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Introduction South Asian Canadian Literature
A Centennial Journey

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Discontinuous Journeys: South Asian Canadian Migrations

MAY 23, 2014, MARKED THE CENTENNIAL ANNIVERSARY of the arrival and subsequent expulsion of the *Komagata Maru*, a Japanese ship commissioned by a Sikh entrepreneur, Gurdit Singh, to transport a group of South Asian migrants hoping to join a modest community already settled in the Dominion since the turn of the century. The fate of the passengers on board the *Komagata Maru* marks a significant "moment" in the history of South Asian migration to Canada, and arguably in Canada's own transformation from Dominion to nation.[1] This special issue commemorates these early migrants' pioneering efforts in light of the ways in which such watershed moments accrue significance for subsequent generations of artists and scholars. The anniversary of the *Komagata Maru*, itself a marker of the one-hundred-year history of South Asian migration to Canada, also occasions a (re-)reading of South Asian Canadian literature and culture, in terms that are as expansive, varied, and richly textured as this "centennial" history might imply.

The *Komagata Maru* is a tragic story of individuals who were denied what historian Daniel Gorman attests was, in principle, the British imperial subject's "guaranteed freedom of movement throughout the Empire" (*Imperial Citizenship* 161). Indeed, this journey was undertaken as a direct challenge to Canada's exclusionary immigration practices, which, in the aftermath of the Vancouver anti-Asian riots of 1907, took the form of the Continuous Passage regulation. Passed under Sir Wilfrid Laurier's government, the Continuous Passage Act was a historic piece of legislation designed with the "Indian" imperial subject in mind.[2] As its name suggests, it necessitated an "uninterrupted journey" from the Indian subcontinent to Canada, a virtual impossibility at the

time. The Continuous Passage Act was, in part, the Dominion's asser-
tion of independence against the dictates of the proverbial *Mater*, the
British Empire. In fact, a year after the ship was turned away, this dra-
conian legislation would prompt Britain's "tacit acknowledgement that
the dominions had sovereignty over their own immigration practices"
(161), thus indelibly drawing the *Komagata Maru* story into the frame
of Canadian history.

For me, as a South Asian of Pakistani origin whose family immi-
grated to Canada in the 1980s, coming across the *Komagata Maru* story
was something of a revelation. Like most Canadians, I thought of South
Asian migration to this country as a post-60s phenomenon, borne out of
then-prime minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau's lifting of the racial immigra-
tion ban that had prohibited non-Europeans from settling in Canada
for over forty years. My parents' emigration story was also part of an
entirely different historical moment as they were, like Salman Rushdie's
erstwhile "midnight's children," born in the years surrounding the par-
titioning of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, becoming citizens of a
newly formed Pakistan, and then denizens of the western hemisphere,
like countless other disenchanted "post-colonials." To those who grow
up in the knowledge and experience of these multiple displacements, it
soon becomes clear that however discontinuous our individual journeys
may seem, they are nonetheless part of a continuously unfolding series
of catalysts for movement and migration. The *Komagata Maru* story
thus resonates differently for me when re-framed as part of a series of
trans-historical moments. In fact, it might be said that my parents'
trajectories and those of the *Komagata Maru* passengers were prompted
by similar kinds of catalysts: specifically, those created by the institu-
tions, internal displacements, and global intra-imperial flows of the
British Raj and, after its dissolution in 1947, by the various geopolitical
upheavals of the imperial and post-imperial moment. In revealing the
protracted struggle for what the passengers, and those who fought on
their behalf, considered their birthright as "fellow" British imperial
subjects, the *Komagata Maru* episode epitomizes the fact that these jour-
neys are never benign, but rather part of a complex and ever-unfolding
history of ideological and sociopolitical debate, activism and hard-won
legislative change, both acted *upon* and *by* South Asians themselves.

The question of who claims the *Komagata Maru* is necessarily not
without controversy. As Rajini Srikanth rightly notes, "The debates

have centered on the question of whether the incident marks a specific-
ally Sikh memory or a more general Indian memory" ("The Komagata
Maru" 88). However, the notion of a specifically "Indian memory"
might also be seen as a rather circumscribed reading of such moments.
As several of the essays in this collection showcase, the *Komagata
Maru* has come to mean many things to many people. Nandi Bhatia,
in "Revisiting the Theatre of the *Komagata Maru* Incident," suggests
that "the history of the *Komagata Maru* belongs within a much wider
socio-cultural landscape and bears multiple meanings. Such multipli-
city is shaped not only by the various viewers and audiences of these
artifacts — in Canada and India — but also by the voices that underlie
such remembering." Anne Murphy, in "Performing the *Komagata Maru*:
Theatre and the Work of Memory," similarly considers the *Komagata
Maru*'s interpenetrative sites of meaning as they are reimagined in cross-
linguistic and inter-communal acts of social memory: "The imagina-
tive act of calling the past into the present . . . is productive of many
different pasts, and many different presents, through which the defin-
ition of Canada itself is formed." And in her comparative essay on the
Komagata Maru and Air India tragedies, "What is Remembered and
What is Forgotten?: South Asian Diasporic Histories and the Shifting
National Imaginary," Alia Somani observes that the common sentiment
across an otherwise diverse and vigorously growing archive is the insist-
ence on remembering this "tragedy as a shared struggle, one that cuts
across communal (or religious) divisions."

 For the South Asian diaspora, therefore, the *Komagata Maru* has
transcended the pages of history, now serving as a kind of mythological
ur-text that maps the history of Sikh arrival and settlement in Canada
across the breathtaking span of the last century. It has also transcended
ethno-communal specificity, becoming, as I have argued elsewhere,
a diasporic metanarrative articulated as the struggles, hopes, and
aspirations common to multigenerational communities of South Asian
Canadians.[3] The latter is evident in a steady stream of representations
of the *Komagata Maru* across a variety of media, including documen-
tary film, museum exhibits, digital collections such as the Simon Fraser
University archive inaugurated in 2011, theatrical production, fiction
and poetry[4]; and by those who neither share ancestral nor communal
ties to this early generation of hopeful migrants but feel connected to

their history, if not deeply moved by the continuing resonance of their plight.[5]

This is not to suggest that such sentiments are emblematic of a unified ethno-cultural narrative. The South Asian diaspora not only reflects the immense diversity of one of the most densely populated regions in the world, but sadly also quickly betrays the fractious internal struggles and geopolitical rivalries of this region. Even for those of us who have made Canada our home, any such unifying narrative is quickly unsettled by the fact that those who self-identify as "South Asian" in Canada are now estimated, as of the 2011 Census, to constitute over 1.5 million people. Nor do I wish to suggest that the *Komagata Maru* story should heretofore be viewed as a seamless "myth of origin." As Larissa Lai contends, in *Slanting I, Imagining We: Asian Canadian Literary Production in the 1980s and 1990s*, similar myths of origin framing the Japanese and Chinese Canadian communities are as empowering as they are problematic, since they elide experiential heterogeneities as well as "ongoing racisms and injustices, . . . quickly becom[ing] national myths [that] are thus easily coopted as strategies of assimilation" (7).

Indeed, South Asian Canadians cannot call upon or be contained by a singular myth of origin in the way that other diasporic groups, here and elsewhere, have drawn on shared histories of displacement and resettlement, such as those epitomized by the African slave trade, the Armenian genocide, or Chinese and Indian indentureship. However, the fact that so many of us in the diaspora are drawn, each in his or her deeply personal way, to the *Komagata Maru* story is undeniable. In his documentary film *Continuous Journey*, Ali Kazimi asks himself why he was so compelled to piece together this story from the houses of public and private memory. By the film's conclusion, he reflects: "This is the first ship bearing South Asian migrants to be turned away from Canadian shores. . . . I am here because of earlier struggles" (*Continuous Journey*).

Other Discontinuous Journeys: South Asian Canadian Literature and Criticism

South Asian Canadian literature, as a category of study, came into being in the 1980s, becoming the object of vigorous critical attention until the late 1990s. The post-millennium period has necessarily brought with it other significant avenues for reading South Asian Canadian literature.

One such early intervention was that of Asian Canadian literary studies, which provided fecund new ground for comparative work in the field.[6] Numerous other critical and theoretical frameworks have further nuanced our reading of South Asian Canadian texts and contexts, including diaspora and transnational studies, gender studies and queer theory, and so on. Scholarship devoted to single authors or single works have also appeared in the form of journal articles, book chapters, and a modest range of book-length studies.[7] However, while South Asian Canadian literature has been filtered through specialized readings of authors and texts, it has not been the object of sustained critical attention, either as a category of study or as a growing body of writing, in the post-millennium period.[8] This calls attention to the discontinuities that likely inform our current discussions, and warrants a retrospective reading of this earlier period of criticism if, that is, we are to move forward in more productive ways.

From the mid-1980s to the late 1990s, a select number of works helped establish the central terms of engagement for South Asian Canadian literature. These works are as scant as they are tentative and, dare I say, begrudging at times. With a few exceptions, the majority are edited collections, surveys, or anthologies that define "South Asian Canadian" in socio-historical terms and introduce a Canadian readership to authors who might fall under this category. This rather uneven approach is undoubtedly reflective of its own "moment" of articulation, one which was fueled by the heated debates surrounding official multiculturalism, and the galvanizing role multiculturalism played, as a cultural mandate and funding agency, in publishing and literary circles.[9] In other words, these earlier works gesture toward a body of writing in gestation at a time when "South Asian Canadian," as a diasporic or ethnic category, emerged from a seemingly fraught polemic: on the one hand, it was seen to be a productive marker of socio-religious and ethno-cultural affinities; on the other hand, it was seen to be a multiculturalist invention, shaped for the expedience of a nation attempting to accommodate a vast and unruly influx of new immigrants connected to an equally vast and unruly place, the Indian subcontinent.

The arrival, so to speak, of South Asian Canadian literature took the form of novelist and publisher Moyez G. Vassanji's *A Meeting of Streams: South Asian Canadian Literature.* Not only was this the first collection of essays devoted to the subject but it was also the first book

to be published, in 1985, by TSAR, Canada's first independent press devoted entirely to "multicultural" writers.[10] The collection includes a broad range of essays on what is variously referred to as "Indo-Anglian" and "South Asian Canadian" writing. It also includes two informative surveys on the non-anglophone contexts of Urdu which, as Nuzrat Yar Khan suggests, accounts for much of the early literary activity by Pakistani-Canadians, and Punjabi, which Surjeet Kalsey classifies under two distinct periods: an earlier period of anti-colonial poetry produced in the early twentieth century, and the heightened literary activity of the seventies, which saw the publication of "more than three thousand poems . . . written by more than seventy five poets" ("Canadian Panjabi Literature" 109). Vassanji's approach is thus inclusive and open-ended rather than prescriptive, aiming as the collection does to foreground "South Asian Canadian" as a "term best used as one of contrast," not only in light of South Asian diversity itself, but also by way of contrast to the "mainstream — that which shares a common heritage with British and American literature" (Introduction 4). Despite its brevity, Vassanji's introduction makes several important assertions, including a clear objection to the category of "immigrant" writing, and the concomitant affirmation that South Asian Canadian writing "does not become less Canadian because it is global" (3).

Vassanji's collection was followed by Suwanda Sugunasiri's *The Search for Meaning: The Literature of Canadians of South Asian Origin* (1988), a government study funded by the Multiculturalism Directorate of the Department of the Secretary of State, which also contains several essays found in *A Meeting of Streams*.[11] Primarily a quantitative assessment of writing by those of South Asian origin, the study is nonetheless the most informative among its group, as Sugunasiri provides a solid rationale for the term South Asian Canadian as a workable and, indeed, preferable category of assessment over "Indo-Pakistani," which was in usage at the time. Specifically, Sugunasiri asserts that ethno-linguistic overlaps between the literatures and peoples of the subcontinent (e.g., the ubiquity of languages such as Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi and Bengali across the border regions of Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh) warrants such an approach, significantly looking to commonality as his entry point into the literature, rather than difference and "contrast." Sugunasiri also significantly acknowledges the continuity of this literary

tradition in light of the Punjabi community's presence in Canada "for over 80 years" (12-13).

The 1990s brought with it a steady stream of anthologies and critical works, the vast majority of which reflect the introductory and tentative qualities of their antecedents. In addition, several special issues, such as W.H. New's "South Asian Connections" (1992) in *Canadian Literature*, and Michael Thorpe's focus on South Asian Canadian drama (1998) in the *Canadian Theatre Review,* marked a turn to genre-specific studies or broader comparative frameworks.[12] Two critical works of note from this period are Uma Parameswaran's *Saclit: An Introduction to South-Asian-Canadian Literature* (1996) and Arun Mukherjee's essay "How Shall We Read South Asian Canadian Texts?," in her study *Postcolonialism: My Living* (1998). Parameswaran's work promises to critically frame the field in announcing the arrival of a new term, "saclit," to "denote the writings of South-Asian-Canadians."[13] However, the study takes a rather contrary turn in its introductory chapter, which "restricts" its focus to the literature of the "Indian diaspora," making a rather broad and uncritical distinction between "Indian" and "South Asian Canadian" (5).[14] While the book fails to deliver on its central claim, it importantly contextualizes diasporic theatre and poetry in terms of the rich literary heritage of South Asia, including the influence of the *ghazal* form or that of Bengali protest theatre.[15] In "How Shall We Read South Asian Canadian Texts?," Mukherjee's focus is on postcolonial critical and theoretical reading practices which, she argues, not only reductively position South Asian Canadian writers "*a priori* as resistant postcolonials, as subalterns and marginal" (*Postcolonialism* 39), but also "render irrelevant the South Asian Canadian aspects of South Asian Canadian writing" (27).

Vassanji's expository piece "Am I a Canadian Writer?," in which the author embraces the "postcolonial" over ethnic or national classifications, suggests that Mukherjee's aforementioned critique is not entirely shared.[16] Vassanji states, "One might define and truly recognize a category called Canadian Postcolonial; those of us who would be described by this term are essentially those who emerged from the colonies in the 1960s and 1970s." In his discussion of Asian Canadian literature, Donald C. Goellnicht takes a rather provocative approach to the question of postcoloniality, deducing that South Asian Canadian writers did, in fact, embrace the postcolonial as a marketable category

favoured by the publishing industry, a preference which Goellnicht rightly contends displaces issues of discrimination and injustice outside the purview of Canadian locales and contexts.[17] In her introduction to the benchmark anthology *The Geography of Voice: Canadian Literature of the South Asian Diaspora* (1992), Diane McGifford similarly attributes the penchant for the "foreign" to publishers who privilege the "pre-" or "non-Canadian" settings and preoccupations of many South Asian Canadian texts.[18] However, as I have argued in my 2015 critical survey of South Asian Canadian literature, McGifford's counter-discursive strategy to emphasize the "'in Canada' South Asian immigrant experience" ("Introduction" viii) through tropes of racial outsidership and minority-hood merely substitutes one oppositional stance for another, reproducing what Mukherjee deems a postcolonialist overemphasis on subaltern subjectivities.[19]

There are many assumptions from this earlier period of criticism which, quite understandably, do not hold up as easily today, particularly when we read South Asian Canadian literature both retrospectively and dynamically. Most obviously, perhaps, demographic shifts and changing socioeconomic realities have been substantial — particularly since the influx of immigrants during the post-60s boom — and must be factored into new readings of South Asian Canadian literature and culture. Though the post-60s immigration boom privileged a certain class of immigrants under the points system (namely, an affluent or educated professional elite), a demographic turn that at least partly accounts for the shift from literature produced in South Asian languages to literature produced in English,[20] a broader socio-historical reading of South Asian migration immediately problematizes this somewhat generic portrait. In her poetry collection *White Album*, Rishma Dunlop alludes to the socioeconomic differences between her parents' generation of immigrants "who will vote for Trudeau's white papers" ("August Wedding" 43), and those who "do not speak my parents' Queen's English" ("Vigil" 8). Farzana Doctor's novel *Stealing Nasreen* and Vinay Virmani's (co-written) screenplay *Dr. Cabbie* similarly depict a Torontonian metropolis haunted by accountants-turned-janitors and doctors-turned-taxi drivers, thereby unsettling from within both diasporic and national myths of professional opportunity and upward social mobility.[21] In a different vein, a growing number of novelists, including Gurjinder Basran, Randy Boyagoda, Ranj Dhaliwal, Farzana Doctor, Priscila Uppal, and

Padma Viswanathan, signal the coming of age of the second generation. However, as Viswanathan reminds us, Canada has been home to "five generations of Sikh settlement" (*Ever After* 8), which should caution us not to restrict our apprehension of multi-generational perspectives to the contemporary moment.

Few would deny that the millennium has thus far been defined by global narratives such as 9/11 and the "war on terror," or that these narratives bear a particular resonance for South Asia and its diasporas. Indeed, these arenas of ideological conflict, armed warfare, and socio-political upheaval have adversely impacted the South Asian region and its minority communities at home and abroad, while also prompting significant demographic shifts within the South Asian Canadian population. The theatre of the global "war on terror," in which Canada has played a distinctly hawkish and militaristic role under Prime Minister Stephen Harper, has not only precipitated new waves of migration from the *Maghreb* and the Middle East but also from Pakistan, a site of protracted military incursions, U.S. drone attacks, and a grossly under-reported cross-border refugee crisis between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Indeed, the largest influx of Pakistanis to Canada has occurred between 1996 and 2011, with the lion's share notably occurring between 2001 and 2006.[22]

To date, there has been much critical interest, in the United States, in literary responses to 9/11 and the "war on terror." In the Canadian context, non-literary reflections fill the discursive gaps, while a paucity of literary texts, itself a likely symptom of the lack of local publishing opportunities available to writers addressing these subjects, has generated a vacuum in the cultural imaginary.[23] Yet, the war on terror has permeated the national narrative, creating new forms of racialization and discrimination for South Asians looking to emigrate to Canada as well as those already settled here. For instance, a climate of heightened Islamophobia found expression in controversial legislation such as the proposed *Bill 94: Reasonable Accommodation* and *Bill 60: The Québec Charter of Values*, which fundamentally undermine the religious freedoms of Canadian Muslims and other religious minorities.[24] Anti-terror legislation implemented by the Harper government also continues to corrode civil liberties for minority communities. This is typified in Canada's radical policy shift from a Liberal government sympathetic to Tamil asylum seekers at the outbreak of the Sri Lankan Civil War,

to the brandishing of Tamil refugees as "terror" suspects by the Harper regime. [25] Thus, even though the Tamil refugee crisis, which has made Canada home to "the largest Tamil diaspora in the world" (Wayland 7),[26] might be seen as a *fait accompli*, this, too, is a discontinuous narrative that demands retrospective and comparative re-readings.

The aforementioned gaps can be partly accounted for by the dearth of creative publications by writers who might be said to provide "minority" South Asian Canadian perspectives — namely, those from generally under-represented areas of the Indian subcontinent, such as Pakistan, Kashmir, Bhutan and Bangladesh, as well as minority communities in India. Such perspectives are admittedly harder to come by; however, Alison Donnell's observation, in the context of Caribbean literature, that "neglect is not the same as absence" (138), bears consideration here. New works that have emerged since the millennium are beginning, however nominally, to unveil a more complete picture of the local and global contexts of "South Asian Canadians." For instance, recent fiction by Jaspreet Singh, Musharraf Ali Farooqi, and Anosh Irani turns to the social and political backdrops of Kashmir, Pakistan, and Parsi India, respectively.[27] In addition, the late Chelva Kanaganayakam began the important task of laying the critical groundwork, in translation and criticism, for Sri Lankan and Tamil diasporic literatures.[28] Recent publications such as Shyam Selvadurai's *Hungry Ghosts*, Randy Boyagoda's *Beggar's Feast*, and R. Cheran's numerous collections of poetry, confirm an active writing community within this substantial segment of the South Asian Canadian population.[29]

To this list one must add writers of the "double diaspora," whose journeys from the Indian subcontinent to Canada are also wholly discontinuous, emigrating as these writers have from the Caribbean, East Africa, and other parts of the former British Empire where their ancestors had settled as indentured labourers or as "free passengers" in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[30] Among the latter group, Shani Mootoo and M.G. Vassanji have received the most critical attention to date, even though much of this attention has focused on debut or earlier works rather than the growing corpus of each of these writers, a point that is discussed in my interview with Mootoo in this special issue. Others continue to get short shrift, including Caribbean writers Cyril Dabydeen, Ramabai Espinet, Rabindranath Maharaj, and poet Janet Naidu, or East African writers Yasmin Ladha and Anar Ali, to

name a few. Suffice it to say that there is much more work to be done in this area, and that ethno-national and diasporic specificities must continue to inform our reading of South Asian Canadian identities.

As ground-breaking as these earlier studies were, therefore, we are reminded, time and time again, of "the provisionality of our critical acts" (Kamboureli 49). This special issue is no exception. While my own reflections are necessarily indebted to an earlier period of scholarship, they are equally driven by the task of teasing out the gaps and fissures left in its wake, and ever-energized by the writing, which never tires, even when other kinds of wheels stop turning.

Continuous Journeys and New Critical Mappings: The Essays

In keeping with its commemorative spirit, this issue includes several contributions that bring to view what has been, in recent years, a heightened period of creative and critical interest in two watershed events to have marked the diaspora: the *Komagata Maru* and the Air India tragedies. Each of these events has been the object of private and public memorialization, national apology, and political redress (indeed, it should be noted that 2015 marks the thirty-year anniversary of the tragic demise of Air India Flight 182). The essays in this collection also open up the field to alternate critical and comparative directions in the genres of theatre, poetry, and fiction, or in light of second-generation perspectives. Essays focusing on the novel genre also add substantially to extant scholarship on internationally acclaimed authors such as Rohinton Mistry and Michael Ondaatje, while considerations of the "double diaspora" are addressed in an essay on the Indo-Caribbean context and in my interview with Shani Mootoo.

As the essays by Nandi Bhatia, Alan Filewod, and Anne Murphy variously reveal, literary activism rooted in South Asian street and protest theatre, coalitionist and inter-ethnic forms of collaboration, community-inflected themes, as well as the use of non-professional actors, are a few such continuities between earlier and current iterations of South Asian Canadian drama.[31] In their consideration of dramatic staging(s) of the *Komagata Maru*, the essays by Bhatia and Murphy foreground the interrelationship between memorialization and performance as it is projected through dialogic modes of representation. Bhatia's "Revisiting the Theatre of the *Komagata Maru* Incident" specifically examines Sharon Pollock's 1976 play *The Komagata Maru Incident* in light of a resurgence

of literary and cultural materials on the *Komagata Maru* history. In her revisionist reading, Bhatia argues that the play is not simply concerned with imperial racism as it is emblematized in the ship's expulsion, but also "the triangulated relationship between India, Canada and the British Empire." Bhatia teases out this "complex web of social relations" through Pollock's deployment of the "aesthetics of the circus" which, as Bhatia argues, "urge[s] spectators to consider a multiplicity of identities — race, class, and gender — through characters whose subjectivities are embedded in asymmetrical colonial and national power relations." Anne Murphy's "Performing the *Komagata Maru*: Theatre and the Work of Memory" considers the experimental bilingual play, *The Komagata Maru*, an integration of Pollock's *The Komagata Maru Incident* (1976), Ajmer Rode's Punjabi-language play *Komagata Maru* (published in 1984), and Sukhwant Hundal and Sadhu Binning's Punjabi-language play *Samundari Sher Nal Takkar* (1989). Murphy wrote the integrated play's framing narrative; she was also involved in the work's production, which she animates in a series of photos from the play's staging at the University of British Columbia in May 2014. Murphy's reading of this collaborative endeavor thus effectively enacts, in theory and practice, the inter-subjective nature of memorialization, which she describes as "a performance of community memory."

The bombing of Air India Flight 182, on June 23, 1985, took the lives of the 329 passengers on board, the vast majority of whom were Canadians of South Asian origin. In Padma Viswanathan's *The Ever After of Ashwin Rao* (2014), the first novel to bring the Air India tragedy into full narrative focus, this event is witnessed as a symbol of betrayal by the state, since "Canadians at large did not feel themselves to have been attacked, although nearly every passenger aboard that flight was a born or naturalized Canadian. . . . No wonder Canada had failed to prevent the bombing in the first place. No wonder they had failed, for eighteen years, to bring it to trial" (7). Tanis MacDonald's and Chandrima Chakraborty's essays implicitly elaborate on the trope of betrayal as a hegemonic act that is counter-discursively remembered through the politics and poetics of mourning. MacDonald's "Un/Authorized Exhibits: Elegiac Necropolitics in Renée Sarojini Saklikar's *children of air india*" introduces readers to Saklikar's debut volume of poetry (published in 2013), which focuses on the 2003 court trial that resulted in the acquittal of the state's two prime suspects. Reading the

text as "necropolitical" elegy, MacDonald avers that Saklikar's elegiac naming of the "child" victims on board the flight not only "scrapes the grief politics of South Asian Canadian tragedy against the official ideology of remembrance offered by the Canadian government," but also brings the event into full relief, as "a culturally-inflected" legacy, for subsequent generations of South Asian Canadians. In her essay "Official Apology, Creative Remembrances, and Management of the Air India Tragedy," Chakraborty examines Bharati Mukherjee's short story "The Management of Grief" (published in 1988 in *The Middleman and Other Stories*) and Anita Rau Badami's novel *Can You Hear the Nightbird Call?* (2006) in relation to Prime Minister Stephen Harper's "apology," in 2010, for Canada's failure to acknowledge a terrorist act perpetrated against its own citizens. As Chakraborty states, Mukherjee's and Badami's texts expose the ways in which racial minorities' "grievances against the state" are contained by the latter's attempt "to manage . . . grief civilly and even hide it discursively," a strategy of containment which effectively turns the model minority into a "model mourner." In "What is Remembered and What is Forgotten? South Asian Diasporic Histories and the Shifting National Imaginary," Alia Somani evocatively maps, within a comparative and interdisciplinary framework, the *Komagata Maru* and Air India tragedies as two strikingly similar narratives of "South Asian exclusion," insofar as each of these events has been (mis-)represented and diminished in official public discourse. Somani reads Mukherjee's "The Management of Grief" alongside Ajmer Rode and Jarnail Singh's "The *Komagata Maru* Stories," a 2011 collaborative museum exhibit consisting of a series of paintings and narratives, suggesting that each of these works is part of an ever-growing public archive that "collectively constitute[s] a powerful counternarrative, forcing the Canadian nation to remember its forgotten past and to recognize its minority communities."

Several papers in this collection substantially reenergize discussions of the South Asian Canadian "canon," represented here by novelists Anita Rau Badami, Rohinton Mistry, Michael Ondaatje and Shyam Selvadurai. Each of these essays breaks new theoretical ground in readings of texts and contexts that are as challenging as they are far-ranging, including Ondaatje's and Selvadurai's unique aesthetic treatments of the protracted Sri Lankan Civil War, and Mistry's Dickensian renderings of contemporary Indian political history. James William Johnson's

"'Beggaring the Nation': Bodily Inscription and the Body Politic in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*" examines Mistry's 1995 Giller-Prize winning novel set during Indira Gandhi's State of Emergency. In teasing out "the ubiquity of bodily metaphor" in contradistinction to the regulatory practices of the state, Johnson traces the ways in which corporeality functions as narratological device and political paradigm. Drawing on Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva, and others, Johnson posits that destabilizing "bodies" in Mistry's text structurally and thematically work to "problematize the attempts of the Indira Gandhi regime to depict the Indian body politic as a coherent, homogeneous, and corporeal totality."

The essays by Lichung Yang and Arun Nedra Rodrigo examine recent fictional representations of the Sri Lankan Civil War, which officially erupted in 1983 and ended in 2009, with the Sri Lankan government claiming victory over the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). In her essay "Physiognomy of War: Ruins of Memory in Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*," Lichung Yang examines Ondaatje's 2000 novel, notably published during the war years, through a post-structuralist reading hinged primarily on Walter Benjamin's and Jacques Derrida's allegorical vision of the ruin. Yang posits that in *Anil's Ghost* the "bodily, architectural, and psychic" are among the unscripted casualties of war and, as such, surface as textual fragments or "ruins" in Ondaatje's characteristically "ambivalent narrative." As Yang argues, these "textual ruins" are allegorical renderings not merely of the material traces of violence and decay in bodies and objects, but also of those "mnemonic residues . . . buried deep inside individuals." Arun Nedra Rodrigo provides a timely consideration of Shyam Selvadurai's latest novel *Hungry Ghosts* (2013), the first of Selvadurai's works to closely chart a Sri Lankan family's migratory journey and settlement in Canada at the height of the Sri Lankan Civil War. In her essay, "A 'Just Hearing': Reading Shyam Selvadurai's *The Hungry Ghosts* as Counter to State Practice," Rodrigo looks through the interdisciplinary lens of law and literary studies, specifically reading the fictional narrative within the framework of two legal infrastructures, the Refugee Hearing and the PIF or Personal Information Form. As Rodrigo suggests, while the refugee hearing and "the generic constraints" of the immigration form carry an epistemic burden that marginalizes the traumatized individual, the refugee narrative functions as a "*bios*" that "endow[s] that life with meaning." In this vein, Rodrigo considers *The Hungry Ghosts* as a

counternarrative to the kinds of "self-endorsing practices" of the state, arguing that the novel genre epitomizes the ways in which the refugee can "enter the body politic as *bios* through a complex engagement with trauma and truth claims."

Alan Filewod's "Family Business: Affect and Reconciliation in *A Brimful of Asha*" introduces the work of a relative newcomer, Ravi Jain, the founder and artistic director of *Why Not Theatre*, a Toronto-based collective devoted to experimental theatre and cross-cultural collaborations.[32] Filewod examines the published (2012) text *A Brimful of Asha*, originally a theatrical piece performed by the real-life mother and son duo of Asha and Ravi Jain. Working through an intergenerational conflict over Ravi's assertion of independence against the dictates of custom (his refusal to accept an arranged marriage) and social expectation (his unpopular choice of a career in the arts), the play provides a remarkably fresh and humorous approach to popular South Asian Canadian themes and second-generation subjecthood. Filewod examines these central themes in light of "theatrical affect," a semiotic and physical encoding of the relationship between performance and spectatorship which, in this case, is further reified through the cultural trope of food, which the mother interactively shares with the audience to establish "her maternal authority over the space of performance."

Finally, several contributions in this issue complicate the "South Asian Canadian" paradigm in light of the "double diaspora," or those whose migrations have been twice- or multiply-removed from the Indian subcontinent, by way of ancestral migrations to Britain's colonies in the Caribbean, East Africa, and elsewhere.[33] The double diaspora holds an often ambiguous, if not unsettling, place in discussions of South Asian Canadian literature and culture. Albeit marginally, this is a less vexed position for the Indo-African diaspora, whose displacement from the ancestral homeland has been somewhat allayed by a precolonial history of cross-cultural ties between coastal East Africa and the Indian subcontinent, as well as opportunities for transcontinental mobility and exchange, in the colonial and postcolonial eras. In contrast, the wholesale adoption of the Indo-Caribbean diaspora within the taxonomy of "South Asian Canadian," when not accompanied by a critical awareness of this community's multigenerational history in the Caribbean region for almost two centuries, risks pulling us back into an essentializing multiculturalist quagmire. In her essay "Indigeneity and the Indo-

Caribbean: Cyril Dabydeen's *The Dark Swirl*," Aliyah Khan illuminates this alternate trajectory in her reading of Dabydeen's magic-realist novella, originally published in 1988 and reprinted in 2007. Khan considers Dabydeen's complex representation of the cross-cultural encounter between the South Asian diasporic (or "Indo-Caribbean") and Indigenous populations of Guyana through the entity of the *massacouraman*, a reptilian water-spirit of pre-Columbian folklore. In charting the Indo-Caribbean subject's "syncretic" rooting in an Amazonian landscape infused with Indigenous beliefs, Khan also sees in the story a cautionary tale, concluding: "In the context of the fast-growing Indo-Caribbean double diaspora in North America, Dabydeen's work also offers the subtle and timely reminders that migrant communities, even with their own socio-economic struggles, can politically and physically displace marginalized indigenous communities."

For the Indo-Caribbean diaspora, specifically, subsequent migrations "North" must be viewed as part of a pan-continental journey across the Americas that is unique to this branch of the "South Asian Canadian" community. This sentiment is echoed in my interview with author and visual artist Shani Mootoo, the final piece in this collection. As much of Mootoo's fiction reveals, the author's simultaneously deeply personal and public engagements with Indo-Trinidadian and Caribbean contexts call attention to the ethno-cultural specificities of her work, as well as the inter-spatial mappings of her novels across the Caribbean and Canada.[34] However, as Mootoo attests, for the twice-removed diaspora in Canada, the Indo-Caribbean subject's identification with other South Asians was, in the early period of official multiculturalism, as much an act of strategic essentialism as it was an uninvited form of racial ossification, distilled through what Himani Bannerji has termed "a collective cultural essence" (*Dark Side* 8). Mootoo's interview thus leads us to another trajectory along these discontinuous journeys — that is, the ever-shifting borders of identity that continually reconfigure South Asian Canadian cartographies — and situates all such discussions within an ongoing polemic which, I believe, neither entirely unravels nor irreversibly freeze-frames the ties that bind.

Coming out of what has been a rather dormant period of critical focus on South Asian Canadian literature, as its own category of study, this special issue is, itself, part of a discontinuous journey. In mapping some of the demographic and literary developments to have emerged

in the last several decades, it is my hope that this issue unearths some touchstones of continuity to help us re-read South Asian Canadian literature, like South Asian migration to Canada, in light of our retrospective awareness of its centennial "narratives" of settlement, and by way of the possible journeys and moorings to come.

Notes

[1] Statistics Canada (2011) identifies South Asian Canadians as the largest visible minority, comprising "a total of 1,567,400 individuals," or "one-quarter (25.0%) of the total visible minority population and 4.8% of Canada's total population." See Government of Canada, Statistics Canada, "Immigration and Ethnocultural Diversity in Canada," 2011.

[2] For a historical account of what is referred to, in official Canadian annals, as "The *Komagata Maru* Incident," see Hugh Johnson's *The Voyage of the Komagata Maru: The Sikh Challenge to Canada's Colour Bar*.

[3] My assertion that the *Komagata Maru* is a diasporic meta-narrative for South Asian Canadians was first postulated in the context of two fictional works: Tariq Malik's *Chanting Denied Shores: The Komagata Maru Narratives* and Anita Rau Badami's *Can You Hear the*

Nightbird Call? (see Pirbhai, "South Asian"). A longer version of this discussion was delivered in the form of my conference paper, "'Chanting Denied' Intra-Imperial Borders: The *Komagata Maru* and Contemporary South Asian Canadian Historical Fiction," presented at Congress 2014 for the Canadian Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (Brock University, St. Catharines, 24-26 May 2014).

[4] Simon Fraser University inaugurated the first open access digital archive, in 2011, on the *Komagata Maru*. See "Komagata Maru: Continuing the Journey," Simon Fraser University Library, 2011.

[5] Ali Kazimi's documentary film *Continuous Journey* and his book-length study *Undesirables: White Canada and the Komagata Maru* are two notable examples of these current engagements. Another singular achievement is Tariq Malik's *Chanting Denied Shores: The Komagata Maru Narratives*, the first major work of historical fiction to narrativize this event.

[6] See, in particular, Eleanor Ty's *The Politics of the Visible in Asian North American Narratives* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2004), Ty and Goellnicht's *Asian North American Identities Beyond the Visible* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2004), and Ty and Christl Verduyn's *Asian Canadian Writing Beyond Autoethnography* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2008).

[7] With the exception of Michael Ondaatje, book-length studies and edited collections devoted to an individual corpus are not as numerous as one would hope. A few notable examples are Nilufer E. Bharucha's *Rohinton Mistry: Ethnic Enclosures and Transcultural Spaces* (Jaipur: Rawat, 2003), Jameela Begum's *Cyril Dabydeen* (Jaipur: Rawat, 2000), and Asma Sayed's edited collection *M.G. Vassanji: Essays on His Works* (Toronto: Guernica, 2014).

[8] My aforementioned critical survey "South Asian Canadian 'Geographies of Voice'" also brings the terms of assessment of South Asian Canadian writing back into critical focus.

[9] Studies on multiculturalism and multicultural literature are by now well-rehearsed and too numerous to name. Ty and Verduyn's *Asian Canadian Writing Beyond Autoethnography* and Larissa Lai's *Slanting I, Imagining We* provide informative explications of these debates as they impacted writers of the Asian/South Asian diaspora in Canada.

[10] TSAR was co-founded by Moyez G. Vassanji and his wife Nurjehan Aziz, who remains its editor-in-chief. The press was an off-shoot of the journal *The Toronto South Asian Review*, which later became the *Toronto Review of Contemporary Writing Abroad* before it was discontinued. It should be noted that TSAR was renamed Mawenzi House in 2015; it remains under the editorship of Aziz.

[11] This followed on the heels of Sugunasiri's *The Literature of Canadians of South Asian Origin: An Overview and Preliminary Bibliography* (1987), the first bibliography of its kind.

[12] The special "South Asian Canadian Connections" issue of *Canadian Literature* provides a brief four-page introduction focused mainly on an assortment of essays on South Asian Canadian writers and Euro-Canadian representations of India.

[13] This statement appears on the back cover of Parameswaran's study and is reiterated in her introductory chapter.

[14] Parameswaran distinguishes between "South Asian Canadian" as those with ancestral ties to the Indian subcontinent and "Indian" as those "who came directly to Canada from one of the South-Asian countries" (*Saclit* 5). Parameswaran's use of the blanket term "Indian," while not atypical in its approach to writers from the Indian subcontinent, also essentializes the geopolitical breadth and ethno-national diversity of the region.

[15] Surjeet Kalsey also speaks of the structural and philosophical influence of the *ghazal* form on Punjabi poetry, in her essay "Punjabi Literature in Canada" in Sugunasiri's *The Search for Meaning* (113-68).

[16] This piece served as the introduction to a 2006 section on the "South Asian Diaspora" in *Canadian Literature;* it includes only three essays on the subject.

[17] Though Goellnicht implies that South Asian Canadian writers capitalized on the "postcolonial" label, he also firmly indicts Canadian institutions for using the "postcolonial" as a marketing strategy and critical tool, to keep "this literature simultaneously inside and outside the field of 'Canadian literature'" ("A Long Labour").

[18] McGifford's anthology brings together writers from the various and sundry contexts of the diaspora (e.g., the Caribbean, East Africa, South Africa, India, and Sri Lanka), and showcases works in every genre, including poetry by Himani Bannerji, Cyril Dabydeen, and Rienzi Crusz; fiction by Rohinton Mistry, M.G. Vassanji, and Samuel Selvon; and drama by Rana Bose and Rahul Varma.

[19] See Pirbhai, "South Asian."

[20] As Sugunasiri notes, the higher level of education of those immigrating at this time, not only directly from the Indian subcontinent but also from the diaspora, assured a facility and comfort in English that earlier generations did not always possess. Moreover, those from the former colonies of the Caribbean and East Africa were schooled entirely in English. (See Sugunasiri's introductory chapter in *The Search for Meaning*.)

[21] In Doctor's novel *Stealing Nasreen*, accountant Shaffiq Paperwala spends his first years as a new immigrant in Toronto working as a janitor in a downtown psychiatric facility. *Dr. Cabbie* is a 2014 feature film set in Toronto which offers a contemporary portrait of a newly accredited doctor in India whose "untransferrable" accreditations, in Canada, force him to resort to a career as a taxi driver; the film is co-written by Vinay Virmani, Manu Chopra, and Ron Kennell, and directed by Jean-François Pouliot.

[22] Statistics Canada indicates that the most active period of immigration from Pakistan occurred between 2001 and 2006, with the arrival of 57, 630 new immigrants; approximately 75,000 immigrants arrived between 1991 and 2001, with the majority arriving between 1996 and 2001. See Canada, Statistics Canada, "Immigration Population."

[23] In the last few years TSAR has taken the lead in providing these issues and perspectives a platform, particularly in non-fictional genres, such as Bhalwant Baneja's travelogue/memoir, *Troubled Pilgrimage: Passage to Pakistan* (2013), or Sheema Khan's personal essays, *Of Hockey and Hijab: Reflections of a Canadian Muslim Woman* (2009).

[24] On 24 March 2010, Justice Minister Kathleen Weil introduced *Bill 94: An Act to establish guidelines governing accommodation requests within the administration and certain institutions* (more commonly known as *Reasonable Accommodation*) in Québec's National Assembly to limit the use of the Muslim veil in government settings, thereby calling into question the religious freedoms of Muslim Canadians. Bill 94 was reincarnated as *Bill 60: Charter affirming the values of State secularism and religious neutrality and of equality between women and men, and providing a framework for accommodation requests* (more commonly known as the *Québec Charter of Values*), proposed by the Parti Québécois to expand the scope of the first bill to include other religions and their religious symbols. Bill 60 has not come to pass, given the defeat of the Parti Québécois in the 2014 provincial election.

[25] In 2006, the Harper government deemed the Liberation Tamil Tiger Elam a terrorist organization. Human rights groups claim that this has resulted in the Conservative government's hostile position against Tamil asylum seekers (see Wayland). This hostility is typified in the unlawful detainment of Tamil asylum seekers on board the *M.V. Sun Sea*, which arrived on the coast of British Columbia in 2010. See also Canadian Council for Refugees, "Rights advocates decry detention of refugee claimants from MV Sun Sea."

[26] Amarnath Amarasingam estimates that the Tamil population in Canada now stands close to 200,000, most of whom sought asylum between 1984 and 1992. Immigration from

Sri Lanka was steady in the 1990s, with the largest influx between 1991 and 1995. See also Canada, Statistics Canada, "Immigration Population."

[27] Jaspreet Singh won the McAuslan First Book Prize for his short story collection *Seventeen Tomatoes*; Singh's debut novel *Chef* (2010) is a unique account of a "terror" attack in the war-torn, politically disputed territory of Kashmir from the perspective of a young chef-in-training. Toronto-based Musharraf Ali Farooqi is the author of a 2008 debut novel titled *The Story of a Widow*, set entirely in the domestic interiors of Karachi, Pakistan. Vancouver-based Anosh Irani (whose debut novel *The Song of Kahunsu* was a finalist for Canada Reads and for the Ethel Wilson Fiction Prize) is the author of three works of fiction, including *Dahanu Road*, the saga of a land-owning Parsi family living on the outskirts of Bombay.

[28] Kanaganayakam was prolific in this area, beginning with his first monograph *Dark Antonyms and Paradise: The Poetry of Rienzi Crusz* (1997) and culminating in a bilingual anthology of translated poems, *In Our Translated World: Contemporary Global Tamil Poetry* (2013), all of which have been published by TSAR.

[29] Windsor, Ontario-based R. Cheran has authored several collections of poetry, including *You Cannot Turn Away*, *A Time of Burning*, and *The Second Sun Rise*.

[30] Migration from the Indian subcontinent under the aegis of the British Raj consisted of bonded or indentured labourers, and "free passengers," who travelled and settled freely in the non-settler colonies. See Pirbhai, *Mythologies of Migration.*

[31] The Montreal-based theatre collectives, Rana Bose's *Montreal Serai* and Rahul Varma's *Teesri Duniya*, have made significant contributions to Canadian and Québecois theatre, particularly in light of their multi-ethnic casts and grassroots activism. The British Columbia-based Vancouver *Sath* (founded by Sadhu Binning and other Punjabi activists in the early 1980s) is also rooted in a tradition of literary activism based in the Punjabi-Canadian community, specifically. *A Brimful of Asha* was first staged by *Why Not Theatre*, a theatre collective based in Toronto, founded in 2007 under the artistic direction of Ravi Jain. See Why Not Theatre, "About Why Not Theatre."

[32] Notably, one project in development by *Why Not Theatre* is a collaborative production of the *Komagata Maru*. See Why Not Theatre, "Komagata Maru Project."

[33] In my introduction to *Mythologies of Migration, Vocabularies of Indenture*, I define the "double diaspora" as a "complex subject position" involving "two diasporic trajectories simultaneously (namely, the old and new South Asian diasporas in the non-western and western hemispheres)" (12-13).

[34] In an earlier essay, "To Canada From 'My Many Selves'," I problematize the usage of "South Asian Canadian" as a blanket term that does not take into account the diverse trajectories and multiply-positioned identities of the South Asian diaspora in Canada, particularly as it obfuscates the triangulated relationship between the Indian subcontinent, the Caribbean or Africa, and Canada, in which the Indo-Caribbean and Indo-African diasporas have found themselves doubly marked by ethnic outsidership in the former British colonies (the 'old diaspora') and in North America.

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