

An Embodied Political Analysis of Violence Against Women: Understanding Female Feticide in Punjab

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Formal equality for Sikh women is explicitly enshrined in Indian and Sikh law. Despite formal guarantees of equality, Sikh women experience pervasive violence against women (VAW). I consider female feticide among Sikhs as one example of VAW. In particular, I examine current feminist explanations of VAW in Sikh and Punjab Studies and extend these explanations by bringing the symbolic and physical body into a single analysis because the symbolic body is mediated through contextual, situated, and embodied practice. I argue that we cannot equate the adoption of formal or religious laws with effective implementation or enforcement. Rather, I call for a critical examination of the gap between formal and religious law and women's lived reality to demonstrate how gender determines who is most vulnerable to violence, and to reveal how a singular focus on the symbolic body may maintain and perpetuate the very gender violence feminists seek to eradicate.

Introduction

Formal equality for women is explicitly enshrined in Indian law. Indian women won constitutional parity - including enfranchisement - prior to ratification of the Indian constitution. India is a constitutional parliamentary democracy, with written Fundamental Rights containing extensive equality provisions: Article 14 guarantees equality; Article 15 restricts the state from sex-based discrimination; Article 16 guarantees equal opportunity; Article 39.d guarantees equal pay for equal work; and Article 19 guarantees freedom of speech and expression, freedom of association, freedom of travel, freedom of residence, and freedom to form labor unions.¹ The Indian Constitution protects gender equality, while also retaining a plural system of personal law.²

In addition to enshrining formal equality in Indian law, many legislative acts have been adopted to prevent discrimination and violence against women (VAW) in India. For example, in 1994, the Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) (PNDT) Act, which prohibits sex selection, was adopted. The PNDT Act regulates the use of prenatal diagnostic techniques, like ultrasound and amniocentesis, for sex determination and selective abortion of female fetuses. The Act limits the use of prenatal diagnostic techniques to detect genetic abnormalities, metabolic disorders, chromosomal abnormalities, and congenital malformation. In 2003, the PNDT

Act was amended to The Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition Of Sex Selection) (PCPNDT) Act in order to make punishments for sex selective abortion more stringent and to improve the regulation of technology used.

In Punjab, a state with a majority Sikh population, there is history of formal equality for women enshrined in Sikh doctrine. According to Gurinder Singh Mann, the *Prem Sumarag*, from the eighteen-century, stressed women's full participation in religious life: women were expected to be the best-informed members of the household, able to instruct their husbands and children in matters of belief and practice; widow marriage was encouraged; and women partook in the *khande di pahul* ceremony (2001, 103). In the twentieth century, the Sikh *Rahit Maryada*, ethical code, was emphatic that no distinction be made on the basis of gender and laid out specific rules to combat female oppression: female veiling, female infanticide, and dowry were forbidden, and widow remarriage was sanctioned (Mann 2001). According to Nikky Guninder Kaur Singh, the Sikh religion, as envisioned by Nanak and institutionalized through the *Rahit Maryada*, "grants full equality to men and women in all spheres - religious, political, domestic, and economic" (2008, 333). Sikhism espouses a radical equality by placing the Untouchable on par with the Brahman and the woman on par with man (Grewal 1990, 30).

Despite formal guarantees of equality in Indian and Sikh religious law, Sikh women experience pervasive discrimination and violence against women. Even when legal and religious institutions mandate gender equality, we find a contradictory situation of *exclusionary inclusion*³, where inclusion exists alongside discriminatory practices (Behl 2014). For example, among Sikhs, while an explicit ban against female infanticide marks a commitment to gender equality, the fact that the sex ratio in Punjab is highly skewed (895:1000)⁴ indicates continued sexism.⁵ Other measures of VAW in Punjab reinforce these findings, such as high rates of female feticide and infanticide, neglect of female children, sexual assault, domestic violence, and dowry murders (Gupta 1987; Chhachhi 1989; Booth and Verma 1992; Sen 1992, 2003; Mutharayappa, Choe, Arnold, and Roy 1997; Karlekar 2004; Grewal 2008). Socio-economic measures in Punjab also indicate gender-based discrimination: 71% of women are literate compared to 80% of men; and 19% of women participate in the labor market compared to 54% of men (Indian Census 2001, 2011). Similarly, social norms in Punjab, such as lack of female *granthis* [priests], restrictions on women's religious *seva* [service], and women's restricted relationship with her natal family also indicate continued sexism (Singh 2000; Jakobsh 2006; Shanker 2002; Karlekar 2004; Grewal 2008).

The disparity between proposed equality at an institutional level and the lived reality of Indian women is best demonstrated by a startling absence: there are 44 million missing women in India. Many scholars argue that the most plausible explanation for the skewed sex ratio at birth in India is prenatal sex determination followed by selective abortion of female fetuses (Sen 1992, 2003; Jha, Kumar, Vasa, Dhingra, Thiruchelvam, Moineddin 2006; Sahni, Verma, Narula, Varghese, Sreenivas, and Puliyl 2008). Based on conservative

assumptions, the practice of sex selective abortion in India accounts for 500,000 missing female births yearly, translating over the past 2 decades into the abortion of 10 million female fetuses (Jha, Kumar, Vasa, Dhingra, Thiruchelvam, Moineddin 2006).

In this article, I examine female feticide in Punjab as one example of VAW. I draw on and extend Nikky Guninder Kaur Singh's feminist reading of Sikh scripture. Singh's scriptural analysis entails a project of what she terms re-memorying. Her main argument is that Sikh scripture originally contained the tenets of gender parity, which has over hundreds of years been symbolically aborted from the text. I extend her reading in my own analysis of female feticide by celebrating her efforts at unearthing alternative feminist histories and narratives, while also pointing out the limitations of such an approach. Singh's textual analysis of Sikh scripture opens up feminist possibilities and rememberings; however, I also ask how far this symbolic resuscitation takes us in redressing the violence done to the physical bodies of women in India now in a market-dominated global economy. What are the consequences of work done in isolation from the context in which Sikh women find themselves? I call for an extension of Singh's analysis by bringing the symbolic and physical body into a single analysis because the symbolic body is mediated through contextual, situated, and embodied practice.

I find that we cannot equate the adoption of formal or religious laws with effective implementation or enforcement. Rather, I call for a critical examination of the gap between formal and religious law and women's lived reality in an effort to limit gendered violence directed at women, whether born or unborn. This article contributes to growing literature on the impact of unwritten rules and social norms on public policies and social reforms (Chappell 2014; Raymond et al. 2014; Waylen 2014; Hochstetler and Milkoreit 2014). According to Leigh Raymond and S. Laurel Weldon, "*informal institutions*, or the sets of 'unwritten' rules...that exist outside 'formal' structures of government, exercise tremendous influence over social behavior and political choice, and should not be ignored" (2014, 181). In particular, Raymond and Weldon argue that informal unwritten rules frequently cause behavior that is inconsistent with formal laws and policies, yet receive relatively little attention from those trying to solve important policy challenges (Raymond and Weldon 2014, 181). I respond to Raymond's and Weldon's concerns by turning our attention to informal institutions - in particular gendered norms - to understand the seemingly intractable problem of Sikh women's formal equality in Indian law and Sikh religious law, and their experience of pervasive discrimination and violence against women.

Much in the same way political scientists study the complexities of how power operates through people and institutions, how power operates through ideas and research practices can also be analyzed. In this paper, I show how these two projects can unfold simultaneously. One project entails a situated analysis of citizenship to understand Sikh women's differential experience of

citizenship in India (Behl 2014). The second project entails an examination of different approaches to VAW, and the implications for processes of knowledge production.⁶ In conducting these two simultaneous projects, I find as scholars we need to be cognizant of how our explanations may help to maintain and perpetuate the very gender violence we seek to eradicate.

In the following section, I draw on Western and Third World feminist scholarship to explain reproduction and abortion in the Indian context (Mani 1990; Visweswaran 1994; Narayan 1997; Spivak 1999; Menon 1999; Mohanty 2003). In the next section, I draw on and extend Singh's feminist reading of Sikh scripture. I extend Singh's scriptural analysis of female feticide by pointing out the limitations of her approach and extend her analysis by bringing the symbolic and physical body into a single analysis. I conclude by discussing the implications of my analysis for the study of gender violence in Punjab.

Reproduction and Abortion in the Indian Context

Reproduction constitutes a key theme of feminist theory and political practice. Reproduction, in particular abortion rights, is an issue that deeply divides global feminists. For Western feminists, reproductive rights are one of the central arenas of contestation, through which scholars "have creatively questioned conventional understandings of politics and problematized previously taken for granted divisions between the public and the private spheres" (Mottier 2013, 230). For Western feminists, abortion rights act as a yardstick for women's rights and gender equality more generally. Feminist scholarship on reproductive rights, according to Veronique Mottier, "has produced a rethinking of the boundaries of the political, emphasizing the importance of the body, sexuality, and normative models of masculinity and femininity for political theory as well as practice" (2013, 231).

Indian feminists have long criticized Western feminism's focus on reproductive rights, in particular abortion rights, as a luxury of privileged, middle-class, white women.⁷ Indian feminists argue that Western focus on reproductive and abortion rights fail to recognize the concerns of third world women who have often been subjected to coerced sterilization and forced abortion. Furthermore, many Indian feminists are critical of Western feminists because their feminist theory and practice often serve to further stereotype third world people, and reinforce the view that brown women need to be freed from brown men (Mani 1990; Visweswaran 1994; Narayan 1997; Spivak 1999; Mohanty 2003). Many Indian feminists challenge oppressive modes of feminist ventriloquism, and disrupt Western sanctioned ignorance about the experience of third world women (Narayan 1997; Spivak 1999; Mohanty 2003).

Indian feminists also warn that national contexts shape feminist issues, and therefore, one must be cognizant of national context when trying to conduct comparative analysis.⁸ In India, the issue of reproductive and abortion rights is quite different to its positioning in the West. Since independence,

India has been concerned with poverty. Poverty is often understood as being caused by overpopulation, and therefore, abortion has long been accepted as a family planning measure in India. The Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act was passed in 1971 amidst Parliamentary rhetoric of choice and women's rights, but it was clearly intended as a population control measure, as several MPs stated during debate on the Bill. The Act was not the result of campaigning by women's groups, nor was there any anti-abortion opposition (Menon 1999).

In the 1980s, abortion became an issue for Indian feminists because of the growing practice of selective abortion of female fetuses after prenatal sex-determination tests. The Indian women's movement primarily responded by campaigning for change in law and social policies.⁹ According to Nivedita Menon, two crucial questions arise for Indian feminists in relation to abortion in this context: "At the level of politics is the contradiction involved in pushing for legislation which can restrict the access to abortion itself...at the level of feminist philosophy, if abortion is a right over one's body, how are feminists to deny this right to women when it comes to the selective abortion of female fetuses" (1999, 278-279)? Menon argues that the abortion debate in India demonstrates that rights over one's body "are not natural, timeless, and self-evident" (1999, 281). Rather, these rights are constituted within specific contexts and political practices.

I examine female feticide in the Sikh community because this case provides insight on the complex relationship between formal and religious laws that protect gender equality and women's lived experience of gender violence. Even when religious and legal institutions mandate gender equality, we find a contradictory situation of exclusionary inclusion among Sikhs. This contradictory experience provides further evidence for my claim that analyses of VAW require specificity. A situated approach helps to understand the gap between legal and religious commitments to gender equality and the processes that result in VAW.

Understanding Female Feticide in Punjab, India

In the field of Sikh and Punjab studies, there is a growing feminist literature, which was pioneered by scholars such as Nikky Guninder Kaur Singh.¹⁰ Singh's scholarship is committed to a feminization of Sikh ritual, scripture, and identity (2000, 2005, 2008, 2009). In particular, Singh invokes the "re-memory" of Sikh scripture to open up the possibility of alternative feminist histories and futures.¹¹ I examine Singh's "Female Feticide in the Punjab and Fetus Imagery in Sikhism" (2009) as an example of feminist textual analysis, and call for an extension of this analysis through an examination of the physical as well as symbolic body.

Singh's analysis is animated by the chasm between Sikh scripture and Sikh practice. She asks, "When the fetus is so strikingly honored [in Sikh scripture],

how could they [Sikhs] be practicing consistent female feticides" (2009, 135)? Singh sets out to explain the disconnect between Sikh scripture, which "treasures the fetus and the feminine" (2009, 135) and "Sikh society [which] aborts them both" (2009, 135). In her scholarship, Singh provides two distinct explanations for female feticide in the Sikh community: (1) the influence of outside patriarchal culture, and (2) symbolic abortion of the womb from Sikh scripture. I will examine both these explanations and discuss the limitations associated with both.

Others, like Doris Jakobsh, reject this view and question the chasm between scripture and practice.¹² According to Jakobsh, "although Sikh apologetics repeatedly insist that men and women are inherently equal in the Sikh worldview, in reality, historical writings say virtually nothing about women" (2000, 270). Jakobsh also argues that Nanak's hymns can be read as contradictory because, at times, women are respected as procreators and, at other times, they are described as manifestations of *maya* and the source of corruption and degradation. Jakobsh argues that the idea of gender equality is best understood as a myth because Sikh history is largely silent when it comes to gender. Similarly, Rajkumari Shanker finds that the Granth emphasizes female subservience, obedience, docility, and dedication while these same attributes are discouraged in men, thus undermining notions of gender equality (2002, 118-120).

According to Singh, female feticide in the Sikh community is caused by the pernicious influence of Hindu, Islamic, and British patriarchal culture (2008, 2009). This causal explanation allows Singh to assert Sikh exceptionalism by claiming that the problem of female feticide exists elsewhere, in other communities, not among Sikhs, and what is required is a return to Sikh scripture, a return to Sikh exceptionalism. A narrative of Sikh exceptionalism often includes reference to the Guru Period, extending from the birth of Guru Nanak in 1469 to the death of the Tenth Guru in 1708, as the golden age of Sikh women's equality. Many scholars point to the Guru Period as evidence of Sikh exceptionalism, which was corrupted by pernicious Hindu and Muslim patriarchal culture. Doris Jakobsh finds fault with this particular approach and argues that references to a Sikh golden age of women's equality obscures present-day issues of gender inequality: "The 'golden age' of Sikh women during the Guru period is iterated and reiterated and scriptural passages highlighting women's equal access to liberation along with injunctions against women's impurity are consistently upheld. When the issue of inequality is raised, the *raison d'être* for such inequalities is quickly deflected to the religious milieu surrounding Sikhism [Hinduism and Islam]" (2006, 187).

Singh also argues that female feticide in Punjab can be explained through the symbolic abortion of the womb from Sikh literature. She argues, "We must explore Sikh literature and utilize its fetal imagery to end gender-specific feticides" (2009, 124). Singh claims that literature can succeed where laws have failed because it has "the capacity to reach our inner recesses and change our conscience and consciousness" (2009, 123). In particular, she argues that the symbol of the womb "has tremendous potential to activate our imagination

and sensibility and to transform sexist attitudes and practices” (2009, 123). Singh argues, “living within the parameters of patriarchal society of medieval India, Sikh male gurus possessed a ‘feminist’ sensibility” (2009, 132). According to her, male commentators and translators have aborted this feminist sensibility that was “so boldly expressed and affirmed” by the gurus (2009, 234). In particular, Singh provides a detailed discussion of Gopal Singh’s and G.S. Talib’s English translations of Sikh scripture, which either ignore or alter the womb (*udar*) into a general stomach or belly (2009, 134).

For Singh, the aborting of feminist imagery from Sikh scriptures has two distinct implications. First, she argues that this omission of feminist sensibility aborts “the opportunity to pool our different religious, economic, social, and political resources...[aborts] the opportunity to engage Western feminist perspectives...[and aborts] the opportunity to break androcentric codes” (2009, 134). Second, Singh argues that the erasure of the womb in Sikh scripture results in sexism in Sikh homes in Punjab and in the diaspora (2009, 134). Singh finds that the gurus’ feminist contributions have not been understood or practiced. In response, she calls for re-memories of the aborted womb because “Once we register the healthy fetus mentally, we may then find it easier to reproduce it in our visible social, cultural, and political realms” (2009, 135). According to Singh, real change can occur when “we hold on to our scriptural ‘fetus’ and nourish it mentally and emotionally, it will surely birth a new world” (2009, 135).

Singh’s textual analysis of Sikh scripture is powerful because it opens up the possibilities of feminist readings. However, there are major limitations to conducting textual analyses in isolation from the context in which Sikh women find themselves—both in Punjab and in the diaspora.¹³ Singh’s analyses often slips into a simplistic one to one correlation between symbolic abortion and actual abortion. Singh argues that literature can succeed where laws have failed because literature - in particular symbols of the womb in literature - can transform sexist attitudes and practices (2009, 123). Based on this logic, Singh argues for re-memories of the aborted womb because real change can occur when “we hold on to [and nourish] our scriptural ‘fetus’” (2009, 135). Singh does not explain the causal mechanisms by which literature can change sexist practices, she simply assumes that re-incorporation of feminist symbolism in Sikh scripture will change Sikh behavior and practice. Singh assumes that Sikh behavior and practice are a simple reflection of Sikh scripture. This assumption fails to take into account how dimensions, such as religion, ethnicity, caste, class, and gender are implicated in structuring the material circumstances of women’s lives and their experience of VAW. Uma Narayan describes such explanations as “‘schizophrenic analysis,’ where religious and mythological ‘explanations’ must be woven willy-nilly, even if they do no real ‘explanatory work’” (1997, 111). Singh’s claims about the symbolic fetus and the possibilities for enacting change are highly limited. The symbolic body is mediated through the physical body; the symbolic body is mediated through

contextual, situated, and embodied practice, and thus what is required is an analysis of both the symbolic and physical body.

I urge feminist scholars in Sikh and Punjab studies to address the physical body in analyses of violence against women, including female feticide and infanticide. According to Linda Alcoff, “social identities cannot be adequately analyzed without an attentiveness to the role of the body” [because] “social identities are most definitely physical, marked on and through the body, lived as a material experience, visible as surface phenomena, and determinant of economic and political status” (Alcoff 2006, 102). Many feminist scholars call for embodied political analyses and find that the stakes of not conducting such analyses are particularly high for those whose bodies are most exploited—women, colonized people, racial minorities, the disabled, and laboring classes (Coole 2013, 167). According to Georgina Waylen et al., “gender determines who goes hungry and who gets adequate nutrition and water, who can vote, run for office, marry, or have rights to children, who commands authority and respect and who is denigrated and dismissed, and who is most vulnerable to violence and abuse in their own homes and intimate relationships” (2013, 2).

Singh’s analyses of violence against women are limited because of their singular focus on the symbolic body. For example, she hopes that a feminist remembering of the symbolic body (fetus) will stop physical violence against women and girls (female feticide). In conducting this analysis, Singh overlooks Sikh women’s and girl’s embodied physical reality. She overlooks the way in which women’s bodies are located within a sexual division of labor, the effects of globalization and global restructuring on women’s bodies and labor, how and why their embodiment results in differential experience and practices, and how and why this embodiment makes some more vulnerable to violence. By raising questions about the physical body in context, as well as the symbolic body in text, feminist scholars can understand the gap between women’s formal equality, and their experience of pervasive discrimination and violence. A dual analysis of the symbolic and physical body allows us to ask the following kinds of questions: how and why do informal institutions and unwritten rules cause behavior that is inconsistent with formal laws, public policies, and scripture? How and why do certain domains, in particular home and marriage, become the natural space of Sikh women beyond the reach of religious, social, economic, and political intervention (Behl 2014)? How and why do gendered norms - women’s rights and duties, public policies, women’s religiosity, purity and pollution, and women as perpetual outsiders - determine who is most vulnerable to violence (Behl 2014)? By asking such questions we can identify and eradicate the gendered norms that justify and legitimize violence against women. Also, by raising these kinds of questions we can ask how textual analyses and explanations of VAW that focus solely on the symbolic body need to be supplemented by more embodied approaches, lest they risk maintaining and perpetuating the very gender violence they seek to eradicate.

Contributions and Implications

By extending Singh's textual analysis to include Sikh women's situated experience of VAW, I advocate for an approach that makes power central and demonstrates how gender intersects with other identity categories to determine who is most vulnerable to violence. I argue elsewhere for a contextual approach to citizenship because this approach makes visible the situated intersections between gender and other identity categories, and accounts for the gap between the abstract promise of equal citizenship and the lived experience of situated citizenship in India (Behl 2014).

In this article, I have raised questions about and opened up a discussion on how best to approach and make sense of violence against women in Punjab. I have raised these questions to ensure that future research on gendered violence in Sikh and Punjab Studies will make women central to the analysis, address violence against women without perpetuating other forms of violence, and bring together the symbolic and physical body into a single feminist analysis.

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Notes

¹ For further detail, see Kapur and Cossman (1999), Nussbaum (2001, 2002), Trivedi (2003), Kapur (2007), and Keating (2007).

² In India, the concern with equality and diversity was simultaneous and what emerges is a constitution that provides cultural autonomy for communities, but limits women's rights because control over women functions as the central marker of cultural autonomy. For a detailed discussion of how personal law effectively suspends women's most basic rights on behalf of group rights, see Sunder Rajan (2000), Rudolph and Rudolph (2000), Nussbaum (2001, 2002), Sen (2002), Keating (2007, 2011), Robinson (2010), and Htun and Weldon (2011).

³ I make sense of Sikh women's experience of citizenship and argue that their experience constitutes a pattern of *exclusionary inclusion*, where women are included in formal democratic institutions, but always on a limited basis because their inclusion is determined by the intersection between gender and other categories of difference (Behl 2014).

⁴ In India, the sex ratio measures the number of females per 1000 males, whereas in the rest of the world the sex ratio measures number of males per 100 females. In 2011, in Punjab the sex ratio was 895:1000 and the child sex ratio was 846:1000. In 2001, the sex ratio in Punjab was 874:1000 and the

child sex ratio was 961:1000 (Punjab Population Data, Indian Census 2011). For comparative purposes, in 2011 the Indian sex ratio was 943:1000 and the child sex ratio was 919:1000. In 2001, the Indian sex ratio was 933:1000 and the child sex ratio was 927:1000. In 2011, the five states/Union territories with the highest sex ratio were Kerela (1084), Puducherry (1038), Tamil Nadu (995), Andhra Pradesh (992) and Chhattisgarh (991). In 2011, the five states with the lowest sex ratio were Daman & Diu (618), Dadra & Nagar Haveli (775), Chandigarh (818), NCT of Delhi (866) and Andaman & Nicobar Islands (878). In 2011, the States/Union Territories with the highest child sex ratio were Mizoram (971), Meghalaya (970), Andaman & Nicobar Islands (966), Puducherry (965), and Chhattisgarh (964). In 2011, the states and union territories with the lowest child sex ratio were Haryana (830), Punjab (846), Jammu & Kashmir (859), NCT of Delhi (866), and Chandigarh (867) (Gender Composition, Indian Census 2011). For comparison to western industrialized nations: India is 1.12 male(s)/female; United States is 1.05 male(s)/female; United Kingdom is 1.05 male(s)/female; Denmark is 1.06 male(s)/female; Finland is 1.04 male(s)/female; Switzerland is 1.05 male(s)/female; and France is 1.05 male(s)/female (CIA World Factbook Sex Ratio, 2012).

⁵ For a detailed discussion, see Miller (1981), Gupta (1987), Chhachhi (1989), Booth and Verma (1992), Sen (1992, 2003), Mutharayappa, Choe, Arnold, and Roy (1997), Jha, Kumar, Vasa, Dhingra, Thiruchelvam, Moineddin (2006), Sahni, Verma, Narula, Varghese, Sreenivas, and Puliyal (2008), Purewal (2010, 2014), and UN Women (2014).

⁶ For a detailed discussion of gendered violence and knowledge production, see Purewal (2010, 2014), Jakobsen (2011), and Elman (2013).

⁷ Similarly, women of color in the United States argued that their experience differed from those of white women and men of color because they experienced multiple subordinations. They challenged the use of women as homogenous categories reflecting the common essence of all women. This intervention decentred white, western, heterosexual, middle-class woman and pluralized feminism (Combahee River Collective [1977] 1997; hooks 1981, 1994; Anzaldúa and Moraga 1981; Feminist Review 1984; Collins 1986, 1989, 1990, Anzaldúa 1987; King 1988; Crenshaw 1989, 1991).

⁸ For an example of comparative analysis of domestic violence in the United States and dowry murder in India, see Narayan (1997).

⁹ For a detailed discussion of the divisions and fissures within the Indian women's movement, see Kumar (1999), Sen (1999), and Sen (2002).

¹⁰ For a detailed discussion of feminism in Sikh and Punjab studies, see Johal (2001), Brah (2005), Mandair (2005) Purewal (2010, 2014), and Jakobsh (2000, 2003, 2006, 2010).

¹¹ In an earlier work, Nikky Guninder Kaur Singh calls for a reimagining of the divine as mother in Sikh scripture to combat sexism in Sikh homes and the larger society (2008, 332). Singh argues that male Sikh theologians aborted maternal imagery from Sikh scripture, which has “stultified and stratified Sikh

society" (2008, 339). Singh explains gender-based discrimination and violence against Sikh women through a symbolic aborting of the mother in Sikh scripture.

¹² According to Navdeep Mandair, Sikh repudiation of misogynistic practices like dowry and *sati*, particular vis-à-vis the reforms of the Singh Sabha movement, are best read as a strategy of establishing a clear distinction between Sikhism and Hinduism: "It is not obvious that this repudiation of misogynistic practices facilitates a sanction of gender equality given that the real purpose of this expression of censure is to highlight the fundamental degeneracy of a [Hindu] culture that advocates such customs" (2005, 49-50). In short, for Mandair, the purpose of repudiating misogynistic practices is not to create gender equality, but to create separation between Sikhism and Hinduism.

¹³ There is no singular or homogenous experience of Sikh women in Punjab and in the diaspora as these women are differentiated based on their caste, sect, and class background. For detailed discussion, see Brah (2005).

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