

Pragmatic Environmentalism: Sikhism and Grassroots Environmental Advocacy in North India

Aase Jeanette Kvanneid

Abstract

In urban North India, climate change, land degradation, biodiversity loss, and pollution severely impact the environment. Small grassroots initiatives, such as EcoSikh in Punjab, address these challenges by anchoring their activism in religious faith while striving to mobilize beyond their socio-religious communities. Drawing on fieldwork with EcoSikh, this chapter explores how Sikh environmentalists anchor their environmental advocacy in Sikh teachings, examining how “pragmatic environmentalism” functions as a non-confrontational strategy to navigate politically sensitive contexts and to mobilize local communities across sociocultural divides. It argues that addressing the context of “pragmatic environmentalism” is crucial to understand the potentials and limitations of religiously inspired grassroots environmentalism in North India and beyond.

Keywords: Grassroots movements, Sikh environmentalism, environmental advocacy, pragmatism

Introduction

India is, in 2024, the world's most populous country, the third-largest producer of greenhouse gases, and it hosts three of the fifteen most polluted cities in the world (Forbes 2024; The World Bank 2024).¹ Through a process of climate change, land degradation, biodiversity loss, sinking water tables, excess waste, toxic air and polluted water, the cumulative impacts of climate and society on the Indian environment now pose a threat to food, water, and energy security, as well as the health and well-being of all living beings (Dubash 2019; Pörtner et al. 2019; Krishnan and Dhara 2021; Mehta, Adam, and Srivastava 2021; World Health Organization, 2024). Indian environmental organizations are among the important actors working to solve these increasingly serious issues. The large international environmental organizations have proven to be powerful in their ability to affect policy and politics in the larger international arena, yet they appear largely invisible in the everyday lives of most of India's population. Despite their efforts and the severity of

issues at stake, the “green giants” appear to struggle to mobilize the kind of broad grassroots support needed to change the unsustainable direction of India’s development trajectory. Encouraged by scholars such as Duara (2014) and Clapperton and Piper (2019), it seems timely to look beyond the “green giants” of environmental activism and toward the smaller environmental initiatives of India to see what they are achieving in their local communities, and how. Over a period of six weeks of fieldwork in North India in 2022, I visited four environmental grassroots organizations which, despite being small and diverse in their background, composition, and ambition, were all actively engaging with local communities to encourage a sustainable future for society.²

This chapter will focus on the largest of the four—EcoSikh. This organization is particularly relevant for the topic of this volume, as it explicitly anchors its activism in the Sikh religion and aims to mobilize both within the local socioreligious community as well as beyond. Through my interviews with EcoSikh in India and Norway in 2022, as well as by visiting three Guru Nanak Sacred Forests planted by EcoSikh as part of their environmental campaign in Punjab, Haryana, and Delhi, I observed a grassroots organization that engaged and initiated several projects and processes on the ground, and that in a distinctively pragmatic way, enabled outreach and dialogue on environmental issues across socioreligious communities. The key questions I explore in this chapter are: What role did Sikhism have in the organization’s environmentalism? How does religion affect outreach beyond their own Sikh socioreligious community? What has caused their pragmatic, non-confrontational approach to environmental activism, and what are the implications of this form of environmental engagement?

In this chapter, I draw on environmental anthropology, political ecology, and religious environmental studies to enable a nuanced analysis of EcoSikh and the role of religion in a grassroots Indian environmental movement. In the first part, I look into EcoSikh India and its various projects and initiatives before turning to the role Sikhism has played in enabling environmental advocacy on the ground. To explain the reason for EcoSikh’s relative success as a grassroots movement, I also highlight how socioreligious identities are closely related to other aspects that shape EcoSikh’s form of environmentalism, namely caste, class, and politics. Based on my analysis, I introduce the concept of “pragmatic environmentalism” as a way to describe the contemporary Indian environmentalist grassroots movement. I conclude by arguing that this pragmatism is as much a consequence of skill, as it is a necessity for performing environmental activism in an increasingly polarized society. First, however, an introduction to the case study is needed.

EcoSikh India: Background and Origin

Whether traveling through the congested, densely populated capital of New Delhi or the rural and urban areas of the northern states of Uttarakhand and Punjab, the severity of environmental destruction and economic inequity in North India were pronounced at the time of my fieldwork in late 2022. Some issues were more visible in the cities, such as cows rummaging in the ubiquitous roadside litter and plastic waste for fodder, or the severe air pollution from industry, traffic, and crop stubble burning leading to school closings and remain indoors advisories. Other environmental problems were more noticeable in the districts: deforestation and land degradation combined with the heavy use of fertilizer and pesticides in agriculture, inadequate wastewater and solid waste management, and the loss of biodiversity—all of which demonstrate how acute the environmental problems of North India have become (N. Singh 2022; Liu, et al. 2021; UNEP 2012).

In Punjab, known as one of India's most important "grain-basket" states, the effects of the 1970s Green Revolution in agricultural food production have left the ecosystem vulnerable to the cumulative impacts of climate change and environmental deterioration. It is also here, in Punjab's largest city, Ludhiana, that the small environmental organization EcoSikh India is located. As the name indicates, the organization is a Sikh community effort to mitigate the impacts of climate change and environmental deterioration (EcoSikh 2024). EcoSikh India is an independent chapter of the main EcoSikh organization, founded by the Sikh diaspora in the United States in 2009.

EcoSikh India is actively engaged in environmental projects and processes directed at mitigating air pollution, deforestation, and biodiversity loss, as well as promoting organic and natively grown food and awareness-raising within and beyond the Indian Sikh community. From a humble start in 2016, EcoSikh has in eight years grown into a professionally managed organization with five full-time employees, four on-call employees, as well as a growing number of community volunteers. The staff are all highly educated and fluent in English, and most of the volunteers were young adults, often students. Many of the staff members were recruited from the large number of unemployed engineers and technology graduates of the region (Ahmed 2023; Kumar 2024). As a sign of the organization's growth rate, a media and communications officer had been hired not long before my visit to manage and develop content for the website and news-media presence, as well as to share stories of achievements through social media. The daily work itself was managed from a small, ground-floor office in a residential area of Ludhiana, and the majority of EcoSikh initiatives and projects were located in this region, as well as in Haryana and the union territories of Chandigarh and Delhi.

The first campaign of EcoSikh India was the “Millet Mission.” This campaign latched on to an ongoing grassroots movement toward “green *gurdwaras*” (Sikh community houses of worship) that began in parts of the Sikh community around 2010–2012, when several *gurdwaras* in Punjab began to recycle waste and install solar panels (Singh 2022). In the Millet Mission, EcoSikh promoted the use of organic foods in *langar*, the Sikh community’s practice of a community kitchen serving a free meal in the *gurdwaras*. When organic, natively grown millet replaced rice in the community kitchens and gardens of the iconic and holiest of Sikh *gurdwaras*, the Golden Temple of Amritsar (Bassi 2016; Vijaykumar 2016) in 2016, the “Millet Mission” established EcoSikh as an environmental initiative in the local community. Other efforts by EcoSikh to encourage environmental awareness among Sikhs have been through celebrating the seventh Guru, Guru Har Rai’s enthronement day on 14 March as “Sikh Environmental Day.” Judging by the growing number of EcoSikh Environmental Day toolkits sent out from the Ludhiana office to *gurdwaras* around India, the celebration seems to have caught on in the Sikh community in India, just as Prill (2015) has shown to be the case for the American EcoSikh.

Other EcoSikh projects active during my 2022 visit were the air-pollution mitigation projects “Clean Air Punjab” and the more local “Lungs of Ludhiana.” Related to the first project, representatives from the organization were preparing for meetings with labor unions and drivers on the electrification of auto-rickshaws in Amritsar (*The Tribune* 2022). Others were planning workshops with Punjabi farmers and researchers from the Punjab Agricultural University to reduce large-scale stubble burning, a cost-efficient but extremely air-polluting method for enriching the soil after a large rice harvest (Abdurrahman et al. 2020). Through Clean Air Punjab, EcoSikh contributed directly to the crafting of a state action plan for clean air for the Punjab state government. Other parts of their activities included visiting local schools, both private and public, to raise awareness of environmental issues and the dangers of air pollution, and trying to engage the children in what they and their families could do to mitigate it. The project manager reported that so far, the children had responded well to their workshops, and she had heard that they had asked their parents to stop unnecessarily allowing their car engines to idle, to avoid the use of firecrackers at Diwali, and to replace single-use drink bottles with reusable ones.

The planting of “micro-forests” was, however, EcoSikh’s most prominent campaign. Originally starting as an ambition to plant 550 Guru Nanak Sacred Forests as a tribute to the 550th birthday of Guru Nanak in 2019, the campaign quickly attracted global attention. By 2023, EcoSikh had planted 850 micro-forests with one hundred native, rare, and endangered species in India (M. Singh 2023). Sacred forests have also been planted by Sikh communities abroad, in Ireland (EcoSikh UK 2022) and Canada (EcoSikh Canada 2023). In India, all Sacred Forests are geo-tagged

and can be located on Google Maps (EcoSikh 2024). At the beginning of the project, planting a forest turned out to be a challenge to the EcoSikh staff. As the Forest Manager recounted:

In the beginning, the forests would just die—the survival rate was only about half! We did not know, for example, what species would grow, from what habitat, in what soil, at what temperature, or how much water they needed. We were engineers you know! (Laughing). We were so enthusiastic, but we knew nothing about forests! (EcoSikh Interviews 2022)

Concerned that the campaign would fail from the start, they eagerly accepted the offer from an environmentally concerned industrialist in Mumbai, Charan Singh, who had approached EcoSikh and advised them to try the “Miyawaki method.” This is a micro-afforestation technique developed by the Japanese botanist Akira Miyawaki to make a “micro-forest” of compatible native species in small spaces. The method was first applied in India in 2010 by, among others, Shubhendu Sharma, founder of the for-profit company Afforestt, who actively promotes this forest planting method through his company (Afforestt 2023). Sharma has been training and advising the EcoSikh staff on the method which is used in all sacred forests planted in India today.

Ideally, a Guru Nanak Sacred Forest consists of a heterogeneous canopy of native trees and bushes supporting a diversity of animal lifeforms. The forests are planted predominantly in public parks or spaces in villages and cities, or on private and industrial land. As the Miyawaki method allows the forests to be very small, the Guru Nanak forests range between minor pockets of trees (20m²) to the decisively largest EcoSikh-planted forest in Pathankot (600sq meters; EcoSikh 2024).

In 2022, I visited three EcoSikh Sacred Forests. The first was planted on industrial land behind a steel factory owned by an elderly, environmentally concerned Sikh. From the street, the factory land looked as dry and inhospitable as any North Indian industrial property, yet behind the walled gates, and behind the factory building itself, a young sacred forest with a variety of species of different sizes and heights, growing at will, laid claim to one corner of the backyard, while a park with a wide range of edible fruit trees laid claim to the other. Although most of the forests planted in Punjab belong to the Sikh community or the Sikh diaspora, the Sacred Forests are also found in public and private parks, schoolyards, and industrial areas across India, adopted by non-Sikhs. The land is not acquired by EcoSikh, it is the property owner who “adopts” the forest, which could theoretically be done by anyone, anywhere. If the forest is constructed in a village, for example, the forest will belong to the village. However, if the level of environmental toxins in the soil and water is too high, this could exclude some areas, although this could in some cases be mitigated by removing more than the required depth of one meter of topsoil.

When a plot of land is considered for afforestation, the EcoSikh Forest staff will survey the surrounding vegetation and soil quality, and procure the permissions, materials, machinery, and manpower needed. A team of EcoSikh staff and volunteers from the area first replaces the top layer of soil with composted soil before they plant the trees cultivated in local nurseries. The saplings are attended to in the first eighteen months by the company or individual “adopting” the forest, mainly by watering in the dry season. After this period, the forest is largely left to grow at its own pace. As the Forest Manager told me, the Punjab Agricultural University was a little apprehensive about the method at first, especially since the tree species were planted very close to each other. Yet after a recent workshop held in one of the forests, the researchers had been genuinely surprised at how well it seemed to thrive. Talking about the direct environmental impact of the various initiatives, the staff at EcoSikh were aware that in a larger context, they could address but a fragment of the environmental issues at home and abroad, but this did not dampen their enthusiasm. For them, these projects were a tiny step in “the right direction” and considered much better than doing nothing at all. In the words of one Project Manager: “You know, we are not changing the environment ... We are changing the people” (EcoSikh Interviews 2022). And a key means ‘to change people’ is through the religion of Sikhism, as many of my interviews and conversations emphasized (EcoSikh Interviews 2022; EcoSikh 2024).

In the following, I begin with a brief introduction to Sikhism as religion, before looking more closely at the relationship between Sikhism and modern-day EcoSikh environmentalism. I distinguish between Sikhism as a formalized, textual religion, and Sikhism as an aspect of a socioreligious identity, as these aspects came to matter in different ways.

The Role of Sikhism in Sikh Environmentalism

As a formalized religion, Sikhism was founded by its first Guru, Nanak Singh (1469–1539) in late fifteenth-century Punjab. This makes Sikhism a relatively recent religious tradition compared to Hinduism, the largest religion in India. Today, there are an estimated 26–30 million registered Sikhs in the world, of which approximately 90 percent live in India (Government of India 2011; Kramer 2021). Sikhism is commonly regarded as a monotheistic religion based on a textual tradition. Sikhs believe in the one, timeless, immaterial God, referred to as “Akāl” and depicted with a sign (*Ek Ongka*). For Sikhs, the immaterial God is conceptualized as a form of energy that is present in all creation. Central to the religion is also the sacredness of the Sikh gurus. Although the title ‘guru’ in India can refer to any revered religious or spiritual teacher, ‘guru’ in a Sikh context refers to a historical lineage of ten Gurus who brought forth the message of God. The first nine gurus were men, while

the last guru is the holy religious scripture *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* (N. Singh 2022; Prill 2015; Virk 2021; EcoSikh Interviews 2022).

When talking about the role of religion in their environmental advocacy, several of my EcoSikh interlocutors emphasized how the Sikh philosophy is ideal for the sustainable development of society. Sikhism, they argued, teaches humans to care for nature in a way that, due to its openness to other religions and cultures, will resonate well across faiths and cultural traditions. While Western or modern forms of environmentalism are distinctively dualist in the way they externalize and objectify nature as “environment,” Sikh philosophy approaches the environment holistically, as an integral part of all lifeforms. To enable effective outreach within and beyond the Sikh community, Sikh ideals of community practices, such as the concepts of *sarbat da bhala* (the well-being of all), *seva* (service to ensure this well-being) and *sangat* (congregation to support community and community action), are argued to be well-suited.

By drawing attention to the environmental aspects of Sikh tradition, EcoSikh attempts to help people to “remember the meaning, revive it, and connect to our roots.” Selected verses and the life story of Guru Har Rai (1630–1661) were also shared with me as examples of how well Sikhism encourages care for nature and the well-being of the environment. In her interviews with me, the EcoSikh president would, for example, elaborate on how EcoSikh draws attention to the “original meaning” of well-known *gurbani* (Sikh hymns) as part of their advocacy. One example was the hymn “Air Is the Guru, Water Is the Father, and Earth Is the Great Mother of All” that is recited by devoted Sikhs every day as part of their daily prayer. She described their approach to engaging fellow Sikhs in environmentalism: “We say this every day, but we have forgotten its meaning: what does it mean? So we are asking them [our fellow Sikhs]: how are we treating the air, water, and earth? This was so powerful that they now understood” (EcoSikh Interviews 2022). The life and teachings of Guru Har Rai were particularly seen to reflect Sikhism’s sensitivity and compassion for nature (also noted by Prill, 2015) and were, therefore, particularly apt for emphasizing the environmental values found in Sikhism. Another example was the Sikh cultural relationship with trees and forests. Sikh *gurdwaras* are often encircled by trees (Prill 2015), and Sikhism has a tradition for “sacred trees,” such as Dukh Bhanjani and Baba Budha Sahib near the Golden Temple. Additionally, many Sikh shrines are named after species of trees, such as the highly revered Neem and Holy Fig (Pipal), which arguably have aided the Sacred Forest campaign.

The way that EcoSikh merges environmental and religious philosophy resembles what the historian Prasenjit Duara (2014) argues to be a potent enabler for dialogical transcendence toward sustainability. In contrast to scholars who have emphasized how spiritual traditions can be reservoirs for both ecologically friendly *and* destructive views and practices (Huber and Pedersen 1997; Bruun and Kalland 1995; Gold 2010; Gold 2002; Haberman 2006), or enabling polarizing,

ultra-nationalist rhetoric (Alley 2000, Tomalin 2002, 2023, Gherter 2011, Sharma 2012), Duara argues that Asian religious texts and teachings carry a transcendent potential that can induce environmental grassroots mobilization across communities and cultures. As Hulme (2009; 2017) too has argued, science or scientific evidence alone can never provide access to all that matters—or that which is considered meaningful—to humans. When writing on how societies around the world have (failed) to mitigate climate change, Hulme argues for the need for a “grand narrative” or “myth” to guide societal development in a more sustainable direction (Hulme 2009; Hulme and Marshall 2009). The role of myths and grand narratives as sources of motivation resonates with what the EcoSikh Forest manager told me:

I may not believe in the stories of the Bible or of Hindu mythology or even the Norse and Greek pantheon or in the Egyptian or African tribals—but I can believe in the morals or ethics these stories teach if it aligns with the teachings of my faith (EcoSikh Interviews 2022).

As a local answer to a global call made by the WWF, UN, and the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), can EcoSikh carry the prospects of a grassroots movement that resonates back into the global? EcoSikh staff believed it could, as the Forest Manager of EcoSikh put it:

The UN tried to work through society, through politics, but they failed. Now they are trying through religion. The logic behind it was that if we [the Sikh community] started doing this [planting trees and protecting nature] in the name of our Guru, it would be a good thing. We are hoping that this movement can be copied and taken up by other faiths as well. This stems from a core concept of openness in Sikhism: good things should be shared (EcoSikh Interviews 2022).

This, however, raises the question of whether Sikh environmentalism will resonate equally strongly among all Sikhs, and indeed whether it can aid environmental mobilization beyond the Sikh socioreligious community. To address the first question first: perhaps not. Although Sikhs are known for their strong sense of identity and community (Cheema 2006; Kinnvall 2002; van der Veer 2001; Prill 2015), the Sikh community is internally heterogeneous, and not all Sikhs are equally environmentally concerned or engaged. As Singh (2022), Mooney (2018) and Prill (2015) have all noted for Sikh environmental initiatives in Punjab and the Sikh US diaspora respectively, Sikhism must first be curated somewhat to fully align with contemporary environmentalist ideals. This has, in the case of EcoSikh, happened through a conscious process of recovery and reinterpretation of Sikh philosophy. Assisting this process, EcoSikh US has compiled an online environmental anthology

(Prill 2015, 229) highlighting, for example, elements and passages in written hymns and verses in Guru Granth Sahib that emphasize the life and teachings of Guru Har Rai (Prill 2015). For EcoSikh, Sikhism evidently offered the kind of moral and ethical compass that—interpreted or understood in the most hopeful way—can help move humanity toward a common path to sustainability. But the morals or ethics of (environmental) care obviously have not sprung from some religious or spiritual “pure space” alone. Knowledge or awareness of natural scientific processes (Leiserowitz and Thaker 2012; Dubash 2012) also matter. And, in studies of environment and climate change activism, tradition and culture, world-views and ideologies, as well as sentiments of sorrow and loss are identified as other powerful and transcultural sources of motivation for action (Norgaard 2011; Kvanneid 2021; Rudiak-Gould 2013). Indeed, when asked, the EcoSikh staff would readily acknowledge that their own concern for the environment had not originated exclusively from within Sikhism, but came about as a result of a combination of many impulses, including becoming aware of environmental destruction and climate change through education, media coverage, and direct exposure.

In all my interviews with EcoSikh, Sikhism was talked about less as an “environmental” religion in itself, and more as an apt “vehicle” for environmentalism. This indicates that it is not the Sikh religion as such that induces an environmental consciousness, but the process of an environmental reinterpretation of the Sikh tradition. This reinterpretation, tellingly, is not done by all Sikh religious leaders, but develops through environmental initiatives such as EcoSikh. Hence, if Sikhism is not the X-factor that can explain the relative success of EcoSikh as a grassroots organization, we must look to other factors. Below I suggest that by foregrounding social status, we can come to appreciate how strongly EcoSikh’s advocacy has depended on social capital and on the close intertwinement of the Sikh religion with other powerful structures in Indian society. In the next section, I highlight two aspects relating to social status in particular: the symbolic standing of the Khalsa tradition within Sikhism itself, and the privileges and forms of access and connectivity that flow from particular class and caste locations.

Structural Enablers: Status, Power and Identity

Khalsa refers to a self-chosen path within Sikhism in which the devotee joins the martial tradition of the Sikh brotherhood, constituted by the tenth and last guru, Guru Gobind Singh. Being Khalsa is a lifelong commitment to the purest ideals of Sikhism: religious devotion, abstention from intoxicants (alcohol, tobacco, drugs, etc.) and adultery, and committing to *seva* (service) to protect the vulnerable (Kinnvall 2002). As an outward sign of commitment, a follower of the Khalsa will visibly

distinguish him or herself from other Sikhs by five signifiers: keeping the hair uncut and always wearing the *kirpan* (sword or knife), a steel wristband, a wooden comb, and a characteristic undergarment of cotton. To a certain extent, being a follower of the Khalsa does give a particular standing among Sikhs, and EcoSikh's association with this tradition could arguably be said to positively aid EcoSikh in gaining the respectability needed for them to advocate both within and outside their community.

This association with the Khalsa tradition has been a conscious choice made by EcoSikh in the US from the start, by symbolically extending the role of the Khalsa as warriors protecting the environment—a vulnerable part of God's creation (Mooney 2018, 325). Although some members of the EcoSikh staff belonged to the Khalsa tradition in India, being Khalsa was by no means a requirement for engaging with or in EcoSikh in India. As EcoSikh President Kaur explained, the founder of EcoSikh himself, Dr. Rajwant Singh, was not Khalsa, “just an ordinary Sikh” with a good network and a good reputation³ (EcoSikh Interviews 2022).

Social Standing Beyond the Sikh Community: Social Status and Class

The second aspect that enabled EcoSikh's environmental advocacy had to do with social status and class. EcoSikh was, as mentioned, founded in 2009 in the US by the then Chairman of the Sikh Council on Religion and Education (SCORE), Dr. Rajwant Singh. Dr. Singh had been invited to represent the global Sikh community at the ‘One Earth’ summit, a large interfaith event hosted by Prince Philip, the secular ARC⁴ and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) at Windsor Castle in 2009 (EcoSikh 2024; Mooney 2018). Dr. Singh's Indian family background eventually led him to meet Dr. Supreet Kaur, who herself was an environmentally concerned Sikh working as an academic in India. Urged by Dr. Singh, Dr. Kaur went on to establish EcoSikh as an independent chapter in India with support from ARC. Receiving direct funding for the three first years, as well as providing the organization's members with access to ARC's large network of religious environmentalist groups both within India as well as internationally (Sharma 2012, 182), ARC played an instrumental role in EcoSikh India's establishment, paving the way to other affiliations with powerful and influential networks within and beyond the Sikh community. A high social status among individual members can thus enable the formation of wider networks that can open doors to influential political fora, academic communities, and private sector boardrooms. It can also enable other more subtle forms of environmental advocacy, such as when female EcoSikh staff members host “kitty parties with a meaning” (EcoSikh Interviews, 2022). “Kitty parties” are popular social get-togethers hosted by and for women belonging to the higher social strata of urban India. The gatherings are mostly spaces for networking and socializing with peers, in which all members contribute in cash

or kind toward the next party, but can also be arenas for hosting charity events. In kitty parties hosted by EcoSikh, wives (predominantly the non-working wives of well-to-do husbands) gathered to also talk about topics related to environmental or climate change issues. This, according to one staff member, had resulted in several “Warrior Moms” who not only encouraged their husbands to promote environmental solutions in their workplaces but also wrote letters to the authorities, sent complaints to the government, and so on (EcoSikh Interviews 2022).

Being supported by actors or institutions with economic or political muscle is, of course, an asset for any minor environmental organization, including EcoSikh. In 2022, EcoSikh was entirely funded by donations from rather wealthy individuals, such as industrialists or philanthropists, as well as through partnerships with large Indian companies, such as the ICICI Bank. To secure financing over time, however, was always a concern. As the organization grew and the number of projects and initiatives expanded, more funding was also needed for management and upkeep. As a possible solution to this challenge, EcoSikh had, at the time of my fieldwork, engaged in a lengthy process of applying for approval for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) partner status. Since 2014, when India passed the CSR Act, Indian companies of a certain size have been obliged to spend 2 percent of their revenue toward addressing social and environmental impacts in a way that aids sustainability goals (Government of India 2024). Many companies choose to do this by donating money to CSR-registered civil society organizations. To be eligible as a CSR partner, the organization must meet set requirements for revenue, governance and transparency (Government of India and Ministry of Corporate Affairs 2024). Although the Indian CSR system has been criticized for directly privileging organizations that support the policies of the ruling party (Mkandawire and Utting 2003; Kleppe 2006), obtaining CSR status would evidently matter greatly for EcoSikh’s future ability to pursue environmental advocacy. In 2023, EcoSikh was approved as an eligible CSR partner by the central government of India, and in the words of the Forest Manager: “Now the industries can plant a forest with EcoSikh as part of their CSR. That means—they are now reaching out to us—and they have both money and land!” (EcoSikh Forest Manager 2023). This also boosted EcoSikh’s forest campaign which by 2024 had planted around one million Sacred Forests (SikhNet 2024).

Caste

The third important aspect related to social status as an enabling element for advocacy is caste. Although Sikhism is largely thought of as an egalitarian religion which is open to all, and which from the start renounced the endogamous social stratification system that is closely interwoven with Hindu ideals of ritual purity and impurity (Gupta 2005; van der Veer 2001), caste identity still matters within the

Sikh community. Albeit less pronounced, and with more room for social mobility compared to what is seen in Hindusim, the relevance of caste identity is, for example, apparent in Sikh marriages as well as in politics (Ram 2007; Singh 2021). It is therefore important to mention that EcoSikh India's leadership was associated with the Jat Sikh community. Jat is a caste identity that in North India enjoys a higher socioeconomic and sociocultural status through their association with landownership. As a numerically strong community of historical landowners, Jat Sikhs tend to accumulate both economic and political capital and are, as a whole, generally more privileged than the landless and often low-caste and Dalit communities of Indian Sikhs (Ram 2007, 4067). Being an organization with such a strong Jat Sikh imprint has, therefore, likely enabled EcoSikh's advocacy in political arenas that may be closed to less privileged Sikhs or much more difficult for them to access.

Cultural Identity Beyond Sikhism

A final element that deserves consideration as an enabling factor for EcoSikh's environmental advocacy is the prevalence of a more widely shared cultural identity that stretches beyond Sikhism. The Forest Campaign again serves as a good example. As mentioned above, trees—at least certain species of trees—have a particular cultural standing among Sikhs; however, this is also true for other North Indian religious traditions, including Hinduism (Kvanneid 2021; Gold 2010; Guha 1989). The scientific reasoning behind the Miyawaki method also emphasizes the distinct symbolism of forests as representing “carbon sinks” for storing carbon dioxide, or as the home of biodiversity (see, for example, Robbins 2020). Confined to smaller areas with scientifically selected species of trees, these forests were never referred to as “jungles,”⁵ a word commonly used to refer to most native forests in North India and denoting something wild, uncontrolled, and even savage (Dove 1992, Kvanneid 2021). Emphasizing a selected blend of trees combined into a “forest” thus lends a “symbolic simplicity” to the campaign that easily resonates across religious communities in India.

Another aspect of the campaign that touches upon a more widely shared cultural identity is the emphasis on planting *native* trees to protect and restore the forests of the past. In conversations about all four North Indian environmental initiatives I visited, environmental decay was seen to happen mainly because of “modern” or “Western” practices, such as conspicuous consumption, greed, and egocentrism. This (undesired) development was seen to affect “all Indians” alike, irrespective of caste, creed, faith, and location. In my interviews, the environmentalists expressed feelings of discomfort, sorrow, and even fear about this change that they saw as not merely environmental, but also as a change in “Indian culture.” Perceiving themselves and their peers as representing a disassociation or discontinuity with

the (somewhat idealized) past, the ecological crisis also represents a crisis of identity. As Sharma (2014) has noted, such sentiments can easily fall prey to the kind of ultra-nationalist rhetoric espoused by Hindu nationalist organizations (see Nielsen and Gokhale, this volume), yet this was not something I observed in the four environmental initiatives I encountered. For them, environmentalism generated feelings of hope and belonging: through participating in a common effort to restore a simpler, more sustainable lifestyle through everyday practices such as replacing rice with natively grown millet, or planting native species of trees, environmentalism was, to them, crucially about crafting a meaningful engagement with others, be that through strengthening relationships between people living in the present or by connecting to traditions representing generations now lost to time.

To sum up, EcoSikh's relative success in enabling environmental grassroots activities is the result of a complex set of interacting factors that includes the teachings and practices of Sikhism, as well as the status, social roles, and resource networks of individual activists, and which also draws sustenance from more widely resonant symbolic universes and identities that stretch well beyond Sikhism. Yet while these factors may thus be aligned in productive ways from the point of view of EcoSikh, they may also at times give rise to challenges. In the following section, I zoom in on some of the challenges that EcoSikh, as a Sikh environmental organization, has encountered in its efforts to change society, focusing especially on how these challenges have been navigated through pragmatism.

EcoSikh Environmentalism: The Pragmatic Approach

As EcoSikh's stated ambition was to reach out beyond the Sikh community, the organization soon found itself in a situation where it had to navigate quite pronounced differences and inequalities between social groups and their religious, cultural and political identities. My interviews with members of the organization revealed that this required a great deal of pragmatism and considerable contextual adaptation or even downplaying of their own identity, as well as their personal political or ideological convictions.

One telling example was how EcoSikh would downplay their religious and cultural identity when reaching out beyond the Sikh community, for example by speaking English and not Punjabi.

You know, we speak English most of the time in these public places ... although some [in the community] do want us to stick to Punjabi ... but we disagree, language should not be a barrier. In a big meeting ... I simply cannot afford to speak Punjabi and risk losing them! (EcoSikh Interviews 2022)

This downplaying of socioreligious identity seemed to be particularly important when talking to government and industry representatives outside of Punjab. These were situations in which EcoSikh was open to placing “religion on the side” to get the message across. In the words of the EcoSikh president: “From the onset of interaction, we are always very open. They should never think we are reaching out to the Sikh communities only to help. In the work itself, religion is not there” (EcoSikh Interviews 2022).

This pragmatic approach to dealing with the question of cultural identity when moving outside Punjab also showed up when I discussed the religious sacredness of the sacred forests with EcoSikh after visiting two that had been adopted by Hindus. One of the forests, planted in an enclosed park area in a posh residential area of New Delhi, had been adopted by a Hindu who had removed all visible signs of EcoSikh’s affiliation. He had also denied the spiritual or religious significance of the forest, insisting that the forest was planted for educational and scientific reasons only. In asking the EcoSikh staff what they thought about this, the EcoSikh forest manager responded that this was not a problem. Everyone who adopts a forest is “free to change the name if they want.” He then added: “But most of them you know, they don’t! The environment is the one connecting link between all religions” (EcoSikh Interviews 2022).

To downplay one’s socioreligious identity was, however, not always unproblematic. To retain its identity as a local Sikh organization, EcoSikh would normally opt for using Punjabi, the official language of Punjab and a powerful marker of Sikh identity, when self-promoting on social media. English was preferred only in cases of outreach to non-Punjabi-speaking communities. However, they would never use Hindi, perhaps because for some within the Sikh community, Hindi is considered the language of Hindu nationalism.

At other times, the strategy of pragmatic engagement can cause considerable discomfort on the part of individual members. This was evident in a discussion I had with the EcoSikh staff after a trip to a sacred forest adopted by a private Hindu school in the region. When I recounted my visit to the EcoSikh staff, I told them I felt the adopters had expressed an “open-minded” and “tolerant” attitude toward the Sikh community. Even though the adopters were Hindu, I told them, they had kept the EcoSikh sign showcased at the entrance of the small thriving forest, and the adopters had even acknowledged the spiritual role of the forest for Sikhs. I also told them how the adopters had explained their tolerant mindset, explaining how Sikhs were “one of them” (i.e., Hindu). The adopters had said:

You see, the Sikhs *are* Hindu! Five to six hundred years ago, around that time, they were all Hindus who had to fight the Muslims. Guru Nanak himself was a Hindu, and he was the one who made the Sikhs. They are related to us! Even intermarriages between Hindus and Sikhs happen! ... We are all humans (Interview with Forest Adopters, 2022).

The EcoSikh staff, however, dismissed my interpretation and instead saw the adopter's statement as yet another example of the "Hindu assimilation" of Sikhs. However, as an organization, living with statements such as this was the price to pay if their goal was to be reached. The planting of forests as a symbolic act of reverence to Guru Nanak and to save the environment seemed to be more important than the discomfort of the individual.

If EcoSikh was thus pragmatic about how or in what way they emphasized their socioreligious background, they were equally pragmatic in approaching sensitive political issues. This was apparent in how they talked about the question of stubble-burning farmers. North Indian farmers, many of whom are Sikh, are frequently blamed for the extremely toxic levels of air pollution haunting the North Indian plains every winter. When EcoSikh reached out to farmers to address these issues, I was told how much they strive to create a solution in dialogue with the farmers. "We are never saying 'this [stubble burning] is bad,' we are rather trying to start a discussion amongst the farmers" (EcoSikh Interviews 2022). They would also never critique industrialists openly about their blatant pollution, but would much rather change them from "within" and see them plant a forest than start an argument.

EcoSikh was also reluctant to identify as environmental *activists* and would refer to their practice as "doing environmental advocacy." In cases where they were invited along to demonstrations or other confrontational forms of activism, they would politely decline. The aggressiveness associated with activism, the EcoSikh President explained, could have negative consequences as it risked closing many doors to potential allies. This stance had made them unpopular with some of the more vocal and oppositional organizations in the region, but there were other ways of aiding the cause, she stated. This "stepping down from the barricades" did, she admitted, come with the risk that "people feel we are not doing anything. But how do you stop the air pollution? It is through advocacy ... We are doing the groundwork, but we are doing it with everyone" (EcoSikh Interviews 2022).

There were, however, limits to pragmatism, or at least areas where ethical and moral convictions got in the way of compromises for EcoSikh. Some of these limits became evident in a conversation about who could adopt a forest. According to the webpages, "anybody" can adopt a forest, but in practice, EcoSikh was hesitant about collaboration if the reason for adopting a forest was seen to be motivated by greed or personal gain. For example, forests could not be adopted by individuals who privatized community-owned village land for that purpose, and never if EcoSikh sensed that the main intention on the part of the adopter was to harvest the forest or indirectly make money from it, such as is done via the "carbon credit" system in which forests are used to generate tradable credit for the emerging Indian carbon market (Mukherjee 2023). These limits had been set on the back of past experiences, of which the staff told me several stories. As the forest manager

concluded, “So now, if someone shows a very economic interest upon initiating contact, for example asking a lot about the economic value of certain species, then we say that we are sorry, but this might not be for you” (EcoSikh Interviews 2022).

Pragmatic Environmentalism and Its Implications

To appreciate what is specific about EcoSikh’s turn to “pragmatic environmentalism,” I proceed in this final section to briefly place it in the longer history of environmentalism in postcolonial India, focusing also on the current political context that is increasingly hostile to more confrontational forms of environmentalism.

The non-confrontational approach spearheaded by relatively privileged actors sets it markedly apart from the early Indian environmental movements that have been described as an “environmentalism of the poor” (Guha 1989; Baviskar 1995; Sharma 2012). The iconic forest conservation movement Chipko (1970s), the anti-dam movements such as the Anti-Tehri Dam (1980s) and Narmada Bachao Andolan (1990s), as well as the Vrindavan Forest Revival Project (1990s) all originated in local, environmental struggles over natural resources, with activists boldly addressing distributive and environmental injustices “on the barricades” at great risk. In contrast, contemporary Indian environmentalism has been characterized by Baviskar (2020) as “bourgeois.” Performed primarily by a cultural and economic elite, “bourgeois” environmental activism is shaped by the privilege of choice. To the acclamation of “aware” peers, the elite can support the environmental cause without risk or too much effort through donations or social media “likes,” by choosing food or activities considered more “sustainable” or “healthy” (see Baviskar, Münster, this volume), or by going “plogging,” that is, picking up garbage on the trail while jogging (Kvanneid 2021; Jeshi 2023). This more recent phase (or face) of Indian environmentalism resembles the shift toward a more individualistic form of activism that is popular in China (Qian et al.; Chen and Li, this volume), where the focus lies more on controlling individual practices and self-development (an inward focus) than engaging in collective efforts directed at changing society at large (an outward focus). Both in terms of leadership and forms of activism, EcoSikh shares these distinctively “bourgeois” and “individualistic” traits.

Some may view (and dismiss) EcoSikh’s pragmatism not merely as bourgeois, but also as indexing an unwarranted avoidance of, or submission to, important issues that would ruffle the feathers of powerful political and economic actors. Seen in this way, EcoSikh could indeed be described as a “tamed” social movement. This, however, is a process necessary for any social movement that wants to be regarded as a respectable negotiating partner (Chambers et al. 2008, 376), and does not need to imply a loss of agency. Similarly, if we follow Sharma (2014) in seeing

India's contemporary environmental movement as pluralistic and dynamic, and as working along "pragmatic political paths" (Sharma 2012, 263), we may argue that choosing a pragmatic approach for an environmentalist organization is not simply a straightforward reflection of social position, nor is it about conveniently opting out of the tough battles; it is about skillfully navigating the complex realities of colonial and postcolonial processes (Baviskar 1995; Argyrou 2005; Agarwal and Narain 1999), global discourses of sustainable development and climate change (Kvanneid 2021; Swarnakar 2019; Dubash 2019), and powerful cultural and social structures related to class, caste and religion (Sharma 2012; Baviskar 2020; Tomalin 2024). Most importantly, my fieldwork among EcoSikh showed that it was becoming increasingly difficult, even dangerous, to be involved in an idealistic environmental organization in India. This was particularly the case if an environmental initiative was seen as somehow targeting the state, or the national government, and the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) in particular. In such situations, environmentalists are at best met with hostility and distrust by politicians, local elites, and bureaucrats, and at worst by violent retribution (Dutta and Nielsen 2021, *The Economist* 2024). Swarnakar (2019), for example, has described how members of environmental movements that criticize the government risked being "beaten up, vilified and shot" (Swarnakar 2019, 263). Such events echoed in stories told to me by environmentalists in confidentiality during my fieldwork, indicating that the pragmatic, non-confrontational approach also reflects a fear of reprisals. These stories also suggested that the situation had considerably worsened under BJP rule.

For small environmental initiatives and organizations that depend on goodwill, private savings, random donations, and a good deal of volunteer work, the consequences of "climbing the barricades" could not only spell the end of environmentalism, but could also have serious negative effects on the individual environmentalist and their future career. This indicates that pragmatic environmentalism is at least in part the outcome of conscious decisions among environmentalists who have to navigate a risk-filled political conjuncture.

Concluding Remarks

Small initiatives such as EcoSikh may add up to a large and powerful social movement in an Indian "river of change" toward more sustainable futures, yet at present it is hard to know what course that river might take, or what havoc it may cause on its way. The case study presented in this chapter shows that Sikh teachings and philosophy have been a formative, substantial part of the activism of EcoSikh India, demonstrating how religion can provide both tools and inner motivation for environmental action. However, the case study also shows that

religion—whether as lived life or as philosophy—cannot be isolated from other aspects of everyday life, such as culture, tradition, politics, and power. Highlighting the relations between religious identity and other sociocultural identities, such as caste and class, also demonstrated that Sikhism was not the sole catalyst for environmental action, and that while Sikhism emerged as an enabling factor to EcoSikh's environmental advocacy in some contexts, it was a constraining factor in others. Belonging to a globally oriented, well-educated and privileged segment of an increasingly polarized North Indian society, EcoSikh environmentalists had to reinterpret both how to be an environmentalist, as well as how to be a Sikh. I have argued that understanding how and why these reinterpretations work might reveal something about what enables environmental grassroots movements, and which potential they have for changing structures and practices in the society in which they work. Here, I identified pragmatism as a defining feature of EcoSikh's strategy to enable environmental advocacy across sociocultural and socioreligious divides, and argued that while environmental pragmatism can be seen as an active display of navigational skill, it can also indicate a process of acquiescing to more powerful political actors.

Notes

- ¹ I would like to thank the editors, Mette Halskov Hansen and Kenneth Bo Nielsen, for their invaluable help in structuring and improving this chapter and its main argument.
- ² These comprised the Nature Science Initiative (Dehradun/Uttarakhand), Plasticvalla (Delhi/Uttarakhand), Healing Himalayas (Haryana/Uttarakhand), and EcoSikh (Ludhiana/Punjab).
- ³ The EcoSikh founder may not have been a Khalsa, but Dr. Singh does not exactly represent “an ordinary” Sikh. Among his more prominent resources, he has a large network of Sikh gurdwaras within and outside India (Mooney 2018, 326).
- ⁴ ARC (1996–2019) was a secular network organization that originated in a WWF initiative to explore a coordinated interfaith approach to help religions “develop environmental programs based on their core teachings and practices, creating links between communities of believers and environmental organizations” (Alliance of Religion and Conservation 2019).
- ⁵ *Jagala* (Punjabi), and *Jangal* (Hindi).

References

- Abdurrahman, Muhammad Isa, Sukalpaa Chaki, and Gaurav Saini. 2020. “Stubble Burning: Effects on Health & Environment, Regulations and Management Practices.” *Environmental Advances* 2: 100011. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envadv.2020.100011>.
- Afforestt. “Native. Wild. Forever.” n.d., accessed August 21, 2024, <https://www.afforestt.com/>.

- Agarwal, Anil, and Sunita Narain. 1999. *Making Water Management Everybody's Business: Water Harvesting and Rural Development in India*. Gatekeeper Series, no. SA87. London: International Institute for Environment and Development.
- Ahmed, Nasim. 2023. "Youth Unemployment—A Rising Threat." *Weekly Cutting Edge* (blog). Published 20 June, accessed August 5, 2024, <https://weeklycuttingedge.com/youth-unemployment-a-rising-threat/>.
- Alley, Kelly D. 1994. "Ganga and Gandagi: Interpretations of Pollution and Waste in Benaras." *Ethnology* 33, no. 2: 127–45. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3773893>.
- Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC). n.d., accessed September 3, 2021, <http://www.arcworld.org/>.
- Argyrou, Vassos. 2005. *The Logic of Environmentalism: Anthropology, Ecology and Postcoloniality*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Bassi, Aseem. 2016. "Golden Temple Serves Organic Langar, Other Gurdwaras Motivated." *Hindustan Times*, March 15. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/organic-langar-at-golden-temple-amritsar-other-gurdwaras-motivated-sgpc-started-organic-farming/story-cUVLcpqCymhk1X-wOK75wN.html>.
- Baviskar, Amita. 1995. *In the Belly of the River: Tribal Conflicts Over Development in the Narmada Valley*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Baviskar, Amita. 2020. *Uncivil City: Ecology, Equity and the Commons in Delhi*. New Delhi: Sage, Yoda Press.
- Bruun, Ole, and Arne Kalland. 1995. *Asian Perceptions of Nature: A Critical Approach*. Richmond: Curzon.
- Chambers, Simone and Kopstein, Jeffrey. 2008. "Civil Society and the State." In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory*, edited by Anne Phillips, Bonnie Honig, and John S. Dryzek, 363–81. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Cheema, Iqtidar Karamat. 2006. "Sikh Communal Consciousness and State Violence in India." *Pakistan Horizon* 59, no. 3: 67–82.
- Clapperton, Jonathan, and Liza Piper. 2019. "In the Shadow of the Green Giants: Environmentalism and Civic Engagement." In *Environmental Activism on the Ground: Small Green and Indigenous Organizing*, edited by Jonathan Clapperton and Liza Piper, 1–23. Calgary: University of Calgary Press.
- Cronon, William. 1996. "Introduction: In Search of Nature." In *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, edited by William Cronon, 23–56. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Dhara, Chirag, R. Krishnan, and Dev Niyogi. 2020. "Possible Climate Change Impacts and Policy-Relevant Messages." In *Assessment of Climate Change over the Indian Region*, edited by R. Krishnan, J. Sanjay, Chellappan Gnanaseelan, Milind Mujumdar, Ashwini Kulkarni, and Supriyo Chakraborty, 223–26. Singapore: Springer Open. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-4327-2_12.
- Dove, Michael R. 1992. "The Dialectical History of 'Jungle' in Pakistan: An Examination of the Relationship between Nature and Culture." *Journal of Anthropological Research* 48, no. 3: 231–53.
- Duara, Prasenjit. 2014. *The Crisis of Global Modernity: Asian Traditions and a Sustainable Future*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dubash, Navroz. 2012. *Handbook of Climate Change and India: Development, Politics and Governance*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Dubash, Navroz. 2019. *India in a Warming World: Integrating Climate Change and Development*. Delhi: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199498734.001.0001>.

- Dutta, Anwesha, and Kenneth Bo Nielsen. 2021. "Autocratic Environmental Governance in India." In *Routledge Handbook of Autocratization in South Asia*, edited by Sten Widmalm, 70–80. New York: Routledge.
- "EcoSikh Awarded for Environmental Work." 2024. SikhNet. January, accessed August 18, 2024, <https://www.sikhnet.com/news/ecosikh-awarded-environmental-work>.
- EcoSikh Canada. n.d. "EcoSikh Canada—Update," accessed August 15, 2024, <https://www.ecosikh.ca>.
- EcoSikh India n.d., accessed August 15, 2024, <https://ecosikh.org>.
- EcoSikh Interviews. 2022. Formal interviews with EcoSikh Staff (President, Forest Manager, Clean Air Punjab Project Manager, Media Officer, Volunteer).
- EcoSikh Interviews. 2023. EcoSikh Forest Manager. Pers. Com.
- Ghertner, Asher. 2011. "Green Evictions: Environmental Discourses of a 'Slum-free' Delhi." In *Global Political Ecology*, edited by Richard Peet, Paul Robbins, and Michael Watts, 145–67. London: Routledge.
- Gold, Ann. 2010. "Why Sacred Groves Matter: Post-Romantic Claims." In *Village Matters: Relocating Villages in the Contemporary Anthropology of India*, edited by Diane P. Mines and Nicolas Yazgi, 107–29. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Government of India. 2011. "Population Census 2011," accessed June 7, 2023, <http://www.census2011.co.in/>.
- Government of India and Ministry of Corporate Affairs. 2024. "About CSR," accessed August 26, 2024, <https://www.csr.gov.in/content/csr/global/master/home/aboutcsr/about-csr.html>.
- Government of India and Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports. 2021. "Nationwide Clean India Campaign Culminates with Fit India Plog Run." October 31, 2021, accessed August 26, 2024, <https://pib.gov.in/pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1768172>.
- Gold, Ann Grodzins. 2002. "Environment/Ritual/Research Ethics: Crisscrossing Issues in Anthropology and Religious Studies." *Research Ethics and Environmental Health*: 2–3.
- Guha, Ramachandra. 1989. *The Unquiet Woods. Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gupta, Dipankar. 2005. "Caste and Politics: Identity over System." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34: 409–27.
- Haberman, David. 2006. *River of Love in an Age of Pollution, The Yamuna River of Northern India*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Huber, Toni, and Poul Pedersen. 1997. "Meteorological Knowledge and Environmental Ideas in Traditional and Modern Societies: The Case of Tibet." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 3, no. 3: 577–97. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3034768>.
- Hulme, Mike. 2009. *Why We Disagree about Climate Change: Understanding Controversy, Inaction and Opportunity*. 4th Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hulme, Mike. 2017. *Weathered: Cultures of Climate*. London: Sage.
- "India's Civil Society Is Under Attack." 2024. *The Economist*, 21 February. <https://www.economist.com/asia/2024/02/21/indias-civil-society-is-under-attack>.
- Jeshi, K. 2023. "'Plogman on India' Ripu Daman Bevli and Residents Clean up Streets of Coimbatore." *The Hindu*, October 31. <https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/energy-and-environment/plogman-on-india-ripu-daman-bevli-and-residents-clean-up-streets-of-coimbatore/article67430315.ece>.
- Kinnvall, Catarina. 2002. "Nationalism, Religion and the Search for Chosen Traumas: Comparing Sikh and Hindu Identity Constructions." *Ethnicities* 2, no. 1: 79–106.
- Kleppe, Per. 2006. *Hva Betyr Corporate Social Responsibility i Praksis?* FAFO 2006:09. FAFOs Rådsprogram 2006-2008. FAFO. ISSN 0804-5135.

- Kramer, Stephanie. 2021. *Religious Composition of India*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/09/21/religious-composition-of-india/>.
- Kumar, Vinod. 2024. "Why Punjabis Struggle with Unemployment." *The Times of India*, May 30. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/challenges-of-unemployment-faced-by-punjabis/articleshow/110547229.cms>.
- Kvanneid, Aase J. 2021. *Perceptions of Climate Change from North India: An Ethnographic Account*. New York: Routledge.
- Leiserowitz, Anthony, and Jagadish Thaker. 2023. *Climate Change in the Indian Mind*. Yale University. New Haven: Yale Program on Climate Change Communication.
- Liu, Rongchen, Anirban Sanyal, and Nirvikar Singh. 2021. "Environmental Issues, Economic Policies and Agricultural Development: The Case of Punjab, India." *Indian Public Policy Review* 2, no. 2: 25–48.
- Mkandawire, Thandika, and Peter Utting. 2003. "Corporate Social Responsibility and Development: Towards a New Agenda? UNRISD Conference Summary." *United Nations Research Institute for Social Development* (UNRISD). Retrieved August 21, 2024. <https://cdn.unrisd.org/assets/library/newsletters/pdf-files/cn13e.pdf>.
- Mooney, Nicola. 2018. "Sikh Millennials Engaging the Earth: Sikhi, Environmental Activism, and Eco-Enchantment." *Sikh Formations* 14, no. 3–4: 315–38.
- Mukherjee, Mohua. 2023. "Building the Indian Carbon Market: A Work in Progress." *Oxford Institute for Energy Studies*, accessed August 5, 2024, <https://www.oxfordenergy.org/publications/building-the-indian-carbon-market-a-work-in-progress/>.
- Norgaard, Kari Marie. 2011. *Living in Denial: Climate Change, Emotions, and Everyday Life*. Cambridge: Michigan Institute of Technology Press.
- Panesar, Ricky and EcoSikh UK. 2022. "Ireland's Sikhs to Plant 1,150 Trees in Honour of Guru Nanak." February 15. <https://ecosikhuk.org/2022/02/15/irelands-sikhs-to-plant-1150-trees-in-honour-of-guru-nanak/>.
- Pörtner, Hans Otto, Nerilie Abram, Carolina Adler, Nathaniel L. Bindoff, Lijing Cheng, So-Min Cheong, William W. L. Cheung, et al. 2019. "IPCC Summary for Policymakers." In *IPCC Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate*. 1–36. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://www.ipcc.ch/srocc/>.
- Prill, Susan E. 2015. "Sikhi and Sustainability: Sikh Approaches to Environmental Advocacy." *Sikh Formations* 11, no. 1–2: 223–42. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17448727.2015.1023112>.
- Robbins, Paul. 2020. *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction*, 3rd Edition. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Roy, Dunu. 2015. "A Subaltern View of Climate Change." *Economic and Political Weekly* 50, no. 31: 31–39.
- Rudiak-Gould, Peter. 2013. *Climate Change and Tradition in a Small Island State: The Rising Tide*. New York: Routledge.
- Sharma, Mukul. 2012 *Green and Saffron: Hindu Nationalism and Indian Environmental Politics*. Bangalore: Permanent Black.
- Singh, I.P. 2021. "Punjab's Dalit Conundrum: A Look into Sikhs' Caste Identity." *The Times of India*, 30 September. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/punjab-dalit-conundrum-a-look-into-sikhs-caste-identity/articleshow/86607310.cms>.
- Singh, Manjari. 2023. "EcoSikh Celebrates 850 Guru Nanak Sacred Forests across Seven States." *Khalsa Vox* (blog). November 18. <https://khalsavox.com/news/ecosikh-celebrates-850-guru-nanak-sacred-forests-across-seven-states/>.
- Singh, Nadia. 2022. "Sikhism and Sustainability: New Approaches to Environmental Ethics." In *Faith Traditions and Practices in the Workplace Volume I: The Role of Religion in Unprecedented Times*,

- edited by Mai Chi Vu, Nadia Singh, Nicholas Burton, and Irene Chu, 37–61. Cham: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-09349-4_3.
- Singh, Pritam. 2022. "Farm Laws, Federalism and Farm Protests: Challenges for Punjab." In *Agrarian Reform and Farmer Resistance in Punjab*, edited by Shinder Singh Thandi, 245–66. New Delhi: Routledge India.
- Srivastava, Shilpi, Lyla Mehta, and Hans Nicolai Adam. 2021. "Climate Change and Uncertainty: Politics and Perspectives." In *The Politics of Climate Change and Uncertainty in India*, edited by Lyla Mehta, Hans Nicolai Adam, Mihir R. Bhatt, Synne Movik, Lars Otto Naess, and Shilpi Srivastava, 1–26. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Swarnakar, Pradip. 2019. "Climate Change, Civil Society, and Social Movement in India." In *India in a Warming World: Integrating Climate Change and Development*, edited by Navroz Dubash, 253–72. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- "Switch to Electric Vehicles, Auto-Rickshaw Drivers Urged." *The Tribune*, November 29, 2022. <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/amritsar/switch-to-electric-vehicles-auto-rickshaw-drivers-urged-455758/>.
- Tomalin, Emma. 2004. "Bio-Divinity and Biodiversity: Perspectives on Religion and Environmental Conservation in India." *Numen* 51, no. 3: 265–95.
- Tomalin, Emma. 2024. "Religion, Ecology and Hindu Nationalism in India." *Religion and Development* 2, no. 3: 463–82. <https://doi.org/10.30965/27507955-20230032>.
- "The Top 10 Largest Economies In The World In 2024." 2024. *Forbes India*. Last updated November 4, 2024. <https://www.forbesindia.com/article/explainers/top-10-largest-economies-in-the-world/86159/1>.
- United Nations Environment Programme. 2012. "A Glass Half Empty: Regions at Risk Due to Groundwater Depletion." *UNEP Sioux Falls*, January. <https://wedocs.unep.org/items/4e992ffd-26cd-461a-929a-1fdb5919c107>.
- University of Bath. n.d. Alliance of Religions and Conservation Collection, accessed August 14, 2024. <https://www.bath.ac.uk/corporate-information/alliance-of-religions-and-conservation-collection/>.
- van der Veer, Peter. 2001. "India, Religions of." In the *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, edited by Neil J. Smelser and Paul B. Baltes, 7279–82. Oxford: Pergamon. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B0-08-043076-7/04040-7>.
- Vijaykumar, Neeti. 2016. "The Golden Temple's Community Kitchen Goes Organic, Grows Its Own Vegetables without Pesticides." *The Better India*, March 15. <https://thebetterindia.com/49225/golden-temple-serves-organic-food/>.
- Virk, Hardev Singh. 2021. "Concept of GOD, the Ultimate Reality, in Sikh Religion." SikhNet. October 26, 2021, accessed August 2, 2024, <https://www.sikhnet.com/news/concept-god-ultimate-reality-sikh-religion>.
- World Bank. 2024. "The World Bank in India." Last updated September 16. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/india/overview>.
- World Health Organization. n.d. India. "Statistics from WHO's Global Health Observatory," accessed August 10, 2024, <https://www.who.int/countries/ind>.