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The Quest for Bargallie: Mapping Our Roots and Routes

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Introduction

In the Australian steel city of Wollongong—colloquially known as "The Gong"—during the bustling 1970s, a young girl in a regional suburb became captivated by a singular curiosity: the unusual family name, Bargallie. That girl was me—Debbie Bargallie. The name Bargallie stood out among the common surnames of my classmates, drawing attention with its unique exoticness compared to the usual Anderson, Bell, Smith, Brown, White, and Johnson. Its distinctive quality sparked endless questions from teachers about its origins—"Where are you from? Are you Italian? What's the story behind that name?"—inviting me to explain and explore my roots from an early age. I frequently had to repeat and spell out my surname for others, and I still do. I vividly remember standing next to my father in a clothing store on Wollongong's main street, as he arranged alterations for a new pair of trousers. The shop assistant kept stumbling over his name, forcing him to spell it out while enduring a string of mispronunciations. Growing increasingly frustrated, my father carefully enunciated each letter—B-A-R-G-A-L-L-I-E—with deliberate clarity before remarking, his anger barely concealed, "You spell it as it sounds, and you say it the way it's spelled!"

I am the great-granddaughter of Thomas Bargallie, the name by which he came to be known in Australia. He arrived here from the Punjab region of India in the late 1890s. The family anecdote is that he "jumped ship" in Sydney after departing from Bombay with his brother, known as Ramalli or Ram Ali in Australia. They arrived undocumented. Like most Indian men arriving before 1901, they "came from 'paperless' societies where births deaths and marriages were often unrecorded; some were illiterate in their own language" (Deen, 2012, p. 63). However, as they were British Indian subjects, having arrived before 1901, they could legally remain. The brothers ventured into the trade of hawking, navigating the vast expanse of Kamilaroi Country in the northwest of New South Wales and southern Queensland, then British colonies. They were known to be Mohammedan men—the earlier term used for Muslim, meaning belonging or relating to the religion of Islam and the teachings of its last prophet Muhammad. The term is now largely superseded by Muslim, Moslem, or Islamic. Bargallie married a Kamilaroi Aboriginal woman, Rose Ethel Griffiths, and settled in the towns in and around Mungindi, Moree, and Walgett on the traditional lands of the

Kamilaroi peoples. This union navigated intersecting systems of racialisation and colonial oppression, where Aboriginal peoples and Indian migrants were marginalised in distinct yet interconnected ways within a colonial regime committed to maintaining a 'White Australia.' It was through this union and the official documentation that Bargallie first became visible in Australian archives. His name was recorded as Thomas Bargally on his New South Wales marriage certificate, and later, with the births of his nine children, his name appeared under various spellings, including Bargally, Bargallie, and Bargalli, on both New South Wales and Queensland birth certificates.

We, the authors, begin by introducing ourselves and outlining the collaboration behind this research, emphasising the distinctiveness of our transnational genealogy approach. From there, we guide the reader through our journey of discovery, starting with the limited information available at the outset and charting our progress toward future steps and the broader implications of this ongoing exploration. This paper presents early findings from a larger research agenda that combines oral history, written records, and genetic analysis to uncover the origins and migratory paths of Bargallie. Our "quest for Bargallie" explores both his roots—tracing his birthplace, ancestry, and family origins—and his routes—the migrations and movements of him and his descendants.

How did we Come Together to do Collaborative Transnational Genealogy?

> We all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific. What we say is always 'in context', *positioned*. (Hall, 1990, p. 222)

As an Indigenous Australian woman, my ontological (way of being) relation to Country informs my epistemology (way of knowing). My coming to know and knowing is constituted through what Goenpul scholar from the Qandamooka nation, Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2000), terms relationality. She explains,

> Indigenous people are related by descent, country, place or shared experiences ... one experiences the self as part of others and that others are part of the self; this is learnt through reciprocity, obligation, shared experiences, co-existence, cooperation and social memory. (p. 16)

I am an Indigenous critical race scholar descending from the Kamilaroi and Wonnarua Aboriginal peoples of New South Wales, Australia. I am also an avid family history researcher: for most of my adult life I have been tracing my great-grandfather's roots back to the Indian subcontinent. I grew up knowing I had Indian ancestry: how could I not with my dad and his brothers gathering at our family home in Wollongong cooking up curried

chicken, curried peas, and Johnny Cakes—a traditional type of bush bread made by the Indian hawkers and Aboriginal peoples from dough rolled into small balls, flattened out, and cooked on a bed of coals. However, beyond sporadic mentions in old documents and occasional stories from relatives, uncovering who Bargallie was and pinpointing our family's origins in the Punjab seemed almost impossible.

The Punjab is a vast region, with definitions and boundaries that have shifted throughout history. Punjab derives from the Persian *panj* "five" and *aab* "water", so Punjab refers to the land surrounding the five rivers of Sutlej, Beas, Ravi, Chenab, and Jhelum. The geographical borders of the area are vague, as are its cultural boundaries, such that the concept of a greater Punjab area or upper Indus Valley region encompasses numerous identities, language varieties, ethnicities, and practices. The Punjab later narrowed as a political identity, becoming roughly equivalent to the Suba of Lahore under the Mughals, and the Sikh Empire under Ranjit Singh, before the establishment of the Punjab Province in British India. As a result of the British partition of the subcontinent in 1947, Punjab was torn in two between Pakistan and India, with Pakistani Punjab becoming largely Muslim and Indian Punjab predominantly Hindu and Sikh.

With little prospect of finding out more about Bargallie's origins beyond the documents indicating he was from Punjab, India, I decided to turn to autosomal DNA testing in the hope of making new discoveries. In March of 2021, I was in contact with Crystal Jordan and Len Kenna of the Australian Indian Historical Society. Both have done extensive research on Indian migration to Australia, particularly on the Sikh community. It was then that Crystal introduced me to Awais Hussain (the co-author of this paper). At the time an undergraduate student, he is now a doctoral student of Linguistics at the University of York, examining the morphosyntax and typology of Indo-Aryan and South-Asian languages, with a focus on Pahari-Pothwari and the western Punjabi group of language varieties. Awais has undertaken genealogy research for over 10 years that examines families from Mirpur and the surrounding areas of present-day Azad Jammu and Kashmir, northern Pakistan, and their diaspora communities in the United Kingdom. He founded Apna Heritage, a charity that aims to preserve and promote the heritage, arts, culture, history, family history, language, and literature of the British South-Asian community. We soon found shared DNA matches between Awais' family and my own. Albeit distant matches, they hinted at some overlap between our family trees and that is when our journey into collaborative transnational genealogy research essentially began.

As an Indigenous Australian scholar and a diasporic UK scholar with ancestral ties to Punjab, our positionalities deeply inform our methodological approach, emphasising the importance of decolonising dominant genealogical practices. This collaboration brings together relational, transnational, and

decolonial perspectives, challenging Eurocentric frameworks that have historically marginalised the genealogies and histories of Indigenous and diasporic communities. Together, building on historical records and documents that I had gathered over several decades, we set out on a quest to unravel the story of Bargallie to pinpoint the precise place he once called home in the Punjab.

Exploring family history and genealogy becomes a captivating journey through time and identity, engaging with what Stuart Hall (1990, p. 225) describes as the dynamic interplay of "being" and "becoming". This journey uncovers how roots, routes, and "ruptures and discontinuities" (Hall, 1990, p. 225) shape and reshape identities, navigating histories of migration, colonialism, and cultural transformation, while emphasising the significance of decolonising dominant genealogical practices. It typically commences with gathering information about immediate family members and then extends to distant ancestors. This personal quest, driven by the desire to document and preserve our familial narrative, often prioritises uncovering specific details like birth dates, marriages, occupations, life events, and forgotten memories, which have often faded with time. However, this pursuit is not without its critics who dismiss family history research as self-indulgent and mere navel-gazing, questioning whether it is sufficiently analytical, challenging, or critically and theoretically rigorous (Sleeter, 2020, p. 64). As a critical race scholar, adopting a "critical family history" approach (Sleeter, 2016) rooted in critical race theory (CRT) (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) felt like a natural research pathway for me. This method, as described by Sleeter, involves tracing multiple generations of family within their historical contexts—often spanning long periods—to explore power dynamics, relationships, and their relevance to contemporary life. Expanding this approach, transnational genealogy reveals connections that transcend national and cultural boundaries, shedding light on global movements and interactions. It examines migration patterns, settlement across regions, and the maintenance of cross-border ties, exploring how cultural practices and identities evolve through diverse contexts.

Within transnational genealogy, relationality, place, identity, and belonging are pivotal concepts. Relationality emphasises interconnected familial ties that transcend borders, revealing expansive networks. Place provides context for understanding migration patterns and the forces shaping familial dynamics. Identity influences self-perception and interpersonal relationships, while belonging extends beyond physical boundaries, encompassing a sense of rootedness across cultures. Researchers navigate these concepts, recognising how cultural contexts shape familial bonds across geographical settings. Personalising family histories uncovers the human aspect of genealogical inquiry, offering deeper insights into transnational kinship. Together, relationality, place, identity, and belonging enrich our understanding of

family histories within a globalised world, framing the complexities of migration, cultural identities, and personal experiences across generations and continents.

Throughout our research journey, we have explored historical archives and the "memories and momentos" that Goodall et al. (2008) suggested are necessary to examine when the records provide no insights for those who entered Australia without official sanction. Furthermore, we embraced genetic genealogy. These diverse sources converge to produce a narrative of our ancestral past, offering glimpses into the lives, struggles, and triumphs of those who came before us, from distant places and times. Ultimately, this Indigenous-led research approach represents a decolonising methodology to family research, challenging the traditionally white Eurocentric narrative that has dominated genealogical studies.

What did we Know About Bargallie?

Stuart Hall, the eminent cultural studies professor, once said, "When I ask anybody where they're from I expect nowadays to be told an extremely long story" (Hall, 1990, p. 225). Where do we begin when sharing our family story? For me, it starts with *Punjabi Dreaming: The Story of Us Bargallie Mob*. I introduce my family and my roots through the Bargallie name, which holds a deep connection to Country and kin. As I have said, my great-grandfather, Bargallie, was a hawker who travelled across the northwest of New South Wales. During his travels, he met my great-grandmother, Rose Ethel Griffith, who lived with her Aboriginal parents on the former Walhallow Aboriginal Reserve located on the Liverpool Plains. They married while Bargallie was working in the area. This marriage highlights the agency of Aboriginal women like Rose Ethel Griffith, whose actions represented a continuation of their sovereignty through land, culture, and kinship systems. By living her entire life on Kamilaroi Country, Rose Ethel ensured her family maintained a deep and enduring connection to her ancestral land and community. By forming intercultural kinship networks, Aboriginal women actively navigated the oppressive conditions of settler colonialism, sustaining cultural continuity and reinforcing their relational authority across colonial boundaries. While I initiate my narrative with Bargallie's arrival in Australia in the late 1890s and his subsequent marriage to Rose Ethel in 1903, I make clear that my Aboriginal Australian lineage transcends such specific historical moments. Rooted in descent, country, place, and shared experiences, my connection to my Aboriginal ancestry stretches back to time immemorial. It encompasses the enduring bond with the land, culture, kin, place, and traditions preserved and passed down through countless generations. So this narrative doesn't merely begin with Bargallie's arrival but acknowledges the deep ancestral ties and timeless connections to the land and community that define my Aboriginal Australian identity. At the same time, my South Asian heritage is deeply rooted in the Punjab. Belonging, after all, is not always

defined by physical proximity to a place. It can be shaped by heritage, identity, and how you connect with your past, whether through memories, cultural practices, or emotional bonds.

Insights into the roots of the Bargallie and Ramalli brothers can be gleaned from their marriage and death certificates, which offer a glimpse into their family backgrounds. According to Bargallie's marriage certificate, registered on the 29th of October 1903, he was 23 years old, suggesting he was born around 1880. His parents are listed as "Miphadene Karamoath" and "Goard Beebee", with his father's occupation recorded as a farmer from "Punjaub, India". Bargallie and his wife Rose Ethel had nine children—three daughters and six sons—between 1904 and 1921.

Ramalli's marriage certificate records his name as "Ramallie Nashie Deen", a hawker residing in Moree. He married Madeline (or Adeline) Doyle—an Aboriginal woman from Kunopia via Boomi, New South Wales (Kamilaroi country)—on the 15th of April, 1907. The record notes that he was born in Bombay, India, which conflates with other mentions of the family being from Punjab, and his age is also given as 23, with his parents named Nashie Deen and Ja Nara Bebe. His father's occupation is also listed as a farmer. His signature is marked with a cross indicating that, like many other early Indian arrivals, perhaps he had a poor command of English (Allen, 2018). Ramalli and Adeline had six children—five sons and one daughter—between 1908 and 1919.

Having left their lives and families in Punjab in the late 1890s, Bargallie and Ramalli found a place in Australia's rural economy as hawkers, a role many Punjabi migrants adopted during this period, seeking to earn money to support their families back home. Hawking, a common occupation in rural India, seamlessly adapted to the demands of rural Australia (Deen, 2012). Hawkers served as traveling salesmen who acted as intermediaries, bringing goods and supplies directly to rural communities and isolated farms that often lacked easy access to town markets. Bargallie and Ramalli's marriage certificates recorded their occupations as "hawker" and "dealer". The mention of their father's occupation as a farmer further indicates their roots in a rural, agricultural background in the Punjab. They settled in the Mungindi region, located along the New South Wales/Queensland border, where they raised their children. As previously mentioned, there is limited documentary evidence of the brothers' lives before their marriages.

Over the years, they advanced from working as hawkers to establishing themselves as shop owners in the northwest region of New South Wales, offering a curated selection of goods and wares while steadily building their livelihoods. In a 1907 newspaper article ("Collarendabri Police Court", Jan 23) reporting on Collarendabri Police Court proceedings of two men charged with stealing from Bargally, he is recorded as being a storekeeper in Collarendabri (now Collarenebri). The article further reports that Ram Ali

corroborated the evidence of his brother Bargally. The data file Coloured labour and Asiatic aliens in Queensland 1913 (Queensland Government, 1913) records Bargallie, a Storekeeper, arriving from Punjab in 1897 and residing in Mungindi in the Roma Police District. The file was compiled from correspondence relating to *non-British subjects* residing in various Queensland Police Districts, as kept by the Chief Secretary's Office in 1913. However, as noted earlier, Bargallie arrived in Australia from India prior to 1901 so was a British subject. As Margaret Allen (2018) pointed out, "many of those dubbed aliens – Indians and a number of Chinese – were in fact British subjects" (p. 501). Allen argued that in the framing of the Australian Constitution, "legislators had ignored the special status of non-European British subjects. The notion of 'alien races' was central to their discourse about the White Man and White Australia" (2018, p. 501): "The term alien was an important language tool in the creation and maintenance of White Australia" (Prince, 2015, cited in Allen, 2018, p. 501). Census records from the 1920s note Bargallie as a shopkeeper in Garah, and finally in Walgett from the late 1920s. Ramalli's life came full circle, transitioning from his farming roots in Punjab to gaining recognition as a successful businessman in Mungindi—one of the first in the region to own a motorcar. He also purchased a bush property in Mungindi, embarking on a new agricultural life vastly different from the one he had known in his homeland. He named the property Bombay.

This early period of migration to Australia is characterised by a predominantly male-centric history, as Indian men's wives and relatives were generally unable to enter the country until around 1928 (Deen, 2012). Saifullah Khan (1977) insightfully observed that, for early migrants, it was widely believed that "No villager will go [abroad] without some established contact" (p. 67). Historical records, including newspaper clippings and certificates, reveal that Bargallie and Ramalli were not isolated figures in the colony. The northwestern region of New South Wales was a favoured destination for Punjabi Muslims (Simpson, 2016). Numerous documents suggest that they were surrounded by other Punjabi men, many of whom were either their relatives or part of their biraderi—a significant sociocultural structure in the Indian subcontinent (Hussain & Rehman, 2021).

The term biraderi, which literally means brotherhood, is derived from the Persian word biradar, "brother" (Alavi, 1972). The biraderi system plays a crucial role in structuring social relations, as it organises kinship networks, economic ties, and social status, especially in rural areas of the Punjab. For Bargallie and Ramalli, this system would have been vital in providing a sense of solidarity and mutual support in a foreign environment and, importantly, a connection to home. The biraderi helped to form a close-knit community, allowing men to navigate social, economic, and emotional challenges. However, migration often disrupts these established networks. It is commonly observed that the biraderi system can weaken or even break

when individuals or families move abroad, as the physical distance makes it difficult to maintain the strong, localised connections that are essential to its functioning. Once broken, the biraderi is often hard to re-establish in a new setting. Despite this, the men in this context managed to maintain aspects of their biraderi through marriage and familial alliances, thereby preserving some continuity of their social network. The biraderi system's adaptation in colonial Australia illustrates CRT's emphasis on how racialised groups navigate and resist systemic exclusions. By transforming traditional kinship networks into tools for survival and solidarity, Indian migrants like Bargallie and Ramalli redefined relationality within the constraints of a racially stratified colonial society.

Notably, the men did not just work and live among each other but were bound through interrelated marriage links, such as marrying within the same family or arranging their children's marriages among each other. For instance, Ramalli's son Curram Deen "David" Ramalli (1908–1985) married Alma Maude Jeladeen, the daughter of fellow Punjabi hawker Jela Deen. Jela Deen's wife, Mary Campbell, was the sister of Fanny Campbell, who married Swarah, another Punjabi hawker. Swarah and Fanny had a son, Hassan Dean, who later returned to the Punjab with his father. Similarly, Bargallie's wife had a sister, Margaret May Griffiths, who was first married to Kadrabox, another Punjabi man. After Kadrabox's death, Margaret married Budda Deen, a Punjabi hawker, with whom she raised a large family. This intricate web of relationships illustrates that, despite the potential weakening of the biraderi system through migration, men like Bargallie, Ramalli, Jela Deen, and others maintained ties through marriage, forming an enduring, albeit modified, community network. This allowed them to navigate life in Australia while staying connected to their cultural and social roots.

Thomas Bargallie passed away on the 22nd of March 1956 in Walgett, New South Wales, with his father listed as Nasherdeen on his death certificate, though no mother is mentioned. He is buried in Walgett Cemetery. Ramalli had passed away much earlier, on the 26th of April 1936, in Moree, New South Wales. His parents are listed as Nashie and Ja Nara. Ramalli is buried in Mungindi General Cemetery, with his grave notably oriented in a different direction from the others. It appears to face the qibla—the direction of the Kaabah in Mecca—reflecting his Muslim faith.

So, What's in a Name? The Name Bargallie

The reader may have noticed that the spellings of the brothers' names have varied throughout the previous sections. A prominent dimension of transnational genealogy is to explore research through the lens of an entirely different and perhaps unfamiliar culture and tradition. With Punjabi family history, this is particularly pertinent when it comes to naming conventions, daily lifestyle, social practices, social norms, and methods of recording family history. Naming practices and customs are intricately linked to the language,

culture, and heritage of the community from which they derive, and even though such practices as having miscellaneous variants of spelling may confuse an audience, it must be recognised as a natural consequence of transliterating or translating a name from one cultural sphere into another. This paper will highlight a few differences in naming conventions which may seem foreign, as most of the genealogy research undertaken has been Eurocentric, with South Asian genealogy being underresearched.

Names serve as markers of identity. The names documented in written records are often arbitrary and may not reflect what the person was commonly known as. Names in the Punjab differ from the traditional Western norms of naming children, primarily because Western conventions were neither required nor formally established in the rural areas (Temple, 1883). In Islam, soon after a child is born, the parents or immediate family decide on a name. This can be any name as long as it does not have a negative or blasphemic denotation. A large proportion of names have Arabic etymologies, and many are names of prophets or Islamic persons and concepts. Nonetheless, many names likewise have Indo-European roots, being from the native mother tongues and thus ultimately descending from ancient Prakrits and indigenous varieties. The name decided on is a given name: It is one whole name, meaning that it should not be considered a forename and a surname.

The name Bargallie, though comprising of two names, Barg and Allie, is actually one entire name. The first part, Barg, can be spelled in several ways: Bagh, Baagh, Baag, Barg, and various others, because it is spelled how it is pronounced and there are no standardised spellings for transliterating between languages. Bagh is Persian and means “garden”, while the second part, Allie or Ali (named after the Caliph Ali, companion and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad pbuh), is simply a traditional name which goes with Barg such that Bagh Ali is an extremely common given name. In the same way, Ramalli is Ram Ali or Rehm Ali, with “rehm” deriving from the trilateral Arabic root R-H-M meaning “mercy”, from which also derive the words rahmah, marhoom, raheem, Rahman, and Rahim. The Ali component should not be perceived as a surname; it is somewhat coincidental that both the brothers have the name Allie in their names as it has no bearing on their family names, which is also indicated by their father’s name being noted as Nasherdeen/Nashie Deen.

Overall, the main reason for the misdocumentation or varied spellings of names can be attributed to transnational representation, where naming conventions from one linguistic culture were adapted to align with the colonial British naming standards in official paperwork. Additionally, names were often misheard or miswritten due to language barriers and the limited English literacy of early Indian migrants encountering Australian officials

who spoke in English. In some cases, pseudonyms were used to protect identities, especially when the real names posed a threat to the family's ability to remain in Australia.

Returning to naming customs in the Punjab, interactions nearly always begin with a mention of residence—for the most part, of village location—and then a mention of elders and relatives, which quickly establishes a good rapport. Any form of anthropological or sociological research should appreciate the kinds of kinship ties involved in the community. Ties of biraderi meant elders knew each other. In a village scenario, if you wanted to call or identify someone, you would use their name together with some contextual information. For instance, you might add the village, so one could typically say, "Do you know Awais, the one from the village Pind Khurd?" and the conversation would continue from there. As there could be more than one person with the same name and from the same village, or as the person may not be well recognised immediately, more information such as the sub-village, the caste, the clan, profession, father's name or mother's name, other relatives' names, and other details of this sort would be used to clarify who exactly is being referred to.

Caste, clan, and tribe are more similar to the Western concept of surname in that they represent familial ties. A caste can be defined as a macro-web of families, similar to an ethnic group, though caste is often connected to hereditary profession (*paisha*) in that people of the same caste traditionally had the same occupation. There are two main types of caste: (a) the land-owning agriculturalists or farmers, of which Jatts formed the majority in the Punjab; and (b) the skilful artisan castes, including weavers, tailors, builders, carpenters, blacksmiths, shoemakers, oil-makers, water carriers, dyers of cloth, barbers, and entertainers. It was customary to marry only within your caste, and it was taboo to marry outside of your caste. Even though a social hierarchy existed, it was not as rigid as in other parts of South-Asia. While caste can be viewed as connected to social status and may be subject to change, clan is much more identifiable because it indicates a patrilineal affinity of the direct male lineage, so it is much more like the Western surname or family name. Clans are believed to be descended from a common forefather whose offspring over the years expanded and spread out to different areas.

Passports and official documents in areas out of the Punjab required a full name with a forename and surname, but people were not familiar with these conventions. Names were often randomly added in official paperwork, simply as a formality. There are almost certain formulae and patterns in names used in official forms. Most women's names from this region end in Bi or Bibi or Begum. In the same vein, men's names generally start with Mohammed or end in Khan, Ali, Hussain, Deen, or Bakhsh. These names are detached from the idea of an actual family surname; they are in fact equal to given names.

As such, villagers may often have three or more different names: (a) their birth name, which is potentially a single word, a given name with a meaning; (b) their official name in passports; and (c) perhaps a nickname too, which may be a shortened or phonetically adjusted version of the name, or even something entirely different.

Names from other languages ultimately must surrender to the English language's orthography when it comes to spelling them in the Latin alphabet, and thus there is a miscellany of ways they can be written, which is how we get Bargallie, Barg Ali, Barg Ally, and so on. Names have a specific spelling in the language they come from, but when transliterated it could be in any number of ways, none of which is incorrect. محمد can be written as Mohammed or Muhammad, among many other variants, all depending on the inscriber's discretion, with no strict ruling. None of these is correct or incorrect, as it is a transliteration from another linguistic system and so there are nuances.

These naming differences may make it difficult for those having grown up with Western naming system norms wanting to research their ancestry, given that many of the early migrants came under different names. Nonetheless, as more people are becoming interested in their roots, there are more opportunities to explain and research our heritage; this article can be a gateway to learning about how names were used. Overall, a naming system may ostensibly seem straightforward, but the actual workings are more complex because a name, what someone or a community is known by, is intricately connected to identity and how we represent ourselves.

Routes from the Punjab to Australia?

Bargallie and Ramalli likely came to Australia for a variety of reasons, but economic motivations were paramount, as they sought to support their families. Labour in the villages was largely agricultural, but it was not enough to sustain the ever-growing population. Len Kenna (2013, p. 13) highlights that during this period in India, the shortage of suitable farmland, coupled with the practice of subdividing land among sons after the death of an owner, resulted in progressively smaller plots that could no longer sustain successful subsistence farming. Families were large due to high infant mortality rates, and sons were favoured because they could farm, inherit land, and be sent to work in other places. There was a general culture to travel to other places where there were prospects for work and income, such that many men joined the railway project, some built roads, and others joined the army. Economic migration is often framed by push and pull factors—the push being conditions in Punjab, and the pull, the opportunities in Australia, widely shared through returning travellers' stories. Before leaving Punjab, Bargallie and Ramalli likely heard accounts from *Australiawalas*—men who had lived and worked in Australia—about the availability of work and the prospect of good wages (Allen, 2011, p. 199).

One prominent aspect of this migration trend is the facilitation of the journey and opportunity which enabled the brothers to depart and arrive on foreign shores. With the railway linking the ports of Bombay to the northern areas of Punjab towards the close of the 19th century, and with P&O opening their offices in Bombay, it was not long before that news spread across to areas of the Punjab where men were eager for employment of any kind. A significant number of men working on P&O steamships sailing on the Pacific routes were from the sub-continent of India, with a good number from northern Punjab (Goodall et al., 2008; Simpson, 2016).

Many Indians worked their way to Australia as "lascars". During the colonial period, the term "lascar" was commonly used to refer to Indian sailors or crew members who worked aboard merchant ships. These sailors were typically recruited from various regions of the Indian subcontinent by European or British shipping companies to serve as crew members on their vessels. The term originally derived from the Persian word "lashkar," meaning army or camp follower, but in the maritime context it came to refer specifically to Indian sailors and became a racialised term (Goodall et al., 2008). Lascars played a significant role in the maritime trade of the era, serving on ships that sailed across the oceans, transporting goods and commodities between ports in different parts of the world. Lascars were often paid lower wages than their European counterparts and endured deplorable living and exploitative working conditions (Kirkby & Monk, 2017). They further faced racism and prejudice from European crew members and officers, alongside systemic inequality embedded in their treatment aboard ships.

Bargallie and Ramalli are known to have "jumped ship" in Australia in the same way that many others before them had as a common learned practice. To date, we have not found any evidence in the immigration archives of their arrival to the colony. They are also known to have sent money and gift packages home to their siblings in the village through members of their biraderi who visited them while they were working on merchant ships.

Life as Hawkers in Rural Australia: Navigating Opportunity and Oppression

When young Punjabi men like Bargallie and Ramalli arrived from the Indian subcontinent in the late 19th century, they stepped into an Australia both brimming with opportunity and rife with racialised barriers. These men often disembarked from ships to find a fellow countryman waiting for them on the docks—sometimes a relative, other times an associate or community figure—who had been arranged to meet them and take them to refuge in the inner-city suburb of Redfern in Sydney. This was "the informal network of Punjabi migration" (Simpson, 2016, p. 324). Redfern was a crucial entry point for these migrants. In boarding houses shared with established compatriots, the newcomers were set up to begin their lives as hawkers. They were taught the trade, some basic phrases of English, and the money system

(Simpson, 2016). They were provided with the hawker necessities: usually a cane basket of goods to sell and basic provisions, tailored clothing to suit their arduous journeys through the bush, and vital instructions on navigating rural Australia. Following the train line, Bargallie and Ramalli travelled from Sydney to northwest New South Wales, a region well known as a popular route for Punjabi Muslim hawkers (Simpson, 2016).

The hawking trade, while gruelling, was indispensable to the bush economy. Hawkers, predominantly Indian men, carried an array of goods—textiles, utensils, and household items—essential for isolated rural communities. Traversing vast and remote areas, they became lifelines for families living far from urban centres. Most started out as foot hawkers then, as their business grew, many progressed to pack horses that followed in the footsteps of the hawker, or to horse-draw wagons (Kenna, 2013, p. 75). The hawker's regular visits were often much anticipated, welcomed with fondness and excitement by children and women isolated on farms who were their customers (Kenna, 2013, p. 84), yet they were never far from the shadow of racism.

By the time of Federation in 1901, political life in Australia had taken a sharp turn toward exclusionary nationalism, formalised through the Immigration Restriction Act 1901—the cornerstone of the White Australia Policy. As one of the first Commonwealth laws passed, it extended existing colonial policies and laws and was explicitly designed to prevent the entry of non-White peoples—specifically 'aboriginal natives of Asia, Africa, and the Pacific'—to maintain a predominantly White population. The Dictation Test was designed as a 'device to refuse entry' (Allen, 2011, p. 188). Immigration officers administered the 50-word test in any European language—later expanded to include any prescribed language— to non-White migrants. Although framed as a neutral literacy measure, it was deliberately structured to ensure failure and systematically used to deny entry.

To regulate mobility of existing residents, Certificates of Exemption from Dictation Tests (CEDTs) were introduced, primarily for Chinese, Japanese, and Indian individuals who wished to travel overseas and return. These certificates permitted re-entry within 3 years without retaking the dictation test. However, obtaining a CEDT was an invasive, laborious, and often humiliating process, subjecting applicants to intense scrutiny and racial bias (Allen, 2011, p. 192). The certificates were limited to those who could demonstrate their value to the nation, such as long-term residents, business owners, or individuals whose familial ties were deemed acceptable under the racial regime. We have found no evidence that Bargallie or Ramalli ever applied for a CEDT. The most likely reason they remained in Australia was their marriages and the financial commitments associated with raising young families. The draconian restrictions of the White Australia Policy severed travel routes and networks, isolating many men from the families and

communities they had left behind. Over time, this isolation deepened as the migrant population aged (Kenna, 2013, p. 96), ultimately contributing to the breakdown of Bargallie's biraderi.

Indian hawkers were particularly visible targets of racism. Media reports often painted them as threats—falsely accusing them of undermining the livelihoods of White men or portraying them as a danger to women in isolated farming areas (Cleland, 2002; Simpson, 2016). Yet, for the most part, hawkers formed respectful relationships with their customers and were remembered warmly in rural communities as resourceful and indispensable traders. Nonetheless, the undercurrent of suspicion and hostility was pervasive, especially as the White Australia Policy gained momentum. By the 1950s, the advent of automobiles marked the decline of the hawking trade. Yet the legacy of Indian hawkers endures in rural memory and historical records as a story of resilience—individuals who traversed the physical and social landscapes of a land that offered both promise and prejudice.

By forming familial ties with Aboriginal women, Indian migrants like Bargallie and Ramalli created kinship networks that subverted colonial efforts to isolate and control non-European populations. Many strategically lived low-profile lives to avoid the restrictive immigration and race-related policies of the time, including the practices of child removal and other invasive controls over Aboriginal lives. However, this did not shield them from racism. Court records, such as those from the Collarendabri Court mentioned earlier, reveal the exploitation and racism Indian shopkeepers endured. They were often subjected to unfair business practices and legal rulings that favoured White Australians. Despite these challenges, the shopkeepers resisted and persisted, carving out livelihoods while navigating the contradictions of life in colonial and post-Federation Australia. These marriages produced descendants who navigated complex identities—both Aboriginal and Indian—while challenging the rigid racial binaries imposed by the White Australia Policy.

The Partition of India in 1947 marked the political restructuring and division of assets following the end of British rule in the Indian subcontinent, resulting in the formation of two independent dominions: India and Pakistan. After almost two centuries of British governance, the British government withdrew from India in August 1947. While calls for independence had been ongoing for years, the notion of dividing the land was not widely anticipated until the early 1940s. British and Indian officials had just 9 weeks to negotiate the division of British India. Ultimately, the final borders separated the eastern and western regions, traversing the provinces of Punjab and Bengal, which were economically and politically significant, roughly equally splitting Indian and Muslim populations. The place that Bargallie had once known had been changed forever. To date, we have found no evidence from immigration records or family stories that the brothers

ever returned to their homeland. The profound influence of relationality, place, identity, and belonging on the brothers' lives is truly remarkable to contemplate.

Where are we Now?

Working with the few documents and certificates we had gathered, it was clear that the family's roots were in the Punjab, but we needed to pinpoint the exact location and identify the family members. Our use of DNA testing proved to be one particularly groundbreaking method for us. Companies such as MyHeritage, Ancestry, 23andMe, and FamilyTreeDNA, among many others, examine saliva samples of testers and enter their genome data into a database from which matches are identified. Given that we had both tested our DNA this way for genealogy purposes, and asked other Bargallie and Ramalli family members to share their DNA matches with us, we cross-examined our matches' lists and noticed patterns. We identified matches with heritage in surrounding locations of Gujrat and Bhimber, the lower Mirpur, Azad Kashmir belt. We then identified that there was a cluster of significant matches from a large village called Langrial in District Gujrat of Punjab, Pakistan. So, it seemed that the roots of the family lay somewhere in this vicinity.

We corroborated this with what we had learned about the men who were part of Ramalli and Bargallie's biraderi, such as Jela Deen and Swarah. According to his marriage certificate, Jela Deen is a widower, aged 28, with the occupation of a storekeeper; a usual resident of Boomi, his father's name was Theo or Meo, a farmer, and his mother's name Yatu. The date of the marriage was the 13th January 1909 and Swarah is mentioned as a witness. Jela Deen's place of birth was noted as Ningarial, Punjab, a more precise location, and Ningarial is a recognised alternative pronunciation to Langrial. With this lead in mind, efforts were made to communicate with people from Langrial, but with it being one of the largest and prominent villages of the area, near the prominent town of Kotla Arab Ali Khan, we were uncertain whether we would find what we were looking for. Our local contacts asked people from the village if they had heard of anyone going to Australia or venturing "on ships" and never returning. While we did not immediately locate Jella Deen, we did locate Swarah, given that his son Hassan Deen was recognised as being from Australia. They were from a village called Sheikhpur which was near Langrial, and they had family ties there. In addition, there were stories passed on through oral tradition of a man called Haji who ventured from Langrial to Australia and never returned as he had passed away there in a horse-riding accident. We tried to find mentions of such an occurrence in Australia, and lo and behold, the oral history story not only was the same as that found in Australian newspapers, but it also led to another clue, that the man called Hadji existed, and he was reported as a cousin to the Ramallis, and thus a relative:

> At the Coroner's inquest into the death at Boomi, of Hadi Ahmed, 31, an Indian hawker, it was stated that deceased was a reckless rider and had gone out bare-backed, with Jella Deen, a Boomi storekeeper, to catch some horses. Whilst riding between two trees, he was thrown from his horse and struck his head against one of the trees. Jella Deen ran half a mile to the post office and rang up his home. The doctor was informed of the accident but Ahmed was dead when he arrived.
>
> The Coroner found that death was accidental. Deceased is a cousin to the Ramallis of Mungindi, and comes from the Punjab. ("Coroner's inquest", 1929)

Having established the identities of both Swarah and Hadji Ahmed, we turned to traditional methods of researching family trees in the Punjab, with a view that searching the records for the village of Langrial for the two brothers Ramalli and Bargallie may uncover some information. The few village records which existed were primarily related to land and genealogy (kept by the mirasi or the raah) and these were organised on a clan and caste basis. The mirasi, or raah, is a caste whose occupation is to record genealogy. Historically, they would travel from household to household making a note of new births and, like bards of old, they would reel off narratives of forefathers of bygone eras on special occasions such as weddings. The name "mirasi" originates from the Arabic word (ميراث) mīrās, signifying inheritance or, occasionally, heritage. Strictly speaking, they are regarded as custodians of cultural and social heritage. The mirasi of Langrial was consulted to help trace this family's history with hopes of uncovering more details about the family's origins and relationships. He drafted a family tree in Urdu based on historical records. This tree revealed that Haji had an uncle named Nishra, as well as sons named Baghu and Rehmu—nicknames for Bargallie and Ramalli—along with other siblings. Asking about the names Baghu and Rehmu, it was said that they had travelled abroad to Australia, and never returned. The discovery felt like striking gold, as the father's name, Nishra, aligned with the names on the brothers' marriage certificates in Australia—Nasherdeen and Nashie Deen. This breakthrough confirmed that Bargallie and Ramalli belonged to this family and had indeed come to Australia from the village of Langrial in Punjab, now part of Tehsil Kharian, District Gujrat, Pakistan.

Conclusion: Where to From Here?

In his 1990 essay Cultural Identity and Diaspora, Stuart Hall presented a dynamic perspective on cultural identity, framing it as an ongoing process of "becoming," rather than a fixed state of "being" (Hall, 1990, p. 225). Hall emphasised that cultural identity extends beyond temporal and spatial boundaries, continuously evolving and being shaped by various influences. Hall's insights resonate with the experiences of Bargallie and Ramalli, whose

sense of belonging to Punjab would have transformed significantly as they lived in Australia, adapting to new cultural and social contexts while maintaining some connection to their homeland. Transnational migrants maintain connections with both their country of origin and their destination country, creating a complex web of social, economic, and cultural interactions that transcend national borders. What does this imply about cultural identities and how descendants born elsewhere negotiate or engage with what has largely been an imagined sense of place in their lives? Hall (1990, p. 225) argued that, in addition to numerous similarities, our identities are also shaped by significant differences that define "what we have become," influenced by the intervention of history—particularly colonisation and transnational migration. This makes it increasingly difficult to speak definitively about "one experience, one identity" without recognising the ruptures and discontinuities that contribute to the uniqueness of our transnational family experience. Our future research will explore the complexities of relationality, place, identity, and belonging, focusing on the cultural identities of the descendants of Bargallie, Ramalli, and their siblings, now spread across the globe. We will particularly examine the similarities, continuities, ruptures, and discontinuities within these identities.

A modest yet valuable body of research has documented the journey of the Muslim men who arrived in Australia from the subcontinent of India in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Allen, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2018; Cleland, 2002; Deen, 1995, 2011, 2012; Kabir, 2005; Khatun, 2018). A significant focus has been on the cameleers (Butta, 2022; Jones & Kenny, 2007; Murray et al., 2008; Rajkowski, 1987, 1995; Stevens, 1989) and the Muslim and Sikh hawkers (Kenna, 2013; Rhook, 2015; Simpson, 2016; D. Spennemann, 2019; D. H. R. Spennemann, 2018). Significant attention has been directed towards the "visible" figures—those who are well documented in archival records and preserved in iconic photographs. These individuals often become central figures in romanticised narratives, contributing to the creation of exoticised perceptions of their lives. However, beneath these well-known stories lie the stories of many others whose experiences remain less visible or obscured. For instance, the story of Bargallie and his biraderi from the Punjab village of Langrial, Gujrat, unfolds outside the public eye, overshadowed by the passage of time. Their lives, though integral to the local fabric of northwest New South Wales, are absent from official records. Despite their contributions to local communities and their relationships with both Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people, their stories remain largely unacknowledged, overlooked in the broader historical narrative.

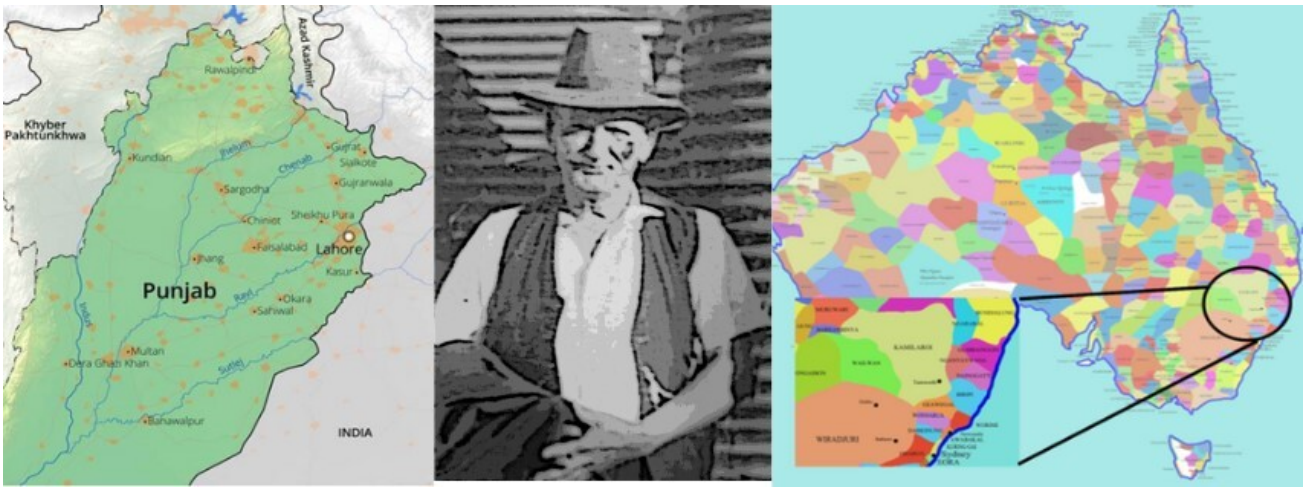
The documentation of family and community histories is fraught with limitations. Important events, traditions, and attitudes within families and communities may be overlooked or omitted from official records, leading to incomplete narratives. Additionally, errors in recording by government officials introduce inaccuracies in the historical record. Official

documentation often focuses primarily on interactions with the government, neglecting other aspects of family or community life. These limitations highlight the need for a more comprehensive and nuanced approach to historical documentation—a decolonial approach to family history. As Quandamooka scholar Karen Martin (2008) reinforces:

> To know your Stories of relatedness is to know who you are, where you are from and how you are related. Whether these stories have been distorted or forgotten, they still exist then the task becomes one of finding how this happened to reclaim them. (p. 83)

As we write, we are preparing to travel to Punjab, Pakistan, to further validate our research by reviewing historical family records and engaging with the descendants of Bargallie and Ramalli's siblings who had remained in Punjab. While these individuals are part of the broader kinship group or extended family network, they are not direct descendants of the two brothers. Their experiences and connection to the family's history will shed further light on the transnational ties and cultural continuities across generations. Under the project title Punjabi Dreaming, future research aims to delve deeper into the complexities of transnational genealogy, with a particular focus on the biraderi system in transnational contexts. This includes exploring how migration disrupts or reshapes kinship structures and examining its ramifications of displacement for descendants—such as those of Bargallie and Ramalli—who were born and raised in Australia with limited knowledge of their Punjab origin or extended kin. Examining these experiences enables understanding of the dynamics of belonging, estrangement, and the perceived losses of kinship ties, language, religion, and connection to a homeland which, for many, are constructed through storytelling rather than through personal recollection.

The significance of our research lies in the relationships forged within our transnational family connections. As Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith argued in her groundbreaking book first published in 1999, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Indigenous peoples must have agency in telling their own stories "with a view to *re*writing and *re*righting our position in history" (Smith, 1999, p. 28). Punjabi Dreaming will serve as the platform for rewriting and rerighting my family's history, creating a more accurate, nuanced, and empowering representation of our family's collective journey and ensuring that the stories and memories of Bargallie, Ramalli, and their siblings are honoured, preserved, and passed down to future generations.



Map sources: https://catholicoutlook.org/voice-treaty-truth-julie-waddell-embraces-this-years-naidoc-week-message/indigenous-peoples-aus_map_covered_text_lined-copy-aa/

https://ratingword.com/geographical-characteristics-of-punjab/

Left and right image, middle image supplied by author

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