

Article

# Gendering Dance

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**Abstract:** Originating as a Punjabi male dance, bhangra, reinvented as a genre of music in the 1980s, reiterated religious, gender, and caste hierarchies at the discursive as well as the performative level. Although the strong feminine presence of trailblazing female DJs like Rani Kaur alias Radical Sista in bhangra parties in the 1990s challenged the gender division in Punjabi cultural production, it was the appearance of Taran Kaur Dhillon alias Hard Kaur on the bhangra rap scene nearly a decade and a half later that constituted the first serious questioning of male monopolist control over the production of Punjabi music. Although a number of talented female Punjabi musicians have made a mark on the bhangra and popular music sphere in the last decade or so, Punjabi sonic production continues to be dominated by male, Jat, Sikh singers and music producers. This paper will examine female bhangra producers' invasion of the hegemonic male, Sikh, Jat space of bhangra music to argue that these female musicians interrogate bhangra's generic sexism as well as the gendered segregation of Punjabi dance to appropriate dance as a means of female empowerment by focusing on the music videos of bhangra rapper Hard Kaur.

**Keywords:** hypermasculinity; misogyny; sexism; good girl; bad girl; bhangra; rap; Hard Kaur

## 1. Introduction

"Munde bhangra paunde te kudian giddha paawan [Boys dance to the steps of bhangra and girls to those of giddha]," Sukhbir's chartbusting bhangra song of the 1990s, provides a glimpse into the segregated space of Punjabi dance with its generic gendered boundaries (Sukhbir 1996). Originating as a Punjabi male dance, bhangra, reinvented as a genre of music in the 1980s, reiterated religious, gender, and caste hierarchies at the discursive as well as the performative level. If their borrowing of folk formulaic composition made Bhangra texts inherit patriarchal Punjabi/Jat/Sikh gender and caste hierarchies, the dominance of male producers in the space of bhangra production, if not of consumption, marked it as an unmistakably masculine space. Although the strong feminine presence of trailblazing female DJs like Rani Kaur alias Radical Sista in bhangra parties in the 1990s challenged the gender division in Punjabi cultural production, it was the appearance of Taran Kaur Dhillon alias Hard Kaur on the bhangra rap scene nearly a decade and a half later that constituted the first serious questioning of male monopolist control over the production of Punjabi music. The tone of amused dismissal with which her arrival was grudgingly acknowledged by male bhangra legends such as Malkit Singh: "*Oh kudi jedi rap-shap kardi ai* [Oh, that girl who does rap-shap]" (Kaur 2006, personal communication) reflects the masculine paternalism underpinning the field of bhangra production. Although a number of talented female Punjabi musicians have made a mark on the bhangra and popular music sphere in the last decade or so<sup>1</sup>, Punjabi sonic production continues to be dominated by male, Jat, Sikh singers

<sup>1</sup> Among these contemporary rising stars, one may include Mona Singh, Sazia Judge, Seetal Kaur, and Sarika Gill in Britain and Jasmine Sandlas, Kanika Kapoor, Sunanda Sharma, Nimrat Khaira, Neha Kakkar, and Miss Pooja in India. Talented

and music producers. This paper will examine female bhangra producers' invasion of the hegemonic male, Sikh, Jat space of bhangra music to argue that these female musicians interrogate bhangra's generic sexism as well as the gendered segregation of Punjabi dance to appropriate dance as a means of female empowerment. The essay begins by tracing how traditional bhangra texts and remixes have constructed Punjabi/Jat/Sikh masculinity and femininity and bhangra. It traces the articulation of bhangra, which was not an exclusively Sikh music, to the Jat Sikh body and appropriated in the construction of a post-independence Sikh ethnocultural identity. It then shows how the Punjabi/Jat/Sikh customs and traditions of veiling, segregation, family honor, sexual "purity", and so on have been carried over in these texts through their fetishizing the female as beloved, whore, or mother. The essay will proceed by examining female performers' re-reading of the texts that enables them to challenge the hypermasculinist, sexist, and misogynist lyrics of bhangra music by focusing on the music videos of bhangra rapper Hard Kaur.

## 2. Gendered Space of Punjabi Dance

In addition to region, sect, instruments, rhythm, and movement, gender forms a crucial component in differentiating Punjabi dance genres from one another (Chandan 1987; Nahar 1988). Gender is the primary category along which Punjabi dance genres have been classified followed by those of region and religion. While *bhangra*, *jhummar*, *luddi*, *dhamal*, *julli*, and *dhankara/gatka* are defined as male dance genres, *giddha*, *sammi*, *kikli*, *teeyan*, and *jaggo* are considered appropriate for performance by females. Each dance genre, believed to have originated in a particular region in the *doabs* or interfluves of the five rivers of Punjab, is associated with beliefs, ritual practices, and festivals of different ethnic and sectarian groups (Schreffler 2013, p. 389). Unlike *julli* that is traditionally associated with *pirs* and performed in a sitting position at the *khanqahs* of Sufi saints, *dhankara* or *gatka* is a Sikh martial dance performed with swords or wooden sticks. The gender divide is equally visible in the gendered dance movements with male genres characterized by more robust, energetic, and vigorous movements requiring extraordinary stamina and strength in contrast to the gentle, swaying, graceful movements of female genres suited to the female body in which *malwai giddha*, a male genre with gentle, swaying movements originating in West Punjab, constitutes the sole exception. Additionally, the instruments accompanying each genre accentuate the gender divide through instruments requiring more strength such as the *dhol* attached to male genres and smaller instruments such as *dholki* to female ones. Finally, the stock themes of the lyrics of the genres are split along the masculine (alcohol, women, desire, hedonism, war, bravery) and feminine (longing, devotion, complaint, affection) grid.

Bhangra's movements have been alternatively traced back to martial or agricultural activities of warriors and peasants who were traditionally constituted as male and its vigorous beats (Randhawa 1954, p. 199) are injected with the *veer rasa*, the signature mood of the male warrior. Whether bhangra existed prior to the partition of Punjab or was a new dance invented through the amalgamation of a variety of Punjabi performance genres or not (Schreffler 2013, p. 395), its gendered boundaries remained unaltered through its many transformations. The dance performed by students of Mohindra College Patiala in the 1950s that formed the template for what came to be known as bhangra was simply presented as 'Men's Punjabi dance' (Schreffler 2013, p. 396). The eligibility criteria about height and chest size used by Bhana Ram, the hereditary *dhol* player from the *baazigar*<sup>2</sup> community who trained the team that included a number of Jat Sikh dancers (Pande 1999), in the selection of dancers unambiguously produced it as a martial male dance (Bai 2006, personal communication). Bhana Ram's inclusion of the robust, vigorous movements, leaps, and jumps from various male genres demanding physical strength, stamina, and energy to the exclusion of the gentle, swaying, graceful moves of the

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singers like Jaspinder Narula, Satwinder Bitti, and Rani Randeep appear to have been reduced to singing other genres after the token recognition they received in the first decade of the 21st century.

<sup>2</sup> *Baazigar* is a community of multi-source nomads found in Punjab who were also entertainers and performed acrobatics. Many of them were forced to migrate from west Punjab to east Punjab after the partition of Punjab in 1947.

*malwai giddha* emphasized its strongly masculinist orientation. Additionally, the all-male composition of the same group of dancers who came to be known as the PEPSU team and performed at several official events over the following years naturalized its masculinist credentials. The raw energy and virility exuded by the team performing at the first Republic Day Parade in 1954 was summed up by the Hindi film actor Nargis in her exclamation, “*Pehli bar mardon ko mardon jaise nachte dekha* [I saw men performing as men for the first time], which reflected the gendered etiquette that has conventionally defined Indian dance (TNS 2003).

A coffee table description of Punjabi dance by eminent dancer Ashish Mohan Khokar reveals the extent to which the emblematic masculinity of bhangra has been assimilated by practitioners of the dance,

The dances of Punjab are earthy and robust, just like its people. The land of five rivers . . . Punjab has given to India a race [sic] that is daring and noble. The Punjabis symbolize freedom of spirit and daredevilry. They regard dancing as their birth right, and their dances reflect this attitude of supreme confidence and conviviality. The people are capable of strenuous work, yet nothing seems to sap them of their infectious zest for life. They do nothing by halves. So they launch into their dances with swaggering gusto and overflowing energy. Bhangra gives this Indian state its very identity. Performed by men, this folk style has jumps, leaps, swirls, skips and hops—just about any physical feat that a virile son-of-the-soil can attempt. It is punctuated by a lot of acrobatics, meant to showcase daredevilry. Clapping, snapping of the fingers, and a recitation of boli [witty couplets] are its specialities. . . . Gidda [sic] is the feminine riposte to Bhangra, no less colourful or vigorous. (Khokar 2003, pp. 19–20)

The newly invented bhangra’s foray into Hindi cinema through its attracting the attention of several Hindi film actors and directors is marked by twin transformations that impacted the traditional gendered segregated space of Punjabi dance. The first was the transformation of bhangra into a couple dance with female dancers joining the male dancers of the PEPSU team with their feminine steps and movements forming a perfect alterity to the male. The second was the well-known Hindi film actor dancer Vijayantimala’s integrating bhangra machismo, including *bolis*,<sup>3</sup> in her dance composition after having watched it at the Republic Day Parade (Schreffler 2013, p. 397). If the insertion of female dancers in the first fissured the all-male space of traditional bhangra, the rendering of its masculine movements by a trained female dancer struck at its performative boundaries. It is the second, Vijayantimala’s interrogation of bhangra’s mapping on the male body through her deft execution of its masculinist moves in the song “*Tum sang preet ladai*” in the film *New Delhi* (Mangeshkar 1956), which inaugurated the feminine questioning of bhangra’s paradigmatic masculinity that has been carried over by contemporary female bhangra musicians.<sup>4</sup>

### 3. Lyrical Machismo

In addition to its performative space, beats, and movements, bhangra’s discursive space reflects a strong sexism and casteism through its lyrics that glorify male valor, courage, resilience, and reify women as the objects of male adoration or desire.<sup>5</sup> Traditionally performed to bolis largely consisting

<sup>3</sup> Bolis are call and response couplets that were traditionally sung by women but also by men in *malwai giddha*. Bolis have a uniform rhythm and their appeal lies in the inclusion of a meaningless rhyme. In bhangra, they were used to provide a breath pause in the vigorous, high-energy dance with either the *dholi* [dhol player] or one of the dancers singing a call with a formulaic couplet. The rest of the dancers would respond by naming an object and the lead singer would improvise a couplet to rhyme with the object inviting the rest to join in.

<sup>4</sup> Gabbah Shareef Bhalwan introduces another twist to Vijayantimala’s borrowing from the PEPSU team’s dance by observing that the team, probably inspired by the men’s *giddha* of the local Malwa area (where they lived) did a set of *boliyan* that seemed like the malwa styles, which suggests that “bhangra” included some “giddha-like stuff” too (Bhalwan 2002).

<sup>5</sup> Gayatri Gopinath, in her examination of bhangra as a diasporic genre, argues that “bhangra as a multivalenced text resists being read as purely patriarchal or sexist, yet it remains possible to identify certain dominant notions of gender and sexuality

of nonsense lyrics (Randhawa 1954, p. 199) whose themes ranged from celebrations to patriotism, social issues, and love, the textual component of bhangra gradually increased with nonsense formulaic improvised composition replaced by individual lyrics and poetry (Gera Roy 2010, pp. 203–4; Schreffler 2013, pp. 397–98). With the increase in the proportion of the lyrical content and individual composition, certain themes and motifs that often built on traditional formulae became attached to bhangra dance. The imagined subject of these lyrics is a Jat male whose patriarchal gaze either completely elides female presence or allows room for her only as an extension of the self. The lyrics that include themes like bravery, courage and risk-taking, patriotism, family, friendship, love, women, and hedonism uphold traditional patriarchal values and have been appropriated in the construction of new patriarchal structures. Through its turning to Punjabi folksong formulae or cannibalizing folk lyrics, contemporary bhangra inherits the sexist, casteist legacy of these songs in which traditional Punjabi cultural values have been enshrined.

An analysis of the song lyrics of legendary Punjabi folksingers reveals the extent to which they have been shaped by the Punjabi patriarchal ethos and socially sanctioned behavior. The Punjabi folksong defines typical male Jat behavior and pursuits that have become normalized as quintessential Jat attributes. These include indulging in carnal pleasures including eating, drinking, chasing women, making merry with friends that coexist with strong family values, patriotism, and piety. If folk legend Hazara Singh Ramta's satirical take on the Jat's proverbial love for drinking in "*Ramte peeni chadd diti hai* [Ramta has given up drinking] (Ramta 2015b)" indirectly celebrates his inability to resist alcohol as epitomizing Jat machismo, "*Charhi jawani Ramte nu* [Old man Ramta relives his youth] (Ramta 2015a)" adopts a tolerant stance towards the lusty elderly Jat's virility and "*Ramte da dusra viyah* [Ramta's second marriage] (Ramta 2004) justifies polygamy as a reaction to the Jat custom of early arranged marriages.

The Jat's love for alcohol is equated with that for women in another legendary folksinger Lal Chand Yamla Jatt's imagination where the comparison of a young woman with a bottle of whiskey who the Jat can pull out of his heart and have a swig from exhibits the collapse of the twin objects of the Jat's adoration and endorses the complete reification of the woman

*Whiskey di botal wargi main ik kudi fasa layi ae*

*Mere dil da bojha khali si ohde vich pa layi ae*

*Jad jee kardae main datt kholke haarha la laina*

I have been able to catch a young woman who is like a bottle of whiskey

I have put her away in my heart that was free of all baggage

Whenever I feel like I uncork it and take a swig. (Yamla Jatt 2011, "*Whiskey di Botal Wargi*")

In formulaic folk lyrics, the beloved's beauty has an intoxicating effect on the Jat as in Asa Singh Mastana's popular song,

*Mele nu chal mere naal kurhe*

*Ho, ho*

*Tere nain jo peeti bhang kurhe*

*Tere nain jo peeti bhang kurhe*

*Te waang tamaater rang kurhe*

*Koi nazar na tenu laa deve*

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that surface in much of the music" (Gopinath 1995, p. 304). Through examining the music video of Bally Sagoo's '*Mera laung gawacha*', she shows that the way "bhangra most clearly reconsolidates hegemonic patriarchal constructions is in its deployment of gender and sexuality" (Gopinath 1995, p. 316).

*Jaadu na akh da paa deve*

Come along with me to the fair, girl

Ho ho ho

Your dopey eyes, girl

Your dopey eyes, girl

And tomato red complexion, girl

Hope none casts an evil eye on you

And cast a spell on you (Mastana 1999b, “Mele nu Chal Mere Naal Kurhe”)

Traditional folksong’s gastronomic imagery has been standardized in bhangra songs to describe female beauty as an aphrodisiac that whets the male appetite,

*Ni mitran di loon di dali*

*Ni tun mishri borobar jaani ni*

*Sajna di gadvi da*

*Mitha sarbat warga paani ni*

You are like my lump of salt

but are known as a cube of candy

Like the water as sweet as sherbet

in my ewer. (Dhuri 2009, “Mitran di Loon di Dali”)

Alternatively, the male Jat fetishizes the beloved through fixing his gaze either on the female body or an object worn by the beloved,

*Kali teri gut te paranda tera laal ni*

*Kali teri gut te paranda tera laal ni*

*Roop deeye raniye paraande nu sambhaal ni*

*Ho . . . . .*

*Kanna vich bunde tere roop de shingar ni*

*Mithe tere bol moohon bol ik vaar ni*

*Pailan paandi e ni teri moran jehi chaal ni*

Your braid is black and the *paranda* is red

Oh, Beauty Queen, mind your *paranda*

Your dangling earrings adorn your beauty

Your speech is sweet, say something

You wear anklets, you have a peacock’s gait (Mastana 1999a, “Kali teri Gut”)

Paralleling pleasure-seeking as an important rite of passage in the Jat’s journey is the Jat’s recognition that his true calling lies in serving his family, particularly his parents,

*Ma piyo naalon duniya utte*

*na koi hor sakiri*

*Aenan di seva te wadi*

*nahin koi hor fakiri*

There is no one in the world

More near and dear than one's parents  
 Nor is there any pious deed  
 Greater than serving them. (Yamla Jatt 2006, "Maa diyan Asisan")

The hypermasculinist Jat's devotion to his mother makes him a devoted son and a complete Mama's boy. Since the feminine is fetishized either as an object of male desire or affection in the Jat's imaginary, a woman who poses a threat to patriarchal authority must be disciplined through prescriptive labelling.

It is the folksong that performs the function of the construction of the idealized female of the Jat's imagination through its prescriptive overtones. "Ik ran asli and ik ran nakli" polarizes the authentic and inauthentic female/wife through the degree to which she guards family honor and makes sacrifices for the sake of her husband and his family,

*Ik ran asli te ik ran nakli*  
*Solah baat utaraan*  
*Asli chundi kakh liyave*  
*Nakli kare baharaan*  
*Asli suchhe khandan chon neki niyat akhvave*  
*Andar baithi bhuki pyasi apni laaj bachave*  
*Nakli ai khudgarj mijaji*  
*Jide yaar hazaraan*  
 The real wife and the fake one  
 What I am saying is completely true  
 The real one picks and fetches the fodder  
 The fake one whiles away her time  
 The real one is known for being good-natured in the entire family  
 She remains inside hungry or thirsty shielding her family's honour  
 The fake one has a selfish disposition  
 And thousands of male friends. (Yamla Jatt n.d., "Ik Ran Asli")

Jat masculinity may be constructed as strong, fearless, aggressive, arrogant and amorous as an alterity to weak, helpless, submissive, self-abnegating femininity. The paradoxical sexualization and eroticization of female bodies in folksongs that is accompanied with the strict regulation of female sexuality through prescriptive behavior replicates the binary of the mother and the whore through which patriarchy has traditionally represented women. Although the sexualized body of the object of the Jat's desire that is used to accentuate Jat virility is contrasted with the apotheosized figures of the beloved and the mother, neither the whore, nor the beloved or the mother, can escape being fetishized.

#### 4. Bhangra and Sikhism

Locating the making of modern Sikh kirtan to the Singh Sabha reformation, Bob van der Linden argues that "music was certainly part of the Singh Sabha redefinition of the Sikh self (van der Linden 2008, p. 2)." However, unlike julli that is associated with Sufi pirs and gatka with Sikh practices, bhangra, which emerged as a rural Punjabi dance, particularly in West Punjab, by the 19th century and came to be associated with the annual Baisakhi festival, was not an official Sikh tradition (Schreffler 2013, pp. 389–90). As van der Linden points out, Punjabi popular culture was considered "morally repulsive" by the Singh Sabha who opposed female dancing, censored the sexual content

that originally was part of Punjabi qissas, bhajans, and ghazals, and were highly critical of bhangra (van der Linden 2008, p. 10). However, bhangra has become synonymous with Sikh culture in the popular imagination through its appropriation in the construction of a transnational Jat Sikh identity, which is a cause of great concern for both Sikh religious organizations and dance scholars. Reversing East Punjab Jat Sikhs's dismissal of dancing and singing as an effeminate vocation traditionally assigned to derided lower caste Muslims before partition (Brard 2007, p. 312), the self-conscious mapping of Sikhism on bhangra dance and music has made it a signifier of Jat Sikh subjectivity.

Rajinder Dudrah, Nicola Mooney, and Harjant Gill have thrown important light on the connection between bhangra's agrarian origins and "the rural imaginary" that defines Jat Sikhs. Mooney defines Jat Sikhs as "a caste of farmers and landlords with significant regional status" and views them as embodying "the autochthonous Punjabi identity" despite their leading urban and transnational lives. She ascribes Jat Sikhs' symbolic association with the region to their "landed attachments to the region, whether expressed in actively agricultural practices, emotive rural nostalgias, or religiously nationalist Khalistani aspirations (Mooney 2008)." Maintaining that "the jat [sic], and his female counterpart the jati [sic], are portrayed through respectively stereotypical notions of male strength articulated with farming skills and youthful prowess and a feminine beauty that is 'sharp' in looks and allegedly unique to this caste", Dudrah notes the privileging of the Jat subject in bhangra (Dudrah 2002, p. 376). Mooney avers that "Bhangra is thus understood, practiced and represented as a primordially Jat phenomenon, related to both language and beat, as well as to the organic embodiment of Jat identity in its performance (Mooney 2008)." Gill's emphasis is on bhangra's articulation of a certain kind of masculinity or hypermasculinity that is both mapped on the Jat Sikh body and appropriated by the caste in its self-constitution (Gill 2012). Mooney demonstrates that bhangra "privileges a Jat-centric hierarchy of caste, gender and ethnicity" (Mooney 2013, p. 279) and explores "how Jat Sikhs, or specifically Jat masculinity, exercise particular dominance in bhangra themes, performances and discourses (Mooney 2013, p. 280)."

Yet, bhangra's translation of 'the rural imaginary' of the Jats does not quite explain its articulation to Sikhism or Sikh identity (Mooney 2011). A careful analysis of bhangra texts reveals that although the Jat caste can be found across religious boundaries and bhangra is reported to have been performed by the Jats (Schreffler 2013, p. 390), the dance is increasingly used for the articulation of specifically Jat Sikh masculinities. The most telling cue about the collapse of the Jat with the Sikh is the frequent substitution of the term Jat in the song lyrics with Singh or Sardar. In the Bhangra vocabulary, the frequency of the terms Jat, Singh, and Sardar is matched with the frequency of their interchangeability. A random sampling of the songs of some of the best-known Punjabi singers reveals that they constitute eulogies to the Jat. From Kuldip Manak's "Jat ho giya sharaabi peeke poori vodka [the Jatt got drunk having gulped down a full bottle of vodka] (Manak 1984)" and "Ni putt jattan da halh wohnda vatte tadke da [Oh, the son of Jats begins ploughing at the crack of dawn] (Manak 1979)" to Pammi Bai's "Do cheeza jatt mangda, daaru ghar di bandook baran bor di [The Jat asks for only two things, country liquor and a 12 barrel gun]" (Bai 2002) and "Jatt jattan da te bholu narayan da bai gallan sachian kare [The Jat of Jats might be a simpleton but tells the truth]" (Bai and Tharika Wala 2003), Surjit Bindrakhia's "Ni toon jatt di pasand, jatt ne vihauni hai [Oh, you are the choice of the Jat, the Jat wants to marry you] (Bindrakhia 2011) or Jazzy B's "Kehra jamm piya soorma jehra jatt di charat nu roke [Which champion is born who can dare to stop the Jat's rise?]" (Jazzy B 2006), the Jat is praised in hyperbolic terms. Out of the songs recorded between 2014 and 2019, an overwhelming number of titles include the term Jat.

The Jat is further produced as Sikh rather than Hindu or Muslim through his sporting specifically Sikh bodily signifiers and symbolic markers such as the sword, the *khanda*, the *kada*, and the *dastaar*.

*Dushman v hove bhave dastaar kade ne lahi de*

*je khud chahiye satkar, ta sabh di ijat karni chahidi*

Give respect to one and all, if you wish to be respected!

Never take off the turban, even when confronted by an enemy! (Sartaaj 2011, "Dastaar")

Additionally, allusions to Sikh religious icons and concepts particularly to the Sikh gurus in bhangra songs reveal the appropriation of bhangra music and dance in the consolidation of Jat Sikh or even Sikh identities. Sartaj's invocation of the figure of the *sant sipahi* in "Dastaar" is an unambiguous allusion to the Sikh guru Gobind Singh,

*Jihna bacheya izzatan te jo sabh kujh tetho vaar gaye*

*Maaf jamir ne karna nai je oh vi dilon visaar gaye*

*Hai mehangi ai kurbani . . .*

*Mehangi ai kurbani bhul na jaiyo sant sapahiye de*

The one who saved your honour and sacrificed his everything for you

Your conscience won't forgive you if you were to forget him too.

Priceless is the sacrifice of the Saint Soldier, don't you forget his sacrifice. (Sartaaj 2011, "Dastaar")

Instead of perceiving material success and consumerist ethics as incompatible with deep piety, the Singhs' success in the material realm reflected in their display of conspicuous consumption is attributed to the blessings of the Waheguru in Jazzy B's song "Singhan diya Gaddian".

*Satgur diyan mehran ne*

*Singhan diyan gadiyan rehn sada ladhiyan*

*Chap de note poora kam loot te mouja laggiyan*

*Babbe diyan meheran ne*

*Singhan diyan gadiyan rehn sadah ladhiyan.*

The Almighty's blessings are with us!

Let the trucks of the Singhs always be laden

Let them mint money, bag all the jobs and enjoy life

Baba Guru Nanak's blessings! (Jazzy B 2014, "Singhan diya Gaddian")

## 5. Dance, Masculinity, Resistance

Celebratory narratives of bhangra's acquisition of the status of the ethnocultural signifier of South Asian, Punjabi, or Sikh identity and its emancipatory potential were undercut by grave academic anxieties about its affirmation of traditional Punjabi/Sikh/Jat patriarchies through its gendered discursive and performative space (Housee and Dar 1996). Concerns about bhangra's perpetuation of traditional hypermasculinity and heteronormativity voiced by some producers and scholars were relegated to the background in the emancipating possibilities it offered for the consolidation of resistant Asian subjectivities. In addition to the fact that *giddha*, the traditional dance performed by women in Punjab remained invisible in contrast to the visibility and appropriation of bhangra in diasporic identity formation (Purewal and Kalra 2010), the conspicuous female absence in bhangra production shows that bhangra's resistance to racism did not unsettle gender hierarchies.<sup>6</sup> Although young South Asian women's convergence on bhangra performance in resisting hegemonies of race and gender

<sup>6</sup> Invisible or marginalized as producers, women are conspicuously visible in the bhangra music videos as the reified objects of the Jat's desire. The fetishization of the female body in traditional bhangra lyrics is accentuated in the visual genre as the camera's lascivious gaze lingers on the exposed female body to sate global voyeuristic pleasures (Gera Roy 2010). In particular, the misogynist male gaze of bhangra rap videos fixed on sexualized female bodies represents women as promiscuous temptresses who may be exploited with impunity. As Gera Roy points out, "the Jat space is represented in Bhangra texts as an exclusively male space from which the woman must be banished or controlled and invited to play the role of the machista by admiring their manliness (Gera Roy 2015, p. 178)."



was synchronous with those of their male counterparts, bhangra's emancipatory effects in their lived experience were restricted to the consumption of music and performance of dance. Several interviews, essays, and studies have examined the resistance by young women to the gendered narrative of bhangra by insinuating their way into the hypermasculine space of bhangra production and consumption and challenging gender stereotypes (Gopinath 1995; Bakrania 2013). The early work of Gayatri Gopinath looks at bhangra's complex negotiation of race, nation, and gender. Gopinath argues that, bhangra, "as a performance of diaspora becomes complicit in Hindu hegemonic projects to the extent that it reinforces dominant articulations of gender in its construction of a (male) diasporic subject" and of the woman as an embodiment of a pure, unsullied tradition and homeland (Gopinath 1995, p. 316).

Falu Bakrania's *Bhangra and the Asian Underground* focuses on the club-going activities of a group of educated, professional women that interrogate the construction of the Punjabi/Sikh/Asian woman as the guardians of tradition through their visiting clubs in London, an activity that would be considered taboo for 'good' girls (Bakrania 2013). Yet, the clubgoers in Bakrania's book construct themselves as 'good' girls by differentiating themselves from promiscuous 'bad' girls. Clubgoing could be viewed as constituting a resistant gesture that replies to traditional patriarchal injunctions against partying and clubbing through which female conduct and sexuality are regulated. In their responses to ethnographers, female clubgoers confess to enjoying the freedom that the mere act of stepping out of the house, wearing certain kind of attire, consuming alcohol, or dancing in mixed gender space signifies with respect to the breaking of patriarchal taboos (Bakrania 2013). However, although female clubgoers' challenging Punjabi/Sikh patriarchy through the forbidden act of clubbing, drinking, and dancing is perceived as emancipatory, they paradoxically identify with the sexualized, reified object of the male desire in the bhangra text through their pleasure in the consumption of bhangra. Thus, the female clubgoers, in their rejection of the patriarchal stereotype of the coy, vulnerable, virginal Sikh woman, unwittingly succumb to the risk of auto-objectification.

Sandeep Bakshi's uncovering of "the availability of queer infra-politics in Giddha performances" reveals that "a critique of heteropatriarchy" could be located "within traditional Punjabi female genres" (Bakshi 2016, p. 13). However, resistance to the gender hierarchies governing the space of bhangra production and consumption have largely been addressed by the interrogation of bhangra's sexist, hypermasculinist, patriarchal ethos through women's usurpation of positions traditionally assigned to men. If female bhangra DJs like Radical Sista and Ritu in Britain, Rekha in New York, or Ameeta in Canada were the first to challenge the gendered norms of Punjabi performative traditions (Ballantyne 2006, p. 153), UK's first female drummer Parv Kaur formed her dhol band 'Eternal Taal' to deconstruct the stereotype of the male dhol player through demonstrating that women's physical difference was no barrier to their ability to handle heavy instruments that required strength and stamina.

The examples of pioneering DJs like Radical Sista, Ritu, Rekha, and Ameeta, dhol players like Parv Kaur and all-female bhangra teams demonstrate that resistance to gendered hierarchies can be performed in innumerable ways. The image of the salwar kameez clad Radical Sista who was the only female DJ in the 1990s and felt isolated but resolutely refused to "dress up and play a role" or "take any crap" from the male clubgoers suggests that resistance to patriarchy could take place without women having to adopt aggressive masculine behavior (quoted in Kalia 2019). In sharp contrast to Radical Sista, Rekha, who has successfully challenged the masculinist stereotype through hosting a very successful Bhangra night in New York City, does so through a complete rejection of stereotyped Punjabi female attire or conduct. On the other hand, Parv Kaur, who began to play the dhol at the tender age of 12, disengaged the conventional signification of the dhol as a masculine instrument through co-opting the masculine characteristics of strength, energy, and stamina in her feminine ensemble. The all-female bhangra teams claim to be motivated by the desire to disprove that its strong, masculinist movements are impossible or inappropriate for female performers and to dissolve the segregated boundaries of Punjabi dance.

The discursive construction of the woman as an embodiment of tradition in the bhangra text through the figures of the self-abnegating mother and the virginal beloved is inverted in the lived space

of performance through the resistive acts performed by female DJs, musicians, or dancers. In their wresting of the right to indulge in vocations, activities, and conduct that is traditionally sanctioned by Punjabi/Sikh patriarchy for their male counterparts, female producers and consumers unwittingly assume a masculine or hypermasculine posture. This shattering of gender stereotypes is believed to be progressive and liberating and is celebrated in analyses of bhangra as providing agency, albeit limited, to women. However, these resistant acts are unable to demolish the patriarchal ideological structures underpinning bhangra texts that are glorified in the song lyrics or the gendered violence through which relations between male and female consumers are governed in the space of the club. The assumption of gender roles such as playing the dhol, deejaying at nightclubs, performing in bhangra teams, or visiting clubs could be perceived as an emancipatory act so far as it challenges Punjabi/Sikh patriarchy. None of these resistive gestures, however, question the hypermasculine, sexist, casteist aesthetic naturalized both in the bhangra text and performance.

## 6. Hard Kaur: The first Asian Female Rapper

In view of the fact that only an insignificant number of female singers with the exception of Rani Ranbir, Satwinder Bitti, Rajeshwari Sachdev, or Kamaljit Neeru were able to make a dent in the male bhangra monopoly in the 1990s, the emergence of the first female rapper on the hypermasculine arena of bhangra rap a decade and half later could be considered a major breakthrough. A revisiting of Taran Kaur Dhillon alias Hard Kaur's pathbreaking incursion into the hypermasculine, misogynist rap space reveals that grit, determination, and sheer bravado can, in fact, surmount any obstacles that a female performer might face in infiltrating the male dominated bhangra scenario. Born in Kanpur to Sikh parents, Hard Kaur migrated to UK in 1984 after her mother was turned out by her paternal grandparents following the death of Kaur's father and was coerced by her own parents into remarrying an older Sikh. It was Kaur's direct experience of racism, sexism, and classism in school and abuse at home that transformed her from a demure Sikh girl to a fighter, "They'd say stuff like why've you got two plaits? Did you live in a hut in India? Did you have a toilet? I used to cry when I came home (quoted in [Sharma 2008](#))." When she returned from school one day to find her mother's face completely bruised after the battering she had got from her stepfather, she beat up her stepfather and reported him to the police. "After the police took him away, I told my mom that she doesn't need a man. I said, 'I'll be your husband, your son, and your daughter (quoted in [I for You Team 2019](#))." She recalls that it was her refusal to put up with bullying in school that won her the respect of her peers and led to her turning to hip hop, "I wasn't taking it from anyone anymore. In school, I stood up to a girl who was bullying me. Another group of girls were impressed and introduced me to Hip Hop (quoted in [I for You Team 2019](#))."

Hard Kaur's struggle with race, class, and gender during her adolescent years toughened her and fueled her determination to break all barriers. Her explanation for assuming the name Hard Kaur was the beginning of her questioning of Sikh gendered norms that enjoin a Kaur to be gentle, demure, and obedient.

I was a 'soft' Kaur. I used to obey and follow everything, that people asked me to, which was not of worth I later realized. This world has made me Hard Kaur. And I am thankful to people who are an obstacle for me and created problems for me, which is where I developed my urge to succeed from. (quoted in [Walia 2013](#))

Hard Kaur has been alternatively vilified and applauded for her willful transgression of Punjabi/Sikh patriarchal gender hierarchies and norms. Her daredevil image and unconventional behavior have been exploited by the press for its shock value even as her pioneering efforts in the field of music have been commended. The juxtaposition of these twin opinions reveals that while her shattering of the stereotype of the Asian female musician or Hindi playback singer along with her innovative, original brand of music have been perceived as emancipating the Asian sonic space, her attire and conduct at live events has attracted the wrath of traditionalists. Her generalized subversion of

Hindu and Sikh patriarchal strictures in her early albums was perceived as an empowering gesture for female singers not conforming to the stereotyped construction of the female voice quality, themes, and behavior in the Indian music industry. However, her turning up drunk at events, hurling expletives, and using disrespectful language at an event in Chandigarh offended the sensibilities of Sikhs present there (JSinghnz 2013). More recently, she was booked for her abusive social posts against Hindu nationalist leaders like Yogi Adityanath, the Chief Minister of UP, and Mohan Bhagwat, the Chief of the Hindu nationalist organization Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), when she went a step further by challenging the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and right wing activists of the RSS to a one to one duel and extended her support to the pro-Khalistan movement by posing with separatist Khalistanis (Arya 2019). Whether her acts, speech, and conduct have been intentionally cultivated to approximate the stereotyped image of the rap singer or timed and calculated to boost her album sales or not, they are in complete opposition to the patriarchal construction of the Sikh woman.

An analysis of Hard Kaur's public image produced through visual, vocal, and kinetic signifiers reveals the extent to which it has been meticulously cultivated to fit into that of the female rap performer. Hard Kaur claims to have been introduced to rap and hip hop while she was in school and acknowledges the appeal that rap lyrics and style, which emerged from the privations, abuses, and violence faced by working-class black migrants in Britain, had for an Asian woman like her subjected to domestic violence and racism. She has also shared the possibilities that the musical genre, which naturalized both violence and resistance, offered her to articulate her experiential angst emerging from the intersection of class, race, and gender in the oppression of black people in Britain. She has often spoken about how her induction into the rap scene through her schoolmates enabled her to cope with the domestic and professional pressures she was confronted with in her lived experience. She uses rap, a male-dominated black music characterized by its misogynist lyrics, violence, and gangland culture, as an effective tool for confronting Asian/Punjabi/Sikh hegemonic structures. The question whether the image was carefully cultivated as a strategy to break into the male dominated bhangra or rap scene or was a logical step propelled by a similar experience of domestic violence and racism shared by working class Punjabi/Sikh immigrants with black migrants remains unanswered. However, a rearrangement of her life story to match the life narratives of oppressed black women and doubly oppressed black women that would enable a Sikh young woman to enter the black rap scene cannot be completely ruled out.<sup>7</sup>

The music of female rappers reveals the diverse ways they respond to the five themes undergirding rap's misogynist lyrics: (a) Derogatory naming and shaming of women, (b) sexual objectification of women, (c) legitimization of violence against women, (d) distrust of women, and (e) celebration of prostitution and pimping, which have been identified by Ronald Weitzer and Charis E. Kubrin (Weitzer and Kubrin 2009). Female rap represents the female perspective on the experience of racial, class, and ethnic discrimination faced by working class black youth that supplements the male viewpoint with the neglected question of gender. Female black rappers, therefore, focus on the oppressive effects of racial violence faced by black males in the public space on the black domestic space in the form of domestic violence and sexual abuse. However, as Matthew Oware points out in "A 'Man's Woman?' Contradictory Messages in the Songs of Female Rappers, 1992–2000," there are very "high numbers of female self-objectification, self-exploitation, and derogatory and demeaning lyrics about women in general (Oware 2009, p. 787)" in female rap that apparently provides an emancipatory forum for the marginalized or oppressed such as women. In Oware's view, "these contradictory lyrics nullify the positive messages that are conveyed by female rap artists, consequently reproducing and upholding hegemonic, sexist notions of femininity, and serving to undermine and disempower women (Oware 2009, p. 787)." Taran Kaur Dhillon's transformation into the rapper Hard Kaur is contingent

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<sup>7</sup> For instance, although her father did not die in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, she did not correct the press when it projected her as a victim of the anti-Sikh violence whose family had sought asylum in UK (Kaur 2006, personal communication).

upon her adoption of the stance of black female rappers, who resist the hypermasculinist, misogynist, sexist, and violent language of male rappers through foraying into the misogynist field of rap and empowering messages but ironically convey and reproduce male hegemonic notions of femininity.

Shanara R. Reid-Brinkley argues “that black women construct an oppositional response to dominant representations of black femininity, while simultaneously engaging in the disciplining of black women’s subjectivity (Reid-Brinkley 2008, p. 238).” Reid-Brinkley’s analysis of internet responses to the sexual objectification of women in rap music in which she shows that the readers’ responses unwittingly borrow the binary of the good and the bad black woman in dominant representations of black women in their upholding of the notion of ‘the black queen’ who represents traditional black values in order to reverse the sexualized image of the ‘ho (whore)’ in rap music. Reid-Brinkley points out that black women construct diverse subject positions “around the performance of race, class, and gender as a means to resist dominant representations of black women, while simultaneously engaging in disciplinary practices that constrain black femininity (Reid-Brinkley 2008, p. 236).” Hard Kaur resists dominant white representations of the Asian and (non) dominant Punjabi/Sikh of the Punjabi woman respectively through her assumption of the position of the bad woman or the whore of the male rap video. Her resistance to the notion of respectability through which the good Sikh woman is constructed is expressed through her breaking of the taboos against drinking, mixing, and sex by which Sikh/Punjabi femininity has been disciplined. The “Glassy” song that catapulted Hard Kaur to fame has her indulging in the masculinist pleasure of drinking,

*Ek glassy, do glassy teen glassy char* (One glass, two glasses, three glasses, four)

Put ya hands in da air like u jus dun care, cuz u feel

Lika supastar

*Ik glassy, do glassy teen glassy char*

Ur drunk as hell, n u dunt feel well, but u still go

Bak 2 da bar. (Kaur 2007a, “Ek Glassy”)

Her self-representation as an independent hardworking woman entitled to drinking and partying at the end of a busy week in “Peeney do” replies to bhangra songs normalizing drinking as a quintessential male Jat weakness,

Yo I need a drink

Yo need a drink

I’ll be working all week

And I need a drink (that’s right)

*Aha ho ja sharabi* (Let’s get tipsy)

*Aha ho ja sharabi* (Let’s get tipsy) (Kaur 2012, “Peeney Do”)

In simultaneously replying to rap’s misogyny through demystifying the stereotype of the easily available bad girl or whore by threatening to kick the male who dares to misbehave with her, she points to alternative subject positions available to women other than that of the ‘the black queen’ and the ‘ho’ (Reid-Brinkley 2008).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The young clubgoers in Bakrania’s book, similarly, refuse to fit into the stereotyped representation of the teetotaling, domesticated, reticent good Sikh/Asian girl even as they reject the sexualized position of the bad girl or whore who self-objectifies herself through wearing provocative attire and makes herself easily available to one and all (2013).

Do all da rudeboyz, try n cht  
 U get sum attention n ur try n kiss  
 Betta keep ur hands of maa skurt  
 Cuz I will turn around and kik ur whr it hurts. (Kaur 2007a, "Ek Glassy")

In her refusal to occupy the position of the sexualized object of the Jat's desire in the bhangra song and threatening to break the leg of the guy who dares to talk dirty, she suggests that strength, daredevilry, and violence are not the sole prerogative of the Sikh male,

*Jo ladka bola gandhi baat*  
*Tod ke rakh du uski laaf*  
 The guy who talks dirty  
 I will break his leg. (Kaur 2007a, "Ek Glassy")

In "Move your body" where she exhorts all 'sexy gals and boys' to dance, questions the idea of dancing in the club as an exclusively male pastime by legitimizing dancing as every woman's fundamental right,

O yeah all da sexy gals, all da sexy boys  
 (Got ya move ur - 3 body tonite) - 2 like this . . .  
 Move ur body baby - 3 *jab kudiye*  
 Move ur body baby, move ur body baby (u got to) *soni baliye*  
 (Got ya move ur - 3 body tonite) - 2 like this like this like this  
 Like this n that n this n that. (Kaur 2007b, "Move your Body")

While refusing to conform to the image of the fetishized object of the Jat's desire, she celebrates her own sexuality and inverts bhangra's gender imbalance by repositioning the male as an instrument for the gratification of her needs in "Dilli Wali Zalim Girlfriend",

*Nachna bada ni tera kaim lagda* (Your dancing is very pleasing)  
*Chakhna pauga tera taim lagda* (I want to taste it but it will take some time)  
 Hey boy *zaalim dilli* is gonna beat to the drum  
 Hey boy I'm calling you  
 Won't you come and give me some  
 Hey boy won't you pick me up  
*Tu le mera naam* (Call out my name)  
*Zaalim Delhi meri jaan* (This evil Delhi is going to take my life). (Jazzy B and Kaur 2015, "Dilli Wali Zalim Girlfriend")

In expressing her desire for a 'sexy boy' in "Sexy Boy", she invokes the imagery of gangsta rap to displace the desirable female of the male rapper's imagination with that of the desirable male. Through voicing her choice of a desi guy, she speaks back to the allegedly sexist lyrics of Apache Indian's "Arranged Marriage" in which he fetishizes the '*soni kudi*' (beautiful girl) from the heart of Punjab by a conscious play on the lyrics of the male bhangra rapper's iconic song. The '*lafanga*' (bad guy) or gangster who is posited as an alterity to the girl who is "sweet like *jalebi*" in Apache Indian's song parodies gendered patriarchal Punjabi/Sikh norms in which a trace of 'wildness' is deemed desirable in a Jat male but not the Jat female,

Gimme a desi . . . .a desi guy  
 Gimme a desi . . .  
 who looks so fly  
 I want a man that rocks my world cuz I need a gangsta  
 Don't know about you girl but I need a gangsta  
*Ek sona munda* (A good-looking guy)  
 I need a gangsta *te thoda sa lafanga* (and who's bit of a cad) cuz I need a gangsta. (Kaur 2007c, "Sexy Boy")

Beginning with the choice of a stage name that retains her Sikh qualifier, Hard Kaur has never shied away from acknowledging her Sikh origins, which are accentuated by her insertion of Punjabi lyrics and use of Punjabi laced Hindi. In her more recent albums, her self-conscious referencing to specific Jat cultural and Sikh religious concepts has made her Sikh antecedents more pronounced. The titles of some of these songs allude to specific Punjabi literary tropes, Jat cultural codes, and Sikh religious imagery.

The song "Ranjha", the name of the male lover in the legendary Punjabi folk epic *Heer Ranjha* that has become a metaphor for the lover in the Punjabi popular imagination, may be viewed as a subversive reinscription of the Punjabi epic romance. Hard Kaur borrows the trope of the legendary love of Heer and Ranjha as a signifier of true love to redefine the role of the modern day Heer within hypermasculine Jat hierarchy. Her amused response to her male lover's reassuring her not to be afraid, "*Tu darr na kudiye ni..Tu darr na dudiye ni* (don't be afraid girl)", invokes the proverbial fearlessness of the Jat female not only to overturn the stereotype of the protective Jat but also to gain feminine agency,

*Aanh.. di..* anything for the boy  
*Tu jo bhi bol* (whatever you say)  
 This my lover boy  
 I loveem Hard Kaur  
 He see now, \_\_ is clear  
*Aa gaya* [he's here], save better,  
 get out here  
 I'm by your side or die  
*Jatti kabhi nahi dari* (The Jat female is never scared)  
*Main tere naal khadi* (I'm by your side)  
*Mera ranjha* Deep Money (My Ranjha is Deep Money). (Hard Kaur with Deep Money 2015, "Ranjha")

In "*Sherni*", Hard Kaur appropriates the Sikh metaphor of the '*sher*' (lion) in her parodic play on the male braggadocio and swagger in rap music that equally addresses Jat hypermasculinity. She co-opts the Jat equivalent of the rap swagger called '*bakre bulan*,' a loud roar/call like 'Bruahhhhhhh' in bhangra bolian often used by male singers to celebrate masculinity, in her own swaggering act to decouple it from Jat masculinity. At the same time, her assumption of the feminine equivalent '*sherni*' of the symbol of the *sher* or lion invokes the religious reinscription of the Sikh male as a courageous warrior by the tenth Guru Gobind Singh to lay a genetic claim to the Sikh warrior legacy in addition to the honorific of Kaur or Princess given to all Sikh women,

My name is Hard Kaur  
 I'm staying here  
 You hear?

KIA ... KIA

I got too much swagger in my DNA

*Sherni hai, sherni hai, Sherni hai jatti* (The Jat woman is a lioness)

*Bol diya so bol diya main piche nahi hati* (She speaks out when she needs to and does not go back on her word)

*Aankh mila lo aur tuda lo* (If you make eye contact, you are asking for getting broken)

*Free mein apni haddi* (your bone for free)

I am a champion. (Kaur 2016, "Sherni")

Hard Kaur was charged with sedition in 2019 for her naming the Indian Prime Minister a terrorist in her new song "Khalistan to Kashmir" (Kaur 2019) and her social media account was suspended for her equally vituperative charges against other right wing Hindu politicians (The Wire Staff 2019; Online Desk 2019). The controversial music video has provoked the anger of not only sympathizers of the Hindu party, but also of her former admirers who include Sikhs. Hard Kaur's repeated use of the word rape and obscene language in her social media posts and video has been justifiably criticized for their unparliamentary character. The wisdom of her charging powerful politicians with having committed heinous crimes without evidence and extending her open support to the Khalistani cause has been challenged and led to allegations of her receiving Pakistani support. However, her inversion of the idiom of rape standardized by male rappers to vociferate misogynist sentiments in order to draw parallels between rape as a symbol of hypermasculine anxiety in the sonic sphere of rap music and the political sphere has been overlooked. First of all, she frames her response to death and rape threats by sympathizers of the Hindu party within the hypermasculine idiom of rap in which rape constitutes the most brutal form of sexual violence through which hypermasculinity is defined,

"Why (are) you doing all these girly things? Like sedition charge, 'we're gonna rape you ... we're gonna kill you ... ' Come and fight like a man," she challenged the two veteran politicians. (quoted in TNN 2019)

The second emerges from the proverbial Sikh contempt for the attacker who lacks the courage to make a frontal attack as a dastardly feminine act unbecoming of a real man. Hard Kaur's veiled allusions to Sikh cultural norms in her earlier albums find a culmination in her declaration of her unambiguous commitment to the Khalistani cause in her new video.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, Hard Kaur adopts a hypermasculine bhangra genre to address the misogyny, sexism, and violence of rap to reverse the sexualized, reified Punjabi female of male desire in rap, bhangra, and Punjabi folksong through adopting a number of subject positions that are apparently contradictory. She rejects the binary construction of the idealized *soni kudi* or the good Punjabi/Sikh girl and the bad girl or whore in bhangra and rap music, respectively, to assume the subject position of the strong, independent, hardworking modern Punjabi female. However, she appropriates the features that have traditionally served to define Punjabi/Jat/Sikh masculinity and glorified in bhangra music from the Punjabi/Jat/Sikh male to constitute herself. She constructs this new Punjabi/Jat/Sikh woman through an amalgamation of the qualities of mental strength and courage associated with the Jatti (Jat female) or Sikh woman in the Punjabi popular imaginary and of the bad girl of bhangra who takes an undisguised delight in her beauty, femininity, and sexuality. In her return to rap resistivity in her new albums, she takes on both the Sikh and Hindu patriarchal regimes through invoking Sikh religious symbols and Punjabi cultural tropes.

<sup>9</sup> Kaur marries the hypermasculinist imagery and language of rap with hypermasculine Sikh symbols in her album to invoke and affirm stereotyped representations of the bold, fearless, just Sikh warrior. Her braggadocio in challenging Hindu leaders, dissing and name-calling, and open contempt for the oppressive regime echoes rather than interrogates the hypermasculine narrative of Khalistan. She places herself in opposition to the emasculated Hindu male through assuming the position of the hypermasculine warrior.

## 7. Conclusions

The space of Punjabi dance has traditionally been a strictly segregated space in which male and female performativity is regulated and disciplined by traditional gender norms and expectations. Since the 1980s, bhangra, classified as a Punjab male dance and co-opted in the production of Punjabi ethnocultural identity in the state of Punjab and Asian/Punjabi/Sikh identity in the diasporas, gained unprecedented global visibility whereas female Punjabi dances remained marginalized. Not only is the space of bhangra production heavily male centric in its inability to make room for female participation except as consumers, but its lyrics are also highly masculinist, sexist, and casteist that perpetuate Punjabi/Jat/Sikh patriarchal structures and gender hierarchies through the reification of women as the good beloved and the bad whore. In their consumption of bhangra and embracing it as the signifier of Asian/Punjabi/Jat/Sikh identity to resist racist regimes, female clubgoers and musicians unwittingly accept its disturbing gender hierarchy. However, a number of female musicians have successfully interrogated Punjabi/Jat/Sikh patriarchies through refusing to conform to the idealized image of the demure, obedient, good Punjabi/Jat/Sikh girl by opting for diverse subject positions that include performing movements or playing instruments requiring strength and stamina, borrowing features of the bad girl through dancing, drinking, and visiting nightclubs, or by establishing themselves as successful singers to challenge patriarchal definitions of femininity. The bhangra rapper Taran Kaur Dhillon alias Hard Kaur, through her refusal to fit into the binary of the good or bad Sikh girl, foregrounds the disciplining of the female body implicit in the expectation of identification or disidentification with either subject position and carves out a new definition of femininity through blending elements of the masculine and feminine, the good and the bad girl in her self construction.

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