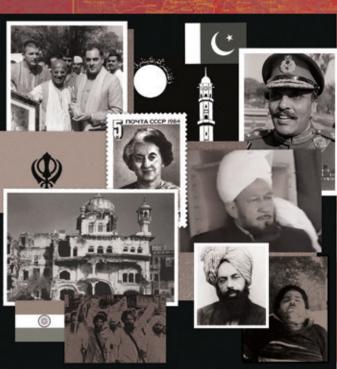


MAPPING PRECARITY AND POLITICISATION IN PUNJABI DIASPORAS

Nijhawan's work considers the long-term effects of social, legal and political violence on Sikh and Ahmadi diaspora communities in Toronto and Frankfurt. He is interested in finding out how these communities negotiate experiences of both marginalisation and resilience in the context of everyday lived religion. In his research, he uses the concept of 'precarious diasporas' as a conduit to explore the fragility, mutability and complexity of diaspora communities.





1984

The year 1984 is a key reference point for both Sikh and Ahmadi communities. For Sikhs, it marks the beginning of a decade of political violence, characterised by the rise of Sikh militancy and the Indian state's brutal repression of widespread unrest. The role of 1984 has been hotly debated within Sikh Studies – and it has triggered new intellectual, artistic and political responses among the youth of today.

For Ahmadis, 1984 marks the passage of an Ordinance issued by the Pakistani President that made it illegal for Ahmadis to claim official status as a religious organisation or live ordinary religious lives as Muslims in Pakistan. Although this received far less international media attention than simultaneous events on the Indian side of the Punjab border, it resulted in the relocation of the Ahmadiyya religious leadership from Pakistan to London and in widespread transnational migration and diaspora formation.

The significance of 1984 is generally perceived as greater among Sikhs than Ahmadis, but Nijhawan's work draws connections between the experiences of the two groups in relation to this date as a result of its impact on the 'precarisation' of religious minority status and the politicisation of religious identity.

MEMORY

Nijhawan is investigating the roles of memory and memory activism in the aftermath of political violence against Sikh and Ahmadi diaspora communities. His studies in this area largely focus on youth in the two communities.

To date, Nijhawan's research has shown that young people in Sikh and Ahmadi diasporas play a crucial role in mobilising their ranks around issues of past injustice through forms of memory activism. This is exemplified in Sikh youth events that have brought together artists, activists and community organisers in the Toronto region. He also highlights the differences between these organised forms of memory activism and forms of remembering that take place through interpersonal transactions of loss and suffering.

In contrast to their parents' generation, young people today are actively forging cross-community solidarities and using the human rights discourse in an attempt to universalise the suffering experienced by their parents' generation and to acquire legal recognition of political persecution through international bodies. By paying close attention to how youth use religious concepts to articulate memories of violence in their current socio-political context, Nijhawan's work is shedding new light on how religious discourses shape these memories and govern responses to them.



MULTIDIMENSIONALITY

Diaspora communities are not fixed and homogeneous. Instead, they are evolving sites of sociality and belonging – and the identities of their members are being constantly renegotiated. In Nijhawan's research, the multidimensionality of precarious diasporas is a key concept, encapsulating different layers of socioeconomic, sociolegal and religious precarity, which exist alongside high levels of endurance and resilience.

The innovative part of Nijhawan's work in this area involves interpreting and understanding the precarious marginalisation of Sikh and Ahmadi communities in the context of insecure immigration status, a lack of secure income and being subject to different power brokers. For example, he is exploring how individuals who came as refugees understand and articulate their suffering through ethical concepts and practices of religiosity as well as their aspirations for future change. He demonstrates how the material conditions of precarious status weigh heavily on the ability to recover from past trauma and on the manner through which religious selves are made and unmade in a situation in which everyday survival is paramount.

the contours of a movement that originally took the form of local antimosque protests – specifically targeted at the Ahmadiyya community in Germany in the 1990s – before spilling over into the Europe-wide antiimmigrant rhetoric and policies of today.

The mobilisation of Islamophobia has complex social effects on Muslim and other immigrant communities. Prejudiced discourse brands specific minority religious groups as inassimilable in mainstream society. In extreme cases, this can lead to the political persecution of minority religious groups through state-condoned acts against religious heterodoxy. In other cases, it can lead to a general suspicion about the beliefs of minority groups, consequently unleashing a powerful exclusionary force against the participation of such groups in mainstream society. As a group facing both of these forms of exclusionary violence, Ahmadis have had to constantly negotiate their status as a 'persecuted group'. This has involved legal debates as to what constitutes a genuine Ahmadi and political claims that call for their recognition as a moderate and peaceful religious minority.

MICHAEL NIJHAWAN is an anthropologist and associate professor in Sociology at York University, Toronto. His Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)-funded research focuses on violence, memory, religion and migration, with a focus on South Asian communities. His forthcoming book is titled The Precarious Diasporas of Sikh and Ahmadiyya Generations (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

