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Disruptive Garb: Gender Production and Millennial Sikh Fashion Enterprises in Canada

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Abstract: Several North American Sikh millennials are creating online values-based fashion enterprises that seek to encourage creative expression, self-determined representation, gender equality, and ethical purchasing, while steeped in the free market economy. Exploring the innovative ways young Sikhs of the diaspora express their values and moral positions in the socio-economic sphere, one finds many fashionistas, artists, and activists who are committed to making Sikh dress accessible and acceptable in the fashion industry. Referred to as "Sikh chic", the five outwards signs of the Khalsa Sikh—the "5 ks"—are frequently used as central motifs for these businesses (Reddy 2016). At the same time, many young Sikh fashion entrepreneurs are designing these items referencing contemporary style and social trends, from zero-waste bamboo kangas to hipster stylized turbans. Young Sikh women are challenging mainstream representations of a masculine Sikh identity by creating designs dedicated to celebrating Khalsa Sikh females. Drawing on data collected through digital and in-person ethnographic research including one-on-one interviews, participant observation, and social media, as well as fashion magazines and newsprint, I explore the complexities of this phenomenon as demonstrated by two Canadian-based Sikh fashion brands, Kundan Paaras and TrendySingh, and one Canadian-based Sikh female artist, Jasmin Kaur.

Keywords: Sikhs; Sikh women and gender; Sikh diaspora; Canadian Sikhs; Sikh millennials; Sikh chic; Sikh entrepreneur; Sikh values; Khalsa; Sikh fashion

1. Introduction

When exploring the innovative ways in which millennial Sikhs of the diaspora are expressing their religious identity and values in the socio-economic domain, it is hard to miss the plethora of young Sikh fashionistas, designers, models, bloggers, photographers, and activists who are committed to making Sikh dress stylish by way of the fashion industry. Referred to as the "Sikh look" (Gell 1996) or "Sikh chic" (Reddy 2016), the turban and the five outward signs required of the Khalsa Sikh, known as "the 5ks"—*kesh* (uncut hair); *kangha* (comb); *kirpan* (sword); *kachh* (cotton breeches); *kara* (steal or iron bangle)—are central motifs for the many fashion and accessory lines designed by young Sikhs in the 21st century. From beard oils to printed turbans, young Sikh fashion and accessory designers are blending religious garb styles with contemporary style and social trends, including zero-waste bamboo kangas and hipster-stylized printed turbans. Some scholars have highlighted how this growing phenomenon of Sikh chic has demonstrated how the creation of new strategies of branding of Khalsa Sikh identity in the global free market has contributed to the centering of a normative Sikh masculine identity in the Sikh mainstream and the broader public, mainly by way of the growing number of popular Khalsa Sikh male fashion designers and models in America and in the UK; in many cases, where South Asian women are depicted in fashion ads, their Sikh identity is rendered as invisible, as they may not be donning the 5 ks and are viewed as merely extras in these photoshoots (Reddy 2018, p. 188). However, there has been a simultaneous contemporary movement to feminize the Khalsa—via the establishment of new Sikh institutions, websites and blogs, and conversations in online chat groups—where Sikh

women discuss wearing the 5 ks or are shown wearing them, as well as the turban (Jakobsh 2015a). I suggest that exploring the recent development of the Sikh fashion industry in Canada serves as another avenue in which a small group of Sikh millennial women are making strides to feminize the Khalsa by creating designs that reflect a Khalsa Sikh feminine form. In doing so, I argue that their designs and fashion enterprises intertwine Sikh values and fashion, while engaging discourses around gender equality and Kaurhood/sisterhood, self-determined representation, intersectionality, diversity, and, in some cases, ethical purchasing.

I explore the complexities of this phenomenon as demonstrated by two Canadian-based Sikh fashion lines, Kundan Paaras and TrendySingh, and one Canadian-based Sikh female artist, Jasmin Kaur. In each case, each designer legitimizes their fashion enterprises by referencing shared—and commonly held—Sikh values. For this essay, I draw from data collected through digital and in-person ethnographic research, including one-on-one interviews, participant observation, and social media, as well as fashion magazines and newsprint. This study is part of my larger doctoral research about Sikh millennial innovators in Canada.

2. Sikh Chic or Khalsa Chic? The Canadian Context

In the "Epilogue" of her book *Fashioning the Diaspora: Beauty, Femininity South Asian American Culture* (2016), Vanita Reddy outlines a contemporary Sikh diasporic phenomenon: the ways in which male fashion entrepreneurs in America and Britain have been aestheticizing their Sikh bodies, what she terms "Sikh chic". In the cases that inform Reddy's discussion of Sikh chic, it is the normative Khalsa Sikh aesthetic that is stylized, produced, and commodified in the marketplace—that is emphasized. As such, the qualities that define Sikh chic presented by Reddy and how they operate in the marketplace are more reflective of the particular lived experiences of Sikh males and a historical trajectory that contributed to the construction of a normative Khalsa Sikh male identity.

While not all Sikhs maintain or identify with the full expression of the *amritidari* Khalsa Sikh dress (Singh 2018, p. 263), scholars have made note of the fact that the turban—by way of the turbaned Sikh male—has come to be the primary marker of Sikh identity (Jakobsh 2015a; Singh 2018). Of course, there are many factors that have contributed to this. More broadly, historical Sikh movements, such as the intrareligious transmission of Khalsa Sikh ideals undertaken by the Singh Sabha in the 20th century, included a marketing strategy that aided in the construction of a normative Sikh male identity (Oberoi 1994; Jakobsh 2003). A significant aspect of the Singh Sabha movement was that the many leaders and members of the Singh Sabha—mainly Sikh males—made notable use of the print technologies of the time to publish numerous books, newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets, in which writers defined the boundaries of what constituted a true Khalsa Sikh identity and practice, reflective of their own perceived ideals and experiences. In doing so, perhaps inadvertently, these writings propagated notions of the ideal Khalsa Sikh male. These writings contributed to establishing a normative Sikh male identity that, in some cases, still maintains itself today (though not necessarily under the banner of the Singh Sabha).

However, beyond the internal construction of normative Khalsa practices, the turban and the turbaned Khalsa Sikh male also function as the primary marker of Sikh identity and "Sikh-ness" in the North American socio-political public (Singh 2018, p. 262). As the case studies I will be exploring in this essay are rooted in the Canadian context, I situate my research in Reddy's broader discussion of Sikh chic in the diaspora by making reference to Canadian examples.

Reddy identifies two functions of Sikh chic in the diaspora (Reddy 2018, p. 185; 2016, p. 209). The first function of Sikh chic is to address the already existing "capitalist orientalist fashion aesthetic of turban chic", i.e., the cultural appropriation of the turban by non-Sikhs in the fashion industry (Reddy 2016, p. 184). Reddy pinpoints the rise of the Sikh chic industry as a politicized response to non-Sikh designer, Jean Paul Gautier, and his Spring 2013 menswear collection at Paris Fashion week, which featured non-Sikh models wearing his "Sikh-style" turban designs (Reddy 2016, p. 207). Accordingly, Sikh chic can be understood as a practice of creative agency enacted to claim ownership

and authority over the Khalsa Sikh aesthetic to ensure authentic self-representation in the fashion industry. As young Sikhs "take-up-space" in the fashion industry by filling top positions or creating businesses—whether as designers, photographers, models, make-up artists, etc.—they strive to own and curate segments of the industry and, in doing so, define what Sikh fashion is (Reddy 2016, p. 186). As I was beginning my own preliminary research on Sikh activists in Canada around this time and conducting digital ethnography on Instagram and Facebook, I was able to examine the negative impact Gaultier's fashion show had on young Canadian Sikhs, as critiques and claims of inauthenticity were circulated online via global and transnational social networks. The development of this new Sikh expression in America and the UK was being felt in Canada, so much so that, just a few years later, Sikh Foundation of Canada released a short film on YouTube called "Sikhs in Fashion", which included a history of the cultural appropriation of the turban, but also proudly displayed the many ways in which Sikhs are actively engaged in the global fashion industry (Sikh Foundation of Canada 2015). More recently, in 2018, there was another incident in which a non-Sikh designer, Gucci, designed a one-piece turban for $790 that was being sold by Nordstrom. Prominent American Sikh scholar-activist Simran Jeet Singh, as well as several young Sikh fashion entrepreneurs including Turban&Beard, an American Sikh fashion brand, and TrendySingh, Canadian Sikh fashion line, directly and publicly condemned the Gucci product using their Instagram and Facebook accounts. Just a few months later, Gucci removed the product from sale.

The second function of Sikh chic is to maneuver the "historical and ongoing anti-Sikh sentiment and violence" and the "turban's historical associations with criminalized, terrorist South Asian masculinity" in the diaspora (Reddy 2018, p. 185). Specific historical moments have contributed to these associations. Sikh immigrants of the diaspora have faced discrimination since their earliest arrival to America, Canada, the UK, and Europe (Tatla 1999; Basran and Bolaria 2003; Jacobsen and Myrvold 2011; Singh 2011). The disenfranchisement of early Sikh arrivals came in the form of systemically established restrictions in Canadian institutions such as immigration laws, (for example, the tragedy of the Komagata Maru in 1914) and various aspects of Canadian daily life, including employment, home- and land-ownership, and voting restrictions. Being visibly distinct and disruptive to the Canadian imagination, Khalsa Sikhs have been particularly targeted, facing restrictions on wearing the turban and the kirpan in the public sphere (Wayland 1997; Walton-Roberts 1998; Dhamoon 2013; Jakobsh 2012). In cases of restrictions on employment, *amritdhari* Sikhs were at times restricted in being able to wear their turbans at work. These restrictions were met with resistance from Sikhs, including many legal cases and activism in labor movements, advocating for religious accommodation in the workplace, all in the name of human rights. Many of the efforts made by Sikhs to advocate for the allowance of wearing a turban on the job, while strenuous, were met with great success and led to the eventual change of restrictions on workplace dress codes. A prominent example is the case of Baltej Singh Dhillon, a turbaned Sikh man who eventually became the first officer in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) in 1990 (Morlock 2018). Dhillon was initially met with great resistance—not just from the RCMP, as the dress code forbid beards and wearing a turban in place of the uniform hat, but also from many Canadians. Dhillon was faced with a lawsuit that was organized by members of the RCMP that raised over CAD 100,000 to challenge the case (Jaremko 1994). Supporters of the lawsuit managed to get 210,000 signatures for a petition protesting against Dhillon and changes to the RCMP uniform. In addition, several Canadian vendors sold merchandise, such as calendars, satirizing RCMP uniform changes and anti-Sikh, anti-turban accessories such as pins (CBC 2017; Jaremko 1994; Morlock 2018).

For Sikhs in Canada—and many other racialized minorities—these restrictions are not something of the distant past but are still faced and challenged today. One need only consider Bill 21, the recent ban on religious symbols in Quebec which passed in June 2019, where religious minorities who don religious headwear have been restricted from working as public servants in the province. Amrit Kaur, an educator, activist, and President of the World Sikh Organization in Quebec—a Canadian Sikh advocacy organization—became one of the public personalities advocating against Bill 21. As a young

millennial Sikh turbaned female, Amrit Kaur had to relocate to British Columbia as she would not be able to keep her job as a public school teacher due to the passing of the bill (CBC News 2019).

In the aftermath of 9/11, a wave of hate crimes and violence was directed toward racialized visible minorities, including Sikhs who were being mistaken for turbaned Osama Bin Laden supporters. At this time, there was a significant shift in the lived experiences of the Sikh diaspora identified by numerous scholars who highlight the contemporary experiences of Sikh youth (Jacobsen and Myrvold 2015; Nijhawan and Arora 2013; Nijhawan 2016; Singh 2018; Singh et al. 2018; Verma 2006; Verma 2011). As a response to the injustices faced by the Sikh community, many young Sikh students and professionals, especially in America and Canada, felt a great sense of responsibility to educate their coreligionists, non-Sikh peers, colleagues, and the general public about Sikh religion and culture. In producing this new public outreach strategy, new networks, Sikh organizations, and websites were established, incidentally centering their activities around the Khalsa identity. For example, one of the more popular initiatives included hosting public turban-tying days in parks and on university campuses, to teach the significance of the turban, how to wrap it, and have them try it on themselves (Gill 2007; Singh 2018). In these moments, strategies to dispel xenophobic and racist stereotypes sometimes reinforce and reproduce the gender normativity of the Khalsa Sikh male, while such initiatives are conducted in the name of adequate self-representation and Sikh rights. Similarly, centering aspects of the Khalsa Sikh identity, such as the turban, in the fashion industry can be understood as an attempt to diffuse the fear and challenge stereotypes held in public perception of the Sikh tradition and make the turban appear "cool" and fashionable. As Reddy suggests, Sikh chic "refashions the violable, violent, and non-national Sikh male body into a fashionable, diasporic citizen-subject" (Reddy 2018, p. 185).

The development of the Sikh chic market can be understood as resulting from a religio-political response from Sikhs to the xenophobic discourse that equates a turban-wearing brown-skinned male with a national threat. The need to make the turban appear cool and trendy functions as a corrective to the xenophobic views held by some Canadians (and other publics) and offers a means to create dialogue around something that can otherwise seem like a barrier. It is important to note that a similar—and perhaps more comprehensive—strategy to use fashion as a means of addressing racism and xenophobia has been used by Muslims globally, particularly in the post 9/11 context, as a response to Islamophobia and cultural appropriation. Morlock reminds us of the following:

> … religious minorities use dress to communicate their needs and goals to the larger Canadian society, in the process pushing the scope and advancing the parameters of human rights for all Canadians. So doing challenges the common but false narrative of Canada as a religiously neutral nation without many Canadians' own equally fervently held belief system and venerated practices, and of religious minorities as an inherently threatening force to inviolable Canadian values … In the hands of determined individuals, these items of dress can then become vehicles for legislative and cultural revisioning … [D]ress functions as a means of communication within and between religious minority communities and the larger Canadian society. (Morlock 2018, pp. 3–4)

The formation of Sikh chic is one of the many strategies that have been implemented to address the limits placed on Sikh dress in the Canadian public sphere, including advocating for religious accommodations that allow Sikhs to wear the 5 ks in various forms of employment. One such Sikh that exemplifies this self-reflexive strategy is none other than Jagmeet Singh, the federal leader of the New Democratic Party (NDP) and also a turbaned Sikh male.

The Canadian political arena has, in some ways, functioned as a fashion runway for Jagmeet Singh, who has become a fashion icon. From postings on his Instagram and Facebook accounts to fashion shows and magazines, Singh is often making model-like poses and is often noticed for his colorful turbans and three-piece tailored suits (Toronto Life 2018). For Singh, wearing his Khalsa Sikh dress this way was an intentional campaign strategy. In their Special Issue Stylebook Fall 2013, *Toronto Life* selected Singh as one of "Toronto's Most Stylish" sartorial superstars. In the magazine, he is

quoted as saying that his wardrobe staples are "Suits from Trend Custom Tailors and Garrison Bespoke, plus colourful turbans and pocket squares. Fashion is both social armour and a barrier breaker if I'm wearing a bright turban, for example, it's a conversation starter" (Miranda 2013, p. 56). Shortly after the release of the Stylebook, Singh provided more context for the photoshoot in the magazine on his Instagram feed stating the following:

> . . . I was born in Toronto, I love the city and Toronto Life is one of my favourite magazines. For this year's 2013 Fall/Winter Stylebook Toronto Life chose me as one of Toronto's Most Stylish. I have to give a huge shout out to the folks at Toronto Life for capturing what an amazingly diverse city Toronto is. Our of the 21 most stylish people Toronto Life chose 8 racialized people. "They featured 2 people of colour on their cover page and 1 person who is proudly wearing his articles of faith. This is pretty amazing given what's going on in Quebec right now with the proposed Quebec Charter of Values, which would ban articles of faith in public places. While one province is rejecting diversity, the other province is embracing and celebrating it. I'm so proud of my city! Thank you Toronto Life! I always said I wanted to encourage people to foster a courageous sense of their self-worth. I hope I am doing my little party to demonstrate you can boldly display your identity and still gain recognition. Sat Sri Akal: Truth is Infinite. (Singh 2013)

Singh's efforts to educate the public about his turban and Sikh identity has remained constant throughout this leadership and campaigning, sometimes out of direct response to firsthand experiences of racism and xenophobia and, at the other times, in direct response to Bill 21 (National Post 2019). In a *GQ* magazine, he was asked more directly about how his style became such an important part of his political career. In response, he noted the following:

> So throughout my life, I realized that people would stare at me because I stood out. Some may feel awkward about that. Being stared at makes you feel self-conscious. I felt that if people are going to stare at me, I might as well give them something to look at. [laughs] I saw it as a chance to transform an awkward situation into an opportunity to show people who I really am. I wanted to show that I was confident and sure of myself—that I wasn't afraid of who I was. That confidence fought off some of the stereotypes and prejudice I encountered, and I started to develop my style more when I realized I could tear down some of these stereotypes. A beard and a turban sometimes conjure up negative associations, but if you see someone with a lime colored, bright orange, or pink turban, it disarms people's stereotypical notions of this image and it disarms people from those stereotypes. It became a way for me to extend my platform as a politician. Because I was considered stylish, with these colorful turbans and well-cut suits and showing myself as confident person, I could use that as a tool to talk about things like unfairness, injustice, poverty, and inequality in the public sphere. (Nocos 2017)

Though not the focus of this paper, I mention Singh here because he is the most publicly recognized Sikh in Canada at the moment and is understood as being very fashionable in his Sikh expression. In Singh's case, we can come to see how Sikh chic directly impacts the political sphere at the federal level in Canada. It is important to acknowledge that these experiences and events have not had a homogenous response. Making the Khalsa aesthetic fashionable in the 21st century is a religio-politicized response to the broader systemic barriers Khalsa Sikhs have faced in public life. It is merely one strategy in a multi-pronged approach in the politics of recognition and representation for Sikhs in the diaspora, on the one hand, and contributes to a modern mainstreaming of the Khalsa Sikh identity in the diaspora, on the other. These religio-political responses are rooted in an understanding of core Sikh values including *seva* (selfless community service), *sarbat da ballah* (the well-being of others), and *miri piri* (the non-dualism and integration of spirituality and politics in daily life). These core Sikh values have operated as a framework for Sikh engagement in volunteerism (in and beyond the gurdwara);

politics, social activism, and philanthropy, as I suggest, also function as a guide for millennial Sikh entrepreneurs and values-based business (Desjardins and Desjardins 2009; Dusenbery and Tatla 2009; Jakobsh and Walton-Roberts 2016).

3. Sikh Values-Based Fashion Enterprises

Sikhs of the millennial generation are making innovative social, political, and economic contributions to establishing new modes of religious expression. Numerous second- and third-generation Sikhs are translating their religious and social values into new cultural productions that engage the economic domain, such as the fashion industry. From becoming multi-billion-dollar YouTube sensations (for example, Lilly Singh; See Bhagat 2016) to designing floral printed turbans, young Sikh entrepreneurs are expressing their religious identity, principles, and moral positions in the free market. In establishing new modes of religious expression in the form of innovative solutions to society's most persistent and complex social and environmental problems, young adult Sikhs are striving to create social change at varying scales.

Although seemingly commonplace initiatives, some scholars of religion argue that it is precisely in creating and participating in such socio-economic activities/activism that religious adherents may demonstrate faith as living practice. In other words, actions reflect guiding religious principles that are imbued with personal meaning and that impact their own spiritual lives (Bender 2003; McGuire 2008). While the ways in which millennial Sikhs engage the socio-economic sphere are extensive, the ventures discussed in this paper emerge specifically at the intersection of religion, fashion, design, feminism, and values-based entrepreneurship—or what is also referred to as social entrepreneurship.

Defining values-based business and social entrepreneurship has been a task taken up by both practitioners and researchers. While there is contention in defining these terms, scholars and practitioners alike recognize that these ventures are situated at the cross-sector of the public and private domains, operating within the social economy. In contrast to business entrepreneurship that maintains a bottom-line of financial gain alone, the bottom line of social entrepreneurship is threefold: financial, social, and environmental—where every effort is fostered and focused on the social mission of the initiative, and profits are mainly reinvested into the program. What is valued by such enterprises is the socio-political benefit their ventures provide, rather than simply achieving economic stability or profit. Religion is one of many major thematic ideologies that continue to inform values-driven entrepreneurship (Spear 2010, p. 32). In faith-based social entrepreneurship, guiding principles held by religious entrepreneurs motivate and align with the call-to-action and mission that are characteristic of values-based entrepreneurship. Sikh values such as *seva*, *sarbat da ballah*, and *miri pir* (as defined above) function as guiding principles for Sikh entrepreneurship, as noted earlier.

An underlying aspect of the functions of Sikh chic is that young Sikh fashion entrepreneurs believe that it is possible to create shifts in the public perception of Sikhs and broader socio-political change by engaging the (digital) market. The production of the Khalsa Sikh aesthetic in the modern fashion and accessory industry by Sikh entrepreneurs is framed and legitimized by Sikh values, and perhaps is another case through which to critically explore "a Sikh spirit of capitalism" (Mooney 2012, p. 422). McQuilten discusses how creative social enterprises, such as art- and fashion-enterprises, function as means for critical and political engagement with the socio-economic sphere (McQuilten 2017). She points out that "[o]f equal importance to the economic dimension of social enterprise is that these types of organizations provide, other non-monetary benefits for the artists involved, including the opportunity to make art, a space in which to explore and address issues of cultural identity in a changing global context, as well as skill development and participation in civic life" (McQuilten 2017, p. 71). McQuilten goes on to say that "[t]his generation of artistic and social value links to a range of other cultural movements emerging as counter-hegemonic practices such as the maker movement, ethical consumption, craft and social engaged art." Inclusive of McQuilten's argument, the cases to be discussed in this article also demonstrate the ways fashion enterprises become a means through which religious individuals can engage with the politics of religious and gender identity production,

intrareligious dynamics, and cultural representation while using current technologies and trends of the market. It is imperative for a fashion social enterprise to address complex societal problems within and beyond the fashion industry. That said, Sikh fashion social enterprises may not only address Sikh issues, but may also address broader social, political, economic, and environmental concerns. Sikh values frame the ways in which Sikh fashion entrepreneurs engage contemporary commodity discourses. For example, we can see the intertwining of Khalsa Sikh aesthetics, Sikh environmental justice, and anti-plastic commodity discourse in Turban&Beard selling of plastic-free bamboo kangas. Participating in the free market as social innovators, young Sikhs continue to expand the parameters of what constitutes as *Sikhi* in practice and the role their faith has in social change. Young Sikh social entrepreneurs are not satisfied with the status quo, but rather look for a deeper meaning and creative engagement within their everyday lives, work, and social contexts.

4. "Feminizing the Khalsa": New Market Segments of Sikh Chic

It is important to note that gender constructs are subjective, as is Sikh identity, and there is "no single way of being a Sikh. Punjabi Sikhs frequently move between different sub-identities according to their situation in life … A mona ['clean-shaven'] Sikh of yesterday could be a *keshadhari* ['unshorn'] today and might be an *amridhari* ['those who have performed the Khalsa enthronement ceremony'] tomorrow … Therefore, to think of the five categories of Sikhs as 'predetermined' or 'fixed' permanently … might be misleading" (Singh 2018, p. 263). Despite this diversity, it is still the Khalsa Sikh male donning the 5 ks and the turban that functions as the primary and normative identity marker of "being Sikh", centering the lived experiences of Sikh males for reasons stated earlier in this discussion (Jakobsh 2015a). Without question, the authoritative Khalsa Sikh male identity has been largely reproduced in the fashion industry by Sikh male fashion entrepreneurs—by way of visual representation and by name. For example, many of the Sikh fashion entrepreneurs have named their fashion brands with some sort of play on words with the Sikh name Singh (lion), most commonly given to Sikh males (Jakobsh 2014, p. 595). Acknowledging this phenomenon begs the question: how are Sikh women being represented in the Sikh chic industry and by Sikh fashion entrepreneurs?

The limits on the discussions about Sikh chic and the focus on the Khalsa Sikh male aesthetic has more to do with the cases that scholars have focused on in their analysis than what is actually reflected in the market today. While Reddy gives us a strong theoretical foundation to understand Sikh chic, the Sikh chic industry has expanded and grown exponentially into a global, transnational, and digital phenomenon. The commodification of the Khalsa Sikh identity via fashion entrepreneurs has influenced how young Sikhs of all genders purchase, wear, and talk about the 5 ks in the 21st century. As the Sikh chic industry has grown in influence and as young Sikhs continue to participate in the modern economy as fashion entrepreneurs, new niche market segments have formed. So too have new ways of understanding how Sikh identity, values, and commodity discourses intertwine in the free marketplace and how they have become more salient. A discussion about all of the new possible market segments of Sikh chic would be far too extensive to outline in this article. Instead, I will focus on the ways in which young Sikh women in Canada are challenging the mainstream representations of a masculine Sikh identity, by creating fashion designs dedicated to celebrating the Khalsa Sikh female aesthetic, in all of its forms.

In her article "Feminizing the Khalsa: Text, narrative, and image within the virtual realm", Doris Jakobsh discusses the ways in which "a small minority" of Sikh women are responding to the notion that "Sikh women have not 'represented' Sikhs and Sikhism" (Jakobsh 2015a, p. 190). While the Khalsa Sikh identity has been often represented by men, young Sikh women are challenging the mainstream representation of a masculine Sikh identity (Jakobsh 2012, 2015a, 2015b). Drawing from Anastasia Karaflogka and Peter Mandaville, Jakobsh makes the case that the internet easily allows for new spaces to be created in which subjective Sikh discourse about identity can take place (Jakobsh 2015a, p. 191). She examines "the online discourse surrounding the question of Sikh women's identity, particularly with regard to women and turbans" in spaces such as websites, blogs, web archives, and online chat

rooms (p. 192). I suggest that the free market is another avenue in which the subjective religious can operate and that the fashion industry is another platform within which we see young Sikh women attempting to "feminize the Khalsa" (Jakobsh 2015a).

One possibility may be due to the new digital marketplace. In a neoliberal context and given the growth of the creative digital/craft gig-economy, several e-commerce platforms for digital stores and retail-point-of-sales systems have developed that help facilitate small businesses and pop-up shops, making it easier for independent artist to sell their products online. A few major examples include Shopify, Etsy, and Square. Such online platforms are marketed to millennials who perhaps may have multiple sources of income or side-hustles, including their own small shop, but still are unable to afford to open up an in-person store. Whether one is successful or not, it has become much easier to create a low-risk online store. In Canada, for instance, there are several female Sikh fashion entrepreneurs who have created online shops to sell their designs for Sikh women.

The creation of new fashion lines dedicated to the needs of Sikh women who don the 5ks segments the turban market, reaching potentially new audiences, and is perhaps reflective of a growing demand as more Sikh women are wearing turbans. However, it is important to note that while there is a general increase in the number of women wearing turbans in the diaspora, it is still the case in Canada that it is not the norm for Sikh women to wear the turban.

Jakobsh identifies themes in online discourse around Sikh women's identity: seeking legitimacy, the search for historical validation, and meaning-making in the feminization of the turban (Jakobsh 2015a). In the feminization of the Sikh chic market, I suggest that the discourse around Sikh female identity is translated in the marketing of fashion brands and the production of gendered Khalsa attire and ad campaigns. For example, one of the ways Sikh female identity is represented in the marketplace is by the use of the Sikh female name Kaur (princess) for business and/or product names, in contrast to the many Sikh male fashion icons and designers who brand their businesses with a play-on-words of the name Singh (lion), as mentioned earlier. Sikh fashion designed for female turbaned Sikhs contributes to the movement to make Sikh women more visible.

For the three Canadian-based Sikh fashion enterprises that make up the case studies for this discussion, I argue that their designs and fashion enterprises intertwine Sikh values, fashion, and business, while engaging discourses around gender equality and Kaurhood/sisterhood, authenticity and self-determined representation, intersectionality, diversity, and, in some cases, ethical purchasing.

5. Case Studies: Canadian-Based Sikh Female Fashion

5.1. Kundan Paaras (Instagram: @KundanPaaras)

Originally based in Toronto, Kundan Paaras is a fashion line designed by Sikh women, for Sikh women, which has become an international brand that is available in London and New York. The Sikh female designers—Laveleen and Gagan Kaur—are almost inseparable best friends—or "two sisters", as they often refer to themselves. Lavleen and Gagan have designed a couture-like brand, all handmade and custom tailored to fit their buyers. They draw inspiration from their ancestral roots in Punjab and their travels, including their residence in Korea. On their website store—which has recently been removed from Shopify (though they still have an active tumblr account: https://kundanpaaras-blog.tumblr.com/)—they state that their designs are inspired from "the majestic royal courts of the Punjab" as well as "contemporary silhouettes of Asia". In total, they have managed to create three different collections, all modeled by young Sikh women who are often their own friends.

On 30 November 2013, they launched their first Fall/Winter collection and hosted a fashion show at the National Ballet School in downtown Toronto, which I attended. Their first collection was modeled only by young Sikh women, some of whom were donning stylized elements of the 5ks and uniquely designed turbans that matched their clothing designs. The mandate of the designers of Kundan Paraas was reflected in their support of other prominent Sikh millennial female artists from the Greater Toronto Area, who collaborated in organizing the event and performed during the fashion show. While none

of these artists wore the turban, they did maintain other elements of the 5 ks, including kesh and their kara. Some of the Sikh female artists who performed included the now-famous spoken-word poet Rupi Kaur; Keerat Kaur, a multi-media artist and singer; and singer Selena Dhillon. While in the audience, I got the impression that, as a collective, this network of young Sikh women was establishing their presence as a new generation of leaders. Each audience member was given a small fashion look book that included a biography listing of each of the Sikh women who helped put the show together, including make-up artists, hair stylists, and the DJ, emphasizing not only the strong network being established in the region, but also how the fashion show functioned as a platform of recognition of the creative entrepreneurial spirit of this network. In another way, the designers of Kundan Paaras maintain a transnational sense of this Kaurhood in that ten percent of the proceeds from ticket sales from the fashion show were donated to widowed women's programming in Punjab.

The central message the designers hope to convey in their designs and shows is that the turban or dastaar is a royal crown. They emphasize that young Sikh women should be proud of their identities and the ways in which they express their individual religiosity, declaring their intentions on their website through statements such as "Sikhi & the Royal Crown: The Dastaar. This is our pulse: Young Sikh women proudly living and thriving, with their Sikhi loudly displayed on their head and body. Kundan Paaras celebrates the Sikh armour and Sikh women in all their righteousness. From their hair on your body, to the dastaar on your head, wear your identity with pride sistas, and remember, you were born a queen." For Lavleen and Gagan Kaur, creating Kundan Paaras is an "exploration of spirituality, politics, travel and the arts".

5.2. Trendy Singh (Instagram: @TrendySingh)

A collaborative project between a group of friends living in Calgary, Alberta, TrendySingh designs and sells printed turbans online with a signature floral print design. TrendySingh claims to be a social enterprise and is the only company of its sort in the region (Asian Heritage Foundation n.d.). Social enterprises, or values-based business, is a third-way approach to the private–public spheres of society, where generating profit—though necessary to fund such initiatives—comes second to meeting the social needs of citizens (Quarter et al. 2009). Rooted in Sikh values of *seva* (selfless community service) and equality, TrendySingh engages discourses around gender equality, as well as ethical purchasing. For designer and business manager, Jenn Nguyen, starting a fashion social enterprise based on Sikh values is a reflection of her own deep admiration for the Sikh faith, and her Sikh friends. When I spoke with Nguyen in an interview, she said that while she did not grow up in the Sikh faith, the fact that "Sikh" is defined as learner, deeply resonated with her own religious upbringing as a Catholic, and she has invested significant time in learning about the Sikh faith, engaging in Sikh practices, and becoming involved in Sikh institutions as a volunteer.

A significant aspect of TrendySingh's designs is that their printed turbans are presented as gender neutral, carrying the same designs for Kaurs and Singhs. After discussing the ideation process behind the fashion enterprise with Nguyen, she mentioned to me that the initial reason she designed a floral printed turban was because many of her Sikh friends were experiencing discrimination in every day public spaces, such as on their daily bus commute, and that the floral turbans could act as an ice breaker for onlookers, perhaps encouraging strangers to ask questions about the turban (Interview). In an interview with an online culture magazine, Nguyen states, "There are so many misconceptions and racism towards Sikhs, especially after 9/11. People associate them with terrorists and that type of thing . . . the turban represents standing up for oppression, and I believe that is universal for everyone" (Vern Magazine 2018).

Nguyen also mentioned that her initial designs were meant for her female Sikh friends who felt their needs were not being met and that their experiences were being underrepresented. Holding degrees in art design, business management, and education, Nguyen did some market research and realized that the contemporary turban fashion market was primarily targeting turbaned Sikh males. Nguyen expressed an understanding that, while not all Sikhs wear turbans, those who do, are mostly

Sikh males. However, in marketing the printed turbans, Nguyen wanted to promote gender neutrality. As such, both Sikh men and Sikh women are presented as wearing the turbans on TrendySingh's website (which has since been removed from the internet) and social media profiles. Nguyen made it clear that presenting a more gender-neutral look was more in-line with Sikh egalitarian principles. TrendySingh has also produced a series of instructional videos on how to tie a turban in various ways that reflect current trends and has used Sikh male and female models as the instructors. These videos can be found on YouTube and Instagram. That being said, in the various ways TrendySingh markets itself, it also contributes to the production and circulation of *Sikhi* in the digital marketplace.

As a social enterprise, TrendySingh donates all earnings to pre-existing Sikh services, including Khalsa Aid, Sikh Relief, Nanak Naam, and the World Sikh Organization. In this regard, not only is the production of these printed turbans an act of *seva*, according to Nguyen, the purchasing of them is also an act of *seva*, as customers will be contributing to Sikh social services. For Nguyen, choosing to create a social enterprise is a more ethical approach to engaging the market, and she emphasizes that the priority should be on Sikh values, providing service to the Sikh community, and representing the Sikh community in the best way.

5.3. Jasmin Kaur (Instagram: @Jusmun)

Unlike Kundan Paaras and TrendySingh, which are both fashion brands, my third case study is a cultural creative by the name of Jasmin Kaur, who resides in British Columbia. A poet, an activist, a community organizer, a model, an illustrator, and a designer, Jasmin Kaur is a Sikh millennial Instagrammer and is a master of the contemporary gig-economy. While Jasmin holds a diverse portfolio, it is her design of a collection of graphic print t-shirts that caught my attention on my perusal of Instagram. Jasmin Kaur sells her t-shirts on RedBubble.com (https://www.redbubble.com/people/jusmun/shop), a website dedicated to selling works of independent artists. A few of her graphic print illustrations depict individual Sikh women wearing colorful turbans. Several of her designs have slogans such as "decolonize your body", "decolonize your femininity", and "the diversity of sisterhood". One of Jasmin Kaur's most circulated illustrations is of three young Sikh women standing together—each with different characteristics, including different skin tones. One is wearing a colorful dastaar, while another has her hair in braids. One of the Sikh women in the illustration is holding a baseball bat, and one is wearing a sports jersey. Above the illustration is the caption "Support your sister".

During an interview with Jasmin Kaur, she said that the inspiration behind her illustrations was to challenge the cliques that have been forming around the way young Sikh women choose to practice their *Sikhi*. The illustration described above reflects the idea that while not all Sikh women may look like her, i.e., wear a turban or keep their *kesh*, nonetheless, they are her Sikh sisters, and they should have each other's backs in a society that does not often support their existence (Interview). Kaur went on to say that her illustrations capture her desire to create spaces where Sikh women feel safe to be who they are, regardless of their identity and how they choose to practice their faith. As the "Support your sisters" image circulates online, via Kaur's Instagram and Twitter accounts, it is now often coupled with a poem of hers:

> scream
> so that one day
> a hundred years from now
> another sister will not have to
> dry her tears wondering where
> in history she lost her voice
> (Jasmin Kaur)

In advocating for a Kaurhood through this image, Jasmin Kaur is also capturing the subjective: not all Sikh and not all Kaur experiences are the same. Similar to her co-religionists in this study, Kaur frames

her lifestyle, professional activism, and creative pursuits like these graphic t-shirt illustrations, through her own understanding of Sikh feminist values that are rooted in the Sikh notion of *miri piri*. As Jasmin Kaur indicated, if the spiritual and political are intertwined, and Sikhs are required to stand up against injustice and help take care of others, then it is her duty to address the systemic oppressions in society and acknowledge the intersectional realities Sikh women experience. For Jasmin Kaur, the Sikh dastaar represents a long political history of Sikhs challenging corrupt leadership, but that often Sikh women's experiences are ignored both by Sikh men and broader society. According to Kaur, as Sikh women have not been as visible—both in not traditionally wearing the 5 ks, as well as not visible in Sikh institutional leadership roles—the stories and experiences of Sikh women are not often heard or represented.

6. Conclusions

While there has been a long historical tradition of constructing a normative Khalsa Sikh male aesthetic, young Sikh women in the 21st century are challenging the mainstream representation of masculine Sikh identities that are made more visible today in the Sikh fashion industry or what has been referred to as Sikh chic. Contemporary movements to feminize the Khalsa have predominately formed online but have more recently been taken up in the economic domain. Millennial Sikh female entrepreneurs in Canada are creating Sikh values-based fashion enterprises to disrupt normativity in Sikh communities, the fashion industry, and broader society by creating new platforms of self-representation through fashion designs that reflect the lived experiences of Khalsa Sikh women and a new-found Kaurhood among this younger generation in Canada. Overall, this study contributes to an anthropological theory of Sikh values expressed in the contemporary digital marketplace and in the Canadian social economy.

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