

Minority- Majority Relations: Bridging Gaps in Perception

Project Report to Langara Research Committee, 2013

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I wish to thank the Langara Research Committee for granting me \$2000 dollars in research money towards a project on minority- majority relations. I have been granted Ed Leave in January 2012 to work towards this project (which is still a work in progress) for which I have used the funds. The research project is part of a self directed publication that examines the underlying processes that are part of minority – majority relations with a focus on the experiences of Diaspora groups on pressing social and political issues in Canada that have gripped them in the modern world. The book will provide a rare glimpse into some of the issues faced by Diaspora groups in general and more specifically the Sikh Diaspora in Canada. The book also aims to deconstruct a common sense understanding of some of the issues affecting Diaspora groups and to bridge gaps in perceptions through a critical examination of media discourses and representations of minority groups in Canada and their history.

The research funds contributed to writing towards two chapters which were guided by two research questions:

- How do media representations influence identity formation and how are media portrayals of the South Asian Diaspora both deconstructed and resisted?
- How has the Sikh massacre of November 1984 and other atrocities towards Sikhs since 1984, impacted identity formation? What function does memorialisation of Sikh atrocities of 1984 serve for the Diaspora in Canada today?

Funds used for Research Assistance and some Translation work:

- Translation of quotes and key points from Punjabi into English (from press releases and letters) during the 1990's, 2009 (twenty five year commemoration of the Sikh Massacre in Delhi) and the year 2012, of Sikh icons of 1984 in relation to: Sikh identity, effects of modernity and consumerism on identity, struggles and resistance against assimilation into the dominant culture and the continued quest for justice for the victims of 1984.

The translation of these quotes revealed firsthand accounts of the social conditions Sikhs were confronted with in 1984 which are often eclipsed or distorted in some media reports. These accounts are important to provide a critical overview of the existing discourses and representation of Sikhs and their

history. This approach to media critique is informed by Yasmin Jiwani's work titled "Discourses of Denial: Mediations of Race, Gender and Violence."

The translations also provided insight into understanding how the Diaspora in Canada are impacted by their history and how this influences identity formation as citizens of "a" nation.

- Researching of historical facts during the period of the 1990's in Punjab, including eye witness accounts of atrocities by the state during the militant movement. These facts assisted in providing a critique of the media's representation of Sikhs and their association with violence during that time period. The value of these facts lies in the objective of the chapter which aims to "bridge gaps in perception" through inclusion of historical facts.
- Translation from German into English of important quotes of holocaust survivors with respect to language in describing: "Affect," disclosure of meaning in relation to commemoration and symbolic resistance. The use of language and affect are tied into a chapter in the project on commemoration of historical atrocities of Sikhs and identity formation of Canadian Sikhs in relation to this history. The findings from the translations revealed similar modes of disclosure, according to the transcriptions of Sikh widows who survived the 1984 Sikh Massacre in Delhi, India. However, unique and culturally specific use of language (words) in describing experiences of affect was noted.
- Translation from Punjabi into English of two transcriptions of widows who survived the 1984 Deli Massacre.

Cost to visit the Holocaust memorial Museum, Montreal Quebec:

- This visit enabled me to gather information on how the holocaust, as a historical atrocity is represented through artifacts. I also examined how news clippings were displayed to illustrate how the "Jewish" community was dehumanized through language and symbolic associations. This visit was informative and productive for the chapter on memorialisation of Sikh atrocities and to illustrate similar modes of "symbolic" dehumanization applied Sikhs in the Canadian media.

Purchase of Books:

- The purchase of books on and by, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault and other contemporary thinkers contributed to the theoretical significance of the project which aims to provide a theoretical analysis of the findings and social phenomena identified. Of importance in the project are concepts of: Power, violence, discipline and the body, cultural semiotics, identity formation, terrorism and affect to name a few.

The research funding enabled me to interrogate the issue of minority and majority relations and through the research findings, I was able to successfully, incorporate them into two chapters of the book with a more incisive analysis. Furthermore, the facts generated for the project enabled me to prepare and give presentations on the subject.

- May 2012, University of Berkley, California.
- June 2012, Congress, Federation of the Social Sciences and Humanities, Wilfred Laurier University, Kitchener, Waterloo, Ontario.
- Forthcoming, June, 2013, Congress, Federation of the Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Victoria, BC.

Once again, I would like to thank the LRC for supporting this project which is still a work in progress. If there are additional questions regarding the content, please do not hesitate to contact me.