

The Security State and Securitizing Patriarchies in Postcolonial India

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The period of the 1980s and 1990s was a time of insurgency and state counterinsurgency in Indian Punjab, though it was by no means the only challenge to the Indian state since its independence in 1947. Conflicts inside the country as well as on the borders emerged in the Northeast and Kashmir as well as in regions such as Chhattisgarh, where Maoist movements erupted to fight the Indian state. The borders of the postcolonial state, as well as some of its interior regions, continue to challenge the state as a stable entity.¹ Similar to other regions of Africa and the Middle East that have been created by colonial boundary making and partitioning, the project of national security in India has led to border conflicts, animosities, and anxieties that have come to characterize the postcolonial state. These anxieties have meant that state repression—policing, militarizing, and securitizing—continue to be used to hold together people as a nation whose territorial boundary was imposed from the outside and by outsiders. Punjab is one example in India whose geography reveals the violence of the postcolonial state as it struggled to produce a nation through its repression of insurgencies that unsettled the partitioned subcontinent.

The case of Punjab suggests that the specificity of securitization in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and the Caribbean emerges from a colonial history, and a colonial legacy of policing and law and order deployed for state repression in the ongoing project to make a nation-state out of colonial partitioning. Adding to that historical legacy of imperialism, the pressures of ongoing and contemporary geopolitics also inform security regimes in neoimperial ways, especially through the US-produced “global war on terror.” In such security projects, constructions of gender that emerge from colonialism are in constant deployment, recruiting commu-

nities and families into the colonial and postcolonial state through both biopolitical and necropolitical futures.

Even as other border uprisings continue in Kashmir and India's Northeast, the conflict in Punjab is, by all accounts, perceived as a "success" for the Indian state against the Sikh insurgency. Over the following decades, the "Punjab Solution" has provided a blueprint for counterinsurgency operations elsewhere.² Despite this claim of success, scholarly debates about the impacts of the insurgency and the counterinsurgency continue into the present.³ The insurgent movement that erupted in Punjab, similarly, continues as aspirational for some groups (even outside the region), but also serves as reason for continued security presence in the region due to concerns by the Indian state that "militancy" or "terrorism" may rise up again. Moreover, the global war on terror, a project of the United States as it emerged over the last two decades, reanimates concern over "terrorists," as Sikh insurgents came to be labeled by the state. The constant threat of labeling dissident groups as terrorists has become the defining aspect of contemporary security states. In the process, South Asian regional politics, especially the relations with Pakistan and Afghanistan, have been entangled in the geopolitics of this global war, leading to continued military clashes and territorial disputes with Pakistan, and more recently, China.

The emergence of Sikh nationalism (often termed "ethno-nationalism") led by Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale in the late 1970s was built on economic and religious grievances that began in the colonial period and continued after independence. Negotiations among British and Indian nationalist leaders in the 1940s led to the division of Punjab between India and Pakistan, setting the stage for the traumatic and bloody event of Partition that inaugurated the new nation. Decades later, the insurgency of Punjab in the 1980s was suppressed by the central government through the use of militarized forces, the creation of antiterrorist laws such as the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA) of 1987, and the deployment of brutal police violence against the Sikh community. Some estimate that twenty-five thousand people were killed, many at the hands of security forces.⁴ Nearly three decades later, while Kashmir, the Northeast, and the Maoist "Red Corridor" are seen as spaces of state violence and unrest, Punjab is believed to be at peace because of a successful counterinsurgency. Yet these narratives of "peace" or "success" do not account for the ongoing gendered, political, and economic violence in Punjab.⁵ Sikh nationalist aspirations remain ongoing among some groups (and especially in diasporic spaces), while the state's economy, mainly rural, remains in shambles, and its youth are leaving the region.⁶ The lack of jobs and employment has led to migrations abroad and to shifting geographies of urban and rural life in Punjab.⁷

This article examines postcolonial violence through a gendered approach—that is, through understanding impacts on and shifts in patriarchies and masculinities that have continuities across the colonial and postcolonial state. We draw on semistructured interviews from fieldwork in Punjab across three summers between 2016 and 2018, textual analysis of primary sources, human rights reports, and news articles to explore religious reform and the paternalistic masculinities of key political actors: Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale (the leader of the insurgency), K. P. S. Gill (the police chief), and Beant Singh (chief minister from 1992 to 1995). While there is now a great deal of scholarship on the period of the 1980s in Punjab, especially on emerging Sikh nationalisms,⁸ few studies have examined the effects of gendered violence from this period of insurgency. Research by Rainuka Dagar does address this gap, but it focuses predominantly on the experiences of women, whereas our focus is to examine the structures of patriarchy and masculinity that are also central to research on gender.⁹ Specifically, we argue that the regimes of precolonial and colonial militarism, which constructed hegemonic notions of Sikh masculinity in service to the colonial and postcolonial state, were altered in this period, and a dominant caste-based warrior masculinity came to be fractured to include a more securitized version. Our research reveals that hegemonic Sikh masculinities were altered but remained powerful during this time as the patriarchal state and patriarchal communities both relied on violence for their own ends. We see the targeting of Sikhs, a religious minority and a border community, as part of the broader process of postcolonial nation making through militarism and security that alters the nature of its patriarchy, and we reveal that such masculinities are central to emerging practices of security across state and society.¹⁰ While this article focuses on masculinities and patriarchies, we note that the overwhelming contest between state and insurgent patriarchies leaves many others—especially women and those of other genders and castes—in the region to suffer the violence, one that people do not easily forget.¹¹

Over the span of a decade in Punjab, the Indian Army, paramilitary forces, and state police carried out a combination of “cordon and search” operations, arrests, and abductions with impunity using special counter-insurgency laws which targeted any identifiable male Sikhs. Jats, one of the most powerful castes in Punjab due to their ownership of land and property and control of Sikh religious institutions, were particularly targeted, especially those in rural areas. The accused were implicated in false cases, subjected to torture, sexual harassment, and assault, or forcefully disappeared, extrajudicially executed, and illegally cremated with impunity.¹² Furthermore, the insurgency itself recuperated a history of patriarchal nationalism, religious reform, and mostly male figures of religious authority in order to gain power in the region. The confluence of multiple

sedimented and emergent masculinities and patriarchies (of the postcolonial Indian state and within the region) produced forms of gender and power that fueled the insurgency as well as the counterinsurgency, leading to economic, political, and social changes in the region that continue to resonate into the present.

Patriarchy and the Colonial and Postcolonial State

Feminist scholars such as Urvashi Butalia and Veena Das have underscored the founding moment of independence as based on patriarchal logics that undergirded some of the violence of Partition.¹³ If we understand patriarchy as a form of structural violence built into the Indian state from its founding moments, we need to also examine how it shifts and changes over time,¹⁴ and interrogate the intimacy between state and community patriarchies. Because state structures are also cultural formations, they are difficult to hold accountable precisely because they are embedded within particular cultures and are not alien to them.

Punjab has been seen as a region characterized by patriarchy, one that is based on caste and property. Punjabi patriarchy and masculinity have long been hypervisible as a stereotype and historical formation produced through religion, class, and caste. What one might call a masculinist overdetermination is central to these narratives of Sikh identity and communalism. For many scholars and politicians in both India and outside, the male turban-wearing Sikh represents the community,¹⁵ an image that has limitations because of the plural history of the region.¹⁶ Within India, that figure is the target of jokes as much as it is seen as a threat in the West. The emergence of Jats as the dominant caste group further emphasizes a particular version of masculinity that endures to this day in popular culture in the region and elsewhere.¹⁷

Punjab's precolonial history as a region of war, religious transformation, and struggle, and the powerful Sikh kingdom of Ranjit Singh as able to withstand British power, all combined to produce a martial tradition that became useful to British control of the subcontinent.¹⁸ The colonial state built on this history, constructing Sikh men (of the Jat caste and from rural areas in particular) as good soldiers and warriors who were inducted in large numbers into the British army, producing a notion of the "martial caste" and "martial races."¹⁹ Through this process, Sikhs, mostly of the Jat caste, were recast in masculine archetype as hardy, warlike, enduring, and loyal. In an attempt to continue recruiting from the community, the colonial state permitted the possession of religious swords (*kirpans*) among Sikhs (figured as men) in the military, and relied on their turbans and beards as signs of warrior masculinity. At the same time, as Sikhs became visible in both the colonial state and in anticolonial resistance, the

same markers of martial status also became symbols of anticolonial resistance.²⁰ Sikh men remained visible as soldiers in the first few decades after independence, becoming nationally visible as embodiments of Otherness, protection, and threat.²¹ Within the Sikh community, Jats constituted the dominant caste patriarchy in the region, their visibility and power—in politics and as the majority of rural landowners in a predominantly agricultural state—often erasing the presence of Punjabi women, and its religious and caste heterogeneity.

During the period of insurgency, these militarized masculinities were transformed and split in close relation to the masculinity of the state. First, Sikh males were transformed from the warrior protecting the nation and community into the figure of the terrorist and the extremist. According to Steven Wilkinson, three districts in Punjab's Majha region where much of the insurgent violence was concentrated during the conflict—Amritsar, Tarn Taran, and Gurdaspur—were also the three most heavily recruited army districts in India, with more than one hundred thousand army veterans and thousands more serving army *javans* (junior soldiers) and officers even today.²² Such a history reveals the overlap between the state-sponsored militarized masculinity and the masculinity of the insurgency.

Second, this same masculinity became securitized as Sikh men in the police force were asked by the state to carry out a counterinsurgency against others in their religious and caste community.²³ Since the very beginning of the counterinsurgency campaign, Sikh males have been at its helm as much as they have also been leaders in the insurgency. The Indian Army's June 1984 attack (code-named Operation Blue Star by the state) on Sikhism's most revered place of worship²⁴ and its subsequent targeting of rural Sikh youth in their homes in the countryside (code-named Operation Woodrose), created a rupture between the Sikhs and the Indian Army's disproportionate use of force, which further fueled insurgent sympathies among the local population.²⁵ Two of the generals leading Operation Blue Star²⁶ and the president of India, Zail Singh, as well as their prime target, the leader of the insurgency, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, were Sikh males, mostly from the Jat caste,²⁷ as was the police chief, K. P. S. Gill. Army units with high Sikh representation were used for visible public works projects along the volatile border belt, and Punjab police commandos were encouraged to keep visible symbols of Sikhism (such as a beard and a neatly tied headdress).²⁸ In an attempt to improve the resonance and acceptance of the Army and police within Punjab's rural Sikh community, a securitized construction of Sikh masculinity was enabled by the state in order to control the region.²⁹

A third version of masculinity is of the paternal and protective patriarchs, who became victims of the state, as did a religious and reformist

masculinity. The former masculinity was transformed into the patriarchal keeper of religious tradition, while the latter became the subject of a new piety and the enemy of the state. Religiously observant or locally powerful masculinities became seen as terrorists and enemies of the state. Such differences were not just in the realm of theology or ideology, but also visible in sartorial performance: the military and police style of tying up beards neatly and turbans in somber shades, and wearing uniforms comprising pants and shirts, was quite distinct from the insurgency's bright yellow turbans and flowing kurtas. Such differences were most visible between the two powerful male figures around whom this masculinist conflict revolved, where Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale emerged as the insurgent reformer, while K. P. S. Gill was celebrated for "stamping out terrorism."³⁰

Religious Reform and Paternal Masculinities: Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale

Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, head of the orthodox Sikh religious school Damdami Taksal, became the key figure in the Khalistan (Sikh separatist) movement. His masculinity was performed in religious terms through the charismatic authority of "*babas*," the holy man or the spiritual leader of a religious sect who sits in his particular site within the "*deras*" (sectarian religious communities).³¹ Bhindranwale combined his nationalism with a longer tradition of the "*baba*" and the moral reform of religion that first emerged in early twentieth-century India within Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh reform movements.³² His image was of a tall man, youthfully dressed in white robe with a blue turban and flowing beard, and his speeches circulated powerfully, especially in the form of cassette tapes that could be found across Punjab and its diasporas.³³ He spoke in a language that refracted religious history through contemporary politics (and economic issues) to produce a nationalism that resonated with many in the rural areas who were tired of the corruption of politicians and government policies and were concerned with what they saw as the central government's discriminatory treatment of agricultural issues in Punjab. His speeches referenced Sikhs as a rural, unified, and masculine community, but one that needed reform and purification to become "true" Sikhs. Both these formations—the religious reformer and the spiritual leader—reproduced masculinities emerging from both Sikh history and the colonial and post-colonial state that entrenched male power within an ongoing politics of state power and negotiations with the central government.

While his following did not extend to all Sikhs or across all castes of Sikhs, the state counterinsurgency and government actions (particularly the Indian military attack on Sikhs' holiest religious site, the Golden Temple) created sympathy for Bhindranwale in rural areas of Punjab and in

diasporic spaces that emerged variously in Europe and North America.³⁴ To this day, his memory remains alive among certain segments of the Sikh community in Punjab and its diasporas, visible in photographs, T-shirts, calendars, and other such popular items in the “bazaar economy,” and as commodities and icons.³⁵ His iconicity extends to making ethnic identity in North America and political campaigns in Punjab, as well as social and national aspirations for diasporic and Punjab-based groups across the world. In Punjab he is remembered by both Hindus and Sikhs—especially rural, small-town, and middle-class women—more for his respectability and reformist politics than for his nationalist aspirations.³⁶ Bhindranwale, like his fellow “*sants*” (saints), could not expand his following across all castes and communities, even among Sikhs.³⁷ The plural history of Punjab³⁸ could not easily be attached to his version of Sikh nationalism, even as his image and memory proliferates as it is used by political parties to gain votes.

We saw this understanding of Bhindranwale in our ethnographic research.³⁹ In another article, we address the language that women use to describe Bhindranwale and his followers’ approaches to the conflict.⁴⁰ What is important to note is that while the media and popular culture used terms like *atankvadi* or *Attvadi* (one who creates terror) to refer to Bhindranwale, our informants used terms such as *kharku* (one who creates disturbance), but they did not always use them pejoratively. Women also used the term *baba* (holy man, or spiritual leader) because Bhindranwale was seen to be a holy man with religious authority. Thus, our interlocutors referred to these men as *babas*, while the state termed them terrorists or criminals. Women saw Sikh men as targets of the state even as they remembered and valued the history of reform that Bhindranwale brought—a memory that is shared among many Sikh, Hindu, and Dalit religious communities. Many mourned the loss of sons, fathers, and male relatives killed or imprisoned, or those who had migrated. However, they also recalled, with approval, the kinds of moral reform and politics of purity that the insurgency promised: simple marriages without dowry, attire that did not require the consumption that marked the present, abstention from alcohol and drugs, devotion to prayer, and purification of religious practice.

These moral structures have long been used by various religious leaders in religious reform movements since the twentieth century, and “*babas*” and “*deras*” use these ideals to enlist and discipline followers. Gender respectability was remembered with nostalgia by our informants who recalled when women wore modest dress and exhibited modest behavior.⁴¹ Importantly, even as many had remembered that Bhindranwale’s movement had helped women by regulating male consumption of alcohol and drugs, they also remembered that women were disciplined, often in vio-

lent ways, rendering them vulnerable to sexual assault by insurgents and other groups who took on the mantle of Bhindranwale, as well as by the police.⁴² These religious reforms, whether understood by our interlocutors as nostalgic or as disciplining, were constitutive of Bhindranwale's paternalism, which brought together religious reform with a nationalist and revolutionary masculinity.

Shifting Masculinities: K. P. S. Gill and the Production of Security Expertise

There is irony in the fact that, as political scientist Jugdep Chima points out, the same honorific of *baba* used for the insurgent leader, Bhindranwale, was also used by subordinates to refer to both police chief, K. P. S. Gill, and the chief minister of Punjab at the time, Beant Singh.⁴³ This was a deliberate effort by the state to reappropriate insurgent symbols, local identities, loyalties, and respect. Gill worked to co-opt both Sikh and Bhindranwale's cultural symbols and motifs across the security apparatus, presenting himself as a better representative of the Sikh community. This kind of mirroring of patriarchy and power produced contestations between insurgency and counterinsurgency, and between a patriarchal reformist movement for Sikh nationalism and the patriarchal state. Yet both relied on violence and masculinity to control the population.

K. P. S. Gill, who came to call himself a "security expert," is celebrated even decades later across India for "stamping out terrorism."⁴⁴ Taking sole credit for ending the insurgency in Punjab, he fashioned himself as an antiterrorism and security expert and authority figure, even as he enacted and embodied a violent masculinity in responding to security challenges with characteristic repression. He became something of a complicated figure, appreciated by the government for what he did in Punjab, but seen as a sexual harasser as well because of a famous charge brought against him by a high-ranking civil servant for assaulting her at a party.⁴⁵ He was represented as both the uncouth Jat and a "supercop" (a sobriquet used in the Indian news media). Many in the Sikh community vilified him, though not as much for the sexual scandal, but for his violent tactics of policing.⁴⁶ He had served for over two decades in Assam, another border region of unrest, where, as inspector general of police, he became well known for his use of counterinsurgent violence that some Indian journalists praised by calling it "no-nonsense."⁴⁷ At the end of his career, he returned to Assam as a "security adviser," a position that rankled many in the region who had been critical of his tactics.⁴⁸ During the insurgency of the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, the Sri Lankan government used him as a "security adviser," as did Narendra Modi in Gujarat after the pogrom of the Muslims in 2002. After the "success" in Punjab, oth-

ers in the fields of security came to call his counterinsurgency tactics the “Gill Doctrine.”⁴⁹ While this honorific was considered a testament to his contributions to the police force, the doctrine itself is far from his individual invention; instead, Gill is both a beneficiary as well as a product of the security regime, one that became central to the postcolonial security state trying to maintain its colonially endowed territory. Securitized responses to internal threats, that focus on raw state coercion and the co-optation of minority identities and of border communities, have emerged from the history of the colonial and the counterinsurgent state⁵⁰ and continue to be widely deployed across the South Asian subcontinent.⁵¹

At the height of the state’s counterinsurgency campaign in 1992, Gill’s tenure as the director general of police was supplemented by Beant Singh’s election as chief minister. Singh was a rural politician who had moved up the ranks and publicly ordered his local political appointees to not interfere with police operations. Gill incorporated the historical and militaristic representation of Sikh warrior masculinity into the police, while remaining a favorite guest of the members of the English press.⁵² Together, Gill and Singh created a public image of law and order that was designed to resonate with a large section of the rural and urban Sikh community and matched well with the dominant political culture of rural Punjab. Chima notes that governmental and administrative officers regularly complained that they felt subservient to the police, but these complaints fell on deaf ears as long as a staunchly loyal Beant Singh was in power.⁵³

Gill’s masculinity, in service of the nation, turned Punjab not only into a target of police or military operations, but into what was widely termed a “hot spot” of terrorism—enabling a securitizing of Punjab through a mode of control over particular spaces that we now see in many other parts of India and the world. As an important member of the Jat Sikh community, he had kinship and government networks that hailed him in diverse ways: as the face of a repressive state in border regions, he was seen as the rescuer of the state and the nation. However, importantly, he moved from a policeman, in police institutions that were little changed from its colonial “public order” rule⁵⁴ to a more recent version: the security expert who was now transforming policing into a securitizing force. He claimed that he was securitizing the region through better information gathering and networking, while opposing the power of other elite civil servants, recalcitrant politicians, or preceding police chiefs. In sum, his argument was that democratically elected representatives and elite bureaucrats (which had continuities with colonial civil service) could not be allowed to interfere in the security project.

This shift to a powerful male security expert is visible in his writings. In an article entitled “Endgame in Punjab: 1988–1993,” Gill writes of the changes that he brought (and takes credit for) to the police to fight

what he calls “terrorism” in Punjab. He writes, “The movement for the creation of Khalistan was one of the most virulent terrorist campaigns in the world.”⁵⁵ Rather than political solutions that he views as an “appeasement of terrorists,” he claims he did something new and radical, creating “counter-terrorist and counter-insurgency operations in Punjab that also challenged established traditions of response to situations of extreme and widespread militancy.” He goes on to claim that rather than using armed violence, he used new security methods, asserting that the “defeat of terrorism” was “unambiguously the result of the counter-terrorist measures implemented in the state by the security forces.”⁵⁶ These include replacing older weapons with more military style weapons for the police; increasing the size of the police force from twenty-five thousand men to sixty thousand; creating greater integration and coordination between the army and the police; and collecting, analyzing, and sharing information across these forces. From the localized practices of the police, he claims that he created a shift toward an information network of security forces—a more network-centric approach. Thus, Gill states that “successful counter-terrorist are based on accurate and detailed intelligence on terrorist networks and activities,” in which even the local police station needs to become incorporated into the security framework. Each police station, he writes, is identified and categorized, a “village-wise analysis” is carried out to understand their relationship with insurgents, patterns are found pertaining to sources and flows of weapons, and intelligence is found by interrogation and infiltration. Gill states that he created “a large body of corroborated data based on surveillance operations, informers, interrogations and the progressive infiltration of many of the terrorist gangs.” He continues by claiming that by “early 1989 itself, a fairly clear, accurate and continuously updated picture was available on the jurisdiction, membership, activities, strategies and networks of each of the major gangs operating in the state.” Gill speaks of the need to overcome bureaucratic infighting and turf battles and inept and corrupt politicians, as well as government policies at both the central and the state levels that he deems “confused, irresponsible and ill-informed.”⁵⁷

Several aspects of this description of securitization are worth mentioning. First, he designates the insurgents as criminals as well as terrorists so that both police and military securitization become necessary to contain these groups. Second, by redirecting the source of violence as caused by terrorists, he claims that he was able to control the population. Third, using his position as a powerful Jat Sikh, he argues that this insurgency was a caste insurgency of an “oligarchy,” an “ethnic cluster” that did not represent Sikh interests and had no resonance with other groups.⁵⁸ He redesignates human rights activists as “terrorist front organizations”

and argues that it was only policing and securitizing, rather than political negotiations, that would end the conflict.

Despite this narrative of securitizing through improved techniques of intelligence gathering and surveillance, it was some more old-fashioned practices of police—ones that had their roots in the colonial state⁵⁹—that created a state of terror among the population and led to killings of many journalists, human rights workers, and ordinary people. Under Gill, the police and security forces seemed to be everywhere, in villages as in towns and cities, and at every major street corner, embodying a threat of violence that could randomly erupt at any time or place. They could detain anyone, and did so, targeting especially young men in rural areas. They killed with impunity, used extortion, and tortured and sexually abused detainees (and the law allowed them to detain without habeas corpus). At the same time, those policemen seen as insubordinate or protesting at the injustice of police, as well as whistleblowers within the security apparatus, were subjected to torture and harassment in the form of false legal cases.⁶⁰ Police surveillance of people in villages extended to entering homes and arresting people at will, since the emergency laws passed by the government gave them immense power to arrest and detain people without evidence of a crime being committed. Gill created a special force, known as Black Cats—militants turned undercover police agents—that provided information about insurgent identities.⁶¹ Many people we interviewed told us tragic stories, whether of children killed by police, women sexually assaulted, relatives in the police who were targeted by their fellows, or young men who had to leave the country to escape being killed.

Our fieldwork revealed that decades later, many believed that the brutality of the counterinsurgency had led to the migration, drug epidemics, and the abysmal economic conditions that they saw in the present. Many in the region continued to see Gill as a traitor to the Sikh community and one who not only encouraged but also actively enabled state violence at all levels of the security apparatus.⁶² While many did express relief at the end of police violence and civilian deaths under the regime of state counterinsurgent repression of insurgency, most did not see the police as saviors—they understood that one kind of violence had been repressed by another kind of violence. They also challenged the notion that all insurgents were terrorists, seeing them as husbands, brothers, and sons, economic, familial, traumatized, or community subjects rather than criminals. As much as our interlocutors blamed the insurgency, they also blamed the government counterinsurgent program for its violence and its appropriation of local kinship networks to recruit coethnics into the Punjab police, which served to draw “battle-lines within the villages, with Sikh fighting Sikh, and the police backing their ‘good guys.’”⁶³

Through our interviews with police officers who had been part of the counterinsurgency, what became visible was the extent to which securitization came to encompass civil society, as governance was taken over by the police. In a conversation with one particular police officer, we learned that civil governance had given way to police control and rule by security forces—though this officer believed that such governance was helpful. What emerged was a picture of police as government and governance as securitizing. This officer remembered that “most of the judiciary in the districts and subdivisions, they were nonfunctional,” and “even police officers who did some atrocities, they also worked really hard to maintain the peace.” He went on to relay,

We were deciding marital disputes—everything. People were coming to us, restoring girls back with honor to their in-laws’ house. And if separation had to be done, we were making sure that they had enough for their life. For these kinds of disputes, civil in nature, and also land disputes, this also gave opportunity for corrupt officers to make money. The magistracy did not fill the duties, so the police had to fill the vacuum. Police had to even do things like sit in examination halls in schools to make sure that people weren’t cheating. . . . So many normal activities were held. Film star nights were organized by the police.

This governance relied on a paternalist form of securitizing of the region and community, where police saw themselves as peacemakers, as producing harmony and negotiating communal strife in the region, rather than as responsible for violence. The widespread extrajudicial killings were seen as the work of a few “bad apples,” instead of as a more systemic pattern of policing. This paternalism of the police also stands in stark contrast to narratives from earlier phases of the conflict, where locals expected militants to arbitrate the same village-level disputes, while the local police was viewed as too unprepared, poorly trained, and corrupt to adequately react to insurgent violence.⁶⁴ It was clear from this interview that it was not just the insurgency that had become securitized, but the entire population as well.

Paternalism and the Demonization of Sikhs as National Threat

While securitizing transformed the colonial “martial race” and the post-colonial “soldier” into the “security expert,” for those Sikh men not in the police or military, there were few ways to inhabit patriarchy that did not expose them to state violence. For some Sikh men we spoke with, even those belonging to the dominant Jat caste, the loss of a notion of masculine protector in the familial form, as protective paternalism, came as a blow since they could neither be the militant, the security operative, the baptized Sikh who became the target of the police, nor even the

soldier-protector of the Indian nation. While historical military tradition had enabled Sikh males to see themselves as the protectors of the nation, the insurgency transformed them into the figures of the terrorist and the extremist. Those whom we interviewed were highly aware of these shifts, sorrowfully cognizant that they had been demonized no matter which class, region, caste, or community they belonged to. The Indian nation now considered them all as “terrorists.” As Gurmeet, now retired after civil service, told us, “People used to feel safe with a Sikh. In a bus, they would say that a Sikh is sitting there, go sit with him. And now they are doing this to us?”

Gurmeet mentioned that he had also been very hurt by the behavior of those he served and worked with all over India, and who now began to see him as a threat to the country and began to harass him at work. He felt that there was a religious divide between the rest of India and the Sikhs that had not been present in the secular past of postindependence India:

Earlier, I never thought of my religion, but I felt after that [period] I was being identified as a Sikh officer, . . . that there was some incident that happened after that, there were so many complaints against me—they filed so many complaints against me accusing me of being a criminal-minded officer that is favoring the Sikhs, that I am anti-Hindu, and that I am harboring the extremists. . . . Yes, yes, they found the excuse to call me criminal-minded and all that.

Targeted as a sympathizer with the “militants” and “terrorists,” such that he spent a great deal of his time defending himself and his work, Gurmeet retired with great bitterness about how he had been treated, seeing such treatment as having long-term effects on Sikhs’ loyalty to the nation. Using the language of “alienation” from the Indian nation, he went on to say the following, with much sadness and sorrow in his voice:

The anti-Sikh riots and Bluestar made the Sikhs alienated. They felt that this was not their country, the country we fought for all the time: World War I, World War II, the independence movement, Bhagat Singh, suffering in the Partition. The wars with Pakistan and China. We have done this for the country. We have gone to the highest peaks, into Sri Lanka, and the deserts of Rajasthan. Our community is the largest provider of soldiers to this country, farmers, transporters, etc. . . . And now they are doing this to us? So, people started thinking of leaving the country. This migration to Canada and a big wave started after this. Before that Canada was nowhere in the picture. Before ’47, everyone was going to the UK; after ’47, again to the UK. Roughly after ’60, more went to the US.

As a member of the all-India civil service, Gurmeet had served all over the country and had seen himself as central to the making of the Indian

nation through his service. For many like him, military service for his parents' and grandparents' generation, and civil service for him, had been not just a means of social mobility or evidence of a colonial construct of masculinity, but also came from allegiance to Indian nationalism in the decades after independence that promised "unity in diversity." Allegations of disloyalty to the nation thus hit hard at his own sense of loyal soldierly service that he had inherited from the family and which he had taken into civil service. Such shifts in attitudes also explained why some Sikh men became more religiously observant, moving their loyalty to the community instead of to the nation. Lawyer and activist Mallika Kaur's interviews, for instance, make this comparison: "In the 1970s it was very difficult to find in our university any student who was an *Amritdhari* [baptized in the religion]—not fashionable. But now, after 1984 Operation Bluestar, it suddenly became the opposite, it became very unusual to find persons who would not have a flowing beard and saffron [the color of sacrifice in the Sikh ethos] turban."⁶⁵ Kaur's research on attitudes of young men resonates with our project in an effort to address the demonization of Sikhs as a threat. As our work reveals, the splintering of masculinities during this period produced a complex set of responses that reconfigured gender both during and after the insurgency.

Conclusion

The official calculation of "peace" and "success" in repressing the insurgency hides the many disturbances that unsettled the postcolonial state. Two causes of this unsettling are the social changes enabled by altered masculinities and the reassertion of patriarchal power by the state and the insurgency. To the extent that the designation of Sikhs as terrorists and militants in India and transnationally has now moved to Muslim bodies, enabled by a new Hindu nationalism and an American "war on terror" with its global security regime, Sikh males are now being recuperated in new ways: as migrants, as unemployed youth, or as bodies riddled with drugs or cancers.⁶⁶ As biometric identity cards and digital surveillance transform policing and power,⁶⁷ the entire country is being securitized using the same regime tactics that enabled Gill's controversial doctrine. The new Hindu nationalism's targets are now both those border states and those seen as "antinationalists" within it: journalists, activists, women advocating for their rights, Muslims, Dalits, Adivasis, farmers. Colonial laws of sedition are being repurposed for repression, and state counterinsurgencies remain to exercise violence to protect the postcolonial security state.

These contemporary iterations of state masculinities have continuities with the conflicts of the 1980s as well as with the history of the colo-

nial state's military and its celebration of Jat Sikh warrior masculinity. The violence of the counterinsurgency in Punjab continues into the present even twenty-five years later, not just in material but in affective ways, through precarities of health and employment, the ruthless targeting of political dissent, and the worsening economy of the region. Suicides by both farmers and agricultural labor have risen,⁶⁸ as rural indebtedness and disinvestment by the Central Government in New Delhi and neoliberal policies to corporatize agriculture in the state have led to protests by farmers that began in October 2020 and continued for over a year.⁶⁹ Caste patriarchies remain powerful⁷⁰ even as Dalit groups have improved their standing through remittances from migration. As the postcolonial state repurposes the American war on terror to designate non-Hindus as threatening Others to the Indian nation, the designation of protest—especially in border states across the North—as terrorism enables securitizing the region through colonial and postcolonial laws, military and paramilitary presence, and targeting of communities in gendered ways. Rural areas are under new forms of repression and threat by a state intent on privatizing even more domains of state control and to enable capitalist extraction. The ways in which emerging forms of resistance—such as the farmers' protest—can undo the security mechanisms of the postcolonial state remains to be seen.

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Notes

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1. See, e.g., G. Singh, *Ethnic Conflict in India*. See also G. Singh and Kim, "Limits of India's Ethno-linguistic Federation."
2. See Gossman, "India's Secret Armies"; Fair, "Lessons from India's Experience"; Chima, "Punjab Police and Counterinsurgency"; Hultquist, "Countering Khalistan."
3. See Puri, Judge, and Sekhon, *Terrorism in Punjab*; Dhillon, *Identity and Survival*; J. Grewal and Banga, *Punjab in Prosperity and Violence*; Shani, *Sikh Nationalism and Identity*; Rajinder Kaur, *Sikh Identity and National Integration*.
4. J. Kaur and Dhani, "Protecting the Killers." See also Mukhoty and Kothari, *Who Are the Guilty?*; Silva, Marwaha, and Klingner, *Violent Deaths and Enforced Disappearances*.
5. In another article, we have discussed how women responded to and remembered the conflict and the ways that it altered their notions of gender, family, and community. See I. Grewal and Sabherwal, "Slow Violence."
6. See, e.g., Mahmood, "Sikhs in Canada"; G. Singh and Tatla, *Sikhs in Britain*.
7. H. Gill, "Transnational Hair (and Turban)."
8. Axel, *Nation's Tortured Body*; Shani, "Memorialization of Ghallughara."
9. Dagar and Kumar, *Victims of Militancy*.
10. Even though in this article we emphasize the period beginning June 1984, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's project of Sikh control started with the dismantling of Sikh opposition to the undemocratic national emergency she imposed beginning in 1975. Gandhi remained deeply contradictory in her own politics—spearheading a campaign to dismantle local Sikh leadership, yet relying on their warrior masculinity by deploying them as bodyguards for her personal protection. See Tully and Jacob, *Amritsar*, 10, 57.
11. I. Grewal and Sabherwal, "Slow Violence."
12. See Kumar et al., "Reduced to Ashes"; Amnesty International, *Human Rights Violations in the Punjab*; J. Kaur and Dhani, "Protecting the Killers."
13. Butalia, *Other Side of Silence*; Das, *Life and Words*.
14. See A. Gupta, *Red Tape*.
15. See Jakobsh, *Relocating Gender in Sikh History*.
16. See Oberoi, *Construction of Religious Boundaries*.
17. H. Gill, "Transnational Hair (and Turban)"; H. Gill, "Masculinity, Mobility and Transformation."
18. Dhavan, *When Sparrows Became Hawks*.
19. See Choudhry, "Militarized Masculinities," 713–50; Cohen, "Military and Indian Democracy."
20. See Imy, *Faithful Fighters*; Streets, *Martial Races*; Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*.
21. Mann, "Media Framing."
22. See Wilkinson, *Army and Nation*.
23. Sikhs constitute less than 60 percent of the population of postpartition Punjab. While the recruitment and securitization of other Punjabi communities is important, it is outside the scope of our study given Sikhs' unique position as the prime targets of both state violence and counterinsurgent recruitment in this period.
24. The site, located in Amritsar, Punjab, is better known as the Darbar Sahib, Harmandir Sahib, or Golden Temple.
25. In response to Operation Bluestar, over two thousand Sikh Army men from all over the country attacked, mutinied, and deserted en masse. See Kundu, "Indian Armed Forces." For records of the multiple direct disciplinary infractions by Sikhs in the army in June 1984, see Tully and Jacob, *Amritsar*. See also Pettigrew, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*.

26. Although non-Sikhs—General A. S. Vaidya (India’s chief of army staff) and Lieutenant General K. Sundarji—were in charge of the deployment of the army in Punjab, Operation Bluestar was planned and led by two Sikh men: Lieutenant General Ranjti Singh Dayal and Major General K. S. Brar. See Tully and Jacob, *Amritsar*. General Vaidya was assassinated in 1986 by the insurgent Khalistan Commando Force in retaliation for his involvement. See Mahmood, *Fighting for Faith and Nation*.

27. The insurgent defense of the temple complex was led by two retired Sikh major generals, Shahbeg Singh and Jaswant Singh Bhullar, who had other ex-army men under their command. See Wilkinson, *Army and Nation*, 150.

28. Chima, “Punjab Police and Counterinsurgency,” 271–75.

29. Mark Tully and Satish Jacob catalogue how Bhindranwale was initially encouraged by the Congress Party, where Sanjay Gandhi and Zail Singh both used him to increase the party’s power in Punjab over that of the Akali Dal (a Sikh regional party). See Tully and Jacob, *Amritsar*, 60–65. See also Nayar and Singh, *Tragedy of Punjab*.

30. *Financial Express*, “KPS Gill Dead.” See also Sahni, *Fragility of Order*; Bal, “Lessons Not Learnt.”

31. Deras constitute sectarian communities that belong to the long tradition of local saints and preachers that dot the region and exist mostly outside the framework of the orthodox religious establishments. While deras are powerful centers of power that can combine political and religious authority, they are often ignored in a great deal of research on politics in South Asia, though not ignored by political parties.

32. Oberoi, *Construction of Religious Boundaries*.

33. Videos of Bhindranwale’s speeches are available on YouTube. See Bhindranwale, “Under What Law?”; Bhindranwale, “Historic Moments.”

34. Tatla, “Unbearable Lightness.”

35. Pritam Singh and Purewal, “Resurgence of Bhindranwale’s Image.”

36. I. Grewal and Sabherwal, “Slow Violence.”

37. One might argue that it was not Bhindranwale but the central government’s attack (Operation Bluestar) on the Golden Temple, which Bhindranwale had occupied, that united Sikhs across castes and across its diasporas against Indira Gandhi, then prime minister.

38. Mir, *Social Space of Language*; Bigelow, “Post-partition Pluralism.”

39. This fieldwork comprised three summers of research between 2015 and 2018 and semistructured interviews with thirty people from across the state, men and women of different castes in the districts of Ludhiana, Amritsar, Bhatinda, Patiala, and Rupnagar.

40. I. Grewal and Sabherwal, “Slow Violence.”

41. I. Grewal and Sabherwal, “Slow Violence.”

42. M. Kaur, *Faith, Gender, and Activism in the Punjab Conflict*.

43. Chima, “Punjab Police and Counterinsurgency.”

44. *Financial Express*, “KPS Gill Dead.” See also Sahni, “Fragility of Order”; Bal, “Lessons Not Learnt.”

45. I. Grewal, “Civil Servant and the Supercop.”

46. Ghuman, *Punjab da Butcher*.

47. Karmakar, “KPS Gill.”

48. Karmakar, “KPS Gill.”

49. Mahadevan, “Gill Doctrine.”

50. For instance, the colonial army in India also recruited heavily from the Jat Sikh population, especially those based in rural areas, for its external security needs

during the two world wars. International recruitment provided recruits avenues for emigration, and remittances from soldiers overseas enhanced Punjab's economic fortunes. See Mazumder, *Indian Army*; Tatla, "Sikh Free and Military Migration."

51. Staniland, "Counterinsurgency Is a Bloody, Costly Business."

52. Chima, "Punjab Police and Counterinsurgency."

53. Kalhan et al., "Punjab Police and Counterinsurgency," 271.

54. Chima et al., "Colonial Continuities."

55. K. P. S. Gill, "Endgame in Punjab."

56. K. P. S. Gill, "Endgame in Punjab."

57. K. P. S. Gill, "Endgame in Punjab."

58. This view has since been replicated in academic work on the subject. See

G. Singh, *Ethnic Conflict in India*.

59. Sauli, "Circulation and Authority."

60. Ensaaf, "Last Killing."

61. Mahadevan, "Counter Terrorism in the Indian Punjab"; Fair, "Lessons from India's Experience."

62. Gossman, *Dead Silence*; G. Singh, *Ethnic Conflict in India*.

63. Gupta and Sandhu, "True Grit."

64. Fair, "Lessons from India's Experience."

65. M. Kaur, *Faith, Gender, and Activism*, 184.

66. See, e.g., *Uda Punjab* (dir. Abhishek Chaubey, 2016)—though there is much debate about the impacts of this film as enabling new kinds of securitized control over youth in Punjab.

67. The impacts of these new biometric surveillance regimes on gender issues is an important area of research. See Kelkar et al., *Aadhaar*.

68. Singh, Bhangoo, and Sharma, *Agrarian Distress*.

69. See, e.g., Ravinder Kaur, "How a Farmers' Protest"; N. Gill, "Popular Upsurge"; M. Kaur, "Unprecedented Farmers Protests." As we submit this essay, the Modi government seems to have caved to the demands of the protestors and has agreed to repeal the laws—especially because of upcoming elections in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, two states where powerful Jat farmers were part of the protest.

70. P. Singh and Shemyakina, "Gender-Differential Effects."

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