was equal in the presence of the Granth Sahib, in the *sangat* and the *langar*, but in the life outside, social differences were legitimised” (Grewal, 1994, p. 118). In the Sikh religion, nowhere does it say that one person is better than another or superior to them. “Guru Nanak [Dev Ji] taught that this inner devotion to *nam* (name) is open to all, irrespective of gender or caste” (Nayar, 2004, p. 122). Similarly, Guru Arjun Dev Ji continued the expansion of the Sikh community, which attracted followers because of its call for equality (Nayar, 2004, p. 123). Sikhism became so popular in its early days because everyone respected the fact that it did not have a caste system or sharp class divisions among people; instead, Sikhism promotes the religious ideal that all humans are equal and ultimately the same (Nayar, 2004, p. 124).

Yet, a Sikh woman in Nayar’s (2004) book noted that, “most Sikhs do not know the teachings of the Guru Granth Sahib, and simply practice the customs and rituals handed down through the

generations” (p. 134). She further states that people say they are religious, but they do not practice the religion fully, and many people do things just as a ritual (Nayar, 2004, p. 134). However, despite the erosion of founding ideals, people continue to consider religious identity as being important to community belonging. For this research project, I gathered first-hand information about this apparent contradiction, to explore through qualitative research these more popular understandings of the teachings of Sikhism and to gather first-hand evidence of how the practical adaptations of these teachings (i.e. caste system) may diverge from the principle of equality that Sikhism supports; in other words, my research explores the difference between Sikhism supporting equality and the practical reality of caste affecting Sikh self-definition.

### **2.3 Caste and marriage**

We see that even though Guru Nanak opposed the idea of caste, it continues to hold sway with Sikhs, especially when it is about marriage (Bowker, 2000). Understood within the Indian context to be “a social, religious, spiritual, and/or legal union of individuals”, marriage as an institution is recognized legally, on the basis of religion, or both (Dhar, 2013, p. 1). Cultural practices beyond religious ones surrounding marriage are central to migrant identities. Even though the significance of caste may be lessening in urban areas, due to Hindus’ protests in more recent times, the system still holds much sway in terms of choice of marriage partner (Bowker, 2000). Stepping out of the bounds of these restrictions, and especially marriage between castes is considered very troublesome for not just the spouse, but even society overall (Johnson, 2009).

#### **2.3.1 Common practices of arranged marriage according to caste**

Immigrant Indian parents have started to use a different version of the traditional arranged marriage to find suitable spouses for their children. As Ravinder put it,

It’s not called arranging anymore; it’s called “suggestion.” When a daughter’s education is completed or a son has a steady income, parents “put the word out,” letting relatives and friends know their child is ready to marry. Sometimes they place an ad in an Indo-Canadian newspaper or web site; at times they seek nominations from families in other countries or India itself. (Netting, 2001, 135).

There appears to be a widely held belief that intra-group marriages are ‘easier’ than inter-group marriages. This is because marrying within the group means marrying someone who likely shares similar cultural heritage, religious values, upbringing and language. Limiting marriages

to being preferred within members of the same caste is one way of enforcing caste in both, urban and rural areas. These limitations are couched in terms of compatibility being more likely with a spouse from the same caste. This serves to reinforce the stratification system of caste and also reasserts men's control over women's reproductive abilities, which ties in directly with caste maintenance (Smith, 2008). In an attempt to ensure their children marry within the caste, families often arrange matches early on. Furthermore, marriages not only abide by rules of caste but also the custom of dowry, which hints towards their role in symbolizing wealth and status (Smith, 2008).

### **2.3.2 Gender politics and arranged marriage**

Patriarchy is a system where a man or a group of men hold primary control in a society. The father or father figure is the head of the family and holds power over women and children. The patriarchal structure in Indian society places importance on arranged marriages as the customary practice, in place of spouses choosing each other independently (Dhar, 2013, p. 12). Although all Indian women experience patriarchy, the specific forms this discrimination takes depends on women's caste and class. Thus, there are differences across regions when it comes to gender relations, as not only gender but also ethnicity, affluence, caste and status intersect to shape women's experiences (Smith, 2008). Arranged marriages are a defining feature in the society, even though the practices differ throughout India (Samuel, 2010, p. 99). In India many years ago: "Families investigated each other's history, economic standing, education, health, and drinking habits. If all seemed favorable, the young people usually attended a brief meeting, with parents present, and without delay were asked to consent" (Netting, 2001, p. 134). In addition to marriage-related traditions, gender norms play a key role in shaping immigrant experiences. Immersed in various social categories, immigrant women are influenced by cultural practices and beliefs. The bride is seen as being a 'gift,' once she is married she is required to move to her husband's home. This leaves a bride isolated from her birth family and demonstrates the low status of women (Jeffrey and Jeffrey, 1996). According to cultural practices in marriage, the bride's family has to bear the cost of the dowry (Bhopal, 2011, p. 433).

Dowry usually includes material gifts, land and cash paid to the groom and his family. It used to be a symbol of affection given to the daughter by her parents but has now become a demand

from the groom's family (Dhar, 2013, p. 20). These demands and amounts vary and can be enormous. Dhar (2013) reports that, "average dowries are equal to 68% of total assets before marriage and can amount to six times the annual wealth of the bridal family" (p. 20). Furthermore, women's dowry is not a form of inheritance for her because it is transferred directly to the bridegroom's family (Viridi, 2013, p. 113). The government of India instituted several dowry reform and prohibition acts to prevent the giving or receiving of dowry. The Dowry Prohibition Act was enacted on May 1, 1961 and applies to people of all regions in India (Lodhia, 2017). However, the act was seen to widely ineffective in reducing and stopping the practice of dowry. In 1984 the legislation was amended to state that presents were allowed to be given to a bride and groom at the time of wedding, but the law required a list to be maintained describing details of the gifts (Lodhia, 2017). Sections of the Indian Penal Code and the act were also amended to protect female victims of dowry-related violence and further legal protection was provided in 2005 with the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (Lodhia, 2017). Regardless of the act and the revisions, they are not followed and the practice of dowry and dowry-related violence still occurs (Lodhia, 2017).

In addition to this, women are seen as the guardians of tradition and culture, which is closely tied to their role as not only child-bearers but also as the assumed primary caregivers for children as well as the elderly in the family. As child-rearers and as torch-bearers of society's value system, their actions may not be treated as having an impact on only themselves, but as a matter of communal interest, a discussion which is often connected to the concept of honor that is described in greater detail in chapter five. Each rung on the ladder of caste has adopted particular mannerisms in aspects ranging from marital rituals to domestic practices, such as caring for family deities as well as the preparation and consumption of food (Smith, 2008). Women across the castes expected to partake in domestic labour such as childbearing and rearing, observing fasts, orchestrating prayers and performing household duties. Through these forms of domestic labour, women's work serves to uphold traditions that relegate girls and boys to differences in relationship with food, play, academics and spatial access. Beyond this, gender-based and caste-conscious socialization continues in the world outside the home too (Smith, 2008).

In contrast, men are seen as the primary breadwinners in the family and may thus be accorded higher status within a capitalistic framework that associates worth with earning potential. This higher status may in turn be accompanied by privileges and freedoms that women may not automatically get. For each caste, women are perceived as being inherently less pure than their male counterparts, and as sources of pollution (Smith, 2008). The implication here is that women's experiences of menstruation and childbirth preventing them from ever achieving the (higher) level of purity of men. Nonetheless, we see that women's purity is seen as central to maintaining a family's status and honor within the caste system (Smith, 2008). Furthermore, the tendency in South Asian culture to associate women with their male relative i.e. as a mother, daughter or wife, rather than an autonomous individual woman, also suggests that patriarchal structures remain in place. As we see in the research findings section, there are comparisons made between how the same behavior displayed by a man or woman may elicit different responses from parents if the participant's sibling of the opposite gender were to do the same; this offers insight into how gender influences societal and familial reactions, even within the same family.

Mooney (2006) states that it has been argued that because of dowry there is a preference for having male children and by extension female infanticide. South Asian women were seen as either "docile, obedient and passive or as sexualized exotic 'others'" (Bhopal, 2011, p. 433-434). South Asian women are often perceived through stories of Western vs. Asian culture clashes or 'forced marriages.' They are seen as being brought up in strict environments where the male relatives frequently monitor their behavior (Wilson, 2006). But with the forces of globalization and immigration and the spread of mass media across borders, we have seen these gender roles being challenged. Moreover, with the rise of access to education and widening employment choices, the traditional basis for a bias towards male children is also being questioned. Increased movement of people across continents is also serving to uproot the false dichotomy of us vs. them or Western vs. Eastern; this is opening up the space for a more nuanced and complex conversation about gendered identities that are multi-faceted. Moreover, since dowry has been outlawed and legal protection for women in cases of abuse and access to rights have been put in place, we see even more challenges to the stereotype of South Asian women described above. However, while there have been strides made towards enabling women to have agency and

choice in decisions about their lives, the pace at which such advancements have been achieved is not only slow but also non-linear, with previous victories sometimes being rescinded and constantly needing to be fought for. While there has been progress made on this front, patriarchal practices may be diminished but continue to be potent nonetheless. It should also be mentioned that, measuring change in beliefs that support practices is harder to measure.

## **2.4 Gender politics or equality in Sikhism?**

Society is shaped by, and shapes gender norms and roles. Coming back to the trope of purity and its role in maintaining segregation, this idea is reinforced by the differences in occupation described above. Climbing up the social ladder, this idea of purity for higher castes reveals itself in the marked absence of women's bodies and their work. However, even with this invisibility, higher-caste women have better access to wealth, status, and academic and professional opportunities (Smith, 2008). For the most part, the caste system has undergone major shifts, but its impact on gender continues to be complex (Smith, 2008). A great deal of pressure is placed on women and girls as 'carriers' of family honor, to uphold this concept of *izzat* and not bring shame to them. *Izzat* descends from the Urdu language and means "honour, respect and reputation" (Viridi, 2013, p. 110). *Izzat* is relevant and significant to Sikhs but it is practiced and interpreted differently according to one's caste (Viridi, 2013, p. 112). Women are mainly responsible for preserving and carrying on the concept of *izzat* (Viridi, 2013, p. 112). "[*Izzat*] transcends class, ethnic and religious boundaries and is culturally determined, defined and taught" (Toor, 2009, p. 243). It signifies one of the most important goals for Punjabi families and is deeply entrenched in the family structure (Viridi, 2013, p. 112). Sanghera in 'Daughters of shame' (2009) writes:

Trying to explain the concept of honour is one of the hardest things because "...[South] Asian people don't question it: they're swaddled in it from the moment they're born, it's as though they absorb it along with their mother's milk. Honour – *izzat* – is the cornerstone of the [South] Asian community and since the beginning of time it's been the job of girls and women to keep it polished. And that's really hard because so many things can tarnish it" (p. 25).

If dishonor is brought to the family, then extreme actions such as (dis)honor killings can be taken. A murder case, which was addressed by the British Columbia's Supreme Court, draws attention to such situations. In 2000, 25-year-old Jaswinder (Jassi) Kaur Sidhu was allegedly

murdered by her mother and maternal uncle as an ‘honor killing,’ because she disobeyed her wealthy family and eloped with a poor driver from her family’s village in Punjab. She was encouraged to meet reputable suitors through family referrals, but her independent decision to marry a man of low status was seen as being shameful by and for her family. Jaswinder’s alleged murderers, her family, took this action because they believed it would restore their high status and reputation amongst the Sikh community in British Columbia (Viridi, 2013, p. 107-108).

#### **2.4.1 Wider patriarchal norms erase any potential for social equality implied within Sikhism’s egalitarian spiritual ideals**

Given South Asian culture’s predominantly patriarchal structure, in the motherland as well as the diaspora, women are seen as being key to protecting the group’s purity because as birth-givers they are seen as points of entrance into the caste system (Samuel, 2010, p. 99). Hence, the women of the family, the guardians of culture and tradition, are likely to have greater restrictions placed on their lives because familial reputation rests on their actions. Daughters are particularly affected by this gendered expectation, which underlines the gendered distribution of power and privilege (Samuel, 2010, p. 98). As Dasgupta (1998) points out, the South Asian woman’s identity is dependent on the identity of the men in her life at every stage; on her father as a daughter, on her husband when she becomes a wife and daughter-in-law and, eventually, on her son when she becomes a mother (p. 8). Although this dependency offers some forms of protection and validation, it also places constraints on a woman and may make those women who don’t have fathers, husbands or sons vulnerable. Considering how important marriage and family is to South Asian culture, immigrant women may feel pressured to meet the expectations of family members and society when it comes to choosing a partner for marriage (Samuel, 2010, p. 101). In light of these gendered expectations, it becomes easier to understand why women who marry out-group partners may be shunned by society and by their family, temporarily or permanently. If parents do not approve of the marriage then women may not be able to count on parental support, financially and emotionally in the case of marriage failure because they are fully responsible for their partner choice (Casier, et. al., 2013, p. 473).

Today, in the West, with weakening yet still existent patriarchal structures, men and women are met with double standards when it comes to what is expected of them in terms of marriage and partner selection (Samuel, 2010). How the gendered nature of caste affects women in their lives in general and in marriage in particular may explain differences in men and women's attitudes towards the caste system. It would be reasonable to argue that if caste were perceived as being more limiting for women than men, then women would express greater dissent against it. However, it is important to temper this with the expectation that interviewees may not be willing to share personal experiences with such candor as to allow for me to explore this possibility. Yet because I am a woman interviewing them, they may be more willing to share critical opinions than with a male interviewer. This can be explained by Dorothy Smith's standpoint theory, introduced in the 1970's, which "reflects the view that women (or feminists) occupy a social location that affords them/us a privileged access to social phenomena" (Longino, 1993, p. 201). Women, by nature or social experience, are seen as better prepared to know the world than are men (Longino, 1993, p. 201).

## **2.5 Diasporic complexities**

Considering how important marriage and family is to South Asian culture, immigrant women may feel pressured to meet the expectations of family members and society when it comes to choosing a partner for marriage (Samuel, 2010, p. 101). In light of these gendered expectations, it becomes easier to understand why women who marry out-group partners may be shunned by society and by their family temporarily. If parents do not approve of the marriage then women may not be able to count on parental support, financially and emotionally in the case of divorce, because they are fully responsible for their partner choice (Casier, et. al., 2013, p. 473). As further evidence of the significance of parental approval of potential marriage partners, several reasons have been cited as explaining why this approval matters. Nonetheless, in some cases, depending on personal preferences, marital prerequisites regarding religion, gender and social classes are often ignored or finessed. While one may be subject to restrictions when it comes to partner selection, individuals are rarely, if ever, entirely controlled by these restrictions. As one of Netting's research participants elaborates:

She'll have to be Indian, a Sikh *Jat* [as we are].... Although the Sikh religion aborted caste, it's definitely there.... Here in Canada, low-castes sit with others at the same table—but when it comes to marriage, my parents won't let me marry into a low-caste family! Even if they're



friends with the family.... I think love is huge... my parents say there's no such thing! They feel you fall in love afterwards – but even kids in India have changed their ideas.... It's really important for me to be who I am, to be happy. I have to sacrifice a little for my family—like, limit myself to *Jat* Sikh girls to choose among (Netting, 2001, p. 138).

I anticipate that marriage, often the lynchpin to family life and subsequent intergenerational transmission of cultural values, would be particularly tied up with a person's caste. Mainly, I shall explore the social acceptability of marrying within versus outside one's caste. As we continue, it is worth remembering that marriage, like most socio-cultural phenomena, is ever changing in what it symbolizes and in what it produces in the way of relational and power dynamics within social groups.

## Chapter Three: Research Methods and Samples

### 3.1 Research methods

My research is grounded in a qualitative approach that recognizes that people are thinking and motivated beings that give form and meaning to the social world around them. As Schutz (1970) states, “By a series of common-sense constructs, they (i.e. human beings) have a pre-selected and pre-interpreted this world which they experience as the reality of their lives” (Palys & Atchison, 2008, p. 7). The qualitative nature of my work is also evident in the emphasis it places on people’s ways of life, and their descriptions of it, which often involves environmental factors and cultural ideas, such as caste and gender.

Moreover, I seek to explain the connection between social and personal variables, which lends itself naturally to qualitative research. In doing so, my research asks what social situations and experiences mean to participants, which are subjective. The caste system and the support related to it suggests that the topic is fairly conflict-ridden and mobilization to level the differences of opportunities between castes speaks to the large-scale social movement that is shaping up on this front.

Within a qualitative paradigm, the principles of phenomenology form the basis of my research in the sense that attempts to understand human actions and thoughts must account for the fact that people are “cognitive beings who actively perceive and make sense of the world around them, have the capacity to abstract from their experiences, ascribe meaning to their behaviour and the world around them, and are affected by the those meanings” (Palys & Atchison, 2008, p. 7). All of the above is evident in my research findings, as it relates to how people think of and understand caste, make sense of it and are impacted by it.

I use an inductive approach (Palys & Atchison, 2008, p. 31) to my research as I start by observing to generate broader understandings. My independent variables are generation, gender and level of education. Given my qualitative approach, I am interested in looking at how the influences of the independent variables *intersect*. My hypothesis is that participants belonging to an older generation grouping, with a lower education level of education and male participants

will be more likely to have more traditional views about the caste system (Bhopal, 2011). They will then be more likely to have a strong belief in adhering to the caste system when choosing a marital partner, especially if they fit in more than one of the above categories. Max Weber developed the interpretive sociology approach, which is important in studying social trends and problems (Crossman, 2017). Interpretive sociology attempts to understand social phenomena from the standpoint of those involved in it and “focuses on understanding the meaning that those studied give to their beliefs, values, actions, behaviors, and social relationships with people and institutions” (Crossman, 2017). I chose to take an interpretative approach toward interpreting my data because I am attempting to understand two generations and their beliefs and values towards marriage and the caste system.

My dependent variables include views on the importance of the caste system on its own and how central a factor it is when considering marital compatibility in the diaspora (Dhar, 2013). One may reasonably expect that long-held traditional views, such as those regarding the caste system, may shift as people come across other value systems particularly in a country as diverse and multicultural as Canada (Somerville, 2008, p. 23). As a result, this exposure to differing worldviews and expanding horizons can also expect to lead to questioning and perhaps changing one’s own beliefs. Furthermore, gender is an integral variable to consider because the caste system situates itself within the context of patriarchy, prevalent within the Southeast Asian community, and arguably beyond that as well (Samuel, 2013).

I arrive at this hypothesis by reflecting on my own experiences as a member of the Sikh, and more broadly, Southeast Asian immigrant communities that include first and second-generation immigrants, men and women and people with varying levels of education. The experience that I refer to is comprised of not only conversations I have had with friends, immediate and extended family members, and co-workers, but also my lived experiences of negotiating caste. Thus the origin of my research idea comes from autoethnography, a type/branch of qualitative research. More importantly, this hypothesis is also based on findings from the extensive literature review I conduct, to discover if my experiences are reflective of others’ as well, as documented by academic research.

### **3.1.1 Generation**

Sociological research demonstrates the importance of looking at different generations (Nayar, 2004). Generation is important because to some extent, one's view of the world, including religion, is shaped by the time within the particular society in which one grows up and spends their formative years (Nayar, 2004). Both the younger and older generation face their own struggles when it comes to adapting social values and beliefs in the Western society. The older generation may face issues with the process of integrating into the multi-cultural environment of Canada (Nayar, 2004). The younger generation faces additional difficulties of trying to maintain and preserve the reputation of the family and community, while trying to be a part of the modern Western society (Samuel, 2013, p. 92; Netting, 2001). Looking at both generations will help to understand the intergenerational conflicts that they face and what the cause of these differences may be. In my study, generation also relates to whether an individual is Canadian-born or immigrated to Canada at some point in their life.

### **3.1.2 Gender**

South Asian culture, and arguably societies globally have long upheld patriarchal structures and beliefs that may subjugate women in favor of men (Samuel, 2013, p. 96). Religious injunctions often serve to strengthen these asymmetries of power and privilege, which is why I consider gender relevant to my study of how caste accords status to people differently (Walton-Roberts, 2013, p. 3). Gender refers to the social construct that gives meaning to peoples gender-based identifies. While it often aligns with the sex category that people are born into, this is not always the case (Walker & Cook, 1998, p. 255). Gender is social while sex is biological. Relations between men and women and norms arise from gender identities rather than being rooted in biological differences (Walker & Cook, 1998, p. 255). Gender relations particularly come to the forefront when it comes to practices of marriage, and as discussed in chapter two, dowry in particular. This is further complicated when considering migrant identities. As Samuel (2013) notes, "Cultural practices surrounding marriage are central to migrant identities. The process of migration and settlement allows women the opportunity to modify and transform cultural practices which are rooted in unequal gender relations" (p. 103).

These multiple identities that migrant women imbibe can often be conflicting as gender, race and generation intersect (Virdi, 2013). The tensions in these identities arise from not only immigration that one experiences first-hand but also from the historical context and connections between the motherland and the new home country. As the responses from participants indicate, the family is a key domain where gendered, racialized, class and national identities are enacted. The unequal gender relations within families can often disadvantage women, which comes up in participants' experiences of gender (Samuel, 2010). These identities are intertwined and change over time and across space. In some cases we see that the experiences of race and gender class in the context of diaspora, as illustrated by Amita Handa's study of second-generation South Asian youth in Toronto (Samuel, 2010, p. 98).

### **3.1.3 Level of Education**

The more educated one is, the more liberal a viewpoint one will likely have, in terms of the freedom they accord individuals to make their own choices (Nayar, 2004; Samuel, 2013; Bhopal, 2011). This variable is relevant to my study because it looks at whether a higher level of education corresponds with a belief in the need for the exercise of individual freedom through the creation of a more equitable society that treats everyone equally and differentiates between individuals on the basis of achieved attributes, rather than ascribed ones. The World Values Survey demonstrates links between educational attainment and conservatism vs. liberalism. The greater the access to education the more people become postmaterialist in their attitudes, meaning they emphasize the free expression of ideas, greater democratization, and the development of more humane societies (MacIntosh, 1998, p. 452).

In this research project the level of education is determined using the following categories: less than high school, high school, some university/college, completed undergrad, post grad or higher. I chose these specific categories because it allows for a clear and simple understanding of how educated each participant is. While grouping respondents into one of the above categories blurs details of their level of education, it allows one to look at whether there are similarities of belief regarding the caste system amongst members of the same category.

### **3.1.4 Perspective on Caste System - The Dependent Variable**

My dependent variable is attitudes towards caste: views on the importance of caste in general and then more specifically, in relation to practices of marriage and social mobility. Looking at how respondents think of caste generally allows me to establish an overall understanding of how caste is perceived, and the values that participants subsequently associate with adhering to the caste system. This provides the basis for my analysis of how caste then interacts with marriage partner choice and with participants' social mobility. This approach enables me to interconnect more precisely the abstract notions of caste to the concrete choices and practices of the participants. As we will see below, in some cases the inductive technique also brings out contradictions between individuals' overall beliefs about the caste system and their perception of how it should interact with the other ideas I focus on. The use of an inductive approach allows me draw on my own experiences and reflections to arrive at a hypothesis. This approach is characterized by the belief that research should begin with observation. Researchers should observe, produce empirical generalizations based on those observations, and then, attempt to develop a full-blown theory through analytic induction. This theory will adequately reflect the observed reality (Palys & Atchison, 2008, p. 420). This is precisely what I have done in my project; through general discussions I saw that the issue of caste in Sikh marriages still appears to be prevalent and from there I was able to research why this may happen still. My research question is multi-faceted, using an inductive approach means I can attempt to combine my research findings to obtain a specific conclusion. The inductive approach is relevant and useful to my work because it involves "largely qualitative interpretation by the researcher" (Del Baso & Lewis, 2008, p. 39). I can interpret the themes that surface from my research to better understand the characteristics and behaviors of my participants.

My research method is entirely qualitative because this technique is most conducive to eliciting detailed responses from participants. Given the complex nature of the topic I explore, and the need to be able to develop questions in response to participants' answers to previous queries, my method necessitates procedural flexibility that a quantitative approach might not have allowed. Procedural flexibility means that I am able to use a variety of strategies and information from the sociocultural context to select the most appropriate analytical procedure of the participant's responses (Verschaffel, Luwel, Torbeyns & Van Dooren, 2007). Using a semi-structured

approach during the interview process allows me to sense where the conversation with a respondent is heading, meaning that I can tease out complicated ideas and beliefs to explore them in greater detail. To elicit clearer responses and to provide overall direction as well as some consistency of topics to explore with each participant I still had an outline of questions and probes to refer to (Balso & Lewis, 2008, p. 122). The research evolves from the responses I received, suggesting an iterative process of going back and forth between data analysis and collection, all the while keeping in mind the findings from the literature review. All in all, this means the research took on a natural flow, as opposed to being rigidly pre-determined from the get go.

### **3.2 Participants and Recruitment**

My target population is Sikhs born in Canada and Sikhs that immigrated to Canada. From this cohort, I decided on a sample size of 20 participants. I chose to have 20 participants because it is feasible for the scope of the project without being too limited in the number of participants involved. This would also allow considerations around building a sample where there is a possibility of reaching saturation. According to Statistics Canada (2016) there are 118,400 Punjabis in Canada, so attempting to select a bigger sample from this sizeable population would have made it difficult to manage. Given the limited time frame that I have for this research, a sample size of 20 allows me to manage my time and data efficiently. It also allows me to have sufficient variety in terms of participants being immigrants or Canadian- born, their gender and their levels of education. Having a mix of these variables without being overwhelmed by too much data for the scope of this project was achieved by limiting myself to 20 participants. I believe I am able to reach saturation with the 20 participants because I have the ability to obtain additional new information with my sample size. Saturation is not exactly about the numbers but about the depth of the data and ensures that adequate and sound quality data are collected, regardless of the sample size (Burmeister & Aitken, 2012, p. 271). I am also starting to see a lot of repetition in my themes, without many new themes emerging after a certain point.

I recruit the participants through a combination of snowball and purposive sampling. I start off with five participants that I select from people that I already knew. I pick these initial participants because through previous encounters, such as casual discussions at school or work

with them I determined that they matched the research criteria I that was looking for. Prior knowledge of participants did not diminish my ability to speak objectively with them because the participants were acquaintances and not people that I hold a close relationship with.

Since I have five individuals initially selected to interview, snowball sampling was effective because these participants were able to reach out to their social networks and refer me to other potential participants that matched my research criteria. The purposive element of the sampling design enables me to make stronger claims through my findings. Since I have a target number of participants, the purposive sample allows me to concentrate specifically on participants that fit my criteria, which then enable me to make stronger claims. In terms of socio-demographically I wanted my sample of 20 to break down evenly between men (10) and women (10) to get an equal distribution of each. From there I wanted to recruit five men and five women from both generational groups because this would create a balance in the sample. In addition, purposive sampling strengthens the framework for my project by ensuring that the participants in my study are (were) people in whose life the caste system had been present, and in most cases, has operated as a significant cultural framework because they were actively practicing or following the Sikh religion. This means that respondents are not only intimately familiar with the topic but in many cases, had multiple life experiences relating to it, thus allowing them to speak knowledgeably about it in a variety of contexts and in relation to other topics that are relevant to my research, including but not limited to marriage and social mobility. Therefore, the fact that purposive sampling enables me to include participants with first-hand experience of the issue at hand strengthened the claims I am able to make.

In this first group, half of the participants are Sikh, Canadian-born children between the ages of 22 to 30. In the second group, half of the participants are Sikh immigrant parents with children from the age of 22 to 30 (Appendix A lists participants' demographic information). There are no parent and child pairs in this sample. There is an equal representation of five men and five women in each of the categories and 55 percent of the respondents are married. Everyone resides and works in the Lower Mainland. Out of the 20 respondents, 80 percent have a higher than high school diploma education. Of the 80 percent, 25 percent have a Master's degree or are in the process of a higher degree. I carried out in-depth, semi-structured, in-person interviews



with participants one-on-one, which are an average length of about 30 minutes. These interviews were conducted between January and April 2017 in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. I began with five initial contacts that I knew and recruited future participants from among their acquaintances. I handed out an informational letter to my initial contacts that forwarded the letter to potential participants who then contacted me if they chose to participate in the study. I targeted the Lower Mainland (Abbotsford, Surrey and Mission) in British Columbia, as there is a visibly large Sikh and immigrant population in this area. According to Statistics Canada (Census 2016) South Asians are one of the three largest visible minority groups and the vast majority live in Ontario (Toronto), British Columbia (Vancouver), Quebec (Montreal) and Alberta. There are 468,670 Sikhs in Canada and they represent 1.4% of the nation's total population. In 2016 about 38,725 of Punjabi's live in British Columbia and about 4,105 of that population live in Abbotsford (Census, 2016).

Given the density of Sikh population in this area, it may be safe to assume that this research will be relevant to the lives of many people. If this research were to be publicly available, it may help people question the caste system and make more conscious choices about how, and if, they will like to make the caste system central to their lives as an evaluative criterion for choosing marriage partners or even just defining relational dynamics with other Sikhs in their community. It can also help people question whether they have *already* made the caste system central in how they date or think about marriage, and if so, what the consequences thus far have been. They can resist simply accepting it as a belief that has been passed on from one generation to the next. Beyond being a topic of interest to a large sector of the local population that has experienced this issue first hand, it may also pique the curiosity of others who may not be personally affected by it but would like to learn more about it, thus raising awareness of the topic on a much broader level. However, the findings may also cause some discomfort amongst those who consider the caste system a cherished and/or valuable part of their belief system, particularly if it is seen as a questioning of the issue. On the other hand, the findings may also encourage those who were previously hesitant to broach the issue to now discuss it openly and challenge it, if they feel so inclined.

### **3.3 Research Instrument**

My research questions consist of 20 semi-structured interview questions (these appear in Appendix B). My pre-determined questions assisted in providing structure for the discussions. It also ensured that all respondents are asked at least some of the same questions, providing some standardization and a fair amount of consistency across interviews. In contrast, the questions that arose from the discussion meant that I was able to adopt a personalized strategy for each respondent and build flexibility into my work. Remaining aware of how the conversation was flowing and tailoring my questions accordingly meant that I could inquire about things I may not have considered previously. Furthermore, asking questions based on the responses I received may have helped the participants feel empowered in that their views were being taken seriously and thought about deeply, which may have been difficult to convey if I had abided strictly by a previously finalized set of questions.

I also used probes to elicit further information. Probes were crucial because talking about one's beliefs, religious practices, family relationships and personal life can be a sensitive topic and can require additional efforts to get the respondent thinking about and articulating their responses, beyond simply asking a question. The probes also helped me keep the conversation flowing and prompt respondents to think about a particular line of thought more deeply; this helped me obtain more information than I may have gleaned without the prompts.

The major themes that I focused on were the relevance of beliefs and practices of the Sikh religion for the respondents regarding marriage practices, their concepts of marriage, what the caste system means to them, in what ways it may affect them and their sense of how gender plays a role in the caste system. I aimed to include a diverse group of participants in terms of their demographics, so I could determine how their distinct experiences change or do not change their views and beliefs on the caste system and its influence on marriage; this shaped the purposive nature of my study design. My literature review suggested that there is a dissonance between how Sikhism is practiced and the actual institutional teachings that Sikhism established as a religious tradition; hence, I wanted to inquire about this to gain a deeper understanding of how, if applicable, participants negotiate this contradiction in their lives in manageable ways. The topic of marriage is relevant because, as we will see below, even for respondents whose

lives are not significantly shaped by the caste system, when it comes to marriage, caste can take on particular importance. Marriage and religion being such intertwined concepts in Sikhism and Hinduism means that the former holds a central place in a discussion of the latter. For Sikhs and Hindus, however secular minded they may be, marriage remains tied to religious belief and custom.

Last but not least, gender can influence the access one has to power or status and thus was an important factor in my research on how the caste system may privilege some, and not others along the lines of gender. It was reasonable to argue that if caste is perceived as being more limiting for women than men, then women will express dissent against it. Because a woman was interviewing the participants, women were more willing to share these sorts of critical opinions. It was important to temper with this understanding that interviewees may not have shared personal experiences with such candor as to allow for me to explore this possibility.

### **3.4 Data analysis**

I hypothesized that people who are less educated and older are more likely to place a higher importance on caste in general and in relation to marriage than people who are more educated and younger. I hypothesize this because I believe that being educated makes it more likely that people will be open and broad-minded in terms such that they will not value the concept of the caste system as highly (Bhopal, 2011, p. 432; Nayar, 2004; Samuel, 2013). One can reasonably expect that with education comes a broadening of perspectives that allows for, respects and even appreciates the differences in people's beliefs, thus makes it easier to change one's own mind about certain ideas over the course of life (Nayar, 2004). A higher level of education may also encourage one to believe in more egalitarian ideals whereby status in life should be accorded based on one's achievements and not on characteristics that they were born with or inherited (Bhopal, 2011, p. 432). It follows that if caste is an important issue in one's life, it will not be an insignificant issue when it comes to a decision many people take seriously, i.e. marriage (Kumar, 2012, p. 225). Age can also be a factor as people are more likely to be set in their ways the longer they have held some beliefs (Nayar, 2004). For these reasons, it can be considered acceptable to propose the above hypotheses.

Bhopal (2011) uses Wenger's social theory of learning in his article to suggest that education creates a better understanding of how to function in society and allows an individual to have more of a say in the way their life goes (p. 432). I also believe that the younger Canadian-born generation, in a Western society where they are raised to be critical thinkers, will question the caste system and it will have a more limited influence upon their choice of a life partner. This influence may not be negligible but it may be more nuanced in that this generation, having been exposed to a variety of cultures and different belief systems, may be more likely to, at the very least, question the caste system in relation to marriage (Netting, 2001; Samuel, 2013; Nayar, 2004). While they may not reject it outright, the era they have grown up in encourages introspection about their own beliefs and perhaps a greater tolerance, acceptance and even celebration of difference in belief (Netting, 2001; Samuel, 2013; Nayar, 2004).

Caste considerations when seeking a life partner may not be completely disregarded, but it may not be considered the primary basis of assessing partner-compatibility for this generation, with possibly greater priority being placed on other measures of compatibility. It is hard to imagine that a belief that has been so important in the lives of their parents will hold no value for this generation; thus a more probable suggestion may be that caste in relation to marriage may be perceived differently by this generation. They may have some knowledge about what the caste system is, but I think they will question what significance it should have in their lives. Nayar (2004) states in her book that Canadian-born children are more analytical than their immigrant parents because they have received Western education, and Nayar's research was specific to the Sikh population.

In addition, Samuel (2013) observes that when South Asians immigrate, they try to preserve their culture by holding onto the values that were dominant when they left their country of origin (p. 96). Perhaps this is the reason that the older generation still believes caste is important when it comes to the marriage of their children. Being older and with them having also lived in the old country may mean that it is harder for immigrant parents to let go of their belief in the caste system after immigration. Kumar (2012) conducts research on the Indo-Canadian population and it states that the younger generation is advocating for a more liberal lens with which to view caste (p. 223). The younger Canadian-born generations in Western societies are raised to be

critical thinkers and are more likely to question the caste system as being irrelevant and unfair, and to believe that it will not have any bearing on their decisions of when they decide to get married (Nayar, 2004).

I also endeavor to understand and assess the comparative importance men vs. women accord to the caste system, when controlling for age and education. I expect that gender will influence feelings about marriage and caste because South Asian cultures have a predominantly patriarchal structure and women are seen as key protectors of the group's purity (Samuel, 2010, p. 99). As child-bearers and often as children's main caregivers, they are seen as responsible for passing on cultural values from one generation to the next; this may mean that their behavior is more closely monitored and their mobility is more restricted in the name of protecting 'honor,' their own and that of the family. Hence, the women of the family, the guardians of culture and tradition, are likely to have greater restrictions placed on their lives because familial reputation rests on their actions (Viridi, 2013). I imagine that since, traditionally, women and girls faced more pressure to maintain the honor of their families, with access to education they will place less importance on caste restrictions for marriage.

Having conducted qualitative research for my thesis, it is highly likely that there are many factors at play influencing my focal variables. If the data do not support my hypothesis, we will be able to suggest that there is not a singular factor, set of factors or the particular set of factors that I proposed at play that determine how much importance one places on caste, in relationship to marriage and social mobility. There is a more complex relationship at play between the independent and dependent variables. Given the complex nature of the topic I'm exploring, it is likely that there are several factors that shape one's view on the caste system and it may be beyond the scope of my research to identify and assess the influence of all those factors. This will open up avenues for further qualitative research and insight into the correlation between belief in the caste system and other factors of significance in the lives of Sikhs. It will also warrant research into how one's belief in the caste system and the importance Sikhs place on it may change over their lifetime, especially among the older generation. The layout of my research methods and samples shows that my methodological approach is innovative and differs from other studies.

### **3.5 Limitations of the research methods**

While caste is inextricably bound up with other factors such as immigration (Kumar, 2012, p. 224-225), and while it is likely to be interpreted and enacted differently across generations (Nayar, 2004), I am narrowing my focus to the caste system's influence within and surrounding marriage and how this influences my independent factors such as generation, gender and level of education. This scope has been chosen to render this research project manageable and to allow for depth of insight, rather than breadth. A possible limitation that I have faced is that while being an "insider," as a Sikh, it has given me the possibility of more accessibility to and ease of communication with interviewees. Yet respondents may also want to create a good impression in front of another Sikh person. They may feel like a person may judge them more critically with the same cultural background as them, hence tailoring their responses accordingly. Being an "in-group" member of the same religious background and ethnicity, means that as a Sikh, respondents expect that I understand the basic tenets of Sikhism. I did not disclose any aspect of my identity or faith background to participants but I visually appear Sikh and can communicate with them in Punjabi and so I do not need to provide them with a background before they share their personal experiences. This was also particularly evident in the quotes from scripture that participants referred to, which they include in conversations without providing much context about their origins, which they may assume I will be familiar with. Even concepts such as *langar* (community kitchen) are discussed without explicitly defining them, suggesting that interviewees expect me to know about this beforehand, from my own life experiences. Furthermore, in sharing experiences of India as the motherland, respondents work from the assumption that as a fellow Indian I do not need an 'introduction' to the country. I will have had similar experiences and knowledge and would be 'in the know'.

Additionally, I think that my gender (female) and age (28 years old) may have impacted my interactions with some interviewees. Where the younger generation might feel more open to discussing questions with me, I feel the older generation might have been more hesitant as they may not be accustomed to being questioned on such topics, especially by someone significantly younger than they are (Nayar, 2004). I also see that females are more communicative when answering questions perhaps because they can relate to me, whereas males cannot and are more guarded in their responses. This was evident in the length of responses I receive from women,

being more descriptive and detailed, as opposed to the relatively more concise way in which men share their experiences. This was particularly evident in the example of Samantha, who offers insightful commentary about how caste as a concept has evolved in terms of how it's understood. Furthermore, as we see below in the accounts of how respondents see caste influencing marriage-related decisions, there appears to be a gendered distinction between how much explanation participants offer.

Overall, the research method I chose served the purpose well in that I was able to dive deeply, rather than broadly, into a topic that is complex, dynamic and multi-layered. This depth over breadth is important in qualitative research – in fact, it's one of its central aims. Although the findings of my research may offer limited potential for generalization, the research techniques that I adopt allow for validity in my results (Babbie, 2018).

## Chapter Four: Similarities and Differences between the Teachings of Sikhism and its Practice

The theme of this chapter is that equality is a key principle of the Sikh religion but there is a contradiction between the original teachings of Sikhism and how it's practiced. The first section elaborates on the fact that Sikh scriptures specifically state that caste does not exist in Sikhism. It then discusses the differences Sikhs encounter between what is advocated in Sikhism and what is actually carried out in real life. The last two sections talk about the views and experiences of the older and younger generation in regard to religion and caste. The varying environments that diasporic communities find themselves in make it likely that members of religious groups adapt their religious practices and beliefs in response to external factors (Rai & Sankaran, 2011). Religion plays a key role in the formation of diasporic identity and community formation (Rai & Sankaran, 2011).

Guru Nanak Dev, the first of the ten Sikh Gurus, founded the Sikh religion around 1500 CE. He began to teach new beliefs that were different from that of the Hindu and Islamic elements (Nayar, 2004, p. 121). Guru Nanak's teachings, which are intended to be open to all irrespective of gender or caste, focused on inner devotion to *nam* (meaning name) (Nayar, 2004, p. 122). Many people were first attracted to Sikhism due to its values and principles. Guru Nanak, the creator of Sikhism, aspired for equality amongst all people. The first Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Nanak, rejected the caste system as a whole. In fact, one of the most popular of his lessons is "*Fakar jati phakar nau, Sabhana jia ika chau* (Worthless is caste and worthless an exalted name; For all mankind there is but single refuge)" (Puri, 2003, p. 2694). Amongst the 20 respondents that I interviewed, regardless of age, education or gender, there was unanimous agreement that equality was and remains a key concept of the Sikh religion and is an important principle of Sikhism. Whether they follow this concept or not was a different story, but everyone knew that the Sikh religion is based on the notion of equality. For Sikhs, religion continues to be a key component of collective identity, but we must acknowledge that religious practices and beliefs do evolve over time (Rai & Sankaran, 2011, p. 5). Evidently, although the caste system arose from Hinduism, it has seeped into other religions too (Samuel, 2010, p. 99). This is not uncommon when religions flourish side by side in similar socio-political climates and in close geographic proximity. This diffusion of practices and beliefs is evident in that Sikhism has come



to adopt the caste system, even as it stands in contrast to the religion's teachings pertaining to equality. The caste system bled into Sikhism, regardless of equality being an important part of Sikhism.

The majority of all the participants' perspectives about Sikhism cohere around the idea that they consider their faith inclusive and open to believers seeking knowledge for themselves/or open to critical inquiry. For most, that also meant and includes opening up their minds when it came to the caste system. As an example, one of the participants, Mindy, thinks that Sikhism is completely about social justice and that it is a forward-thinking religion because it's still fairly young. At the end of the day, she believes that if one really narrows Sikhism down to its core values, it's about being a good person. Likewise, another participant, Harry, states that Sikhism is for everyone and all are equal, which is a big part of Sikhism. Harry's statement concurs with the idea that Sikhism promotes the religious ideal that all humans are equal and ultimately the same (Nayar, 2004, p. 124).

Basic knowledge of the Sikh religion and its history reveals that, according to scripture, Sikhs are not supposed to believe in the caste system. For believers, Guru Nanak's main pursuit is for salvation, union with God. It is believed that caste is irrelevant to God and that God grants greatness without regard to caste (Puri, 2003, p. 2694). This is not only something that is deeply or spiritually embedded in Sikhism, its historical realization is well documented. It is not a secret that Sikhism believes in equality and it is a key concept of the religion (Netting, 2001, p. 140). In addition to agreeing that caste is not supposed to exist in Sikhism, there is also a general consensus that social practices differ from the religious teachings (Nayar, 2004, p. 134). If there is room for interpretation in religious teachings, meanings can be distorted or modified to accommodate a variety of personal or political agendas.

The data that my research has yielded explores the tensions and multi-faceted ways of coping with and reconciling sometimes-contradictory principles as participants deal with family expectations and their own desires. The responses below further shed light on the complex ways in which religious beliefs and views about the caste system are navigated and the diverse strategies respondents adopt to do so.

#### **4.1 No caste in Sikhism**

The caste system has been a part of the Hindu religion since around 1500 BC (Deshpande, 2010). Its main purpose appears to be to segregate people and have a hierarchy in society. Closely linked with the Aryans' arrival in 1500 BC, the caste system was based on the type of classification termed *Varna Vyavastha*, which is explained in greater detail in the literature review (Deshpande, 2010). It is tied to the concept of reincarnation, a central tenet of Hinduism that certainly motivated adherence to caste affiliation (Deshpande, 2010, p. 14). Therefore, Hinduism provides a religious worldview that fosters the caste system's entrenchment (Smith, 1994, p. 9). Hindus believe in a cosmic order in which the social order participates. Justice goes beyond the space and time of this world. There will be cosmic justice, and cosmic harmony is always maintained even if humans can't see this in their lifetime. The laws of punishment/justice exercised through karma and rebirth keep the cosmos in a state of perfect equilibrium beyond our comprehension. To preserve this equilibrium, according to Hinduism, it is crucial that humans remain in and faithfully perform the prescribed duties of their proper place/caste in the cosmos. This broader sense of cosmic justice beyond human comprehension is what motivates people to accept their lot and be faithful to their caste placement. They are part of a larger whole – wrong moves destroy cosmic equilibrium.

Until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Hindu and Sikh identities have shown numerous overlaps and crossovers (Roy, 2011, p. 90). Guru Nanak wanted to veer away from this, thus the Sikh religion was formed. However, "the Hindu-Sikh boundaries appear to have been particularly permeable until the formal organization of Sikh religious practice by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699 with the formation of the Khalsa" (Roy, 2011, p. 92). Since there was influence from older religions, some of the ideologies of the ancient systems remain. Thus, Sikhs may still hold onto those historical beliefs such as the caste system because Sikhism was so deeply entrenched in the Hindu tradition where caste perdures. This makes it much harder for a new faith, such as Sikhism, to pull away from the ancient beliefs. Despite the fact that Sikhism claims equality for all as a central principle of the faith, this permeability between the two religions means that caste in some way or form came to be incorporated into practices of Sikhism (Roy, 2011, p. 92).

Technically, all the gurus, starting from Guru Nanak, tried to abolish this division of society that is the caste system. The 10th guru, Guru Gobind Singh, founded the Khalsa (meaning pure) or community of believers into which a Sikh is fully initiated or baptized into Sikhism. The creation of the Khalsa allows for more of a division between the practices of Sikhism and Hinduism. One of the respondents in my study, Moe, a fifty-eight-year-old married male, believes that since the caste system existed long before the Sikh religion came to life, it made its way into Sikhism. Moe goes on to quote passages from the Guru Granth Sahib where Guru Nanak Dev said:

*'sabh main jot jot hai soye, tis dai chanan sabh meh chanan hoye, gur saakhee jot pargat hoye'* it's saying that god is in every heart, everybody is the same. If we believe in god so much then we should treat everybody equally, there is no caste.

This echoes the findings from my literature review, which reiterate the belief that "Just as every human being was equal before God so every individual who accepted the path of Guru Nanak was equal before the Guru and all his followers were equal before one another" (Puri, 2003, p. 2694). Moe quotes further:

Guru Gobind Singh said *'awal allah noor upaya* (In the beginning God created light) *kudrat ke sabh bandey* (all are nature's creations/people), *ek noor se sabh jag upjeya* (from that one light the whole world has been born) *kaun bhaley kaun mandey'* (how can some be good and some evil?).

Guru Granth Sahib is the religious scripture of Sikhism where prayers, hymns and actual words and verses from the Sikh gurus are compiled. It is considered the final sovereign and eternal guru. These passages from the Guru Granth Sahib highlight the fact the gurus believed we are all born the same way, every single person on this earth, and when one looks at every person, god is within their heart.

From the beginning, Sikhism supports equality among people. A prime example of this is the *langar* system, which is a community kitchen in the *gurdwara* (temple) that serves a free meal to all the visitors. This free meal is served to everyone regardless of his or her caste, gender, religion or economic status. This is reinforced by the literature which highlights that "the teachings of the Sikh Gurus, the religious institutions of '*sangat*' and '*langar*', the absence of a caste-based priesthood, and the respect for manual labor, all these were together aimed at

creating a caste-free Khalsa Brotherhood” (Puri, 2003, p. 2693). At the *langar*, everybody sits together; it does not matter if one is a king, politician or just someone off the street, everyone will sit on the ground because no person is higher or lower than the other. In trying to reconcile social categorization with this equality preached by the religion, prior research points out “Every Sikh was equal in the presence of the Granth Sahib, in the *sangat* and the *langar*, but in the life outside, social differences were legitimized” (Grewal, 1994, p. 118). In addition, Guru Gobind Singh said that every Sikh who is born into a Sikh family will have the surname Singh and Kaur for a female. This is to create uniformity and equality. Having different surnames is a way to differentiate people and determine what caste they came from. If every Sikh has the last name Singh or Kaur, then they will not be discriminated against because of any caste affiliation.

Participants believe that in theory there is no connection between Sikhism and caste because the religion itself states there is no caste. Even the gurus were not from one caste. Overall, participants agree that Sikh teachings do not support the caste system. However, the ways in which respondents reconcile this knowledge with their worldviews differ. Some, like Mindy, took it as a prompt to challenge the discrepancy and question parents’ teachings about the issue. Others, like Rita, took on the understanding that while Sikhism does support equality, the caste system can be explained by there being a difference between what the religion preaches and what believers follow.

The underlying criteria if one is a Sikh and considers themselves a practicing Sikh, then they are not expected to abide by a caste system. It is not something one ever asks about others, it is not something about which one judges other people, it is not something one believes in and it is certainly not something one brings up or considers when they are thinking about marriage, whether it’s their own, their children’s or their grandchildren’s. It is a non-question that is dictated by the Sikh faith and historical facts. So if someone calls himself or herself a Sikh, they are not supposed to believe in the caste system.

Following this train of thought, a twenty-two-year-old single male, Harry, discusses how he does not feel that caste has any connection to Sikhism. Harry thinks that Sikhs still follow and believe in the caste system because it’s a culture or tradition outside of the religion and it is a way that

people socially classify themselves and others. Similarly, Moe also states that in the Guru Granth Sahib there is no place for the caste system at all, and that it is meant to be eradicated. However, he further mentions that in some form or other, the caste system will always exist because it plays into human beings' need to classify people. Thus Moe believes that given our need to categorize others, we will always have this certain way of 'reading' others. Moreover, comments were made that regardless of what religion a person is a part of, it is difficult to be fully committed to practicing it. One can say they are religious based solely on rituals they follow, without practicing the religion fully (Nayar, 2004, p. 134). This brings up the question that although people say they are following a religion, how many really follow it one hundred percent? The implication of this is that beliefs and practices may not line up perfectly; in other words, talking the talk is not necessarily the same as walking the walk. In the context of this research, this possibly discrepancy highlights the need to account for limited coherence in articulated beliefs and their enacted practice.

#### **4.2 Preach vs. Practice**

Religious identity has been important to community belonging in Sikhism, regardless of the erosion of founding ideals, which causes a wide gap between the "doctrinal principles and social practice" (Puri, 2003, p. 2693). A major idea and theme throughout the interviews is the disconnection between what Sikhs preach and what they actually practice. The older generation, Indian-born parents of Canadian-born children currently in their 20s and 30s, state that they know that caste does not exist in Sikhism, but they still follow some or all aspects of it and they do not have any explanation as to why. The younger generation also understands that caste is not part of the Sikh religion, but they question people that still adhere to the caste system and are curious and want to know why that is the case.

Hank, a fifty-one-year-old married male who immigrated to Canada in his early thirty's, also understands that the gurus said there is no belief in the caste system, "*manas ki jaat sabhe eke pehchan ho*" (recognize all of mankind as a single caste of humanity). Hank explains that people in the past used to live according to their caste in terms of work as well as to further family relations such as marriage and that practice still exists in modern society. It appears that the older generation generally does not seem to mind the dissonance between the theory and practice

of Sikh beliefs and rituals (Rai & Sankaran, 2011, p. 12). The caste system can be seen as a social practice because people say they are Sikhs and follow the religion but then they are following such social practices that contradict Sikhism's essential tenets. Moe agrees that he is guilty of this as well: "we are just preaching but not doing it. We go to the *gurdwara* and preach that this is the thing we are not going to do, but then we go out and do it."

Despite the fact that there was general consensus amongst the participants that equality is a fundamental belief within Sikhism, a couple of the respondents still maintain a bias towards the caste system. For some participants, this manifests in a hesitation to question older relatives about the caste system when Sikhism supports equality, as is the case with Mindy. For others such as Moe, caste continues to be important for some life decisions. When Moe is asked if he will think caste is an important factor in considering a potential spouse for his children, he answers "I think we are still biased, I would if I had my choice right, I would like [my children] to get married somewhere similar." The older generation seems to think that if people marry within the same caste, they will be like-minded and have a more successful marriage. Moe explains: "I think the caste system is there...so that people marry from the same villages so that their thinking was the same, that's why the caste system probably exists, is so that their thinking is compatible." Explaining what this marital compatibility means, Moe gives an example: "If a guy has done a degree and there is an illiterate guy, you know their thinking is different as far as education is concerned." He likens the issues that may arise from differences in education status to those that may come up due to caste differences: "This would be similar if someone wants to marry a person because they think if I am a *jatt* and the other is a *jatt*, they will be somewhat compatible."

In one instance, Moe states that as long as his children find someone that is compatible and have the same views, he would be happy. On the other hand, he also states, "Having said that, you know I would like the religion to be the same." Here we see a distinction being made between caste belonging and religious beliefs. Moe appears to be someone who is somewhat well-versed in the Guru Granth Sahib; he mentions in the interview that he believes in Sikhism, however, throughout he still states that he will want his children to marry like-minded people, which he also said means similar castes. He also clarifies that he would not consider inter-racial options

for his kids. In a similar vein, Hank shares his concern regarding one of the castes being more dominant in a household of inter-caste marriage, depending on the spouses' characteristics. Unlike Moe, Rita mentions that she has never read the Guru Granth Sahib in detail, but she does not think that it says anywhere that if one is a part of a certain caste, that means they are higher or lower than other people. Hank, Rita and Moe's accounts serve to tease out the various considerations to which parents and family's pay heed when considering marital partners for their children or grandchildren.

When it comes to the younger generation, they have a different perspective on trying to understand Sikhism and tended to question their parents' views. Rita, a twenty-seven-year-old single female talks about her frustration in understanding Sikhs who may not practice what they preach. Although the belief in caste does not appear to be stated anywhere, in reality people have created this divide even while practicing Sikhism; she contends that that's not what the religion is teaching or intended to teach anyone and that, in fact, Sikhism is all about equality (Nayar, 2004, p. 123). She states that she is a Sikh but does not practice Sikhism; however, one thing she is not able to comprehend is people who practice or say they practice Sikhism but don't actually live by what they say. In relation to this, a participant in Nayar's study also states that people say they are religious, but they do not practice the religion fully, and many people do and believe things just out of habit (Nayar, 2004, p. 134). Following ritualistic practices out of habit may not be the same as performing a ritual because one believes in it. It may be worthwhile to probe into why a ritual is being performed to truly get at what the person performing it believes.

The views of another respondent are of relevance here, too. Mindy, twenty-three-years-old, was born and raised in Canada; she completed her degree to become a Social Worker and is currently a Master's student in a Social Work program. She says that Sikhism comes down to being someone who cares about humanity, who does *seva* (volunteers). Adding to this, she notes that it is something one does from the goodness of their heart; it's about not being materialistic, but about being happy with what one has and having respect for each other. So, those on paper seem to be the principles of Sikhism, but when compared to what people are actually doing, their claims about following Sikh teachings and their actions are somewhat different.

The younger generation discusses how the older generation says that they are religious and follow Sikhism but then they also say that they will still follow or believe in the caste system, regardless of what the Guru Granth Sahib says. This is a blanket statement that the younger generation makes. This further suggests that there is a major disconnection between teachings and practice, making one ask, where does the caste system come in if Sikhism technically does not allow it? Mindy explains that she still asks this, as it does not make any sense to her. She is hesitant to ask her grandmother and question her beliefs regarding this because she is a devout Sikh: “I felt if I ask my grandma that question who is a devout Sikh, she would be very upset that I even asked her that because, part of me believes that she follows, she has a strong support for the caste system. It doesn’t make any sense to me.” Mindy feels that her grandmother will be upset because Mindy is questioning religion and its practices.

Mindy believes that Canadian-born children should be questioning adults regarding the divide between preaching and practicing Sikhism:

There’s a disconnect [sic] between Sikhism and caste right, there’s irony in it and I don’t know I question my own parents about it, I would say maybe more of us who are Canadian-born, I kind of urge them to maybe question their parents about it too right and find out what it is that really rooted them in that thinking and why do they think that way and did that thinking change over time.

Mindy questions her own practicing Sikh parents to find out what it is that really roots them in this way of thinking and still believing in the caste system and to find out if that thinking has changed over time. They unfortunately were not able to give her an answer and they state that’s just how it’s always been: “When I do ask them about it I challenge them about it because like I mentioned earlier about Guru Nanak Dev Ji like the more I learned about Sikhism the more I learned that it began rooted from our guru who believed in getting rid of the caste system right, so my mom would be like yea but you know that is the way it should be but it’s unfortunate that it’s not like that.” In addition, Mindy is also curious about how the concept of caste kept flourishing at the same time as Sikhism took hold and how the timing of this coincided.

Also delving into the tension between what is preached and what is practiced, Victor, a thirty-year-old single Canadian-born male expresses, that he feels a lot of the “traditionalists” are hypocrites when it comes to the Sikh religion, as they are not practicing what they preach. He further discusses the action that younger generations need to take: “Having a caste system, and



adhering to it, goes against being a Sikh. If the new generations keep voicing their concerns, the topic of same-caste or inter-caste marriages will be less prevalent in the Sikh community.”

Unfortunately, in practice, we see that Sikhs continue to follow caste in its organized way in organized religion, which is not a part of the Sikh religion but is a part of the cultural practices.

#### **4.3 Older generation: Caste, teachings and practice**

Nayar’s (2004) study was a central component of the literature review I conducted for this study. She uses three terms of communication to discuss three Sikh generations: orality (first-generation), literacy (second-generation) and analytics (third-generation). These concepts are useful in understanding the development of thought forms and patterns caused by modernization. Orality is a traditional mentality where speech consists of telling and retelling of ideas and stories that have been passed from one generation to the next. Literacy is influenced by the ability to read and write, but it still operates within the context of traditional society. The thought forms and patterns of literacy reflect main characteristics associated with orality. Analytics refers to the mode of critical thinking that comes out of the culture of reading and writing, which breaks away from traditional mentality to reflect essential characteristics of modernity. It involves deeper thinking and conditioning as well as intellectual experimentation and exploration. Levels of literacy/education play a decisive role in whether Sikhs will challenge adherence to caste values. Older generations tended to do what they were told via a religious practices. Analytics leads to more questioning of the status quo.

As we saw in the literature review earlier, “Most Sikhs do not know the teachings of the Guru Granth Sahib, and simply practice the customs and rituals handed down through the generations” (Nayar, 2004, p. 134). The more educated the older generation became after immigrating to Canada, the more some of them shift from orality to literacy. This section discusses the views of the older generation when it comes to the concept of caste and Sikhism. To remind ourselves of what caste is, the definition we are working with is that of caste as “a small and named group of persons characterized by marriage within a group, hereditary membership, and specific style of life such as... a particular occupation” (Dhar, 2013, p. 3).

Samantha, now fifty-nine-years-old, has said that she is a practicing Sikh. Samantha emigrated from India just before she got married. She was married at the age of twenty-three in Vancouver, BC where her family arranged her marriage to her husband. Samantha emigrated from India just before she got married. She is a well-educated individual with many years of work as an instructor, researcher, community educator and consultant in the areas of Indo-Canadian Studies, but regardless of being so developed in the western society she continues to find herself being curious and wanting to ask about caste. She says that she consciously holds back her questions to her elders and knows that she shouldn't ask about caste, because at the end of the day, it does not matter. However, it is still inside her where it bubbles up and she wonders what a person's caste is. Samantha claims that she wants to know because she is curious, but then realizes that she needs to interrogate her own thoughts and ask herself why she is curious and why does it matter. For Sikhs, and for all human beings, this is the most difficult part i.e. to look within themselves and question their own assumptions. This is challenging to do. If one is uneducated or illiterate, they tend not to question things, they don't go deeper into their own thinking and question their biases. When people ask the question why caste matters to their parents, the reason they can't tell their children why is because they never really understood themselves why they have bought into this narrative about caste being an issue.

Joe, a married fifty-year-old male who immigrated to Canada about twenty-five years ago, states that caste would still be a determining factor for a potential marriage partner for his children. He believes in and follows the Sikh religion. Joe still has a strong connection to his roots in India as the majority of his family live there and so he travels back to India quite frequently. He not only runs a farming business in Canada, but also assists his brothers in their farming business in India. It appears as though the continuous communication and visits to his homeland keep him connected to the traditional cultural practice of believing in the caste system. Even while living in Canada for so many years, it may be difficult for him to separate himself from the views that his family may hold in India or hold views that differ from theirs when it comes to the caste system.

Pam, a fifty-four-year-old female who is married and immigrated to Canada believes that Sikhism has changed because people manipulate *gurbani*, the teachings of the gurus, to suit their

own needs, instead of just accepting what the *gurbani* are trying to teach people. In other words, instead of following what the Guru Granth Sahib is teaching, people will pick and choose things that benefit them. Earlier, another participant, Hank, has stated that he knows equality is a key principle of Sikhism, but he also considers that, if one wants a healthy family environment and wants to mould the next generation according to their beliefs, then the caste system is important and he would follow it. He thinks that if one doesn't bother or care about these things then they can get married in any caste.

Hank believes that there will be deviations and differences in the coming generations, such as a change in their behavior, their personality, etc. at least in part due to inter-caste marriages. He thinks, "If you want a healthy environment and want to mould the next generation according to your worldview, then the caste is important." In this context, Hank argues that depending on what side, the mother's or father's side, dominates in the family, that side will have the most effect on the children: "There will be deviations and some difference, the coming generations will have difference in their behavior, their personality etc. that will be either the mother's effect or the father's effect, whoever is dominating they will have their effect." In effect, Hank means that, depending on which caste is more prominent in the household, the children will be more like that caste in their beliefs and values, and that one caste will dominate.

Hank thinks if one cares about how their future generations are going to turn out, then they need to ensure that they make appropriate decisions when it comes to creating relationships. It appears that he thinks a healthy relationship will come from marrying within the same caste and perhaps traditions and values will be better passed on to their children. Out of all my respondents, Hank is the last one to have immigrated to Canada, and as a result, relatively speaking, has spent the least amount of time in Canada as a resident. His views on the importance of the caste system were much different from other immigrant parents who had been in Canada for some time. As an example, Hank believes that "the different castes within Sikhism have a difference in their behavior, and immediately you can assess that. For example, the way of talking and way of behavior, there is always some difference."

Moe was born in India but moved to London, England at an early age where he was brought up. He is asked what he thought about the culture when he moved to Canada and he says when he came to Surrey, BC, it was like India to him. The customs were a little bit different in Canada and people were regularly wearing Indian attire as they would if they were in India. He then experienced that people started asking him if he was from Jalandhar or from Ludhiana (cities in Punjab, India), but he did not associate with those things, because he moved to London when he was fairly young. Furthermore, he realized that people would start asking if he was a *jimidhar* or a *mistri* (different types of castes) and he was appalled by this because he had not experienced it before and he felt that it really did not matter. Guru Nanak and the other gurus told us many years ago that there is equality for all. He states that he noticed the questions regarding caste a lot more in Surrey, BC than he did in London; below he considers possible reasons for this difference in the importance of caste system for Sikh diaspora in different parts of the world, largely attributing this to differing levels of education.

Moe thinks that there are more Sikhs together in Surrey, BC so they stick together, but also he says that in London the circle of people that he associated with, which is not to say all Sikhs there, but the majority of Sikhs had degrees and were educated with high job posts. “So you know there were a lot of educated people, but when I come to Canada right, I am not saying there is not an educated community here, there are many people that are highly educated but most of the time you know, maybe it’s changing again maybe it is shifting, but there are so many family class people that came to Canada and they were from the village and they hadn’t seen Ludhiana or any cities in India let alone here. So I think they kind of brought all of their views with them and that’s where it’s gone.” He thinks the people that immigrate from the rural villages in India may have brought all of their views with them and that’s why these views and beliefs are so strong in urban Canada.

#### **4.4 Younger generation**

The younger generation in this study is between the ages of 22-30 and they are all born in Canada. Being born in Canada means that they grew up in a different society than their parents’ generation, who are all immigrants. Their lives and experiences are much different from the lives their parents lived (Gerson, 2009, p. 737). The younger generation has grown up with or

has been exposed at an early age to pervasive forces of mass media, globalization and immigration and along with it, cross-cultural exchange of ideas and practices. This has brought the world to their doorsteps in a much more intimate way than would have been prevalent when their parents were growing up. This suggests that since the younger generation has access and exposure to so much more than their parents, there will be tensions between the generations in regards to ideas and practices. The older generation will still have a more closed off view of things than their children, who are more modernized.

Out of 13 participants in this category, 11 of these participants come from families where their parents were in arranged marriages, within the same caste. There are only two out of 13 participants whose parents are not from the same caste and who had a romantic marriage. Of the 13 participants that I interviewed from the younger generation, five are married. All married participants of the younger generation are in romantic, inter-caste marriages.

All the participants discuss what they feel are some of the important principles of Sikhism. They feel that equality is a big part of the Sikh religion. This is the most dominant theme that emerges in this chapter. The implications of this theme's prevalence is that Sikhs are aware that equality is a main belief of the religion but peoples thoughts and actions continue to contradict this value. Mindy, a twenty-three-year-old Canadian-born educated woman of Sikh descent who has struggled to reconcile the caste system with Sikhism's egalitarian principles and whose views are shared earlier in this chapter, goes on to talk about how when she was a teenager her parents attempted to tell her about marrying within the same caste: "I think when I was 15 or 16 they started talking about it because at that age my brother was 20 and they were just talking about, oh if he gets a girlfriend it just better be a *saini* (type of caste), like that's all we ask for and if, god forbid, you ever find a boyfriend just he better be a *saini* too." Thinking through this critically, Mindy did not really understand the concept of caste at this time and tried to question why it is important to her parents that she marry within the caste: "I questioned it a bit especially because I wasn't really understanding it too much, but really I didn't get a response, but I think it was that they didn't really have a solid response for it." They did not really have much of a response that explains why marrying within one's own caste is ideal. This touches on the idea

that sometimes beliefs may be passed down through generations without being challenged or even fully understood.

Mindy says she asks her parents about the caste system and challenges them about it because the more she learns about Sikhism and about Guru Nanak Dev, the more she learns that the religion began with a guru who believed in getting rid of the caste system. Mindy's sentiments are echoed in the literature, which sheds light on the contradiction that "the whole point of Sikhism was to abolish the caste system and have everyone equal, and yet we [still] believe in the caste system..." (see Netting, 2001, p. 140). Her mother agrees with her that it should be like that where the caste system does not exist, but she also states that it is unfortunate that it's not like that. Mindy's mother thinks it's wrong to believe in the caste system, but she is not actually doing anything to actively challenge it. This illustrates that the younger generation sees and experiences this contradiction in what their parents are saying.

John, a twenty-two-year-old single, Canadian-born male explains that he used to be religious. He used to go to the *gurdwara*; his parents made him pray and he did this only because they told him what to do. John says that because he was a child he had to follow what they told him, and he did not question them. When he grew up and learned more he realized that his parents told him to follow practices that did not make sense in accordance with the Sikh religion, and here again they had no explanations to offer him. John states that his parents are religious, and that caste was a factor in their marriage. They were in an arranged marriage and were coupled because they were from the same caste, and if they had been from different castes their marriage would not have happened.

Nicky, a twenty-eight-year-old single female states that caste means absolutely nothing to her and that it is an artificial label that tries to establish a hierarchy of value, based on birth alone. Nicky expresses, "A system that classifies based on birth is oppressive and impedes progress." The Sikh religion abolished caste at the time of its establishment. As noted earlier, Sikhs are even given the identity Singh and Kaur in order to disassociate from caste. Surnames can be associated with the caste one belongs to and that is why Sikhs were given the identity of Singh (males) and Kaur (females) to reinforce that all humans are equal under god. From the accounts

in this section, we see that the younger generation appears to be more forward thinking in regard to Sikh teachings. Nicky states that she thinks over time, Sikhism has grown and changed significantly, as newer generations begin to learn about Sikhism. Their access to information allows for a new and more comprehensive understanding of Sikh teachings. Consequently, Sikhism has become more inclusive over time. As the Sikh population grows, it continues to diverge from traditions associated with Hinduism; an example of this is that inter-caste and 'love' marriages are becoming more acceptable (Netting, 2001, p. 143).

Bob, a twenty-nine-year-old married male who was born in Canada states that, "if you consider yourself to be a Sikh, caste shouldn't be important in marriage. Caste was brought up when I was getting married, it was a love marriage, but it was not the most important factor for my situation. He goes on further to say that, "Caste is not important to me. Yes, I would ask and be curious, but it would not change my decision or alter my opinion of anyone." Even though Bob believes that caste does not fit into Sikhism, he still cannot help but be interested in knowing, whether he uses that information for anything or not. This leads to the next chapter's central focus: that, as much as the younger generation does not believe in the caste system or see its relevance in society today, it may be difficult to dismiss it entirely depending on one's family of origin.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

It is commonly recognized that the gurus taught equality, regardless of caste, race, and religion. The older generation, by and large, state that they understand Sikhism is about equality and that's what the gurus wanted. However, they contradict the concept of equality when they still abide by the caste system and expect their children to marry within the same caste. There is a discrepancy between what is preached and what is practiced amongst the older generation; perhaps this arises from the fact that they follow what they were taught and raised with, without questioning it to better understand it.

The younger generation also understands that there is no caste in Sikhism, but with education and critical inquiry they challenge the religious teachings, and question the older generation's practice of and belief in the caste system. They question contradictions when the older

generation's practice of Sikhism conflicts with the religion's teachings. The younger generation attempts to question the teachings and practices in front of/directly to the elders; however, they do not receive a satisfactory response to their queries. The older generation tends to not have answers to the questions being asked or explanations for certain practices, such as believing in the caste system. It appears that the younger generation has a different view of the Sikh religion than their older counterparts who are more likely to take the religion for what it is. They might not follow Sikhism in the same way the older generation thinks it should be followed, but they have a seemingly more critically informed outlook on being religious and following the Sikh religion, an approach that allows for greater flexibility in choosing associates, friendships and marriage partners. The younger generation is actually being more meticulous about discerning core values in Sikhism, i.e., equality and rejection of caste, while, perhaps, at the same time, allowing that for older generations, preoccupations with caste aren't going to go away completely.



## **Chapter Five: Significance of Caste in Relation to Marriage and Honor**

Day to day, Hindus and Sikhs may or may not experience or have to deal with the caste system, but it tends to be a common theme discussed during the time of marriage and when looking for potential spouses (Deshpande, 2010, p. 4). When relationships are beginning to form, that's when inquiries around things like caste identity start to happen. Reactions, however, vary from family to family. Some parents are adamant that their children marry within the same caste, as they believe that is best for them because perhaps the marriage partners will have similar thinking and will be more compatible. The literature review reaffirms this concept of similarity of lifestyle habits and beliefs ushering out of caste identity being a good indicator of compatibility; as Netting (2001, p. 134) states, the practice of matching potential spouses on the basis of caste, religious belief, economic standing and geographical affiliation has been a long-standing one. Other parents have changed their thinking over time and are more open to inter-caste marriages. Some parents do not care at all and, additionally, some children do not really care about what their parents have to say. As the findings below indicate, the choice of marital partner and the restraints around it run the entire gamut from marrying within one's own religion, caste and other social categories to having free rein over whom to marry.

The varying strategies that families adopt for determining criteria for the eligibility of a marital partner confirm that an intersectional framework is required to understand this process, one that accounts for not only caste but also socioeconomic status, religious beliefs, ethnicity and academic qualifications (Casier, et. al., 2013). As we see below, the ways in which children negotiate the complexities of meeting parents' demands while still maintaining their agency in selecting marriage partners gives rise to creative mechanisms of coping with these sometimes conflicting ideals. This section looks at the complex and sometimes conflicting ways in which individuals and families negotiate decisions and choices related to marriage. The factors influencing this decision-making process differ based on one's own beliefs, one's parents' beliefs, and the trajectory that one's life has taken so far. In some cases, the articulation of these values in itself points toward the conscious and sometimes subconscious struggle to make sense of this issue within each individual.

The concept of *izzat*, meaning honor or respect for the individual and/or the family, plays a significant role in the ways in which women's—and to a lesser extent, men's—behavior is monitored or policed. Respondents discuss the ways in which *izzat* falls primarily upon the shoulders of women to preserve, and what this means for the freedom and agency accorded to them. Other ideas that take on importance in the discussion below include the economic power and privilege and social status that some caste affiliations accord their members, and on the other side, inflict great cost on some castes at the same time. Last but not least, the ways in which immigration and migrant identity shape expectations and experiences of marriage also come up in the description below.

### **5.1 Caste and marriage in the older generation**

For some participants, caste was not a topic of discussion in their marriage; it was just something that happened. The expectation to marry within one's own caste can be felt without ever having been openly stated. As a value that one has been raised with and one that does not need to be explicitly explained, it can hold power as being almost unquestionable as an evaluative criterion for choosing a partner. As Bourdieu's theory of habitus states, the reasoning for this may be because of the deeply ingrained habits, skills and dispositions that one possess due to their life experiences (Cooper & Glaesser, 2014, p. 465). For the older generation, caste was an aspect of the Sikh culture that was anchored into the daily practices of their society. For instance, Moe discusses that for his marriage caste was a significant factor, to the extent that he never considered marrying from outside his caste, attributing this to the way he was raised. He explains: "we did not think about the caste system, we were just brought up and said we are going to marry same caste as us...I didn't even think that I would marry someone outside." In this way, one can self-restrict one's choices to within one's own caste. This suggests that some individuals do not feel externally limited by the restraint of marrying within one's own caste but instead choose to opt for this condition themselves.

Historical sources that scholars consult pertaining to arranged marriage in the South Asian culture suggests that women did not traditionally have much of a voice in their life choices and would have marital partners chosen for them, thus taking away their agency in this process (Bhopal, 2011, p. 433). This is echoed in Pam's sentiments below, where she considers herself

as a spectator rather than an active participant when selecting a life partner. Pam, a fifty-four-year-old had an arranged marriage at the age of nineteen. She states: “I didn’t know if it was important in my marriage, because I didn’t really have a choice of who I was going to marry in general. We were introduced, and that was that. And thankfully it worked out, but I don’t think that it worked out because we were born in the same caste.”

Where one does not pick their own partner at all, the discussion of whether they would marry out of caste is eclipsed by the lack of choice in any aspect. Like earlier accounts that speak of the unspoken acknowledgement of caste divisions, Samantha explains her experience with caste during her marriage, noting that although it may not have been said out loud, the expectation was always that she would marry within her own caste. Samantha, a fifty-nine-year-old was introduced to her husband and married at the age of twenty-three. As she says, “I don’t remember my mother or my father saying, ‘thou shall not’ but I certainly got messaging, when they started looking for a boy when my elder siblings were getting married, that they were *jatts*.” Samantha further reflects on how the importance of caste to one’s identity shifts in the context of immigration. “Actually, coming to Canada, the issue of caste became clearer to me than it did as I was growing up in India.” Underlining the particular significance of caste in relation to marriage, even in cases where caste is not otherwise a major consideration, when it comes to marriage, it becomes more important. “In India where I grew up caste wasn’t as important, but I wasn’t at a marriageable age at that time. Caste raises its ugly head usually at the time of marriage, it tends not to have much cachet otherwise.” Like other participants, we see that Samantha’s experience also accounts for learning about caste-related expectations when choosing a marriage partner without being directly told of these. “The biggest clash in caste comes at the time of marriage. I didn’t get any direct messaging from my parents ‘you shall not marry outside your caste’ but there were subliminal messages that I picked up and unspoken words.” In the context of migration and diaspora, as evident in Samantha’s case, the retention and adoption of cultural practices related to marriage and selection of a marital partner play a key role in identity formation for migrants (Samuel, 2010, p. 96). Here we see that even in families where caste is not always discussed openly in relation to marriage, the implied expectation to marry in-caste can still be there.

Hank has previously said that he knows the Sikh religion does not believe in the caste system, but he further states that he will consider the caste system if he personally had to put it into practice for himself and his family. He couches this in terms of maintaining similarities across generations: “There will be some difference, the coming generations will have difference in their behavior, their personality etc. that will be either the mother’s effect or the father’s effect, whoever is dominating them will have their effect.” Caste similarity appears to take importance because it is believed that spouses from the same caste may provide more of a united front when raising children. Hank adds, “If you want a healthy environment and want to mould the next generation according to you, then the caste is important. If you don’t bother about these things, then you can get married in any caste.” As Hank suggests, there is a prevalent belief that marrying someone similarly located in society makes it easier to sustain marital relationships as compared to marrying someone from a different social grouping. The idea that being from the same group makes it more likely that values, religious beliefs, language, culture and manner of upbringing will be similar is why intra-group pairings are thought to be better. Therefore, this similarity is considered to make compatibility between spouses and their families more likely (Casier, et. al., 2013, p. 467). This general philosophy falls in line with the idea that endogamy is a safer, lower-risk option when choosing a marital partner. This in turn can be attributed to the idea that we are likely to get along better with people who are like us.

It also appears that when it comes to friends or coworkers of different castes, one may have different thinking, but it is more acceptable and easier to be friends with people of different castes than it is marry across castes. This is reiterated by a research participant who describes how caste consciousness is more evident in some instances and not so much in others: “when it comes to marriage, my parents won’t let me marry into a low-caste family, even if they’re friends with the family” (Netting, 2001, p. 143). Similarly, Hank states that if he had to deal with the absence of the caste system in the work field it would not bother him much whether it was in India or Canada: “For the work field, I can go together, and I can work with people from other castes but when it comes to be the subject of the relations then definitely I consider the caste system.” Mingling with people from other castes in everyday life does not seem to be an issue. However, once it comes to marriage or building a relationship, then being from a different caste creates a problem.

## 5.2 Caste and marriage in the younger generation

Harry, a twenty-two-year-old single Canadian-born male, states that caste was more for his parents than for him and “it would affect them if I married out of caste but ultimately it would be my decision not theirs and their reaction would not alter my decision.” Furthermore, John, a twenty-two-year-old male born in Canada, explains that his parents have talked to him and said that he needs to marry in the same caste: “They have asked me to marry in the same caste but we’ve come to the conclusion where it’s not going to happen, but it is something they would want.” John elaborates with an example within his family where caste and nationality took on prominence: “My brother has been in a relationship with a Russian girl and my parents have somewhat come around. It was a slow process, but they’ve come around, it took a while.” Even when some parents accept their children’s choices, it is felt that the children’s choice is not the parents’ first choice, and when they pick someone outside of their social grouping, the relationship may not be taken as seriously. John explains, “Ideally they would want it to be someone same, they just think that we’re having our fun and at the end just watch they’re going to marry within the same religion and caste.” Both participants are young males that attend university. Their parents work general labor jobs and had arranged marriages.

As John’s brother’s example illustrates, even when one faces restrictions around selecting a marital partner, these restrictions rarely dictate individual behavior in a straightforward manner. Individuals will seek out creative solutions to the restrictions they face, seeking a happy medium that accounts for their personal choices while still accommodating socially imposed restrictions (Netting, 2001, p. 143; Nayar, 2004, p. 72-73; Samuel, 2013, p. 96-98). We see compromises being made to arrive at solutions, as worded by one of Netting’s research participants that, “I have to sacrifice a little for my family—like, limit myself to *Jat* Sikh girls to choose among” (Netting, 2001, p. 138).

John thinks his parents want him to marry within the same religion and caste because of how they have been brought up; they have been brought up this way and so they want their children to be raised the same way. John’s understanding of his parents’ expectation for him is reflected in Deshpande’s (2010, p. 4) research that there were and continue to be restraints around what is appropriate behavior within and across castes, especially as it relates to marriage. John thinks

that inter-caste marriages are still not as acceptable and can create issues. Another example he shares is that of his sister-in-law's brother: "He wanted to marry a girl, but she wasn't the same caste and his parents would not allow it to happen they had to run away from home but then her mom also wouldn't allow them to get married." In the face of parental disapproval, their children may have to choose between pleasing their parents or sticking to their choice. In the above example, John says "he's like I don't want to leave my parents anymore and it's not going to happen and she's like same thing, so they just left it." Here we see support for the research that suggests most individuals would comply with restrictions of marrying someone from the same religion and caste, if not doing so would result in parental disapproval (Casier, et. al., 2013, p. 475).

Mindy adds that the importance of caste depends on what type of family one hails from: "I think for some families, yes caste is an important factor for marriage, it depends on what type of family you come from, from a very traditional family or a much more forward thinking one." Mindy tells her story regarding a potential spouse, whose caste would be important for her parents to know. Anticipation of parents' disapproval can make one hesitant when it comes to confiding in them fully: "I knew that it would be a big big deal to my parents and it would almost be a deal breaker so it was hard. I still haven't told my parents fully, honestly and openly about him."

Individuals will adopt creative strategies to address their parents' concerns while still maintaining their autonomy. One such strategy that Mindy adopted is described here: "I feared if I told them right away they would be more inclined to having us break up because they knew it would be a fast and quick break up for us because we were so young." Taking into account her parents' likely reaction, Mindy thought carefully about how best to share this with her parents: "I hindered myself from telling them about him...but I have conversations with my mom she seems pretty open about me having a partner outside of my caste but she still doesn't know that he's not my caste." Mindy confiding in her mom reminds us that parents can be seen as good advisors; furthermore, her hesitance in sharing more about her boyfriend hints towards a desire to please her parents, which is considered important in case a match does not work, so as to avoid having to take all the blame for things not working out (Casier, et. al., 2013, p. 473). Mindy is then

asked if caste will affect her if it came or were to come up when she eventually told her parents about it. Will she think it might be an issue then? She explained: “My parents are a little bit not so set in their ways as maybe other parents are, I think they are a bit more forward thinking because in my family tree we’ve had inter-racial marriages.” Addressing a possible reason for her parents’ open-mindedness, Mindy shares more about her family dynamics: “We’ve had people marry outside their religion, they haven’t necessarily been very accepting of them, but they haven’t stopped talking to those people so if it did get brought up in my marriage, they would be accepting of it over time.” It looks like where inter-group marriages within one’s own circle are seen to be successful, the resistance to them becomes less severe; Mindy further explains “since we’ve had those inter-racial marriages and in everyday life we see people that don’t visibly look like they ‘belong together,’ they’ve probably just seen it more so they feel less with their backs turned up against it.” Mindy’s comments shed light on the dynamic nature of individual and collective attitudes towards marriage, underlining how what is considered acceptable shifts over time and across families. Furthermore, her insight also hints towards the complex interactions between parents and children as they navigate the waters of marriage.

Some Canadian-born children have seen their parents change over time. Initially, some parents had told their children that they have to find someone and marry within the same caste, but as situations around them changed the parents seemed to move away from these stipulations. As with Mindy’s example above, this can sometimes include seeing the success of marriages that may have initially been considered ill-matched, including inter-caste and inter-racial marriages. Other changes include shifts in worldviews due to migration as well as possibly seeing children make responsible decisions in other areas of life, such as obtaining post-secondary and post-graduate education and attaining respectable careers, thus making them seem more capable of choosing the right partner for themselves as well.

Nancy, a thirty-year-old Canadian-born single female, is asked if caste affects her everyday life and she states that her parents belong to different castes and caste has never been a factor in her life at home. However, she has seen it come up in her experiences beyond her immediate family: “I had noticed, when I was single and dating Indian men, it was a topic of discussion during some dates and caste did seem to matter to some Indian men and their families.”

When Rita is asked where she thinks people learn about the caste system, she states, family is the primary source of learning: “From their parents! Not in my house though, we don’t talk about different castes and this guy married a girl from this caste, like we just don’t do that.” She explains that she thinks she’s been raised thinking everyone is equal. Here she speaks of her grandfather’s teaching to “treat the other person with respect that’s it, that’s all that really matters.” What’s interesting in her description is that she somewhat disassociates her late grandfather with Sikhism, noting that he did not practice Sikhism; “he never actually did *paath* in his life ever.” Rita further explores her stance on this, linking her personal experience to the teachings of Sikhism by noting, “people have complicated a simple religion. I haven’t really read from the Guru Granth Sahib, but from what I’ve been taught it’s all about equality, so then there should be no caste system, we’re all on the same level.” In articulating her thoughts on the topic, Rita notes the discrepancy between the teachings and practices, “clearly they’re not following what Sikhism is about because it’s not about who’s higher or who’s lower, who’s superior or inferior.”

Mindy says that she does think the practices of Sikhism have changed over time and perhaps inter-caste marriages are more acceptable now than they were before: “Yeah, I do think caste and Sikhism has changed over time, they do seem to be more acceptable.” However, she tempers this statement with her own limited experience, in that she does not experience this on a daily basis. She further points out that she has seen evidence to the contrary; “my own cousin was being disowned and you see honor killings and things like that still happening so perhaps progress has been made but also the oppression that some women are still facing, it’s happening behind closed doors.” Highlighting that the private domain in which this plays out preempts attempts to raise awareness about the issue more publicly, Rita says, “nobody is shedding light on it, therefore I don’t know about it therefore public doesn’t know about it.” To give some context, Mindy’s cousin in India married outside of her caste and as a result of that was disowned by her parents. Her own family has not spoken to her again and even her family in Canada has not re-connected with her. We see that, with the strong reaction meted out to Mindy’s cousin’s decision to marry out of her caste, marriages arranged on the basis of caste and other social categories serve as an essential force in maintaining divisions of caste (Samuel,



2010, p. 99). So, when Mindy feels that perhaps views around the caste system were changing, she simultaneously experienced her own family's rejection of her cousin for going through with an inter-caste marriage.

Sandy, a fifty-three-year-old married female who immigrated to Canada, states: "It is important to know my child is looked after financially for a secure future and has similar beliefs as all this affects not only the couple but also the families involved." Sandy's account hints that migrant identity formation is heavily dependent on cultural practices around marriage. Sandy's expression of familial involvement indicates that marriage is in fact seen as a socially significant institution that unites families and not simply individuals (Dhar, 2013, p. 1). Parents believe it's important that not only the couple is on the same page, but the families as well. As much as they may want the best for their children, they also appear to be considering whether the families will get along.

With such an emphasis on families coming together through marriage instead of only two people, the institution takes on even more religious and social significance than if it were considered to be only a marriage of two individuals. This idea of familial unification means that the reputation and vested interests of family members must be accounted for when choosing a marital partner. It is not simply a matter of choice for the spouses-to-be, but a decision that affects immediate and extended family as well. With family life being a central component of religion, marriage as the gateway to that family life becomes even more important.

It is this coming together of families that makes the individuals' family backgrounds a matter of importance in the marriage process (Dhar, 2013, p. 12). When Rita is asked how important caste is to her when considering a potential spouse, she states: "To me, it's not important but I know to my parents, actually my mom it might be because I think it's almost like a pride thing to get married into the same caste." She says that her parents will expect her to find someone of the same caste but might be more accommodating in reality: "They don't nag me but it doesn't have to be said, it's expected that you will find someone within your caste system but I'm sure they wouldn't go crazy if this person wasn't the same." Rita states that her parents probably will not reject the guy if he is from a different caste, but if there is a proposal and it is somebody of a

different caste, it will be different: “I think if someone was trying to set me up with someone from a different caste, they’d be like no but if it was someone I found they would (not) really have a problem with it.”

Rita’s example holds true to research findings that when it comes to matchmaking, the parties involved tend only to search for people of the same nationality and caste and who speak the same language and hold the same religious beliefs (Netting, 2001, p. 135; Dave, 2012, p. 168). Especially if there are enough people in the in-group from which to choose, then the tendency to opt for someone that society considers compatible is even higher than if the options within one’s own social grouping were more limited (Casier, et. al., 2013, p. 469). Sarah discusses her story about how the caste system affected her when she wanted to get married: “Growing up it was something that we never discussed. I never knew what caste I was growing up... it came up when I wanted to get married and my husband wasn’t of the same caste.” Sarah’s experience offers support for the idea that even where caste is not otherwise considered important, it comes up in relation to marriage nonetheless. Sarah adds, “that’s when the questions started arising, oh by the way we’re *jatt*, you’re not allowed to marry somebody who’s not *jatt*.” At this juncture, Sarah had a critical choice to make; she talks through what this meant for her: “I made a decision to not abide by restrictions of caste because I didn’t believe it was right for me to believe in that. I was disowned by my entire family, eloped and had a court marriage and a small *anand karaj* (wedding ceremony) at a local *gurdwara* (temple).” The use of strong words such as “disowned” and “eloped” in Sarah’s account above allude to the social sanction that occurs if a marriage that took place without parental approval fails; women may be unable to rely on their family for monetary and emotional support as they would be considered entirely responsible for their choice (Casier, et. al., 2013, p. 473).

Victor, a Canadian-born thirty-year-old single male, states: “I do not think caste is of important at all, for marriage or in general. It is not an important factor in my upcoming marriage. It’s not something that I cared to ask for or wanted to know.” Even in this instance where caste is considered irrelevant, we see that there is a desire to know the other person’s caste anyway; as Victor describes; “With that said, it was still a topic discussed due to the fact that the parents had a “need to know” about the caste. It did not affect my relationship in anyway whatsoever.”

Mandy, a twenty-nine-year-old Canadian-born married female, explains: “My husband and I are from different castes; we think the idea of caste is silly; it did not affect our decision. The priest at our wedding addressed the topic of caste and said he was glad to see people looking beyond caste.” However, even in Mandy’s case we see that caste was not a foreign topic: “Growing up I always heard about caste. My siblings and I were always told we should marry within our same caste. However, when I told my parents that my now husband is of a different caste they had no problem with it.”

Across the participants’ narratives, we see some commonalities in terms of their focus on how caste is thought of in relation to marriage. The difference lies in the extent to which caste impacts choice of marital partner for each respondent. On one end of the spectrum, Sarah made the decision to stand up to and go against the societal and familial pressure to marry within her caste. Further along we have Rita, whose family will encourage marriage within the caste but will not enforce it. Then there is Victor, who likes to know about someone’s caste, but does not consider it particularly relevant for marriage. Finally, on the other end of the spectrum is Mandy who not only is part of an inter-caste marriage, but also made it a point to denounce the system at her own wedding. Here we see the various ways in which caste can be considered insignificant but still crop up in life decisions and marriage events. Religion and awareness of it or adherence to it can be heightened or “activated” around big life events such as marriage (Davidman, 1991).

Mindy says that a few years ago her parents were encouraging her to marry within the same caste. She is asked if she thinks that’s happening in more households in Canada. Mindy states: “I think it’s still happening in some households here. I think it depends on how religiously your parents are practicing Sikhism. Some families are really rooted in thinking that you have to marry within the same caste.” Elaborating on how religiosity influences views on caste system, Mindy adds: “If some of them are *amrit shak* like baptized and they really follow Sikhism, it could be surprising that they actually support the caste system, or they might not.” Rita assumes that in India people still think that being a *jatt*, the higher caste equals to being of the upper class. She thinks that the older generation, because they are born and raised in India, still have that ingrained belief of caste and continue to think that way: “I hope not, but I think they do a little bit and it doesn’t matter if you’re in Canada.”

### 5.3 Education

Samantha thinks that caste has affected her everyday life when she looks back and sees where she came from in India. Being a *jatt* from a fairly well-off family, she claims she has enjoyed privileges. “A certain kind of occupation allows you to have wealth and upper mobility where I come from, a land-owning culture and community so as a result we had disposable income.” Demonstrating an understanding of the impact of socioeconomic standing on the opportunities one has in life, Samantha adds: “I look back and wonder, why did we have access to higher education, go into a private school. Your parents owned land and they could sell pieces of land to raise their children and my father was in the army.” Building on the idea that doing well economically affords one advantages in life, and how this comes into play with caste, Samantha notes: “Caste has affected me in that it has given me power and privilege. I mean people think of *jatts* as a certain kind of people and I wonder if without realizing I have benefited from that.” The advantages implied here can include life chances such as education, employment, travelling and exposure to worldviews that may not be as accessible to those with limited economic privileges. Benefitting from belonging to a certain caste then, means that those belonging to less advantageously positioned castes may not have the same access to opportunities. Samantha recognizes this, saying: “I wonder if somebody who was from a different caste did not have that access to wealth or to education or to travel or to even being accepted by society in a certain fashion.” In speculating about this, Samantha demonstrates an awareness of her privilege relative to others.

Since Samantha had access to education and opportunities, she feels she has potential to do so much more in her life than someone who did not have the same opportunities. Her family situation allowed her to pursue her goals and be the successful individual that she is today. Gaining the education and experience she did has perhaps contributed to her not believing in or following the caste system. Samantha’s recognition of the impact of socioeconomic status on one’s life chances in some sense pays tribute to the continuing influence of how the Sikh community has developed through the interplay of religion, tribal cultural backgrounds and the dominance of *jats*’ as well as their personal interests (Puri, 2003, p. 2693). The following explains why Samantha does not think caste is important when considering a potential spouse for her children. “I have been married 37 years and we have been through everything. We gave

them language and religion, sense of culture, so perhaps again sublimely we wanted them to stay in the culture right.” Samantha delves into her early immigrant experience, saying that: “As immigrants we are in the pursuit of survival, got our heads down, we are working, we are making money, we are saving money for our kids, building a legacy for our children whatever we are doing.” As she moves forward to think about her more recent experience, Samantha adds: “After the early immigrant experience, you raise your head and say I can do what *gorey* (Caucasian people) do in that sense. We never thought that I could go on vacation to another country other than India. That’s our trajectory as immigrant living.” Reflecting on her experience as an immigrant and how that influences her hopes for her children, Samantha shares: “Happiness before anything else. We want them to have identity and feel good about themselves.”

Further elaborating on how the experiences of second generation immigrants may differ from first generation immigrants, Samantha adds: “Your children, because they were born here and have access to much more than we did in terms of knowledge, they would question if we were to put labels on them, this is what you should do.” Recognizing that children of diaspora may have different ideas of what they want, Samantha notes: “I think they would not just question, they would push against it and we will have to accept so better to accept before that pushing happens.” Tying this back to caste and marriage on the basis of this grouping, Samantha states: “Caste has no meaning to me in terms of who they want to marry as long as the person they marry is going to make them happy and they find common ground that they can build their marriage on.” However, she cautions that a successful marriage specifically and happiness in general is multi-faceted: “Happiness is much more layered and nuanced and textured than that. So happiness is because they feel secure and they are able to common goals. That’s more where we are headed.”

John thinks it also makes a difference if parents are more educated, whether they believe in caste or not: “100% I think it does, I know a lot of parents that are born here and born in India and there’s a big difference, it has more to do with education. The more educated you are, the more open-minded.” Samantha goes on further to discuss how much of a difference access to education has made in the collective groups priorities shifting regarding marriage for the younger

generations: “Priorities have shifted in the educated class; I am not sure if it shifted in all classes of people but it has shifted for young girls, as they get more educated, as they take on more personal pursuits.” Samantha provides context on how the individual is situated within the society; “Especially in Punjabi culture, the collective was more important than the individual so now with the age of individualization and age of information and access, people set their own priorities.” In an era where the individual takes priority over the collective (Nayar. 2004, p. 93; Netting, 2001, p. 130; Richardson & Zeddies, 2001), Samantha states, “Kids are deciding on their own when and whom they are going to marry, and these conversations are actually happening where previously they may not have happened.” The reason why this culture of talking about marital options is only now taking hold, according to Samantha, is that earlier it was assumed that: “You reach a certain age and the parents are talking, you are not really involved in their conversations, but you are observing that they are talking about your marriage, you know they going to make this decision for you.” Speaking of a cultural shift where now one is more actively involved in choosing their life partner, Samantha explains: “Kids are saying this is my life, I am going to be involved in the decision making and the good thing is that parents are involving the kids not as observers but as active participants in their marriage.”

#### **5.4 Gender**

When it came to discussing whether caste affects men and women differently, many of the participants respond that it does and they think that women are more affected by it. It also depends on how parents chose to raise their sons and daughters; some are treated equally while others are not. Rita states the following when she is asked if caste affects genders in a different way: “That depends on your family because in some families, males are favored more, so if a male was to bring home a girl who wasn’t of the same caste, the parents they might have a problem with it but they’d eventually accept it.” Rita goes on to point out that the same might not be applicable if a girl would do the same, but it varies from family to family; “I feel that plays a gender role. I think the whole caste system; the whole gender thing depends on the family.” Here Rita is pointing out the lack of gender equality in the Sikh diaspora, which stands in contrast to the egalitarian teachings of the religion itself (Viridi, 2013, p. 115).

Pam, who is born in India and then was in an arranged marriage at the age of nineteen, believes there is a double standard: “A man can do the same thing wrong that a woman does, but all heads go towards the woman. The emphasis is always on the woman and what she did, in most situations.” She thinks that the caste system affects women’s lives because it detracts from some of their rights: “When women do something out of the ordinary, they think she’s done something so horrible, and takes families longer to accept them. She may be disowned for the same thing than a man would just get a slap on the wrist for.” This idea of being disowned may have its roots in the concept of *izzat* or honor and respect (Viridi, 2013, p. 110). Although enacted differently across castes, the idea of *izzat* remains important in Sikhism (Viridi, 2013, p. 112). The stricter rules for women may be attributable to the fact that *izzat* seems to rest on women’s shoulders for its preservation and maintenance (Viridi, 2013, p. 112).

From a young Canadian-born male’s perspective, Harry is asked if he thinks there is more pressure on women to marry within the same caste than it is for men, and he states that he feels there is more pressure on women to marry in general. Harry continues to say that he thinks the caste system detracts from some of women’s rights: “I never really experienced it so I don’t know. I know that (it) would probably harder for my sister to marry outside the caste than for me, I could probably get away with it a little more.” When asked why, he states: “I just feel like I have more of power in the household or freedom than my sister because I’m a male and the oldest.” This discrepancy in gendered expectations of appropriate behavior is representative of the divide created along the lines of gender by the notion of *izzat*; which not only cuts across boundaries of class, religion and ethnicity but is also a concept that is defined differently across cultures (Toor, 2009, p. 243). In Punjabi culture, it is a vitally important principle, forming a central component of familial relations (Viridi, 2013, p. 112).

Victor, another Canadian-born male agrees that caste affects men and women differently: “I think caste (if it were to impact your life), would affect women greater than men.” Victor then speaks of this in connection to marriage, saying that: “Extremely traditional parents often put extra pressure on their daughters to marry in the same caste. Even though equality is a part of the Sikh religion, unfortunately not all traditionalists have the same interpretation of what is right or wrong.” In light of the patriarchal nature of South Asian culture, the greater sanctions placed

on women's behavior and stricter monitoring in relation to notions of purity must be understood within the context of women being perceived as points of entry into the caste system, given their role as child bearers (Samuel, 2010, p. 99). Seen as torchbearers of culture, tradition and family honor, their actions are policed more so than their male counterparts. Victor emphasizes again that there is a disconnection between what Sikhism stands for and people's interpretations of it. This dissonance is perhaps well articulated by Mahmood and Brady (2000, p. 43-44) when they state that all Sikhs take pride in their egalitarian beliefs about gender norms, especially the men who hold power.

Gender equality is a key principle of the Sikh religion, along with equality regardless of race, creed, colour, even if it is not practiced widely. Mindy talks about her experience of when her parents attempted to discuss what type of person they expected her to find or marry: "When I was 15 or 16 they started talking about it because my brother was 20 and they were talking about if he gets a girlfriend it just better be a *saini* (type of caste)." Mindy further talks about the same restriction being applied to her as well: "They kind of engrained it in me immediately when I was a teenager." Mindy's experience thus reinforces the perception that women can feel pressured to adhere to familial and societal expectations when it comes to making decisions regarding marriage (Samuel, 2010, p. 101). Mindy goes on further to say that caste affects women differently and more than men, bringing up the idea of *izzat* in her discussion: "Women are getting the brunt of it more. Women just always deal with having honor and not feeling shameful and things like that but then when you throw caste into the mixture, they are facing a bigger disadvantage."

Samantha shares her insight with regard to the concept of family honor, that it is more of an issue if a woman chooses to get married outside of the caste or make decisions that others may disapprove of, and more pressure is put on her as compared to a man's marital choices.

"Woman's body is controlled by society, so a woman does not have the same sexual freedom that a man has. A man can have sexual freedom before marriage and after marriage without a lot of frowning." Samantha argues that the same does not apply to women, saying that: "A woman has to remain a virgin and clean and pure for the man, so as a result women have huge pressures to fall into what Sikh society's demands are, because *izzat* is attached to the female body."



Further drawing on the concept of *izzat*, which has been discussed in detail in the literature review, Samantha comments that: “Women uphold the honor of the family; I think it is absolutely wrong that only women should have that kind of stress...but that is what the society has done.” Reiterating the notion of *izzat*, Samantha’s description of women being defined in relation to their male relatives supports the research finding that South Asian women are often identified as daughters to fathers, sisters to brothers, wives to husbands, daughters-in-law to fathers-in-law and mothers to sons, rather than as individuals (Dasgupta, 1998). This points towards the gendered ways in which privilege and power are accorded (Samuel, 2010, p. 98).

## **5.5 Conclusion**

In conclusion, we see that caste comes up as a pressing point of discussion, if not an actual evaluative criterion when it comes to choosing a marital partner. Often couched in the conviction that compatibility will be more likely between partners from not only the same caste, but also the same ethnic and religious background. People frame caste in more euphemistic, practical terms as being worth respecting in partner choice. Yet, the significance of caste in marriage still seems to differ from family to family. In response, children adopt creative ways of meeting their parents’ expectations while still fulfilling their own wishes. The older generation does not have much experience dealing with caste when it came to marriage, because their parents chose a partner for them, who was picked precisely (and perhaps solely) because they were of the same caste. The younger generation appears to face more varieties of conflict, partly because they do not understand why their elders want them to choose a partner within the same caste.

There is a general consensus between males and females though that the burdens of maintaining honor and respect, and this, in part, through choosing the right partner, mainly fell on the females. This also depends on whether a person comes from a more traditional or modern family. Modern families appear to be more educated which allows for broader and open-minded thinking, whereas traditional families concentrate on how they grew up and want their children to grow up with the same values. Furthermore, we will see in the next chapter, the connection of caste to immigration and how globalization and the media have influenced Sikh religious and cultural beliefs.

## **Chapter Six: Caste and its Interaction with Immigration, Globalization and Mass Media**

The concept of caste, its ties to religion and culture, and the ways in which it is passed from generation to generation—as well as how this transmission changes the way caste is conceptualized and believed in—is a matter of much complexity. It is not simply tied to religious teachings in a straightforward or unchanging way. As the literature review indicates, in actuality, the development of the Sikh community progressed through “complex dynamics of interaction among religious principles, tribal cultural patterns of the dominant caste of *jats* and their power interests” (Puri, 2003, p. 2693). Here we see that forces of economics and politics as well as social norms play a role in how Sikhism has evolved over time. This history illustrates how religious teachings are far from stagnant and are in fact dynamic across space and over time.

This chapter considers the ways in which the intersecting forces of global movement of people, ideas, and media influence the way religious beliefs travel and are transformed across space and over time. Another multi-layered topic that this section explores is the role of religious beliefs regarding the caste system in shaping identity. In doing so, this chapter aims to tease out these various, sometimes overlapping themes and how they connect to shape perspectives on the caste system. In the excerpts below we see that the experience of immigration changes how respondents think of caste in their lives and how the forces of globalization influence beliefs about caste. Respondents place differing values on the centrality of caste in the formation of one’s identity. In this section, we see that caste is learnt about and understood in multiple ways that sometimes overlap. Connecting the dots between this and the previous chapter, we see how marriage renders salient the issue of caste even in families where it has not previously been a prominent point of discussion. This preoccupation is also evident in traditional (print and TV) and digital media such as newspapers and websites that include or even focus on matrimonial ads specifying the caste one is seeking; this is a phenomenon that two respondents talk about below. Matrimonial advertisements are a list of criteria that are published in newspapers to search for prospective and eligible brides and grooms. Furthermore, we see how caste comes up in everyday conversations, through inquiries about last names, for instance. Another common thread across participant interviews involves the ways in which popular music and media

perpetuate certain stereotypes about particular castes and the impact that this has on children and adults alike.

Reflecting on my own experiences, which correspond with some of the participants' responses, the caste system is not an every day discussion for the older or younger generations in the diaspora. Parents or families are far from being the only source of information for their children about caste. Being in a close-knit community, inquiring about each other's caste can appear to be a common occurrence and received as an offhand question that may indicate a certain caste consciousness (Kumar, 2012, p. 225). So even if one's family is not teaching a person about the caste system, people learn about it from others in the community, in private and public domains, from schools and universities to cultural get-togethers and even the workplace. Additionally, having easy and constant access to social media, to news close to home and far away, and to music and television from across the world also makes it easier to learn about concepts such as the caste system even if one has not been exposed to them much or at all by one's family, a point which was particularly evident in responses from Samantha, amongst other participants.

### **6.1 Caste in the diaspora**

When one meets someone new, they may ask where that person is from, which often means what town or village the person and their family are from in India. This is almost always asked as a means to identify who one is, caste-wise, as a Sikh. From the last name, people can determine what caste one belongs to and can classify them instantly, once again bringing to mind the concept of caste consciousness (Kumar, 2012, p. 225). Rita bears testimony to this: "It's seriously the first thing people ask you! What *pind* (village) are you from? Even [in Canada]." The literature suggests that caste is often seen as a determining factor of one's identity, which is supported by Rita's observation that it is often the first way people try to make sense of a stranger (Dhar, 2013, p. 3). Even where the question does not come with inherent or apparent judgment, it is still a focal point of conversation. Rita adds: "No one's ever said anything to me but people have asked, because my last name is not a common last name. It's the first thing people have asked me, so are you *jatt*?" Josh also discusses that he thinks inquiring about each other's last names still happens now in Canada, "somebody will see your last name and be like

okay well what are you? Big thing is you're a *jatt* or you're not a *jatt* right, that's usually what comes up."

Samantha, a fifty-nine-year-old married woman who is born in India says that, for her, caste and its impact on one's life actually became clearer to her when she came to Canada: "I grew up in Shimla, which is a northern city in India where Punjabis are a small minority, the most population was Hindu. I don't really remember hearing that there were all these varieties of caste." Samantha's lack of awareness of her caste affiliation falls in line with Srinivas' research finding that caste is perhaps more fluid than usually imagined and is less limited by ideas of purity and impurity than we think (Srinivas; as cited in Kumar, 2012, p. 215). Samantha adds that caste was perhaps less consequential to her in India than it is now as an immigrant, even though she could always identify her location within the caste system: "I knew about *jatts* because we came from that background; I think I must have known that we were *jatt*-Sikhs." However, it's one thing to be able to identify the label one is assigned and another to be able to recognize the social, political and economic associations that are made with that label. As Samantha explains, "I didn't actually know that there were all these varieties of castes that had hierarchical and cultural inscriptions labeled on them." Samantha elaborates on how immigration and the process of being in a new, alien country impacts how one holds onto their cultural upbringing even more: "It happened to me more here because the society in Canada is very fearful of letting go of what they bring with them from India."

Samantha's statement above reinforces research that argues people adopt and modify religious beliefs and practices in the face of external factors, of which one may be immigration (Rai & Sankaran, 2011; Nayar, 2004). In the face of potentially losing one's own culture, there may be the tendency to ascribe even more value to the ideals one brings from their country of origin. Samantha dives into this idea, noting that: "So whatever small vestiges they have of their culture they cling on to them much more here, because we have to maintain our cultural status; we tend to hang on more, and it is not just our culture, every culture does that." In fact, it is interesting that Samantha shares this observation that some Sikhs' tendency to avoid adaptation may be more likely to occur among those in the diaspora than for those who reside in India. Samantha notes rather succinctly, that: "They freeze up our frameworks and hang on to our cultural

identities much longer than we might in India” (Samuel, 2013, p. 93; Roy, 2011, p. 89-90). Expanding on the notion of diaspora and migrant identities, Samantha notes that, in a foreign country, one’s sense of being, previously unquestioned, now needs to be redefined: “I felt it is much stronger here, I mean you go to India nobody questions your Indian-ness, it’s just who you are, but here everybody questions who you are.” The need to locate oneself in a new setting perhaps evokes introspection as to who one is and what they believe in. Samantha further states: “Here, the first question you get asked is, where have you come from? You have to suddenly start to figure out your own identity. If you didn’t get asked that question, perhaps you wouldn’t worry about it so much.”

In many instances, the younger generations are not taught by their immigrant parents about the caste system, but some people have said it is sort of ingrained in them; it’s never been said out loud but it has just been there. Bourdieu’s theory of habitus explains that ingrained habits that have been acquired through past experiences influence and shape individuals’ attitudes and expectations (Cooper & Glaesser, 2014, p. 465-466). Sarah explains: “It’s like osmosis, you grow up in a certain environment where...it’s not explicitly said that you are *jatt*, *jatt* means this, and other things mean this.” Sarah goes on to make an astute observation that, even in families where the caste system is not adhered to or believed in, it is difficult, if not impossible to avoid children being exposed to the issue: “I’m somebody who’s very against this whole system and my children are still asking me questions about *jatt*, so imagine that and imagine that in a family where they actually believe in the caste system.” Alluding to the multiple ways in which caste as a concept is reproduced and shared, Sarah notes that there is not just a singular method of transmission of this idea: “It’s this idea of, this energy that you’re surrounded and it’s the conversations that you take place in, even though you’re not explicitly told you’re a *jatt*, it’s this idea...it self-perpetuates through language, through pop culture, through last names.”

Even in ways that appear to be disconnected from the conversation around the caste system, Sarah shares that using caste as a way to identify others is still evident: “Like discussing people’s last names, it will still always come out in the small way where something gets ingrained in us.” Sarah’s experience of last names coming up in discussion is by no means uncommon. Research shows that even as Canadian-born youth stand up for a more forward-thinking understanding of

caste, they may continue to hold onto some caste-based traditions, one of which is the use of caste names for surnames (Kumar, 2012, p. 216; Nayar, 2004). This corresponds with my own research findings, which evidence participants' common desire to know others' caste affiliation, despite the declaration that it is irrelevant.

## 6.2 Experiences with caste

Even though the younger generation is born and raised in Canada, they have stories to share regarding their experiences with caste in their daily lives. Adam, a thirty-year-old married male who is born in Canada, explains his encounters with caste in school: "During high school, kids would ask each other what caste they were a part of. Having a non-common last name, I got asked, 'What caste are you' quite a bit." Adam attended high school in Surrey, BC and at that time there was not a high immigrant population at the school. Adam suggests that how much a person's caste is a part of their identity may depend on whether or not they believe in it. He also hints that being able to disregard caste affiliations is a sign of being progressive and forward thinking: "It didn't affect me, because I was never brought up to believe in the caste system. I would say my family is pretty modern, and so are my friends who would ask about the caste." He is careful to distinguish between the diverse intentions that lie behind asking someone their caste affiliation: "I think it was more out of curiosity rather than judging." Adam is asked if he got treated any differently because of his caste. He responds that: "I never was treated any different because of my caste. It was more of a talking point. Majority of my friends are *jatt* (farmers), which they believe to be more superior." Pointing out how the professional associations with each caste are no longer relevant, Adam offers: "My family's caste is *sheemba* (tailors), which many believe to be less superior. None of my *jatt* friends have ever farmed and I have never sewn clothing." In the face of possible discrimination on the basis of caste, below we see that humor can be an effective way of diffusing the situation; as Adam explains: "But if they (his friends) ever bring it up, I always resort back to comparing picking crops vs. designing clothing. It's farming versus Armani. That usually brings in a laugh." This can serve as an effective, almost imperceptible mechanism for preventing tension building up in discussions about potentially contentious topics, such as caste.

Josh, a Canadian-born thirty-year-old single male says that, being from an Indian background we hear about caste all the time and no matter how often we say that it does not affect us and that we do not personally believe in it, we still have to deal with it. Josh explains: “I think it’s something that’s tacit but not really upfront. Surprisingly when marriages come up...everybody’s parents are saying we don’t really care but they do.” George is a twenty-eight-year-old single male and born in Canada who remarks that the caste system does not mean much and it is not important to him. He knows all about it though, because he grew up in Surrey and, regardless of the fact that it does not affect his life, he hears all about it in Punjabi songs. Surrey is a city that has a visibly large Sikh population in a small geographical area. According to Statistics Canada (2016) there are 168,040 South Asians in Surrey, BC and 22,195 of them are Punjabi’s. There are lots of small Sikh communities within Surrey where it is difficult to avoid the Punjabi culture or not be influenced by it.

Mindy discusses how caste may have started to affect her very early in her life when she attended a private Punjabi school in Abbotsford, BC: “I went to a traditional Punjabi school, it was a private school and I didn’t even know what caste really was until actually perhaps the 5<sup>th</sup> grade.” Mindy offers details about the first incident she remembers where caste was brought up: “Someone brought it up because they were talking to their parents about it and they were like I’m a *jatt* and how many *jatts* are there in this class and so many people raised their hands.” This incident is a prime example of how children can have the first exposure to markers of difference, such as caste, outside the domain of the home. Shedding light on how at this point caste is not something her family had talked to her about in detail, Mindy adds: “There was maybe a select few of us who were just looking at each other like what does that even mean. I went home and asked my parents, I learned a little bit more about it, and they’re like this is what you are.” In Mindy’s experience, we see that even if parents choose not to emphasize caste affiliations, children may come across these ideas in other situations. Although Mindy’s parents did not explicitly discuss the caste system unprompted, after the incident at school, they did tell her which caste she belonged to, suggesting that even families that don’t place too much importance on the system do, to some extent, identify with their caste or can report on it.

Exemplifying how caste can evoke feelings of belonging to or alienation from a group, Mindy states: “So when the topic got brought up again I learned that there’s only two of us in the whole classroom that were *saini* (a different caste) and it made me feel really singled out.” Despite this particular incident, Mindy says: “If we’re talking about everyday life I don’t encounter it.” This example shows that there are some children who are aware of things such as caste, but others who do not learn about it in their homes. When in a social setting and the issue is raised, they then inquire about it. At a young age one may not understand what the caste system is but in Mindy’s case she still felt left out from the majority of the class and perhaps questioned why she was different from everyone else. These feelings of alienation or even marginalization can be the result of being singled out based on an ascribed characteristic, even if this is not accompanied with other, more obvious forms of discrimination.

Rita shares a story about how she faced questions regarding her caste when she was dating her ex-boyfriend. Her ex-boyfriend and his family were all *jatts* and she was of a different caste, which is considered lower than a *jatt*. His male cousins asked about her last name because they had never heard it before and stated that they assumed she wasn’t *jatt*. The cousins are all born in Canada and had never been to India but are aware of the distinctive last names that are associated to *jatts*. Rita states that she had received comments before about her last name, but only because it was a unique name. She had never been asked about her caste because of the unusual surname she had and was unsure of why it mattered. She felt that his cousins attempted to make her feel like a lesser person by jokingly bringing up her caste a number of times, and that perhaps they felt that being a *jatt* meant they were better than others. It is interesting to hear about situations such as Rita’s, because the people she was dealing with are born and raised in Canada, in a society where equality and inclusivity is emphasized.

### **6.3 Media and caste**

There appear to be many social forces that keep the concept of the caste system as well as its real consequences for social stratification, alive and well. One is the media (for example, newspapers), and the dissemination of Punjabi songs. This includes both, traditional media (i.e. newspapers) that are produced for distribution in the Lower Mainland, as well as digital media (i.e. songs and movies) that are produced in India but consumed globally. Punjabi songs are



primarily disseminated through television, movies and mainly the Internet (YouTube). Noticeably there is quite a large Sikh population in the Lower Mainland and there are many newspapers that are dedicated to Punjabis with news from India and Canada. Mindy shares how she felt reading a Punjabi newspaper one day: “I was going through the Punjabi newspaper and it just astonished me that so many pages of the newspaper were dedicated to finding like a marriage partner who was of a specific caste.” Sharing her sentiments about the significance of caste when looking for marital partners, a topic discussed in the previous chapter, Mindy states: “I actually was so shocked, I totally didn’t think it was happening still because, I don’t know, maybe I was very naïve to think that.” However, it appears that the older generation may be more aware of the influence of caste when one is choosing a marriage partner. As Mindy discovers: “My mom was like oh yeah, it’s very real, it’s still a big issue here. So, I think I just didn’t know about it.” Matrimonial ads in the Punjabi newspapers and on matrimonial websites reinforce the message that caste may be an important requirement when parents or elders look for a suitable marriage partner for their children or grandchildren. It is often the parents and grandparents who write the matrimonial ads for their children. Sarah also comments on this phenomenon: “If you look at the Punjabi newspaper, I always get a good laugh because of the matrimonial section and how much we equate caste, so like I said it’s a generational thing.” Like Mindy, Sarah not only emphasizes newspaper matrimonial ads but also the impact of popular media in shaping how caste is understood and perceived. In her own words, “pop culture is such a huge factor and such a powerful force and just perpetuating that. We have to move beyond and we have to question artists who continue to sing about *jatts*.”

Many respondents discuss how Punjabi songs emphasize the *jatt* caste because it is seen as the highest caste. Mindy discusses: “If we were to speak of *jatt*, you’d probably hear it a lot; you type in Punjabi song into YouTube and you’d probably hear like Jazzy B (popular Punjabi singer) talk about it.” Like other respondents, Mindy also underlines the importance of pop media in strengthening notions of caste-based associations: “It seems like it’s mainstream pop culture, like pop Punjabi culture at least and then you try to watch a Punjabi movie and it just so happens to be *jatt* this and *jatt* that.” For example, some recent Punjabi movie names are “Jatt & Juliet,” “Carry on Jatta,” and “Jatt James Bond.” It seems that the media’s representation of certain castes more frequently than other ones reinforce the economic privileges associated with

particular castes, for example, that of *jatt*. To this point, Mindy remarks: “It’s seldom that you hear about like any other caste, so I’m not surprised to hear people be proud to exclaim that they are *jatt*.” Linking back media portrayals to what she sees in her daily life, Mindy observes that: “You literally can be driving down the main street here on South Fraser Way (a main street in the city of Abbotsford, BC) and you’ll see bumper stickers saying *jatt* on them.” Mindy explains that this may affect people in society by reinforcing a sense of hegemony and hierarchy; they may think because they are *jatt* that they are higher class; “They’re flaunting it because pop culture like this is perpetuating it, making them feel like they are above others.”

Understanding that children gain knowledge from multiple sources and may give some more authority than others, Sarah comments: “No matter how much we as intellectuals and intelligent people try to teach our children, the music will always be there, and we have to move beyond that.” As for family-based discussions about caste, she goes on to say: “I still hear about caste amongst family, friends. I feel like there is still a dominant idea that somehow *jatt* is better, even amongst educated people I hear language that I have to put a stop to.” Highlighting the ways in which language defines and situates a concept, and gives it legitimacy, Sarah says that: “Language is really powerful and...you play on this idea that somehow *jatt* bravado is just a thing.” When one can name a concept, it legitimizes its very existence. Language may also reinforce caste consciousness within and across caste groupings (Kumar, 2012). When a certain set of social characteristics or a particular social location is given a specific label or name, this places it within a discourse and discourses have legitimating power in society. The power of language is evident in the definition of caste itself and the definition states that occupation is a central defining feature of one’s caste association (Dhar, 2013, p. 3).

Detailing how language affects the ways in which abuse is conceptualized, Sarah elaborates: “It’s just whatever we’re actually empowering that language where we’re empowering the disenfranchisement and the abuse, whether it’s sexual, physical, emotional...that has happened for centuries amongst those who were lower.” This is a topic of much importance to Sarah in her role as a mother. Raising young children, Sarah adds: “It’s very much in my fore day in and day out. I’m teaching my children because they listen to music, they love Diljit, but they question what is *jatt* mom?” Diljit is currently one of the most popular and admired singers/actors; he

even has a pervasive influence on the younger generations where they are picking up things such as caste from his songs, as exemplified in the accounts of several participants in this section, including Mindy, Rita, George, Josh and especially Sarah, considering her conversations with her young children. Below are a few song lyrics to illustrate the point that jatts are unduly valorized through pop music:

Jithe hundi aa pabandi hathiyar di (where guns/weapons are prohibited)  
ni ohthe jatt fire karda (that's where jatt's fire guns)  
(Dosanjh, 2015)

Jatt de blood da group ohhi aa (the blood group of a jatt is the same)  
ni jehde akhar ton pehnda tera na (as the letter that starts your name)  
(Aulakh, 2016)

Jatt 24 carat da (A jatt is 24 karats of gold)  
jattiye jatt ch khot na koi (jattiye, there is no imperfection in a jatt)  
jithe marji parakh laavin (you can test him anywhere)  
(Harman, 2016)

Notorious jatt aa gaye (Notorious jatt are here)  
bach ke pataliye naare (be careful skinny girl)  
notorious jatt aa gaye (notorious jatt are here)  
kich lai tequila wale shot gatt gatt ni (take back lots of tequila shots)  
Bentley ch baitha vekh raje jeha jatt ni (there is a royal looking jatt sitting in a Bentley)  
(Randy J, 2011)

Jattan da munda shaukeen (A son of a jatt is fashionable)  
ainve ni kudiya mardi ah (there's a reason girls die over them)  
jatt kharche kr da eh (jatt's spend a lot of money)  
(Aulakh, 2016).

A simple YouTube search of “*jatt* songs” results in an extensive list of songs which have the word *jatt* in the title of the song. In a lot of these songs *jatts* are portrayed as these cool, stylish, wealthy, bold, heroic characters to who all the girls are attracted to or end up with. In the music videos *jatts* are driving fancy cars, walk around with their gang or groups of friends, throw money around and often carry guns.

Adding to the conversation about how the discussion of caste in the context of family affects how children think of this, Sarah states: “I’m going to have these conversations with my boys where I teach them, this is what it is, it’s an occupation, we as Sikhs do not believe in this occupation-based hierarchy.” This leads to the discussion that, “human personality is not “born” but must be “made” through the socialization process that in the first instance families are necessary” (Parsons, 1956, p. 16). Families are the primary contributors to socializing children

so they become members of the society. In relation to caste, one may be taught by one's parents and/or grandparents at an early age.

Rita also comments that it appears to be a matter of pride where singers flaunt being a *jatt*: "Like I'm a *jatt* but I don't walk around saying like hey I'm a *jatt* but in a lot of Punjabi songs you hear that's the first thing they say." Thus we see that being a *jatt* is portrayed many times, especially in Punjabi music, as someone who is wealthy and powerful. During my interviews and while I was narrowing my findings, the topic of music emerged quite a bit. Background readings do not discuss pop culture very much and its impact on reinforcing or eroding adherence to stereotypes associated with caste affiliation. The few studies that do talk about the influence of pop culture on ideas and values talk about it as a general topic and not in regards to its connection with caste (Schreffler, 2012; Gill, 2012). While there has been much written on the topic of pop culture's impact on social formation, especially on younger generations, the literature does not have a repertoire of research on how the caste system is portrayed in the media. So in this case it has not really been discussed with specific regard to interpretation of Sikh generations and the concept of caste.

George, a twenty-eight-year-old single Canadian-born male, mentions in his interview that equality is an important principle of Sikhism. In light of this important principle, he states that caste does not fit in with the Sikh religion and he thinks that there is no connection. George is asked why he thinks that people who consider themselves to be Sikhs still talk about caste or believe in caste and he says: "Because every singer, every single thing you see is *jatt* this, *jatt* that." He states that even though that applies with regard to singers and songwriters, it still plays a role in influencing his generation and every single time anyone goes to a party or get together, they hear music which is often about caste: "It's about the caste system, all the songs nowadays." When asked why this may be the case, George says he is not sure, perhaps because media plays a huge role in meaning construction for people in the younger generations. So even if people don't know what the caste system is from their family, they'll still know about it because of the media and popular music.

George also talks about how he does not think the caste system treats men and women

differently. In relation to media, he believes that women are discussed just as much as men in Punjabi music: “Media wise, there’s no difference, there are songs like *jatti* (female jatt) *di jaguar* (Jatt’s Jaguar car) and all this other stuff too, so same thing.” I told George about the research that I have done where it was suspected that women’s rights are different from men’s in the sense that women have to deal with more pressure in regard to upholding the honor system and concepts such as *izzat* are applied more to women than to men: “*Izzat* is maintained and perpetuated largely through women, who expect to endure subordinate positions within the corporate family;” “...[I]*zzat* is a matter of male pride. Yet the responsibility for *izzat* ultimately depends on women” (Viridi, 2013, p. 112). George replies with the following: “No I don’t think so, I think a lot of people like to think that, that there’s again like the feminist movement, but I don’t that’s the case, I think it’s actually reverse now.” In fact, George suggests quite the opposite: “I think women have more rights than the guys. Guy does something wrong, it’s not ok. If a woman does something wrong, it’s ok. There’s more tolerance on women now.” In this discussion he is referring only to the West/the diaspora.

Finally, Sarah once more reiterates how popular media, music in particular, shapes the way in which the younger generation thinks of caste: “The attributes that I talk about (mentioned in a quote below) that are associated to *jatts* are highly endorsed in Punjabi music videos, by Punjabi singers. By watching and listening to these, kids continue to have these images of *jatts*, though they are not entirely true.” When one continuously sees a specific caste that is glorified in the popular media, then the kids that view this media learn from it. Usually little research is done to create factually accurate scenarios in music videos because they are purely entertainment or creating a realm of fantasy. Yet, the realism of these videos is rarely questioned and they manage to influence their viewers. Punjabi pop culture has become a learning platform for young Sikh children. Unfortunately, caste is still present in Sikh culture and does have an influence on people. The culture still maintains language that perpetuates this; for instance, in the Punjabi music and social media, where it is not so easy to escape the weight that the caste system has on society. We also see how pervasive the popular ideas in the media are, and how relevant pop culture is to the discussion about caste. As Josh notes, “if you listen to any new Punjabi songs, usually every second song is about *jatt*.” He further goes on to talk about caste

and class: “I think class comes into it because *jatts* have always been connected with being landlords or being well off and it’s what people want to be, it’s a status symbol being a *jatt*.”

To sum up, we see that caste consciousness and its association with social privilege and superiority is evident in various forms of media, from matrimonial ads in the newspaper to popular music. It even seems that popular media strengthens belief in the caste system, even as it goes against the equality that Sikhism promotes. In addition to media, language and how conversations about the caste system are framed play a major role in shaping perspectives towards it, especially for younger minds. These discussions happen publicly on multiple social and traditional media platforms, but also in the private domain, amongst friends and family members. It would be interesting to see if the discussions seem to play out differently or are framed differently depending on the context in which they are being carried out.

#### **6.4 Caste and class/privilege**

Mindy is asked about class and if she thinks one’s caste and class affect each other. Mindy answers: “I never even made that connection before but if you think about it, economically speaking or even status wise, I think if you’re attributing yourself to the caste of *jatt* for example, economically I’ve only associated *jatts* with being wealthy.” She has this realization that people perhaps do associate caste with a higher or lower class. It appears that talking through the complex idea of caste and its connections to wealth encouraged participants like Mindy to gain a better understanding of these linkages: “I never really thought about it before but that’s the way it’s been flaunted in social media and things like that.” Tying media depictions to what she has seen in her own life, Mindy’s account below suggests that perhaps the portrayal of certain castes as well-off is somewhat reflective of reality: “That’s actually the way I’ve seen it in real life, my peers who are *jatts* are actually well off, now that I think about it that way.” To situate Mindy’s observation above, we need to acknowledge the forces of globalization and urbanization as well as immigration and their role in aligning people along lines of similarity other than caste; one of the most prominent such lines being class (Kumar, 2012, p. 216). Globalization and a rapidly changing economy, coupled with legal measurements such as quotas according to caste diversity being enacted to counter caste-based discrimination have meant that from one generation to the next, some individuals and families have encountered class mobility that was previously

considered unlikely if not impossible. The transmission of wealth down generations of castes who have been relatively well to do, if coupled with the restriction to marry within your caste, may go some way in explaining Mindy's statement above regarding well off *jatts*. Mindy's views line up well with the historical development of Sikhism occurring through the interplay of religion and *jatts*' economic interests (Puri, 2003, p. 2693).

As mentioned in an earlier chapter, the Hindu religion maintains the caste system and caste divisions play an important part in both, social interactions and in the ideal system of values. Its main purpose appears to be to segregate people and have a hierarchy in society. Not only does caste divide people into ascribed categories, but it also defines rules of acceptable behavior; across castes, individuals are expected to interact with those of other castes in a more reserved or more subservient manner, depending on where one falls in the hierarchy (Scott, 2014). Within the caste system, *varna* categories offer values to adherents, *jati* serves to organize the system functionally. Though the bigger picture is one of treating the entire cosmos as an organism that requires each component to operate properly within a complex 'being' in order to maintain cosmic harmony and cosmic justice. The caste system creates a higher and lower class – the higher the caste, the better the occupation, and financial rewards; and vice versa for lower castes. Reflecting on how belonging to a caste that has not historically been associated with power and privilege can lead to marginalization within the Sikh community, Sarah notes that: "People who aren't *jatt* are constantly intersected into conversations where caste comes up and it's that feeling of somehow I'm less than because I'm not *jatt* and I haven't ever dealt with that except when it came to marriage." In a previous chapter, Sarah tells us her story about how her family disowned her because she chose to marry a man who was of a lower caste than they were. She states earlier that growing up she was never taught about the caste system and never faced issues because of it but she went on to explain how things were different after she got married. "Ever since I got married, caste has constantly been there, always. My husband and I will have conversations.... which makes me actually realize the privilege that I have in being a *jatt*." Contextualizing caste-based discrimination within the wider issue of racism, Sarah adds: "It's this idea of privilege even though as a marginal group we are all underprivileged, compared to white mainstream population. But even within us as being underprivileged there are other layers of it, which caste comes in definitely." As mentioned in the above examples, Sarah also

connects how popular media affect the ways in which ideas about certain castes are reinforced: “You grow up in an environment where certain songs are listened to, where you watch certain movies and this idea of the *jatt* bravado is very powerful.” In pigeonholing people with labels, Sarah suggests that historical roots are overshadowed by stereotypes: “They bypass the history because it’s like they equate *jatt* with power, privilege, drinking, land, being fit and healthy; it’s all these weird attributes we hold to *jatt*.” Furthermore, with the positive connotations attached to a particular caste, there may be the risk of blurring the less than appealing associations that can also be made; to this end, Sarah adds: “We don’t think about a *jatt* raping lower caste women, *jatt* physically molesting, murdering, we don’t think about *jatt* in that angle; we don’t think about the persecution of lower caste people.”

### **6.5 Understanding caste today**

The historical context Sarah refers to is of particular importance when considering the effect that colonization has on the caste system. Historical scholarship indicates that the British policies during the colonial period relied on a mechanism of divide and conquer; this mechanism relies in part on supporting the caste system as a way to divide people along these lines (Corbridge and Harriss, 2000, p. 8). We see that this perception of caste as a mechanism for division is articulated in the research; as exemplified when Samantha shares what caste means to her, as below: “At the very core it is a classification of people’s occupations, that’s what it means to me. But beyond that it means there is an affiliation of some sorts to people that ascribed a sort of identity to our caste.” Situating the discussion of caste historically, Samantha compares past and present social contexts to see how the utility of the caste system has waned over time: “We have to start understanding that caste had its meaning and probably had reason to exist at some point but it has no relevance today, absolutely no relevance.” Offering ways in which caste needs to be eradicated from one’s interactions and life, Samantha argues that: “It should not be in our lexicon, it should not be in our language and it should not have any weight, it should not have aspersions cast upon it that certain people have this caste, that caste.” Stating the necessary prerequisites for moving towards a world where caste does not have any significance, Samantha urges, “we have got to get rid of those ideas and we will only do that once we understand that they have no bearing or meaning or weight in our society.”



Despite her decision to disregard caste as a factor in choosing a marriage partner and her conscious effort to talk to her children about this, Sarah notes that: “I still hear about caste amongst family, friends... caste is very dominant in my life and continues to be.” Sarah also discusses the fact the younger generation continues to comment on the caste system and things such as last names, but a lot of them are not aware of the history or the persecution behind it: “It has always been interesting to see when somebody hears your last name and they’re like, automatically, even people of the younger generation, say to me oh well you’re not *jatt*, your name is completely different.” While caste may be considered a way to group people into categories, this grouping is not always done in a manner that reflects an awareness of what the categories actually denote: “That’s just a thing even people in the younger generations do. I always wonder then if they even know what a *jatt* is or what it means but they usually don’t.” In her attempt to teach her children about caste in a way that does not encourage them to think of caste as a way to identify people or ascribe them with attributes, Sarah is trying to shift what caste means: “I think this is something that will not go away in my generation of course, I don’t think so but it will go away in my children’s generation because I will feed them the kind of knowledge that I think will be the change shaper.” Evidently, Sarah belongs to the camp that believes caste, previously seen as unchangeable, is becoming less important and is losing its currency (Kumar, 2012, p. 215-216).

## **6.6 Conclusion**

In summary, we see that whether or not caste is formally taught at home, it tends to be absorbed from various sources including media and music, friends and school life. Socialization plays a key part in this because individuals acquire knowledge and social skills from not only people they associate with but other informal means of education, such as the media. Schreffler (2012) discusses how Punjabi music is an important component of cultural identity in the diaspora (p. 355).

Factors such as inter-caste marriage, generational differences in values, and immigration affect how caste is thought of; and in some cases they serve to reinforce stereotypes about particular castes (Dhar, 2013). Finally, research of the diaspora is showing caste as an outdated system of occupation-based hierarchy that should not be used as basis for discrimination (Kumar, 2012, p.

216). As we saw in Rita's example above, even a society that promotes egalitarian values and ideals such as Canada, one that has a fairly well educated and multicultural population, bias and discriminatory beliefs may be unavoidable. Even here, deeply ingrained ideas of one's place in society, which sometimes originate from the caste system, are hard to avoid. This notion of an unquestioned hierarchy, which came from a different time and place, still holds some sway in modern-day Canada. The caste system continues to embody and sustain a hegemonic ideal where one's life chances are determined by something as arbitrary and uncontrollable as where and into what family one is born (Deshpande, 2010). These perceived power and privilege differentials can perpetuate the marginalization and stigmatization of some people.

## Chapter Seven: Discussion

My thesis has aimed to explore the relevance of the caste system in marriages within the Sikh diaspora, and how one's generation, gender and level of education – in particular – may influence the importance one places on caste in the context of marriage and how marriage is influential as a source of cultural identity rooted within religious tradition in people's lives. The two generations that I considered were first-generation immigrant parents who were between the ages of 50 and 60 years old and their second-generation Canadian-born children who were between the ages of 22 and 30 years old (refer to Appendix A for details of participants). My research lays the foundation for inquiring about the ways in which the idea of caste, and its impact on interpersonal beliefs and practices, is relevant in the diaspora. I also seek to explore, not just the why, but the *how* – i.e. how does caste as a concept and lived reality play out across generations, and what are the ways in which the importance of caste is similar and different for members of different generations.

This question arose, initially, through personal experiences and discussions with family and friends. I began talking about marriage with female friends and they stated that they were concerned about introducing their boyfriends to their parents because they were of different castes. These friends were not sure how the family would react to this. One example of this was a friend who was dating a *jatt* but she was not *jatt* and when she finally told her parents about him, after dating for about six years, her parents were angry and upset at the fact that she chose a man from a different caste. They did not speak to her for a few months after she told them. They were concerned with what their community (meaning the people that they associate with who are within their caste) was going to say. When I heard my friend's story, I was surprised to learn that such situations still existed because I did not imagine that being from different castes could be such an issue in the Western diaspora. That was the moment when I started to question the caste system and its relevance to us as Sikhs. I expected this question and my investigation to shed light on the fact that caste was perhaps still a consideration for marriage and even an issue amongst the second-generation children. I hoped to build dialogue for people to discuss the issue and to really consider why they might think like this and why it still matters, because people seem to believe in such traditional values and practices without questioning or understanding them.

Given that it is a multi-layered research question, this study yielded useful insight into several complex ideas that come into play when one considers caste and its importance. Given that my data are qualitative in nature, the richness of the findings lends itself well to making headway in at the very least, beginning to address a complex question. However, I also recognize that since the data are qualitative, it is limited in its potential to be generalized. In this section, I discuss the implications of my findings. Three major observations to draw from my research include the frequent, noticeable dissonance between what is practised and what is believed theoretically, as well as the tensions that exist between parents' expectations and children's wishes, a dynamic that gives rise to creative mediation strategies. Additionally, pop culture plays a role in shaping beliefs about caste.

### **7.1 Finding one: Preaching vs. Practice**

To begin with, we see that when participants reflect on what their religious teachings impart in terms of values and whether these affect what is actually practiced, one sometimes notices a dissonance between the two. Further complicating this is the idea that the era and society in which one grows up and spends their adult life shape how one thinks religious beliefs should be practiced, and this brings us to the topic of differences across generations in religious practice. Summing up the different ways in which the principles of Sikhism can be practiced and the variations that can arise in this regard over generations, Mindy notes, "Maybe my grandma feels she's a great Sikh because she does her *gurbani* (religious readings) and she does her *paath* (prayers) and she follows all of that. But to me I feel like I'm a good Sikh because I think I'm following the actual day to day duties of it or the principles of it, where I think social work is following Sikhism. To me that's the meaning I've ascribed to it and I actually feel like I'm following it day to day."

Mindy's quote above highlights well the different interpretations of the teachings and values of Sikhism between the generations. In this research, all of the participants hailing from the younger generation were curious about and questioned why some people, including those belonging to the older generation, claimed to be religiously observant and yet followed the caste system and sometimes even imposed it on their children. The younger generation saw this as clearly going against Sikhism's principle of equality.

The younger generation of participants was fully aware that the Sikh religion does not support belief in the caste system, which was why these respondents were not sure why their parents still subscribed to it. A few interviewees would directly challenge their parents regarding this and reported not receiving persuasive responses as to why their parents believe in the system, or their parents actually agree that there should be no discrimination based on caste, and yet fail to explain why they continue to abide by the caste system. Here we see nuances of differences in beliefs even within one generation i.e. the parents' generation. Whereas some (roughly 5) remained staunch in their beliefs, as reported by their children, other members of the younger generation reported that some of their parents (approximately 15) either had less restrictive views to begin with, or became more liberal over time.

In most but not all instances, in seeking to understand their parents' somewhat contradictory responses, some participants of the younger generation offered that, perhaps the caste system is so ingrained into the minds of some of the older generation, that challenging it becomes difficult, thus enabling belief in the system to continue unabated and unquestioned. This in turn encouraged them to pass on these teachings to their children, putting pressure on them to also accept belief in the caste system without question. However, there were hints of some members of the older generation being more empathetic towards the arguments presented by the generation that followed them. It appears that the older generation is trying to understand and consider the feelings of the younger generation but it is also difficult to overlook the views that have been ingrained in them.

In contrast, we see that participants of both generations who had integrated well into Canadian society tended not to pay much heed to the caste system nor did they insist on caste similarity as a factor for marital compatibility for themselves or, where applicable, for their children. Integration into Canadian society was subtly indicated as shaping such choices in comments that were made regarding how positively a participant felt about mainstream values and whether or not certain participants were protective of maintaining Sikh/Indian culture. An interest in cultural preservation was invoked, hence it was assumed that Canadian society was still considered "other," and full integration was seen as being a questionable goal.

## **7.2 Finding two: Parents' expectations**

When it came to parents' expectations of their children in terms of marital partner choice, it appears that if caste is of particular importance to the parents themselves in relation to marriage, then the parents are more likely to impose restrictions about the caste of potential life partners upon their children. Conversely, for parents who did not consider caste to be especially relevant in terms of compatibility for marriage, they were also more accepting and non-interfering when it came to dictating restrictions of caste toward who their children chose to marry. This was applicable even for parents who themselves had married within their own caste. This meant that their children agonized less over caste-related concerns when considering someone as a potential marital partner.

Attesting to how a generation gap can lead to differing perceptions of religious practices and beliefs, including those regarding the caste system, Mindy, aged 23 and a part of the younger generation explains, "I think generation-wise, we all have different values for how we experience Sikhism." In light of this, it is noteworthy that participants attested to taking on creative strategies to ensure that they were able to meet both the demands of their parents, significant others and also their own desires, all of which can sometimes be in conflict with each other. They adopted interesting ways of seeking and advocating for a middle ground that kept their parents content if not happy, while ensuring that they themselves did not have to completely forego their preferences. For instance, some participants of the younger generation said that they would entertain the concept of marrying within their own caste when their parents asked but it would not be a deciding factor.

These participants may have asked or inquired about caste from their partner or partner-to-be, but they also added that it was not a defining factor for them, nor did they let it alter their decision about what the future of the relationship might be. Some participants, like Mindy, chose not to openly tell their parents about their partner's different caste affiliation. This was mainly done in an attempt to avoid conflict in a situation where the participant was not sure about what to expect in terms of parental reaction. This predicament can be particularly daunting when, as in Mindy's case, parents have explicitly stated that their child's partner must be from the same caste, thus putting pressure on the child to conform to parents' expectations. In some instances, we see that this apprehension amounts to nothing, as parents, despite earlier warnings, end up not opposing inter-caste choice of partner (Netting, 2001, p. 140).

As seen in Nayar (2004) and Netting (2001), participants here also discussed alternative ways of accommodating differing expectations from parents and partners. For instance, there were cases where it would be (relatively more) acceptable to date someone from a different caste, but when it came to choosing a marriage partner, participants would either seek or consider being introduced to someone who belonged to the same caste as they did (i.e., someone their parents would approve of). This indicates the selective ways in which participants exert a certain agency in some areas of their lives while choosing to compromise and prioritize others' expectations over their own wishes in others. It appears to be a classic scenario of "picking one's battles" where one lets go of smaller demands to stake claims for bigger issues, such as choice of marital partner. An example of this may be choosing a partner of the same faith, but not necessarily of the same caste--to have some choice, but still appease parents.

On the other hand, some participants would only be open to dating someone within their own caste, suggesting that caste can be an important factor in one's life even beyond the realm of marriage. This may involve preoccupations such as employment options, who one associates oneself with in social life and who becomes one's friends. This is perhaps because the concept of caste is still present amongst Sikhs and therefore remains something that impacts one's life choices. More so among older generations, caste identity influences not only the level of self-respect one develops, but also respect accorded to one's family and the Sikh society because they are concerned with how they will be judged and what others will think of them. If one is of a higher caste then it will be more honorable for them to associate with people that are within their caste. Intra-caste choices of friends and partners may also afford less interpersonal conflict; one may believe that associating with people from one's own caste is beneficial as they are like-minded people from similar backgrounds. On the opposite end of the spectrum were participants who were keen to make their own decisions regarding who they wanted to be with and/or marry, irrespective of whether their partner fulfilled their parents' expectation of same-caste affiliation. Within the younger generation, those who were in their early 20s seemed more inclined toward this view of choosing their partner solely based on their own wishes, and not being concerned with the views their parents held.

Adopting a middle road in this context would involve a child accepting to be introduced to a potential partner by their parents. This is a means of gatekeeping for parents, as they would only introduce partners to their children for consideration if they were of the same caste, thus ensuring parental and broader familial approval and approval within the wider Sikh community. Since the final say is still left with the potential partners, children may be more likely to partake in this process as it gives them at least some degree of choice, even if it is limited to the pool of candidates that their parents pre-select. This method seems to accommodate both sides to a certain degree, allowing parents to have a say in their children's choice of life partner, while still giving the children some agency. When parents see their children willing to meet some of their demands, it reassures them that their directives are still important to their children. In some cases, this is enough to get parents to relax other restrictions. For the children, having some say allows them to retain a sense of independence while still allowing them to uphold their perceived role as respectful, obedient children.

### **7.3 Finding three: Influence of pop culture**

For some participants from the younger generation, even if their parents were not talking to them about or teaching them about the caste system directly, they were still picking this information up from other sources. A common avenue for learning about the caste system is pop culture, including Punjabi music videos and singers. Punjabi singers and their videos seem to perpetuate the hierarchical nature of the caste system through their music, where certain castes such as *jatts* are shown to be powerful and wealthy, with a higher status accorded to them than to other castes. Even if pop culture does not significantly alter viewers' thinking about *jatts* and other castes, this discriminatory attitude is still shown in a positive light, thus serving to legitimize it to some extent as an evaluative criterion for behavior and attitudes in real life.

### **7.4 Gender**

We see that gender influences how participants thought of caste in relation to marriage. Despite some accounts to the contrary, by and large, participants noted that women's behavior, if considered to be outside of the norm, tends to be more heavily socially sanctioned than men's. This can be seen not only in men's assessment of women's behavior, but sometimes even more evident in women's assessment of each other. Not only is women's behavior policed by society in general, but self-



policing is also encouraged (Viridi, 2013, p. 112; Toor, 2009, p. 243). This reinforces the idea that patriarchal norms continue to hold sway, potentially offering women less room to make their own choice of marital partner, when it goes against what is expected of them (Samuel, 2012, p. 91-92).

I observed while interviewing and transcribing interviews that men, especially those belonging to the younger generation, replied using fairly minimal words to the questions asked of them. While older men had interviews about 35-40 minutes long, the younger men's interviews were about 15-20 minutes long. They kept to the point with their minimal responses and were not particularly descriptive with them. In contrast, female respondents discussed their experiences and feelings regarding the caste system in greater detail and were more verbose than their male counterparts. The women's interviews were on average about 35 minutes in length, but it is worth noting that two of the older women had the longest interviews at about 45 minutes each. Since probes were not featured prominently for the women, I decided to keep this consistent for the men as well, even if that meant shorter interviews. With an issue as personal as caste identity, I had to ensure that the interview remained respectful of boundaries and it was important that I did not appear pushy. When I realized I was not getting as much detail from the males, I attempted to probe the men but they just had no further information to add. Research by Tannen suggests that men do talk a lot but it depends on their audience, they will talk more to their friends, rather than their partners or to people in social settings (Broadbridge, 2003, p. 16).

## **7.5 Immigration**

Mindy, a twenty-three-year-old Canadian born female summarizes the discrepancy between how different generations experience Sikhism in different ways. She ties in the concept of immigration neatly when she notes, "Our parents came from the very country, the same land from where Sikhism was founded, whereas for us we're still trying to make that connection between what does Sikhism even mean to us as Canadian borns." My research suggests that the more tightly rooted one sees him- or herself within the Punjabi culture, as it is perceived to be 'back home' (i.e. in India), the more likely the individual is to hold the caste system dear as a value system. It appears that how strongly one believes in the caste system has a lot to do with how much first-generation immigrant parents have integrated into or isolated themselves from mainstream Canadian society and its cultural norms. The more isolated the parents have been, the stronger the belief in caste tends to be and vice versa. One of

the participants, Moe, summarizes this tendency, saying: “There are so many people that came to Canada and they were from the village and they hadn’t seen...any big cities in India let alone here. So I think they kind of brought all of their village views with them.” My theory pertains to the fact that the more well integrated parents or first-generation immigrants become within Canadian society, the more likely they are to be open to worldviews that are considered Western. This kind of thinking also encourages adoption of new perspectives and abandonment of outdated ones; in turn this makes it more likely that one gives up belief in a system that they see is no longer applicable to them, including the caste system (Bhopal, 2011, p. 431-432).

Importantly, all of the immigrant parents and parents of the younger generation that I interviewed stated that they knew the caste system is not relevant to Sikhism and said that they do not abide by its principles. However, this does not automatically mean that these same participants did not adhere to the caste system, thus shedding light on a dissonance between what one believes regarding the values of Sikhism and the practices one embraces. In my study, participants who had spent longer in Canada as immigrants tended to be more receptive toward adapting to the mainstream society, perhaps because they had lived in Canada much longer than those who had migrated more recently. For instance, one of the interviewees, Hank, was a relatively recent immigrant, as compared to other members of the older generation. Hank, a fifty-one-year-old male, was born in India and immigrated to Canada about twenty-three years ago. He was certain that people from the same caste were similar and like-minded and had similar beliefs in their households, which would allow them to get along better. He placed much more importance on the caste system, considering it vital as a factor for suitability of marriage partners.

On the other hand, some participants offered more nuanced responses. For example, Nicky, a single twenty-eight-year-old, was asked about the importance of caste as a factor for marital compatibility. She was born in Canada and is an educated female with two university degrees and is currently a teacher. Here is what Nicky had to say:

I think this is largely dependent on geography, family connection to culture and social influence. In India I think caste continues to hold incredible significance. It is, in many cases, the primary factor in determining if a marriage is suitable. However, in a Western-influenced Indian culture, caste can play a smaller role. First-generation Indo-Canadians would consider caste far more important than the generations to follow, who have less of a connection to their motherland and its traditions. It should also be noted that some social circles still put

implausible status on caste; this tends to cascade through generations. Those who still value caste and the status associated with it, likely come from a family with the same values, or are influenced by those in their social circle.

Here Nicky brings up some key points that tie in with caste, namely that immigration and connection to the homeland influence how much importance once places on caste as a factor for marital suitability. Nicky concisely sums up how the significance of caste shifts through one's experience of being an immigrant or Canadian-born Sikh and based on how central caste is to one's family values.

Along similar lines, Nancy, a single thirty-year-old Canadian-born participant, notes: "The reason that the caste system still seems to exist outside of India is because of the extensive immigration of Sikhs from India to Canada who have not adapted fully to their new communities." Here, Nancy alludes to the isolation some immigrant's experience that leads them to retreat further within their own cultural practices from the homeland. This goes back to the sense of safety and security that holding onto traditions can provide during a time of change and significant upheaval (Somerville, 2008).

From the responses I collected, it seems like being part of Canadian society, with its emphasis on accommodating cultural differences, can almost serve as impetus to *not* integrate into wider society and remain isolated within one's own tradition. Since it can be easier for immigrants to settle in Canada without truly attempting to embrace Canadian cultural norms, the latter themselves being difficult to define, it can be that much easier to hold on to belief systems from pre-immigration life, including the caste system. This is evident in the enclaves of Indian stores and 'Little India' in many cities, as well as a close-knit Punjabi society that makes it easier to avoid integration into society beyond one's own cultural grouping (Somerville, 2008, p. 23-24; Nayar, 2004, p. 194-195).

## **7.6 Level of education**

I originally expected that the participants from the older generation with less education and blue-collar jobs would be more strongly supportive of the caste system. Educational backgrounds of parents can be linked to the degree of choice that they offer their children when it comes to marriage (Bhopal, 2011, p. 435). This appeared to be somewhat true, as illustrated from the responses from the younger generation participants and how they spoke about their parents' attitudes. A majority of the younger generation talked about how they did not believe in the caste system. Even in cases where they

allowed that its existence likely served a function the past, they see it as purposeless now. Furthermore, even where they conceded that caste was important to their parents, they often articulated that it had little, if any, bearing on whether a marriage would be successful.

These participants were born and raised in Canada and completed higher education in Canada as well. When speaking of their parents' attitudes, all of whom had immigrated to Canada, participants noted that their parents had either explicitly stated or implied at some point that they required or would like their children to marry within the same caste. I probed further and discovered that most of these participants' parents did not complete post-secondary education and were employed in blue-collar jobs. Attitudes of those with less education tend to be more conservative (Bhopal, 2011, p. 443).

## **7.7 Limitations**

One of the limitations of my study is its small sample size of 20 participants. The limited number of participants was necessary to ensure feasibility of the study for the scope of this thesis. Future research would likely benefit from including a broader group of participants, with wider variety in terms of demographics, including more diversity in levels of education and length of time since immigration. A different sampling technique may have resulted in participants echoing each other's beliefs more strongly. Variations in the time frame, meaning a longitudinal study design, and location of study would also show the effects of variations in how diaspora communities see themselves and the way their values evolve over time and across space. The location of participants is a factor of particular importance. Studying this topic across various parts of Canada and the world where members of the Sikh diaspora reside could shed light on the differences and similarities in immigration patterns. This research would also offer insight into how the caste system comes to be seen during and after immigration and settlement as a diaspora.

Beyond encompassing a greater section of the Sikh population across various parts of the world, to generalize further, another possible area of improvement for subsequent studies could be to include more depth and variety of questioning. Ensuring more probing questions are included for various types of responses and encouraging respondents to tease out the rationale for their beliefs and actions would be other areas of improvement. One could also put forward a research design involving multiple interviews on different days. Even though it will be harder to secure participants for such a

time-intensive study, one would gain more information about each participant. This could also include having a more open-ended questioning method that would ask participants of both generations about their style of upbringing and their acquired teachings about Sikhism from parents and other sources. These sources include teachings at school, through popular media of various kinds, via social media platforms as well as instruments of nationalist rhetoric such as national anthems, history books, flags and emblems. These would be helpful to know about because conceptualizations about caste are informed in complementary and contrasting ways by a multitude of factors and looking at as many of these factors as possible would paint a fuller picture of where the younger generation is learning about the caste system. I am most focused on learning about how Punjabi music and music videos may influence the younger generation in regards to caste.

In addition to this, broadly speaking there is a wide spectrum of Sikhs' belief in and practice of the religion. Of course, my participants do not encompass all types of Sikhs or demonstrate the full range of beliefs and practices. Arguably, representing the most comprehensive portrait of this diversity is impossible to achieve within the scope of a qualitative research project, thus making it difficult to generalize about the majority of the population. It would be easier to create such a profile through a different research method like survey research. To reiterate, the limited sample size of 20 participants means I do not have a wide enough cross-section of the population to be able to generalize my findings or offer a depiction of Sikh values regarding the caste system and marriage that would apply to the majority of Sikhs. Moreover, the majority of my participants from both generations, nearly all in fact, were educated and/or had occupations that were white-collar jobs. Out of the 10 males, two of the younger Canadian born males had only a high school diploma, one had a university diploma and the rest all had university degrees. Out of the 10 females: two of the older first-generation women only had high school diplomas, one had a post-secondary diploma, two had university degrees, one had multiple degrees, two had their Masters and two were working on their PhD's. It may be that the high education levels of my participants may have inclined them to be more open-minded and offer fairly forward-thinking responses. A correlation can be seen between educational attainment and liberal attitudes and beliefs (Bhopal, 2011, p. 431). Since my sample included participants who shared similar demographics in terms of location and education levels, it is not surprising that their responses were also similar to each other's.

## 7.8 Further areas of research

On the basis of the information gathered from this modest research project, it appears that what remains unclear is why caste continues to hold sway over people's values and their worldviews, especially marital compatibility. Caste continues to do this in spite of disparity between teachings about equality and caste identity and the caste system's perceived lack of relevance on daily life today. It remains to be determined why caste remains prevalent in the Sikh diaspora community, given that, as my study indicates, participants unanimously, and independently of each other, agree that caste goes against the principle of equality that Sikhism espouses with great fervor. This call for equality is evident in the scripture of Sikhism, as well as its practices, such as that of *langar* (community kitchen).

From my literature review, I discovered that there is not much research that delves into how pop culture affects perceptions of the caste system amongst youth. There is some literature that looks at the influence of pop culture on young people in general, but not much that specifically looks at how Punjabi music shapes views towards caste for a specific subset of the population such as Sikhs. Therefore, one key area for future research is looking into how Punjabi pop culture, specifically music, influences attitudes towards and about the caste system, and specifically towards the *jatts*, who tend to feature prominently in songs. This is especially important given how much of an effect pop culture can have on younger generations. Schrefflers (2012) findings discuss that Punjabi popular music has evolved to represent characteristics of Punjabi identity. In the 1930s, at the start of the music industry, Punjabi performers appeared less aware of their "Punjabi" identity (Schreffler, 2012, p. 355). But now music has become a prime medium to articulate cultural identity and Punjabi heritage in the diaspora (Schreffler, 2012, p. 355).

Some potentially useful forms that future research could adopt would be to include talking to Punjabi singers and exploring their perspective on why they sing about *jatts* and/or the caste system and what this means to them. An interesting question within this realm would be to look at whether the singers believe in the caste system's hierarchy or whether they are making what sells or are they in fact operating out of mixed motive—aiming for authentic artistic self-expression yet complying with economic pressures regarding profitability. Perhaps stereotypes sell, so they are promoting stereotypes through their art.

In conclusion, we see that caste holds differing levels of importance for respondents based on their immigration status, educational level and gender. How much caste matters to one is also dependent on the way close friends and family talk about it, and how well one is integrated into the country they reside in as a diaspora community. A major theme in this thesis has been that there are tensions between the younger generation wanting to address (and to a decent extent) respect their parents' concerns while having power and autonomy of their own. What these findings suggest is that there is no one, clear, cookie-cutter response to what makes people believe in the caste system or reject it. This is where future research would help shed light on subsequent questions that are important, such as how this multitude of factors influences beliefs about caste, as well as how these beliefs differ across diaspora communities in other parts of the world and at other points in time.

## Chapter Eight: Conclusion

The impetus for this thesis comes from my curiosity as to why people continue to believe in and/or practice the caste system. Today, with ample access to information, it is of interest to me that people continue to adhere to a system that to others appears archaic and outdated. This thesis delves deeper into the tensions these contradictions bring about and the way they shape beliefs and actions.

Digging deeper, I want to explore whether certain characteristics make people more or less likely to abide by the caste system. In particular, I am curious as to whether gender, one's level of education and one's age played a role, either together or independently, in whether they believed in the caste system and how they conceptualized it. In my own personal experiences, I have seen these factors align with certain ways of thinking not only about caste, but about other aspects of life as well. These variables, I have informally observed, tend to impact how conservative or liberal one's thinking is about a host of life issues. In my research methods section, my analytical approach is inductive. I observed caste in general to understand how it is perceived and the values associated to it adhering to the caste system. This provides the basis for my analysis of how caste then interacts with marriage partner choice and with participants' social mobility. This inductive approach enables me to interconnect more precisely abstract notions of caste to the concrete choices and practices of the participants.

The belief in the caste system is of particular interest to me given that the Sikh religion clearly states that everyone is equal, regardless of any personal attribute (Puri, 2003, p. 2694).

Sikhism's obvious support for equality and sameness, to me, stood in stark contrast to the caste system which obviously differentiates between people and assigns them a social category in a hierarchy, based only on the conditions of their birth within a wider scheme of cosmic justice and harmony (Smith, 2008).

Despite this dissonance between Sikhism's principles of equality and the caste system's perpetration of the opposite, we see that the two often go together. Cultural traditions and practices tend to bring caste into play, despite the lack of evidence that religious teachings in



Sikhism support it. We see that even in cases where caste is not a focal point of discussion for some families, it tends to become so when the topic of marriage comes up.

The caste system initially arose as an occupation-based classification system that sorted people into categories based on class associations (Dhar, 2013, p. 3). It is the hierarchical element of this system that assigns one a higher or lower status based on their caste affiliation; and this status assignment is what has been associated with the historical discrimination of some castes over others (Kumar, 2012, p. 215-216). Amongst other things, my project aims to look at whether these attitudes are specific to geographical location, in terms of the caste system having originated in India. However, as my research shows, these beliefs are evident in the diaspora as well, although they do undergo transformation in various ways through the effects of immigration into a different multicultural and relatively secular context.

As one of the participants, Samantha notes in the previous chapters, caste is central to one's self-perception and identity. She further comments that the role caste plays in one's conceptualization of oneself changes through the process of immigration. Looking into how this relationship between caste and immigration shapes self-perceptions is one way that future research can delve more into the topic of caste. Previous research has looked into how caste shapes perceived actual life chances, including marriage prospects and employment opportunities. Earlier literature also explores how perceptions of caste differ throughout the process of immigration. My work further builds on this research by exploring this phenomenon in a particular socio-cultural context and at specific time.

Canada is a diverse, multicultural country that is generally accepting, if not welcoming of differences in beliefs, religious backgrounds and cultural practices. Given that the vast majority of its inhabitants constitute immigrants, whether newly migrated or settled over a number of generations, it is not surprising that the country's laws affirm a celebration of diversity. In this context, immigrants to Canada are, at least in theory, encouraged to hold onto their beliefs and cultural and religious practices, integrating them into a multicultural context. On the other hand, this encouragement to sustain cultural practices can be seen as inviting the possibility of isolating

oneself within one's own culture, without adapting to the wider society (Schreffler, 2012, p. 337).

Arguably, this is more evident amongst first-generation immigrants, especially if immigration occurs later in one's life, as opposed to when one is younger and one's worldviews are still being formed. We see that for first-generation immigrant parents, this lack of integration into Canadian society can mean that there is a disconnection in terms of identifying with their children, who have been born and raised in Canada, and consequently may have significantly differing perspectives than their parents.

Tying this in with the caste system, we see that all of the participants in my study agree that equality is a central concept in the teachings of Sikhism, which negates belief in the caste system as this system assigns higher or lower value to people based on their caste affiliation. This dissonance between the value of equality that Sikhism supports and that the caste system goes against has been brought to light in my work, and can and should be teased out in future research, to identify how people reconcile these two opposing concepts.

In addition to highlighting that some people continue to believe in the caste system despite recognizing that it goes against key tenets of Sikhism, my research delves into how caste emerges and figures in discussions of marriage. We see that almost always, albeit with some exceptions, when participants or their children are considering potential partners for marriage, the topic of caste came up. The time when caste is not addressed is when participant's parents disregard the caste system themselves and did not marry within the same caste. In most cases, a desire was expressed to have marital partners be of the same caste. An oft-recurring explanation for this was the perception that people belonging to the same caste system are likely to be more compatible with each other, suggesting that people of the same caste share similar life experiences and worldviews.

Nonetheless, this should qualify with the observation that how caste figures into the discussion about marriage varies from family to family. Factors that influence how strictly family members

are expected to adhere to the same caste when considering marriage include how children have been raised as well as children's willingness to abide by their parents' expectations.

Another key finding from my research is that teachings about the caste system are largely shared in the private domain of the family. However, by no means is this the only source of learning about the topic. Participants, especially those belonging to the younger generation, encounter caste in popular media, especially in music videos that associate pride with some castes, especially the *jatts*. This association of some castes with a higher rung in society in terms of class and status accorded to their members can strengthen a system of hierarchy based on ascribed, rather than achieved status.

This can give people who identify with these highly regarded castes an unearned sense of superiority, while making those who associate with other castes to feel inferior. Given that historically, some castes have been given significantly more power and privilege than others, this trend can reinforce a sense of marginalization and isolation within the community (Roy, 2011, p. 94). This is, yet again, an area for future research.

Closely related to this is the idea that, while some people are able to identify what caste they are considered a part of, not everyone recognizes the economic, socio-political and even religious-based associations that go along with that caste. It is this understanding of the historical context of the caste system, or lack thereof, which can make the caste system appear as a potent dividing mechanism for Sikh society or a relatively harmless categorization on the basis of occupation.

Music videos are an important and influential way by which participants learned about the caste system, as one participant noted that this medium plays a central role in how children conceptualize caste consciousness. Moreover, another avenue for learning about the caste system is one's wider social circle, including friends and extended family. These are platforms where learning's about the caste system are more often reinforced than questioned.

Reinforcing what I found in my literature review, one of the participants in my study note that there is limited agency granted to women in the diaspora and the motherland in South Asian

culture when it came to choosing their own marital partner, or making any life decisions. Relegated to being spectators in their own life instead of active agents, the role of gender in South Asian society and its relation to personal autonomy is an area of research that ties in with my project quite significantly.

I believe that my research is new and innovative which is relevant to today. With all the immigration to Canada and the convenience to intermingle with ones cultural and religious group in Canada, it assists in helping to understand perhaps what measures need to be taken to change some of the aged attitudes and mindsets of people. Two main studies which I initially started off my research with was by Netting and by Nayar. Netting talks about different types of marriages and how younger children may go about picking a potential marriage partner as well as pleasing their parents. Nayar talks about intergenerational relations and conflicts amongst the Sikh diaspora, with research specific to Vancouver, BC. Other research did not bring together the topics I did and try to understand how they relate to one another. This project focuses mainly on caste and marriage. It focuses on views and beliefs of the Sikh religion – how caste is a concept that still gets intertwined with the religion regardless of the religions teachings. Caste and marriage in the Sikh religion has not been so closely studied. Assimilation or integration or lack of may not assist in shedding these views about caste, especially in relation to marriage. This project lends a hand in breaking down these concepts to better understand them.

Finally, as my thesis draws to a close, there remain gaps in research to be filled in the future. My work provides insight into the role caste plays in the lives of first-generation immigrants in Canada who have moved from India, and second-generation Canadian-born children. Questions remain as to why the caste system is still relevant to immigrant parents and/or their children. One of the key areas for future research is to explore how the caste system continues to survive, if not flourish, in light of the teachings of Sikhism that explicitly oppose hierarchies and favor equality for all.

It has been evident that caste influences discussions of marriage and suitability of marital partners, as well as how children and parents navigate contradictory expectations of each other in this regard. A common theme has been that children adopt creative strategies to negotiate

expectations of potential life partners and their parents as well as their own wishes; this is a potential area for future research that will likely yield interesting results. For instance, we see that humor can be one way of addressing conflict in situations. This applies not only to interactions with family but also friends. As evident from one participant's experience, humor can be a relatively safe yet effective comeback to an attack from parents or other, on one's caste affiliation. Research on this topic can reveal other strategies that people adopt to address caste-related conflicts.

We see that, instead of interrogating long-held beliefs when confronted with a new environment that may call for changing one's perspectives, it can be easier to stay connected to one's roots, attitudes that are perceived to be dominant in the motherland from which one migrated. This takes the form of holding on to traditions that one understands to be relevant 'back home' which, in this case, is India; although it may be that the motherland has also evolved past these traditions. As one participant noted, staying true to these cultural practices can provide a sense of comfort in the context of immigration, which can be a daunting and unsettling process. It can offer something to hold onto when everything else is changing and in this process, the traditions one holds onto from the pre-immigration period can become even more deeply rooted as they provide a sense of safety and security.

An explanation that can account for the durability of caste is that it holds great symbolic value for people. Furthermore, its power lies in the fact that it can offer meaning and structure to the lives of individuals, family units and society overall. In categorizing people, it shapes the way one is supposed to think of, conceptualize and enact ideas of marriage, as well as other aspects of life. Perhaps it is this ordering of things that makes some people keen to hold on to believing in the caste system, even in the face of Sikhism's opposition to it in principle.

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## Appendix A: List of Participants

|    | Pseudonym | Age | Sex | Marital Status | Education           | COB    | Parent/Child |
|----|-----------|-----|-----|----------------|---------------------|--------|--------------|
| 1  | George    | 28  | M   | Single         | University degree   | Canada | Child        |
| 2  | Moe       | 58  | M   | Married        | University degree   | India  | Parent       |
| 3  | Pam       | 54  | F   | Married        | High School diploma | India  | Parent       |
| 4  | Harry     | 22  | M   | Single         | High School diploma | Canada | Child        |
| 5  | Hank      | 51  | M   | Married        | University degree   | India  | Parent       |
| 6  | Josh      | 30  | M   | Single         | University diploma  | Canada | Child        |
| 7  | John      | 22  | M   | Single         | High School diploma | Canada | Child        |
| 8  | Mindy     | 23  | F   | Single         | University degree   | Canada | Child        |
| 9  | Nancy     | 30  | F   | Married        | Master's degree     | Canada | Child        |
| 10 | Rita      | 27  | F   | Single         | Diploma             | Canada | Child        |
| 11 | Sandy     | 53  | F   | Married        | High School diploma | India  | Parent       |
| 12 | Samantha  | 59  | F   | Married        | Master's degree     | India  | Parent       |
| 13 | Sarah     | 30  | F   | Married        | Master's degree     | Canada | Child        |
| 14 | Victor    | 30  | M   | Single         | University degree   | Canada | Child        |
| 15 | Adam      | 30  | M   | Married        | University diploma  | Canada | Child        |
| 16 | Barb      | 42  | F   | Married        | University degree   | India  | Parent       |
| 17 | Nicky     | 28  | F   | Single         | University degree   | Canada | Child        |
| 18 | Mandy     | 29  | F   | Married        | University degree   | Canada | Child        |
| 19 | Bob       | 29  | M   | Married        | University degree   | Canada | Child        |
| 20 | Joe       | 55  | M   | Married        | University degree   | India  | Parent       |

## Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself
  - Name
  - Age
  - Education
  - Occupation
  - Marital Status (If married, how long have you been married?)
  - Age of marriage
  - Type of marriage (arranged or romantic)
  - Where were you married?
2. Tell me about your parents
  - Occupation
  - The age at which they were married
  - Type of marriage
  - Location of marriage
3. Do you consider yourself to be a Sikh? (OR would you consider yourself to be part of the Sikh religion?) (Note: you have been screened to ensure you are Sikh for this project)
4. Do you believe in Sikhism?
5. If married: What does being married mean to you? How does it affect your life?  
If unmarried: What would being married mean to you? How would it affect your life?
6. In an historical sense, do you think marriage is becoming more or less important with time? Why do you think this is? (Or is it staying the same?)
7. Do you think caste is an important factor for marriage? / Was it an important factor in your marriage?  
Definition of caste for this study: Caste is a form of social stratification characterized by endogamy, hereditary transmission of a lifestyle, which often includes an occupation, ritual status in a hierarchy and customary social interaction and exclusion based on cultural notions of purity and pollution.
8. What does caste mean to you?
9. Does caste affect your every day life? If so, how? Please give examples of how it affects you in terms of:
  - Your occupation / at your place of work
  - School
  - Do you get treated differently because of your caste?

10. How important is caste to you when considering a potential spouse? OR how important is caste when considering a potential spouse for your child?
11. Do you think same-caste marriages are more or less likely to be successful than inter-caste marriages?
12. Why do you think same-caste/inter-caste marriages are more successful?
13. What are some of the factors that are important when choosing a spouse? (Education, family background and occupation, financial stability)
14. What do you think are some of the important principles of Sikhism?
15. In light of these important principles that you just mentioned, how does caste fit in with Sikhism (is there a connection)? What's the relationship between caste and Sikhism?
16. Do you think caste affects men and women differently? If yes, how so?
17. How do you think the caste system affects women's lives? Does it support or detract from some of their rights?
18. Does your caste influence what level of society you're at i.e. does it affect whether you are upper, middle or lower class? If yes, how so? If not, what is the difference between the two?
19. Do you think the practices of Sikhism have changed over time? E.g. are inter-caste marriages more acceptable now than they were before? If yes, why?
20. Is there anything you would like to discuss that hasn't been discussed so far? This is an opportunity for you to raise new issues or ask questions.