



***In the Spirit of  
Inclusive  
Reflection:***

***Reflections of a Cultural  
Expeditionist***

**by Asna Adhami 2015**

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# *Acknowledgements*

*Adaab. Salaam. Welcome.*

*With the deepest gratitude and love I acknowledge:*

*My beloved Baba*

*the spirits of the universe, of creation and nature, and all that informs essence  
the elders and the ancestors of the lands I come from and of the lands where this work (e)merges*

*Dr. Susan M. Brigham for your care, consideration and guidance, support of my voice and  
vision, and your companionship on this journey, which helped make this work possible*

*Dr. Rita S. Deverell for your guidance, precisions, insights and attention, for your openness,  
time and energy in working together over distances*

*Graduate Studies in Lifelong Learning, Office of Graduate Studies, and the Faculty of Education  
at Mount Saint Vincent University members and staff*

*The many precious, beautiful and amazing people in my community of support, who have  
inspired, supported, and encouraged me on this journey, all the teachers and all the students in  
many forms. The care of every one of you is embedded in this work. I share gratitude:*

*SA: for your enduring support over time and the many loving offerings along the way*

*SA, AA & AA: for your sustaining, unconditional love and beautiful gifts of joy and laughter*

*HM, NM, GH, LM, MEL, LR & MR, JU, CR, JP, dg & SM: for the encouragements, faith, care,  
thoughtfulnesses and times together; and for the preciousness you each are and share*

*MM, DL, FN & RSG: for enriching my journey with your insights, wisdoms, and anecdotes*

*This research is supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.*

# ***Dedication***

*For your precious light and laughter, Momma Jaan,  
for your encouragement to dream beyond  
for believing in Starshine*

*For my community of like-hearted people*

*Because creativity is breath.*

*Ke hum saaroun ki roshni buland ho*

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**In the Spirit of Inclusive Reflection:  
Reflections of a Cultural Expeditionist  
2015**

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Education at  
Mount Saint Vincent University in partial fulfilment of the  
degree of Master of Arts in Education  
(Lifelong Learning)  
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# *Abstract*

*My work is an authorial experiment, a dialogic and integrative engagement with Inquiry. As both the participant and the researcher, I mine my Sufi and South Asian worldviews, heritages, and lived experiences to un/re/dis/covers their influence on my perspectives and practices of pluralism and inclusion in Canadian contexts. I define and apply a culturally-reflective framework for my particular approach to lifelong learning. I interpret the wisdom of peh'chaan, an Urdu word for a cultural way of being, of bringing together and observing (inter)connections, into a practice of inquiry.*

*I employ peh'chaan to create a research space where traditional wisdoms blend with contemporary ones, cultural voices mix with scholarly ones and where arts practices (e)merge as representations of (inter)connection. I bring together these elements to present a layered work of intention and meaning in a cohesive whole. In combination, the elements speak to many contexts in which peoples and perspectives can become under- or misrepresented when othering practices become normalized in institutions and in daily life. I employ peh'chaan as a practice of resilience, solidarity, and hope. I create narratives of four fictional female characters. Their stories reflect how they negotiate themes of identity, culture, and belonging in their everyday lives and how it becomes necessary to develop—sometimes creative—ways to address the gaps as they encounter them.*

*I liken my research to a type of cultural expedition and/or a journey of exploration, where research, reflection, experience, negotiation, and experimentation occur simultaneously.*





## Chapter 1

روحِ عالم،  
راہِ عالم

*Ruh-e-Aalam,  
Rah-e-Aalim*

*The earth  
awaits, anticipating our  
footsteps. Those moments when  
the soles of our feet meet soft, brown  
dirt. Harmonizing conduits. Absorbing the  
vibrations of our beating hearts into its depths.  
Dispersing them back into movements of waters,  
stirring winds, the flames of all fires. Creating a  
single rhythm, integrating the beats of all others.  
Every. Single. Other. Connecting through the  
earth the, sun, the air and the oceans. And  
one another. Each beat together in  
precious symphony. Resonant.  
(Inter)connected. Beings.  
So the Sufis say.  
~ Asna, 2014<sup>1</sup>*

## ***Ruh-e-Aalam<sup>2</sup>***

Traditional Sufi teachings often refer to life as a constant learning journey. They teach that each journey is precious and each journey is equal and that each is a privilege for which travellers bear responsibility. The teaching “*There are as many paths as there are people*” suggests that each path is rich with lessons, detours, dead ends, and destinations. Every learning

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<sup>1</sup> The placing of text in the form of shapes and figures is my interpretation of traditional eastern calligraphy practices. Each of these shapes and figures are my designs and interpretations, and they appear throughout the text. All photographs are my own, and were taken by me during the research period.

<sup>2</sup> Spirit of creation, or spirit of the universe, or spirit of the times.

journey is seen as precious and unique, and though there may be experiences in common, each has the potential to make meaningful contributions to the shared conditions of our coexistence. All learner/travellers are seen as having the potential to learn and grow during their journeys by collecting knowledge and cultivating wisdom through self-awareness and circular, analytical reflection on their experiences. An important duty is for learner/travellers to share the lessons they gather by telling stories. The spirit of sharing is embedded in a sense of love, community, mutual responsibility, respect, and (inter)connection. This is the spirit in which I undertake my self-reflective and integrative research. I use the privilege of this academic opportunity to create an authorial experiment with inquiry and share insights from my journey.

My research is grounded in and privileges the indigenous spiritual belief systems and cultural knowledge traditions of my eastern ancestries, as I consider these to be key elements that inform my body of prior knowledge and my approach to lifelong learning. I locate my research in Sufi and South Asian traditions<sup>3</sup> of bringing together and identifying and forming (inter)connections in an inquiry practice I call *peh'chaan*.<sup>4</sup> I establish this culturally-informed position as my primary research space. My inspiration to interpret *peh'chaan*, in part, as a contemporary application of ancestral wisdoms comes from my experiences of an academy in which knowledge from global cultures, such as those of my heritages, have been historically excluded. I exercise authorial license to define my own cultural values and terms to establish this foundation and empower myself to create a research landscape that is familiar and resonant, one that enables me to conduct meaningful research.

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<sup>3</sup> The definitions and interpretations of these cultural paradigms are based on my research and personal observations, interpretations, and experiences of my cultures. My definitions and interpretations are meant to aid in my research, and are not meant to be construed as exclusive, exhaustive, or representative of anyone else's experiences. I focus on integrative practices of (inter)connection and holism as relevant to my research.

<sup>4</sup> An eastern way of recognizing, bringing together, and observing (inter)connections, explained further in Chapter 3.

As  
the  
elders  
tell it, when  
travellers stop to  
rest, there is great  
joy in the sharing of  
their adventures, the telling

of their  
In the calm  
stories. And there is great learning.  
of the night, resting around campfires under starry skies, having finished their toils over shelters  
and meditations over meals, each reflects on their rah,<sup>5</sup> their safar,<sup>6</sup> and their maqam.<sup>7</sup> They tell  
stories that honour all that was held in paths they travelled, in the earth, and in the environments,  
for that is their duty. To learn, to listen and be deeply. With responsibility and respect. And  
what they learn they commit to posterity through the telling of these stories, the seen  
and the unseen, retracing their steps. Starting from the place where their feet now  
rest. She knew that was how her story would begin, too. In the spirit of tradition.  
To speak of her own journey she would mine her life's experiences. To make  
sense of it, she would reach deeply into her ancestry. Her ancestories. From  
where she stood, she would need to un/re/dis/cover<sup>8</sup> a path back to them;  
guided only by the light from a chiraagh<sup>9</sup> of Peh'chaan would she find  
a way. The ancient implement, the elders often said, would be  
needed to  
understand...  
meaningfully.

That would be the only way  
to truly understand and tell her story...

~ Asna, 2014

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<sup>5</sup> Path.  
<sup>6</sup> Journey.  
<sup>7</sup> Destination.  
<sup>8</sup> Simultaneous action or condition where the work of uncovering is the lifting of the veils that have shrouded narratives, histories, and identities that would otherwise remain in plain view; recovering refers to the efforts to reach, reclaim and restore displaced or buried narratives, histories, identities that distance and time make elusive, and also to the healing the reconnections bring; and, discovering refers to learning/finding something new.  
<sup>9</sup> A wick/oil lamp or lantern.

Readers are invited as companions on this experimental journey with method and content, as guests with whom the bread of these (inter)connections is broken, together, and shared.

## *Rah-e-Aalim*<sup>10</sup>

In this chapter, I provide an outline of the elements that contribute to this research, as well as a map of the path this work will take. My worldviews are informed by my multiple locations as a Sufi-identified-South-Asian-descent-North-American-born-Canadian. This life experience provides me with a rich body of languages, cultures, pluralism philosophies, and worldviews from which to contemplate, interact, and create. This perspective is rare and uncommon for this region, which makes conducting this culturally appropriate scholarly work both challenging and exciting. I approach this work as an authorial experiment. One objective is to address gaps in locally generated, culturally representative research, as well as gaps in research created from plural worldview perspectives. Another goal is to define this work as alongside and companion<sup>11</sup> to other work in the academy, rather than define it in terms of a different subjectivity or a hierarchical relation.

A portion of this work is dedicated to un/re/dis/covering the Sufi and South Asian traditions and wisdoms. Another portion of this work is bringing them dialogically together with scholarly work and creative practices, while exploring themes of (inter)connections. I participate in the broader dialogue by experimenting with ways to merge traditional wisdoms, scholarly work, and my own experiences, and contributing the insights that I glean.

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<sup>10</sup> Path of a scholar.

<sup>11</sup> The terms *friend* or *companion* are commonly used in Sufi and South Asian literature to address any other, in a manner that suggests and assumes (inter)connection and familiarity, even with strangers. In the context of this research, it refers to placing side by side as equals.

I reflect on experiences as a Canadian-born-person-of-Sufi-and-South-Asian-descent to inform this academic exploration of reconciliations of identity, culture, and belonging. Navigating multiple and plural cultural contexts is my familiar and well-travelled terrain. My eastern worldviews are informed by my Sufi and South Asian heritages, and my western worldviews are informed by my Canadian and North American-identified ones. Each has particular ways to organize values and beliefs, conveyed in the cultures through stories and political narratives, embedded in the structures of institutions, and validated by norms and social conventions. I learned to read in one language from left to right, and in another, from right to left. I learned to follow a solar calendar as well as a lunar one and reconcile distinctions in the calculations of what constituted days, months, or years in each, entirely functional for their own purposes. These life experiences were educational and informative and provided pathways for a grounded sense of respect for multiple cultures and *dialogic*<sup>12</sup>, parallel ways of knowing and being.

Part of the work of *peh'chaan* is describing reconciliations of the self in relation to environments. This enables my inquiry to integrate holistic practices of *being in relation* and honour wisdom traditions, while engaging in scholarly research. As both researcher and subject, I choose how to identify and position my Sufi and South Asian identities and locate them as companion to and alongside others within the academy. Another integrative aspect to this inquiry is that it infuses heritage, cultural, scholarly, and spiritual perspectives with ancient and contemporary arts practices. I theorize from eastern and western literature and also draw from

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<sup>12</sup>

I use dialogic perhaps non-traditionally, to refer to that which is simultaneously occurring, existing in a shared space with a possibility for interactions. Dialogic is not intended to represent literal conversation, convey debate, or invite conflict, domination, dismissal, or derision. When I refer to something as dialogic, I mean a circumstance where sharing and exchanging ideas and perspectives can occur without oppression.



prior cultural knowledge to establish key themes and assumptions from this position to shape the research framework and to create a container for my research space. I draw from my cultures, heritages, lived experiences, as well as from literature, theory, and my previous body of work to make observations. I identify themes of identity, culture, and belonging, and integrate my learnings, reflections, and experiences, and create stories about being in relation and (inter)connections. These stories take many forms and appear throughout this text as poetry, visual imagery, (my interpretive homage to eastern) figural calligraphy, and the fictionalized, lived experiences of four characters: Maliha, Sana, Aman, and Zainab. These stories are integrated and placed throughout the body of the text, in dialogue with one another.

The (inter)connections are also represented in the manner in which this thesis is used as a space for curation and presentation. The fictional, factual, visual, anecdotal, theoretical, traditional, and cultural elements exist together in layers and as an integrated whole, where each piece is a companion to the others. Each piece can be engaged with, reflected upon, or revisited individually and/or as a part of an entirety.

In this way, I extend my integrative experimentation with methodology by providing the reader/audience with similar and simultaneous negotiations of the contexts being discussed in this work. I assemble the elements of my research in ways that resemble the very conversations taking place within its content. The reader/audience may come across content that is unfamiliar, as I include language, cultural constructs, forms, and concepts that may not typically be applied or considered primary in western academic contexts. By drawing these elements out from the margins I establish them in mainstream contexts, in a way that mirrors my lived experiences.

I retain authorial license over my work and my stories, and unpack identifiable oppressions and risks historically associated with conducting this kind of culturally located, self-reflective work. The potential risks to researchers doing this kind of work include the possibility for them or their work to be systemically recolonized, re-appropriated, re-exploited,<sup>s</sup> or re-objectified, as a result of being situated in a western academic framework. I use terms such as racializable, minoritizable, and objectifiable<sup>13</sup> to illustrate how some people may be at risk of being racialized, minoritized, or objectified. Part of the work of peh'chaan is decolonizing underrepresented worldviews, cultures, and heritages—that have been displaced by colonial structures and practices—and restoring their place in the global knowledge landscape as primary, and by, at times, privileging them.

*Learning is  
a life-long process. If we learn  
only in schools, our  
learning is limited. The  
Sufis attribute a  
higher value to learning from experience...  
Learning through experience  
is what defines  
a person...Our upbringing and  
conditioning to physical and tangible  
things makes us  
undervalue matters of  
the heart and spirit.*

*Azim Jamal (2002, pp. 151—152)*

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<sup>13</sup>

Further explained in Chapter 4.



## *On Integrating Experiences, Themes, and Practices*

In this traditional approach, lifelong learning is an ongoing cycle of living, doing, knowing, creating, and being. In my own life, I developed two particular dialogic approaches that identify (inter)connections among binaries and can reframe them as being in relation to one another. I draw on these practices in many areas of life and rely on them particularly in my work as a storyteller. I eventually coined the term “Cultural Expeditionism” to describe my way of learning about people and how they become labelled and defined. I also developed a process for questioning and exploring narratives of conquest, difference, conflict, oppression, and adversarialism by questioning and exploring parallel narratives of coexistence. I refer to this process as “Inclusive Reflection”—a way of seeing and understanding contexts *in relation* to one another that honours a sense of (inter)connection.

The two practices described above have become my ways of mining distinctions or presented binaries to locate what is equal and parallel at their essence. Through the course of this research, I un/re/dis/cover that these practices are rooted in the eastern notion of *peh’chaan*, an embodied way of being that presupposes (inter)connection, uniqueness, and being in relation. The eastern ideologies I was raised with celebrate diversity of heritages and cultures from worldviews of holism and pluralism in which all are deemed to be connected, regardless of the differences. This kind of conciliatory ideology was less evident and seldom named in my western experience as I was growing up. The western contexts I was raised in celebrate multiculturalism, while at the same time they seem to, at times, perpetuate variations of segregation, maintaining notions of otherness that become coopted into agendas of opportunism. Throughout my work as a reporter, for example, many communities’ members have commented

that celebrations and understandings of their diverse populations in our interwoven society seem to become relegated to certain days, months, and geographic spaces that may otherwise go unseen.

Along with understanding these configurations of coexistence comes a continually evolving awareness of how oppressions, privilege, and power can distort and politicize cultural and historical narratives. This awareness enhances my knowledge of the impact, appropriations, and exploitations of colonialisms, orientalisms, capitalisms, individualisms, and other methods of oppression and subjugation. It informs my observations of how such relationships (in)creasingly and (in)variably result in misrepresenting and othering contexts of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability, faith, and nationality and across socioeconomic, sociocultural, and sociohistoric realities. I develop and use these deeper understandings about histories and human rights to inform the contributions I make as a multimedia broadcast journalist, an interdisciplinary scholar, and a transmedia artist. The knowledge I gain influences my use of the arts, my approach to education and the media I create, all of which seek to enable opportunities for dialogue, share information, bridge understandings, dissolve stereotypes, and support inclusion. I work to ensure many perspectives and worldviews and perspectives are represented. I develop initiatives to mend and build (inter)contextual relationships and create resources and strategies to foster the longevity of those relationships. This integrated, syncretic orientation is the activism inherent in my works.

Through my formal education I studied sociology, journalism, and education and furthered my interests in social justice, human rights, and inclusion practices. My early post-secondary education was informed by traditional western, enlightenment, colonial, and eurocentric influences and perspectives, which seldom reflected diverse global cultures and peoples with

productive, historical relevance. The current course of study is the first time in my post-secondary education that I have come across or was introduced to scholarly work on topics of identity, integration, culture, and education from perspectives that are also familiar to me. Academics such as Vandana Shiva, Edward Said, Linda T. Smith, Chandra T. Mohanty, and Susan M. Brigham observe relationships between hegemonic practices and underrepresented perspectives and discuss changes that are relevant to the field of education and to civil society as well. These themes resonate with me, because throughout my career as an artist, broadcaster, and scholar, and in my own life experiences within many of the communities that become defined as underrepresented, such conversations and strategies are part of everyday life.

My broadcast portfolio includes work for a number of mainstream and niche media organizations, creating national and international content, and I also specialize in covering stories from culturally specific communities. I work to tell everyday stories about everyday people, as well as ones that address institutional barriers to the representations of diverse communities and their members. My body of work includes researching, writing, and producing inclusive and intercultural news, current affairs, arts, entertainment, and local interest stories, as well as profiles of artists, communities, leaders, and elders. I have covered stories for and about Aboriginal communities in the Atlantic region from Elsipogtoq to Lennox Island, and We'koqma'q to Sipekne'katik. I documented multicultural histories from throughout Nova Scotia, from Eskasoni to Digby, and Liverpool to Canso, of the many peoples who landed and travelled through our Maritime shores. I also had the opportunity to facilitate the broadcast of stories specific to South Asian cultural communities across Canada and from countries of origin. I also created dialogic, intercultural documentaries that brought together multiple voices around



themes of similar lived experiences. My documentaries “*Lest We Forget*” (Adhami, 1999) and “*Where are You From?*” (Adhami, 2000) are two examples of culturally reflective and inclusive content that at the time were not yet considered acceptably “mainstream.” Telling other people’s stories, an honour and a responsibility, provided numerous opportunities to research, observe, listen to, document, and gain insight into how people negotiate the many contexts of difference, identity, culture, and belonging in our shared world. I was a founding member of CBC Atlantic’s Regional Refection committee during the early 2000s, leading and participating in a number of initiatives, and I continue to make contributions that support the inclusion of diverse peoples in media and broadcasting.

As an artist I experiment with a number of forms such as video, photography, poetry, and narrative. I also incorporate activating spaces and creating experiences into my work. I explore ways of relating to or bringing together notions of holism and pluralism that also appreciate our distinct identities. For example, at a time when local watering holes and coffee houses were the most common venues for spoken word and poetry gatherings, held mostly in the evenings, I developed and ran an afternoon, outdoor poetry circle series, Poetry in the Park (Adhami, 2006–2010). Creating an outdoor venue was a means for me to (re)connect poetic and spoken word artistry with the natural environment, something that I associated with my cultural and spiritual heritages. I also designed and hosted a number of intercultural spoken word events, such as Fusion Infusion (Adhami, 2008), where layered aspects of diversity were embedded in the show’s themes and performances and contributed to by audiences. And for a number of years I was one in a succession of women who coordinated informal monthly breakfast meetings where women in the film and television industry would gather to exchange stories and share support. I

continue to participate in local and national initiatives that strive to encourage and support the participation and representation of diverse artists in various aspects of the industry.

All of these experiences inform my understanding and practice of peh'chaan. For my research I unpack this notion and take authorial license to design an integrated arts inquiry method that is also informed by these lived practices. This inquiry brings together worldviews, western academia, cultural literature, indigenous wisdoms, and lived experiences, and they converge in the forms of stories that appear throughout this text. Each of these contexts informs one another and often overlap, and they are always evolving and emerging.

***A Path to/of Peh'chaan: Retracing Roots/Routes Through  
Cultural Expeditionism and Inclusive Reflection***

My practices of Cultural Expeditionism and Inclusive Reflection evolved intuitively as my response to negotiating polarizing experiences. Cultural Expeditionism is an overarching framework for analyzing and understanding diverse categorizations in environments of pluralism. It includes observations of similarities, differences, and connections among multiple culture-centric narratives, by placing them alongside one another, as equals. Inclusive Reflection is a further examination of the nature of relationships among the categories and includes an analysis of power, privilege, and oppression. To apply these concepts in an academic context, I un/re/dis/cover their deeper connection to the Sufi and South Asian ancestral teachings embodied in the eastern concept of peh'chaan.

Peh'chaan employs resonance, recognition, and reconciliation to sift through similarities and differences, identify connections, and bridge understandings and uses spiritual, physical, emotional, and intellectual wisdoms, ways of noticing, connecting, and being. Peh'chaan is a

practice of being—contemplative, intentionally dialogic, and non-adversarial—a mediative translation between contexts that are alongside.

*Companion to.*

*In a spirit of and.*

Peh'chaan informs how I engage with themes of identity, culture, and belonging.

In my scholarly work, I experiment with activating the eastern notion of peh'chaan into a culturally and spiritually informed integrative, authorial research exploration of method that mobilizes arts praxis to create multi-media stories. Through the practice of peh'chaan I weave together many elements, with representations of (inter)connectedness, into a cohesive whole.

***Academic Intention: Research in Practice, Practice in Research***

In Sufi traditions it is often said that knowledge increases in depth and richness, as it ripens over time and emerges as wisdom:

*A  
Sufi  
is a seeker  
of knowledge.  
For a Sufi, learning  
takes place from the  
cradle to the grave. The  
Sufis transform data and  
knowledge into insight  
and wisdom. This, for  
a Sufi, is real  
learning.*

*Jamal (2002, p. 149)*

In keeping with teachings and tradition, I set an intention for my academic journey: to create self-reflective, culturally-informed, holistic, and integrative research through which I gain insights that contribute to global knowledge and shared systems of understandings. I privilege my eastern cultural heritage and simultaneously integrate and honour my western, Canadian heritage and experiences, and in contemplating both, keep an open heart and an open mind. Sufi teachings suggest that a clear sense of intention or purpose will help guide the process, whatever the outcomes may be. I set my intention while reconciling some fundamental questions that emerge, including “How do I wish to integrate my lifelong learning to explore themes of identity, culture, and belonging?” and “What would my inquiry and research framework look like if I were to locate it in my ancient eastern worldviews and wisdom traditions?” I reference the spirit of mutual respect described in a previous work:

[I]mplicit in my own philosophical, societal and spiritual values, I offer my reflections, acknowledgements and observations...rather than ‘adversarial’ comparisons, or value judgments as to which...may be ‘better.’ Each one is equal in that they all make valuable contributions to the societies they serve, and each has areas of challenges to grow and better their practices in. (Adhami, April 5, 2009, p. 1)

As learners, educators, and in all our contexts, we have the opportunity to create and sustain environments where the appreciation for similarities and differences are valued, deepened, and remembered over time. I fashion my research space to mimic the resting place of the traveller, where the journeys, the people, and the experiences all come together and where new and old stories are told. I share insights from my journey, focused on creating deeper understanding of

intercultural environments and bettering practices of observing similarities, differences, and (inter)connections.

## ***In Support of Culturally Inclusive, Integrated Research: An Interdisciplinary, Dialogic Expedition into Un/Re/Dis/covering***

*I choose stories  
as the parchments  
through which to  
document these  
journeys.*

*~ Asna 2015*

Traditional knowledges and teachings passed along in songs, sayings, and stories have endured and inform current collective, global knowledge systems. My effort to create a framework of cultural and heritage reference is a way to also experiment with decolonizing academic practice. I engage in research from a position where my heritage identities are accepted as primary and equally valid and alongside others. Acknowledging indigenous teaching stories and narratives rooted in heritage and cultures of origin honours and recognizes the paths those before have travelled. I draw on teachings and literature that reflect on themes of identity, culture, belonging, and (inter)connections.

I also review academic research that is similarly located. Scholars including Said (1979, 2001, 2003), Mohanty (2003), Jo-Ann Archibald (2008), Smith (2012), and Brigham (2013) all



address individual and collective oppressions of hegemonic norms and work to restore previously marginalized narratives as equal—and companion—to the existing ones. My research favours the (re)sharing and (re)interpretation of these many perspectives in a context that places them alongside one another in the traditional way: in a remembrance and practice of *and*.



The idea of *and* is also articulated in Vandana Shiva's (2004) descriptions of Earth Democracy, which I reference in my previous work, (Adhami, March 19, 2009). I write that Shiva's approach is "particularly relevant to theories and practices of adult education" as she advocates for "an inclusive and (inter)connected understanding of all diverse forms of life." I state the importance of Shiva's position, which I describe as "a holistic view of existence as a foundation for all subsequent understandings, theories and strategies for action" (Adhami, March 19, 2009, p. 3). Shiva says:

Earth democracy also nourishes diversity by going beyond the logic of exclusion, of apartheid, of 'us' and 'them', of either/or, of the law of the excluded middle. It is in the included middle where diversity and creativity flourish in nature and in culture. The law of the included middle also implies multi-functionality, the logic of 'and' – of inclusion. It

transcends the false polarization of wild versus cultivated, nature versus culture, or even the false clash of cultures. (Shiva, 2004, p. 12)

***“There are as many paths as there are people” ~ Traditional Sufi saying***

A research-oriented interpretation of this traditional wisdom suggests that there are as many means of inquiry as there are researchers in the academy, as there are viable hypotheses, as there are knowledgeable perspectives, as there are informative outcomes. All knowledge is valuable. All wisdom is precious. Each, as a facet, has something to offer to the whole.

In many Sufi and South Asian traditions, the heart is considered the medium of connection and an access point to the whole of creation, seen as a source for love, deep learning, compassion, and heart wisdoms. A connectable heart, in my interpretation, is a valued and prized Sufi and South Asian attribute. Its use is encouraged as the primary context for observation and analysis, an alternative to intellect, as a lens that unifies and sees holistically. From this worldview, the heart wisdoms are seen as mature and all encompassing, as intellect—in isolation—is considered preliminary and/or immature. Intellect, by itself, is seen to be susceptible to ego-based and individualistic predations and can become a vehicle for oppression, imposition, and adversarialism. It requires heart wisdoms to keep it open to and accountable to all of its relations. An exclusively intellectual approach to inquiry or knowledge is seen as incomplete, as intuitive and environmental intelligences are considered necessary to acquire a depth of understanding.

Nasim Zazmanzadeh (2012) offers an interpretation of how Sufi notions of love or heart-wisdoms affect the gathering and perception of knowledge, as reflected in Sufi art and poetry:

It is characteristic of Sufism that its expressions often hold the balance between love and knowledge. The language of love makes it possible to express the most profoundly esoteric truths without coming into conflict with dogmatic theology. Furthermore, the intoxication of love symbolically corresponds to states of knowledge that go beyond discursive thought. There are also expressions, which though they do not arise from an attitude of love, nevertheless evoke it, because they reflect an inner beauty, which is the seal of Unity on the soul. It is from this Unity that clarity and rhythm spring, whereas any kind of mental rigidity or vanity of speech contradicts the simplicity, and thus also the transparency, of the soul.... (2012, p. 49)

Both Shiva (2004) and Zazmanzadeh (2012) speak to global epistemological and pedagogical traditions that are inclusive of multiple cultural ways of knowing and many spiritual belief systems. I consider such ancestral, cultural, and heritage wisdoms as elements of an educator and/or learner's prior knowledge and believe they are important to include in learning environments. Many such traditions remain othered by definitions of western or colonially defined cultures and are consequently also underrepresented in academia and other institutions in society.

Brigham (2013), Said (1979, 2001, 2003), Archibald (2008), Mohanty (2003), George J. Sefa Dei (2005), Renu Sharma (2005), and Smith (2012) are among numerous scholars whose works identify historic exclusions of diverse voices, spiritual and cultural wisdom traditions, and world knowledge systems from the academy. They also identify, analyze, and suggest ways to address the systemic barriers that impede and impact the creation of culturally inclusive and reflective research in the academy. They provide descriptions of how norms of western and

colonial-descent pedagogies resist—and at times outright reject, devalue, and oppress—any knowledge or belief system viewed as other. They expose the systemic mechanisms that continually objectify, appropriate, and exile other worldviews and paradigms into so-called ‘margins’ of subjugation and inferiority. Each calls for action and provides remedies, while facilitating the dialogue that is necessary through their own work. Brigham (2013), Said (1979, 2001, 2003), Mohanty (2003), and Smith (2012) also reveal how the ongoing under- and misrepresentations in these systems have parallels beyond academic systems, in our social systems and civil institutions, which also continually perpetuate oppressions. As Smith (2012) describes:

Literacy, as one example, was used as a criterion for assessing the development of a society and its progress to a stage where history can be said to begin. Even places such as India, China and Japan, however, which were very literate cultures prior to their ‘discovery’ by the West, were invoked through other categories which defined them as uncivilized. Their literacy, in other words, did not count as a record of legitimate knowledge. (p. 33)

Our oral histories, concepts of holism and interconnectedness, achievements in the arts, medical accomplishments, scientific discoveries, and ancient wisdoms and knowledges remain largely omitted from western accounts of histories. Our ancient practices of introspection, meditation, and definitions of (inter)connection, denied western sanctioned legitimacy despite sustained use by communities all over the world, over many millennia, in eastern academies, societies, and institutions. They were not acknowledged, that is, until they were (re)appropriated and re-attributed as credible from western sources and perspectives, repurposed into trends, fads, and fashions. Old world wisdoms ironically rebranded as new-age revelations. The discovery positioning of cultures and communities in relation to one another sets a problematic

hierarchical, subject-object precedent that subsequently repeats in individual interactions.

Exploited.

Appropriated.

Patented.

Copyrighted.

Owned.

Brigham (2013, p. 119) suggests notions of “race, racism and racialization are not sufficiently addressed in adult education” and that such notions are inherently problematic in construct as well as in application. Said (1979) makes a similar observation about Orientalism:

[I]t is not the thesis of this book to suggest that there is such a thing as a real or true Orient (Islam, Arab, or whatever); nor is it to make an assertion about the necessary privilege of an “insider” perspective over an “outsider” one, to use Robert K. Merton’s useful distinction. On the contrary, I have been arguing that “the Orient” is itself a constituted entity, and that the notion that there are geographical spaces with indigenous, radically “different” inhabitants who can be defined on the basis of some religion, culture or racial essence proper to that geographic space is equally a highly debatable idea. (1979, p.322)

Such problematic labels in turn result in problematic narratives that establish western and colonial versions as norms, and as superior. Many scholars un/re/dis/covers how traditional academic practices establish parameters of inferiority and superiority, based on dominant, colonial perspectives, that directly affect what constitutes higher learning. They describe how practices of exclusion, appropriation, exploitation, and othering disenfranchise people on the basis of spiritualities, ideologies, ethnicities, cultures and race, collectively and individually.

Said (1979) says these systems perpetuate “the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures” (p. 7) within our academic institutions and also our social systems. Said (1979) explains how western practices of hegemony served to exclude or other non-European cultures, ways of knowing, and practices. Smith (2012, p. 2) uses Said’s notions of the other to identify how the similar patterns of repression and oppression have been used to (mis)represent or exclude indigenous peoples, wisdoms, traditions, and ways of knowing. Smith (2012) says “The globalization of knowledge and Western culture constantly reaffirms the West’s view of itself as the centre of legitimate knowledge, the arbiter of what counts as knowledge and the source of ‘civilized’ knowledge” (p. 66) and identifies reasons why the problem persists:

Academic knowledges are organized around the idea of disciplines and fields of knowledge. These are deeply implicated in each other and share genealogical foundations in various classical and Enlightenment philosophies. Most of the ‘traditional’ disciplines are grounded in cultural world views which are either antagonistic to other belief systems or have no methodology for dealing with other knowledge systems. Underpinning all of what is taught at universities is the belief in the concept of science as the all-embracing method for gaining an understanding of the world. (Smith, 2012, p. 68)

It is common knowledge in eastern education systems that eastern scientists, philosophers, and theorists made many great contributions to global knowledge during the Dark Ages. The abilities they possessed before that time and the contributions they continue to make remain absent from everyday western academic discourse and in our educational materials. Both eastern and indigenous knowledge systems, and likely many more, have been historically dismissed

from western academic traditions. Nowadays, there is a growing awareness of indigenous wisdom contributions to disciplines of knowledge such as medicine, the environment and the arts, and they have yet to be accepted as formal disciplines such as Indigenous Medicine, Indigenous Science, Indigenous Architecture, or Indigenous Climatology. Smith writes:

Under colonialism indigenous peoples have struggled against a Western view of history and yet been complicit with that view. We have often allowed our ‘histories’ to be told and have then become outsiders as we heard them being retold. Schooling is directly implicated in this process. (Smith, 2012, p. 34)

I have witnessed similar struggles many times throughout my career as a broadcaster, echoed in interviews I conducted with people from a number of communities and identities. While being indoctrinated by colonial ideologies, at the same time, the colonized are left to reconcile different versions of ‘truth,’ as traditional and cultural ways of knowing are invalidated and/or eradicated. As Welton’s historical review acknowledges (2013, p. 22), “Those of non-European origins, First Nations, and many others, have found themselves outside the halls of power, circles of conversation, wealth, knowledge, good work and recognition.” In honouring Welton’s choice of language, this sentence can be read as a recognition of inequities. Important messages and implications of subject position and responsibility reside in unpacking the framing and the relationship embedded in the literal message. Did these groups just happen to ‘find’ themselves on the outskirts of these institutions? Or was it through systemic barriers and oppressive practices of power that they were denied access to “the halls of power, circles of conversation, wealth, knowledge, good work and recognition.” How we tell our stories is the perhaps the most important difference. An acknowledgement that we have *our own* stories to tell

is equally relevant. It follows, then, that we must create safe, shared spaces for these stories to be told.

Those engaged in processes of decolonizing must often reconcile these narratives and negotiate such paradoxes in everyday life. Many do so while living in societies and environments that consider such oppressions a thing of the past, as Brigham (2013) writes:

[R]ecognizing and acknowledging the importance of diversity in relation to adult education has been a contentious and challenging process. This is particularly so in the face of an image of Canada as a multicultural society that embraces pluralism and no longer needs be concerned with discrimination... (2013, p. 119)

The ongoing framing of diversity matters as “contentious and challenging” or unnecessary because inclusion and equality are a *fait accompli* is revealing. Efforts for equitable societal change can remain shrouded in the rhetoric of polarizing binaries in societies that favour worldviews where absolute notions of other, adversarialism, or colonialism dominate. Such attitudes can undermine the very integrity of those efforts, while simultaneously denying a reality where these problems persist. These ideologies fundamentally maintain structures of power and privilege and support societal systems that disenfranchise and adversarialize. These kinds of denials—women have equality, minorities are now equal, there is no such thing as racism anymore—are evidence of how oppressive cycles merely transform and how this messaging can be imposed and impressed and then used to inform the foundations upon which our societal structures are built. Such erosions make it necessary for people to tell their own stories, to restore a sense of agency and primary positionality. Mohanty (2003) writes of her own, similar, negotiation:



It is this process, this reterritorialization through struggle, that allows me a paradoxical continuity of self, mapping and transforming my political location. It suggests a particular notion of political agency, since my location forces and enables specific modes of reading and knowing the dominant. The struggles I choose to engage in are then an intensification of these modes of knowing—an engagement on a different level of knowledge.... [W]hat I hope and struggle for, I garner as my knowledge, create it as the place from where I seek to know. (2003, p. 122–123)

*Jalaluddin  
Rumi tells a story*

*about an elephant that was put on exhibition. A large crowd of people gathered  
to see it, undeterred by the fact that the elephant was displayed  
in a darkened room. Because there was not  
enough light to see the elephant by, they felt it in the  
dark with their hands. One person felt its trunk and  
declared that the animal was like a water-pipe.  
Another felt its ear, and said it was like a large fan. A third,  
who felt its leg, said it was like a pillar. Yet another, who felt the  
elephant's back, claimed it was like a large  
throne. Depending on which  
part of the elephant  
they touched, each person  
gave a different description  
of the animal.*

*~ Jalaluddin Rumi, Mathnawi, III  
John Baldock (2004, p. 59).*

In the context of lifelong learning and adult education, this traditional Sufi story can be interpreted to convey the necessity of including many perspectives as valuable contributions to the collective body of knowledge. The nature of my inquiry also allows me to point to historical intercultural connections among scholars, while engaging in a similar process or engagement in my own work. Said (2003) provides an example of how learning can intersect and lead to inspired creativity across so-called borders, from his work in what he calls “the most basic and creative of the interpretive arts,” philology:

It is exemplified for me most admirably in Goethe's interest in Islam generally, and the 14th-century Persian Sufi poet Hafiz in particular, a consuming passion which led to the composition of the *West-östlicher Diwan*, and it inflected Goethe's later ideas about *Weltliteratur*, the study of all the literatures of the world as a symphonic whole which could be apprehended theoretically as having preserved the individuality of each work without losing sight of the whole. (Said, 2003, para. 15)

Poet Allama Iqbal is said to have written his *Payam-e-Mashriq* in response to Goethe's work, as part of an ongoing, (inter)connected, historic, intercultural, literary, and philosophical dialogue. The absence of knowledge of such histories of accomplishments and narratives of creativity originating in global communities is another gap I identify. Without these kinds of globally-informed, holistic approaches to knowledge, learners—adult or otherwise—are forming views and practices based on information that might otherwise be described as incomplete. My experiment with methodology enables me to be inclusive and to place these wisdoms side by side with western discourse for a deeper reflection and study.

It is important to note that the calls for the inclusion of cultural perspectives in academia (Brigham, 2013; Said, 1979; Smith, 2012; Dei 2005; Mohanty, 2003) also often include calls for change across societal institutions. Colonialist hegemonies can bear many pressures on everyday people whose ways of knowing and understanding are considered different. Some take on roles as change-makers and activists in response to experiences of exclusion and oppression, as attempts to counter, remedy, balance, or restore. In Chapter 4, I review literature that discusses educational reforms (Brigham, 2013; Said, 1979; Smith, 2012; Dei, 2005) as well as some examples from broadcast media. I cite Rita S. Deverell's (2009) sharing of lessons from her own experiences as well as her six strategies for ensuring the success of equitable measures in media institutions. I comment on Deverell's (2009) insightful exposition on institutional barriers to inclusion practices and the "seven smokescreens that mask non-action" tactics (p. 149) she identifies. Similarly, I look at Mary Elizabeth Luka's (2013) account of the evolution of CBC ArtSpots (1997–2008) as an activation of a cultural space that sought to affect attitudes and address issues of access. Artists, social innovators, and citizens became co-creators working within an (inter)connected, holistic television programming structure that simultaneously negotiated institutional policy confines, budgetary considerations, and practices of equality and equity.

### *Enter the Arts*

More recently there is an increasing acceptance and use of arts praxis for scholarly research in western academia, which also enables the inclusion of many forms of previously excluded ways of knowing. In a spirit of academic, journalistic, and artistic curiosity, I begin my research through experimentation, by designing a peh'chaan-based arts research process/container, in

which the key themes and assumptions are grounded in Sufi and South Asian worldviews. I envision my research framework as both composite and composition. My research approach is inspired and affirmed by the existence of integrative, arts-related, multi-contextually informed research practices. In *métissage* and *a/r/tography* I find a familiarity to the techniques I had developed to navigate inter-contextuality in my own life. During my research, I came across *métissage* discourse about curriculum studies, which illustrates just how different the worldviews can be from what is considered mainstream and how that affects knowing, understanding, teaching and sharing (see Appendix 1). I see my Inclusive Reflection approach to storytelling and community work as similar to the *métissage* practice of arts-based research. I draw from the concept of *métissage* as a “conceptual trope and as a practical tool or strategy,” as applied by Erika Hasebe-Ludt, Cynthia M. Chambers and Carl Leggo (2009, p. 8) in shaping the Inclusive Reflection aspect of *peh’chaan* practice. Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, and Leggo (2009) write:

As a form of curricular inquiry, *métissage* requires researchers to craft pieces of autobiographical writing in which they research and teach themselves. The texts are selected and braided in such a way as to highlight both points of affinity (Haraway, 1994) and dissonance. The braiding becomes an interpretation of the narrative as well as a form of representation and reporting of the research, individual and collective. (2009, p. 9)

I can relate to the metaphor of braiding as akin to the processes of bringing together and finding (inter)connections that I have applied in different life and career contexts. Similar to Sufi and South Asian practices, *métissage* inquiries are by nature infused with negotiations and reconciliations of cultures, ontologies of (inter)connectedness, and multiple epistemologies, identities, and places.



My practices of Cultural Expeditionism, which explores contexts such as academic, artist, and media professional or Sufi, South Asian, and Canadian, are resonant with a/r/tographic explorations of artist/researcher/teacher experiences and identities. Rita L. Irwin (n.d.) presents a/r/tography as a methodology that incorporates multi-vocality, multi-locality, and interdisciplinarity as a basis from which research is conducted:

To be engaged in the practice of a/r/tography means to inquire in the world through an ongoing process of art making in any artform and writing not separate or illustrative of each other but interconnected and woven through each other to create additional and/or enhanced meanings. A/r/tographical works are often rendered through the methodological concepts of contiguity, living inquiry, openings, metaphor/metonymy, reverberations and excess which are enacted and presented/performed when a relational aesthetic inquiry condition is envisioned as embodied understandings and exchanges between art and text, and between and among the broadly conceived identities of artist/researcher/teacher. A/r/tography is inherently about self as artist/researcher/teacher yet it is also social when groups or communities of a/r/tographers come together to engage in shared inquiries, act as critical

friends, articulate an evolution of research questions, and present their collective evocative/provocative works to others. (Irwin, n.d., para 1)

For me, a/r/tography is a parallel way of bringing together and finding (inter)connections in order to cultivate deeper understanding.

## *The Path to Come*

There are many well-travelled, well-documented hegemonic routes through the traditional terrains of western academe. For my academic safar of un/re/dis/covery, I travel along routes that are mapped, others that have been handed down over centuries, and some held only in generational memory. Every now and then, I carve out a trail of my own. Such could be a tale of any expedition. This telling is of my own. My rah passes through cultural and spiritual topographies, and I invite the reader to accompany me as a travel companion.

In this chapter, I introduce the lived, cultural and heritage inspirations for this self-reflective and integrative research and provide an overview of the landscape I intend to cover in my inquiry. In the coming chapters I further explain concepts and processes, present analysis and arts-inspired outcomes, including stories, poems, calligraphic representations, narratives, and photographs. In Chapter 2, I describe the method and steps of my culture-and-arts-inspired research practice. In Chapter 3, I expand on the meanings and applications of the eastern concept of peh'chaan and how it is used in this research. I establish key Sufi and South Asian themes and assumptions using traditional wisdom, and academic and contemporary literature. In Chapter 4, I review western academic literature to source parallel conversations about identity, inclusion, and arts-related practices. Chapter 5 is a dedicated presentation of stories and contains

the concluding narratives from each of the four characters. In Chapter 6, I share my reflections and analysis on this academic experiment process and share the implications of this research.

The journey in progress, now underway, begins with a single step. From where I now stand I can see that I am surrounded by thousands more.

Taken. Forgone. Retraced. Waiting to be explored.

## The invitations are many...

*to engage in ways of being  
to make space for voices  
and perspectives  
oft objectified  
and/or  
relegated to margins  
to become implicit in  
creating empowered contexts  
where people can choose  
their own  
and locate  
for themselves  
to consider many sides  
of our collective story*

*to imagine  
experience  
and explore*



*to join an expedition  
of respectful curiosity  
to notice veils  
to engage  
to relate  
and so much more*

*The invitations are many*

*in the heart of hearts  
storyteller*

*through the telling  
of these stories*

*you are invited to consider...  
you are invited to consider...  
you are invited to consider...*

*~ Asna, 2014*





## Chapter 2

پہچان کا  
طریقہ

*Peh'chaan ka  
Tariqa*

*Science  
and poetry are  
different ways of seeing.  
When you write a poem to  
capture something, you find  
yet another window on the  
world; experience gets  
richer. Besides,  
it's fun.*

*Piet Hut (2004, p. 20)*

## ***Peh'chaan as Inquiry***

Peh'chaan creates a research space that is primary. It is an inquiry that focuses on bringing together varying contexts and identifying (inter)connections, while understanding negotiations of similarities and differences. This inquiry brings together cultural concepts, languages, and worldviews in configurations of the researcher's choosing. As a practice of reflecting the underrepresented as primary, peh'chaan serves as a restorative practice and may, as a matter of circumstance, address issues of inequity, underrepresentation, and imbalances. In peh'chaan contemplation, self-reflection and creativity are as natural and necessary to education and learning as analysis and observation. Peh'chaan incorporates and honours multiple intelligences, including intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical. The researcher retains agency over their academic intention and the prerogative to choose whether or how to assign politicality and/or purpose to their work.

As Hut (2004) suggests, arts-related research enables a spirit of creativity and curiosity in practices of inquiry. In this section, I present the methods that inform my design and application

of this Sufi- and South Asian-centric research. I explain how I use processes of introspection to connect with heart wisdoms and contemplation to explore and examine relationships. The creative inspirations that emerge during introspection and contemplation result in stories. These artistic representations, including poetry, photographs, fictional narratives, and adaptations of figurative calligraphy, are placed throughout this text.

## *Processes of Inquiry*

### *Introspection*

I define introspection as the cultivation of an inner space of stillness that opens or clears pathways to heart wisdoms and insights and that facilitates connections with others. This focus of *peh'chaan* is on recognition, reconciliation, and resonance within the researcher's internal environment. This space allows the researcher to develop or enhance spiritual, emotional, physical, and intellectual awareness of the self. Introspection is enabled by setting aside distractions and engaging in regular practices such as meditation, walks in nature, or engaging creativity. For the purpose of this research, I attune my introspective attention to themes of identity, culture and belonging in relation to my life and work as an academic, journalist, and artist. I reflect on my approaches and experiences, as well as the content, materials, and events I created from those contexts. I similarly ruminate on the research materials and content gathered during this research and pay special attention to the moments of *peh'chaan* or resonance that lead to a sense of understanding or being in relation and that (in)form creative inspiration.

### *Contemplation*

During contemplation inner knowledge and heart wisdoms gained through introspection are applied to the awareness and observation of (inter)connections within and among internal and external environments. The researcher, now situated in the research landscape, identifies relationships with or among elements including life experiences, cultural identities, wisdom traditions, contexts, theories, literature, and artistic creations. Peh'chaan is applied as a recognition, reconciliation, and attention to resonance in these relationships. Again, attention is trained to notice connections, coming to understanding, observing patterns of relationships and creative inspiration. For the purpose of this research, contemplation refers to observations of similarities, differences, and (inter)connections among the Sufi, South Asian, and other materials specific to this research. This process inherently requires placing the many elements alongside one another.

### *Creation/Expression*

Creation is the activation of the (inter) connections that are inspired and emerge during introspection and contemplation, articulated in story forms. The stories are all examples of peh'chaan in practice. The stories result from contemplations on the issues and topics under discussion, in relation to my reflections on personal and professional life experiences. The stories (e)merge from the bringing together of traditional wisdoms, scholarly writings, and personal experiences and reflect the (inter)connections found. The representations embody the themes of identity, culture, and belonging and some or all of the Sufi and South Asian key themes and assumptions



established for this research. The experience of negotiating contexts, for example, takes a subtle and important place in the storylines.

They are stories of resilience, acceptance, creativity and the beauty that surrounds us as well as of some of the hardships that can also be a part of the daily experiences of. This approach is an intentional reflection of how celebrated cultural narratives can be met with tensions and the mediations can take place naturally and almost incidentally in everyday life. The simplicity in story narratives and the variety of form, provide a number of ways for the readers/audiences to engage with the content from their own perspectives and experiences.

Through the practice of peh'chaan I was inspired to create many kinds of stories, each representing many forms of (inter)connection. In this work, these artistic representations mainly include adaptive representations of traditional figurative calligraphy, poetry, photographs, and fictionalized narratives.<sup>14</sup> These creations are curated into the overall document in relation to the scholarly writing. The curation also mimics the way in which lived experiences of identity, culture, and belonging often require simultaneous reconciliations of multiple contexts. Each bears an independent, primary relevance, and also act in relation to other elements, and functions together as part of the whole.

### ***Traditional Figurative Calligraphy***

My use and adaptation of traditional eastern figurative calligraphy is one example of my way of bringing together, in this case combining traditional wisdoms, an eastern art form, and western academic practice. Eastern calligraphy attempts to convey the beauty of the words it

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<sup>14</sup> As I may draw from stories from my own experiences, for the purpose of this research the narrative stories are fictionalized, to attend to the concern of collateral identification.

contains, whether the viewer is able to read them or not. The goal of the creator is to move and connect with the viewer by engaging other senses, beyond a literal exchange of words. I create a presence for my interpretations of these practices in the body of this work. This allows me to reflect the (inter)connections among the elements I bring together, between shapes and figures I design and with literal words of the selected. It is also a way to demonstrate the companion nature of and similarities between the ancestral teachings and wisdoms of my heritage cultures and the contemporary practice of learning I am engaged in. This allows me to retain a connection to cultural historical teachings and heritage, in a western learning atmosphere, while also creating and sharing new learning that incorporates both.

### ***Photography***

The photographs are a visual representation of my contemplations and reflections, and of the bringing together and finding (inter)connections in the larger environment. They are placed companion and equal to the words throughout the text, without explanations, and share space in a metaphor of restoration and coexistence. They may represent some of the challenges of integration and/or the beauty of being alongside.

### ***Poetry***

The poems represent my personal voice of contemplation, and new poems appear at the beginning and end of this text. They arise from contemplations and reflections on the content, process, and purpose present of my work. I also include the poem “On Leaving a Spiritual Footprint,” in Chapter 5, (Adhami, 2006). This poem, at its root, is simply about being *in relation*. It is a metaphor for tranquility, harmony, and disruption, about being in relationship with the natural environment and all the beings within, and the sense of belonging and

(inter)connection that we can derive from it. Through introspection and reflection, there is hope—to connect with others and make peaceful change. It is a work I reflected on throughout this research process.

### ***Fictionalized Narratives***

The narrative passages are fictionalized, composite accounts of stories and reflections that result from contemplations on the traditional and academic literature and anecdotal lived experiences. The four main characters are all South Asian descent and Canadian. The stories of four women convey different life experiences and are a way to attend to the representation of diversity in the lived experiences and perspectives of people who share a similar background. The stories appear in Chapters 3, 4, and 5, and each chapter reflects a period of time in the character's lives. Chapter 3 contains stories from childhood, Chapter 4 contains stories from teenage years and early adulthood and Chapter 5 contains stories of these women as adults.

The fictionalized narratives represent how the presence and/or absence of meaningful knowledge of global communities and cultures can manifest in interactions. There are no grandiose, obvious conflicts, no large celebrations. This absence is intentional, so as to make the things the characters are going through accessible and to not sensationalize the experiences; things that bring them joy, that inform their sense of place and belonging and the microaggressions they may face, all are the realities of their everyday lives. In the simple telling of the stories of their everyday encounters, the ongoing the subtle negotiations of identity, culture, and belonging reveal themselves and become visible and accessible.

The stories in Chapter 3 take place during the early to mid-1990s. During this era, the landscape of overt racisms from the '70s and '80s were slowly being sown over with sensibilities



of political correctness. This was the era after the Marshall Inquiry, and diversity initiatives were popular and common in its wake; political correctness was settling in, atop a landscape that had traditionally been something else. As Thomas King writes, “People used to think these things, you know, and they used to say them out loud. Now they don’t. Now they just think them” (King, 2003, p. 147).

During this era, cultural and ethnic minorities remained unrepresented in media across the country, though efforts were underway in varying stages. Local communities were still very local, distinct and rich with mom-and-pop shops, restaurants, and service providers. The World Wide Web was still in infancy, and before long, headlines would warn of an impending calamity that would become known as Y2K.

In chapter 4 the stories take place during the 2000s. Diversity initiatives are making some headway, which is also resulting in backlash, and the resulting racial integrations have a dual effect of building communities while pronouncing tensions. The headlines warn of projected demands on healthcare and other social systems by aging populations and decry the out-migrations of the working young. The United Nations’ Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance has been to Canada to assess the state of racism, intolerance and xenophobia, including in contexts of Aboriginal peoples, Islamophobia, and anti-Semitism, among others.





Immigration initiatives are a popular solution of the day, to attract and welcome people to fill the projected employment gaps. Globalization as an economic and cultural concept is well underway, and technology is (inter)connecting the far reaches of the world in instantaneous ways that never been seen before. They call it The Wild West. The country is at the crest of an economic downturn.

I conclude these narratives in Chapter 5, which take place around the present day, in recent years. The economic downturn is in full effect. The UN will send another rapporteur, this time to assess the circumstances of Canada's Aboriginal, Inuit, and Métis communities. The Idle No More movement sows seeds of dialogue and renews calls for justice for the First Peoples of the country, and sparks a national movement. Headlines are filled with job market loss statistics, global (in)security issues, the successes and failures of immigration initiatives and programs, the problems of temporary foreign workers, and the economic impact of the retiring baby-boomer populations. Big box stores and restaurants are now the norm, many mom-and-pop places have disappeared. Individuals identify as much with online communities as with face-to-face ones, and social media is established as the dominant venue for instant, international information exchange, discourse, and activism.

I use *peh'chaan* to write the inner dialogues and environments of the characters, to describe the daily experiences of living with many contexts and colonial legacies in a multicultural society (Smith, 2012; Said, 2003; Archibald, 2008; Brigham, 2013; Dei, 2005). The women rely on cultural knowledge, lived experiences, and their inner wisdoms, as they face the collectivity and disparity associated with notions of identity, culture and belonging, that they negotiate not

only among the contexts, but within them as well. The fictionalized stories are intended to reflect the everyday or normalized experiences of negotiation and reconciliation in everyday life.

***A note about spontaneity:***

In practices of peh'chaan, it is imperative to begin any process with a clear intention or *neeyat*.<sup>15</sup> An intention keeps the traveller focused on their path and their purpose; as in any journey, there may be aspects that are practiced and anticipated and others that may be unexpected. The intention serves as a connection to peh'chaan when the surroundings are ambiguous and as an anchor to the integrity and purpose of the path. An intention is meant to foster fluidity and adaptation and enable the traveller/researcher to be open-minded and receptive to events, observations, and experiences. Keeping an open mind is important to processes of peh'chaan, as the deeper wisdoms and meanings that can emerge from knowledge are also, similarly, unexpected.

***Claiming common knowledge***

Throughout the course of this work, I also claim the common knowledge from both my eastern and western cultures. I draw from each to observe distinctions and similarities and the many qualities that are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Throughout my research, I reference people and events that are a part of my eastern cultures of heritage in the same way as I would those from my western cultures and heritages. People such as Hallaj, Allama Iqbal, and Al-Khwarizmi are known throughout large parts of the world and have been for decades, and yet they remain absent or largely unknown in western academic practice. To claim common

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<sup>15</sup>

The intention within.

knowledge is an exercise of empowerment and agency when writing about or from cultural and historical perspectives.

It brings to light a paradox of intercultural positionality and colonial legacy that one person's position of truth can be another's position of doubt, based on hegemonic notions of validity and authority.

### *A note about language*

This research space is one where thinking, writing, and creating are happening in multiple worldview and language contexts, simultaneously. This exemplifies another aspect in which this space is a dialogic negotiation. I use the experience of being bilingual in English and Urdu to take authorial and creative license to reflect and experiment with those experiences in this text. In my integrated research, I establish Urdu words and phrases in the same way in which I would establish the use of a new concept or phrase in English. I then proceed to use them as part of the normalized lexicon of this research, as in Chapter 1.

I use English in this research work, though at times I favour an Urdu sentiment. I refer to these occurrences as Urdu-isms<sup>16</sup> when they happen in English and as *Angrez-o-fy-ing*<sup>17</sup> when they occur in Urdu. Urdu written phonetically in English is also known as Roman Urdu, as used, for example, in the chapter titles. A similar practice exists of writing English words in Urdu. There are no grammatical conventions that direct these processes.

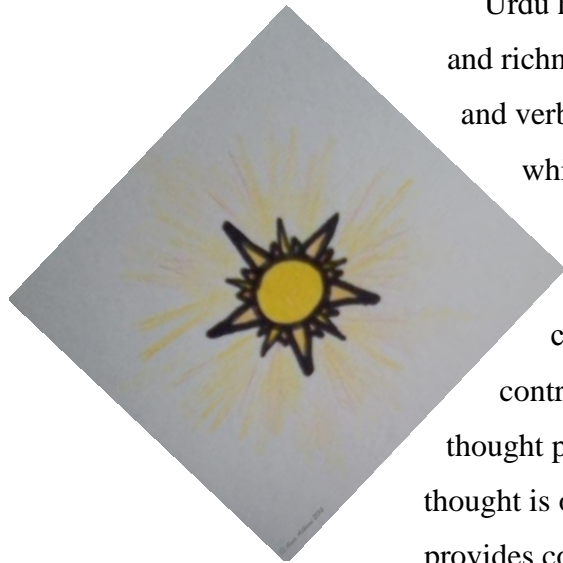
An example that comes to mind shows up often during Indian and Pakistani newscasts. It is quite common for both hosts and interviewees to use multiple languages interchangeably and

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<sup>16</sup> English sentences that contain Urdu phrases or English words that are assembled together in a sentence to convey an Urdu sentiment. In my experience, interchanging words, phrases, scripts, languages, even cadence and tone to suit conversational needs can be a common experience among multilingual speakers and writers.

<sup>17</sup> English-o-fy-ing, mixing Urdu and English words together to convey a sentiment or meaning.

switch back and forth during an interview. They may replace words in a sentence, combine phases and sentences, or alternate with sentences of each with the goal of communicating the best representation of a sentiment or feeling. I have seen it in the contexts of my Canadian news production experiences, though less frequently. Other language Canadian newscasts often become multilingual, if hosts or reporters read scripts in a language of presentation and present interviews or clips in English (often the case when covering political common stories, for example). Translations, voiceovers, or subtitle can be cost-prohibitive or as is often the case cited by organizations, difficult to accomplish in the allotted time. Canadian hosts, reporters, and interviewees may also adopt an inter-lingual approach during live reports and interviews.



Urdu has long been a celebrated language of eastern poetry and prose for its lyrical density and richness. It is a complex language in which both formal and informal address are used, and verbs and nouns are assigned masculine and feminine genders. Urdu also has specific, whimsical tendencies, such as rhyming a word in a sentence with one that does not exist (e.g., would you like some biscuit shiscuit?) and it is common to repeat words or phrases during conversation, usually twice. They are part of the lyrical, equivocal character and culture of the language. Urdu's inherent implicitness naturally contradicts the explicit tendencies in English. In English there is a convention that one thought per sentence conveys clarity. In Urdu there is a convention that a complete, clear thought is one expressed *in relation*, that is, accompanied by an example or reference that provides context. Otherwise the thought can be vague or incomplete. My style of writing integrates and demonstrates both conventions.

For me Urdu also contains an emphasis on subject-subject orientation and positions dialogue *in relation to*. I feel this reflects the importance and value of relationships in the culture, demonstrated, for example, by the detail and specificity in the use of family titles:

Table 1  
*Urdu Titles of Family Relationships*

Female		Male	
Urdu	English	Urdu	English
Naani	Maternal Grandmother	Naana	Maternal Grandfather
Daadi	Paternal Grandmother	Daada	Paternal Grandfather
Phuppo	Aunt, Father's Sister	Phuppa	Uncle, Father's Sister's Husband
Khala	Aunt, Mother's Sister	Khaloo	Uncle, Mother's sister's Husband
Mumaani	Aunt, Mother's Brother's Wife	Maamoon	Uncle, Mother's Brother
Chachi	Aunt, Father's Brother's Wife	Chacha	Uncle Father's Brother

The titles used for cousins, nieces, and nephews are also just as precise. It is also common for titles to be conferred to non-blood relatives—including perfect strangers—as a sign of respect or connectedness during interactions, such as when being introduced to someone new or while asking someone for a favour. An unrelated person may be generically be referred to as auntie or uncle or be given a relational title such as *bhai* (brother), *behan* (sister), *daadi*, or *chacha* in such circumstances and depending upon the ages of people involved.

Concepts of time are also expressed differently in English and perhaps more fluidly in Urdu. The orientation of time in language can be illustrated in the following example:

Table 2

*Urdu and English Time References*

<u>Urdu</u>	<u>English</u>
Kal	Yesterday
Aaj	Today
Kal	Tomorrow
Parsoun	Two days from now and two days ago
Tarsoun	Three days from now and three days ago

As the words for yesterday and tomorrow are the same in Urdu, the conversational tense determines the appropriate interpretation of the person in relation to their place in time. I also interpret the way in which references to the past mirror the references to the future as a reflection of a cultural tendency towards cyclical analysis, where the conversants are constantly engaged.

These are all common conventions, in my experience, in the use of the language in mass media, literature, and conversation. My translations and interpretations are based on my understanding and use of the languages, and at times I have consulted with community members, as well as an English to English and Urdu dictionary.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I ground this inquiry in cultural knowledge and scholarly theory and establish six key themes and assumptions. I also begin sharing the fictional narratives of Aman, Maliha, Zainab, and Sana.



## Chapter 3

پہچان

*Peh'chaan*

# *The Peh'chaan of Peh'chaan*

*In*  
*knowing differences*                      *and particularities,*  
*we can better see*                      *the connections*  
*and commonalities*                      *because no border*  
*or boundary*  
*is ever complete*  
*or rigidly*  
*determining.*

*~Mohanty (2003, p. 226)*

I interpret Mohanty's above comment as an invitation to engage in understanding and solidarity with one another. My research takes a similar position in the eastern notion of peh'chaan. In this chapter I elaborate on the concept, provide examples to illustrate contexts for its use, and establish key themes and assumptions from Sufi and South Asian wisdom and traditions. Peh'chaan is a process that inspires the creation of stories, which are also located throughout this and the upcoming chapters.

In Chapter 1, I described peh'chaan as "an embodied way of being that presupposes (inter)connection, uniqueness, and being in relation." (p. 11). Peh'chaan is a complex concept that suggests a way of being that has many possible meanings depending on context. For me it represents an awareness of *being in relation* to others and environments, through a simultaneous engagement of intellectual, physical, emotional, and/or spiritual ways of knowing. It is a way of bringing together and noticing (inter)connections among and between subjects and contexts. I define peh'chaan as a relational concept, an experience of positionality that involves



contemplative, holistic, cyclically analytical, and reflective identifications of resonance, recognition, and reconciliation. For the purpose of this research I use peh'chaan to describe ways of learning, knowing, sensing, and understanding contexts of identity, culture, and belonging.

Peh'chaan can mean many things. It refers to deepening self-awareness and strengthening the relationship within through self-reflection and reconciliation, which also enhances understanding about the external world. Peh'chaan refers to inner recognitions or stirrings—such as moments of inspiration or creativity—when aspects of knowledge transform into wisdom. Peh'chaan is recognition of familiarity, patterns, or connections and the reconciliation with them. Peh'chaan refers to a unique attribute or quality, and is a reference to describe qualities in common. For the purpose of my research, I use peh'chaan as an integrated concept, inclusive of many ways of being in relation.

To ground my work in peh'chaan is to anchor my research in an inherently plural worldview that favours coexistence and recognizes that individual contexts are multi-layered and complex. The researcher takes a primary position, that is dialogic in relation and companion to every research other. It is a way to define and inhabit spaces of primary positionality, so as to disengage from the incomplete, problematic, and misrepresentative definitions—and terms—of colonial classifications. It is an intentional abdication of perspectives that perpetuate ideologies of conflict, dominance, adversarialism, and conquest as the norm. It is a conscious effort to create an integrated and embodied research practice.

Evolving.

Emerging.

Unfolding.

A living

practice

of decolonization.



### *Zainab: Awareness. Abundance. Options.*

Growing up her eastern culture favoured- but not exclusively- voluptuous, curvy and *hathey kathey*<sup>18</sup> women with “meat on their bones.” Movies were filled with “typically” curvy matriarchs, who determined and signed off on all the financial, educational, social, and political decisions of the home, with *chabion key guchchey*<sup>19</sup> tied to their saris, and at least one wad of cash tucked into the bosoms. A powerful woman was a CEO in her own life. She may be educated or uneducated, a professional or stay-at-home. Whether she lived in a hut, in a village, in a city, or in a villa, she had absolute authority in some contexts of her life. She was an entrepreneur, who ran cottage

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<sup>18</sup> Robust; healthy; sturdy.

<sup>19</sup> Collection of keys on a key ring.

industries based on her talents as an artisan, because she was raised in an atmosphere where it was important for everyone to know their strengths and to develop them.

Zainab grew up with stories of women who could do anything, women who were hopeless romantics, and women who stayed at home. She came to define power as presence, the kind that enabled perseverance and determination. She learned about the powerful women around her, who had been rulers and warriors in empires and governments, poets, politicians, mothers, and doctors. Not just in the movies, but in everyday life too, Jinnah and Gandhi to name a few.

Mothers held the highest spot of reverence in the matriarchies and motherhood was considered the most powerful status in humanity. Zainab often chuckled with satisfaction when she heard the common turn of phrase “the mother of all —” that placed mothers and women as the highest earthly powers. She herself had not yet decided which route she would take. She still had plenty of time for that.

There is a traditional South Asian saying, “*Dil ko dil se rah hoti hai.*”<sup>20</sup> It suggests that each heart shares a ‘pre-existing’ link or path to every other heart in (co)existence. It also implies an integrity to the peh’chaan of these links, to their recognitions, of when these links are stirred by feelings, inklings, or insights. South Asian and Sufi literature often use the metaphor of ‘*lifting the veils*’ to refer to times when peh’chaan, a (pre-existing) sense of (inter)connection, is revealed or un/re/dis/covers. Similarly, the Sufi saying “*There are as many paths as there are people*” implies a holistic approach where all exist as primary in their own contexts, and being in their own primary locations is also what they share in common.

## ***(Re)tracing Ancestral Footsteps***

*Appearances are husks – the seed is hidden.*

~ Rumi

Freke (2000, p. 31)

In this section, I draw from Sufi and South Asian philosophy, theory and literature to establish the landscape from which this research journey originates. I draw from traditional teachings, relevant literature, and self-reflection based upon my work in media creation, education, and art to develop a dialogic framework for bringing together elements and finding (inter)connections.

### ***Sufism and South Asianism: Locating Worldviews as Research Foundations***

Much like with any traditional faith or belief system, it is not possible to describe or define South Asian or Sufism worldviews in singular or conclusive terms. In each there are numerous

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<sup>20</sup> I translate this saying to mean “from [a] heart to [another] heart, a path exists.”

paradigms, contexts, customs, interpretations, practices, voices, peoples, and paths and no one, superior view. I derive and describe the aspects of pluralism that are common in my cultural experience of both and useful in my lived experiences of negotiating diverse contexts in my North American Canadian life experiences. I do not take a religious position of Sufism. Nor do I take a nationalistic position of South Asianism.

Ali Asani (2011) suggests researchers working in faith context account for many dynamic societal and environmental factors that influence how individuals practice (Asani, 2011). As Asani explains:

[R]eligion and religious expressions are essentially cultural phenomena that are embedded in and intricately interwoven with political, social and economic contexts. And therefore, the study of religious traditions, devotion literatures have to be, by definition, interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary. And also recognizing that religious traditions, devotional traditions are never static, they're dynamic, as the context in which they are in—the political, economic, and social contexts, the traditions themselves—change and are informed by larger, I would say, cultural changes. And this is, of course, very apparent when one looks at the emergence of, what I would say, Muslim devotional literatures in South Asia through the centuries. (excerpt from video, 2011)

My research path is informed by traditional teachings and academic literature, and I draw from my lived, learned, and anecdotal experiences for reference and context. The key themes and assumptions I define are informed by both Sufism and South Asian cultural values. Dei (2005) makes a similar assertion. “There must be a recognition of the history and context that underpin the nature of research” (Dei, 2005, p. 12). Asani (2011) and Dei (2005) speak to

notions of simultaneity that I also negotiate in my research, such as the influence of culture and spirituality on both self and social contexts. For me their instructions also speak to the subtle and distinct depth of awareness that understanding histories and communities—particularly those that have been historically absent or misrepresented in colonial narratives—can bring. The peaceful, celebratory integration and overlap of vastly diverse and distinct peoples in South Asia throughout the centuries is celebrated and well documented regionally (Asani 2011; Michel Boivin, 2012, 2013; Shemeem Burney Abbas, 2007; Jawaharlal Nehru, 1998). Among these histories are accounts of the shared spaces of South Asian Sufi celebrations people of diverse religions, classes, tribal, and cultural affiliations, in India and in Pakistan, historically and in the present, engaged in traditional pluralism. These practices of pluralism are also reflected across many faiths and cultures in the region.

### *Sana: History is a Matter of Perspective*

*Sana's family migrated as she was about to start high school. She had studied under both South Asian and Canadian education systems.*

*In her eastern education, students were typically taught about both western and eastern contributions to literature, science, and the humanities. They were taught as on par with one another, as equal contributors to a global knowledge system. She learned about Einstein, Curie, and Newton, while at the same time learning about Al-Khwarizmi's, Ibn Battuta's, and Omar Khayyam's contribution to the*

sciences, literature, and the humanities. She studied the writings of Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Allama Iqbal and those of Shakespeare and Wordsworth, while learning about world religions such as Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, Sikhism, Jainism and Zoroastrianism, and the ancient civilizations of Rome, Greece, Egypt and the Indus Valley. They learned to read and write in English and in Urdu in elementary school and later to read the indigenous language Sindhi. They learned of the cultures, stories and traditions of each—Pakistani, English, and the indigenous—as part of the shared narrative of history.



Of course she also learned about the thousands of years of shared histories with India. About the precursor to modern day globalization that came to the subcon<sup>21</sup> for tea, in the form of Britain's merchantile

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<sup>21</sup> Short for subcontinent (slang). India, prior to Partition, is sometimes referred to as the Indian sub-continent, the Indo-Pak subcontinent, or simply the subcontinent.

East India Company. They didn't leave until after colonization had been established, until finally being pushed out. Not until they had carved the nation into pieces and displaced an estimated 14 million people, some say more. Not until a precedent was set for modern nation-birthing. She read about the fights over Bangladesh and Jammu Kashmir. She read about the tragedies and travesties of Partition and new nations full of hope that longed for peace.

As a young teenager, she watched Indian movies and Pakistani dramas with her friends. She noticed a tendency in the storylines of each. When they dealt with war or conflict, most of the time each favoured a particular narrative about who won a certain war, battle, or skirmish. Some of the time, but not all of the time. Sometimes, they told stories from the other side's point of view and fantasized about reconciliations, about long lost relatives and repatriations.

The relationship reminded her of bickering cousins or competitive uncles. Beyond the split on narratives, they had shared too many other things, for too long, in common: The traumas of Partition and the stories of *bichhrey huwai*<sup>22</sup> families, traditions, cultures, cuisines, interests, values, histories and ancestries—and they remembered it.

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<sup>22</sup> Separated, long lost.



They came to each other's aid during natural disasters, laid claim to each other's arts and culture celebrities, and secretly enjoyed one another's music and entertainment. They had been neighbours, relatives, friends and community members who had lived together for a much longer time in peace. That's what she saw sometimes, in the movies and TV shows of the time, too.

They were just a generation removed from Partition, and the national interests seemed to be focused on healing, building a future, and the promise that the sacrifices had indeed been worth it. Among equal nations different versions of the same events were less damaging between them than the versions of history the colonizers would go on to tell about them in the rest of the world...

Throughout history, many Sufis were respected as contemplative philosophers of politics and religion, sought out as mediators, intercommunity bridge-builders, for jurisprudence, as advocates of harmony, social justices and equities. Pnina Werbner (2010, p. 239) writes:

[T]here is evidence that Sufi pilgrimage shrines in South Asia often transcend the boundaries between Hindus and Muslims, while simultaneously recognising difference and hierarchy. (Rehman, 2007; Saheb 1998; Werbner, 2003; Werbner and Basu, 1998). This marking of both equality and difference points to the fact that rather than total 'religious synthesis', the amity at these shrines is better described as a moment of heteroglossia,

(Bakhtin, 1981; 368): like urban processions and carnivals, worship at these shrines is open to multiple interpretations by different cohorts of participants who nevertheless share a joint project of shared communication and devotional performance. Religious identity is anchored in these moments of *communitas* and dialogism without negating diversity.

Invoking this conviviality, the ‘rupture’ view of South Asians religion(s) contends that before British colonialism, Muslim and Hindu elites had shared interests, while the masses participated in a shared syncretistic culture (Saiyed, 1989: 242).

Werbner’s (2010) description of synthesis demonstrates the approach to pluralism that I derive from my Sufi and South Asian heritages, based on values embedded in culture, rituals, and traditions. Werbner’s use of language, however, such as evidence and a moment of to describe these shared contexts suggests a rarity and skepticism, rather than an awareness of the pluralism that was a fundamental, shared value of the participating peoples. These values are historically present in the oral stories and written literature passed down through millennia of generations. Similar, shared, open celebrations occur among the many peoples and across faiths in South Asia including Hindu, Jain, Sikh, and Zoroastrian. The spirit of respectful inclusion of multiple cultural communities exists in structures of governance, in historical accounts in textbooks, in the world of arts, and among artists and industries involved. This spirit occurs globally and has not been the exclusive domain of western societies. It is a problematic legacy of colonial and western accounts of global histories, that they exacerbate conflict, while omitting coexistence and negating plural traditions. Globally speaking, we have as much to learn from our times of peace as we do from our times of conflict, perhaps more.

Boivin (2012, p. 292) documents the historical and contemporary interreligious followings of some Sindhi Sufi saints by both Hindus and Muslims, in India and in Pakistan. Boivin (2012) cites local lore that tells of how, prior to his passing, Sufi saint Lal Shabaaz Qalandar appointed Hindu and Muslim families to perform key annual rituals on his urs (Boivin, 2012, p. 293), the anniversary of his passing. Boivin (2012, p. 297) documents the migration of certain Sufi sects from Pakistan to India and how Sufi Sindhi poetry, written by both Hindu Sufis and Muslim Sufis, is also common across the national borders (Boivin, 2012, p. 292). Neil Douglas-Klotz (2005), notes a how Sufi practices are influenced by the many indigenous wisdom traditions, from the lands they originated in as well as those they travelled through. He says, “Historically, diversity has been Sufism’s strength. It is ultimately a nomadic tradition, one that has constantly deconstructed and transplanted itself, rather than settle and build gigantic shrines, institutions, monolithic rituals or organizations. There is no Sufi Vatican or Potala” (2005, p. xviii).

The Sufi philosopher and saint Mansur Al-Hallaj (d. 922) is famous for his search for divine unity, which led him to study multiple knowledge and wisdom traditions. Baldock (2004) quotes Hallaj writing about his reflections on separateness and unity:

I have meditated on the different religions, endeavouring to understand them, and I have found that they stem from a single principle with numerous ramifications. Do not therefore ask a man to adopt a particular religion (rather than another), for this would separate him from the fundamental principle; it is this principle itself which must come to seek him; in it are all the heights and all the meanings elucidated; then he will understand them. (Divan: Muqatta’at, L). (Baldock, 2004, p.117)

Hallaj's account illustrates a philosophical position about pluralism, as well as an underlying Sufi occupation with text and subtext, which together inform the process of un/re/dis/covering (inter)connections. This very tendency caused dismay for many ruling classes and religious establishments, as some perceived Sufi messages of solidarity and social justice embedded in poetry and music, as problematic. James Fadiman and Robert Frager (1997) write, "In some countries, Sufism is well known and widely accepted. In others, Sufism is considered heretical or even subversive because of its frequent preference for the spirit of the law over the letter" (p. 3). Asani (2011) suggests that Sufism "has a very amorphous nature." In addition to its religious and cultural implications, the text and subtext aspects of poetry, songs, and teachings were also used to promote social justice and instigate political change:

[P]eople think about [Sufism] as mysticism and listening to music and so on, but it is also a political ideology.... it's not just always about spirituality and mysticism.... If you look at the very early figures involved in the origin, people like Al-Hallaj, I would say even Rabia Basri and so on, in their own ways they were, what we would call today as, political revolutionaries for their time. (excerpt from video, 2011)

These philosophers and others are considered revolutionaries by many for their advocacy of pedagogies of coexistence and pluralism, especially during repressive eras. Many Sufi poets and philosophers are heralded as saints to this day. Burney Abbas (2007, p. 632) writes, "...[W]henver rulers exercised extreme political-ideological repression in Pakistan and India, Sufi poetry and other mystical poetries emerged, giving a voice to oppression." Burney Abbas (2007) says the nomadic, minstrel culture of the early Sufi poets and their messages of human unity, equality, and love, shared much in common with subcontinent's Bhakti movements,

occurring between the twelfth and seventeenth centuries (Burney Abbas, 2007, p. 628). She writes these social movements favoured egalitarian practices and equality among castes, classes, and genders. She notes their gatherings became spaces of political resistance, where Hindu and sometimes Sufi musicians and poets also shared poetry in indigenous languages –Hindi, Braj, Gujrati, Sindhi, Saraiki, and Punjabi—infusing their art with political and spiritual meaning. Philosophers, artists, and intellectuals of the time, such as Allama Iqbal, would once also infuse their poetry, art, and literary discourse with political ideologies of emancipation, such as during British occupation. Burney Abbas says such movements paved the way for poets like Shah Abdul Latif (d. 1752) and Bulle Shah (d. 1758). Their art contains themes of the trials and hopes of everyday people and challenged the hegemonic practices of the ruling classes and theocracies of the time. She writes that the nomadic nature of Sufi culture gives it a particular affinity for deeply understanding marginality. Burney Abbas (2007) writes that in an era when “political and religious bigotry” (Burney Abbas, 2007, p. 626) were on the rise, these poets wrote in indigenous languages, including Punjabi, Siraiki, and Sindhi so that their work could be accessible to the masses. Shah wrote many poems about the suffering of women, and his poems also served as metaphors for the suffering of the land. Burney Abbas (2007) writes that gender theory discourse has been taking place for centuries in Sufi writing and art. She says Shah’s poetry is often sung at shrines by men in the female voice, and there are a number of contemporary female artists who perform traditional *qawwali* in the male voice (Burney Abbas, 2007, p. 627–628).

Sufism’s focus on integration and pluralism is also found in references to lifting the veils (of notions of compartmentalization and separateness) and reawakening from forgetfulness (the

intoxications of individualism and materialism). Many Sufi teachings suggest the process of awakening begins with the self, by paying close attention to inner heart wisdoms, and by mastering spiritual, and other intuitive senses and perceptions. Fadiman and Frager (1997) write:

The self is actually a living process rather than a static structure in the psyche. The self is not a thing. The Arabic term is related to words for “breath,” “soul,” “essence,” “self,” and “nature.” It refers to a process that comes about from the interaction of body and soul.

When the soul becomes embodied, it forgets its original nature and becomes enmeshed in material creation. (Fadiman and Frager, 1997, p. 19–20)

Gaining a depth of knowledge is as important as having a breadth of it. Introspection and contemplation are the exercises that strengthen the connection to heart wisdoms, and are as valuable and vital to research and critical reflection, as analysis and observation. Heart wisdoms support an ontological framework, as well as notions of pluralism and (inter)connection, in which each individual is always in relation to one’s self, and another. That ‘other’ could be a belief system, a community, an environment, another living being and/or another way of being. These philosophies, and acts of *peh’chaan*, are the understanding and enacting of philosophies, as Shiva (2004) suggests, of *and*. Cultivating this type of an inner space of awareness is considered fundamental and conducive to gathering knowledge and acquiring heart knowledge and wisdom. There is a traditional Sufi saying, “The Sufis understand with the heart what cannot be understood with the head,” (Freke, 2002, p. 80) a notion Freke elaborates on:

The Sufis encourage us to nurture our powers of intuition, because it is through intuition rather than rational thought that we come to know.... Thinking is a powerful tool, but we can only think in terms of opposites, which traps us in duality and blinds us.... Being

intuitive doesn't mean stopping thinking. It means valuing what we feel as well as what we think. It means harmonizing all of our various faculties and using them appropriately.

(Freke, 2002, pp. 80–81)

Heart wisdoms support an ontological framework in which one is always in relation to another. They arise from the integration of inner, intellectual, and intuitive knowledge and wisdoms where each work together as companion ways of observing and knowing that facilitate a depth of understanding. Gaining a depth of knowledge is as important as having a breadth of it. Cultivating this type of an inner space of awareness is considered fundamental and conducive to acquiring heart wisdoms. Introspection and contemplation are the exercises that strengthen the connection and are as vital and valuable as analysis and observation to research and critical reflection. In Sufi lore, love is the mechanism for harmonizing the “various faculties” and a core vehicle for transformation. As Fadiman and Frager (1997) explain:

Love. For the great Sufi teacher and poet Rumi, love is the only force that can transcend bounds of reason, the distinctions of knowledge, and the isolation of normal consciousness. The love he experienced was not only sensual pleasure; it might be more fully described as love for all things, for creation itself. Love is a continually expanding capacity that culminates in certainty, in the recognition that there is nothing in this world or in the next that is not both loved and loving. (1997, p. 14)

In this way, *peh'chaan* is a conciliatory practice of being that seeks and supports the bringing together of ways of knowing to enable the un/re/dis/covery of (inter)connections.

## *Maliha: The Dastarkhwaan*

She was excited to be invited to lunch at Kanval's. Kanval lived in a nice house in a nice part of town. Maliha imagined it was going to be a fancy event. The pair had met in an after school arts program the day Maliha forgot her paint brushes at home, and Kanval came to her rescue. Maliha arrived at the house along with two others from the class. The house had a vast, perfectly manicured front lawn, and Maliha could almost see a figure moving around in the orange glow emanating from beyond the pale sheers in the window. Kanval opened the door with huge welcomes and hugs. A fantastic mixture of promising smells and rhythmic folk music surrounded the girls, as they settled in.

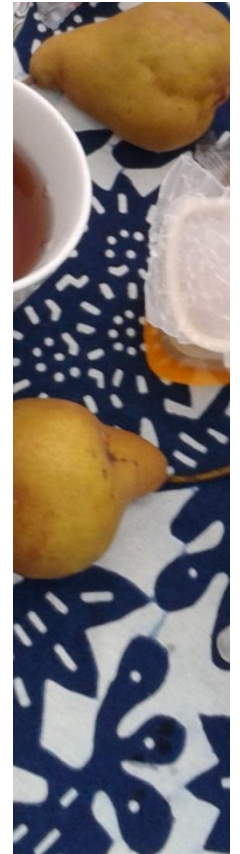
After a tour of the fancy house, adorned with original artworks, artisan furniture, and many expensive-looking things, Kanval led them to the dining area, off the kitchen. "Today," she said, "we're having a traditional feast." Bright sunlight flooded into the space from huge patio doors, South Asian artwork hung on the walls and the only place to sit was on the Persian rug on the floor. The rug took up most





of the floor space, and a *dastarkhwaan*<sup>23</sup> was laid out over it. Strategically placed cushions signaled the seating arrangement around the edges of the *dastarkhwaan*. At each spot was a ceramic plate decorated with tradition patterns and a handcrafted glass.

Sensing some uncertainty in her guests, Kanval explained. Eating on the floor, together in a circle, is the traditional way of the ancestors. The *dastarkhwaan* was an esteemed kind of sacred space. It symbolized the union of the earth and her people and the bounty of sustenance they created together. It was the place where laughter and sorrows were shared, decisions were made among families, communities and governing peoples of the day. It was an important part of her culture. “In all that our family has achieved and accomplished, my parents also want us to honour and remember our heritage. So whenever we can, we eat together, here.” As she finished speaking, the food began to arrive, courtesy of Kanval’s mom and aunt, plate upon plate of traditional meat and vegetable dishes, fresh hot rotis, colourful biryani and plenty of fixins. Maliha felt a kind of comfort and familiarity with the spread, even though she had never experienced it herself before. She was reminded of the stories her aunts would tell



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<sup>23</sup> A traditional cloth upon which meals are served.



*from their childhoods. Stories of mischief and silliness that often began around the kids' dastarkhwaan in their grandmother's house, whenever the family came together. There was a gentle pride and reverence to Kanval's telling, one that Maliha had never noticed or understood for herself before. In reconnecting with the spirit of legacy was a (re)awakening of love.*

*One of the girls asked Kanval, "Can I have a utensil or are we eating with our hands?" Kanval smiled.*

William C. Chittick (2003) also references love as the preferred Sufi mechanism for personal, spiritual, and consequently societal transformations, as found in patterns of bipolarities in Sufi poetry. He suggests Sufi teachings are simultaneously concerned with accomplishing a depth of understanding by reconciling the *zahir aur batin*,<sup>24</sup>—which I refer to as a common philosophical preoccupation in Sufism. The search for the “outer” and the “inner,” the ‘kernel’ and the “husk,” the “heart of hearts”, can be understood as a metaphor for the search for depth of understanding. It can also refer to the awareness of (inter)connections among elements that might be seen as separate or distinct yet seen as comprising a whole, such as person in a community or

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<sup>24</sup>

Seen and unseen.

a group of communities in a nation. Chittick's examination of Sufi poetry highlights the transformational qualities attributed to love in contexts of spiritual, personal, and societal development:

Beyond the polarities the poets find the reality of love.... The use of the word 'love' (*'ishq*) in preference to any other shows that this reinstatement can only be achieved by the transformation of the soul, not simply by theorizing and theologizing. Only love, among all human experiences, has the universality and open-endedness to suggest something of the nature of the ultimate transfiguration that is the goal of human life. (p. 425)

In this holistic tradition, heart wisdoms are meant to be used in harmony with other intuitive wisdoms, the sensory perceptions of the body and of the natural environment. Vicky Kelly's (2010) culturally and spiritually informed approach feels similar to my approach, as Kelly (2010) also privileges integration and holism and indigenous worldviews:

Indigenous epistemologies acknowledge the individual journey of lifelong learning as a pathway, a sacred way of moving toward completeness or fully becoming one's potential. Through our journey toward wholeness we are gifting our essence to the multitude of unique essences, which make up our world. This profound reciprocal sense that "We are all related, we are all related, we are all related" is central to indigenous ways of knowing, being and participating in the world. In this process we are at once poised between an environmental ecology and a spiritual ecology (Cajete, 1994). Together they create our one world.... Our own understanding of our indigeneity in relationship to our place and our (inter)connectedness with our environmental ecology leaves a qualitative signature deep within our physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual identities. (p. 83)

*When  
“I” and  
“you” vanish,  
how can I tell  
whether  
I am  
in a mosque,  
a synagogue,  
a church, or an  
observatory?*

*~ Mahmud Shabistari  
Douglas-Klotz (2005, p. 56)*

Traditional teaching stories can be adaptable to the sharing environment and often use of humour and absurdity that invite contemplative engagement rather than explicitly providing didactic or prescriptive solutions. For example, Freke (2000, p. 29) writes:

A man gave some money to four friends — a Persian, an Arab, a Turk, and a Greek. The Persian suggested, “Let’s spend this on angur.” “No,” said the Arab, “I want to spend the money on inab.” The Turk demanded, “We should spend the money on uzum.” The Greek shouted. “Stop all this arguing. We’re going to buy istafil.” And so they began to fight — all because they did not know that each one of them was talking about grapes.

This old teaching story reminds me of Rumi’s elephant story in how different perspectives might benefit from bridging in order to foster a broader understanding. I have come to notice through my own work and life experiences, for instance, that some indigenous philosophies and some eastern perspectives share similarities, including systems of matriarchy, a sense of

(inter)connectedness, oral story traditions, and a similar use of teaching stories. The oral traditions of storytelling in some indigenous cultures (see, for example, Archibald, 2008; King, 2003), such as in the use of Trickster and Coyote characters, to me, seem similar—and familiar—to the traditional eastern teaching stories (see also, Freke, 2000, 2002; Baldock, 2004; Douglas-Klotz, 2005; Fadiman and Frager, 1997) that reference the foolish wisdoms of Mullah<sup>25</sup> Nasruddin. Archibald (2008) describes the Coyote or Trickster character in indigenous lore as



“one whose transformations often use humour, satire, self-mocking, and absurdity to carry good lessons” (Archibald, 2008, p. 5). Similarly, in the old eastern teaching stories, Mullah Nasruddin is at times referred to as a trickster and is often depicted in the midst of silly antics, or some kind of hot water. His wisdom, foolishness, or innocence carry lessons for the listeners that invite them to engage in contemplation. Trickster is known by many names such as Raven, Glooscap, Nanabozo and Wesakejac (Archibald, 2008, p. 5), and the stories may vary from region to region or teller to teller. In eastern teaching stories, the Mullah character (Freke, 2002; Baldock, 2004; Douglas-Klotz, 2005) is also often known as Hodja (Fadiman and Frager, 1997) and by other names in countries around the world.

<sup>25</sup>

In this instance refers to an informal, generic title of respect, in reference to a scholar, or elder, someone considered learned. The character is often depicted as a silly person, whose foolish antics impart wisdom, usually as lessons in what *not* to do.

Kelly (2010) quotes Cajete (1994) to describe how ancestral, cultural, and creative elements, such as “Environmental relationship, myth, visionary traditions, traditional arts, tribal community, and Nature-centered spirituality” (Kelly, 2010, p. 83) became woven into her personalized life tapestry to inform her introspective research.

In many wisdom traditions, deepening inner knowledge and awareness are essential to decolonizing practices, and arresting the conscious or unconscious oppressions against ourselves and others. Another step in decolonizing knowledge is un/re/dis/covering and reclaiming knowledge, narratives, and practices that have been suppressed and denied. For example, it is well known that the ancient Indus Valley civilization, a number of sites dating back at least 5,000 years (Nehru, 1998; Vilanayur S. Ramachandran, n.d.) in what is now Pakistan, are among the earliest known examples of sophisticated urbanization in the old world. With brick homes and non-residential town buildings, streets, and elaborate water and sewage systems they were early bastions of city planning. Some say, the language and written inscriptions, yet to be deciphered, some say bear resemblance to those found on Easter Island (Ramachandran, n.d.), and the identity of the peoples remains varyingly claimed and disputed. The archaeological evidence suggests the Indus Valley was a hub of trade and activity with many nations via the Arabian Sea. The ceramics, jewelry, figures, and other inscriptions found at the sites suggest the use of art in symbols and designs was common practice.

Throughout the history of the Indo-Pak subcontinent there are accounts of Rajput, Mughal, Sikh, and other empires who ruled on principles of inclusion, freedom, and democracy. Many established councils of jurisprudence inclusive of learned sages from numerous communities, including Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, and Parsi. These councils were responsible for



advising on and implementing systems of education, justice, and human rights in their multicultural regions. The cultures of learning in these communities encouraged individual growth and education in many literacy and non-literacy based forms including trades, artisans, professions, religions, and academia. Often, the most highly revered were those who were considered deeply knowledgeable in their fields. Cultivating learning was a part of being in practice, and a dedicated practice of learning to one's calling was often equated to *adab*<sup>26</sup> or *puja*,<sup>27</sup> i.e., a kind of sacred lifelong practice. Oral traditions, memorizing texts, scriptures, and stories, were used as ways to share learning and knowledge among those who could not read or write, as were visual and creative traditions. To this day politicians use specific symbols of everyday items, such as an umbrella or sunglasses, during elections to identify them during election campaigns. These symbols appear throughout the public relations campaigns and also on the ballots so that voters can easily locate and select their choice. In the case of literacy and intellectuals, a common practice was for scholars to be fluent in multiple languages. A scholar able to study world texts in languages of origin (such as Arabic, Mandarin, Farsi, and Greek) would be considered in a better position to understand nuanced cultural meanings of the worldviews represented in those texts that might otherwise be lost in translation. Scholars who attained a greater ability to understand, interpret, and convey the literal and figurative nuances in meanings from the cultures of origin were highly regarded and respected.

Examples of this can be found throughout history, including in accounts of India's sixteenth-century Mughal emperor Akbar. Nehru (1998) describes India's diverse peoples participated in ongoing exchange of learning among academies, philosophies, and artistry:

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<sup>26</sup> Discipline.  
<sup>27</sup> Worship.

During the Mughal period large numbers of Hindus wrote books in Persian, which was the official court language. Some of these books have become classics of their kind. At the same time Moslem scholars translated Sanskrit books into Persian and wrote in Hindi. Two of the best-known Hindi poets are Malik Mohammad Jaisi who wrote the ‘Padmāvat’ and Abdul Rahim Khānkhāna, one of the premier nobles of Akbar’s court.... (Nehru, 1998, p. 269)

Nehru (1998) describes the Mughal era as one where diverse groups were able to develop deeper understandings of each other’s ways of being, and Akbar as a leader who championed diversity, pluralism, and inclusion:

Round himself Akbar collected a brilliant group of men, devoted to him and his ideals.

Among these were the two famous brothers Fyzee and Abdul Fazl, Birbal, Raja Man Singh, and Abdul Rahim Khankhana. His court became a meeting place for men of all faiths and all who had some new idea or invention. His toleration of views and his encouragement of all kinds of beliefs and opinions went so far as to anger some of the more orthodox Moslems. He even tried to start a new synthetic faith to suit everybody. It was in his reign that the cultural amalgamation of Hindu and Moslem in north India took a long step forward. Akbar himself was certainly as popular with the Hindus as with the Moslems. The Mughal dynasty became firmly established as India’s own. (Nehru, 1998, p. 260)

Nehru writes Hindus and Muslims shared many common “traits, habits, ways of living, and artistic tastes, especially in northern India—in music, painting, architecture, food, clothes, and common traditions. They lived together peacefully, as one people...” (Nehru, 1998, p. 268). Not only did they share languages and lifestyles, he says the economic and societal problems



they faced were also the same. The relational harmony that Nehru describes was fundamentally displaced once colonialism became established in the subcontinent. Werbner (2010, p. 239) writes about a similar change in the “shared religious participation”:

These were disrupted, it is argued, by the British colonial state’s bureaucratic ordering activities of classification, enumeration and legislation, and above all by the electoral politics, coupled with modernizing religious reform, leading inexorably to the new phenomenon of religious communal violence. (Werbner, 2010, p. 239)

Nehru (1998, p. 329) writes these disruptions of society were an “inherent contradiction in British rule”:

Having brought about the political unification of the country and thus let loose new dynamic forces which thought not only in terms of that unity, but aimed at the freedom of India, the British Government tried to disrupt that very unity it had helped to create. That disruption was not thought of in political terms then as a splitting up of India; it was aimed at the weakening of nationalist elements so that British rule might continue over the whole country. But it was nonetheless an attempt at disruption, by giving greater importance to the Indian states than they had ever had before, by encouraging reactionary elements and looking to them for support, by promoting divisions and encouraging one group against another, by encouraging fissiparous tendencies due to religion or province, and by organizing quisling classes which were afraid of a change that might engulf them. (Nehru, 1998, pp. 329–330)

As Nehru (1998) puts it, it should not be surprising that imperialist tactics were used, but “the fact that it was so must be remembered if we are to understand our subsequent

developments” (p. 330). In many a newsroom, I have heard producers repeatedly insist upon a conflict narrative as the primary vehicle that drives a story. In my view, this push to focus on conflict can also conflate the problems discussed in a story, and possibly skew the audiences’ perspectives, if tellers are not careful to balance the use of conflict in their storytelling with stories about peace, progress and reflection. In my view these kinds of stories also sustain our communities, from the smallest to the largest populations around the world, and foster deeper understandings. In my work as a broadcaster, educator, I strive to maintain an overall balance among the narratives I present and work with, as a storyteller working in multiple genres.

*No  
man can  
reveal to you  
aught but that  
which already lies  
half asleep in the dawning of your knowledge.*

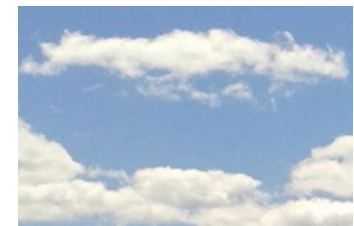
*~ Kahlil Gibran  
Jamal (2002, p. 98)*

### *Aman: Hole in the Soul*

*Aman loved the old stories her grandparents would tell. Living in the farm, drawing water from the well, and the neighbourhood boys stealing mangoes from great-grandfather’s favourite tree. But she seldom heard the Partition ones from her grandparents, the generation that actually lived through it as adults. It was the first modern experiment*

in nationhood and one of the largest “migrations” of humans on earth – to this day. They would talk about the times of peace and harmony from before and the hopes they clung to for the future, but seldom did they speak about their journeys during Partition.

If she did hear the stories, it would mostly be from aunts and uncles, those who were children at the time. Their stories always sounded like fairy tales. Life was good, something bad happened, and they managed to live happily ever after. They would have been little, kids. Their parents made adventures out of the danger, so that the kids wouldn't be afraid, and they had no tangible sense of the dangers they had faced. If ever the subject was raised with members of the older generation, it was like *ekdam ghataa chaa jaati thi*.<sup>28</sup> At times overcome with grief, if they chose to speak it would be in hushed tones. What was left behind not as much as who was left behind. But sometimes, they would repeat the stories about the people who saved one other, when the stories were told. The people who hid one another. The stories without which they would not be alive. It seemed like everyone had them. Muslims saving Hindus and Hindus saving Muslims and every imaginable combination that also includes Sikhs, Christians, Jains,



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<sup>28</sup> Suddenly, storm clouds, like shadow, would come over, as if foretelling a storm.

and everyone else. No family was left unaffected. These were everyday people. To witness the elders relive their stories was like seeing a hole opening up in their souls. So much heartbreak, horror, and loss in all that they went through. Families were torn apart. Some say more than a million died, and 14 million others left everything behind, loved ones, the lands of their ancestors, worldly possessions, everything they had known.

All for a promise and the hope of a fresh, new start.

*[S]piritual  
research takes  
courage. Courage  
to prove or attempt to  
standardize what is  
seemingly not  
possible  
to  
standardize.*

*Sharma (2005, p. 151)*

### ***Key Themes and Assumptions***

In this section I identify key themes and assumptions that inform my integrated practice of peh'chaan. I draw from Sufi and South Asian cultural and philosophical paradigms to convey values and meanings relevant to my research work. These are also pervasive and evident in

traditional teaching stories, poetry, songs, images, oral traditions, and other renderings in religious, social, academic, and/or political social contexts. I focus on interpretations that indicate or highlight (inter)connection and pluralism. Each theme acts independently and also in relation to the others. I create this list in relation to my own experiences and interpretations.

The key themes and assumptions are:

- *Love as transformation*
- *Knowledge of self*
- *Knowledge and wisdom*
- *Pluralism and (inter)connectedness*
- *Privilege*
- *Cyclical analysis and occurrence*

As this research is also the work of navigating cultural territories, these themes function as guideposts for readers to help (re)orient to the framework and to the worldviews in which this research is located.

*Dear Friend,  
Your heart is a polished mirror. You must  
wipe it clean of the veil of dust that has  
gathered upon it, because it is destined to  
reflect the light of divine secrets.*

*~ Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali  
Fadiman and Frager (1997 p. 102)*

### ***Love as Transformation***

In countless Sufi stories and teachings, the goal of self-development is transformation. The heart is considered a key instrument for cultivating this inner space of reflection and reconciliation, when it is activated by love. As love is considered the essence of all that exists in

the universe, it is also considered the ultimate transformative energy. Love reveals heart wisdoms. It acts as a cohesive agent by recognizing the preciousness of the self and resonating with when that preciousness is recognized in another. Love enables individuals to transform perspectives, relationships, and environments. It is both a factor of and a medium for (inter)connection. The Sufi reference “*polishing the mirror of the heart*” conveys a number of peh’chaan-based objectives, including developing self-awareness, reconciling within one’s so-called strengths and weaknesses, mistakes and successes, and cultivating compassion and understanding for one’s own shortcomings, all of which serve as means to cultivate a similar compassion for others. Better peh’chaan of the self can lead to a more authentic peh’chaan of what lies beyond the self. This is often referred to as seeing through the lens of the heart. As Shabistari suggests, “When ‘I’ and ‘you’ vanish,” the other is seen as a reflection of the self, in relation, as parts that comprise a larger whole. Love is considered an act and a gift, a conveyor of insight, and conductor of peh’chaan.

*If you could get rid  
Of yourself just once,  
The secrets of secrets  
Would open to you.  
The face of the unknown,  
Hidden beyond the universe  
Would appear on the  
Mirror of your perception.*

*~ Jalaluddin Rumi  
Fadiman and Frager (1997 p. 244)*

### ***Knowledge of Self***

*“Polishing the mirror of the heart”* can help cultivate an inner environment that is receptive and attuned to un/re/dis/covering inner wisdoms and (inter)connections. Many eastern worldviews teach that in order to know the world outside one must know the world within, first and foremost. The traditional saying, *“your answers are in you”* implies that the more attuned people are to their inner climates and intuitive wisdoms the better able—and more empowered—they will be in considering decisions, taking actions, and engaging with the outside world. This notion suggests that every person, of any age, status, ability, and experience, carries innate, intuitive wisdoms within, and the ability to recognize them can increase with practice.

From this view, starting with the self is appropriate—and expected. It is important and necessary to start with the self, as the self is the only thing a person can ever know with any authenticity, entirety, and integrity. A deepened sense of inner knowing can be grounding, can empower, be restorative, lead to insights, and cultivate the ability to sense (inter)connections. The belief is that the quality of the relationship with the self determines the quality of relationship with others and the manner in which a person actualizes in communities. Practices such as meditation, reflection, contemplation, and introspection are said to deepen and strengthen the ability to *peh’chaan*, the un/re/dis/covery of awareness and (inter)connections in (m)any contexts, such as internal, external, academic, spiritual, cultural, and/or scientific, and enable transformations.

There is a traditional saying, *“Good leaders master others. Great leaders master themselves.”* In eastern contexts, titles such as *ustaad*, *guru*, or *sheikh* may be conferred, only after a lifelong immersion and dedication to a particular practice, vocation, art, or discipline—in other words self-mastery—is demonstrated.

*You are your own obstacle.  
Rise  
above  
yourself.*

*~ Hafiz  
Freke (2002, p. 91)*

### ***Knowledge and Wisdom***

Knowledge is often considered a collection of data, facts, and observations, whereas wisdom is considered the deeper understanding of the knowledge gained through experience and insight over time. There is a *peh'chaan* that knowledge is fluid, emerging, and at best a temporarily conclusive construct. The metaphor of “*the ocean and the pearl*” is often used in Sufi and South Asian literature to refer to wisdom that lies deep beneath the surface of basic knowledge. An exclusively intellectual approach to inquiry is seen as incomplete. It is thought that intellect must be accompanied by intuitive, environmental, and other intelligences in order to facilitate depth of understanding. Cultivating knowledge is likened to collecting and sowing seeds in an inner garden, where under the right conditions and after the cycles of seasons, planning, sowing, watering, weeding, and tending—the seeds of knowledge may eventually grow fruits that ripen into wisdom over time. Urdu words for knowledge often infer stewardship, and suggest it is something that can be gathered, achieved, accumulated, and shared over time. This spirit of lifelong learning sees knowledge as an accessible, naturally occurring evolving resource, rather than as an explicit thing to be owned, possessed, exploited or commodified by an elite few.



*Wouldn't it be a  
 shame to reach the  
 sea and only come  
 back with a  
 pitcher of  
 water? The  
 sea  
 contains pearls as well as millions of other precious things.*

*~ Rumi  
 Douglas-Klotz (2005, p. 250)*

### ***Pluralism and (Inter)connectedness***

The saying “*There are as many paths as there are people*” presupposes and implies (inter)connectedness and diversity. No two will ever be exactly the same, no two people, no two families, no two communities, and so on. Each has their own ways and at the same time also shares many features in common with others. These cultural ways of being assume (inter)connections and focus on knowledge sharing and mutual growth among people and communities rather than exploitation and conquest. These ways of being are at the root of how I engage and utilize terms such as *dialogic* and *companion* in my research approach.

It could be said that social practices, for example, of *apnaana*<sup>29</sup> and *shirkat*<sup>30</sup> are the opposites of othering and individualism. Like *peh'chaan*, *apnaana* and *shirkat* are eastern concepts of being, combinations of intentions sentiments and actions which reflect communal values of being in relation. These social practices convey high honours in cultural and social contracts. This is perhaps why Nehru (1998, p. 270) writes that “Akbar’s success is astonishing,

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<sup>29</sup> Actual or symbolic practices that adopt, accept, entertain, include, or consider another “as one’s own” in a spirit of connection, family, community, or companionship.

<sup>30</sup> Actual or symbolic practices of inclusion of the “other,” such as in contexts of sharing, inviting, remembering, attributing.

for he created a sense of oneness among the diverse elements of north and central India.” Similar stories are recorded in songs, myth, legends, and histories throughout South Asia. Throughout the region’s development and evolution tribal, migratory, rural, and urban communities have coexisted for thousands of years. Perhaps this lengthy coexistence, and deeper understanding of one another’s beliefs and values, reflect how conventions of apnaana and shirkat, and the interfaith and intercultural celebrations, came to be. These ways of being strive to understand and appreciate that which is other by learning from, adapting to and adopting from, rather than excluding, exploiting, oppressing, or appropriating from. The notion of *ghair kerna*, literally “to other”, is considered a punitive act in the social contract, enacted through forms of exclusions and banishments.

*The more of ourselves  
we give, the more of  
ourselves we  
find.*

*~ Traditional Sufi Saying  
Jamal (2002, p. 94)*

### ***Privilege***

The traditional saying “*There are as many paths as there are people*” also implies that from every unique human journey, each individual gains unique gifts, experiences and insights that can be of value to themselves and their communities. These are the ways in which we are individually privileged. Exchanging these for meeting one’s needs and/or offering them as contributions to society is part of the plural or holistic social contract. Individual journeys involve figuring out the domains of privilege, to develop the peh’chaan for them, and then to

participate and contribute from those positionalities. The implication is that people can be privileged in a number of ways, including spiritually, emotionally, financially, and by other means such as through religious affiliation, gender, employment status, abilities, institutional, or familial connection, etc. To share one's privilege is to work is for the betterment of self, community and the *aaney valey naslain*.<sup>31</sup>

In the context of populations where the extremes of wealth and dire poverty are readily visible on an everyday basis, there are numerous ancient, cultural norms that speak to pluralism and interpersonal responsibility. A common starting point for understanding privilege is to consider the basic necessities of life: *roti*,<sup>32</sup> *kapra*,<sup>33</sup> and *makaan*.<sup>34</sup> The traditional saying “*Daany daaney per khaaney valley ka naam hota hai*”<sup>35</sup> suggests a holistic sentiment of stewardship rather than ownership over resources such as food.<sup>36</sup> If guests unexpectedly arrive during a meal, the social convention is to invite them to partake in whatever is being served, trusting that some of the food was predestined for that person. It is part of an individual's personal responsibility in a holistic society to understand the way(s) in which they are privileged and to honour communal conventions by rising to the responsibility of their context(s) of privilege through acts of empowering and sharing with others. Within these ancient worldviews is an awareness that the ways in which individuals are advantaged and enfranchised shift and (r)evolve over time.

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<sup>31</sup> The coming generations.

<sup>32</sup> Bread (implying food).

<sup>33</sup> Clothing.

<sup>34</sup> Shelter, housing.

<sup>35</sup> “[Upon each] grain is [imprinted] the name for whom it is intended,” suggesting it is predetermined.

<sup>36</sup> Notions of stewardship also extend to knowledge, opportunities, etc.

*You have a duty  
to perform. Do anything  
else, do a number of things,  
occupy your time fully, and  
yet if you do not  
do this task, all  
your  
time  
will  
have  
been  
wasted.*

*~ Rumi  
Jamal (2002 p. 65)*

### ***Cyclical Analysis and Occurrence***

The cyclical nature of these worldviews is represented in notions such as kismet and karma, which suggest there is connection and recurrence in reality and existence. Notions of learning, knowledge, history—sometimes even form and being—change over time. Some aspects recur and return, such as relationships, opportunities, and experiences, as if in orbit, providing opportunities for individuals to collect, shift, change, expunge, retain, and purge. The process of transformation and expanding awareness is an ongoing journey of engaging and experiencing emotionally, intellectually, physically, and spiritually, repeatedly and contemplatively. In a paradigm of (inter)connection, notions, contexts, conditions, interpretations, and meanings are often described as elastic (not fixed), fluid (dynamic and affected by spontaneous contextual shifts), recurring, always evolving, and connected.

***Peh'chaan as Praxis***

Establishing a foundation that sustains and carries cultural and spiritual nourishment is a most important, foundational process for this journey of inquiry. It is the source from which insights and stories spring.

*The  
only  
constant  
is change.*

*~ Traditional Sufi saying*



## Chapter 4

سفر، راه،  
مقام

*Rah, Safar,  
Maqam*

*Anti-racism  
research  
is not  
about  
becoming  
located or situated in  
another's lived experiences but  
is rather an opportunity for the  
researcher to critically engage  
his or her own experience as  
part of the knowledge  
search.*

*~ Dei (2005, p. 2)*

## ***On Integrated Practices***

In the previous chapter I defined the concept of peh'chaan and established key Sufi and South Asian themes and assumptions for this research. In this chapter, I present a selective review of literature that examines the work of integrating minoritized or othered voices and knowledge traditions into academic and societal institutions, including arts-related praxis. Given the dearth of research specific to integrative practices in Sufi–South Asian–Canadian contexts or peh'chaan, I draw from the work of scholars who also examine individual and cultural positioning and institutional experiences of integration and who employ such positions of awareness in their tellings of our collective stories. I use peh'chaan in this way to add layers of multi-vocality to my exploration of these shared experiences, as the voices of the scholars join in dialogue.

### *Structures of Coexistence and In/Difference*

As long as processes of othering and exclusion remain the standardized norm, those working from or for multiple cultural positions face numerous systemic and institutional challenges. In contexts of lifelong learning, Brigham (2013) points to the need to address ongoing issues of race and racializations, as they are found in every aspect of life:

[R]acism is acknowledged as being engrained in educational, legal, cultural, and psychological structures, discourses and policies that govern everyday practices, including subtle racial microaggressions. Challenging racisms which have been normalized in everyday activities requires extensive and targeted approaches. In an adult education context, such an approach involves educators and students analyzing class, power, privilege, and language, including the role of White supremacy that is embedded in curriculum, teaching and assessment practices. (Brigham, 2013, p. 124)

Brigham (2013, p. 124) refers to an incident where the Bank of Canada changed its depiction of a female scientist on the new 100 dollar note, after some focus group members complained she was too “Asian” looking. While the protests also include notions the supposedly “Asian”-looking depiction was a stereotypical, the depiction was changed to reflect someone who was more Caucasian in appearance, in order to reflect someone who was “neutral.” And even though this example is simply the exchange of one racialized or ethnic look for another, as Brigham writes, “...whiteness is considered neutral; the racial norm” (Brigham, 2013, p. 124). This kind of debate—and the subsequent “adjustment”—raises questions about how micro and macro aggressions are enabled in our Canadian society. Why not favour a number of depictions, as is the practice with the emblems of many causes appearing on 25 cent pieces nowadays, or



depict a variety of scientists together? What message does this example convey if only Caucasian-looking people are allowed this kind of privilege or status? What does that say about who is accepted as representative of what our country looks like?

The practice of neatly compartmentalizing identities into labels of race and difference is seldom makes understanding them clear or precise. When used as oppression, these constructs are enacted by those in majority positions as over-simplified and imposed objectifications, for the sake of convenient categorizing, by covering over actual, complex realities. As a self-described “feminist and antiracist theory” (Mohanty, 2003, p. 191) scholar, Mohanty calls for educators to deepen their understanding of contexts, histories, and processes in relation to one another as a vital step to decolonizing practices:

Curricular and pedagogical transformation has to be accompanied by a broad-based transformation of the culture of the academy, as well as by radical shifts in the relation of the academy to other state and civil institutions. In addition, decolonizing pedagogical practices requires taking seriously the relation between knowledge and learning, on the one hand, and student and teacher experience, on the other. In fact, the theorization and politicization of experience is imperative if pedagogical practices are to focus on more than the mere management, systemization, and consumption of disciplinary knowledge.

(Mohanty, 2003, p. 200–201)

The labels applied in these kinds of interactions usually have little to do with where people locate themselves and more to do with where someone else desires to locate them. Mohanty (2003, p. 190–191) references her own experiences of being ascribed labels including: “Indian,” “Third World,” “foreign student,” “person of colour,” “black,” “Asian,” “South Asian,” and

“resident-alien.” Mohanty (2003) asserts “[R]ace’ or ‘Asianness’ or ‘brownness’ is not embodied in me, but a history of colonialism, racism, sexism, as well as of privilege (class and status) is involved in my relation to white people as well as people of colour...” (p. 191). She says her way of describing herself is “deeply historical and collective” (p. 191). She writes:

So for me, theory is a deepening of the political, not a moving away from it: a distillation of experience, and an intensification of the personal. The best theory makes personal experience and individual stories communicable. I think this kind of theoretical, analytical thinking allows us to mediate between different histories and understanding of the personal. One of the fundamental challenges of “diversity” after all is to understand our collective differences in terms of historical agency and responsibility so that we can understand others and build solidarities across divisive boundaries. (2003, p. 191)

### *Aman: Decolonization Interrupted: “Where are you From?”*

*It wasn't so much the question itself, it was the times that question—and other assumptions like it—imposed a perception of other, with a certain hint of inferiority mixed in. She proudly considers herself Canadian, but the question, more often than not, was reminder that for some reason—the colour of her skin being the most obvious one—(too) many people felt entitled let her know they didn't see her that way. Being asked the question, repeatedly, out of context—at funerals, in grocery store lineups, paying a parking ticket, about to undergo surgery, sometimes by complete strangers—most often by people who*

were born here like she was, was often odd, inappropriate and uncomfortable. The exchange would usually go something like this:

THEY: Where are you from?

SHE: Here.

THEY: No. But where were you born?

SHE: Ummmm, Halifax.

THEY: No, I mean where are you really from? What is your nationality?

SHE: Canadian.

THEY: No. But where were your parents born...?

SHE: [A reply.]

THEY: Oh. [then followed by one or some of the most common follow-ups]

- You know, I just love curry! Do you know a good place in town?
- Hey do you know Salman Tariq? He lives in Toronto.
- Welcome to Canada!

SHE: Well, how about you? Where are you from?

[most common responses]

THEY: Oh, I'm Canadian.

- I'm just normal.
- I'm just a normal, regular Canadian.



She was as proud of her immigrant parents and her immigrant heritage as she was of being Canadian. She loved our diversity as peoples of many lands, because that's what she saw everywhere, and identified herself and Canada with. She didn't mind the times when the question was asked out of genuine innocence in the context of conversations that were mutually respectful. But after a lifetime of being on the receiving end of questions meant to answer to someone else's categorization of her, she grew fatigued. She was growing tired of people commenting on how well she spoke English, even after she explained she was raised here. She never knew how to respond to those who "welcomed" her despite her telling them that she was born here, and especially as those who did the welcoming did not identify as First Peoples. She did not feel equal when people commented on her eastern attire as costumes, even after she referred to them as clothes. The implication was that she was stamped with a perpetual immigrant status, a visitor badge, with a clear message that even though she thought she belonged, others did not.

*It was the (sm)othering,<sup>37</sup> as she eventually learned to name it, that felt imposing, the insistence upon an inferior difference. It was the not being asked how she chose to identify. After a while she decided she would politely decline conversations about culture and race if she didn't feel up to negotiating their loaded subtexts. In doing so she would come to realize that she was only exchanging one set of loaded subtexts for another. No matter how respectful her retreats would be, there were always those who became offended because they felt entitled to a response.*

Brigham (2013) and Mohanty (2003) exemplify problems stemming from static, polarizing, and colonializing attitudes towards identity that those who are othered face. Their practices depict ways of decolonizing thought and processes that also suggest actively preventing any further recolonizing. I experiment with a similar practice on themes of identity, culture and belonging in the documentary, “Where are You From?” (Adhami, 2000). I was inspired to explore the topic being asked the question, after coming across it in disproportionate amounts during daily conversations in life and work. On a reporter’s hunch, I informally surveyed peers and community members to if anyone else noticed the same thing. It seemed as if as diversity was becoming a societal priority at the time, people like us were suddenly *coming into view* from the so-called margins, perhaps as objects of interest and curiosity. As a journalist I wanted to

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<sup>37</sup>

I use the term (sm)othered to refer to two simultaneous conditions. I build on the notion of being othered, as described by Said (1979) in the context of Orientalism, an application of misguided and inferior circumstance while also describing its oppressive impact as that of being smothered.

share the experience and the stories. Only now as a scholar do I reflect on its linkages to decolonizing interactions and perceptions.

Said (1979, 2001, 2003) draws from his own life experiences of multiple cultural identities. His work on Orientalism details the creation of the Oriental as ‘other,’ a romanticized, poetic, exoticized foreign, and inferior set of people, in need of the west’s discovery, of the civilizing savior of colonialism. Said’s work unpacks the power of language and (inter)connections among politics of nations, economies, and academic theories that come to perpetuate myths and intolerance. He explains how labels such as Oriental polarize national and cultural identities, for colonial and capitalist agendas. Said (2001) also explains how communities and cultures define themselves and inhabit specific or shared identities, in relation to or in conflict with one another. Said suggests these binary strategies are effective in teaching distorted versions of peoples and histories, and that they also have the power to become adopted by the designated others, who then participate in their own oppressions. Said says:

Most systems of education today, I believe, are still nationalist, that is to say they promote the authority of national identity in an idealized way and suggest that it is incapable of any criticism, it is incapable of any fault, that it is virtue incarnate. There is nothing that lays the seed of conflict in the future more than what we educate our children and students in the universities to believe about ourselves. (Said, 2001, pp. 392–393)

Said’s observations reflect an oppressive reality that adds layers of difficulty to the lives of so-called others. At the same time, I believe, he suggests some optimism for change. His work depicts the latent and obvious ways in which systems uphold power structures in favour of whoever comprises the so-called majority, according to their prescribed norms, in adversarial,

conflict-oriented ways. It relates to observing situations where such structures may exert tensions and continuous pressure on individuals, who must then decide whether and/or how to respond to the systemic disenfranchisements. I have seen students learn to other, in part because of how historical narratives are framed, and because of how those students come to identify with how conflicts are validated and which side is celebrated. I have also worked with students who may happen to identify with the heritage of vilified descriptions of the conquered others, and how they internalize this negative messaging and learn to other themselves. Most of the narratives I place in this text include the characters working through these kinds of pressures. In Aman's narrative above she is seen in the midst of negotiating the impositions of colonial and systemic microaggressions that result in defining her as other.



## *Zainab: Mirrors Covered in Dust*

“Oooh, beta,”<sup>38</sup> Juji aunty used to say to her. “You have such nice features. It’s too bad your skin is sooooo dark. You would be so much prettier if you would fix your complexion, you know? Be more like your sister? She is so pretty, you know, *gauri, gauri*.<sup>39</sup> Why don’t you try the bleach? You should try that, nah?<sup>40</sup> How else will you ever find a husband?”

She already knew that both of her cultures favoured lighter skin colours, and Juji Aunty was not the first to comment on her skin tone, and wouldn’t be the last...but she didn’t want to feel bad about not wanting to be white. She liked her brown skin, and the way it looked. Like the earth and the trees. When she was much younger, she did try “the bleach,” with her cousins, but she decided trying to be lighter was just too much work. As if waxing, threading, haircare-ing, nail polishing, and make-up-ing wasn’t enough. It would be just too much work to add trying to look lighter to the list. Besides, she was never going to actually be lighter skinned, and any would-be husband

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<sup>38</sup> Child (male), also used as a generic term of affection for a child of any gender description.

<sup>39</sup> White, white.

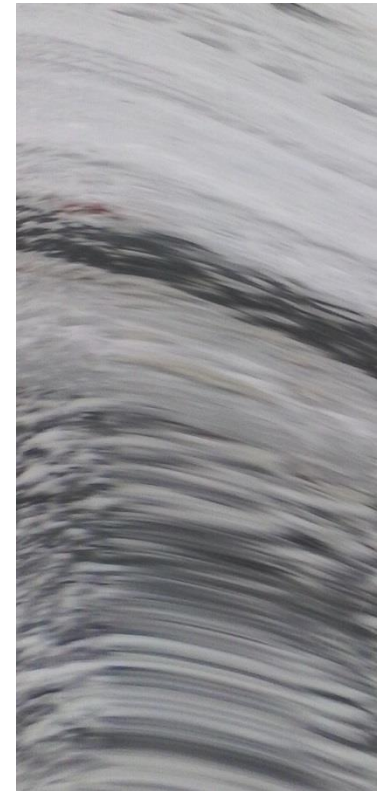
<sup>40</sup> A word for “no” that in this context means “right?”



would find that out eventually. Based on that logic, she knew she would never stand a chance at being considered beautiful in either of her cultures—at least not on the outside anyway. She understood it as a choice and decided for herself, to spend that “bleaching time” on other things.

She had already started to realize that messaging for girls and women was very mixed and complex. The voluptuous women were desirable in the east, yes, but likely because they were thought to make sturdy homemakers and good, childbearing stock. The skinny women were desirable in the west, whom she often saw as sexualized objects of male fantasy and satisfaction, selling cigarettes and beer on TV. Neither option seemed particularly appealing. What that told her was that women were somehow subjugated in each context.

There were also contexts in each where women were empowered, celebrated, and honoured. She knew plenty of examples of strong women in both cultures and there were a lot of similarities in each, but sometimes the western feminists would offer her pity or sympathy



*for no reason other than that she was a woman of eastern descent. She didn't want to feel bad or ashamed about being a woman of that heritage either.*

Zainab's story depicts some of the systemic conversations about feminist and cultural identity that Mohanty (2003) writes about. In my view, Zainab would relate to Mohanty's position that while there are many kinds of categorizations, definitions of identity are very personal.

Dei's quote at the beginning of this chapter echoes the lessons of the Sufi saying "*There are as many paths as there are people*" by suggesting that each researcher has the potential to contribute to collective knowledge based on their own experience. As Dei (2005) says, "[a] hegemonic way of knowledge production that accords unquestioned ethnographic and discursive authority to the researcher has served to deny local intellectual agency and disempower local subjects" (p. 12). Dei (2005) describes ways in which systemic inequities in academic research practices have in perpetuating systemic exploitation, and impacted research relationships:

[T]he history of the (mis)application of research findings; (non)recognition of the contributions of subjects; and the context of using research information for academic imperialism and domination have created mistrust on the part of local subjects with regard to institutional research. (Dei, 2005, p. 12)

These practices impact relationships among students, subjects, researchers, and communities, as well as the quality and integrity of the content that is generated. Dei suggests exclusionary and paternalistic research practices can skew the quality and integrity of knowledge

production, and these elements act in relation to one another. He calls for researchers to behave in more ethical, aware, and accountable ways.

Dei (2005) notes that communities are comprised of individuals who often simultaneously identify with multiple, complex labels of identities. He argues that understanding the complexity of the relationships among the labels and identities is necessary for creating accurate and appropriate research:

As members of a community or communities, individuals have multiple, rather than single, affinities and allegiances resulting in profound complexities that defy/challenge easy categorizations and designations. Yet, each community also reinforces certain processes of inclusion/exclusion in order to ensure that identities and histories are not obliterated. (p. 15)

I suggest that labels—and language—can become perpetually problematic if they continue to be used in ways that other or objectify. For example, scholars regularly use words such as minoritized, marginalized or racialized to describe communities and peoples who face oppressions. The main process is one of objectification. For the purpose of accuracy when quoting such scholars, I honour their choice of usages—for them. At the same time, I attempt to diverge from using such terms to describe such positionalities in my writings. In describing such contexts, I prefer the use of the terms such as minoritiz-able as a more accurate description of the context, the objectification involved in the act of being minoritized. All are primary, equal until they encounter dynamics and/or circumstances where, through the imbalances of power in relation, they are marginalized. If anything, people to whom such labels apply might more accurately be referred to as *at risk of being objectified* because the precarious nature of power relationships and assumptions create contexts of disenfranchisements.

To return such labels, in their original packaging as acts-in-progress, to those who are enacting them in these ways, is a way to respectfully create space for contemplation of alternative actions, thoughts or approaches. It is to increase the peh'chaan of how language enables and enacts power dynamics in relationships. To shift the subject-object orientation to a subject-subject one reminds language users to consider and be responsible for how they position the act and the moment of interaction in relation to the person or people being discussed. Who is responsible for the minoritizing? Are the activity and the actor being held to account? Is there actually a context of marginalization, or is the reference a matter of association because of race, religion, gender, etc.? Such (re)positioning and unpacking of objectifying terms invites an alternate engagement and consideration with language and invites a deeper appreciation for the layers and contexts of power contained within. I extend this linguistic and contextual preference to suggest such terms as racializable and objectifiable, exotifiable and immigrantizable.

While oppressive and unequal contexts exist, adopting and/or imposing labels that are secondary or minoritizing in an expected or constant manner as norms is problematic and invites (re)examination and (re)negotiation of contexts of (dis)enfranchisement. To accept monikers such as minoritized as an adjective in the past tense implies an ongoing acceptance of positions that are unequal or secondary rather than primary. This example serves to illustrate an important distinction in how the word is used—as an adjective to describe a person or group of people, or as the past tense of an act upon that person or peoples— and what that may also imply. Is it a descriptor of a people or an act-in-progress? If it is a past-tense adjective, does that tacitly suggest, sanction, perpetuate, and participate in oppressive paradigms where unequal processes will always be accepted as norms?

The present and active tense helps alert the user of the impositions embedded in catch-all choices of language. Rather than accepting objectification as a matter of the past and a matter of entirety in a manner that leaves the thereby-oppressed holding such contexts and labels implicitly as passive (non)participants, people can choose how they wish to be identified in a context. To point this out is an optimistic gesture, one that implies that the enactor of the minoritizing interaction is actually empowered to make a different choice than to racialize, objectify, or minoritize another, and could actually do so.

People may reference marginalizing language to self-identify contexts in which they are being minoritized or perhaps when they identify as having experienced past marginality themselves. I feel it is more appropriate and empowering to understand that a person, who otherwise exists in a primary and present context, might experience minoritization as something that is being imposed, based on an aspect of their (in)visible identity, while interacting with certain others. It may not be their constant state—how they see or wish to define themselves—all the time.

Through art, poetry, and written accounts, Fabiola Bahiyya Nabil Naguib reconciles experiences of othering, silencing, belonging, and identity. Naguib (2007) writes:

I believe that ethnicizing, exotifying, generalizing, and/or reducing are racializing procedures, functions of racism and colourism, that work to support and maintain colonially hierarchical renderings of people/s. These misinformed homogenizations of “convenience” or considered relegation add to the already multiple and insidious ways that euro-settler-colonial-racism harms and impedes both people of colour and indigenous peoples—systemically, psychologically, physically and interpersonally. (Naguib, 2007, p. 49)

Writing from personal and observed experiences as an artist, writer, and activist, Naguib (2007) describes the how these kinds of oppressions silence and undermine the agency, resolve, and resilience of those who attempt to claim it. These interactions are indicative of how legacies of colonialisms take shape in contemporary society, when people attempt to enact their primary positionality.

In an analysis (posted in 2013) of the 1988 film “They Live” Slavoj Zizek suggests that many people become complacent in accepting society’s hegemonic ideologies, regardless of whether they are imposed or exist as norms. He calls this latent compliance an invisible form of “dictatorship in democracy,” where hegemonic practices suppress other ways of thinking and

knowing:

According to our common sense, we think that ideology is something blurring, confusing our straight view. Ideology should be glasses which distort our view, and the critique of ideology should be the opposite, like you take off the glasses so that you can finally see the way things



really are.... [T]his precisely is the ultimate illusion. (excerpt from video, 2013)

The taking off of glasses is similar to what is referred to the Sufi and South Asian notion of lifting of the veils, seeing the unseen, or finding the pearl in the ocean, referring to a moment when a deeper truth is revealed. In this case, Zizek suggests that critical thought is a paradox to ideology itself, so applying critical analysis can shatter the illusions people have about

themselves and their societies. Žizek suggests that when hegemonic norms and dominant ideologies are challenged, even in the most menial of ways, resistance to the challenger can be striking and severe. Žizek (2013) posits that when people strongly identify with a particular ideology, they experience a desire to fight for or defend and resist any narrative they feel conflicts with it. Žizek suggests that in order to understand or learn deeply, people must develop the ability to look below the surface of their beliefs and ideologies, and engage in deeper analysis. In Sufi and South Asian terms, as set out in the key themes and assumptions individuals and learners are encouraged to first understand and lift the veils of their own assumptions, in order to understand the ideologies, cultures and societies. Žizek says, “To step out of ideology, it hurts. It’s a painful experience.” (excerpt from video, 2013). The perpetuation of hegemonic norms and beliefs as superior to others, the proliferation of narratives of conflict and conquest from colonial and settler perspectives, the hostility facing researchers when working on alternative discourses, the excessive scrutiny and immediate disbelief of any possible parallel narratives, can result in exclusions and isolation for those working outside so-called norms (Smith, 2012; Mohanty, 2003; Dei, 2005, Sharma, 2005).

To illustrate that resistance happens in many across cultures as well as academic paradigms I use an example Hut (2004) provides in an interview about his work in the discipline of science. As a scientist, Hut draws parallels between the practices, concepts, and approaches in science, art, and spirituality:

The basic step underlying objectivity—namely the effort to strip away judgment and just observe what presents itself, to catch certain aspects of reality—is a beautiful move, one that was formalized around the time of Galileo in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. This move of stepping

out of the world is found everywhere: In science, we make controlled laboratory observations; in religion, it's called meditation; and artists step out of a particular environment or personal circumstance in order to catch the fullness of the moment. (Hut, 2004, p. 16)

He also describes the resistance he faced from peers for taking such an approach, particularly once he expanded his scientific frame of analysis to also include the experience of sense:

By adding “sense” to the framework of human experience—so that now we can speak of space, time and sense—we provide a more complete description of science. Given that my description of science includes “sense,” when you ask me what value I put on science, where I place the importance of “sense” in relation to space and time, or how “sense” is interwoven with other attempts to get in touch with deeper aspects of reality, then I think I have a different, more comprehensive view than many of my colleagues. Most of my colleagues are very skeptical if not downright hostile toward philosophy and toward attempts to put things in a larger context. (Hut, 2004, p. 17)

These kinds of resistances are described by the many scholars I reference in this research, and they extend beyond the academy into everyday negotiations of identity, culture, and belonging. I weave these kinds of experiences into the fictional narrative passages to create an empowering pedagogical tool that enables understanding.

Smith (2012) describes the impacts of colonialism on indigenous and aboriginal cultures around the world. She identifies issues such as the arrival of imperialism, “predatory individualism” (p. 21), the use of collectivizing terms such as “indigenous” to incorrectly



homogenize peoples of diverse experiences, and the commodification of the cultural practices as factors contributing to the problematic content generated in academies. She points to the deep and damaging impacts on researchers and communities:

It galls us that Western researchers and intellectuals can assume to know all that is possible to know of us, on the basis of their brief encounters with some of us. It appals us that the West can desire, extract and claim ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce, and then simultaneously reject the people who created and developed those ideas and seek to deny them further opportunities to be creators of their own culture and own nations. (Smith, 2012, p. 1)

Smith (2012) says that recovering and placing stories, languages, theory, knowledge, and wisdom systems into co-existing realms of equality is work that requires courage and fortitude. As this work happens within existing colonial contexts, she emphasizes that care is also necessary so that these efforts do not in the process recolonize or re-traumatize the people and communities engaged and affected by this work. Smith goes on to remind us that even as this restorative work ensues, as long as colonial practices remain, a further danger and/or possibility exists that those new words and narratives may again be misappropriated and/or “used against”, to discount the very perspectives they are meant to uphold, preserve, and represent.

Archibald (2008) describes similar struggles encountered while working to develop and integrate Indigenous Storywork into West Coast educational systems. She grounds her restorative work in seven principles; respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy (Archibald, 2008, p. 2). Archibald illustrates the traditional dynamics of how relationships among community, (hi)story, and life experience are conducted.

She combines spiritual process, consultations, and the notions of giving in ways that preserve as they restore, that decolonize without recolonizing. She provides examples of the nuanced depths of the subtle challenges encountered in claiming authentic narratives as also mainstream:

When I began to delve into the topic of Indigenous stories, the first contradiction that I faced was that I had to complete academic work steeped in literacy, analysis, and explicitness. However, the topic of Indigenous stories, which were presumably based on oral delivery and aural reception and were sometimes thought to have implicit meanings, conflicted with the academic literate traditions. Indigenous stories have lost much educational and social value due to colonization, which resulted in weak translations from Aboriginal languages to English, stories shaped to fit a Western literate form, and stories adapted to fit a predominantly Western education system. The translations lose much of the original humour and meaning and are misinterpreted and/or appropriated by those who don't understand the story connections and cultural teachings. I did not want to perpetuate this loss. Instead I wanted to find a way to respectfully place First Nations stories within the academic and educational milieu[sic]. (Archibald, 2008, p. 7)

I set out with a similar sentiment include the underrepresented perspectives that I identify with in the academy, and place them alongside.

Archibald (2008) suggests that addressing and bridging gaps in scholarship of less-validated cultural knowledge and belief systems is rigorous and relentless work of negotiation. Not only must researchers recognize and address historical biases, they must also be attuned to the nuances and subtlety required to preserve the meaning and integrity of the content they work with. In my experience, the work of bringing Sufi sayings and South Asian teachings and

bridging them into current, western academic contexts faces similar challenges. Archibald's (2008) accounts of stories of Coyote or Trickster remind me of Nasruddin or Hodja teaching stories. They aim to entertain and engage the listener/audience to locate a meaning in relation to their own experiences, rather than to provide explicit answers. The complexity of meanings and interpretations often becomes a natural part of the discourse within communities.



### *Sana: Conscious Un-learning*

*Her western education and upbringing came with a kind of individualism that at times propagated a kind of segregationist mentality. It was often defined by rigid binaries and polarities. With so many regions, so many dialects, so many cultures, and so many religions, in eastern schools she learned in more about how that came to be, how cultures cohabited, clashed and merged, rather than about who won and who was superior. Everyone had eras, everyone had*

rulers who were just and fair, and if rulers were unjust and unfair that was seen as personal failings of the rulers, not specific traits of an entire culture or religion. Most of her eastern influences were so poly- and multi to begin with, the histories of thousands of years were taught as such. She had learned about the Arab scientists and philosophers along with Chinese and Indian ones, on top of the European and western ones.

Yet, throughout her western education, as a teenager and into university, whenever she would reference those examples, so-called alternative perspectives, she would be met with ridicule and be dismissed or told flat out that it was not possible. Even those who professed to be objective and would entertain a notion, would demand defiantly, "What is your proof?" She didn't have her textbooks from before, and when she went looking for sources that were primarily Eurocentric, in the pre-Internet days, she found accounts in texts that repeatedly depicted anyone deemed foreign, Asian, African, or First Nations was depicted as inferior and incapable of sophisticated intellectual ability and practice. It helped her understand the problem: a lack of understanding of global experiences coupled with familiar knowledge being legitimated, led to societal foundations that

perpetuated inequity. People actually believe the things they read in these books, about themselves and the others.

Without tangible proof, the logic of her rational arguments invited ridicule, being jeered, diminished, othered, hierarchized, called uppity by those in power or those in the majority. She had always assumed she was equal and free, that is until being put in her place for her nerve to question the inequities of the status quo taught her otherwise. Under the weight of entrenched oppressions of institutional colonialisms, she eventually learned to internalize the violence of silencing<sup>41</sup> by learning not to speak up. She wasn't equal. It wasn't fair. Not everyone was interested in dialogue. Sit there and look good, token, no one wants to hear what you think. Her people were less than. All other people were less than. Minorities should be seen and not heard. "Those people" belonged somewhere else, like the privacy of their homes, communities or congregations, and they should be grateful they have that option in the first place.

Her approach would eventually become a human rights one, to understand the patterns of oppressions as they occur, so that in

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<sup>41</sup> I was introduced to the concept of the 'violence of silencing' in Naguib's (2007) work.

*whatever roles she would take on in life, she might better her own practice and become a part of the solution.*

Sana's experiences reflect some of the kinds of moments that inform and inspire the work I take on, supporting inclusion and diversity in my contexts as broadcaster, artist, and academic, and perspectives that comes across in works such as "Lest We Forget" (Adhami 1999)

### ***Activisms and Change***

Luka (2013) describes how artists engage in activism in the context of her broadcast work. She calls it "creative citizenship":

[A]rtists and networked workers who engage in practices of creativity day-to-day are simultaneously occupied with civic actions or interventions beyond simple participation or community-building. Their responsibility is simultaneously to their artwork and to the networked flows of social relations discussed above, and may include an economic context even when there are no overt economic considerations. (p. 130)

Luka (2013) also describes methods of bringing processes of collaboration and consultation to a traditional institutional context. In her work on the CBC ArtSpots program, she created and executive produced the show for eleven years out of CBC Halifax. Luka's article is helpful in locating my work as an artist/broadcaster/academic, as I was a part of the production team for that show for several years. It also unites contexts of identity with social engagements and community responsibility. In her academic study of the show, Luka (2013) describes ArtSpots as a structure and a venue for raising awareness, addressing gaps of marginalization, and a place of social action:

[A]rtSpots is examined as a rich, single case study (Yin 2009) employing semi-structured, reflexive interviews and discussion groups through research-creation. This generated insights into how and why this Canadian cultural space developed, and enabled interrogation of ArtSpots' claims around diversity and citizenship-based engagements by its participants. (Luka, 2013, p. 126)

Some people who face objectification may at times also take on the work of renovating the systemic aspects through which marginalizations repeat. Affirmative action strategies attempted to account for the systemic barriers people faced trying to get a proverbial foot in the door. In current climates of economic recessions, the institutional doors may be revolving, as cutbacks, downsizing, layoffs, and shrinking budgets lead to fewer opportunities and consequently the challenges continue or increase. For those who might manage to gain footing somewhere beyond the entryways, systemic barriers continue long after gaining initial access. The celebrations of making change and experiences of discrimination create complications of negotiating and enduring for populations that Welton (2013, p. 22) describes as “outside the halls of power, circles of conversation, wealth, knowledge, good work and recognition.” The responsibilities associated with the recognizing, building, and implementing of restorative societal practices often fall to the in-some-way-or-another-visibly-or-invisibly minoritizable and disenfranchised. This extra—often unpaid and under recognized—work becomes incorporated into regular routines. Some inclusion initiatives, while sometimes seen as making a difference, may make little actual, systemic change.

Deverell (2009) shares a series of lessons about integration and inclusion originating in cultural and familial practices and implemented in her experiences as broadcaster, academic,

artist, and activist. Deverell documents some of the systemic, attitudinal barriers accepted as norms that she encountered during her career. The “Canadian people are not ready to have...” experience from the mid-1970s, and the “There are no Black farmers in Saskatchewan” one in 1984, (Deverell, 2009, p. 144) bear resemblance to the 100 dollar bill story from 2012 that Brigham (2013, p. 124) reminds us of and are examples that such flawed, divisive rationale continue.

Deverell (2009) also details some of the gains that were made in contexts of equality during her career, such as specialized broadcast channels for women, aboriginal communities, and those from multi-faith and abilities groups as well as in on-air and first-person representations. Deverell reminds us of ways in which power structures create the semblance of change and progress, while they resist making actual, lasting change. She points out that diversionary or smokescreen tactics are often embedded in common organizational practices such as including training, language, accolades, and consultations (Deverell, 2009, p. 149). These bureaucratic and administrative smokescreens serve as veiled forms of resistance to change which tend to impede progressive action. Deverell suggests strategies that she has employed for addressing the barriers in the hope that lasting change may take effect. These include solidarity among groups, support for underrepresented communities, and mentorship (Deverell, 2009, p. 152).

These examples of integrative work taking place in media institutions relate to my work as they reference problems and solutions from media industry contexts that run parallel to those in education contexts. As a media creator and educator, I can relate to circumstances in both.



## *Maliha: Lessons in Optics*

*She liked to take meditation breaks at least once during her workday. Even if it was only 5 minutes, she found them refreshing and relaxing, and something she looked forward to. Sometimes these breaks were walks, and sometimes they were silent, sitting meditations, in a lounge area set aside as a community space. It was the most culturally and spiritually inclusive of the building's many spaces, and as the cultural inclusion facilitator, she found it a rather inspiring space. It housed bibles, crosses, rosaries, a menorah, murals, meditation cushions, and Buddhist scriptures as well as community notices and posters about the area's cultural events, all designed, paid for, and approved by the workplace.*

*One day, she noticed a napkin pinned to the wall. Upon it was a schedule of the 5 daily prayer times for the entire month, handwritten neatly in rows. Inspired, she took the napkin to the coordinator of the space, who also had personal contexts of marginalizability, thinking that the environment could build on the initiative that had been taken, as it clearly suggested a need. What if the organization printed a chart with the prayer schedule once a month, as a*

demonstration to the community of the organization's support? The coordinator stared at her. "Why would we want to do something like that?" Rationales about inclusion, safe spaces, support and respect for diversity all dismissed, she was met with a final, "That's someone's work on a napkin. We should respect that." She suggested a dialogue with the napkin writer, in an effort to find a collaborative way to build on the idea, but that, too, was dismissed and so was she.

She sought the advice of the person who hired her, a long-time institution insider; she was sure to have some insights. "What do you think we could do here?" she asked. Her boss, fixated on the paperwork she had on her desk, replied without looking up. "If it's not about [Culture A] or [Culture B], I'm not concerned. They're the only ones I care about. They're the most important." Maliha started, unsure, "But isn't inclusion about everyone? This could be an opportunity for..." Her boss interjected. "Look, the coordinator doesn't like change. No one does. It's not worth the hassle. How many of those people are there here, anyway, that we would actually spend our resources to make charts like that? Besides, we don't want to encourage those people too much." Finally looking up from her desk at Maliha, she asked, "Was that all?" Maliha looked at her boss, and beyond the

person she saw budget numbers, politics of visibility, loudest voices and practices of fairness for some instead of all.

Perhaps they didn't understand the subtlety and consequence of those differences, but she did.

Another integrative example of companionship and (inter)connection in academic and social practice comes from Shiva's (2004) *Earth Democracy*. Shiva suggests the exclusions and insecurities caused by globalization and individualist capitalist consumerism are at the root of global political instabilities. Like Said and Smith, Shiva reiterates the universality of characteristics of human nature and points out that the relationship between the dominant and the subjugated others influences the behaviours of each. Shiva (2004) advocates that structures of global economic systems need to change so that they place citizen wellness and human rights at the centre of economic purpose and above the needs of profit driven multi-national corporations. She describes Earth Democracy as an Indian-grown worldview and an alternative social system, designed in response to the inequities emerging from cultures of conflict, capitalism, and violence:

Earth democracy provides an alternative worldview in which humans are embedded in the Earth Family; we are connected to each other through compassion, ecological responsibility and economic justice as objectives of human life. In Earth democracy our primary identities come from the earth, from a sense of place, of rootedness, of limits of sharing within those limits. In Earth democracy positive systems ensure the fundamental right to life of all

species, and all peoples are defended. The maintenance of life in its diversity and integrity rather than limitless extraction of profits through monopolies over biodiversity and water and all vital resources is the basis of relationships in Earth democracy. Earth democracy transforms our mind and our actions, and liberates us from patterns of thought and paradigms which have pushed us to our contemporary predicament. It helps to address exclusivist monocultural modes of dominant thinking that lead to: (a) the destruction of resources and the creation of monopolies over land, biodiversity, water and food; (b) the deepening of poverty and the exclusion of millions from livelihoods and economic security; and (c) the destruction of democracy, peace and cultural diversity. (Shiva, 2004, p. 11)

Both Earth Democracy and my approach share beliefs originating in ancient eastern traditions, of pluralism and peaceful coexistence. They both advocate the implementation of inclusive and integrative practices to counter binary notions of superior exclusivity.

Earth democracy enables us to transcend the polarisation, divisions and exclusions that place the economy against ecology, development against environment and people against the planet and against one another in a new culture of hate. In India, it means actively fighting against religious polarisation when Hindus visit a Muslim shrine on their pilgrimage to Sabarimala and Wasiffudin Dagar, when a Muslim singer prays to Durga and Shiva, keeping the ancient Dhrupad tradition alive for a composite culture. It is symbolised in farms rejuvenating biodiversity and in species acting in mutuality to benefit one another. Earth democracy recontextualises humans as one member of the Earth Family (*Vasudhaiva Kutumbhakam*), and diverse cultures in the mosaic of cultural diversity which enriches our lives. I advocate re-embedding humans in the ecological matrix of biological and cultural

diversity, which reopens spaces for sustainability, justice and peace by reorganising relationships, restructuring constellations of power and revitalising freedom and democracy. (Shiva, 2004 p. 11)

Shiva contends practices of holism necessitate dialogue, appreciation, and understanding among communities and peoples, as individualism and globalization favour adversarialism, exploitation, and conflict.

Kelly (2010) writes about a moment of that I would refer to as one of *peh'chaan*, of (re)awakening and (inter)connection, that had a profound impact on her life and work. It was a chance encounter with Oji-Cree artist, Carl Ray. Kelly (2010) writes:

[H]e told me he was unveiling a large mural depicting the creation of the world the next day. He invited me to attend the unveiling. Throughout our conversation I felt looked at or seen in a way I had never experienced before. I felt seen and known for who I was. He saw and awakened my aboriginal self, lying deep within me. He recognized and honoured my indigenous identity as no one had ever done before. (Kelly, 2010, p. 87)

In her self-reflective work, Kelly (2010) goes on to describe how she experienced what I would also refer to as a moment of *peh'chaan*, in this case an awareness of absence or disconnect. It was a moment where the kinds of systemic institutional exclusions under discussion result in a lack of cultural awareness that negates the integrity and preciousness of personal and cultural values, with profound impact:

I went the next day to the unveiling of the mural. Kitchen Manitou, as a Thunderbird with outstretched wings, glided across the painted portrayal of the creation story I knew so well. Flowing out of the tail feathers of the Great Spirit flowed the gift of life. It pulsed into all

creation, into the bear, the wolf, the moose, the crawlers, the swimmers, the wingeds, all the plants and animals. Carl unveiled the magnificent mural not once but three or four times. Humbly he would climb the ladder and cover and uncover his creation as the CBC reporter filmed. The reporter did not seem to see the greatness of the vision nor the magnitude of indigenous insight depicted in the creation scene. He did not seem to notice the intense and astonishing artistry before him. He did not honour Carl as the great artist I now know him to be. He did not see, respect or know who and what lay before him. (Kelly, 2010, pp. 87–88)

Kelly's article describes a journey of retracing and reconnecting with ancestral and cultural traditions and values, and how that journey informs her personal actualization and fulfilment. It is a journey of identity, culture, and belonging. Deverell's (2009), Luka's (2013), and Kelly's (2010) accounts illustrate that the work of integrating underrepresented contexts into larger institutions is usually an ongoing process. How systemic practices, policies and documents align with or oppose the changes determines how they work in relation with one another to either perpetuate or address the problems.

### ***Arts-Related Approaches***

As it seems that there are as many arts methodologies as there are researchers, I use the term arts-related to refer to the many arts inquiry practices that exist in the qualitative field inclusively. Some of the approaches are referred to as arts-based, arts informed, scholaristry, *a/r/tography*, and *métissage*. I am inspired by *métissage* and *a/r/tography* arts research as examples of integrative methodologies that commonly reference themes of culture, identity and belonging, similar to the application of *peh'chaan*.

Patricia Leavy and Elliot Eisner, among others, historically and contextually locate arts research as a field of qualitative research emerging from post-positivist paradigms. Eisner (2008) suggests arts research opened traditional models of research to new ways of understanding. He says it allowed methods of analysis and observation to consider emotions and qualitative nuances (Eisner, 2008, pp. 10–11). Eisner (1997) writes that while art forms such as poetry, diagrams, and stories have always been used to convey information, they only gained acceptance as academic inquiry and representation in recent decades (Eisner, 1997, p. 5). He says the value of using these forms includes the ability to evoke empathy as a means to understanding, to encourage contemplation of complexity and deeper meaning in the material and provide researchers with alternative ways to engage with and present their content (Eisner, 1997, p. 8). He says validity in these works is assigned by a critical community, and as data representation can be ambiguous and subject to personal interpretations, consensus by a critical community may be difficult to achieve. Validity may also be difficult to access if the form cannot be easily disseminated through available media or technology.

It could be said that Eisner's (2008) use of empathy is similar to the *peh'chaan* notion in that love acts as a precursor to transformation. In both cases, emotion connects the individual to the subject matter, and that leads to deeper understanding. The approaches also share a sense that knowledge is unfolding and that self-reflection is of value. They differ in that the Sufi and South Asian notions of pluralism and privilege suggest critical analysis extend beyond decision of form, the what, to the entire process, the how. They shape the academic, methodological implementation, impact interpretation, and relationships with subjects as well as the final representation. Eisner (1997, p. 5–6) seems to suggest the critical community has the capacity to



assess validity, but in cases where the community's understanding is impeded by historic exclusions of certain content, this could be problematic.

Ardra L. Cole and J. Gary Knowles (2008) describe arts-informed research as “neither prescriptive nor codified” (p. 65). They outline “qualities of goodness” (pp. 65–68) that are used to assess arts-informed research projects. These qualities include intentionality, researcher presence, aesthetic quality, methodological commitment, holistic quality, communicability, knowledge advancement, and contributions. Many of Cole and Knowles's (2008) suggested qualities contain values that are similar to the Sufi and South Asian-informed key themes and assumptions in my research. The notions of knowledge, transformation, self-reflection, commonality, community responsibility, and holism are similar.

Pauline Sameshima and Gary Knowles (2008) suggest an arts-informed approach has a traditional social science research orientation:

Gary: [T]he researcher allows herself to become inspired by the arts – broadly defined – or an art form, or a particular artwork, or an artist. What invariably needs to occur is that the researcher be inspired to work differently. The researcher (who has the authority or assumes the authority) is not bound by rigid research protocols but knows that what make sound, qualitative research is that which is mindfully and artfully developed. (p. 108)

Arts-informed and other branches of arts-related research provide examples of how arts are approached in western academia. The knowledge of these approaches helps me locate peh'chaan as an integrative practice of inquiry among other arts research methods.

Leavy (2009) says arts-based practices are “particularly useful for projects that aim to *describe, explore or discover*” (p. 12) and “often useful in studies involving *identity work*” (p.



13). She also documents the emergence of arts-based research as an increasingly accepted methodological genre and says it provides new ways to pose questions, consider information, and reach non-academic audiences with research. She says these practices have been used to give voice to the underrepresented and can promote dialogue and evoke multiple meanings as “[a]rts-based practices lend themselves to *inductive* research designs” (Leavy, 2009, p. 14). Leavery (2009) says researchers sometimes also use theory, literature reviews, and cycles of analysis (where a researcher revisits their earlier interpretations) in addition to arts practices. In peh’chaan the researchers are encouraged to honour voice through self-reflection; a voice to others may leave the process open to appropriative or exploitive practices. The peh’chaan approach is and uses cyclical analysis, literature, theory, and inductive processes similar to arts-based practices.

Susan Finley (2008) describes the arts-based approach to research as definitively social justice-oriented:

By its integration of multiple methodologies used in the arts with the post-modern ethics of participative, action-oriented, and politically situated perspectives for human social inquiry, arts-based inquiry has the potential to facilitate critical race, indigenous, queer, feminist, and border theories and research methodologies (p. 71)

Finley’s (2008) describes this type of approach as radical, ethical, and revolutionary, and as research that strives to “initiate introspection, reflection, and representations that teach” (p. 76). Finley’s (2008) definition mirrors the way, as I demonstrate in my research, how Sufi and South Asian arts practices have been used in the transmission of ideologies, as tools of information dissemination, and implements of social justice for centuries, especially in cases where literacy

and formal education were not historically universally accessible to the masses. Fadiman and Frager (1997) also speak about the diversity, multi-locality, and multi-vocality that exist in Sufi arts practices:

There is no single, systemic approach to Sufi teachings, and not all of its teachings can be communicated in words. The wisdom of Sufism can be found in stories, poetry, art, calligraphy, rituals, exercises, readings, dance movements and prayer. (p.1)

The differentiation between knowledge and wisdom in the peh'chaan approach necessitates contemplation. Frager and Fadiman (1997, p. 258) refer to the centuries of Islamic calligraphy practice as “an ancient, well developed art form.” Asani’s (2011) study of the evolution of traditional Sufi music, such as traditional qawwali, and, the emergence of Sufi inspired rock music in India and Pakistan, also locates Sufi arts practices in centuries of pluralistic, (co)existent, and (r)evolutionary religious and political traditions. He refers to the transmission of these ideologies in forms including literature, folk poetry, women’s poetry, and women’s traditional work songs such as *chakkinamas*,<sup>42</sup> in places such as Bijapur, Sindh, and Punjab. Burney Abbas (2007) describes how *chakkinamas*, *carkhi-namas* are coded with the “[T]he existential metaphors of struggle and stoicism in the face of political oppression” (2007, p. 639) and house feminine mythologies of Indian and Pakistani Sufism. Boivin (2013) writes about the evolution of *Samā’* traditions in the Indus valley and Sindh, where the chanting, musical instrumentation, poetry, movement, breath and dance all formed part of Sufi tradition and ritual. Werbner (2010), citing Sandria Freitag (1989) and Korom (2003), says a pan-Indian sense of nationality connected many faith groups and cultures in North India during the eighteenth and

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<sup>42</sup> *Chakki* is a traditional, hand operated stone grinding mill, and *Nama* refers to a ballad or song. A *chakkinama* is a traditional women’s work song, sung by women such as while grinding grains and spices.

nineteenth centuries. Werbner (2010) provides the example of public religious celebrations, ceremonies and festivals, “Celebrated in a carnivalesque style, with folk music, food, dance and drink available in abundance, most years these public events were open to the whole population, irrespective of religious identity, living in the town or neighbourhood” (pp. 240–241)

These events represent simultaneous discourse and analysis of diverse philosophies as embedded and taking place holistically and historically across many aspects of society, including the arts. This view is based in a position that values multiple intelligences (spiritual, intellectual,



emotional, and physical; from this position learning is the domain of any life context and not restricted to intellect, literacy, or academies. I believe the same would be true of many ancient and existing global wisdom traditions. These Sufi and South Asian wisdom systems have been practicing and enacting social change through varying combinations of ethical and revolutionary ideologies in arts practices for generations (Asani, 2011). The understanding in peh’chaan is that depth and subtext can emerge from ongoing, cyclical analysis. Figurative calligraphy is a traditional example of how artistic practice and meaning are incorporated together into the written texts. Philosophers and artists including Rumi, Hafiz, Rabia and Hallaj, for example, also exemplify a tradition of

incorporating meaning and interpretation into their poetry, songs, literature, or teaching story creations. As Leavy (2009) writes, though, the Western academies have only become more accepting of the arts in research in recent decades. Part of the work of decolonization, and peh’chaan, is recognizing the previously neglected wisdom traditions and restoring their location as alongside western ones.

### ***Métissage***

Métissage research honours ancient wisdom traditions and multiple cultural identities. It is a companion to my own practice of Inclusive Reflection. This integrative approach blends cultural heritages, belief systems, life stories, and voices. Erika Hasebe-Ludt and Nané Jordan (2010) cite the writings of Laurel Richardson (1998) and Jean Vanier (1998) in their approach to métissage (Hasebe-Ludt and Jordan, 2010, p.1), “Drawing from literary, poetic, artistic, Indigenous, feminist spiritual, and other related epistemological and wisdom traditions, we advocate auto/biographical, life writing inquiry as a way to reach into the *heart of wisdom* (Richardson, 1994).” Hasebe-Ludt and Jordan (2010) describe métissage as “[A]n active literary and pedagogical strategy for negotiating conflicting or dichotomous value systems, a political praxis that might also uncover the swallowed wisdom of lost or forgotten origins,” (Hasebe-Ludt & Jordan, 2010, p.3). Chambers et al. (2008) describe métissage as a writing practice that affirms pluralities, “seeks cross-cultural, egalitarian relations of knowing and being” and “thrives on ambiguity and multiplicity” (p. 142). They write:

What does métissage look like in practice? Single authors/researchers use métissage as a theoretical construct and textual practice (Lionnet, 1989; Zuss, 1997). They weave repressed languages and traditions of local cultures and vernaculars (particularly incorporating autobiographical material and local oral traditions and stories) with dominant (often colonial) languages and traditions of literacy. (p. 142)

Métissage is restorative in its exploration of perspectives that have been previously neglected and/or under/mis/represented in the academy. This approach is similar to peh’chaan in un/re/dis/covering ancestral and cultural connections. Hasebe-Ludt and Jordan (2010) use the métissage practice of life writing to explore and bridge understandings emerging from a heart of

wisdom. In the plural practice of *métissage*, multiple authors share their stories in the shared space of a common text (Hasebe-Ludt and Jordan, 2010, p. 2):

This commons is characterized by a sustained loving attention to each other's stories in relation to the histories and mythologies of the places each of us lives in. We use *métissage* both as a research approach and a literary praxis that invites writers to braid strands of their own writing with that of others. *Métissage*, as we have come to define it in a Canadian context, is a mixing and a rapprochement of differences: race, culture, class, gender, geography, and language. (Chambers, Hasebe-Ludt, Donald, Hurren, Leggo, & Oberg, 2008)

The threads are woven together using creative processes into a final research piece, the commons, and the metaphor of braiding together is often used to describe this process. Hasebe-Ludt and Jordan (2010) also describe their use of *métissage* as an integrative practice. They use it to merge inner and outer knowledge, and cultural ideologies, to manifest creations, to and braid together multiple voices.

In plural practices of literary *métissage* a number of authors come together to share their stories in a collective context. Each piece works individually as well as in relation to one another, and they also work together as a whole. This research method is a valuable reference for my own work, as it also negotiates the many similar issues and considerations in working with mixed contexts and heritage cultures. The *peh'chaan* of other researchers negotiating similar questions in their own diverse cultural contexts is comforting and reassuring, as well as familiar. In my singular work, I braid together research references, narratives, form, and my own

contexts. It is also an indication that along with arts-related work, work with themes of underrepresentation is also becoming more accepted.

### *A/r/tography*

Irwin (2004) presents a/r/tography as a métissage practice where researchers explore, define and experience through multiple contexts—as artist/researcher/teacher. It involves an interdisciplinary and multi-vocal approach to the three contexts. Irwin (2004) suggests this process is “[A] more complex intertextuality and intratextuality of categories.... [A] multilectical view that encourages thirdness, an in-between space that exists between and among categories” (p. 28). Irwin (2004) suggests the space of thirdness is an empowering space of exploration.

A/r/tography researchers create their own ways of “reading, reflecting writing and creating” (Lymburner, 2004, p. 87) and believe that “no single research methodology can serve to answer the myriad of questions that swarm around the field of education” (ibid).

This approach is similar to my work in *peh’chaan* in its relational approach to different contexts: artist, educator, and media creator. Our approaches differ in that I suggest that any space the researcher occupies can be defined as primary in their occupation of it, even if in context it is seen as otherwise. Stephanie Springgay, Rita L. Irwin, and Sylvia Kind (2008) suggest a/r/tographic representations may also locate the audience in ways that may be uncomfortable and/or unfamiliar (Springgay, Irwin, and Kind, 2008, p. 84):

It is an inquiry process that lingers in the liminal spaces inside and outside—the between—of *a(artist)* and *r(researcher)* and *t(teacher)*. Vacillating between intimacy and distance, a/r/tography constructs research and knowledge as acts of *complication*. Rather than

reassuring a reader/viewer with an easily shared idea or commonly held belief, a/r/tography recognizes that meaning making can be disturbing, unexpected and hesitant.

I interpret this description to infer a potential discomfort or resistance that may arise when, as Zizek (2013) suggests, people respond to circumstances that challenge their sense of ideology or norms. Sylvia Wilson (2004) uses a/r/tography as a process of integrating the fragmented identities of artist, researcher, and teacher selves in her search for a holistic practice. Stories of motherhood, growth, hope, dependency, and loss are woven into her life writings and stitched into her quilts. Wilson describes her process as emotional, personal work often involving struggles and processes of letting go. Wilson uses this experience to approach her work as an engagement and as ongoing, uncertain life practice and refrains from a need for concrete conclusions (Wilson, 2004, p. 50):

My intention is not to generalize or to draw conclusions but to leave open. Writing and imaging fragments. An invitation is extended to you, the reader, to explore and spin your own stories along with mine, creating a dialogical reading (Frank 1999) so that these narratives here can become something other than what they already are.

My approach is similar to Wilson's in its intention to also be open-ended, dialogic and accessible. Kelly (2010) also describes her research as a combined process of arts-based creativity, cultural reconciliations, and the journey of establishing a culturally relevant place of inquiry, that she refers to as life writing:

[A]n arts-based inquiry using visual arts practices and reflection are incorporated in order to discover formative experiences which have influenced my evolving artist/teacher/researcher self and chosen life path within the larger context of my personal narrative. By reflecting on

one's life through a reverse review, backwards viewing or "looking from the mountain," key incidents emerge from the panorama of lived experience. These pivotal moments are threaded and braided, creating strands that are then woven into the emerging patterns of an evolving Métis sash, a Métissage. (Kelly, 2010, p. 85)

Like Kelly, my peh'chaan inquiry is a combined approach. I draw from my cultural traditions of storytelling to create stories that relate to my experiences. A/r/tography is companion to my process of Cultural Expeditionism, and Inclusive Reflection is companion to métissage. In this research, stories are creative representations that emerge from reflections and contemplations about my life experiences as an artist, scholar, and broadcaster.





## Chapter 5

ہماری  
کہانیاں

*Humaree  
Kahaaniyan*



In this chapter, I conclude the narratives of Sana, Maliha, Zainab and Aman. I share some of the other creative works that have emerged as part of this research practice. I also include a poem I wrote and that I have also reflected on during the undertaking of this work.

### **Aman: “The Matter of Perspectives”**

It was one of those moments of realizing both the similarities and the divides. She had learned about “The War of Independence of 1857” as a politically significant battle for freedom and independence, fought by people in the Indo-Pak subcontinent against the British colonizers. That was how she had always heard it referred to in Indian and Pakistani popular culture, in the movies, news coverage and history books. As she came across the same event in Eurocentric narratives, however, she saw it referred to under many names, including “The Great Rebellion,” the “The Indian Rebellion,” “The Indian Mutiny,” “The Revolt of 1857,” “The Rebellion of 1857”, “The Uprising of 1857”, “The Sepoy Rebellion” and “The Sepoy Mutiny” to name a few. She already understood that people and groups have their own narratives of the same events. While most agree it was a battle for freedom, the versions of “The War of Independence of 1857,” of what happened and how and who did what, can vary greatly depending on the cultural, religious or even geographic narrative. Most people also know that everyone had a “primary” way of experiencing that event.

But the telling of that story from the colonial point of view was demonstrating something else. And it explained a whole lot more. She was starting to realize the incredible power of colonial messaging, through its ability to convey inferiority, wrongdoing, and felony, in this case by the simple use of words in a title. It also gets defined and accepted as “the truth.” In western accounts, there was no understanding of parallel narratives, no peh’chaan of alternative experiences or truths. She already knew that when she read about India and/or Pakistan, explicitly defined in the two or three paragraphs of a textbook learning module, that most of what she knew about hers and others’ peoples and the cultures was going to be left out. Poverty, illiteracy, population, and politics might cover it, but that was about it.

She heard similar complaints from other recent immigrant-descent and indigenous identifying peers. As a high school student, she did wonder why the advanced education systems of the west didn’t go into more detail and provide a better understanding, but other than that, she just accepted it as the way things were. After all, some teachers would make an effort and dedicate whole periods to students, assigning them to speak on behalf of their cultures as experts and representatives. In high school, nobody asked too many questions. Most people were too preoccupied with their

own stuff, except for her and a few other keeners who were interested in learning about people and their histories. She took those lessons in the vein of the ones she'd learned earlier in life, that everyone had their way of telling their stories and that there was always going to be more.

Her post-secondary experience, however, was a different story. So many people from so many communities, geographies, backgrounds, walks of life, and experiences converged in a space dedicated to higher learning. Though sometimes she wondered. It was the beginning of her concentrated encounters with "Where are you from?" Of course, a normal line of conversation among people previously unfamiliar. What she wasn't prepared for were the questions that would sometimes follow, such as "Do you guys have cars?" and a few other stereotypically offensive queries she didn't ever wish to repeat. It wasn't the innocence of the questions that bothered her. It was the assumption of inferior difference coupled with intrusive entitlement that sometimes accompanied them.

She couldn't understand why people's understanding of the people of the rest of the world was so astonishingly poor. Until, that is, she realized that people actually believed the education they were given, as a singular, empirical reality. That anyone using Eurocentric texts may just

come out with inferior views of cultures they were unfamiliar with. It was a powerful illustration of how nations established and defined a primary positionality and superiority in the narratives. And how the power of language, used in direct and subtle ways, held and maintained perceptions of dominance and authority in global society.

She began to notice the glaring absence of global narratives from India, Africa, China, Russia, and Arabia, from some of the oldest civilizations around the world. Places with long histories and the most ancient traditions. Communities with millennia of existence and different stories of wars and treaties and that have more context and think differently. And then she saw the parallel. That those same narratives, from the people of these lands were glaringly absent as well. Ohhhh, so that's the power of the colonial narrative. In the absence of those stories, people actually believe the singular narrative, and take it as the truth.

She'd learned about the dark ages and the role eastern nationals played in advancing science, medicine, and philosophy during that time. She also assumed that there had been centuries of these practices in every land. She imagined a global system of education that would one day include these pre-academy, pre-existing knowledge and wisdom

traditions/paradigms—what she calls pre-paradigms— and also the parallel ones. A contemporary global knowledge configuration that considered all knowledge as global knowledge, as foundational, contributory, and restored them to their rightful place alongside one another.

For the time being, all she could rest with was her own deepening awareness of these kinds of loaded, patriarchal and adversarial representations and the power and influence they held. They inspired her to expand her consciousness, raise her own awareness in her practice as a storyteller and as a story absorber. She couldn't affect how the decisions were made, what texts represent or what information they include, but she still could determine how she might interpret it. As long as she kept an open mind.

### **Maliha: “Mussaafir, Raastey, aur Qadmain”<sup>43</sup>**

After years of facilitating cultural understanding among people within institutions, she was excited to finally have a chance to be creative and tell stories she could put her name to. She was going to be a journalist.

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<sup>43</sup>

The traveller, paths, and steps.

There was a dearth of representation of cultural communities in the media at that time and Maliha felt she had a lot to offer. She knew a lot of people, she was sensitive to many of the issues, and she could relate to stories from intercultural points of view. It was a skill she had acquired and developed over time, having lived through experiences of being a Canadian of diverse descriptions.

She also had what she called explorer tendencies. She made it a point to get to know her surroundings. First by getting to know her city in search of places to eat and scenic images to capture, and then her province, camping ground by camping ground, town to town. She liked to travel. She loved anything that was new to her. New people, new places, new sights and sounds—all of it excited her. She wanted to share her passion with others, thinking that if maybe they saw it from her point of view, another point of view, she could make a difference.

She was excited by the prospect of exploring and telling stories. Rather than giving away her inclusive insights and strategies to large organizations, she felt like she could embed them in her stories and be recognized for her skills. Her first experience was in a mainstream magazine, which at the time wasn't very diverse in content or in story



coverers. She felt the privilege of the position and a pride for having gotten a foot in the door. It was a big deal. She was the only one of her “shade” around the table, and many friends and acquaintances from many communities had high hopes riding on her. In doing her stories she always felt a responsibility to herself and also to all the people who would tell her they hoped to finally be represented, now that she—or one of them—was in the mix.

Her excitement for her first story meeting could barely be contained. She had a list of at least a dozen stories, important cultural stories that had yet to be told. When it was her turn, she started with the first on her list. The group of senior reporters and her managing producer waited until she had finished before they shared their thoughts. “Why should we care?” “We were just in that community six months ago. We don’t have the resources to send one person out 40 minutes away just to cover *that* community.” “If they get that kind of coverage, then everyone else will want that coverage.” Unsure of how to proceed, she moved on to pitch idea number two, a story with interviewees easily accessible within the city. Again, they waited for her to finish, but just barely. “Listen, our viewers have a hard time with accents. They’ll turn the whole damn thing off!” “Who cares?” I do, she thought to herself. But she felt

silenced. These are the stories she wanted to do because these were the stories she missed. Stories about communities and people like her, who never got to see or hear themselves in the media. As the barrage continued, she wound up her turn with pitch number 3. A short voiceover to commemorate a celebratory day, that the producer re-assigned to one of her colleagues. He told her it was part of paying her dues. And that her turn would come in time.

Every story meeting went on in a similar way. She pitched her unique ideas, and her producer re-assigned them to someone else. None of her colleagues, these seasoned people she knew and respected, stepped in or stepped up and in silence remained complicit. She wasn't quite sure why. No one told her what was expected in the unspoken, underground work culture, and she wasn't sure what to ask. So she just did her job, followed the lead of her colleagues, and waited for her boss to honour his word. Then one day one of her colleagues, jokingly, asked, "So. What story do I get to steal from you today? I might as well ask you in advance so I can pitch it myself in the meeting." She didn't know what to say. On the one hand she was entirely offended by what he had to say. On the other hand she was relieved that someone else had actually articulated, confirmed, the sneaking suspicion she couldn't quite put her finger on.

*She became an informal diversity strategist; her colleagues would regularly come to her for advice on how to approach a story or community, ask her for her contacts and people they could speak to, and for the rest of her time received neither credit nor recognition for the work that she did or the contribution she made.*

*On occasion she would seek to be seconded to special projects and was able to satisfy some of her personal goals that way. Every once in a while, she would come across a colleague who seemed to understand, because they had a similar perspective on Canadian society and similar ethics about inclusion. On one such occasion, she was able to do a story about her friend's father, Jamshed, who had come to Canada as an engineer. The increasing shift towards credentialisms meant his degree – the basis for his approved immigration to this country – was invalid and he would need to re-educate himself. Without advance warning for the circumstance and now with a family to feed, he took on three minimum-wage jobs to support his wife and children in Canada and to send money back home. Maliha described how the man's family, of humble financial means, had made many sacrifices in order to educate one family member in a professional field—that was all they could afford. They imagined their sacrifices would benefit the entire family. He would*

move to Canada, get a well-paying job, and be able to support the family back home as well as in the promised land. He would be able to support his aging parents in their retirement, pay for the weddings of his two younger sisters, and other relatives wanting either an education or an opportunity. That never happened. Jamshed had never imagined this scenario, and he never told his family he wasn't a practicing engineer. He sent them money anyway, from his jobs driving a taxi, delivering pizzas, and as a baker. He put his daughters through university and paid for his sisters' weddings. It struck Maliha how when the best and the brightest left Canada, there was an outcry about the brain drain. Yet, somehow, when the best and the brightest left some of the poorest countries in the world, it was simply called immigration. There was never any recognition or accountability for the consequences of these kinds of stories globally. No calls for restitution, no demands for accountability. They remained largely hidden, while in plain sight.

She had made contacts with media professionals around the country through an inclusive media conference in another major city. There, around discussion tables, she heard story after story that was just like hers. People's stories being appropriated, their talents exploited and no chance at ever getting ahead. This wasn't the state of her workplace. This

was the state of the industry. Some of the people around the table had been working in these environments for decades. It wasn't anything newsworthy. Eventually through her contacts, she was able to find work with a niche cultural community paper.

As much as Maliha loved to travel, she had never been overseas. She was like many who had never had a chance to visit the gravesites of their ancestors, see centuries of her people's histories in the vistas and buildings around her. They had never seen familiar, family names on street signs or the churches or mosques, altars, temples, or synagogues they built. She would never see the ruins of their ancient cities, the schools they attended, or the neighbourhoods the elders played in as children. But she would travel throughout the region, discovering and exploring and sharing what she un/re/dis/covered as news.

She took care to make advance arrangements with communities and be clear about what her purpose was to be there. She travelled to many communities and reserves to tell these stories, drawing from all her personal cultural resources to listen, see, and understand.

The first time she interviewed a Chief and heard her speak about a negotiation as a “nation to nation” conversation, Maliha immediately had the context she was missing to understand the issues, the context that was missing from the history books and the media accounts. She was reminded of the moment on the dastarkhwaan, and that without the context of environment and feeling and the many versions of history, the telling of any story would remain incomplete. She recalled how the geographic isolation of some of the communities stood as a metaphor for so much else. And she was struck by one very noticeable thing. No matter how many First Nations she travelled to, no one ever asked her “Where are you from?”

### **Zainab: “Apni Awaaz Main”<sup>44</sup>**

She had two very different experiences of what constituted feminism. Each culture had its version of strong, powerful women, and in her estimation, each had a way, a path, and a set of qualities that defined a woman as strong. Yet, in her experience, one of her cultures taught her that its version of feminism was better than the others and that other feminisms weren’t real feminism. They didn’t seem to take into account the environments or the worldviews, which were entirely different, all

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<sup>44</sup>

In My Own Voice.

other feminisms simply didn't measure up. She was often told how sorry people felt for her because of her origins, since she was a "girl from there." She never asked for sympathy or pity, and she didn't want any. Heck, even in that culture, people could not agree about what *is* and *should be* feminist. No one way would ever be the right way for anybody else. She detested ego-riddled debates, but she welcomed open dialogue and discussion.

It didn't help matters much when fellow male students would complain to her that because of what she looks like, she would have no problem getting a job. She didn't know quite what they meant. She was newly immigrated and had no experience of the advantage of which they jibed. Yet they would unload on her, begrudging her very appearance for something she hadn't even done. She didn't know what that would become, but she internalized a difficult message. She didn't want anyone to question her accomplishments, and so if such advantages did exist, she would leave them for others. It also didn't help when a professor in one of her classes made constant jokes about women and told stories about how much fun it was for him and his male colleagues to—back in their day—to dismiss, taunt, undermine and ignore their newly minted female counterparts. Nor was it helpful that sometimes, his tales of this type of

behaviour extended to people of so-called colour. She'd try to offer alternate perspectives in class, but he would look at her and as if he didn't understand, and move on to the next thing. When she finally mustered up the courage, one evening after class, to ask him to consider the seen and unseen impacts of his messages, he patted her on the head and responded, "Now there's the girl that's gonna keep me on my toes." He walked away, smiling...and she stood there, speechless.

As a woman she was a majority, but underrepresented in pay scales, opportunities that matched her abilities and, as the news reports suggested, unlikely to get a promotion. She heard the stories that it wasn't unusual for young woman of non-majority skin colour from her community to be followed around by security staff in department stores, nor for the young boys to be pulled over by police, for a disproportionate number of routine checks. She had already reconciled that many light skinned women would tan their faces and many dark-skinned women would bleach theirs, neither of which interested her—to each their own, she would say, two sides of the same coin. Her faith made her a target, and the spate of go home narratives she encountered broke her heart. She loved where she lived and the values of mosaic-ness and equality, and with those who shared such views, she built her community.



What she desired and needed was understanding – that there were gifts and lessons we could all draw on and exchange with one another. We all had a lot to learn.

She un/re/dis/covered her voice in her art. Her artistry did not demand that she compartmentalize herself. She could be all or some of whatever she felt she needed to be—spiritual, emotional, intellectual, mother, daughter, citizen, molecule or universe. She always felt connected, and always felt whole. She began writing stories and filled notebook upon notebook with poetry and prose. About the kids who were racially profiled, to validate their experiences. The groups that fought amongst each other, inviting them to consider. The constant (sm)othering of othering and the messiness of being quashed. The suffocating oppressions of everyday life and the ways to restore breathing. Soon, Zainab began sharing her works with others. A library group here, an open mic there, she shared her work in the groups that came together. She began to plan events for art and poetry where dialogue could take place too. This was her way of activating spaces and being the change she wished to see.

### *Sana: "Load Shedding"*

It was one of the fondest memories of her youth. Distilled moments of romanticized peace and tranquility, nesting somewhere in the archives of her existence, pulled out from time to time for comfort and nostalgia. Much like the ones her friends would share, memories of times spent at summer cottages, submerged in innocent shenanigans by a lake or brimming with frenzied amusement park mindlessnesses. Hours pounded away on silly carnival games or in lineups for rides that lasted brief minutes, if not mere seconds, spurred on by rotating infusions of sugar-laden dissolving pink (or blue) fluffs, ice creams, and funnel cakes. In her case such moments of childhood bliss came most unexpectedly and courtesy the local power authority.

"Load shedding," as it was called, was common practice that referred to power outages meant to ease the load on the system. Periods of supposedly regulated power disruptions, supposedly scheduled, supposedly timed, supposedly rolled out, equitably through various parts of the city. In those days load shedding was a reality of everyday life that people simply had no choice but to adapt to. The aging infrastructure of an aging city was overwhelmed by the demands of its millions and millions of

inhabitants. A city that never slept. A sweltering city where the average temperatures could easily reach 38 to 40 degrees Celsius in the summer.

Load shedding often began in the evenings and would last into the darkness of night. After all that could be taken care of, the family members would retreat to the flat chhat (rooftop) of the house. They'd bring pillows and blankets to rest upon or around the *chaar pai*<sup>45</sup> a transistor radio (and hope that the batteries would last), a lantern or some candles, and usually a deck of cards. Every once in a while, if they hadn't eaten, the hibachi would make its way there too. There was always an accompaniment of assorted snacks and food, whatever fruits or nuts were in season.

The nights were often much cooler than the days, but even so, could be quite warm. The concrete floor of the roof was perimetered by a concrete, half-wall that served as a railing, with holes every so many feet in the base to let out the monsoon rains. It was cool to lie on. Once each family member had found a spot, on either the cool concrete or the *chaar pai*, all the stresses of interruption, impending deadlines, urges of immediacies, would slowly melt away. The only thing to do would be to

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<sup>45</sup>

A traditional four-legged bed with a wooden frame held together by a jute weave.

surrender to the moment. In the days before the internet and before cell phones, the shoulds and woulds and coulds had no place to go. On the typically hot evenings and nights, the only thing to do was to wait for the thandi hawain—the reprieve of cool breezes. Well, that and for the power to come back on, eventually.

Once in a while a neighbour might call out from their balcony and offer a polite exchange, check in if everything was okay, before returning to their own power-less routine. But otherwise, the sounds of the city would fall off into the distance, and just the moment would remain.

Sometimes, whoever had the transistor radio would relocate around the rooftop, trying to get a signal, and they would listen to songs, the news, or an evening radio drama. Sometimes they sang along with the music, and sometimes they sang from their own playlist, depending on the mood – or battery situation – at the time. Card games – sometimes a whole series – would eventually be lost or won, at times rummy, spoons, or fish were added into the mix. The most noticeable thing, once all else settled down, would be the stars. The millions and millions of stars. Load shedding diminished a lot of the usual light pollution, so they were always on the lookout for shooting stars and airplanes as they passed by above.

Something about the starlight would inevitably evoke nostalgia and bring on moments when the retelling of memories began. Elders, aunts, parents would usually start, "You know, when we were kids we used to..." or "These cool breezes remind me of..." They learned about their families and their history. What aunts and uncles were like when they were kids. Who loved comic books and who loved to play pranks. How strict – or soft – the grandparents were. About the simpler times of the early days and talks about hopes for the future. Her mom called it the magic of starshine.

Eventually, they would head back downstairs, depending on which came first, bedtime or the power, and do what they could to prepare for the next day. Ironing laid out, just in case. The fridge remained closed, just to be safe. All the doors and windows would be locked and double checked. Without warning, without any set duration, those load shedding nights were always journeys into the unknown. Most often returning her to being in the moment without distractions, with loved ones under the stars. Perhaps the most empowering moments of all. Everything felt simpler. And lighter.

## Miscellaneous

### The Frame Story

Always, always naturally artz. She would dabble in any kind of artistry. She could – well at least those that interested her. She remembered that moment when the history-of-film class instructor stated – rather definitively – that all visual composition occurs from left to right, because that's how people read and that is how the eye travels. She found herself wondering, how does that work when I also read from right to left? ... I never heard of that before. I never thought of that before. Where does that leave people like me and those who read in any other way?

### ***Breaking News***

**[cue: Intro music (dramatic, *breaking news* music); Fade up: graphic (breaking news screen crawl)]**

*...BREAKING NEWS...BREAKING NEWS.....BREAKING NEWS...BREAKING NEWS...*

**[Take: announcer camera and sound, fade out intro music and graphic]**

**[v/o]** We interrupt your regularly scheduled (whatever you are doing right now) to bring you some breaking news. This just in...

The Academy had decided to renounce the sourcing of all previously known knowledge, gathered from colonial and patriarchal acquisition traditions, in order to acknowledge and recognize previously neglected contributors and sources. Given current advancements in awareness, and the new positionalities occupied by scholars and researchers, the Academy has decided to redesign its current practices of knowledge gathering—and knowledge attribution—in an effort to make them more historically accurate and globally representative.

Details are still being worked out, but effective immediately, effort is underway to build a universal database that acknowledges and reflects academic contributions from all civilizations since the beginning of time. The use of all currently existing, traditionally exclusive models is suspended immediately and is pending a review of attribution, sourcing and research practices. Funding has also been allotted for a

newly-struck commission of inquiry and to fund global consultations that are already underway. Headlining the talks are matters of restitutions, restoration, re-attribution, and reconciliation.

We'll bring you more as this story unfolds. And return you to (whatever you were just up to).

**[cue: Extro music (dramatic breaking news music)]**

**[Fade out: announcer, camera sound and extro music]**



### ***On Leaving a Spiritual Footprint***

*Why is it  
that people choose not see  
what we do and how we live  
impacts more than the ecology*

*what lives in our spirit  
has an enduring legacy*

*what we give out to others so freely  
but forever refuse ourselves to see*

*Anger attacks the very base of a soul  
leaving it barren*

*and unfunctioning*

*as clear-cutting does a rainforest*

*depleted  
and injured*

*desolate wounds will throb to recover*

*painfully...*

*indefinitely...*

*Hostility, spoken or unspoken,  
pollutes the very air*

*occupying precious space*

*manipulating moments*  
*to spread its contagious poison*  
*a silent, vicious and deadly poison*  
*Unconscious bystanders will begin to suffocate*  
*not ever knowing why they are lashing and thrashing out*  
*at the very next person they see*

*Hatred is that toxic waste*  
*that seeps into the essence of beings*  
*to permeate foundations and penetrate hearts*

*that perpetuates in the form of Violence*  
*into aggressions big and small*  
*transgressions latent and manifest*

*destroying our chance to be whole*

*A peaceful, healthy and happy whole*

*It's time to take responsibility*  
*for our actions and our deeds*  
*own what you and I have done*

*to deplete our collective space to breathe*

*to contribute to the wounds*  
*that will take more than time to recover*  
*and scars that may never heal*

*We all have a choice*

*we all have the chance  
to make it right  
to be real with ourselves  
own our intentions  
and our ignorant slumbers*

*to better our enduring legacies*

*Consider this an invitation  
an invitation to spiritual activism*

*a call to action*

*an opening*

*to cultivate something new*

*Allow the purest of your compassion  
to fall on hurt like rain  
washing away the bitterness*

*making space for change*

*Clearing the way for you to see  
that which is outside of you*

*as it really may be*

*Plant the seed of forgiveness  
that you have grown from within*

*Make this offering to yourself and to others*

*your inner voice will guide you  
to the right place  
and the right time  
if you allow it to*

*With every moment  
and with each breath  
apply the awareness of gratitude  
in as much as you can do*

*appreciating abundance  
of possibilities and opportunities*

*open to you*

*We have so much more  
than what we need*

*Light up your heart  
Shine your love like the sun  
Healing with your warmth  
Let each ray illuminate darkness  
Yours and others*

*See beyond the limited vision of before  
transcend those selfish, devastating ways*

*Make space.*

*Make peace.*

*Asna Adhami January 2, 2006*



## Chapter 6

داستانِ  
سفر

*Dastaan-e-Safar*

## **Un/Re/Dis/covering**

I am this energy first  
Some hybrid matter of light and love  
Maybe even a spirit  
I know not of these differences you speak of

I am a molecule, first  
Perhaps enroute to identity or form  
Compelled to combine and collaborate  
And make structure  
I know not yet of these differences you speak of

I am a human being first  
Perhaps of this place or face or that  
Infused and informed  
by heritage, culture and ancestry  
I learn something of these differences you speak of

I am an equal first  
Perhaps at times a minority in your eyes  
Views of inferior or inadequate  
Inform systems of hierarchy, appropriation and exploitations complex  
I live the binding inequities of the differences you speak of

Learning so much of that which you speak of  
and forgetting what I once knew

# Analysis

*There are many paths to the same truth.  
Showing respect to one and all is the Sufi way.*

Jamal (2002, p.177)

Our educational and other societal institutions could be more effective and productive, especially in our globally-connected world, if the processes and policies better reflected and accepted the populations they serve. *That* is the kind of acknowledgement and inclusion that can displace impositions of marginality, accepting research and researchers as concurrent, companion, and *primarily* located. In that it conveys instances of negotiating oppressions, the peh'chaan practice is one of resilience, solidarity, and hope, an ongoing practice of lifelong learning. As the traditional Sufi saying goes, “*There are as many paths as there are people.*” Each one unique. Each one equal. Every single one precious.

While I set out on a self-reflective research path to depict negotiated contexts of lived experiences as a Sufi- and South Asian descent, Canadian-born Nova Scotian, this work became an integrative experiment in inquiry. It became clear from the beginning of this project that setting a culturally relevant landscape to do this research would be my first step, to address gaps in this area of research.



As an artist, educator, and broadcaster I use Cultural Expeditionism and Inclusive Reflection to understand and tell stories from specific cultural or identity locations. I developed these techniques during my own work and life negotiations of identity, culture, and belonging, as ways to decolonize stories I was told about the histories I identified with. These tools also served useful in better understanding the (hi)stories of those around me. In transferring these practices of finding (inter)connections and bringing together to my academic work, I determine that both tools are rooted in the traditional eastern notion of peh'chaan. This forms the inspiration for my integrated research framework design.

## *Peh'chaan as a Practice of Inquiry*

I place my traditional ancestral narratives as the primary position of practice and analysis for my research and use these traditional wisdoms to frame my approach. It is both a gesture and a measure meant restore an aspect of balance within a western academia, in recognition of the historical omissions of such perspectives. Creating knowledge from this position also helps to address existing gaps in a more authentic way. It is important to establish these culturally centred research parameters, to conduct this kind of work, as the traditional eastern and the traditional western academic ontologies and epistemologies differ greatly at times. There is much value in establishing a foundation of themes and assumptions from my cultural perspectives, especially in their influence on the inquiry practice and the creation of stories.

Peh'chaan embodies notions of pluralism and a practice of *and* or *bringing together* to transcend borders and boundaries and recognizing (inter)connections. I apply it as a mediation among the disciplines, scholarly work, and arts practices to create a space that may contribute to



deepening inter-contextual discourses. I place fictional narratives, traditional wisdoms, and academic literature alongside and companion to one another. The inclusion, placement and interpretations of each element inform my engagement with the others. This alignment allows me to identify similarities and connections among and between eastern, western, indigenous, post-colonial, spiritual, cultural, historical, and arts contexts. By grounding this work in worldviews that assume distinctness and diversity as well as knowledge systems that precede the western academy, the pre-paradigms, I privilege and define this position as primary—not in opposition, rather in relation to the others.

Peh'chaan favours dialogue over debate. The framework itself is an outcome of a dialogue between my eastern values and beliefs and the western research context and the use of integrative arts practices. It is holistic in this combined sense and in the way these elements (e)merge. My first creative engagements resulting from this inquiry include establishing the culturally informed framework defined by key themes and assumptions and the interpretation of peh'chaan as a practice of inquiry.

I use this academic space to experiment with inquiry in a spirit of “liberation and advancement” (Mohanty, 2003, p. 200). I am interested in inclusive academic practices that view elements in relation to an entirety; in a way that, as Said suggests, “preserve the individuality of each...without losing sight of the whole” (2003, para. 15). My use of peh'chaan builds links of connection and solidarity among disciplines, theorists, and practices. In this way, I provide examples of dialogic, parallel consideration to illustrate ways of approaching cultural inclusion in academia and potentially elsewhere.

There is a practice of care and attention in peh'chaan that are a part of the etiquette to inhabiting a spirit of bringing together and the search for (inter)connections. In this Sufi/South Asian approach, the academic intention defines the researcher's process and direction. The intention, in this sense, is akin in spirit to an important vow one may make to a person or a deity, except that intention in this case looks more like a commitment researchers make in their own hearts to themselves, about the purpose of their work. It implies a level of integrity, honour and loyalty to that purpose, and a sense of care and respect for all that is encountered during the process.

This spirit is dialogic in nature, mindful *and* respectful of differences and of similarities; it is *appreciative* of similarities and differences, and inclusive of multi-vocal and multi-local traditions. This practice enables me, as a researcher, to define purpose, sentiment, content, and method, from a self-determined, more authentic position, rather than from or fitting into a hegemonic systemic perspective. I use peh'chaan as the basis of my experiment with inquiry and as a means of validating and un/re/dis/covering traditional, cultural and spiritual wisdoms that inform my notions of identity, culture, and belonging. A sense of peh'chaan recognizes its own validity as a kind of instinctive knowing. Finding and feeling resonance is a very personal process, to which there is no right or wrong, from my point of view.

The process of building this inquiry is ongoing; it will continue and evolve beyond this initial (en)visioning and versioning.

### ***Bringing Together: The Presence and Logic of and***

The materials I bring together for this research confirm the need and support the call for work that un/re/dis/covers connections among peoples, regions, ideologies, cultures, and communities as an imperative in our globalized world.

### ***Layers of Wisdoms***

Including the traditional sayings and cultural history is a way of honouring the wisdom of elders and ancestors. For example, I reference traditional Sufi wisdoms from a number of sources and philosophers. Interpretations of Rumi's elephant teaching story, for example, can be extended to the many ways of bringing together and finding (inter)connections present throughout my work. Traditional wisdoms appear in the forms of traditional sayings, cultural conventions, and teaching stories and are placed alongside academic literature. This placement highlights the similarities in their meanings and messages, and creates a space of integrated knowledge to work from, as in Sufi and South Asian tradition, where individuals and societal processes are often describes as *in relation* to one another, as parts of a plural and holistic structure. I establish culturally located themes and assumptions by bringing together traditional eastern Sufi spiritual wisdoms (Douglas-Klotz, 2005; Jamal, 2002; Fadiman and Frager, 1997; Freke, 2002; Baldock, 2004) and South Asian cultural practices (Nehru, 1998; Burney Abbas, 2007; Adhami, 2009; Boivin, 2012, 2013; Asani, 2011) and interpreting them through the lens of my personal experience.

Similarly, Rumi's elephant teaching story can also be applied in the context of self-reflection to suggest it is not enough to know ourselves from the surface, we must know ourselves as deeply as possible, as the relationship we have with ourselves impacts the quality of

every experience and relationship we engage in. Some of who we are below the surface is waiting to be known, and the rest is yet to be created. The *zahir* is what is evident at the surface, and the *batin* is the rest of our story that awaits un/re/dis/covery.

### ***Ways of Knowing***

Another fundamental element to the act of bringing together is in mining of heart wisdoms, which enable self-reflection and empower the self with compassion, and keep us accountable to ourselves and to one another, in a plural world context. References to heart wisdoms appear throughout the Sufi and South Asian literature and teachings and are also found in a number of arts-based research works (Kelly, 2010; Hasebe-Ludt and Jordan, 2010). Love, considered the invisible thread of creation and (inter)connection, is waiting to be un/re/dis/covered and restored. Coupled with creativity, love and heart wisdoms can facilitate transformation.

Many Sufi and South Asian teachings suggest that the use of intellect alone may lead to a partial or incomplete gathering of knowledge. These teachings also suggest processes of introspection, reflection and creation can engage additional sensory and intuitive faculties which can facilitate learning that is well-rounded and deepened. The methods I use are inclusive of intuitive, instinctive, intellectual and learned skills to aid in observing and identifying (inter)connections. Smith (2012), Eisner (1997), Said (1979, 2003), Hut (2004), and



Kelly (2010) also refer to the value of emotion and sensing, such as the use of empathy and compassion to further and deepen understanding.

### ***Combining Arts Practices***

As Asani (2011) says, the arts have been used for centuries in many regions to teach and convey meaning. Chakkinaamas, traditional works songs, often held hidden messages, as did poems of many philosophers such as Hallaj and Rabia. The use of creative expression and multiple forms of intelligences is also found in many approaches to cultural and arts-related scholarship. I place artistic approaches (Burney Abbas, 2007; Boivin, 2012, 2013; Asani, 2011; Naguib, 2007; Hasebe-Ludt and Jordan 2010; Kelly, 2010; Irwin, 2004) together and these categorizations become layers that overlap and inform one another, rather than existing as mutually exclusive of one another.

In my understanding of the histories of the ancient cultures of India and Pakistan, learning was often considered a lifelong process and was included in all aspects of life. Artistry, craftpersonship, healing, spirituality, physical skill, and education were all facets of life that one could study and excel in and someday be considered a master of. Such honours were sparingly bestowed and only after an individual had undergone lifelong tutelage, trial and error, and had gained various levels of approvals. As the old adage says, anyone could impress with a certain skill or a highly developed talent, but a master was one with the ability to connect and inspire, to move people. I see similar acknowledgements of traditional ways of knowing and weavings together of arts practices in western *métissage*. *Métissage* researchers braid together multiple cultural, identity, and belief contexts with research practice and at times may combine the voices of a number of researchers together. The *métissage* framework provides a methodology that is

able to work with other knowledge and belief systems, as Smith (2012) suggests is needed in the academy. The engagement, inquiry, and material similarly participate together and influence the outcome of art practices, and often stories emerge. The a/r/tography practice provides ways for researchers to conduct research in simultaneous contexts, which creates opportunities for bridging contexts, media, and experiences. Researchers such as Kelly employ practices such as “living inquiry” (Kelly, 2010, p. 84) by also incorporating arts practices with cultural and spiritual knowledge and autobiographical inquiry.

In my creative practice during this research I weave together teachings, life contexts and experiences, and academic literature, similar to other researchers (Naguib, 2007; Hasebe-Ludt & Jordan, 2010; Wilson, 2004; Irwin, 2004), and create the fictionalized narratives of four female characters. Through their experiences, these characters attempt to retain a primary positionality in their daily lives and (re)negotiate, explore and reflect on the conflicts and reconciliations they encounter. The stories reflect the things they honour and celebrate about themselves, as well as demonstrate the everyday occurrences of smokescreens and microaggressions in their lives. The stories raise questions and reveal many of the complexities of race relations and place, of segregation, entitlement, hierarchy, displacement, and belonging. What are the legacies of centuries of colonialist practices, and what do they reveal about concepts of race, subjectivity, and relational entitlements and perceptions of dominance and inferiority? The narratives demonstrate a strength and resilience with which the female characters interact with and are affected by themes of identity, culture, and belonging and the legacies of displacement in their daily lives. These are some of the themes and conditions that also appear in the works of Smith, Said, Brigham, Deverell and Mohanty.

### ***Layering Languages***

There is an immense challenge to bringing together, thinking and writing in multiple languages, as the norms and references, at times, vary significantly. Sometimes, sentiments and concepts are not translatable and are better left intact and in the original language. Throughout this work I endeavor to use the Urdu words that best represent meaning and sentiment, and provide explanations that convey meaning and intent. Using language in this way allows me to:

- honour and retain authenticity of my voice, preserving sentiment, and meaning;
- privilege, and honour the language of my elders and ancestors;
- share the experience of working in multiple languages with the reader/audience;
- invite the reader to engage with the concepts as they are, rather than trying define them through another cultural context.

Exercising my bilingualism is another way of observing and appreciating how structures, sayings, and turns of phrase can convey complexities of worldviews within them and how each language does this in different—and similar—ways.

### ***Decolonization Interrupted and Un/Re/Dis/covery***

Decolonization, when interrupted, is being pulled back into colonially based relationships that still define hierarchy and assign power in those outdated, oppressive ways. People may come from contexts of decolonizing that are further advanced than in Canada, only to meet with questions that are still being asked here. Colonizing practices seek to maintain underrepresented peoples in positions of perpetual marginality.



Earlier in this paper, I engage in a discussion about various forms of “objectify-ability” as a way to describe how individuals may perpetuate oppressions during interactions on the basis of perceived differences. At the same time, I honour and respect the choices people make in defining their own sense of marginality and how they may define, occupy and own marginal and liminal positionality. Over the years I have considered the various categories and designations, to arrive at a positionality that I am comfortable with. In my view, all people are always primary in their own identities and/or subjectivities. Ideally, all should have the agency to decide which aspect of their identity or subjectivity is relevant to a circumstance or should be made prominent within it. People may become defined during interactions, or by their society’s rules and policies, or even through social norms as inferior, minority, or not the same, but for me it doesn’t make them any less primary in and of themselves. I believe that we all have multiple contexts, such as our familial relationships, professions, cultural orientations, spiritual identities, and we all have our own ways of valuing those aspects of ourselves and deciding which part of ourselves is to be most prominent or appropriate in a given context. The moment a person is objectified in a way that is not of their choosing, they face an imposition over their agency, and then may work to restore it, or else accept it as oppression.

Canada’s multiculturalism approach is successful in establishing a general awareness about human rights and designated groups. However the complexity of the rights do not always match neatly with the categorizations of designated groups, as the people, and their descriptions are much more complex. At times, such policies can be appropriated into smokescreen tactics and tokenisms, (re)enforcing cultural segregations and furthering marginalizations rather than dispelling them. Communities in many regions may be showcased and celebrated on special



days, in special places, with special foods, and become the pinnacles of social inclusion without truly becoming part of the everyday social fabric. It remains a problematic legacy of colonial practices that narratives that are non-colonial may be seen as against the norm and subject to skepticism and distrust. The scrutiny of such scrutiny, to put it in Sufi terms, is a must in processes of decolonization and applications of critical thought, and it requires a willingness and openness on the part of educators in academia and those in positions of power in other institutions. Knowing our own stories is one step, and knowing each other's is an important other. Both steps are important to decolonizing beliefs among the colonized and building solidarity among communities.

Rumi's elephant story suggests that people need to come together and share their experiences so as to provide a better understanding of the big picture and not just parts such as an ear or the trunk. In a similar way, colonial and western narratives have, by omitting or displacing global historical contributions and ways of knowing, amputated our awareness of certain parts of the elephant. Without the rest of the stories—of the histories, contributions, and cultures from the rest of the world—entire societies and nations may believe they have an understanding of world history, when in fact it remains incomplete. With just an understanding of ears and trunks, people may believe they know the whole elephant. It is why I bring together many kinds of sources that reference ways of negotiating multiple contexts, including themes of culture, identity, gender, and ethnicity, to show that this work is happening and illustrate a method of considering them dialogically.

### ***More Layers of Wisdoms***

Said's (1979) work about Orientalism, Smith's (2012) work about indigenous identities and research, Mohanty's (2003) descriptions of identity and feminism, and Brigham's (2013) contexts of Canadian and Nova Scotian applications of race all share oppressions of denial of history, of displacement of peoples, exclusions from society and the confines of conflict. Mi'Kmaq, Mohawk, Cree, and Anishinabe are just as similar and as varied as Sindhi, Punjabi, Gujarati, and Lukhnawi. And yet colonizing narratives in popular culture create limited understanding that the peoples of any nation or description might be as distinct and diverse as Nova Scotians, British Columbians, Quebecois, and Nunavummiut. Smith (2012), Mohanty (2003), Brigham (2013), Said (1979, 2003), and Dei (2005) all similarly describe ways homogenized descriptions of diverse communities and peoples co-opt the distinct narratives and identities. This fast-food tendency towards diversity remains evident in our mainstream structures, such as educational curriculum, media coverage, and civil institution policies.

How the descriptions of peoples, barriers to access, and historical narratives become documented is very important. There may be a vast difference between a story that is referred to as evidenced and one that is written from first-hand experience and thus referred to as fact. Just as there may be a difference between the stories told about the people outside the walls of privilege and power (Welton, 2013) by those *on the inside*. Similarly, a story could be told by people outside the walls of power and privilege, whose perspective of the *zahir* may include barriers to access and of the *batin* may include was to access the entrance to and what happens behind those walls. Understanding both provides a better sense of the bigger picture.

Peh'chaan, for me, creates a way of interpreting narratives as parallel, an alternative to ways that traditionally favour conflict—adversarial and conquest-oriented worldviews, such as

colonialism. These ways of structuring knowledge maintain silos and ghettos, and social orders of segregation that perpetuate “predatory individualism[s]” (Smith, 2012, p. 21), “irreducible opposition,” and “ideological fictions/mind-forg’d manacles” (Said, 1979, p. 328) among cultures, paradigms, and disciplines. Donovan Plumb (2011) suggests that theoretical discourses of adult education are in desperate need of expansion. “An enriched range of perspectives on human learning would strengthen the capacity of adult educators to take meaningful, ethical, and effective action in the world” (Plumb, 2011, para. 5).

I reference western academic literature that examines contexts of underrepresentation and provides suggestions for overcoming oppressions (Brigham, 2013; Smith 2012; Mohanty, 2003; Said, 1979, 2003; Dei, 2005; Archibald, 2008; Deverell, 2009; Luka, 2013; Zizek, 2013). I also place eastern knowledge and teachings exploring similar themes and issues alongside (Fadiman and Frager, 1997; Freke, 2000, 2002; Nehru, 1998; Burney Abbas, 2007; Boivin, 2012, 2013; Asani, 2011). This bringing together raises an awareness of the many social and political oppressions present and/or common among the contexts, and of some of the ways in which cultural, academic and artistic practices are, similarly or differently, used to address them.

### ***Knowledge, Validity and Perception***

What constitutes common knowledge is another contradiction of conducting culturally inclusive research. How we apply it to knowledge creation matters. The use of such common knowledge throughout my research invites readers/viewers to engage in reflection or critical analysis of what they consider common knowledge to be. It provides readers/viewers with opportunities to consider the basis upon which they define common knowledge and how that influences how they interpret and what they teach. It is not about counter, alter, anti, it is about

companion to and alongside, enhancing the understanding that that there is *more than one way* and *more than one story*.

I reference some examples that draw from my eastern sense of common knowledge, including references to Omar Khayyam, Al-Khwarizmi, Allama Iqbal, Hallaj, the Indus Valley Civilization, and the War of 1857. These references are well known by millions, and yet may not be seen as valid by communities whose common knowledge draws from different sources and narratives. For example, Nehru's (1998) matter-of-fact account of peaceful coexistence in South differs in some ways from the "evidenced" position that Werbner (2010) takes. Depending on the perspective, validity can be a certainty or be ambiguous, the approach can be analytical or discursive—each with its own merits. As Jo-Ann Archibald (2008) describes there can be many contradictions between work from cultural perspectives and what are seen to be the norms. As with any research, interpretations can vary in many ways, *according to the interpretive lens of the viewer/audience*. Eisner (1997) suggests, "What succeeds in deepening meaning, expanding awareness, and enlarging understanding is, in the end, a community decision" (pp. 5–6) If the "community" happens to be entrenched in hegemonic norms or ideologies, it may undervalue or miss important pieces of information and key opportunities for "expanding awareness, and enlarging understanding." Kelly's (2010) story about the reporter and the artist reflect such a disconnect, between perhaps, cultural etiquette and professional purpose. The awareness of this kind of disconnect is something I became aware of growing up, that I address in my contexts as an intercultural educator, and bring to my other contexts. It is an example of the work of negotiation and reconciliation identity, culture, and belonging.

Sometimes, researchers may take cultural positions in their work to simply accomplish the first task of establishing presence and participation without an intention of conflict, challenge, critique, or reform in seeking voice or validity, though sometimes they can be perceived that way because of the perceived polarities and contradictions. It remains a problem that such perspectives can be seen as resistance and responded to with resistance, even though they may not actually be created with resistance or with an intention to resist (Zizek, 2013). Many current systems still perpetuate accreditation and validity based on norms and values that do not apply to all or that may systemically discredit the less- or unfamiliar.



Smith (2012, p. 206) writes that there are many risks facing researchers working in areas of

decolonization and representation. These include perceptions that their work is suspect, potentially biased, or lacking objectivity, or that their work intends to undermine academic status quo, and their work may impact relationships with the communities they identify with. These kinds of inherent tensions supports my notion that it is important to develop a perspective and collection of diverse academic and systemic practices as dialogic, alongside, and companion to one another.

Paradigms of reconciliation and dialogue can provide a

different experience from those where conflict and debate might be the norm. Neither is needed to validate, qualify, or authenticate the other, and each relates to a whole in some way. Instead, they work together to provide a better understanding of the bigger picture by mining the distinctions or presented binaries/polarities to find what is equal and parallel at their essence.

### ***Institutional Colonialism***

It is another problematic legacy that colonial beliefs extend into societal norms in other institutions as in the examples Deverell (2009) and Brigham (2013) provide in their work. Brigham's (2013, p. 124) discussion of microaggressions in everyday interactions and Deverell's (2009, p. 149) identification of institutional smokescreens, represent two sides of the same problem—the interruption of decolonizing processes in favour of recolonizing practices. For me, microaggressions and smokescreen policies together exemplify the kinds of resistance that Zizek (2013) refers to, exercised by individuals and systems, in defense of an ideology they feel is being upset. The conflicts inherent in colonialism repeat on smaller scales in institutions and in interpersonal interactions. For me, the “(mis)application of research findings,” “the (non)recognition of the contributions of subjects,” and “academic imperialism” that Dei (2005, p. 12) refers and the “ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce, and then simultaneously reject[ing] the people who created and developed those ideas and seek to deny them further opportunities...” (Smith, 2012, p. 1) are examples of such practices. Each of these behaviours can result in silencing voices and perspectives (Naguib, 2007) that are seen to go against a prescribed norm, while maintaining a hegemonic norm—a form of what I refer to collectively as *institutional colonialism*. Some examples of this include debates and distractions that can affect interactions, decisions and potentially policy:

- Debates that perpetuate hegemonic notions such as “What being Canadian looks like”: We are a nation of people from all parts of the globe, and to ascribe, for example, the physical attributes of one group over another as more Canadian seems outdated and exclusive, particularly of those whose histories on this land span thousands of years.

- Debates that project the hegemonic norms into the future such as “What Canada is ready for”: In the context of politics, for example and the question is asked, is Canada is ready for a (e.g., female, indigenous, LGBTQI, racializable minority, faith minority) leader such as a prime minister. Such perspectives suggest a cultural resistance to those who may identify as different and that they may not be welcome in such positions, even if they may be capable. If we knew our global histories and accepted them as equals, we would recognize such leaderships already exist around the world. We may be inspired, then, to reframe these questions, instead, to ask “*Why isn’t* Canada ready for a...?”
- “Please explain again...” Questions such as “Where are you from?” may sometimes be charged in this way. Asking the question may not be a microaggression in itself, but the expectation or insistence that the answer fit into a preconceived notion or stereotype may result in one. The person may keep (re)asking or reframing their query to solicit an explanation that matches their view, while negating or resisting the perspective being presented, rather than accepting it.
- The Name Change: Some name changes of policies, peoples and practices can be helpful in addressing oppression. At other times, changing names of policies, peoples and practices can cause confusion or disrupt the connections of people to historical narratives, contexts of identities or institutional strategies that may have proved useful in the past. Terms such as Indian, East Indian and South Asian, for example, might make it difficult for some to understand or study cultural history, if they are unfamiliar with the context of each.

For me, if used to implement smokescreens or as microaggressions, such practices can impede our progress and ability to further the integration of diverse perspectives and peoples, and maintain plural and inclusive environments of mutual respect and understanding.

### ***Two Kinds of Colonialisms***

I bring together my two primary experiences with colonialism as a South Asian and as a Canadian, enacted in ways specific to the conditions and peoples in each region. By placing them side by side I see similarities in displacements of languages, social structure, peoples, spiritualities and cultures. They also have similar legacies, of shadism, classism, and conflict and necessitate restoration and recovery. I gained an understanding of how colonialism was enacted, and how its legacy continues, in India and Pakistan. I was well aware of the Partition, the shadisms, the favouring of groups over others, the displacements, the divide-and-conquer strategies, and the different versions of these histories, by the time I was a teenager. I saw the devastating, silencing effects of these many displacements on elders and in my communities, and I saw the resilience and strength with which the people persevered. There was a trauma to losing connections to places, people, beliefs and stories, especially through injustice or segregation, and consequently there may be some trauma encountered in their un/re/dis/covery. But the un/re/dis/covery is essential to the healing process. This awareness facilitated my understanding of the impact of other similar displacements, such as the centralization of indigenous communities and of African Nova Scotians in cases such as Africville; of how notions of identity, culture, and belonging can be challenged, and how the histories of such displacements can be virtually erased, if not for the will of the affected peoples. It is in understanding the connections, through shared and similar experiences, that we can deepen understanding, such as



learning how colonialism can be context and culture-specific, and while there may be similarities, it also differs from region to region. If it was not for my eastern awarenesses, I may have taken the colonial Canadian narratives for granted.

I agree with the assessments that individualism, capitalism, and colonialism erode the practices of pluralism and solidarity among groups. They instill injustice or inequity and have a legacy that homogenizing peoples (Said 1979; Smith, 2012; Brigham, 2013; Mohanty, 2003) in large, all-encompassing polarizing narratives. I interpret circumstances that speak to interactions of displacement of subject-object relationships and deal with inter- and intracontextuality. The fictional narratives I create span time and include pan- and trans-national to represent such reconciliations of identity, culture, and belonging in mixed and complex categorizations.

### *Un/Re/Dis/covering (Inter)connections*

For me, there is truth in each story, as each is a matter of perspective. Together, they provide a deeper understanding of the whole. How people inhabit primary locations can depend upon how they define it and, in contexts of underrepresentation, how they negotiate it in relation to their environment and interactions. Healing and decolonizing from those kinds of circumstances is continuous and arduous work. Smith (2012) describes the process of decolonizing as “messy”:

[I]n a political sense it can fail miserably, replacing one corrupt elite with its mimics. The intellectual project of decolonizing has to set out ways to proceed through a colonizing world. It needs a radical compassion that reaches out, that seeks collaboration, and that is open to possibilities that can only be imagined as other things fall into place. *Decolonizing*

*Methodologies* is not a method for revolution in a political sense but provokes some revolutionary thinking about the roles that knowledge, knowledge production, knowledge hierarchies and knowledge institutions play in decolonization and social transformation. (p. xii)

To offer my work as food for thought is the spirit in which I undertake it. Mohanty (2003, p. 200) says that “[T]he task at hand is to decolonize our disciplinary and pedagogical practices.” She suggests that transforming how we teach and telling our own stories can perhaps dispel the marginalization of oppositional narratives, and education can become a means of “liberation and advancement,” (Mohanty, 2003, p. 200). Hut (2004) also suggests the work of bridging understanding ahead of us is accessible, and possibly even simple, “namely the effort to strip away judgment and just observe what presents itself, to catch certain aspects of reality...” (Hut, 2004, p. 16). All of these examples capture the Sufi and South Asian spirit of *alongside*.

I am particularly interested in academic approaches and research work that apply holistic methodologies among disciplines, communities, social systems, and cultures. Peh’chaan practice, in part, is one of mining beyond the distinctions or presented binaries/polarities to find what is equal and parallel in essence. At the same time, there are many challenges to working from positions that provide alternatives to colonial and western narratives, that in some cases also call into question the very premise and foundations of western academia (Said, 1979, 2003; Smith, 2012; Dei, 2005; Brigham, 2013). There is a need, and many calls, for work from underrepresented perspectives; however, the very things that make these works unique and necessary can also sometimes repeat the challenges that led to the underrepresentation in the first

place. Said (2003) suggest critical analysis and compassion are the essential elements of enabling societal transformation:

Critical thought does not submit to commands to join in the ranks marching against one or another approved enemy. Rather than the manufactured clash of civilisations, we need to concentrate on the slow working together of cultures that overlap, borrow from each other, and live together. But for that kind of wider perception we need time, patient and skeptical inquiry, supported by faith in communities of interpretation that are difficult to sustain in a world demanding instant action and reaction. (Said, 2003, para. 24)

This kind of compassion and critical analysis can also be useful for scholars as it can change the very nature—and quality—of inquiry. By locating examples of integrated academic approaches, I am able to learn from and build on existing templates that can help to negotiate, expand on, and bridge the divides that exist within, between, and among disciplines and across institutions. These kinds of approaches provide me with positive ways to negotiate contexts of hegemonic norms, and provide environments where this kind of research is enabled, supported, and integrated into the academy.

This inquiry practice creates opportunities for a simultaneous deepening of understanding while expanding awarenesses. Much like the 25 projects described by Smith (2012), *peh'chaan* can be considered restorative, in that it restores and/or strengthens an awareness of (inter)connections rather than awareness or focus on individualisms, conflict, or views of separateness. For me, the experiences of having heritages that may be racializable or minoritizable has also meant seeing the issues academics often discuss, being lived out among communities. I endeavoured to *know* decolonized versions of stories my ancestral histories from

my South Asian life contexts, and as a Canadian I have had to work very hard to intentionally un/re/dis/cover them over the years during my work and life experiences.

The traditional saying “*There are as many paths as there are people*” suggests that each of us has a lifelong, *unique* learning journey, and we travel as teachers *and* as students, in some combination of both, in relation to one another. This notion invites an appreciation and sense of respect for the parallel journeys of others. It also has more to do with supporting a person’s practice to be their best self, than with imparting specific knowledge. This teaching also provides a collective context for knowledge and information. It invites the negotiation of impositions and oppressions, and the resolutions of adversarialisms and conflicts, and in this way serves to substantiate notions of holism, interconnection, *resonance*, and equality. Notions such as the use of *zahir* and *batin*, searching for the kernel of the kernel, are invitations and reminders to engage in a deeper understanding, as there is always more than appears on most surfaces. This manner of critical thought can serve as an invitation to think deeply, to reflect, to consider, to question, to seek to understand one another in ways that connect, rather than divide us.

I came across an example Ramachandran’s (2009) discussion, in a TED talk video shown by a professor during class, about how his work in neuroscience suggests evidence of other (inter)connections among people. In the video, Ramachandran (2009) uses his scientific work with mirror neurons in the brain as a metaphor for how science and the humanities *are* interconnected and *can* work in tandem:

[T]here are mirror neurons for touch...if somebody touches me, my hand, neuron in the somatosensory cortex in the sensory region of the brain fires. But the same neuron, in some cases, will fire when I simply *watch* another person being touched. So, it's empathizing [with] the other person being touched.... Now, the question then arises: If I simply watch another person being touched, why do I not get confused and literally feel that touch sensation merely by watching somebody being touched? I mean, I empathize with that person but I don't literally feel the touch. Well, that's because you've got receptors in your skin, touch and pain receptors, going back into your brain and saying "Don't worry, you're not being touched. So, empathize, by all means, with the other person, but do not actually experience the touch, otherwise you'll get confused and muddled."

Okay, so there is a feedback signal that vetoes the signal of the mirror neuron preventing you from consciously experiencing that touch. But if you remove the arm, you simply anesthetize my arm, so you put an injection into my arm, anesthetize the brachial plexus, so the arm is numb, and there is no sensations coming in, if I *now* watch you being touched, I literally feel it in my hand. In other words, you have dissolved the barrier between you and other human beings. So, I call them Gandhi neurons, or empathy neurons. (Laughter)



And this is not in some abstract metaphorical sense. All that's separating you from him, from the other person, is your skin. Remove the skin, you experience that person's touch in your mind. You've dissolved the barrier between you and other human beings. And this, of course, is the basis of much of Eastern philosophy, and that is there is no real independent self, aloof from other human beings, inspecting the world, inspecting other people. You are, in fact, connected not just via Facebook and Internet, you're actually quite literally connected by your neurons. And there is whole chains of neurons around this room, talking to each other. And there is no real distinctiveness of your consciousness from somebody else's consciousness.

And this is not mumbo-jumbo philosophy. It emerges from our understanding of basic neuroscience. (excerpt from video, 2009)

Ramachandran suggests his example proves connections and (inter)connections among disciplines, people, and worldviews, in a way that is similar to the (inter)connection philosophies of *peh'chaan*. I use examples such as Ramachandran (2009) and Hut (2004) to reiterate that this work of bridging is happening, across borders of all kinds. Their work exemplifies, in my view, the kinds of shifts that, if maintained and sustained in our educational and societal institutions, can support peaceful, integrative practices of culturally diverse communities.

When I was younger, I longed to see myself reflected in the environments. I wanted to see myself and I wanted to see everyone alongside one another. In many of my early work and life contexts, as a student, as an artist, and as a broadcaster, I worked to ensure inclusion and representation of my and other underrepresented communities. As a scholar I now work to expand my perspectives and think critically about perspectives that are acknowledged and

accepted as mainstream and common. Now, my work shifts to include the creation of more opportunities for dialogic exchange. I reaffirm through this research that eastern discourse on lifelong learning, social justice, inclusion, and equity are well established throughout history, and are ongoing, alongside those occurring in western discourse. There are also many parallels in the use of arts practices in eastern contexts for education, social justice, and activism, among indigenous knowledge approaches and western academe. Some of these approaches also share means of accessing and evoking intuitive senses and emotions, as part of the learning process. I developed a distinct peh'chaan for the subtle and important differences between *being* and *belonging* after recognizing the multiple contexts of othering, conflict and adversarialism, both from my own experience and from witnessing that of others throughout my work and life practices. The experience of these negotiations is the inspiration for a *decidedly intentional* practice that focuses on similarities while seeking to understand differences in a spirit of dialogic exchange and mutual respect.

As educators we may be better served by developing ways of accepting and seeing these multiple narratives as parts of the entire whole and inform ourselves so that we may be able to bridge such gaps in knowledge and awareness. By learning from the past, applying the lessons in the present, and considering consequences in the future, this inquiry process is not just about the latest or the newest, the most visible or obvious; it considers things in broad, historical, and global contexts.

## *Reflections and Considerations*

Based on my work, I conclude by offering a number of reflections for the reader/audience to consider. That I chose to conduct self-reflective research and privilege Sufi and South Asian perspectives within this context offers a rare perspective. In this manner, my work confirms and supports the work of Said, Brigham, Smith, Archibald, Mohanty, Dei, and others who call for research to be created from within underrepresented communities and from non-colonial perspectives. I answer the call by experimenting with methodology and by using it to conduct research. I also bring my knowledge and experience as an adult learner and adult educator to my research work, all of which bears influence on the insights I gain in doing this work. I add to the advancement of knowledge by transforming my findings into accessible arts formats and sharing them. My work adds to the voices of underrepresented scholars in Nova Scotian and Canadian academies.

I suggest that prior learning from various sources can be an important resource that enhances learning environments. If educators are able to apply critical awareness to the processes used in the classrooms, they might be able to mitigate how hegemonic processes are perpetuated. If educators are mindful of how the kinds of learning they deliver may have been generated in hegemonic ways, then they may be able to improve learning environments and experiences. Such tools of awareness can enhance the





abilities of educators to understand and address inequities as they occur or as they become aware of them, and empower them as researchers and learners.

I believe integrated learning opportunities can enable deeper connections in the learning environments, to the content, among the learners and with educators. It is important to consider how other approaches, systems, and sources of knowledge support, can broaden and critically engage both educators and learners in a spirit of deep, mutually respectful learning. As educators and citizens we may benefit from a willingness to consider how power and privilege intersect with authorship, agency, positionality and environmental contexts. If we aspire to address inequities, then being prepared to identify how these patterns play out in individual and collective contexts and can create opportunities that deepen mutual understandings and transformation, evolution, and coexistence. Diversity, perhaps now more than ever, is an everyday reality in our global, instantaneously technologically connected village. Inclusive and plural practices of respectful dialogue, accommodation, and adaptation in our shared contexts are imperative and necessary. We as educators are accountable and bear a responsibility to educate ourselves about multiple narratives, and the circumstances that may arise when restoring those narratives, so that we are well equipped to negotiate learning environments as they grow and expand. This background knowledge can inform what language we use and how we curate these stories.

Culture-centric knowledge is vital and important to create and include in our educational and social institutions. Especially where it can remedy, begin to restore, and address gaps in collective narratives of history, as contributions to peace, progress, and development. What I am also suggesting is that we may benefit from learning about and establishing better practices of

pluralism that are inclusive and respectful of the diversity as it exists in many forms and iterations on this land. We are no longer simply identifiable as elements of a mosaic, we are simultaneously many variations and combinations in a melting pot as well, and our policies and perspectives about this nation may be better served to include both perspectives.

We need institutional approaches to pluralism that account for many perspectives, including indigenous, settler, and immigrant histories. Our stories are the paths that connect us to one another, stories of compassion, stories of war, stories of innovation, and stories of displacement, which all need to have a place in our collective, shared space. Conquest narratives may reflect how we became categorized and defined. Collaborative narratives may well be how and why any and all of us continue to exist. We need parallel conversations about content and process, borne of instinct, curiosity, understanding, and imagination, not just necessity—a process that mirrors the everyday life experiences of ongoing reconciliations. Claiming and knowing our stories is an important part of healing and empowerment. As a lifelong storyteller, as a journalist, educator, and artist, I have borne witness many times to tensions contained in our shared stories. The creation of stories and content, the un/re/dis/covering is one aspect of the decolonization. Culture-centric narratives require the balance of plural and (inter)connection narratives; we need to be able to accept and appreciate each others' stories, even when they differ from our own.

In my view, everyone is primary and therefore every story matters and has something to offer to the rest of us. At the same time, every story is precious and must be treated with care and respect. It requires that we, as educators and story facilitators, take time to reflect on our own processes, biases, and understandings and learn the signs of our own inner resistances so that we can keep an open mind—and heart—in order to truly learn from others. We can create

spaces where people can connect with and create their own stories, and they can choose if they wish to share them or not.

If as educators we wish to create leaning environments of agency, it is also important to consider accountability and be aware of how microaggressions and smokescreens may occur in relation to the stories being generated or shared. The goal is to provide environments where people can make empowered and informed decisions about how to participate for themselves. This requires a deeper understanding of issues of appropriation, exploitation, and agency and creating a space where the stories are valued as equals, and the environment is safe and one of respect and care. Building solidarity and learning from parallel narratives, especially those that have been excluded, is another important step. In a pluralism context, the working alongside to restore narratives is a shared responsibility, and it can also go a long way toward building relationships among communities, disciplines, and institutions. It is not a conflict or conquest-oriented approach, it is a deliberately companion and dialogic one. Developing a better understanding of each other's stories can help us understand ourselves and may enable us to facilitate understanding in one another. We might consider that besides being an artwork of mosaics, we are also many variations of a melting pot society that can benefit from more restorative, resolution-based educational practices.

Contemporary Canadian institutions of learning, and our populations, are becoming more representative of the world's peoples, daily. Better acceptance and inclusion of learning and prior knowledge, such as cultural and spiritual ways of knowing, are imperative and necessary in our academic and social institutions. Said (1979, 2003), Smith (2012), Ramachandran (2009), Archibald (2008), Dei (2005), Hut (2004), and many others support inclusive practices that build

bridges among disciplines and social institutions and see those bridges as beneficial to learners and instructors across disciplines, in educational contexts and among communities. They describe how traditional academic practices can—and have been—oppressive and exclusive.

When researchers create works that address gaps, shift borders, and might be underrepresented, these works should be considered as research first and foremost, equal and companion to the research that already exists. If they choose research that happens to include areas of underrepresentation, such as arts-related, spiritually and/or culturally located, or includes integrative and inclusive research contexts, their work may provide opportunities for expanding the collective body of knowledge. It is important, perhaps now more than ever before, that learning environments shift to include and reflect approaches of global citizenship and simultaneous coexistence, so that trans, mixed, inter, and pan contexts are included and reflected in content, paradigms, processes, and environments.

One of the key interpretations for me, of the Sufi saying, “*There are as many paths as there are people*,” the elephant story, and the zahir and batin references, is that no matter what we think we know or see, there will always be more if we look below the surface. These traditional wisdoms have often guided my work as a journalist, artist, and educator. Sometimes a tail is just a tale. The elephant is the whole story.

## Author's Note

The presence and voices of elders, the ancestors, the community members, scholars, all who have travelled the paths before, those who are companions, and those who are yet to come, are honoured in this way. Gathered at this rest stop. Stories shared around a dastarkhwaan. Companions alongside one another. *Saath, saath.*<sup>46</sup>



In the spirit of Sufi and South Asian traditions, this is a work of heart. As a scholar, this is the first time during my academic career that I am able to bring together and reference scholarly material that resonates with my experiences of negotiating identity culture and belonging. Throughout my life and work I observed the displacements of people in the communities I identify with and from many I have worked with, all engaging in similar negotiations and reconciliations. From the perspective of an immigrant descent person, for example, the challenges to accessing ancestral lands, absence of elders, relatives, extended families, and community, inspire many adaptations and new ways of reconciling themes of identity, culture, and belonging. Often in metaphor, often in spirit. The stories in this paper reflect the kinds of narratives I grew up with, rich in themes of pluralism, hope, and unity embedded in cultural lore, community gatherings and artistic traditions. As I reference my ancestral cultures of heritage and wisdom traditions, I also acknowledge the knowledges and stories that exist in communities and cultures around the world.

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<sup>46</sup>

Together, together.

I invite those who engage with my work to consider experiences of peh'chaan in their own ways, to engage in their own versions of my eastern-imagined research process, to locate themselves experientially into a worldview that may validate them, or perhaps differ from the ones they are used to, to experience what that might be like. I encourage more experiments with content and inquiry, especially those that build understanding for global cultural and intellectual traditions, knowledge systems, and belief practices. I invite readers and audiences to think about and identify with the experiences and issues I share in their own ways, in a spirit of dialogue. To consider how we identify ourselves, organize into groups, and interact—how we maintain, sustain, (re)locate, (re)tell, or reinstate our cherished and displaced stories—and how (re)frame them as equals. By creating this work in this way, I hope to add my voice to the growing body of first-person representations that help broaden academic and societal understanding of inclusion, belonging, cultural and intellectual diversity, traditional education, artistry, and activism.

With gratitude for your companionship on this journey.

*Shukriya*

### ***Future Research***

This research sets the stage for further study and experimentations with peh'chaan methodology and content creation. I would like to continue my work developing peh'chaan as an inquiry and search for more paths of (inter)connection. I hope to conduct further, in-depth study into Sufi and South Asian worldviews, arts practices, and integrative practices. I wish to locate and incorporate more authentic, primary-context South Asian and Sufi resources. During future study I will extend my community of research to locate Sufi and South Asian academic

practitioners and conduct interviews with them. I plan to continue to work with story and develop the narratives of the four characters. I would like to also extend the work with narrative and voice to include additional research subjects and participants. This would allow for more in-depth research into peh'chaan ideologies of pluralism and (inter)connection among the academic disciplines and theories. I will enhance my own understanding through the research I conduct in what is being done by others in these areas, across disciplines, and of how my work fits into broader contexts. I plan to explore opportunities to integrate this work into my practices in media and arts presentation and other life work.

***The path has no value when you have arrived.***

*~ Traditional Sufi Saying*

*The path is the destiny.*

*Once we arrive, the path has no value.*

*So let us not cease to savor the journey.*

*It is exciting, challenging, and invigorating.*

*It is a place for continuing growth, experience, and wisdom.*

*Value the path, learn from it, and apply the learning to future endeavours.*

*Each time you stumble or struggle, ask yourself:*

*What have I learned from this and how can it help me in the future?*

*There are no failures, only lessons.*

*Jamal (2002, p. 160)*



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## Appendix 1

Dominant Curriculum Discourses	Alternative Curriculum Discourses Métissage <sup>1</sup>
Explanatory.....	Hermeneutic <sup>2</sup>
Didactic .....	Performative <sup>3</sup>
Representational .....	Inquiry <sup>4</sup>
Comprehensive.....	Partial <sup>5</sup>
Analytical.....	Discursive <sup>6</sup>
Paradigmatic.....	Narrational <sup>7</sup>
Monologic.....	Dialogic <sup>8</sup>
Abstract .....	Autobiographical <sup>9</sup>
General .....	Situated <sup>10</sup>
Objective.....	(Inter)Subjective <sup>11</sup>
Apolitical .....	Transformative <sup>12</sup>
	(for individuals and/or collective)
Certainty.....	Ambiguity <sup>13</sup>
Clear.....	Blurred <sup>14</sup>
Detached .....	Embodied <sup>15</sup>
Logos .....	Ethos <sup>16</sup>
Unity.....	Multiplicity <sup>17</sup>
Categorical .....	Points of affinity <sup>18</sup>
Individualistic.....	Kindred <sup>19</sup>

Source: What is Metissage? (2002)