

Central Valley Culinary Landscapes: Ethnic Foodways of Sikh Transnationals

Heather L. Benson
University of Nevada, Reno
and
Jennifer Helzer
California State University, Stanislaus

Abstract

This study explores the Americanization process of Sikhs in California's Central Valley based on the degree to which cuisine has evolved and consumptive patterns have changed since their arrival in the area. Drawing on insights from cultural geography and anthropology, this research examines the ethnic foodways of Sikh transnationals. The foods consumed by Central Valley Sikhs constitute fundamental components of ethno-cultural and geographical identity. This study contends that migrants experience foodway assimilation differently based on geographic location, age at arrival, and current age. The study employs multiple methods, including intensive field research, open-ended questionnaires, participant observation, and in-depth personal interviews. Because contact with American cultures has resulted in exposure to new types of foods, understanding which traditional foodways have resisted change will help clarify the process of acculturation. This study also reveals the role that spatial relationships play in maintaining a traditional diet.

Introduction

THIS STUDY EXPLORES the Americanization process among Sikh transnationals based on “cuisine evolution” and changes to food consumptive patterns since their arrival in California's Central Valley. “Cuisine evolution” refers to changes of ingredients and food preparation techniques in traditional Punjabi-Sikh dishes due to deliberate alteration of recipes to accommodate new consumer preferences and/or lack of availability of traditional foods and spices (Vu and Voeks 2013). Lack of availability may occur because the items are not sold or are difficult to grow in the United States, or because of the distance (drive time) required to obtain them from a market. This concept applies to immigrants who have lost interest in their traditional dishes or who have integrated new local foods and flavors into their cuisine—Americanizing or “watering down” their native dishes (Vu 2008, 6–7).

“Fusion cooking,” the combination of elements from two or more culinary traditions, can be used to measure assimilation into, and acceptance of, a dominant culture and can additionally reveal an emerging ethnic identity or foodway. Mannur (2005) argues that “the rhetorical strategies used to describe fusion as a form of culinary multiculturalism can be better understood by placing it in the context of the racial and ethnic debates about diversity, difference, and assimilation in the US without necessarily creating a homology between race on the one hand and culinary practices on the other” (74). Fusion cooking is popular in California, a state that has long served as a melting pot and home to people from all corners of the globe. Here, a culinary tourist can enjoy a fusion culture that takes inspiration from Italy, France, Mexico, and eastern Asia, and creates dishes from these cultures with non-traditional ingredients, such as Mexican pizza or the Korean taco. The Korean taco, a Korean-Mexican fusion dish, originated in California and quickly gained popularity in cities throughout North America (Amster-Burton 2009). The tacos use *bulgogi*, with all of its Asian seasonings, and the Mexican corn tortilla, fusing them into a single dish (Farivar 2009). This paper examines another example of a multicultural culinary fusion within the state of California: Sikh foods in the Central Valley.

In this article, we show how Sikh migrants experience foodway assimilation differently based on their age at arrival in the Central Valley, their current age, and where they live in relation to ethnic food suppliers. The reason this research focuses on the Central Valley Sikh transnational experience is because of the lack of academic literature written about them. While a great deal of literature looks at Sikhs in North America, the United Kingdom, and other parts of the world, very little addresses Sikhs in the Central Valley, despite their large presence within the region. This paper adds to the body of literature on Sikh transnationals, specifically California’s Central Valley population, through the lens of food geography.

Cultural Preservation, Acculturation, and Americanization

Cultural heritage is the legacy of religion, language, folk culture, history, place of origin, and cuisine of a group of people that is inherited from past generations, maintained in the present, and retained for the benefit of future generations. The deliberate act of maintaining cultural heritage for subsequent generations is known as “preservation.” Preservation of both tangible and intangible cultural features can all help in providing the basis of the sense of “we-ness” that underlies ethnic identity (Domosh, Neumann, Price, and Jordan-Bychkov 2010).

In contrast, “acculturation” refers to the changes that occur when disparate cultural groups come into close contact. As opposed to assimilation (total adoption of the “dominant” culture), the term *acculturation* is used to describe a process of extensive borrowing between cultures; representatives of the culture that is borrowing may voluntarily adopt elements from the dominant society’s culture in order to survive in their changed world. Religious change can sometimes be a consequence of acculturation, which can lead to a breakdown of social structures and spiritual demoralization (Ember and Ember 2002). Until recently, researchers studying culture change generally assumed that the differences between people of disparate cultures would become minimal. But over the past few decades, scholars have suggested that people affirm ethnic identities in a deliberate effort to introduce cultural difference (Ember and Ember 2002). In some ways, people reject assimilation and acculturation and, in the process, reassert place-based ethnic identities (Domosh, Neumann, Price, and Jordan-Bychkov 2010). “Americanization” refers to the action of making a person or thing (diet, for the purpose of this research) American in character or nationality.

Researchers are increasingly concerned with understanding a more sweeping culture change—the emergence of new cultural identities, or “ethnogenesis”—often in the aftermath of violent events such as depopulation, relocation, enslavement, and genocides (Ember and Ember 2002), such as the 1984 Sikh Massacre. Because the Central Valley region is home to both early and recent Sikh immigrants, the region provides an excellent setting to witness the process of ethnogenesis.

The Relevance of Foods and Foodways

The term “foodways” was coined to explain traditional behavior that includes more than simply preparing a certain recipe at a certain time, but rather encompasses behavior that reaches into many aspects of daily life. Foodways are “a whole interrelated system of food conceptualization and evaluation, procurement, distribution, preservation, preparation, consumption, and nutrition shared by all members of a particular society” (Shortridge and Gimla 1998, 121–122). They are the customary behaviors that vary by place and ethnic group. Foodways underline who we are and who we are not. In some cases, iconic foods become inseparable from the people who eat them. Some obvious, and perhaps stereotypical and even offensive, examples include the Irish being identified as “potato people” by the English, and Sicilians as “macaroni eaters” by northern Italians (Scholliers 2001).

What people choose to eat and drink constitutes a fundamental component of geographical identity (Vu and Voeks 2013). Some truth underlies the saying “you are what you eat.” The things we eat can say a great deal about us—who we are; where we came from; our current social, cultural, economic, and religious positions; and our ambitions (Shortridge and Gimla 1998). Historically, food has been place-based, dependent on local ingredients, and recipes have been passed down through generations. In recent times, food has served an important function for transnational communities. According to Brain (2014), “it serves as something familiar, emulates a sense of home, and functions as an act of tradition” (84–85). Foods play a crucial role in religious ceremonies, traditions, and customs, and serve as a material basis for rituals through which the stages of life are celebrated (Heine 2004). The present study follows in this tradition by investigating ethnic foodways among Sikhs in the Central Valley region of California.

Foods are pivotal to our sense of identity and spirituality (Fischer 1988) and often serve as the center point of religious and secular feasts, symbolizing culture-bound values and meanings (Murphy 1986). For example, Jewish dietary laws require matzo (unleavened bread) to be eaten during Passover. Matzo flatbread was created to represent the lack of time for leavening during the exodus from Egypt thousands of years ago (Apfelbaum 2001). In Islam, it is customary to sacrifice a sheep and share its meat with friends and relatives on Eid al-Adha (Festival of Sacrifice), in commemoration of Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son to God (Kittler and Sucher 2001). Among Brazil’s African diaspora, foods originating from their homeland—okra, black-eyed peas, sesame, and others—have attained sacred status for the followers of syncretic Afro-Brazilian religions. Some are sold on the streets to passersby as a form of offering to guardian deities (Voeks 2012). Many religions view certain foods as “unclean,” and members abstain from eating tabooed animals, such as pork among Muslims and cows among Hindus, beverages containing caffeine among Mormons, and dishes containing blood among Muslims and Jehovah’s Witnesses (Bell and Valentine 1997; Kittler and Sucher 2001; Heine 2004). In each of these cases, food and people are linked in complex interrelationships that reveal dominant ideas and prevailing practices within a culture.

In a globalized society, foods and foodways are often mobile, traveling and settling as they serve to renegotiate a sense of place for migrants, forced and voluntary, in their new homes (Vu and Voeks 2013). Food is also essential to maintaining connections to home and signifying ethnic identity among diasporic communities (Vallianatos and Raine 2008). Immigrants use different

foods not only to articulate cultural difference and distinctiveness, but also to make claims about the power and importance of ethnic food (Searles 2009). Historically, immigrants in the U.S. sought to maintain familiar foodways because food “initiated and maintained traditional relationships, expressed the extent of social distance between people, demonstrated status and prestige, rewarded and punished children’s behavior, and treated illness... [T]o abandon immigrant food traditions for the foods of Americans was to abandon community, family, and religion in the minds of many immigrants” (Gabaccia 2000, 51–54).

Today, more people are migrating than ever before; we live in the age of human migration. In 2015, around 244 million people migrated to international destinations, and the U.S. is home to more than 47 million of these transnationals (United Nations 2016). Because of this colossal movement of people around the globe, the significance of foodways as cultural markers and symbols of identity has never been stronger (Vu and Voeks 2013). Immigrants worldwide face scores of changes over which they had little control—where they will live, what kind of employment they will have, which language they will be required to learn and speak—but at least they have some control over their meals (Gabaccia 2000). The traditional foods of transnational migrants represent a connection to the past and assist in reducing negative effects of acculturation. So strong are connections with foods that they are often the only cultural element that is preserved after other ethnic traditions have faded away (Han 2008).

Transnationalism

A “transnational” is defined as a person who operates in, or belongs to, more than one country. Transnationalism involves a sense of home in the new territory, linking the country of origin with the country of settlement. A Central Valley Sikh transnational is defined here as a person of the Sikh faith who immigrated to the Central Valley but retains a significant connection with the Punjab homeland. Major transnational separatist movements, like the Sikhs, conduct their self-imagining in sites throughout the world where they have enough members to allow for the emergence of multiple nodes in a larger, diasporic public sphere (Appadurai 1997). Vu and Voeks (2013) argue that “nowhere is the attachment to homeland more evident than in the case of transnational foodways” (37).

Who Are the Sikhs?

A Sikh is a follower of Sikhism, a monotheistic religion (the youngest of the world’s major religions) that originated during the fifteenth century in the

Punjab region of South Asia. “Sikh” properly refers to adherents of Sikhism as a religion, not an ethnic group. However, because conversion is rare in Sikhism, most Sikhs share strong ethno-religious ties. The term “Sikh” has its origin in the Sanskrit word for “disciple” or “student.” A Sikh, according to the religion’s code of conduct, is any human being who faithfully believes in the One Immortal Being, the ten Gurus (from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh), the teachings of the ten Gurus, and the baptism bestowed by the tenth Guru (making the scripture, otherwise known as *Guru Granth Sahib*, the final Guru). Baptized Sikhs, also known as *Amritdhari* Sikhs, can be distinguished by wearing the “Five K’s”: *kesh* (uncut hair), *kangha* (a wooden comb), *kara* (a metal bracelet), *kashera* (cotton undergarments), and the *kirpan* (a small, curved sword). *Amritdhari* Sikhs are also responsible to live by the slogan “*Degh Tekh Fateh*” (“cauldron/kettle sword victory”), symbolizing the religious obligation to protect and feed the needy through *langar*—the free distribution of food to all people, regardless of religion, caste, or ethnicity (Mann, Numrich, and Williams 2008).

A Punjabi is any individual who is from the state of Punjab in India, but the term is usually interpreted as an individual belonging to the Sikh faith. This interpretation, however, is not entirely correct. Muslims from the region are called Punjabi Muslims, and Hindus from the region are called Punjabi Hindus. All three religious groups speak, or at least understand, most of the Punjabi language.

Geographic Setting: California’s Central Valley

California’s Central Valley comprises the large, flat valley that dominates the geographical center of California. It is forty to sixty miles wide and stretches approximately four-hundred-fifty miles from north to south (roughly from Redding to Bakersfield). “The Valley,” as it is called by its residents, is outlined by the Cascade, Sierra Nevada, and Tehachapi mountain ranges on the east, and the California Coast ranges and San Francisco Bay on the west. It runs parallel to the Pacific Ocean coastline and encompasses, fully or partially, nineteen California counties (see Figure 1). The Valley’s climate is predominantly Mediterranean; summer temperatures can reach 115°F (46°C), and winters are cool and damp, with temperatures rarely dropping below freezing.

One of the most productive agricultural areas in the world, the Valley is California’s breadbasket. It is known for producing mainly non-tropical crops such as tomatoes, grapes, cotton, apricots, and almonds. Early farming was concentrated close to the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, where water was

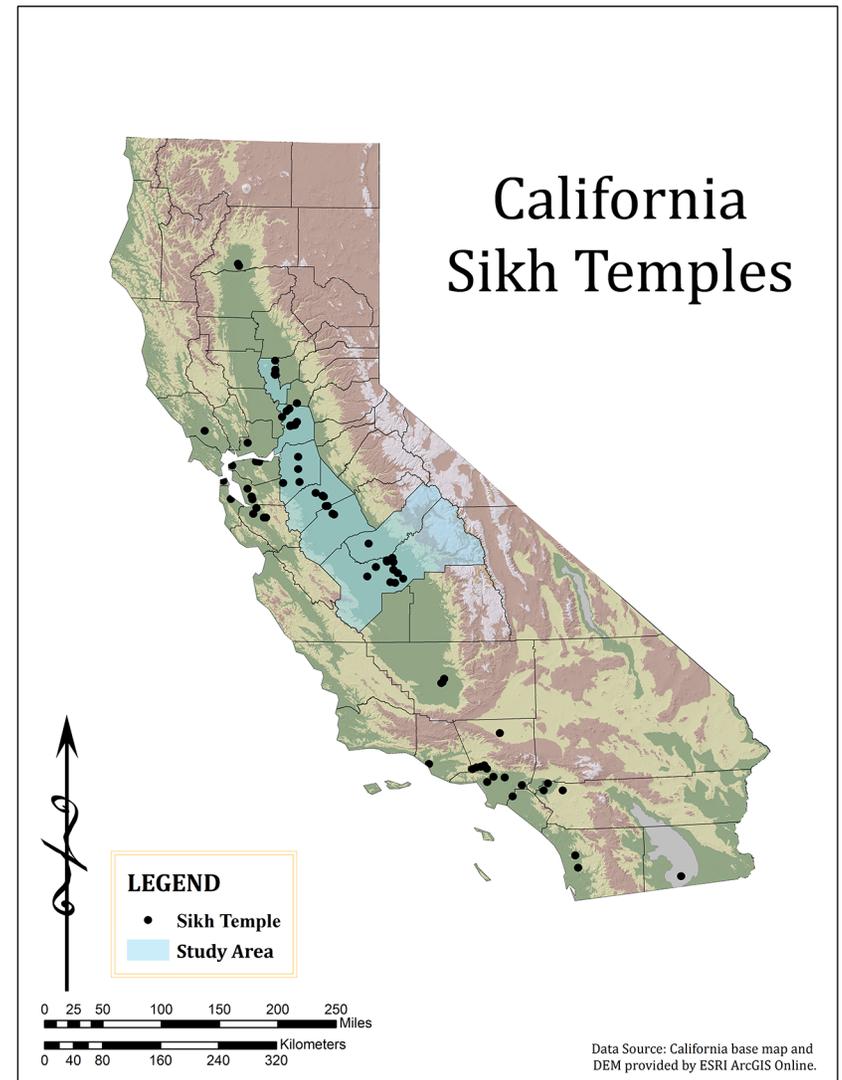


Figure 1. Map of California Sikh temples and study site. (H. Benson)

readily available, but later irrigation projects brought other parts of the Valley into production. The Central Valley is a culturally diverse region with an agrarian base; throughout California’s history, many immigrants, including Sikhs, have settled here to work in agricultural production.

Settlement Patterns and Cuisine

The early 1900s saw the peak of Sikh immigration to the U.S., with many migrants coming from British Columbia rather than directly from India.

Hostility and violence against Asian Indians drove Sikhs out of Canada, south to Washington and Oregon where they were met with more hostility, and finally further south to California (Takhar 2002). In California, they traveled along the farm belt, known worldwide for growing crops that Sikh farmers were familiar with in their native land, mainly orchards (peaches, plums, almonds, walnuts, and pistachios) and field crops (celery, beans, and potatoes) (Helzer 2015). Initial settlement destinations in California for Sikhs included the Imperial Valley to pick melons and cotton, Fresno to work in the fig and grape fields, and the orchards of northern California to pick stone fruit. In December and January, Sikhs pruned trees and grapevines; from March through May, they irrigated row crops and orchards and dug canals and ditches; and in the summer, they picked fruit and worked in the packing sheds (Takhar 2002). In particular, they settled in San Joaquin County and its county seat of Stockton. Stockton is home to the first U.S. Sikh temple, built in 1912 and still in operation today (see Figure 2). The first U.S. *gurdwara* (temple) was constructed at this site because Stockton was a central location for Valley Sikh farm workers and laborers on the Western Pacific Railroad. The Stockton *gurdwara* is no longer the hub of Central Valley Sikh activity, but it nonetheless retains historical significance.



Figure 2. Gurdwara Sahib, Stockton, CA. First Sikh temple established in the United States. (H. Benson)

The life of early Punjabi immigrant farm workers was harsh, their foodways reflecting their challenging situation. The workers' diet depended on religious ties and available food items. Sikhs ate mostly vegetables, fruit, milk, and *roti* (tortilla-like bread). Milk and butter were also consumed in large quantities. Butter (*ghee*) was viewed as a required ingredient. Each Sikh worker consumed as much as fifteen pounds of butter per month. Back in the Punjabi homeland, neither vegetable oil nor lard was commonly used for cooking. Sikhs enjoyed their food heavily spiced with curry, coriander, cumin, cayenne, and black pepper (Takhar 2002).

The population of Indian Americans, including Sikhs, grew considerably in the 1980s and nearly doubled in the year 2000 in response to the diaspora ("1984 Sikh Massacre" and aftermath), the establishment of the H1B visa program, and the American Competitiveness 21st Century Act, which increased the number of visas available for workers in specialty occupations such as math, science, and medicine. As a result, South Asian Indians became the third-largest group of Asian Americans, with increasing visibility in the Silicon Valley and other high-tech communities (Bayer 2011). With the expansion of the information technology economy, new locations have emerged as the latest destinations for Indian professionals; California led all U.S. states in 1990 and 2000, when the population had grown to include more than 350,000 South Asian Indians (Skop 2007).

The number and location of *gurdwaras* in California reflects this trend. More than fifty percent of all Sikh temples were constructed after the year 2000 (see Figure 3). As seen in the map of Sikh Temples (see Figure 1), *gurdwaras* are clustered in high-tech, urban communities such as the Bay Area and Southern California (forty-four percent), while others are scattered throughout the farm belt of the Central Valley. In contrast to urban



Figure 3. Number of gurdwaras established since the beginning of Sikh United States immigration. (H. Benson)

Bay Area and Southern California *gurdwaras*, Central Valley *gurdwaras* are commonly constructed on the outskirts of towns in large parcels of farmland or in low-income neighborhoods (see Figure 4).



Figure 4. Livingston Peach Street gurdwara located at the city limit on the outskirts of town. (H. Benson)

The Asian Indian population in the U.S. grew from 1,678,765 in 2000 (0.6 percent of the total U.S. population) to 2,843,391 in 2010 (0.9 percent of the U.S.), a growth rate of 69.37 percent, making them one of the fastest-growing ethnic groups in the nation (United States Census Bureau 2016). Today, hundreds of *gurdwaras* in the U.S. cater to the Sikh transnational population; seventy-three operate in California alone, forty-one of which are located in the Central Valley (see Figure 1). After the induction of immigration incentive programs, such as the H1B visa, most Sikhs were able to attain middle-class status immediately upon arrival, making them a “model minority.” Hence, rather than clustering in neighborhoods near other Punjabi Sikhs for social support during the assimilation process, they dispersed to middle-class neighborhoods and lived relatively independently of other Sikhs. This pattern is not only evident in California and the Central Valley, but is displayed in other parts of North America as well (Skop 2007).

Today, sites of Sikh cultural and religious activities are typically found at *gurdwaras*, which are spatially dispersed throughout the Central Valley, with Yuba City representing a northern California regional focal point. Yuba-Sutter is home to the largest population of Sikhs in the nation and outside the state of Punjab. This region hosts an annual Sikh parade on the first Sunday of November, a commemoration of the baptism bestowed on the Holy Scripture in 1708. Sikhs from across the U.S., Canada, the United Kingdom, India, and other parts of the world make the pilgrimage to Yuba City to attend the parade, which features floats and a procession of parade participants.

Methodology

The seven counties examined in this study were selected based on the prevalence of *gurdwaras* and a high number of Indian-Sikh grocery stores. There are seventy-three *gurdwaras* located in the state, with thirty-four located in the study area (see Figure 1). Participants included Sikh immigrants residing in the study area, men and women, who either have migrated from the Punjab or are the American-born offspring of Sikh immigrants.

Research activities were modeled after Vu and Voeks’ (2013) analysis of changing foodways of Vietnamese in Orange County, California. The current study employs a similar multi-method ethnographic approach, utilizing open-ended survey questionnaires, participant observation, and in-depth personal interviews. Researchers developed good working relations with a key informant and *gurdwaras* within the study region, which assisted in providing links into the Sikh community. At least one *gurdwara* in each of the study sites was visited (see Figures 1 and 5) to distribute questionnaires, perform interviews, and conduct cultural landscape analysis that included identifying Sikh symbols, Punjabi language, gathering spaces, and cultural festivals within the study area. Distance was calculated based on the drive-

STUDY SITE: GURDWARAS VISITED

Name:	Year Established:	Physical Address:	City:	Zip Code:	County:	Visit Date:
Sikh Association of Fresno	2013	4827 N Parkway Dr	Fresno	93722	Fresno	3/13/2016
Gurdwara Gurmat Parkash	2004	18456 Road 21	Madera	93637	Madera	3/13/2016
Sikh Temple, Livingston	1980	2765 Peach Ln	Livingston	95334	Merced	3/27/2016 Holla Moholla
Guru Nanak Sikh Temple, Livingston	1995	884 B St	Livingston	95334	Merced	3/27/2016 Holla Moholla
Gurdwara Sahib Guru Nanak Sat Sangat of California	1997	8132 Elsie Ave	Sacramento	95828	Sacramento	3/20/2016
Sikh Gurdwara Sahib, Stockton	1912	1930 S Grant St	Stockton	95206	San Joaquin	3/20/2016
Gurdwara Sahib, Turlock	2011	1391 5th St	Turlock	95380	Stanislaus	4/10/2016
Sikh Temple Gurdwara Sahib	1969	2468 Tierra Buena Rd	Yuba City	95993	Sutter	4/3/2016

Figure 5. List of gurdwaras visited. (H. Benson)

time required to get from place of origin (home) to destination (ethnic food supplier), similar to a study conducted by Wiseman (1975). This multi-method approach provided important opportunities to identify how foods are prepared and served, as well as whether alteration of traditional fare is taking place.

Ten questionnaires and food logs with an attached self-addressed/stamped envelope were distributed at each *gurdwara* within the study area (see Figures 1 and 5), totaling seventy in all. Eight responses were returned by mail (eleven percent return rate) from four men and four women, ages twenty-one to sixty-seven. Additionally, three personal interviews were conducted with two males and one female. Altogether, data were collected from eleven respondents in the following counties: Fresno (one), Madera (one), Merced (one), Stanislaus (three), San Joaquin (one), Sacramento (three), and Sutter (one).

Results and Analysis

To the Sikhs, food goes hand in hand with worship: The faithful cannot focus on God if they are hungry. A common meal, *langar*, an indivisible part of Sikh worship, is served at the end of *gurdwara* gatherings. *Langar* was established during Guru Arjan's time (1581–1606) and continues to this day; the charity of the communal meal is a religious duty. The *langar*, as it is open to everybody, also works as a medium for service and a marker of Sikh philanthropy. Participants sit and eat together without age, caste, gender, or status distinctions. *Langar* provides a way of expressing gratitude for the divine reward by sharing its fruit with others; offers the opportunity for service when participants help cook, serve, and clean up; and manifests Sikh solidarity and equality (Mann 2004).

Sikhs have few specific taboos regarding food, but meals served in the *gurdwaras* are always lacto-vegetarian (vegetarian dishes that include dairy products such as milk, cheese, yogurt, butter, *ghee*, cream, and kefir, but excludes eggs), although Sikhs are not bound to be meat-free. Once baptized, Sikhs are forbidden from eating ritually slaughtered meat, like Halal and Kosher meat. Seventeenth-century traditions report that meat was served at *langar*, but as a mark of respect for those who do not eat meat, food offered today is always vegetarian. Other dietary Sikh practices include what is known as an “all-iron lifestyle,” which consists of using only iron utensils and flatware and strictly eating only food prepared by members of the Sikh community (*The Sikh Review* 2005).

Data Analysis: Age

Respondent 2, the oldest respondent at sixty-seven years old, was born in Punjab and migrated to California in 1981. He speaks Punjabi fluently, English moderately well, and believes he has assimilated into American culture at a conservative pace. He was the only respondent who eats Indian dishes for every meal, no matter what day of the week, including savory Punjabi breakfast dishes (commonly *aloo paratha*, *puri*, and *chholey*). Respondent 2 often lunches on *chapati* with oats, veggies, and rice curd. Dinner for him is a repeat of the lunch meal, and he eats no snacks throughout the day. He predominantly eats at home, where his wife prepares all meals, and his favorite dish is *paratha* (fried, puffed bread) and duck curry. He dines at restaurants infrequently, but when he does, once in a while he indulges in food from Jack in the Box, Wendy's, and McDonald's.

Respondent 7, at twenty-one the youngest respondent, was born in the U.S. to immigrant parents. Her diet consists of only American foods, apart from Sunday when she attends service and *langar* at the *gurdwara*. She is fluent in English, speaks Punjabi moderately well (only at home), does not cook, and often dines at fast-food restaurants. For breakfast, she consumes items like garlic bread or Frosted Flakes cereal, or skips the meal altogether. Lunch for Respondent 7 generally consists of items from restaurants such as Subway and McDonald's. Her dinner continues this trend, as she reports eating popcorn chicken salad from Sonic, chicken burritos, or her favorite dish, Little Caesar's three-meat pizza. She enjoys several snacks throughout the day, such as Chee-tos chips and soda. Second-generation Punjabi Sikhs like Respondent 7 are faced with their parents' traditions and cultural heritage while simultaneously being confronted with American values. First-generation immigrants use the ABCD acronym (American-born confused desi) to convey a sense that American-born Punjabis are confused about who they are and where they belong.

All other respondents, median age forty-seven, reported roughly the same diet. They usually consumed an American-style breakfast but Indian/Punjabi for every other meal, occasionally partaking in international cuisine such as Chinese, Mexican, and Italian.

Data Analysis: Distance and Location

Respondent 7, the youngest respondent, resided in Merced County. An examination of the local phone book and Internet searches reveal that only one Indian ethnic grocer, India Bazaar, is in operation in Merced. There are, however, a couple of Southeast Asian stores and several Hispanic grocers

in the area. Respondent 7's Americanized food pattern could be attributed in part to her age and the fact that she is American-born, but the lack of traditional ingredient supplies in her region might also have an influence on her foodway pattern. However, Respondent 2, the oldest respondent, resides in Madera, where there is a similar ethnic grocer situation—only one Indian ethnic grocer and several other stores supplying Hispanic foods and spices—yet he had a less-Americanized foodway pattern. Neither Respondent 7 nor Respondent 2 specified in their questionnaires where the primary food preparer of the household purchased ingredients. This could be due to the fact that the person responsible for purchasing ingredients must travel a significant distance to buy traditional supplies, or because it is simply unnecessary for them to know where ingredients are bought. All other respondents were able to name at least two to three ethnic grocers within their region where they purchased supplies.

As mentioned earlier, women (wives and mothers) are typically responsible for purchasing ingredients for the household. Basic supplies (vegetables and grains) are purchased at American grocers, such as Winco Foods, Food 4 Less, Food Max, Save Mart, and Costco. Traditional Indian spices are purchased at ethnic grocers, including Sikandar Cash & Carry, Sher-E-Punjab, Jasber's Palace, Amar's Fashion & Grocery, the Golden Spice, and New India Sweets & Spices. On average, most traveled between 2 and 13 miles (3–21 kilometers), 9 to 30 minutes, one-way, to buy traditional spices at Indian grocers, and in some cases 48 to 63 miles (77–101 kilometers), 45 to 60 minutes, one-way, to revered ethnic grocers in the Bay Area.

American grocers, especially in culturally diverse areas like the Central Valley, are adapting their supplies to meet the needs of the local clientele. Most large American grocery stores have a section devoted to ethnic ingredients, most often catering to multiple ethnic groups. While large grocers may sell general ethnic foodstuffs (such as chili peppers, spices, sauces, and so on), specific traditional ingredients (for example, chickpea flour and milk solids) are harder to find. Costco, Food Max, Trader Joe's, Winco, Food 4 Less, and other American grocers sell ethnic items such as *tamales* and *naan* bread, but ethnic groups generally feel those items are whitewashed versions of ethnic foods, not authentic versions found in their home country. With U.S. supermarkets loaded with ethnic foods and gourmet foreign foods, advertising employs the words “authentic” and “real” to market mass-produced food products that have little or no relationship to the ethnic traditions upon which they are supposedly based (Lindenwold 2007). Several survey and interview respondents replied that they often have to shop at multiple stores,

both American and ethnic, in order to obtain all of ingredients necessary for their particular diet.

Another pattern revealed in this research is that many Sikhs in Sacramento had not emigrated from Punjab, nor had their ancestors immigrated directly from Punjab; rather, they emigrated from the Fiji Islands. Fiji was a British-controlled territory during the early years of Sikh emigration, and South Asian Indians were shipped to Fiji to meet labor demands of the British. Punjabi Sikh immigrants, however, arrived later as free settlers, in contrast to their counterparts, who were brought under the indentured labor system. From 1987 to 2005, the Fiji Islands have experienced a “brain drain” due to U.S. immigration incentives such as the H1B visa program, which stimulated the flow of immigrants out of Fiji and into the United States. Because Fiji is inhabited by people from across India, Fijian residents (including Sikhs) tend to speak Hindi rather than Punjabi. As reflected in questionnaire responses, Sacramento Sikhs generally speak Hindi at home but Punjabi at the temple. Chain migration brought Fijian Sikhs to Sacramento, where they are clustered here in a unique ethnic substrate. An “ethnic substrate” is defined as a semi-assimilated culture region that retains some distinctiveness, differing from the surrounding region in a variety of ways, whether they be local cuisine, dialect, or traditions (Domosh, Neumann, Price, and Jordan-Bychkov 2010).

Data derived from surveys and interviews indicate that Sikhs located in central and southern parts of the Valley (Fresno, Madera, Merced, and Stanislaus) tend to incorporate Mexican food into their diets more regularly than those in the northern parts of the Valley (San Joaquin, Sacramento, and Sutter). Sikhs in Fresno, Madera, Merced, and Stanislaus admit to experimenting with recipes such as Indian-spiced burritos and tacos, whereas those in the north tend to maintain a more traditional Punjabi-Indian diet. This could be a result of three factors: geography, history, and nodes of ethnic/cultural activities throughout the Central Valley.

Mexicans and Punjabis first came into contact with one another in the early 1900s in Southern California's Imperial Valley. The Imperial Valley was mostly uninhabited until 1901, when the Imperial Canal was opened and thousands of acres of desert were transformed into prime farmland. The culture of the area blended those of U.S. and Mexico due to its geographic location along the international border. Mexican immigrants began entering the U.S. during the 1910s, shortly after the Mexican Revolution, and many of these immigrants got their start by picking cotton in Imperial Valley

fields farmed by Punjabi men (Hart 2000). Inter-marriage between Punjabi men and Mexican women began in this area, where hundreds of bi-ethnic couples were clustered in the Imperial agricultural valley (Leonard 1994). The history and geography of this Southern California culture region could have an influence on the southern Central Valley Sikhs who claimed to incorporate Mexican foods into their diets more often than those in the north.

In addition to history and geography (distance from the U.S.-Mexico international border), another influencing factor could be that Sikhs in the northern parts of the Central Valley may have stronger Punjabi ethnic identities due to the presence of important nodes of ethnic/cultural activities. For example, San Joaquin County is home to the first *gurdwara* in the U.S.; Sacramento hosts an ethnic substrate of Fijian Sikhs; and Sutter has the largest population of Sikhs outside the Punjab. Such nodes of ethnic-cultural activities help to reinforce a sense of “we-ness” and “Punjabi-ness” within these communities, which could be reflected in the desire to maintain traditional foodways. It should also be noted that Central Valley Sikhs are fairly stable; they have anchored themselves in specific locations throughout the region, whereas other immigrant farm workers commonly uproot themselves to follow seasonal crops. Immigrant communities that are able to stay “in place” can engage in ethnic and cultural activities that solidify their community and reinforce a sense of “we-ness.”

Gender and the Preservation of Food Culture

Despite the many responsibilities associated with working outside the home, many Indian women follow traditional gender roles and are encouraged to be the torchbearers of family and culture as well. Hence, the least Americanized meals in the diet of Central Valley Sikhs are those prepared by women at home. Indeed, women in many ways are emblematic of what constitutes authentic “Indian-ness.” As cultural custodians, Indian women are primary transmitters of religious and cultural traditions within the household and in local associations (Skop 2007). Women tend to be responsible for food purchasing and preparation, and the meals they serve at home are often traditional Punjabi-Indian fare, like *roti* (tortilla-like bread), *daal* (spiced lentils), *basmati* rice, *chapati* (deep fried bread), *saag* (leaf-based puree), *chholey* (spicy chickpeas with onions, carrots, green chutney), and curries (meat or vegetable dishes prepares in a peppery spiced sauce).

In the Central Valley, the idea of women as “cultural custodians” is not only apparent in food traditions but in dress as well. During fieldwork, it was noted that many men at *gurdwaras* wear casual clothing, such as T-shirts

or button-downs, jeans or shorts, trimmed beards, short hair, and tennis shoes or sandals. Often, men do not wear the *dastar* (Punjabi turban), with the exception of the older generation, whereas nearly all women, old and young, wear the traditional *salwar kameez* (pantaloon and body shirt) and *dupatta* (head scarf).

The second-least Americanized meals are those served at *langar* in *gurdwaras*. Although Central Valley *gurdwaras* occasionally will host a pizza night, meals served are traditionally Punjabi-Indian dishes, such as *roti*, *daal*, *barfi* (condensed milk and sugar, cut into squares), *laddu* (minced flour dough and sugar, ball-shaped), and *pakora* (deep-fried vegetables dipped in batter) (see Figures 6a and 6b). Gender figures into the division



Figure 6a. Women making *roti* for *langar*, Fresno *gurdwara*. (H. Benson)



Figure 6b. Women making roti for langar, Madera gurdwara. (H. Benson)

of food preparation duties in *gurdwaras*: women usually make *roti* and other Indian fare, while men generally work the fryer and serving dishes. Both genders help clean up after *langar*, sometimes chanting religious hymns in the process (see Figure 7).

Acculturation and Americanization of Food Culture

In the Central Valley, Sikhs feel they must adapt to local customs, including fast food, changing time commitments regarding school schedules, and working outside the home. However, upon arriving home in the evenings, they commonly return to a house full of extended family, native language, and traditional fare. In both surveys and interviews, respondents admit to feeling Americanized when it comes to work and school, but Indian when it comes to family and home life.

The most Americanized meal in the Central Valley Sikh diet is the one eaten outside the home. In India, it is common to dine at street-side vendors or restaurants for several meals throughout the day, but traditional cuisine and eateries are less available in the Central Valley. As a result, Central Valley Sikhs very rarely dine at restaurants, but when they do, they tend to patronize fast-food restaurants such as Subway, McDonald's, Jack in the Box, and Mountain Mike's Pizza, or they dine at international cuisine restaurants



Figure 7. Men and women washing dishes after langar at a gurdwara in Turlock. (H. Benson)

such as Chinese or Italian. Remaining committed to a vegetarian diet in the U.S. poses an additional challenge for many respondents; most restaurants feature few vegetarian options and thereby often limit Sikhs to eating salads, which are not considered Indian fare nor eaten regularly in the home country. Respondents also complain that food in the U.S. tastes bland; one respondent attributes this to the mass production of food and industrial farming, stating that “even the bananas are flavorless” when compared to bananas in India.

Breakfast is the second-most Americanized meal among Central Valley Sikhs. Rather than eating a savory Punjabi breakfast, such as *aloo paratha* (*roti* stuffed with potatoes) or *chana masala* (spiced chickpeas), many opt for cereal, muffins, eggs and toast, or nothing at all. Seven out of eight questionnaire and food-log respondents ate an American-style breakfast every morning, and only one respondent regularly ate a traditional Punjabi-style breakfast.

Fusion-Cooking and Cuisine Evolution

After decades in the U.S., sharp intra-ethnic demarcations soften and some blending of food traditions—or “fusion cooking”—can occur. This style of

cooking is occasionally reflected in the diet of Central Valley Sikhs, usually at the request of the younger generation, with some admitting to experimenting with recipes such as curry pizza and Indian-spiced burritos or tacos. As described by Leonard (1994), California has already witnessed a blending of cultures among Punjabis and Mexicans during the early years of Sikh immigration:

Mexicans and Punjabis shared a rural way of life, with similar types of foods, furniture, and a similar material culture... Cuisine in the homes drew from both Mexican and Punjabi food cultures and the men taught their wives to cook chicken curry, roti, and various vegetable curries. As Moola Singh of Selma, California, (who has thirteen children from three marriages with Mexican women) says, “I never have to explain anything India to my Mexican family. Cooking the same...they make *roti* over there, sit on the floor—all customs India the same Mexico... Adobe houses in Mexico, they sit on the floor there, make *tortillas* (*roti*, you know). All kinds of food the same, eat from plates sometimes, some places tables and benches. India the same, used to eat on the floor, or two cutting boards, made benches” (311–316).

Another example of this blending of cultures can be found in the Central Valley town of Kerman, which has grown by sixty percent over the past nineteen years, fueled in part by a wave of Punjabi immigrants whose cultural and political influence is reshaping a town that is largely Latino. Inside the Kerman Food Market (see Figures 8a and 8b), sacks of *basmati* rice and spice jars of turmeric are stacked across from the counter, where business owner Kulwant Brar sells hot tacos and burritos. Brar is one of several Punjabi merchants to run Mexican grocery stores in Kerman. In a 2012 interview with the *California Report*, Brar admitted that he never imagined selling cow-tongue tacos when he lived in India—where the cow is considered holy—but it is part of adapting to the largely Mexican clientele (Khokha 2012).

Cultural Landscape Analysis

Central Valley Sikh temples are fairly consistent in terms of cultural landscape elements. They feature the orange Sikh flag (*nishan sahib*), worship halls, Sikh architecture, the sound of spiritual hymns, and aromas from the *langar* halls. Modern U.S. Sikh architecture can be described as Indo-Persian in style. *Gurdwaras* are typically square or rectangular, with entrances on all four sides, and usually have domed sanctums (*gumbad*) in the middle. The *gumbad*, the crowning feature of the *gurdwara*, is customarily painted white or gold. *Langar* halls can be found adjacent to the *gurdwara*, and



Figure 8a. Kerman Food Market & Liquor, Kerman, California. Sign reads, “Kerman Food Market & Liquor, Mexican-Indian, groceries & fabrics.” (H. Benson)



Figure 8b. Inside the Kerman Food Market & Liquor, Kerman, California. (H. Benson)

most halls offer the option to sit on the floor or at tables and chairs. Arched copings are used as exterior decorations, commonly painted in white, blue, or gold, and a tall Sikh pennant flag can be found on top of the building or in front of the *gurdwara*. Inside the worship hall, *Guru Granth Sahib* (the sacred text) rests under a canopy or in a canopied seat, usually on a platform higher than the floor where the devotees sit; men on one side, women on the other (see Figures 9 and 10).



Figure 9. Gumbad (domed sanctum) and Nishan sahib (pennant flag), Turlock gurdwara. (H. Benson)

In no way limited to the temple, the Sikh imprint on the cultural landscape throughout the Central Valley. The Punjabi language appears on signs in commercial centers, the word *khalsa* (“pure/nation of Sikhs”) embellishes the sides of semi-trucks (today, many Central Valley Sikhs are employed in the trucking business), and the *khanda* (emblem of the Sikh doctrine) is commonly pasted to signs and cars (see Figure 11).

Interviews In-Depth

The individual cases that follow offer an intensive illustration of how the foods consumed by Central Valley Sikhs constitute fundamental components of ethno-cultural and geographic identity. As immigrant lifestyles change, so do immigrant foodways. Upon arrival in the new territory, Sikh



Figure 10. Guru Granth Sahib and worship hall, Madera gurdwara. (H. Benson)



Figure 11. Khanda identified on a vehicle within the study site. (H. Benson)

transnationals have begun to modify recipes and meals to accommodate changing technology, ingredients, and time commitments. Distance and location have provided some challenges to preserving traditional day-to-day fare, but Central Valley Sikhs persevere; they track down grocers that supply desired spices and ingredients, and prepare dishes that suit their palate and make them feel at home. In each of the cases described below, food and people are linked in complex interrelationships that reveal dominant ideas and prevailing practices within the Central Valley Sikh culture.

Respondent A

Respondent A discussed his family's negotiation with "Americanness" as well as their experimentation with new recipes and food patterns. Respondent A is a twenty-nine-year-old male, a law student from Stanislaus County who is fluent in English but speaks Punjabi at home with his family. Suggesting a meeting at Denny's, he ordered a vanilla banana milkshake before commencing the interview. He and his parents are Sikh immigrants, although they did not all migrate at the same time. Born in India, outside of the Punjab, he eventually relocated with his parents to the state and spent a few years in the region. His father was the first to immigrate, followed by his mother, and then himself in 2008. His sister and brother still reside in the Punjab with extended family. "My mother had a hard time with the immigration process," he said. "In India, she lived in a house full of people, so when my father went to work she still had people to talk to. But in America, her and my father lived alone. So when he went to work, she was by herself at the house, bored and lonely."

Navigating the expectations of American societal norms for Respondent A continues to highlight cultural disparities. Living with his parents and consuming the traditional food his mother prepares makes for a situation that he says most of his American peers find "odd." "I get asked all the time, 'Don't you find it difficult to live with your parents? What about privacy and personal space?'" he said with a chuckle. He continued:

To me, it's normal. This is how we live in India. It would be harder for me to live alone and go to school, and work, and pay rent. This way, we all contribute to the same household. It's nice. When I wake up in the morning, my mother is there to make food or help with whatever I need. But Americans think it's strange to be an adult and still live with your parents. I'm American when it comes to work ethic, but Indian when it comes to family structure. I work hard and I do my work from home. But my mother has someone to talk to now.

Acquiring ingredients for traditional fare has proven to be one of the challenges that Central Valley Sikhs face, due to the location of ethnic grocers and restaurants and the travel required to reach them. As a result, fusion-cooking practices have found their place in Respondent A's family kitchen. His mother does the cooking for the household, and they all prefer Indian-Punjabi fare, such as curry, beans, rice, *roti*, *paratha*, yogurt, and Indian tea (*chai*), but both generations are open to integrating new foods into their diet. His mother often experiments with recipes, preparing, for instance, burritos with Indian spices. Occasionally, Respondent A will suggest that the family dine at well-known South Asian Indian restaurants in Dublin, and often encourages his father to eat healthier (his father, due to health reasons, follows a slightly different diet than the rest of the family). Respondent A and his mother regularly travel 3 to 14 miles (5–22 kilometers), or 9 to 30 minutes, one-way, to purchase ingredients and foodstuffs at ethnic grocers, and occasionally 35 to 48 miles (57–78 kilometers), or 36–60 minutes, one-way, to South Asian Indian restaurants and markets in Dublin.

In line with the majority of survey responses, Respondent A has difficulties maintaining a traditional diet when dining out and feels unsatisfied when consuming processed American foods. When asked what came to mind when he thought of Punjabi food, he replied, "Heavy foods. Vegetarian, no eggs. No liquor." When asked the same question about non-Punjabi foods, he answered, "Fast food, burritos, pizza." And when asked how living in the Central Valley has changed his eating habits, he said:

In India there are many restaurants to choose from, but there is only one Indian restaurant in my area and it's too expensive. Indian buffets here are expensive, and they're not that tasty. So when I go out to eat, it's not Indian food. My mother usually cooks for my father and I, but sometimes she goes back to visit Punjab for months at a time. When she is gone, my father and I eat fast food more often, so we eat less traditional food when she is away. Also, when I travel for events or classes, I am forced to eat fast food. There are few options for vegetarians, mostly just salad. I eat a lot of salad and processed food when I am away from home. Processed foods do not make me feel full and they don't taste good either. I enjoy eating at Subway though because the food there is not cooked or fried.

Respondent A provided an example of his family's utilization of transitory spaces and food to (re)create and maintain a sense of cultural cohesion and solidarity among Central Valley Sikhs. He and his father are very involved in the community, and they organize several Sikh awareness events throughout

the year. These events provide opportunities for Sikhs to socialize outside of the *gurdwaras*, as well as occasions to educate the local populace about Sikhism and promote acceptance. These events are catered by the one Indian restaurant in his area, and the food is free to all who attend.

Respondent B

Respondent B is a twenty-four-year-old male student from Stanislaus County who negotiates a similar American social-cultural matrix and reinforces his Sikh identity through familiar foodways. Born in the Punjab and migrating to California in 2006, he considers himself to be fifty percent Americanized, saying, “Compared to the average immigrant, I guess. I spend a lot of time at school, and all of my school interactions are American. But when I go home, I am Punjabi.” He lives with an extended family (father, mother, brother, and sister-in-law), speaking Punjabi and eating Indian-Punjabi food. His brother and sister-in-law enjoy dining at American restaurants more than the rest of the family, and his sister-in-law often suggests having a “taco night.” Everyone (brother and sister-in-law included) appreciates home-cooked Punjabi meals. Respondent B and his mother regularly travel 3 to 7 miles (5–11 kilometers), or 9 to 12 minutes, one-way, to local ethnic grocers, and occasionally, like Respondent A, 64 miles (102 kilometers), or 65 minutes, one-way, to South Asian Indian restaurants and markets in Dublin.

As with other immigrant groups in California, Sikh transnationals have incorporated new foods into their daily meals. Common foods of the immigrant generation, in some cases, have been reserved as ethnic treats for special events. Respondent B’s mother loves making Indian pizza (pizza with Indian spices), and he believes his family eats pizza more often in the Central Valley than it did in Punjab. “When I think of non-Punjabi food, I think of pizza,” he stated. “The temple serves pizza on Wednesday nights, and that’s the most non-Indian food served at the temple.” When thinking of Punjabi food, he conjures images of items like *shahi paneer* (Indian gravy with cheese). “*Shahi*” means ‘royal/fancy,’ so it is usually served at weddings.” When asked how his food habits have changed since arrival in the Central Valley, Respondent B stated:

Instead of Indian breakfast, we eat cereal. I’ve also been drinking *chai* a lot more. The Central Valley is similar to the Punjab; both are agricultural areas, so there are a lot of fresh fruits and vegetables available. Many Sikhs gain weight after they immigrate because of the American sedentary lifestyle. I try to eat more salads. I also drink more protein shakes for weight lifting. When I first moved here and found out everything wasn’t vegetarian that was difficult. Others don’t seem to understand

what vegetarians eat, finding vegetarian options is hard. Also, the food here seemed flavorless, the Indian food and even the bananas. There is something missing. I think that’s due to the mass production of food; bigger products, less flavor. Even carrots taste better in India, they are big and red and juicy.

In some ways, Sikhs reject assimilation and acculturation and are in the process of reasserting place-based ethnic identities. Respondent B illustrated this with a comment on the political battle waging between the younger generation and the older generation at a local *gurdwara*:

The older generation wants to become more modern—more American. They want to bring tables and chairs into the *langar* hall so they can attract more weddings and make more money. But the younger generation wants to keep things traditional, we want to get back to our roots and sit on the floor.

Respondent C

Respondent C, as with Respondents A and B, experiments with fusion-cooking and maintains her Sikh identity through purchasing and preparing traditional foods in her Central Valley home. Respondent C is a twenty-three-year-old female student from Stanislaus County. She is American-born to an immigrant father who was born in the Punjab and migrated to London and later New York, prior to settling in the Central Valley, and a mother born in California. She has visited family in Punjab on many occasions and for several months at a time. Respondent C lives in a household of five people (mother, father, brother, friend, and herself), where everyone speaks English and enjoys all types of vegetarian foods. She, also like Respondents A and B, encourages the older generation to maintain a healthier diet. She considers Punjabi food to be heavy, based on simple recipes, and views non-Punjabi food as “processed.” As the primary cook for the household, she buys ingredients at Food Max, Safeway, Costco, Trader Joe’s, Target, and Amar Fashion & Grocery. “I literally have to go to those six stores to obtain all of the necessary vegetarian ingredients that everyone eats,” she stated. She admits to experimenting with American-Punjabi recipes, like bean burritos with *masala*, spaghetti with Indian spices, and tacos with tofu and turmeric. Fusion-cooking recipes, such as the ones mentioned above, are examples of the unique cuisine evolution and ethnogenesis unfolding in the Central Valley.

First-generation immigrants in North America may be inclined to use the ABCD acronym to describe young, American-born Sikhs. However, that

acronym may not be applicable to Central Valley Sikh youth like Respondent C, especially with regard to cultural foodways. When asked about how the process of Americanization has impacted her, Respondent C said, “I try to have a balance between both Sikh and American cultures. America is a combination of so many cultures, so what is American anyway?” She shares a view similar to Respondent B’s in stating that the agricultural landscape of the Central Valley is akin to that of Punjab, in that both places offer access to fresh vegetables and dairy: “It’s almost like living in Punjab, except now we don’t wake up in the morning to milk the cows—we go to Costco to buy milk.” Respondent C observes that a plethora of Indian grocery stores have opened to cater to the Central Valley’s large Sikh population, contributing to continuity of a food culture amid long-distance migration: “It’s not difficult to retain traditional recipes.” Upon becoming a baptized Sikh three years ago, she committed herself to a lacto-vegetarian diet, stating that “it was hard not to eat eggs. Eggs are in everything, cookies, etc. When I go out to eat I often have to ask the waiters if there are eggs in the recipe. They usually say ‘no’ but I know how to cook, so I know that eggs are used in that sauce!” Respondent C regularly traveled between 5 and 7 miles (9–11 kilometers), or 9 to 13 minutes, one-way, to buy ethnic ingredients for the meals she prepared at home.

Like Respondent A, Respondent C provided an example of how she makes use of transitory spaces and food to reinforce her Sikh identity. Outside of the *gurdwara*, she gathers with other Sikhs at week-long *Siki* camps, which serve to educate youth about the history of Sikhism and Punjabi language. *Siki* camps often serve pizza, sandwiches, pasta, burritos, and Punjabi food for young attendees. She laughed, “The kids usually complain when they are served Punjabi food.”

Gathering Spaces

Central Valley Sikhs utilize a variety of strategies in their attempts to (re) create and maintain a sense of cultural cohesion and solidarity. One strategy involves the building of permanent spaces, like *gurdwaras*, as enduring sites for the demonstration and cultivation of Sikh ethnic heritage. Another strategy makes use of temporary spaces, such as community events and parades, as a more transitory way of bringing families together to celebrate cultural and religious traditions. In this place-making strategy, Punjabi Sikhs (both the foreign-born and their native-born children) invoke and transform traditionally ordinary spaces into social and communal spaces that they temporarily call their own. Unlike permanent sites of ethnic maintenance that endure as visibly identifiable and generic (Sikh) spaces, transitory sites

such as parades are nearly always inconspicuous in the urban landscape. They exist as (Sikh) places only briefly, to be returned to their customary purpose once events conclude (Skop 2007). Transitory Sikh spaces were made evident during field research: *Hola Mohalla* (see Figure 12) created a cultural space on the blocks between temples until the parade concluded; public spaces were made Sikh during community awareness events; athletic activities (such as volleyball) and weightlifting at the gym became cultural spaces; and *Siki* camps. All of these transitory spaces help reinforce a sense of “Punjabi-ness” among Sikhs in the Central Valley.



Figure 12. Parade procession following Livingston gurdwara float, *Hola Mohalla*, Livingston, California. (H. Benson)

Discussion and Conclusions

This study explores the Americanization process among Sikh transnationals based on cuisine evolution and changes to food consumptive patterns since their arrival in California's Central Valley. Central to this paper is the assertion that geographic location and age significantly influence the process of acculturation among Central Valley Sikhs: Sikh migrants experience foodway assimilation differently based on their age at arrival in the Central Valley, their current age, and where they live in relation to ethnic food suppliers.

The narratives provided in this paper show the nuances that exist between the participants' age and their rate and degree of Americanization. As in Vu and Voeks' (2013) research on Vietnamese diaspora in Orange County, the results of our study indicate that members of the first generation of the Central Valley Sikh population retain food culture more strongly than those of subsequent generations. The older generation of Central Valley Sikhs, those who arrived earliest, are the least Americanized and tend to preserve a traditional Indian-Punjabi diet; whereas the younger immigrant generation and native-born Central Valley Sikhs are the most Americanized and tend to incorporate more of the local, American cuisine into their diets. This aspect of the research reveals that youths who arrived in more-recent decades and those who are American-born straddle being Punjabi and being American, a dynamic that is reflected in their foodways. When cooking non-Punjabi food, they would add Indian flavors such as curry, turmeric, and masala to dishes that would not normally contain those ingredients. Contact with American cultures has resulted in exposure to new types of foods, and as a result we are witnessing an emerging Sikh foodway culture and ethnogenesis in the Central Valley.

A culturally diverse region with an agrarian base, the Central Valley hosts a number of ethnic grocers that supply traditional ingredients and basic components necessary to a Sikh vegetarian diet (for example, fresh vegetables and grains). However, ingredients and food items that figure into traditional Sikh cuisine are also amply available at American grocers. Furthermore, the Central Valley is within a reasonable distance (45–60 minutes by car) to revered ethnic markets in the Bay Area, which aids in providing access to customary ingredients. Field research shows that while Sikh food practices have changed significantly with regard to breakfast and dining at restaurants, foods prepared and consumed in the homes of Sikhs have largely remained traditional Indian-Punjabi fare. Additionally, due to geography, history, and nodes of ethno-cultural activities, Sikhs in the central and southern parts of the Valley differ from those in the northern region; those closer to

Southern California exhibit Mexican influences in their foodway patterns, whereas those in the north exhibit a more traditional Indian-Punjabi diet. Published literature does not reveal much in relation to foodway preservation and distance decay (Vu 2008); further research on this topic could provide additional data to strengthen the results of this study and provide additional details regarding access to traditional ingredients.

Additional findings revealed that Sikhs employ place-making strategies utilizing permanent and transitory spaces to bring people together to celebrate cultural and religious traditions. This place-making strategy, which often involves food, helps reinforce the sense of “we-ness” and “Punjabi-ness” within the new landscape and culture of the Central Valley. In this approach, Central Valley Sikhs (both foreign- and native-born) invoke and transform traditionally ordinary spaces into social and communal spaces that they temporarily call their own. The unique combination of these methods and interdisciplinary approach have provided a fresh perspective on ethnic foodways and transnational identities that isn't currently available in the literature, and it has added to our understanding of ethno-religious groups in the Central Valley. This study has further added to our understanding of the process of acculturation among young and old Sikh transnationals and has helped uncover the role that spatial relationships and processes play in maintaining traditional foodways.

What Punjabi-Indian food lacks in visual aesthetic, it makes up in flavors and aromas. In claiming the superiority of French over English food, lovers of French food, from the “great master” Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin on, have argued that theirs is a cuisine of intermingling, while English food is the product of mixture. If we concede that to the French, then Punjabi-Indian food is the result of an even-deeper interpenetration, in which the original substance loses its distinctive identity, as in a stew (Ray 2004). In regard to the Central Valley, it is important to celebrate and preserve cultural and ethnic diversity, call it what you will—an intermingling, a mixture, an interpenetration, a fusion of recipes, a stew—but the variety of people and flavors create a unique buffet of international culture.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the Department of Geography, Anthropology, and Ethnic Studies of California State University, Stanislaus for its support, including Dr. Peggy Hauselt and Dr. Steve Arounsack for their input and feedback; Cameron Pallotta, Chelsea Canon, and Brendan Lawrence for their mapping expertise; the Association of Pacific Coast Geographers (APCG)

Larry Ford Cultural Geography Fieldwork Scholarship; and the California Geographical Society.

More importantly, we could not have completed this research without the patience, participation, and encouragement of numerous Central Valley Sikh respondents and assistants. We hope we have successfully narrated their stories and not disappointed them.

References

- Amster-Burton, M. 2009. Korean tacos come in off the street. *Gourmet Magazine*. <http://www.gourmet.com/food/2009/05/korean-tacos.html> [last accessed 30 January 2017].
- Appadurai, A. 1997. *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization*. Delhi, India: Oxford University Press.
- Bayor, R. 2011. *Multicultural America: An encyclopedia of the newest Americans*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO.
- Domosh, M., R. Neumann, P. Price, and T. Jordan-Bychkov. 2010. Geographies of race and ethnicity: Mosaic or melting pot? *The Human Mosaic: A Cultural Approach to Human Geography*. New York: W. H. Freeman and Company.
- Ember, C., and M. Ember. 2002. Culture change. *Cultural Anthropology*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Farivar, C. 2009. How to make Korean tacos at home. California Taco Trucks Blog. <http://californiatacotrucks.com/blog/2009/05/31/how-to-make-korean-tacos-at-home/> [last accessed 30 January 2017].
- Gabaccia, D. 2000. *Why we eat what we eat: Ethnic food and the making of Americans*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.
- Han, P. 2008. "Hidden in-betweenness": An exploration of Taiwanese transnational identity in contemporary Japan. *Asian Ethnicity* 9 (2):121–132.
- Helzer, J. 2015. Building communities—economics & ethnicity. *Delta Narratives*. Sacramento: The Delta Protection Commission.
- Helzer, J., and E. Machado. 2011. The new Blue Islands: Azores immigration, settlement, and cultural landscapes in California's San Joaquin Valley. *California Geographer* 51.
- Khokha, S. 2012. Punjabi community finds home in Central California. *The California Report*. <http://audio.californiareport.org/archive/R201208031630/c> [last accessed 13 March 2015].
- Leonard, K. 1994. Interactions: California's Punjabi-Mexican Americans, 1910s–1970s. *Peoples of Color in the American West*. Lexington: D.C. Heath Company.
- Lindenfeld, L. 2007. Visiting the Mexican American family: Tortilla soup as culinary tourism. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 4 (3):303–320.
- Mann, G. 2004. *Sikhism*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Mann, G., P. Numrich, and R. Williams. 2008. *Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs in America, a short history*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mannur, A. 2005. Model minorities can cook: Fusion cuisine in Asian America. *East Main Street: Asian American Popular Culture*. New York: New York University Press.
- Ray, K. 2004. *The migrant's table: Meals and memories in Bengali-American households*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Respondent A, interviewed by Heather L. Benson, Denny's Restaurant Modesto, 10 April 2016.
- Respondent B, interviewed by Heather L. Benson, California State University, Stanislaus Warrior Grill, 11 April 2016.
- Respondent C, FaceTime interview with Heather L. Benson, 24 April 2016.
- Scholliers, P. 2001. *Food, drink, and identity: Cooking, eating, and drinking in Europe since the Middle Ages*. Oxford: Berg.
- Shortridge, J., and B. Gimla. 1998. *The taste of American place: A reader on regional and ethnic foods*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Skop, E. 2007. Asian Indians and the construction of community and identity. *Contemporary Ethnic Geographies in America*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Takhar, J. 2002. *The Sikhs and other East Indian immigrants' experience in Stockton, San Joaquin County, and America*. MA thesis, California State University, Stanislaus.
- The Sikh Review*. 2005. Kolkata: Sikh Cultural Centre. 7–12: 619–624.
- United Nations. 2016. *International migration report 2015: Highlights*. New York: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division.
- United States Census Bureau. 2016. *American fact finder*. http://www.factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/guided_search.xhtml [last accessed 10 May 2016].
- Vu, V. 2008. *The changing foodways of Vietnamese Americans in Orange County, California*. MA thesis, California State University, Fullerton.
- Vu, V., and R. Voeks. 2013. Fish sauce to French fries: Changing foodways of the Vietnamese diaspora in Orange County, California. *California Geographer* 52:35–51.
- Wiseman, R. 1975. Location in the city as a factor in trip making patterns. *Tijdschrift voor Economische En Sociale Geografie* 66 (3):167–177.

Survey Questionnaire

(adapted from V. Vu 2008 and K. Ray 2004)

General Information:

1. Your Zip Code: _____
2. Gender: Male ___ Female ___
3. Year of Birth: _____
4. Occupation: _____
5. Were you born in the Punjab? (Circle one) Yes / No
6. If you were born in Punjab, what year did you migrate to the U.S.? _____
7. What year did you arrive in California? _____
8. Were your parents born in the Punjab? (Circle one)
Father: Yes / No Mother: Yes / No
9. If your parents were born outside the US, how old were they when they arrived in the U.S.? Father: _____
Mother: _____
10. What is the primary language spoken in your home? _____

Food Practices:

Please answer questions 11–14 based on the following scale:

1 = Least Often, 5 = Most Often

11. How often do you eat at home? (Circle one)
1 2 3 4 5
12. When you eat at home, how often are the dishes Punjabi/Indian? (Circle one)
1 2 3 4 5
13. How often do you go out to eat? (Circle one)
1 2 3 4 5
14. When you go out to eat, how often is the restaurant Punjabi/Indian? (Circle one)
1 2 3 4 5
15. Which member of your household is the primary food preparer?

16. Where do you, or the primary food preparer, typically buy ingredients? Please name grocery store, vendor, or market. _____

17. What type of food is primarily consumed in your home? (Punjabi/ Indian, American, Mexican, etc.) _____
18. What is your favorite dish to consume? Please include ingredients if possible.
Meal: _____
Ingredients: _____
19. Do you cook? If so, what are your favorite dishes to prepare? Please include ingredients if possible.
Meal: _____
Ingredients: _____
20. What dishes do you typically consume during special occasions? (Holidays, birthdays, weddings, etc.) Please specify special occasion and include ingredients if possible.
Meal & occasion: _____
Ingredients: _____
21. Do you dine at restaurants or fast foods? If so, where? Please provide name of eatery: _____

Perceived identity:

Please circle the best answer for each of the following questions (22–29).

22. How quickly did you assimilate to American Culture?
Very Quickly Quickly Moderately Slowly Very Slowly
23. How well do you speak the Punjabi language?
Very well Moderately well Very poorly I don't speak Punjabi
24. How well can you understand the Punjabi language?
Very well Moderately well Very poorly I don't understand Punjabi
25. How well do you speak the English language?
Very well Moderately well Very poorly I don't speak English
26. How well can you understand the English language?
Very well Moderately well Very poorly I don't speak English
27. How often do you speak Punjabi?
Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never

28. How often do you listen to Punjabi music or radio?
 Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never
29. How often do you watch Punjabi programs (television or online media)?
 Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never

Further research will be conducted regarding cooking practices and food consumption habits. If you would like to participate, please provide your *first name* and *phone number* or *e-mail address*:

Food Log

(adapted from V. Vu 2008 and K. Ray 2004)

The purpose of this survey is to observe daily food consumption habits of Punjabi Americans. These findings will be presented at academic conferences and in my Master's thesis. I would greatly appreciate your participation in this project. All you have to do is write down what you ate for 3 days. If you could be as specific as possible, that would be great! (i.e. A cheeseburger from McDonald's; *sarson da saag* made by my mother/myself/wife/husband; *basmati* rice and *roti* from Punjabi Dhaba; or a ham sandwich, jello, and juice that my mom packed for my lunch). You can even include drinks and desserts. If the meal was prepared in your home and you know what ingredients were used, including those will also be very helpful. Please include at least one weekend day in your food log. Your information will remain anonymous. Thank you for your assistance.

Thank you,

Heather L. Ream
 Geographer, MSIS
 California State University, Stanislaus

Please write down what you have eaten during a 3-day period:

Day 1 _____

Breakfast: _____

Lunch: _____

Dinner: _____

Other (Snacks, Beverages, Desserts): _____

Day 2 _____

Breakfast: _____

Lunch: _____

Dinner: _____

Other (Snacks, Beverages, Desserts): _____

Day 3 _____

Breakfast: _____

Lunch: _____

Dinner: _____

Other (Snacks, Beverages, Desserts): _____

Any Additional Information: _____

Follow-up Interview Guide

(adapted from V. Vu 2008 and K. Ray 2004)

How many people live in your house? Can you provide the age, gender, and how they are related to you?

What are the food preferences of each of these persons?

Do you feel pressured by the younger generation to integrate new foods into your diet?

When you think of Punjabi food, what comes to mind?

When you think of non-Punjabi foods, what comes to mind?

How Americanized do you think you are?

How has living in the Central Valley changed your food habits? (ex. food preparation, food consumption, integration of new ingredients, changing time commitments or gender roles)

According to your questionnaire, you typically buy ingredients (*insert name of food supplier*). Do they have adequate supplies of traditional foods and spices?

Do you blend American/Californian foods with Punjabi/Indian foods? (ex. curry pizza)

Are there Punjabi/Indian markets or restaurants in your area that I should be aware of? Please specify.

Aside from *gurdwaras*, where do you gather with other Sikhs/Punjabis? Is there food/eating involved at this/these location(s)?

Have you been to Punjab? If not, would you like to go? If yes, would you like to go back, if only for a visit?

IF FEEDING INTERVIEWER: Why was the particular meal served? How was it prepared?

Do you have any stories you would like to share about your experience assimilating in the U.S. related to food?

Description of Sikh Fare

basmati rice: aromatic, slender-grain rice from the subcontinent of India

roti or *chapati**: tortilla-like flat bread

daal or *dhal**: staple food; dried lentil, pea, or various types of bean which have been split and cooked into a thick stew

chana masala or *chholey*: popular street food/snack dish commonly eaten at breakfast; spiced chickpeas with a sour circus note

jalebi: sweet; deep-fried wheat flour batter in pretzel or circular shapes, soaked in sugary syrup

*barfi**: sweet; condensed milk and sugar, cut into squares, originating from the Indian subcontinent

*laddu**: sweet often served at religious or festive occasions; flour, minced dough, and sugar, molded into a ball shape

paratha: unleavened flat bread, originating from northern India

aloo paratha: breakfast dish; unleavened flat bread, originating from northern India, stuffed with potatoes

paneer: non-melting curd cheese

sarson da saag: vegetable dish made from mustard leaves and spices, originating from the Punjab region of the Indian subcontinent

curry: dishes prepared with a complex sauce made from spices, herbs, and fresh or dried peppers/chilies

*pakora**: snack; deep-fried vegetables, fruit, or meat in a chickpea flour batter

samosa: fried or baked dish with a savory filling, such as potatoes, onions, peas, lentils, noodles, or meat

chai: Indian tea; black tea, milk, and a mixture of aromatic spices such as cardamom, cinnamon sticks, and ground cloves

*denotes fare found at all Central Valley *gurdwaras* during *langar*