Article

'In Our Whole Society, There Is No Equality': Sikh Householding and the Intersection of Gender and Caste

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Abstract: Sikhism is widely understood and celebrated as san egalitarian religion. This follows from its interpretation as a challenge to the caste schema of Hinduism as well as readings which suggest its gender equality. This paper explores the intersection of caste and gender in Sikh society in relation to Guru Nanak's tenet that Sikhs be householders. Nanak's view that householding is the basis of religious life and spiritual liberation—as opposed to the caste Hindu framework in which householding relates only to the specific stage of life in which one is married and concerned with domestic affairs—was one of the most important social and ritual reforms he introduced. By eliminating the need for an asceticism supported by householders, or in other words the binary framework of lay and renunciant persons, Nanak envisioned the possibility that the rewards of ascetism could accrue to householders. For Sikhs living at Kartarpur, the first intentional Sikh community, established by Guru Nanak as a place of gathering and meditation, Nanak's egalitarian ideals were practiced so that women and members of all castes were equal participants. Guru Nanak's model for social and ritual life presents a radical challenge to the hierarchies and exclusions of Hinduism, and yet, contains within it the basis for ongoing caste and gender disparity for Sikhs, since most Sikhs continue to arrange their householding around caste endogamous marriages and social and domestic arrangements which privilege men. Taking the position shared by a number of Sikh ethnographic informants, and supported by a number of feminist scholars, that the realization of an equal Sikh society remains incomplete, I juxtapose the continued acquiescence to caste and gender with the vision of an ideal and socially just society put forward by the Gurus.

Keywords: gender; caste; intersectionality; householding; Sikhism

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Ethnographers have long been trained to attend to the gaps between what is said and what is done, or in other words, the ideal and the real, for these third spaces are instructive sites for analysis and critique. As an ethnographer among Sikhs in India and the diaspora over the past two decades, I have often been struck by incommensurabilities between Sikh doctrine and actual social practice. Indeed, these contradictions, especially manifest around the egalitarian principles that we are told outline a casteless and genderless Sikh society, are noted by most scholars. While Sikhs certainly demonstrate Sikhi(sm)'s social justice credentials in some obvious ways in society at large, as we see in the Sikh institutions of seva and langar, it is also clear that caste and gender hierarchies are ongoing. As a member by marriage of the Jat Sikh community, I have frequently had my attention drawn to their social centrality and supposedly superior status among Punjabis, a trope that continues into the popular cultural sphere. And, having met Jat Sikhs in at least their several hundreds, I can count on one hand the number who use just Singh as their only surname, one of the consummate Sikh practices to erase caste consciousness. As well, I have often heard Sikh women (and particularly Jat Sikh women) describe a range of oppressions and lament that the gurus' egalitarian utopia is not

manifest; collectively, they lend their voices to the title of this paper: 'in our whole society, there is no equality'.

During fieldwork interviews in the late 1990s among Sikh women in northwest India (who were primarily but not exclusively Jat), I commonly met with statements like: 'a boy does not have to behave virtuously, like a girl'; 'Jat men do not listen to their wives'; 'in our society, women are inferior to men'; 'taking birth as a man is better'; and 'our religion says we are equal, but in reality, we are not'. And while older women were rather more likely to insist that conditions were improving (Mooney 2010), they still said things like 'a woman won't have too many problems if she takes care of the household'; 'if we go out, here and there, our men will criticize us'; 'in good families, they don't trouble the women that much, but elsewhere, they are kept down'; and 'we must try to make our kids understand that they should not marry beyond our caste'. In the years since, my nieces, nephews, students, and friends (again, primarily but not exclusively Jat) have also reminded me of the continued operation of gender and caste, both enmeshed within a dynamics of honour and shame, and in diaspora inflected with new inequalities—and potentials for transgression—as concerns with race and Western nuances of class are introduced. (Colleagues such as Jakobsh and Nesbitt (2010) and Kamala Elizabeth Nayar (2010) have also noted similar encounters). Some Sikh youth have been raised without explicit caste awareness and are variously puzzled, intrigued, or shocked to find that the caste system is still operational among Sikhs (or indeed at all). Others have grown up in castecentric and even casteist settings with a(n anti-Sikh) sense of their own status and distinction. Still others fall in the middle, living an everyday life that is largely untouched by caste but aware that it will enter their lives when they consider marriage. A relative few have shared tales of outcasting related to marriage beyond the caste group. Not only marriages but psyches and lives can be made or broken in these intersections of gender and caste. For Jats, there is or will be much pressure to marry another Jat; while marriage outside of the community is only sanctioned if to somebody white. Jat boys, whose fitness for marriage no longer rests on village land, must demonstrate wealth via material markers that evoke class, but may be bereft of its finer distinctions. Meanwhile Jat girls, attuned to the gender imbalances and traditional expectations of their homes, and well aware that these are likely to force upon them a life trajectory more limited than those of their brothers, often strategically remain in school for as long as possible so as to avoid marriage. Clearly, caste and gender inequalities in Sikh society are ongoing, even though they may take different shapes as they traverse the moving spaces and sundry places of contemporary Sikh society. Inderpal Grewal has observed that "the question of how millennial modern subjects are being made by disavowing the existence of patriarchy even as gendered subordination and violence continues is crucially important for feminist research, both theoretically and empirically" (Grewal 2013, p. 3). This proposal might be productively reframed to suggest, as I do here, that it is critical to further understand the ways in which contemporary Sikh subjects are produced via assertions of religious reform and social equality at the same time as gender and caste hierarchies continue to be present and even resurgent.

If the standard narrative of Guru Nanak's egalitarian intent is more than "ideological self-image" (Jodhka 2016, p. 585), why, five hundred and fifty years since his birth, and given the otherwise successful establishment of his vision for religious and social reform, do such inequalities persist among Sikhs? In this paper, I explore some of the dimensions of this question. Observing that gender and caste intersect is scarcely groundbreaking: the feminist study of gender and caste practices and hierarchies in India is a substantial field (e.g., Basu 1999, 2005; Caplan 1985; Chakravarti [2003] 2018; Channa 2013; Chowdhry 1994, 2007; Dube 1997; Grewal 2013; Harlan 1992; Jeffery and Jeffery 1996; Kapadia 1995, 2002; Kolenda 2003; Liddle and Joshi 1989; Minturn 1993; Oldenburg 2002; Puri 1999; Raheja and Gold 1994; Sangari and Vaid 1990; Wadley 2002), and within it, attention to Punjab is growing (e.g., Grewal 2010; Jakobsh 2003, 2010; Malhotra 2002, 2010; Mooney 2010, 2013b; Purewal 2010). However, there are few studies that explicitly link caste and gender inequalities, as occurring simultaneously and produced and experienced in intersection with each other, and thus in an intersectional frame, to Sikhism. The continuation of caste and gender inequities also points to the

vexed nexus of religion and culture, aspects of social architecture and worldview that are also complexly intersected. Taking such an intersectional approach, I suggest that the household is a central aspect of these ongoing inequities among Sikhs for the key locus of Guru Nanak's new religion yet remains the site of unreformed traditional patriarchal kinship practices that depend on the intersection of gender and caste and thus reproduce their hierarchies. Rather than being a strictly empirical paper, I attempt to think through the gap between the egalitarian ideal and lived practice among Sikhs. While some of what I write here may seem obvious to the reader familiar with Punjab, Sikhism, and Sikhs (and perhaps especially Jats), there are few studies of the nexus of these inequalities. Moreover, for the reader that is relatively unfamiliar with the region and its people—as well as for students grappling with the complexities of gender, caste, and Sikhism in their own lives—there are few concise sources that attempt to account for these pressing issues. While what I accomplish here is far from comprehensive, it is one point of entry into some of these challenges.

Implicit in the Sikh community's discourse on equality as noted above is the idea that the Guru's Sikhi successfully reformed the religious domain inherited from Hinduism, but not the—gendered, castecentric, and casteist—cultural one. However, the egalitarian reading of Sikhism is normative. Sikhs widely assert that Sikhism is an egalitarian religion while academics argue that Sikhism challenges the caste schema of Hinduism (e.g., McLeod 1989; Takhar [2005] 2016), and advocates gender equality (e.g., Mahmood and Brady 2000; Singh 2005). Guru Nanak's universalistic and humanitarian Sikhi proposed a utopian reform of society contingent upon the eradication of caste-based priestly authority and the elaborate rites of the Hindu life course, as well as the life cycle stages of everyday life, which compartmentalize spiritual and social pursuits such that only some people—none lower caste, and very few women—might attain mokśa (or freedom from the karmic cycle). The Guru proposed instead that all Sikhs, regardless of gender or caste, could perform the few rituals of Sikhism, and moreover that Sikhs should be householders permanently engaged in both society and spirituality as the means to mukti (or spiritual liberation). Regardless of the actualities of these tenets, a matter that is at the crux of this paper, Sikhism proposes critical socioreligious engagement in marriage and family life at all (adult) ages across the life course for women and men of all castes even as both women and men are to be equally and simultaneously engaged, as individuals and soul partners in religious practice and spiritual pursuit, "one light in two bodies" (Guru Granth Sahib, 788; cited in (Singh 2005, p. 133)). For instance, even as they suggest gendered difference, the Sikh surnames of Kaur and Singh challenge patrilineality and assert gender and caste equality, while Sikh first names are largely gender-neutral. Despite these egalitarian social and religious formations, caste and gender differences and inequities continued to manifest in Guru Nanak's new society. Scholars point out that women are far from equal in Sikh institutions (Jhutti-Johal 2010); the Guru's message may be out of step with contemporary feminist perspectives (Nayar 2010, p. 269); and—perhaps most critically—the masculinized, and Khalsacentric, Sikh body is not only normative but hegemonic (Axel 2001). Meanwhile, Sikhs continue to assert caste privilege and prejudice and even casteism: beyond unequal marriage and reproductive arrangements, caste is pronounced and widely observed in everything from patterns of village settlement to national elections (Jodhka 2016, p. 583). Encounters with the West under the raj, in diaspora, and amid modernity and globalization have entrenched and exacerbated inequalities by introducing new economic and status pressures which map onto gender, kinship, and household dynamics (e.g., Mooney 2011; Padhi 2012).

In this paper, I argue that ongoing inequalities of gender and caste among Sikhs are related to the Sikh practice of householding, which was a key aspect of Guru Nanak's reframing of Hinduism. Rather than becoming the key site of Sikh spiritual development, householding has remained the prosaic—and deeply unequal—site of kinship, and thus the intersection of gender and caste. From this site, the profound and pressing inequalities of gender subordination and caste hierarchy emanate. Viewing Sikhism as a reform movement with aims to establish a new model society that was otherwise largely successful, as evidenced by the establishment and growth of Sikhism, I examine the promise and paradox of Sikh egalitarianism, arguably, a key proposition of the promised transformation.

I begin by describing Guru Nanak's revitalization of Hinduism and the routinization of Sikhi(sm), paying particular attention to the doctrine of householding, or gr̥hastha, in which ongoing inequities of caste and gender are located. I then articulate some of the key contexts of gender and caste among Sikhs so as to demonstrate their significant divergence from the Sikh ideal of social equality. I propose that the necessary intersection of gender and caste within the traditional kinship and marriage system, which remain relatively untouched by Sikh revitalization, has prevented social equality from becoming manifest and indeed even reproduces regional and diasporic forms of intersectional disparity and domination.

Before commencing, a few further words on my approach to the argument are in order. I take the perspective that there is no essential Sikh and no essential form of Sikhism, just as there is no essential Sikh woman or man, nor Jat nor Mazhabi nor Khatri, (just as there is no one form of Hinduism), and, that Sikh subject formation transcends these categories; in this, religious principle coheres with cultural theory. This reflects a constructivist approach which seeks to avoid deterministic and bounded interpretations by viewing culture and religion as the unfixed, fluid, and evolving products of particular periods, encounters, expectations, and experiences (e.g., Appadurai 1996; Clifford 1988; Gupta and Ferguson 1997). Although it is in some ways an unsatisfactory paradigm, I largely view religion as an aspect of culture: Western secular framing treats religion and culture as theoretically separable (e.g., Asad 1993; Geertz 1973)—the whole of the one (religion) constituting the part of the other (culture)—and yet I am also aware that they are mutually imbricated and enmeshed phenomena, as clearly evidenced in the idea of worldview. Political and other domains of culture are also part of this complex cultural whole (e.g., Asad 2003), in keeping with the holistic paradigm of anthropology. Proceeding from this, while for the purposes of this broad and exploratory comparison I treat both Hinduism and Sikhism as mutually exclusive, distinct and isolable traditions, at the same time, I recognize that in Punjab they emerge from and coexist within a shared regional culture in which religion has historically overlapped so that these distinctions are, at certain times and within certain contexts, not only analytically problematic but also socially contentious. This approach blurs the differences within Sikhism, and there are certainly other, particular forms of Sikhi, such as the Khalsa formulation, that go unexplored here. Fortunately, other scholars (e.g., Jakobsh 2003; Mahmood and Brady 2000; Singh 1996, 2005) have explored at least their gender dimensions closely. Another proviso is that readings of the religious traditions of South Asia—such as the idea that India is 'spiritual', the distinction between 'other worldly' and 'this worldly' and the very category 'Hindu'—have historically been deeply embedded in complicated processes of translation that have produced orientalist frames (King 1999; Said 1979), whether prejudicial or romantic (Inden 1986), even though engaging with such readings remains foundational to contemporary scholarship such as my own.

Beyond modes of religious understanding and being, modes of social organization such as caste and gender are also susceptible to considerable distortion, if not outright colonization, if read through an ethnocentric lens (and again, via a process of translation). Critical, non-canonical perspectives on religion by academics and particularly 'outsiders' are often unwelcome. These sensitivities in part reflect the fact that Sikhism was and continues to be colonized in multiple ways during the long centuries after its founding in encounters with Islam, the raj, modernity, development, Hindu nationalism, and globalization. The urge of these 'others' to categorize, fix, reduce, and suppress has understandably produced anxieties over diversity of form: "the process of creating a self through opposition to an other always entails the violence of repressing or ignoring other forms of difference" (Abu-Lughod 1991, p. 140). To observe that Sikhs have disavowed the Guru's commitments to equality is perhaps inevitably confronting given that both gender and caste were reconfigured in these historical processes, so as to become much less aligned with Guru Nanak's poetics and praxes of equality and much more subject to sexism and casteism. Given that the West is yet to address its own rampant sexism, racism, and severe and growing inequalities, there is no scope for superiority here. Reading Sikhism through feminist, intersectional, and even antiracist perspectives—particularly by a

Western scholar—may be problematic for those members of the Sikh community who are sensitized to these histories and thus concerned with misreading and misrepresentation. Others may dismiss such interpretations as part of a "tangential lexicon" (Singh 2016, p. 606). Such refusals would suggest the continued need to commit to, and take on, the challenging work of decolonization, incumbent on us all. In this, I am as enamoured of Sikhi's potential for radical equality and transformative social change as are many Sikhs.

1. Guru Nanak's Equal Society

Sikhs are celebrating the 550th year since their founder Guru Nanak's birth in 2019. The hagiography we have of Guru Nanak holds that he was born in the village of Talwandi, later renamed Nankana Sahib in honour of the Guru, in present-day Pakistan on 15 April 1469. Undivided Punjab at this time was an "enchanted universe" (Oberoi 1994) of pluralistic and heterogeneous folk traditions that we might characterize as broadly Hindu, but was colonized by the Moghul empire and as such both influenced by regional traditions of Sufism and threatened by the spectre of conversion (although there was considerable diversity within both the Muslim and Hindu communities). Beyond the rituals of everyday agricultural life and the rites of passage, bhakti Hinduism expressed devotion to the deities, while mystics of the sant, nath, and Sufi traditions sought communion with the divine through a range of practices including asceticism. Guru Nanak's Sikhi bears the influence of his religious contemporaries, bhakts, sants, and Sufis, and yet expounds a unique tradition that is neither Hindu nor Muslim.

The janam sakhis (birth stories) outline a dramatic foundational episode when Guru Nanak was swept into a river while bathing, transported by divine revelation, and feared drowned. Three days later, he returned with his universal message 'na koi Hindu, na koi Mussalman', (there is no Hindu, there is no Muslim). Although it has been read this way, this statement was less a refutation of both religions, or an invitation to conversion to an as yet amorphous Sikhi, and more a means to establish a third, and common, ecumenical, universalist—and even feminist (Singh 2005)—truth. Having received this inspiration, Guru Nanak travelled throughout the Indian subcontinent and beyond, preaching "a common humanity . . . [transcending] all racial, social, religious and gender barriers" (Singh 1996, p. 22) before establishing the first Sikh settlement and community at Kartarpur in 1515. It should be noted that Guru Nanak's egalitarian reforms, later reiterated in Guru Gobind Singh's founding of the Khalsa, are part of a long trajectory of protest against the hierarchies of caste Hinduism and its distinction between worldly and spiritual life, whether in Siddhartha Gautama's ancient assertion that caste (and gender) were inconsequential in pursuing the middle path between worldliness and renunciation (Omvedt 2003); medieval, and ongoing, Nath traditions encompassing householding, ritual inversion, and asceticism (Nath and Gold 1992); or modern critiques of the caste status quo, inspired by social reformers such as Ambedkar, that recuperate the value of work of all kinds in a practice of 'disciplined householding' among the Dalit-Bahujan (Ilaiah 2009, p. 91).

Although Guru Nanak's Sikhism—pluralist, quietist, and mystical—was forced to adjust to the pressures of its routinization and growth under the sharpening of Mughal attention under later gurus, culminating with the birth of the Khalsa in 1699 under the tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, Guru Nanak clearly laid the foundations for Sikhi and Sikh society within his lifetime. Sikhi rests on mindfulness and meditation on the name (nām) of the singular yet formless divine (ek onkar) alongside simultaneous social engagement, as practiced in honest labour and conduct, humility and selflessness, unity and equality, service and shared prosperity. Guru Nanak's legacy is encapsulated in the exhortations: vaṇḍ chhakō (sharing and assisting the needy), kirat karō (earning an honest living through one's own labour), and nām japō (contemplation and recitation of the names of god, also known as nām simran). This meditative practice sought to confront and overcome the spiritual and social problem of haumai (ego), or individual identity, and all of its potential accretions—lobh (greed), kāma (lust), krodh (anger), hankar (pride), and moh (attachment).

It has been proposed that this apparent founding of a new religion was likely unintentional, and rather, what became Sikhism was initially a Hindu reform movement (McLeod 1989). This is in part how I read Sikh householding and egalitarianism here. It is interesting to consider just how forcefully Guru Nanak, "a pious god-loving Hindu of gentle disposition" (Madan 1986, p. 258), refuted the extant traditions with his famous unitary dictum, there is 'neither Hindu nor Muslim'. While this position refuses the claims that either might make to exclusive practice or identity, it also thereby suggests that Nanak was as interested in reforming social and religious categories as in spiritual liberation. Indeed, to some, Nanak was a revolutionary (e.g., Singh 1988), who found little "in contemporary politics, society or religion ... commendable" (Grewal [1990] 1997, p. 28). Sikh texts and practices demand "no priests, no commentators, no hierarchies between reciters/singers and listeners, no social or gender obstacles" (Singh 1996, p. 8), and moreover, as is widely noted, include verses from both Hindu and Muslim saints. Guru Nanak's unitary theology was inclusive and pluralistic. One recent interpretation suggests Guru Nanak, as 'enlightenment personified', was a harbinger of several core aspects of twenty-first century social justice, including multiculturalism, women's liberation, human rights, and socialism (Singh 2019). Despite this, Guru Nanak counselled Hindus to follow Hindu tenets, and Muslims to follow Islamic tenets (Singh 1996, p. 22). And yet for those Hindus who would become Sikhs, Guru Nanak outlined a transformative religious and social vision.

Importantly, Sikhism can be (re-)interpreted through a feminist lens, even if gender equality is not the prevailing condition of Sikh society. Certainly, Guru Nanak's rejection of the androcentrism of the Hindu model of the stages of life can be read as challenging patriarchy (Nayar and Sandhu 2007, p. 108). It is interesting, too, to consider that the Guru Granth Sahib may metaphorically link gender and caste equality. A widely cited passage on gender equality emphasizes women's roles in birth and social reproduction:

> From woman, man is born; within woman, man is conceived; to woman he is engaged and married. Woman becomes his friend; through woman, the future generations come. When his woman dies, he seeks another woman; to woman he is bound. So why call her bad? From her, kings are born. From woman, woman is born; without woman, there would be no one at all. O Nanak, only the True Lord is without a woman (473).

Elsewhere in the Granth, women's childbearing bodies are viewed as the site of an originary and perfect social equality: "In the dwelling of the womb, there is no ancestry or social status. All have originated from the Seed of God" (324). Moreover, nonbinary gender metaphors are featured throughout the writings of the Gurus to communicate divine transcendence. According to Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh, the Gurus used "the language of intimate human relationships" (Singh 1996, p. 3), and of marriage in particular, to describe human relations to the divine. She writes: "The Gurus often speak from the point of view of a woman, a bride awaiting her divine Groom, who addresses the Formless One as 'Beloved'" (4). This is exemplified in gurbani, such as in the stanzas of the anand karaj (Sikh marriage rite, literally 'blissful union'), which describe the bride and groom as 'one soul in two bodies' who are enjoined together to pursue divine peace. Singh argues that Sikhism thus rejects distinctions between male and female in comprehending divinity, and by extension, in human society. Marriage is both a metaphor for divine union and a spiritual tool for its realization, which bride and groom are to utilize equally, as partners. Singh amply demonstrates that if we read and translate gurbani in feminist (and humanist) ways, the Gurus envisioned, idealized, and urged us to realize an equal society. While this is no doubt a moving and inspiring interpretation of equality in Sikh marriage, it must be pointed out (as Singh herself does) that ritual, symbolic, and social inequalities between brides and grooms and their families remain. For instance, during the four lavān (circumambulations) during the anand karaj (Sikh wedding), brides must follow their grooms around the Guru Granth Sahib. More onerously, the bride and her family are the groom and his family's inferiors throughout the wedding arrangements, at the ceremony, and into the marriage thereafter, as the troubling custom of dahej (dowry practice) makes plain. (Even more disturbing, there is also a scarcity of Sikh brides, given pronounced sex ratio imbalances arising in female foeticide; e.g., Purewal 2010, p. 38). Similarly, there

are ritual constraints on women's equality in the Khalsa initiation ceremonies (Singh 2005, pp. 139–40). Perhaps unsurprisingly, while the Guru's compositions also express the ideal of caste equality, this too goes unrealized.

2. Householding

Although a tradition of worldly asceticism, in which renunciation "is the ethos characterizing the ideal householder" is known in other Indian contexts (Cohen [1978] 2002, pp. 236–37), it is most well known in Sikhism. Guru Nanak's egalitarian, humanitarian, and universalistic reforms intended to eliminate Hindu rites of passage and the caste-based authority of priests which unwittingly separated social and spiritual life. Sikhism does not formally separate practitioners from priests, and thus needs no caste or gender divisions, for all Sikhs are to be both social and spiritual. In comparison with 'other worldly' Hinduism, Sikhism outlines a way of attaining divine realization in this world. In a single telling sentence, Surinder Jodhka observes that "it was perhaps the emphasis on just such a 'this-worldliness' which ensured that the social and personal world of the Sikh Gurus and subsequently of all Sikhs could not be caste-free" (Jodhka 2016, p. 585). Householding is the particular social formation that accomplishes Guru Nanak's this-worldly reform, but also, lays the framework for our further consideration of gender and caste: in providing a basis for kinship, gender, and caste, householding is the very formation that enables the continuation of gender and caste distinctions. Here, I briefly outline the Hindu notion of āśramadharma, the religiocultural ground from which Sikh householding emerges and diverges. In this regard, it is important to note that my understanding of householding has emerged from and is largely concerned with the context that it provides for Sikhism, rather than a specific concern with Hinduism.

In the concept of āśramadharma (or stages and duties of life), Hindus are provided with an explicit model for the life course. The āśramas outline four age-appropriate roles for Hindu males from the elite, twice-born castes (Brahmin, Kśatriya or Vaiśya) across the four stages of their lives, so that they may fulfill the dharma or responsible conduct of each. The āśramas are linked to a series of rites of passage or saṃskāras which enable life transitions and initiate men into their expected social roles, although most are concentrated in childhood. The saṃskāras depend on the ritual authority of priests, the elite category of which is foundational to both the conduct of ritual and the caste hierarchy of Hindu society. The āśramadharma, as described in the Dharmaśāstras such as the Manusmṛiti, explains that in the Hindu life course, one is first brahmacārī or student (and celibate), then gṛhastha or householder (and married), and then vānaprastha (or retiree), essentially in retreat from society and the world. The fourth 'stage' or status, saṃnyāsa or ascetic renunciation, which was not part of the original schema (Doniger 2014, p. 28), is neither incumbent upon all Hindus (for many simply 'retire'), nor always the final stage (for one can enter from any other point in the life course), but is—in allowing saṃnyāsīs to get closest to moksha—the culminating phase of the ideal Hindu life. The saṃnyāsī renounces the world and lives an ascetic life beyond society, or more precisely, the social world as represented through the activities, responsibilities, and relationships of study, householding, and retirement. Becoming a saṃnyāsī requires social death (Narayan 1989, p. 74) and thus erases one's caste and kinship ties. Given that women can also renounce (Hausner 2007), arguably, if not always demonstrably, renunciation renders gender equality. In the permanent liminality of the world beyond the social, the renunciant is liberated in this life (Narayan 1989, p. 75).

In terms of the political economy and organization of society, gṛhastha supports all of the other stages, and within the household family structure in particular, the brahmacārī and vānaprastha phases. As well, householders financed ritual. Gṛhastha is thus essential to the system. But importantly, gṛhastha inverts the normative social order of the other stages of āśramadharma: the householder is spiritually subordinate to the student, retiree, and renunciant, and yet, socially powerful via control of household resources (Cohen [1978] 2002, pp. 202–3, 277). And, in terms of the potential for karmic accretions, gṛhastha is the most onerous stage (Klostermaier 2007, p. 123), in no small part as it is embedded in caste, gender, kinship, and other social formations and bound up with the expected

pursuits of artha (material wealth) and kāma (pleasure). Gṛhastha thus lends spiritual force and necessity to vānaprastha and perhaps even saṃnyāsa since its bonds and responsibilities, not to mention its pleasures and desires, obscure engagement with spiritual questions. For Hindus, spiritual development is best pursued in retreat to the forest ashram in vānaprastha or otherwise entirely beyond the social and bodily in saṃnyāsa.

Sikhism explicitly rejects the Hindu stages of life framework, along with the saṃskāras and the associated ritual authority and social status of Brahmin priests. Instead, it emphasizes permanent householding as the means of the ideal religious life. Yet some of the aspects of āśramadharma will be familiar to Sikhs, who also use a temporal life course model derived from the Manusmṛiti in the idea of rāt de char pehar or the four watches or quarters of the night. The rāt de char pehar frames the stages of the Sikh life course around the womb, childhood, marriage and household life, and advancing age and preparation for death, which is mapped onto the amrit velā, or ambrosial period just before dawn, although there is no retreat to a forest ashram as in vānaprastha nor indeed the possibility of renunciation or saṃnyāsa at this later stage of life (or any). This may pose problems for individual Sikhs as they age and live the final stages of the life course (such as those with few social ties or desirous of a more solitary spiritual engagement), although the fourfold framework does address the later years of the life course, which are ideally to be lived with sons and grandsons in joint, extended, and patrilineal households which accommodate, and view as valuable, a heightened spiritual engagement among the elderly. Nevertheless, māyā or attachment is apparent throughout the stages (Nayar and Sandhu 2007, p. 108). Even for Hindus, the idea of renunciation is not simply and easily contrasted with immersion in social life (e.g., Madan 1991). Indeed, "techniques of detachment" are a means of "dealing with the world and the intensity of affections and attachments that extended living in the world entails" (Lamb 2000, p. 141).

The āśramadharma being a model for the heteropatriarchal male life course means that the reproductive capacities of women are an essential basis of the social system and thus are harnessed and constrained. At the same time, women are effectively beyond the system as marriage is the only life cycle rite of any consequence to a woman's life, in that it links her to the husband whose householding she will serve and whose retreat—in the classical sense, to the forest hermitage or ashram in vānaprastha—she will follow, should he so choose. Should the husband opt to renounce and become saṃnyāsī, his wife effectively becomes a widow. Good Hindu wives are kanyadān (virginal) upon marriage (Fruzzetti 1982; Malhotra 2002) and pativratā, (devotees of their husbands) thereafter (Leslie 1989; Malhotra 2002): servants, protectors, and conduits of their husbands' dharma (Nabar 1995), not to mention his honour (izzat), although this is a form of maya or illusion (Nayar 2010, p. 269). Hindu texts describe the duties of the pativratā, who was to be "like a slave when at work, a courtesan when making love, . . . a mother when serving food, and a counsellor when her husband was . . . distress[ed]" (Nabar 1995, p. 149). The idealized tradition of sati, the self-immolation of the wife upon her husband's death, reflected that she was a 'good woman', chaste, virtuous, devoted, and committed to the protection of her husband by making sacrifices on his behalf (Harlan 1994). Clearly, Hinduism sits within, if not emerges from, an explicitly heteropatriarchal and patrilineal milieu, and women—despite their importance to bhakti and other domestic rituals (e.g., Hancock 2000)—are socially positioned vis-à-vis their kin relations to men (fathers, husbands, and sons) at all stages of their lives, and ideally, at least in the religio-social sense, 'protected' by those men, often in ways which are culturally elaborated so as to subvert true protection, such as the gender paradigm of honour and shame and via traditions such as dowry. In addition to gender biases, the āśramadharma system articulates significant inequalities around caste and asserts these differences on both ritual practice and everyday life. Indeed, the fact that the system is often termed varṇāśramadharma emphasizes that caste is the overarching social and ritual construct of Hindu life (Uberoi 1996, p. 14). Of course, this social system constrains more than women and lower caste men, for it rigidly scripts a masculine, even hypermasculine, and exclusively heteronormative framework for gender, as well as ascribing

fixed caste roles at birth with which individuals may or may not identify and which moreover assert, by various violent means, casteist and racialized social hierarchies.

Amid this context, Sikhism proposed a 'conscious sociological model' (cf. Leaf 1972) for an intentional and utopian community of householders. In contrast to Hinduism, Sikhism "holds a definite and uniform position against the path of renunciation as a valid means to liberation" (Nayar and Sandhu 2007, p. 4). Ang 71 of the Guru Granth Sahib describes householding as one among several forms of (Hindu) practice, including renunciation, yet within this framework, it is ineffective. To become so, householding must be conjoined with renunciation. The renunciant householder is exalted in several passages from the Guru Granth Sahib: "Blessed is the Gurmukh, householder and renunciate. The Gurmukh knows the Lord's Value" (131); "Those who are attuned to the Naam, the Name of the Lord, remain detached forever. Even as householders, they lovingly attune themselves to the True Lord" (230); "Immersed in family life, the Lord's humble servant ever remains detached; he reflects upon the essence of spiritual wisdom" (599). Kamala Elizabeth Nayar and Jaswinder Singh Sandhu argue that Guru Nanak 'denounced' the traditional householder framework even as he employed the ascetic terminology of the Nath yogis, a Śaivite sect, to describe his vision of 'living in this world' as a new kind of householder (Nayar and Sandhu 2007, p. 6). Sikhs, by name, were to actively learn throughout life (rather than in a distinct first stage), living simultaneously amid worldliness and asceticism, and pursuing spiritual development in the midst of family and community life. (Even Sikh ascetics, to the extent that they exist among subgroups like the Nihangs, marry and participate in household affairs). Enlightenment was not to be mediated by priests as in Brahmanical and later forms of Hinduism nor sought outside of family life and society as among saṃnyāsīs, Buddhists, and Jains, but rather through disciplined engagement in the life of the world, and equally, the contemplative realization of its illusory nature. For Guru Nanak, detachment was best and truly practiced amidst the daily distractions and attachments of life, so that the ideal Sikh is what Nayar and Sandhu have called a 'socially involved renunciate' (Nayar and Sandhu 2007), or learning to become one, in the spirit of the meaning of Sikh as learner. J. P. S Uberoi on the other hand describes Sikh practice as 'the renunciation of renunciation', according to the following formulation: "Whereas (the Hindus) had sought to achieve emancipation and deliverance through individual renunciation and what amounted to social death, . . . the new Sikh community was called to affirm the normal social order as itself the battleground of freedom. . . . the Sikh initiation rites makes the positive theme of investiture prevail wholly over the negative theme of divestiture, and taking certain widely established customs of Hindu renunciation, emphatically inverts them" (Uberoi 1996, p. 11). Kesh or unshorn hair is an important example of this, as is the refusal of priestly (and caste-based) authority. The worldly engagement of householding thus also becomes privileged means to the realization of the divine for Sikhs. Thus, as Max Weber (Weber [1930] 2001) has so productively demonstrated of the Protestants, Sikhism too espouses the challenge of renunciation amid worldly realities.

For Guru Nanak, householding was both a means of personal spiritual realization and the moral means to social reform. The Guru Granth Sahib exhorts Sikhs, as gurmukhs, to "look upon all with the single eye of equality" for "in each and every heart, the Divine Light is contained" (598). At Kartarpur, radical praxes of equality in which everyone contributed to farming and everyone shared equally in its fruits placed the householder at the centre of a new society. Nanak wanted "the disciples who had gathered around him to continue to live differently" from the Hindus and Muslims around them (Madan 1986, p. 261). Life at Kartarpur was "a fellowship of men and women engaged in the ordinary occupations of life" (Nesbitt 2005, p. 23), but here in this consciously Sikh community, several key Sikh institutions—seva (voluntary social service), langar (community kitchen), and sangat (congregation)—were developed and helped to establish "the values of equality, fellowship and humility, and in affirming a new and dynamic sense of 'family'" (23) in which there was neither marked retreat nor renunciation. Moreover, in these praxes, "the neat horizontal divisions and vertical hierarchies of society were broken down" as "Guru Nanak brought to life a 'Sikh' consciousness" (Singh 2011, pp. 11–12).

In laying out this new socioreligious ideal and the means to attain it, Sikhism fulfills several of Anthony Wallace's (1956b) elements of the revitalization movement: it intends to construct a more satisfying culture through utopian reform of beliefs, ideals, and practices, and it is led by not one but ten charismatic leaders, and now the eternal guru as word. As well, according to Wallace's (1956a) principle of mazeway resynthesis, the development of Sikhism is both socially and individually therapeutic in its efforts to establish reform. The Sikh householder, whether amritdhari or not, adopts a set of values that support the establishment of a just society and is ideally engaged in a broad range of institutionalized social practices (such as vand chhakna, seva, langar, etc.) that enhance its equitable development. Sikh householding as a mutual embrace of quotidien and spiritual life is also echoed in the idea of sarbat da bhala or the wellbeing of all, and the later formulation of mīrī-pīrī, the refusal to distinguish between sacred and secular realms, and its figuration of the sant-sipahī or saint-soldier. The inseparability of the historical and worldly domains of life from its sacred dimensions assert Sikhism's lived ethics of social justice. In his reformulation of householding and social life, Guru Nanak urged Sikhs to pursue the detachments of spiritual ends in the midst of family, community, society, and sociality. And as they rejected the separation between worldly and ascetic life, the Guru's Sikhs rejected the binary and bounded distinctions between Hindus and Muslims, Brahmins and Sudras, women and men. Had Sikhs continued to live collectively in what some have called 'communes'—as at Kartarpur—immersed in the worldmaking potential of the utopia, it may well be that the genderless, casteless society might have been realized. However, the continuation of normative Punjabi kinship practices upon which everyday Sikh householding is based has ensured the continuation of caste and gender inequalities for femininities and masculinities, caste identities, and group formation are grounded in the household.

3. The Intersection of Gender and Caste

It goes without saying that householding depends on the ghar or household, which in India is an economic, social, and ritual unit with important domestic, familial, and moral meanings. Social relationships within and beyond the household depend primarily on kinship, a foundational aspect of human society. Collectively, kinship, family, and household map and pattern social relations and produce human societies via an assemblage of social, cultural and moral practices. In most societies, "relationships to ancestors and kin have been the key relationships in the social structure; they have been the pivots on which most interaction, most claims and obligations, most loyalties and sentiments, turned" (Fox 1967, p. 13). In short, kinship provides one's basic identity and orientation to the social world. Another important aspect of kinship is its power to allocate access to and control over economic resources. Feminist anthropologists have long drawn attention to the patriarchal nature of the social customs and norms around particular kinship roles that enable these processes, delimit women from economic agency, and render them dependents (e.g., Sacks [1979] 1982). Even in societies that are not overtly and binarily gendered, men tend to have public cultural roles, while women's natural reproductive capacities tend to confine them to the domestic realm (e.g., Ortner 1972; Rosaldo 1974). For instance, Doris Jakobsh (2003, pp. 7–18) elucidates that the history of Sikhism silences and negates women while at the same time holding them to unrealistic ideals, at times within a colonial project. Sikh historiography puts forward a few extraordinary women as emblematic illustrations of gender equality, resilencing and further negating ordinary women in the process. As if in illustration, Nikky Singh (2005, p. 102) writes forcefully of her belated realization that the five Ks, "intrinsically paradoxical and multivalent", were just as much feminine symbols as masculine.

Central to all of these concerns are arranged, endogamous marriages, which reproduce gender, caste, and power. Marriage and the reproduction of (male) heirs it facilitates are paramount concerns across South Asia (e.g., Dumont 1970; Mandelbaum 1970). This is no less the case for Sikhs, among whom the cultural imperative is that both women and men be married, ideally as arranged by their parents (Mooney 2011, p. 92). Within these marriages, women's social roles are still overwhelmingly circumscribed to those located in kinship and household (daughter, wife, mother, etc.). Wives reproduce culture, community, and the caste group through bearing and raising children, especially sons; embody

the community through chaste moral practice; and represent essentialized, sacralised, and feminized domesticity and interior modes of identity. Anjali Bagwe (1995) has proposed the telling phrase 'of woman caste' to suggest the separate and unified category of South Asian women subjects beyond the pale of all other social differences. And yet, matrimonial advertisements clearly articulate caste group identification, not to mention racial (e.g., 'wheatish complexion') and gendered stereotypes (e.g., 'innocent, issueless divorcee'). Even as love-cum-arranged marriages increasingly become the norm in India (Mooney 2011, p. 98) and the diaspora (Pande 2016, pp. 389–90), the fact that transnational marriage remains an important migration strategy (Mooney 2006) means that arranged marriages retain their force.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, most Sikhs continue to maintain caste endogamy, and to apply gendered cultural codes to their marital and family relations and within their everyday lives. North Indian gender practices broadly reflect the inferior social position of women. The feminist literature on South Asia demonstrates that a litany of gender issues accumulates around kinship, marriage, and family, as well as bodies, reproductive capabilities, and selves. These include patrilineality, patrilocality, hypergamy, dowry, son preference, sex selection/female infanticide/foeticide, levirate marriage, seclusion (purdah or ghund), socioeconomic subordination and dependency, disempowerment of women from rights over property, domestic abuse, and the paradoxical location of family, lineage, and caste status in the bodies of female kin, as reflected in the honour-shame paradigm. Presenting a list such as this risks essentializing gender practices and implying that all women are constrained and even victimized by them; my intention, rather, is to summarize and name those aspects of gender subordination that I have witnessed among or discussed with Sikh women in both my personal and professional life for the past quarter century. These practices are not Sikh-specific, and some of them are quite uncommon; moreover, many Sikh women live beyond these constraints. Nevertheless, all are still found in some measure in the Sikh community at large.

As this list suggests—cautions against gender universalism (Mohanty 1984) aside—India is an archetypal patriarchy. Men dominate socioeconomic relations and occupy most positions of power and authority, cultural norms and values are defined in relation to manhood, masculinity, and male dominance and control, and men are focal in most cultural spaces, and certainly those in the public realm. To varying degrees, and depending in considerable part on the organization of everyday household and kinship relations, women lack agency and rights to property, are discouraged from attempts to claim authority or exercise power, are subject to male (and proxy female) scrutiny, hegemony and sovereignty, and are held to different standards of conduct, while men compromise women's social, economic, political, and bodily autonomy in multiple ways. Women's submission to this gendered hierarchy is policed and negotiated, or misogynistically coerced, via various cultural means, and in instances when it is not secured, it may be forced through violent subjugations of non-consenting women's bodies. Patriarchy, indeed heteropatriarchy, also demands the submission of lower status men to its hierarchical structure, as seen in the everyday submissions of sons to fathers and younger brothers to older ones, but also men outside the heteronormative frame, as well as men of other groups, who are often subjugated via their female kin, as evidenced far too amply by intergroup rape, for instance, as evidenced at Partition (e.g., Butalia 2000; Menon and Bhasin 1998; Mooney 2008).

The heteropatriarchy is infused with, oriented against, and expressed through a discursive moral code oriented to the gendered values of honour and shame, which are mapped onto a purity-pollution framework and script a feudal model for retributive justice. While these concepts refer broadly to social status, symbolic capital and public reputation, typically of the patriline and by extension the caste group, they also have explicitly gendered and sexualized dimensions. Veena Das (1976) proposes that honour is the cultural principle—and moral code—that is applied to the natural mechanisms, or biological and sexual aspects, of Punjabi kinship. Significantly, honour is associated with men: izzat is the male register, conveying reputation, dignity, and respect(-ability), and connoting influence, power, and authority, whereas sharam, the female register, is literally translated as shame, but more accurately refers to its prevention via modesty, humility, and sexual propriety, in other words, by maintaining

purity as formulated and expected by men. When women are shameless, and even when they are not, they are called besharam (without shame), an epithet often used to regulate women's behaviour; while shameful behaviour is referred to as bezhti (without honour). (As an aside, it is interesting to consider that lower caste names are also used in dominating and perjorative ways). Jat Sikhs explain that 'a man's izzat is his women's sharam'. This epistemological containment of sharam, the concern of women, within izzat, the purview of men, evokes the containment of the domestic in the public (Rosaldo 1974), of the natural in the cultural (Ortner 1972), and of female lives and subjectivities in male ones. Women—mothers- and sisters-in-law being notorious here—themselves surveil and regulate other women's sharam so as to uphold (men's) izzat (Mooney 2010, 2011). At the same time, women are always guarded by male kin, with endogamous marriage transferring guardianship—along with body and progeny—from the paternal to the conjugal line; men always have authority over women (Chowdhry 2007, pp. 4–5). As part of this social contract, violations of male honour warrant retribution; this may take the form of "physical, mental, or emotional assault" (Virdi 2013, p. 111), and even, honour killing.

Although India has a diverse 'kinship map' (Karve 1993), Hindu kinship is "subtly equated" with and subsumes other forms of Indian kinship (Uberoi 1993, p. 39). In fact, there are many regional commonalities between Hindu and Sikh kinship in Punjab (and neighbouring states such as Haryana). The unreformed nature of Sikh kinship is illustrated in several ways in the course of Sikh history. It is often remarked that the gurus were Khatri and thus originated, married, and had children within a single caste community, and a twice-born one at that; as well, there are patrilineal connections among the later six gurus. Hew McLeod (1976, pp. 87–88) interpreted this in terms of the gurus' concern to reject caste as a vertical, but not a horizontal, principle of social organization. Meanwhile, Eleanor Nesbitt (2005, p. 21) speculates that Guru Nanak's name (and that of his older sister Nanaki) may reflect that they were born at their nanke (maternal parents' village). This tradition is rooted in ideas about pollution so as to prevent defilement of the patrilineal household into which the baby is born. Despite the Guru's defence of these natural and life-giving processes (Singh 2016, p. 612), the practice of giving birth at the nanke continues in India today. Village midwives (dais) were from those low caste communities now called Scheduled Caste or Dalit, who in addition to attending births were routinely called upon to perform female infanticide. This practice also continues, although it has been medicalized (Purewal 2010). Doris Jakobsh asserts that "a patriarchal value system was firmly established throughout the guru period, and by the end of the seventeenth century . . . [it gave] religious, symbolic, and ritual sanctioning to a specific gender hierarchy" (Jakobsh 2003, p. 238). Anshu Malhotra (2010, p. 98) argues that seventeenth century Khatris (the caste of all of the Gurus) and Bedis in particular (the patriline of Guru Nanak) encouraged female infanticide so as to limit their daughter's exposure to marriage to men from lower castes such as the Jats who were at the time adopting Sikhism in large numbers and thus to maintain Bedi "ritual superiority" over them. The hypergynous ideal was thus of greater importance to the Bedis than female lives. This example conjures what Srinivas (1956, 1989) would term Sanskritization (and Sheel (1999) calls Brahmanisation), the concern of twentieth century Hindu castes to demonstrate their greater ritual purity so as to secure changes (or in this case maintain distinctions) in how the group is perceived and classified. Moreover, reading between the lines of Malhotra's account, we see concern for not only caste boundaries but also izzat, that profound attachment to masculine identity, ego, and lineage.

All of these practices demonstrate the intersection of gender with caste. Indeed, kinship is the key site for the intersection of gender, class, race, ethnicity, and nation, as well as caste, and like all intersectional axes is a space of shifting and complex structures of power. Feminist scholars (e.g., Abu-Lughod 1991; Behar and Gordon 1996; Bridgman et al. 1999; Collins 1998; Kaplan and Grewal 1994; Kandiyoti 1991; Narayan 1993; Ortner and Whitehead 1981; Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989) have variously described how gender is embedded in complex webs of relationships and differential power, drawing attention to forms and systems of social and cultural difference—gender, race, class, language, religion, ethnicity, and so on—as mutually constituted,

and to the ways in which they overlap, converge, and amplify each others' effects in producing identity, marginality, privilege, dominance, and discrimination. Social life is constructed and shaped by the borderzones in which frameworks, structures, systems, and experiences of identity, power, and oppression meet, make space for, refuse to accommodate, or subjugate difference. The intersectionality approach recognizes that race (which we might read here as caste), class, and other forms of inequality are entangled with and compound those of gender (as well as sex and sexuality), etcetera, so as to produce a 'matrix of oppression' (Collins 2000). Associated with third wave feminism and critical race theory, intersectionality was proposed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) in response to the white middle-class homogeneity of second wave feminism (although both are being challenged in the nascent fourth wave). The intersectional approach attends to multiple aspects of lived culture, multiple social locations, and multiple axes of both identity and oppression. In this, intersectionality in some ways eclipses earlier feminists' focus on patriarchy (Patil 2013), as it suggests that women's oppressions result from more than gender. Nevertheless, intersectionality critiques can be productively applied to understanding the complex but clear relationships between gender and caste.

To a considerable extent, ideas about what constitute equality and inequality are products of their times. Feminism "perennially . . . [contends with] . . . the important question of what it means to be a woman under different historical circumstances" (Brah and Phoenix 2004, p. 74). Before the advent of academic feminism, which has considerably addressed gender bias, writers were likely to read the Guru's egalitarianism primarily through the caste lens, so that gender inequality was a byline. This is in keeping with Padma Velaskar's argument that "caste and class studies have a strong masculinist sub-text" that both ignores women's voices and constitutes women as "gateways to caste" via their reproductive roles and a purity lens (Velaskar 2016, p. 391), suggesting that caste studies are ripe for feminist readings. The oppressions of gender find parallels and agglomerations in the oppressions of caste. Much like gender is arguably a key trait of South Asian society, Nicholas Dirks states that "caste has become a central symbol for India, indexing it as fundamentally different from other places as well as expressing its essence" (Dirks 2001, p. 3). Yet it cannot be taken as "a single term capable of expressing, organizing, and above all 'systematizing' India's diverse forms of social identity, community, and organization" (Dirks 2001, p. 5). Rather than the immemorial and immutable ideology of perfect social order (e.g., Dumont 1970) that orientalist texts might describe (Appadurai 1986), caste is viewed today as shifting and contextual (Raheja 1988), diverse and situated (Gorringe et al. 2017), and evoking the idea of "multiple hierarchies" (Gupta 2005, p. 424).

Thus, the term 'caste' is a vastly simplistic gloss on the complex and perhaps so wide-ranging as to be almost all-encompassing social phenomena it attempts to render into English. A colonial mistranslation of the Portuguese casta (for breed, race, or type), the English word caste—which is of course used in elite discourse in India—must render almost every nuanced aspect of Indian social relations. Little surprise that it has come to be so emblematic and essential, despite being a clumsy universalizing framework for the subtleties and intricacies of local socialities. In its Indian iterations, caste entails a far more particular—although still overlapping—range of social forms. These include varna, a ritual, social, and racialized ranking based in Brahminical Hindu ideals of hierarchy and purity; varna is 'caste writ large' (and sometimes rendered as 'class' by Indian scholars). Another aspect of caste is jāti (Punjabi: zāt), a hereditary category that traditionally denotes occupation and ascribed social role; this is 'subcaste'. Jāti determines one's position within the jajmāni system of patron-client relations, the rural socioeconomic framework that organizes caste in relation to the—now diminishing (Srinivas 2003)—feudal or peasant economy. Still other aspects of the ascribed nature of caste are the kinship categories gotra (or clan, and thus surname), and biraderi (variously lineage, fraternal relations, and community). Ronald Inden observes that "the ideal, Brahmanical scheme of four varnas or classes is ever at odds, empirically and historically, with the multiplicity of jātis, castes and subcastes, and there are always discrepancies between caste rules and actual behaviour" (1986, p. 428). Here, we see the logic of McLeod's (1976) suggestion that the vertical (varna, jāti) and horizontal (gotra, biraderi)

principles of caste must be differentiated, as he argues they were by the gurus. Yet the conundrum remains, for the horizontal organization of kinship relations supports caste's vertical differentiation.

Caste references a complex organizational framework of 'traditional' social relations, both inter- and intra-group, with regard to daily social relations as expressed in commensality, marriage, inheritance, and other kinship practices (including jāti endogamy and gotra and biraderi exogamy), as well as notions of ritual and racialized purity, ideas about rank, hierarchy, and status, and understandings of community. Originally manifest in the village context, today these aspects of caste have global reach. Subcaste, clan, and lineage are the most salient aspects of the caste system among Sikhs today, for these regulate everyday social obligations and alliances, determine the possibility of creating affinal relationships within arranged marriages, and express the importance of patriarchy to sociality, reiterating the ways in which caste is closely mapped onto gender. Since there is relatively little attention to varna among Sikhs, it is worth considering whether this might be read as evidence of Guru Nanak's successful eradication of caste, at least in the vertical register, even as jāti, gotra and biraderi awareness continue. More critically, while caste performs numerous functions of social organization, including group formation and identity, it also expresses a racialized system of comparative power relations in which Dalits are subaltern. Since, like gender, caste is an ascribed social category embedded within everyday life, these marginalities are difficult to avoid and indeed become normalized and hegemonic. Caste groups construct themselves such that "caste comes to be viewed, narrated, embodied, and performed by social actors simply as pre-existing 'natural' cultural difference or identity" (Natrajan 2012, p. 5) rather than as highly structured and antagonistic power relations.

In his village fieldwork in the early 1970s, Paul Hershman (1981) observed that the "essentials of the Hindu caste system" remained prevalent in Sikh society, and despite the routine proposition that urbanization diminishes caste practices, I found considerable caste awareness in my fieldwork among urban Sikhs twenty-five years later; indeed, while I had planned to document the incidence of intercaste marriages for my doctoral dissertation, the Jat Sikhs I met insisted that they had never engaged in such practices. Rather than dying out, caste has adapted itself to contemporary sociopolitical regimes, arguably evolving from the basis of village social relations as apparent in "endogamy, heredity, and relative rank" (Reddy 2005, p. 548) to a forceful and entrenched political concept. There is certainly evidence that it has become the racialized and ethnicized basis of contemporary local, regional, national, and even transnational politics, and particularly so after the Mandal reforms (e.g., Gupta 2000, 2004, 2005; Jodhka 2012, 2014, 2015; Judge 2014; Srinivas 1959, 1987, 1996, 2003). Even in the diaspora, caste remains a deeply emotive and controversial practice, although some Sikhs are unwilling to admit its tenure (Takhar 2018). All of this suggests that caste still has considerable social force and impact.

These politicizations of caste, for the most part read in non-feminist terms, nonetheless reiterate its dependence on kinship and gender—including the honour and purity nexus—to maintain group identity (even as they may erase women). As well, the existence of dominant castes such as Jat Sikhs poses additional paradoxes for Sikh equality. According to Srinivas (1956, 1987), the dominant caste refers to those groups with low positions within the classical varna scheme, typically Shudras with traditional manual occupations in farming and as labourers, who are able to claim and assert social privileges and power owing to their demographic and socioeconomic preponderance—and as is readily apparent in the Jat case, their control of land as a key economic resource. Little surprise, then, that the incidence of landowning and independent cultivation among Punjab's scheduled castes is among the lowest in India (Jodhka 2002). A whole assemblage of everyday custom and popular culture coalesces around Jat dominance, privilege, and castecentrism in Punjabi village society (Mooney 2013b). At the same time, there is something of a narcissm of small differences or perhaps more accurately a status inferiority complex in the Jat claim to dominance, which emerges—highly aware of the Jats' original status in the varna formulation—from considerable and proliferating marginalities under post-coloniality and globalization. It is problematic to assert in this context (although I do elsewhere) that the particular losses and anxieties of Jats over the past three-quarters of a century—around Partition, the Green Revolution, 1984, migration, Hindutva, and so forth—are likely to amplify assertions of

dominance, including over women and other castes, as these slights and traumas are read as assaults on the masculine Jat body, which, emasculated, retaliates in hypermasculine ways. As this point suggests, it is worth noting that the practices, performances, and meanings of caste patriarchy were solidified in the colonial encounter. For instance, hypermasculinity responds in part to British constructions of Indian men as feminized, and at the same time was actively channeled for some communities such as Jat Sikhs via the martial race framework as part of the calculus of colonial rule (Mooney 2013a). Meanwhile, Anshu Malhotra has suggested that the very idea that Sikhism is an egalitarian religion may have been propagated by the British (2010), and, it is well worth acknowledging that the social virtues today attributed to the Gurus may be anachronistic. It is also provocative to consider the possibility that caste in diaspora may be evolving into an ethnic frame in response to the emergence of multiculturalism (as touched upon by Takhar 2018, p. 304). All of this points to the complexities of yet other intersections—femininities and masculinities, tradition and modernity, colonizer and colonized, roots and routes, (and so on)—themselves complexly infracted through historical processes such as colonization, migration, the emergence of Hindu nationalism (and so forth). These are matters for future consideration. And yet the point remains: if Sikhi had truly transformed Sikh society, would the very construct Jat Sikh exist?

4. Householding and Equality, Revisited

This paper has described gender and caste as mutually related aspects of Sikh society that have as yet been elided from the Guru's egalitarian reforms. Guru Nanak proposed an idea of householding radically different – at least in its' emphases and goals - from the version evident in most contemporary Sikh households. As I have demonstrated, the Hindu construct of householding offers the possibility of social equality and spiritual liberation only to renunciant males from the upper twice-born castes, while Sikhism theoretically offers these possibilities to every Sikh regardless of caste or gender in every stage of the life course. Surinder Jodhka (2016) has noted that, on the whole, caste is different and more muted among Sikhs than Hindus. This would seem to imply that partial social reform of the caste hierarchy was indeed actualized as Sikhism became established. And yet, I have described how heteropatriarchal concerns with purity, honour, socioeconomic prowess, and group identity which link women's bodies and lives with masculine caste status and identity still circulate across both communities, producing inequalities of resources, status, privilege, influence, authority, and power.

Sangeeta Luthra has written that Sikh women's issues—like Sikh men's—are "existential threats" to the community demanding "parity between women and men" (Luthra 2018, p. 324). The problem of casteism that intersects gender subordination and oppression echoes this and also urgently demands resolution. I have located the prevailing inequalities of caste and gender in the ongoing kinship practices that Sikhism theologically and ideologically opposes. Given that gender and caste inequalities jointly underlie and emerge from the kinship system, the fundamental basis of human society, they perhaps are likely to persist for some time to come. Yet the signs are not all bleak. The intersectional approach does not privilege either gender or caste as the foundational basis of social discrimination for the premise of intersectionality theory is that forms of oppression augment each other rather than compete. Hence, since gender and caste are enmeshed phenomena, their eradication would seem to depend on mutually conjugated efforts. Opinderjit Takhar has recently described mobilizations around caste discrimination in Britain, noting that "mixed caste marriages are becoming more acceptable in the British Sikh community" (Takhar 2018, p. 304). Similarly, ongoing gender inequalities have recently materialized resistance in the form of challenges around gurdwara seva (Jakobsh and Walton-Roberts 2016; Singh 2011, p. 118). Meanwhile millennial Sikh activists employ new forms of "creative agency in translating Sikh tradition and identity through and across the contexts they inhabit" (Luthra 2018, p. 283) to engage not only Sikh issues but global ones (Mooney 2018). Luthra describes a "rapidly expanding Sikh American civil society" that enables "new social spaces, networks, and forms of expression for all Sikhs" that hope to establish "a Sikh praxis of equality for all" (Luthra 2017, p. 326). As well, as noted at the outset, there are

other, more specific modes of Sikhi, unexplored here, that may already offer greater equality (or at least a greater tolerance of at least some forms of difference).

Sikhi's resistant and emancipatory egalitarianism rejects the very premise of social inequality based on caste and other distinctions such as gender and religion. At the same time, to state that Sikhism is egalitarian is perhaps effectively to claim that caste and gender inequalities do not exist, or at least are not meaningful, for there is no conceptual space for them, and they are silenced, which also means they cannot be addressed. Thus, the demonstrated persistence of these inequalities potentially produces a cognitive dissonance reliant upon the separation of religion from culture. In opening this paper, I noted that Sikh youth today still grapple with the "shameful continuities" (Malhotra 2010) of gender and caste. Often, they attribute these difficulties to their culture rather than their religion. In doing so, they are following a learned cultural script that locates unequal thinking and practice in an unevolved and even debased regional culture that they share with Hindus (and Muslims) rather than in the surely perfected and exalted religion that Guru Nanak initiated and they have learned to revere. At times, their regard for Sikhi is such that I too want to be convinced by their argument that culture rather than religion is to blame for these ongoing issues. It would be ideal to separate these two fields, but they are deeply intertwined, much as are gender and caste.

In this paper, I have explored the idea that the intersection of cultural and religious practices in the creation of a new Sikh society may, inadvertently and unintentionally, have left a religious space in the commitment to householding—which is, in its Hindu antecedents, the fundamental location of caste and gender—for the continuation of these unequal practices. Gurdwaras (despite being among the most private of public places) for the most part remain predominantly male spaces while caste-based gurdwaras are a detrimental diasporic norm. This being the case, contemporary programs aiming to reform gender (and caste) discrimination from within religious structures and institutions, while surely necessary and welcome forms of "consciousness raising" (Jakobsh 2016, p. 601), may yet be inadequate to fully realize a genderless and casteless Sikh social order. At the same time, to seek to resolve inequities through rights-based legal channels within a secular context seems to divorce caste and gender from religion, negate the ethos of mīrī-pīrī, and potentially rupture the possibility that Sikhs might "live out the emancipatory praxis birthed by their guru" (Singh 2005, p. xi). Here, we return yet again to the problematic intersection of religion and society: "Nanak's thought . . . was marked by comprehensiveness and consistency: its theology entailed its sociology, or, . . . its sociology is incomprehensible without reference to its theology" (Madan 1986, p. 260). While doctrine and practice remain at odds, or are described by Sikhs as being so, Guru Nanak's vision remains a deeply inspiring, but as yet elusive, utopia.

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