

Religious Responses to Cultural Issues: Sikhism and its Response to Indo-Canadian Gang Violence in the Lower Mainland Area

Harkit Bhandal

LAPS/SOWK 3060

Abstract:

This paper looks at gang prevention initiatives targeting second-generation Punjabi male youth in Surrey, British Columbia. I interview a community activist who co-chairs a community coalition to better understand social work responses to gang violence. This community coalition understands gang violence as male youth's alienation from Sikh religious institutions such as the Gurdwara. Using secondary sources, this paper reveals contradictions amongst first-generation and second-generation Punjabi immigrants about the use of religious responses to solve gang violence. Despite contradicting sentiments, I investigate and critique a specific advocacy response by the community coalition

Thesis:

I argue that gang prevention initiatives in Surrey, British Columbia understand gang violence amongst second-generation Indo-Canadian male youth as a departure from religious institutions like the Gurdwara (Sikh Temple). First-generation and second-generation Punjabi's have contradicting ideas about the value of the Gurdwara in responding to gang violence.

Methodology:

- Using primary research methods: I conduct a semi-structured interview with the Co-Chair of the Community Coalition
- Using Secondary research methods: I use scholarly articles to critique the advocacy response and reveal sites of contradiction amongst first and second generation Punjabi Sikhs

Sites of contradictions:

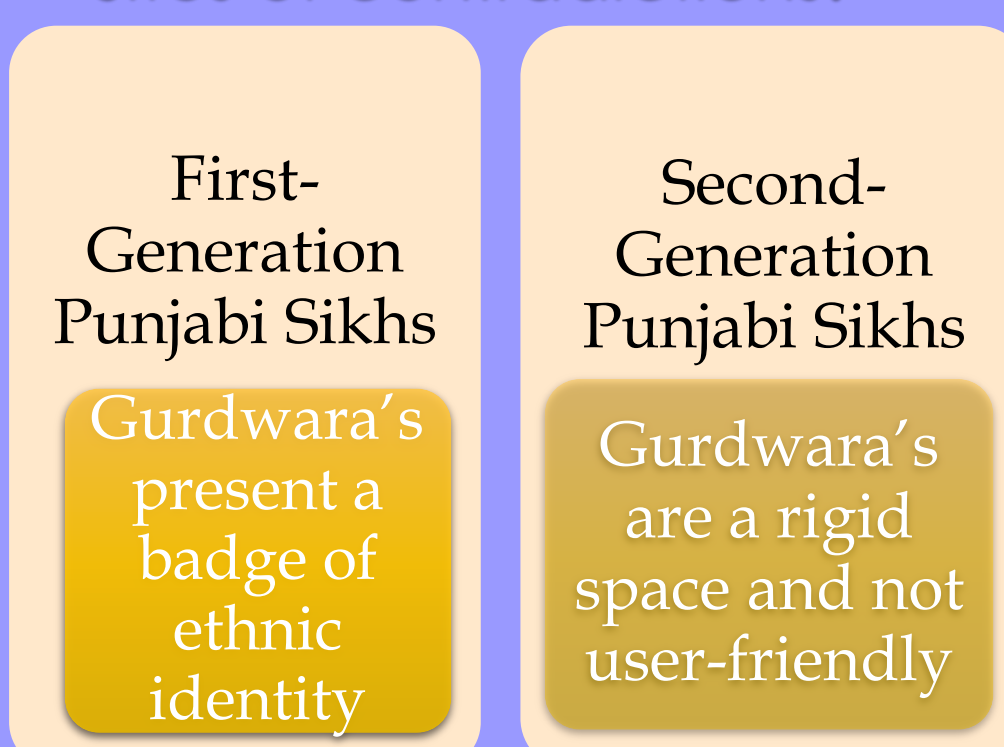
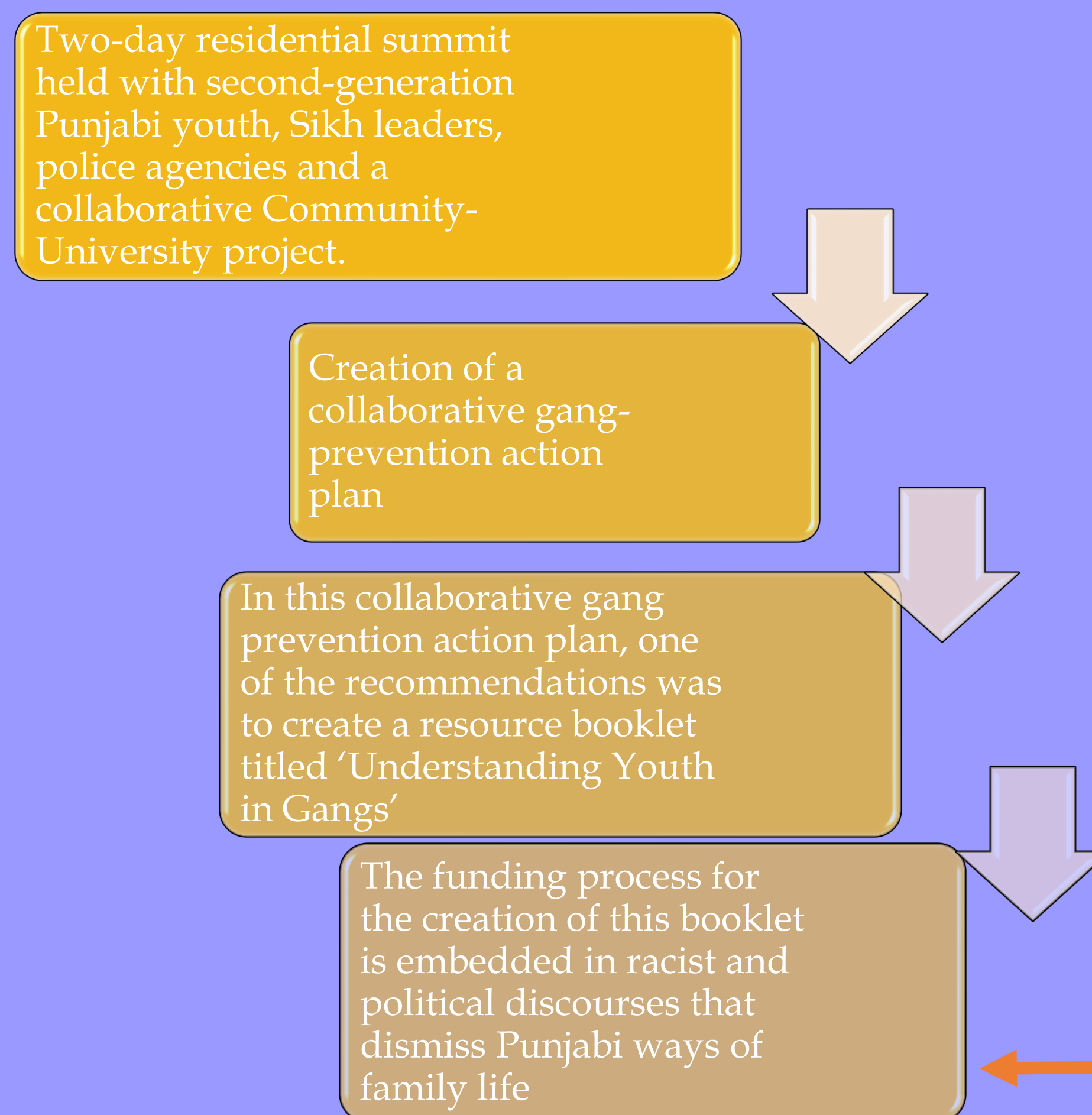


Photo of a Gurdwara (Sri Harmandir Sahib in Amritsar, Punjab captured by [Piyush Kashikar](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Results:

The Advocacy Response:



Implications:

Future Considerations for a culturally appropriate 'Understanding Youth in Gangs' booklet:

- The Indo-Canadian community needs to heal from religious and cultural trauma. The Sikh genocide of 1984 is integral in understanding immigration and settlement and its impact on individual and family life.
- Gang prevention initiatives that are holistic and considers all aspects of and beyond the self.
- The Indo-Canadian community needs to voice their trauma in the face of the Indian nation-state and in the face of Whiteness.

Critique of the 'Understanding Youth in Gangs' booklet:

Critiques	What does this critique suggest?
<p>1) Booklet is published in several languages including Punjabi. This is made possible by Sikh gurdwara's and individual community members.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • However, no disclosure of how the collaborative Community-University research team secured \$1 million dollars in funding. • Co-chair of the coalition states it was the result of 'effective' partnership between the federal government, local Gurdwara's and community members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoidance to talk about funding criteria and political opportunities impacting service delivery can be understood by Healy's (2014) argument that religious organizations depend on government funds. • Thus, services become shaped by funding criteria and obedience to a service contract (Healy, 2014, p.105). Religious-based services have service contracts that refrain them from publicly critiquing government policy.
<p>2) Despite two-day summit with members from the Punjabi and Sikh community, the booklet does not contain culturally appropriate strategies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neoliberalist climate reduces funding allocated towards social programming. Coupled with service contract limitations for religious organizations, the resource booklet's content is unsatisfactory
<p>3) The booklet presents problematic prevention strategies. A prevention strategy example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents should increase their participation in their child's academic career through participation in parent-teacher meetings and school events. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Some instructors host 'Punjabi Evening' nights for youth to express themselves in culturally appropriate ways. This event is inadequately supported by school administration (Sayani, 2010, p.290). ▪ Lack of participation in parent-teacher interviews due to alienation from the school. (Sayani, 2010, p.290). Strategies in the resource booklet are embedded in the concept of 'Whiteness' where the White Anglo-Saxon family is the representational core of how family life should be practiced by others.