V.N. Datta, with an introduction by Nonica Datta, *Jallianwala Bagh: A Ground Breaking History of the 1919 Massacre* (Gurgaon: Penguin Books, 2021) viii+ 186pp. £14.99 (pb)

On 13 April 1919, Indian troops under the command of General Reginald Dyer fired for ten minutes on an unarmed crowd in the walled area of Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar. The firing which had been ordered to disperse an unlawful gathering killed according to official figures 379 Indians and left more than 1200 wounded. It remains one of the most controversial episodes of the British Raj. The centenary of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre both rekindled academic debates concerning its causes and renewed calls raised in 2017 for a formal British apology. These circumstances make the publication of a second edition of the late V. N. Datta's pioneering history, (*Jallianwala Bagh*, Kurukshetra 1969) especially timely. The new edition includes an introduction by his youngest daughter, Nonica who is also a noted historian of colonial Punjab. The introduction builds on the classic volume's delinking of the massacre from an all-India narrative by exploring local memories and understandings of the event and its immediate aftermath.

Many works have been produced since 1969 when the volume first appeared. General Dyer's personality, the extent to which the events were an aberration or reflected the racist character of British rule and discussion as to whether this was a peculiarly Punjabi tragedy have all been debated. The black and white portrayals by imperialist apologists and nationalist critics have been both highlighted and nuanced; whether in discussion of the extent to which the firing was a failure in the doctrine of minimum force, or in understanding it as the inevitable outcome of a 'mutiny' complex in which paranoia and the need to display 'spectacular' force were intertwined. (Kim Wagner, "Calculated to Strike Terror': The Amritsar Massacre and the Spectacle of Colonial Violence", *Past and Present* 233, 1 November 2016, pp. 185-225).

V.N. Datta's work provided the foundation for several subsequent historical understandings. The notion that the Massacre marked a turning point from which the Raj never recovered moral authority is notable amongst these. It has now become a commonplace understanding and is reflected in influential works (Alfred Draper, *Amritsar: The Massacre that Ended the Raj* London, 1981; L.K. Tuteja, "Jallianwala Bagh: A Critical Juncture in the Indian Nationalist Movement", *Social Scientist* 25, 1/2 January-February 1997, pp. 25-61). The possibility that the massacre was a plot involving an agent provocateur according Hans Raj was also picked up by other writers who approached the events from a nationalist perspective. (See for example, Raja Ram, *The Jallianwala Bagh Massacre: A Premeditated Plot* Chandigarh 1969). Datta's pioneering study possessed two other important legacies that are highlighted in this new edition. Firstly, he extended the source base for the examination of the events of 13 April. Secondly, he brought a local dimension to their meaning.

During the research in 1966 for the original volume, V.N. Datta accessed the previously unavailable Volume 6 of the Disorders Inquiry Commission (Hunter

Inquiry Committee). This material included Dyer's account before the Commission. Datta later published the source material as *New Light on the Punjab Disturbances in 1919* (Simla, 1975). The material has been woven into their narratives by later historians of Jallianwala Bagh.

V.N. Datta had grown up in a house in Katra Sher Singh close to the Jallianwala Bagh which he knew well. Family stories of the violence and the place haunted him. Two years before his pioneering study, he had published an important history of his birthplace (V.N. Datta, *Amritsar: Past and Present* (Amritsar 1967). This local knowledge fed into his examination of the massacre. It embedded an event, which had already become a synecdoche for British imperialism, into the politics, life, and locality of Amritsar. It thereby brought a human dimension to an event that stood for a national tragedy. He was also able to counter the prevailing view that women had been present in the Bagh, whilst at the same time revealing that the labourers, Sikh farmers, and locals who were present had not been involved with the anti-Rowlatt agitation that had convulsed the city in the previous days.

The new edition makes this classic study available to a new generation of readers. It reveals how V.N. Datta's understanding has not only stood the test of time, but it interrogates the reading of the event in terms of a narrowly focused nationalist narrative. These findings remain pertinent for a people's history that recognizes the scars that remain for families of survivors and nearby inhabitants of what has become a national memorial and myth of the freedom movement.

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**Mallika Kaur.** *Faith, Gender, and Activism in the Punjab Conflict: The Wheat Fields Still Whisper* (New York: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2019), 305 pp.

There has been much written - both journalistic and academic - about the Punjab conflict of the 1980s and 1990s, but Mallika Kaur's recent book *Faith, Gender, and Activism in the Punjab Conflict: The Wheat Fields Still Whisper* stands out as an exceptionally unique and major contribution to this extensive literature. It is a book that defies concise methodological and empirical classification - a risky discursive strategy for a writer/scholar but one that Mallika Kaur masters in commendable fashion in writing such a beautifully-researched work of readable prose and analysis. It is this unique quality, in addition to its empirical content based on extensive field research in Punjab, that makes this book such a major contribution for scholars and the general educated audience alike for understanding the historical dynamics and antecedents of the Punjab conflict, and the complicated modes of human interaction and experience during those violent years.

The book uniquely interweaves the disciplines of history, political sociology, legal studies, and biography/personal narrative into a very readable and valuable work of academic analysis. The chronological narrative of the book consists of

concurrent timelines starting in chapter 1 from one end, with the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1839 and, on the other end, from the "end" of the Punjab conflict in 1995. In chapters 2 thru 9, these two chronical narratives run diametrically from these beginning points, until both converge in unison in chapter 10 with the horrific events of 1984. This unconventional presentation of the book's narrative, as opposed to the usual chronological ordering, is a notable strength because the reader learns about Sikh history from 1839 to 1984, while also concurrently being immersed in the harrowing (but also often uplifting) dynamics and experiences of individuals during the Punjab conflict from 1995 to 1984. The result is an exceptionally rich humanistic, but also highly academic, learning experience for the reader, including those who are professional experts in the field.

The primary protagonists of the book are three prominent human rights activists - Ajit Singh Bains, Baljit Kaur, and Inderjit Singh Jaijee - who left their lives of urban comfort and economic privilege to engage in risky human rights documentation and advocacy in the hinterlands of rural Punjab during the 1980s and 1990s. Mallika Kaur spent significant time with these three activists in Punjab, and utilized their networks of sources/contacts for extensive empirical field work and rich interview data. Yet, in a unique methodological innovation, Mallika Kaur also uses the family histories of these three individuals, sometimes extending as far back as into the mid-1800's, to elucidate factual Sikh history with personal family stories, thus effectively adding a personalized human quality to her rendition of "Sikh history." This includes their families' participation in various political and social movements in Punjab including the 1920's Gurdwara Reform Movement, the Indian independence movement, the 1950s/60s Punjabi Suba movement, the movement against Indira Gandhi's Emergency in the mid-1970s, and the leftist Naxalite movement of the 1970s. Yet, Mallika Kaur avoids "aggrandizing" these three activists, but rather discusses them and their involvement in human rights advocacy in strictly human terms including their episodes of self-reflection and personal frailty. Yet, what is consistent in the narrative is the centrality of their "faith" (i.e., *Sikhi*) and, in the case of Baljit Kaur, "gender" (i.e., feminism) in their decision to engage in risky human rights works.

A particular strength of the book are the personal stories and narratives offered by Mallika Kaur's interviewees, which give the reader a rare glimpse (or personal visit) into the world of unspeakable violence, human cruelty, and periodic personal resilience and compassion experienced in the interrogation centers, police stations, and killing fields of the state during the Punjab conflict. Each of the ten chapters of this book are interspersed with multiple stories from those who experienced these dynamics first hand. For example, in chapter 2 contains the story of Jaswant Singh Khalra as narrated by his widow and children; in chapter 4 one sits with Chaman Lal of Tarn Taran whose son was "disappeared" by the police; chapter 5 contains Ajit Singh Bains' own near "disappearance" from the Chandigarh Golf Club in 1992; in chapter 6 Baljit Kaur narrates her human rights work in rural Punjab including in relation to the

infamous Balwant Singh Multani custodial murder; chapter 7 examines the extrajudicial killing of Kulwinder Singh "Kidd"; and chapter 8 narrates the death of Kuldip Kaur's youngest son "Ginnu" in the anti-Sikh violence in Bidar in 1988.

The story of Mrs. Kulbir Kaur Dhami and "Monu's Mother" in chapter 2 best encapsulates the human and analytical content of the book. In this chapter, Dhami describes how she was arrested along with her husband (and their infant son) by the police for alleged involvement in separatist activities. Her time spent in a secret detention center along with other Sikh women provides the centerpiece of the chapter. Dhami describes the inhumane torture and abuse she and other women endured while in police custody, including gendered violence in the form of threats of sexual abuse. Yet these detained women developed a "sisterhood" while in custody, which even extended to some of the policewomen in the center who disclosed their own abuse at the hands of male police officers. Within the confines of this violent venue, there were also random acts of kindness, such as police officers sharing sweets with the women detainees and their infant children during special occasions. In other instances, many of the police officers, including men, apologized to the women detainees for their treatment. The pinnacle section of the chapter describes a pact these detained Sikh women made with each other to take care of each other's children in case one of them were killed in a "faked encounter." This was, in fact, a promise Dhami kept when another female detainee ("Monu's mother") was executed in this blatant extrajudicial manner. This episode in chapter 2 illustrates many of the themes - faith, gender, and humanity - Mallika Kaur explores in this book. It also illustrates failure of Indian democracy and its legal system to protect the human rights of Sikh dissidents during this violent period. Yet, Mallika Kaur's analysis does not only pertain to "what happened" (i.e., the past), but also to "what is happening" (i.e., the present) and "what can happen" (i.e., the future). As narrated in this chapter, Monu still awaits "justice" for his mother in either the Indian or international judicial arena. Thus, this book pertains squarely with issues of human rights and transnational justice as well.

In conclusion, Mallika Kaur's book equally represents a "labor of love" as evidenced by the extensive field research required to compile and synthesize such a rich and fascinating array of personal narratives and history, but also the work of a serious and well-qualified academic (in this case, a legal scholar and ethnographer) interested in exploring the complex intersection of the law, faith, gender, and activism in the context of violent conflict. The product is a very readable but intellectually engaging book which is equally valuable for novices who wish to learn more about Sikh history and the Punjab conflict, and also for established scholars of Punjab, Indian democracy, human rights and legal studies. The book raises a number of compelling questions around these important issues, which makes it a scholarly work of enduring value in numerous fields of humanistic and academic study.

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**Kate Imy**. *Faithful Fighters: Identity and Power in the British Indian Army* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), 328pp.

The selective military recruitment in South Asia by the East India Company and later the British Crown has long been a topic of debate and disquiet. From the inception of the policy in the 1750s, to the wars of expansion and consolidation within and beyond the Subcontinent during the nineteenth century, and perhaps most strikingly in both world wars, colonial power relied on the blood and sweat of the colonized. While some have pointed to native service in what became the British Indian Army as evidence of a lack of "national" unity, and thereby justification for colonial rule, others have regarded it as a product of "divide-and-rule" tactics, and thus proof of colonial manipulation and impoverishment. Kate Imy's *Faithful Fighters: Identity and Power in the British Indian Army* does an admirable job of transcending those strained positions to foreground the perspectives and conditions of the soldiers themselves, and places them within the larger context of imperialism, nationalism and changing South Asian society. Focusing on the period from 1900 to 1940, her book aims to "interrogate how soldiers actually experienced and responded to British efforts to categorize and control their identities" (p. 9) alongside their own struggles to negotiate "multiple loyalties to family, community, nation, and empire" (p. 10). The result is a complex, detailed portrayal of the competing imperatives and intricacies of colonial military culture during both war and peace.

The book consists of six chapters along with a short introduction and conclusion. The first three take up the history of specific groups deemed "martial races." Chapter 1 examines the crude trope of the "loyal Sikh," showing how British investment in regulating a certain kind of militaristic Sikh identity intersected with the desires and demands of different Sikh activists. On the one hand, officials mandated all Sikh recruits become *amritdhari* and carry a *kirpan* (sword), which they tried to limit to less than nine inches in length. On the other hand, members of the Ghadar Party used similar idioms of valor and sacrifice to instigate a military and popular revolt in 1914-15, while later the newly-formed Akali Dal emphasized *kirpans* to garner support among ex-soldiers for its struggle to take control of Sikh *gurdwaras* in the 1920s. In Chapter 2, Imy discusses the predicament of Indian Muslims, who constituted the bulk of recruits from Punjab and over a third of the total British Indian Army. Viewed with suspicion since the 1857 uprising, official anxiety increased when Britain used native troops to occupy Egypt, Palestine and Mesopotamia after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War One. In order to "cultivate a pro-imperial, pan-Islamic identity" (p. 66), the British decided to fund the annual pilgrimage to Mecca for all Muslim soldiers, which ended up exacerbating ethnic tensions by favoring Punjabis over Pathans to the neglect of Hindustanis. Chapter 3 addresses the recruitment of troops from the semi-independent kingdom of Nepal (usually misnamed as "Gurkhas"). Despite being mostly Buddhists, the British regarded Nepalis as "pure" Hindus who were at once resistant to caste strictures and unsympathetic to Indian nationalism. Yet after decades of a

profitable alliance, Nepali rulers sought to increase their leverage by opposing the overseas deployments of their men, citing a relatively obscure Brahmin prohibition on traversing the *kala pani* ("black waters"). In response, the British mandated all returning Nepalis attend a purification ceremony called *pani patya* and obtain a certificate in Dehradun, often against the wishes of individual soldiers.

In the second half of the book, Imy shifts to explore a fascinating series of themes cutting across religious and ethnic lines. Chapter 4 uncovers how officials were "both steadfast and paranoid" (p. 117) about soldiers' dietary habits, upholding *halal* requirements and the month-long Ramzan fast for Muslims yet ridiculing certain Hindu preferences for cooking standards and vegetarianism. In Chapter 5, Imy charts the process of "Indianization" or how native graduates of new military colleges were gradually inducted into the officer corps, as well as the way disparate religious teachings became standardized and incorporated into the routine of army life. Chapter 6 exposes the myth of an inclusive British Indian Army by tracing how its racial logic and culture of "militant masculinity" (p. 213) actually perpetuated divisions among Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus by embedding the need to compete for prestige and benefits. Imy ends the book by invoking the controversial unveiling and defacing of a 2018 public memorial to Sikh soldiers from World War One in Birmingham, England. Rather poignantly, she asks, is it possible to "remember colonial soldiers without commemorating colonialism?" (p. 218). Instead of providing a straightforward answer, Imy lays out the terrain of conflicting interests: the need to counter both myths about white-only participation in world wars as well as racist narratives about intrinsic native loyalty, the demand for inclusion by visible minorities in Western countries, and the ongoing problem of extoling militarism, ethnic supremacy and violence.

With such a broad scope, Imy's book perhaps unavoidably provokes further issues and questions. First, it might have been helpful to have a clearer theoretical evaluation of the colonial archive. A few key episodes - the Akali agitation (p. 36), Muslim soldiers going on Haj (p. 67), Hindu cooking habits (p. 128-29) - are almost entirely narrated using official files and reports, reproducing the statements therein as facts without much explanation of the nature of their articulation or potential alternative interpretations. Similarly, many of the actual voices of native soldiers are drawn from English-language extracts, letters and newspapers which, nevertheless, at times appear terse and fragmented. We often read what a soldier said about a certain topic without getting a meaningful sense of the texture of their thoughts or the context within which they were produced. In contrast, two fascist British soldiers, Francis Yeats-Brown and H.H. Somerfield, are depicted with far greater interiority and detail, although this is in part due to their published writings and voluminous diaries. (A notable exception are the soldier impressions of hospital arrangements on p. 134.) On a minor note, Bhagat Singh was executed in 1931 not 1930 (p. 184). Also, the discussion of the fluidity of Sikh identity would have gained from engaging the work of Harjot Oberoi and J.S. Grewal. Finally, the overall conclusion of the book could have benefited from Imy making a more

forthright argument about what it actually means to "remember." Can it be neatly separated from "commemoration"? Or does it depend more on what and how we choose to remember, and to what ends? In that sense, perhaps the defacing of the war memorial in Birmingham is itself an act of "remembrance," drawing on a different history and through an alternative politics? What does remembering end up forgetting?

Far from demerits, such points are a reflection of the provocative and far-reaching themes Imy brings to the fore. *Faithful Fighters* is well-researched, clearly written and full of valuable insights. Hopefully, it will not only set but expand the parameters of future debates.

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**Santanu Das**. *India, Empire, and First World War Culture: Writings, Images and Songs* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp.446.

Though India's role in the First World War has received the attention of historians, this monograph is the first cultural treatment of the 'war experience' of peoples from undivided India. Soldiers, civilians, men, women, laborers, orderlies, lascars, doctors, politicians and intellectuals were drawn to its net and have left behind a wide range of responses in political, visual, literary and oral forms. The author has traced these testimonials through the recovery and use of material translated from Punjabi, Urdu, Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati and Nepalese sources. Micro-study of artefacts linked with the soldiers and others have shaped the scope of the monograph.

The deadly inter-imperialist competition between the European big powers culminated in an immensely destructive war in 1914. Imperialism, the underlying cause of the war, had triggered tremendous brutality in the colonial territories of Asia, Africa and Latin America. It was returning to unleash havoc within Europe. Though the war was chiefly confined to Europe and Asia-minor, it had a worldwide material impact by subjecting the colonies and semi-colonies to conditions of death and hunger. Apart from professional soldiers, civilians were mobilized by the belligerent powers as 'military' labor. Those who emerged victorious, namely the Anglo-French Alliance, were supported by men and money taken from the colonies. France exploited the cheap labor of Vietnamese workers in the armament factories and used the West African, Moroccan, Algerian, Tunisian and Somalian 'sepahi' as cannon-fodder. Stephan Likosky has shown how African soldiers used by the French military establishment were caricatured in racist French iconography as sub-human infants. Max Weber, a theoretician of the German social-democratic party and father of modern sociology, lamented that the French were unleashing uncivilized black hordes on other white people, thereby destroying European culture and civilization. The presence of non-white soldiers bred deep racial

anxieties. The fear of 'racial miscegenation' was shared by the generals and officers of the British and French armies. Chinese coolies, unarmed, were transported from their villages to Southern France to dig trenches in the face of German machine-gun fire. There were revolts by colonial troops at wartime. If caught, the mutineers faced the firing squad. In early 1915, Indian Muslim soldiers in Singapore turned their guns on the British officers. They were subjected to mass execution and imprisonment. Between 1914 and 1918, the British colonial state recruited thousands from India. Punjabi, Rajput, Pathan and Gurkha units registered mass casualty and disability. An estimated 75,000 soldiers from the Indian subcontinent were killed. As for the flow of money from the colony to the imperial center at wartime, Sumit Sarkar has pointed out that the 'drain of wealth' by the British state led to massive plunder of India's material resources. The defence expenditure was increased by 300%. Semi-compulsory 'war loans' were imposed on the colonial economy. There was a sharp rise in taxes and steep fall in the living standards for the majority of the population in India.

The book is divided into four parts and ten chapters. The author has examined the cultural implications of political concerns emerging from the 'home front' in India. While offering conditional support, Indian nationalists grappled with aspirations and anxieties. From moderates in Bengal to Gandhi, all were keen to display 'loyalty' to the war effort. A Bengali battalion raised towards the end of the war gave a regional dimension to war literature. Kazi Nazrul Islam, a veteran of the 'Bangali Paltan' returned from the war with a radical anti-imperialist orientation. In a separate chapter devoted to Punjab, the author has treated the ways in which recruitment, resistance and war-weariness found myriad expressions. Ambivalence paved way for social dissent. As early as May 1915, soldiers were writing to their relatives not to enlist. They represented the neglected anti-war voices from below. The intertwined relationship between race and representations of the war experience was evident in photographs taken in France and elsewhere, transforming the colonial 'sepoy' into an anthropological species. Cartoons, posters and photographic images turned the 'native' soldiers into primitive, exotic, oriental bodies in combat. When injured, the medical care of their bodies became objects of propaganda. In British war writing, the Indian soldier was placed in the contexts of pre-war familiarities, shared strains of battle and 'the overarching ideology of empire and the hierarchies of race and rank.' Letters, poems, prayers and songs of the 'sepoys' in Europe on the other hand were 'life-writing' from below as they confronted death and mourning. These cultural productions illuminated their social world, feelings and emotions. The sound-recording of hymns have survived: 'Please carry Nanak across the terrible dark pit of the world on the other side.' The literary and intellectual cultures were captured in war memoirs and chronicles of Indian combatants. In English, Hindi, Bengali and Punjabi colonial literary spheres, the war was inscribed critically. From Rabindranath to Nand Singh, writers recorded their observations through the urban centers of print culture in India. The after-effects and memorialization of war from a colonial-official and colonized perspective generated their own complexities.

By studying objects, images and writings left behind by participants and observers and investigating the 'fragile hope' embedded in these productions, this monograph has unearthed a rich resource for those interested in the hidden and forgotten facets of the First World War's links with colonial India. The lives, memories and contemporary responses obscured by time have been painstakingly collected and surveyed. Their haunting quality and resonance are perhaps best captured in these lines of a Punjabi folksong by women quoted at the beginning of the book: 'The war pains me like hot sand in a cauldron/ every household now has widows.' By unraveling the cultural imprints of chaos, ravages and pain in the wake of a conflict between colonial powers more than 100 years ago, this book enriches our understanding of the war and those who bore its burdens. It arrives at a time when the most powerful states of the planet continue to pursue the goals of imperialism and millions die as a result from Afghanistan to Yemen.

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**Suchetana Chattopadhyay**, *Voices of Komagata Maru: Imperial Surveillance and Workers from Punjab in Bengal*, Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2018, xxi – 178, Rs. 575 (Hardback), ISBN: 978-81-934015-8-3.

On the eve of the World War I Calcutta was not only a commercial passage of the British Empire, but an important centre of colonial authority of surveillance and practicing repressive policies to secure imperial interest. As a hotbed of colonial capital in Eastern India and connected with global markets it also attracted migratory labour forces from all over South Asia that gave the area a multicultural identity. This cosmopolitan character of Calcutta and its hinterland also shaped the political identity of this region in where anti-colonial protest of underground revolutionaries led by the middle class Bengali *bhadralok* community intermingled with the struggle of poor migrant labourers. During the early war-time era in Bengal, Punjabi Sikh migrant passengers of the *Komagata Maru* were massacred upon arrival due to colonial repression and racial discrimination – 21 of them including some local inhabitants were shot dead by the British troops; several were arrested and some kept under surveillance in the coming decades also. This single event played a vital role in instigating various forms of anti-colonial and anti-capitalist resistance in India throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The existing scholarships on the Ghadar movement or the *Komagata Maru* incident have neglected this historioghaphic thread of colonial repression and emergence of Punjabi people's resistance from below in Bengal. In the backdrop of the *Komagata Maru* incident, this monograph traces the way in which trans-regional surveillance and repression of the Empire from above and its counter resistance from below connected the Bengal hinterland with Punjab, East Asia and North America.

Along with the introduction and a conclusion, the monograph is divided into four chapters. In the first chapter, Chattopadhyay begins with the wider context of war-panic and imperial racism which shaped the policy of colonial surveillance and mindset against the entry of the returning emigrant passengers, mostly Punjabi Sikhs along with some Hindu and Muslim labourers, of *Komagata Maru* into the Calcutta port. This chapter also retrieves the ways in which the migrant passengers were ill-treated, besieged and exhausted by the impediments at every British dominated port of Canada, Eastern Asia and Singapore where they were refused entry and forcefully brought to South Bengal as a part of a pre-planned colonial repressive policy. Analysing both the narratives of the official reports and arrested passenger's statements the author establishes a counter version of the event which depicts brutal colonial repression on the helpless, mostly unarmed passengers of the voyage that the colonial authority tried to suppress from the outer world, marking the event as the 'Budge Budge Riot'.

In the second chapter 'Closely Observed Ships', the author examines the process of post-*Komagata Maru* surveillance and policing at the Bengal costal line on all ships, loaded with homebound migrant labourers, sailing to India from America and East Asia. Chattopadhyay depicts how the spectre of return of the 'potential rebels' haunted the British colonial machinery. It relied on trans-continental exchange of intelligence reports and surveillance. Branded as 'the receiving zone of floating sedition from the east' (p. 55), Calcutta became the epicentre of imperial surveillance connecting India with global order to safeguard imperial interest. Besides various branches of colonial authority, several European business conglomerates nourished by colonial capital also extended their support to the process of imperial surveillance which again proves the nexus between the empire and capital. Through this micro-surveillance and repression, the colonial authority successfully prevented the spread of Ghadar network within India. However, the author traces the voice of defiance and revolutionary consciousness, influenced by the Ghadar ideology, among a section of Sikh inhabitants of Bengal that ignited anti-colonial movements in the later period.

The third chapter traces the reaction of different strata of society of wartime Bengal against the colonial repression on the passengers of *Komagata Maru* which created confusion and rumours in the public sphere. The author compares and discusses the varying reaction of print media about the incident; while the European press like *Capital*, *The Statesman*, *Empire* propagated the official version and branded the Sikh migrants as a violent community of dangerous fanatics, the Calcutta based vernacular newspapers became vocal against government repression and demanded neutral investigation of the *Komagata Maru* incident. Upholding the miseries of Indian migrant labourers, the Bengali middle class intelligentsia also expressed their feelings of outrage against imperial racism through their writings in different forms. The most important finding of this chapter is the inter-connection between the secret societies of Bengal and poor of the Punjabi Sikh diaspora, living in and around Calcutta. Chattopadhyay shows while the Bengali *bhadralok* revolutionaries gradually

broke from their elitist confinement and tried to forge links with the Ghadar and pan-Islamist organizations, the Punjabi Sikh activists, in turn, used the network of underground revolutionary activism, *gurudwaras* and neighbourhood communities to resist British oppression. Thus, a pan-nationalist revolutionary network was gradually emerging which played a crucial role in the anti-colonial movement during wartime and in the post-war period.

The fourth chapter is an account of the forgotten memory of active participation of Punjabi Sikh inhabitants of Calcutta and its hinterland in working class movements and left politics of post-war Bengal. Here the author traces how personal memory of imperial racism and repression of Gurdit Singh and other activists who travelled on *Komagata Maru* influenced the collective memory of the working class people irrespective of religious identity and prompted them to join hands against anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist agitation throughout the late colonial period.

By way of conclusion, Chattopadhyay successfully traces the inter-connections between the passage of the Punjabi Sikh migratory workforce, uprooted by the colonial land revenue policy, memory of their miseries, colonial repression and also formation of collective resistance of these migrants. This study represents an alternative historiographical account, completely different from the popular narrative which portrayed the migrant Punjabi Sikh workforce of Bengal either as a martial race, loyal to the colonial authority or a trouble making rioting community. Through this alternative narrative Chattopadhyay upholds the development of political consciousness among the migrant minority as a working class diaspora and their collective resistance alongside other working people irrespective of caste and religion for better wages and livelihood, and transformation of their political self from Ghadar inspired anti-colonial mobilization to the left-lining revolutionary consciousness and communist internationalism that led to the formation of political branch organizations like *Kirti Dal* and *Naujawan Bharat Sabha* in Bengal. The incident of *Komagata Maru* was pivotal in this transformation.

Overall, this is a classic example of historical research exploring unaddressed historical narrative from below, which connects many events of global with local, everyday memory with longue duree. It deals with archival materials and other secondary sources unused so far. Use of various rare archival photographs gives an extra weight; through them readers can feel the essence of a forgotten memory of rebels and their habitat in the past century. The work must be regarded as an insightful research mapping a neglected terrain of historiography triggered by a traumatic event of colonialism's violent history. Chattopadhyay opens up aspects of diaspora studies and people's history of late colonial Bengal which could be a great resource for future researchers.

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Anshu Malhotra, *Piro and the Gulabdasis: Gender, Sect, and Society in Punjab*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2017, pp. xlviiii+357, Rs 995.

This fascinating book is a study of Piro, a Muslim female follower of Gulabdas (1809-1873), a late nineteenth century religious leader of Punjab. It has eight chapters, placed in three parts. The first part consists of Chapter 1; Chapters 2-5 constitute the second part, and the remaining chapters are placed in the third part. The core of the book is the second part. It consists of an elaborate exposition and interpretation of Piro's poetic compositions, particularly her *Ik Sau Sath Kafian* (one hundred and sixty poems).

The first chapter on Gulabdas and his *dera* provides the context for Piro's life as his follower. Malhotra talks of the philosophical and theological position of Gulabdas. He was seen both as a learned man and a *guru* who broke all rules of morality. Malhotra refers to Sikh sources and the reports of colonial administrators for the beliefs and practices of Gulabdas and his followers. Giani Gian Singh (1822-1921), for example, says that Gulabdas identified himself with the Supreme Being, called himself Brahm and gave to his followers the mantra of *soham*. This was an elaboration of the *advaita* (non-duality) belief in the unity of Brahman and *Jiv* (living being), underscoring the location of the divine within the self. Gian Singh refers also to Gulabdas's penchant for sensuous pleasures, and mentions his relationship with a rich prostitute whose wealth was appropriated by Gulabdas after her death. Much of the criticism of Gulabdas was due to his loose morals, according to Gian Singh.

In Chapter 2, the author tries to reconstruct Piro's tale on the basis of her *Ik Sau Sath Kafian.* Addressed to her friends, it starts with her marriage which becomes a metaphor for spiritual union with God. Piro introduces Gulabdas into her narrative as a charismatic man who came to the Moti Bazaar of Lahore, surrounded by his disciples, and picked her from the crowd to sit next to him. Piro then portrays the anxiety of the 'Turks' (Muslims) with her apostasy. The Mullahs failed to win her back into the Islamic faith. She was abducted but rescued by the disciples of Gulabdas, and taken to his *dera*. Piro praises Gulabdas as her *guru*. Throughout the text she remains respectful towards him, calling herself his slave. With allusions and allegories Piro crafts a story on her resemblance to Sita. There are references to women like Heer and Kubjan, and to the *bhakta*s like Kabir. Mansur is presented as the mystic who was bold enough to utter 'I am the Truth', and to be crucified for it.

The issues of religiosity, gender, and conversion are discussed in Chapter 3. Piro sets up opposition between Hindu and Muslim identities. This could be seen partly as a legacy of both Sikh and Bhakti inheritance of the Gulabdasis. Piro objects to the outward signs of religious identity among all the three communities because they define only men and leave women out. Malhotra points out that the Khalsa were instructed to avoid any intercourse with Muslim women. Therefore, Piro's position in relation to Gulabdas became all the more difficult. Piro makes her conversion rather dramatic, but actually the process of conversion was slow and it was filled with negotiations and tensions. In her Bhakti-steeped worldview she was convinced of the uselessness of externally

oriented religiosity. In her view an interiorized piety was more suitable for women.

In Chapter 4, the author argues that Piro sought to exploit the subversive tendencies of Bhakti. She pushed for more radical possibilities opened by it, seeking to widen its ambit to include herself, a low-caste woman, a prostitute, and a Muslim. The cultural imaginary provided by Bhakti enabled Piro to establish her autonomous agency. For this she used the Sufi tradition as well. In Piro's view, love and devotion redeem both men and women without any distinction between the high and the low. Piro and Gulabdas were not cremated but buried and that too in a single tomb.

Malhotra takes up the question of Piro's agency in Chapter 5. Piro refers to the qualities she acquired through the grace of the *guru*: equanimity (*samta),* liberality (*udarta*) and fearlessness (*nirbhayta).* The mediation of the *guru* was the means of reaching the goal. The *guru* often displayed his own power to perform miracles. Piro's agency lay in actively choosing a path and following its precepts to reach the given goal. She allowed her *guru* to shape her, molding her for the religious path. At no point does she question or thwart his power. Eventually, she was successful in being acknowledged as the consort of Guru Gulabdas.

In Chapter 6, Malhotra talks of Giani Ditt Singh, the well-known advocate of socio-religious reform among the Sikhs as a leader of the Lahore Singh Sabha, who was earlier a low caste (Rahtia) follower of Gulabdas. She pays special attention to the treatment of caste by Giani Ditt Singh in two of his works, *Nakli Sikh Prabodh* and *Sultan Puara*. In the former work Giani Ditt Singh endorses the ideal of casteless society, but on the whole, he remains inconsistent. Malhotra says that in the corpus of Ditt Singh's writings we find ambiguity, vacillation, and fickleness in maintaining a single coherent line of reform. She comes to the conclusion that diversity was an intrinsic part of the Sikh world of the eighteenth or the nineteenth century, accepting, thus, what she regards as the view of W.H. McLeod.

In Chapter 7, Malhotra discusses two dramas, the *Piro Preman* by Santokh Singh Shahryar and the *Shairi* (poetry) by Swarajbir, and the introduction of Vijender Das, the present head of the Gulabdasi *dera*, Hansi, Haryana, to a volume called *Sant Kavitri Maa Piro* (Sant Poetess Mother Piro). Shahryar and Swarajbir treat Piro primarily as a poetess. Even Guru Vijender Das gives great importance to her poetry, but he is more seriously concerned with the religious position of Piro. Malhotra advises historians to remain alert to the principles of their own discipline, even though dependent on previous textualizations and fictional accounts.

In Chapter 8, the author looks at how the Gulabdasis are faring in contemporary India. For this she tries to understand the activities and concerns of the head of the Gulabdasi *dera* at Hansi. She pays special attention to the Gulabdasi understanding of caste and gender relations in order to know whether they have changed or remained the same since the late nineteenth century. She

shows that the *dera* has been influenced by practices associated with Hinduism, Sikhism, and Islam, and it is catering to an assertive *dalit* constituency.

This study is commendable for a perceptive interpretation of Piro's poetry. The second part, actually the core of the book, presents a thorough discussion of the various aspects of Piro's life, based primarily on her own writings. This is undoubtedly the most valuable part of the book. The issue of gender is well treated. Unlike the first part, the third part relates to Piro rather indirectly. However, all the three chapters of this part are interesting in their own way.

The author debates the issues of identity and caste while discussing Piro's links with contemporary society in Punjab. On the issue of caste, Malhotra refers to McLeod who, in her view, underlines the theoretical rejection of vertical caste hierarchies in Guru Nanak's teachings, drawing attention to his egalitarian vision of emancipation available to all castes without any disability attached to being born of low caste. At the same time, according to Malhotra, McLeod draws attention to the continuation of historical operation of caste for matrimony. However, in the bulk of Sikh literature, there is no statement against inter-caste marriage. In other words, the continuance of the patterns of matrimony had no validity as an argument in support of upholding the horizontal linkages. It is important to note that the egalitarian norm was never modified in theory.

The author gives two reasons for introducing the debate on the 'invention' of Hinduism in her book. 'First, on whichever side of the debate one might be ranged, most scholars will concede to the existence of "strands'', "layers'', or "components'' within Hinduism.' But the postulation of 'strands', 'layers' and 'components' within a single entity does not support the assumption of a supposed unity. The term 'Hinduism' was coined in the early nineteenth century from the word 'Hindu' on the erroneous assumption of a single religious system among the peoples called Hindus.

In Piro's writings, according to Malhotra, there is a sharp sense of Hindu and Muslim identities as well as loyalty to her sect and its *guru*. Nevertheless, at various times, or simultaneously, Piro could be seen as a Muslim, a Hindu (Sikh), and a Gulabdasi. It is not clear why Malhotra talks of 'a Hindu (Sikh)' identity. She maintains that Piro was indebted more to the Bhakti movement than to the Sikh. However, Gulabdas and Piro say explicitly that they were neither with the Muslims, nor with the Hindus. What did the Gulabdasis think of themselves in the late nineteenth century? The question is not posed.

Malhotra's second reason for introducing the debate on Hinduism was to bring in the question of three distinct religious communities in Punjab in the middle of the nineteenth century. She refers to Harjot Oberoi and W.H. McLeod in support of her view that there was no distinct Sikh identity before the *rahitnama* literature began to be produced in the mid eighteenth century. Furthermore, she accepts Purnima Dhavan's view that 'Sikh' (that is, non-Khalsa) identity continued to exist after the *rahitnama* literature. Here, it may be pointed out that the most important works of the *rahit* literature are now placed in the time of Guru Gobind Singh. My own article on 'The Earliest Manual on the Sikh Way of Life', published in 2005 argues that the *rahitnama*

called *Tankhahnama* was originally composed in the life time of Guru Gobind Singh; a more comprehensive statement on the early emergence of the *rahitnama* literature by Gurinder Singh Mann appeared in 2008 in the *Journal of Punjab Studies*. In fact, in some of the works of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, the term used for the Khalsa Panth is 'the third community' (*tisar panth*), the other two being Hindu and Muslim. By now, there is sufficient contemporary evidence to suggest that during the course of the eighteenth century, the 'Sikh' came to be equated with the 'Khalsa', and the latter with the 'Singh'. After the British annexed Punjab they recognized the dominance of the 'Singh' identity by treating the 'Singhs' alone as 'Sikh'.

The author states that the 'revisionist' scholars like Gurinder Singh Mann present the earliest available *recensions* of Sikh scripture as transforming the quietist image of Guru Nanak who is presented as a self-conscious community builder. In the process, according to Malhotra, development of Sikh self-consciousness is being pushed further back in time. It must however be pointed out that even McLeod and Oberoi discuss the issue of Sikh identity *before* the institution of the Khalsa and recognize the emergence of a considerable degree of consciousness of distinct identity among the Sikhs, notably in the *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas (late sixteenth-early seventeenth century). In fact, in the compositions of Guru Nanak and his successors there is no identification with Muslims or Hindus as communities. The whole issue of Sikh identity is discussed in detail in some recent works of J.S. Grewal, notably *Historical Perspectives on Sikh* Identity (1997), *Contesting Interpretations of the Sikh Tradition* (1998), and *Recent Debates in Sikh Studies* (2011) to which Malhotra makes no reference.

The author observes that in Piro's writings, whereas 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' are sharply etched categories, there is ambivalence with regard to the Sikhs. Moreover, Piro makes a clear distinction between the Sikhs and the Khalsa, referring to the latter as the new way. Malhotra suggests that notions of 'Sikhness' were varied and these could be bracketed with 'Hindu' in a non-specific, generalized way. She states that at no time does Piro speak of her *guru* as a 'Sikh', or his sect as one within the Sikh tradition, though Gulabdas had received his early training under the auspices of the Udasis and the Nirmalas. It must nevertheless be added that Piro does not refer to Gulabdas as a 'Hindu' or to his sect as one within the 'Hindu' tradition. Piro says that there was no peace in the house of 'Turks' nor in that of the 'Hindus'; there was peace only at the door of Gulabdas. What was he then? Did Gulabdasis occupy a separate position of their own?

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**Lakhwinder Singh and Anita Gill (eds)**. *Agriculture Innovation Systems in Asia: Towards Inclusive Rural Development.* (London & New Delhi: Routledge 2020), 364 pp.

To meet the growing food demand from an expected population of close to 9 billion people in 2050, agricultural output will need to increase by about 40 percent as compared to 2012. But we are facing an exceptional challenge that affects the sustainability of our food and agricultural systems. The urbanization of population, deteriorating natural resources, loss of biodiversity, and climate change impacts pose a combined threat to the livelihoods of millions of farmers. The way we produce, process, distribute, and consume food must become wholly sustainable and inclusionary. Innovation is central to increasing food production and land productivity, creating employment, achieving food security, and ensuring sustainable development. All this is much more important for the developing countries of Asia where most of the world's under-fed population lives.

The Food and Agricultural Organization defines agricultural innovation as a process involving individuals or organizations who bring new or existing products, processes or way of organization into use in a specific context in order to increase effectiveness, competitiveness, resilience to shocks or environmental sustainability. These contribute to a country's food security and nutrition, to economic development and sustainable natural resource management. Thus, streams of agricultural innovation are continuously required to transition agriculture from one developmental phase to the other, dealing with the problems inherent in the developmental processes. Accelerating and scaling up agriculture innovations systems can trigger needed transformations and, for that, we have to learn from past experiences to identify and consolidate the strengths, address weaknesses, and discover future pathways. Agricultural innovation in Asia has been in place since almost six decades but, unfortunately, there was a paucity of studies reviewing the Indian agricultural innovation system. Only some scanty and fragmentary studies existed to address the specific issues.

Thanks to the meticulous and passionate editorial work by Lakhwinder Singh and Anita Gill, we have a comprehensive account of the agricultural innovation system in Asia highlighting its strengths, weaknesses, and future opportunities. The book is organized into fifteen chapters contributed by eminent scholars in the area of innovation and development. The overarching theme of the book is the holistic analysis of and how to use the knowledge economy to achieve inclusive and sustainable agricultural development in the developing countries. The book starts with a robust review of the agricultural innovation system at global and national levels in a historical perspective. The well sequenced appraisal perfectly catches the changeovers that took place overtime. It also sets the agenda of the book and that unfolds in the subsequent papers.

The first and foremost question is whatever technologies exist or will be generated in the future, will these technologies really travel from laboratory to farmers' fields? Strong barriers exist to this happening, including the required

support networks and the fact that necessary institutional mechanisms are weak. Even an empirical study of the agriculturally-developed state of Punjab confirms that farmers have knowledge of the problems of sustainability, but lack awareness about the potential solutions. National innovation systems must allow the development of knowledge both by science and technology-based systems, and interaction of the users in a proper institutional framework.

There is special focus in the book about the transition from a publically-funded innovation system, to private research and development. This requires sound public policy for regulation, intellectual property protection, and generation of complementarities of education and skill base of the workforce. In India, the public-funded agricultural innovation system that was in place in the last six decades and was fairly successful in the first three decades is now on the verge of collapse. The same is the story in other developing Asian countries. Governments must devise plans for public agricultural research and also assure adequate funding for a long period of time. While public research is collapsing, the private sector, on the other hand, has yet to take root. The primary challenge is how to prevent the private sector from generating exclusionary innovations and instead incentivizing it to develop the scale-neutral and environment-friendly technologies that help all categories of the farmers and also conform to sustainable development.

Another major sub-theme of the book is the role of innovation in increasing productivity without adversely affecting the resource base. Through an empirical analysis of the growth experience of three northern states in India during the Green Revolution it is clear that the tremendous productivity gains came at the cost of resource exhaustion and degradation. Already much damage has been done, and revival of the resource base must be a priority. For that to happen, the innovation system has to be revamped and reoriented. The same needs to done for transfer of technology and extension services. This plan also necessitates feedback-critique harmonization among researchers, extension specialists, and ultimately stakeholders.

Identifying alternative pathways that are sustainable, equitable, inclusionary, and scale-neutral is much emphasized throughout the book. The challenges to this transition are brilliantly discussed. Both the national systems of science, technology and innovation in India and also the many peasants' movements have failed, so far, to view agriculture through the lens of ecological and social justice in order to deal with the challenges of productivity management. Since the start of the nineties, both advanced capitalist, as well as some developing countries, have focused on "ecological modernization" or "ecological democracy." Cuba has successfully transformed its agricultural science and technology system to put its agricultural sector on a sustainable path along with ensuring food security. The developing countries must learn lessons from such experiences, but such a transition will face challenges from the aggressive intrusion of multinational biotechnological corporations into seed and input markets, and pressure for export oriented corporate agricultural initiatives.

The role of institutions and the institutional context as important determinants of development are well recognized in the book. Institutional innovations involve a change of policies, standards, regulations, practices and relationships that encourage improvements in the performance of the institution to make it more interactive. Interestingly, some localized innovative institutions initially emerged without any support from the government, but they may not survive without its recognition and active support. The role of technology in livelihood diversification is also elaborated in few research papers. Many hints are available about what India can learn from the experience of other countries, especially from how China uses the knowledge economy for technology dissemination and extension services.

Lastly, a very interesting paper discusses the political economy of agricultural growth in Indian Punjab. Those who benefit from the present economic structure of the state are the large farmers as well as the business interests, and they must perceive they have something to gain from the aforementioned innovations. It also highlights the contradictions in the federal and state governments' interests.

The inclusion of studies on monopolization of global agricultural research, disputes about genetically-modified organisms, ongoing negotiations in the World Trade Organization about agricultural issues and their impact on innovation systems, and reorientation of agricultural research for food sovereignty (much emphasized in Latin America) would have added value to the book. Nonetheless, the book on the whole contains interesting readings and analysis, and initiates a dialogue on somewhat less emphasized development issues. The book is not only a qualitative addition to the existing knowledge, but also potentially a predecessor to many more studies on required agricultural innovations in the future.

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