

How do shifting forms of cultural identity
manifest themselves spatially amongst
the Punjabi diaspora in Britain today?

(par)desi

ਅੱਜ ਦੇ ਬ੍ਰਿਟਿਨ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਪਰਵਾਸੀ ਭਾਈਚਾਰੇ ਵਿੱਚ ਸਾਂਸਕ੍ਰਿਤਿਕ ਪਹਿਚਾਣ ਦੇ ਬਦਲਦੇ ਰੂਪ ਆਪਣੇ ਆਪ ਨੂੰ ਥਾਂ-ਥਾਂ ਰਾਹੀਂ ਕਵੀ ਪ੍ਰਗਟ ਕਰਦੇ ਹਨ?

ਪਰਦੇਸੀ

pardesi

prrr-deh-c

adjective / noun

A Punjabi word that means foreigner, outsider, or someone living away from their homeland. It is often used to describe migrants or expatriates, particularly those who have left their native country for work, education, or a better life.

In the context of the Punjabi diaspora, Pardesi symbolises the identity, struggles, and cultural evolution of Punjabi's living abroad, especially in places like the UK.

If pardesi is a person before assimilation, desi is a person who has assimilated to the new culture.

SUMMARY

The Punjabi community has been present in Britain since the end of the Second World War, deeply embedding itself in British culture while also shaping it in return. Birmingham, UK, is home to a significant Punjabi population, where food, fashion, and faith are woven into the city's fabric. Another vital aspect of this heritage is the performing arts; dance, music, and theatre, which, despite their popularity, remain spatially fragmented across Birmingham.

By analyzing Soho Road, a key cultural and commercial hub, I explore how the Punjabi diaspora manifests in Britain today. Through an examination of existing cultural spaces, I investigate the hybridity of the British Punjabi experience, using the high street as a lens. I also highlight the contributions of influential figures within the diaspora and incorporate insights from interviews with key members of the Punjabi Theatre Academy in Southall and DAAR Society in Chandigarh, India.

This research further examines how generational divides and assimilation shape the evolution of Punjabi culture in Britain. These insights inform my vision for a dedicated space for Punjabi performing arts, addressing the need for a unified cultural platform. As Klinenberg argues in *Palaces for the People*, 'Social infrastructure has the power to uplift communities during this era of deepening social divides.'¹



Bhangra or Bust Competition (BBC, 2020)

¹ Eric Klinenberg, *Palaces for the People: How social infrastructure can help fight inequality, polarisation, and the decline of civic life*, (2018).

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GLOSSARY OF DEFINITIONS

ASSIMILATION/ ACCULTURATION: The process in which usually a minority group comes to resemble a majority group: usually having colonial history. 'Assimilation or acculturation assigned to the behaviour of migrant's place too great an emphasis on a break with the past, a break with all contexts. They enforce a rigid binary between home and host, old and new, rather than appreciating cultural fusions and reshaping.'²

SOUTH ASIAN: A person from the region covering the Indian subcontinent south of the Himalayas, including the wider diaspora that are now dispersed throughout the globe.³

BROWN: A person of South Asian origin, used to mean pre-partition (pre-independence) India (or the Indian subcontinent).⁴

IDENTITY: What makes you, you. Your qualities, beliefs, cultural expressions, personality, and appearance all formulate this.

DIASPORA: Originating from the Greek language, meaning 'to scatter about' it describes the dispersion of people from their ethnically native homeland.

POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVES: 'In architecture and urbanism, this offers ways of thinking about built form and space as cultural landscapes that are at once globally interconnected and precisely situated in space and time.'⁵ However 'post-colonialism can be seen as a first-world, male, privileged, academic, institutionalized discourse that classifies and surveys the East in the same measure as the actual modes of colonial dominance it seeks to dismantle.'⁶

POSTCOLONIAL CRITICISM: This 'bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order. Postcolonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of 'Third World' countries and the discourses of 'minorities' within the geopolitical divisions of East and West, North and South. They intervene in those ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give a hegemonic 'normality' to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, races, communities, peoples.'⁷

SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE: 'Broadly includes public institutions, places, community organizations, and establishments.'⁸

IMPOSTER SYNDROME: A feeling of not belonging whilst (un)willingly being part of a group, usually associated with feelings of intellectual or professional fraudulence. This can often stem from racial concerns such as lack of representation or alienation within diasporic groups.

SUBALTERN: 'The economically dispossessed'⁹

MIGRANT: 'A migrant is a person required and refuted by Western sovereignty. To inhabit this impossible dualism requires living with a steadfastly unstable status, readily questioned at the onset of national elections or economic crises, while tenuously embraced under the banners of celebratory multiculturalism.'¹⁰

ALIENATION: Feeling alien in the environment in which you occupy, often a feeling familiar to migrants or people of colour.

OTHER: A sense of being viewed or treated (a person or group of people) as intrinsically different from and alien to oneself.

GLOBAL SOUTH: The group of countries that are in Africa, Latin America, and the underdeveloped parts of Asia.

GLOBAL NORTH: The group of countries that are in Europe, North America, and the developed parts of Asia.

ANTICOLONIALISM: 'The much talked-about discourse of postcoloniality is a critical location that, ironically, often maintains white cultural hegemony. The less well-recognized discursive practices of anticolonialism, on the other hand, decentre, interrogate, and displace whiteness.'¹¹

DECOLONIALITY / DECOLONIAL PRACTICE: The practice of a place, which was previously a colony (controlled by another country) becomes politically independent; the process of getting rid of colonies through political thinking, arts, and literature for example.

CULTURAL HYBRIDITY: Being exposed to two or more cultures and them forming a collective part of one's identity.

THIRD SPACE: 'On the boundaries in-between forms of difference, in the intersections and overlaps across the spheres of class, gender, race, nation, generation, location. Here, the most creative forms of cultural identity are produced.'¹²

DISPLACEMENT: The situation in which people are forced to leave the place where they normally live.

WHITE PASSING: Passing as white through features, skin colour or how one presents themselves. 'Gaining access to a whole set of public and private privileges that materially and permanently guaranteed basic subsistence needs and, therefore, survival. The valorisation of whiteness as treasured property in a society structured on racial caste.'¹³

SECULARISM: Principles separating religion from other forms of identity, including political stance.

RACIAL VISIBILITY: The idea that a person's race is distinct and can be seen by others. This rejects 'colour-blindness', as not all human experiences are the same.

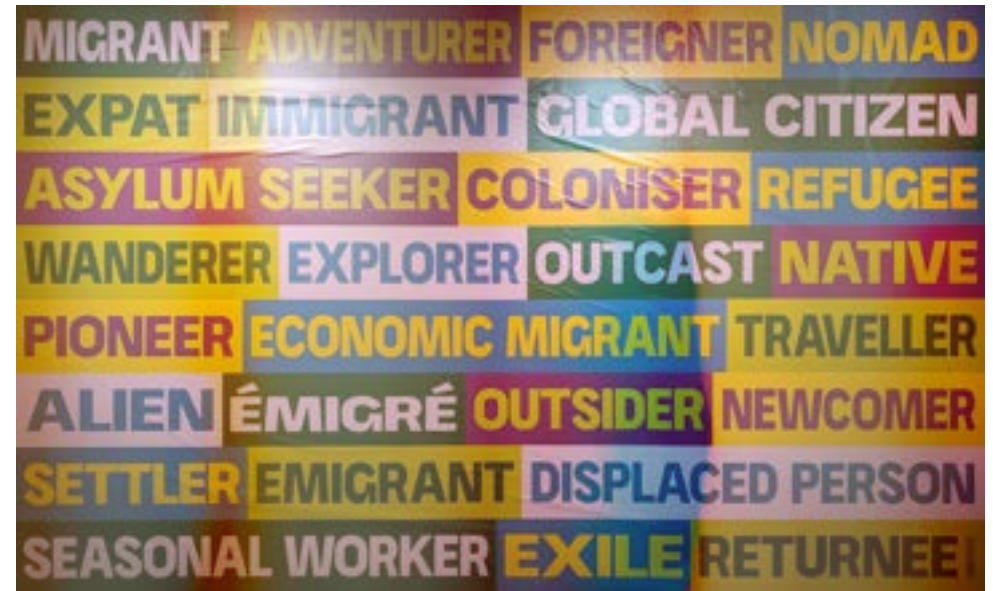
INTERGENERATIONAL: Involving and bridging the gap between different generations of people.

PUNJAB VS PANJAB: Whilst I refer to the Indian state as 'Punjab', pronounced 'pun-jaab', many others prefer 'Panjab' to not mistakenly pronounce it as 'poon-jab'. "Punjab" and "Punjabi" are colonial mispronunciations of the more exact pronunciations "Panjab" and "Panjabi".¹⁴

BHANGRA: Modern Punjabi dance. 'Bhangra is not actually a Punjabi folk dance. In a way it's a culmination of different folk dances that existed.'¹⁵

DESI: 'A desi is someone who has left India or has family who have left the country. Indians living in India aren't 'desi's; they're influenced by the present, particularly the West (which includes films, video games, sport and even music), while desi's are trying to preserve the culture of their homeland, even though that might be a culture from the past. The word has Sanskrit origins-desh means land and country-but is most commonly used by people of Punjabi origins, although other Asians, such as those who have Gujarati heritage, are familiar with it. Desi means country, and in this particular case mother country. It can also be used as a catch-all term to mean Indians or even brown people. Most Asian people, particularly those of Punjabi origin, find the word more empowering: Desi is a feeling rather than an identity.'¹⁶

GURDWARA: Sikh temple: a place of worship for the community.



Migration Museum (Authors Own, 2024)

² "They were living ten years behind our Asian countries": Oral histories of British Punjabi communities 1960s-present" <https://www.routedmagazine.com/british-punjabi-1960-present> (accessed 15 February 2025).

³ Nathaniel, Krish and Mohamed, Bushra (2024) South Asian History London Map. London: Blue Crow Media.

⁴ Jesudason, David (2023) Desi pubs Desi Pubs: A guide to British Indian pubs, food, and culture. London: CAMRA Books p.⁸

⁵ Jyoti Hosagrahar, 'Interrogating Difference: postcolonial perspectives in architecture and urbanism,' in C Grieg Crysler, Stephen Cairns and Hilde Heynen (eds), The SAGE Handbook of Architectural Theory, (Sage, 2012).

⁶ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds), Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, (University of Illinois Press, 1988).

⁷ Homi Bhabha, Location of Culture, (New York, Routledge, 1992), p.171

⁸ Eric Klinenberg, Palaces for the People: How social infrastructure can help fight inequality, polarisation, and the decline of civic life, (2018).

⁹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds), Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, (University of Illinois Press, 1988).

¹⁰ Suzanne M. Hall, The Migrant's Paradox. Street Livelihoods and Marginal Citizenship in Britain (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2021, 217

¹¹ bell hooks, 'Diasporic Landscapes of Longing,' in bell hooks, Art on My Mind: Visual Politics, (New York: WW Norton, 1995), p. 66

¹² Homi Bhabha, Location of Culture, (New York, Routledge, 1992).

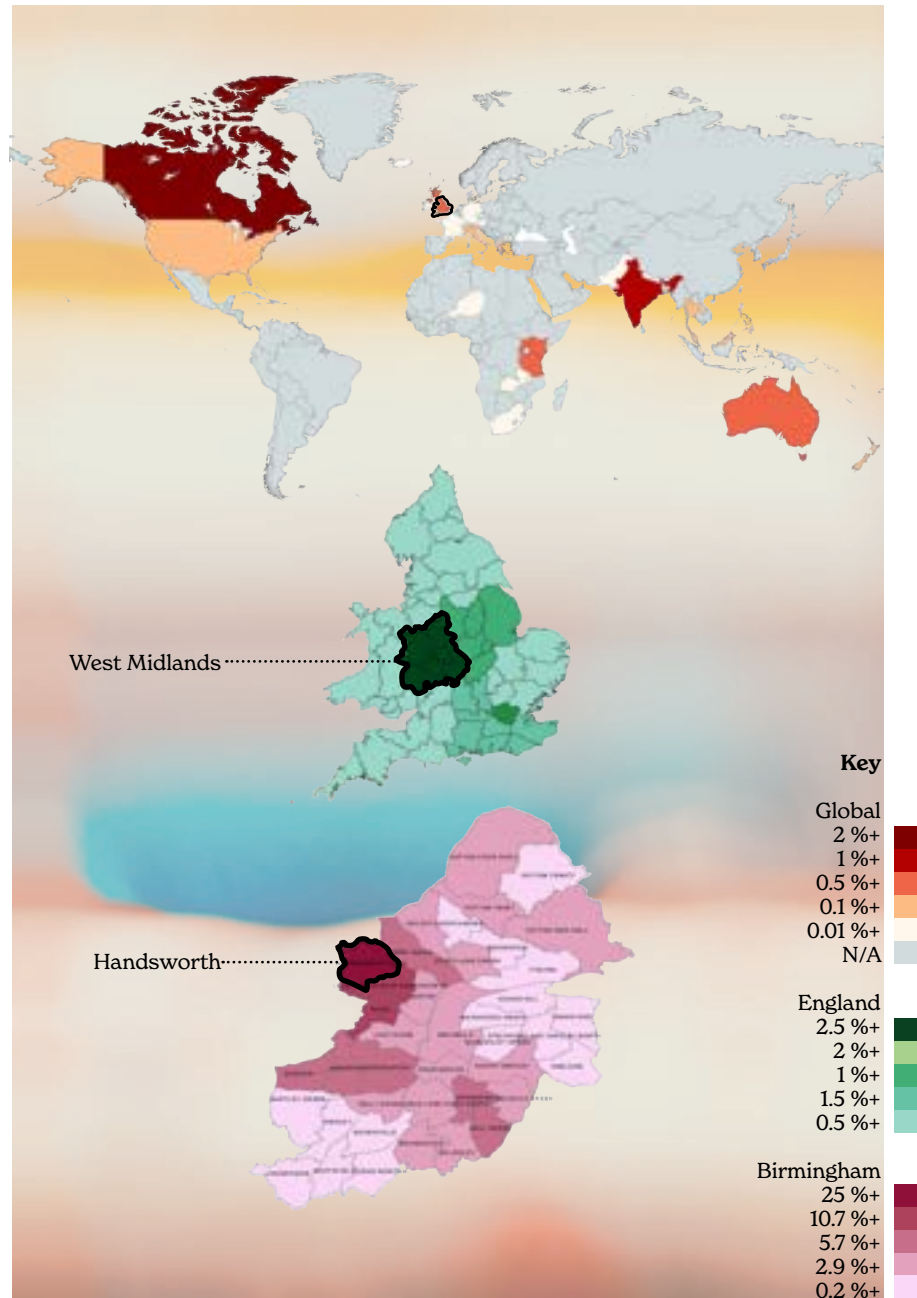
¹³ Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil T. Gotanda, Gary Peller and Kendall Thomas (eds), Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement, (New York, NY: The New Press, 1996).

¹⁴ "Punjabi Community" <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2000-03-07/debates/07b16da0-17e9-4eed-add0-1982e3d038e0/PunjabiCommunity> (accessed 15 February 2025).

¹⁵ Interview between author and Ajay Kalwaniya, (12th February 2025)

¹⁶ Jesudason, David (2023) Desi pubs Desi Pubs: A guide to British-Indian pubs, food and culture. London: CAMRA Books p.⁸⁰

PERCENTAGE SIKH POPULATION



INTRODUCTION

‘Punjab’ means the land of the five rivers. It has a history that flows from the ancient civilisation of the Indus valley in approximately 2000 BC, through a series of empires and Mogul dynasties, to the founding of Sikhism in the 15th century. Punjab came under British rule in the 19th century and, on independence in 1947, the region was split between India and Pakistan, leaving a much smaller state of Punjab.¹⁷

During the post-war period the British government actively invited foreign nationals to come to work in the UK, to fill labour shortages, especially people from the former territories of the British Empire, or better-known as Commonwealth of Nations.¹⁸ During this time, ‘the old empires were on the verge of collapse, thanks in part to a world war against fascism that left Europe in material, spiritual, and philosophical shambles. It was the age of decolonisation and revolt in Asia. Malcolm X once described this extraordinary moment, this long decade from the end of the Second World War to the late 1950s, as a “tidal wave of colour.”¹⁹ The second wave that followed, was the expulsion from east Africa, when, prior, in the early 1900s they had been asked to move to East Africa by imperial Britain to fulfil labour shortages. In 2021, nearly 60% of Birmingham’s Sikhs had been born in England.²⁰

My parents migrated from Punjab in the 1990s to join my great aunt (Maji) and great uncle (Baba), who had settled in the UK in the 1970s. They made their home in the Birmingham area, specifically in West Bromwich. By examining Soho Road in Handsworth, I illustrate how the migration of the Punjabi diaspora has shaped one of the most culturally significant high streets in Birmingham. Through this lens, I aim to capture the essence of the Punjabi diaspora - its resilience, traditions, and evolving identity. From Punjabi cuisine to the vibrant colours of traditional fashion and the presence of faith woven into daily life, Soho Road stands as a testament to the thriving hybrid culture of this community.

¹⁷ “Punjabi Community” <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2000-03-07/debates/07b16da0-17e9-4eed-add0-1982e3d038ec/PunjabiCommunity> (accessed 15 February 2025).

¹⁸ “Picturing Punjabi Migration Experiences in the Black Country” <https://bclm.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Picturing-Punjabi-Migration-Experiences.pdf> (accessed 15 February 2025).

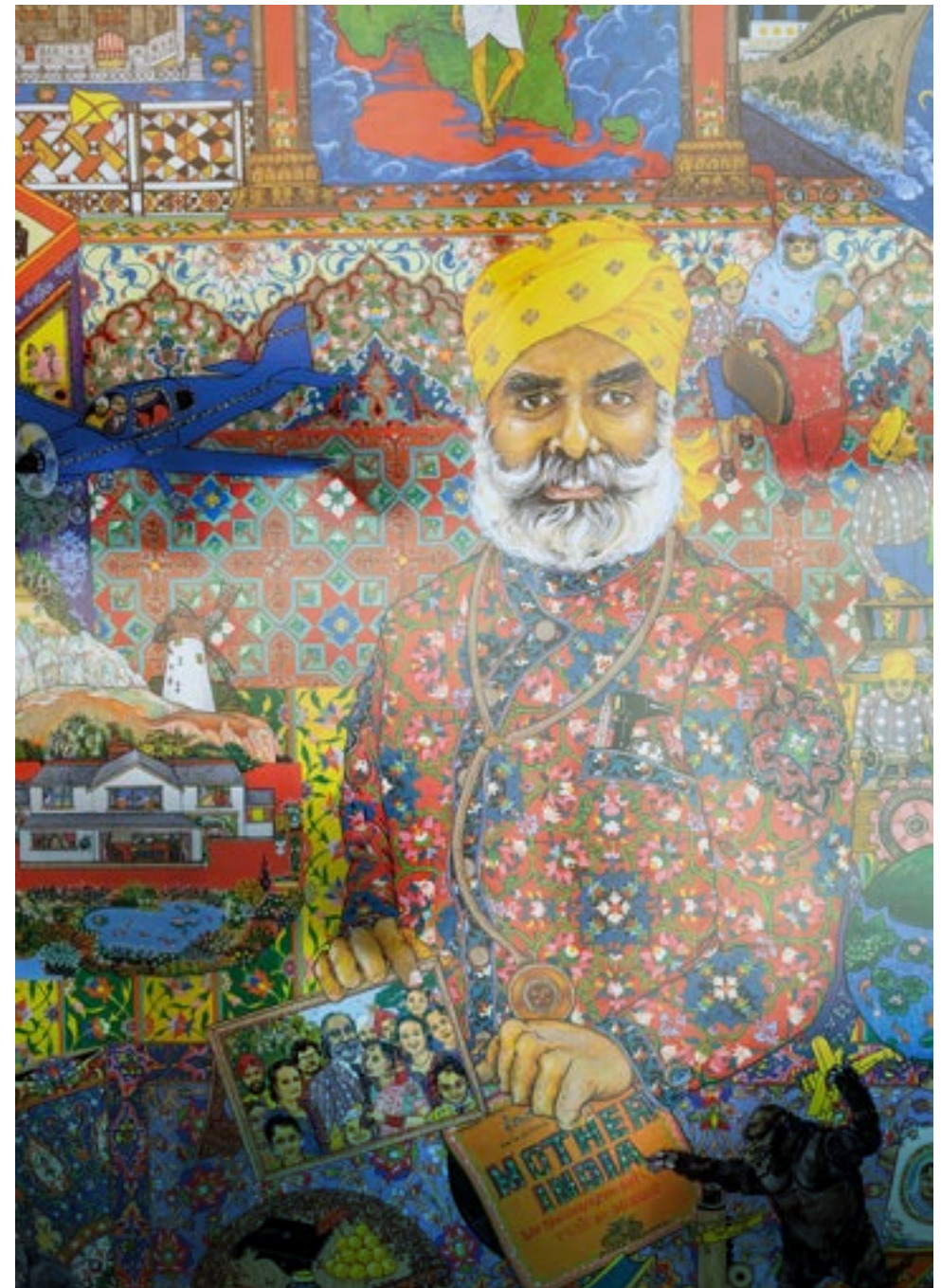
¹⁹ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, (trans Joan Pinkman; New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000; 1950).

²⁰ Birmingham City Council, (2021), *Sikh Community Profile*, Birmingham: Public Health.

This exploration highlights a striking gap: even on one of the most prominent high streets for the Punjabi diaspora, there are no dedicated spaces for the performing arts. Looking beyond Soho Road to wider Birmingham, these spaces remain scattered, fragmented, and lacking a unified presence. I explore the critical need for dedicated spaces to house the Punjabi performing arts. I will examine the work and perspectives of cultural influencers who have played a key role in representing the Punjabi community in Britain's performing arts scene. Through conversations with leading figures in the field, such as the director of the Punjabi Theatre Academy in Southall and a founding member of the DAAR (Dance and Art Researchers) Society in Chandigarh. Punjabi performing arts, encompassing music, dance, and drama, are dynamic and ever evolving with each generation. This research ultimately supports the case for curating a dedicated space that nurtures and preserves this rich culture.

The need for dedicated spaces is most evident in their absence. The lack of such spaces reflects broader issues, from systemic neglect to the lingering effects of racism in the UK. With the rise of far-right ideologies, it becomes even more crucial to create spaces where marginalised communities can preserve and celebrate their identities, countering exclusion with visibility and cultural resilience. Assimilation, while often seen as necessary for integration, can also create deep divides between generations. Language barriers, differing cultural references, and a lack of shared experiences can lead to disconnects within families and communities. Finally, I will examine the wider sociopolitical issues that underpin my major project, exploring how assimilation can have both positive and negative consequences. By unpacking its root causes and long-term effects, I will investigate how cultural spaces can serve as bridges, helping to maintain heritage while fostering understanding between generations.

This triad of research forms the foundation of my design proposal: the curation of a flexible space for the Punjabi diaspora's performing arts in Birmingham. By addressing spatial absence, sociopolitical challenges, and the evolving nature of Punjabi artistic expression, this project underpins the need to provide a unified home for music, dance, and drama: one that not only preserves heritage but also nurtures future generations of Punjabi performers and artists in Britain.



Evolving Diaspora through the Lens of Soho Road

INTRODUCTION: SOHO ROAD

How does the evolving Punjabi diaspora take shape in three-dimensional space? Soho Road serves as a powerful typology, embodying this cultural transformation. Within Birmingham, the highest proportion of Sikhs are located in Handsworth Wood (25%)²¹ - it stands as a living testament to the community's enduring presence and adaptation over time. Soho Road became a cultural centre, at one time having the largest Gurdwara outside of the subcontinent. In the late 20th century, some of the biggest bhangra artists and producers in the world called Birmingham home. Soho Road became more than just a busy road, it became a part of the British Punjabi psyche, the subject of bhangra songs, and Sikh identity. By the end of the 20th century, the Handsworth Nagar Kirtan (religious celebration) that passed through Soho Road was the largest gathering of Sikhs anywhere outside of the subcontinent.²²

Many shops on Soho Road are owned by and serve the Punjabi diaspora, reflecting both cultural identity and economic survival. Self-employment, especially through independent businesses, has been both a response to and a refuge from the harsh conditions and discrimination migrants face when working under others. In 'The Migrant's Paradox', Hall describes 'migrant shopkeepers being pushed to the urban margins, relegated to the edge territories.'²³

²² "The Travelling Singh" <https://www.thetravellingsingh.com/the-world/birmingham-uk> (accessed 15 February 2025).

²³ Suzanne M. Hall, *The Migrant's Paradox. Street Livelihoods and Marginal Citizenship in Britain* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2021), 217



Soho Road (Authors Own, 2025)

'59-year-old Gurmit Beghal is the joyful owner who customers will come to for a chat over a cup of tea. The store more like a family home filled with laughs and stories shared over the counter, Beghal believes this warm atmosphere is why they are reaching their 50th anniversary next year.'²⁴

To illustrate the Punjabi diaspora, I map out the shops along Soho Road, examining their cultural significance and how they differ from their British counterparts. Each typology serves the community in a distinct way, reflecting traditions, values, and identity. I focus on three key typologies; food, fashion, and faith, analysing their role in shaping everyday life and preserving heritage within the diaspora.

In 'Subaltern Architectures: Can Drawing "Tell" a Different Story?', Tayob uses 'architectural drawing as a means to study the often overlooked and unseen spatial practices on the spaces of marginalised population'. These groups are further oppressed after 'a dependence upon western intellectuals to "speak for" the subaltern condition rather than allowing them to speak for themselves. By speaking out and reclaiming a collective cultural identity, they will in fact re-inscribe their subordinate position in society.'²⁶ In many ways this is evident across Soho Road, through the typologies that I present.

²⁴ "We visited the heart of Soho Road" <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/visited-heart-soho-road-meet-28212622> (Accessed 17th February 2025)

²⁵ Huda Tayob, 'Subaltern Architectures: Can Drawing "Tell" a Different Story?', *Architecture and Culture*, 6(0), 2018, pp 203-22.

²⁶ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, (University of Illinois Press, 1988).

FOOD & DRINKING ESTABLISHMENTS

Food is a huge part of the culture – it signifies looking after your loved ones, the importance of family and community. For example, ‘langar’s’ are free meals served at Gurdwaras every day using food and donations from the community. This caters for every member of the Sikh community regardless of class, and economic status. The shops along soho road range from desi pubs, caterers, Indian sweet centres and cafes.

Desi pubs formed from ‘colour bars’, that operated by not allowing non-white people to enter premises, not allowing them to be served, and/or forcing them to drink in certain rooms.²⁷ After changes in the law prohibiting this, racist landlords lost their licences allowing a new type of landlord to move in- from south Asian heritage and then came the hybrid desi pub, serving mixed grills, to the diaspora and beyond. This type of British Asian cultural hybridity has little to do with assimilation or palatability but has been carved out by South Asians living in Britain on their own terms, to their own tastes. They say something complex about place, immigration, and the malleability of culture and who can claim ownership of it.

Elsewhere, such as Brick Lane in London, Indian restaurants largely serve a non-Indian clientele seeking "a curry." However, this context on Soho Road specifically caters to the Punjabi community by selling celebration foods, quick lunches, and key ingredients for home cooking. The commercial success of these enterprises reflects how Punjabi culture has thrived in capitalist Britain, not just through preservation but through adaptation and entrepreneurship.

²⁷ Jesudason, David (2023) *Desi pubs Desi Pubs: A guide to British-Indian pubs, food, and culture*. London: CAMRA Books



Illustration of Food and Drinking Establishments on Soho Road
(Authors Own, 2025)



FASHION, TEXTILES & JEWELLERY

The vibrant and opulent fashion and jewellery of the Indian subcontinent are integral to Punjabi identity. Dressing up isn't about flaunting wealth but rather a bold expression of culture, worn with pride, never meant to blend into the background. Jewellery, in particular, holds deep significance within the diaspora, with Indian women collectively owning 11% of the world's gold, often acquired through dowries, weddings, and to mark the birth of children.²⁸ This tradition of safeguarding gold is rooted in colonial history: Britain's looting of Indian treasures has left a lasting imprint, reinforcing the importance of holding onto wealth in tangible forms.

Soho Road stands as the prime destination for traditional South Asian attire, whether for weddings, religious gatherings, or everyday wear. People from across the UK travel here for wedding shopping, while others fly to India, often finding better deals abroad. The commercial success of this industry highlights how Punjabi culture not only endures but thrives in capitalist Britain, turning heritage into an economic force for the diaspora.

²⁸ "Indian women hold 11% of the world's gold" http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/16435306.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst (Accessed 17th February 2025)

FAITH & PLACES OF WORSHIP

Soho Road is home to four gurdwaras, each serving different Sikh castes within the diverse Punjabi community. My family belongs to the Ravidassia community and the Chamar caste, and our gurdwara, Guru Ravidass Bhawan, sits at the heart of Soho Road. Despite the distinctions between these places of worship, Soho Road acts as a unifying thread, connecting these communities into a shared cultural and spiritual hub.

Across Britain, gurdwaras are deeply embedded in Punjabi life, strengthened by both cultural proximity and strong community funding. Donations (ranging from £1 to £20 per visit) sustain the langar, maintain the building, and support religious staff and community initiatives. This self-sustaining model ensures that gurdwaras remain vital spaces of worship, social support, and cultural preservation.

However, as generations evolve, questions of secularism emerge. Punjabi identity is often deeply intertwined with religion, yet many members of the diaspora feel disconnected from faith. This evolving relationship challenges traditional structures, prompting reflections on how cultural heritage can be maintained beyond religious ties.



Illustration of Gurdwaras on Soho Road
(Authors Own, 2025)

Punjabi Performing Arts

INTRODUCTION

Exploring Soho Road reveals a striking absence, despite being one of the most prominent high streets for the Punjabi diaspora, there are no dedicated spaces for the performing arts. This gap extends across wider Birmingham, where Punjabi-owned creative spaces remain scattered, fragmented, and lacking a unified presence.

Performing arts hold deep significance in Punjabi culture, serving as a powerful means of connection to heritage - a home away from home for many in the diaspora. For me and my siblings, having a creative outlet was essential, providing a means of self-expression.

While the term performing arts is a colonial construct primarily used in the West, different cultures have their own ways of defining and categorizing artistic expression. In Punjab, Kala (art) is deeply embedded in daily life, where music, dance, and drama are inseparable. Bollywood, though rooted in Hindi-language cinema, reinforces this interconnectedness, and Punjab's own film industry carries these traditions forward in its own linguistic and cultural context.

No discussion of Punjabi performing arts is complete without bhangra, one of its most celebrated dance forms. More than just a dance, bhangra is an umbrella term encompassing various folk styles from across Punjab, recognised worldwide for its high-energy movements and rhythmic, powerful vocals. In the 1960s and '70s, the British Punjabi community began recording bhangra folk songs in the



Bhangra Dancers perform live at RSVP Exhibition (Calmer Karma, 2025)

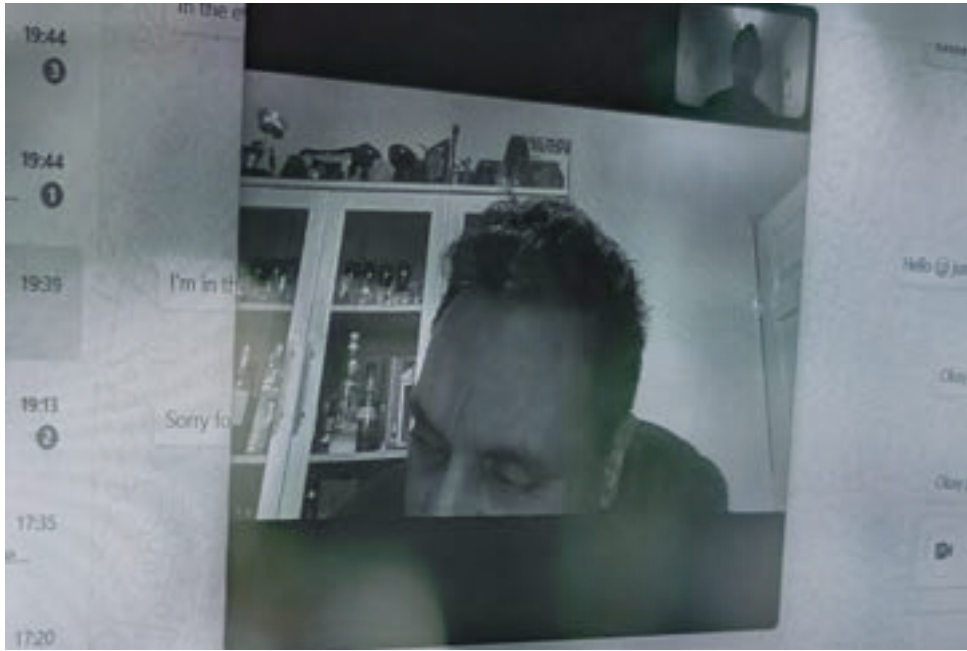
UK, turning it into a defining symbol of identity at a time when South Asian presence in Britain was marginalised.²⁹ While no single figure is credited with pioneering the art form, bhangra itself has become an enduring cultural force, influencing not only the Punjabi diaspora but also mainstream British music and dance.

Through conversations with leading figures in the field - such as the director of the Punjabi Theatre Academy and a founding member of the DAAR (Dance and Art Researchers) Society, I will gather insights from those actively shaping this evolving cultural landscape. In conducting these interviews, I have considered ethical research frameworks, from Practising Ethics, asking myself: Have I understood the local social, cultural, and political context enough?³⁰ Whilst I am Punjabi, being British-born means there are still cultural and linguistic barriers to navigate.

The Punjabi diaspora has made significant contributions in representing the community and educating others about its culture. From artists and actors to musicians, these cultural figures have played a key role in shaping Britain's performing arts scene. I will examine the work and perspectives of actor and comedian Sanjeev Bhaskar, artists Jasleen Kaur and Dawinder Bansal, exploring how they have amplified Punjabi identity through creative expression.

²⁹ "Understanding the Origins of Bhangra in the United Kingdom" <https://svasalive.com/bhangra-in-the-uk/> (accessed 15 February 2025).

³⁰ "Practising Ethics" <https://www.practisingethics.org/> (accessed 15 February 2025).



Above: WhatsApp call with Tajinder Singh (Authors Own, 2025)
Below: Dr Randhawa with Ms Norah Richards (Singh, 1876-1971)



PUNJABI THEATRE ACADEMY INTERVIEW

I came across the Punjabi Theatre Academy through an unexpected Google search, simply combining the words Punjab and theatre. After reaching out via email, I had the opportunity to speak with its founder, Tajinder Singh. The interview was conducted in English, with occasional Punjabi words and terms woven into our conversation. While this discussion was not recorded or transcribed, I have included my notes in Appendix A at the end of this document.

From their online presence, it is clear that the academy's mission is to make performing arts an enjoyable and accessible experience while preserving its traditional discipline. They welcome individuals from all backgrounds who are eager to learn and engage with Punjabi culture through theatre.³¹ Below are selected dialogues from our conversation via WhatsApp voice call.

Tajinder: *Theatre in Punjab began with Norah Richards – she was from Britain.*³²

This intrigued me, so upon further research, I found that Norah Richards was an Irish actress and theatre practitioner who became known as the Lady Gregory of the Punjab. She spent 60 years of her life to nurturing and enriching the region's cultural landscape. Arriving in Punjab in 1911, she played a pioneering role in the development of Punjabi theatre, producing the 'first-ever' Punjabi play, *Dulhan* (Bride), in 1914.³³ I hesitate to fully believe this narrative, as history has long been documented through the lens of the coloniser - especially during the period of British imperial rule. While *Dulhan* may have been the first recorded play in the Western theatrical sense, performance in Punjab existed in many rich and diverse forms long before this. Folk traditions such as *naqal* (mimicry performances), *kisse* (oral storytelling), and *raag*-based musical narratives have been deeply embedded in Punjabi culture for centuries. The notion of a first Punjabi performance, therefore, must be understood within a broader historical and cultural context.

³¹ "Punjabi Theatre Academy" <http://punjabitheatreacademy.com/> (accessed 15 February 2025).

³² Interview between author and Tajinder Singh (29th January 2025)

³³ "NORAH RICHARDS AND HER RETREAT AT ANDRETTA" <http://23himachal.com/nora/norah.htm> (accessed 16 February 2025).



Sikh Raj production and crowd (Punjabi Theatre Academy, 2019)



Tajinder: *We established in 1990, formed over 3 decades ago. People ask me why would you not call it South Asian or Indian theatre academy, and I say I want to keep the Punjabi culture alive.*³⁴

In 'Desi Pubs', Jesudason argues that although 'the racists might see us all as a 'non-white' mass, it doesn't mean we shouldn't celebrate our distinct identities, whether that be British Asian, British-Punjabi-Sikh or Gujarati-Kenyan Indian.³⁵

Tajinder: *We perform historical issues, family issues for the shows, which attracts different audiences. Our latest play was the Southall Riots with the national front people.*³⁶

Their most recent production reenacted the Southall Riots of 1979: a historically significant event, especially given their location in Southall, a key hub for the Punjabi diaspora in the UK. Again, this was a history I was unaware of. During a meeting from the National Front (who were opposed to immigration and in favour of repatriation), a peaceful protest of 3000 people with its large Indian population was responded to with an equal amount of police officers, provoking some in the crowd to violence, which escalated into a riot.³⁷

Tajinder: *We need youngsters to come and work on the board. (He then asks me if I would be interested, to which I remind him that I am talentless in the performing arts!) We have an open event on Friday 21st February in Southall: there will be singing and dancing - you should come.*³⁸

Tajinder touches on the intergenerational divide, particularly the challenge of engaging young people in his work. He believes that one way to bridge this gap is by actively involving them in decision-making processes, ensuring they have a voice in shaping the narrative- hence asking me to join the board. This mindset is crucial in fostering a sense of ownership and connection, ultimately helping to close the intergenerational gap within the diaspora.

³⁴ Interview between author and Tajinder Singh (29th January 2025)

³⁵ Jesudason, David (2023) *Desi pubs Desi Pubs: A guide to British-Indian pubs, food, and culture*. London: CAMRA Books

³⁶ Interview between author and Tajinder Singh (29th January 2025)

³⁷ "Southall riots: 23 April 1979" <https://www.aroundealing.com/history/southall-riots-1979/> (accessed 16 February 2025).

³⁸ Interview between author and Tajinder Singh (29th January 2025)



Above: Teams call with Ajay (Authors Own, 2025)
Below: Giddha Desh Puadh Performance (DAAR Cultural evening, 2023)



DAAR SOCIETY INTERVIEW

To open a dialogue with the performing arts scene in Punjab, I contacted groups operating in Tagore Theatre – a multi-use theatre space in Chandigarh. In ‘Postcolonial urbanism’, Grubbauer states we must ‘learn from the cities in the Global South, for new ways of thinking about design and planning.’³⁹ I reached out to DAAR Society, who then put me in touch with co-founder of DAAR (Dance and Art Researchers) Society- Ajay Kalwaniya. The interview was conducted in English, using occasional Punjabi words and terms. This interview was recorded and transcribed through Microsoft Teams: I have attached the full transcript in Appendix B at the end of this document, but here I pick out key quotes from our conversation.

On engaging with lost dance forms, to keep the diversity of the Punjabi culture alive.

Ajay: We were passionate about the folk dances of Punjab. In truth, our society honour such artists, the coaches, the drummers, the singers, all of them, who have been contributing to the field of Punjabi folk art. For the past five years, he (Parvesh Kumar, founder of DAAR) has been giving 4-5 such performances, which are not available otherwise anywhere now which are lost to the time.⁴⁰

On secularism within the values of the society, separating performing arts from the faith.

Ajay: So, I am from Haryana right. If we see in old sense, Haryana was also part of Punjab. So that land is Punjab overall. So, the form, the love towards art forms is more there instead of the religion or faith in those terms. It's not a religious thing that we follow. It's performing thing that we follow. The performances, the arts, the culture that was there and those things, some of them are getting lost.⁴¹

³⁹ Grubbauer, M., ‘Postcolonial urbanism across disciplinary boundaries: modes of (dis)engagement between urban theory and professional practice’, *The Journal of Architecture*, 24(4), 2019, p 469

⁴⁰ Interview between author and Ajay Kalwaniya, (12th February 2025)

⁴¹ Interview between author and Ajay Kalwaniya, (12th February 2025)

On globalism, Ajay has hopes in the future to reach out to other groups with similar ethos.

Ajay: So, the Punjabi music or the city has more influence from Punjab. In an obvious sense, Chandigarh city, the capital, has more influence from Punjab. You don't have to belong to the exact land of Punjab to enjoy the Punjabi people, or enjoy the Punjabi music or the dances?

But it has developed itself so much that people belonging to different religions, different places, they all like Punjabi music, Punjabi dances. So, they do show up, but majority of them would somewhere belong to Punjab.

The city itself has more population from the Punjab side, the people who are going to perform are somewhere in from the city or the Punjab side or have been settled here for some years. So, the majority audience is still there.

We are going to hold an international show with Malaysian people, Malaysian artists. With that kind of exchange, that kind of dialogue is starting to happen and might happen in the coming years.⁴²

Author: Do you think it (folk dances) could be a part of Punjabi societies outside of Punjab? So in Canada or in the UK?

Ajay: It should be. with time we this is what we wish for that we get the opportunities outside India as well where. There are Punjabi people who can connect again with those dance forms and know about them what existed earlier.

Through his (Parvesh Kumar) channel, he many people are there in Canada and UK who want him to comment, teach there and talk about it.⁴³

On performing folk dances and traditional instruments.

Ajay: We have never performed bhangra because we know it's so overrated.

⁴² Interview between author and Ajay Kalwaniya, (12th February 2025)

⁴³ Interview between author and Ajay Kalwaniya, (12th February 2025)

Now the second thing about Bhangra is bhangra is not actually a Punjabi folk dance. In a way it's a culmination of different folk dances that existed.

We are focusing on those dances which brought bhangra to life because it was something that different dance forms existed, and they brought it together and with more loud music and more energy they performed. So, it became a symbol of Punjab.

Actually, in the old Punjab, it didn't exist then.

But that's what we are working towards as a society, to bring those lost dance forms and art forms back to life.

Those instruments that have been lost.

Once one of our events in the beginning, especially an instrument, was ordered or somehow acquired from Pakistan.

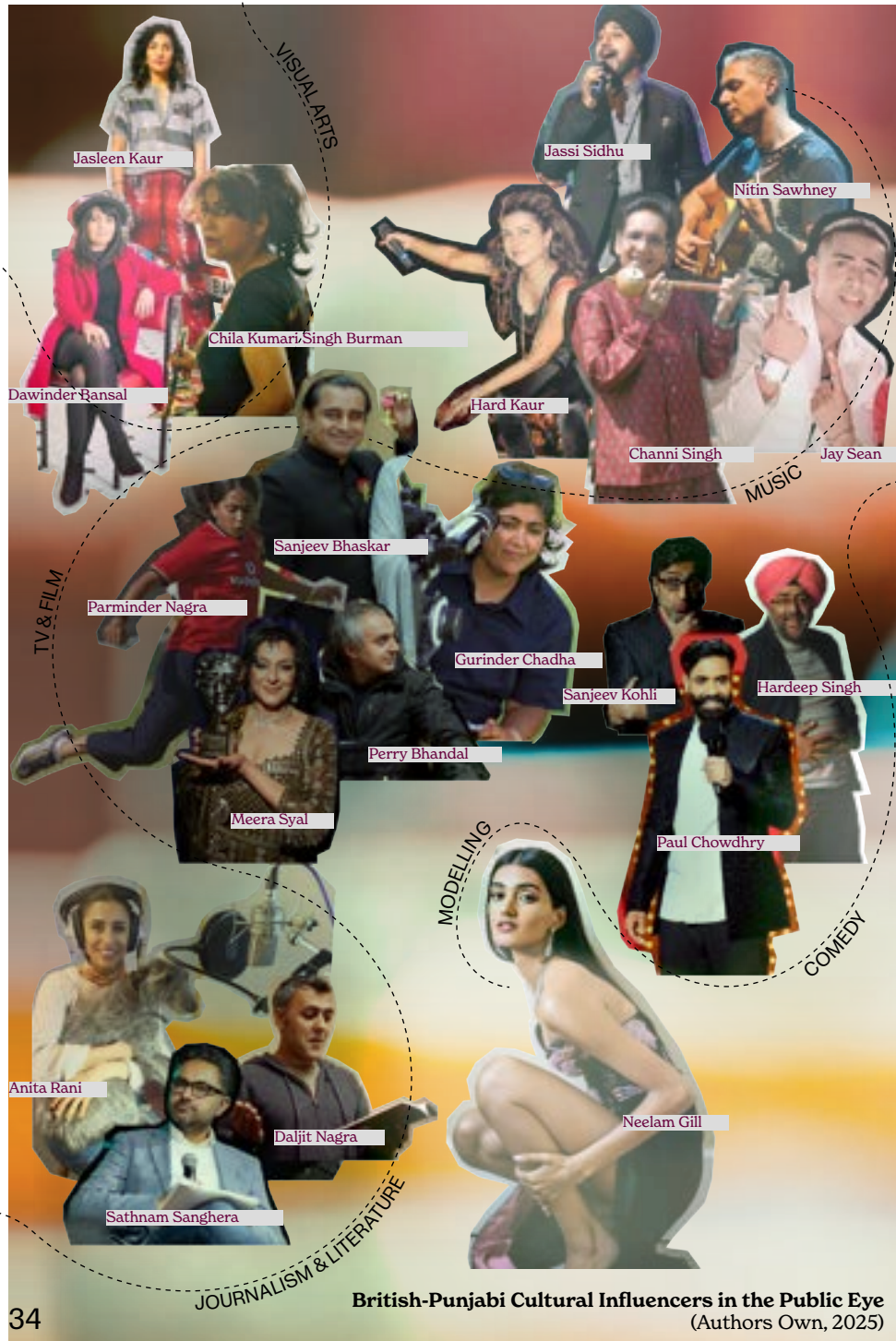
A lot of research was gone into how, from where to we can get it and finding links in Pakistan from where that instrument may be, because many such instruments and things are getting lost with time in every stage including Punjab.

We are trying to find other ways to entertain people and bringing older culture, the authentic culture, some way in back into the society.⁴⁴

After speaking with Ajay, his deep passion for Punjabi folk dances became evident. Before our conversation, my knowledge was mostly limited to Giddha and Bhangra, but learning about the rich history of Punjabi dance beyond these forms was eye-opening. Together, we explored thought-provoking questions: will future generations of the diaspora in the UK embrace and popularise other Punjabi folk dances? Will anything ever reach the same level of recognition and celebration as Bhangra?

Only time will tell, but Ajay remains hopeful that DAAR Society's values and efforts will resonate with Punjabi communities worldwide, ensuring these traditional art forms continue to thrive across the globe.

⁴⁴ Interview between author and Ajay Kalwaniya, (12th February 2025)



British-Punjabi Cultural Influencers in the Public Eye (Authors Own, 2025)

PUNJABI CULTURAL INFLUENCERS IN THE ARTS

The individuals to the left have played a vital role in representing the community and fostering cultural awareness amongst various backgrounds in the UK. From artists and actors to musicians, these influential figures have helped shape Britain’s creative landscape. The collage to the left highlights prominent British-Punjabi individuals in the public eye who have contributed to the rich, hybrid culture that thrives today.



PUNJABI CULTURAL INFLUENCERS IN THE ARTS

SANJEEV BHASKAR

The hit sketch comedy series *Goodness Gracious Me* and sitcom *The Kumars at No. 42* were deeply impactful and loved by the South Asian diaspora in Britain and beyond. These shows were truly the first to represent the cultural hybridity that the diaspora faced upon arrival to this foreign land, getting accustomed to their values, ways of living and climate. The shows approaches were traditional but the key difference being that they were 'written, performed and produced by British Asians and that hadn't happened before.'⁴⁵ Sanjeev Bhaskar OBE is a British actor, comedian, and television presenter, who starred in these shows.

In an interview in *The Louis Theroux Podcast*, he speaks about the importance of representation of the South Asian diaspora:

59:35 Sanjeev: *I think you know at that time across the 60s and the 70s, there was no sort of South Asian representation on TV. So even someone Browning up for us was kind of a step closer to seeing ourselves reflected.*

He also describes his initial meeting musician, British-Punjabi Nitin Sawney:

48:53 Sanjeev: *There was no one around me that kind of really was interested in films and music and creativity, and it was only when I met Nitin Sawney that I found a kindred spirit. We kind of, we both talked about the fact that there was nobody that we could see in the public eye that reflected our experience of being British and of Asian heritage, South Asian heritage. And so, we said why don't we do something and why don't we mix comedy and music. And so that's been driven through everything I've done. So, whether it was sketches on *Goodness Gracious Me* or *Kumar's* or anything else that I've come up.*

⁴⁵ Theroux, Louis (2024) "S2 EP6 Sanjeev Bhaskar on his ground-breaking comedy show *The Kumars at No. 42*, 'browning up' in 1970s comedy, and his outrageous rider demands" in *The Louis Theroux Podcast* [Podcast]. ²⁷ February 2024. Available at: <https://open.spotify.com/episode/7uWnDfnfiwGgSSpZ4lhUh2> (Accessed ¹⁵ February 2025)

JASLEEN KAUR

Artist Jasleen Kaur recently won the Turner Prize 2024 through highlighting her Scottish-Punjabi cultural hybridity. She reflects upon everyday objects, animating them through sound and music to summon community and cultural inheritance. She weaves together the personal, political, and spiritual in her exhibition *Alter Altar*, choreographing a visual and aural experience that suggests both solidarity and joy. Her ability to gather different voices through unexpected and playful combinations of material, from Irn-Bru to family photographs and a vintage Ford Escort, locating moments of resilience and possibility.⁴⁶

DAWINDER BANSAL

Artist Dawinder Bansal re-animates her childhood in Wolverhampton, growing up as a young girl in her parents' electrical shop, Bansal Electrical, which also rented VHS Bollywood films. It draws upon her memories of watching Bollywood films with her Sikh extended family, pays homage to her Kenyan roots, and explores the social history of South Asian home entertainment in 1980s Britain, through a series of exhibition rooms in Birmingham.⁴⁷

Dawinder also draws on her experiences of attending 'daytimers' which were daytime discos for young South Asians. This underground moment meant that teenage South Asians had a safe space to experience the nightlife they were forbidden to engage with due to cultural traditions, curfews, and safety from racial abuse.



Above: Jasleen Kaur with 'Alter Alter' exhibition.
Below: Dawinder Bansal with 'Bansal Electrics' exhibition.



⁴⁶ "Jasleen Kaur Wins Turner Prize 2024" <https://www.tate.org.uk/press/press-releases/turner-prize-2024-winner-announcement>, (accessed 15 February 2025).

⁴⁷ "Dawinder Bansal: Projects" <https://www.dawinderbansal.com/projects> (accessed 15 February 2025).

Wider Socio-political Issues

DECOLONIAL PRACTICES

In response to the racist riots of summer 2024 and the global rise of the far right, we must celebrate our migration: an integral force shaping this country. Creating spaces for the community is essential to combating racism. As the far-right gains ground, it is crucial to establish spaces for marginalized communities, providing both safety and visibility while displaying their strength and celebrating their rich, vibrant culture. In 'Imagined Communities', Anderson acknowledges that we are living 'in an age when it is so common for progressive, cosmopolitan intellectuals (particularly in Europe) to insist on the near-pathological character of nationalism, with its roots in fear and hatred of the Other, and its affinities with racism.'⁴⁸

These conditions birth 'social concerns that affect community resiliency; some are longstanding social problems such as social class and race inequality.'⁴⁹

In Hall's 'New Ethnicities', he 'identifies and characterises a significant shift that has been going on (and is still going on) in black cultural politics' which draws parallels with the diasporic shifts in the Punjabi community, where 'both are rooted in the politics of anti-racism.' These shifts are 'access' and 'contestation'. They 'challenge, resist and, where possible, to transform the dominant regimes of

⁴⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1991). Especially 'Patriotism and Racism', pp 141-154.

⁴⁹ Eric Klinenberg, *Palaces for the People: How social infrastructure can help fight inequality, polarisation, and the decline of civic life*, (2018).

⁵⁰ Stuart Hall, 'New Ethnicities', in *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, edited by Baker, H., Diawara, M. & Lindberg, M., (London/Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p 163



UK riots (BAMEd Network, 2024)

representation first in music and style, later in literary, visual, and cinematic forms'⁵⁰, much like that of the Punjabi community settled in the UK.

In *Bodily moves and racial justice*, Sheller argues that 'it is difficult to ignore the persistence of racist violence and ethnic exclusions on our front doorstep. This, in turn, is connected to other kinds of uneven mobility: relations between people, access to transport, urban infrastructure'⁵¹ On the planetary scale, she demands that we rethink the contested politics of migration and restricted borders.

The decolonisation of buildings and public spaces is inherently tied to the democratisation of access. The right to belong and a rightful sense of ownership are not acts of charity, hospitality, or liberal tolerance. Nor should they be contingent upon assimilation into a culture that is not one's own. Rather, they emerge from the recognition of public spaces as common goods—spaces where ownership is defined by a collective commitment to true publicness.⁵²

Despite the painful legacy of India's history with 'colonisation, partition, famine and indentureship, we should celebrate the positive impact of these stories and the diverse mix of peoples, languages, religious and cultural traditions which form this region',⁵³ through ownership of space.

⁵¹ Mimi Sheller, 'Bodily moves and racial justice', in *Mobility Justice: The politics of movement in an age of extremes*, (London: Verso Books, 2018).

⁵² Achille Mbembe, 'Decolonising Knowledge and the Question of the Archive', *Aula magistral proferida*, 2015

⁵³ Nathaniel, Krish and Mohamed, Bushra (2024) *South Asian History London Map*. London: Blue Crow Media.

WHAT ARE WE ASSIMILATING TO?

Assimilation occurs when individuals feel pressured, intentionally, or not, to fit in, although it can also reflect an appreciation of another culture in some cases. However, it most often involves conforming to the dominant culture, raising questions about power, choice, and authenticity in cultural exchange. Anderson argues in 'Imagined Communities' that 'in everything 'natural' there is always something unchosen. In this way, nation-ness is assimilated to skin-colour, gender, parentage, and birth-era - all those things one cannot help.'⁵⁴

Questions arise regarding the Punjabi diaspora: What exactly are we assimilating to? At what point does assimilation go too far? How do we distinguish between meaningful cultural exchange and the erasure of identity?

On the topic of sacrificing, host, Rubina Pabani describes her experience on podcast Brown Girls Do It Too.

10:09 Poppy: *What's the biggest thing that you've sacrificed?*

Rubina: *I think I've sacrificed a bit of my identity, and I think I sacrificed a bit of my Indianness to assimilate and be British. I think I sacrificed my language and my culture a little bit to have friends, and to party, and to do all the other things because I thought that's what British Society was about. I think in the process of assimilating and for me to feel comfortable at school, I gave up a lot of things.⁵⁵*

A journal entry by author, Kaur describes her childhood as 'experiencing a double life: *One life was at school with white, black and Indian friends, speaking mostly in English, and the other at home, where Punjabi language and traditions dominated.*⁵⁶ She describes the cultural hybridity as a battle between trying to '*preserve our ancestral*

⁵⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1991). Especially 'Patriotism and Racism', p. 141

⁵⁵ Pabani, Rubina and Jay, Poppy (2025) "The Sacrifices We Make" in *Brown Girls Do It Too* [Podcast]. 31 January 2025. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0kn41r7> (Accessed 15 February 2025)

⁵⁶ "Navigating Traditions: The Journey of a British-born Sikh" <https://asiasamachar.com/2023/10/09/navigating-traditions-the-journey-of-a-british-born-sikh/> (accessed 15 February 2025).

⁵⁷ "Navigating Traditions: The Journey of a British-born Sikh" <https://asiasamachar.com/2023/10/09/navigating-traditions-the-journey-of-a-british-born-sikh/> (accessed 15 February 2025).

⁵⁸ bell hooks, 'Diasporic Landscapes of Longing', in bell hooks, *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics*, (New York: WW Norton, 1995), p. 66

*roots and the rich heritage passed down by our parents, whilst at the same time learning to navigate the British culture and taking the best bits of it.'*⁵⁷

In 'Reflections on Exile', Said reflects that we as hybrid beings, 'take home and language for granted; they become nature, and their underlying assumptions recede into dogma and orthodoxy'.⁵⁸

In an article recounting her grandmother's migration to the UK, Loomba stresses that 'the break between Britain and India in 1947 was not final'. She argues that '*assimilation* or '*acculturation*' assigned to the behaviour of migrant's place too great an emphasis on a break with the past, a break with all contexts. They enforce a rigid binary between home and host, old and new, rather than appreciating cultural fusions and reshaping. For example, when it comes to language, Kinship terms like 'mummyji' or 'cousin-brother' or '-sister' were coined to better reflect a value system of respect and community that it was felt English did not possess. There is a kind of 'myth of authenticity' that clings too tightly to an image of Punjabi culture that may not really exist.'⁵⁹

Mama Told Me Not to Come UK Tour (Brown Girls Do It Too, 2024)



THE INTERGENERATIONAL DIVIDE.

In Critical Race Theory, Crenshaw reflects 'on her grandmother's experience working in America. *'Whatever retort might have been called for, had been suppressed long before it reached her lips, for the price of her family's well-being was her silence. Accepting the risk of self-annihilation was the only way to survive.'*⁶⁰ Whilst earlier generations sometimes suffered racism in silence in order to survive, the current generation are very vocal, particularly online and through protest, causing a further divide in the generations.

Hooks 'theorizes the value of "homeplace" for Black families living in the colonised world of white supremacy, by describing her grandmother's and mother's struggles to maintain a place of refuge from white hatred, to "transcend their tiredness" in order to create private havens free from racism'.⁶¹

Many migrants experiences of arriving in late-20th century Britain would have been alienating. An anonymous author describes her grandad's experience: *'a Sikh Punjabi wearing his 'pagh' (turban), arriving in Scotland alone with no knowledge of English, (least of all Scots) and the prospect of having to adapt to a new culture would have been a daunting one.' They were 'faced with the complexities of adapting to and bringing up their children in a new culture while striving to preserve their roots. My family's ability to assimilate into a new culture and be successful has left an indelible mark on my character.'*⁶²

To the right, I have identified the key aspects that make the culture, alongside how strong each generations connection is to each part. Whilst this is based off my personal observations of my extended Punjabi family living in the UK, this might not be the case for other families in the Punjabi diaspora.

⁵⁹ "They were living ten years behind our Asian countries: Oral histories of British Punjabi communities 1960s-present" <https://www.routemagazine.com/british-punjabi-1960-present> (accessed 15 February 2025).

⁶⁰ Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil T. Gotanda, Gary Peller and Kendall Thomas (eds), Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement, (New York, NY: The New Press, 1996).

⁶¹ bell hooks, 'Homeplace: A Site of Resistance', in Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics, (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1990), p 41

⁶² "South Asian Heritage Month: Growing up with Punjabi Culture" <https://www.mfm.com/insights/life-at-mfm/south-asian-heritage-month-growing-up-with-punjabi-culture/> (accessed 15 February 2025).

GENERATIONAL DISCONNECT TO PUNJABI CULTURE

Name	Baby Boomers	Generation X	Millenials	Generation Z	Generation Alpha	Generation Beta
Birth	1946 - 1964	1965 - 1979	1980 - 1994	1995 - 2012	2013 - 2024	2025 - 2039
Age	79 - 61	60 - 46	45 - 31	30 - 13	12 - 0	Future Gen
Language	Understanding					
	Speaking					
	Reading/ Writing					
Sikhism	Celebrating Occasions					
	Visiting Gurdwara					
	Following beliefs					
Arts & Culture	Watching Punjabi movies					
	Listening to Punjabi music					
	Dancing Bhangra					
	Cooking Punjabi Food					
Punjab	Visited Punjab					
	In contact with family there					
Lineage	Marrying Punjabi spouse					



ASSIMILATION GONE TOO FAR.

In an interview in The Louis Theroux Podcast, Sanjeev Baskar describes an account of extreme assimilation, visible across the Conservative Party today, though the lens of an episode from Goodness Gracious Me, called 'The Coopers Go Golfing.'

Sanjeev: Yeah, it's two couples, the Coopers and the Robinsons and they're actually called the Kapoor's and the Rabindranaths, but they refuse to accept their anything but traditionally British. So interestingly here, when various members of the British Asian community have reached high offices of government, whether it be foreign secretary, home secretary or Prime Minister, somebody will send me either a clip or a photo of the Coopers and the Robinsons, because they were, they were trying to be more British than the British.

So, they hated immigrants. They hated kind of flying. You know if anyone referred to them as being immigrants, they would be, you know, absolutely. They called themselves Chigwellian, Chigwell's place in Essex. So it was that refusal to kind of accept who they really were.⁶³

In the same interview Bhaskar recognises the impacts of extreme assimilation on the diasporic mentality, towards Brexit, when revealed that many children of immigrants voted 'leave,' including members of my own Punjabi family.

Sanjeev: British Asians voted for Brexit, voted for leaving the European Union. And I asked my mum why that was, why so many of her friends had voted Brexit. But I think it was that when they arrived, that generation arrived, they suffered the exclusions and they suffered the kind of, I mean, you know, racism is, is probably too strong a word to throw in this early. But certainly, prejudices they were, they were subject to. And I think this was their first chance to prove how British they were by going, yeah, Britain, Britain alone, yeah.⁶⁴

⁶³ Theroux, Louis (2024) "S2 EP6 Sanjeev Baskar on his ground-breaking comedy show The Kumars at No. 42, 'browning up' in 1970s comedy, and his outrageous rider demands" in The Louis Theroux Podcast [Podcast].²⁷ February 2024. Available at: <https://open.spotify.com/episode/7uWnDfnfiwGgSSpZ4lhUh2> (Accessed 15 February 2025)

⁶⁴ Theroux, Louis (2024) "S2 EP6 Sanjeev Baskar on his ground-breaking comedy show The Kumars at No. 42, 'browning up' in 1970s comedy, and his outrageous rider demands" in The Louis Theroux Podcast [Podcast].²⁷ February 2024. Available at: <https://open.spotify.com/episode/7uWnDfnfiwGgSSpZ4lhUh2> (Accessed 15 February 2025)

PLATFORMS BY AND FOR THE DIASPORA: EMBRACING HYBRIDITY.

Innovative and necessary platforms are arising over the past decades that celebrate and highlight the British Asian hybridity. One of these are WEIRDO, which is a zine challenging the representation of South Asian people in the alternative, mainstream and South Asian cultures. Their first issue was centred around exploring identity and community in British subculture, sharing the experiences and perspectives of alternative South Asian people in the UK through essays, artwork, photography, and interviews.⁶⁵

Another platform that creates spaces and opportunities for South Asian artists to display their talents, collaborate, and push creative boundaries, are Dialed In. They are an artist-led initiative set out to an to inspire South Asian expression.⁶⁶ They embrace the British rave scene and marry it to music from the home nations to house a truly hybrid identity. Events from this organisation are illustrated on the front and back cover of this publication.

Bollyqueer host a set of dance classes which centre the Queer and Trans South Asian diaspora. By incorporating the south Asian performing arts, it's a way to celebrate the magic and beauty of Bollywood dance without having to sacrifice your queerness or identity, which otherwise is still not widely accepted in parts of India. 'It's a family.'⁶⁷

The list goes on beyond the performing arts, but these are a few examples of how the South Asian diaspora express their culture in the British landscape.

⁶⁵ "WEIRDO Issue 1: Identity & Community in British Subculture" <https://www.weirdozine.com/> (accessed 15 February 2025).

⁶⁶ "Dialed In" <https://www.dialed-in.com/> (accessed 15 February 2025).

⁶⁷ "Bollyqueer" <https://bollyqueer.com/about-us> (accessed 15 February 2025).



Above: WEIRDO Founders (WEIRDO Zine, 2021)
Below: Vinay (Bollyqueer, 2024)





Building Motimposo Primary Schools outdoor kitchen in Lesotho (Authors own, 2024)



MY SPATIAL PRACTICE

I am interested in how we can uplift communities in the global south, who have historically been impeded upon due to coloniality, and to this day suffer the effects of it. 'Europe is literally the creation of the Third World.'⁶⁸ In *Diasporic Landscapes of Longing*, hooks' focuses on 'decentering Western civilization, which necessarily requires that attention shift from a central concern with white subjects'.⁶⁹

My practice focuses on decentering the European and colonial narrative, by involving the underrepresented, and marginalised communities that exist outside of their homeland, such as the Punjabi diaspora. In *Rethinking Urbanism*, Myers 'engages heavily with postcolonial studies and Global South thinking and calls for a new understanding of planetary urbanism that moves beyond Western-centric perspectives.' 'The need to reconstruct our understanding of who and what makes urban environments is essential.'⁷⁰ Whilst focusing on communities from the Global South, I am looking at a local scale of my hometown where I grew up, instead of a global scale.

Hosagrahar states in 'Interrogating Difference' that 'Dichotomies such as those between West and non-West, traditional and modern, have persisted as rigid oppositions that deny both the interdependence and the inequalities in the relationship.'⁷¹ Marginalised groups and their rights in property are intertwined with race. Through this entangled relationship between race and property, historical forms of domination have evolved to reproduce subordination in the present.⁷²

To put this thinking into practice, I volunteered at RISE International - an NGO in Lesotho over summer 2024. Here we hand-made earth blocks using local materials to build an outdoor kitchen for a primary school, who had prior been cooking outside, affecting whether the children would eat or not on a rainy/ windy day.

⁶⁸ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, (trans Joan Pinkman; New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000; 1950).

⁶⁹ bell hooks, 'Diasporic Landscapes of Longing', in bell hooks, *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics*, (New York: WW Norton, 1995), p. 66

⁷⁰ Garth Myers, *Rethinking Urbanism: lessons from postcolonialism and the Global South*, (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2020), p.1

⁷¹ Jyoti Hosagrahar, 'Interrogating Difference: postcolonial perspectives in architecture and urbanism', in C Grieg Crysler, Stephen Cairns and Hilde Heynen (eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Architectural Theory*, (Sage, 2012).

⁷² Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil T. Gotanda, Gary Peller and Kendall Thomas (eds), *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, (New York, NY: The New Press, 1996).

MY PERSONAL NARRATIVE

Before leaving West Bromwich at 18, I assumed the rest of the country was somewhat equally diverse. Living away from Birmingham for nine years showed me otherwise, deepening my appreciation for the community I come from and reinforcing my belief that it deserves to be celebrated.

As a second-generation Punjabi, I see the diaspora evolving: my cousins are third generation, and some are now raising the future fourth. The most powerful way to stay connected to Punjab is by visiting, a privilege I had two years ago after a 12-year gap. That experience rekindled my bond with the language, culture, and family. However, many lack this opportunity due to rising travel costs, long distances, or estrangement from family back home. In a Podcast, Sanjeev Baskar explains how he would visit India every 5-6 years because tickets were expensive. 'My mum then started work as well and it would take my dad four or five years to save up the money.'⁷³ This is an experience that resonates with a large portion of the South Asian diaspora. This made me question—how can we stay connected to our culture while living in the UK, without physically returning to India? For me, the strongest connections come through food, music, dance, film, and faith.

Growing up, I never truly connected with Punjabi dance, music, or film: partly because, deep down, I feared it would make me feel less "British." A clear example of assimilation in my own life was when I stopped speaking Punjabi to my parents, even though they continued speaking it to me. This shift was influenced by a moment in primary school, when my teacher advised my mother, that speaking Punjabi at home would hinder my English skills at school. This teacher was also Punjabi, and I now realise she was projecting her own assimilation onto me.

⁷³ Theroux, Louis (2024) "S² EP⁶ Sanjeev Bhaskar on his ground-breaking comedy show The Kumars at No. 42, 'browning up' in 1970s comedy, and his outrageous rider demands" in The Louis Theroux Podcast [Podcast]. ²⁷ February 2024. Available at: <https://open.spotify.com/episode/uWnDfnfwGgSSpZ4lhUh2> (Accessed 15 February 2025)

Growing up, me and my sisters found our creative outlet in art, drawing and making - whilst my little brother found his in bhangra classes and school theatre productions. The performing arts play a crucial role in building self-confidence, especially for children from migrant backgrounds, who may struggle due to English not being the main language spoken at home.

Later in life, my love for Punjabi music blossomed, during a trip to India, when my nieces and nephews introduced me to Sidhu Moose Wala: a Canadian-Punjabi rapper and singer blending grime (which I love), with Punjabi music. This has led me to discovering 'Punjabi Underground raves' in the UK, which are wildly popular with the diaspora. My desire to improve speaking in Punjabi while in India also led me to explore more Punjabi music and films.

Family Portrait, West Bromwich (Authors own, 2001)



PROPOSITION

My vision is to curate a program that reflects the evolving Punjabi diaspora, celebrating its rich and diverse performing arts. My project proposes to transform to the Palladium Cinema, located at the end of Soho Road, by retrofitting it into a dedicated Punjabi Arts and Culture Centre. Klinenberg argues that ‘social infrastructure provides social connections and knowledge that empower individuals, creating “palaces for the people” to showcase the social capital that these assets infuse into our communities.’⁷⁴ The future of democratic societies rests not simply on shared values but on shared spaces where crucial connections are formed.

This proposition is both necessary and in demand, as evidenced by my interview with the director of the Punjabi Theatre Academy. His work in Southall highlights the success of such spaces, but we can take it further expanding beyond the immediate diaspora to include friends and family eager to engage with Punjabi culture. My proposal explores how to create these inclusive spaces.

Creative work within the Punjabi diaspora already exists, from artists like Jasleen Kaur and Davinder Bansal to books like *Desi Pubs* and platforms such as *Dialled In*, *WEIRDO Zine*, and *Bollyqueer*, which provide stages for South Asian creative expression. I position myself alongside these initiatives—not just as a member of the community, but as a spatial practitioner and curator shaping both the program and design of these spaces. We must build spaces that uplift marginalised communities and celebrate their culture, rather than suppressing or erasing them.

⁷⁴ Eric Klinenberg, *Palaces for the People: How social infrastructure can help fight inequality, polarisation, and the decline of civic life*, (2019).



Hockley Palladium Cinema (Cinema Treasures, 1952)

CONCLUSION

Spaces like my proposed centre actively resist racist ideologies and challenge colonial notions of what an "arts and culture" centre should be. Hooks' states that we need to 'make room for an inclusive understanding of radical subjectivity, that allows recognition and appreciation of the myriad of ways individuals from oppressed or marginalised groups create oppositional cultural strategies that can be meaningfully deployed by everyone'.⁷⁵ Britain's history has been 'shaped by the forces of trade, colonialism, independence and inventiveness, the stories which emerge are tied to the fabric of today's city'.⁷⁶

Soho Road exemplifies this: a vibrant neighbourhood where various spaces meet the community's needs, from essential food and fashion to places of faith. Through exploring how the diaspora expresses itself spatially along this high street, I found that people

Binghamton University gets Bhangra Fever (Pipe Dream ,2014)



carry memories of home: in this case, India, and adapt them to existing urban structures, creating something truly unique in the process. Through talking to both Tajinder from Punjabi Theatre Academy and Ajay from DAAR Society, I gained valuable insights into the histories of kala (arts) in Punjab and the opportunities they offer for the diaspora.

These discussions were essential in recognising the importance of preserving this rich artistic heritage while also highlighting the need to make it more accessible and widespread for both current and future generations.

As new diasporic generations are born, the culture shifts, evolves and assimilates based on a variety of symptoms. By identifying key influences, such as language, racism, the desire to fit in, and the embrace of other cultures, I have found that, while no two experiences are identical, there are common threads that connect those who share the same heritage. Sharing these stories and experiences helps to ease feelings of alienation, transforming assimilation from an unconscious struggle into a conscious choice rather than one driven by imposter syndrome.

At a time when nationalism is often framed as rooted in fear, exclusion, and racism, it is important to remember that nations and their diverse peoples also inspire positive culture. This is evident in the music, visual arts, and in countless forms and styles.⁷⁷ The diaspora's take on Bhangra dance, Punjabi Natak (theatre), comedy, and hybrid Punjabi music performances currently take place in venues primarily designed for other purposes. The diasporas rich and vibrant arts scene deserves to be celebrated within the evolving generations, but also to share with the wider community. Through this initiative, we move towards a future where cultural expression is not just accommodated but truly valued.

⁷⁵ bell hooks, 'Diasporic Landscapes of Longing', in bell hooks, *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics*, (New York: WW Norton, 1995), p. 66

⁷⁶ Nathaniel, Krish and Mohamed, Bushra (2024) *South Asian History London Map*. London: Blue Crow Media.

⁷⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1991). Especially 'Patriotism and Racism', pp 141,154.



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My Notes from the Interview.

Appendix

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW NOTES WITH TAJINDER SINGH, FOUNDER OF PUNJABI THEATRE ACADEMY

Questions asked:

What do you do as an organisation and why?

How did you begin, and what values are driving this?

What type of events do you cater for and how do you know what to do next?

What is your target audience? What type of people engage with your work in terms of age, gender, faith and race?

How important is faith in your work?

Do you open your doors to non-Punjabi people, by reaching audiences outside of Punjab, through social media?

What are your links and relationship to India, and what events have taken place there?

How do you get funding/ go about paying your researchers?

Can dance and performing arts be a method for Punjabi people outside of India to connect with their culture?

• ~~organise~~ feasibility study: find out funding if possible to run this.

est 1990 Punjabi Theatre Acad
Tajinder Singh

Nora work ~~to~~ Nora Richard - Britain worked to promote.

1975 - 79 people from Bhangra did theatre
"people ask me why you not call it south asian/ indian, aim - to keep alive punjabi the culture"

formed over last 3 decades
historical, family issues shows
coordinate diff audiences to go india

Funded by British Arts Culture - older theatre play.
Indar Sahil - prof @ ual
↳ southall riots, national front people
write with bollywood to, coming march
after covid, young people couldn't
young people
funding, donation
need youngsters come & work & the board.
- funding application.

fri 21st feb open event southall, singedance,

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW WITH AJAY KALWANIYA, CO-FOUNDER OF DAAR SOCIETY

ANU: Maybe you could start by telling me about DAAR Society, how did you come together?

How long have they have you guys been going on?

AJAY: The our society started in December 2019.

ANU: Hmm.

AJAY: The first event was organized.

Then it started. Few months back we started talking about it and the core team, the people who are behind it, are all from - there's a Government College of Arts.

We call it GCA in Chandigarh. It's a college where BFA degree of the BF and MFA degree they gave in under Punjab University.

ANU: Yeah.

AJAY: So Bachelor of Fine Arts is the name of the course and then Master of Fine Arts.

These two courses are run in that institution. All the members belong to that college only.

So the person, if we did name one person, is the responsible person who has.

ANU: Yep.

Mm hmm.

AJAY: Who's the reason behind our society being formed? Is Mr. Pravesh Kumar.

ANU: OK.

AJAY: So the YouTube channel also is in his name only he is a sculptor by profession. If you say and also teacher we are in the same post in Chandigarh station schools.

So profession wise, he's sculptor and a teacher.

But he was too passionate about the folk dances of Punjab and he started coaching right after his college.

ANU: Mm hmm.

Yes.

AJAY: He was coaching us earlier.

We were in the same team.

In the college team, we were performing at youth festivals.

Competing at the Youth Festival, he was a teammate.

He was two years senior to us.

ANU: Mm hmm.

So then when he finished college, he was coaching then.

So there are many government colleges and private colleges in Chandigarh in which he could keep coaching as well because he has been doing research in all different dance forms of Punjab.

ANU: Oh wow.

AJAY: So the key feature was with a bunch of 8-9 people that he were in the core team

and in initially.

We all belong to belong to that college and we have. We have come up as a family in many years.

So there are different people from different batches.

Like Parvesh Kumar, the Sir is only from his batch.

He's the only person there. Then two people from my batch, then three people from some other junior batch, and we came together finally in 2019 and we started.

This was a dream for for him specially and the reason I am the one in this interview is just because I'm a little better in English than the rest of us.

ANU: Yes.

Oh, no worries!

AJAY: So there are many Co Founders 2 three main Co founders.

The founder is Mr. Paresh Kumar only so he's an encyclopaedia in himself, whether it's arts performing or visual. He's a national state in the field of visual art also and in performing arts also.

So he's the man behind all of this, the society that isn't created.

So many suggestions came through that how we are going to proceed with it.

The first exhibition, only the people the code team, was there in the exhibition.

The society has been doing is for these 5-6 years is we make we conduct an event every year.

In which we ask for student entries, student artist, visual artist for the exhibition. They give us, send their entries, painting, photograph or sculpture. Anything that is free of cost.

Most of the organization they charge different fees for professional artists and different and lower fees for student artists.

So one of the things started is to ask for student entries without any fees, no fees for them, and giving them away.

Cache awards and all in that exhibition.

The other thing that none of the other organizations or groups in Chandigarh have been doing is we, because we all were from performing arts as well.

So we collaborated that thing that if we have a 2-3 day show the first day we'll start with the exhibition the next or day or the day after, we'll have that performing arts event which will be held in Tagore.

The exhibitions featured available in some other sector in Chandigarh, so in Sector 16 there is the exhibition hall.

Punjab Lalita Academy is their unca hall.

So the exhibition takes place there and Tagore was a better place for performing arts.

So we shifted after a day we'll have a performing arts as well.

So people who know the society, they know that both the things will be there visual as well as performing arts.

So this was the unique part of our society which we started, that we'll be doing and in

that category also pervasor gives away students and senior artist on.

Trophies and all, to honor them.

The people who have been working in this field, like drummers, are there.

They have been contributing to the Folk society for many, many years.

The drummers.

That and sometimes these artists are being treated as like.

Label you know that? OK, fine. When the event will be there, they'll be called.

Otherwise, no one will give a **** about them.

ANU: Yes, exactly.

AJAY: And today, and even when their functions or university festivals become as paid companies and they perform, they get their money and they they don't get the credit as much.

He made sure to use our society and this platform as.

A platform which?

Honors those artists which are neglected by us otherwise.

So all.

So we have been every year 4-5 awards. He has been giving.

In truth, our society to honor such artists, the coaches, the drummers, the singers, all of them, who have been contributing to the field of Punjabi folk art.

ANU: Mm hmm.

OK, I see.

I mean, it's true. So often you have artists, they get overlooked or they don't get paid as well because they enjoy what they do and people think that because you enjoy something you shouldn't, like you shouldn't get paid as much for it.

And that's why you have people like artists and dancers working so many hours more than they should be.

Same with architecture as well.

It happens with us like.

Because you enjoy something and it's creative that you, you get kind of overwhelmed.

An underpaid for it?

But thank you.

Thank you for that.

It's great to hear that you have a combination of the Fine Arts and the performing arts, like a lot of places.

I don't know any anywhere in the UK that kind of does that as well.

They're always kind of separated.

So when you hold these events, who kind of comes and interacts with them?

Like, who is your audience? Is it mostly?

People.

From like one age group? Or is it different ages as well?

AJAY: No, we we kind of the audience is very vivid actually all the participants, they're going to student artists are there.

Student performers are there. Then all our families all then all the artists of the Tri-City, the Chandigarh, we call it tri-cities, Chandigarh, Mohali and Panchkula.

There are three cities connected to each other.

One is in Haryana, one is in Punjab and Chandigarh. There is the capital of both the states.

So these three cities make Tri-City together.

So all the artists from the Tri-City belonging to both visual and performing arts.

The artist who support the events. They are the audience.

People who like to watch like, I'll give you an example. One of our artists, Sarabjeet Singh, Art College.

He's from art college.

Also, he's a singer as well. He sings a very good Diwali. He has been like I have been performing.

I performed the dance.

He's the one who's singing for the live, singing for the performance.

So he does a Diwali thing at every function every year, so he has his own fan base that people are coming specifically for that I we want to hear Sarabjeet's qawwali and every event we have been doing is pervasive, do research on those dancers that are lost.

After their partition.

Or even or which existed before or the other part of the Punjab.

So those old dances which are known not which are not happening anywhere now. So he makes his research bring one new dance from every year.

For the past five years, he has been giving 4-5 such performances, which are not available otherwise anywhere now which are lost to the time suit he make, do his do his research throughout the year and bring one such performance so many people come for that that but. Knew they are going to bring this time.

So you may know that Punjabi bhangra is there Gedda is there Sammi? Is there Mr. a few dances beyond them.

He has been researching and bringing such dances every year.

One such event is there.

One such dance is added to that event, so people now have a base, the whole be coming to see that what new this time they'll be bringing on. So these kind of people who love art or who are exhibition people are to the exhibition. Those people come who.

Are related to the fine art event.

What do the visual arts but performing arts?

All other people who are entertained by it or they like the music they like the dances. They come and join us at the event.

ANU: Yeah.

Yeah, from like the general public, you probably have like quite a few people.

AJAY: The entries will make it paid.

I don't know how many will come, but the entry is free, so the auditorium is full.

All, all the time. Every year we have all we have good audience.

ANU: The entry.

OK. How do you how do you manage to fund paying for the Tagore theatre? Like, if your events are free?

AJAY: The artist.

The artist ourselves, we have been doing that ourselves.

ANU: Oh wow.

AJAY: The team.

The four team we contribute all of us because it's a government registered society.

ANU: I see.

Hmm.

AJAY: So if we take any out of we take a donation or anything from other third party so that event becomes private.

Which will actually make it more costly for us as far as the Tagore Theatre and these things are concerned.

So we still now we have been keeping to what keeping it to ourselves.

Only that we all contribute and sometimes with God's grace.

Some are teachers, they the contribute to it.

But not even participating.

But they just like it that we what?

The what?

We are doing so sometimes, few, thousands and people who enjoy or who relate to it.

They donate to us.

But mostly the all major events, everything has been taken care of by the society itself, the.

ANU: Hmm.

AJAY: For participating.

ANU: OK. And the government funding, is that quite helpful or like do they have schemes to?

AJAY: Not not till now.

Not till now.

Not directly.

The events like government funding does not come directly to us the way we are holding events, but what happens is because we are a registered society with the Punjab Government like you know, the 26th January parade, if you know Republic Day parade at Delhi.

ANU: Yeah, I've heard of it.

AJAY: So for past three years, our team has been performing there. So we get the recognition

through it. We got the opportunity because of our work.

So we, we are a society that see that we are doing good work. They give our students the chance to go and participate there.

ANU: Acha (Okay in Punjabi)

AJAY: So it adds onto the recognition of the society, or if some other two months there was AI. Don't know what you what we say that inter Interstate something that our team got the chance to visit Goa for seven days.

Few of our students, few other NGO NGOs who are registered with Punjab government. They were there.

So that kind of opportunity brings to the government. Otherwise direct sponsoring has not happened yet.

ANU: Hmm.

OK, so you registered as an NGO?

AJAY: The events events happen, they can get off society.

There are different actually the technical terms. So as a society earlier we were. Club, there's a club.

Youth clubs are registered in Punjab government also.

We were DAAR club, not society. Then in 2022, we got the recognition of the society.

It's a registration process, just a government process that you go through.

So earlier we were DAAR Club.

Now we are DAAR Society and that I hope you know the full form of DAAR.

Do you know?

ANU: Yes, I forgot.

But you can remind me.

AJAY: Dance and art researchers society.

And Research award is very well used now because earlier they were not, but now we have a PhD artist with us through others are also into research completing their PhDs.

So we are literally a group of researchers in the literal sense now.

ANU: Yeah, I mean, like there are a lot of opportunities that can come through like you being researchers as well.

Like, I'm just thinking like from universities as well, like they.

I mean, even where I work, we have a researcher like in our office. He researches on AI and architecture.

And through that we get funding from RIBA, which is this kind of like Royal Institute of British Architects.

And we can only do that if we have like that kind of research grant.

So yeah, you can definitely have doors opened with that kind of researcher part.

In terms of like the kind of dances that you mentioned, Parvesh does.

AJAY: Parvesh kumar yeah.

ANU: Parvesh Kumar, he choreographs them.

Does he?

AJAY: Yes.

ANU: Does he kind of research like religion and faith as part of that as well, or is it just the kind of historic dances like how how linked is?

Religion and faith like to like what you guys kind of do.

Because I know you mentioned that Sufism like you, you looked at the Sufi dance as well.

AJAY: I.

Yeah, those things, I.

ANU: Does that attract like people from that community?

AJAY: Well, I cannot be very certain about what his believes are, to be honest.

ANU: No. Yeah.

AJAY: That's something only he can answer, but otherwise the the way organizing works more about the history of our land.

The place that we belong to, I'm from Haryana.

ANU: Hmm.

Yeah.

AJAY: Like, but if we see in old sense, Haryana was also part of Punjab.

So that land of Punjab overall. So the form, the love towards art forms is more there instead of the religion or faith in those terms.

It's not a religious thing that we follow. It's performing thing that we follow.

The performances, the arts, the culture that was there and those things, some of them are getting lost.

So bring them back to life.

That was the purpose, not the religious side of it.

ANU: Yes, definitely.

AJAY: The cultural side of it, the heritage side of it.

Not that much into the religion part of it.

ANU: Yep, that's yeah, that's exactly kind of the brief that I'm like setting for my my project as well.

So at the moment, a lot of funding comes through religious institutions and that's why, like, they kind of have money to thrive and then like the arts and culture gets lost because it doesn't really have a place in, like commercial society.

So in a way this brief for my like kind of project is arguing like why?

Like it should have those spaces and the funding. Shouldn't all just be designated to kind of religious societies, which at the moment government do give money just to kind of like your religion?

Like if you want to set up like a temple or go to a mandal they kind of give money to that, but then they don't give money to other forms of migrant cultures.

AJAY: The cultural people or the artists or the performing arts, they don't get that kind of respect or the opportunities that there is.

ANU: And if they do like in the UK, then it's usually.

Older like societies that have been here since the 1800s, like, you know, kind of British societies and yeah, Punjabis have been here since, like the 60s.

So it's like we should also like get funding for this.

So I'll just looking at my questions.

So you mentioned the audience that you kind of cater to and you get different people from like different kind of cultures.

Like, not just Punjabi people.

AJAY: The thing is, in India actually, if you do like Diljit is not going global, right?

ANU: Yeah.

AJAY: So the Punjabi music or the city is has more influence of Punjab. In obvious sense, the Chandigarh city, the capital, has more influence of Punjab.

I am from Haryana. As I told earlier, one of our one of other few Members are also from Haryana, not from Punjab. But The thing is Punjabi, it is does.

You don't have to belong to the exact land of Punjab to enjoy the Punjabi people.

Will or enjoy enjoy the Punjabi music or the dances?

But it has developed itself so much that people belonging to different religions, different places, they all like Punjabi music, Punjabi dances. So they do show up, but majority of them would somewhere belong to Punjab.

The city itself has more population from the Punjab side, the people who are going to perform are somewhere in from the city or the Punjab side, or have been settled here for some years.

So the majority audience is still there.

From the Punjab own because Chandigarh is more populated with Punjabi people, the students who are going to perform are either learning them in are this in the student life. They are doing those performances.

So there's a link there.

So yeah, do not really cater to all of India.

We are somewhere catering to Punjabi people more than any other state or different types of people.

The dances are also Punjabi style folk dances.

ANU: Do you as?

Do you as like a DAAR society? See yourself going like national like you mentioned that there was a student exchange program in Goa?

Do you see yourself? Kind of?

Reaching out to other parts of India, is it not really your goal?

AJAY: Not soon, I don't.

It will take some time.

Not any soon, because most of the people who are linked would be.

They are from Punjab, Brazil and the person behind all of this that says that Prvesh Kumar, he's not a Sikh, but he's from Punjab.

ANU: Yeah, of course.

Hmm.

AJAY: Who his expertise in isn't folk culture of Punjab only so having a cultural exchange with some other organization and bringing them here, for example, the art part of it.

We are still not certain, but most probably we are going to hold a international show with Malaysian people, Malaysian artists.

So that site, so they will be coming to India and we'll be organizing the event for them and then some of our artists might by the end of the year they might go to Malaysia and they will organize an exhibition for us.

With that kind of exchange, that kind of dialogue is starting to happen and might happen in the coming years.

But our society itself will for some years at least, I think, unless there's some major change, because all the experts were in the organization they belong or they have knowledge about the arts of Punjab, visual art can be take visual art. It sense we can visual art is.

Not land related, you know, place related visual art can be universal.

But when you come to performing arts, it belongs to a certain place.

ANU: Yes, that's true.

AJAY: So the performing arts side of DAAR is going to stay Punjabi for some time at least.

Not soon it's going.

There was diversity will not come very soon, I guess, because all the core team members who are there, they all know only about the Punjabi art culture.

We might have experienced with some organization that that can happen, that that might happen.

ANU: Yeah. No, that it definitely makes sense.

Like the kind of the dance and performing arts is very linked, much linked to the land. And like you can get art that's linked to the land as well. But then it's also it's so abstract that it can merge into like so many different things.

Like for example in in the UK like the performing arts like Bungalow is such a big thing here that like if you have a class it's not just Punjabi people going to Bangla classes. It's like go there people like it's like Sarda janaya like John there. Yeah.

AJAY: Yeah, everyone is more of a more of like a physical activity or exercise, which is enjoyable now.

ANU: Yes, exactly like if you go, if you go out, they're playing like.

They're playing like one Punjabi song and everyone.

How is it?

Because they play it so often, it's that kind of thing.

And then also the food as well is such like a big part of the culture here.

Like it's very, very like common for like for like British people to have like, you know, Curry and like, like Indian food.

It's very normal.

But yeah, this part of the culture is like very evident here, which is why so many different people enjoy that part of the culture and not just like Punjabi people.

But I guess in India if you have like, yeah, you're like performing arts events, it appeals mostly to like the Punjabi people that in Chandigarh.

So what do you what do you think about the idea of kind of bringing what you do at data society, so different dance, different dances every year. But outside of India?

So do you think it would be an important way for Punjabi people to connect with their culture?

So if they learn about other dances other than bungler, because at the moment people in the UK only really know about that because it's such like a popular thing.

But in a way like they don't really have like ways to connect to other parts of the culture like other traditional dances.

AJAY: The.

The other in the sense of other traditions of Punjab or India.

ANU: Other traditions of Punjab.

Let's let's just yeah talk about Punjab.

AJAY: Yeah, that seems that's something that our team is trying to do because I guess till now we have never had as a part of our event the specific because our experts are into the different fields of different types of dancers.

So bhangra is the most common.

So we have been trying to keep it away from we are we have.

In our main events, some other team might have some, like other known who wants to perform at the stage. They bring their own team of bhangra device. We have never performed bhangra because we know it's so overrated.

Now the second thing about Bhangra is it's a bhangra is not actually a Punjabi folk dance. In a way it's a culmination of different folk folk dances that existed.

We are focusing on those dances which brought bhangra to life because was something that different dance forms existed and they brought it together and with more loud music and more energy they performed. So it became a symbol of Punjab.

It actually the old Punjab that existed there was it. It didn't exist in then.

But that's what we are working towards as society's working towards to bring those dance forms and art forms back to life. Different those instruments that have been lost.

Once that one of our events in the beginning, especially a instrument, was ordered or somehow acquired from Pakistan.

Just to show you intend to be played at the event.

A lot of research was went into how from where to we can get it and finding links in Pakistan from where that instrument because many such instruments and things are getting lost with time in every stage including Punjab.

ANU: It's true.

AJAY: So our focus is towards that.

Only that is something that none of us were are very interested in, but no doubt it is the most energetic and most entertaining performance.

But we are trying to find other ways to entertain people and bringing older culture, the authentic culture, some way in back into the society.

ANU: Do you think it could be like a part of Punjabi societies outside of Punjab?

So like in Canada in the UK?

AJAY: It should be. They should.

They should know that if The thing is, it's all about reach. If we get an opportunity, ever, anywhere, we are all we.

Our team is already always ready to if we get any such opportunity.

We'll be performing very the the people on the other side of the the wall, those who don't know about these things, if they get a chance to see this, if they get a chance to know about this, they are definitely going to enjoy it and they're definitely going.

AJAY: So due to the limit of our reach and all, we are still like we are popular in Chandigarh or people do know about the society and what we do. But with time we this is what we wish for that we get the opportunities outside India as well where.

There are Punjabi people who can connect again with those dance forms and know about them what existed earlier.

ANU: Yeah, definitely in a way. There are different ways of doing that you can.

You can go to the place and you can teach it, or there's always the online platform, which is it's very kind of successful in get reaching out to people that like you usually wouldn't have contact with.

So do you see your kind of?

AJAY: Has played a big role in this, also, Parveen Parveshkumar said. As I said through his channel, he many people are there in Canada and UK who want him to comment, teach there and talk about it.

ANU: Yeah.

Yeah. Wow.

AJAY: So he's also just, yeah, yeah, he has.

ANU: Have people invited him?

AJAY: He has already been invited many times to Canada, where he's just the not the right time, maybe.

The different reasons that it get postponed because of, so he himself, he's a coach

specifically in in commercial sense because he's a he's been coaching at one of the finest private institutes colleges in Chandigarh.

The transform of get down so that is one thing.

Then now, through this research of DAAR, he has been adding one dance form every year.

So he has a lot to teach out there, and if it is about the folk dances, folk culture of Punjab.

So he also wishes for the same. He's been trying. So whenever the time is right, he will be going and hopefully our whole team will be going and.

Performing for.

To showcase what the other side of Punjab is there, which people have not seen much.

ANU: Yeah, that sounds amazing.

I mean, I know of like.

There are loads of like melas that happen in Canada.

Like there's one.

Called something the Brompton.

Something like fast? I'm not.

I'm not sure I can find you the name, but it's, yeah, but then they have, like, they have, like,

Melas where they have performances from different groups and like that kind of thing would be really like, interesting. I can see you guys like.

AJAY: I understand what you're what you're saying.

ANU: Performing there, but yeah, I I personally like have never been.

There. Thank you.

Thank you so much for talking with me. It's been really useful.

I don't have any more questions, but if you have any more questions for me or.

If there's anything that I can do to help you guys like you guys, you've helped me massively by asking answering my questions.

But if there's anything that I can do on my end, then I'll be happy to help you.

AJAY: Well, I don't know.

Send us an invite for a fest.

ANU: Yeah. If I see anything, I will.

I'm I'm in touch with a group.

AJAY: Let's just help us spread the message that there are other transforms out there and there are things working towards it to preserve the folk that has been lost by this land of Punjab.

ANU: Yeah.

Yes, I think that's really important message to end on.

AJAY: Thank you.

ANU: No, thank you.

END OF PUBLICATION.

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Unit 5

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Critical

& Contextual
Studies

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