Oberoi, Harjot. *When Does History Begin? Religion, Narrative and Identity in the Sikh Tradition* (New Delhi: Permanent Black Publishing, 2021), 270pp.

In his preface to *When Does History Begin?: Religion, Narrative and Identity in the Sikh Tradition*, Harjot Oberoi tell us that humans have two components in their cognitive system. Drawing on the American-Israeli psychologist Daniel Kahneman, Oberoi explains there is *automatic* or intuitive thinking in which we do not think through our responses and, therefore, fall prey to cognitive illusions. But there is also the more difficult task of *effortful* thinking, which allows us to be deliberative in a systematic way, warding off mental error. The story is familiar. There are those who use their critical faculties, ready to begin the arduous task of leaving "Plato's warm cave to get rid of flickering shadows and see the light" (xix). And then there are the others who respond emotively, affirming "knee-jerk group psychology" (xxi). We are warned of the seductions of the cave and automatic thinking. We are reassured of the rewarding hard labor of leaving the cave and effortful thinking. We are compelled to ask ourselves a question Oberoi asks his students: What kind of adult do you want to be? Do you want to be "reliant on the beauty and seduction of automatic thinking or alternatively on the hard labor of effortful systems?" (xxxi-xxii).[1] Are you ready for Enlightenment, as others have asked, even though "humans are, generally speaking, hardwired to be irrational and harbor illusions" (xxii)? How then do scholars write critical histories when the passions and illusions of the automatic thinkers await?

Oberoi, however, recognizes the question of historical truth is no easy matter, merely a matter of effort in recognizing what is "out there."[2] Oberoi acknowledges that "truth is not something just existing out there in some natural state or obvious way" (p. 3). There is a question of how truths will be told, presented, and narrated. And there are, we learn, multiple traditions of recounting the past that do not fetishize facts (p. 8). Here Oberoi turns to rasa theory, which is a tradition of history-writing that articulated "the passage of time in large units of poetic utterance" (p. 13). Pulling from Santokh Singh's *Suraj Prakash*, Kalhana's *Rajatarangini*, and Padmanabha's *Kanhadade-Prabandja*, Oberoi argues that this is a coherent Indic culture that "has opted to render its history via poetry or more loosely via the use of poetic-literary tropes and strategies" (p. 18). These poet-historians, Oberoi explains, do provide judgments on what really happened, but they do so by centering

aesthetic arrangements that play upon the passions. Unlike Graeco-Roman, Islamicate, and Sinic forms, Indic poetic history was a "civilizational praxis" that looked to "generate the right telos" in an imaginative performance that tugs at the emotions as peoples come to taste the past. Indeed, Indic poetic forms were written in verse in order to generate "a panoply of emotions within those who savored these texts" (p. 24). With this civilizational praxis, Indian historiography has been imbricated with human passion (p. 25).

In Oberoi's rendering, we have now two types of history: one tied to "the superfluity of emotions involved in the traditional toolkit of historical narration" which "quite obviously needs to be tempered by a reason-based toolkit i.e. modern critical historiography" - a toolkit that was "modified, refined, and expanded by historians operating in the Graeco-Roman, Sinic, and Islamicate worlds" (p. 25). Obviously. To be clear about the argument, Oberoi is contending that historical narrative in India is tied to a surplus of emotion in contrast to other regions that are more reason-oriented. As he writes, "in the Indian context we have had an overabundance of emotions, so that emotively charged narratives of the past have merged into and bolstered hierarchical projects in the domain of myth and religious belief" (p. 24-25).

He argues this emotive tradition did change as new forms of history writing found themselves in the subcontinent especially with British colonialism. Going against the general historiographical consensus that questions the stability of forms reduced to "region," Oberoi argues for a largely insulated Indic tradition of history writing.[3] Although he argues some trends did filter into India with the Mughals, it was only with British colonialism that there was substantial change that sought to end, in elite circles at least, poetry as history. But Oberoi contends this change did not register more broadly because "the Indian public largely refused to acknowledge the epistemic shift: the 'truths' discovered by historians were not generally palatable to an audience attuned to history as passion" (p. 26). Indians remain too emotional, too tied to passionate forms of a rasa historiography and, thus, not amenable to persuasion by the critical historians.

Historians are left with a choice, much like the choice Western colonial Orientalists once posed and Oberoi presents his students: "a choice between the emotional and the epistemological" (p. 27). Oberoi tells us he makes a choice: "a deconstruction of emotion" (p. 27).[4] Oberoi will be the adult in the room and provide us with a critical understanding of the past to tame the passions. He will historicize

emotions because the Indian public is too emotional. Oberoi undertakes his task in the six essays collected in this volume (p. 27). It is important to note that five of these six essays have been published before in various venues over the years.[5] This might be why the argument about emotions is thin across the chapters. In fact, a sustained discussion of history and emotion does not appear within the chapters and instead we are presented with "complex transcripts of the past" to show how critical history works (p. 28).

The disparate nature of the chapters makes it difficult to think with the book's contents without individually rehearsing each chapter. Chapter 1, "Brotherhood of the Pure," for example, turns to the Namdharis (Kukas) in the late nineteenth century to center the Namdharis' own objectives and their "structures of consciousness and experience" beyond their socio-political circumstances (p. 33). Oberoi finds that binary opposition of purity/pollution was central to Namdhari symbolic structure; it was a cultural code that allows us to recover "shadowy meanings" (p. 48 and p. 51). Those who transgressed these boundaries and violated the cultural system, such as British colonial officials, found themselves under attack, construed as foreign.

Chapter 2, "Empire, Orientalism, and Native Informants" considers Sir Attar Singh Bhadour and his relation to the production of colonial knowledge. Oberoi provides a thick description of Bhadour's translation efforts and scholarly endeavors to argue that Orientalist knowledge was not a self-contained to Europeans, but also reliant upon native informants who had agency in enabling the colonial enterprise.

Oberoi stays with Sikhs in the third chapter, but focuses on the Gurdwara Rikabganj agitation - a protest against an enclosure that led to the dismantling of one of the Gurdwara's walls. Oberoi centers the protest's narrow social base "confined to landlords and an embryonic middle class" and its "lack of any concrete ideological programme" to downplay the revolutionary character of the agitation (p. 121). Instead, the agitation demonstrates the rise of a new social class.

The collected essays then shift more broadly to the diaspora and global dimensions of Sikh and Punjabi history. In Chapter 4, Oberoi attends to the Ghadar Movement and its "hermeneutic slipperiness" to refuse analytic categories emergent from within Empire. In contrast, Oberoi finds that global anarchism and an alternative cosmopolitanism are better categories to situate the Ghadar Party - categories he deploys when analyzing Sohan Singh Bhakna (1870-1968) and Bhagat Singh (1907-1931).

Bhagat Singh is also the focus of Chapter 5, but now his inner life. In this one new chapter written for this volume, Oberoi argues that Bhagat Singh transforms his minimal self - one who is enmeshed unreflexively in their quotidian life - to a maximal self - one reflexively grappling with large meta-questions. Oberoi, here, could have connected to his earlier ruminations on cognitive psychology, but makes no connections and, instead, draws broadly from the work of Charles Taylor to make this argument.

Chapter 6 turns to the diaspora and asks: "If the nation is narrated by the novel, what sort of text narrates the diaspora" (p. 191)? Oberoi answers this question in "An Epic Without A Text" by analyzing Sadhu Singh Dhami's *Maluka* alongside a memoir by Tara Singh Bains. Whereas Dhami's *Maluka* is cosmopolitan and full of secular openings, Bains is "hardly ever assailed by self-doubt, is content to live within a structure and established cartographies" (200). With these stories, Oberoi highlights a fractured diasporic group in two small narratives.

What we do learn in these disparate historical narratives is that there are those who are absorbed by automatic thinking and those who are engaged in effortful thinking. There are those who remain embroiled in the passions of what is given and then there are those who destroy those givens, refusing the pull of the tradition and offering a possible future. Oberoi says he chooses the latter; he chooses to deconstruct emotion by presenting historical facts to dispel fantasies - a longer project Oberoi has engaged in.[6] One problem, however, is that Oberoi ignores large swathes of literature that have critically examined not only the formation of "critical historiography," but the very practice of scholarly inquiry and its evidentiary regime. It is a thinking that has troubled the very distinctions that Oberoi takes for granted in his analysis.[7]

To take one example: Are emotion and reason opposites in the production of history as Oberoi presents them? Zeb Tortorici teaches us the visceral is central "from the writing of history to the reading of historiography" for both the so-called effortful and automatic thinkers.[8] An attentiveness to this viscerality does not dispel affect and emotion, but rather takes us, Tortorici writes, "to that uncomfortable place of suspension, where our own analytical tools both illuminate and obscure"[9] There is no easy escape here as there are questions of desire and relations rather than systems of thinking.

To think about relations, rather than typologies of thinking, we would need to consider how inquiry into the past is not a free-floating venture, tied to a general production of human knowledge. It instead

occurs within specific social relations and disciplinary protocols. We could consider how protocols of knowledge formation might require a particular type of sociality, rather than following a natural hard-wired cognitive psychology. We know, for example, to follow Elizabeth Povinelli, kinship sociability was replaced by stranger sociability with the advent of capitalist production.[10] Whereas kinship sociability requires knowledge circulates "based on thickly embedded social relations that are constantly negotiated within and across the social categories that compose them and their territorial substrate and expression," stranger sociability abstracts "the person from her social skin" in which "in their everyday practices of being - their political imaginary, market interactions, and intimate aspirations - everyone acts as a stranger to other strangers."[11] Stranger sociality then requires one traffic in abstractions in order to calculate proper risks which can produce a cosmopolitan horizon: a market logic.

But we must consider how promises of harmony in the marketplace tied to stranger sociality also engender exclusions tied to behaviors made irrational. Such promises of harmony and their exclusions might even provide coherence to our categories of analysis such as the "Indic." There can be a promise of harmony by way of exclusion in the workings of a region. In Oberoi's analysis, region only gains coherence by excluding the Sinic and Islamicate.[12] One can ask, however, if terms such indigenous and foreign are relevant concepts in understanding early modern conceptions of place-making?

Let me try to be effortful in my thinking here. But a question emerges: how does one prove that one is engaging in effortful thinking and not automatic thinking? How does one show that one has the capacity to exit the waiting room of history? How does one demonstrate one's credibility?[13] If credible, can ideological schisms still occur? Or are they merely signs of one's immaturity? How, then, does disagreement proceed? What do we make of divisions within an interpretative community?[14] This is what Reinhardt Koselleck has argued about this new historical regime:

> Someone might argue in a rational and consistent manner, but all the same have a certified false consciousness of the matter he treats or attests to. Subjectively he may not be lying nor committing any error; he might even be able to recognize his prejudices. All the same, his attitudes or concepts will be

> relativized through their temporal grading and in this ideologized.[15]

One can be effortful, but still be certified as passionate and emotional because one has to produce historical work that can be accredited according to particular protocols tied to particular relations - such as gentlemanly behavior or a self-denying ethics - that govern the community at the time. Otherwise, accusations of backwardness or fundamentalism await; it is what Koselleck called temporal grading tied to questions of race, religion, and, therefore, region.[16] If so, the modern historian does not have better cognitive workings. Instead, the modern historian continues to reproduce the horizon of their social relations. "More often than not," Amos Funkenstein writes, "the historian's writing reflects the past images shared by his larger community—people of his generation and location, images he embellishes and endows with scholarly respectability" or, now, effortful thinking.[17]

For a historian inhabiting such norms, what could be a critical or even negative review can also become a sign of ordinary automatic thinking or backwardness. The reviewer could say this is a bad book, but the historian can claim that the reviewer cannot shed their social skin and become a stranger to themselves and engage in the requisite abstract thinking. With that assurance, the critical historian can sink back into the certainty of their methods and protocols; theirs is a critical work that just needs to find an effortful audience. The marketplace of ideas *could* function harmoniously, if only these automatic thinkers could undertake that interminable task: maturity. The historian then waits, much like colonial officials did, for peoples to exit a door that they also claim is, alas, 'hardwired' shut.

[**Acknowledgments**: I would like to thank Naindeep Singh Chann and Zunaira Komal for their comments and suggestions in writing this review]

Notes

[1] The contrast between the passions and hard work has a longer history, tied to ideological transformations with the emergence of capitalism. See, to give one example, Albert Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political*

Arguments for Capitalism Before its Triumph (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977). Of course, this distinction was critical in colonial typologies.

[2] Often enough in the book, there is conceptual confusion as concepts are conflated, for example, "truth," "understanding," "facts," "historical hindsight," and "wisdom." Distinctions are ignored for example between ancient facts and modern facts. See, for example, Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) and Lorraine Daston, "Marvelous Facts and Miraculous Evidence in Early Modern Europe," *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 1 (1991): 93–124.

[3] The literature is vast. For an exceptional example, see Mana Kia, *Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin Before Nationalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020).

[4] What this exactly means, however, is not clear. This is a not deconstruction in the Derridean sense since Oberoi makes no attempt to consider how the rational relies upon the emotional for its coherence.

[5] Oberoi acknowledges this. See "Brotherhood of the Pure: The Poetics and Politics of Cultural Transgression," *Modern Asian Studies* 26, no. 1 (1992): 157–97; "Empire, Orientalism, and Native Informants: The Scholarly Endeavours of Sir Attar Singh Bhadour", *Journal of Punjab Studies* 17 (2010): 95–114; "From Gurdwara Rikabganj to Viceregal Palace: A Study of Religious Protest," *The Panjab Past and Present* 14 (1980): 182–98; "The Ghadar Movement and Its Anarchist Genealogy," *Economic and Political Weekly* 40 (2009): 40-6; "Imagining Indian Diaspora in Canada: An Epic Without a Text," in *Culture and Economy in the Indian Diaspora*, ed. Bhikhu Parekh, Gurharpal Singh, and Steve Vertovec (New York: Routledge, 2003), 181–93.

[6] The distinctions between those with capacity and those without capacity has been a central driving thrust in Oberoi's work. In his essay, "Sikh Fundamentalism: Translating History into Theory," Oberoi takes a similar line. He writes: "Historically, peasants have not been known to come up with grand paradigms of social transformation. Peasant societies are, by definition, made up of little communities, and their cosmos is invariably parochial rather than universal" (p. 256). The peasant thus is one, to follow Oberoi's recent analysis, who engages in automatic thinking contra the merchant or urbanite. Such distinctions become can be tied to presumed caste differences, say, between Jatts and Khatris. See Harjot Oberoi, "Sikh Fundamentalism: Translating History into Theory" in *Fundamentalisms and the State: Remaking Polities, Economies, and Militance*, eds. Martin E. Marty, and R. Scott Appleby, 256-285 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

[7] For example, see Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience*, trans. Liz Heron (New York: Verso, 1993); Jacques Derrida, *On*

the Name, ed. Thomas Dutoit, trans. David Wood, John Leavey Jr. and Ian McLeod (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Ranajit Guha, *History At the Limit of World-History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Charles Hirschkind, *The Feeling of History: Islam, Romanticism, and Andalusia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020).

[8] Zeb Tortorici, *Sin Against Nature: Sex and Archives in Colonial New Spain* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 32. This might be especially true for histories marked by violence. As Ann Cvetkovich writes, "Lesbian and gay history demands a radical archive of emotion in order to document intimacy, sexuality, love, and activism–all areas of experience that are difficult to chronicle through the materials of a traditional archive. Furthermore, gay and lesbian archives ad- dress the traumatic loss of history that has accompanied sexual life and the formation of sexual publics, and they assert the role of memory and affect in compensating for institutional neglect" (241). See Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

[9] Tortorici, *Sin Against Nature*, 36.

[10] This stranger sociability extends to the self as Lorraine Daston argues. She writes, "This internalization of the impartial critic implied that the faceless anonymity of foreigners or posterity now paradoxically extend to one's self: only by treating one's own discoveries and ideas as those of a complete stranger could the standards of impartial self-criticism be psychologically upheld" (282). See Lorraine Daston, "The Ideal and Reality of the Republic of Letters in the Enlightenment," *Science in Context* 4, no. 2 (1991): 367-386.

[11] Elizabeth A. Povinelli, "The Woman on the Other Side of the Wall: Archiving the Otherwise in Postcolonial Digital Archives," *differences* 22, no. 1 (2011): 156.

[12] When recovery is the goal, as it is for Oberoi in his desire to provide thick descriptions, categories of analysis themselves can remain unquestioned. As Joan Scott writes, "History is a chronology that makes experience visible, but in which categories appear as nonetheless ahistorical" (p. 778). Oberoi never questions the category of the Indic or India which appear as ahistorical entities. See Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (1991): 773–97

[13] In Early Modern British contexts, there were few attempts to spell out what a credibility meant, even though it played a critical role in the law and science. As Shapin writes, "Participants 'just knew' who a credible person was. They belonged to a culture that pointed to gentlemen as among their society's most

reliable truth-tellers, a culture that associated gentility, integrity, and credibility" (p. 241-2).

[14] I borrow here from Ellen Rooney, *Seductive Reasoning: Pluralism as the Problematic of Contemporary Literary Theory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press,1989), 142.

[15] Koselleck, *Futures Past,* p. 254.

[16] See, for example, Steven Shapin, *The Social History of Truth*: *Civility and Science in Seventeenth Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) and Chakrabarty, *The Calling of History*, p. 33.

[17] Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 9.

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Mandair, Arvind-Pal Singh. *Violence and the Sikhs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 90pp.

This book is a reflective essay about the way violence is perceived in the Sikh tradition. It is not based on any historical research, textual analysis or field study, but provides a framework about thinking about violence in general and Sikhism in particular. I suspect that for that reason, this brief book will be much discussed.

Mandair wants to avoid Western conceptualization and base his analysis on the concepts of *kal* and *akal* that are familiar terms in Sikh literature. The former Mandair identifies with linear time, and *akal* as a kind of time beyond time; it is often translated as 'eternal' or 'timeless.' Mandair then uses this distinction to challenge the familiar narrative that Sikhism under Guru Nanak was peaceful and then the religion became militarized in the actions of later Gurus against the Moghul rule. In the familiar narrative, the tradition of Sikh militancy was the precedent for the violence advocated by Bhindranwale and the Khalistan confrontation in the 1980s.

From a timeless, *akal* perspective, Mandair sees even in Guru Nanak's teachings a kind of violence - a challenge to the normal social order. The later Gurus' confrontation with Moghul rule, he describes, as one perceived as a confrontation of views of sovereignty. It is this duality of perspectives that Mandair shows to be inherent in his understanding of the 1984 event and Bhindranwale's death. In Mandair's reckoning, the strict dichotomy between pacifist and violent Sikhism is overcome in the dual perceptions of violence and nonviolence. At least this is the way that the book is supposed to work. There are some problems, however, from the outset.

It is never very clear how *kal* and *akal* can be applied to views of violence. Nor are these different ways of thinking about time unique to the Sikh tradition. They are found elsewhere in the Indic tradition, and in other traditions in well. In Greek thought, for instance, there is a difference between *chronos* (chronological time) and *kairos* (nonlinear time) that the theologian Paul Tillich discusses extensively in his book *The Eternal Now*.

It is perhaps understandable, then, that Mandair adopts other concepts. At the outset of the book, he turns to the Slovenian philosopher *Slavoj Žižek* and his distinctions among subjective violence (the kind of physical violence we usually associate with the word), symbolic violence (demeaning and controlling forms of language), and systemic violence (the violence embedded in political and economic systems of domination). (pp. 9-10).

But most of the book depends on concepts developed by two French thinkers - the philosopher Gilles Deleuze and the psychoanalyst Felix Guattari, whom Mandair thinks capture best the distinction between *kal* and *akal*. One of the concepts, which in English is translated as 'states of affairs,' describes events understood 'from the standpoint of causal-linear, materialistic history' and another, 'lines of flight,' is the view that is not causal-linear. (p.19) Mandair then goes on to say that this applies to two ways of looking at violence - one from a historical observation standpoint, and the other as an 'incorporeal event' or 'internal' violence, which Mandair calls 'sovereign violence.'

Though it is not immediately clear what is meant by this internal sovereign violence, the examples that follow make it clearer. The Deleuze and Guattari categories are the basis for the analysis of different moments in Sikh history that constitute the remainder of the book. He begins with Guru Nanak, then the militant confrontation with Moghul rulers, and the recent rise of the Punjab insurgency in the 1980s and the killing of Bhindranwale.

In each case, he presents the event from the two perspectives. In the case of Guru Nanak, the 'lines of flight' aspect is the internal struggle with the ego that constitutes his sovereign violence. In the case of Bhindranwale and the 1984 attack, it is the experience of the event shared by Sikhs around the world that creates a rupture in their perception of state control, offering at least for the moment a glimpse of an alternative reality. Or at least this is the way I understand Mandair's point.

It is an interesting argument, and one that will be discussed. Most observers of Sikh history will agree with the general premise that events are viewed differently from the subjective experience of those engaged in them or affected by them, than from outside observers. Many will also understand the notion of nonlinear perceptions of events, including violent ones that are not easily characterized by historical description. (See, for example, the book of essays *On Violence: A Reader* edited by Bruce Lawrence and Aisha Karim, and the excellent article on Sikh violence by Ashis Nandy in his book *The Intimate Enemy,* neither of which are mentioned by Mandair.) The elaboration of different kinds of violence is widely accepted by most scholars who study the issue of violence in public life, even those who focus on what Zizek and Mandair call 'subjective violence.' This nuance is not just the province of the circle of Western post-modern thinkers whom Mandair widely quotes.

Despite Mandair's good intentions in utilizing indigenous notions of *kal* and *akal,* his theoretical apparatus is in fact almost solely derived from European philosophers and literary critics identified with critical post-modern thinking. If one were to look for scholars of Indian origins who rely on Indic concepts for their analytic frameworks, it can be done such as the late Delhi University sociologist J.P.S. Oberoi. In his famous article 'Science and *Swaraj,*' he advocates for indigenous forms of scholarly analysis to replace the neocolonial imperialism of intellectual life that relies almost entirely on the Western linguistic lexicon. Mandair's love affair with European post-modernism has hampered an otherwise worthy attempt to utilize indigenous analytical concepts from within the Sikh tradition.

Moreover, Mandair's book is marred by the high-handed way in which he presents his argument. To elevate his case, Mandair feels it necessary to trivialize or dismiss the positions of other scholars who he thinks are out of step with his line of thinking. In some cases, he wrongly interprets their positions. Let me take one of his comments about my own writing as an example. On page 15, it is not just the spelling of my name that he gets wrong, but he incorrectly summarizes the notion of 'epistemic worldviews' that Mona Sheikh and I discuss in an essay in the *Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence.* Our point is actually similar to the one that Mandair makes in his book - that is, religion is not an essentialized object but a pattern of language and images that are in 'cultural worldviews' which include politics, economics, and everything else meaningful in life. If one adopts the perceptual stance of those within these worldviews, we argue, the violence associated with religion is seen as a natural part of this holistic nexus, and not something caused by religion - however one might define that enigmatic term. Yet, Mandair summarizes Mona Sheikh and myself as saying that we think that it is 'God-logic' that gives rise to 'religious violence.' This is something we didn't say, don't believe, and adamantly reject. It is almost diametrically opposite to our argument.

Putting aside his intellectual prejudices and a penchant for post-modern language, however, this is an interesting book. Though it breaks no new ground in textual analysis or historical interrogation, it does raise interesting conceptual issues. Readers may find the turgid writing style to be slow going, but the ideas in this small book are sure to enliven graduate seminars and provide fodder for many a scholarly discussion on the topic.

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Singh, Ranveer. *Patshahi Mehima: Revisiting Sikh Sovereignty* (Kington, United Kingdom: Khalis House Publishing, 2021), 395pp.

In this monograph, Ranveer Singh skillfully weaves the evolving narratives of Sikh sovereignty since the days of Guru Nanak at Kartarpur in the early decades of sixteenth century to the current situation of the Sikh Panth in the twenty-first century by using primary and secondary sources. The author employs the term

Sikh Sovereignty 'as a means of expressing the self-regulating and autonomous nature of the Sikh Panth, empowered by the Pātshāhī of Gurū Nānak Sāhib' (p. i). He describes the purpose of this book in the introduction: 'In exploring the origins of Sikh sovereignty, I aim to present the uniqueness of Gurmat and the Gurmukh, and in particular, Gurū Nānak Sāhib's worldview, that cultivates the notion of Halemi Rāj and the formation of the Khālsā, to actualise a model of governance in which Sarbat Da Bhala is permeated to all life forms' (p. iii). Reading this opening statement one can immediately sense that the author is basically writing for the Sikh audience by assuming the knowledge of his readers who understand the key Punjabi terms and popular Sikh discourse in reverential language. Throughout his arguments he employs sermonic language as a traditional Sikh exegete by citing Sikh chronicles without any concern for the historical context in which they are embedded. The book is divided into four parts based on chronological sequence, namely: 1) Sache Pātshāh; 2) Rise of the Khālsā and Pursuit of the Rāj; 3) Invasion and Occupation of Sikh territory; and 4) Transfer of Colonial Power and the Rise of Indian Nationalism, followed by a brief conclusion.

The first part is devoted to the canonical period of the ten Gurus (1469-1708) in which the author employs a verse from the Persian text, *Gañj-nāmā*, of Bhai Nand Lal to introduce each Guru as a true sovereign (*sache pātshāh*) of this world and the next. Following the eulogistic descriptions of the bards, Singh asserts that 'Guru Nanak Sahib established Rāj, political rule' (p. 18) at Kartarpur in opposition to both Mughal imperialism and the caste-ridden systems of Brahmanical hegemony, and that 'Gurū Sāhib installed the royal canopy over Lehna's head' (p. 22), thereby making his loyal disciple as 'Sache Pātshāh Srī Gurū Angad Sāhib Ji Maharaj' who established his reign at Khadur. In the case of the third Guru, he argues that 'Gurū Amar Dās Sāhib established 22 Mañjīs ['Cots', the seats of delegated authority]' (p. 39), a number which is significant because it reflected the number of provinces under the Mughal rule of Emperor Akbar. Singh maintains that the annual assembly of Sikhs under the guidance of the Mañjīdars in Goindval on the day of Vaisakhi 'promoted solidarity and a real sense of nationhood amongst the Sikh faithful' (p. 42). Again, 'Guru Rām Dās Sāhib established the Masand system, which was essentially a network of individuals who acted as the Gurū's agents in administering various tasks on behalf of the Gurū' (p. 49). By the time of the fifth Guru, the Sikh movement had become a 'state within a state' (p. 61), leading to Guru Arjan's execution on May 30, 1606, under the orders of Emperor Jahangir. By wearing two swords of Mīrī ('temporal authority') and Pīrī ('spiritual authority') and building the Akal Takhat ('Throne of the Eternal One'), Guru Hargobind sent 'a message to the ruling elite that the Gurū would continue to defend the sanctity and sovereignty of the Gurū's Darbār and would do so with the sword' (p. 80). After four skirmishes with the Mughal troops, Guru Hargobind withdrew to the Shivalik Hills at Kiratpur beyond the jurisdiction of the Mughal empire, where he passed on his authority to his younger grandson, Guru Har Rai, who maintained the troops and held the court.

The eighth Guru, Har Krishan, 'led the Sikh movement for a short duration before his departure at the tender age of nine' (p. 110). The conflict with the

Mughals reached its culmination with the execution of the ninth Guru, Tegh Bahadur, in Delhi on November 11, 1675, by Emperor Aurangzeb's orders, for refusing to renounce his faith in favor of Islam. If the martyrdom of Guru Arjan had helped bring the Sikh Panth together, Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom helped to make the protection of human rights central to its identity. The tenth and the last human Guru, Gobind Singh (1666-1708), created the institution of the Khalsa ('Pure') on Vaisakhi Day 1699 at Anandpur, an order of loyal Sikhs bound by common identity and discipline, representing the corporate sovereignty of the Sikh community as 'Gurū Khālsā Panth' (p. 166). The Guru symbolically transferred his spiritual and temporal authority (*jāmā*) to the Khalsa when he received the nectar of the double-edged sword from the hands of the Cherished Five (*pañj piāre*), becoming a part of the collective body of Khalsa.

The second part of the book deals with the 'Rise of the Khālsā and Pursuit of Rāj,' covering the first Sikh rule established by Banda Singh Bahadur in the form of Khalsa Republic (1710-1716), followed by Dal Khalsa and the Sikh Confederacies (*misls*) and the establishment of the Sikh rule in Punjab by Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780-1839), under the title of 'Darbār-e Khālsā.' Fired with the zeal of Guru Gobind Singh's ideal of *rāj karegā khālsā* ('Khalsa shall rule'), Banda Singh Bahadur and his companions went to Punjab like a storm, gathering momentum as Sikh warriors from Malwa and Majha joined them, destroying all oppressive rulers of Kaithal, Sonepat, Samana, Kapuri, Shahbad, Sadhaura, and Banur in 1709, before liberating Sarhind in 1710, and leading to the founding of the Khalsa Rāj, in which sovereign flags and mints of the Khalsa Panth were established from the Satluj to the Jamuna River (p. 185). Although this first Sikh rule lasted for only six years, it paved the way for the establishment of twelve Sikh confederacies (*misls*) in the eighteenth century, a period of great struggle during which some important institutions such as *Dal Khālsā* ('Army of the Khalsa'), *Sarbat Khālsā* ('Entire Khalsa') and *Gurmatā* ('Intention of the Guru' expressed in formal resolutions) came into being. By consolidating the Misls, Maharaja Ranjit Singh established Sikh Rāj at Lahore in 1799 and expanded it further by victories over Kasur (1807), Attock (July 1813), Kashmir (July 1814, and 1819), Multan (June 1818), Peshawar (1834) and Jamrud (1837). Before he died on June 27, 1839, Maharaja Ranjit Singh was remembered as *Sher-e Punjab*, the 'Lion of the Punjab' (p. 217). His successors could not withstand the pressure exerted by the invading British forces, and after two Anglo-Sikh wars in 1846 and 1849, the Sikh kingdom was annexed to the British Empire.

The third part of this book focuses on 'Invasion and Occupation of Sikh Territory,' claiming that Punjab was always on the British radar, and despite previous treaties of friendship (e.g., the Treaty of Amritsar 1809), they took full advantage of the internal state of disarray at the Lahore Darbar (p. 232). The author describes the main cause of the loss of the Sikh Rāj to the British forces during Anglo-Sikh battles was the treacherous behavior of certain groups of people: 'This treachery not only presented itself in the form of Dogrās, Pūrbīās, or Pahārīs, but also from the Phoolkīān states, in particular from the Sikh chiefs of Patiālā, Jīnd, Faridkot, and Chachrauli' (p. 244). He further argues that during

his reign, Maharaja Ranjit Singh's 'fatal mistake was to abandon the Guru-sanctioned mode of Sikh polity and decision-making, namely the Gurmata' and that 'with his passing, and the temporal loss of Sikh Rāj, the Sikhs entered a new political reality that they had not previously experienced' (p. 245). While the political autonomy of the Sikhs was taken away, the British adopted a policy of 'recruiting Sikhs into their army, playing on the sentiments of the Sikhs' connection to their faith,' putting them into their so-called 'martial races' category, they respected the 'religious' aspects of the Khalsa to the point that 'only the most ardent Khālsā, perhaps in their minds the most 'religious', would be permitted and honored within the British army' (p. 250). The author continues: 'For the benefit of harnessing the power of the Khālsā, for their own colonizing and secularizing mission, they reimagined the importance of the physical and outward appearance of a Sikh, especially an Amritdhāree Gursikh and placed it within the control of the British Empire, and the overarching epistemological authority and self-professed legitimacy of Western secular philosophy' (pp. 250-51).

In light of the fundamental principles of Gurmat, the author carefully looks at colonialism and western secularism, involving 'colonial loot' of resources of Punjab by imposing colonial logic of modernity to replace the earlier paternal rule through a large measure of bureaucracy, codes, and procedures. The most significant change that occurred during the colonial rule was through the classification of peoples into different 'religions' through the process of religion-making in which *Sikhi* became 'Sikhism' categorized as a well-defined system of doctrine and praxis limited to the private sphere (pp. 278-79). The author then turns to Sikh resistance to colonial rule through such movements as Kuka Movement (1957-1972), Ghadar Movement (1913-1917), Komagata Maru (1914), Babar Akali Movement and Gurdwara Reform Movement (1920-1925). He particularly mentions an exchange through correspondence between M.K. Gandhi and the SGPC in 1920s in which Gandhi was astutely aware of the Sikh desire for Rāj, given that 'the Sikhs were rulers of Panjab prior to the colonial occupation and were spearheading the campaign to remove colonial forces' (p. 306). Talking about Gandhi's assurances (1929) and Jawaharlal Nehru's promises to the Sikhs (1946) for autonomy to 'experience the glow of freedom' in North India, the author concludes the section by Sikh struggle for 'Sikh State' before the partition of the country into India and Pakistan in 1947 (pp. 307-308).

The fourth and the final part of the book is devoted to the 'Transfer of Colonial Power and the Rise of Indian Nationalism,' describing the precarious situation in which Sikhs found themselves when their main representatives in the Constituent Assembly refused to sign the draft constitution to be adopted by the people of India on 26 January 1950. They resented the fact that the Constitution of India did not recognize the independent identity of the Sikhs and failed to establish a separate personal law for them. This was hardly an auspicious beginning for the Sikhs in post-independence India. The Congress government did not honor the solemn promises given to ensure Sikh self-determination before independence. The author then turns to 'Stolen River Waters' how more than half of East Panjab's allocated share of river water was

diverted to the neighboring non-riparian state of Rajasthan (p. 323), followed by 'Panjabi Suba Movement' and 'The Anandpur Resolution' of 1973. In all these sections the author repeatedly talks about the systematic suppression of genuine Sikh demands that led to 'Dharam Yudh and the Khalistān Sangarsh' (pp. 324-362). The author concludes his arguments: 'During the Sikh struggle of 1980s and 1990s, the early Generals of Khālistān exposed the veil of Indian secularism and democracy and reinstated the magnificence of the Khālsā. Whether they attained martyrdom within the glory of battle or the courage of withstanding inhuman torture, they moved within the Hukam of Akāl' (p. 372).

In my reading, I have encountered some problems in this book. First, the author frequently employs plural pronouns for the Gurus: 'When young Gurū Nānak Sāhib was presented with the *janeu*, they spoke out against such superstitious beliefs and rebutted the claim…' (p. 9). Again, 'Gurū Nānak Sāhib was unapologetic in their overt condemnation of rulers…' (p. 11). These plural examples become problematic when the author turns to singular expressions: 'This demonstrates that the Gurū was not content with merely pointing out the problems leading society astray…' (p. 17). The author does not remain consistent in his usages. One should remember that plural pronouns are nowadays used for trans-gender subjects. Second, in his *Bābar-vāṇī*, Guru Nanak has employed the word 'Pīr' for millions of religious leaders who failed to halt the invader through their spells and tricks (GGS 418). But the author has made them 'Yogis' (p. 13). Third, the author frequently cites scriptural passages in his narrative (pp. 10, 12, 13-15, 22-3, and so on), but he does not provide their exegeses to connect them with the flow of the narrative. Fourth, to buttress his arguments on Guru Angad's Darbar at Khadūr Sāhib the author employs a stanza of Bhai Gurdas (p. 30), which has relevance in a different historical context of Guru Hargobind's period. In his narrative the author makes Bhai Gurdas (c. 1558-1636) a contemporary of Guru Angad (p. 31), which is historically inaccurate. Fifth, the author is not careful about historical events: 'Sikh tradition holds that Emperor Humayun once came to see the Gurū after being defeated by Sher Shah Suri in the Battle of Kanauj (May 1550).' The actual year was 1540. Again, the author wrongly writes the 'Treaty of Lahore, 1809' (p. 232), which was actually the Treaty of Amritsar, 1809. Sixth, the author maintains that 'there are writings of 15 different Bhatts included in the Gurū Granth Sāhib' (p. 50). The actual number of Bhatts is eleven. Finally, there are several typos in the text which should have been removed at the time of proofreading. I hope these blemishes will be removed in the new print.

Notwithstanding these flaws in the book, the author has offered a liberating alternative to the oppressive power structures of various regimes (Mughal, British and Indian), giving voice to unheard voices, and decolonizing the popular Sikh discourse in reverential language. As a young writer he deserves compliments for his brilliant achievement. This book belongs to every Sikh library and will have greatest appeal to the younger generation growing up in the Sikh diaspora.

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Juss, Satvinder Singh. *The Execution of Bhagat Singh: Legal Heresies of the Raj* (New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers, 2021), 288pp.

Satvinder Juss has written a remarkable book in exposing the fundamental legal flaws in the trial of Bhagat Singh and his associates which eventually resulted in the unlawful hanging of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev on 23 March 1931. This work is a fine example of writing a legal history which is simultaneously a political history. Law, politics, history and even a shade of colonial political economy stand so tightly integrated into the argument of the book as they should be in a work of this nature that it stands out as an excellent work of inter-disciplinary mode of research and writing.

While citing Edward Said about the usual saying that history is written by 'those who win and those who dominate,' Juss has admirably written about those 'who did not win and did not dominate' (p. 282). Colonial rulers and their post-colonial successors in India can both claim to be winners of history as far as control of state power is concerned. The colonial rulers tried to obliterate the legacy of Bhagat Singh by branding him as a 'murderer' and 'terrorist' who needed to be hanged, and the post-colonial rulers have tried to marginalise that revolutionary legacy by giving primacy to the Gandhian narrative in the writing of India's 'independence' movement history. However, the use of the power of state institutions to promote a historical narrative does not necessarily mean that it is unquestionably victorious over the folk memories of historical events that get transferred from one generation to another. In my research on Bhagat Singh, I have found that his martyrdom had so deeply touched the ordinary people of India at that time that he eclipsed all other leaders who subsequently became associated with state power in India, Pakistan. and Bangladesh. (For example, see https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/archive/comment/bhagat-singh-gandhi-and-the-british-58033.) Juss offers us additional evidence in support of this research in the form of a photo of a popular poster circulated on Republic Day 2020 that shows Bhagat Singh standing tallest among all leaders who are credited with having contributed to India's independence (p. 145). It is worthwhile to mention the names of the other leaders who are shown in the poster as of significantly lesser importance than Bhagat Singh such as Chandrasekhar Azad, Rani of Jhansi, Subhas Bose, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Maulana Azad, and Mahatma Gandhi.

In chapter 1 titled 'Coercive Colonial Legalism,' Juss elaborates the overall legal perspective of his argument relating to the flaws in Bhagat Singh's trial. In different ways, the argument of 'coercive colonial legalism' runs through the entire book. At times, it appears unavoidably as repetitive. However, it is important to understand the contradictory role of repetitiveness in any work to appreciate the nature of this book. Sometimes repetitiveness is resorted to by some authors because of their failure in advancing their argument. In these cases, repetitiveness as a poor substitute for an argument becomes dreary. Contrary to this, however, more careful scholars resort to a limited use of repetitiveness to enhance the robustness of their argument in different contexts. Such repetitiveness becomes enlightening. Juss manages very adroitly the limited use of repetitiveness to demonstrate from different angles the coercive nature of

colonial legalism in Bhagat Singh's trial. Five aspects of this coercive colonial legalism stand out as most glaring. First, it was the act of taking the trial midway from the magistrate's court where the judgement could be appealed in the High Court to a Special Tribunal instead where the option of resorting to an appeal was legally closed. Second, the witnesses by the prosecution (457 in number) were not allowed to be cross examined by the defence lawyers. Third, the violation of an important legal point that an accused should not be tried by a law which did not exist when the accused was suspected of having committed the crime. As such, trial of an accused by a law passed after the suspected activity amounts to a trial by a law that could be viewed as specially targeted to punish the accused. Fourth, the ordinance setting the Special Tribunal was never approved by either the Central Assembly in India or by the British Parliament. Fifth, in the Special Tribunal's judgement, Bhagat Singh and associates were called 'murderers' and not 'the accused' which amounts to prejudging the outcome of the trial. As Juss puts it, 'The Tribunal's preconceived mindset demonstrated its bias against the accused in the way that the undertrials were not referred to in the judgement as 'the accused' but as 'murderers' so that their guilt was predetermined,' (pp. 178-79).

Juss also points out that Bhagat Singh's case is not mentioned in the biographies of any of the British judges involved in his trial. 'It is as if they were ashamed; as if they knew that they had not done right by sending three men to the gallows without due process and in the absence of a fair hearing' (p. 232).

Two inter-related questions might arise in the minds of the readers of the book: 'Was it not expected that the trial would not be fair and, therefore, why is it necessary to go into the minute details of the trial as Juss has done to prove that it was flawed?' The answer to these two questions can be twofold. First, to explode the widespread myth of rule of law under the colonial rule, it is necessary to go into as much detail as possible and with as much rigour as possible so that even the proponents of the colonialism are forced to concede that it was a flawed trial. Second, Juss demonstrates the contemporary relevance of the flawed trial by referring to the Military Tribunals used to try 'terrorists' or 'anti-nationals' in even many 'democratic' regimes today (p.190).

Juss has built on the seminal work of A.G. Noorani (*The Trial of Bhagat Singh: Politics of Justice*). He acknowledges generously Noorani's contribution in often referring to his work. Thus, Noorani's and Juss's work will now remain the most standard works on the subject.

Despite the focus of his work on the legal dimensions of the trial, Juss brings in many other aspects of critical importance. For example, the revolutionary socialism of Bhagat Singh and associates was seen as dangerous with global implications in ways that Gandhi and his Congress Party never were (p. 42), and this had an impact on the nature of the trial leading to Bhagat Singh's execution. The trial had, in fact, attracted attention of British socialists. Juss found a letter in the British Library that was written (dated 5 March 1931) by the Secretariat of the Communist Party of Great Britain and addressed to fellow 'comrades' in Britain to draw their attention to the Lahore Conspiracy trial in which 'some of the comrades stand in danger of execution and we are asking that you should organise meetings and demonstrations of protest to demand that Comrade

Bhagat Singh should not be executed by the Labour Government' (p. 43-44). This, according to Juss, 'had a marked effect on the way in which the proceedings were conducted thousands of miles away in Lahore, particularly on the way that the evidence was marshalled to convict them' (p.44).

Mohammad Jinnah, 'India's highest paid lawyer' (p.32), had stepped in to defend Bhagat Singh. His stellar defence had defeated the government move to try the revolutionaries in absentia when they were on hunger strike and physically so weak that they could not be brought to the court. Juss cites Noorani that Jinnah's legal performance 'was magnificent, but it has been completely ignored in all Indian writings on Bhagat Singh and little noticed in Pakistan' (p. 33).

Juss also brings to light the admirable contribution of Justice Agha Haider– an Oxford graduate who was a close friend of Winston Churchill–who was one of the Indian judges involved in one stage of the trial. Haider showed exemplary bravery in dissenting from his fellow judges on the way the trial was being conducted, especially the beating by police of Bhagat Singh and his associates in the premises of the court itself. Unsurprisingly, he was later sacked from the Special Tribunal. Juss bemoans that no memorial to Agha Haider exists today anywhere in either India or Pakistan (p. 142). Along with Justice Agha Haider, another person whose life story Juss brings to light is that of Amolak Ram Kapoor (p.163-166) who had a troubled and financially difficult life but decided to defend Bhagat Singh out of a sense of patriotic revolt against imperialism.

Juss also does justice to the contribution of D.N. Pritt, a left-wing lawyer from London, who argued the appeal against the Tribunal's judgement to the Privy Council in London. In the last three chapters, and especially in the last chapter 11 titled 'Pritt Vindicated,' Juss's account and documentation will remain one of the best tributes to the brilliance and tenacity of this remarkable lawyer. Pritt had defended Ho Chi Minh in 1931-32, Jomo Kenyatta who became independent Kenya's first President in 1952, the veteran socialist Tom Mann in UK in 1934, National Unemployed Workers' Movement against the UK police in 1934, the National Council for Civil Liberties in the UK in later years, and the University Socialist Club in Singapore in 1954 in the first sedition trial in post-war Malaysia and Singapore. Juss points out that despite such an illustrious legal career, 'his work on the Lahore Conspiracy Case is almost forgotten. When he died in 1972 at his Hampshire home, his record of having defended anti-colonial leaders from Ho Chi Minh to Jomo Kenyatta was emblazoned in headlines in *The New York Times* but there was no mention of Bhagat Singh or the Lahore Conspiracy Case' (p. 194). The last three chapters of the book can be considered as a vital correction in the written history of the legal career of this great defender of Bhagat Singh.

The importance the colonial rulers attached to this trial can also be judged from the details Juss has presented on the rewards given to those who were present at the time of execution of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev on the evening of 23 March 1931. There was also a punishment to one individual present there. He was Khan Sahib Mohammad Akbar Khan, the Deputy Jail Superintendent, who had broken down and wept bitterly after watching the execution of Bhagat Singh and his two companions (p. 189). For the colonial

rulers, the display of human sympathy, such as weeping at such a critical moment in colonial governance, amounted to an act of disloyalty to the rulers. Coercive colonial legalism was enacted in its most naked form.

I felt that after reading dense material of 239 pages, it would have been helpful for the reader to have a concluding chapter tying up different threads of arguments in the book's 11 chapters. Nonetheless, this work will remain an important contribution to the celebration of the intellect and bravery of Bhagat Singh and his companions demonstrated so vividly during their trial, and through the denunciation of British colonial rule and colonial laws.

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Ram, Ronki. *From Paghri Sambhal Lehar to Samyukt Kisan Morcha: A Century of Punjab Kisan Struggle 1907-2021* (Chandigarh: Unistar Books, 2022) 144pp.

The repeal of the three Farm Laws marks the victory of one of the longest struggles of peasantry in the age of neoliberal capitalism in India. After the introduction of Green Revolution technology in Punjab, income of the farming community of the state had increased at a relatively higher pace than the national level. The infrastructural investment by the state along with the introduction of the minimum support price had made agriculture a profitable occupation. However, with the over utilization of water sources and intensive use of chemicals on the one hand and the introduction of neoliberal reforms since 1991 on the other, Punjab had to suffer a steep fall in profitability of its agriculture sector. Along with this, the implementation of the recommendation of the World Trade Organisation to push the agriculture sector towards massive corporatization had given way to the agrarian crisis. The magnitude of the agrarian crisis had deepened over a period of time, which was visible in the form of increase in farmer indebtedness and resultant suicides in Punjab. Meanwhile, the peasant movement in Punjab also began to fragment and weakened due to splits in the major peasant unions during this period. In light of the above facts, the peasant movement of 2020-21 was a significant milestone in the history of pro-people social movements in many respects. First, it boldly challenged the authoritarian-corporate nexus that desired to bring the agriculture sector and, in a way, food sovereignty under the control of corporate capital. Second, it set an example for other social movements that aimed to push back neoliberal forces. Last but not the least, the victory of peasantry over the anti-peasantry laws was a major setback to the unregulated growth of imperialism that seeked to control the production and distribution system of food and land use in the third world countries. In the light of these facts, the significance of the book under review lies in the attempt by its author to historically contextualize the 2020-21 peasant struggle. The author's attempt to draw parallels between the 2020-21 peasant struggle and other major peasant agitations of the 20th century in Punjab brims with insight and telling details.

The protest by Punjab's farmer unions against the three ordinances dealing with agricultural produce, sale, hoarding, marketing and contract farming promulgated by the Government of India in June 2020 began almost immediately in Punjab. Despite their continuous resistance against these ordinances, the central government turned these controversial farm ordinances into bills in September 2020. The fundamental objective of these three acts was to open up agricultural production and distribution for private corporate capital. The author of this book has meticulously traced the intervening period between the passing of the central farm ordinances and their enactment as acts/laws. When the central government unilaterally pushed ahead with the three farm bills in a manner that fell short of the democratic procedure, farmers of Punjab and Haryana started *dharnas* (sit-ins), blocked roads and began a *pakka morcha* (indefinite sit-in) outside the residence of Parkash Singh Badal - a former Chief Minister of Punjab, chief of Shiromani Akali Dal and ally of Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) since 1998. Strident opposition gradually built up in Punjab against the central government's farm laws by galvanizing varied Kisan organisations of the state (pp. 7-8). The peasant unions soon sensed that the central government was in no mood to withdraw the farms laws. Further, the fear of losing the Minimum Support Price (MSP) and Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) system and the freedom to cultivate crops, as well as the fear of land grab by the big corporations played an important role in the mobilization of peasants by the unions against these laws. The farmers' and agricultural labourers' unions of Punjab took the lead to shift their protest base to the periphery of Delhi, which was immediately supported by the farmer unions of Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh. The protest was held under the leadership of Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) - a united front formed by the 32 farmer unions of Punjab which was subsequently supported and joined by the unions from the other states and other pro-people national and international organisations. During the year-long protest, more than 700 protesting farmers lost their lives. The author of this book has discussed many other incidents, which reveal the government's agenda to derail the non-partisan peaceful protest at all costs. One such incident that dented the movement was the unfortunate acts at the Red Fort on January 26, 2021. Despite the government's nefarious attempts to brand this confrontation as an anti-national act, the farmer unions showed great patience and jointly convinced the protesting farmers to remain peaceful and focused on the immediate goal of their protest.

The 2020-21 farmers' protest proved that peaceful but persistent resistance against the anti-democratic whims of a government under the influence of neoliberal forces can be challenged, even during the rule of majoritarian political regimes. The author has further argued that the unique features of the protest (including but not limited to common kitchens, libraries at protest sites, health facilities, participation by women students, etc.), as well as its unity and commitment for justice call for an in-depth exploration of the movement. The author undertakes this exploration by contextualising the farmer's protest within the rich heritage of peasant struggle in both pre-partition undivided Punjab and post-independence Indian Punjab.

In chapters 3 and 4, the author reviews some of the major peasant struggles of Punjab, which have bequeathed a rich legacy for later generations of farmers in this region. After the annexation of Punjab in 1849, the British Raj put the entire land of the state under meticulously devised legal control. The canalization of large tracts of barren land gave way to development of irrigation facilities that not only propelled the high-yielding varieties of crops, but also gave rise to the residential colonies of farmers around the newly dug canals. Further, many farmers of this region joined the British army, which led to a social and political awakening among the newly established canal colonies in western Punjab that eventually played a catalytic role in the peasant movements of Punjab. The author contends that 'the farmers' struggle of 1907 is the pioneer of peasant movement in Punjab, which provides clues to understand what sustained the vigor of 2020-21 farmers' protest at the borders of Delhi' (pp. 35-36). He highlights that a good number of agro-related acts -The Land Alienation Act 1900, The Punjab Limitation Act 1904, The Transfer of Property Act 1904, The Punjab Pre-Emption Act 1905, The Court of Wads Act 1905 and The Punjab Land Alienation Amendment Bill 1906 - had all been passed by the provincial government to bring agriculture under the command of British Raj. These acts were passed without any resistance from the landowners. However, The Punjab Land Colonization Act 1906 which stated that 'if a new settler died without gaining occupancy rights, the land lapsed to the government,' had prompted the landowners to rise against the provincial government. When the landowners of Punjab felt that the act threatened their ownership of the land, they turned hostile. The increase in water rates by the government further aggravated the crisis. In order to resist, the landowners first united under 'yeoman grantees' of the Bar Zamindar Association and then under the revolutionary leadership of Ajit Singh (uncle of Shaheed Bhagat Singh) who, with the support of the underground organisation Bharat Mata Sabha, fought the Punjab Land Colonization Act 1906. Here, the author makes an important analogy between the 1907 and 2020-21 peasant movements - that is, the laws passed by the governments then and now were perceived by the farmers as a threat to their land. The 1907 movement played an important role in cultivating consciousness among the peasants about their rights of land cultivation. In addition to this movement, the author discusses a series of other movements which were generally against the feudal lords or the laws of the state to protect and extend the feudal system of land tenure. One such movement named Nili Bar da Morcha began in 1938 with the strike of 50,000 *muzara* (tenant peasants/sharecroppers) under the leadership of Punjab Kisan Sabha formed in March 1937. The significance of this morcha is highlighted by the author as the beginning of the Kirti Party's movement against feudalism in the Punjab. Other important pre-partition struggles discussed by the author include the Anti-Bandobast (land settlement) agitation of Amritsar of 1938 against unjust increase in land revenue, *muzara* struggle of Gurdaspur, Charkit Morcha, Korotana struggle, Lahore morcha of 1938-39, Harsa Chinna Moga morcha (1946) and Tanada Urmar morcha (1946-47) against the anti-peasant policies of British rule and/or feudal lords which were either restricting or undermining the land or cultivation rights of the tenant peasants.

Like in the pre-partition times, the post-independence Indian Punjab also witnessed many peasant struggles to safeguard land rights of the farmers. From independence to 1970s, the majority of the movements were anti-feudal in nature led by the left-wing leadership/forces. Among the pre-Green Revolution movements, the Patiala and East Punjab State Union (PEPSU) *muzara* movement of 1948-51 was the most prominent. The PEPSU movement was a continuation of the protracted *muzara* struggle against the *biswedars* (big landlords/absentee landlords). The Praja Mandal leaders, Akalis and leaders of the communist-led kisan unions stood with the *muzaras* in their movement against the *biswedars*, who had no legitimate right to land which had been theirs for generations. The *muzara* movement of the Patiala state compelled the Maharaja to make a royal proclamation in March 1947 to guarantee proprietorship rights to tenants, though, only on a portion of the land. The tenants did not accept the proclamation and remained steadfast in their resolve to realize the return of their hereditary land (p. 59). The author claims that the *muzara* movement touched new heights with the entry of the Lal Communist Party Hind Union, led by Teja Singh Swatantar, in January 1948. After a long struggle, the PEPSU Tenancy and Agricultural Land Act, together with PEPSU Abolition of Ala Malkiyat Act, brought the *muzara* agitation to its successful conclusion.

It is interesting to note that the central government's intentions to permit private corporate capital into the agriculture sector in 2020-21 was seen by the peasantry as a revival of *muzara* system. The farmers' fear of land grab by big corporate capital can be seen as an important trigger for their movement against the state-corporate nexus. Another intriguing link with the past that the author brings to fore is the Mehatpur Byet Anti-Betterment Levy Agitation *muzara* movement. This movement, locally known as Khush-Hasiyati Tax morcha of 1959, was led by the Punjab Kisan Sabha against the levy of taxes to cover the construction cost of the Bhakra canal system. The author rightly highlights that, much like the contemporary peasant struggle, the Anti-Betterment Levy Agitation 'brought together volunteers from across divides of castes, class (poor, middling, rich landowners and landless agricultural labourers), gender, age, religion, political affiliations (Congressities, Akali and Communists) and both urban and rural.' (p. 66) The farmers protesting at Delhi borders were accused of being Khalistanis and supported by urban Naxals, just as the peasants of the Mehatput Byet *muzara* movement were allegedly accused of being supported by Naxalities and were resultantly subjected to brutal oppressions of the state. Ultimately, however, both emerged victorious due to their innate strengths.

Moving on, the book takes us through the shift in leadership and objectives of the Punjab peasant movements after the introduction of the Green Revolution technology. Prior to the 1970s, these movements were essentially aimed at striking against the state and zamindars who were exploiting the tenant peasants. However, after 1970s and particularly after the introduction of Green Revolution technology, the rich peasantry who benefited from the above technology gradually hijacked the peasant organisations. The Chandigarh Morcha is an apt example of these changes. The author argues that a major shift occurred in the nature and politics of farmers' movement in Punjab with the formation of Punjab

Khetibari Zimindara Union (KZU) in 1972, which was later transformed into Punjab unit of Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU) in 1980. (pp. 72-73) Until the mid-1970s, all farmer struggles were waged under active leadership of the communists but, with the formation of BKU, the centre of gravity in Punjab farmers' union politics shifted to affluent farmer leaders with no communist background. The BKU leadership has since its inception been monopolized by the rich farmers, but even small and marginal farmers join it. The first major kisan agitation launched by BKU started in January 1983 with the non-payment of electricity bills. Since then, the farmers' movements of Punjab have shifted to issues of remunerative prices, input subsidies, etc. Consequently, the unions backed by the communist parties gradually lost all ground in Punjab. Even in the present movement, leaders of many left-oriented unions have hesitated to openly declare themselves as communists. The fundamental reason behind this shift is the incessant attempts of mainstream political parties and mainstream BKU leadership to brand indigenous communist-oriented farmer organisations as stalking horses for the global communist movement.

In the last chapter of the book, the author raises some important concerns that he hopes pro-people intellectuals will address in the near future. It is of great importance to understand how the question of farmers' welfare through state initiatives such as public investments, building the rural infrastructure, strengthening the cooperative rural network, and extending MSP support for other crops other than wheat and paddy has been effectively substituted with the interests of big corporate capital and imperialism. There is also a dire need to understand the changing role of the state in response to agrarian crisis. The government has built a compelling narrative about the necessity of big private corporate capital's intervention into the agriculture sector to promote the welfare of the farmers. The implications of this for state-society relations in the near future needs critical evaluation. Yet, another dimension that came into being after the publication of this book is that the movement was not able to fulfill its promise to transform the economic, political, and social scenario of Punjab. In fact, the rise of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Punjab is the outcome of the dissatisfaction of the masses from mainstream political parties on the one hand, and the conflict between the peasant unions on the issue of participation in assembly elections on the other. Why the peasant unions could not forge a common front to contest the 2022 Punjab Assembly election and what led to the failure of those who jumped into the electoral fray also needs to be probed. Although the farmers and agricultural labourers of the state showed their unity to collectively fight against the three farm laws, they failed to carry forward the same zeal into the state electoral arena. However, the failure of the peasants and landless-agricultural labourers to come together is evident by the recent tussle between farmers and agricultural labourers in three villages in the Bathinda and Sangrur districts of Malwa over the issue of planting paddy and daily wages. The broader issues of neoliberal capitalism and the relative capacity of social movements to translate their cohesive unity into electoral gains, while intriguing, fall beyond the analytical framework of this historically grounded study.

Overall, this book is an important contribution in understanding the long-standing tradition of peasant movements and protest in Punjab. It is an important source for those who want to further explore the relationship between the peasantry, the state, and corporate capital and imperialism in the past, present and future. The analysis and background in this book is also essential to understanding various aspects and dynamics of the Punjab peasant movement of 2020-21 which confronted the policies of the central government.

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Chattha, Ilyas. *The Punjab Borderland: Mobility, Materiality, and Militancy 1947-1987* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 334 pp.

The India-Pakistan border was supposedly closed immediately after it was formed in the Partition. This notion has been common wisdom in popular understandings and scholarly work on South Asia. Ilyas Chattha's fabulous social history of the Punjab borderlands in the decades immediately following Partition, however, systematically dismantles this entrenched idea. Bringing to life a rich tapestry of 'border crossings and social relations built on mutual benefit and trust' (p. 269), the book introduces us to a world in which the border is of great importance as much in the differences it introduces (for example, markets and currencies), as well as in its transgressions (such as movements of people, goods, gifts, ideas). The central concern of the book is contraband economies and cultures across and around the Punjab border. Over five substantial chapters, the book traces the ways in which cross-border contraband flows made the postcolonial state of Pakistan, cities such as Lahore and Amritsar, and an emergent elite of traders and businessmen.

Bringing an ethnographic eye to an incredible range of local archival sources, Chattha presents a lively borderland world undergoing tremendous socioeconomic churn through the post-Partition decades. This is clearly a work of tremendous diligence and enterprise, as the author assembles a wide range of source materials. Files of the Field Intelligence Unit, first information reports from border police stations, and various incident and situation reports of the surveillance wings of the police and paramilitary are utilized alongside extensive work with local newspapers and oral genres of expression such as Punjabi ballads, folklore, and interviews with borderland residents with lived experiences of these decades. Methodologically exciting, the book is a masterclass in how much we need to unlearn received nationalist histories and investigate in renewed ways the lived experiences and complex processes by which national economies were forged in and through entanglements with borderland socioeconomic relations and networks.

Chapters 1 and 2 provide an overview of what the making of a border and borderland from a connected region looked like in institutional and material terms in Punjab, detailing the state apparatus and range of cross-border social

actors and networks respectively. Chapter 3 to 7 dig deep into different aspects of contraband economies and cultures in the Punjab borderlands. In chapter 3, the author argues that cross-border contraband trade was key to the urban regeneration and economies of Lahore and Amritsar in the years when restriction of legal trade between India and Pakistan was devastating to the economy of the region and livelihoods of many. Migrants brought with them new kinds of commodity demands and the inter-generational trade networks to supply them. This included *paan* in the borderlands and Paan Gali in Lahore, that ran alongside and sometimes in contradiction with state efforts to control and nationalize space and mobility. Continuing a creative reading of state sources of seized goods and field reports on key smugglers, chapter 4 focuses on gold smuggling of the 1950s. Gold became central to the Pakistani state's efforts in producing and containing a national economy and defining its economic interests as security interests. In a series of fascinating insights, we see how pilgrimages including the Hajj became key routes of gold smuggling in the face of state surveillance and attempts to contain gold within West Pakistan. Tracking gold smuggling also reveals the Punjab borderlands to be the center of global gold traffic in these decades as bullion markets stitched the borderlands, including along the Wagah-Attari crossing, to Lahore, Delhi, Amritsar, Hong Kong, Karachi, Kabul, Dubai, and further afield.

What kinds of social relations and imaginaries underpinned such risky contraband economies in the tense decades after Partition? Chapter 5 seeks to address this question by connecting capital accumulation through smuggling with shifting social stratification. Analyzing border ballads, Chathha identifies the emergence of solidarity among borderland locals against state interventions - a notion of *bhai-bandi* that holds affective and material significance in forging trust and providing protection in the emergent contraband economies. Given the power of such cultural expression, I wanted to understand the world of these ballads better: how were they classed and gendered in terms of who composed, sang, and celebrated them? How were they circulated? What were some of the erasures and absences within them? While they paint a picture of a borderland society coming together against state prohibitions, I wanted to better understand what the power relations were in sociocultural and political economic terms *within* borderland society in Punjab?

Connecting cavalier stories of gold kings, cricketers, and politicians with the labor of various minority subgroups and marginalized communities in the daily life of border policing, the final two chapters reveal that state elites colluded with newly rising borderland elites to shape a *selective* regime of border security and economic control in Pakistan. The final chapter reads files of the Pakistan Interior Ministry's Field Intelligence Unit, hitherto unavailable to researchers. It reveals the nature of interaction between significant borderland residents and the Wagah authorities, enabling the escape of Sikh militants to Pakistan and their safe passage back to India with arms. Existing smuggling networks are sanctioned and deployed in the service of moving arms and militants, alongside other contraband commodities. Sensational reports of cross-border arms smuggling and Pakistan-government sponsored militancy was widespread in the Indian press through the 1980s based on Indian BSF operations to seize weapons

and capture militants. Juxtaposing these news reports with Pakistani intelligence records and oral history interviews with key border residents involved in cross-border smuggling and militancy activities in the 1980s, this provocative chapter goes beyond sensationalism to reveal the mechanisms and social dynamics of an institutionalized smuggling system. By the 1980s, drugs overtake guns. Using the same method of interweaving archival sources from both sides of the Punjab border, Chathha traces the Indian exigent security response to the entangled situations of spiraling addiction among Punjabi youth, support for Khalistan, and Pakistani state's denial of any involvement in supporting militancy. It was in this period that 'militant' and 'smuggler' emerge as criminalized and interchangeable categories in Punjab, facing the brunt of Indian state violence. By extension, residents of the Punjab borderland on the Indian side were subject to harsh surveillance and militarized security practices, including the fencing of the border. I wondered what the stakes are of such revelations in contemporary times.

The Punjab Borderland makes several important contributions to the study of borderlands, illicit economies, and post-Partition South Asia. First, in Chathha's nuanced analysis of ethno-historically rich material, he neither separates nor collapses smuggling and militancy in dealing with questions of 'greed' and 'grievance' in the Punjab borderlands of the 1980s. Avoiding homogenizing frames that are either celebratory as heroic bandits and resistance fighters, or criminalizing frames as smugglers, terrorists and infiltrators, the book focuses on the entanglements which illuminate the nature of political economic relations in the borderlands, including between diverse social and state actors. Second, in countering the common understanding of the Punjab border as the region's hard and closed post-Partition border, the book argues that diverse state and social groups formed one another and respective forms of legitimacy through smuggling. Relations and networks of trade between India and Pakistan did not cease. The materiality of cross-border flows was in fact the connective tissue both in the Punjab borderlands and in the cities of Amritsar and Lahore in the decades after 1947. This contribution quite dramatically changes the received understandings of the nature of transnational ties in Punjab on both sides of the border in the decades after Partition. It also shows how the Punjab borderlands were key nodes in a much wider geography of trade and social relations across the Punjabi diaspora. Folklore and ballads reveal not only laments of a region torn apart, of families and communities separated, but also archive the escapades and celebrations of daring figures and imaginaries of adventurism and cross-border connections. I wondered how we might make better sense of the role of gender ideologies in shaping such imaginaries and transnational geographies: how masculinities and femininities are shaped in the Punjab borderlands and of social groups and the state in terms of politics, authority, and security?

Boldly intervening in received histories of Partition's borders and post-Partition borderland life and economy, this book retells the story of the Punjab borderlands. It should be read and discussed widely - inside and beyond classrooms on South Aisa. No doubt this book will inspire renewed interest in

and critical study of post-Partition South Asia from a transnational methodological vantage point.

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Geva, Rotem. *Delhi Reborn: Partition and Nation Building in India's Capital* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2022), 268 pp.

This book represents a significant body of work needed to address the lacuna in partition studies, especially the aftermath of partition on South Asian cities. Studies on partition have largely examined the question of migration, relief and refugee rehabilitation, government narratives, evacuee property, and oral accounts of survivors especially women. The aftermath of partition is a theme which has recently become an area of interest of historians after the publication of important works on the subject such as Joya Chatterji book Spoils of *Partition: Bengal and India 1947-1967* (Cambridge University Press, 2007) and also Tan Tai Tong and Gyanesh Kudaisya's book *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia* (Routledge, 2000). While Joya Chatterji discusses the impact of partition on cities such as Calcutta which were overnight turned into capital cities and borderlands at the same time, Tong and Kudaisya look at the transformation of cities such as Karachi and Dhaka due to the influx of refugees. Delhi, the capital city of the new nation witnessed mayhem during the partition disturbances of 1947-48 which resulted in temporary or permanent migration of Muslim residents of the city and the arrival of Hindu and Sikh refugees. The dynamic between those who left, those who stayed and those who sought shelter after the disturbances in Lahore and Punjab requires a deeper analysis which goes beyond the preliminary issue of rehabilitation and resettlement. The social and political fabric of the city underwent transformation, a theme Geva explores in his book. Despite the works on the subject, there are more areas to be covered because partition was a defining moment in South Asian history which had long term consequences.

The author of this volume asks a pertinent question that has haunted generations for years as to how and why did the demand for Pakistan take root in Delhi, and town in Uttar Pradesh during the WWII given that its most ardent supporters would eventually remain outside its borders? (p. 4) This theme is of interest among historians and students of history as to how did those who would remain outside of the territories we call Pakistan, so fervently supported it? While some migrated, others never really had an idea that Pakistan would make them refugees and 'the other' overnight in their own *watan* or *desh*. The work of Aishwarya Pandit in her book *Claiming Citizenship and Nation, Muslim Politics and State Building in North India 1947-1986* (Routledge, 2021) examines the impact of partition on Muslims from UP who, like Muslims in Delhi, would always be outside the territories called Pakistan. Despite this, towns in UP such as Aligarh, Lucknow, Sahranpur, Muzzafarnagar, and Bijnor experienced a migration of elite Muslims who left for Pakistan. In fact, many

known Muslim Leaguers left the city in 1948 and during the Holi riots of 1950s. Those who remained were confronted with questions about their conflicting loyalties in the new nation state given that Aligarh and many other cities formed the ideological storm centre of the Pakistan movement.

Geva charts the development of the city as an imperial capital after the decline of the Mughal Empire and its transformation into the seat of the British Raj. He is thus able to establish the pivotal position of Delhi as an imperial capital and later the capital of a new nation state and how this impacted the issue of partition and influx of refugees. He traces the polarization of the city from 1937 onwards, as competition between both Hindu nationalist organizations and Muslim League grew in the city. (pp. 47-48) The provincial elections held in 1937 were central to polarization along communal lines. (pp. 50-51) This worried Muslims who saw Congress secularism as a way to secure Hindu tyranny. This was similar to the situation in UP which, contrary to Delhi, experienced a local Congress government which quickly got embroiled in controversies when it refused to ally with the Muslim league leading to accusations of Hindu raj and Hindu rule. This experience in UP was a catalyst for the popularity of the Pakistan movement in province. (p. 52) Even though Delhi didn't experience Congress rule, polarization reached its peak during war years. In Delhi, the Muslim league built its campaign around emotive issues such as the conflict between the Fatehpuri Mosque committee and Seth Gadodia, the Hindu owner of the adjacent property. Geva's work thus helps the reader come to a conclusion that tensions existed between Hindus and Muslims in Delhi prior to partition and increased manifold during the 1946 elections. The post partition tensions have to be seen in this context.

After the announcement of partition, the first bomb explosion in Delhi was reported near the very same Fatehpuri Mosque which had been an area of tension between the local community. It happened during the *Juma* prayers and many were wounded, and Geva points out that this incident was a pointer to the Muslim residents in the city that the 'war is on.' (p. 82) He mentions how Shahid Dehlvi heard the explosion from his office near Kahri Baoli, a Hindu locality. The 'war is on' expression captures the happenings in the city including the terror that spread among Muslims. The first weeks of September 1947, he argues, was marked by sporadic stabbings and attacks on Muslim property and life, thus sealing the fate of all those who believed that both the communities could forgo bitterness and stay together. Geva argues that, while the official narrative tried to downplay the violence as a result of the arrival of refugees from West Pakistan, the official response was to present it as more of a spontaneous outburst rather than planned attack which the author believes was more the possibility. He also provides a nuanced account of the planning that existed on both sides of the riot-stricken city of Delhi, and how the arrival of Hindu and Sikh refugees increased tensions.

He explores the role of the press in peddling narratives favoring one side or the other like the *Dawn* newspaper which ceased to be printed after three months and took an anti-Hindu stance. In contrast, papers like the *Hindustan Times* took a pro Congress stance. (p. 93) This analysis presents a similar story to that which happened in UP and Bengal. The chapter on evacuee property in Delhi is a

significant contribution to the studies on evacuee property laws and how they operated in a national and state context. (p. 135) Geva points out that Delhi was an important battleground for Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's and Home Minister Sardar Patel's conflicting visions of the new nation. He points out that, since Delhi was governed by the Home Ministry, which was headed by Patel, the clash between the visions of the two leaders had an impact on the issue of evacuee property. Deputy Commissioner Randhawa and his conduct was a bone of contention between Nehru and Patel. This study provides an alternative perspective that argues that sometimes the happening at the local level influenced decisions at the top and vice versa. (p. 137) Geva does provide the reader with a complete overview of the property issue and how it was governed by several factors such as pre-existing tensions within the communities and official apathy dictated by communal considerations. Geva thus adds to existing literature like Vazira Zamindar's *Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia* (Columbia University Press, 2010) which discusses the evacuee property extensively. Like Zamindar, he discusses the creation of Muslim zones and Hindu zones especially after the partition violence settled. Geva's work is a significant contribution towards ongoing studies on partition in South Asia, which has an impact on politics of the two nations and communities even today.

The role of the Urdu press during the partition violence and its role in reclaiming the city of Delhi is one of the most detailed chapters and a new area through which we can study the changes the city underwent. He points out that the reclamation of the city was done through articles and writings that appeared in the Urdu press, which alluded to the past Muslim association with Delhi. Even a decade and a half after partition, Delhi still featured 16 Urdu dailies that had a substantial readership. The papers and writers used this platform to convey a sense of loss, deprivation, and changing nature of the city. Focus on the Urdu press thus opens up a big source of information regarding the happenings in Delhi, which is often ignored in the official narrative and private sources. The extensive use of official and unofficial sources, and both English and Urdu publications thus strengthens Geva's narrative and conclusions. It also forces the reader to look beyond conventional sources to capture partition and its impact.

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Ali, Nadir. translated by Amna Ali and Moazzam Sheikh, *Hero & Other Stories* (San Francisco: Weavers Press, 2022), 104pp.

Nadir Ali's haunting short stories often came to him in dreams as well as through encounters with real people, according to his son-in-law Moazzam Sheikh in his illuminating introduction to this collection of fourteen stories in English translation. In fact, one story, 'Feeqa's Death,' opens with the author musing on dreams as 'strange enactments of life's song and dance' (p. 20). In the final story, 'Bundu, Consoler of the Rich,' the narrator admits, 'I am the kind of man

who always thinks deeply about dreams' (p.82). The translations too, all crafted by his daughter Amna Ali and son-in-law Moazzam Sheikh (apart from one by his son Omar Ali), have a dreamlike quality. The introduction - a fine tribute to Nadir Ali's output - is a valuable supplement to the stories themselves.

Sheikh reveals, for example, that the stories only started to come to Nadir Ali after he had suffered a severe mental breakdown brought on by witnessing, as a soldier, West Pakistan's brutality to Bengalis in 1971. This devastating experience was too terrible for him to mention directly in any of his stories. However, there are resonances. For example, in 'Bundu, Consoler of the Rich,' the professor-narrator explains how he was affected by 1971, became ill, and lost much of his memory of that time during treatment.

Other losses that affected Nadir Ali deeply stemmed from India's partition in 1947 (see his story 'Feeqa'), and from the breakdown of the traditions and natural environment of his youth. Indeed, his writing was also a response to the loss of a culture/ language - at least in the experience of many Pakistani Punjabis - whereas he himself had an 'in-depth knowledge of classical Punjabi literature, including the poetry by the Sikh gurus' (p. ii).

In addition to his erudition and his interest in politics and world affairs, Nadir Ali was 'fundamentally a poet' (p. iii). In translation, his stories remain elusive and poetic. They are brief, vivid, and often puzzlingly multi-layered. There is a multivalent irony, as in the title of 'Hero.' Nadir Ali himself served in the army, but in 'Hero' (as in 'Bundu, Consoler of the Rich') the first-person narrator is an academic - a role that, Sheikh tells us, Nadir Ali himself would have preferred in real life. Fittingly, the longest story in the collection is 'Qissa of Shah Husain,' a feeling full evocation of Lahore's sixteenth-century Sufi poet Shah Husain (or Hussain).

The stories are, for the most part, light-touch cameos of a fascinating range of 'ordinary people' such as goldsmiths, a kite-maker, the patients in a 'mental asylum,' a prisoner, and 'the last *sarangi* player of Pakistan' (p. 71). These ordinary people are neither straightforwardly heroes nor villains. For example, in 'Baba Sheenah,' the narrator recalls that, when he was a child, thieves and dacoits, including his maternal uncle Sheenah, were regarded as heroes. Sheenah reveals how he abandoned that way of life - whether heroically or not is for the reader to decide. 'Twins' is a particularly powerful exposure of the tragic interrelatedness of two brothers' lives.

Because many of these characters are from a now bygone age, there is an extra mystique for readers discovering Nadir Ali's stories in the present. 'No one makes or plays sarangis anymore' (p. 71). The present reviewer's recent experience of an Indian *sarangi* player's recital gives this and other such brief comments an intense poignancy! Poignant too (and evocative of Guru Nanak's dictum) is the statement: 'In the darbar of Shah Husain there was already no Hindu, no Muslim' (p. 69).

While most of the characters are men, the resilience of women shines through on occasion. For example, Shado in 'Twins' capably manages in her marriage to a husband with severe mental health problems. 'Nooran Devi' hints at women's possible sexual deviance from approved societal norms. Thus, his stories explore a deeper realm of reality and experience.

The translations in *Heros & Other Stories* are a labour of love and respect - eloquent and fluid despite challenges such as Nadir Ali's invention of his own syntax and idiom, and disregard for literary conventions. (p. viii) They allow the reader to experience situations and feelings not equivalently captured in contemporary literature in present-day partitioned Punjab. I commend this collection of stories unreservedly.

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