

## **[CFP \(closes Aug 15\): Bhai Vir Singh \(1872-1957\): Rethinking Literary Modernity in Colonial Punjab \(workshop & edited volume/journal issue\)](#)**

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Type:

Call for Papers

Date:

July 13, 2017 to July 16, 2017

Location:

British Columbia, Canada

Subject Fields:

Asian History / Studies, Intellectual History, Literature, Religious Studies and Theology, South Asian History / Studies

Call for papers for workshop and subsequent edited volume/special journal issue:

*Bhai Vir Singh (1872-1957): Rethinking Literary Modernity in Colonial Punjab*

Convenors/Editors: Anshu Malhotra (Delhi University), Anne Murphy (University of British Columbia)

Proposals due: 15 August 2016

Notification of inclusion: 1 October 2016

Workshop: 13-16 July 2017 at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, BC, Canada

(Final Papers will be due to the editors before November 30, 2017 and revisions completed and returned to editors by January 31, 2018.)

For many, the name Bhai Vir Singh is synonymous with Punjabi literary and religious reform. A poet, novelist, exegete, theologian, historian, journalist, and pamphleteer, Vir Singh is often said to have single-handedly ushered “modernity” into Punjabi language and literature, and was a major force in shaping the Sikh and Punjabi politics of the undivided Punjab. He was sympathetic to the reformist project of the Lahore Singh Sabha, for whom he penned many a tract through the vehicle of the Khalsa Tract Society, set up in 1894. In 1899 he began the newspaper *Khalsa Samachar* in support of the same cause. In many of his novels Vir Singh imagined the agency of women as vital to the cause of the reformed Sikh; this was portrayed in both negative terms, such as through the figure of the “unreformed woman” who encouraged Sikh ambivalence towards religious identity, and more positive ones, defining the “reformed” Sikh woman’s role in bringing her men to the call of community. In his myriad writings Vir Singh both popularized and clarified his ideas on what constituted Punjab’s religious communities and their distinguishing characteristics. He was a prominent exegete and scholar of Sikh scriptures and literatures, and a historian. As a man trained in the tradition of multiple cosmopolitan and vernacular languages of India and Punjab, Vir Singh dedicated his intellectual life to promoting Punjabi, lending it a particular form and envisaging it an

emotive symbol of Sikh identity. Indeed, he is seen by many as the "father" of modern Punjabi literature. Vir Singh's politics were colored by the urgent need for Sikhs to establish their separate identity so that they could take their place as a "community" in the colonial political and public sphere, a space where competing community claims were increasingly seen to decide the social, cultural and economic fate of Punjabi peoples within the logic of colonial governance.

While much has been written about Bhai Vir Singh that is hagiographical or semi-hagiographical in nature, further critical analysis of the work and impact of such an important reformer and literary and intellectual figure is needed. We invite papers for a proposed workshop in July 2017 at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada and subsequent edited volume or journal special issue that will critically analyze this important figure and his contribution, politics, and literary impact in light of our current historical understanding of Punjab and the colonial period. Funding will be sought to provide full or partial support for all participants in the workshop.

Please send paper proposals, including title, 300 word abstract, and 150 word bio, by Aug 15 to: Anshu Malhotra ([anshumalh@gmail.com](mailto:anshumalh@gmail.com)) and Anne Murphy ([anne.murphy@ubc.ca](mailto:anne.murphy@ubc.ca)).

Contact Info:

Anshu Malhotra ([anshumalh@gmail.com](mailto:anshumalh@gmail.com)) and Anne Murphy ([anne.murphy@ubc.ca](mailto:anne.murphy@ubc.ca)).

Contact Email:

[anne.murphy@ubc.ca](mailto:anne.murphy@ubc.ca)

URL:

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