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0521432871 - The Feminine Principle in the Sikh Vision of the Transcendent  
Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh  
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This work is an original and critical analysis of Sikh literature from a feminist perspective. It begins with Gurū Nānak's vision of Transcendent Reality and concludes with the mystical journey of Rāṇī Rāj Kaur, the heroine of a modern Punjabi epic. The eight chapters of the book approach the Sikh vision of the Transcendent from historical, scriptural, symbolic, mythological, romantic, existential, ethical, and mystical perspectives. Each of these discloses the centrality of the woman, and shows convincingly that Sikh Gurūs and poets did not want the feminine principle to serve merely as a figure of speech or literary device; it was intended rather to pervade the whole life of the Sikhs. The book bolsters the claim that literary symbols should be translated into social and political realities, and in so doing puts a valuable feminist interpretation on a religious tradition which has remained relatively unexplored in scholarly literature.

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THE FEMININE PRINCIPLE  
IN THE SIKH VISION  
OF THE TRANSCENDENT

NIKKY-GUNINDER KAUR SINGH

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*In memory of my grandmother, Roop Kaur*

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## *Preface*

*The feminine principle in the Sikh vision of the Transcendent* is the outcome of many years of reverie and research, and I could never succeed in acknowledging everyone for their input into it. From my grandmother, who gave me an image of what a Sikh woman could be, to my current students at Colby College, who make me recast and recreate my ideas with their provocative queries and comments, there are many, many conscious and unconscious contributors to whom I owe my thanks.

I spent several years of my childhood with my grandmother and was nurtured on her stories about life. Lying next to her on the terrace of our ancestral home under the starry skies I would keep asking Bībījī (for this is how we referred to my grandmother) to narrate to me incidents of my favorite protagonist, her maternal aunt – the strong and courageous woman who was afraid of nothing, not even of snakes. This tall and beautiful woman with big dark eyes as big as a triangle (Bībījī would join her two thumbs to make the base of a triangle formed by her index fingers) governed her own farm, and with her intelligence and kindness won the affection of all, including that of robbers and cobras. Each night I would stay up late hearing from my dainty grandmother's lips the daring episodes of her maternal aunt. With my mother, of course, it was different: she would read to me stories of Cinderella and Little Red Riding Hood, and I enjoyed them immensely. I especially enjoyed seeing their lovely pictures – one did not encounter their blonde hair and blue eyes in my part of the world. The convent school that my parents sent me to in the Punjab, and then Stuart Hall in Virginia, and later again Wellesley College continued to feed my imagination with many more figures like Cinderella. But somehow the image of Bībījī's maternal aunt had been impressed too deeply ever to be forgotten.

From my mother I received an aesthetic appreciation of Sikh



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sacred literature. I would wake up in the morning to her melodious recitation of the Sikh scripture. I was too young to know what the verses meant, but their beautiful rhythms and melodies were to reverberate in my being for many a year to come. It was my father who ever so gently launched me on the academic search for my literary heritage. His devotion to the Sikh scholarly world was inspiring. He always encouraged me to interpret the sacred text for myself and to discover its meaning from my own perspective. And when I began to approach it from the feminist stance I had learned in America, he welcomed my new readings with an enchanted enthusiasm.

Apart from my childhood mentors, I wish to thank my teachers, colleagues, and students. I especially thank Debra Campbell, Yeager Hudson, Bill Mahan, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Nancy Paxton, Annemarie Schimmel, my brother, Nripinder Singh, Giani Gurcharan Singhji, and my husband Harry Walker for reading drafts of my work and giving me valuable suggestions. I thank Grace Von Tobel, who typed the entire manuscript and created a special font for transliterating the Gurmukhī alphabet. I am very grateful to Colby College for granting me a pretenure sabbatical which enabled me to complete my research for this book at Brown University and in India. I warmly thank my gracious hosts at the Bhāi Vīr Singh Sadan in New Delhi and the Punjabi University in Patiala. Finally, I wish to extend my very deep thanks to my editor at Cambridge University Press, Mr. Alex Wright, for his endorsement of a project that has meant so much to me.

*Colby College, Waterville, Maine*

NIKKY SINGH