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Writing Punjabi across Borders

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4:30pm
Callaway Center S-319
Emory University

Dr. Murphy explores advocacy for and cultural production in Punjabi in both the Gurmukhi script (used in India and the Indian diaspora) and Shahmukhi (the Indo-Persian script, utilized in Pakistan and its diaspora). Punjabi language activism in the postcolonial state of India led to the redrawing of the boundaries of the state of Punjab in 1966; this in turn led to the promotion of the language within state institutions. The widespread preference of Punjabi speakers for English-medium schools, however, means that elites largely neglect the language, and there is widespread sentiment that the language is still at risk, despite state patronage. In Pakistan the Punjabi language in Shahmukhi has suffered from significantly less support. Yet, there is a growing movement for Punjabi language and literature, to allow it to by used for precollegiate education. In both locations and in their diaspora communities, a transnational language and literary movement advocates for the language, linking activism in both scripts, even as cultural production in the two Punjabs remains relatively isolated. The paper will explore the complexity of the Punjabi language movement across borders, its literary forms, and the challenges it presents to both religious and nationalist formations.