

Book Review

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Behl, N. (2019). *Gendered citizenship: Understanding gendered violence in democratic India*. Oxford University Press. 172 pp. \$69.53 (hardcover). ISBN 9780190949426.

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The book, *Gendered Citizenship: Understanding in Democratic India*, by Natasha Behl, one which is divided into six chapters, combines the brutal gang rape and murder of Jyoti Singh in December 2012, with ethnographic data from the Sikh community to highlight the paradoxical standards of gender equality in the public and private spheres through the lens of situated citizenship. Further, Behl explains that citizenship is experienced unequally depending on the myriad differing intersecting identities including but not limited to gender, caste, religion, class, sexuality, among others. In the introductory chapter, Behl analyzes the horrific rape and murder of Jyoti Singh and explains how similar misogynistic logic plays a role in gender-based violence toward women in civil society, religious communities, and at home.

In Chapter 2, Behl explains the importance of utilizing *situated citizenship* as an interpretive methodological tool to expose the paradoxical nature of gender blindness by emphasizing that Indian women do not have equal rights as men in democratic citizenship. It further outlines that women are trapped in violence both in public and private spaces in spite of the national institutions that are claiming equality. Behl has further outlined how political ethnography is the most ideal way of explaining *situated citizenship* to showcase the lived experience, meaning-making processes, and self-reflexivity of the Sikh community. As a Sikh woman herself, Behl conducted in-depth interviews with 40 Sikh participants (21 men and 19 women) of varied ages, of different socioeconomic and religious observance backgrounds, belonging to both upper and lower castes over a period of 10 years (2000–2010). The participants were interviewed on issues like that ranged from gender to dowry and sex ratios within villages and larger communities.

In Chapter 3, Behl highlights three topics: how women in India experience the state, citizenship, and law as contradictory; the awful rape and murder of Jyoti Singh that led to reinstating the patriarchal laws; and, finally, the Sikh women experiencing *exclusionary inclusion* in their own community. These topics are explained through the debate and consensus between two opposing groups—the Hindu fundamentalists and some secular liberals. Both groups advocate for a Uniform Civil Code (UCC), rather than religious personal laws, for different reasons (Hindu fundamentalist in order to secure Hindu hegemony and secular liberals in order to further equality, uniformity, and cohesion). Behl further explains the divide among feminists on the topic of UCC. Some feminist groups support UCC as a symbol of egalitarianism, while some others are against it as they want the change to come from within the minority religious groups. Behl argues that the Indian criminal and civil law in general is discriminatory toward women, and the personal laws of any religion treat women more as symbols of community honor. The indicators of sex ratio, literacy rates, infant

mortality rate, and life expectancy clearly show that the Indian institutions have failed the women in spite of messages of equality through constitutional guarantees and legislative interventions. Even though the teachings of Sikhism purport gender equality, the skewed sex ratio (893 women:1000 men), high rates of female infanticide, and domestic violence speak otherwise.


In Chapter 4, Behl explains the concept of exclusionary inclusion through ethnographic data gathered from Sikh participants. Behl's analysis of situated citizenship highlights how gender inequality exists both in civil society and at home. The author points out that even though the Sikh scriptures mention gender equality, it seems abstract and does not seem to translate into daily practice. Behl therefore highlights the continuum of gendered violence that Sikh women experience in both public and private spheres of life through women's rights and duties, public policies, women's religiosity, women's purity, and women being considered as perpetual outsiders (natal family treats women as "*paraya dhan*" [someone else's wealth], and the marital home may or may not accept them).

In Chapter 5, Behl analyzes the participant interview data from Sikh participants and shares the findings. Behl brings to the forefront how some Sikh women uphold and resist exclusionary inclusion from within their religious community; some other Sikh women actually utilize the religious spaces for more egalitarian gender relations through participation in Sukhamni Seva societies (devotional organizations); and, furthermore, some other Sikh women link the goals of gender-based liberation and spiritual liberation.

In the concluding Chapter 6, Behl reiterates the concept of *situated citizenship* to highlight and challenge the concept of exclusionary inclusion through the plethora of repressive practices toward women from "womb to tomb." Starting from eliminating the female fetus to treating girls as *paraya dhan* (someone else's wealth), not allowing them in cremation grounds, not allowing them to inherit property, not letting them get college education, and further perpetrating domestic violence and sexual assault on them. Behl utilizes her own ethnographic data with the Sikh community along with the rape and murder of Jyoti Singh to explain and further challenge these concepts.

Behl, through autoethnographic writing, truly fills an immense gap between empirical and theoretical work on citizenship and brings to the forefront an important topic in political science. Behl emphasizes that there should be multidimensional indicators of gender (in)equality rather than the current unidimensional one measured by the number of women holding seats in the national legislature. Further, Behl challenges the field of political science by arguing that if its members are not open to new sources of knowledge, they would continue to replicate gender-blind policies and restrict the capacity of Indians to move toward gender equality.

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