



The Collision of Power and Protest in the Farmer's Movement in India

Dr. Satwinder Kaur Bains

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1:00 – 2:30 pm

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Bio

Dr. Satwinder Kaur Bains is the Director of the South Asian Studies Institute at the University of the Fraser Valley and an Associate Professor in Social Cultural Media Studies, College of Arts. Dr. Bains' critical analysis of India's multilingual policy and planning has fueled her interest to study the impact of language, culture and identity on South Asian Canadian migration, settlement, and integration. Her research includes and intersects cross-cultural education with a focus on anti-racist curriculum implementation; race, racism, and ethnicity; identity politics; Sikh feminist ideology; migration and the South Asian Canadian Diaspora and Punjabi Canadian cultural historiography.

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Abstract

Although the crisis in the agriculture sector in India is nothing new since farmers have been struggling for decades, the face of agriculture has changed significantly. In the 1960's India embraced the green revolution under former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, who implemented the growth of high-yielding wheat and rice crops to address famine in the country. The green revolution marked the beginning of industrialization of the agriculture sector, and introduced new methods of fertilization and the use of pesticides. Over time farmers felt they and their land had been exploited in order to produce these high-yielding crops for the government. Post-Green Revolution, the production of wheat and rice doubled because of initiatives put forth by the government, and the production of crops such as indigenous rice varieties and millets declined. This then led to the loss of distinct indigenous crops from cultivation and even caused extinction of certain crops. Fast forward to the 1990s when corporate genetically modified seeds were introduced in order to produce even higher yields. Ever since, farmers have been taking big loans to pay for irrigation, fertilization and pesticides. In some instances, they saw no return on their investments, and farmers died by committing suicide in large numbers, because they feel trapped in a cycle of debt. There have been more than 300,000 farmers suicide in India over the last two decades. The farmers movement in India has a long historical trajectory that has brought thousands of farmers to the largest protest movement of farmers in the world. The movement is a direct effect of the collision of history, power and politics. I am interested in why the South Asian diaspora has had such a visceral response to the movement from so far away.