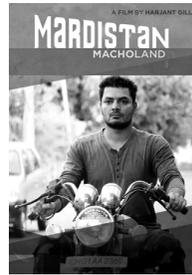
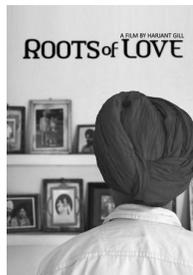


# Indian Masculinity: An Important Intervention in Gender and Masculinity Studies

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Harjant Gill, dir. *Indian Masculinity Series. Roots of Love*. Produced and distributed by Public Service Broadcasting Trust (PSBT). New Delhi, India. Made in partnership with Doordarshan, Prasar Bharati, and Tilotama Productions, 2011. 26 min. In English, Hindi, and Punjabi with English subtitles. [http://www.tilotamaproductions.com/Tilotama\\_Productions/ROOTS\\_OF\\_LOVE.html](http://www.tilotamaproductions.com/Tilotama_Productions/ROOTS_OF_LOVE.html).

Harjant Gill, dir. *Indian Masculinity Series. Mardistan (Macholand): Reflections on Indian Manhood*. Produced and distributed by Public Service Broadcasting Trust (PSBT). New Delhi, India. Made in partnership with Doordarshan, Prasar Bharati, and Tilotama Productions, 2014. 28 min. In Hindi and Punjabi with English subtitles. [http://www.tilotamaproductions.com/Tilotama\\_Productions/MARDISTAN\\_%28MACHOLAND%29.html](http://www.tilotamaproductions.com/Tilotama_Productions/MARDISTAN_%28MACHOLAND%29.html).

Harjant Gill, dir. *Indian Masculinity Series. Sent Away Boys*. Produced and distributed by Public Service Broadcasting Trust (PSBT). New Delhi, India. Made in partnership with Doordarshan, Prasar Bharati, and Tilotama Productions, 2016. 43 min. In English, Hindi, and Punjabi with English subtitles. [http://www.tilotamaproductions.com/Tilotama\\_Productions/SENT\\_AWAY\\_BOYS.html](http://www.tilotamaproductions.com/Tilotama_Productions/SENT_AWAY_BOYS.html).

## Introduction

Harjant Gill's insightful documentary trilogy *Indian Masculinities* explores the complex and intricate dynamics of the construction and reception of the projected image of Indian men and their social duties, responsibilities, and privileges in context of the Indian state of Punjab. The first film, *Roots of Love* (2011), deals with the history of Sikh identity formation in India—its evolution, significance in Punjabi society, and visible cultural markers of identity—as well as challenges posed by globalization. The second film, *Mardistan (Macholand): Reflections on Indian Manhood* (2014), deals with the construction of masculinity and its impact on men as well as women; gender relations in Indian society; and gender-based violence in India. The third film, *Sent Away Boys* (2016), investigates the issue of male labor migration and its impact on the society with particular reference to Punjab. The trilogy is made using a predominantly reflexive mode combined with the observational mode of documentary. The absence of the author's direct intervention through voice-over narration as in the classical documentary makes the trilogy appear less authoritative and open-ended in the sense that it allows for the audience to derive their own conclusions about the issues represented in the films. The presence of an expert's voice in each film to analyze and comment on the central theme increases provisions for critical engagement, academic credibility, and endorsement from an external perspective. For example, Swarn Singh Kahlon, a Sikh himself and the expert voice in *Roots of Love*, has been researching the Sikh Diaspora and migration history across the globe since 1970s.<sup>2</sup> Nivedita Menon, the expert's voice in *Mardistan/Macholand*, is a feminist scholar, activist, and professor of political thoughts at Jawaharlal Nehru University, India. The third film of the trilogy, *Sent Away Boys*, has Radhika Chopra as the expert, who teaches at the Department of Sociology at University of Delhi and works on ethnography, Indian masculinity, sexuality, gender violence,

and militancy movements among other things. The experts' interventions play the same role in the three films as direct quotes in printed pieces of research, presented in support of the argument. The argument and narrative of each film unfold through a series of interviews with people from a variety of backgrounds interspersed with comments from experts. This helps the audience get an extensive idea not only about the cultural identity of Sikh men in India, but also the position of women, complex gender relations, and the issue of mass migration and its impact on Indian society.

Gill's trilogy is an important addition to gender studies in the sense that it portrays the formation of gendered identity in the aggressively male-dominated Indian society marked by structural misogyny. All three films explore the construction of gendered identity in a society with assumptions of heterosexual normativity that assign very strict gender roles to individuals. Indian masculinity imagined in strict conformity with rigid patriarchal norms has an affective implication for men and women alike, making the films useful for Indian feminist studies as they throw light on the nature of Indian masculinity with direct effects on women and other gendered subjectivities. Though contextualized with specific references to Punjab and Haryana, the two provinces in North India, the films' representation of masculinity and issues related to this idea can be extended to a pan-Indian level for the shared historical, cultural, and social contexts. The perceived notion<sup>3</sup> of adult male subjectivity is that of a heterosexual, assertive, outgoing, and at times aggressive, powerful, and authoritative individual who is the provider as well as protector of women, the elderly, and children in the family and has full control over the lives of those dependent on him. A male child grows up under tremendous pressure to conform to this normative masculine cast. This conceptualization of Indian masculinities may be one of the reasons Indian films and popular media pervasively represent Indian femininities and other gendered positions as reductive, marginal, and monodimensional. However, people who do not conform to this norm have to constantly struggle within the system, sometimes making compromises, sometimes through direct conflictual encounters, and sometimes by creating a balance between the two. The second film, *Mardistan/ Macholand*, includes three such men, Amandeep Sandhu, a writer and journalist, Tarun, an unemployed student, and Dhananjay, a social worker and LGBT activist. Sandhu talks extensively in the film about the plights of those who don't conform to the normative Indian masculinity. He refers to instances of structural violence that such a person is subjected to in

school, among family, in the professional sphere, and in society at large. Through the interview of Dhananjay, Gill shows how an Indian man with non-normative sexuality constantly struggles due to the legal uncertainty<sup>4</sup> vis-à-vis homosexuality in a homophobic society. In foregrounding these aspects, Gill's trilogy aptly exemplifies the impact of the normative masculinity on other subjectivities and the non-conformist male agency.

Through these films, Gill exhibits the nature of social pressure that men encounter in the cultural context of Punjab, conditioning his social behavior while shaping his views about women and other non-normative subjectivities. The trilogy also shows instances of sexual and other kinds of abuse that individuals who don't conform to the normative masculinity are made to endure. Whereas critical research interest abounds in the way women are portrayed in Indian media (Urvashi Butalia, 1984; Lalitha Gopalan, 1997; Brinda Bose, 1997; Shoma A Chatterji, 1998; Sangeeta Datta, 2000; Mana Tabatabai Rad, 2016; Sanghita Sen, 2017; Sanghita Sen, forthcoming), there is not much work investigating the construction of Indian masculinities and its implication for the representation and treatment of women in Indian society. These are interconnected issues, thus the discussion of one cannot be complete without discussing the other. It is in this context that Gill's trilogy plays a crucial role as it explores how this projected image of Indian masculinity is instrumental in nurturing misogyny and impairing gender-justice in Indian societies.

### ***Roots of Love***

The first film of the trilogy, *Roots of Love*, deals with Sikh male identity. To be noted here is that the idea of Indian masculinity in this film (and also in the two other films of the trilogy), emerges with specific references to Sikh cultural contexts. Nevertheless, by virtue of sharing the cultural and social contexts, the Sikh masculinity shares attributes of male identity formation and gender roles in pan-Indian scenarios. The history of the Sikh identity is extensively discussed in the film through the narration of experts, young and old Sikhs. The film provides not only the reasons why the turban is so critical to Sikh male identity, and the history of its development, but also details of current tensions and misunderstandings. As Kahlon, notes: "There is no denying that a turban does throw you up as a stranger—does throw you up with the negatives that anybody has on any

migrant.” Sharing his own experience in South America, he states how this strangeness of appearance affects a turbaned Sikh in the post-Bin-Laden period, in which people unaware of the nuances of Sikhism and the significance of the turban in it, may associate a turbaned Sikh with similar identities. Additionally, the film explores how long hair and the turban as visible cultural and religious markers are circuitously connected to the process of constructing a unique Sikh masculinity. The narrative of this film progresses through interviews of six men of different age groups, ranging from 14 to 86.

The film provides an extensive overview of different beliefs and rituals regarding Sikh male identity. It undertakes a comprehensive survey of the development and evolution of the Sikh identity from the time of Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708)—who created the Sikh codes of conduct—through the colonial period, to the post-partition era, the Khalistan movement<sup>5</sup> of the 1970s and 1980s, and the present day.

The film addresses the anxieties among members of the Sikh community regarding a growing tendency in the younger generation who demonstrate a propensity to rid themselves of the traditional markers of their ethnic identity. This is attributed partly to the cultural homogenization of globalization and partly to a negative stereotype that the Indian media circulate about the Sikh identity. In trying to adorn a cosmopolitan metrosexual appearance as opposed to the “old-fashioned heterosexual model of masculinity” (Brown 2006:136), the younger generation of Sikh men tend to remove visible markers of their identity. The organizer of the Turban Pride Movement mentions how a turbaned Sikh man is never a part of the Indian media projection of cosmopolitan masculinity. He adds that in Indian films and television, such figures are trivialized, stereotyped, and even ridiculed. Such stereotypes of Sikh identity in Indian media are cited by the interviewees as one of the reasons for the sense of discomfort among young Sikh men about their own identity.

The film represents how deeply disturbing the cutting of one’s hair appears to the older generation of Sikhs as they associate the turban and long hair with a unique pride in Sikh cultural identity and history. Cutting the hair and denouncing the turban are thought of as acts of cultural and religious transgression tantamount to denouncing Sikhism itself. While commenting on the tendency of removing these markers, older interviewees attribute it to an engulfing exposure to modernization and globalization through the media and its propagation of self-aggrandizement

and self-satisfaction as the goals of a meaningful personal life. This over-emphasis on “self” stands in opposition to Sikh values. Though this is a crisis that affects most local cultures in India, this film depicts the cultural influence of globalization in the contexts of Punjab and Haryana. Such is the societal pressure towards preservation of cultural markers on young men that anyone deciding to cut his hair sometimes has to maintain dual identities, i.e., a turbaned man within family circles and a man without long hair and turban in professional and social network circles. One interviewee narrates how he maintained two social network profiles—as an “uncut,” turbaned Sikh on Facebook and as a Sikh with trimmed hair on Orkut. The film ends with a young man throwing his hair in the river after having a haircut and then walking forward, thus demonstrating the argument regarding intergenerational schism and anxieties within the Sikh community. While investigating and interrogating the issues intricately related primarily to the Sikh identity, this film also touches upon the conflicting encounters of tradition and modernity, essence and appearance, as well as generational schisms and the construction of an androcentric worldview. In doing so, the film contextualizes itself as a critical intervention into the discourse of the study of Indian patriarchy and the patriarchal hegemony while trying to examine the gender roles from a variety of perspectives representing the Sikh masculinity as the microcosm of the Indian masculinity.

Other than depicting the intergeneration schisms and anxieties, the film also depicts measures taken towards cultural preservation by the Sikh community and religious organizations such as organizing the Turban Pride Movement. The film represents how the construction of the idea of the Sikh “God” as the guardian of male warriors forms the ideal for the Sikh masculinity that are dedicated to protect the faith as well as the vulnerable in the society by following the teachings of the ten Sikh Gurus.<sup>6</sup> It is to be noted here that the Sikh idea of God as *Akal Purkh* literally refers to the timeless male being. Emphasis should be added to this word “Purkh,” which literally means “Man” or a masculine identity. Kohli points out, “the dominant understanding of Sikh masculinity seems to be trapped within a martial Khalsa identity” (2016:44). She also suggests that the Sikh martial masculinity continued to strengthen during the colonial period as the colonizers privileged, nurtured, and protected “the hyper-masculine and martial understanding of Sikhs and Sikhism” (2016:62) for their own benefits. In addition to the colonial patronizing of the Sikh martial expertise, Punjab also remains one of the strongest loci for the Indian anti-colonial

struggles. A long history of military participation along with an equally strong tradition of antihegemonic resistances intertwines the Sikh cultural identity simultaneously with masculine prowess and fervent nationalism.

*Roots of Love* forms the foundation of Gill's investigation of the Indian masculinities continued in the two subsequent films. The intergenerational crisis and anxiety regarding the Sikh cultural identity and the components of the projected image of the Sikh masculinity that he addresses here are expanded in *Mardistan*. The impact of globalization and the issue of immigration are undertaken in the last film of the trilogy, *Sent Away Boys*.

### ***Mardistan (Macholand): Reflections on Indian Manhood***

Whereas *Roots of Love* concentrates exclusively on the construction of Sikh masculinity, *Mardistan (Macholand)* extends its discursive field to a broader Indian context with participation from both Sikh and non-Sikh Punjabis. The film centers on four men—an intellectual who is an unturbaned Sikh, a middle-class IT professional who is a turbaned Sikh, an unemployed student, and an LGBT activist/social worker, both non-Sikh—each representing a different social category. The opening interviews introduce the four thematic strands of the film: cultural conditioning, gynophobia and misogyny, aggressive behavior as a typical male attribute, and LGBTIQ issues with specific reference to the idea of masculinity. This film also seeks to challenge the essentialization of Sikh men as brave warriors. The film contrasts the projected Sikh masculinity and the associated idea of Sikh valor and chivalry with socio-cultural practices in non-Sikh cultures founded on male-dominance, misogyny, and aggressive hyper-masculinity. The latter is made to stand in contradiction with the myth of interconnection between bravery and masculinity that is imagined to be the Sikh male subjecthood. The film suggests that as the Khalistani insurgency of the 1980s is not an exclusive issue for Punjab alone but for all of India, behavior and attitudes that characterize Sikh masculinity are also applicable to broader cultural contexts.

The film has a highly subversive title to complement its radical content. *Mardistan* literally means “a man's land.” The film begins with the voiceover of Amandeep declaring a personal resolution, in likeness of an oath of non-conformity to the normative masculine subjectivity:

While growing up I realized a certain kind of man I'd not like to become. I would not like to become an uncle of mine who would beat my mother up. I would not like to become a senior of mine who defines himself by sodomizing a junior. I would not like to pull a gun on somebody because I have had a gun pulled on me.

The film exposes the issues and anomalies in a “man’s land” which assigns high importance to virility, anger, and sexual aggression as markers of manliness. This system leaves very little space for women, persons of non-normative sexuality, and gender fluidity. For example, Gurpreet—a designer and a father of two daughters—discusses how his parents, despite having two daughters, were desperate for a son. He resists this attitude by raising his own daughters exactly as one would bring up sons. During his wife’s pregnancy, some friends suggested a prenatal sex-determination test so that an abortion could be arranged if the fetus were female.<sup>7</sup> Tarun, a student, talks about his dilemma regarding virility and his lack of sexual aggressiveness, which is considered by his peers as unmanly or gayish. Dhananjay’s narrative informs the audience about the challenges and suffering of an Indian with non-normative sexuality as homosexuality is still not decriminalised in India. Despite being gay, he was forced into marrying a woman just to “put up a pretention of normalcy” in society. He came out to his wife about his sexual orientation. The helplessness of women is even greater in such contexts. Though Dhananjay’s wife is aware of her husband’s sexual orientation, she opts to remain in the marriage as he is a “good,” compassionate, and non-abusive partner. They even have two children together. Moreover, divorcee women suffer a lot of social stigma and are blamed for an unsuccessful marriage. Dhananjay is aware of this. He describes his decision to remain in the relationship first to safeguard his wife from the social ire that a divorce would have brought upon her and secondly for their children.

The mindset of toxic hypermasculinity, gynophobia, homophobia, and misogyny explored in *Mardistan* results in acts of oppression and violence against women, men who do not conform to the patriarchal norm of masculinity, and people of non-normative sexuality. Conversations with the informants and Nivedita Menon demonstrate how gender is an analytical category as well as a process in Indian context. Menon comments in *Mardistan*, “Learning to become male involves learning about privileges.” She further adds that the system phenomenally rewards men who follow

the social norms, whereas women learn to follow the norm for mere survival; acts of nonconformity for women only leads to punishment. In a system of what Menon calls “male supremacy,” patriarchy functions through cultural forms which is structurally rooted and embodies “power of men over women...older men over younger men...and of all men over all women.” In *Roots of Love*, one witnesses how modernization/globalization and a consequent cultural homogenization are thought to be significantly responsible for younger Sikh men’s discomfort with religious identity markers. However, the impacts of globalization and modernity appear to be merely skin deep, as they only affect individual appearances while core ideologies of masculinity go undisturbed. The contradiction between the real situation and a carefully crafted image is exemplified by harrowing statistics of rape, domestic violence, and female feticide in India.<sup>8</sup> Gill’s film unravels the banality of hyper-masculinity and structural violence perpetrated against women and other gendered subjects.

The ideology of male supremacy in the Indian socio-cultural system conditions girls to be subservient while desensitizing male children to any emotion not considered suitable for a man. In an attempt to toughen the alpha male of the future, this socio-cultural system promotes aggression, physical prowess, highhandedness, feelings of supremacy, and entitlement in men. Gill’s film investigates components of this toxically aggressive masculinity and its effects. Since the construction of heterosexual, aggressive, authoritative masculinity is the tool through which patriarchy works and tends to dominate the gendered other, a thorough understanding of how this ideological formation works is crucial, and *Mardistan (Macholand)* helps us look at this process closely through its four case studies. For example, Amandeep narrates how the school system that prepares boys to join the Indian Armed Forces plays an instrumental role in instilling toxic hypermasculinity. He considers the dynamics of hierarchies in school, its discipline and corporeal system of punishment along with a latent practice of sodomy to be responsible for normalizing aggressive masculinity. He reports that sodomy is practiced within the student communities to hierarchize and exclude those who don’t fit into the format of normative masculinity. He also discusses the vacuity of the projected stereotype of Sikh masculinity as brave warriors. Both the perpetrator and the victim are from the same culture and the former oppresses the latter by means of physical violence and sexual abuse, falsifying the traditionally assigned duty of protecting the vulnerable. Amandeep also shares

how physical violence was used against his schizophrenic mother as a measure of disciplining by her in-laws. His father's relative considered his father unmanly for not using violence against his wife.

Caste, religion, and sexuality intersect with gender-based violence in India (Menon 2006, Pasricha 2015, Sabharwal and Sonalkar 2015). The film documents this intersectionality as well. Though *Mardistan* is the most critical of the idea of Indian masculinity and gender-relations among the trilogy, there is an evident lack of female voices in this film. The argument would have been more complete, had there been more female voices. Nevertheless, a particularly valuable asset of this film is Nivedita Menon's insightful interventions and analysis of different aspects of gender relations, patriarchy, and masculinity in the Indian context. While delivering cautions about generalizing masculinity as singularly responsible for gender-based violence, Gill effectively uses Menon's expert voice in support of his argument. Menon deliberates in the film that cases of dowry deaths and Sati are instances of different forms of patriarchal oppression, not traceable to masculine identities alone. She also points out that toxic masculinity constricts the life choices not only for women but also for men. The uniqueness of the theme and a very engaging storytelling technique that uses points and counter-points interspersed with expert comments, makes it an effective film-essay on the topic of Indian masculinity and related issues.

### ***Sent Away Boys***

The last film of the trilogy, *Sent Away Boys* (2016), concentrates on the mass migration of male members of Punjabi society, the depopulation of villages, and the fate of an older generation left behind. Among the three films, this is the longest and dwells on issues relevant to, yet reaching beyond, masculinity.

Whereas the second film is narrated predominantly from a male point of view with only two female interviewees and a female expert voice, the third film gives female narration equal importance. Increased female presence in the film may be the result of the fact that women and older generations are the ones who are left behind when younger men migrate. This film tracks the loneliness of households saddened by the haunting absence of migrated kin. These spaces are occupied by women who are left with no choice except to endure absence and memorialize the once

present. Such is the lure of an imagined good life abroad that young men are ready to travel to a foreign country, even illegally. The film also portrays the hardships that an immigrant goes through being conned by fraudulent immigration agents, the female victims of marriage to Non-Resident Indians who do not return, the yearning of family members for their scattered loved ones, and aspiring young men investing everything to make the plan of exit a success. This film also addresses the social crisis faced by the people of Punjab because of the secessionist demand of a separate country by the Khalistani insurgency of the 1980s.

*Sent Away Boys* opens with scenes of departing young men at the airport being seen off by their families and friends. A pensive solo in Punjabi about the sadness of separation and a life in a faraway land plays in the background. An intertitle appears soon after with the following text:

Despite belonging to one of the most fertile states of India, young Punjabi men do not see a promising future here. Global migration from rural Punjab has grown exponentially over the last three decades. The desire to escape, in search of somewhere better, is now an aspiration shared by most.

Indeed, around the time of the Khalistani insurgency in the 1980s, and after the 1984 Sikh genocide followed by the assassination of Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, by her Sikh bodyguards, the nature of migration changed from exclusively labor migration to migration for a variety of reasons, such as marriage, uniting with the extended family, education, and so forth. Furthermore, given the political circumstances, migration became one escape route to ensure safety, particularly for young men of the community. The film provides a glimpse into the social problems and challenges with reference to migration in today's Punjabi society.

In India, no serious study of culture can be undertaken without considering both caste and gender. One of the trilogy's most important contributions is to make this suggestion through expert voice. We hear the reiteration of these concerns from Nivedita Menon and Radhika Chopra in the last two films of the series. In the third film, Chopra associates the question of caste with the pattern of migration from Punjab. She points out that with access to better private English education, the people from the upper landholding Jatt caste migrate to the West. Whereas, the people from the Dalit and scheduled caste<sup>9</sup> end up migrating as laborers to the Middle East. Lack of competence in English language coupled with lower levels

of education does not offer the poorer people from Punjab a secure migration. They end up moving to the West either as illegal immigrants or to the Middle East as laborers. Sometimes aspiring migrants are even cheated or remain in debt to make migration possible. The film also includes references to the dangers of illegal migration and resultant deaths in transit.

## Conclusion

The Indian Masculinity Series is not only an important contribution for gender studies but also for Indian ethnography, feminist studies/activism, and feminist film studies, as well as the study of identity politics in Punjab. These films will serve as a wonderful resource to initiate discussions in sociology, cultural anthropology, and South Asian studies courses on gender roles in Indian societies, traditions, and cultural practices.

What I found interesting was that the films are structured in such a way that one can watch each film as an independent work or can take all three as an audio-visual representation of a complete argument with reference to Indian masculinity and gender relations vis-à-vis the Sikh socio-cultural contexts in which each film plays the role of building blocks constructing a larger intervention. The issues addressed in the trilogy include Sikh male identity and its cultural as well as religious markers, the position of women and gendered others within a highly hegemonic patriarchy, and the question of migration and deserted parents, among others. Though presented in the context of Punjab, these issues abet understanding of construction of masculinity and gender-equations in other regions, making this an important ethnographic documentary project on gender-dynamics in India. ■

### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup>See <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8305-0545>.

<sup>2</sup>Access to his research project is available on the website entitled "Sikh Global Village" (<http://www.sikhglobalvillage.com/index.htm>).

<sup>3</sup>Indian societies in general propagate this perceived notion of Indian masculinity which subsequently gets transmitted through print and electronic media, film and literature as well as the legal systems. This perceived notion of masculinity and the gender role of men is uncovered in the trilogy through the comments of the informants/interviewees.

<sup>4</sup>Homosexuality was criminalized in the national legal system in India until September 6, 2018 when the Indian Supreme court in a historic ruling, repealed the article 377 in the Indian Penal Code (Safi 2018), a colonial-era ban on homosexuality first introduced in 1861 by the British. For a detailed discussion, please see Nivedita Menon (2006) "Sexuality, Caste, Governmentality: Contests over 'Gender' in India."

<sup>5</sup>This insurgency has a complex history that involves lack of recognition of Sikhism and inadequate attention paid to its language and culture by the Indian state since the Partition of India. Innocent and ordinary people of Punjab became subject to violence and injustice from both terrorists and the Indian state. A huge number of Sikh people migrated to the West after the post-1984 Sikh genocide, a Congress-led retaliation to the assassination of the Indian Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, by her two Sikh bodyguards. The assassination was carried out in response to Operation Blue Star, a military action that led to the killing of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, a radicalized Sikh religious leader at the helm of the Khalistani insurgency in order to take back the control of the Golden Temple, the most sacred shrine of Sikhism. Sikhs worldwide criticized the Operation as they considered it as an assault on their faith. The Khalistani Insurgency of the 1980s, the crushing of the insurgency by brutal military force by the Indian state, and the 1984 Sikh Genocide are instrumental for the second largest migration of the Sikh community after the Partition in 1947.

<sup>6</sup>The founder of the Sikh religion, Guru Nanak, and the nine Gurus after him, played an instrumental role over a period of 239 years (1469–1708) in shaping Sikhism. The Gurus are considered to be the enlightened divine messenger of the Akal Purkh, or the timeless supreme being. It is from the time of Guru Angad (1504–1552), the second of the ten Gurus that physical training alongside spiritual training was made mandatory for Sikh youth. The sixth guru, Guru Hargobind (1595–1664), also known as the “soldier saint,” started an army of Sikh men. He instructed them to use their sword to protect the weak and vulnerable. This was the beginning of the idea of the Sikh nationhood.

<sup>7</sup>Although prenatal sex-determination is illegal in India, it exists in several states evading the legal system through an undercover practice in pathological laboratories or private hospitals. The prenatal sex-determination and female feticide are interrelated as the former leads to the latter. Extensive instances of female feticide give rise to a highly problematic sex ratio in India. As Amandeep notes, female feticide is related to patriliney in the agrarian Punjabi society. Virilocality, or women shifting homes after marriage, is also responsible for social consideration of women as “disposable” and consequently a “bad investment” (Menon 2012) which is another reason for female feticide. The film reveals how these practices are entrenched in the quasi-feudal structure of Indian society with relation to the question of entitlement, inheritance, and legacy.

<sup>8</sup>According to a national daily report, 92 women are raped every day in India, out of which four are from Delhi, the country’s capital (Times of India 2014). The BBC reports that incidents of domestic violence ensue in India once every five minutes. An astounding number of 309,546 cases of violence against Indian women were reported in 2013 alone (BBC News 2014). An alarming sex ratio as a result of prenatal sex-determination tests followed by female feticide is reaching a genocidal scale, another grave consequence of the structural misogyny in Indian societies (Punam 2011). The declining child sex ratio in Indian states has reached such a frightening proportion that it attracted the attention of UNICEF. Although punishable under law, prenatal sex-determination along with sex-selective abortion has become an INR 1,000 crore industry (US \$244 million), according to the UNICEF Press release.

<sup>9</sup>Schedules Caste (SC) is the bureaucratic term used in the Indian constitution to refer to the historically and socially disadvantaged communities in India. Indian society follows a strictly hierarchical system of classification of people into different categories, known as the caste or Varna—the Brahmin, the Kshatriya, the Vaishya, and the Sudra. There is another category of people who are kept beyond these four castes, being forced to do scavenging and other menial works, not considered “pure.” The concept of the so called “purity” plays an important role in rendering this entire group of people untouchable. There had been religious, social, and cultural restrictions depriving the untouchables from human dignity, accessing public spaces, spaces of religious worship, and education. The Dalit is a political term widely used for these groups of marginalized Indians.

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