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## Globalization, Modernity and Migration: The Changing Visage of Social Imagination

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### ABSTRACT

In this article, I assert that the recent phenomenon of migration is one apparent and fundamental process that shapes human communities, transforming cultural variation, and distorts the constructs of distance and space. The boundaries of nation-states and identities are constantly being challenged, restructured and interrogated and the trends of modernity and globalization, new ways of projecting feelings and diffusing cultures among displaced communities are produced. The article looks for the new stories that are produced with this vibrant intersection of globalization, modernity and migration. In particular, I focus on the distinct Sikh migrant community in the Philippines: how they have evolved, how the forces of globalization have pervaded their lifestyle and how they have utilized the benefits of recent trends of modernity to survive life beyond India's borders. I maintain that Sikh migrants choose to stay in the Philippines because they have produced a simulation of life in their home country albeit with perceptible deviations. This transplanted community utilized the benefits of globalization and modernity to modify the limited space they occupy to re-create their homeland and therefore India has been easier to "imagine," "visualize" and "experience."

### Keywords

migration, Sikh migration, Philippines, globalization

### Introduction

It should take only the merest observance to see that the recent process of migration within the intricate structures of modernity and globalization has extensively been more dynamic, comprehensive and complicated. With the trend of technological advancements and the opening of national economies to global trade, population movement also escalated—continuously shaping various communities, strengthening cultural exchanges, and opening a multiplicity of arena for human relations. Time, distance and space appear to be negligible and are not anymore regarded as concrete barriers or hindrance for social, political, economic and cultural relations. Ideas, goods, and people are easily transported from one destination to another. As the process of migration remains unrelenting, nations and states cease to be the area of interest. As migrant communities emerged all around the globe, crevices in the bounds of area studies are also produced.

Though migration or population movement is not a novel concept, the current trend of globalization potentially paves the way for the emergence of new subjects, new constructs and new approaches in examining the phenomenon of migration. As modernity and globalization manifest, we see a disruption or ambiguity of boundaries of nation-states and national identities: migration is, more than ever, swiftly rising, breaking postcolonial margins of nation-states, and carving new terrains of cultural transactions. This context gets further complication as new ways of projecting feelings; envisioning ideals and diffusing culture are produced within the very structure of migrant communities. Ergo, new stories and subjects are possible. These stories and subjects are outside and unbounded by nation-states, impelled by the increasing diversity and density brought about by the forces of heightened mobility.

In the face of this global phenomenon, the need to (re)define, (re)examine, and (re)formulate subjects inexorably require new methodology and framework. There is compelling need to interrogate the legitimacy of nation-states and identities, to look beyond the traditional subject of national histories and to identify new stories of social and cultural exchanges in the midst of modernity and globalization. Thus the objective of this article is to explore how the trend of modernity and globalization affect migrant community—whose narrative is beyond the frontiers of their homeland and seemingly absent in the receiving country's national history. Such is the case of Sikh migrants in the Philippines.

When one walks along the streets of Manila, it is not uncommon to catch sight of one or two Sikhs mounted on a scooter or motorcycle. They constitute less than one percent of the country's total population but the Sikhs are highly noticeable because of their distinctive Indian physical appearance and attire.<sup>1</sup> The image of a Sikh male is usually a dark-skinned, bearded, and turban-wearing man while a female Sikh is typically conceived of as a woman bearing the same Indian features, with *bindis* on her forehead and wearing a colorful sari. Known to most Filipinos as *Bumbay*,<sup>2</sup> the Sikhs are traditionally and generally identified as either money lenders or peddlers.

As money lenders, they provide small credit to common people like market vendors, street peddlers and farmers without any collateral but on exorbitant interest amounting to twenty percent (thus the term five-six).<sup>3</sup> As peddlers, the Sikhs usually go from house to house carrying their merchandise, such as mosquito nets, clothes and umbrellas, on their heads, which they would sell on installment basis.<sup>4</sup>

Although all Indians in the Philippines are collectively known as *Bumbay*, the surrogate name directs aptly to the Sikhs – their money lending business, their long beards and the turbans they wear. During several interviews, Filipinos were questioned regarding their familiarity with the Indians. Their answers reveal that they imagine an Indian, the *Bumbay*, based on the image of a Sikh.<sup>5</sup>

The tag, though, is not always used as a term of endearment. For as long as one can remember, Filipino elders have been using the term *Bumbay* to frighten their children to behave well by being told that if

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1. In 2000, there were only 34,955 Indians in the Philippines based on the statistical data of the National Statistics Office.
  2. The term *Bumbay* has a derogatory allusion and it refers not only to all Indians but also to Pakistanis, Turks and even Arabs. See Ofelia Angangco, "The Indian Community in the Philippines" (M.A. thesis, University of the Philippines Diliman, 1956).
  3. Five-six is also used sometimes by Filipinos to refer directly to Indians regardless if they are money lenders or not. In other words, the label, like the term *Bumbay*, has been used to stereotype Indians.
  4. The view that Sikhs are peddlers has been traditionally preserved in the memory of Filipinos. It was in the 1950s, that Indians were vigorously and patiently peddling various products along the streets of major cities in the Philippines. To date, though, peddling is not anymore a major livelihood among the Sikhs.
  5. Although Indian Hindus and Sikhs have the same facial and physical features, the Sikhs (not the Hindus) are the ones who are engaged in money lending and peddling, they wore long beards and turbans and rode motorcycles.

they did not behave or do what they were supposed to do, “*the Bumbay will get you.*” That depiction of the *Bumbay* as some sort of an ogre that kidnaps children is still partly to blame for even today, the image of a Sikh on a motorcycle infuse fear and alarm for some locals, particularly to children.

Despite the preconceived notions of the locals, the Sikhs have managed to establish their own separate community and cultivated cordial relationship with Filipinos, speaking fluent Filipino and other local languages, eating Filipino foods and watching local *telenovelas* and movies. Sikhs were able to establish various businesses, garment factories and retail stores of Indian goods and products. Others found employment in local companies and are even married to Filipinas, their children studied in local colleges and universities maintaining Indian culture and traditions and most notably, they have founded Sikh Temples in various parts of the predominantly Catholic country. On the whole, the Sikhs were able to adapt to the local culture, maintain their customs, language and religion, and endure the strains of living in a land far from the country they might still call home.

The present study is a forthright attempt to give an overview of Sikh migration to the Philippines from 1947, when the province of Punjab, the homeland of the Sikhs, was divided between India and Pakistan, up to 2000. It explores the factors that motivated the Sikhs to move out of India and settle in the Philippines. Furthermore, it evaluates how the Sikhs respond to the local culture and traditions and how they deal with the impediments of migrant life in the country, particularly their economic and religious life. It delves into the processes of how the Sikhs transmit as well as maintain their culture and how modernity and globalization affect not only their decisions to stay but the dynamics of their adaptations to migrant life as well.

I assert that the social and economic conditions in Punjab after the partition of India and Pakistan motivated the Sikhs to transcend borders. The moment migrants reached Philippines, the survival instincts of the Sikhs triggered them to cope with the indigenous Filipino culture, producing a simulation of life in their native soil notwithstanding visible inevitable digressions. They utilized the benefits of globalization and modernity to modify the limited space they occupy to transplant “*India*” within the Philippines. From the Indian specialty stores to the Sikh Temple they built, the food they eat, songs they patronize and clothes they wear, the Sikhs reinforce Indian culture and re-created Indian life in the

country. Throughout their long history of residing in the Philippines, the Sikh community managed to uphold the most vital aspects/necessities of life back in India, acquired economic stability and restructured their new life notwithstanding physical and geographic dislocations, and, for this reason, they opted to remain in a country far away from the peripheries of their own home.

As the author intended the research design to be mainly exploratory, the paper is segmented into the following parts: a). survey of the pre-colonial to colonial link between India and the Philippines, b). nature and causes of Sikh migration to the Philippines, c). economic life of the Sikhs in the country, d). perpetuation of their religious life, e). social and cultural adaptations of the Sikhs as well as their strategies to transmit their distinctive culture among younger generations and their relationships with the Filipinos.

### **Prologue to Sikh migration: Contact between India and the Philippines from the Pre-Colonial to Colonial Period**

Indian migration is a fairly new phenomenon but India's cultural influences permeated the Philippines long before the advent of Spanish colonization of the country. Juan R. Francisco asserts that Indian customs possibly penetrated the country between the ninth to eleventh centuries up until the coming of the Spaniards.<sup>6</sup> He further argues that there was no direct contact between the natives of the two countries however Indian culture was brought to the country by the Hinduized and Islamized Malays and Indonesians.<sup>7</sup> His postulation was based on Sanskrit derivatives found in Philippine languages as well as archeological artifacts discovered in the country. Four Old Malay scripts that were found in Northern Sumatra and in an island named Bangka and one Old Javanese script called the Harinjing Stele A that was obtained in Eastern Java, all contained 120 Sanskrit words out of which, not less than 18 words are present in Philippine languages.<sup>8</sup> Based on the dates of the Old

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6. Juan R. Francisco is a leading Filipino Indologist who surveyed pre-colonial contact between India and the Philippines.
  7. Juan R. Francisco. *The Philippines and India: Essays in Ancient Cultural Relations* (Manila: National Bookstore, 1971), 7-8.
  8. Examples: antara (Sans. Interval of time) – antala (Tag. delay); tyaga (Sans. sacrifice) – tiyaga (Tag. sacrificing); Devata (Sans. divinity) – diwata (Tag. spirits); mantra (Sans. “formula”) – namtala (Pamp. psalms); suklapaska (Sans. Crescent moon) – sukla (Bis. White, silk thread).

Malay inscriptions (682–686 AD) and the Old Javanese script (804 AD), Francisco presupposes that Sanskrit words penetrated the Philippines through a cultural diffusion or drift from the 900–1100 AD.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, archaeological finds in the country such as the Lokesvara from Cebu, the Golden Garuda from Brookes Point, Palawan, the Golden Image of Agusan, and the Buddhist medallion from Calatagan, Batangas, further substantiate the infiltration of Indian influences in the Philippines. Based on their physical attributes, these artifacts presumably arrived in the Philippines between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. Francisco asserts that Sanskrit words penetrated the country before the arrival of the artifacts at a time when the Sri Vijayan Empire was at its highest peak in terms of cultural achievement and was indubitably on its way to decline.<sup>10</sup>

Although there is evidence of pre-colonial drift of Indian culture to the Philippines, Indian migration to the country before Spanish colonial period was rather insignificant if not non-existent at all. Since the Spanish *conquistadores* led by Fernando Magellan reached the *Las Islas Phelipinas* in 1521, to the formalization of the colonial framework in 1572 by *Adelantado* Miguel Lopez de Legaspi in 1572, up until the early part of the eighteenth century, there was no known Indian community in Manila.<sup>11</sup>

While the country was under Spanish colonial government, trade and contact with other European countries was restricted by the Spaniards to thwart any potential threat to their rule. The only external trade and commercial connection of the Philippine was with Spain and Mexico.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, at about the same period of the Spanish colonization of the country, India already harbored various European merchants and traders within its ports. Among them, the British eventually gained hegemony and as the longstanding enmity between Spain and Britain prevailed in the 1700s, the economic and diplomatic barrier between the Spanish Philippines and British India seemed even more impregnable—an obstruction that the British East India Company attempted to break

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9. Francisco, *The Philippines and India*, 10–12.

10. Francisco, *The Philippines and India*, 14–16.

11. Preliminary survey of archival sources and Spanish accounts shows no data on the number of foreign settlers of Indian descent.

12. Before 1834, the Philippines was close to international trade. The Spanish Crown only allowed the Galleon Trade, or the Manila-Acapulco Galleon Trade to facilitate the transportation of goods while direct trade with Spain was vested with the Royal Philippine Company.

down incessantly.

The advent of the earliest Indians in Manila during the colonial period was in actuality a result of British merchants and traders' series of attempts to forge formal commercial activities in Manila. In 1644, the British East India Company dispatched the *Seahorse*, a cargo ship carrying cotton piece-goods amounting to 110,000 mahmudis to the Philippines.<sup>13</sup> When the ship arrived in Manila, British merchants were received with great suspicion. Their request for the landing and sale of their merchandise was rejected by Governor General Sebastian Hurtado several times, to the dismay of the British who traveled all the way from Madras.<sup>14</sup> Hurtados reasoned that his decision was due to the fact that the British had not brought iron or saltpeter for the Spanish government in Manila. After three appeals to the Spanish Governor General, the British were finally given the permission to unload their ship's cargo.<sup>15</sup> This encounter, though exhausting and risky on the part of the British have in fact, paved the way for the beginning of a clandestine trade between the British free merchants in Madras and East India Company and the Spanish colonial government in Manila, which subsequently came to be known as the "Manilha Trade."<sup>16</sup>

In January, 1647, the English ambassador in Madrid petitioned to the Spanish Council of State to extend trading rights to the British in Manila but the proposal was never given a positive response.<sup>17</sup> Indomitable with their commercial interests in the Philippines, British merchants were forced to utilize several strategies in their subsequent shipments to Manila. One of their tactics was to load their cargoes on ships and vessels owned by Hindus, Muslims, Armenians and Parsis since trade in Manila was only open for Asians. Other times, they simply relegate their goods to wealthy Indian merchants who acted as dummies or "middle man."<sup>18</sup> Despite the fact that the Indians were relegated to the background of the "Manilha Trade," it still served as short break for Indians to reach the Philippines. However, during this period, there was little stimulus for

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13. Serafin Quiasion, *English Country Trade in the Philippines 1644-1764* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1966) 6-7.

14. Quiasion, *English Country Trade*.

15. Quiasion, *English Country Trade*, 8-10.

16. Quiasion, *English Country Trade*.

17. Quiasion, *English Country Trade*, 17.

18. Quiasion, *English Country Trade*, 41-43.



the influx as well as settling of Indians to the country.

In 1762, when Manila was captured under the ephemeral British rule, some 600 Indian soldiers or *sepoys* reached the Philippines.<sup>19</sup> They formed a contingent of the British military forces under Admiral Samuel Cornish and General William Draper that led the attack against the Spanish-ruled Philippines.<sup>20</sup> Upon the surrender of the Spanish colonial government in Manila, British soldiers and Indian *sepoys* conducted military expeditions to the fringes of Manila like the Southern Luzon and the Visayan region.<sup>21</sup>

It was a short lived encounter between the Indians and the Filipinos, for by 1764, the war was ended and the British colonial forces retreated and left the Philippines to the hands of the Spaniards. Some of the Indian *sepoys* managed to break away from the British and settled in a barangay named Dayap in Cainta.<sup>22</sup> They married local women and were eventually baptized as Christians. Their descendants were said to have retained the physical distinctiveness of their Indian ancestry and remained living close to one another and for that reason, Cainta was acknowledged as “Little India” as early as the 1950s.<sup>23</sup>

At this juncture, it should be noted that, it is rather difficult to ascertain the religious background of the Indians who settled in the islands during that period. The *sepoys* were simply listed as “morenos” in the old church records, not as Sikh or Hindu.<sup>24</sup> One author supposed that those were in fact Tamils from Southern India. Furthermore, such movement of Indian *sepoys* to the Philippines can be considered more of a brief and coincidental encounter than premeditated migration. It was not even the advent of Indian migration since it caused no subsequent influx of either Sikh or Hindu Indians to the Philippines.

At the turn of the century, Indian migration still remained slow. In

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19. Tarlochan Kaur Pabla, *The Punjabi Indian Family in Manila* (Manila: Centro Escolar University Research and Development Center, 1986), 6; and Rye, “The Indian Community,” 712–713; Angangco, “Indian Community in the Philippines,” 8–9.

20. Pabla, *The Punjabi Indian Family in Manila*, 6.

21. Pabla, *The Punjabi Indian Family in Manila*.

22. Some *sepoys* were said to have reached even some parts of Southern Luzon and the Visayas.

23. *Ibid.*; Rye, “The Indian Community,” 715–716; “Little India” in *Sunday Times Magazine* (7 June 1953), 10.

24. Angangco, 8.

fact, there were only 241 Indians in the Philippines in 1903.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless during this period, the earliest Sikhs arrived to the Philippines. They were indentured soldiers by the British to help them fight an armed conflict against the Chinese but some of them opted to move to the Philippines and work as night watchmen.<sup>26</sup> They usually supplemented their meager income by selling goods such as textiles, household appliances, umbrellas and mosquito nets.<sup>27</sup> In the long run, the Sikh watchmen, through prudence and hard work, were able to accumulate small capital and started investing. They were able to establish their own stores.

During this time almost all Sikh migrants were males. They usually rented houses with in Paco, Sta. Cruz and Malate, Binondo, Sampaloc and Quiapo in Manila and lived disjointedly since they had no opportunity to gather around as a distinct community. They had no organization and there was no Indian temple in the Philippines where they could have at least maintained close contact with other Sikhs. However, in 1929, a copy of the *Guru Granth*, the holy book of Sikhs, was brought to the Philippines.<sup>28</sup> This event marked the turning point in the history of Sikh as well as Hindu migrants in the country because the arrival of the *Guru Granth* gave the impetus for the Sikh community in Manila finally concerted their efforts to establish a temple, where regular religious services would be conducted, and the Khalsa Diwan, the first religious organization of Sikhs in the Philippines.<sup>29</sup> The construction of the first *gurdwara* or temple was a united endeavor by the Sikhs and Hindus who both mobilized their resources and avidly supported the construction of the first Sikh temple in the Philippines.

In 1932, the construction of the *gurdwara* along Isaac Peral Street in Paco, Manila was finished. This event marked a decisive moment in the history of the Indian community in the Philippines because the Sikh Temple itself finally institutionalized or legitimized, symbolically the Indian community in the Philippines. Although the foundation of the temple was initiated by the Sikhs, it eventually became an arena not only for religious activities and the perpetuation of their traditions and

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25. U.S. Bureau of Census, *Census of the Philippine Islands Taken Under the Direction of the Philippine Commission in the Year 1903* (Washington: United States Bureau of Census, 1905).

26. Pabla, "The Punjabi Family in Manila," 6 and 8.

27. Rye, "The Indian Community in the Philippines," 716.

28. Rye, "The Indian Community in the Philippines," 733.

29. Rye, "The Indian Community in the Philippines," 733-735.

practices but also for social interaction among the Indians. For both the Hindus and the Sikhs, the temple serves as a unifying force for all Indians in the Philippines.

Nonetheless, despite the establishment of the Sikh temple in Manila, Sikh migration to the Philippines remained low and insignificant. In the 1930s, there were only about 250 Sikh migrants in the Philippines and in 1939, their number increased to approximately 457.<sup>30</sup>

### After the Great Partition, the saga begins

Sikh migration to the Philippines eventually gained ephemeral force after the partition of India and Pakistan. It was the year 1947 that sealed the fate of the Sikhs and their homeland. When news about the partition spread, the Sikhs in Punjab clamored for the establishment of a separate state but their demand was simply denied. Lying along the Radcliffe Line,<sup>31</sup> Punjab was divided into two: East Punjab, which became a part of India; and West Punjab, which was annexed by Pakistan.<sup>32</sup>

Though confused and terrified of the consequences of the partition of Punjab and of what might happen to them in India or Pakistan, the Sikhs had to make a decision. The partition line was fixed, their homeland was divided and they had to choose whether they would go to the Muslim-controlled Pakistan or the Hindu-dominated India.<sup>33</sup>

In due course, the Sikhs decided to go with India despite the fact that it was to Pakistan that a larger fraction of the Sikh homeland was given.<sup>34</sup> Many Sikhs were compelled to leave their homes and businesses and relocate in other parts of India. They were distressed and uncertain of their future as refugees. In some cases, those displaced were simply forced to move to other countries where they could escape the adversities of life in Punjab. As they look for better opportunities abroad, the Sikhs found their way to the Philippines and confronted their new life as migrants in the country's capital—Manila. In 1952, Indian migrants rose

30. Rye, "The Indian Community in the Philippines," 717.

31. The Radcliffe Line determined the boundaries between India and the newly created state of Pakistan.

32. Singh, *A History of Sikhs*, 259; and Thapan, "Tradition, Change and Identity," 101.

33. Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 105–109; and Vimal Athi, interview by author, notes, Manila, 23 February 2008.

34. Singh, *A History of Sikhs*, 259–260.

to 1,535, approximately three-fifths of which were Sikhs.<sup>35</sup> In 1967, the number Indians barely increased to 1,640, in 1982 it increased to 2,033 and in 1990 it rose to 4,129. At the turn of the century, the strength of the Indian community in the Philippines mounted to 34,955.<sup>36</sup>

From the data presented it is apparent that the Indian community rose slowly but steadily after India's independence in 1947. From 1990 to 2000, it is also interesting to point out that Indian population escalated rapidly. As aforementioned, statistical data on Indian migrants does not distinguish the Sikhs from the Hindus, but based on the accounts of the Sikhs themselves, they outnumber the Hindus in the country—60% are Sikhs from Punjab and 40% are Hindus from Sindh. From this estimate, we can assume that in 2000, there were about 23,300 Sikhs all around the country and about half this number resides in Manila and its surrounding areas.<sup>37</sup>

Interestingly, more than the immediate impacts of the partition, the lingering consequences of the subjugation of Punjab to two distinct governments further intensified the impetus for out-migration. During the course of the author's interviews with more than fifty Sikh migrants in the Philippines, the perennial economic crisis in Punjab forced many of them to move to other countries. Contrary to the nature of Hindu or Sindh migration, composed of merchants and shopkeepers, the Sikhs are commonly farmers and brick-makers back in their homeland. Many of them could not even support their families with their meager income.

I was a farmer in India. Life [there] was very hard.... I was told to move by my friends and relatives. My brothers and cousins live here [in the Philippines].<sup>38</sup>

Harwinder Singh relates that had no other choice but to find a more profitable livelihood abroad. His story is shared by many other Sikhs who had families in the Philippines and were encouraged to work in the country. They believe that though life was uncertain in a new land, with prudence and hard work, they will be able to live a more decent life here. According to them, there were more opportunities in the Philippines compared to India. Some of them, despite acquiring college degree

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35. Census of the Philippine Islands.

36. Census of the Philippine Islands.

37. Rye, "The Indian Community in the Philippines," 719; interview by the author and Census of the Philippine Islands.

38. Interview with Harwinder Singh, supervised by author.

found it very difficult to look for a stable job in Punjab. With their families to support, Sikhs, usually males, decided to try their luck in the Philippines.

***Kulambo, Payong at Pautang: The economic life of Sikh migrants in the Philippines***<sup>39</sup>

In the light of the economic motivations for Sikh migration to the Philippines, it is rather central to our understanding of them to look into struggles of Sikhs to attain financial stability in the country. As aforementioned, there are two major Indian migrant groups in Manila, the Hindus and the Sikhs. While the Hindus are mostly merchants from the province of the Sindh, in Pakistan, the Sikhs were traditionally farmers, brick layers and pottery makers from the fertile agricultural region of Punjab in northern India. Furthermore, it is difficult to identify the precise date of arrival of the earliest Sikh migrants in the Manila subsequent to the British Occupation in 1762. The earliest Sikh migrants who came to the Philippines were in fact soldiers of the British Army stationed in Hong Kong. They sailed to Manila to escape their grueling tasks under the British forces in the early 1920s.<sup>40</sup>

In the country's capital, the Sikhs were able to find work as security guards in American military facilities.<sup>41</sup> Known to the natives as *serenos*, the Sikh watchmen were highly regarded for being efficient and hard-working. During this time almost all Sikh migrants in Manila were males. They usually rented houses with in Paco, Sta. Cruz and Malate, Binondo, Sampaloc and Quiapo and lived disjointedly since they had no opportunity to gather around as a distinct community.<sup>42</sup> They had no organization and there was no Sikh temple within Manila where they could have at least maintained close contact with other Sikhs.

The Sikh watchmen usually supplemented their meager income by peddling goods.<sup>43</sup> By the early 1950s, peddling became one of the main means of livelihood of the Sikhs in Manila. The peddlers go from house to house within the margins of Manila, sometimes on a motorcycle, car-

39. Literally, Mosquito net, Umbrella and Micro-Financing: The Economic Life of Sikhs in the Philippines.

40. Pabla, *The Punjabi Indian Family in Manila*, 6.

41. About this time, the Philippines was under the tutelage of the United States of America.

42. Rye, "The Indian Community in the Philippines," 725.

43. Rye, "The Indian Community in the Philippines," 716.

rying his merchandise which includes clothes, appliances, umbrellas and mosquito nets. For the locals, it was very convenient to purchase from the Sikhs not only because they were able to get their orders promptly but more importantly because they could pay on installment basis.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the Sikh peddler formed amiable relations with his customers since he doesn't force his clients to pay if they don't have money. The natives could simply ask the Sikh to come back in another day and the latter would not mind going back and forth to his clients' houses as long as he recovers his investments plus the interest.

At this point, it is also necessary to point out that when the Sikhs ventured into peddling, it was not at all easy for them. Foremost of all, they forced themselves to learn the local language since it is the medium of their business transaction. Determined to make a living in the country, the Sikhs slowly learned to speak Tagalog through rigorous efforts. They constantly and politely asked the locals to repeat and explain the meaning of words that they don't understand. One interviewee recalled how his Filipino friends would laugh at him at any mispronounced or misused word. Nevertheless, he did not mind the humiliation. According to him, a good grasp of the language is vital to their livelihood; hence, he should learn it no matter what. Some Sikhs learned the language through reading Tagalog comic books and watching Filipino films.<sup>45</sup>

Another interviewee, a "first-timer" Sikh migrant, related to the author that he had to learn the language by reading and studying rigorously for two months, secluded in his cousin's room. He did not leave the house, he continued, and just focused on preparing himself with facing his new job and new clients. Other Sikhs who had previous connections in the country, for example, their fathers, uncles or brothers were already settled there, found it easier to break the language barrier as they were assisted by their relatives to almost everywhere they go.

Moreover, the Sikhs also had to overcome his feeling of isolation in a foreign land and endure pranks and jokes of the people. The Sikh's image as a tall, dark-skinned man, with long beard and a turban coupled with the "bizarre" way he speaks the local language sets him apart from the natives, hence, he was looked upon as odd and a "weirdo." Simply, a Sikh had to bear not only the disparity between Indian culture and Philippine culture, he also had to suffer and survive traumatic encounters he had

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44. Interview by the author.

45. Surinder Jit Singh, interview by the author, notes, 13 July 2008, Manila.

with the natives just so he can establish commercial relations with the natives and make a living in the Philippines for his family in India.<sup>46</sup>

*Mababait naman ang mga Pilipino. May iba lang na makitid ang pananaw. Tinatawag nila kaming Bumbay at pinagtatawanan. Minsan, pag may mga bata, yung anak nga mga suki ko, o yung mga batang naglalaro lang sa kalsada, na sumisigaw ng Bumbay, talagang pinapaliwanag ko sa kanila na okay lang na tawagin akong Bumbay, pero kailangan may paggalang, Kuya Bumbay o Mamang Bumbay na lang sabi ko.*<sup>47</sup>

While the Sindhis maintained their own shops and offices in Escolta and Quiapo and had little interaction with the natives, the Sikhs permeated the social stratum in Manila as they attempt to forge social as well as economic relations with people from grassroots level. Between the two main groups of Indians in the Philippines, the Sikhs appear to have closer relation and interaction with the natives owing to their economic activity in the country not only as peddlers, but more importantly as money lenders. Along with peddling the Sikhs also ventured into money lending business which came to be known as “five-six.”

At some point in peddling their products, the Sikhs encountered various problems from their clientele, who were mostly market vendors, side-walk or street peddlers, store owners, and farmers. Some of their clients came up to them to ask for loans, for example, to pay their suppliers of fish. To maintain cordial relation with the locals and at the same to take advantage of the opportunity to earn a little extra money, Sikh peddlers provided the natives with small credit with an interest of twenty percent.

In spite of the excessive interest demanded by the Sikh, the locals still choose to borrow money from “five-six” because no collateral is needed, no contract or written agreement is required, they can borrow money from the Sikh anytime they need it, and most importantly because the Sikh is very lenient when it comes to the terms of payment.<sup>48</sup> The locals can pay once or twice every week and the Sikh money lender makes paying very convenient for them since he visits them right at their houses.

46. Rye, “The Indian Community in the Philippines,” 732.

47. “Filipinos are generally very kind. Naturally, there are some who are narrow-minded. They sometimes call us Bumbay and they laugh at us. Sometimes, the children of my clients of those who play in the streets, calls us out, shouting “Bumbay!” I see to it that I explain to them that I don’t mind being called bumbay as long as they show some respect, so I ask them to call me Brother Bumbay or Sir Bumbay.”

48. Interview by author.

Furthermore, the locals also find the Sikhs very affable and easy to deal with. They don't coerce people who failed to pay their debts immediately, they don't intimidate the locals who borrow money from them and they don't even mind going back and forth to their clientele's house as long as they recuperate their money.

From the interviews conducted among the locals, many of them responded that they opted to borrow from the Sikhs because they were very kind, nothing like some Filipinos, who, according to them, were unsympathetic and indifferent. This culture of five-six is not altogether perceived of as upright. Some Filipinos compare the act of borrowing and lending at a lofty interest to a sinful act as it is apparently immoral that one gains money from the neediness or penury of another. Nonetheless, beyond the moral framework attached to five-six, it is still a principal and essential source of capital or credit among the locals. In the course of the Sikhs' relations with their local clientele, the culture of five-six became an inherent part of their life as migrants in the Philippines as well as formidable avenue for the interface and communication between the Sikhs and Filipinos.

In the 1950s, Sikh money lenders were able to accumulate substantial amount of money and were able to establish their own retail stores in Manila, particularly in Escolta and Quiapo area. In 1954, the Philippine Government issued the Nationalization of Retail Trade Act which prohibited foreign nationals to engage in retail trading.<sup>49</sup> Although the law, which was passed by President Ramon Magsaysay, was not directed to the Sikhs, some of them were still affected. Some Sikh retail store owners were forced to move out of Manila and go to the provinces where the implementation of the law is more relaxed and where there was less competition in business. This process indirectly pushed Sikhs to move from the congested urban centers to rural areas, further dispersing and expanding their presence throughout the country. Other Sikhs even managed to avoid the law by marrying Filipinas and consigning their properties under the name of their wives.<sup>50</sup>

From the 1950s onwards, some Sikhs in Manila continued their money lending business while some also ventured into other occupations. Some have already established restaurants specializing in Indian cuisine like the New Delhi Restaurant along Quirino Avenue corner Osmeña Boul-

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49. Rye, "The Indian Community in the Philippines," 721.

50. Interview by author.



evard. Others are employed in local and multi-national companies located in and out of Manila. At the turn of the century, some members of the Sikh community have established various Indian specialty stores along United Nations Avenue in Ermita. Assad, the earliest Indian specialty store near the Sikh Temple in Manila, was established by a Muslim in 1990. It was subsequently followed by several other Indian specialty stores and outlets owned by Sikh merchants such as Uncle Ed's and Little India.

From being *serenos*, they ventured to peddle and then to money lending and slowly they fortified their economic standing in Manila. From being transient drifters who had practically nothing to lose as they simply wanted to try their luck, the Sikhs, have relied on hard work, determination and perseverance and have eventually sowed firm economic grounding in the Philippines.

### **Perpetuating Sikhism: Gurudwara, rituals and religious life**

Central to the formation of Sikh community in the country is the perpetuation of their religion. At the onset of their arrival in the country, the Sikhs faced uncertainty as they found themselves in predominantly Catholic country. Prior to the establishment of the Sikh Temple in Manila, the Sikhs had very minimal interaction among themselves. They had no social organization and there was no Indian temple in Manila where they could have at least maintained close contact with other Sikhs. There were accounts, however, of rented apartments in Manila that were utilized by the early Sikh migrants as places of worship. They would gather together once in awhile to pray, celebrate important festivities and of course, to preserve communication intact among them. It was difficult though, since religious meetings were not held regularly.

However, in 1929, a copy of the Guru Granth was brought to the Philippines - an event that marked a turning point in the history of Sikh as well as Hindu migrants in the country as it serve as the impetus for the Sikh community in Manila to finally concert their efforts to establish a temple, where regular religious services would be conducted, and to organize the Khalsa Diwan, the religious organization of Sikhs.<sup>51</sup>

The planning, construction and the supervision of the Gurudwara was a united endeavor by the Sikhs and Hindus who both mobilized their resources and avidly supported the construction of the first Sikh tem-

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51. Rye, "The Indian Community in the Philippines," 733-735.

ple in the Philippines. In 1932, the construction of the *Gurudwara* along Isaac Peral Street in Paco, Manila was finished.<sup>52</sup> This event marked a decisive moment in the history of the Indian community in the Philippines because the Sikh Temple finally institutionalized or legitimized the Indian community in the Philippines. Although the foundation of the temple was initiated by the Sikhs, it eventually became an arena not only for religious activities and the perpetuation of their traditions and practices but also for social interaction among the Indians. For both the Hindus and the Sikhs, the temple serves as a unifying force for all Indians in Manila.

The Sikh Temple in Manila is a two-story building with a huge hall, kitchen, guest rooms and a stage at the ground floor. Before going up the second floor, one should leave his shoes and wash his hands in a faucet located near the gate of the temple. The second floor is a large prayer room where the *Guru Granth* is placed on an elevated platform adorned with flowers and curtains. Also at the second floor is a small conference room where the board of directors of the Khalsa Diwan conducts their meetings and conferences.

As a venue for upholding the principles of Sikhism, the *Gurudwara* serves as a place where a Sikh can seek shelter, food and comfort. As aforementioned, the temple has several guest rooms. These rooms are prepared for the sick and needy members of the community.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, the temple also serves as a place for the *langar* or free kitchen, where free food is served not only to the members of the Sikh community but also to their non-Sikh visitors. The food consists of Indian food such as Indian tea, chapati and curry which are prepared by the wives of the board of directors of the Khalsa Diwan together with some volunteers. The *langar* is an opportune occasion for the members of the community to gather and discuss their concerns both personal and social.

Aside from the *langar*, Sikh weddings and baptisms are also held in the Sikh Temple. A priest is usually the permanent resident of the temple. He performs weddings following the same process as Sikh weddings are conducted back in Punjab. No different from their usual practices in India, Sikh marriages among wealthy families are arranged by the parents. Some Sikhs were asked to go back to India and marry the one whom their parents chose for them before finally settling in the Philip-

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52. Isaac Peral Street is currently named United Nations Avenue.

53. Vimal Athi, interview by author, notes, 23 February 2008, Manila.

pires permanently. Others who married Filipinas found it more practical to marry in the Philippines, which have been made possible subsequent to the erection of the Gurudwara. Although, presence of the priest makes a marriage done in the Philippine legitimate, not all the processes in Punjab are followed. As mentioned, an important deviation would be the selection of a non-Indian or a non-Sikh as a wife. Strictly speaking, a Sikh wedding must follow the a process from finding a match, which is usually arranged by the woman's family as early as birth or upon she finishes secondary or tertiary school. This is followed by the *kurmai* or an engagement—a manner of “reserving” a man for a girl, which includes a ceremonial gift giving to the boy and his family. When the boy's family accepts the gifts, the parents can now arrange for the exact date of the wedding. Two days before marriage, the bride is tasked to undergo a process of purification called as *manya*. These rituals and intricacies are often discarded in the Philippines more significantly when weddings are done between a Sikh and a Filipina.

Another important ritual done inside the Gurudwara, that is continued in the Philippines is the naming of babies based on the Guru Granth. To choose a name for a new-born baby, the Sikh father goes to the temple and consults the Guru Granth while in front of the priest. The *granthi* or the priest opens the holy book and the first letter on the page opened will be received by the father as a revelation of Guru Baba Nanak from which the first letter of the name of baby must be based.

Festivities and celebrations are also done frequently in the Gurudwara, though they are less often than those performed in Punjab. One Sikh interviewee reasoned that the Sikhs in the country, particularly in Manila are very busy that they hardly have sufficient time to facilitate all the rituals, processions and celebrations practiced in India. This is not to say though, that the Sikhs in the Philippines altered their belief system to suit their context. It is a key principle in Sikhism that one needs not to attend or perform all rituals done in the temple, they need not to regularly attend religious services, what is important is their everyday relationship with God. It is therefore not uncommon, to see a Sikh money lender collecting dues from his clientele even on a day of worship.

In spite of this, certain rituals are still done in the Philippines such as the *dorhi* or the celebration for a baby boy. Celebrated every January 13, every family who had a new baby boy gathers together for thanksgiving. They assume responsibility for the langar and they distribute sweets, candies and other delicacies to everyone invited in the temple.

The birthdays of the *gurus* are also commemorated in the Sikh Temple with a service. Diwali, *baisakhi*, among others are also observed in the Philippines. To date, more than twenty Sikh temples are scattered all around the Philippines, which further attests to the growing number of Sikh migrants in the country.

### **Transplanting Sikh lifestyle in Manila: Formation of sites of imagining, visualizing India**

Despite some similarities between the culture of the Philippines and India (which resulted from the pre-colonial cultural drift of Indian practices to the country), early Sikh migrants faced uncertainty as they had to adjust to the local customs and distinctive lifestyle in the country. However, with the recent trends globalization and modernity, it has been easier for the Indians to transmit the aspects of their Indian way of life within the spaces in occupy in the country. From the food they eat, songs they patronize and clothes they wear, Indian migrants reinforce Indian culture and re-created Indian life in the Philippines.

The early Sikh migrants in Manila inevitably encountered minor setbacks as they tried to survive migrant life in Manila. For example, when the Indians arrived in the country, they saw the disparity between their diet and the Filipinos'. Rice is the staple for the Filipinos while the Indian diet typically consists of *chapati* (unleavened bread made out of wheat flour) and vegetables stir fried in spices. Based on the accounts of the community members, the early migrants did not only find it difficult to obtain wheat flour, they also had to make their own *chapati* since there it was not a commonly found local markets and stores.

Sikhs are also used to include Indian spices in almost every dish such as *haldi* (curry) and *masala* (ground black pepper). Some Indian spices are found in stores in Divisoria and Binondo while those which are not found in the country had to be imported from India.<sup>54</sup> Apparently, Sikhs preferred to eat their own traditional dishes even after they have settled in the country but because of the inconveniences in finding some of the ingredients they typically use, they also had to try other alternatives. They also had to try the country's local dishes and in due course, Filipinos dishes such as *sinigang*, *adobo*, *menudo*, and *pinakbet* became common on the table of Sikhs.

They also encountered problems as they secure economic stability in the country. Between the two groups, the Sikhs had more difficulty adjusting. Peddling was not at all easy for the Sikhs, who were tradi-

54. Pabla, *The Punjabi Indian Family in Manila*, 26.

tionally farmers, potters and bricklayers in India. Foremost of all, they forced themselves to learn the local language since it is the medium of their business transaction. Resolute to make a living in the country, they slowly learned to speak Tagalog through rigorous efforts. Through their business transactions, the both Sindhis and Sikhs strived to learn more about the language by chatting with their clients and once they have established rapport, sometimes they would engage in long conversations with them. They also talked and discussed among themselves the words or expressions in the local language which they were not familiar with.<sup>55</sup>

Moreover, the Sikhs also had to overcome his feeling of isolation in a foreign land and endure pranks and jokes of the people. The Sikh's image as a tall, dark-skinned man, with long beard and a turban coupled with the "bizarre" way he speaks the local language sets him apart from the locals, hence, he was looked upon as odd and a "weirdo". For as long as one can remember, Filipino elders have been using the term *Bumbay* to frighten their children to behave well by being told that if they did not behave or do what they were supposed to do, "*the Bumbay will get you.*" Simply, the Sikh migrant had to bear not only the disparity between Indian culture and Philippine culture, he also had to suffer and survive traumatic encounters he had with the locals just so he can establish commercial relations with the locals and make a living in the Philippines for his family in India.<sup>56</sup>

Nevertheless, with the recent trends in globalization and modernity, the Sikh community was able to resolve some of their problems as migrants. Indian spices and ready to eat *chapati* and Indian sweets and delicacies are easily accessible to them now unlike before, Indian songs and movies and are also available at Indian specialty stores. Beside the Sikh Temple, a makeshift store was established to cater to the needs of Indians that are not easily accessible to local shops. They have a wide collection of Bollywood films, Hindi songs and other Indian delicacies and products. With the emergence of Internet and the introduction of new communication devices such as mobile phones, Indians in the Philippines appear to be "nearer" to their homeland in India.

Different from their context before 1990s, the Sikh migrants today have various opportunities and options to "imagine" *India* better. That is to say, globalization and modernity make it even more possible for

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55. Surinder Jit Singh, interview by the author, notes, 13 July 2008, Manila.

56. Rye, "The Indian Community in the Philippines," 732.

them to transplant *India* within the Philippines. It is now easier to “feel” and “experience” *India* without actually returning back to India. Due to the advances in technology, the chasm of time and space seems to be superseded. The latest fashion trend in New Delhi is not unknown even to the Sikhs in the country. News in India reaches Manila in no time at all through the cyber-world, Indians in any province in the Philippines can easily communicate with their relatives in Punjab, Sindh, Bombay, or any other city in India, for that matter through the Internet. Some Indians living in the Philippines occasionally fly back to India for various purposes ranging from the most personal motivations to business *raison d’être*. Again, it is evident that modernity and globalization, to some degree, breach borders and frontiers, paving the way for a thread of transnational continuity to exist.

At this juncture, it is necessary to point out that globalization and modernity make it possible for the Indian community in the Philippines to assert, maintain and transmit their own culture in a landscape far from their own homeland. The Indian community in the Philippines consciously strives to transform or re-create the space they occupy to a replica of their homeland.

As Appadurai suggests,

*those who wish to move, those who have moved, those who wish to return, and those who choose to stay rarely formulate their plans outside the sphere of radio and television, cassettes and videos, newsprint and telephone.*

Shifting to the context in the Philippines, it is of the essence to highlight that modernity, in the form of print media, movies, internet and television, among others, affects not only the survival of Indian community, it also infiltrates their actions, visualizations and more importantly their decision making – their decision to stay in the Philippines.

In the streets of Manila, it is common to see Indians mounted on a scooter or motorcycle. From being transient drifters who merely tried their luck in the country, Sikh migrants proved to be resilient enough. Throughout their long history of survival as migrants, Sikhs have managed to establish their own separate community in the Philippines and cultivated cordial relationship with the locals. They were able to adapt to the local culture, maintain their customs and tradition, and endure the strains of living remote and disjointed from the country they call home.

The presence of Indian grocery stores along United Nations Avenue in Manila, just a stone’s throw away from the Sikh Temple and relatively in

close proximity to the Sikh community in Paco, proves to be a very clear indication of the politics of adaptation of Sikhs to the local setting. These stores foster their visualization and experience of India outside India, of a home that is geographically beyond the boundaries of home. Owing to the relatively speedy transfer of merchandise from all points of the world, Indian products are not only obtainable in India but are present in markets and stores in China, United States or Great Britain.

Similarly, in the Philippines, the mere accessibility and availability of Indian food and condiments supply stores, for example, reinforces the collective imagination of Indians of their “nation” perhaps or the bond that weaves their lives together as migrants. It is even probable that India has been easier to imagine for some of the migrants because of the seemingly effective conduits of trade globalization.

### **From Sojourners to an established migrant community**

In a frenziedly interactive, interconnected and dynamic world, shifting perspectives and shifting paradigms are, more than ever, becoming more and more apparent and momentous. As the world appears to be smaller, more accessible to those who has the means, and people’s imagination of other places is driven, impelled or compelled by various media and products of modernity, knowledge and knowing need new trajectories and new subject.

With the manifest waves of globalization enveloping the world, penetrating even the most “isolated” communities, it is inevitable and thought-provoking to investigate mass migration in an increasingly “boundless” world, from the driving force or motives of moving up to the ways of adapting to the local conditions of a “foreign” country and explore the dynamics of cultural flow as well as the workings of social imagination as an impetus for action.

From the case of the Sikh migrants in the Philippines, it appears that the Sikh migrant community produces continuity, a simulation of their homeland but with perceptible deviations. Nevertheless, taken in a certain light, the invention or creation of their idea of homeland is basically an imagination. It is an imagination fostered, spurred and sensationalized by means of transporting goods, services, structures and ideas from India to the Philippines or from India and all over the world to the Philippines. The globalization of commodities, consumption, and ideas provide the Indian community a distinctive way of imagining not only their natal place but also other worlds.

We see how modernity and globalization permeates localities and change cultural landscapes from the evolution of Sikh migrants from sojourners to an established community. At the onset of their arrival, they had to cope with the various uncertainties of life as migrants. To survive, they had to adjust to the local culture, he had to learn the local language, adjust his diet, endure the stereotype attached to him, and shave his beard, among others.

As Sikh migrants in the country grew in number, the force to establish a separate and distinct Sikh community also intensified. From being transient drifters, migrants attempt to assert their unique culture and traditions in a land far from the boundaries of their homeland. In the course of the evolution of the Sikh community, they were able produce a simulation of life in their home country albeit with perceptible deviations.

The creation of a separate community of Sikhs in the Philippines could not have ensued without the construction of several Sikh temples all around the country. The temple served as the glue that holds Sikhs together. Its role goes beyond the religious function for it also ensured the retention of Indian religious practices and beliefs as well the transmission of Indian culture to the younger generations of Indians. In a strange land, the temple became the loci for the social interaction among the Indians themselves while it ensured the perpetuation of the community's distinct culture and identity. One can construe that the temples built by the Indians themselves is an embodiment of their collective imagination. The temple can be viewed both as a product of the Indian's imagination as well as a structure that reinforces their imagination of their homeland.

I argue that the clearer, more vivid the idea of home beyond the parameters of the host society, the harder it is for the migrant community to take off their traditional clad and the easier it is to imagine home. However, it does not necessarily imply that the less interaction and exchanges between India and Sikh migrants, the easier it is for migrants to deviate from the distinctiveness of their traditions and the harder to imagine home.

It merely emphasizes that the Sikh migrants' effort to re-assert their Indianess, distinct and separate from the ethos of the local community, is influenced by modernity and globalization and their capacity to imagine their home—even this imagination transcends space and time. Today, more than ever, Indian migrant community in the country finds it even easier to modify the limited space they occupy to transplant "*India*" within Manila. From the Indian specialty stores to the food they



eat, songs they patronize and clothes they wear, they reinforce their distinct culture and re-created Indian life in Manila, fostering the Sikhs community's visualization and experience of *India* outside India, of a *home* that is geographically beyond the boundaries of *home*.

Even their senses—of taste, smell, hearing, sight and even touch—are directed towards simulating their desiring, appealing and gratifying experiences of India. From these stores, Sikh migrants can easily access or avail of commodities that are considered *typical* in India but rare or absent in the nearby *sari-sari store* or grocery store. Ostensibly, it is now easier for them to “visualize,” “imagine” and “experience” India albeit some disparities. Throughout their long history of residing in the country, the Sikh community managed to uphold the most vital aspects/necessities of life back in India (perhaps even better) and, for this reason, they opted to remain in a country far beyond the boundaries of their own home.

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