Until recently, there had been relatively little written on the Sikhs outside of Punjab, and that which was available was largely confined to Sikhs in Britain, the United States, and Canada. This situation has changed dramatically over the past two decades or so with research being done on Sikh communities in East and South East Asia, in Australia and New Zealand, in continental Europe, and most recently there has been an initial foray into documenting the Sikh presence in Latin and South America. There have also been numerous volumes dealing with Sikh diaspora, transnationalism, philanthropy, global Sikhism, and the like.

In light of this, one might well ask whether there is a need for yet another volume on the subject. There are at least two reasons for the present collection of essays. First, despite the recent and commendable work that has been done on Sikhs outside of Punjab, the field is still in its infancy. Thus, this volume contributes to this emergent and quickly maturing field of study. Second, there are numerous dimensions of Sikh diasporic and transnational experience that have yet to be identified, documented, and interrogated. Because of this, the essays in this volume investigate various dimensions of Sikh experience and agency from a range of disciplinary approaches. The essays in this volume break new ground and contribute new perspectives on Sikh experience and agency beyond the Punjab.

It would also be prudent to say what this volume is not. First, this volume is not simply migration history. While migration and settlement patterns are undoubtedly important lenses for understanding Sikh diasporic experience, such a focus risks obscuring the pervasive heterogeneity of Sikh experience within a given geographic area as well as Sikh engagement with the predominantly non-Punjabi communities to which Sikhs have migrated. In addition, many diasporic Sikhs were born in their ‘host’ countries. Physical migration is thus not part of their experience. Notwithstanding the above, there are papers in this collection that prioritize migration history, experience, and early settlement. They have been included here as they contribute to otherwise nascent geopolitical areas in Sikh diaspora studies.
Second, this volume is an attempt to move beyond the ‘Sikhs in…’ theme. ‘Sikhs in Britain,’ ‘Sikhs in Canada,’ ‘Sikhs in the United States,’ and more recently ‘Sikhs in Europe’ and ‘Sikhs in Latin America,’ abound. The essays in this volume are sensitive to the plurality of voices and experiences of the diasporic individuals and communities they discuss, regardless of geographical and national boundaries. This is not merely an acknowledgement of the transnational dimension Sikh experiences and narratives, but it is an attempt to recognize the ways in which different Sikhs and Sikh communities have encountered and engaged their new cultural, linguistic, political, economic, racial, contexts while at the same time remaining open to the possibility that ‘hosts’ may encounter and engage differently with different Sikh groups across time. In other words, the experiences of new migrants to Vancouver, British Columbia in the early twentieth century are very different from those of the sangat in Pointe-Saint-Charles, Quebec in recent years. Additionally, the cultural, linguistic, political, economic, and racial environments were, and are, notably different in these two Canadian locales. But, just as there are essays in the volume that prioritize migration, there are also essays that might well be categorized under the ‘Sikhs in…’ rubric. Again, they have been included because they contribute to hitherto un(der)explored dimensions of Sikh diasporic experience.

In attempting to recognize the importance of migration, location, and relations while at the same time not prioritizing one at the expense of others, this volume is not constrained by a single theoretical or methodological framework. Rather, the purpose of the volume is to provide a sense of the highly contextualized and remarkably diversified range of diasporic engagement between Sikhs and Others, and between Sikhs themselves, by broadening the parameters of how Sikhs have engaged their diasporic circumstances. The essays might well be seen as a series of case studies that begin to capture the rich and highly contextualized nature of Sikh experience and agency beyond the Punjab. Perhaps, to borrow a metaphor from Guru Arjan (AG 1429), this collection is a thali: rich, diverse, and plentiful whose various textures, flavours, and colours are to be consumed and savoured.

On a more analytical note, this volume recognizes both the strengths and limitations of established categories that are often used to speak about Sikhs outside of the Punjab: ‘diaspora’, ‘transnationalism’, ‘hybridity’, ‘third culture’, ‘multiculturalism’, just to name a few. Each of these carries its own conceptual limitations and each has been subject to scholarly scrutiny. The appropriation of the category ‘diaspora’ to generalize on