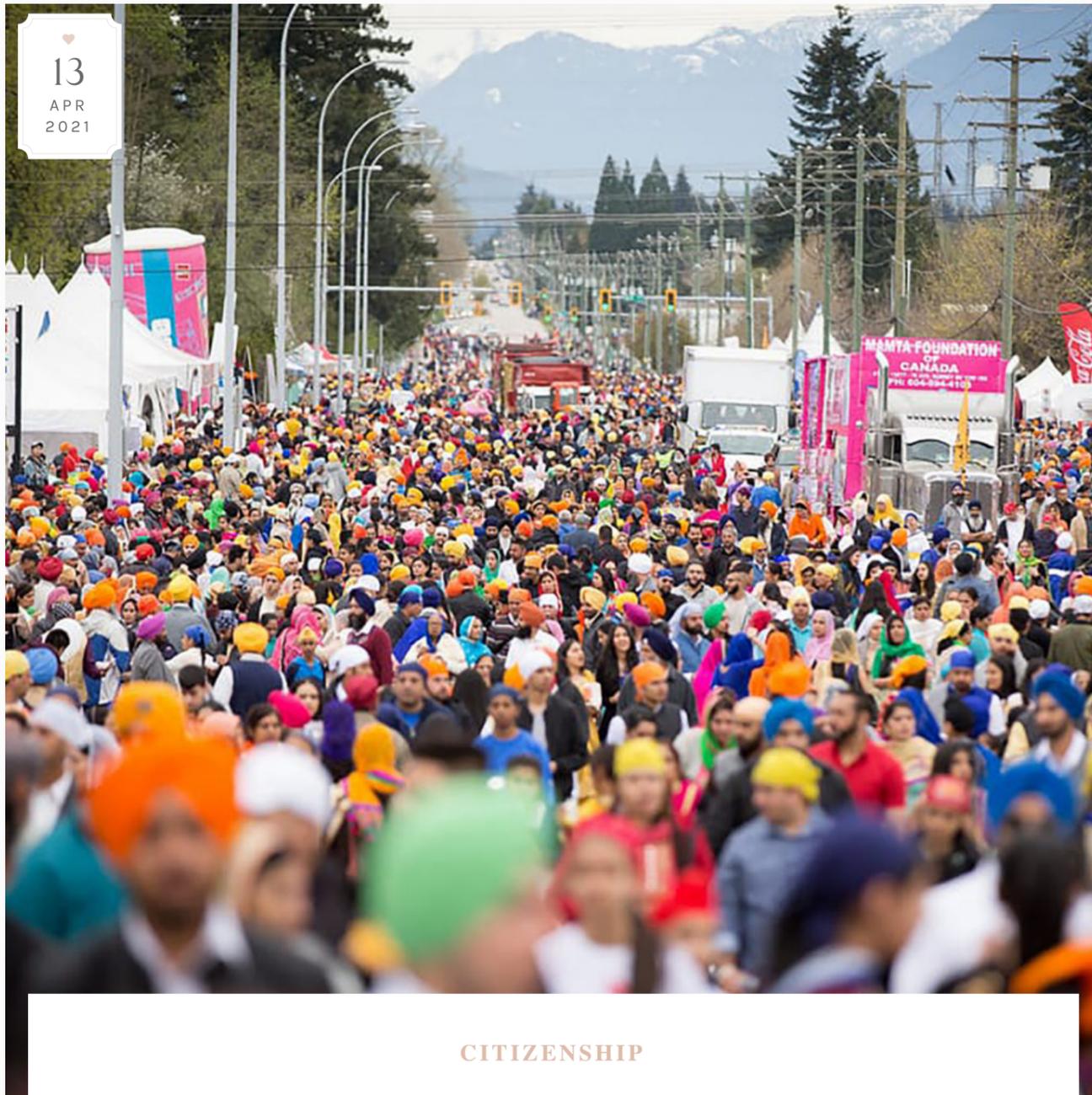




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## Vaisakhi 2021: A Reminder to Care for the Welfare of All Humanity

*by Raminder Hayre*

Hi everyone, I am so excited to be writing this second blog for JHD! My name is Raminder, and I am a lawyer who resides on the beautiful ancestral lands of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations People (aka Vancouver), British Columbia, Canada, and work at a brand new law firm called Soul Counsel. Our aim is to provide personable and relatable services to anyone that just wants to be heard without fuss. The firm was started by my friend, but I have started to carve out my new practice, which involves holding the public and profession a lot more accountable. Just to be safe, anything expressed in this blog post is my own and does not represent the firm's views or thoughts about this memorable holiday. After speaking with Team Jilly about future ideas, we agreed that it would be interesting to share a piece on the historical and religious festival called: "Vaisakhi" (some say "Baisakhi"), and how it ties into cultural awareness, and the Indian Farmers' protest, you can check out my first post [here](https://jillianharris.com/the-farmers-in-india-protest-here-are-a-few-important-things-you-should-know/) . This year, it falls on April 13, 2021, it is always around this time.



## *What is Vaisakhi?*

For some that are aware of Vaisakhi, it may come across as an extravagant parade (also known as the “Nagar Kirtan” or “Vaisakhi Mela” or fair) with a spectrum of colours, all types of free food, a lively environment with music, theme park rides, and dance etc. For the purposes of this blog, I will relate to them as one in the same. The event is so much more than that, so let’s get into it.

It is important to start by saying that Vaisakhi is a Sikh and/or Punjabi and Hindu harvest festival and celebration. Millions of people in the brown diaspora come together in various cities and countries worldwide to celebrate “the beginning of the harvest season” and the start of the Hindu Solar New Year.

The Vaisakhi Festival in Surrey, British Columbia, Canada can see upwards of 100,000 people from the community (not just those that are brown), Toronto and other Punjabi-heavy counties in the U.K. and the U.S.A. will see large parades and commemorations as well. For the purposes of this blog, I will focus on the Sikh and Punjabi aspect. It is important to state that even though being Punjabi and Sikh is often mutually exclusive, it is not a “rule”. Punjab (India) is a state you are from, and Sikhi is a religion you practice.

Sikh’s also pay tribute to their religion by praying at the **Gurdwara** (temple), and walking alongside and behind ceremonious floats that carry the **Sri Guru Granth Sahib** (the holy book and scriptures followed in this religion). There are many other facets to the conversations that involve our **Gurus** (prophets) and ongoing religious and political conflict arising from faith, but it is a much bigger discussion that we can save for another time.

Given that B.C. sees some of the largest parades worldwide, it is crucial to mention the significance of our broader dance community. **Bhangra** is a folk dance that derives from Punjab, and many of the moves signify the harvest (like the move “**faasla**” which mimics wheat as your arms flow), and plays homage to our land and ancestry in Punjab. B.C. has one of the biggest bhangra communities in the world.



## *Connection to The Current Farmer's Protests*

This all ties into the farmers protest because so much of our culture and what the public sees of the brown Punjabi diaspora is based on the same concepts of Vaisakhi. The way we dress, dance or sing, eat and feed others, congregate, celebrate etc... The protest is another link to our connection “back home” that the Western world may not see because they are not faced with the challenges head on.

As a community, we bring together thousands of people of different races and religions to celebrate Vaisakhi. This includes feeding others through **seva** (selfless service), to ensure that no one goes hungry. You will often hear of Sikhs providing free food to the homeless, or those in situations of need. Some of those that celebrate or participate are politicians from the white community and even the brown community. They benefit off of Vaisakhi by leveraging optics to promote their interests and garner support and votes from one of the largest visible minorities in B.C. The media comes, the radio speaks on it, and it is on almost all news outlets. It is one of the only times in the year where South Asians are promoted positively and not in biased media. Ironically, these principles of compassion are traditions we practice every day. Anyone can go to the Gurdwara daily for shelter and a hot meal.

The South Asian or brown **diaspora** (the dispersion of any group of people from their ancestral homeland, this is a fact of colonization and effect of globalization) and local protesters have repeatedly asked for support from their elected representatives, and though some have spoken up, it is not enough compared to what they gain from our efforts. At times, it seems like some are only supportive when there is a gain of sorts. Did you know that South Asians make up approximately 32% of Asians in Canada? This also makes us the largest visible minority nationwide.



## *Although Miles Apart, We Are All Connected*

I recognize that there is generally a disconnect between what members of the South Asian community throughout the diaspora are going through vs. what is happening within the country of India itself. What happens in any of our home countries (regardless of your background) directly affects us here in this multicultural country. If the aim of colonization was to strip us of our roots and heritage, that is something that we have put an end to in our generation. Our voices shall and will be heard across the globe. The overarching concern and requirement for cultural awareness is highlighted when the contrast between what happens in B.C. and what happens in India are seen as separate when they are inherently intertwined. My hope is that, in sharing the deep history and richness of this cultural celebration it will broaden understanding and highlight the interconnection between marginalized groups and their lineage to their “motherland” and inspire those that are privileged to take a stand without hesitating in understanding *why*. It is exhausting for the BIPOC community to continuously educate and explain to the privileged the impact of daily barriers – especially if they do not take it upon themselves to learn about it.

In an attempt to relate current events to cultural awareness, we can look at Vaisakhi as an homage to Indian farmers. Though this is typically a time for celebration to spread good fortune and vibes in hopes of a prosperous harvest season, this is not the case this year. Currently, millions of farmers are sleeping on the streets in order to save their farms, and truth be told, the level of emotion and turmoil that they will go through as Vaisakhi approaches will be unparalleled. One year ago, they were celebrating at their homes the best they could during COVID, now they will be fighting for their rights to maintain these events and memories in a positive light.

I am very proud of my heritage and I hope I shared something new with you today. I conclude by saying that I urge every one of you, regardless of your background, race, or religion, to pass on what you start to understand about oppression and the struggles of visible minorities. The only way that injustice can change is if people from every community come together to take a stand and speak for those that do not look like them. The goal is for the next generation to be met with opportunity and not justification.

Raminder (Rami) Hayre

Ask me a question or follow for more at: [@ramihay\\_ <https://www.instagram.com/ramihay\\_/>](https://www.instagram.com/ramihay_/)



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