BAND LE GANDARI (TIE UP YOUR BUNDLE):
UNPARTITIONED MEMORY CULTURES

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Introduction

Bankiye Naar!
Young Wife!
Band le gandari te chal mere naal!
Tie up your bundle and come along!

V.S. Naipaul uses Giorgio de Chirico’s painting *The Enigma of Arrival* as a compelling visual metaphor to sum up the migrant’s situation.¹ M.G. Vassanji prefers the image of the homespun gunnysack to tell the story of pre-colonial migrations along ancient trade routes.² Salman Rushdie seeks refuge in the linguistic concept of translation to theorize post-colonial migrancy.³ On the Indian subcontinent, however, the image of the cloth bundle carried by Afghan refugees across the perilous border to Pakistan, functions as a disturbingly familiar signifier of forced migration. Live coverage of fleeing Afghans press a trigger in Partition survivors’ collective memories conjuring images of similar bundles they had clutched all the way on the roads or trains from and to Pakistan. The spirit of pre-national movements within and from South Asia is captured in a popular Punjabi folksong about a young man imploring his wife to bundle up her belongings in a piece of cloth and follow him. Although contemporary immigrants might squeeze their possessions in expensive branded luggage, the bundle continues to function as the strongest visual signifier of displacement and loss of home in the Punjabi diasporic imaginary.⁴ Simultaneously, its indelible imprint on the Punjabi migrant’s collective

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⁴ Though the Punjabi diaspora is commonly defined as Punjabi immigrants settled outside India, I include Punjabi immigrants forced to settle outside Punjab after the bifurcation of Punjab post Partition.
subconscious makes it a telling symbol of the cultural baggage the migrant carries across to the new land.

Unlike the movement of Sikhs that has become the paradigmatic narrative of mobility in contemporary discourses of migration, other Punjabi movements such as that of the refugees of the Partition of 1947 have been overlooked due to their being appropriated in the masternarrative of the Indian nation. Through locating the Sikh diaspora worldwide and the Partition diaspora within India in a narrative of migration imbricated in imperialist and nationalist politics, this essay demonstrates that their location of the homeland in a Punjabi region, recalling the violence in the making of nations, underlines their loss of home to reaffirm an undivided Punjabi memory. The paper aims to isolate one such identity place among shared memories that enables the Punjabi diaspora to cross national, sectarian, linguistic, gender, class and caste boundaries to perform the Punjabi place. The performance of this Punjabi identity space intersects with as well as defies national borders reverting, in the process, to a non-essentialized prenational Punjabi imaginary fractured by sectarian and caste difference. The paper concludes that these performative identity spaces can make the tortured and broken Punjabi body whole by reactivating a shared cultural and ecoregional memory.

**Movements from Punjab Before and During the Making of the Nation State**

The dominance of the nation state in the organization of modern space has invariably resulted in the synonymy of the homeland and the nation in diaspora studies. This statecentric organization of space fails to engage with diasporic experiences before or during the demarcation of national boundaries. The pattern of pre-independence migratory movements cannot be traced along nation state boundaries dominating diaspora studies primarily because these migrations preceded the formation of nation states. The narrative of Punjabi migration, embedded in the saga of the Empire, is essentially a prenational discourse of journeys from a particular region, Punjab, to places within India as well as outside.

Punjabi migrations to and from India are equally embedded in the narrative of colonialism. The irony is that prenational migrations to Britain and other colonies were movements of British subjects within the Empire. But national boundaries made Partition refugees emigrating to another part of the same continent aliens in their own homelands. Both Sikh migration and Partition dispersal occurred in a prenational context when