

**Title—Lives in Translation: Sikh Youths as British Citizens**  
**Author—Kathleen D Hall**  
**Year—2002**

Categories: Ethnography, Migration, Assimilation, Colonialism

Place: UK

Time: 1945-Present

Argument Synopsis:

Hall's book is an analysis of how second-generation British Sikhs fashion identities that are neither purely British nor Sikh, but hybrid translations that challenge the boundaries of what it means to be both. It is a story of immigration and the process of becoming British citizens. Her account crafts a narrative that challenges the conventional assumptions of the traditional immigration myth. Hall demonstrates how immigrants are produced as multiple types of subjects associated with distinctive minority statuses that classify those so defined in racial, ethnic, religious, linguistic, generational, and gendered terms. Hall argues that within the varied forms of cultural production at work in the public sphere is where identities and subjectivities are made. She seeks to consider the broader context of social incorporation and nation formation in the United Kingdom, within which the experiences of British Sikhs have been shaped. Hall portrays the experience of British Sikhs as acts of translation, or immigrant acts which involve both being acted upon by discourses that produce identities and acting or performing forms of self-identification. She frames her ethnographic account of social mobility and identity formation among British Sikh within a broader analysis of the workings of social stratification; forces of social reproduction both within the public sphere and within the Sikh communities.

Hall, an anthropologist, examines multiple spheres of cultural production and illustrates how they interrelate in ways that open opportunities for creative self-construction by individuals. She relies on archival and ethnographic research in Leeds, England. Hall argues that discourse and social practices within law and politics, education, media, the family, and the ethnic community come together in relational processes of social incorporation—the making of British citizens—but they do so in ambiguous and often contradictory ways. Hall determines that the productive activity of second generation Sikhs accounts for more than assimilation to the British norms and more than cultural maintenance of Sikh identity and tradition. She highlights the feeling of living in two worlds and the need to fashion something new, a third space; underscoring the forms of cultural hybridity with which Sikh youths negotiate those worlds and push the boundaries of what it means to be British and Sikh. Hall points out the contradiction between the achieved status conferred by meritocracy and the ascribed status of British nationalism and asserts that this is one of many sites where Sikh youths challenge normative identity boundaries. Hall's book illustrates the multiple intersecting and sometimes contradictory spheres of cultural production that can act upon social agents as they creatively act to define themselves.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- The story of immigration is intimately tied to the story of nation formation, especially in the postcolonial United Kingdom
- Identities are produced in relation to multiple forms of discourse that circulate into people's lives through various channels and in relation to distinctive forms of cultural or identity politics
- For the second generation, the task is to construct a 'third space' between the two worlds of British and Sikh identities and status communities