

Title

Gender, Caste and the Practices of Religious Identities

What this Study Contributes

Our intention is to specifically examine how gender and caste contribute to the framing of religious experience in terms of the practices of worshippers at sites which are ostensibly labelled as Muslim, Hindu and Sikh in East and West Punjab. The region of Punjab is significant. The partition of colonial India in 1947 led to the mass expulsion of Muslims from East Punjab and a similar movement of Hindus and Sikhs from West Punjab. The modern nation states of India and Pakistan were forged in through a 'religious cleansing' process in which an Islamic republic of Pakistan and a 'secular' India were formed. In both states the boundaries of the identities Hindu and Muslim became increasingly pronounced. However, despite state sponsored technologies of difference, common places of worship such as the tombs of saints, or pirs, and Gurdwaras are sustained as sites of syncretic practice and boundary crossing.

Team

Principal Investigator: Dr Navtej Purewal (Manchester)

Co-Investigator: Dr Virinder Kalra (Manchester)

University

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Award

Phase 1 Large Grant £277,210

Research Partners

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Approach

The research involved ethnographic fieldwork in six sites ostensibly marked as Hindu, Muslim and Sikh. Interviews were undertaken to establish patterns of religious worship, ensuring a balance in terms of our interest in gender and caste. The project also collected 'biographies of worship' in the form of diaries offering in-depth insights into rituals and reference points, with a specific interest in how gender and caste mark people's religious experience. Uniquely, the project spans two nation states and has therefore been able to explore the impact that different state ideologies have on similarly marked spaces, for example a Gurdwara in India and another in Pakistan. Once this analysis was completed, the implications of this practice in the context of the Punjabi diaspora where sites for worship are limited were also posed in the dissemination dimension of the project.

Findings

Project finished **28th February 2010** and we are awaiting findings.

Activities and Outcomes

Nonika Singh 'The daughter's case', interview with Tej Purewal, *The Sunday Tribune*, 17th May 2009:
<http://www.tribuneindia.com/2009/20090517/spectrum/book2.htm>.

Further Information

www.saanjhpunjab.org