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Troubling Accounts of the Archives

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What to do with an archival mystery?<sup>1</sup> Like many archivists and researchers, I've come across many records that simply don't make any sense, or at least, foreclose the possibility of any singular sense to-be-made. For archivists, the pieces left behind, the remnants in our care, are always incomplete, always fragmented, always subject to infinite impositions. Despite all our talk of provenance and metadata, we never have enough context; the record is distanced from the context of its creation the instant it is created. *And so we enter this game in a state of loss. We are never enough. (And yet we still manage to be too much.)*

It is in this (lack-of) context I find myself haunted by a photograph (Figure 1).



*Figure 1.* With shipmates on the S/S Ile de France. From “Sharanjit Singh Dhillonn,” by Sharanjit Singh Dhillonn, undated, South Asian American Digital Archive, <https://www.saada.org/item/20170719-5101>). Image appears courtesy of SAADA and Bibi Dhillonn.

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Gracen Brilmyer, Maria Montenegro, and Anne Gilliland for the opportunity to present this work at the “[dis]memory, [mis]representation & [re]figuring the archival lens: A Symposium on Visual Archives & Forms of Representation” at UCLA on January 26, 2018. The work is indebted to Verne Harris’s notions of archival traces and hauntings, Eric Ketelaar’s concept of “infinite activation,” and Sue McKemmish’s insistence on archives opening out into the future. This article would not be possible without the work of Samip Mallick and the volunteers who make the South Asian American Digital Archive possible, in particular my student, Evan Tucker, who digitized the Dhillonn collection.

I am both a professor of information studies and the co-founder of the independent, community-based South Asian American Digital Archive (<http://www.saada.org>) (SAADA). SAADA preserves and makes accessible the history of those in the United States who trace their lineage to India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and the many South Asian diaspora communities across the globe. We are a post-custodial archives, which means that rather than accept physical custody of materials, we borrow them from individuals, families, organizations, and archives, we digitize them and describe using culturally appropriate terminology, make them freely accessible online, and then return them. We have a particular emphasis on collecting materials related to early South Asian immigration to the United States pre-1965, to anti-South Asian race riots, to labor, student, and religious organizations, to political activism, and to artists and intellectuals. We collect materials that are not just celebratory in nature, but reflect the diverse range of South Asian American experiences from the turn of the twentieth century to the present.

Over the past decade of working on SAADA, I've helped to digitize thousands of records: family photos, letters between relatives, home movie reels. Through all this scanning, a particular genre has emerged that has really stuck with me because I can't quite make sense of it. I will call this genre the 1950s Orientalist party photo. It is a genre—one I have seen in several scrapbook collections made by several different Indian immigrants who came to the United States as students in the 1950s—but right now I want to hone in on one particular collection, that of Sharanjit Singh Dhillonn.

Sharanjit Singh Dhillonn came to the United States from India in 1955 to pursue master's degrees in chemical engineering and mathematics at the University of Oklahoma. There, he started an international club, excelled academically, and garnered a reputation for throwing good parties. His scrapbook attests to that. Spanning the years 1955 to 1958, the scrapbook photographs show elaborate costume parties, thrown by Dhillonn himself, in which he plays up the image of the "exotic Other,"

masquerading as “the royal maharaja of Florpur”—a place that does not actually exist, *at least not on any map*. He goes as far as issuing press releases to local newspapers to announce the impending arrival of “His Highness” (Figure 2).

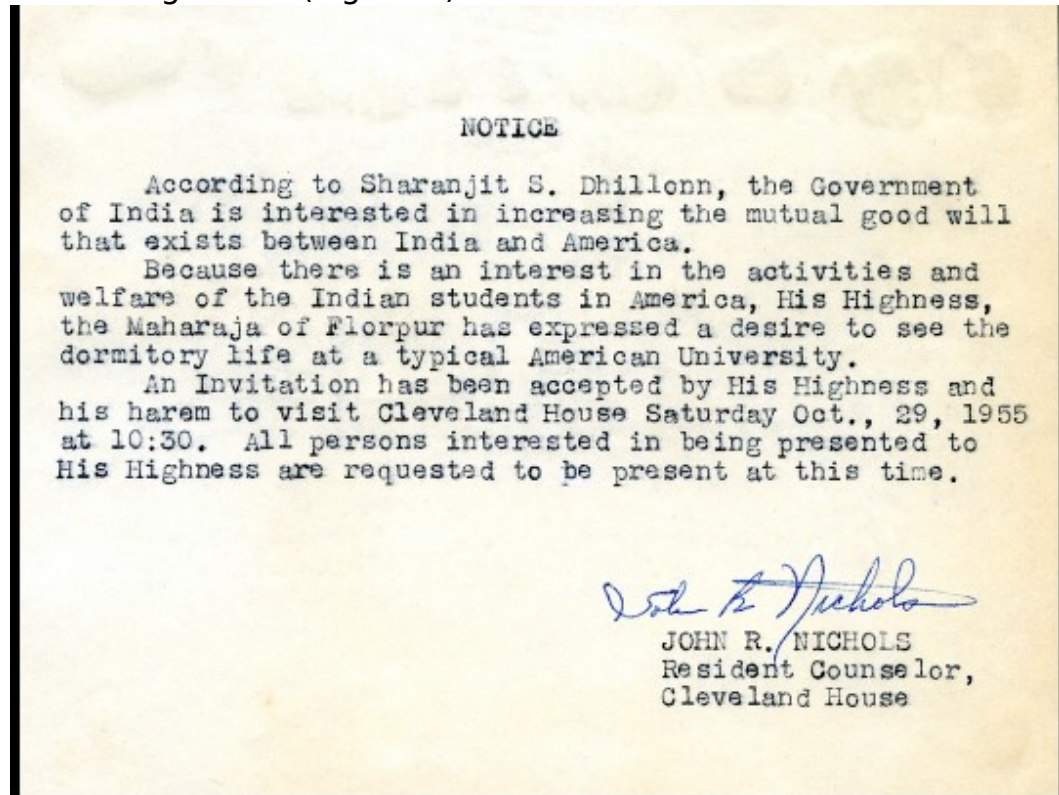


Figure 2. From “Notice,” by Sharanjit Singh Dhillonn, October 29, 1955, <https://www.saada.org/item/20170719-5095>. Image appears courtesy of SAADA and Bibi Dhillonn.

At least one newspaper took the bait, reporting that “His Highness, the Maharaja of Florpur from India, famous for his fabulous harem of 152 girls of various nationalities, is visiting the OU campus on Saturday,” also noting, “His Highness is purported to be on his way to Texas to expand his harem” (Figure 3). The article ends with a direct solicitation: “His Highness will be very pleased to meet OU co-eds in the lounge during this time. His only requirements for future brides are curves and a pretty face. She should also have strong teeth.”

SATURDAY, OCT. 29, 1955

## Maharaja Plans Visit To Campus

His Highness, the Maharaja of Florpur from India, famous for his fabulous harem of 152 girls of various nationalities, is visiting the OU campus Saturday. His Highness is purported to be on his way to Texas to expand his harem.

The handsome young Maharaja is touring American university campuses, "tasting a bit of American life," as he puts it. His Highness is accompanied by some of his favorite wives and is scheduled to spend Saturday evening visiting top officials and various places on the OU campus.

The tentative program issued by his protocol officer says, "His Highness will be visiting the lounge of the Union building between 8 and 9 p.m. Saturday."

According to the protocol officer, His Highness will be very pleased to meet OU coeds in the lounge during this time. His only requirements for future brides are curves and a pretty face. She should also have strong teeth.

Figure 3. From "Maharaja Plans to Visit Campus," by Sharanjit Singh Dhillonn, October 29, 1955, <https://www.saada.org/item/20170719-5094>. Image appears courtesy of SAADA and Bibi Dhillonn.

Dhillonn then stages a second appearance and issues a second press release, this time commenting on how, during his prior visit, the "maharaja" was so "impressed by OU co-eds, their charm, their curves, and their beauty," that he decided to return.

Dear Sir,

His Highness, Maharaja of Florpur wishes to avail of your paper to thank the faculty and the students of Oklahoma University for their kind reception of His Highness and his harem last Saturday evening.

His Highness especially thanks certain senior members of the faculty for their kind invitations to their homes which he enjoyed very much. Unfortunately, due to the shortness of time available, he could not avail of other invitations by members of the faculty, for which he regrets very much.

His Highness was impressed by OU co-eds, their charm, their curves and their beauty. On his return from Texas, he would like to visit OU again and spend some more time with the OU beauties. He will also avail of that opportunity to fulfill the various invitations that he could not do so on Saturday evening.

*Figure 4.* From "Dear Sir," by Sharanjit Singh Dhillon, South Asian American Digital Archive. Image appears courtesy of SAADA and Bibi Dhillonn.

SAADA has photographs from several of these parties. Some of the parties feature costume contests. Some are thrown by the international club Dhillonn founded as "international night" festivities. In several photographs across multiple parties, we see white women flirt with Dhillonn under the guise of being harem members (Figure 5).



*Figure 5.* From untitled photograph, by Sharanjit Singh Dhillonn, February 1956, <https://www.saada.org/item/20170719-5071>. Image appears courtesy of SAADA and Bibi Dhillonn.

In another photograph, we see three white men in turbans and at least one of them in brown face (Figure 6).



Figure 6. From untitled photograph, by Sharanjit Singh Dhillonn, February 1956, <https://www.saada.org/item/20170719-5072>. Image appears courtesy of SAADA and Bibi Dhillonn.

In student newspaper clippings from the time, Dhillonn is portrayed as an exciting, exotic other. For example, a photo published in *The Oklahoma Daily* in 1955 shows a white woman smiling and taking notes as she looks at Dhillonn. The caption begins, in all capital letters, "GETTING SOME" (Figure 7). The rest of the text plays up Dhillonn's otherness; what he is getting is some "proven pointers on the American female." While he is listed as "a Panjab [sic] chief in India," the woman is identified as belonging to "the Kappa Kappa Gamma tribe." Another 1955 clipping, this one from *The Norman Transcript* entitled, "Chit-Chat, Sikh Style," shows a different white woman



smiling at Dhillonn; the article states he “had no trouble making himself understood.” That “exotic other” persona is certainly played up in the party photographs as well.



Figure 7. From “Getting Some Proven Pointers,” by *The Oklahoma Daily*, <https://www.saada.org/item/20170719-5062>. Image appears courtesy of SAADA and Bibi Dhillonn.



CHIT-CHAT, SIKH STYLE—Sharanjit Dhillon, OU student from Punjab, India, has no difficulty making himself understood by Mrs. Patsy Wolf, 435 Park Drive. Dhillon's university teachers in India taught in the English language. The two are shown here chatting before the dinner provided by the International Club Sunday night. Later they partook of such exotic dishes as "mogoro torta," "loenphia" and "opfel strudel." (Transcript Photos)

Figure 8. From "Chit Chat, Sikh Style," by *The Norman Transcript*, December 6, 1955, <https://www.saada.org/item/20170719-5086>. Image appears courtesy of SAADA and Bibi Dhillonn.

But even within the context of the rest of his collection, that first photograph (Figure 1) in particular remains a complete mystery to me. We see Dhillonn on the left, as the "maharaja." We see a Black man, sullen, eyes downcast, playing the part

of the harem guard—in line with the long history of Black eunuchs serving as harem guards. And we see three smiling white men draped in makeshift saris smiling and having what appears to be the time of their lives. Sharanjit plays up the joke on the back of the photo, reproducing the supposedly royal announcement, listing the names of the “cast,” delineating the order of favorite harem girls and wife, and identifying the guard as Conroy Allison (Figure 9). The white men are named as well; we might note that they do not have French names, but we can only guess that, perhaps, they are American. We also learn the photograph documents a costume contest, a bottle of champagne the first prize. A revealing stamp reads:

S/S ILE de FRANCE  
C G Transatlantique  
PHOTOS Yves BIZIEN,  
FRENCH LINE

Unlike the other photographs in the scrapbook, this one was not taken at the University of Oklahoma, but on a ship somewhere in the middle of the Atlantic prior to Dhillonn’s American debut, presumably as he made the long journey from Karnal, India to Norman, Oklahoma. The photograph might mark the moment in which Dhillonn learns to navigate his racial difference in a sea of white supremacy—while the S/S Ile de France party was a prototype for the Oklahoma parties he later threw, the S/S Ile de France photograph was a prototype for the Oklahoma photographs he later staged.

Announcement:

His Highness Maharaja Sir Sharanjit Singh Dhillon, K.C.S.I.; O.B.E.; D.S.O.; Jewel of India, graces this assembly with his presence along with his harem and its guard.

Cast : Maharaja : Sharanjit Singh Dhillon  
 Harem : Favourite : Samuel S. Cullen  
 2nd Favourite : Farquhar Celym Lloyd.  
 Patron : Ernest Newbourn

Guard: Cosby Allison.

JUDGES:

PRIZE WON  
 BOTTLE OF CHAMPAGNE

S/S ILE de FRANCE  
 C<sup>e</sup> G<sup>e</sup> Transatlantique  
 PHOTOS Yves BIZIEN  
 FRENCH LINE

Sharanjit Singh Dhillon  
 Sam. S. Cullen Farquhar C. Lloyd  
 Ernest Newbourn  
 Ch Allison

Mrs Frank Lawson  
 British Nationality  
 Registered in U.S.A.  
 M. M. M. M.  
 Will attend page 1

Figure 8. Verso of Figure 1, by Sharanjit Singh Dhillon, undated, <https://www.saada.org/item/20170719-5101>. Image appears courtesy of SAADA and Bibi Dhillonn.

It is a troubling photograph. It troubles our senses of agency, it troubles our understandings of race and gender and sexuality, and it troubles any easy interpretations.

It raises questions for which I do not yet have—nor do I ever expect to have—answers. What in the heck is going on here? If these party photographs are records, which they are, what exactly are they

records of? We have some context to help us figure it out, but not much. Scholars usually think of the time between 1946, when the Luce-Cellar Act imposed a racist, restrictive 100-person a year quota on immigration from India, and 1965, when U.S. immigration policies opened up, as being a kind of dead space for the South Asian American community. Yet SAADA's staff and volunteers have found some amazing collections in that dead space, mostly from Indian students who came to the United States to study in STEM fields and stayed. We know Dhillonn's party photographs were taken more than a decade before the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Loving v. Virginia* to prohibit anti-miscegenation laws, when interracial sexual relationships were still illegal in many states. We know homosexuality and its attendant threat of cross-dressing was illegal in many parts of the United States at this time as well. (We do not know what the rules and norms might have been on a transatlantic luxury liner, but we can imagine they might have been somewhat more relaxed than American Jim Crow standards of the time.)

Focusing on Dhillonn, we know that he funded his education, in part, by picking peaches in Fresno in the summer; there, he joined a network of Sikh men that have been employed in California's agricultural industry since the turn of the twentieth century. In those early years in the United States, he changed the spelling of his name from Dhillon to Dhillonn in an attempt to get Americans to pronounce it correctly. In 1958, Dhillonn met his wife, Dorothy, who was also studying at the University of Oklahoma. The party photographs stop that year. After their 1959 wedding—the home movie footage of which is also in SAADA—the couple had four children, soon moving from Oklahoma to rural California, where Dhillonn got a job as a chemical engineer at Borax. After a racist attack at a gas station, Dhillonn cut his hair and beard and stopped wearing the customary Sikh turban. We see over the course of a decade of scrapbook photographs and home movie reels that Dhillonn goes from playing up his otherness to trying to fit in, from “exotic oriental” to assimilated American. And then, seemingly abruptly, as if in the middle of the

story—and aren't we always in the middle of the story?—the scrapbook ends. Although Dhillonn continued to document his life, the scrapbook and the home movie reels are all that is currently in SAADA.

How do we read this photographic record given the little information we have? Why would Dhillonn play up and play into the Orientalist stereotypes that constructed him as an exotic Other? What sexual possibilities are awakened by the white men in makeshift saris in the photograph? Does their racism foreclose any true liberatory potentials? When we read this photograph as possible evidence of same-sex desire, are we engaged in a kind of “perverse presentism” as Halberstam (1998) might call it, and if so, *so what?* Who is Conroy Allison, the Black “harem guard” and what was he thinking through all of this? Is this just a group of guys from different backgrounds having a 1950s version of transgressive fun on a transatlantic cruise ship? Is this merely a light-hearted way (presumably) new acquaintances in the 1950s could deal with racial difference? How does whiteness (and the colonial photographic gaze) construct these subjects even as the costumes and the photographs are staged by Dhillonn himself? How do we read this image in ways that acknowledge Dhillonn's agency, that don't purport to speak for him? How does this image and others like it plant the trajectory of white cultural appropriation we are still dealing with today? And how does my own whiteness structure how I interpret this record?

And herein lies the beauty of archives (and photographic records especially). We all bring different selves to this record. We will all ask different questions of it. I have my interpretation, but it does not foreclose yours. There is room for infinite activation of any record, as Eric Ketelaar (2001) has asserted. Endless stories unravel from the records' yarn.

This record is part of both an archival diaspora, to use Ricardo Punzalan's (2014) term, and a diasporic archives. In the first sense, it was dispersed from that moment of record creation. We can never be back on that cruise ship at that party where the photographer Yzes Bizien clicked the camera (as the stamp on the back of the photograph

informs us). We know *never enough* about its context, even read together with all of the photographs from that decade in Dhillonn's scrapbook.

This photograph demands a broader interpretation of provenance. I'm advocating here, as so many others have done before me—Chris Hurley, Jeannette Bastian, Joel Wurl, to name a few—for a shift from a narrow, dominant Western interpretation of provenance that focuses exclusively on the photographer as record creator or Dhillonn as record-keeper, towards a much more expansive notion of provenance that includes the whole community responsible for the creation and stewardship of this record (Bastian, 2006; Hurley, 2005; Wurl, 2005). The record is part of what Jeannette Bastian has called “a community of records,” that is, “the aggregate of records in all forms generated by multiple layers of actions and interactions between and among the people and institutions within a community” (Bastian, 2003). If we take seriously Joel Wurl's assertion of ethnicity as provenance, we can trace the provenance of this record to the entire South Asian American community. Which is, of course, a diasporic community and indeed, multiple, fractured communities. This record is thus a double diaspora, a record dispersed from the event of its creation *as all records are*, and, until SAADA intervened by digitizing it and reuniting it with other South Asian American materials, dispersed from the community who created it and cares about and for it.

But it is too simplistic and too neat a story, I think, to argue that SAADA reunited digital copies of these Dhillonn photographs with digital copies of other records documenting South Asian American history, so we “fixed” the dispersion and our work is now done. That is part of the story, but it is not all of it. I am very suspicious of easy solutions and I think we need to hold ourselves to higher and more complicated, more nuanced standards. Our responsibility as archivists does not end at this “virtual reunification.” *Our responsibility continues as long as the record is subject to interpretation* (which is, if not forever, as long as we, collectively, dedicate the attention and resources to care for it).

As an archivist—and not just any archivist but one partially charged with stewarding this particular photograph through my role with SAADA—I am ethically called to ask: Who has most at stake in the preservation, digitization, and accessibility of these photos? How do we center those who are made most vulnerable by our archival interventions in this record? How do we activate this record for human liberation? How do we use it to dismantle white supremacy? How do we use it to hold power accountable? How do we use it to hold ourselves accountable to each other and to hold us, as archivists for SAADA, accountable to the community we serve and represent?

I want to push beyond standard archival studies constructions of accountability that rely on legal formations and instead focus on records and archives as instruments through which we can construct webs of responsibilities in line with a feminist approach to ethics. Speaking at the Archives and Affect symposium at UCLA in 2014, I proposed a feminist ethics model for thinking through archival responsibility. In a feminist ethics approach, archivists are seen as caregivers, bound to records creators, subjects, users, and communities through a web of mutual affective responsibility. Working with Marika Cifor, we proposed four interrelated shifts in these archival relationships marked by what we called radical empathy (Caswell & Cifor, 2016). Our approach is clear that not all relationships were equally worthy of empathy, that power infused and catalyzed such relationships and as such, was central to the conversation. In each of these relationships, we *begin* by asking who is made most vulnerable *and proceed from there*.

Using this framework, in the case of the Dhillonn scrapbook, SAADA archivists are ethically bound to: (a) the creator of the records—in this case Dhillonn, who, though he didn't take the photographs, clearly staged them and saved them; (b) the subjects of the records—so the people in the photograph: Sharanjit, the three white men, and Conroy Allison; (c) the current and potential users of the record via its digital surrogate in SAADA, which now includes all of you thinking through these records alongside this article; and, (d) the larger



community SAADA serves and represents, that is, South Asian Americans. I am particularly interested in that third and fourth responsibility. How can we repurpose this image in ways that hold us accountable to our users and the larger South Asian American community? To put it bluntly, is this record in any way redeemable? *Can this record be saved?*

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To begin to answer that question, I turn to another record in SAADA, involving a different Indian student who came from the Kashmir Valley to study in the United States in the 1950s. Kuldip Rae Singh was an unknown 21-year-old UCLA medical student when he appeared on Groucho Marx's "You Bet Your Life" show in 1956. Singing his heart out, Singh became an overnight sensation, getting a recording contract, attracting throngs of screaming teenage girls, and being featured in *LIFE* magazine. He had a very brief career in the United States before ultimately moving to Spain to finish his medical studies. In his debut television appearance, Singh is subjected to—and willingly plays into—racist stereotypes of Indians. Groucho Marx calls him "Cool Dip," and makes a joke about how he took a "cool dip" in his swimming pool that morning.<sup>2</sup> When Singh says he comes from the valley of Kashmir, in the Himalayas, Marx trips on the pronunciation and asks, "Are you calling me a liar?" Marx asks if he came to the United States by camel, and Singh responds, "I did halfway, yes, but the other way I had to take a boat, you know, they don't swim," cuing audience laughter. "Brenda," a young white woman who is the other contestant on the show, blushes and coyly looks at Singh. When Marx asks her what she thinks of him, she flirtingly responds, "he's real cool," again to audience laughter. Singh is clearly sexualized in this portrayal; he says he sings "love songs," and Marx goes as far as commenting, "many women in the audience are planning to leave their husbands." Marx then invites Singh to sing, but only after confirming that he's not "a hip-shaker,"

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<sup>2</sup> The clip from "You Bet Your Life" is extraordinary. <https://vimeo.com/226992471>

perhaps in an attempt to quell any racial ambiguity that might read Singh as Black. As Singh croons a love song—“those eyes are the eyes of a woman in love”—Brenda blushes and giggles uncontrollably. The crowd eats it up. Like Dhillonn, we see Singh play into Orientalist stereotypes in exchange for white social capital.

In 2016, inspired by Kathy Carbone’s work on the City of Portland’s Archives and Record Center’s artist-in-residency program and my research team’s work on symbolic annihilation and South Asian American history, SAADA launched the “Where We Belong: Artists in the Archive” project with a generous grant from the Pew Center for Arts and Heritage (Carbone, 2015; Caswell, Cifor, & Ramirez, 2016). The funding enabled SAADA to launch a discovery process whereby we selected five South Asian American artists working across a range of media and genres to create new works of art inspired by records in SAADA. One of the explicit goals of the project was to counter the symbolic annihilation of South Asian Americans by creating new artistic representations that re-contextualize the community’s history. After an intensive in-person weekend retreat in October 2016, the five selected artists began working on their pieces, which were then presented to the public at a well-attended daylong event at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania in April 2017.<sup>3</sup>

One of the commissioned artists was Rudresh Mahanthappa, a New York-based jazz alto saxophonist and composer. For his SAADA residency, Mahanthappa composed a sound piece that incorporates remixed audio from Singh’s television appearance. Entitled, “Cool Dip,” the piece heightens the discomfort of Singh’s performance, juxtaposing Marx’s racist banter with a sped-up laugh track and discordant notes (Mahanthappa, 2018). Mahanthappa plays over and against Marx and Singh’s dialogue, his saxophone interrupting and resisting the flow of the conversation, even as it is forced to keep up with its pace.

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<sup>3</sup> One of the artists, a musician named Zain Alam, created a haunting score for Sharajnit Singh and Dorothy Dhillonn’s silent home movies of their wedding. Zain Alam, “Lavaan,” <https://www.saada.org/wherewebelong/lavaan>.

When Mahanthappa debuted the piece at the SAADA event, the audience—mostly second-generation South Asian Americans—vocally expressed the discomfort it evoked. One woman stood up and recounted all the times she watched her immigrant parents play into racist stereotypes of South Asians so as not to rock the boat, to smooth things over with their white neighbors and co-workers, and to assimilate. Another woman stood up and talked about how her dad had given up trying to get white people to say his name right, so he just changed his name. With “Cool Dip,” Mahanthappa activated that 1956 footage for an important—if painful—conversation about racism in the contemporary United States.

Here is where community archives can activate troubling records from the past to be accountable to their communities *now*. These records enable us to move towards a community-based form of mutual responsibility. Indeed, for communities for whom legal justice remains elusive, accountability is rooted in ethical relationships with each other rather than with the (failed) state.<sup>4</sup> We can thus conceptualize accountability in a community archives setting as a relationship to the past and the future, specifically as an obligation to preserve evidence *in the now* that both interprets the past and imagines possibilities for future generations.

Community-based forms of accountability may take the form of activating records, sharing stories, educating, making connections, learning strategies, speaking out, intervening, and imagining more just futures. In practicing these techniques, we forge mutual responsibilities between ourselves as archivists and those who create records, those who are the subjects of records, those who use records, and the large communities we represent and serve. We reunite people *who have never been united* as a community even as we reunite records *that have never been united* as archives. *Through it all, we are ethically obligated to the people, not the stuff.*

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<sup>4</sup> I am not claiming that legal accountability for injustice is unimportant, but rather it is seen as an unrealistic and even unattainable luxury for many given the white supremacy of the American judicial system.

Returning to the Dhillonn party photographs, we can use Mahanthappa's (2018) reinterpretation of the Kuldip Rae Singh footage and the discussion it provoked to read these records as a way for Dhillonn to fit in socially; by playing into Orientalist stereotypes, Dhillonn successfully maneuvered his way across two oceans and around 1950s Norman, Oklahoma, against an ever-present backdrop of white supremacy. He actively constructed his own image as a novelty rather than as a threat for his own survival. In the context of Singh—and Rudresh Mahanthappa's interpretation of his peers—we can begin to see Dhillonn's parties as a survival strategy in the face of the constant threat of racist violence. Perhaps we can read them as an odd alliance in which Dhillonn is communicating that, though he may be racially different, he shares the dominant white culture's attitude towards women, an assertion of similarity against racialized difference. Or perhaps we read them as a clever way that Dhillonn can control the narrative, poking fun at these gullible white people who think he's a maharaja. "Who exactly is the joke on?" we might think of him asking as he looks directly at the camera. Or perhaps we can read them as all of the above *or none of the above* and then some *in perpetuity*. Always both-and; *the archives are always both-and*. As a community archive, SAADA is held accountable to Dhillonn and the larger community by activating these records for this conversation.

And yet we do not have to over-determine the meaning of these troubled records. By troubling them, living within the discomfort they create, and opening up spaces for debate about them, we are envisioning and enacting a community-based conception of accountability that takes power into account and centers those who have the most at stake in archival interventions.

Returning to my initial question: What do you do with an archival mystery? You unravel its threads. You let them unravel you. You trouble it. You live *with/in* the trouble. You let it haunt you. You stay with the ghosts. You tend their pieces but you never make peace with them.

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*Postscript*

I meet Tarfia Faizullah, a Bangladeshi American poet, at a conference. Over much-deserved drinks at the hotel bar, I show her Dhillonn's party photographs. She begins to tear up. "I've never seen images of people who look like me in the U.S. from that time," she tells me.

*The records, they are imperfect pieces, but they haunt us perfectly.*

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