

Lee Ann Fujii Award for Innovation in the Interpretive Study of Political Violence
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American Political Science Association

This award is presented biannually to a book, journal article, or book chapter that utilizes interpretive methods to illuminate political violence. The award recognizes Lee Ann Fujii's creative contributions to interpretive research methods and methodologies and the study of political violence.

2021 Recipient: Natasha Behl, Arizona State University for
Gendered Citizenship: Understanding Gendered Violence in Democratic India (Oxford
University Press, 2019)

Natasha Behl's *Gendered Citizenship* presents a fascinating and moving analysis of gendered violence. From an interpretive vantage point, this study asks why there exists pervasive gender-based discrimination, exclusion, and violence in India when the Indian constitution seemingly builds an inclusive democracy committed to gender and caste equality. Behl contends that conventional analyses of gender, democracy, and citizenship that focus on formal institutions and descriptive representation cannot adequately account for Indian women's experiences of the public and private spheres. Tacking between the public discourse surrounding the 2012 gang rape of Jyoti Singh and the everyday cultural, structural, and systemic practices that shape Sikh women's lives, Behl illuminates how patriarchal gender norms pervade ostensibly egalitarian secular and religious spaces. Her political ethnographic analysis of interviews, participant observation, and public debate shows in granular detail how the formal equalities and opportunities of Indian democracy do not extend to the lives that many Sikh women actually live.

Gendered Citizenship deepens understanding of the complex relationship between democracy and violence. Behl proposes a framework of situated citizenship and exclusionary inclusion to make sense of people's lived experiences of democracy. "Citizenship is more than a fixed legal status; it also is a situated social relation ... [which] requires that as researchers we be situated within local contexts to understand citizenship" (3-4). This study shows how people are always situated in various intersectional hierarchies of power. The perception of Jyoti Singh as a middle-class and therefore *deserving* citizen spurred popular condemnation of her assault despite widespread disregard of gendered violence against poorer, and lower caste putatively *undeserving* citizens. Subsequent legal reforms broadened the definition of rape but do not protect either people raped by their spouses or LGBTI+ rape victims. These and other forms of exclusionary inclusion pervade formal democracy.

In developing her analysis, Behl sheds critical light on inadequacies in conventional political science "objective" measures of democracy, measures that have portrayed India as a model democracy. Such measures, Behl contends, have failed to seriously consider the lived experience of women's citizenship and exclusionary inclusion. In this way, the findings of her study transcend the borders of India, for this analytic blindspot is not unique to that country.

Demonstrating the power of interpretive ethnographic analysis, Behl shows how Sikh women understand their faith as fundamentally anti-sexist, how they articulate gendered norms of womanhood and how these women exert political agency in religious civic life. Well-chosen interview excerpts illuminate the wide gap between formal and substantive equality. Safety concerns limit women's participation in associational life while violently enforced sexist norms of duty and devotion impede exercising property rights. Many Sikh women participate in religious civic life despite these constraints, challenging (or reinforcing) exclusionary inclusion in the all-women devotional societies. By means of this analysis, Behl offers us a way to not only think about and explore the connection between gendered violence and citizenship, she also provides new insight into the potential for re-envisioning the democratic possibilities of women's religious agency. As she puts it, "religious affiliations are not necessarily an obstacle to citizenship, but rather a way of enacting citizenship in a liberal democracy." (88)

Finally, the theoretical framing of the analysis and deployment of interpretive methods are exemplary. Of special note are her ethnographic sensibility, attention to positionality, and the interpretivist critique she develops of the study of gender and democracy within mainstream political science.

Award committee: Cecelia Lynch, chair (University of California-Irvine), Robin Turner (Butler University), Frederic Schaffer (University of Massachusetts Amherst)