



MOBILIZING PUNJABI MARKET



AMRIT SANGHERA AND DESIREE GABRIEL

IN COLLABORATION WITH
THE PUNJABI MARKET COLLECTIVE

Background

Introduction

The Punjabi Market has been a significant cultural space for many South Asian community members since the 1970s, when the first shop opened its doors. When visiting the neighbourhood, you will find vibrant colors, cultural motifs, and symbols filling the streets, shops, and walls. Punjabi Market has been home to many cultural businesses, including clothing shops, grocery stores, and restaurants. It became a staple place for South Asians to find cultural goods, particularly during the mid 70s to early 2000s when cultural goods were even less accessible than they are now in Metro-Vancouver. Through our conversations with our community partner, Jag Nagra (Punjabi Market Collective), we were able to learn about the importance of Punjabi Market – including what makes it a significant place for many community members and the challenges they are navigating to protect the cultural landscape in the neighbourhood.

Purpose

This project aims to mobilize shop owners, neighbours, and people who are generally connected or passionate about preserving Punjabi Market through storytelling and art. Mobilizing the community will plant the seed of resistance and encourage the masses to rally against gentrification and displacement of cultural food assets and intangible cultural heritage spaces. This is especially relevant with growing xenophobia and racism against people of South-Asian descent, especially with the growing number of newcomers to Canada.

Framing Our Reflections and Hopes

Through the course of our project, as a team we have been having ongoing discussions on various methodologies, potential creative approaches, and what our overall visions/goals are. We have also been reflecting on a multitude of realities and complexities of this project.

For one, we recognize the importance and urgent need to build action in order to protect cultural spaces such as the Punjabi Market. At the same time, we recognize that in order to facilitate larger sustainable change, it will require co-creation, imagination, and collective community action from a multitude of people. This work will require building upon actions that organizations and organizers have already done before us. But also, it will require each of us to reflect on what we can personally do, in our own unique way, and imagine diverse and creative forms of resistance. Connected to this understanding, in our group, we have been reflecting on the following:

- How do we engage, encourage, and mobilize community members who may not necessarily have experience with organizing or activism work?
- How do we build with community members who may be feeling discouraged, overwhelmed, or isolated?
- How do we share and communicate the various ideas mentioned above in a meaningful way? How do we make it accessible?

Secondly, we understand that the threat of displacement for the Punjabi Market does not happen in isolation. Rather, we understand that displacement and gentrification are tools and symptoms of the larger violent system of settler colonialism, which has and is occurring on Indigenous Lands and impacting Indigenous communities. Punjabi Market is on the unceded and traditional lands of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) peoples. As we strive to build change for Punjabi Market and the diverse community members who have relation to it, as Asian Canadians who are uninvited guests on Turtle island, we will need to continue to understand how to actively engage with decolonization and not add further harm our efforts towards placemaking, preservation, and protecting our cultural spaces. With our communities, particularly with Asian Canadian communities, there is an urgent need to recognize our complicities to various systems of oppression. Particularly in engagement with South Asian community members, there needs to be a growing recognition regarding the complicities to settler-colonialism, systemic racism, and the caste systems. In the book *Indians on Indian Land*, Nishant Upadhyay mentions the following:

“Investigation of complicities is not a confession of privilege. Neither is the book invested in moral or political blaming and shaming individuals. Instead, theorizing complicities allows us to understand how uneven access to power positions some racialized communities as colluders with the state. Moreover, exposing complicities illuminates other relationalities, solidarities, and possibilities. This interrogation makes visible the multitudinous ways racialized diasporas align, and possibly un-align, themselves with the settler project.” (p. 43-44)

These reflections from Upadhyay are incredibly important within our work, and we hope to engage communities with these ideas in mind. It will be important to reflect on non-transactional solidarities that we have or must form with local Indigenous communities and racialized communities. In order to build real, tangible change, coalition building will be essential. We are all inextricably interconnected, what we do or do not do has an impact in our world.

We are aware that these are rather large reflections, and in order to properly address them, it will require us to do the work outside the timeframe of this course. Instead, these are long-term considerations and organizing community members towards actively building change will take time. In the time being, what we can do is create opportunities and spaces where we can plant the seeds of ideas towards futures without displacement for historically marginalized communities. Our project aims to create an accessible space where we can have these nuanced discussions, share knowledge, collate collective narratives with each other, and start imagining resistance and future possibilities.

Subsequently, in order to engage with these reflections, we will be conducting interviews, developing and hosting an arts-based workshop, and creating a community resource (zine) that can be accessed beyond the day of the event.

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Project Layout

Arts Based Workshop

The workshop will be held at the opening of a new plaza in Punjabi Market near the Himalayan Restaurant in March 2025. The workshop will be open to anyone who attends the event, which could be intergenerational neighbours, business owners, families, people who come to Punjabi Market regularly or people who are curious about the neighbourhood. . We will be engaging with three thematic areas: Shared Histories, Shared Stories, and Resistance is Our Future. Interspersed between these sections we will engage with various activities. More details regarding these sections can be found in the “Workshop Outline” document.

Through our research and personal experiences, we have found that art is a helpful tool for reflection. Discussions around systems of oppression and reflections on resistance can be potentially overwhelming. Particularly if you have not engaged with these topics before. We think that art can be a bridge or approach to making things less overwhelming. That is our hope.

Additionally, there are many researchers, educators, and activists who have discussed at length the power of art, imagination, and creativity. For instance, Goessling et al. found that using creativity “to translate personal understanding into some sort of content and form”. More so, “engagement with and in the arts can ‘activate imagination’ and a broader understanding of injustice, its consequences, and the range of alternative possibilities” (“Engaging youth in critical arts pedagogies and creative research for social justice”, 60).

Essentially, we can find creative ways to share knowledge regarding on-going injustice and as well as methods of resistance, and we can give/create space to process and reflect on those realities through art. An arts-based workshop also provides us with the opportunity to share with community members how art can be used as a tool to fight injustice. With imagination and reflection, we can picture ways we can individually or collectively build change, later we can implement those ideas in the real world.

Community Resource: Zine

After the completion of the workshop, we will be creating a zine as a resource with the hope and intention that the ideas engaged with in the workshop can be expanded and shared into other spaces, places, and people. It will be a resource to share with local community members within Punjabi Market and with larger populations who may have a relation or connection to the neighbourhood.

We will constructing the zine using multiple materials:

- the art and/or reflections that was created during the workshop
- Material from stores (e.g. scrap cloth, cultural decor, etc.)
- Photos of participants creating the art during the workshop
- Photos and stories from the interviews
- Archival photos of the South Asian community and Punjabi Market

Interviews

In addition to the workshop and zine, we will be facilitating and conducting interviews with community members who have a relation with Punjabi Market. The interviews will be done prior to the workshop. We aim to ground the workshop and zine in the stories and lived realities of the community members who have a connection and relationship to the Punjabi Market. The Punjabi Market is not only a place to shop, it bolsters community, is a cultural space, and a place with generations of memories. With the interviews, not only are we able to preserve these important histories and stories, we will share why this place has already been important for community members who have been connected to the Punjabi Market. This in itself is another act of resistance!



Methodologies

Methodologies for Facilitation:

bell hooks. *Teaching to Transgress*. “Engaged Pedagogy”.

Key points:

- This pedagogy includes interactive relationships between everyone in the room, between teachers, facilitators, and students.
- Mutual participation
- Everyone becomes an active participant, not a passive consumer. One example of a way this can be done is as a facilitator, whatever you ask of the participant, you do as well.
- The importance of creating excitement in the learning space
 - “not only to imagine that the classroom could be exciting but that this excitement could co-exist with and even stimulate serious intellectual and/or academic engagement.”
- bell hooks and Paulo Freire’s emphasis on “praxis” and how it is both action and reflection, and how that can be used to build change
- “any radical pedagogy must insist that everyone’s presence is acknowledged. That insistence cannot be simply stated. It has to be demonstrated through pedagogical practices. To begin, the professor must genuinely value everyone’s presence. There must be an ongoing recognition that everyone influences the classroom dynamic, that everyone contributes. These contributions are resources”,

Methodologies for the Arts-Based Workshop:

Nana Osei-Kof. “The Emancipatory Potential of Arts-Based Research for Social Justice”

Key points:

- The importance of the co-construction of knowledge.
 - “offer new ways to make meaning of the human condition, emphasize reflexivity, and embody great potential for consciousness raising and critical dialogue”.
- “arts-based inquiry as: uniquely positioned ... for radical, ethical, and revolutionary research that is futuristic, socially responsible, and useful in addressing social inequities ... [Finley goes on to argue that through the]
- She provides different examples of arts-based pedagogy and its importance:
 - She facilitated finger painting with her students as an activity for them to describe their feelings and expectations for the class. Nana found that ““participation in art making stimulates imagination, creativity, innovation, and exploration in children and adults alike. To engage in anti-oppressive work, to challenge the norms of what it means to know and how we come to know, imagination is essential.”
 - Her students also created collages: “as a way to gather, analyze, synthesize, and present information. Vaughan suggests that the use of collage in research “reflect[s] a borderlands epistemology ... based on an inclusive, liberatory agenda that can work in the overlappings [sic] of multiple disciplines.” Butler-Kisber notes that collage has the potential to “counteract the hegemony and linearity in written texts, increase voice and reflexivity in the research process, and expand the possibilities of multiple realities and understandings”

The Education for Liberation Network & Critical Resistance Editorial Collective. *Lessons in Liberation: An Abolitionist Toolkit for Educators.*

Key points:

- “We want a vision of safety rooted in care, healing, and well-being. We want a response to harm that foregrounds accountability rather than punishment. We need the energy and imagination of young people and those who work with them—educators, families, and communities—to abolish carceral logics in favor of the logics of liberation and love.”
- “The abolitionist imaginary is cultivated through arts-based practices, pushing the boundaries of thinking and expanding what is possible. As we learn from generations of abolitionist organizers, abolition is as much about building and creating alternatives as it is about dismantling oppressive systems and structures. Storytelling, fiction, and speculative works lend themselves to imagining more livable futures.”

Methodologies on Complicity & Solidarity-Building:

Nishant Upadhyay. *Indians on Indian lands : Intersections of race, caste, and Indigeneity.*

key points:

- “Much of the South Asian diaspora and migration studies situate the discussion of transnational migration within the interconnected vectors of colonialism and capitalism but remain silent on ongoing settler colonialism here on Turtle Island. Racialized migration to white settler states is a product, and often a necessity, of ongoing colonization of Indigenous lands. The erasure within South Asian diaspora studies is symptomatic of the broader settler colonial ideologies and speaks to the complicities of scholars and methodologies of “colonial unknowing.”⁶ Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate scholar Kim Tallbear (2019) argues that American and Canadian dream-making is a settler colonial manifestation. Further, this dreaming “de-animates many humans, including Indigenous and Black people, by placing them below the Western and often male subject.” (35)
- “The book seeks to reframe transnational diasporic movements by exploring the making of first-generation dominant caste Indian diaspora in relation to ongoing Canadian settler colonial processes. It theorizes racial and colonial entanglements between Indigenous and diasporic Indian communities, Indian-Indian relationalities, and the complicities of Indian diaspora in the intertwined processes of settler colonialism, anti-Blackness, racial colonial capitalism, heteropatriarchy, and brahminism (hegemonic violent caste structures encoded within hinduism).” (36)
- “Investigation of complicities is not a confession of privilege. Neither is the book invested in moral or political blaming and shaming individuals. Instead, theorizing complicities allows us to understand how uneven access to power positions some racialized communities as colluders with the state. Moreover, exposing complicities illuminates other relationalities, solidarities, and possibilities. This interrogation makes visible the multitudinous ways racialized diasporas align, and possibly un-align, themselves with the settler project.” (43)

Interviews

Interviewee Information:

Name	Affiliation	Date	Notes
Harinder Toor	Owner, Punjabi Food Center	November 2024	Completed
Jas Lally	Director of Art and Culture, Punjabi Market Collective	January 2025	Confirmed - scheduled for January 2025
N/A	Mona Cloth House	February 2025	Outreach in January 2025 for February interview date
N/A	Bangla Bazar	February 2025	Outreach in January 2025 for February interview date

Interview Questions

Your History:

- 1.What made you want to come to the Punjabi Market in the beginning? What is your first memory of the Punjabi market?
 - a.Can you tell us more about your personal story and history to Punjabi Market? What are your favourite memories?
 - b.Did being a part of the Punjabi Market change your relationship or experience of being in Metro Vancouver?
 - c.How has Punjabi Market supported your cultural experience, especially if you are someone who is currently living away from South Asia?

Placemaking:

1. Why is the Punjabi Market an important place to you?
 - a. Why should people talk about the Punjabi Market?
 - b. Over the years, what are some good things this place has given you? Has it given you a connection to community, to support, or something else?

Imagining the Future for Punjabi Market:

1. What are your hopes for the Punjabi Market in the future? What do you imagine the Punjabi market will look like in the future?
 - a. Businesses
 - i. Cultural food, cultural clothing, cultural décor
 - ii. Solidarity? other ethnic options?
 - iii. Usage of space
 - iv. Festivals and events
2. What are the dreams in your mind for the people who will visit Punjabi Market in the future?
 - a. How do you hope young people will experience this place? How do you hope they will use this place or to take care (nourish) of the Punjabi Market?
 - b. How do you want your family to be part of Punjabi Market?

Findings

Harinder Toor, Owner, Punjabi Food Center

As we continue to conduct more interviews, we will outline key findings and summarize them depending on thematic area. Below, you can find a list of themes and quotes that we have found so far in our first interview.

PUNJABI MARKET COMMUNITY

- We... in Punjabi Market... Business people... we work as a family, family means that... we help each other... that's all part of Punjabi Market... We share
- Our culture is a very great culture, south asian people, we have different programs... we have big nagar kirtan that come in April, Visakhi parade, that's the biggest we have you know, that's why we celebrate here in Punjabi Market...

BENEFITS FOR BUSINESS OWNERS

- I doing my business my whole life, this is the place I feed my family, my children have grown, they're educated and married, I have grandchildren. This is the place I... get money and feed my family, and not for me but everybody... that do business here

NOSTALGIA: Memories of Punjabi Markets glory days

- "Lots of memories - people needed food, (1970s) we used to go to one store [on] Commercial Drive... Famous Foods ... people go buy grocery there, spices, not much, only one flour to make chapati" "Then slowly slowly, wholesale, Indian spices"
- Those days...Punjabi Market is like if I went back to India... people was walking ... visit Himalayas, you know samosas :)
 - We have slowed down in between, because people moved to Surrey... we're still busy [enough]

DIVERSITY

- We have international customers - this neighbourhood is multicultural.... Not only Punjabi customers, we have other customers... which is very good they're helping us If you look at the tea, we have so many kinds of tea... we carry something for [all south asians]
- People come from everywhere, we have Canadian, we have American, we have South Indian... we also have variety for them, different food.... We have all of them, Pakistan, Bangladesh... even vegetables, I've never seen in my life curry leaves, those things we sell here

CONNECTIVITY: geographical and relational

- We are big... this is the first time out of India that we have a bilingual signs in Punjabi
- This is the place... people will come you know if you live in Nanaimo, Prince Rupert, Williams Lakes... wherever... this is the place they come to do shopping, grocery, jewelry, restaurant, anything they want to do. They come to Punjabi Market first... then they stay overnight for the weekend... their family living here... then they go back to where [they live].

PRIDE

- "This is Punjabi Market"
- I am close to 70, but still working life everyday. They still come and thank me for still [being] open for them.
- "This is the place, with better price, variety, quality...and have fun"

YOUTH + CONTINUITY

- Young people are really helping us... they join our team.... They're really good.... They should keep it up the way we did... wishing them good.
- Market start in 1970s... I know we are all, [aging] but we are all still working, the children might do businesses... but hopefully they will join us
- Young generation will help the parents
- We [were] organizing the Punjabi Market, we are association, but we think now is the time... new generation, Punjabi Market Collective should take over from us and help us to do more work... we have more... they are taking over helping us, and hope they do very well

(ANTI-)RACISM: Limited opportunities based on race

- Those days there wasn't many jobs, fishing, mining, lumber... 1986 expo, then people came to Vancouver... those days, 1980s we have problem with big racism... [slurs] those old Canadian don't know [who] we are... now... there's some but now better
- "Turban, no job" "time has changed"
- "Language very important"

DEVELOPMENT/GENTRIFICATION

- We know some people moving to Surrey... Punjabi Market is still doing very well... we have high density area coming, 49th and main.... 6 story building... another one coming on the other side.... But looks like South Asian shops, whatever is there, is staying here...

Workshop Details

Plaza Opening Arts-Based Workshop

- Title of Event: Preserving Punjabi Market
- Date: March 2025, in tandem with Plaza Opening event hosted by Punjabi Market Collective
- Time: 1 hour facilitated event, drop in with passive programming afterwards
 - 1.5 hours after plaza event starts or 1.5 hours before plaza event ends; folks have a chance to explore
- Where: Himalaya Banquet Room
- Audience:
 - Expected: 20-30
 - Intergenerational residents of Punjabi Market
 - South Asian attendees and their friends/families
 - Non-South Asian attendees

Arts Based Activities

Theme	Prompts
Shared Histories	How are some ways we can build places that support all of us? Why is it important to learn about these interconnected histories?
Narratives of Punjabi Market	What stores, restaurants, or places in Punjabi Market are important to you? How are they important to you? What relationships do you have to this place?
Resistance is Our Future	What do you want for the future of Punjabi Market? What do you dream for generations to come to experience at Punjabi Market?



Task Breakdown/Materials Needed

Item Needed	Details	Person Responsible
Promotion Material for mass dissemination <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instagram, Facebook, newsletter material, X, email templates for personal invitations Registration Form Contact list 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our workshop will be a sub-event within the Plaza Opening event. Punjabi Market will share details of the Arts-Based activities in general promotion of the Plaza Opening 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Punjabi Market Collective
Booking Himalaya Restaurant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Banquet Hall room Request use of fold up tables, chairs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Punjabi Market Collective
Retrieving scrap decorative art materials from Punjabi Market stores	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Call/email numerous cloth shops, decor/festival shops, and grocers for scrap material that could be used for art making Ask interviewees in particular for support on this end 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amrit and Desiree
Art materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Construction papers, scissors, glue, pens, markers, magazines, news papers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PMC, Amrit, Desiree

Day of Event Rundown

Time	Item	Details	Person Responsible
1-2 weeks prior	Pick up art materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scrap art materials Camera and tripod Art supplies (pens etc) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desiree, Amrit or PMC
2 days prior	Email reminder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Send email reminder to all registrants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Punjabi Market Collective
1.5 hrs prior	Set up stations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tables and chairs Print out prompts for each table Projector and screen Materials collected from Punjabi Market stores Decorations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PMC, Desiree, Amrit
0.5 hrs prior	REST		
0:00	Event starts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> wait for people to settle down for 10 minutes 	
0:10-0:20	Introduction of event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflexive Land Acknowledgement Housekeeping Community Agreement 	Desiree
0:20-0:45	Shared Histories Section	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Go through the brief presentation and video clips Spider Web activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amrit
0:45-1:10	Shared Stories Section	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share clips from interviews Writing activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desiree
1:10-2:00	Resistance is our Future Section: Art Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 prompts will be provided. Collage making activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desiree Amrit 2 volunteers (potentially classmates from ACAM class)
2:00-2:05	Closing statements		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amrit

Workshop Outline

Prompt 1: Shared Histories

For this section we would like to open up by discussing connected local histories. The intent of this section is to ground the group in discussions around displacement/gentrification, settler colonialism, systemic racism in an accessible manner. We intend to introduce these concepts to the general audience and build on this starting point with community members who are familiar with these topics. However, it is important that we recognize that the current challenges the Punjabi Market is navigating is not an isolated history, but that displacement and gentrification is experienced by racialized communities across Metro Vancouver.

We are considering opening up the space by showing short video clips that provide an introductory history to three places. We found that this might be a more engaging medium and might help to make things feel less overwhelming for the participants. These videos briefly discuss the history of the neighbourhood and also how displacement/gentrification has impacted them. Each video is around 3-5 minutes long. We also want to ground the space in understanding that gentrification/displacement are symptoms of larger systems such as settler-colonialism and systemic racism. In order to change the conditions that are harming the Punjabi Market and the South Asian communities connected to the place, we will highlight solidarity initiatives and teachings about whose lands we are on in the program.

Videos we will share include:

1. Black Strathcona: Hogan's Alley - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ANX5kYh-8dc>
2. Filipino community in Joyce-Collingwood - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yp2nNWKFVF4>
3. South Asian History in Vancouver - <https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/video/1.5669645>
4. Musqueam Through Time - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oCt3loAobeM>

Art Activity for Prompt 1: [Spider Web/Common Thread](#)

For this activity we will ask everyone to sit around in a circle. Depending on how many participants we have, we may split people into groups. We will then explain that we will be building a connecting web. Whoever has the ball of yarn will answer one question: What is one thing you take away from “Shared histories”. We will mention to the group to keep their answers brief. Then the person will hold on to the string and then pass the yarn ball to anyone who has not answered (could be in any direction). The facilitators will start first and model it. This can be a way for participants to engage with what we just discussed, but also to symbolically show how we are interconnected.

In this section we will briefly share Punjabi Markets history. To initiate conversation, we will share specific video clips from the interviews connected and facilitate conversations. We will also distribute sticky notes for note taking and reflection. We will ask everyone to hold on to the notes and encourage them to put their thoughts on a board that we will provide.

Write 2-3 sentences on what made you come to this workshop. Or share if you have any stories that connect you to the Punjabi Market.

In this section we will briefly talk about imagination and how it can be used to facilitate change. By dreaming and using our imaginations for the future, we can outline community-identified desired outcomes for the neighbourhood. These findings are integral to mobilizing for policy change, such as preserving or uplifting ideas from the community.

This prompt is important in encouraging the community to become engaged and involved in changemaking, and will be the main source of art for our zine.

We invite you to create a small collage by yourself or with your peers/family. This creation will be added to a board/poster that we will provide. We will be taking photos/phone scans in order to add these art pieces to the collective zine.

View our Community Collage, a similar output that was co-created with attendees of the ACAM 320J Community Showcase:



Zine

Our zine is the culmination of our efforts, and will be shared amongst all Punjabi Market store owners, neighbours, and visitors.

The link to the zine is [here](#). At the time of writing this document, it will be in draft form. But by summer 2025, it will hopefully be re-uploaded, easily accessible via PDF, and shared among the masses!



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