

Examination of the nature of gender equality from the perspectives and lived realities of thirteen baptized Sikh women is one of *The Guru's Gift's* strengths, for it enables scholars, students, and educators to get a glimpse of these women's worlds. However, this approach is also one of the book's weaknesses, for Mahmood and Brady do not contextualize their findings in relation to the literature within the discipline of religious studies. As a result, they fail to provide a critical examination of the notion of equality within Sikh scripture and do not discuss the latter's possible misogynistic tendencies. By focusing on interpretations that only affirm positive images of women, Mahmood and Brady offer a one-sided view. This criticism is similar to one that can be made of N.K. Singh's *The Feminine*

Principle in the Sikh Vision of the Transcendent (1993). Anyone reading *The Guru's Gift* without applying a critical lens may get the false impression that Sikh religious culture is monolithic, that religious practices are void of issues of "politics," and that the Sikh faith is traditionally "pro-feminist."

As feminist scholars often indicate, there is no one theory that fully explains the nature and causes of women's subordination to men. Implying, as do Mahmood and Brady, that greater adherence to the teachings of the Ten Gurus will afford women equality is presumptuous. Many of the teachings of the Guru Granth Sahib may indeed afford women greater equality, but a broader approach and multidimensional analysis must be conducted before one can make general claims to equality.

Gilean Douglas: Writing Nature, Finding Home

Andrea Lebowitz and Gillian Milton

Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1999. 227 pp. Illus. \$21.95 paper.

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Hornby Island

GILEAN DOUGLAS WAS an emblem of her time and place. Born in 1900, she almost lived the century out. Her fierce independence, ambition, and dedication to her goals were a foreshadowing of what women, through feminism, would reach for in later decades. Born to privilege in Toronto, she embraced the challenges and solitude of a life in the bush in British Columbia, predating the back-to-the-land movement by decades. Writing

was Douglas's life-long passion, and she went about it with gusto, chronicling her travels and her unusual life in nature through weekly columns in Vancouver and Victoria newspapers and for the readers of over 200 magazines. At the time of her death in 1993, she was compiling and revising articles written as recently as the year before.

Andrea Lebowitz and Gillian Milton, in *Gilean Douglas: Writing Nature, Finding Home*, present a

portrait of this remarkable woman through Douglas's own writings, interspersed with sections that place these writings in the context of her life and times. They have done a good job of selecting and commenting upon texts, thus showing the range of Douglas's interests, the closeness of her observations, and the progress of her personal development.

Douglas was an only child and an orphan by sixteen. Much of her life was spent searching for a home and for someone to love her unquestioningly. It is Lebowitz and Milton's premise that, after four failed marriages, writing and nature gave Douglas the home she sought.

In 1939, Douglas, dealing with personal health and financial problems (both of which would dog her all her life), visited her lover at his cabin on the Coquihalla River. In Douglas' words: "Always in the back of my mind was the desire for that one perfect place where I could feel fulfilled and truly at home. I found it. I knew I had – the moment I entered the mountain-fenced valley and saw the silvery shake roof of a cabin trying to peer at me over the fireweed and salmonberry brush" (75). (This excerpt is typical of her writing: lively, well crafted, and full of immediacy: it takes you there.) It was love at first sight. She buys the cabin and makes a life for herself there. These experiences form the heart of the book as well as the heart of Douglas's life. We get a vivid picture of what such a life would have been like in backwoods British Columbia in the 1940s. Douglas repairs the cabin, establishes a garden, hauls her provisions by backpack from a spur railroad line reached by a long

uphill hike through the bush after a swing across the rushing river on a minimal, homemade cable car. She loves the fourteen-hour workdays, the lumber she fashions herself from slabs she splits off cedar logs with a froe, the peace and isolation of the snowed-in winters.

When the cabin burned down in 1947, Douglas had no choice but to move on. With her fourth husband, she moved to Cortes Island in 1949. Once again, the marriage failed, but the union with nature and place lasted. Douglas began a way of life typical of communities and homesteads all along the coast. Accessible from Whaletown only by exposed water or by several miles of forested trails, her home at Channel Rock became her refuge and her inspiration. As she had been in the Coast Mountains, she was a close observer of animals, plants, the weather, and the seasons. She truly lived *with* them, and she conveyed this cohabitation in her writing. She took numerous trips on the Columbia Coast Mission ships to remote upcoast settlements and wrote of the lives lived there. She also became, in her seventies, a director on the Comox-Strathcona Regional Board, working to control development and to preserve nature through local planning.

Lebowitz and Milton are to be thanked for including in the book so many photographs of Douglas at different stages in her life and of the places she loved. The book is declared at the outset to be "a sampler of some of the best writings of Gilean Douglas" as well as "a biographical introduction to a fascinating woman" (8). I imagine many readers will be inspired to consult the bibliography and read more.