

SESSION 11 (Pre-organized panel)

From Sovereignty to “Minority” and Back: Voicing Silenced Songs and Indigenous Knowledges of the Sikhs

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Marginalized in the modern narrative of South Asian music as the expression of a religious 'minority,' the Sikh musical heritage represents a pre-colonial system of knowledge in danger of disappearing. This panel critically discusses the marginalization of the Sikhs from a sovereign tradition to a 'minority' culture, as a process that began in the colonial period and culminated in the 'Independence' era with the partition of Punjab between two modern nations, India and Pakistan. The impact of this shift is still felt today in visible and invisible ways. On the one hand, in the post-Partition era, the political turmoil and the neo-liberal agricultural policies directly affected the Sikhs in their own land, causing massive waves of the diaspora from Punjab to anglophone countries and, more recently, to Southern Europe. On a deeper and invisible level, the nationalist cultural policies caused a systemic erasure of Sikh indigenous knowledges and voices that new generations of Sikhs in South Asia and in the diaspora often fail to recognize. The presenters examine the responses to these political, social, and cultural disruptions through different disciplinary approaches and case studies of resilience. This multivocal project aims to suggest the need for an interdisciplinary method to navigate the complex relationships between 'music' and the marginalization of religious groups, encouraging alternative ways to explore and give voice to silenced histories, practices, and knowledges from the Global South.