South Asian Popular Culture

ISSN: 1474-6689 (Print) 1474-6697 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rsap20

The "Vexed" Status of Guru Images: Visuality, Circulation and Iconographic Conflicts

Koonal Duggal

To cite this article: Koonal Duggal (2022) The "Vexed" Status of Guru Images: Visuality, Circulation and Iconographic Conflicts, South Asian Popular Culture, 20:1, 97-117, DOI: 10.1080/14746689.2022.2047457

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/14746689.2022.2047457

© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

Published online: 26 Apr 2022.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 2714

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Citing articles: 2 View citing articles

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=rsap20

SOUTH ASIAN POPULAR CULTURE
2022, VOL. 20, NO. 1, 97–117
https://doi.org/10.1080/14746689.2022.2047457

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

OPEN ACCESS Check for updates

The "Vexed" Status of Guru Images: Visuality, Circulation and Iconographic Conflicts

Koonal Duggal

Social Anthropology, University of Edinburgh, Chrystal Macmillan Building, 15a George Square, Edinburgh, UK

ABSTRACT

In 2007, the Dera Sacha Sauda (DSS) guru Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh Insan wore an attire similar to calendar image of tenth Sikh guru, Guru Gobind Singh, and performed a ritual baptism, which became controversial. This article will show how this controversy opens up two significant issues: first, questioning the egalitarian ethos of caste equality upheld by the Sikh religion, and second, with regard to authenticity of religious practice – of what is deemed Sikh and non/un-Sikh practices. The controversy became the fulcrum for questions of visuality and material practices around imageries of Sikh gurus in the domain of popular religiosity and visual culture. This historically relates to the much-debated status of images around gurus in contemporary Punjab. The image and ritual become a crucial site of conflict with regard to questions of Sikh identity, religion and caste. Questions of iconoclasm, authenticity and representation have emerged around the images—largely audio-visual in nature–of the Sikh gurus. In this article I will analyse music video/s that engages with the genre of Sikhi (Sikh principles or faith) highlighting crisis in Sikh identity through lyrical and visual references, for instance to the institutions of popular religion, such as Deras. I then mainly argue that the DSS event cannot be grasped without understanding the modes of engagement and ritual practices around images of Sikh gurus. Such an analysis will not only underline contestations around the 'vexed' status of images comprising both Sikh and Dera gurus but will also critique the normative understanding of Sikh identity and religion.

KEYWORDS
Sikhism; Deras; gurus; images; blasphemy; dalits

Mein Vinaypal Buttar bolda,

Ik tere gunahgaran chon,

Mere kol kara ae bas oh vi tor lai,

Tereyan panj kakkaran chon

I, Vinaypal Buttar, one amongst many sinful speak.

I wear only the *kara* to show-off, out of your five K's.

(*Muafinama*, Vinaypal Buttar)[1]

CONTACT Koonal Duggal kduggal@ed.ac.uk

This article has been corrected with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article.

© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

Contemporary 'crisis' in Sikh identity

These above lines are from the song titled 'Muafinama' (a letter of apology) written and sung evocatively by Punjabi pop singer Vinaypal Buttar. The song underscores the conflict in the singer's identification with Sikh religious identity; an aspect that gets accentuated in the music video directed by Arvinder Khaira[2] and released by Buttar's online YouTube channel on 8 November 2012.[3] The music video, courtesy of its lyrical and visual narrative, possesses a self-referential quality, with a first-person background voice narrating the performer's identity as being in 'crisis'. This crisis, as I will argue in this essay, is symptomatic of a larger crisis within contemporary Sikh religiosity itself.[4]

The music video is an important site of investigation not only due to its reunification/reconstruction of sound and image through electronic means comprising interplay of diegetic and non-diegetic elements where 'commercial relation is one obvious reason for the changes brought about by the televisualization of pop music, and for the evolved metalanguage of visual plenitude and semantic cynicism which both confirms and disguises that circulation' (Berland 20). Rather, the artistic strategies deployed in the assemblage of quoted elements structures the song as a text technically mediated with spectacle and affect produced by images, special effects, etc., thus surpassing the aura of sound and its produced affective meanings. As Jody Berland says, 'You can't make a hit record, become known, make money on music, cross national borders or be heard across your own, without making a video. This endows television with a new power: power over music, and power over us through music, which it offers to anyone, anywhere there's a TV' (26). This 'colonizing force' (term Berland used for TV) gets furthered in its reach with online circulation and consumption of music, both sound and video, through various audio/video sharing websites and apps in digital post-network era. It becomes important to analyse these strategies and underlying meanings as 'determined by its intention than by its literal form' (31) – as 'myth' – to understand the ideological and socio-historical discourse that not only informs the music video but also naturalises its artifice.

Let me explicate this: The 'Muafinama' music video begins with a fictional dialogue on a surreal plane between two opposite selves that have emanated out of Buttar's body, through special effects. One represents Buttar – his *present* '*Mona*' Sikh self – and the other, portrayed by a child actor – representing his alter ego, standing for Sikh childhood *past* within the fictional setting of a village. A *Mona* Sikh is someone who cuts or trims his/her hair after *Khalsa* initiation; in short, he/she does not follow the Sikh conventions of five K's (*panj kakar*).[5]

In the narrative structure, the camera moves back and forth between two sequences: one, representing the protagonist and his alter ego at a fantastic level, and second with Buttar writing his 'Muafinama' – by writing the lyrics of the song – possibly to all Sikh Gurus' or the *Panth* (community) (Figures 1 and 2). The song positions itself as a critique of the present 'deviant' lifeworld in which Buttar, like other Sikh youths in general, is marked as a '*gunahgar*' (transgressor or sinner; as someone who has broken the law or violated, a command). For instance, Buttar is represented as the alcohol consuming *Mona* Sikh, wearing only the *kara*, without the turban, and he has a caste name instead of the Singh surname. His devotion towards Sikhism is shown as limited to the exhibition of certain visual symbols as markers of identity (Figure 3). However, this enactment of

Figure 1. Singer Vinaypal Buttar in a rural landscape setting with *gurdwara* (Sikh place of worship) in the background. (Image Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F_QX6pVRaYg, accessed on 24 September 2013).

Figure 2. The spectral dialogue between alter egos shows two opposed selves i.e. 'Sikh' childhood past and 'deviant' present on a same plane along with singer in the centre writing 'Muafinama'.

personal identity crisis is not only limited to the struggle between traditional/religious versus so-called 'western' modernity. Rather, it indexes a crisis within Sikhism and its followers in general shown in the music video with reference to the growing power/corruption of the *jathedars*[6] and a decline in commitment towards religion's communitarian practices like *seva* (service). Taken together, they signify both spiritual and moral bankruptcy, and a decline of *Sikhi* (Sikh principles or faith). Through combining the aural and the visual, the song urges and enacts a process of contemplation and self-realisation (with Buttar as exemplar) that is activated through the performative

Figure 3. Devotion towards religion is shown limited to the exhibition of certain markers of identity like *Khanda* (the symbol of Sikh religion) as pendant or a tattoo on singer's arm banned by Akal Takht in 2013.

intervention of his childhood (authentic) self as the conscience keeper. It is important to locate Buttar's 'Muafinama' within the musical genre of *Sikhi* in Punjabi pop music. Songs in the *Sikhi* genre depart from the typical devotional style of singing (*shabad kirtan*). Various mainstream Punjabi pop singers employ the *Sikhi* genre in order to foreground a (muscular) Sikh identity, invoking the religion's history and survival in order to highlight the importance of one's religious identification in the present. Also, in 2012, Diljit Dosanjh's 'Gobind De Lal' and Gippy Grewal's 'Pariwar' (like Buttar's 'Muafinama') deployed similar aesthetic strategies in songs and music videos. The singer/protagonist's formidable presence in the song is presented by means of their high-pitched voice (even though 'Muafinama' is mellow) and accentuated with beats mostly from traditional instruments. The invocation of sacrifice through presentation of imagery representing the gurus and Sikh history (mostly aligning to *Khalsa*), mediated through the figure of the singer as the masculine voice of the (real and imagined) community, is central in all songs. If 'Muafinama' and 'Pariwar' argue the case for transformation through the trope of 'crisis', then Dosanjh's song invokes 'pride' by invoking instances of martyrdom in the Sikh tradition.

The role of the image

Over the course of the narrative of the music video, Buttar's childhood avatar employs various acts and tropes in order to attempt to make the present-Buttar realise his deviation from the path of *Sikhi*, which he diligently followed during his childhood. He does this through *drawing* pictures representing Sikh history that focus on Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth guru, and his family. The gurus' family portrait here invokes the 'sacrifice' and 'martyrdom' of the ninth and tenth gurus' families for Sikh religion.[7] Other drawings include the formation of *Khalsa* and the five K's, foregrounding images adhering to *Khalsa* ideology in order to build a sense of 'semiotic richness and high level of contextualization' (Straw 8) (Figure 4). The second act undertaken by the childhood self is to show pictures as pedagogic tools – pictorial lessons from Sikh religiosity to Buttar's deviant self. This act serves the purpose of reminding him of the absence of these religious elements and to trigger a process of change, enabled through the performative *showing* and *seeing* of images.

Figure 4. Buttar seeing the hand-drawn image representing Guru Gobind Singh's family; with his childhood self is seen in the background, making more images.

These pictorial references most crucially foreground the presence and role of calendar images in the Sikh community. These mainly represent the 10 gurus and events from the Sikh past in the genre of portrait and history painting. Ironically, this constitutes an everyday popular Sikh visual culture and religiosity which exceeds the scriptural discouragement of guru worship – be it in the form of idols or through human impersonation (see Figure 5).

From repentance to rebirth

In Buttar's 'Muafinama', we see that the childhood self-production of images not only references a world of Sikh visual culture but also confirms the extent of internalisation of these representations through various modes of embodied engagements and material practices within the Sikh community. It is also symptomatic of how everyday practices normalise an individual's vision and visual sense of the community. This process of 'showing' and 'seeing' pictures between Buttar's past and present in the video needs to be located within a particular 'field of desire' – in this case, the picture's desire to transform Buttar through constantly reminding him of the 'lack' of *Sikhi* in him.[8] Buttar's present self is shown oscillating between recognition and self-doubt as a result of the affect-intensity produced by the images. This site of struggle – this play of 'mutual desire' – finds resolution by fulfilling the image's desire to transform, and Buttar's desire to be transformed by images. This mutual fulfilment, the final climax, is quite literally manifested through a graphic integration of Buttar's divided self (Figure 6). The coming together of past and present selves, and the merging of double consciousness into a single body, urge the viewers to resolve their split identity or contradictions by returning to the path of *Sikhi*. This narrative fits a template of repentance and rebirth seen since the music videos of legendary

Figure 5. Calendars of Sikh gurus painted by well-known Sikh painter Sobha Singh, hung on walls as framed pictures in a Sikh household, Patiala, Punjab (image courtesy: Charanjit Singh), 2015.

Figure 6.

punk and pop singers Iggy Pop and Boy George to generate curiosity or interest in the potential success of the 'comeback enterprise' (Straw 17; Footnote 18; Emphasis mine). In the final scene, shot inside a *gurdwara*, we see a 'reformed' Buttar submitting his Muafinama in a donation box and bowing down to the *Guru Granth Sahib* (the sacred volume that is the eternal guru in its present avatar); the video ends with a *shabad* (word/hymn). An iconoclastic interpretation of the video suggests that anthropomorphic

representations of the guru finally led the protagonist to submit himself to the depersonalised form of the guru. This could be understood as a move away from the corporeal to a transcendental religiosity or image of the guru which I will discuss later in my essay.

Buttar's song 'Muafinama' became popular and generated discussions around *Sikhi*, though most of the discussions around the song (in the YouTube comments section, for example) emerged from two kinds of viewers/listeners. The first praised the intent of the song and the singer, the evocative lyrics, and transformative potential of the song, resulting in their return to the path of *Sikhi* (some, for instance, claimed that the song led them to stop cutting their hair and shaving their beards). The second was critical of the representation of Buttar's *Mona* Sikh identity, questioning whether at all he became a proper Sikh after making the song. The latter mode of questioning is particularly directed towards knowing whether Buttar is himself following the path of *Sikhi* or whether the song is just another addition to the list of generic songs about *Sikhi*. As one viewer commented '*tu v bai apne naam vich hon singh lale veere vinaypal singh buttar banja*' (Brother you should also add Singh in your name and become Vinaypal Singh Buttar).

In 2017, in a YouTube video titled 'Muafinama in Real', we see Vinaypal Buttar as a reformed Sikh subject declaring (to the audience) his final resolve to follow the path of *Sikhi*.[9] Another video uploaded by Qaumi Awaaz Radio in 2018[10] shows him performing, where he prefaces his performance with the words: '*Vinaypal Buttar siga ji main, hun Vinaypal Singh ban gaya*' (I was Vinaypal Buttar, now I am Vinaypal Singh).[11] We also see this transformation in his appearance, like in makeover magazine advertisements for hair transplant or botox treatments, along with name, from a *Mona* to a proper Khalsa Sikh as we see in several images circulating online or displayed as flex prints outside gurdwaras (see Figure 7).

The 'other' Guru

I would like to introduce another layer into this analysis of the music video. Let us rewind a bit from the climax and pause at a foundational moment – the showing and seeing of the 'last' picture that finally leads to transformation in the protagonist. The most important act that Buttar's childhood avatar undertakes in this scene is to juxtapose the drawn image depicting *panj piyare* baptising the tenth guru (the founding moment of *Khalsa* tradition) with a blurred image of the guru from the Dera Sacha Sauda (henceforth the DSS) religious tradition, Saint Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh Ji Insan, taking *Jaam-e-Insan* (Figures 8 and 9).[12]

On 11 May 2007, the DSS guru wore an attire similar to the widely circulated calendar representation of the tenth Sikh guru in a congregation held at Dera's Punjab branch at Salabatpura village in Bathinda district (Malwa region). Two days later, several local English and Punjabi newspapers published images of the Dera chief showing him in the 'copied' attire initiating the ritual of *Jaam-e-Insan* to baptise his followers (Figure 9).

However, soon after publication of the image, orthodox and radical Sikh organisations took offence, arguing that this act hurts their religious sentiments and accusing the Dera and its chief of sin and blasphemy for making a mockery of their tenth guru (Figure 10). The images of the 'sinful' act were circulated by Sikh groups through various online

Figure 7. In this image, we see lines from the *Guru Granth Sahib* being quoted to question the ethical and moral conduct of the viewer. This image, much like Buttar's video, foregrounds the *loss* and *regained Sikhi* through the juxtaposition of 'before' and 'after' to compare the past and present of Sikh men (mainly youth) who returned to the Sikh-fold by becoming *Khalsa* Sikhs. This aesthetics of juxtaposition of word and image, we may note, is borrowed from advertisements for fitness, weight and hair loss products.

Figure 8.

platforms containing 'image after image of the DSS guru "as" Guru Gobind Singh' (Copeman 157), prompting an 'incitement to discourse' (158). Sikh groups such as Sikh Students Federation and Khalsa Action Committee also alleged that the DSS guru had inaugurated a cheap imitation of the Sikh baptism ritual of *Amrit Sanskar*. These objections led Sikh organisations like the SGPC and Akal Takht (supreme temporal and religious authority of Sikhs) to issue a *Hukamnama* (edict) to the DSS, summoning its

Figure 9. The drawing of this picture appears in Vinaypal Buttar's video in a blurred form (Figure 8). (Image source: http://www.'Sikhi'wiki.org/index.php/Gurmit_Ram_Rahim, accessed on 24 September 2013).

chief to the Akal Takht in Amritsar to apologise. Though the DSS tendered an apology, a *muafinama* addressed to Guru Gobind Singh expressing regret, it was not considered graceful enough ('Dera apology does not seem to be graceful: Mediators'). In addition, the DSS guru's refusal to present himself before the Akal Takht further exacerbated tensions in Punjab. Violent clashes between Sikh and DSS followers called *premis* (lovers) ensued, with vandalism of DSS properties, a mass social boycott of its followers, and a loss of lives on both sides.[13] At a later juncture, followers killed in these clashes were declared 'martyrs' by both sides.[14] The situation harked back to the similar 'destabilization' of Punjab in the 1980s according to the mainstream media.[15] The DSS, through its guru, thus came to be identified as a trigger of crisis in contemporary Punjab and Sikhism. Here, the DSS guru's image is accused of being a 'weapon' attacking the sacredness that is imbued in imagery of Guru Gobind Singh, thereby hurting the religious sentiments of the Sikh community.[16] Some radical and orthodox Sikh groups/followers also used the language of 'desecration and violence towards images [of DSS icons and its guru] as a political weapon' (Jain 205), with protests featuring open display of *kirpans* (short

Figure 10. Dera guru initiating the baptism ritual in the presence of followers on 11 May 2007. (Image source: https://twitter.com/luckyv167, accessed on 24 September 2013).

Figure 11. DSS guru (right). The calendar image of Guru Gobind Singh (Left). (Image source: http://www.'Sikhi'wiki.org/images/thumb/2/23/Sacha_sauda_baba_guru.jpg/300px-Sacha_sauda_baba_guru.jpg, accessed on 24 September 2013).

Figure 12.

dagger or sword) pointing towards the DSS guru's image morphed as a donkey, the burning of his effigy, the occupation of public spaces and digital spaces, with several videos in YouTube, such as a Sikh youth throwing 'his *chappals* (sandals) at the TV screen depicting the DSS guru' (Copeman 157). Since 2007, periodic eruptions of violence from both sides have signalled the ongoing volatility of this conflict. The DSS guru's film *MSG: The Messenger of God* in February 2015 was not only banned in Punjab but also DSS followers accused the iconoclastic acts of some Sikh groups as being *beadbi* (sacrilege/blasphemy) on account of them tearing down film posters bearing their guru's image. Amidst escalating violence, DSS followers maintained strict vigils around the film's posters and flex hoardings to protect them from acts of desecration by its opponents (Maan). It needs to be clearly underlined that all these attacks on images are attacks against the community because icons are an embodiment of the idea of community itself.[17]

In light of this, we see how Buttar's music video sets up a stark contrast between Sikh gurus and a controversial modern-day saint, between the sacred and the supposedly profane, on the very same page in the music video (Figure 8), in which the childhood self will eventually tear off the part of the page depicting the DSS guru, thereby foregrounding mainstream Sikhism's derisive attitude towards Deras – the DSS in particular – and their followers who have deviated from the path of *Sikhi* (Figure 12). This act of juxtaposing images from two different historical events, one initiated by the Sikh guru and the other by the DSS *pakhandi* (fraudulent) guru, seems to present a clear choice: true guru or *dhongi* (impostor). There seems to be no middle ground which can accommodate both practices – one is either the follower of the Sikh *Panth* or its enemy.

Deras as the 'other'

This is the context that frames the images in Vinaypal Buttar's music video, where the DSS is depicted as a divisive institution throwing an open challenge to the singer-protagonist's religion. This struggle between Deras and the Sikh religion is the second

Figure 13.

important aspect that is underlined in the music video. This can be grasped both lyrically and visually through graphic effects and a flow of words positing Deras as a key 'outside force' causing splits in the Sikh religion (Figure 13). '*Hun kai dharam akhuauti futt paye, tereyan Ik-Oankaran chon, laike granth sahib chon aasra, gurbani vicharan chon*' (Now, your Ik-Oankar has splintered into many other religions . . . They took cover under the ideas from Granth Sahib and Gurbani . . .)

These lines hint at some of the previous and later controversies that have occurred concerning other Deras such as Dera Bhaniarawala and Dera Sachkhand Ballan (DB and DSB henceforth). Most orthodox Sikh objections in such controversies centre on the nature of images, text and ritual. For instance, in the DB controversy in 2001, the Dera chief Piara Singh Bhaniarawala was accused by Sikh organisations of not only copying the image of the tenth guru but also the *Granth Sahib* in his holy book, *Bhavsagar Samundar Granth* (Meeta and Rajivlochan). Here there is a symbolic referencing to the formation of the Ravidassia religion in 2010, where the followers of Guru Ravidass extracted his verses from the Sikh *Guru Granth* and formed a separate sacred text, *Shree Guru Ravidass Amritbani*. The formation of the Ravidassia religion was an outcome of the Vienna incident in 2009 when five gunmen from a Sikh brotherhood objected to DSB ritual, killing one of its *Sants* (saints) (Jodhka 2009).

In this case the crisis centres on the question of caste and casteism practiced within the Sikh community. It is important to note that the state of Punjab has the largest Dalit population of any Indian state. The fact that many non-Sikh Deras have a large number of followers from Dalit and lower caste communities is popularly known (Ram). In fact, all aforementioned 'controversial' Deras have a large number of Dalit and lower caste followers; the Guru of DB is a Dalit; DSB is a Dalit Dera with predominant following from Chamar caste and though the DSS guru is from Jat caste, 75% of his followers are from Dalit and marginalised communities. These controversies, I argue, through their charges of blasphemy, not only made the visibilisation of caste and casteism possible in

the state of Punjab but also further demystified the idyllic image of Punjab and of the Sikh religion as a supposedly egalitarian one. Caste discrimination within Sikhism has been long known but unacknowledged, and the participation of Dalits in non-Sikh Deras pushed this contradiction out in the open. The desperate attempts of Sikh organisations to bring Dera followers back to the Sikh-fold through spectacles of violence show their vulnerability.

The construction of the Guru's image as a 'natural fact'

It is also important to foreground that the DSS guru defended his action by saying that the alleged 'dress was provided to him by one of his disciples and it was not similar to the one worn by tenth Sikh Guru as it was of the kind that was worn during the Mughal period' ('My dress wasn`t similar to that of Guru Govind Singh: Dera chief'). If we see Guru Gobind Singh's calendar iconography where he is shown wearing the attire of similar colour and design embellishments that the Dera guru is accused of copying (Figure 10) and in different representations where the colour of the attire might change but the yellow/saffron turban with the *kalgi* (Plume and aigrette) and the steel *chakkar* (ring) have emerged as key identity markers in the modern representations of the tenth Guru's iconography. Because these symbols (except *kalgi*) are associated with *Khalsa* and also since it is said that the Guru wore a yellow/saffron turban in real life which is restored as a relic object. The presence of markers from *Khalsa* identity in Guru Gobind Singh's iconography are later developments in popular Sikh art. In miniature paintings the tenth Guru was depicted in a manner resembling the iconography of a Mughal emperor such as Jahangir or Shah Jahan, with stylistic and formal similarities in postures (such as seated and horse riding), attire and headgear with *kalgi* and accompanying *baaz* (falcon). It has been argued that 'Hindu painters represented gurus as Hindus and Muslim painters as Muslims' (Goswamy and Smith) thus reflecting historically ambiguous identifications of being a Sikh that defy binary definitions of religion in the Judeo-Christian sense. We see an absence of *Khalsa* identity markers in the DSS Guru's image which might justify his use of attire resembling that of the Mughals. Similarly, a careful study of the etymological meaning of *Amrit Sanchar* and *Jaam-e-Insan* can represent the difference, where *Amrit* literally means 'Deathless', the eternal holy nectar, which can be considered as otherworldly (McLeod defines Amrit as nectar of 'immortality' (12)), whereas *Jaam-e-Insan* can be interpreted as a 'drink that is this-worldly' and linked to humanity.[18]

I propose that the image of the Sikh guru is an artistic product of the imagination. In the devotional paintings of the Sikh painter Sobha Singh (1901-1986) especially his life-like portraits of Sikh gurus in the European naturalism of oil on canvas we see an important role being fulfilled in terms of the representational needs of the community. Much like his predecessor Raja Ravi Varma, who was responsible for delineating standard iconographic conventions for the depiction of Hindu goddesses, Sobha Singh normalised the grammar of representation around Sikh gurus. He became a household name in the Sikh community through the mass production and dissemination of his images in printed calendars, framed posters, and all kinds of religious paraphernalia found in the bazaar (Figure 5).[19]

The question one needs to ask is through what processes, then, does that construction of someone's image become a natural fact? How did Guru Gobind Singh's image become normalised *as* a person? Why do the majority of the people – whether Sikh or others who objected – not comprehend that despite formal and symbolic similarities, the Dera guru is engaged in mimesis, inspired by an artwork which is a work of imagination? Why is it rather taken to be an act of blasphemy? The Dera controversy clearly reflects how 'our' – Sikh – visions are formed and normalised.

As we saw earlier, juxtaposition of the DSS guru's image with that of Guru Gobind Singh – as also shown in Vinaypal Buttar's video – had already been undertaken. Just after the controversy in 2007, the juxtaposition of these two images (Figure 11) was widely circulated on the internet and used by Sikh groups to incite sentiments of hurt and violation, underlining an important paradox. As Jacob Copeman shows, one Facebook page, 'Sikhs against DSS', which couples the two images as its profile picture, incited a 'large number of comments', demonstrating its 'effectiveness as an incitement of discourse. But for several contributors such a coupling for dramatic effect is itself a scandal' (166).[20]

Most reactions assume that the DSS guru copied the attire from a 'photo' of Guru Gobind Singh. Addressing the images as 'photo'[21] or *swaroop* (own form) denotes how the image of the tenth guru, or Sikh gurus in general, is normalised within the Sikh community – the image embodies him or in short is an incarnation of him. To delineate answers for questions connected to the construction of the image's normalcy, one needs to look into material and embodied practices. We need to take note of interactions with the icon of the guru in Sikh devotional practices and to understand the nature of the affective relationship between the image and worshipper.[22] This delineation will not only disclose constructions of vision and Sikh imagery and their worshipping practices. It will also enable us to understand the specificity and difference of Sikh visual culture. This will allow us to understand better the emotions of hurt and injury in devout Sikh followers, and to bring out the nuances not captured in easy polemical readings of the DSS controversy.

Ritual, affect and interaction

In the context of the Danish cartoon controversy in 2005, Saba Mahmood in her essay 'Religious Reason and Secular Affect' problematises both secular-liberal and religious views around the controversy which also framed the polemical nature of the consequent debate. Mahmood in her analysis challenges the views expressed by both sides by considering how subjects come to be attached to authoritative ideas, images, icons, and sensibilities, the better to understand the hurt among Muslims caused by the cartoons. Mahmood illustrates how the Prophet Muhammad is shown as a moral exemplar not through images, but through certain reading practices.[23] Through description of these practices, Mahmood presents the very specific nature of interaction and vision of the Prophet in a devout Muslim subject 'which is not so much upon a communicative or representational model as on an assimilative one' (76). Here, the difference between the nature of the Danish cartoons and the DSS controversy needs to be highlighted. In Sikhism, the model to conduct one's devotion is composed of several fractions supporting both 'representational' and 'assimilative' forms of devotion. It is important to underscore the 'vexed' status that the imagery of Sikh gurus holds within Sikhism. There is

a long history from the early eighteenth century to the present of these images, ranging from miniature to naturalistic, to more recent digital representational forms. Even so, these are understood strictly as 'mere depictions' without any ritual value assigned to them according to *Khalsa* ideology. The *Sikh Reht Maryada* (Code of Conduct and Conventions) argues for maintaining 'uniformity' and 'cohesion' among the Sikh community and its followers in everyday religious (bodily) conduct and observances.[24] It insists on 'recitation or repetition', or the singing of religious hymns, *Nam* (word) and scriptural compositions, thus emphasising the importance of text and words in the form of writing and speech over anthropomorphic images of gurus. The main concentration of all reverential ceremonies and bodily conduct revolves around the *Guru Granth Sahib* as eternal guru in its present avatar. It states: 'No book should be installed like and at par with the Guru Granth. Worship of any idol or any ritual or activity should not be allowed to be conducted inside the gurdwara . . . installing statues, or idols inside the gurdwaras, bowing before the picture of the Sikh Gurus or elders – all these are irreligious self-willed egotism, contrary to *Gurmat* (the Guru's way)' (*The Code of Conduct and Conventions* 13). Many ideologues within the traditional Sikh intelligentsia also hold the strictly iconoclastic viewpoint whereby all popular representations of gurus are considered as demoting the 'transcendental' into the 'corporeal world'. This could be understood as an assimilative model of Sikh religiosity. The nature of affective and embodied practices in Sikh representational models of religiosity is configured more in terms of an image to spectator/devotee or a subject to object relationship, especially for those who practice image worship or hang images in their domestic and other spaces.[25] In opposition to popular devotional practices, many puritanical Sikhs who do not adhere to image worship emphasise the nature of a perceptual relationship based on transcendence.[26] Therefore, in Sikhism, the model to conduct one's devotion is composed of several fractions supporting either 'representational' or 'assimilative', or a hybrid consisting both, forms of devotion.

The point of difference is related to the existence of images of the Prophet and the guru in both domains. The cartoons of the Prophet in the Danish cartoon controversy became a problem not only because the Prophet's representation is prohibited in Islam but also because of different imaginaries and visions through which the intimate connection with the Prophet is formed. There have of course been instances of the creation of representations of the Prophet with or without a face in Persian and other miniature traditions. However, the matter is not about the existence of the Prophet's image at one particular time – the established norm does not encourage image worship or human impersonation of the Prophet. Norms could be changed or consolidated in popular religious practice. The cartoons of the Prophet seem to have become offensive because, as Mahmood would argue, popular and everyday religious practices are composed of more personal, embodied ways of forming a bond with the Prophet than via images. In the DSS controversy, the attire that the DSS guru wore had some similarities of colour and design embellishments. Irrespective of differences, sameness with Guru Gobind Singh's image was articulated. Therefore, the specific role that visuality plays within popular Sikh religiosity becomes crucial to explore. The established norms seem to have encouraged imageries related to Sikh gurus (in two-dimensional forms), while continuing to discourage and abominate worship in any form of idol and human impersonation.[27] This peculiar nature of present established norms in Sikhism takes Sikh visual culture and worshipping practice one step back from the prevalent Hindu view of

image representation, devotion and impersonation, and one step closer to Islamic conventions with regard to anthropomorphic representations of the Prophet. In short, the Sikh image worshipping tradition is placed *between* two extremities. Within popular Sikh religiosity, we see people engage, interact, use and consume images of gurus in everyday practices, through acts of hanging and placing calendar and framed pictures in living rooms and devotional spaces, both domestic and public (e.g. shops, offices, vehicles, etc.). Many Sikhs interact with images through bodily gestures such as holding hands in prayer, bowing in front of the image, addressing the images as *Babaji*[28] or as *Babaji di photo/tasveer, Babaji da swaroop* (photo of Baba, self-image of Baba) and performing rituals such as garlanding the image, and lighting incense or lamps while reciting *Nit-Nem*[29] in front of it. All these practices might not adhere to *Sikh Reht Maryada*, but these practices of looking, worshipping and interacting with guru images help one to understand the process of normalisation of these representations of gurus *as* the embodied presences of gurus.[30] Comprehending this interactive and representational economy of worship – of relationship between subject and object, between image and viewer – through which the process of meaning-making takes place can also help us understand why the DSS guru's act produced hurt in devout Sikhs. Despite the differences at both formal and etymological levels, these differences were effaced when people made meaning out of the Dera guru's image.

Another important difference lies in the nature of the opposition. In the Danish cartoon controversy, the debate between the 'liberal-secular' west (Europe) and the 'religious' Muslim world occurs in the aftermath of 11 September 2001 and some of the cartoons represented the Prophet Muhammad as a terrorist. In the case of the Dera controversy, the opposition is between certain mainstream sections of a recognised religion and a devotional faith-based order – the polemical divide between secular and religious does not apply here.

Lastly, there is a difference in the organisation of actors on both sides of the debate. In the cartoon case, one side consists of the majority of the Muslim world – leaving aside liberal Muslims like Tariq Ali – and on the other side putatively is the rest of the modern western world. The stakeholders, those who objected and felt hurt and those who defended the cartoons, were quite well demarcated. On the contrary, the Dera controversy discloses and accentuates divisions within the Sikh community due to factors such as caste and the participation of Dalit-Sikhs and marginalised communities in popular religious practices. Also, the defender/opponent on both sides is a religious, devout subject/s and ironically Sikhs too highlight this paradox in the nature of following in this violent stand-off between Sikhs and DSS followers. As one Dalit-Sikh follower of DSS said defending the Dera guru 'Those who have a mouth, will say anything. When an elephant walks, dogs bark. Those with objection have nothing to do with religion. Religion is separate, politics is separate. Akalis [mainstream political party of Sikhs] are doing politics in religion; there is nothing religious in them, or in this'.[31] Therefore, desperate attempts to police the images and ritual practices of Deras reproduces familiar patterns of violence that are practiced by majorities against minority/marginalised identities. In the context of Hindutva's violence, Kajri Jain argues, 'use of desecration and violence towards images as a political weapon is a desperate attempt to reconfigure and reassert regimes of power that have been based, first, on the submissiveness of bodies within the social order – particularly those of women, lower castes and religious or ethnic minorities – and second (and relatedly), on the control of access of the divine via sacred

icons and texts' (Jain 205). Here, Sikhs as a religious minority that had been a victim of majoritarian violence by the caste Hindu state are not only the majority in the regional context of Punjab. They are also a dominant caste (Jat) Sikh majority that not only dominates the complex of land-religion-politics but also the domain of (mainstream) representation that suppresses all other identities. Therefore, 'the oscillation between minoritarian rhetorics of victimhood[32] and the violent exercise of the majoritarian privilege' (204) over Deras makes mainstream Sikhism under the dominant caste 'immediate oppressors' of popular religion, one that is mostly practiced by Dalit and lower caste followers of Deras. Such exclusion of Dalits and subaltern communities continues in Vinaypal Buttar's song and music video, which seeks to highlight the crisis within Sikhism in the form of a self-critique. However, the song does not complicate the crisis by bringing in the question of caste, the challenge of Sikhism's caste hierarchy, and the Jat (*Jatt* in the colloquial manner) hegemony in Punjab's structures of power. In short, the song avoids the problem of caste, and presents Sikhism as a religion which is egalitarian in practice. In fact, the song represents the utopia of Sikhism, presenting only the Jat Sikh identity (of the singer) as the universal or natural Sikh identity. The song clearly represents the singer's caste and class identity.[33] In this way, 'other' Sikhs who practice different religiosities through popular religious institutions such as Deras are articulated as being corrosively divisive.

Notes

1. Buttar, Vinaypal. 'Muafinama'. *4 × 4 – Four by Four*, Indya Records, 2012. Note: All translations used in this essay are mine, unless otherwise specified.
2. Arvind(e)r Khaira is a known director of Punjabi pop music videos. In 2011, he co-founded video production company named Virsa Arts and has directed music videos featuring known singers from Punjabi pop music industry, such as Diljit Dosanjh, Hardy Sandhu, Sukhe and others.
3. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F_QX6pVRaYg, accessed on 24 September 2013.
4. The description in YouTube music video link highlights that it was not only made to expand the consumer base of an already successful song among the listening public. But also made as an *act* of 'redemption' from personal 'guilt', as it says: 'This song is an outcome of guilt and religiously oriented thought fight. When Muafinama was initially released, it received a lot of appreciation from Sikhs all around the world. So, on public demand, an official video of the song MUAFINAMA is here'. One could argue that the target audience of this music video is mainly Sikh youth; mostly men.
5. Five K's are five external symbols that are *kesh* (uncut hair), *kangha* (comb), *kara* (iron or steel bangle), *kirpan* (sword or dagger), and *kachha* (shorts that must not come below the knee). In the widely held Sikh view these five symbols were introduced at the inauguration of the *Khalsa*, literally means 'pure', mainly representing the collective body of Sikhs who have undergone initiation under *Amrit Sanskar* or *Amrit Sanchar* ceremony. According to W. H. McLeod 'Khalsa; the order instituted by Guru Gobind Singh, certainly on Baisakhi Day (the first day of the Indian year) and probably in 1699. . . The traditional reason given for its founding was the Guru's decision to provide his followers with a militant and highly visible identity, essential if they were to withstand imminent trials [against the Mughals]' (111). Therefore, to set an example of true Khalsa, the tenth guru on this historic day baptised five followers popularly known as *panj piyare* (five loved ones). The tradition of Khalsa still continues, its membership being the mark of a truly orthodox Sikh initiated through *Amrit Sanchar* ceremonial ritual.

6. Literally a leader of a *Jatha* (community). In Sikhism, mostly he is an ordained leader of a *takht* (sacred and authoritative seat) appointed under the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC).
7. The tenth guru's father Guru Tegh Bahadur (1624–1675) was the ninth Sikh guru, who was beheaded by the Mughal rulers in Delhi. In Sikh tradition, the ninth guru is considered as someone who sacrificed his life for the protection of the Sikh and other religious faiths by not succumbing to Mughal coercion through conversion into Islam. Therefore, Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom is considered to be a crucial for the Sikh community's survival and existence. Similarly, the entire family of both Gurus' that includes Mata Gujri (wife of ninth Guru) and *Chaar Sahibzaade* (four sons of tenth Guru) martyred their lives for *Sikhi*. Sikh visual culture contains a vast number of representations (paintings, calendars, books/booklets, films, museums, memorials etc.) dedicated to these important figures, other martyrs, and events foregrounding their historical importance for Sikh religion in contemporary times.
8. This mode of analysis is inspired by W. J. T. Mitchell's work on the power and desire of pictures.
9. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWzQlEuhRBE, accessed on 11 June 2019.
10. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UM23NcoYsV8&t=17s, accessed on 11 June 2019.
11. Here, we could see the singer has added 'reformed' Khalsa Sikh identity with his caste name juxtaposing both surnames, i.e. both religious and caste identities. I will come to the question of caste and the singer's surname in the later part of my essay.
12. The word Dera also called *Dehra* means 'Encampment' or the dwelling place of a sant (McLeod 55). Surinder Jodhka argues 'Babas, sants, gurus, peers and their deras have been an important part of the religious landscape of Punjab for a long time. As institutions of popular or folk religion outside the more organized structures such as mosques and temples, they represent the enchanted universe of pre-modern religiosity' (Jodhka 55). However, now Deras as institutions of 'popular' religion now functions, almost, in the manner of new religious movements. At present, Deras are looked like a threat to mainstream Sikhism because of their popularity that attracts a large number of followers from different castes and religions precisely because of the 'charismatic' presence of living gurus and sants. Their popularity is not only limited to the religious sphere but rather plays an important role in political sphere too with political parties seeking their support during elections. Dera Sacha Sauda (DSS) (*Sacha Sauda* literally means 'true business' refers its name from an event in (first) Sikh Guru Nanak's life) calls itself 'Confluence of Religions' (as reflects in its present Guru's name) is an inter-caste and inter-religious spiritual organisation founded in postcolonial, post-partitioned, Punjab in 1948 by Shah Mastana Balochistani, who is said to be from Balochistan, at Sirsa in Haryana (located on Punjab-Haryana border). Sirsa Lok Sabha constituency is reserved for the Scheduled Caste (governmental term for ex-untouchable Dalits) candidates since its inception in 1967. It is also said that DSS is an offshoot of Radhasoami religious organisation. After Shah Mastana, Shah Satnam Ji succeeded as the second guru from 1963–1990, followed by Dr Saint Gurmeet Ram Raheem Singh Ji Insan as, the present, third guru. On 25 August 2017, the special Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) court convicted Ram Rahim Singh of the rape of two sadhvis in his Dera and he was sentenced to 20 years in prison. In addition to this, on 17 January 2019 he was also convicted of the murder of journalist Ram Chander Chhatrapati and sentenced to life imprisonment. Most recently, on 18 October 2021, he was given a life sentence for the murder of his manager Ranjit Singh. For fuller background on DSS see Jacob Copeman's *Veins of Devotion*, 2009.
13. It was also said that the (recently elected) state government that time under mainstream Sikh political party Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), in alliance with Hindutva party Bharatiya Janata Party, facilitated violence without any intent to resolve the tensions. It was mainly argued by media and academics that the state took political mileage from this event to avenge electoral loss in its stronghold Malwa region where DSS offered support to the rival Congress Party in 2007 state assembly elections.
14. See for Sikh martyrs (Baixas and Simon) and for DSS martyrs (Duggal).

15. Specifically, the violent clashes were attributed to the historical clashes between the *Nirankari* sect and Sikh sect *Damdami Taksal* in 1978 that many considered as the starting point of 'destabilization' in Punjab which led to the subsequent rise of Khalistani leader Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale (Baixas).
16. In her work on attacks directed at modernist painter M. F. Husain's works by Hindu right-wing groups, Kajri Jain calls that 'images are attacked or accused of being used as weapons' (199). Jain locates the power and conception of images as 'sites of disturbance and transformation [rather than as mere reflections] at the level of the *habitus*: the sensory field where symbolic meanings and values cannot be separated from the materiality of bodily practices' (199).
17. For instance, desecration of Ambedkar statues in Dalit localities are clearly instances of violence against the Dalit community (Jain 2011).
18. The fundamental difference between the two, where one concerns being/becoming immortal and the other becoming mortal/human interlinked with the ideology of humanism, was obliterated in this articulation of hurt from Sikh groups. Therefore, these significant differences were foreclosed in the articulation of sameness in form (than content) 'as a special class of intellectual property' (Copeman 164).
19. Through a carefully cultivated persona of himself as a meditative figure who transferred his spiritual imagination of Sikh Gurus through his art on canvas, Sobha Singh received the epithet of 'divine painter' by ideologues from the Sikh community. His life-like representations not only created a paradigm shift, but his images also set a precedent to be followed by upcoming generations of painters in popular Sikh art.
20. Jacob Copeman discusses how commenters reacted to this coupling of the guru and the photo of the DSS chief as an act of bringing the impostor to the same stature of the divine. Hence, 'The problem is that once a relation is set up it can seem inescapable' (166). Copeman quotes this comment posted in the webpage, where the commentator says: [You have given him a status equivalent of the great kalgi bearing guru by placing his photograph next to the Guru's]. So please remove him from this place.. (166). The comparison drawn between the two images to prove or complain about the similarity poses an important question about the efficacy of the calendar image, which has clearly attained the status of the authentic or 'really real' representation of Guru Gobind Singh. This act of coupling the unreal with the real Guru as a form of cross-examination to interrogate the other, to know the extent of violation, puts the real into crisis. To reiterate: the most common position enunciated is that the Dera chief copied Guru Gobind Singh. The existence of the tenth Guru is already given.
21. Christopher Pinney interrogates this aspect of viewers articulating the printed chromolithograph images of (mostly) Hindu Gods through coropreal practices as 'Photos'.
22. This understanding regarding the corporeal relationship and embodied practices between an image and viewer/devotee is informed through seminal works of Richard Davis's *Lives of Indian Images*; Christopher Pinney's *Photos of the Gods* and Kajri Jain's *Gods in the Bazaar* (2007).
23. According to Mahmood 'These mimetic ways of realizing the Prophet's behaviour are lived not as commandments but as virtues where one wants to ingest, as it were, the Prophet's persona into oneself' (75). Therefore, a subject modelled on this model of perception where one tries to internalise the moral and ethical character of his exemplar feels hurt not because of the language of cartoons, but because of the violation of one's vision, one's relationship with the Prophet.
24. *Sikh Reht Marayada* is a booklet first published in 1950 after long deliberations from Singh Sabha reformers. It is divided into two parts: personal discipline and panthic discipline. The first part covers topics like behaviour in a gurdwara and reading of the *Guru Granth Sahib* and rituals for birth, naming, marriage, and death. The second section largely comprises the order for *Khalsa* initiation (McLeod 191).

25. It is important to highlight that Khalsa *Sikh Reht Maryada* mostly laid down the rules and regulations abhorring image worship or embodied practices around image within the spatial context of gurdwara or where Guru Granth Sahib is present. It does not clearly say about the everyday devotional practices around images in domestic or other non-institutionalised religious spaces.
26. In my PhD dissertation, I have tried to show the tension between these two forms of worship around images of Sikh gurus by focusing on the views of traditional Sikh iconoclasts who upheld the moral code of conduct stressing the importance of reading and listening practices in form of *Guru Granth Sahib* and reciting *Nam* in the context of debate around films such as *Chaar Sahibzaade* (2014) and *Nanak Shah Fakir* (2014) (Duggal).
27. Historically, however, in the nineteenth century such norms did not even exist with idolatry and image-centric devotional practices. As Harjot Oberoi notes, 'one of the first large idols to be installed at this premier shrine of the Sikhs [the Golden Temple] was a metal casting of Guru Hargobind (1595–1644), gifted by the Raja of Chamba during the reign of Ranjit Singh (1799–1839). This was followed by another gold image of the sixth master below the Akal Takht and a minor idol of Guru Nanak within the inner sanctum of the main shrine. In the 1880s the management of the Golden Temple mooted the idea of installing the idols of ten Sikh gurus at the main entrance to the Sikh shrine' (375). These norms were replaced in the early twentieth century with the ascendance of *Tat Khalsa* 'Pure Khalsa' group of ideologues in the Singh Sabha Movement which created the present day understanding of Sikh religion and devotional practices. For fuller historical understanding of this development see Harjot Oberoi's *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*.
28. *Baba* literally means 'Old man'. A title of great respect applied to men (or even boys) of wisdom and piety. The *janam-sakhis* normally use this title for Nanak in preference to Guru (McLeod 26).
29. *Nit-Nem* (literally 'Daily Discipline') is a collection of selected Sikh hymns that are designated to be read by the Sikhs every day at pre-fixed times.
30. One can see the enactment of these devotional practices in several cultural forms, such as popular films and songs. The most famous example is Gurinder Chadha's film *Bend it Like Beckham* (2002), *Des Hoya Pardes* (2005), etc.
31. Interview conducted in Chandigarh. June 2014.
32. The invocation of Sikh holocaust of 1762 or The Vadda Ghallūghārā, Partition violence of 1947 and Anti-Sikh pogrom in 1984.
33. The surname Buttar is a Jat subcaste name.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributor

Koonal Duggal is Research Fellow in the Department of Social Anthropology, School of Social & Political science at the University of Edinburgh. He is currently working on the research project titled 'Gurus, Anti-gurus and Media in North India' supported by the Leverhulme Trust. He completed his MA in Art History and Aesthetics from M.S. University Baroda and has a PhD in Cultural Studies from the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad. He has taught in the Department of Art History and Art Appreciation at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. His research interests revolve around the politics of caste, religion, media studies and popular visual culture.

Works cited

Baixas, Lionel. "The Dera Sacha Sauda Controversy and Beyond." *Economic and Political Weekly* 42 (2007): 4059–65.

Baixas, Lionel, and Charlene Simon. "From Protestors to Martyrs: How to Become a 'True' Sikh". *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* 2 https://journals.openedition.org/samaj/1532 (2008).Web.

Berland, Jody. "Sound, Image and Social Space: Music Video and Media Reconstruction." *Sound and Vision: The Music Video Reader*. Eds. Simon Frith, Andrew Goodwin, and Lawrence Grossberg. New York: Routledge, 1993. 20–36.

Copeman, Jacob. *Veins of Devotion: Blood Donation and Religious Experience in North India*. New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 2009.

Copeman, Jacob . "The Mimetic Guru: Tracing the Real in Sikh-Dera Sacha Sauda Relations." *The Guru in South Asia*. Eds. Jacob Copeman and Aya Ikegame. New York: Routledge, 2012. 156–80.

Davis, Richard. *Lives of Indian Images*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997.

"Dera Apology Does Not Seem to Be Graceful: Mediators." *Outlook*, 28 May. 2007. Web. 11 June. 2019. https://www.outlookindia.com/newswire/story/dera-apology-does-not-seem-to-be-graceful-mediators/476798 .

Duggal, Koonal. "Crossing Religious Boundaries: Representation, Caste and Identity in Contemporary Punjab." Diss. The English and Foreign Languages U, 2015.

Goswamy, B. N., and Caron Smith. *I See No Stranger: Early Sikh Art and Devotion*. Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing, 2006.

Jain, Kajri. *Gods in the Bazaar: The Economies of Indian Calendar Art*. Durham: Duke UP, 2007.

Jain, Kajri . "Taking and Making Offence: Husain and the Politics of Desecration." *Barefoot across the Nation*. Ed. Ramaswamy Sumathi. New York: Routledge, 2011. 198–212.

Jodhka, Surinder S. "Of Babas and Deras." *Seminar* 581 (2008): 54–57.

Jodhka, Surinder S. . "The Ravi Dasis of Punjab: Global Contours of Caste and Religious Strife." *Economic and Political Weekly* 44 (2009): 79–85.

Maan, Surinder. "Dera Followers, Sikh Activists Clash over MSG Movie." *Hindustan Times* 30 Dec. 2014. Web. 11 June. 2019. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/chandigarh/dera-followers-sikh-activists-clash-over-msg-movie/story-SI5yrM6CkiWRnWGWCh5epK.html >.

Mahmood, Saba. "Religious Reason and Secular Affect: An Incommensurable Divide?" *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2009. 64–100.

McLeod, W. H. *The A to Z of Sikhism*. Plymouth: The Scarecrow P, 2009.

Meeta, and Rajivlochan. "Caste and Religion in Punjab." *Economic and Political Weekly* 42 (2007): 1909–13.

Mitchell, W. J. T. *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2005.

"My Dress Wasn`t Similar to that of Guru Govind Singh: Dera Chief." *Zee News* 3 Dec. 2008. Web. 11 June. 2019. <https://zeenews.india.com/home/my-dress-wasnt-similar-to-that-of-guru-govind-singh-dera-chief_488148.html >.

Oberoi, Harjot. "Popular Saints, Goddesses, and Village Sacred Sites: Rereading Sikh Experience in the Nineteenth Century." *History of Religions* 31.4 (1992): 363–84. doi:10.1086/463293.

Oberoi, Harjot . *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*. Delhi: Oxford UP, 1994.

Pinney, Christopher. *Photos of the Gods*. London: Reaktion Books, 2004.

Ram, Ronki. "Social Exclusion, Resistance and Deras: Exploring the Myth of Castless Sikh Society in Punjab." *Economic and Political Weekly* 42 (2007): 4066–74.

Singh, Kulraj, Trans. *The Code of Conduct and Conventions*. Amritsar: Dharam Parchar Committee, n.d.

Straw, Will. "Popular Music and Postmodernism in the 1980s." *Sound and Vision: The Music Video Reader*. Eds. Simon Frith, Andrew Goodwin, and Lawrence Grossberg. New York: Routledge, 1993. 2–17.