

Kamala E. Nayar. *The Punjabis in British Columbia: Location, Labour, First Nations, and Multiculturalism*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012. 361 pp. \$32.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7735-4071-2.

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Moving beyond Multiculturalism: A Blueprint for Cultural Synergy

Kamala E. Nayar's *The Punjabis in British Columbia: Location, Labour, First Nations, and Multiculturalism* takes an original and innovative approach to the study of multiculturalism and First Nations-immigrant relations in Canada. While the author focuses on the experiences of mid-twentieth-century Punjabi labor migrants in the rural British Columbian Skeena region, and their subsequent double migration to the Lower Mainland, her research is representative of a larger study on immigrant integration throughout Canada. Her book is thought-provoking as it moves beyond the confines of academic scholarship and into the public discourse on what it means to be Canadian. Nayar also contributes to the ongoing debate on how to make ideological multiculturalism "work" in the twenty-first century.

Through an analysis of the Punjabi community in the Skeena region of northwestern British Columbia, the author's objective is to reveal the "sharp differences in the way immigrants experience Canada's practice of multiculturalism, depending on whether the experience occurs in small remote towns or in large urban centres" (p. 3). The author focuses on geography as a main determinant of how Punjabi emigrants were received by the Canadian mainstream. She examines labor relations and the split labor market at Skeena's sawmills and canneries; interethnic group and intragroup relations, particularly the often hostile, and prejudiced, interactions with First Nations peoples; and how traditional gender and cultural roles adapted to a new Canadian way of life.

The Punjabis in British Columbia is divided in ten chapters, each with a particular theme. The author begins by contextualizing the history, culture, and religion of the Punjab and Punjabi people. She then provides a background of British Columbian labor history, Canada multiculturalism, Punjabi migrant pioneers in the early twentieth century, and the Punjabi male immigrant experience in the forestry industry in the Skeena region during the mid-to-late twentieth century. The book continues with a gendered analysis of female Punjabi migrants, and how they adapted traditional Punjabi customs of *pardah* (keeping a low profile in the public sphere), *dharam* (duty), and *izzat* (respect), to Canadian social norms. Chapters 6 and 7 examine the politicization of the Punjabi community and First Nations-Punjabi relations. The final chapters analyze the double migration to large urban centers, cultural synergy, and ethnic identification. Throughout the monograph Nayar provides three illuminating and integral ethnographic narratives that support and complement her research.

The book fits within the broader context of multiculturalism and Canadian immigration studies as it positions the case study of a "model" immigrant group—the socially mobile Punjabi community in northwestern British Columbia—in relation to the oppressed First Nations peoples in the region. The book confronts the history of deracinated colonial "East Indians" on displaced "Native Indian" land in British Columbia. The author repositions the multiculturalism and integration

debate from a narrative of “us versus them”—the Anglo-Canadian whites versus the “nonwhite” Others—to the sad reality of the fractured relations of heterogeneous and oppressed visible minority subalterns in twentieth-century Canada.

As a result of her book, Nayar underscores the further marginalization of First Nations peoples in Canada due to official multiculturalism policy. While immigrant and ethnic groups benefited from the implementation of the policy in 1971 under the Trudeau government that promoted “ethnic diversity,” the Liberals pushed for further cultural assimilation of First Nations groups with the White Paper on Indian policy in 1969. In addition to the increased competition for low-skilled jobs in the canneries, especially among immigrant and First Nations women, the double standard put forth by the dominant majority exacerbated deep-seated antagonisms between the First Nations and Punjabi communities of the Skeena region.

By using the Punjabi community in the Skeena region as a case study, Nayar’s book effectively transforms scholarly debates on the merits of multiculturalism in Canada, making them accessible to a non-academic audience. This is articulated in the Skeena Punjabi’s emphasis on interculturalism, or cultural synergy, as opposed to the isolation of multiculturalism practiced in the Lower Mainland. Nayar actively promotes cultural synergy as a political call to action to improve interethnic and First Nations-immigrant relations. She defines cultural synergy as “a combination of the different cultural assets on the basis of shared values,” (p. 276) and it is “experienced as the ‘shared’ or ‘common’ meeting of various peoples in the public sphere, without anyone’s heritage being rejected” (p. 219). The author uses the concept to summarize the interculturalism exhibited by the Punjabi community in a rural setting; however, Nayar provides an overarching blueprint for an allophilic twenty-first-century Canadian society. Along with geographical location as a ma-

ajor determinant of the effectiveness of multiculturalism and multiculturalism policy, cultural synergy is a major theme that moves beyond scholarly debate.

A major strength of Nayar’s book is her clear and succinct writing and well-organized structure. Notwithstanding chapter 9’s theoretical analysis of ethnic identification and second-generation Punjabi-Canadians, the author avoids discipline-specific terminology, and has written a monograph accessible to both an academic and non-academic audience of all levels. Her use of three lengthy ethnographic narratives, along with numerous oral histories and interviews, supports her extensive field research. Some may argue that Nayar’s qualitative analysis and her significant reliance on 105 “semi-structured” interviews, some translated into English, challenge the objectivity of her work. This may be true; however, she uses the interviews, photos, tables, and ethnographic narratives to enhance her historical and sociological research. The narratives provide a personal touch and rightfully put a name and face on the individuals who comprised the Punjabi community in the Skeena region.

The Punjabis in Canada is a remarkable book on immigration, multiculturalism, and First Nations-immigrant relations in Canada. Through a case study on a Punjabi community in northwestern British Columbia, Nayar manages to delve deep into several meaningful topics that resonate with Canadians of all ethnicities and geographic locations. Utilizing her concept of cultural synergy, the author effectively argues that geography was, and is, a main determinant of the effectiveness of multiculturalism in Canada. Moreover, it was the intercultural relationships established by close proximity in rural areas that mitigated intergroup prejudice through mutual understanding and acceptance. By exposing the differences between rural and urban multiculturalism amongst Punjabis in British Columbia, Nayar puts forth a new definition for a harmonious “multicultural” Canada based on allophilia, interculturalism, and cultural synergy.

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