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From the Komagata Maru to six Sikh MPs in Parliament : factors influencing electoral political participation in the Canadian-Sikh community

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FROM THE KOMAGATA MARU TO SIX SIKH MPS IN
PARLIAMENT:
FACTORS INFLUENCING ELECTORAL POLITICAL
PARTICIPATION IN THE CANADIAN-SIKH COMMUNITY

By

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A Major Research Paper
presented to Ryerson University

in partial fulfillments of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
In the program of
Immigration and Settlement Studies

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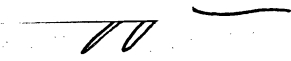
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Master of Arts
Immigration and Settlement Studies
Ryerson University

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ABSTRACT

In the span of about 100 years Canadian-Sikhs have negotiated the path from political exclusion to political inclusion. This ethno-specific study focuses on the federal and provincial electoral performance of the Canadian-Sikh community and attempts to answer the following research questions. What factors have contributed to these electoral achievements, and what does having representation mean for the Sikh community – have the results been substantive or symbolic? The research discusses a range of internal (community specific) and external (structural) factors that have allowed for such electoral success; and utilizes key informant interviews and a political engagement survey to examine community motivations for having elected representation. The study concludes by raising questions about the traditional interpretation around the nature of immigrant integration and political participation. Also highlighted here is the need for further ethno-specific research that recognizes the complexity of the relationship between the factors that influence political participation across different communities.

Key words: minority political participation; political representation; Canadian-Sikhs; immigrant political integration

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Introduction

Over the course of the 20th century, Canada's Sikh community has traveled the path from political exclusion to political inclusion. Historically, the Sikh community was barred entry into Canada in 1914 with the Komagata Maru challenge of the *Continuous Journey Act*, and then was subjected to strict immigration laws and denied the basic right to vote until 1947. Today by contrast, eight Canadian-Sikhs serve in provincial political office¹; six Canadian-Sikhs sit as Members of Parliament²; and Punjabi is the fourth most commonly spoken language by MPs in the House of Commons³. On the federal level, Sikhs have become one of the few minority groups in Canada to achieve statistical over-representation⁴ in a relatively short span of time. According to 2001 Statistics Canada data, Sikhs represent just under 1% of the Canadian population, whereas they hold approximately 2% of the 308 seats in the House of Commons. These accomplishments of Canadian-Sikhs in mobilizing and successively building their political presence over the past ten or so years have been extraordinary, and beg the question what factors have contributed to the success of this community in electoral politics.

What makes this story even more remarkable is that Sikhs are not only a small minority group in the Canadian context, but also a small religious and geographic minority group in India (2.4% of the Indian population, Census of India 2001). This is a double minority group – a minority in both the Indian and Canadian context – that has

¹ The three Canadian-Sikh MPPs from Ontario are: Mr. Harinder Takhar (Lib), Dr. Kuldip Kular (Lib), Mr. Vic Dhillon (Lib). The five Canadian-Sikh MLAs from BC are: Mr. Harry Lali (NDP), Harry Bains (NDP), Jagrup Brar (NDP), Raj Chouhan (NDP), Wally Oppal (Lib)

² The six Canadian-Sikh MPs are: Mr. Gurbax Singh Malhi (Lib), Mr. Navdeep Singh Bains (Lib), Dr. Ruby Dhalla (Lib), Mr. Ujjal Dosanjh (Lib), Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Lib), Ms. Nina Grewal (Con).

³ The Hill Times, July 26th, 2004

⁴ Over-representation is calculated by the ratio of the percentage of Canadian-Sikh MPs to the percentage of the population who indicated their religion as Sikh in the 2001 Census.

mainly come to Canada from geographically concentrated village clusters in Punjab, and has primarily settled in geographically concentrated clusters in Canada, notably the Greater Toronto and Greater Vancouver areas. These factors make Canadian-Sikhs an interesting case study community for examining the political integration of minority groups, as the process of doing so highlights the immigration history of this community to Canada - from exclusion, to reluctant acceptance, towards integration.

This research will attempt to explore the factors that have influenced political participation in the Canadian-Sikh community, and discuss the impact of representation in terms of symbolic or substantive results. In doing so, the study raises questions about the conventional abstract understanding that electoral political participation is an indicator of broader social integration. As well, this work highlights the many factors that come together to influence political participation in different ethnic communities. Despite the complexity of the issue, it is hoped that this ethno-specific research on Canadian-Sikhs will provide a basis for further research with other minority communities.

The study will be presented in five chapters. To begin, there will be an overview of visible minorities and political participation in Canada, which will include a discussion on the nature of representation. Chapter two will provide an introduction to the immigration history of Sikhs in Canada and present a current snapshot of the community. This will be followed with a discussion on the internal and external factors that have contributed to the exceptional gains that Sikhs have made in electoral politics. Next, chapter four will present perspectives from key informants on the electoral political success of the Sikh community, and highlight results from a political engagement survey that was conducted with the Brampton/Mississauga Sikh community. Finally, the study

will conclude with a discussion on the presented research and some closing remarks that will suggest areas for possible future investigation.

The Research Questions

The exceptional level of electoral political success makes the Canadian-Sikh experience an interesting case study for ethno-specific research that will further our general understanding of visible minority political participation in Canada. The following study will explore what aspects of social, cultural and economic capital within the Sikh community, along with other structural factors, have contributed to the notable political integration of this community. The research will also attempt to examine the impact of political representation for the Sikh community – has it been symbolic or substantive?

To answer these questions, this paper will be based on existing literature, qualitative data from personal interviews with six current Sikh MPs and key informants, and quantitative data from surveys conducted with members of the Sikh community living in Brampton and Mississauga. It is important to note that this research is primarily focusing on the experience of the Sikh community living in Ontario; however, much of the secondary literature and general discussion about factors influencing political participation apply to the larger Sikh community living in Canada.

Research Definitions

Before proceeding with the research there is terminology used here that should be defined in order to avoid confusion with the terms of reference.

Two groups that are referred to throughout the study are Sikhs and Punjabis. Although there is some fluidity with both of these terms and how people understand them

as part of their identity, it would be helpful for the reader to have an understanding of the intersectionality of these groups. Sikhism is a religion that originated in 1469 in the area of Punjab that is now part of Pakistan. Over 24 million Sikhs live around the world, with the majority of them (19.3 million) living in India and approximately 278,400 living in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2001; Census India, 2001). Punjabi is the culture and language of people that trace their roots back to Punjab (land of five rivers), which after 1947 was divided between India and Pakistan. The population of India Punjab is just over 24.4 million and approximately 60% (14.6 million) of the population is Sikh (Census India, 2001). Statistics Canada does not provide information on the number of ethnic Punjabis in Canada, but in terms of language Punjabi is the fourth most commonly spoken non-official language in Canada. According to 2001 figures, 271,220 Canadians indicated Punjabi was their mother tongue (Statistics Canada, 2001). It is likely that the number of ethnic Punjabis in Canada is higher than the number of Punjabi speakers since it is possible for people to be ethnically Punjabi, but have another language (such as English) as their mother tongue.

Although an overwhelming majority of Sikhs around the world trace their ancestral roots back to Punjab (as Sikhism originated in Punjab), not all Punjabis are Sikh and can also be Hindu, Muslim, etc. As mentioned earlier, the intersectionality of these terms is much more complicated than presented in the above section; however, to avoid confusion it is important to make note of these distinctions. That being said, during the course of this research the Sikh community will occasionally be described on the basis of their Punjabi characteristics due to limitations in available data. There is some ambiguity with inferring that characteristics of the Punjabi community are characteristics of the Sikh community given the demographics of India Punjab. However, such an inference in the

Canadian context is justified since it is likely that more than 60% of the Indian Punjabi population in Canada is Sikh. The available statistics do not allow for precision, but simply given the dominance of Punjabi-Sikhs in Canada's immigration history from India, it is safe to infer that there is greater correspondence between Punjabi and Sikh in Canada, than in India.

The term "visible minority" is also utilized in this study. As defined by federal Employment Equity legislation, "visible minorities are persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-white in colour or non-Caucasian in race." The visible minority population has been steadily increasing in Canada; in 1986 visible minorities were 6.3% of the population; in 1991 that number rose to 9.1%; it was 11.2% in 1996; and further increased to 13.4% in 2001. In 2001 the overwhelming majority of the visible minority population in Canada was immigrants (67%), with approximately 30% born in Canada, and the remaining 3% non permanent residents (Statistics Canada, 2001, Dhillon, 2005). As noted by Dhillon (2005), the term visible minority dates back to the 1970's and is currently widely understood within the Canadian context. Increasingly, using "visibility" as a category has been criticized by some as "homogenizing specificities" and ignoring across group differences based on history, power, status and culture (Synnott and Howes 1996, p.145). Despite the validity of these criticisms, "visible minority" was still used in this research given that the term is commonly used in "...Canadian public discourse, and the term has been entrenched in affirmative action, employment equity and multiculturalism legislation, including the Charter of Rights and Freedoms" (Dhillon 2005, p.86).

With regards to the concept of political participation, according to Saloojee (2002), "the political participation of immigrants in society can be seen as part of the

process of social and political integration in the new society” (p. 39). The term “political participation” can include a range of activities, from political party membership to involvement in protest movements (Stasiulis, 1997). Given the scale of this paper, the focus with regards to political participation is on electoral and party politics at the federal and provincial level. Although participation in electoral politics is a narrow definition of political participation, it is a valuable indicator of how recent immigrants move from “social isolation into the mainstream of Canadian political life.” (Wood, 1981 p. 178).

Finally, the term “representation” will be used throughout this research in different contexts to refer to statistical, substantive and symbolic representation. Following the general definitions used by Matheson (2005), statistical representation refers to the number of visible minorities in political office; substantive representation refers to the potential for pro-diversity policies and legislation to emerge when visible minorities are represented in political office; and symbolic representation refers to the signals that visible minority political participation in political office sends to the population. When it is mentioned that Sikhs are “overrepresented” in the House of Commons, this refers only to the ratio of the percentage of Sikh MPs to the percentage of the Sikh population in Canada.

Chapter 1: An Overview of Minority Political Participation in Canada

The contested relationship between identity and political representation in a democracy is further complicated when the population demographics are dramatically changed. As the Canadian population becomes more and more diverse, it will be interesting to examine how elected bodies of government adapt to reflect this diversity, especially in the case of visible minorities who have traditionally been underrepresented in political office.

The history of visible minority political participation in Canada is fitting point from which to build this study on Canadian-Sikh political participation since such a discussion will provide the general context for this current research. As well, this review will highlight some of the complexities between notions of symbolic and substantive representation, and how these complexities have played out with regards to the Canadian-Sikh community in Brampton and Mississauga.

Political Participation/Representation of Minorities in Elected Office

Existing literature on minority representation in Canadian politics indicates that exclusion from elected positions is a reoccurring trend in the representative bodies of this country. While there has been limited research into political participation by specific ethnic groups and visible minorities, there is a growing body of literature on the participation of minority communities with regard to representation in decision-making and parliamentary positions (Simard, 2001).

One of the earliest studies on ethnicity and elected federal politicians was completed in 1970 by the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism

(Stasiulis, 1997). It reported that between 1867 and 1964, a total of 97 MPs were of non-British and non-French origin. Of these minority MPs, Germans, and to a lesser extent Ukrainians and Jews, were among the communities that had the largest number in the House. With regards to visible minorities, the report indicated negligible membership in the federal legislature. Interestingly, Stasiulis (1997) also noted that early research has shown that from Confederation to the mid-1960s, minority groups became increasingly under-represented federally in comparison with their increasing proportions in the Canadian population (Manzer 1974, p.251).

The sizable increase of minority representation, both ethnic and visible, in the 1993 and 1997 federal elections among MPs represents an acceleration in trends that began in the mid-1980s (Stasiulis and Abu-Laban 1991). However, this improvement in representation was primarily attributed to the increased participation of individuals from diverse European backgrounds, and the increase of visible minorities was much smaller. For example, in their study of the results of the 1993 Federal Election, Black and Lakhani (1997) found that gains made in the minority presence in the House of Commons nearly corresponded to the level of non-British and non-French minorities in the Canadian population. However despite these inroads, visible minorities remained strikingly under-represented in comparison with their population levels - only 4.4 percent of all MPs in 1993 were visible minorities, in comparison with 9.4 percent of the population at large (Statistics Canada, 1991). As well, of the ethnic and visible minority MPs elected into office there has been, and continues to be, regional trends that correspond to population demographics. In Quebec and especially Atlantic Canada, minority MPs are sparingly represented; in the prairies minority MPs of European origins are concentrated; and in

Ontario and British Columbia visible minority MPs are distinctly concentrated, especially from the Toronto and Vancouver Census Metropolitan Areas (Black and Lakhani, 1997; Stasiulis, 1997)

However, given high ethnic populations in major Canadian cities, researchers have also examined the level of representation at the provincial and municipal levels. In some of the previous literature, it has been noted that access to elected positions by traditionally marginalized groups has been greater at the municipal level, than the provincial or federal level (Burnet and Palmer, 1988; Stasiulis, 1997; Simard 2001). Simard in her study on Montreal found that minority representation was more common at the municipal level, where there are smaller electoral districts, larger residential concentrations of ethnic groups, lower financial expenses and less rigid party structures (Simard, 2001). However, this suggestion that access to electoral positions is greater at the municipal level is being challenged by more recent findings by Siemiatycki and Matheson (2005). Their research identified discrepancies in representation patterns with regards to the South Asian community in the Region of Peel. There was found to be a substantial increase of South Asian politicians after the 2003 Ontario Provincial Elections and the 2004 Federal General Elections, but noticeably few gains at the municipal level.

Generally speaking across all three levels of government, groups that one could identify as minorities have been shown to have different patterns of numerical representation. For non-English, non-French, European ethnic minority groups representation is fairly in line with their presence in the population at large; however, for visible minorities the picture is quite different, as this group continues to be clearly under-represented compared to their population levels. It is important to note that this

comparison based on population levels does not take into account the immigration history of these groups in Canada. However, although for the most part visible minorities have a shorter history in Canada than many European ethnic minorities, there are visible minority groups that have been in Canada for generations (including the Black and Chinese community) that continue to be under-represented in elected political office. Researchers have identified several barriers to the participation of visible minorities in government. For example, Stasiulis and Abu-Laban (1991) conducted interviews with unsuccessful minority MP candidates and found that the "incumbency" factor, which discourages the placement of minority candidates in winnable seats, is a major hurdle facing minority candidates. Other studies have also identified factors such as: financial barriers/burdens facing the more newly arrived; conventional reliance on established social networks to recruitment candidates; negative images of ethnic politics in the media; language barriers; discrimination based on race and social class; and other hurdles within the Canadian system that serve as barriers facing minority candidates (Pelletier, 1991; Simard et al. 1991; Stasiulis, 1997). In addition, specifically with respect to municipal level politics, researchers have also identified municipal amalgamation, which decreases the number of available seats, and the great advantage of incumbency as barriers to election of newer minority groups (Siemiatycki and Saloojee, 2002)

With regards to the existing literature, there appears to be a gap in community specific studies on political participation. For example, despite the political success of the Canadian-Sikh community, no research was found that focused specifically on this minority group and the factors that have contributed to their political success. There has been some recent research (Matheson, 2005, Siemiatycki and Matheson, 2005) on the

political success of the broader South Asian community, which does mention the particular success of the Sikh community. Although this research has been valuable, more community specific research should be undertaken given that there are many cultural and religious differences within the South Asian community. As well, given that the political involvement of Sikhs has been so notable (compared to other South Asian communities) it would be particularly worthwhile to examine the factors that have contributed to the successful political mobilization of this community.

What Do the Numbers Tell Us?

Previous research by Black (2002) on the 37th Parliament examined the patterns associated with visible minority MPs from 1993-2000. His research revealed that despite increasing number of visible minorities in the population, there was a decrease in the number of visible minority MPs between the 1997 and 2000 federal elections. Although this research is only based on two elections, the findings do appear to suggest that the natural increase of visible minorities in the population will not inevitably result in increased visible minority representation.

The electoral participation of the Canadian-Sikh community does not follow the declining pattern of visible minority representation that was confirmed in Black (2002) (table 1). As mentioned earlier, in the most recent January 2006 Canadian elections, six Canadian-Sikhs were voted into House of Commons as Members of the 39th Parliament. The results of this election were similar to the results in the 2004 election (38th Parliament), but yielded a 50% gain over the prior federal election in 2000 (37th Parliament) when three Sikh MPs were voted into the House (Statistics Canada, 2001; Parliament of Canada). As well, the success of Sikh political candidates is also evident

on the provincial level with three MPPs elected in the Ontario General Election of 2003 and five MLAs elected in the British Columbia General Election of 2005. According to 2001 Statistics Canada data, Sikhs represent just under 1% of the Canadian population, but hold approximately 2% of the 308 seats in the House of Commons. Provincially speaking, in Ontario Sikhs represent approximately 1% of the population and hold 3% of the 103 seats in the Ontario Legislative Assembly, and in British Columbia Sikhs represent approximately 3.5% of the population and hold 6% of the 79 seats in the BC Legislative Assembly (Statistics Canada, 2001; Elections Canada, Parliament of Canada; Legislative Assembly of Ontario; Legislative Assembly of BC). On their own these numbers are striking considering the immigration history of the Canadian-Sikh community, but what makes these numbers even more interesting is that this trend is in contrast to that of Canada's other notable religious and ethnic minority communities. For example Canada's Chinese community accounts for less than 1% of the seats in the House of Commons, but makes up 3.7% of the population at large (Statistics Canada, 2001; Parliament of Canada).

Table 1: Sikhs and Visible Minorities Federally Elected from 1993-2006

	% of Canadian-Sikh MPs	Sikhs Population Share	% of Visible Minorities MPs	VM Population Share
35th Parliament (1993)	.66%	Under 1%	4.4%	9.4%
36th Parliament (1997)	.96%	Under 1%	6.3%	11.2%
37th Parliament (2000)	.96%	Under 1%	5.6%	13.4%
38th Parliament (2004)	1.9%	Under 1%	7.1%	14.9%
39th Parliament (2006)	1.9%	Under 1%	unavailable	unavailable

Source: Black (2002), Black and Hicks (2006), Elections Canada, Parliament of Canada, Statistics Canada (2001)

Black (2002) also highlighted the continuing situation of women as the most underrepresented group in the House of Commons. During the three elections from 1993-2000 only 19.5% of the MPs elected during this time frame were women (Black 2002). In the current Parliament women hold 21% of the seats, so the proportion of women elected from the Canadian-Sikh community (25%) is actually marginally higher than women elected in the House as a whole. The relatively recent success of Sikh women⁵ is likely to encourage further participation from their counterparts in the Sikh community. As noted by MP Ruby Dhalla, there was a sizable increase in the presence of female Sikh volunteers on her 2006 campaign, which suggests to Dhalla that her involvement has to some extent made political space more accessible for women in the community (Interview with MP Ruby Dhalla).

The distinct geographic areas from which Canadian-Sikh candidates have been elected is also interesting to mention since the majority of the representation, both provincially and federally, is from the Greater Toronto and the Greater Vancouver areas. Specifically in the Greater Toronto Area, the electoral gains for the Sikh community have come from Brampton and Mississauga, where a relatively high percentage of Sikhs live (10.6% and 3.8% respectively according to Statistics Canada, 2001). This point on residential clustering will be further discussed in the research as a factor that has contributed to the political gains experienced by the Sikh community. However, it is important to mention here that there is much more to explaining this phenomenal success story than simply a geographic concentration of people.

⁵ Both MP Ruby Dhalla and MP Nina Grewal were first elected in the 2004 election.

Research by Siemiatycki and Saloojee (2002) on visible minority political participation in the City of Toronto, highlights that despite having sizable numbers of visible minority populations, there is systematic under-representation of these groups across all three levels of elected government (table 2). A trend which suggests that there are numerous factors and barriers that contribute to the over and under representation of visible minority communities in political office.

Table 2: City of Toronto Elected Politicians All Jurisdictions Combined By Select Ethnic Groups

Identity	% of Toronto Population	% Toronto Population Combined # Seats (P,M,F) Held By Group Member
British Ancestry	24.9%	44%
Chinese	10.6%	2%
South Asian	10.3%	2%
Black	8.3%	5%
Filipino	3.5%	0%

Source: Siemiatycki and Saloojee (2002)

Forms of Representation – Symbolic vs. Substantive

According to Stasiulis (1997), research on the representation of ethnic and visible minorities in political office at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels acknowledges the complicated relationship between statistical representation and substantive representation (Abu-Laban, 1997; Black and Lakhani, 1997; Stasiulis and Abu-Laban, 1991).

Representative democracies, such as Canada, have long struggled with questions on the composition of elected bodies, first with regards to gender and now also with regards to immigrants and minority groups. Although research has shown that ethnic and visible minorities will not necessarily defend the substantive interests of their own

community, statistical representation can have a favourable impact on government policy development if minority groups are well represented (Simard, 2000). However, in their 2002 study, Siemiatycki and Saloojee argue that the statistical representation of minorities in political institutions does not necessarily translate into pro-diversity policies. The researchers caution that the nature of identity politics is extremely complex, and identity alone may not reflect an attachment to a particular community. Siemiatycki and Saloojee (2002) argue that political values are based on more than just ethnicity, and suggest that education, class, upbringing, age, residence, religion and ideology are other crucial factors that influence such values.

Although research has shown that numerical representation does not necessarily result in substantive changes in policy, many researchers maintain that symbolic representation in elected political office does reflect the openness of a political system. For example, Simard (2000) suggests that beyond the possibility of visible minority political participation resulting in policy changes, the symbolic importance of such representation cannot be underestimated, especially considering the changing demographic composition of the Canadian population. To the waves of immigrants that come to Canada, it is important that the political system be seen as an aspect of Canadian society that is accessible all, rather than being reserved for only certain communities. Such is the mandate set out by the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act*, and under-representation of visible minorities in political office is a form of social exclusion that undermines the spirit of multiculturalism in Canada.

Consistent with previous research by Matheson (2005), although politicians interviewed for this paper identified themselves as a “Canadian-Sikh”, they stated that the overall concerns of the constituency were their most important responsibility. However,

there was a general consensus in the group that being a Canadian-Sikh MP did add a layer of responsibility to their job. The interviews revealed that all three MPs and three MPPs believed that their ethnicity and religion had an influence on their political undertakings resulting in: additional political responsibilities, opportunities to educate others on the Sikh faith, and increased participation from their own community.

For example according to MP Ruby Dhalla, “Sikh MPs attend more events in a day than other MPs attend in a week” (Interview with MP Ruby Dhalla). This response was her speaking on the additional responsibility that she feels towards the Sikh community in her riding in terms of meeting with constituents and keeping up with their demands. On a more substantive issue, she mentioned the private member bill on foreign credential recognition that she was involved with, and although this “is not specifically a Sikh issue, it is an issue which affects many in the Sikh, and broader South Asian, community” (interview with MP Ruby Dhalla). Beyond the development of policy, political representation also carries with it symbolic importance, especially in a country of immigrants such as Canada. Liberal MPs Gurbax Malhi and Navdeep Bains recognize the complexity of their role as turbaned Sikh-Canadian representatives. In addition to substantive contributions, both believe that their presence in Ottawa has given them the opportunity to educate mainstream Canadians on the Sikh faith, and also encourage others in the Sikh community to participate in the political system, which has traditionally been seen as inaccessible (Interview with MP Gurbax Malhi and MP Navdeep Bains).

Chapter 2: The Sikhs in Canada

The Historical Sikh Experience in Canada

Many Canadians regard the Sikh community as a recent immigrant community, but in fact, Sikhs have a long, rich history in Canada that goes back over 100 years.

Throughout this history, Canadian immigration laws and policies that were largely influenced by global political considerations and national social trends, have had a strong impact on the identity formation and development of this emerging immigrant community. Although a full discussion of the history of Sikh immigration to Canada is beyond the scope of this research, a brief overview is essential for understanding the group dynamics that contribute to the exceptional level of electoral political participation from this community.

Early Migration History

The migration history of the Sikh community in Canada can be traced back to the early part of the 20th century when young Sikh men from Punjab first came to Canada between 1903 and 1907. During this period of immigration over 5000 immigrants arrived in Canada from Punjab before the Canadian government implemented strict regulations in 1908, which significantly limited the number of Indian immigrants for the next forty to fifty years (Chadney, 1989).

In terms of push/pull factors, the influx of Indian immigrants to Canada between 1903-1907 was initiated by economic and political factors. Immigration became more widespread as villagers from Punjab were able to afford travel costs and were aware of the jobs that were available in Canada. Responsiveness and knowledge about

opportunities in Canada was related to the integration of Punjabi villagers into the international economy. As a result, the expanding rail system and wheat trade activity happening in Punjab provided the cash and credit needed to support distant travel (Johnston, 1990). Upon arrival in Canada, Sikhs found work in areas that had a shortage of white laborers, mostly in sawmills and shingle mills in the Vancouver Region, on Vancouver Island and in some parts of interior British Columbia (Chadney 1989).

Strict immigration restrictions began in 1908 with the Continuous Journey Order-in-Council, which was initially designed and implemented specifically to prohibit Japanese immigrants from Hawaii, and later used to control immigration from India. Given that India was a part of the British Empire, it was not diplomatically possible to place an overt ban on Indian immigration into Canada, so the Laurier government at the time attempted to maneuver around this problem using more subtle immigration regulations. The Continuous Journey regulation demanded that immigrants be in possession of \$200, an increase from the previous amount of \$50, and required that immigrants come directly from their country of birth or citizenship on a continuous journey. The restrictions were not meant to be applied to “desirable” immigrants, but were strictly enforced for East Indian immigrants and had the intended effects. Following implementation, immigration from India drastically declined from 2623 immigrants in 1908 to 6 immigrants in 1909 (Kelley and Trebilcock, 2000).

The exclusionary tactics of the government were challenged in May 1914 by Gurdit Singh and 376 passengers (340 Sikhs, 24 Muslims and 12 Hindus) aboard the Japanese ship the Komagata Maru. Despite meeting the requirements of the Continuous Journey Order, those on board were not allowed to disembark, and two months of negotiations eventually ended with the ship being turned back (Chadney, 1989).

According to Chadney (1989), the Komagata Maru incident, was a notable episode in early Canadian-Sikh immigration history. It made Vancouver Sikhs very aware of their individual cultural identity, and that they were not able to rely on the Canadian government or the Indian government for assistance in times of need. During these years some of the early immigrants returned to India, but the majority decided to stay in Canada despite the hostilities they faced from White Canadian society (Chadney, 1989). The exclusionary immigration policies and the widespread anti-Asian sentiment evident during the early 1900's resulted in community formation that was based on tight community social relations and segmented integration (Walton-Roberts, 2003). Although the community was characterized by the dominant society as being unassimilable based on their nationality, internally the Sikh community was not a homogenous group and differences on issues (such as standards of religious observance) were widespread in the community. However, according to Chadney (1989), rather than trying to assimilate into White Canadian society, the early Punjabi-Sikh community in Vancouver remained very "Punjabi", and despite internal differences the state of the community was more united than divided.

In addition, the circumstances surrounding the Komagata Maru incident also heightened the political consciousness and involvement of Punjabi immigrants living in British Columbia, which further served to unite the community. As noted by Johnston (1988), the Komagata Maru episode "resulted in Indian immigrants forming important early transnational political connections between the Pacific Northwest and India that were used to advance the independence of India from colonial rule" (Walton-Roberts, 2003 p. 238). Following the Komagata Maru incident, many Punjabis in Canada became disillusioned by the response of the Canadian government, which highlighted the

inequality in the British Empire. This state of disillusionment served to increase the popularity of the *Ghadar* Party in British Columbia, which was a group founded by Punjabis in Canada and the USA that waged a well known militant struggle against the British rule in India (Judge, 1994; Singh, 1994). In 1914, the *Ghadar* Party encouraged Punjabis to return to India and participate in a militant uprising against the British – hundreds of Sikhs living in British Columbia at the time responded to that call (Singh, 1994).

It was not until 1947 that the status of Indian immigrants in Canada began to improve when they were given the right to vote in British Columbia. Soon after this, in 1951 Canadian immigration regulations were amended and the immigration quotas from India were increased (Johnston, 1990). Although the Immigration Act of 1953 was still biased against Asian immigrants and granted preferential support to White immigrants, limited family immigration from non-European countries was permitted starting in the 1950's through a quota system. In the early years of allocating the quota, a tug-of-war developed between the Department of Immigration and the Canadian-Sikh community. The Immigration Department preferred that as many places as possible be reserved for skilled independent immigrants, but the Sikhs lobbied their MPs to put pressure on the Minister to allocate the quota to applications made from Canada on behalf of family members in India. In the interest of expediency the entire quota for Indian immigrants to Canada in 1952 was allocated to applications from Canada, the majority of which were made by Sikhs to sponsor family members. Up until 1957, the Sikh community in Canada dominated the number of quota positions designated for Indian immigrants, for example in 1957 of the available 300 spots, 225 were allocated by the Minister for applications from Canada. As a result, the early Indian population that slowly developed

in British Columbia was primarily Sikh immigrants from Punjab (Johnston, 1990). Furthermore, the majority of Punjabi immigrants in Canada at this time were from one specific region within Punjab referred to as Doaba (Johnston, 1988). This tight regional source of immigrants served to strengthen the collective values and identity of the Sikh community in Canada, as there was a strong connection between people not only based on religion and language, but also on family and village attachments. In reference to political participation, researchers such as Bird (2005) have commented on the extensive, interconnected Sikh network in Canada, and the capability of the community to draw on this network as a platform for political mobilization.

Overall, early Sikh migration to Canada has been characterized by young Sikh men coming to Canada with the intention of finding work, and not necessarily settlement. This intention, along with restrictive immigration laws, created circumstances under which immigrant men in Canada repeatedly went home to visit their families, thereby creating a constant flow of population between Punjab and Canada (Johnston, 1990). According to Johnston (1990), without the benefit of open immigration laws "...the Canadian Sikh community in the 1950s were tied to family and village in their land of origin with an intensity shared by few other communities of the same age in Canada" (p. 313). Such intensity has resulted in community formation which is very much based on collective values, rather than individual values. It is perhaps this strong sense of group identity which partially explains the exceptional level of support that Sikh political candidates receive from their community. This point regarding community participation on the political campaigns of Canadian-Sikh candidates will be revisited further on in the research.

The Building of a Community

It was not until 1967 that Canada moved from a discriminatory immigration policy based on race, religion or national origin, towards a policy based on the points system which selected candidates based on qualifications. Despite this change immigration from India increased only slightly throughout the 1960's, to some extent due to institutional impediments such as the limited number of immigration offices in India (Walton-Roberts, 2003). During the 1970's and 1980's, family sponsorship had a key role in the community formation of the Punjabi community in Canada, and even according to current immigration data, India today is the largest source country of family class immigration to Canada (Johnston, 1988; Walton-Roberts, 2003). Citizenship and Immigration Canada figures indicate that in 2001, approximately 27,500 immigrants came from India to Canada, and 46% of those immigrants (12,627) utilized the family class immigration process (Walton-Roberts, 2003).

According to Walton-Roberts (2003), "the legacy of [the] tight regional migration process is evident in the composition of the Indo-Canadian community today. In the 1970s, John Wood (1978) suggested that approximately 70 percent of Indian immigrants in Canada were from Punjab, and in the early 1990s, Paynter (1995) gave the same figure" (p. 238). This data is especially striking considering that the population of Punjab is approximately 2.4% of the total Indian population (Census of India, 2001). Interestingly, although the concentrated immigration flow from Punjab has been anecdotally apparent in the community, only recently in 1998 did Citizenship and Immigration Canada start collecting more geographically detailed numerical evidence on the flow of immigrants from India. The data was collected in response to the political

pressure from the Indo-Canadian community that argued a need for the Canadian government to open a high commission in the capital of Punjab and Haryana, Chandigarh (Walton-Roberts, 2003).

The tight regional concentration that characterized early Sikh immigration to Canada is also evident in the composition and the concentrated settlement patterns of the successive waves of Indian immigrants to Canada (Walton-Roberts, 2003). The majority of Sikh immigrants to Canada have settled in two provinces – British Columbia and Ontario. Based on 2001 census data 278,400 Sikhs live in Canada and represent just under 1% of the population, with 135,310 living in British Columbia and 104,785 in Ontario. It was not until 1963 that Ontario received proportionally more Indian immigrants than British Columbia (Chadney, 1989). However, the majority of Sikhs, even up until the 1980's, continued to go to British Columbia, while Ontario and Quebec welcomed the majority of the other East Indian immigrants (Johnston, 1990).

In terms of the Sikh community in Ontario, their migration history appears to be less studied and documented than the migration history of Sikhs in Vancouver. The existing research indicates that widespread migration began in the 1970's and was based more on the arrival of professional Sikhs from British Columbia and other destinations (e.g. England, Kenya), rather than direct migration from India (Bali and Bal, 1993).

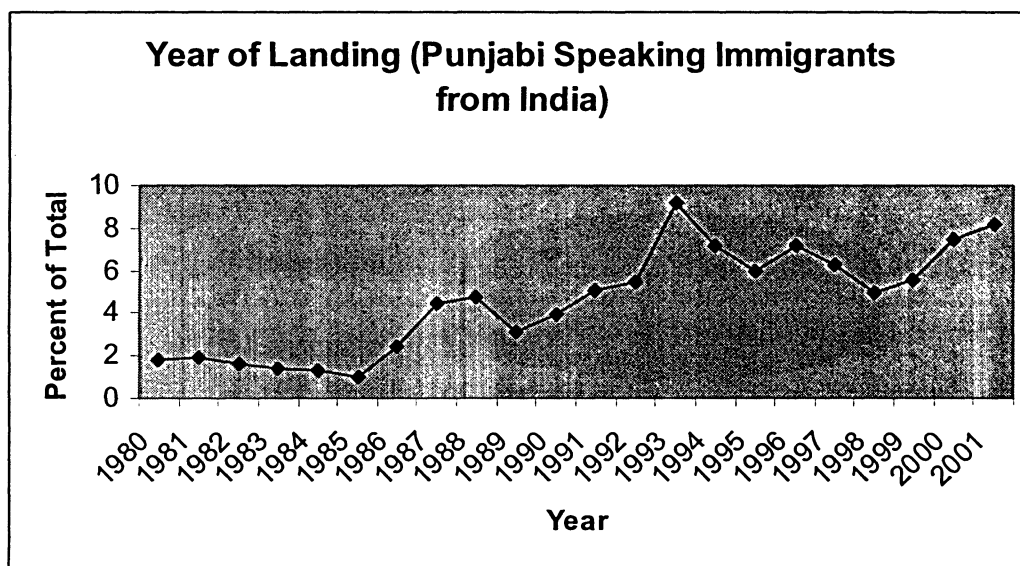
The Sikh Community in the Greater Toronto Area Today

Given the lack of available information on the Sikh community living in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), the following section will develop a profile of the Punjabi community in the GTA based on the National Landed Immigrants Data System (LIDS) from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) and Census data. The LIDS data

contains information (1980-2001) collected at the time of landing from the Immigrant Visa and Record of Landing. The data used here is a subset of the national LIDS for the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (CMA). It is important to note the limitations of the LIDS data used in this section since the data regarding destination is based on intention, rather than actual settlement location. As well, the data has been further analyzed to focus on Punjabi speakers from India (country of last permanent residence [CLPR]), which is important considering that a number of Punjabi immigrants are also Pakistani-Muslim. Although this figure includes Sikhs, Hindus and a few Muslims, this paper will primarily focus on the Punjabi-Sikh community since the majority of Punjabi speakers in Canada are Sikh.

According to the LIDS data, from 1980 to 2001 the number of Punjabi speaking immigrants coming to Canada from India (CLPR) was 65,351; and the number of total immigrants from India (CLPR) was 138,480. These numbers would suggest that the Punjabi speaking population is just under 50% of the total Indian immigrant population in the GTA. With regards to landing year, the data shows that the flow of Punjabi speaking immigrants from India to the GTA has been characterized by an overall upward trend between 1980 and 2001 (figure 1).

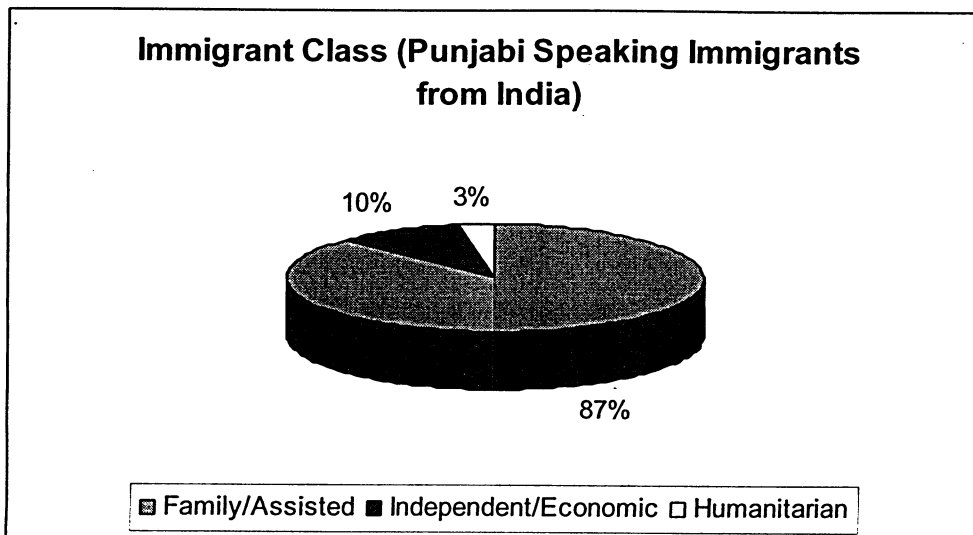
Figure 1: Year of Landing



Source: LIDS data 1980-2001

In terms of immigration class, approximately 87% of all Punjabi speaking immigrants from India that came to the GTA between 1980 - 2001 came using family class/assisted sponsorship (figure 2). This number is significant when compared to the total Indian immigrant population (70%) and Chinese immigrants (34%) that came to Canada during the same time frame and relied far less on family class/assisted sponsorship (LIDS).

Figure 2: Immigration Class



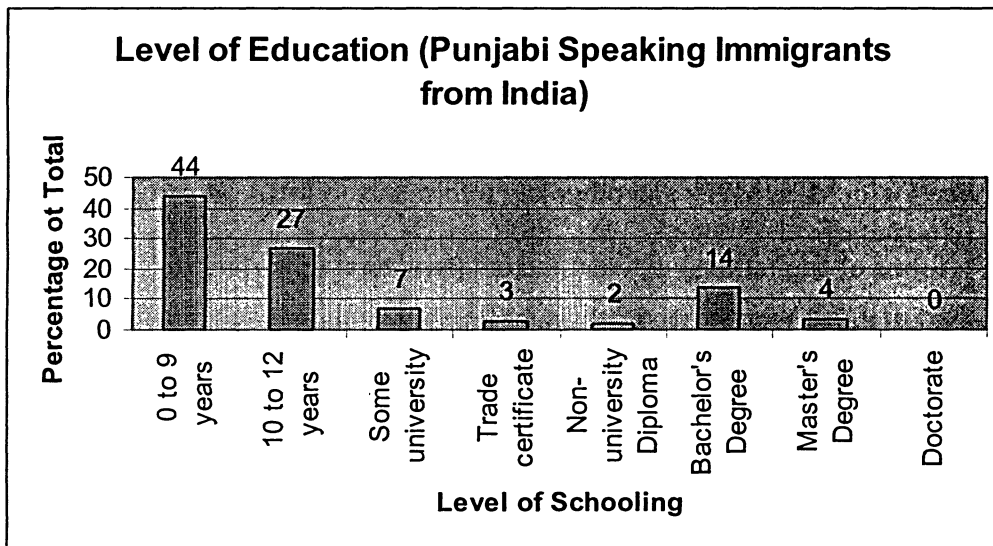
Source: LIDS data 1980-2001

The traditional assumption on visible minority electoral political participation suggests that education and English language ability are factors that positively influence the level of participation. However, the LIDS data may suggest otherwise in the case of the Punjabi-Sikh community in Canada since Punjabi immigrants arriving from India over the last 20 years have neither been well educated (figure 3), nor did they have strong English language skills (figure 4). The level of education data shows that 44% of Punjabis had 0-9 years of schooling, and 75% had neither English nor French language ability upon arrival. It is important to note that there is some subjectivity related to English/French ability since there was not a standardized test to evaluate this component until three years ago. Nonetheless, the percentage of people in the Punjabi community without English/French language skills is strikingly high, and runs counter intuitive to assumptions.

Despite the lag in education and English language, Punjabis have been able to establish themselves as a strong community in the GTA, especially in the area of

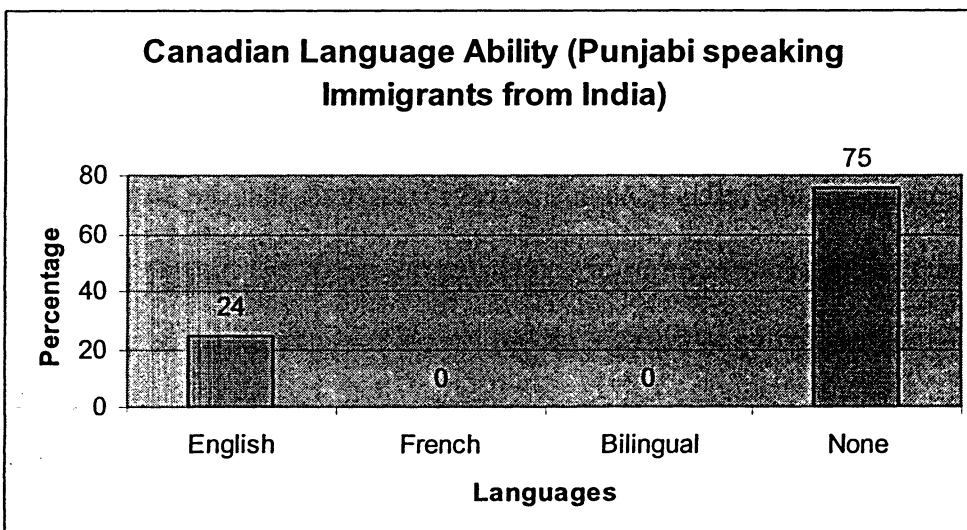
electoral political participation. The following section will examine how certain factors within the Punjabi speaking Sikh community in Brampton and Mississauga have enabled them to build strong social, cultural and economic capital, which in-turn has contributed to the process of successful political integration.

Figure 3: Level of Education



Source: LIDS data 1980-2001

Figure 4: English/French Language Ability



Source: LIDS data 1980-2001

Chapter 3: Factors Influencing Sikh Political Participation in Canada

The Sikh community is one of the fastest growing religious groups in Canada. Statistics Canada (2001) notes that individuals identifying themselves as being Sikh from 1991 to 2001 increased by 89% from 147,440 to 278,410. Over the past 10 years, perhaps one of the most notable successes of the Canadian-Sikh community has been their emergence on the Canadian federal and provincial political scene.

The following section will draw on existing literature and information from personal interviews with MPs, MPPs and other key informants to focus on particular internal factors (forms of capital) and external factors (structural opportunities) that may help to explain the phenomenal success of Sikhs in Canadian politics.

Internal Factors Influencing Political Participation

The utilization of immigrant social, cultural and/or economic capital in the process of integration has been the focus of a number of immigrant related studies, including: immigrant academic performance (Kilbride, 2000), economic performance (Li, 2004) and to a lesser extent political/civic participation (Breton, 1997).

In his work, Bourdieu (1986) describes three forms of capital – economic, social and cultural. Economic capital refers to having access to resources that can be converted into cash. Cultural capital refers to forms of knowledge that serve as a source of advantage in society. According to Kilbride (2000), “when the cultural capital is that derived from the culture of an immigrant or other minority group family, however, it must be valued by the dominant society’s institutions, especially that of education, for it to serve most successfully as “capital”: a resource to be drawn upon in building further resources” (p. 6). Although Kilbride (2000) refers to cultural capital with regards to

education, this statement can also be applied to political activity as a cultural trait of Punjabi-Sikhs. Social capital refers to “the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures” (Portes 1998, p. 6). The sources of social capital can be broadly differentiated into bonding and bridging processes. Bonding processes refer to the association in group activities that are based on shared values and interests, or most likely social capital within a homogeneous group. Bridging processes refer to the association in group activities or social exchanges that have mutual benefit, which is generally social capital that links heterogeneous groups (Portes 1998; Putman, 2000). Both processes are evident in the electoral participation of the Punjabi-Sikh community, and will be explained in greater detail in the following paragraphs.

The above definitions and theoretical framework have been taken into consideration for this case study focusing on the political involvement of the Sikh community in Canadian politics. The following section will build on this theory to suggest that social, cultural and economic capital of the Sikh community, in addition to other structural factors such as spatial concentration, have enhanced the political participation levels in this community.

Social Capital in the Punjabi-Sikh Community

According to the ethnic social capital theory there exists a relationship between the density of the ethnic civic communities and the levels of participation and trust in local mainstream political institutions (van Heesum 2002; Matheson, 2005). Previous research on minority involvement in politics has pointed to the importance of ethnic communities as resources through which candidates from such communities can build social capital,

which can easily be translated into political capital (Fennema and Tillie, 1999; van Heesum, 2002; Berger *et al.* 2004).

In reference to the Sikh community, researchers such as Bird (2005) have commented on the "...dense overlapping of religious, social and business memberships...which makes them [Sikhs] a key community for political mobilization" (Bird, 2005: p. 83). Specifically within Brampton and Mississauga there exists a highly developed and thriving Sikh community consisting of: numerous *Gurudwaras*, cultural organizations, sports clubs, business organizations, media outlets, plazas, health centres, seniors groups, women's groups, and other associations.

The density and richness of the linkages in the community are perhaps best understood by focusing on Sikh *Gurudwaras* in this area and the local ethnic media. From an historical perspective, *Gurudwaras* have served as the centre of the Sikh community in Canada, both socially and politically, since the very early days of migration (Judge, 1994). This research identified thirteen *Gurudwaras* in Brampton and Mississauga, one of which is Ontario Khalsa Darbar (OKD), the largest *Gurudwara* in North America. It draws approximately 30,000 congregants every week (Interview with Jasjit Singh Bhullar, president of OKD). According to Bhullar, the Sikh temple is the heart of the community that provides not only religious services, but also serves as a meeting place for the community where congregants can attend classes (Punjabi, martial arts, Sikh music, Sikh history), attend day camps, and/or book space to have formal meetings (senior's groups, women's groups and other associations).

In addition, this is also a community that has dense and rich conversations about political issues through local ethnic media channels, which gives Punjabi politicians another platform through which they can gain exposure in the community. In a Toronto

Star article by San Grewal (2006), Joginder Bassi⁶ the radio show host of *Gaunda Punjab*, stated that Malhi, Bains and Dhalla....”have each been on the show, I would say, about 10 times this year, on special occasions or to give a message.” As mentioned by Grewal (2006) in his article, one of the favourite topics discussed on *Gaunda Punjab* is politics. Given that this show alone attracts 150,000 listeners during 40 hours of programming every week, the popularity of ethnic media provides Punjabi politicians with tremendous exposure (Grewal, 2006). The popularity of politics in the Punjabi media was also noted by MP Navdeep Bains in an interview:

“A high proportion of the local Punjabi media is about local politics, local politicians and politics abroad. So people have this constant feedback about politics – it keeps them up to date, it keeps them interested and for some of them it is a way of life” (Interview with MP Navdeep Bains).

Interestingly when asked about the influence of Punjabi media on political participation, Navdeep Bains and other interviewees stated that this was a symptom, rather than a cause. There was general agreement among the interviewees that the high levels of political coverage in the Punjabi media was more a reflection of the political appetite in the community, rather than a driving factor that explains the exceptional levels of political participation from this group.

The volume and scale of religious and cultural organizations creates an expansive network of community linkages that in-turn provide Sikh candidates with an invaluable support base for community mobilization (Matheson, 2005). The President of Ontario Khalsa Darbar, Jasjit Singh Bhullar, mentioned that MPs and other politicians regularly

⁶ Bassi has been involved with Punjabi radio in Toronto for the last 24 years. *Gaunda Punjab* is a Punjabi language show on CIRB (88.9 FM) that draws approximately 150,000 listeners during 40 hours of weekly programming (Grewal, 2006).

approach the *Gurudwara* to speak on stage to the congregants, since such speaking engagements are considered to be an invaluable opportunity to be visible and address the “collective” Sikh community (Interview with Jasjit Singh Bhullar). As well, such opportunity is referred to in an interview with MP Gurbax Malhi who mentioned that he attends over 500 events per year, the majority of which are Sikh events.

The majority of events are Sikh events because the community has a different social background/social thinking. Back home people invite dignitaries to the weddings or some special occasion, but besides that even sometimes during the bad times or good times I go and attend the functions myself because I am a social/family oriented person. I believe in these things, so I go and attend the events myself” (Interview with MP Gurbax Malhi).

In addition to being a “social/family oriented person”, Malhi is likely also aware of the opportunity that such events provide to increase his profile in the community. In the article by San Grewal (2006) about Punjabis in politics, Malhi mentioned that many of his events are weddings with between 700-2000 people in attendance, and as Grewal notes, “when it comes to votes, you can do the math” (Grewal, 2006).

In terms of bonding and bridging processes, previous research by Coleman (1990) suggests that bridging social capital, although important for building relationships across groups, can sometimes detract from the equally important bonding social capital within a community. In the process of bridging with the dominant group, there can be the potential for marginalized groups to lose localized capital (Coleman, 1990). On the contrary, it would seem that the Canadian- Sikh community has positioned itself well to take advantage of both these forms of social capital. The community has developed dense overlapping bonds that have been utilized by candidates and community members to bridge with political institutions such as the riding associations and political parties.

Cultural Capital in the Sikh Community

A Culture of Politics

Previous research by Clarke et al. (1985) suggests that the variations in political participation of minority groups in Canada is related to the political socialization and political culture of the group. The political socialization orientation implies that particular ethnic groups that exhibit differing patterns of political behaviour do so as a result of being “reared in environments and exposed to events and conditions as a consequence of which they have acquired values, attitudes, information and perspectives which also differ” (p. 276). According to MP Navdeep Bains:

“Sikhs in Canada, many of whom come from Punjab, were raised in a highly politically socialized culture, which has resulted in a community that thinks politically, and is familiar with democratic institutions such as political parties and elections. Such familiarity has translated into a group that has been able to translate their political culture from Punjab to Canada” (Interview with Navdeep Bains).

Perhaps a testament to the influence and sophistication of the political culture of Punjab is the fact that of the nine current MPs of South Asian decent⁷, seven are ethnically Punjabi⁸. Moreover, of these seven MPs with Punjabi backgrounds, six are Sikh, which indicates that although having a Punjabi background may be an important influence, there are other factors that are unique to the Sikh experience that are driving electoral political participation in this case.

⁷ The nine Canadian MPs of **South Asian** descent are: Mr. Gurbax Singh Malhi (Lib), Mr. Navdeep Singh Bains (Lib), Dr. Ruby Dhalla (Lib), Mr. Wajid Khan (Lib), Mr. Ujjal Dosanjh (Lib), Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Lib), Ms. Nina Grewal (Con), Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Con), Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Con).

⁸ The seven Canadian MPs of **Punjabi** descent are: Mr. Gurbax Singh Malhi (Lib), Mr. Navdeep Singh Bains (Lib), Dr. Ruby Dhalla (Lib), Mr. Wajid Khan (Lib), Mr. Ujjal Dosanjh (Lib), Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Lib), Ms. Nina Grewal (Con).

A Double Minority Community

One factor that may explain why the Sikh community is so politically active is because they are a double minority community – a religious and ethnic minority in both India and Canada. Sikhism originated in 1469, in an area of Punjab which is now part of Pakistan. Throughout their history Sikhs have existed in India as a minority religion, which has many times had to defend itself to maintain a distinct religious identity. The faith is based on the belief in *Miri Piri*, or the balance of the spiritual and temporal worlds. Very simply, based on this principle a Sikh should be spiritually inclined, but also be involved in helping with the needs of one's community (Basran and Bolaria, 2003).

The activist orientation that is encouraged by the religion is perhaps the reason that Sikhs have been able to maintain their distinctiveness despite being such a small minority community in India (2.4% of the Indian population according to Census India, 2001). The homeland experience of being a religious minority has likely created a politically socialized community that recognizes the importance and legitimacy of being involved in politics. Despite their minority status, it is not surprising then that Sikhs have had a long history of being involved in social and political movements in India. For example in relatively recent history Sikhs, such as Gurdit Singh from the Komagata Maru incident, played a substantial role in India's independence movement (Johnston, 1988; Basran and Bolaria, 2003), and today the current Prime Minister of India is a Sikh – Dr. Manmohan Singh.

Heightened political involvement of a minority group based on homeland experiences is not a unique response by a group to their minority status. For instance, in the Jewish context, a history of persecution has created a strong political consciousness in the community, which has translated into high levels of political engagement. As such,

there are numerous examples of the Jewish community exhibiting high levels of electoral political participation, including in the City of Toronto (Siemiatycki and Saloojee, 2002). Similarly, the Sikh community has been able to transfer their homeland orientation towards politics, and utilize previous experiences with political mobilization, to their advantage in the Canadian political context. As indicated by MPP Vic Dhillon,

“I think considering where the community is, as a relatively young community, electoral politics is the fastest, easiest way to get to our goals. This is our way of doing it [comment made relative to other immigrant communities that are not active in electoral politics] (Interview with MPP Vic Dhillon).

The comment suggests that to some extent the strong orientation in the Sikh community towards politics is based on the fact that historically this has been a successful strategy yielding favourable results for the community. These same sentiments were repeated in all of the other interviews with Sikh politicians from Brampton and Mississauga. When MPs and MPPs were asked about possible factors that explain the political success of their community, all replied by saying that there was some connection to the history of the Sikhs in Punjab. MP Ruby Dhalla referred to it as a “history of political savviness” (interview with MP Ruby Dhalla).

Elevated Political Consciousness – Sikhs in Canada

The political socialization of Sikhs in recent times has been advanced by a number of key events starting with the June 1984 Indian Army attack on the Golden Temple; the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by two of her Sikh bodyguards; the Nov. 1984 anti-Sikh pogroms in Delhi; the growth of the *Khalistan* (Sikh nationalism) movement in Punjab and the Sikh Diaspora; and the June 1985 Air India bombings, which placed Sikhs on the political stage in Canada and led to the stereotyping of Sikhs

as 'terrorists' in the mid 1980's. Faced with the label of 'terrorists,' the Sikh community realized the need to show the Canadian public that Sikhs were model citizens. The struggle to shed the 'terrorist' stereotype has been suggested by some Sikhs as a reason that partially explains the political achievements of the Sikh community (Ali Khan, 1999). More recent research on the Muslim community by Hamdani et al (2005) also supports the theory that the fear of being labelled can increase the political consciousness of a community. In their research on Muslim political participation in Canada, Hamdani et al. (2005) found a dramatic increase in political participation of Muslims during the 2004 elections. The authors attribute the events of 9/11 and the ensuing war on terrorism as the main catalyst for increased political activism in the Canadian-Muslim community.

As well, the political consciousness of the Canadian-Sikh community has been elevated by the need to educate the Canadian public (and defend their civil liberties against discrimination) on the religious significance of the *dastaar* (turban) and *kirpan* (ceremonial dagger). Members of the Canadian-Sikh community have continually had to challenge circumstances, through political, legal and workplace battles, that deny them the right to wear articles of faith that define the Sikh identity. Recent examples of such challenges include the Gurbaj Singh Multani court case involving the *kirpan* in Quebec schools and the 2005 VIA rail incident involving the *kirpan*.

In regards to the VIA rail incident, MP Navdeep Bains called VIA rail's treatment of Mr. Singh [individual removed from the train for carrying a *kirpan*] in 2005 as "unfortunate and unacceptable" and promised to discuss the matter with the then Transport Minister (Schmitz, 2005). In an interview, MP Navdeep Bains mentioned that he decided to speak on this issue "...as [he] felt that there was a void that [he] could fill as a Sikh who does wear [his] kirpan in the House of Commons." Although Bains is very

“conscious about always being seen as a champion for Sikh causes,” he does believe that his “...presence in Ottawa has contributed to many silent victories in terms of educating and encouraging dialogue among [his] colleagues, and other Canadians” (Interview with MP Navdeep Bains).

Experience with Community Organizing

Challenges over the right to maintain articles of faith have not only served to increase the political consciousness of the community, but have also given the community specific issues that demand a collective response. Delivering organized responses to challenges facing the group is not something new for this community. According to Judge (1994) the Punjabi community has responded to the challenges arising from immigration by organizing themselves ever since their early days of immigration to Canada. The Komagata Maru incident is one of the first examples of such an organized response, where the refusal to allow the ship entry into the port resulted in the Vancouver Punjabi community forming a “Shore Committee”, which raised funds for those on board and held protest meetings (Judge, 1994).

From a political participation perspective, the inclination and experience of the Punjabi-Sikh community with organizing collective responses to specific challenges has likely contributed to their exceptional level of political mobilization. Based on the involvement of the community on the political campaigns of Canadian-Sikh candidates, it would appear that such campaigns are regarded as an issue/challenge that requires a collective response. As mentioned by MPP Kuldip Kular:

“I would say that more than 70% of my volunteers were from the Sikh community. They volunteered thinking as if it was their own election. I didn’t

really have to call too many people...they just drove in and wanted to really elect a member whom they can depend on” (Interview with MPP Kuldip Kular).

The strong sense of collectivity in the Punjabi-Sikh community, resulting in an orientation towards organized collective action, also relates to the immigration patterns of Sikhs to Canada through family class immigration. This connection and the relation to political participation/mobilization in the community will be further explored in a later section.

Economic Capital in the Punjabi-Sikh Community

Previous research has shown that social class and financial instability are considerable barriers to minority political participation (Pelletier, 1991; Simard et al. 1991; Stasiulis, 1997; Siemiatycki and Matheson, 2005). In terms of the economic profile of the Punjabi community the statistics paint an ambiguous picture. On the one hand, the Punjabi community appears to be lagging economically when compared with the ethnically English community, with lower levels of income and higher levels of unemployment, but on the other hand, the community has above average levels of homeownership rates in the Toronto CMA⁹ (Statistics Canada, 2001; Murdie and Teixeira, 2003). Despite these economic challenges, it appears that the community has been able to leverage social and cultural capital to make up for economic lags, which can be a barrier to political participation. The interconnection of ethnic resources is also noted by Bourdieu (1986) who suggests that cultural capital and social capital under certain conditions can be converted into economic capital. For example, research by Qadeer (1999) on

⁹ The data on home ownership rates is for all immigrants from India. Specific data for the Punjabi community was not found; however, the above data is still valid considering the earlier discussion on immigration trends from India to Canada.

entrepreneurship and enclaves suggests that there exist inter-linkages between ethnic businesses and other resources in the community.

Based on home ownership rates and the density of ethnic businesses in the area, the Punjabi community appears to have strong roots in Brampton and Mississauga. The economic stability of the community was also mentioned in an interview with MPP Vic Dhillon:

“I think when we first come we have priorities of getting a house, making sure your kids are in school...I think we do a very good job of that as Sikhs, an excellent job, so now that you have your bread and butter looked after, then comes what you can do for others and your community” (Interview with MPP Vic Dhillon).

These economic linkages have meaning in terms of political participation, for example, MP Ruby Dhalla mentioned that: “...everyone in the community tries to help out...some do so as volunteers, and others who own businesses and are more secure do so through financial support” (Interview with MP Ruby Dhalla).

As well, the six Sikh MPs/MPPs interviewed for this research all had high levels of personal economic capital, and came to politics from successful professional and entrepreneurial careers. As noted in previous research on ethnic candidates by Sayers and Jetha (2005), having a successful career can serve as a platform for aspiring politicians to raise their profile in their ethnic community. For example, MPP Kuldip Kular responded to a question about his appeal in the community with the following statement:

“I used to participate in community events. I’d go to tournaments, serve them as a medical doctor, and I’d go to other events where they came to know that I’m a member [of the community]. I want to keep this community a safe place to live, and I want to be a part of the community and give back to the community. All those things I had been doing for the last 20 years, at the end of day I just asked them ‘look I’m ready to participate, if you give me a chance’, and people came up and gave me a chance” (Interview with MPP Kuldip Kular).

Sayers and Jetha (2005) also suggest that the economic/career success of potential politicians also provides them with access to political networks in the broader community. In turn, such exposure gives them the necessary positioning to serve as a intermediary between the broader community and their ethnic group. This suggestion also appears to hold for the Sikh politicians that were interviewed for this research, many of whom were involved in the broader community before entering into the political arena. For example, MPP Harinder Takhar served as chair of the United Way of Peel and member of the board of governors of the Credit Valley Hospital.

External Factors Influencing Political Participation

In addition to the internal characteristics of the Canadian-Sikh community that have facilitated the rise in political participation, there are a number of structural factors that have contributed to the electoral success of this community.

Tight Spatial Concentration, a Legacy of Canadian Immigration Policies and the Domination of Sikhs

The concentration of ethnic minority groups in geographical areas has been shown to increase the chances that the party will support a minority politician, and in turn, support from the ethnic community will also increase the likelihood that a minority politician will be successful in getting elected (Dhillon, 2005). For example, this pattern is evident with

elected minority politicians from other areas including the Italian community in the Vaughan area, where Italians are politically well represented in government (Matheson, 2005).

This extremely concentrated geography of Indian immigration has also translated into concentrated regional settlement in Canada. Recent Statistics Canada (2001) data suggests that over 80% of Canadians of South Asian origin reside in Ontario or British Columbia. Moving to the scale of the three largest census metropolitan areas (CMAs), Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver, and then to specific communities within the CMA regions, the settlement concentration of Indian immigrants in Canada is even more evident (Walton-Roberts, 2003).

In the GTA, the residential concentration of the Sikh community in Brampton (34,515) and Mississauga (23,425) appears to have contributed to the impressive increase in minority representation in the last Federal Election (Statistics Canada, 2001). For example, in the City of Brampton Punjabi is the second most common mother tongue, and Sikhism is the second most practiced religion. Interestingly, within certain areas of Brampton, Sikhism even outpaces Catholicism as the most commonly practiced religion (Matheson, 2005).

According to Raminder Gill, former Conservative MPP and defeated Conservative candidate in the 2006 federal election, the residential concentration of Sikhs is one factor that contributes to the electoral success of the Sikh community, but this is by far not the only factor. To support this point, table 3 outlines characteristics of the five federal ridings in Ontario with the largest Sikh populations. Although three out of five such ridings have Sikh MPs, there are still two other ridings with sizable Sikh populations, but without Sikh representation. In the ridings of Beaumier and Cullen,

incumbency is likely also a factor given that the number of Sikhs living in those areas in 1993 and 1996 was less than in 2001. As well, for all the ridings the Census 2001 data is outdated given the population growth in these areas. Regardless, the numbers still highlight that residential clustering does not alone explain the exceptional level of electoral success in the Canadian-Sikh community.

Table 3: Characteristics of Federal Ridings in Ontario with Large Sikh Populations

Federal Riding Name	Elected MP	Current MP Elected Since	Total Population	Number of Sikhs	Sikhs as % of Pop.
Bramalea-Gore-Malton	Gurbax Malhi	1993	119,890	16,840	14%
Brampton-Springdale	Ruby Dhalla	2004	116,770	11,710	10%
Brampton West	Colleen Beaumier	1993	113,645	11,765	10%
Etobicoke North	Roy Cullen	1996 (by-election)	112,410	10,305	9%
Mississauga-Brampton South	Navdeep Bains	2004	113,825	8635	8%

Source: Elections Canada website and Statistics Canada (2001)

A History of Reliance on the Family Class Immigration Category

The historical significance of family class immigration in the formation of the Punjabi community in Canada in the 1970's and 1980's has been noted by Hugh Johnston (1988). More recently the continued significance of family sponsorship on community building has been highlighted by Walton-Roberts (2003). Using data from Citizenship and Immigration Canada, her research shows that by a substantial margin India is the largest source country for family class immigrants to Canada (table 4) (Walton-Roberts, 2003).

Table 4: Top Source Regions for Family Class Immigration to Canada

Country	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
India	13,496	11,190	9,069	9,534	12,007	12,627
China	4,265	4,935	5,059	5,500	5,743	6,472
Hong Kong	5,206	3,985	1,795	1,058	1,182	898
Philippines	4,958	3,742	3,254	4,031	3,381	3,395
United States	3,163	2,497	2,000	2,948	3,167	3,601

Source: Walton-Roberts (2003)

Although India is by far the top source country for family class immigrants to Canada, the number of skilled immigrants has markedly increased in recent years. As shown in table 5, in 2001 slightly more immigrants from India to Canada came through the skilled category than the family category. Despite this increase towards skilled immigrants from India, immigrants from Punjab still overwhelmingly utilize the family class category. In 1998, 80% of all family class applications from India were from Punjab, whereas this number dropped to 55% for the other immigration categories (Walton-Roberts, 2003). The LIDS data that was presented earlier (figure 2) also supports this point, revealing that between 1980 and 2001 approximately 87% of Punjabi immigrants from India to the GTA came through the family/assisted class immigration process.

Table 5: Immigration to Canada from India by Class 1994-2001

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
■ family	14,640	11,759	13,509	11,185	9,969	9,534	12,007	12,627
□ skilled	2,126	3,709	6,194	7,143	4,098	6,904	12,387	13,640
■ refugees	234	499	1243	776	853	697	1,107	1,153
□ other	57	39	123	197	237	76	89	27

Source: Walton-Roberts (2003)

Previous research by Hershman (1981) and Bal (1997) suggests that the traditional importance of family, the practice of arranged marriages/introductions and the responsibility of children to care for elderly parents has served to strengthen the social connection between India and Canada, and family class immigration has been a mechanism which Indian immigrants have used to reunite the extended family in Canada. As such, this class of immigration has had a strong impact on the formation of the Punjabi community in Canada, which has been largely characterized by their strong orientation towards family and community (Walton-Roberts, 2003).

The strong sense of group collectivity, rather than a sense of individuality, that defines the Punjabi-Sikh community likely has relevance with respect to the overwhelming reliance of this community on family class sponsorship. This is obviously a group of people that values family, and perhaps given their immigration history of isolation and exclusion the larger Sikh community is considered to be an extension of family. With regards to political participation it is not surprising then that there appears to be a collective sense of ownership that the community feels about the political campaigns of Sikh candidates. The intensity of political mobilization evident in the Sikh community has been mentioned in the existing literature (Bird, 2005) and was also evident in the interviews that were done for this study. The majority of the MPs and MPPs that were interviewed suggested that the Sikh community played a significant role in their election campaign, and two MPPs (Kuldip Kular and Vic Dhillon) even estimated that the percentage of Sikh volunteers on their campaign was as high as 70%.

When Sikh MPs and MPPs were asked about what explained why the Sikh community was so involved in their campaigns, they all responded with comments related to the strength of the social networks in the Sikh community. From these

statements, it appears as though the powerful sense of attachment to the family and the community perhaps creates a stronger sense of collective identity in the Sikh community, than in other visible minority communities. By extension then, perhaps having their identity reflected in their elected representatives is an important factor motivating the Sikh community to be politically active. As stated by MPP Vic Dhillon, with regards to why those from the Sikh community volunteered so passionately on his campaign, “...they [the Sikhs] have a sense of belonging and achievement that comes from being behind a winning candidate that is from their own community” (Interview with MPP Vic Dhillon).

The Political Party Electoral System

The classic interpretation of minorities and political participation suggests that minorities tend to be better represented at the municipal level, than the federal or provincial level. However, this is not true in the case of the Sikh community in Brampton and Mississauga, which is over represented at the federal level, but underrepresented municipally (Matheson, 2005). Given the different political process at the municipal level, this dichotomy in many ways reinforces the importance of party politics as a factor that has contributed to the exceptional gains of Sikhs in federal and provincial politics. According to Bird (2005), “where they [visible minorities] are densely concentrated, electoral rules and nomination procedures at the national level produce strong incentives for parties and individual candidates to mobilize visible minority voters” (Bird 2005, p. 82).

The party system involves the selection of candidates through an internal nomination process, which consists of local members of the party’s riding association

casting a ballot for whom they would like to see as the party candidate representing that riding. In open ridings without an established incumbent, such as the newer ridings in Brampton and Mississauga, this selection process often leads to mass recruitment drives to sign up new members. For many candidates, regardless of their ethnicity, the focus for recruitment is on members from ethnic communities that are often easier to mobilize and can be relied upon for their support on nomination day (Bird, 2005). Although the party nomination system allows for minority involvement, it has also been criticized given that the system has been manipulated through practices by nominees which include: "hiring people within the ethnic community to sign up members, delivering busloads of instant party members from mosques, temple and other ethnic/religious centres and paying dues of new members" (Bird 2005, p. 82). In response, Sikh politicians that participated in this study discounted these criticisms. Many interviewees responded by suggesting that the high levels of involvement from a candidate's ethnic community was not based on manipulative practices, but more so a reflection of the candidate's social network. As stated by MPP Harinder Takhar:

"I think in general Canadian people don't have a lot of interest in politics as the membership in the provincial riding associations is very very small. So whoever takes interest he has to make members, and it is natural when you make members that you do so from people that you know....and the people that you know are normally people from your own community. I would say Italians do the same...I think anyone who is running for office does the same" (Interview with MPP Harinder Takhar).

In addition to the nomination process that occurs at the local riding association level, minority political participation has also been furthered to some extent by the party system which allows the appointment of candidates to ridings by the national party leader. Research by Erickson (1997) suggests that in the 1993 federal election the

greatest interference with the local candidate selection process was by the Liberal Party, when Prime Minister Jean Chrétien appointed fourteen candidates, ten of which were women (Dhillon, 2005).

With regards to the Brampton area, in the 2004 federal election Prime Minister Paul Martin appointed Ruby Dhalla as the Liberal candidate in the riding of Brampton-Springdale. In an interview with MP Ruby Dhalla, she denied her appointment was based on the demographics of the area, but rather maintained that the decision was based on her roots in the riding as the owner of a number of health clinics. According to MP Ruby Dhalla, “my appointment was a testament to the commitment that former Prime Minister Paul Martin had to further the political participation of women, youth and visible minorities...and it was not until after the appointment did everyone realize what a good fit I was in the riding in terms of demographics” (Interview with MP Ruby Dhalla). Despite her lack of recognition of the possible link between the riding demographics and her appointment, Dhalla during the interview mentioned that her riding of “Brampton-Springdale has the second largest Sikh voting bloc in the country” (Interview with MP Ruby Dhalla). With this being so, it seems rather unlikely that the sizable number of Sikh constituents did not to some extent factor into the national party decision to appoint her, a Sikh who is fluent in Punjabi, to be the candidate for this riding.

The Suburban Political Landscape

Of the Sikh politicians elected federally, all have been from suburban ridings in the Greater Toronto or Greater Vancouver Area. Research on the suburban success of immigrant and minority electoral candidates in the GTA suggests that the suburban

landscape offers greater opportunity for political achievement (Siemiatycki and Matheson, 2005)

In contrast with the older ridings of Toronto or Vancouver, political ambitions and machines are believed to not be so entrenched in the newer ridings of the suburbs (Siemiatycki and Matheson, 2005). For example, the growth of Peel Region over the last few decades has led to a constant reshuffling of riding boundaries, as well as to the addition of new ridings, both circumstances make political footholds far less rooted. In the 2004 Federal Election, the ridings of Brampton-Springdale, Mississauga-Brampton South, and Mississauga-Streetsville were open to new candidates and it was from these ridings that two of the three Sikh MPs from Peel (Ruby Dhalla and Navdeep Bains) entered into the House. The nature of the federal riding structure in the Region of Peel, which has continually seen boundaries readjusted and candidates shifted, has allowed numerous minority candidates to overcome the incumbency factor that has very often been a significant barrier for minority access to political office (Matheson, 2005).

The Emergence of “Ethnic Ridings”

Research by Tossutti and Najem (2002) suggests that the riding’s ethnic heterogeneity and the presence of other ethnic nominees in the candidacy race are factors that significantly influence the nomination prospects of an ethnic candidate. As well, previous research by Carty (1991) which examines the efforts made by political parties to increase the participation of excluded groups suggests that their efforts are motivated by “cold electoral calculations” (Dhillon, 2005). In this sense, the suburban ridings of Brampton and Mississauga may allow visible minority candidates with greater access as parties recognize the importance of the “ethnic vote”, and tend to encourage minority

candidates in certain areas labeled as “ethnic ridings”. More recently Bird (2005) states that: “campaign chairs describe South Asians (Sikhs and Ismailis in particular) as legendary organizers,” whose support “tends to be highly sought after through the nomination and campaign process in many [ethnic] ridings” (p. 83).

Based on the results of the last two Federal Elections it does appear that access for minorities to candidacy is not only related to the percentage of the ethnic population in constituency, but also based on party politics. For example, Matheson (2005) notes an interesting pattern with the “colour coding” of certain ridings in Peel Region during the 2004 federal election. In his research Matheson (2005) found that: “in the federal ridings of Bramalea-Gore-Malton, Brampton-Mississauga South, Brampton-Springdale, and Mississauga-Streetsville, four racial minority Liberal candidates defeated four racial minority Conservative candidates, while in the ridings of Brampton West, Mississauga East-Cooksville, Mississauga-Erindale, Mississauga South, and Mississauga-Streetsville four Caucasian Liberal candidates defeated four Caucasian Conservative candidates” (p. 44). A similar pattern was observed for the 2006 Federal Election, and interesting to note that of these eight candidates running in these four ridings mentioned above (4 Liberals and 4 Conservatives), seven of these candidates were Sikhs.

Traditional research in the area of visible minority political participation has suggested that being awarded candidacy is a barrier to participation; however, with the Sikh community in Brampton and Mississauga this barrier has been surpassed to a large extent in certain ridings. One key informant interviewed for this research from outside the Sikh community who has extensive experience with its political dynamics, but asked to remain anonymous, was particularly critical of the level of “initiative” from the Sikh community in these ridings. The suggestion was even made by this interviewee that the

electoral gains made by the community were partially based on “undemocratic-like behaviour” at candidate nomination meetings. Questions regarding the behaviour of the Sikh community at the riding association level were posed to the interviewed elected officials and other key informants that are familiar with the politics of the area. Their responses to this question, and to other questions, are discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: Key Informant and Community Perspectives on Canadian-Sikh Political Participation

Methodology

This research is an attempt to answer two questions – what are the factors that have allowed for the exceptional level of electoral success in the Canadian-Sikh community, and what have been the results for the community from this electoral political success? In order to answer these questions, elected representatives with Sikh backgrounds from Ontario, at the federal and provincial level, were contacted for an interview. Although there are a number of Canadian Sikh representatives from the Greater Vancouver Area, these politicians were not interviewed given the scale of this research.

The interviews with MPs and MPPs from Ontario were conducted between July 31st and September 1st, 2006. The MPs interviewed include: Brampton South - Mississauga MP Navdeep Bains, Bramalea – Gore - Malton MP Gurbax Malhi, Brampton – Springdale MP Ruby Dhalla, and Brampton West MP Colleen Beaumier. The MPPs interviewed include: Brampton West – Mississauga MPP Vic Dhillon, Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale MPP Kuldip Kular, and Mississauga Centre MPP Harinder Takhar. In addition, one Parliamentarian was interviewed who requested to remain anonymous. Based on these interviews a biographical sketch for the elected Sikh representatives from Ontario was developed, as well, these politicians were asked for their opinion on the main research questions of this study.

In addition to these MPs/MPPs, interviews were conducted with key informants from the Brampton/Mississauga community to help shed some light on the main research questions. These key informants include: Raminder Gill (former Conservative MPP

elected in 1999 in Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale and defeated Conservative federal candidate in 2006 in the Mississauga-Streetsville riding) and Jasjit Singh Bhullar (President of a large *Gurudwara* in Mississauga - Ontario Khalsa Darbar).

Finally, to gain a better understanding of the level of political engagement in the Sikh community a short survey was designed and administered to Sikhs living in Brampton/Mississauga that were eligible to vote at the time of the last federal election (See Appendix A). The researcher stood outside of shopping plazas and local *Gurudwaras* and recruited people to complete the five minute survey that included questions on political engagement, political knowledge/interest and background information. The survey was designed using political engagement questions from the Statistics Canada General Social Survey (2003) and questions from the Canadian Election Study (2004).

Perspectives from Sikh MPs/MPPs and Other Key Informant Interviews

All of the interviewees were asked a set of questions that inquired about three main topics: what factors explain the success of the Canadian-Sikh community in electoral politics, how involved is the community with the candidacy of Canadian-Sikh politicians and what has the community gained from having these elected representatives in political office. In addition, the interviewees were asked basic demographic questions, and questions related to their personal motivations to get involved in politics. Where it was insightful to the research, the interview comments were integrated into the literature review section of the study to provide multiple perspectives on the topic of analysis. However, the following paragraphs will present in greater detail the opinions and perspectives of the interviewees on the key research questions related to this study.

Demographic Information

To begin, it would be helpful to present a demographic sketch of the Canadian-Sikh elected politicians from Ontario (federal and provincial), and the ridings that they represent (table 6 and 7).

Table 6: Demographic Profile of Canadian-Sikh MPs from Ontario

MP Name (party)	Riding	Elected Since	Born In	Education	Immigrated to Canada in	Immigrated From
Gurbax Malhi (Lib)	Bramalea-Gore-Malton	1993	1949	BA in Political Science, English and History	1975	Punjab
Ruby Dhalla (Lib)	Brampton-Springdale	2004	1974	Doctor of Chiropractic Medicine	Born in Canada	Raised in Winnipeg
Navdeep Bains (Lib)	Mississauga-Brampton South	2004	1977	Master's of Business Administration	Born In Canada	Raised in Mississauga

Source: Elections Canada website and research by author

Table 7: Demographic Profile of Canadian-Sikh MPPs from Ontario

MPP Name	Riding	Elected Since	Born In	Education	Immigrated to Canada in	Immigrated From
Kuldip Kular (Lib)	Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale	2003	1948	Medical Doctor	1974	Punjab
Vic Dhillon (Lib)	Brampton West-Mississauga	2003	1969	Bachelors degree in Business	1977	Punjab
Harinder Takhar (Lib)	Mississauga Centre	2003	1951	Master's degree in Economics and Political Science	1974	Punjab

Source: Elections Canada website and research by author

The first similarity is that all the elected officials are from the Liberal party. This is not surprising considering the popularity of the party in the Greater Toronto Area, and the traditional connection of many minority groups with the Liberals. For example, at the

federal level, research by Black (2002) on visible minority MPs from 1993-2000 found that the 71.4% of visible minority MPs elected during this time were from the Liberal party. Given that Brampton and Mississauga are Liberal strongholds, it is important to note that to some extent the race to become an elected official does not occur at the general election, but instead is decided at the party candidate election. As stated by MP Navdeep Bains, "...the internal nomination process can be more challenging at times than it is running in an election" (Interview with MP Navdeep Bains).

All of the Canadian-Sikh elected officials appear to have high levels of personal, political and social resources, for example, they are all well educated; they were all highly involved with their community and/or the Liberal party before being elected; and a number of them have successful entrepreneurial or professional backgrounds. Within the area of study on visible minorities and political participation, questions still remain about whether visible minority candidates need to possess a higher level of resources as compared to their counterparts to be elected. Research by Black (2000) on minority candidates suggests that minority women require a higher level of resources than other candidates at the recruitment level. However, further research by Black and Erickson (2006) indicates that at the electoral level "minority candidates do not appear to require more personal credentials than their counterparts in order to gain votes" (Black and Erickson 2006, p. 556). In interviews with the six Canadian-Sikh politicians, all expressed the belief that their qualifications and work within the community assisted them in securing votes, but none expressed the concern that as a minority candidate they required higher credentials than their counterparts to be nominated or elected. That being said, it should be highlighted that the dynamics are slightly different in the areas that the Canadian-Sikh representatives were elected, most notably, in a number of these

ridings many of the candidates running for election were also visible minorities. This perhaps leveled the playing field in terms of higher credentials being a prerequisite for minorities attempting to access political opportunity.

Another traditional barrier that visible minorities face when accessing political office, which the Sikh community has apparently surpassed, is the recruitment process that tends to confer benefits on established groups. For example, five of the six Sikh Canadian representatives interviewed for this research mentioned that their entry decision to be a candidate was primarily based on their own initiation – they approached the party and put their name forward as a candidate based on their desire to get involved. When asked about their motivation for doing so, all responded with an answer that reflected their desire to be part of the process. Some representatives even went further to say that being involved in the community was something that had always been important to them and is part of the “Punjabi/Sikh culture”. For example, according to MPP Kuldip Kular, “Punjabis are not laid back people...they think if you really want to make a difference, then you need to participate” (Interview with MPP Kuldip Kular). Here Kular was referring to the prevalence of politics in the Punjabi-Sikh culture, which makes it difficult for those in the community, whether in India or Canada to be politically unaware or politically neutral. Similarly, MPP Vic Dhillon mentioned that “...since most of us [referring to Sikhs] are from villages in Punjab where they have elections, and the government holds a lot of power, most people [Sikhs] are attached to one side or the other and very few are on the middle line” (Interview with MPP Vic Dhillon).

Also interesting is that four of the six candidates were born and raised in Punjab, as opposed to other parts of India. As well, all of the Canadian-Sikh representatives presented a strong connection with Punjab – the land, the culture and the language -

either through their own experiences or through the experiences of their parents (table 6 and 7). Despite this connection, all of the politicians appeared to be very careful with not associating themselves with transnational political issues or practices.

“They might have a culture of politics that they bring from Punjab, but one thing I have been very clear about is that the politics of Punjab are very different from the politics of Canada. It is not simply Sikh politics, it is Canadian politics, and we have to be very respectful, mindful and aware of that fact” (Interview with MP Navdeep Bains).

What Are the Factors Influencing Political Participation?

The most common response to the question about what factor(s) explain why Sikhs are so exceptionally involved in electoral politics, was that Sikhs have a strong history of political engagement which is very much a part of the culture in Punjab. All interviewees made comments suggesting that political engagement was a defining aspect of the Punjabi-Sikh community; a culture that is so intensely steeped in political consciousness that getting involved, regardless of where they are living, is like second nature. This inclination towards political activism even appears to go beyond ethno-cultural bonds as members of the Sikh community have also been active on previous campaigns of non-Sikh MPs such as Colleen Beaumier.

“I think look at the political atmosphere from which they come from, I think it is drilled into them by their parents and community” (Interview with MP Colleen Beaumier).

“Most of the people from the Sikh community are politically oriented, back home the majority of people read the newspaper, they discuss the issuesand they are well aware of the political process. I think that politics is in their blood. In the same way, most of the [Punjabi-Sikh] people that came here they also discuss politics...so that is important” (Interview with MP Gurbax Malhi).

Another related factor that was mentioned by some to explain this phenomenon is the fact that “politics is a highly respected profession in India....that is the main reason driving [the community]...it is the glamour of politics” (interview with MPP Harinder Takhar). This suggestion, that the Sikh community is attracted to politics because of the power and prestige that is associated with it in India, was also alluded to in an interview with MP Navdeep Bains. In his opinion, “...they [Sikhs] take pride in being powerbrokers. They take pride in exerting influence on political decisions. So I think for them it is more than a matter of representation, but also a matter of pride to continue on with that tradition in a different country” (Interview with MP Navdeep Bains).

Interviewees were also asked about the role of the riding association in the electoral political success of the Sikh community, in particular they were asked to respond to those that would criticize the Sikh community for monopolizing this institution in certain ridings. Interviewees responded by saying that such claims of monopolization would be unfair considering that riding associations are open to all those that take interest, and the Sikhs are just one example of a community that has done so.

“I think we are conducting ourselves as any Canadian would do. It is not taking over, but people becoming passionate about participating...and that is what Sikhs at this time do. In my opinion, ordinary Canadians are not too much into politics, but I would ask anybody to participate and be interested in making a difference” (Interview with MPP Kuldip Kular).

“The misconception is that people from the outside see it as ‘taking over’, but people who are there as in any case want people that they are comfortable with and people that they can work with. When the riding association meetings come up, prospective candidates work very hard and they go out and recruit people...it is a democratic process and they [the Sikh community] use it to the best of their abilities” (Interview with Raminder Gill).

Finally, the spatial concentration of the Sikh community in certain areas of Brampton and Mississauga was also mentioned as a factor related to the Sikh success in electoral politics. Despite the geographic clustering of Sikh representation, those interviewed indicated that spatial concentration was a secondary explaining factor that favoured the candidates, but was not the primary reason for this success story. According to Raminder Gill, "...it does help when you have a concentration...it is easier to recruit people and get nominations....in that sense it is better to run from these ridings" (Interview with Raminder Gill). As well, MPP Harinder Takhar believes that "...the concentration definitely helps to get the nomination, and that is easier because once you get the nomination you can get elected if the party is doing well" (Interview with MPP Harinder Takhar).

How Involved is the Community with the Candidacy of Canadian-Sikh Politicians?

The footprint of the community on the campaigns of Sikh candidates appears to be quite extensive, regardless of the Sikh population in the ridings. Although quantifying the role of the community on their campaign was difficult for most, the representatives generally agreed that the Sikh community was a strong source of support in this regard.

"It is so tough to say, but I think volunteer wise I would say 50% plus [were Sikhs], fundraising wise I would say 50% plus [were Sikhs] and in terms of advice that is tough to gauge because I seek council of everyone. So yes, I think that they [the Sikh community] were definitely a major player in supporting me" (Interview with MP Navdeep Bains).

"I think about 70% of the volunteers on my campaign were Sikh. It is just magical the activities that take place in my campaign, where people for the campaign period just leave their own activities aside for the whole 28 days and dedicate themselves fully, morning to night. It is just unexplainable...it is not your traditional campaign. And they don't want anything in return, not purposefully, but we just don't have anything to give them that is material (Interview with MPP Vic Dhillon).

Although representatives were appreciative of the support from the Sikh community, they all maintained that people from many other communities also volunteered on their campaign. These responses were not surprising considering existing literature which suggests that “the support of ethnic and cultural communities is usually central to many minority politicians’ nomination and campaign strategies” (Sayers and Jetha 2005, p. 89). However, the same research also states, as confirmed by this current research, that “many minority politicians realize the importance of combining an appeal to their own group with that to the wider constituency” (Sayers and Jetha 2005, p. 90). The need to mobilize volunteers from other communities is especially important considering that in many of the Brampton and Mississauga “ethnic ridings” more than one Sikh candidate is running for election from the same riding. As mentioned by Raminder Gill:

“Many times when I ran, because these were ethnic ridings, my opponent also happened to be Sikh...so there was no real pull saying that I am more deserving of the Sikh vote and volunteers than he is. But one thing I found was that Sikhs, South Asians and other minorities (especially immigrants) tend to be more active in politics...it is very easy to discuss politics with them and they are willing to work with you, and willing to sign up memberships” (Interview with Raminder Gill).

Despite the efforts made by Sikh-Canadian representatives to recruit a wide range of volunteers, the community footprint on their election campaigns was for the most part substantial. This overwhelming level of campaign support is likely related to the high levels of political consciousness in the community, which makes it easier to mobilize people for political purposes. However, the exceptional level of community political

engagement and participation also suggests that the community has something to be gained from having elected Sikh representatives.

What Does the Sikh Community Gain From Having Elected Representation?

Given the level of support that the Sikh community provides to Sikh candidates, it would be interesting to examine what the community receives in return – what do they expect from Sikh candidates once elected, and what is the reward for their support?

Interviewees all agreed that to some extent the Sikh community had slightly higher/different expectations of them as Canadian-Sikhs in elected office, than they did from other non-Sikh representatives. Several of those interviewed pointed out that this is natural, and something that many of their colleagues who are minority candidates from other communities also experience. Nonetheless, there seems to be a change in the expectations of Sikh representatives as the community becomes more knowledgeable about what MPs and MPPs can do, and what issues are federal, provincial and municipal. Despite the increasing level of community sophistication regarding the Canadian political system, the expectations are still there, and this is something that MPs and MPPs must manage.

For example, MPP Harinder Takhar mentioned that in his former role as Minister of Transportation he was faced with high community expectations as a number of people from the Sikh community are involved in the transportation industry. During an interview for this research, Takhar explained that to deal with the demands of those in the transport industry, he called a one time meeting and invited people from the industry (mainly Sikhs) to sit down with him and ministry representatives. According to Takhar, the purpose of the meeting was to discuss industry issues and try and resolve as many of

them as possible, but also to “manage expectations in the community” (Interview with MPP Harinder Takhar). Although this is an example of a special meeting for an industry issue, not specifically a Sikh issue, it does perhaps speak to the power/influence of the community to garner attention for issues that they consider to be of importance.

Immigration is another broad based issue that the MPs from ridings in Brampton and Mississauga have recognized as important to the Sikh community, and spend a considerable amount of time on this issue.

“Probably 98% of my work is immigration, and probably 90% of that 98% are Sikh. Immigration has been a big part of it, but when people come into my office if you can’t communicate in a language that is comfortable for those needing help it makes you less effective. When I started out I had Vic, and he was with me right until he became the MPP [referring to Sikh MPP Vic Dhillon], and then I had Parm Sahota for a while part time, and then Sukhwinder and now I have Arvinder” (Interview with MP Colleen Beaumier).

When Raminder Gill was asked about whether being Sikh made a difference in his position as a former Conservative MPP, he responded by saying that “it does make a difference - it makes a difference who you are, where you belong, and your sense of attachment.” The same question was asked to MPP Harinder Takhar with this response, “...they are my voters so if they have an issue then I have to deal with them, but because I am a Sikh, I have a special responsibility to do it.” Such comments indicate that there is a level of attachment or special understanding that Sikh elected representatives have to the broader Sikh community, but the question is does this attachment translate into symbolic or substantive gains for the community?

All interviewees noted that there are definitely symbolic gains that come from having a strong Sikh presence in provincial and federal political office, especially in terms of education and role modeling. Firstly, having elected officials was believed to

enhance the profile of the Sikh community in the broader community, as it signals to other Canadians that Canadian-Sikhs are contributing members of society.

“It makes the mainstream people understand who these people are; what kinds of things they do; how they participate; and how they can make a difference. In that way, it helps the larger community to understand one part of the community” (Interview with MPP Kuldip Kular).

Secondly in terms of symbolic gains, as mentioned earlier both Navdeep Bains and Gurbax Malhi believe that their presence in Ottawa as turbaned Sikh representatives creates awareness in the general public about the community and gives them an opportunity to educate others on the Sikh religion.

“I think that by being visible, by wearing a *dastaar* [turban], there is no doubt that there is greater awareness of people about the Sikh faith. It is not something I go out to do, I go out to do my job, but by default time and time again you talk to people about your faith, and your upbringing, and your values. That would have existed in any profession, but at a political level it is exciting because you meet so many people across the country so it gives you a wider audience to deal with” (Interview with MP Navdeep Bains).

As for substantive results, the elected Canadian-Sikh officials maintained that their role as representatives is to serve their constituents on issues that affect the whole community. As such, there were no examples of action taken by them that had clear substantive benefits for the Sikh community. However, there are examples of issues affecting the Sikh community where Canadian-Sikh representatives have responded more quickly, have taken the lead on, or responded with greater cultural sensitivity than would otherwise be the case with a non-Sikh MP. For instance, such issues include MP Gurbax Malhi taking the lead on establishing a Canadian visa office in Chandigarh, Punjab, and MP Navdeep Bains speaking out against the VIA rail ban on *kirpans*. In this sense, it can be argued that the Sikh community does indeed benefit substantively from the presence of Sikhs in elected office.

On the surface speaking out against the VIA rail ban does not appear to be a particularly substantive gain for the community, but it is very reflective of the more subtle, but still substantive, impact that having elected officials can have for a community. On this issue, Bains stated that “I quickly reacted and spoke out on that...I thought their behaviour was unacceptable and I made that very clear. This is just one example where I took a position that reflected on an issue important to the [Sikh] community, where no one else commented on but I was able to make my comments known very quickly and they were communicated in the paper the next day” (Interview with MP Navdeep Bains). Two points stand out in this statement, first that his action was taken quickly, and second, it was a position that was communicated in the newspapers. To some extent, it appears that Bains and other Sikh MPs and MPPs have adopted an advocacy role where their familiarity with the issues in the community allow them to respond with greater speed; and their responses generate greater awareness around issues because of their profiles as elected officials. These types of smaller examples are what Bains would call “silent victories”, they are more than just symbolic, but not quite considered by all to be substantive either. Nonetheless they are beneficial to the community, who despite being in Canada for over 100 years is still fighting in the courts, and in public opinion, on issues such as maintaining their articles of faith in public spaces and institutions.

In addition, having representatives that are Sikh and speak Punjabi fluently provides the community with a higher level of accessibility to their elected officials. Interesting to note, but not entirely surprising is the fact that all of the elected Canadian-Sikh representatives that were interviewed for this research were hesitant to say that they have made efforts to accommodate the Sikh community while in office. On the other

hand, Colleen Beaumier who is a non-Sikh MP from Brampton, was very open about saying that this is a community that she has worked with very closely and in some respects has tried to accommodate, especially with regards to the language issue. Although the interviewed Canadian-Sikh representatives claimed that they did not provide any special services for Sikh community (such as campaign literature in Punjabi), every political office that was visited had an assistant or staff member that could speak with constituents in Punjabi. Communication is obviously vitally important when one has an issue that requires the assistance of an MP/MPP, so the language gains in some respects are a substantive result, especially considering the sizable number of Punjabi immigrants who do not speak English (see figure 4).

Overall, in terms of gains for the community from having elected representatives, it appears as though it is an evolving process which initially was very symbolic in nature, but increasingly has become more substantive as political sophistication in the community increases. Given the status of the Sikh community in Canada as a visible religious minority, there was a strong recognition among those interviewed that Sikh voters expect both symbolic and substantive gains from having elected Sikh MPs and MPPs. As stated by former Conservative MPP Raminder Gill,

“There is always the so called ‘*apna*’ [Punjabi word that refers to ‘one of our own’] factor and it does make a difference since people [referring to the Sikh community] want someone that they can feel comfortable with and talk to in their own language...but it is also about other qualifications and what else you can do in the job [aside from providing greater accessibility]” (Interview with Raminder Gill).

“It is an evolving slow process, and they [the Sikh community] know it’s a long climb up, but eventually just through their participation and contribution that eventually they will have appropriate representation to bring their concerns forward” (Interview with MPP Vic Dhillon).

Political Engagement in the Sikh Community

Previous research from the Statistics Canada Ethnic Diversity Survey (2002) suggests that regardless of country of origin, visible minorities vote at lower rates than non-visible minorities. For example in the immigrant population, 84.7% of non-visible minorities indicated that they voted in the last election, as compared to 67% of Chinese; 77.1% of South Asians; and 77.6% of Blacks (Tossutti, 2005). However, given that the political success of the Punjabi-Sikhs has not been shared across the broader South Asian community, these numbers may be understating voting behaviour in the Sikh community.

As such, a political engagement survey based on previous questions from the Canadian Election Study (2004) and the General Social Survey (2003) was designed and administered for this research. Participants for the survey were recruited by random sample from the *Gurudwara* and a small shopping plaza in Brampton. In total, forty-eight eligible Sikh voters, between the ages of 19-67, living in Brampton and Mississauga were surveyed. Based on these results it appears that the Sikh community residing in Brampton and Mississauga is highly politically engaged.

Before going into more detail with the results, it would be beneficial to begin with a demographic sketch of the respondents that completed the survey (table 8).

Table 8: Demographic Profile of Respondents

	Number of People (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	37	77%
Female	11	23%
Age		
19-29	24	50%
30-49	17	35%
Over 50	7	15%
Educational Attainment		
Grade school	1	2%
High school	8	17%
College	12	25%
Bachelors degree	18	38%
Graduate degree	7	15%
Professional degree	2	4%
Occupational Status		
Unemployed	2	4%
Self Employed	18	38%
Working Full time	18	38%
Student	9	19%
Working Part time	1	2%
Immigration Status		
In Canada 3-5 years	2	4%
In Canada 6-10 years	6	13%
In Canada 11-14 years	4	8%
In Canada 15-20 years	12	25%
In Canada over 20 years	9	19%
Born in Canada	15	31%

Approximately 75% of Sikhs indicated that they voted in the last federal election (table 8), which is 10% higher than the 64.9% of registered electors that voted in 2006 (Elections Canada). Previous research on voting in Canada has shown that there is a decreasing trend in voter turnout, particularly amongst younger Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2003). However, based on the survey conducted for the current study, this trend did not appear to translate in the Sikh community. The results show that younger Sikh-Canadians between the ages of 19-29 were just as likely to vote as those in the age group

of 30-49, which is consistent with responses from interviewees who suggested that youth political participation was quite strong in their campaigns. Particularly MP Ruby Dhalla mentioned that she has noticed a shift in the number of youth volunteers that participated in her campaign, “whereas before it was mostly men that came out to help, in the last election there were more women and youth in the office” (Interview with MP Ruby Dhalla). Also interesting to note here is that MP Ruby Dhalla and MP Navdeep Bains, both under the age of 35, are two of the youngest MPs currently elected to the House of Commons.

An overwhelming number of respondents indicated that they had voted Liberal in the last federal and provincial election (table 9). Given that the Greater Toronto Area is a Liberal party stronghold, and the traditional affiliation that many immigrant communities have with the Liberal party, this result was not particularly surprising. Despite speculation that the Liberal party is declining in popularity with immigrant communities, it would appear from these results that the Sikh community remains strongly associated with this party.

Table 9: Voting Patterns in the Sikh Community

	Number of People (n)	Percentage (%)
Voting Behaviour		
Voted in last federal election	36	75%
Voted in last provincial election	36	75%
Party Voted for Federal Election		
Liberal	25	68%
Conservative	6	16%
NDP	6	16%
Party Voted for Provincial Election		
Liberal	29	78%
Conservative	6	16%
NDP	2	5%

Aside from voting, the Sikh community also appears to be highly engaged in other political activities, both electoral and non-electoral. From an electoral perspective, data from the Canadian Election Study (2004) indicates that 15.4 % of respondents from Ontario have been a member of a political party; however, amongst Sikh respondents this number was more than double at 37.5%. As well, in-terms of political activities that are not traditionally associated with electoral politics, the Sikh community was highly engaged compared to the respondents of the General Social Survey that was undertaken by Statistics Canada in 2003 (table 10).

Table 10: Percentage of Those Engaging in Selected Political Activities

	Sikh Respondents	Respondents to Statistics Canada General Social Survey (2003)
Signed a Petition	60.4%	27.5%
Searched for Political Information	52.1%	25.7%
Attended a Public Meeting	43.8%	21.3%
Contacted a Newspaper or Politician	29.2%	12.5%
Participated in a Demonstration/March	41.7%	6.2%
Volunteered for a Political Party	43.8%	3.0%

Source: Statistics Canada (2003); data collected by the researcher

As reflected in the voting patterns and levels of participation, the Canadian-Sikh community appears to be highly politically active; however, is such behaviour an indicator of integration or simply a display of group mobilization? A complex question to unravel, but the results of this preliminary survey appear to contradict the assumption that the ethnic/religious identity of candidates is the driving factor behind these high levels of political participation. According to the respondents, party policies (54.2%), followed by candidate personality (33.3%) and then the ethnicity of the candidate (8.3%) were “very important” in determining who to vote for. However, in a broader context when the categories of “somewhat important”, “important” and “very important” were

combined, the response rate for these three factors was much tighter. These findings suggest the possibility that this is electoral activity based on political integration. This is politics where participants in the process are interested in the basics, such as party policies and candidate personality, rather than simply the ethnicity/religion of the candidate.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Concluding Thoughts

The 1988 *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* recognizes the importance of all Canadians, regardless of their individual origins, to participate fully in the social, economic and political aspects of Canadian life (Simard, 2000). In this regard, as Canada's population continues to diversify, so too should political institutions in order to reflect changing demographics and encourage integration/social inclusion. However, the involvement of minority communities in Canadian politics has not been occurring at an equal pace across different minority groups. This research was an attempt to try and understand why that is the case by examining the factors that have contributed to the political success of the Canadian-Sikh community.

Throughout history one can find examples of minority communities that have politically mobilized as a response to precarious circumstances, so although exceptional in many ways, the political mobilization of the Sikh community is not a unique strategy. The example of the Canadian-Jewish community provides an interesting comparison here, as well as the Italian community, since both of these minority communities experienced a rush into politics, but as these communities integrate further into Canadian society the rush has subsided. For example, although Italian is still the third most commonly spoken language in the House of Commons, the number of politicians of Italian descent in elected office has been declining in the recent elections. This trend would suggest that as integration increases, the need/desire of a community for political representation decreases. However, such an observation is counter to the traditional abstract understanding that civic participation is an indicator of integration. As such,

with regards to groups that are not being elected we worry about this trend as the assumption is that the more marginalized a group is, the less likely they are to participate in electoral politics.

The current research suggests that perhaps we should re-think our conventional understanding surrounding the dynamic and motivations of visible minority electoral political participation. We tend to think that political participation is evidence of social integration or the development of a sense of belonging to the mainstream; however, the Canadian-Sikh experience questions the relationship between social integration and electoral political participation.

Some may interpret the electoral success of the Sikh community as an example of politics based on manipulated group mobilization that does little in terms of integrating the community. In reality, the effect of this has been quite the opposite as it has brought citizens into political space that visible minorities are often excluded from, and this is a positive result. If you want people to feel like they can access political representatives, and that is a good thing in a democracy that a population should access their institutions of government decision making, then this definitely works out in the constituency offices of Sikh MPs and MPPs in Brampton and Mississauga.

As observed by many of those interviewed for this research, there appears to be a lack of interest regarding politics in the broader Canadian community. Raminder Gill suggests that the lack of interest is perhaps due to the fact that once people become comfortable with their place in society their desire to be involved diminishes. Based on the previous political trends of other ethnic minority groups in Canada, it is expected that electoral political participation will decrease as levels of economic and social integration

increase. Such a trajectory is predicted for the Sikh community by some of those interviewed for this study.

“I think it will settle down and I don’t think that it will be seen as such a glamorous and prestigious role. I think like every other community that has had their big rush into politics, people [Sikhs] will become less and less interested” (Interview with MP Colleen Beaumier).

Almost twenty years ago, Joseph T. O’Connell edited a book called “Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century” for which he wrote a post script in 1988 that recognized the political inclination of the community:

“Sikhs are by far the largest ethnic group of South Asian background in Canada and they are steadily becoming more mature organizationally and more effective in civil debates on many levels of Canadian life. They can be expected to have a major role in this area on their own behalf and on that of other related groups.” (O’Connell et al. 1990, p. 445).

This forecast was quite accurate, but it remains to be seen if the future of the Canadian-Sikh community will be as predictable. Unlike the examples of past communities that have matured, become less distinct, and now exhibit less of an impulse towards representation, the case of the Sikh community is unique. This is not only a highly visible racial and religious minority group, but the community also continues to be steadily infused with newer immigrants from Punjab who are highly politically oriented. With this in mind, many of the Sikh MPs and MPPs interviewed for this research believed that political participation will continue to feature strongly in the community. For example, MP Ruby Dhalla stated that: “political participation is likely to stay strong, but the nature in which Sikhs engage with politics, and the issues that Canadian-Sikh MPs are faced with, will likely change as the community matures” (Interview with MP Ruby Dhalla). As well, MPP Vic Dhillon was very confident when he concluded his

interview for this study by saying, “I wouldn’t be surprised if there is a Sikh Premier [referring to Ontario as there has already been a Sikh Premier in BC, Ujjal Dosanjh] or Prime Minister in 20 years - I think participation is only going to increase” (Interview with MPP Vic Dhillon).

Although the future of the Sikh community in electoral politics is uncertain, it is certain that the potential for visible minority political participation will increase given Canada’s current and projected future immigration trends. However, given the research by Black (2002) that visible minority MPs decreased from the 1997 to 2000 despite an increase in their population levels, further research is required to better understand the dynamics that contribute to the over and under representation of certain groups in elected political office.

In addition to raising questions about the traditional assumptions regarding the nature of electoral political participation and integration, this study also highlights the need for further ethnically specific research on visible minorities and electoral political involvement. The term “visible minorities” is so broad, and considering that the people that are included under this heading are so different, it is likely that the factors surrounding their political participation levels will be just as different. Understanding these differences is the first step towards encouraging political integration and addressing the general under-representation trend of marginalized groups in elected Canadian political institutions.

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Appendix A:

From the Komagata Maru to Six MPs in the House of Commons: Factors Influencing Electoral Political Participation in the Canadian-Sikh Community

Section I: Eligibility Questions

1. In what year were you born? _____

2. Where you eligible to vote in Canada as of the last

Federal election?

Yes/No

Provincial election? Yes/No

3. Do you live in Brampton or Mississauga? Yes/No 4. What is your postal code? _____

5. What religion, if any, do you most identify with? _____

Section II: Political Engagement and Voting Questions:

6. Lots of people find it difficult to get out and vote. Did you vote in the last....(Please check all that apply)

	Yes	No, if no then Why?
Federal Election		
Provincial Election		

7. If yes, which party did you vote for?

Federal Election _____ Provincial Election _____

8. Using the scale, how INTERESTED were you in the last federal and provincial elections? Zero means no interest at all and ten means extremely interested.

	No Interest										Extremely Interested
Federal	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Provincial	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

9. During the CAMPAIGN, did you discuss the election with other people (Please check one):

a) several times (includes 3 or more times)

b) once or twice

c) never

10. In the past 12 months, have you done any of the following activities:

	Yes	No
...searched for information on a political issue?		
...volunteered for a political party?		
...expressed your views on an issue by contacting a newspaper?		
...expressed your views on an issue by contacting a politician?		
...signed a petition?		
...put up a sign on your property?		
...attended a public meeting?		
...participated in a demonstration or march?		

11. How important are the following in determining whom you will vote for?

	Not at All Important		Somewhat Important		Very Important
Personality of the candidate	1	2	3	4	5
Policies of the Party	1	2	3	4	5
Voting for a candidate from my own ethnic and religious background	1	2	3	4	5

12. Have you ever been a member of a Canadian political party?

Yes No

Section III: Media Coverage and Political Knowledge

13. How frequently do you follow news and current affairs? (e.g. international, national, regional or local) Is it:

- a) ...daily?
- b) ...several times each week?
- c) ...several times each month?
- d) ...rarely or never?

14. What media do you use for this? Do you use (Mark all that apply)

	Mainstream	Ethnic Media
...the newspapers?		
...the magazines?		
...the television?		
...the radio?		
...the Internet?		

15. How much attention did you pay to news about the following...? (Use a scale from zero to ten, where zero means no attention)

	No Attention										Full Attention
Federal Politics	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Prov. Politics	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Indian Politics	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

16. During the campaign were you contacted by a political party by (Please check all that apply):

	Yes	No
Phone		
In-Person		
Mail		

17. Do you happen to recall the name of :

- a) The leader of the Liberal Party _____
- b) The leader of the Conservative Party _____
- c) The leader of the NDP _____
- d) The leader of the Bloc Québécois _____
- e) Your local MPP _____
- f) Your local MP _____

Section IV: Background Information

18. Where were you born? _____

18b. If born outside Canada, in what year did you come to Canada? _____

19. What is your gender?

- a) Male
- b) Female

20. For how many years have you lived in your current neighbourhood? _____

21. What is your occupational status (Please circle one)?

- a) Unemployed
- b) Self employed,
- c) Working full time
- d) Working part time
- e) Student
- f) Retired but working for pay
- g) Retired

22. What is the highest level of education you have completed, or are currently completing?

- a) Grade School
- b) High school
- c) College certificate/diploma
- d) Bachelor's degree
- e) Graduate degree
- f) Professional degree/designation (Please specify: _____)

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