

Locality, Globality and Gendered Refractions: Sikh Women in ‘Western’ Diasporas

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This essay addresses certain theoretical and substantive points relevant to the analysis of Sikh women’s diasporicity/locationality/positionality in ‘Western’ contexts, especially Britain and north America. It argues for an understanding of Sikh women’s gender as a site of heterogeneity that is performatively embodied in contingent contexts. The paper examines such themes as memory, which is explored here with reference to Partition and East African diasporicity. It discusses the ways in which women are figured in the Gurbani and the possibility of such representations serving as a resource for challenging patriarchal practices in present times. The paper touches upon some social problems that continue to confront Sikh women today. It concludes by highlighting the cultural creativity of women as articulated in expressive cultures within and across diasporas.

What does it mean to address Sikh diasporicity/locationality in terms of ‘gendered refractions’? Like you, I am a gendered subject but saying this does not automatically *engender* my own reflections. The gendered subject certainly bears the marks of gender and experiences its vicissitudes through a range of differing and differential forms of encountered and refigured masculinities or femininities. But the texts we articulate may or may not engage gender analysis. I have used the term ‘refractions’ in the title advisedly and for at least two main reasons. Firstly, in order to underscore the culturally constructed nature of gender and, secondly, to emphasize the point that just as the process of refraction brings unsuspected features of the color spectrum into our orbit of vision, similarly analysis of gender mediation reveals the underlying configurations of power, regimes of knowledge, symbolic meanings and values, aesthetics, and subjectivities through which gender relations are historically produced, sustained or transformed. Such analysis have generated new insights, created novel ways of understanding social issues and challenged many previously taken-for-granted assumptions, inequities and inequalities.

Attention to gender not only foregrounds marginalized histories, it opens up new vistas and allows us to dream new dreams. The concept of gender, as is now all too familiar, has been the subject of considerable debate in the academy for several decades. I do not intend to rehearse that debate here¹. Suffice it to say that gender is not only about women and is as much about men and other genders, although women are my primary focus here. Whilst the regulation of sexuality and the concomitant disciplining of subordinated sexualities remains one of its primary

modus operandi, the subject of gender spans a wider field. Broadly, the concept of gender concerns historically specific myriad of economic, political and cultural processes in and through which, male, female and other genders (such as the 'Hijrah') are *relationally constituted*, imbued with specific meanings, represented in particular ways, and are inserted into caste, class, racism and other forms of social differentiation and hierarchy. Crucially, gender is as much about the 'social' as it is about emotional and psychic investments. Moreover, gender does not operate in isolation from other social dimensions of life. Hence, the development of different types of masculinities and femininities in different historical and cultural contexts cannot be understood without taking into account the ways in which gender articulates with other axis of differentiation.

To argue that gender assumes meaning in and through its relationship with other facets of life does not, however, mean that it is merely a secondary dynamic of some other primary phenomena such as class. On the contrary, gender is constitutive in its own right. Gender engenders. Moreover, to speak of Sikh women or men is not simply a case of weaving together two discrete strands: one of 'female/male gender' and the other of 'Sikh', as if they were autonomous formations. Rather, it involves recognition of their mutual enmeshing and imbrications. At the risk of stating the obvious, it is important, at the outset, to emphasize that the category of 'Sikh women' is extremely heterogeneous. Sikh women are internally differentiated in such terms as their caste, sect, and class background; the country, region, and locality of the globe where they are historically and contemporaneously sited; the relevant trajectories of migration or of 'staying put' that impact on their lives; and the wider socio cultural relations prevalent in the place of residence. Indeed, the task of making sense of the lives of Sikh women in the diasporas calls for systematic analysis of the intersecting network of diverse histories through which the Sikh diasporas have emerged and are sustained. To raise the theme of 'Sikh women in the diaspora', therefore, begs many questions: which category of Sikh women? when?, where?, which aspect of their lives?, in relation to whom?, and so on. There can be so many different starting points to this topic.

Yadoon ki Ahat or Intimations of Memory

My own point of departure on this occasion is provided by the occasion of an annual memorial lecture I was invited to deliver at the university of California. The lecture series has been established in the memory of a woman². When I e-mailed her family for some biographical information about her, I received the reply that she was born in the Punjab but that her family moved to Tanganyika (now known as Tanzania) while she was still a child. She attended schools in Bakoba and Massaka, before returning to India to enter higher education. "How uncanny", I thought, that both she and I should have been born in Punjab and then taken to East Africa as children, where we grew up until she was to leave to attend university in India and I in California. On reading the e-mail, I was instantly transported through memory into

the former British colonial territory that we knew as East Africa, with its mosaic of different and differentially marked colonial subjects, its amazing array of fauna and flora and unforgettable climatic sounds and rhythms. The words Bakoba and Masaka may mean little to those of you unfamiliar with the geographical space surrounding Lake Victoria - with its eastern board connected to the Indian Ocean - which, during the 1960s was reconstituted as the nation-states of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. But for those of us who spent our childhood and teenage years in East Africa, words such as Bakoba reverberate with echoes of intimacy in its multifarious forms. Of course, intimacy, as we know, is produced and assumes its determinate manifestations in the interstices of historically specific socio-economic, cultural and political relations. Intimacy is not only about affection and affinity. It can be as much about ambivalence and antagonism. Indeed, Punjabis are all too familiar with the many faces of intimacy - from deep love and sacrifice to fear, rage, and hatred. In any case, my own reverie triggered by the e-mail message, provided me, in this instance, with certain points of connection and a form of intimacy, an 'imagined community' to use Benedict Anderson's phrase, with a category of diasporians called 'East African Asians'. Hence, the essay begins with some reflections from the 'situated positionality' of the Sikhs in East Africa.

What did it mean to be a Sikh female subject in the East African South Asian diaspora during the period leading to independence? Of course, this question can hardly be addressed in isolation from the broader colonial relations that prevailed in East Africa. The intimacy of everyday life in East Africa was closely associated with racialised colonial hierarchies and practices which, inserted South Asians in-between Europeans and black Africans, with the former at the top and the latter at the bottom. South Asian presence in East Africa dates back long before western colonization, and the pre-Partition nomenclature for the group was 'Indian'. Indeed, one peculiarity of the term 'Indian' as used in East Africa was that it continued to signify all south Asians as a group long after India had achieved political independence from the British, and Pakistan had been created through partition. Why? One possible explanation for the continuation of the use of the term 'Indian' after partition could be the straightforward one: that it represented the lingering echoes of an age-old habit. On the other hand, persistence of the discourse of the 'Indian', in my view, may be better understood in terms of the strength of an East African Asian identity. The disavowal of newly created national borders in the South Asian subcontinent by the East African discourse of the 'Indian' did not necessarily signify a nostalgia for a 'divided homeland'. On the contrary, it may be seen as signaling the way in which most of us experienced East Africa as a place of belonging in its own right, and not as a substitution for some "real homeland", even as connections with relatives and friends in the subcontinent continued to be maintained. The question of 'home' in the diaspora should not be confused with that of 'homeland'. As I have argued elsewhere, the question of what I call a 'homing desire', or desire for a space where one feels at home is not the same as desire for a homeland (Brah, 1996)

The effects of power relations inscribing this in-between positionality of the 'East African Asian' political subject were manifold. Notably, the ensuing cultural life was marked by a hierarchical 'sense of difference' from both Europeans and Africans, albeit in different ways. By the same token, a variety of pan-South Asian communal practices were strengthened whilst the institutional basis of social markers such as caste and religion were considerably modified so that the mainly urban cultural styles which developed in due course were distinctively 'East African Asian' in sensibility. New working patterns, type and forms of leisure, innovative use of Swahili vocabulary as an organic part of the languages spoken at home, new cooking practices incorporating local food products, re-rooting of ritual in a new social milieu, and new linkages across diverse cultural boundaries - all became the basis for the emergence of a 'middle-income' way of life. I describe it as 'middle-income' because status hierarchies among Asians themselves had not yet fully crystallized into recognizable class differences. This life world - with a mixture of rural and urban ambience refracted within the colonial prism - could be easily distinguished from that of the longer established middle classes in the subcontinent as well as from the cultural formations associated with early South Asian migrants of the late 19th and early 20th century. Direct links with India or Pakistan were relatively infrequent. In our imagination - as children growing up in East Africa - the subcontinent figured far less as a geographical place than a symbolic cultural modality imagined and reinvented through life-cycle rituals, music, songs, narration of classic legends or historical dramas in films, in religious rituals, or in the limited space of what was often referred to as the teaching of 'vernacular' languages in schools. With kinship, friendship, business and professional networks sustained across Tanganyika, Kenya and Uganda through persistent contact, especially during the marking of life cycle rituals, the words such as Bukoba, or Massaka became part of the shared semantic and psychic time-space across the three geographical territories, and it marked our deepest sensibilities.

Until independence in Uganda, for example, the primary and secondary education system was segregated into European, African and 'Indian' schools. The curriculum in 'Indian' schools was fashioned after that of 'grammar schools' in Britain, with the English language as the primary medium of teaching. The only concession made to South Asian cultural specificity was that a part of the school timetable was allocated to the learning of 'vernacular' languages. In our school, the option offered was that between Gujarati and Urdu. As a group, the Punjabis - whether Sikh, Hindu or Muslim - tended to take Urdu as their option. Interestingly, this educational practice became a visible mark of our 'difference' as Punjabis from Gujarati students, a 'difference' which, was articulated in a form of largely friendly but stereotypic banter between Gujaratis and Punjabis. Like any language, the study of Urdu deeply marked us with its creolized poetic and literary imagination. As students, we spoke Punjabi outside the classroom, immersed ourselves in the study of 'quissa', 'nazam' or 'ghazal' while attending Urdu classes, and used English when studying everything else. Some of us, like myself, learnt to read Gurmukhi to

a basic level, largely through self-directed study at home. In Kenya, on the other hand, alongside Urdu and Gujarati, Hindi and Gurmukhi were also part of the curriculum, or could be taken in denominational schools. Sikh students there were much more likely to study Gurmukhi as their option subject. Consequently, it may be argued that the contingency of the language taught in the schools was significant in producing a differently marked Sikh-Punjabi ethnicity in Kenya and Uganda. To put it another way, religious idiom always articulates with determinate social conditions to produce variable subject positions. It engenders multiple modalities through which life as a Sikh woman may be lived.

Any study of the experience of different categories of Sikh women therefore demands careful attention to how the effects of a multiplicity of factors are played out in specific situations. How are dimensions such as those discussed above implicated in structuring the material circumstances of women's lives or subjectively experienced? What kinds of subject positions, subjectivities and identities are produced and contested in a particular situation? In the east African case, what impact did stereotypic colonial perceptions of African peoples have in shaping Sikh women's responses? How did women relate to anti-colonial struggles in Africa? In what circumstances did the fact of being *Jat*, *Tarkhan* or any other caste acquire significance? How were solidarities or antagonisms between these castes facilitated or impeded? In what situations did Punjabi ethnicity - encompassing Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus - emerge as the most salient? What kinds of inter-religious affinities or differentiations became the stuff of East African Asian cultures? How were boundaries of various womanhoods - Hindu, Muslim, Sikh; Asian, African, European - policed in this particular multi-ethnic and multi-religious racialised colonial space? What happened if any of the forbidden boundaries were transgressed, say in relation to the institution of arranged marriages? What was the social and psychic cost of transgression for women? How did religious dimensions of Sikh life manifest themselves in everyday interactions? How were religious events celebrated? What precisely was the influence on women of the minutiae of religious rituals, customs and practices? What kinds of inter-generational differences were salient during the period? What difference did it make if you or your parents were migrants to East Africa as compared with families who had been settled for a few generations? What connections did the family have overseas? What kinds of social or cultural issues were germane to the specific milieu in which you participated? These are just some of the questions one would need to address. Many of them are likely to be relevant to all diasporic situations, albeit in a contingent manner.

Historical Memory and Trauma

During the last decade, there has been substantial interest, on both sides of the Punjab border, in the impact of Partition on the lives of people (Butalia, 1998; Ibrahim, 1996; Mohan, 1999). The resurgence of such desire to revisit this critical

moment in the history of Punjab by a new generation of scholars, writers, and artists is a testament to the importance of historical memory to subsequent generations dispersed in time and space.³ It draws attention to *issues concerning the effects of social trauma in the constitution of historical memory and the influence such trauma may exercise upon generations far removed from the actual event*. What is the impact of violent trauma on later generations? How is it communicated across generations? How is it narrativized? What becomes embraced, rejected or disavowed; how and under what circumstances; and, by which segment of a population? What is the nature of subject/political positions that become available to later generations to work through the effects of trauma? In East Africa, there was relative public silence about the Partition in the decades that followed it. In part, this could be taken as a measure of the depth of solidarity that had been successfully established amongst different sections of the Asian community, demonstrating that peaceful relations between communities are possible even in the wake of terrible strife. But trauma warrants attention to far more complex processes of subjectivity: of pain; grief; loss; violent anger; indeed, of not having the language to deal with the enormity of the emotional onslaught unleashed by the events. It is no wonder that our mothers rarely talked about it, even in private, which is understandable given the nature of the trauma that either they, or members of their extended family, or friends might have experienced. It takes time for traumas to be worked through individually or collectively. I remember once, as a child, hearing my mother and her friends discuss among themselves, in hushed tones, about a water-well in an East Punjabi village which, they had learnt from relatives in India, had become filled with the corpses of young Muslim women who jumped into the well to escape 'the fate of being a woman' in a war torn region. The same, evidently, had happened to Sikh and Hindu women on the other side of the border, in what is now Pakistan. They spoke with affection about caring acts such as when households protected their threatened neighbors, sometimes by hiding them in their homes. They sighed with pain while recollecting the moment when such neighbors left their homes to go to Pakistan and took leave of their friends, crying and wailing. Our mothers in the East African diaspora spoke in horrified whispers of the violation of women, and in that moment they came to embody the transcultural - yet by no means ahistoric - figure of the 'woman in war zones'. Such things are happening all over the world today, although, thankfully, women activists have now succeeded in getting rape in war situations recognized as a war crime. But, the broader issues still remain pertinent. Partition is a shared legacy for Punjabi women of all religious backgrounds and provides a political space in which to intervene so that no woman is ever subjected to such experience again. Among Sikh women writers, the poet Amrita Pritam provides the ingredients for an incisive analytical and practical strategy for this purpose. Pritam's poetry castigates those cultural practices, which sustain forms of masculinity capable of sexual violence. In her famous poem, '*Aj Akhan Waris Shah Nu Kite Qabaran Vichon Bo*', she describes acts of rape that occurred during Partition as patriarchal violence enacted on the bodies of Sikh, Muslim, and Hindu

women.⁴ As we now know, not only were women abducted, raped and mutilated, many were later disowned by their families for having become 'polluted'. Amrita Pritam's poem is a strident critique of all forms of sexual violence against women, and a powerful indictment of cultural practices that can sanction the representation of victims of violence as figures of 'impurity'. Her writings, and that of novelists such as Nanak Singh, - as indeed, do writers of earlier centuries such as Waris Shah in his rendering of the legend of 'Hir Ranjha' - offer powerful feminist commentary on Punjabi social formations, from which we would do well to learn so that one is able to move on from hatred, ambivalence or sentimentality, and from putting the blame on to others, in order to make new connections. Oral narrative, personal testimony, artistic practices - film, photography, painting, theatre, music, literature and poetry - may all serve as the means of working through historical memory across generations.

Religious or Social Category?

So far, I have emphasized the diversity of Sikh women as embodied subjects. But it is equally important to explore the specificity of the general category 'Sikh woman'. What does the category signify? What is the basis of that which has the power to interpellate or hail individual women as 'Sikh' in ways that is meaningful to them? This is a crucial, albeit complex question that can only be addressed rather briefly here. First and foremost, this question demands an analytical distinction between 'Sikh' as a religious category, on the one hand, *and* 'Sikh' as a form of ethnicity, a form of cultural specificity forged out of the lived experience of a Sikh background. In practice, of course, the two aspects are inherently connected. The lived experience, as I have already discussed, is mediated by many factors: for example, social and cultural practices may vary across generations, across geographical sites, across different castes and classes, and in relation to other communities of interaction. The articulation of these factors creates the conditions for the emergence of varying Sikh ethnicities. What makes these ethnicities distinctively 'Sikh', however, concerns their relationship to and embeddedness within a genealogy of ethics, values, institutions and practices associated with Sikh history and the Gurbani - the Sikh scriptures. This provides the ground on which connection to a shared ethical, psychic and emotional space are made possible and become part of the lives of members of the collectivity via a myriad of cultural practices, including daily rituals imbibed from childhood in both their subtle and explicit manifestations. For me personally, it centrally involves a relationship to ethical principles inscribed within Sikh philosophy: a philosophy that advocates an egalitarian vision, espouses a fundamental dismantling of caste hierarchy, critiques women's subordination, and proposes a spiritual practice that does away with the mediations of the male cleric or the esoteric priestly caste so that anyone, male or female; black, brown, or white could officiate at the performance of rituals; and finally, a philosophy that permits direct access to 'the Formless Infinite' through a very simple practice of meditation

on the Nam that can be carried out anywhere, rather than being restricted to a place of worship. It is interesting that the Gurbani continuously reiterates that the 'Formless Infinite' has no gender. Yet many writers, including women, continue to invoke the Nam as if it were male.

Of course, other Sikh women may take a somewhat different view from my own. But the point is that, even their difference with my position becomes meaningful precisely because of that which connects us. Dialogue is central to the Sikh principles of critical reflection. It urges Sikh women not to accept received tradition if it violates the key principles of Sikh ethics such as those that I have noted above. In her path-breaking study, 'The Feminine Principle in the Sikh vision of the Transcendent', Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh amply demonstrates the importance of the feminine principle as one of the central motifs of Sikh scriptures and religiously inspired literature (Singh, 1993). She emphasizes the poetic syntax of the Guru Granth Sahib Ji, with its open dialogic imagination and its refusal to enact closure of meaning. These poetics refuse the simplistic binary of, on the one hand, knowledge and reason, and on the other, emotions, feelings, and human or spiritual love. Within the aesthetic sensibility of Gurbani, reason emerges as a form of creative imagination intimately connected with feelings - of joy, longing, love, and desire. As Singh notes:

Guru Nanak and his successors all used the poetic technique to convey their philosophical reflections. The Guru Granth contains no dogma; no societal code is prescribed. Without any resolutions, with only intimations, Sikh thought has felt itself at home in poetry (Singh, 1993).

With citations from the Adi Granth and the Dassam Granth, Singh shows how, in several texts, Gurbani repudiates the treatment of women as inferiors. Guru Nanak's poetry, for instance, explicitly inveighs against such customs as the pollution taboos against women during menstruation. The discourse of 'purity' is thereby seriously placed into question. The institution of 'Langar' expects equal contribution by men and women to all tasks entailed in preparing and serving food and the cleaning up afterwards. Regrettably, this tradition of sharing domestic responsibilities between men and women in the preparation of Langar, did not transfer to households outside the Dhramsala, on any significant scale.

It is important to note that the historical period of the ten Gurus is constitutive of Punjabi 'modernity'. In this regard, the interventions of the Gurus comprise an important element of 'modernity', although much of Gurbani can also be sited within poststructuralist/postmodern thought. As early modern Punjabi reformers, they introduced radical changes, which are not always recognized in the 'mainstream' literature on reform movements. For instance, Guru Amar Das took a strong position against *Sati* (the practice of immolation of wives on the funeral pyre of their husbands) long before this practice became the subject of 19th century reform movement, when *Sati* was officially abolished during the British Raj (Mani

1995). He also challenged the custom prohibiting Hindu widows from re-marriage, and encouraged his male Sikhs to marry widows. Similarly, Guru Gobind Singh was expressly opposed to female infanticide. During the period of the Gurus, women headed some of the '*Pirihs*' (regional administrative units). And we all know that a woman is as entitled as a man to perform Sikh rituals. In light of the socio-economic and cultural context of 15-18th century Punjab, the Guru-agenda on gender was far more radical than any which, the Sikhs have since taken up in the gender field. In saying this, however, I do not wish to suggest that there is only one type of representation of gender in the entire corpus of the Gurbani. Moreover, theological debate is not my direct concern here, nor do I claim any special expertise in theology. Rather, I speak from within the academic fields of sociology, cultural studies, and feminist gender studies. From this vantage point, it is vital to stress the importance of Sikh scriptures as a *cultural resource* for Sikh women to fashion appropriate twenty-first century political and cultural practices designed to improve women's position.

Recursive and the New

It is axiomatic that there is often a gap between the tenets of religion and cultural practice. Sikh women and men can draw inspiration from the writings of the Gurus on women's position, but the vision must be translated into practice by each successive generation under the conditions in which the members of this generation find themselves. The figure of the Sikh woman, as I noted earlier, is a site of heterogeneity that is performatively embodied in contingent contexts. The life worlds of historically embodied women are socially figured, subjectively experienced, and culturally played out in different ways depending upon how issues of gender, religion, class, caste, ethnicity or generation articulate in a given context. During the last decades, the world has witnessed major socio-economic, political and cultural changes. Gender is a constitutive moment in the way the world is being made and re-made (A. Brah, 2000; Brah, 2002; Brah, Hickman, & Mac an Ghail, 1999; A. a. C. Brah, A.E, 2000). As women, we are simultaneously positioned within multiple discursive formations. The subject positions and subjectivities we inhabit in the household, in the work place, in arenas of political intervention, and in our different and differential leisure/pleasure spaces - defy reductive taxonomies. Yet, there are certain social issues that seem to cut across different diasporas, even as the particular form of these issues assume may vary across them. They are the focus of political activism in diverse forums. For example, in common with the experience of women in all patriarchal cultural formations, the question of 'domestic violence' continues to demand attention. Indeed, a landmark legal decision in Britain, - one, that makes a woman's experience of domestic violence admissible, as mitigating evidence, in cases where she has killed the perpetrator of violence in desperate self-defense - entered statute following a major campaign mounted in support of the case of a Sikh woman who was accused of killing her husband after

suffering years of violence at his hands (Ahluwalia & Gupta, 1997). Similarly, although Guru Nanak opposed caste distinction, caste hierarchy is nonetheless rife in Sikh communities, albeit in forms that are distinct from those common among other South Asian groups. Caste produces gender-specific outcomes, including the taboo against cross-caste marriages. Indeed, the institution of marriage continues to maintain its power as one of the central markers of group boundary in most social groups and its maintenance, re-articulation and transformation entails all manner of conformity, negotiation and transgression with varying degrees of ensuing conflicts/sanctions/penalties and contradictions. Sikhs are no exception in this regard. On a related note, the hegemony of heterosexuality is increasingly being problematised as lesbian, gay or otherwise gendered persons are establishing global networks and representing their sexuality in and through the specificity of Sikh ethnicity. The internal diversity and differentiation of Sikh ethnicity is also marked by the increasing expansion of the category through children of liaisons with non-Sikh partners and in other cases through religious conversion (Elsberg, 2003; Leonard, 1992).

Although variable in nature and scale, racism and discrimination continue to mark the lives of Sikh women in such countries as Britain, the USA, Canada and Australia where factors such as the history of migration of Sikhs to that country, its immigration policies, the presence or absence of anti-discrimination laws, and formations of political activism, all have a bearing on shaping life trajectories (Ballard, 1995; Bhattacharia, 1998; Brah & Minhas, 1985; Grewal & Kaplan, 1994; Leonard, 1992, 1997; Puar, 1996). Sikh women are actively involved across different segments of the economy: industrial/service-sectors, information technologies, agribusinesses, finance sector, large and small business enterprises, local and national state sectors, and the professions. Within these various sectors they can be found doing the best paid as well as the worst paid jobs. The growing economic divide makes for significant internal class differentiation amongst Sikhs resulting in different life chances, lifestyles, and cultural hierarchies. Economic inequality has a major impact on women's lives, and social practices such as 'dowry' can have particularly adverse effect on low-income households, even as the creation of new styles of beautifully embroidered clothes, intricately designed jewelry, and other brands of fashion items produce new modes of aesthetics. Of course in everyday lives, these different facets do not have separate existence but interlock in complex ways. A recent conference of Sikh women held in London attracted over 200 women from all age groups, and from different parts of Britain. This gathering highlighted many of the issues raised above. Like women in other parts of Punjabi diasporas, they discussed and debated social problems as well as creativity and promise of their lives⁵.

Sikh women are at the centre of the energy that fuels the vibrancy of Sikh cultures, in both their religious and secular dimensions. There is a proliferation of new forms of expressive cultures produced by Sikh women in this digital age - ranging from autobiographical and literary texts, through art and music, to television

drama, comedy and films, and digital archives ((Bhachu, 1985, 2003; Desai & Sekhon, 2003; Puwar, 2002; Puwar & Raghuram, 2003). These artistic practices resonate with many different diasporic journeys across time-space, articulating global and local influences in the creation of new sensibilities. For example, the global influence of 'bhangra', itself a thoroughly creolised form, is in part a testimony to the vibrancy of transnational diasporic networks. But, this success story represses certain gendered narratives. During 1980s Britain, for instance, when women began to take part in mixed-gender bhangra performances at weddings and other celebrations, women would often spontaneously break into 'giddha', taking over the floor with their own singing and carnivalesque performativity. Over the years, the 'giddha' with live 'bolian' recited by women has, in part, moved back into women only spaces. On the other hand, women have appropriated the bhangra form itself in unique ways, reinventing 'giddha' movements in the 'bhangra' space, reconfiguring the latter. At the same time, giddha itself is increasingly performed as spectacle on stage.

Such varieties of recursivity, shifts and changes are part of the continuing flux of women's lives.

Notes

1. This essay is based on the Amrit Kaur Ahluwalia Memorial Lecture on Sikhism for the year 2002 which, I delivered at the Center for South Asian Studies, University of California at Berkeley
2. See for instance: Alexander J & Mohanty-Talpade C, *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial legacies, Democratic Futures*, (London & New York: Routledge); Anzaldúa G (1990), *Making Face, Making Soul* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Foundation Books); Bhavnani, K K (ed) (2000) *Feminism and Race: A Reader*, Oxford: Oxford Univ Press; Brah A (1996) *Cartographies of Diaspora, Contesting Identities* (London & New York: Routledge); Gedalof, I (2000) *Against Purity*, Routledge; Grewal, I and Kaplan, C (ed) (1994) *Scattered Hegemonies*, Univ. of Minnesota Press; Grewal S et al *Charting the Journey* (1989), (London: Sheba); Mani L (1999) *Contentious Traditions* (Indiana University Press) Mirza H S (ed) (1997); *Black British Feminism* (London & New York: Routledge); Sudbury J (1998) *Other Kinds of Dreams* (New York & London: Routledge); Trinh T Minha (1989) *Woman, Native, Other* (Bloomington & Minneapolis: Indiana University Press)
3. See for instance: Ibrahim, H, (1996) 'The Troubled Past: Literature of Severing and the Viewer/Viewed Didactic' in Bahri, D and Vasudeva, M (eds) *Between the Lines: South Asians and Postcoloniality*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
4. Amrita Pritam wrote this poem in the aftermath of the partition of Punjab in 1947; Nanak Singh wrote many novels during the 1960s such as 'Tuti Veena', and 'Chita Lahoo' which, addressed social issues in post-Partition East Punjab, especially the situation of women.

5. Sikh Studies Forum (2002), Report of a Conference on and by Sikh Women (London: Sikh Studies Forum)

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