Birha

Approaching a Poetics beyond the Human

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I n 1924, E. P. Dutton and Company, the distributor of the Everyman's Library series in the United States, published a poetry collection by noted Sikh scholar and writer Bhai Vir Singh. Titled *Nargas: Songs of a Sikh*, the volume was translated into English by the Punjabi poet, scientist, and mystic Puran Singh. A color print by the famed modernist painter Abdur Rahman Chughtai accompanied the volume, captioned with lines from Bhai Vir Singh's poem "The Punjab Autumn: The Season of the Cooling Dew": "The dew is falling everywhere, And wet is every rose" (fig. 1).[1]

Bhai Vir Singh, Puran Singh, and Chughtai were intellectuals in Punjab in the early twentieth century. Bhai Vir Singh (1872–1957) reshaped Sikh and Punjabi culture, language and politics even though his concerns cannot be reduced to Sikh or Punjabi identity.[2] His voluminous corpus of novels, poems, exegesis has itself produced much contested interpretation which ranges from touching on his incipient modernity to discovering a neotraditionalism.[3] Professor Puran Singh (1881–1931), too, was a poet in the Sikh tradition, though he trained as a scientist in Japan, where he founded the nationalist journal *Thundering Dawn*.[4] After meeting the famed Punjabi ascetic Swami Rama Tirtha, Puran Singh became "a shaven renunciate wearing the ochre robe of the sannyasi," though an encounter with Bhai Vir Singh a decade later brought Puran Singh back into the Sikh fold (though this might encase what scholars have called Puran Singh's ecstatic creativity).[5] Considered the first modern Muslim artist from South Asia, Chughtai (1897–1975) sought to distinguish himself from the renowned Bengal School of painting, which, though open to multiple influences, had a sectarian character that "placed Buddhist and Hindu aesthetic precedents at the heart of national aesthetic practice."[6] Much like Bhai Vir Singh attempted to work with Sikh forms, Chughtai tried to bring classical Islamic artistic forms into modernity, a project made difficult by the imported techniques of production to give one example.[7] And, moreover, how do we reconcile Chughtai's attempt to "re-create Persian and Mughal classicism in an age of nationalism, capitalism, and decolonization," asks Iftikhar Dadi?[8] These tensions are heightened with identity. Chughtai, for example, still painted Hindu works alongside his Muslim ones, a duality that is, Dadi writes, "symptomatic of the difficulties the artist faced during this time of anticolonial movements, which were structurally unable to forge a unified struggle toward independence."[9]

All three effusively praised the work of the others. For example, in a letter from 1921, Puran Singh extolled Chughtai's sketches of Omar Khayyam: "I do not think Abanindranath Tagore or any of the Bengal School can do justice to him and of course all western painters have so far failed to render him. . . . Your Omar Khayyam, I have no doubt[,] would come as a revelation to all lovers of spirituality."[10] Bhai Vir Singh, too, lauded Chughtai. He wrote to Chughtai after receiving a book from him, stating, "It has given me great pleasure to note that you are not only a painter but a writer as well, which is rather a rare combination. I hope to derive a great pleasure from the perusal of books written by a man of vivid and colourful imagination."[11] Chughtai, furthermore, provided sketches for Bhai Vir Singh's poem "Rana Surat Singh" and returned the laudatory letters. Thus Chughtai, Bhai Vir Singh, and Puran

Figure 1. "The dew is falling everywhere, And wet is every rose." Abdur Rahman Chughtai, frontispiece in Bhai Vir Singh, *Nargas: Songs of a Sikh* (1924). B892.38B53 T5 1924 Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.

Singh, alongside other poets and artists, comprised a vibrant artistic and literary scene at the turn of the century in Punjab. And in bringing together these multiple literary and artistic registers, *Nargas* embodies this vibrancy.

Such interconnections in the Punjabi artistic and intellectual scene in the early twentieth century demonstrate what is now a truism in the examinations of Punjab and South Asia more broadly: life refused codification into neatly enumerated "communal" identities. Scholars have pitted the plurality within regional literary formations against hardened religious identities—a task that took on heightened importance after the devastations of Partition in 1947. Farina Mir and Anshu Malhotra underscore that "religious conflict/communalism was always coterminous with a thriving cultural world where religious difference—however contentious in some spheres—did not inhibit common, shared praxis

in others."[12] As Mir argues elsewhere, one particular literary form, Punjabi *qisse*, presents "a vision of late nineteenth century sociality and religiosity in which religious community—Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, or Christian—was not of paramount importance."[13] *Qisse* was a flexible genre that allowed it to "reflect local beliefs, and aesthetic and cultural practices," revealing an "integral aspect of a regional cultural identity."[14]

Punjabiyat is thus counterpoised with religious reform in the late nineteenth century. For many, religious reform signals the emergence of a colonial episteme, appearing in opposition to, as some argue, an indigenous syncretism.[15] As the story goes, colonial technologies such as the census created distinct homogenous boundaries within a prior fluid landscape. This is a problem of language. Historians have taught us that, as Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh writes, "with the British victory in the Anglo-Sikh wars, the rich heterogeneous linguistic world of pre-colonial Punjab was conquered by 'a discourse of differentiations' and reduced to homolingual units: Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi."[16] In this interpellation, colonialism produced subjects who looked to purify their traditions in concert with a new discourse; a colonial language then constricts region, by creating religion. Bhai Vir Singh comes to mirror this shift, as many scholars have argued. Anshu Malhotra and Anne Murphy contend that he reflects "a broader sense of the urgent need for Sikhs to establish their separate identity."[17] Once the context is settled, other historians demonstrate how there were provisional moments of agency that nevertheless provide a richer and textured understanding of the context, fixing the possible discrepancies in time.[18]

Bhai Vir Singh, Puran Singh, and Chughtai unsettle the easy recognition of Punjabi cultural relationality and colonial diagnostics.[19] For example, in his attempts to reform the Sikh tradition, Bhai Vir Singh emerges in direct opposition to the mores of a Punjabi literary formation. And yet if, as Mir contends, "Punjabi literary formation reveals a different history of social and cultural relations than suggested by socioreformists' tracts, language activists' propaganda, and the Urdu Press," what do we make of the poetry of a socioreligious reformer?[20] Is he locatable within that context, the different history constituted by a regional context, a region of coexistence? Or does he instead reflect an altered context by foregrounding the Sikh tradition, signaling an approaching discrepancy that we can diagnose as "colonized"? Chughtai too refuses mediation into a simple Punjabi syncretism.[21] Even though he painted, for

example, Hindu mythology, Dadi reminds us that in his writings, "Chughtai remain[ed] largely silent about his 'Hindu' paintings, suggesting that, unlike the 'Islamic' works, the former were not painterly embodiments of his discursive values."[22]

The literary reduced to a circular exchange between language and a region—what Talal Asad understands as Orientalism—cannot conceptualize such relationships because Puran Singh, Bhai Vir Singh, and Chughtai undo a contextual harmony central to making sense of that very region or religion.[23] The problem is that we render sensible through a higher order explanation grounded in a methodology called contextual reasoning. We learn in contextual reasoning that what Bhai Vir Singh says about the Sikh tradition is true for him, except historians have a clearer picture of how Bhai Vir Singh engages in involuntary errors because the historian can situate him in his context from an Archimedean point. We can see more clearly because within this mode of reasoning, as R. G. Collingwood explains, "all traditions are true, but none mean what they say; in order to discover what they mean, we must know what kind of people invented them and what such a kind of people would mean by saying that kind of thing."[24]

Securing context in discovering *Punjabiyat* and coloniality—a common thing distilled by reducing peoples and traditions to context—flattens incommensurability and contradiction, the failings of Punjab and colonialism. [25] To work with *Punjabiyat*: Punjabi kinship—or, shall we say, the blood of Christ—circulates too vigorously, binding a community within a context, creating its own exclusions that are explained away as colonized problems, sin, to be eradicated.[26] For historians, context is the inevitable space within which we proceed to locate poetry and artwork. To study a text comes to mean providing it a place external to that text. Yet contextualization has "its own temporality and movement, a movement of language, and one that fails to become either background or foreground, but constitutively frames," as Gil Anidjar teaches us.[27] Context, then, frames—it both "is" and "vanishes."[28] Against this frame, perhaps we have something to learn from the poetry rather than the history, from the dew that is falling everywhere that refuses to let the ground determine its placement. Within the poetry, equivocation and translation are central, disrupting the possibility of locating Bhai Vir Singh's poetry "within the coordinates of a preexisting history, cultural situation, or recognizable literary tradition, of containing it within a particular genre."[29] Thus I offer a disruption—a translation—within the

exchange, within the context, since the world is not settled but marked by discrepancies. Such translation is not incarnation. "Historicization leads us to forget that translation has no end," to borrow from Anidjar.[30] Translation is not secure. Instead, it seeks to, following Parama Roy, "gesture, necessarily imperfectly, toward the forms of unassimilable difference . . . that it can neither naturalize nor occult out of existence."[31]

This is the strategy that this article takes by focusing on, perhaps strangely, the nonhuman. What we learn in the poetry is that the nonhuman is central, not instrumentally so, challenging the overt focus on contextual reasoning that undergirds our understanding of the Punjabi artistic scene. Yet the nonhuman in this article does not emerge as a new object of inquiry, a new placement for the text. I do not seek to replace the human with the nonhuman, nor do I wish to resolve the tensions between the two, to reveal a purified identity. The distinction between human and nonhuman, like other dual oppositions, "can be neither reduced to unity, nor derived from a primary simplicity, nor dialectically sublated or internalized into a third term," as Jacques Derrida has elaborated.[32] Instead, I work with a multiplicity of registers of the nonhuman—the nonhuman animal, the "natural" world (sky, stars, stream, rocks, etc.), the world of objects, and even organs disaggregated from the human body—and the human to shift the angle from which the relation of human and nonhuman becomes legible and supplement it with, to borrow from Anidjar, "an ambiguous *vanishing* point (which is not simply an *end* point)."[33] One could say I locate the contaminations from below, ambiguities that were already there, to mark the limits that Bhai Vir Singh, Puran Singh, and Chughtai also draw our attention to in the iteration of an irruptive nonhuman, which is always already a disarticulation.

The goal of this article, therefore, is not to make the nonhuman admissible into the social sciences by revealing a rigorous analytic to understand human and nonhuman relations in their ahistoricity.[34] Nor is the goal to efface or ignore the separation between human and nonhuman to create, as Derrida writes, "a single large set, a single grand, fundamentally homogenous and continuous family tree," which would simply enlarge the capaciousness of Punjab or a universalized mystical experience.[35] Instead, I attend to the limits of Punjab, human, and nonhuman, to disrupt them, which, keep in mind, does not mean to abolish them.[36] Here, the illusion of human/nonhuman relations come to the fore.

And yet there is no resolution that can be secured. As the Guru Granth Sahib teaches,

> O Farid, my withered body has become a skeleton;
> The crows are pecking at my palms
> *Rab* has not come; Look, this is human fortune.
> The crows have hunted the skeleton and eaten the
>   whole flesh.
> Don't touch these two eyes, I hope to see Him.[37]

Though this is but one verse, it reveals a central tenet within the Sikh tradition: *birha*, which means "separation" but not a separation between the transcendent and immanent. *Birha* is the "physical pain caused by a longing," according to Prabhsharanbir Singh; it is a longing "for the divine: to experience reverberations of the divine in our bodies."[38] One waits because the separation cannot be naturalized or warded off by sovereign proclamations. One is in a state of vertigo—a vertigo that cannot be settled by securing meaning or a context.

This tearing is precisely the poetics beyond the human that this article grasps toward to change the terms of analysis. It grasps toward that poetics to tear at the object that kindles our desire without settling a new object such as the nonhuman. To appropriate Eduardo Kohn's words, a poetics beyond the human is "in large part about learning to appreciate the human is also the product of that which lies beyond human contexts," including beyond the historical and its contextual reasoning.[39] As Reinhart Koselleck reminds us, "naturalistic determinants that penetrate all histories . . . are not, for their part, completely historicizable"; the crows, tearing at the human, may escape the human's sovereign reaches and the frame of context, yet the crows are not merely antagonistic to humankind.[40]

I undo the historical and recognition, central to analyses that foreground syncretism, fluidity, and coloniality within a hermetically sealed Punjab landscape, by focusing on the nonhuman registers of poems in *Nargas* by Bhai Vir Singh. The nonhuman, I will argue, functions as an impediment to mediation and recognition; it destabilizes neat and complete transactions by introducing the limits to the circumscribed human and its context—an aperture in the premised exchange, as the human itself is torn apart. The nonhuman, therefore, requires that we consider this very impossibility of ends. It provides this opportunity to disrupt the contextual function because it tears time as we know it. I consider the

nonhuman and the ethical by analyzing Bhai Vir Singh's and Puran Singh's poetry in the 1920s, most notably Ernest Rhys's foreword to Bhai Vir Singh's *Nargas*. I then argue that the human/nonhuman distinction became central to translating the poetics of Bhai Vir Singh and Puran Singh into an aesthetics of historicism—one premised on commonality.[41] In order to cultivate a disruption and reception against the ends central to historicization and universalization, I center poetic thinking or a poetics beyond the human to consider the poetry and work of Puran Singh, Bhai Vir Singh, and Chughtai. Finally, I conclude by thinking through the encounter between Bhai Vir Singh and Chughtai and disarticulating synthesis central to the human and historical time by locating the nonhuman within the human—a focus on the question of vision and the eye, of seeing and being seen, of existences that perhaps refuse our ends into a more unconditional hospitality.[42]

Philosophical Knowledge

Needless to say, this is not a history of the continuity and transformation of different literary forms and genres in South Asia.[43] Instead, I want to consider how contextual reasoning sought to incorporate Bhai Vir Singh's poetic thinking into its register. Scholars have noted how empire functioned through such thinking—one that was also premised on a range of relations between human and nonhuman as the key became to determine what was common to the human. Crucial to this process was the creation of philosophical knowledge. Philosophical knowledge, Derrida proposed, had to deprive itself concerning the animal (*la pensée de l'animal*) and could only see, observe, analyze, and reflect on the animal as a putative object.[44] Philosophers thus made "the animal a *theorem*, something seen and not seeing."[45] To produce a theorem about Bhai Vir Singh and Puran Singh in the mid-1920s in racially codified hierarchical empire, required that they be situated within their context, that one see them as objects in their historical setting. How did this seeing take place? A certain fascination undergirded the incorporative gesture of discovery stemming from a European conceptual model. Sheldon Pollock attended to two aspects of this fascination. First, there was preoccupation with "origins and lines of descent" that made India the cradle of European civilization.[46] Second, with European economic and social dislocations, "India came to be constituted as the repository

of Europe's vanishing spirituality."[47] For literary scholarship, contextualizing in relation to antiquity and religion became central to conceptualizing the literary itself.[48] This was an aesthetics of historicism that seamlessly sought to tie epochs and beliefs by overseeing time.

The capacity for self-recognition, distinguishing human from nonhuman, was central to conceptualizing the understanding of the past as historical process.[49] As the human/nonhuman division took precedence in knowledge, Puran Singh's and Bhai Vir Singh's poetry came to be understood through its context—racialized kinship networks informed by blood. But for colonial officials and literary critics, Sikhs troubled the taxonomic place provided by the rule of colonial difference—a rule that relied on mapping relations between human and nonhuman. Reviewers of the poetry therefore reestablished the distance between Sikhs and the colonial metropole by historicizing Sikhs in relation to nonhuman objects and mapping this difference temporally.

Sikh placement in the colonial hierarchy, in this bestialization, troubled because it refused easy resolution in time especially because, as scholars have noted, Sikhs became objects of both envy and emulation for colonial authorities.[50] Difference is not, to use Bradley Deane's phrasing, "the only weapon in the ideological arsenal of empire," since barbarism functioned as a generative fantasy in its masculine virility.[51] Determining the line between human and animal, human and nonhuman, historical and ahistorical in order to contextualize was not so easily adjudicated.

A review of Puran Singh's *Sisters of the Spinning Wheel* demonstrates the difficulties. "A Modern Sikh Poet," published in the *Saturday Review*, marked racial distinctions and approximations between Sikhs and the British.[52] Sikhism mirrored a Christian history of Reformation; it was ordered synchronous to the movement of epochs measured by Christ. "Nanak, the first of the Gurus and the virtual founder of Sikhism," the reviewer noted, "was an expression, at the remote ends of the Aryan world, of the religious force that in Europe released the energies of Martin Luther for weal and woe."[53] There was, however, also an attempt to curtail this simultaneity, since it would undo the rule of colonial difference. Racial history, then, was central. Because the Guru Granth signaled the "legacy of their race," Puran Singh's poetry became "a contemporary epilogue to these earlier writings."[54] While the reviewer

situated Sikhs as a racial grouping, the reviewer argued that the Rhyses did an admirable job of giving "a succinct and sympathetic interpretation of the Sikh mentality and the historic necessities which imposed upon a foundation of philosophic quietism a military system more than Mohammedan in its hardihood."[55] In their introduction to *Sisters of the Spinning Wheel*, the Rhyses, too, contended that Guru Gobind Singh "became more like the Mohammedans and he and his bards began to write like them."[56] For Edward and Grace Rhys, translators of several volumes of Puran Singh's work, the Islamic context enveloped Guru Gobind Singh, realigning Sikhism with Islam against its Christian reformation origins. By situating Sikhs to this ambivalent manliness, the Rhyses ordered the Sikh tradition temporally as a primitive monotheism.[57]

Settling into racialized context also meant reconciling in relation to the nonhuman in an attempt to mark distinctions between Sikhs and Christians. For colonial officials, Indians, especially Indian villagers, labored under the twin articulated despotisms of nature and the gods. "They failed to understand themselves as *imago Dei*, distinct from animals, or to disenchant the natural world," writes Roy.[58] The review also situated Puran Singh in relation to natural determinants, which were reasoned as antagonists in historical development.[59] For the reviewer, the difference between the more cosmopolitan Bengali Tagore and Punjabi Puran Singh were essential.[60] Puran Singh was "animated with a more simple and imperious emotion than the famous interpreter of the Bengalis."[61] Against Tagore's moralism, "crude earth calls to [Puran Singh] and he calls again."[62] While this naturalism could be conceptualized through a Romantic register, it also remained divergent, though not altogether unfamiliar, since tensions remained, and Puran Singh became "a [Percy Bysshe] Shelley scorched in hot Indian noon."[63] Rather than conceptualizing Puran Singh's address to the earth and his taking upon himself the address of the earth through a poetic thinking that foregrounded the enmeshed relations between earth and humans, it was theorized historically and racially—a theorization based on sentience that relegated a thoughtless stone and earth to the lowest rung.'[64] In so doing, Puran Singh could be placed in time, though not an unfamiliar one. In time, he became a charred copy, delayed in his thinking and, therefore, confined by materiality, though by no means was this restrictive to the British imagination.[65]

In his foreword to Bhai Vir Singh's *Nargas*, Edward Rhys also lauded praise on Bhai Vir Singh's lyrical sensibilities. Yet Western readers, Rhys explained, would have to take into account "race-emotion which we feel in all the genuine Sikh writers."[66] This race-emotion was traced genealogically, placed in relation to kin, a commonality.[67] History dictated the conditions of Bhai Vir Singh's poetry because he had "a remarkable pedigree and a tradition of culture in his own house and descent"—his maternal grandfather was a Sanskrit scholar; his father, a scholar and poet.[68] Bhai Vir Singh, Rhys continues, "following in their steps, runs a printing press at Amritsar, and publishes a journal which circulates widely in the Punjab," making him "a citizen and a man of letters, to his own time and to his own people."[69] This attempt to situate pedigree and kinship created distinctions since the world had to be located historically in order to map its differentiated contexts across time. As Rhys writes, "We are still, as Westerners, aware of an element mysterious, significantly Oriental, breathing of a world which is not quite ours."[70] At the end of historical time, for Rhys, there was a properly secular relation to the world—what was considered the culmination of a Christian history.

Situating the poet historically, Rhys found behind Bhai Vir Singh's poetry "impressive, unusual forms of Sikh warriors and Sikh Gurus, of maidens like Ailin and Sirdars like Malek Jawala Singh."[71] Jawala Singh, in particular, was imposing: "His face seemed fairly to glow with the fire of his Sikh ancestry," an ancestry traced to Guru Nanak himself.[72] Settled into this history, Rhys argues, "to their heritage Bhai Vir Singh has succeeded."[73] But what type of heritage was this? In this heritage, human and nonhuman objects slip into each other as the Sikh body indexed the nonhuman within itself in an enchanted relation.[74] Jawala Singh, Rhys writes, "was about seven feet tall, a slim wiry figure that always carried a huge bamboo staff shod with ironrings at both ends."[75] With bamboo staff as appendage, "a small white turban was bound about his head, covering his long Sikh tresses; he wore, generally two wide-sleeved kurta of home-spun tied by cords of the same cloth—one thicker and wider worn over one that was narrower and shorter."[76] For Rhys, Nanak too provided this very same pictorial index. Though Guru Nanak earlier signaled a Christian reformation, here, in this representation, there is now an elongated historical continuity measured through picturesque nonhuman objects that secure a scenic and object-oriented inheritance from Guru Nanak to Bhai Vir Singh.[77]

Though historical continuity is traced between human to human relations, fastening a genealogical continuity and making the poets legible, this historical process was not contiguous with the West since the struggle for self-recognition in historical becoming was mediated through nonhuman objects such as the earth and turban, for example.[78] Instead of planning and engineering history through recognition of Man as transcendent over nonhuman objects, there was a continuity between human and nonhuman thereby hindering the historical process and allowing Western readers to mark distance through racialized demarcations. Making sense required determining the continuities of such a historical setting, nonhuman and human, and translating it for a Western audience. This translation sealed a particular relation between community and history—one that sought to map time as a singular movement toward reconciliation.

Poetic Thinking

Against such knowledge, is it enough to simply locate a different, regional, context within which to situate poetics? Is the goal simply to discover the right past, a human-to-human context with these nonhuman detriments eliminated or rendered sensible in order to secure relations, to translate and authenticate into the present? Foregrounding the nonhuman, however, is not simply a matter of translating into meaning and text.[79] To consider the other than human is not to translate into symbolic service in order to map the text, but to consider the impossibility of those very ends, of representation itself.[80] My aim in the dehistoricized and decontextualized moment of the nonhuman is then to hesitate, pause our conquest of time and space. The nonhuman is not to be situated; it is not awaiting our gaze to map it. Rather, the nonhuman looks back—it addresses us—rather than simply providing the setting from which to unearth meaning.[81] In this address back, however, we cannot efface the boundaries between human and nonhuman—creating resolution—but, to think of the irreducibility within the very categories themselves, to consider no-thing against a common thing central to context.[82]

Puran Singh, too, rejected the possibility of such transcendent mediations, transactions, or translations. Instead, translation signaled both a boundary and threshold: a hesitation. In the preface to *Sisters of the Spinning Wheel*, which includes his translations of *saloks* from the Guru Granth Sahib, he wrote, "I only publish these fragments in the joy of my total failure at an

attempted rendering of a few pieces from 'Guru Granth' into English."[83] Forgoing a programmatic function or calculable procedure while betraying the destination language, he claimed, "I would have been glad to have been overwhelmed in the Amrit [ambrosia; immortality] floods that are set free by the touch of that Sacred Presence; but no, I am still on the banks of the stream."[84] The question was not to efface boundaries and dwell in a universal oceanic experience, to create pure translations, but to teeter on the edge, the bank that provided joy in the drive toward its very impossibility; translation was a disjuncture. And neither did the original provide authenticity, for, as Puran Singh declares in *The Spirit of Oriental Poetry*, "Even if we read Omar [Khayyam] in the original, we cannot grasp him, for he transcends his own word."[85]

For our aforementioned reviewer, such an audacious claim about translation signaled Puran Singh's own slyness: "To find [Puran Singh] capable of a sly taunt at a rival race gives him human lineaments which we recognize and salute across the sonorous seas of his poetry," the reviewer wrote.[86] Against these human lineaments of poetry, the discovery of the human within the entanglements of the world, Puran Singh argued, "We of the East admire the lark soaring up to the sky rather than the miner delving for the diamonds in the endless beds of conglomerate. What is the use of analyzing human nature when we wish to transcend it."[87] In order to provide a poetics beyond the human, a poetics that transcends the human, the target, for Puran Singh, was not to historicize literature within a temporal taxonomy or situate within kinship networks to secure a common thing—even though geographic determinations remain. Rather, *The Spirit of Oriental Poetry* is decidedly anticontextual, exceeding the very parameters of both pedigree and periodization instead turning us to the sky in to rid our focus on the human.

For Puran Singh, the key was to become the lark even though the ends of the lark remain inscrutable—the lark is not traveling across sonorous seas to the West and what exactly transcendence of human nature implied remains obscure as well. He could be going nowhere. Still inscrutable ends remained preferable to the delirium of unearthing meaning in the earth and the human. Puran Singh, thus, provides a different reflection on Bhai Vir Singh. Refusing to situate Bhai Vir Singh within a pedigree and context, Puran Singh provocatively wrote, "Bhai Vir Singh is an epoch in himself."[88] Expanding and collapsing time, Puran Singh claimed that Bhai Vir Singh

is invisible to the vulgar eye; now and then we have a glimpse of the poet, when he pours out his passion suddenly, in the memory of his beloved Guru, in the bosom of a river, or the heart of a rock, and makes them sing aloud his secret pain. This silent poet makes the rivers cry and sets the hills on fire by the touch of his emotion. He remains behind the scenes, invisible, with his flute ringing in the loneliness of a dark midnight.[89]

The earth, rivers, and hills address us through their affect; the poet does not address us because he is rendered silent. Hidden, the poet is there not to be observed but only to be heard relationally to the rivers and hills as the expanse of time in the other-than-human entanglements renders the poet—and humans more broadly—anonymous.[90] To some, nothing is happening: it is scenic, a landscape, if you will. For Puran Singh, however, there is something happening, if we disrupt human understandings of duration. The earth is not mined for meaning now. It provokes in its affective movement—a movement only possible when we destabilize anthropocentric time into a heterogenous time of interactions that are both lapidary and seismic.[91] Moreover, for Puran Singh, Bhai Vir Singh's poetry does not simply eliminate distinctions between human and other than human; it also dislocates the human from within, now speechless, rendering the possibility of poetry as a relational and dynamic act—an encounter secured through a coextensive affect rather than through sovereign decision and its attendant historical meaning.

One reading of Puran Singh can discover a universal mystical experience brought forth by the poet—a transcendent oneness. His *The Spirit of Oriental Poetry* does indeed oscillate between a longing for a unity with the divine and its very impossibility. For the famous Indian writer Mulk Raj Anand this was precisely what Puran Singh's poetry yielded—a pantheism that foregrounds "an identical ideal in all experience[;] it brings about a certain sameness."[92] Yet Anand countered that Puran Singh averted this danger of monotony "by the variety of things behind which he can see the Invisible spirit," even though, Anand contended, it made "his writings turgid and dithyrambic and deliberately mystical."[93] Puran Singh, however, rejected this bounded totality of an "Invisible spirit" and instead posited that "the modern movement for making all creeds into one liberal religion, seeking unity of feeling in one shapeless, faceless, universal God, wide as earth and academic as Science," lacked intensity. He counterpoised that we need "the grossest superstitions and crudest mythologies," which "gentleman are busy in sweeping

clean away."[94] These are enmeshed relations that are not shapeless but dynamic, that are not stripped away but thickened.

To learn from Puran Singh is not to negate *Punjabiyat*. It is to dwell in what is produced in excess to the demarcations Punjab inscribes. As Jagdish Singh writes, "The Guru's love pulsates inside Puran Singh to the extent that Punjab's wind, rivers, crops, animals, birds, and everywhere else we glance, for him, turn into colors of the Guru as the Guru's spark shines on their surface."[95] In this iridescence, Punjab itself explodes. This explosion is the result not of the hardening of boundaries inscribed by the colonial state's exit but of relations that continually appear and disappear, articulations and disarticulations in a play across and beyond Punjab, across seasons. The world shimmers with the dew and yet tears us apart.

Is it possible, then, to refuse to search for a singular meaning, to still the mining for meaning and commonality and instead pay attention to the fantasy itself, to the mythology that shimmers, as indexing a certain position of the subject?[96] *Nargas* provides this opportunity to dwell on fantasy and the "crudest mythologies" while refusing the search for meaning behind them. In particular, "The Punjab Autumn: The Season of the Cooling Dew," composed on Guru Nanak's birthday in 1916, draws our attention to a different form of time that disrupts the ends of contextualization. Human time becomes one of waiting and longing as the earth rebuffs modes of recovery or securing. The poem relays the changing of the seasons—the routine now is one that brings dew (*trel*). As the dew cools the earth, the poet demands for the return of Guru Nanak in the season of slumber and love:

> My Guru Nanak! Come to me to-day!
> O light of lights!
> Thy seats are the sun and the moon!
> My beloved! return to me to-day!
> It is the season of the cooling dew!
> The dew is falling everywhere,
> And wet is every rose.
> The gentle breath of heaven blows.[97]

There is no resolution as the waiting continues even as the season shifts. Dew covers the earth, which the poet translates as a signal for the culmination of his desire—the recovery of the object cause of desire:

> Now is the time of everlasting embraces!
> My beloved! Come, meet me to-day!
> Take me to thy bosom!

> The dew is flooding things with joy.
> My love! come to me!
> It is the season of the cooling dew![98]

Although the poet makes multiple demands, reveling in his desire and fantasy, the dew refuses to settle time in concordance with human desire—to neatly translate human desire into its domain. Instead, the continual appearance and eventual vanishing of the dew—day after day, season after season—undoes the centrality of anthropocentric destiny, both in the invocations of the Anthropocene and human mastery.[99]

At the end of the poem, the dew itself becomes the condition of (im)possibility for glimpsing Guru Nanak. Yet this is not the failure of desire, creating loss and therefore an object of melancholic attachment awaiting memorialization. Instead, the very failure of the dew becomes the marker of its success in its repetition—that is, desire is constituted precisely by the failure to procure and settle an object while still maintaining that relation to it in its failure, in this case, *via* the dew:

> The dew cometh from heaven down!
> It bringeth heavenly peace for all.
> It wetteth all with sweetness.
> Invisible, it raineth deep into souls.
> It raineth love and peace and joy.
> It raineth sweetness.[100]

To be clear, the dew signals the coming of Guru Nanak. But, in the dew's archive, this arrival is not a permanent one. It does not grant a common figure; it fails as the seasons shift. The poem begins with this recognition:

> The piping of the rain-birds has ceased,
> *Dadar* and *peepiya* are silent now,
> The dance of the peacock is over,
> It is the season of the cooling dew!
> The dew is falling everywhere,
> And wet is every rose.
> The gentle breath of heaven blows.[101]

One cannot secure oneself in an eternal rapture of the dancing peacock or the singing of the songbirds or even in the dew. They function in their own time, eluding while also sustaining human desire, refusing to let the human become the fetish object as the dew does not revolve around human interest. Change in the world is not marked by teleology or human mastery coinciding with an end of time.[102]

The multiple registers of the nonhuman here—the natural world intertwined with the divine—disrupt the very planning of time and history essential to the

colonial project. To return to the shift in seasons, weather does not determine human behavior, but disrupts ends as time eludes. But weather in the late nineteenth century held the promise enact these ends with man's sovereign control over nature, which was no longer simply predicative. This is Katharine Anderson's lesson. In the late nineteenth century, it appeared that meteorological research could "control the anarchy of the weather just as the Raj controlled its chaotic and immense possessions."[103] Meteorology emerged as a scientific discipline that, though complex and challenging, would fall under the dominion of observation and coordination: "These experts assured policy makers that through patient measurement and statistical study, they would soon establish order in the atmosphere," as Sarah Carson has detailed.[104] Bhai Vir Singh overturns such philosophical knowledge in his poetic thinking: control is undone through the seasonal change in which a secure sovereign position is no longer possible; change endures without forecast, though repetition proceeds.

In "Love and Wisdom: Told by A Nightingale and a Wayfarer," Bhai Vir Singh considers the gift of a rose, surrendered, and how it functions as a palliative in this world:

> But pray, why did not thy eye discern that one day
>   all this would die both the garden
>   and its blossoms gay?
> Why can it not see that spring shall die,
> And the autumn of dead and decaying leaves
>   take its place;
> And the flowers and leaves fall to the ground
>   dust with dust![105]

The human gaze and its speculations, even in the management of pain or forecasting of the weather, cannot master the terms of the atmosphere. As Bhai Vir Singh continues,

> Spring with its blossoms is gone,
> Autumn sets in; this too shall go,
> And the spring shall come again.
> These thorny leafless branches cause thee pain,
> But the wheel shall roll, the zephyrs blow, the
>   season again shall come;
> Again the purple leaf buds! again the green
>   leaves shall appear in millions,
> Again, the buds blow, and the armies of flowers
>   come and encamp again![106]

Time does not provide eschatological resolution. It only repeats its entanglements, as the wayfarer tells the nightingale to remain patient to which it despairs:

> To thirst for love, to roll through despair and
> separation for the hope of meeting him
> is all illusion:[107]

Yet the wayfarer reminds the nightingale that this world is constituted by change and to focus on the rose within. The object of desire, then, cannot be concretized as *something* past, present, or future or within the immanent structures of the world. Instead, focusing on the dew or the dancing peacock or the soothing rose without recourse to meaning or intent behind them takes us away from the demand for control in human desire and usurps a settled history. In the now restless world, there is no resolution in the memorialization of an object one longs for in the past, such as Punjab, or a secure identity in a future such as a communal one—there are no ends, since the ideal bourgeois undoing their self-incurred immaturity remains within the binds of desire, object, and synthetic judgement—that is, the pathological passions.[108]

Thus one waits, longing, functioning not in rhythm within an immanent harmony but a discordance between the dew and rose and desire that repudiates neat adjudication in time as one has to disjoint the human within. To return to the Punjab autumn, the dew addresses the human without resolution as historical time withers—even though the longing in the separation from Guru Nanak remains.

> Fill my tearful gaze for ever with thy celestial
>   face;
> And let my eyes be for ever wet with the joy
>   of seeing thee!
> My love! dwell for ever in my eyes!
> It is the season of the cooling dew!
> The dew is falling everywhere,
> And wet is every rose.
> The gentle breath of heaven blows.[109]

And yet the dew *does* dissipate, even if "it bringeth heavenly peace for all" at the moment. For just as the season of the cooling dew began with the end of the dance of the peacock, so this season will shift as well. This is Bhai Vir Singh's lament of separation. Yes, there are these moments of recognition, but they elude and cannot be possessed. In "On Separation from the Stars and the Sky," even as the poet looks out at the stars, becoming one with them, it is soon winter, and he can no longer sleep on his roof; the cruel roof is now between him and the heavens:

> My freedom loving soul is to be shut up again
> within four walls, with a stifling roof
> above them to weigh me down![110]

Weighed down by human mastery and also by seasonal change (therefore, natural forces), the body aches once more.[111]

Waiting to See / Be Seen

In this withering time, the internal unity of the aesthetic components of historicism become undone as the past is opened to the possibility of an ethical encounter rather than a harmonized and sealed context; it is an ethics of nonpossession and distance.[112] For example, in 1929, Chughtai wrote a letter to Bhai Vir Singh, thanking him for a gift:

> Respected Elder Bhai Sahib Ji,
>
> Tasleem, Adaab
>
> With your grace, the book *Mary: The Mother of Jesus* has reached me, regarding this, a weird dream came me, because I was very much worried about the publishing of my second book, which will be named only "Chughtai." My second book will have paintings based on varied themes, seven paintings will be on Omar Khayam and nine will be on Hindu Myth and some will be on historical personalities. Four to five paintings will be on Panjab, surely one painting will be on your poem and one will be on Hir-Ranjha. If I am successful in my aim and effort, then I will add a painting on Baba Guru Nanak Sahib. It is sad that you have not yet seen my immortal painting, I will try and make it go through your eyes. This is my program, please pray, you are elder: May Allah grant me success in this effort. Because I consider that this is a kind of service that I am doing through my art. Allah has given me this kind of blessing that I can easily paint a superior painting for your book. I am your child, if you have any other program regarding this, then definitely write to me, I will implement it quickly.
>
> Yours,
> Chughtai[113]

They exchanged more letters, since Chughtai, Puran Singh, and Bhai Vir Singh remained close. But let us focus on a central aspect of this particular exchange. For Chughtai, his goal was for his image to come within Bhai Vir Singh's sight (*nazar*). What does it mean to gaze at an image? Does looking at an image, such as Chughtai's artwork in *Nargas* (fig. 1), signal the possibility of linking human embodiment and sensory experience through a rapturous unifying aesthetic? Even without context, is the human still central in translating images to produce universal meaning in seeing and being seen?

In asking these questions, my efforts are not to provide a more precise recognition, to see more capaciously to eliminate discrepancies, or to secure the self

through writing; instead, the goal is to disarticulate the human through a focus on the eye and vision. That might appear odd. Vision has been linked to the colonial project as a key sense in producing taxonomies of hierarchy through the imperial gaze—that Archimedean point again. These are "imperial eyes," as Mary Louise Pratt has detailed. Looking to describe the world, these eyes unified and ordered the globe as "the relation of mastery predicated between the seer and the seen" took hold.[114] One could now see without being seen, as well be seen without seeing, as the disembodied gaze became crucial for knowledge.[115] My turn to vision does not uphold it but dislocates it within, showing that the eye itself is not human and, therefore, how it is nonhuman. Or, to walk with our wayfarer, we must consider how these moments of unity of the human and nonhuman are illusory shadows providing a sense of harmony and correspondence.

Vision is, certainly, complex. The centrality of paying obeisance with one's eyes alludes to the concept of *darśan*. As Diana Eck argues, "[Seeing is] an imaginative, constructive activity, an act of making. It is not simply the reception of images on the retina."[116] Seeing, Eck continues, is "not a passive awareness of visual data, but an active focusing upon it, 'touching' it."[117] Seeing can conjoin the two if there is reciprocity. The eye as an organ reaches out and is coupled with, for example, the eye of the deity to suture the gap between the two—a harmonious seeing / being seen dyad. More than simply gazing, *darśan* is the primary conduit of contact between the two; it brings the two together. This contact, however, is by no means strictly benevolent, for "the wrathful glance of deity or *guru* can also be destructive."[118] It can also be, as John Cort contends, not based in the mediation through vision.[119] Still, to quote William Elison, "To have engaged in *darśan*, in short, is indeed for the encounter between human and god to have 'worked.'"[120] There is a bringing together, a coupling, in *darśan*.

Nazar, too, invokes the importance of vision and can be used to beseech a linguistic equivalence, Nile Green explains, "as a deliberate means by which religious agents deflect and dissolve the cognitive structures of religious difference between difference communities of readers."[121] But it also has a different register than *darśan*, centered in the Persianate poetic paradigm and laden with evil potentiality.[122] Shaila Bhatti and Christopher Pinney expand on this point, writing that it is within an "untranslatable zone of the cure *and* poison."[123] *Nazar* thus functions as both a "malevolent

mode of visuality," the evil eye, and that which allows for "sensual proximity and proclamation of feelings between individuals in public that were otherwise forbidden by social mores"—for example, *nazar milana*.[124] *Nazar milana* is to bring vision together, to couple the seeing / being seen dyad and secure an exchange between the two in a naturalized movement.

In our withering time of *birha*, however, the eye is not a tool for a higher synthesis, a reciprocal union, nor a clandestine scholarly automatism. We cannot see and hold Guru Nanak in place. Remember what Bhai Vir Singh both celebrates and laments in "The Punjab Autumn"—that there is bringing together out in the world, but there is no fulfillment of *darśan* and *nazar milana*, from the standpoint of the dew, to give one example, since recognition and acknowledgment dissipate.[125] We make a temporal jump when we bring the *nazar* together or fulfill the temporal movement in *darśan* as a tale of mutual recognition, a reciprocal exchange, creating correspondence.[126] Put another way, the seeing / being seen relationship central to *darśan* and *nazar* also has a temporal dimension that reproduces an immanent harmony as scholars complete the temporal process by taking the ritual or meeting to its presumed teleological end and eliminating *birha*. If we take the ritual of *darśan* to its end, it leads to a fulfilled seeing / being seen relation. To see where the *nazar* falls is to secure it.

In Chughtai's letter, we find a different temporality, one of longing to bring Bhai Vir Singh's *nazar* to his image without conclusion; they are separated. In this hesitation, the eye does not mediate by both seeing and being seen, but neither does it just watch, surveilling while disciplining its own habits as a disembodied gaze returns the favor. There is not a one-to-one translation between eyes. Instead, the eye becomes dislocated while remaining carnal. It cannot fulfill the temporal promise of recognition in *darśan* or the promise of love and awakened desire in *nazar*.[127]

Working through the poetic aspect of Bhai Vir Singh, Puran Singh, and, now, Chughtai helps us undo the ends of a teleologically driven reciprocal seeing / being seen dyad and instead consider separation. Nonpossession of the other is crucial to *birha*, but so too is nonpossession of the self—a nonpossession that cannot be naturalized because a yearning remains. Or, to return to the wayfarer and the nightingale, the goal is to dislocate the human within while remaining entangled in the world. The challenge is, then, not only to forgo, to follow Christopher Pinney, the "numbing of the human sensorium" in "'anaesthetics,'"[128] and instead highlight

"an embodied, corporeal aesthetics" that Pinney terms *corpothetics*,[129] but also to interrupt the human by refusing to mediate human relationships through vision—to hesitate in *birha*. In this pause, the goal is to disrupt autopoietic closure while maintaining longing.[130] Is it possible to consider the eye simply as a supplementary organ without a body that continuously disrupts the fulfilled mediation between gazes while also refusing the disembodied gaze? Is it possible to think of an eye not as wholly embedded within a networked and unified human body—as an organ functioning as a tool for human use? Is it possible to think of an eye as an expression of desire without end, without possession?

In his "On Separation from the Stars and Sky," Bhai Vir Singh centers such questioning. It is only when the eyes are discontinued from their daily human tasks—"the restless eyes of passion led"—do they begin to function differently:

> These almighty eyes are now closed, the lids
>   have dropped on them.
> Thank God! The magic of eyes has ended;
> The tired world sleeps at last.
> This is the time, my soul, for thy love-
>   making with the stars.[131]

Whereas vision creates a sense of transcendence—almighty eyes—this sovereignty is only magic, only *maya*, an illusion of control predicated on a separation between the eyes and the world. This sovereignty, the passions of the eyes in daily human life, becomes dislocated when Bhai Vir Singh "sees," by which he becomes entangled with the stars rather than mapping them. The poet records,

> His grace fills all space,
> The divine substance pours down in these
>   wondrous showers of starry light.
> One great illumination, one great beauteous
>   twinkling of a million eyes!
> One supreme repose. I see God.[132]

Yet, as I mentioned, this moment ends because the moment cannot be possessed—not only in the rising of the day but also in the shifting seasons. The poet cannot manage the daily passions as he goes back inside for winter, and, as the day arises, the poet implores,

> My eyes! close down now; shut your doors and
>   drop your shades!
> The scene is over;
> Those that you loved to see are gone!
> Better by far not to be than to be without those
>   whom we love.[133]

The eyes open to life, but in opening they close, entranced by magic in daily existence, binding them to life and the world while relations of possession and nonpossession oscillate within vision itself.

The human, then, appears only as a surface effect, what is called *maya*.[134] There remains something—not the totalizing organism but simply a supplementary partial inhuman object that allows for sight. There remains an organ without a body in the very glancing out into the sky.[135] It is precisely this partial object (in this example, the eye) that is the condition of both possibility and impossibility of the seeing / being seen relationship, turning us back to separation and nonpossession, *birha*. The eye brings together the two gazes—between Bhai Vir Singh and the stars—yet it is also the "pathological stain" that disturbs the immanent harmony of the teleologically driven reciprocal being seen / seeing dyad.[136] The eyes open and cannot look out; they are closed and can see. The human becomes dislocated and the eye becomes a nonhuman object—not located within a total human body—in what is a temporal delay with inscrutable ends. It is the excess part from which the two are mediated—an intermediary zone, perhaps, both allowing *and* disallowing the very relationship, igniting the very desire and, therefore, refusing homeostasis.

Nargas requires that we consider this aspect of the eye.[137] For example, in the title poem, "Nargas," Bhai Vir Singh writes,

> Let eye and brain dissolve,
> Let limb after limb fail,
> Let my stems and my leaves drop;
> But let my eyes last a little while more!
> My life is in my eyes,
> The elements try in vain to dry me up by drying
>   blood and flesh and bone.
> There is a little lamp of life lit by love and set
>   in the shrine of my eyes,
> And I tell you the winds of death know not how
>   to blow it out.
>
> All other limbs are dead, let them die; but let
>   my eyes remain.
> The green stem has turned dry,
> But heaven and earth feed the life in my
>   eyes.[138]

Here the very continued existence of the eye presents a problem, which the poet recognizes, asking for the eye's annihilation initially. But the gaze continues to look out, even though it is not returned. There is no mutual recognition. There is no reciprocity. There is no end. There is not even a moment of respite in the entanglement that appeared with the stars when the eyes closed. Now there is no possession or closure in rest. There is only what is becoming, as the body fragments, a disembodied gaze; the organ remains, which the poet both asks for ("feed the life in my eyes") and refuses ("Let eye and brain dissolve"). The temporal dimension is crucial. Against a quick movement toward reconciliation, past or future, or a finality in unsatisfaction as the obstacle is concretized, the poet must wait as desire continually eludes its satisfaction; the object of desire cannot be brought under the poet's dominion, even as the subject fades. And yet the eyes repeatedly look out while evading death. The poet does not write a history, though he invokes a past. The poet does not plan a future, though he invokes hope. The poet waits, perhaps, driving toward failure, immersed in his failure, hesitating. Recall Puran Singh, teetering on the bank, refusing the annihilatory bliss promised by the raging waters while longing for an impossible unification.

Conclusion

We return, again, to *birha*. Separation, writes Naisargi Dave, is to "love in distance and in non-possession" of a common thing, such as a Punjabi context. It is a different yearning as divine singularity mapped onto the world and time gives way.[139] The correspondence is not so neat; the human is torn within. In this hesitant time of waiting, of longing, without recognition, a disturbance rises as the body aches and nothing happens. There is an ethical encounter rather than one of harmonizing context, since a gap remains—one that cannot be historicized away. The encounter within this separation, let us say, breaks down the chain of signifiers (animal, human, nonhuman) and returns us, Oxana Timofeeva suggests, "to an impossible truth of the real, which is itself a rupture, a cut."[140] There is no determining of a common thing to produce a homogenous setting and a mapping of relationality; there are only fractures, since there is nothing there to bind (and, therefore, simultaneously, nothing broken, as we remain enmeshed within the world rather than rising above it or unearthing it).

Burying the dead, the historian, in their mourning, laments a lost past while upholding the exceptionality of coexistence in Punjab. But can these relations—between, for example, Puran Singh, Bhai Vir Singh, and Chughtai—be settled through an exceptional context? Working with the nonhuman and on a poetic register, I have tried here to waver when confronted

with such ends and offer instead an ethical stance in which desire—for context, the past, the future, or the nonhuman—could not be satisfied, even when the human itself is ripped away to its inhuman core. I think of this as a poetics beyond the human. And yet in this poetics, in this longing, I deny an envelopment into a universal mystical experience, one in which all distinctions are collapsed—a homogenous fluidity central to political gratification in the present. Instead, the supplementary eye remains, gazing, pining, carnal, refusing the objects of satisfaction. Such a hesitation requires that we "come apart in the face of something extraordinary" and also that we not.[141] In this poetics beyond the human, one is left to wonder at the very limits of ends, asking, with Puran Singh, without leaping while anticipating the leap, in the moment of *birha*, "How long can the tree remain implanted on the river-bank?"[142]

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Notes

1. Bhai Vir Singh, *Nargas*, 88.

2. M. Singh, "From Sikh Identity to Ultimate Reality," 117. See Malhotra and Murphy, "Bhai Vir Singh (1872–1957)," 1.

3. Malhotra and Murphy, "Bhai Vir Singh (1872–1957)," 4.

4. Shackle, "After Macauliffe," 76.

5. J. Singh, "Walt Whitman, Puran Singh, and Punjabiyat," 2 (my translation).

6. Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, 61.

7. Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, 73.

8. Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, 89.

9. Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, 65–66.

10. Quoted in *Artist of the East*. Puran Singh, therefore, challenges the burgeoning ties of the Bengal School, locating a space out the Hindu oriented nationalism of the Bengal school. See Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*.

11. Chughtai, *Artist of the East*.

12. Malhotra and Mir, "Punjab in History and Historiography," xxxviii.

13. Mir, "Genre and Devotion," 729–30.

14. Mir, "Genre and Devotion," 755.

15. Oberoi, *Construction of Religious Boundaries*. For syncretism, see Malhotra, *Piro and the Gulabdasis*.

16. Kaur Singh, *Of Sacred and Secular Desire*, 119. Also see Oberoi, *Construction of Religious Boundaries*; Mandair, *Religion and the Specter of the West*; Jakobsh, *Relocating Gender in Sikh History*.

17. Malhotra and Murphy, "Bhai Vir Singh (1872–1957)," 10.

18. For example, see Minocha, "Bhai Vir Singh and the Public Sphere."

19. J. Singh, "Walt Whitman, Puran Singh, and Punjabiyat," 2.

20. Mir, *The Social Space of Language*, 24.

21. It is important to note that Mir denies the conceptual use of *syncretism* because it too presumes a unity. See Mir, "Genre and Devotion." I use it because Iftikhar Dadi considers the term in relation to Chughtai. See Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*.

22. Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, 65.

23. Asad, "Two European Images of Non-European Rule," 116.

24. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 70.

25. Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age*, 207.

26. On blood, see Anidjar, *Blood*.

27. Anidjar, "Our Place in al-Andulus," 61–62.

28. Anidjar, "Our Place in al-Andulus," 62.

29. Anidjar, "Our Place in al-Andulus," 62. For equivocation, see de la Cadena, *Earth Beings*.

30. Anidjar, "Futures of al-Andalus," 234. Also see Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 222.

31. Roy, "Strange Ecologies of Empire," 75.

32. Derrida, *Dissemination*, 25.

33. Anidjar, "The Destruction of Thought," 307 (emphasis in the original).

34. For admissibility and the ontological turn, see Klima, *Ethnography #9*.

35. Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 40. But, as this article proceeds, neither do I locate only multiplicity. Instead, I follow Slavoj Žižek, who argues that tracing the "multiplicity of animal forms is to be conceived as a series of attempts to resolve some basic antagonism or tension which defines animality as such" (*Less Than Nothing*, 409). Derrida also makes a similar point, arguing that undoing the distinction between an irreducible animality and humanity "does not, of course, mean ignoring or effacing everything that separates humankind from the other animals, creating a single large set, a single grand, fundamentally homogeneous and continuous family tree going from the *animot* to the *homo* (*faber*, *sapiens*, or whatever else)" (*The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 47). Therefore, I do not seek here to integrate animal and human in prior tradition. For this worthwhile project, see Bhogal, "The Animal Sublime."

36. Anidjar, "Our Place in al-Andulus," 62.

37. Guru Granth Sahib, 1382. Translation is modifed and relies on multiple other translations as well.

38. Prabhsharanbir Singh, "*Auseinandersetzung*," 183.

39. Kohn, *How Forests Think*, 15.

40. Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 15.

41. Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 127.

42. Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 9.

43. The literature is vast. For example, see Pollock, *Literary Cultures in History*.

44. Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 7.

45. Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 14 (emphasis in the original).

46. Pollock, introduction, 2.

47. Pollock, introduction, 4.

48. Ahmed, *Archaeology of Babel*, 52–56.

49. "A Modern Sikh Poet."

50. I am grateful to Parama Roy for this suggestion. See Deane, *Masculinity and the New Imperialism*. On Sikhs in particular, see Fox, *Lions of the Punjab*; Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*; and Imy, *Faithful Fighters*.

51. Deane, *Masculinity and the New Imperialism*, 150.

52. "A Modern Sikh Poet." See also Deane, *Masculinity and the New Imperialism*, 160.

53. "A Modern Sikh Poet." In the *Near East*, a reviewer noted a similarity between Matthew 6 in the Christian Bible and one translation from the Guru Granth. There is a difference that separates here too: "He writes wonderfully naturally in English and often expresses his meaning with real beauty, but every now and then we are pulled up by expressions that are commonplace and are obviously those of one writing in a foreign tongue" ("Poetry of the Sikh Religions").

54. "A Modern Sikh Poet."

55. "A Modern Sikh Poet."

56. E. Rhys and G. Rhys, introduction, xxvi.

57. Puran Singh, however, rejected this historical understanding. See Puran Singh, *Sisters of the Spinning Wheel*, 40.

58. Roy, "Strange Ecologies of Empire," 93–94.

59. "A Modern Sikh Poet."

60. Mrinalini Sinha famously examined the distinction produced in colonial discourse between the Bengali and Punjabi. See Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*.

61. "A Modern Sikh Poet."

62. "A Modern Sikh Poet."

63. The literature on mimicry is vast. For example, the editor of *Anthology of Modern Indian Poetry* (1927), Gwendoline Goodwin, posited, "The Indian poet of today is torn, like the Indian painter, between admiration for Western models and desire to mould himself thereon, and an inherent Indian tradition that runs in his veins and will not be denied. . . . We of the West do not want from the East poetic edifices built upon a foundation of Yeats and Shelley and Walk Whitman. We want genuine Taj Mahals and Juma Masjids, cameos of rural sweetness and hopes of faithful hearts." Quoted in Reddy, "Critical Introduction," xxiii.

64. Cohen, *Stone*, 224–25.

65. E. Rhys, foreword, vi. Rhys also finds Puran Singh "childlike" in other writings, a primitive man.

66. E. Rhys, foreword, vi.

67. To clarify, I am not referencing genealogy as a historical method derived from Friedrich Nietzsche and Michel Foucault. As Raymond Guess explains, there is a distinction between genealogy in the Nietzschean sense and the tracing of pedigree. A pedigree, according to Guess, traces "a series of unbroken steps of transmission to a singular origin" ("Nietzsche and Genealogy," 275).

68. E. Rhys, foreword, vii.

69. E. Rhys, foreword, vii.

70. E. Rhys, foreword, vii.

71. E. Rhys, foreword, vii.

72. E. Rhys, foreword, viii. Rhys notes that Puran Singh is grandson of Jawala Singh.

73. E. Rhys, foreword, viii.

74. Jasbir Puar has noted how "the intermixing of the organic with the inorganic turban needs to be theorized across an organic/inorganic divide, a machinic assemblage" (*Terrorist Assemblages*, 175).

75. E. Rhys, foreword, viii.

76. E. Rhys, foreword, viii.

77. Pictures were central to this colonial "seeing" as well as sign to demarcate masculine and feminine. The literature is vast; see Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*.

78. For Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, the key is to see a mediation of humans through self-recognition. Hence object worship and the worship of animals is a lower stage of humanity. The turban, then, would function as a sign that body is for another, more essential will. In vol. 2 of his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel writes, "Pious Orientals regard their bodies, their finite concerns and the business involved, not as their own but as a service directed toward an other; they have to exercise propriety and circumspection that this service is carried out properly and in accordance with the will of the Lord—a universal will" (115). Also see Stewart, *Hegel's Interpretation of the Religions of the World*, 59.

79. Scholars have examined this form of thinking as a zoopoetics. Zoopoetics is not simply a poetics about animals, but requires, as Kári Driscoll and Eva Hoffmann explain in their Benjaminian reading, that we consider how animals "serve as a necessary and unsubstitutable means to particular, as yet inscrutable, poetic ends" ("Introduction," 3). One key implication is that "we need not fear or mistrust the metaphorical, symbolic, and allegorical meaning embodied by literary animals, so long as we do not make the mistake of reading these nonhuman presences *only* or *simply* as metaphors — as arbitrary and interchangeable ciphers for the 'real' or 'intended' meaning" ("Introduction," 4)."

80. Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 193; Driscoll and Hoffmann, "Introduction," 6.

81. Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 14.

82. Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 30.

83. Puran Singh, *Sisters of the Spinning Wheel*, xl.

84. Puran Singh, *Sisters of the Spinning Wheel*, xl.

85. Puran Singh, *The Spirit of Oriental Poetry*, 36.

86. "A Modern Sikh Poet."

87. Puran Singh, *The Spirit of Oriental Poetry*, 32–33.

88. Puran Singh, *The Spirit of Oriental Poetry*, 89.

89. Puran Singh, *The Spirit of Oriental Poetry*, 90.

90. Cohen, *Stone*, 72.

91. Cohen, *Stone*, 161.

92. Anand, *The Golden Breath*, 97.

93. Anand, *The Golden Breath*, 97.

94. Puran Singh, *The Spirit of Oriental Poetry*, 58.

95. J. Singh, "Walt Whitman, Puran Singh, and Punjabiyat," 2 (my translation).

96. Lacan, *Desire and Its Interpretation*. As Lacan writes, "Fantasy is the prop and index of a certain position of the subject in desire" (422). Fantasy does not harmonize a relationship between subject and object; rather, they are incongruent, hence situating desire.

97. Bhai Vir Singh, *Nargas*, 90. Punjabi original can be found in Bhai Vir Singh, *Kambdi Kalai*, 142.

98. Bhai Vir Singh, *Nargas*, 90. Punjabi original can be found in Bhai Vir Singh, *Kambdi Kalai*, 142–43.

99. Deanowski and Viveiros de Castro, *The Ends of the World*, 111.

100. Bhai Vir Singh, *Nargas*, 93.

101. Bhai Vir Singh, *Nargas*, 88.

102. Cohen, *Stone*, 39.

103. Anderson, *Predicting the Weather*, 284.

104. Carson, "Anticipating the Monsoon." Also see Anderson, *Predicting the Weather*, 1. For more on observation, see Daston, "Empire of Observation."

105. Bhai Vir Singh, *Nargas*, 52. For the Punjabi original, see Bhai Vir Singh, *Lehran De Haar*, 144.

106. Bhai Vir Singh, *Nargas*, 54–55.

107. Bhai Vir Singh, *Nargas*, 56.

108. See Lacan, "Kant with Sade," 660.

109. Bhai Vir Singh, *Nargas*, 91.

110. Bhai Vir Singh, *Nargas*, 102.

111. I am grateful to Parama Roy for this formulation.

112. Dave, "Love and Other Injustices."

113. Chughtai to Bhai Vir Singh, 1929. The letter in Punjabi appears framed alongside an Urdu letter at Bhai Vir Singh Niwas Asthan (residence), Bhai Vir Singh Marg (Street), Amritsar, Punjab. Following Bhai Vir Singh's death, his home (on a street renamed after him) was converted to a memorial library. Translation is in collaboration with Dr. Jaswinder Singh.

114. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 200.

115. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 173.

116. Eck, *Darśan*, 14.

117. Eck, *Darśan*, 15.

118. Cort, "Situating *Darśan*," 3; Cort references Babb, "Glancing." Cort highlights the plurality of *darśan* experiences by pointing to *darśan*'s historical diversity ("Situating Darśan," 3).

119. Cort, "Situating *Darśan*," 31.

120. Elison, *The Neighborhood of Gods*, 82. Drawing on Lacan, Elison examines the mutual recognition between master and slave as central to *darśan*.

121. Green, *Terrains of Exchange*, 195.

122. Taylor, "Penetrating Gazes," 303; Bhatti and Pinney, "Optic-Clash," 226.

123. Bhatti and Pinney, "Optic-Clash," 228 (emphasis in the original).

124. Bhatti and Pinney, "Optic-Clash," 230.

125. Naisargi Dave argues this emphasis on sight constitutes an intimate event in which two singular beings acknowledge each other, in a moment of recognition thereby reproducing the supposed value of the human being ("Witness," 434).

126. Elison, *Neighborhood of Gods*, 5.

127. I am not arguing that we need to return to the disembodied eye in the Cartesian sense that Martin Jay critiques. See Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 81.

128. Pinney, *"Photos of the Gods,"* 21, 19; Pinney cites Buck-Morss, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics."

129. Pinney, *"Photos of the Gods,"* 8.

130. Žižek, *Organs without Bodies*, 120.

131. Bhai Vir Singh, *Nargas*, 96.

132. Bhai Vir Singh, *Nargas*, 97.

133. Bhai Vir Singh, *Nargas*, 102.

134. Žižek, *Organs without Bodies*, 118.

135. Žižek, *Organs without Bodies*, 99, 175.

136. Žižek, *Organs without Bodies*, 99.

137. Mohinder Singh also examines this aspect when he looks at *Baneshfe da Phul*, though he argues this is a turn to sublime beauty in Bhai Vir Singh's work. See M. Singh, "From Sikh Identity to Ultimate Reality," 121.

138. Bhai Vir Singh, *Nargas*, 8–9.

139. Dave, "Love and Other Injustices."

140. Timofeeva, "The Two Cats," 108.

141. Dave, "Witness," 451.

142. Guru Granth Sahib, 1382.

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