Kaur Singh, Nikky-Guninder. *Janamsakhi: Paintings of Guru Nanak in Early Sikh Art* (New Delhi: Roli Books, 2023), 224pp.

There are few rules by which I live my life. Of these, one is abundantly clear: if Nikky Singh writes a book I read it, an injunction I have diligently followed since my graduate school days. Such a dictum has always been to my benefit as my past reviews of Professor Singh's works over the last thirty years have suggested. I am a great admirer of Nikky Singh's work; for it has often ensured that long-neglected voices in Sikh history and tradition are no longer marginalized. In the process of allowing us to once again hear these expressions, she has given us a much more robust and inclusive understanding of the historical development of the Sikh Panth and of Sikh ideology, and of the Sikh Gurus and the Sikh Khalsa, reflecting in so many ways the Sikh Gurus' commitment to social justice and inclusivity. Within the last decade, Professor Singh has turned some of her attention to excavating a more visual anthropology of the Sikh tradition. This attention has resulted in a number of insightful articles on Sikh art and iconography, in which she has allowed us to see sights long taken for granted in fresh ways. This latest addition to her continuing legacy, *Janamsakhi: Paintings of Guru Nanak in Early Sikh Art*, appears to be the culmination of these exhilarating artistic explorations and excavations, drawing on some of her previous articles and refracting through a new interpretive lens as it does a series of beautiful paintings briefly and far-too superficially put on display for the reading public in the late 1980s in Surjit Singh Hans' rather somber *B-40 Janamsakhi Guru Baba Nanak Paintings* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University Press, 1987). These are the fifty-seven illustrations by the mid eighteenth-century Punjabi artist Alam Chand Raj which we discover within the unique Punjabi/Gurmukhi manuscript commissioned by one Bhai Sangu and inscribed in *sammat* 1790/1733 CE by Daya Ram Abrol (the son of one Dasavandhi).

The manuscript is the now-famous "B40 Janam-Sakhi," so-called because of its catalogue designation within the British Library (MS Panj B40) where it has been lodged since it was purchased in London in 1907. The term *janam-sākhī* or 'life evidence' is a well-known one which was generally used to describe works which narrate the lives of revered north Indian saints, such as the fifteenth-century Bhagat Kabir. Since the nineteenth century, however, the description has been most commonly associated with the figure on which the majority of eighteenth and nineteenth-century *janam-sakhis* have focused - the first Sikh Guru, Guru Nanak (1469-1539) - so much so that today *janam-sakhis* are exclusively known as religious biographies of the First Sikh Master.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century and continuing to this day, students and scholars of Sikh history and literature have focused a great deal of attention on the texts and literary gymnastics of the *janam-sakhis*. These have undertaken explorations of their evolution and sources; of *sakhis* which are plausible and those which are not; and of how reliable the *janam-sakhis* are in regard to the life of Guru Nanak. All of these studies exclusively rely on the

written portion of the *sakhis*. None, in other words, have bothered to either integrate the manuscript's paintings into their sustained discussions nor have they explicated the narratives of the First Master's life using these paintings or illustrations solely as their source. We discover just a few paragraphs in this regard in W.H. McLeod's masterful 1980 English translation of the B40 [W.H. McLeod (ed.), *The B40 Janamsakhi* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University Press, 1980)] (pp. 7-8) - which only goes so far as to underscore the importance of these paintings - as well as an austere sentence or two in Hans' collection noted above - with some of the printed Gurmukhi text of the *sakhi* with which the illustration is associated. In none of these though is there more than a simple cursory analysis of the paintings. Nikky Singh fills in that lacunae, providing us with both a visual and literary delight in the process. In order to impart justice to these stunning visual texts of the early to mid-eighteenth-century Sikh reverence for Guru Nanak, the publishers at Roli Books decided to ensconce these images within a coffee-table sized book. Often, oversized texts such as these have little to entice the academic. But, as one may rightfully infer, Nikky Singh's text puts this assumption to bed, providing us with a glorious exception to this general rule while, at the same time, allowing a wide-ranging audience to as easily delight in Nikky Singh's vivid text and illustrations.

Indeed, in keeping with her visual turn, Nikky Singh adds a very valuable dimension to previous studies of this particular *janam sakhi*. Relying on both the written text as it appears in Piar Singh's printed Gurmukhi iteration of the B40 [Piar Singh (ed.), *Janamsākhī Srī Gurū Nānak Dev jī* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University Press, 1974)] and the aforementioned W.H. McLeod's 1980 translation to lightly supplement her discussion, Nikky Singh has elevated the dialogue around this religious biography, one of the oldest extant manuscripts of the *janam-sakhi* genre incidentally, from the academic and the popular to the actual lived experiences of mid eighteenth-century Sikhs, well in keeping with current attempts to capture lived experiences in more nuanced understandings of living religions. In order to ensure that the original text of the B40 can therefore contain this more robust being-in-the-world, Professor Singh recasts this *janam-sakhi* as an iconotext, an arresting compound term in English, in which paintings and text are merged together as one, themselves/itself achieving the status of a revered image in which the devout invest much symbolic and emotional capital. As such, we are reminded of the multiple dimensions that the Guru Granth Sahib (GGS) occupies, a systematically arranged compendium which operates in multiple capacities, as the word of the Sikh Gurus, and the word or *śabad* as the Eternal Guru, evoking the very presence of Akal Purakh or the divine who is, as Guru Nanak reminds us consistently, *sarab viāpak*, 'everywhere present.' It is not at all uncommon to hear Sikhs today express a wish to take *darśan* (an auspicious sight) of the GGS. It appears that both Daya Ram Abrol and Alam Chand Raj are fully aware of the deep connection between both of these genres, of *bāṇī* (utterance) and *sākhī* (evidence) for whilst one centers itself on the hymns of the First Guru, supplementing these systematically with the *shabads* by successive Gurus, Bhagats, and Bhatts, the other concentrates on what were believed to be the lived

experiences which precipitated those hymns. In both Guru Nanak is at the center. It is this intimate association that Nikky Singh's attention to the B40's illustrations brings out.

The message communicated through *bāṇī* in the GGS is elucidated in the iconotext through both the actual narrative itself and equally important, through the illustrations. As such Nikky Singh goes into the exquisite detail of each painting, commenting on Alam Chand's use of colour, brush stroke, size, borders; attending to the way clothing and sartorial accoutrements are painted, the imaginative use of space, and the artistic minutiae in much the same way that those of us who examine Sikh literature focus on the use of metaphors, similes, tense, and turn of phrase. The illustrations become, as these were intended, visual texts, iconotexts worthy of reverence themselves despite the general Sikh antipathy towards images and icons. Nikky Singh presents us with a very robust interpretation of each image within the context of the whole text, demonstrating the sheer genius of Alam Chand Raj and his ability to communicate the doctrines of Guru Nanak through the sheer artistry of his images - an explication of these doctrines which gains momentum as one is collectively transported from image to image, from one realm to another. In some of these, the First Sikh Guru's insistence on the triple formula of *nām*, *dān*, *iśnān* or veneration of the name of the divine, charity, and purity of heart, mind, and soul is made utterly conspicuous. What this loving artistry attempts to do, or so we may infer from Nikky Singh's accompanying texts to each image, is to allow readers, listeners, and/or viewers to be visually and acoustically transported into the presence of the First Master, to aesthetically commune with Guru Nanak. In a way that aligns with the exquisite *vār*s of Bhai Gurdas Bhalla. The visuality of the *janam-sakhi* provides us a key which allows the engaged participant to unlock the door to a deeper understanding of Gurbani, in the attempt to engage with Gurbani's limitless meanings, to hear the unspeakable speech (*akath kath*) which transports the pious, disciplined devotee to the Realm of Truth, *sach khaṇḍ*, the final destination in the soul's journey in which one becomes immersed in *vismād*, ecstasy engendered by sheer awe. Indeed, Nikky Singh's text is just such a piece of art which acts as a vehicle along that highway.

This is, put simply, an exquisite text which should be on the coffee table of anyone interested in the Sikhs, in the Sikh Gurus, or in Sikh art.

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Kapuria, Radha. *Music in Colonial Punjab: Courtesans, Bards, and Connoisseurs, 1800-1947* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 410pp.

Radha Kapuria's learned book invites readers into a vibrant world of song and dance, but also into the domains of state formation, regional and cross-regional exchange, contestation and cultural transformation. Accessible for an educated

general audience, this book offers much to both the scholar and the student. I have, in fact, assigned an earlier journal article version of Kapuria's first chapter to undergraduates for several years, with great success. They are captivated by the depth of her portrayal of the dynamic kingdom of Ranjit Singh, and her ability to draw out complex stories about state formation and gender politics within a story that is ostensibly about music and dance. Kapuria is able to do this across her chapters, making this book essential reading for anyone interested in Ranjit Singh's kingdom, the "princely states" of Patiala and Kapurthala, and the cultural and social transformations associated with the annexation of Punjab after 1849, and then under direct colonial rule. Music here is at the center, but is tied to a far larger world, and the book moves through music to represent the complexity of Punjabi life worlds at the cusp of and through the transition to colonial control.

Kapuria's introduction provides a rich and textured state of the field and makes the case for the importance of this book - the first of its kind to foreground the role of urbanity in the Punjab region. She makes a compelling case for reading the classical, the literary, and the erudite back into Punjabi history, and describes in detail the processes by which Punjab came to be rendered as "folk". Kapuria's attention to female performers, and performers from marginalized communities, both of whom remained at the center of the performance traditions that she excavates until well into the twentieth century, contributes much to a new domain of scholarship on the rich histories of music and dance from the pre-colonial to the colonial period - I'm thinking here of Kathryn Butler-Schofield and Richard Williams, for a start - that allows us to move beyond colonial narratives of decline and "debauchery." The brilliant first chapter explicates the role of music in Maharaja Ranjit Singh's court, arguing that musical performance "held a pre-eminent role in the technologies of rule and the rituals of statecraft and diplomacy deployed by" (p. 39) Ranjit Singh, as well as in his personal life (p. 49). Kapuria situates a group of female performers dressed as men in a martial guise within the larger court economy (71ff). This is fascinating and important material, bringing attention to an underexamined domain of performance practices. Kapuria makes the valid point that the female figures she examines reveal "the contradictions of female power" in Ranjit Singh's state (p. 75), both with their power and the constraints on their power, much as women dancing in the European context did as well, as she suggests. Particularly of interest is Kapuria's critical approach to European sources, which allows her to glean value from them, while recognizing their limits (p. 65).

Kapuria's second chapter is equally brilliant, and needed in the field, detailing the "shift in the social position of the *mirāsī*s in Punjab" at the end of Ranjit Singh's reign, and into the colonial period. She reveals the position of these traditional performers between "ridicule and romanticization" (p. 107) in the folkloristic ideology of the colonial state. She details the complexity of colonial engagements with music, and traditional performance, from administrator/scholars to missionaries - the latter of whom embraced music's ability to reach people in their missionizing efforts and found affinities and commonalities through it (p. 122). Music and translation to Punjabi were central

(p. 134). The important account of the engagement of Anne Wilson (1855-1921) with music allows Kapuria to continue her focus on gender in her analysis. Kapuria's reading is nuanced, not seeking simple villains and heroes in this period, but rather appreciating the complexity of the interactions of the time and the multidimensional role of music within it. The fascinating exploration of the *Mirāsīnāmah,* published in 1891, "illuminates the contours of the popular before it was reformed at a macro-level by the city-based middle-class reformers" that she explores in detail in her third and fourth chapters (p. 157). This fascinating text invites serious analysis, and Kapuria takes this up with aplomb. Kapuria sees it as reformist, and written by someone on the "inside" but this is difficult to maintain throughout: there is certainly significant vilification of the *mirāsīs* in the text, with shaming that seems directed at their audiences. At the same time, there are also clear reformist elements, meant to help the *mirāsī*s "better" themselves.

The third chapter continues attention to traditional performers, excavating the marginalization of women performers - who had significant social status prior to colonial rule, and in its early decades - and the rise of middle-class women as "proper" performers (p. 193). She accomplishes this by examining the "colonial-modern musical public sphere" (p. 194) in Lahore, Amritsar and Jalandhar, and the complex interactions that characterized engagement with Indian music in these locations. This focus on cities is important, given the lack of attention to the urban in studies of the Punjab, and is also tied to gender, since cities were a place where "autonomous women" could find space (p. 195). Demonstrating again a capacious approach to sources, Kapuria well demonstrates the status of courtesans in mid to late nineteenth century Punjab by drawing on a range of sources, from court cases to the emergent print domain, post-annexation. As she shows, "Lahore was a crucial centre for northwest India in the pedagogical and printing universe connected to the learning and connoisseurship of classical music" (p. 207). She then details the efforts of reformers, as a part of the larger anti-nautch campaign initiated in 1890, to bring musical domains under their control and, for some, contain "proper" music within religious contexts, "to define music strictly in terms of piety, divorcing it from its earlier association with pleasure" (p. 233), and disallow women the central role they once played within it, except as "upper-class privilege" (p. 247). This was the context for the great success of the musical reformer Vishnu Digambar Paluskar in Punjab (250ff), which she amply shows built on already existing dynamics in the region. Kapuria, however, also allows us to see the limits of Paluskar's project, and the endurance of existing practices (p. 255).

The fourth and final major chapter examines the place of performance in the "princely states" of Punjab, focusing on the important states of Patiala and Kapurthala, to understand the emergence of the Patiala *gharāna* or lineage, within a broader context. This allows us to interrogate the urban environment outside of direct colonial rule, while recognizing colonial influence and exchanges at the same time. Music was configured in quite distinctive ways in these contexts, at the same time that it reflected dynamic exchanges among

artists and connoisseurs from Punjab overall, and beyond. This section of the book is of intrinsic interest and worthy of significant attention because these states have not received the consideration they are due in accounts of nineteenth and twentieth century Punjab (apart from Purnima Dhavan's important 2011 book on the eighteenth century that provides compelling material on them). Ranjit Singh's kingdom and its annexation have instead captured the imagination of the historiography of the nineteenth century Punjab, leading to neglect of these other states. Kapuria's interconnected approach allows us to see how Patiala's *gharāna* emerged at "a confluence of different influences and practitioners" (p. 289). Overall Kapuria demonstrates - in ways that resonate with her first chapter on Ranjit Singh's Lahore state - the centrality of music in the social history of the state. Here too we see a dazzling array of sources, such as a lithographed history of the Patiala State entitled the *Gurū Nānak Parkāś* completed in 1891, and a range of archival traces that provide a sense of quotidian dimensions of performers' lives provided by the bureaucratization of music in this period (p. 302). This evidence also provides a glimpse of the diverse communities that comprised the Patiala musical landscape (p. 300-301). Kapurthala provides another alternative, where dynamic exchange with western musical traditions distinguished it from Patiala and other urban centers. As Kapuria shows so beautifully here, Punjabi urbanity was multi-valent and dynamic.

As its title tells us, this is a book about music: but also about much more. It tells us more about gender in nineteenth and early twentieth century Punjab than we have learned in most recent scholarship, and it enriches our understanding of state formation by bringing together material on Punjab's diverse states through this period. Finally, it provides valuable access to detailed examination of the traditional performers, men and women alike, who are the bearers of Punjab's rich musical and dance traditions. Reading it, we are convinced of the urbanity of Punjabi culture and the need to rethink entirely the kitschy adage that "Punjabi culture is agriculture." Clearly, that is not the case.

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Ranganath, Nicole. *Women and the Sikh Diaspora in California: Singing the Seven Seas* (London: Routledge, 2024), 198pp.

In Routledge's recent publication in its "Ocean and Island Studies" series, Nicole Ranganath innovatively interweaves the themes of women, music and geography - especially the waters of rivers and oceans. Her meticulously researched book is rich with poetry and its metaphors - for example (from the Guru Granth Sahib) "crossing the terrifying world-ocean" - powerfully convey women's sorrow and joy.

Ranganath's substantial opening reflection contextualises her work within several bodies of literature and evokes the two "lands of five rivers"—on the

one hand, the Punjab (*panj-ab*) and, on the other, California's Sacramento Valley - each with its potential for both abundant fertility and catastrophic flooding. In addition to an Introduction and Concluding Reflections, the book has five chapters arranged both chronologically and thematically. They embrace, consecutively, the author's distinctive methodological approach; then Sikh women's performance of anti-colonial Gadar revolutionary songs between 1913 and 1948; followed by insights from women's wedding songs. In this particular chapter, she emphasises how, for women though not for men, migration overseas was the second and lesser rupture they experienced—the first having been the trauma of departure from their parental family to their in-laws. This is examined through the subjects of marriage and oceanic journeys found in folk music from the 1930s to the 1960s. The subsequent chapters examine the creation of communities in California through sacred music (on, for example, the day of the monthly '*Sangrand*') from the late 1940s to 1990s; and, lastly, two women's autobiographical songs from the 1990s to 2000s.

This is a generous monograph, giving voice to the women who reached the United States before, or very shortly after, the 1965 Immigration Act and whose lives have been largely undocumented in existing accounts of diaspora history. With commendable transparency, it also shares the author's research journey with other scholars who may be "interested in pursuing community-engaged research to access marginal voices and lives through song" (p. 32). Ranganath's research journey comprised six years of sensitive, persevering fieldwork. Her methodology is based on collaboration: she was helped at the outset by three daughters of women pioneers and also by students at the University of California, Davis where she teaches. Imaginatively, she invited the women to a tea party, so echoing the women's own practice of supportively welcoming women who had newly arrived from Punjab. Countering the general view that elderly Sikh women's voices were unimportant to the narrative of settlement in California, Ranganath conducted group and individual interviews as the basis of extensive oral history fieldwork. The outcomes also included making a documentary film. Regarding her sample, she notes her dawning realisation of the exclusiveness of village-based networks and how she consequently expanded her sample. She reports how her discovery of some women's autobiographical songs provided an unexpected resource and direction for her research. Central to her exploration were her oral history interviews with 30 elderly Jat women, all from relatively affluent families in Punjab's Jalandhar and Hoshiarpur districts. She emphasises the importance of the contribution of individual female voices to inform a Punjabi migration history that is so often more macroscale and more gendered.

The text is well-supported by illustrations. Maps demonstrate the geographical resemblances between the Sacramento Valley and the Indus Basin of the native Punjab. Family photographs show women and their relatives in Punjab and in the US - mainly in Yuba City just north of Sacramento. The photographs also record events such as a wedding in the historic Stockton

gurdwara in 1964, women taking *amrit* in Yuba City in 1973, or enjoying the annual *nagar kirtan* and having tea.

Women and the Sikh Diaspora in California is important as a narration of history from women's own perspective. When women are placed at the centre of this diaspora history, "the 1940s become a watershed decade involving both the Partition of 1947 and South Asian women's arrival in the United States" (p. 16). Moreover, as Chapter Two makes clear, attention to the songs that women sang, necessitates a scholarly rethinking of the pre-1940s Gadar movement. Previous scholarship, based as it has been on male sources and focused on male leaders, has ignored the inspirational role of Sikh religious tradition to many participants in the movement. Ranganath also addresses the lack of "scholarship about women's creativity as a cultural force shaping the South Asian diaspora" (p. 15). An interesting contribution to diaspora studies is her theorising of migration in terms of water rather than land, and by placing diaspora, decolonial and feminist scholarship in sustained dialogue with the field of critical ocean studies (p. 14).

Women born in the 1930s and 1940s had received little education and were doubly circumscribed: they were limited not only by patriarchy but also by the US's hostile racial environment in which "white people" cursed them and they did not dare venture outside in Indian clothing. At the same time, they suffered from their husbands' insensitivity and the pressure to produce sons. Isolation was another big challenge - indeed, Nand Kaur as "the matriarch of the community" had spent 25 years as the only Punjabi Sikh woman in Yuba City. In foregrounding their lives, the author draws insights from earlier work by numerous feminist scholars, among them Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh and Anshu Malhotra, as well as Pamila Gupta's study of Goan migrants in Mozambique and performance scholar Diana Taylor's distinction between archive and repertoire. Ranganath meticulously examines "the confluence of influences in Sikh women's lives in California between the 1940s and the 2000s that triggered their voices bursting forth" (p. 17). In giving them voice, this study sits alongside a growing body of not only literature but also film. (As I read, I was reminded of Ajay Bhardwaj's film *When the Tide Goes Out*, celebrating the struggle of previous generations of Punjabi women in Canada).

With its focus on what the women sang and the sacred music that they heard, Ranganath's study adds to the growing literature on Punjabis' popular and devotional music-making, given "the unique Sikh worldview in which music triumphs over geography" (p. 45). At the same time, Ranganath affectively documents their companionship and solidarity as women and, in some instances, the shift in gender norms as women began taking the lead, for example by establishing groups to recite Guru Arjan's "Sukhmani Sahib," by participating prominently in public religious/community parades called *nagar kirtans*, and by their agency in encouraging their husbands to "take *amrit*" - initiation into a life of daily commitment to Sikh religious practice. My one small reservation is the use of the word "priest" with its unhelpful connotations (for example, p. 127, p. 138, and p.140) to translate the word *granthi.*

Ranganath flags the need for further research, as she acknowledges the currently growing caste and class diversity of California's Sikhs, and thus the need for a better understanding of the "complex interactions between gender, racial, caste, and class hierarchies among women in caste-oppressed communities in California" (p. 37). In conclusion, with its ethnographic rigour and transparent reporting, strengthened by its rich referencing and annotation, *Women and the Sikh Diaspora in California* will be a valuable addition to the bookshelves of anyone who is concerned with women's studies, migration studies and ethnomusicology, as well as Sikh and Punjab Studies. It is an engaging and exemplary study. I hope that it will inspire future researchers.

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Gill, Navyug. *Labors of Division: Global Capitalism and the Emergence of the Peasant in Colonial Panjab* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2024), 376pp.

Navyug Gill's *Labors of Division* does a deep dive into the copious archive of the colonial state to give us the complex history of the making of the Punjabi peasant under the British Raj. Gill must be commended on at least three counts. First, he imbricates Punjab (Panjab) in the history of global capitalism, to demonstrate the making of the Punjabi peasant under the colonial state as a creature of capitalist modernity rather than an always implied antiquity. Peasants were engineered under colonialism to be tied to land, even as the European left and liberal intellectuals debated peasants' apparently anachronistic existence when advancing capitalism should have transformed them into proletarians. Second, Gill shows the intricate ways in which the colonial state tied caste to occupation and to specific cultural traits, to divide the Punjabi populace into "agricultural" and "non-agricultural" "tribes" - a novel experiment even as caste and its characteristics, much as peasants, were presented as ancient and traditional. The state thereby debarred a large number of Punjabi peoples from participating in the land market, even if they labored on land. Finally, he digs holes into the oft-repeated axiom that the British in Punjab embodied paternalistic benevolence; if there was benevolence, it was selective, designed to hold the peasant in the suffocating embrace of cycles of incessant production and timely revenue payment. While the colonial state did not speak in one voice, and the varied colonized collaborated, resisted or negotiated their way through a hundred years of British rule in Punjab, immiseration for many and reshaped social relations for most, followed in its wake.

The muscular, masculine, yet caring benevolence of Punjab's colonial administrators is a canon of Punjab's colonial historiography. In his first chapter, Gill discusses the steely drive to maximize Punjab's revenues even while maintaining the veneer of peasant-friendly modest and flexible revenue demand. The insistence on measuring and quantifying land, soil types, prevailing

irrigation systems and future irrigation possibilities (the last fructified into the extensive canal expansion on Punjab's rivers), and computing the likely revenue yield of each of Punjab's five *doabs*, was an intrinsic aspect of the new mensuration regime. This was exemplified in R. Baird Smith's *Agricultural Resources of the Punjab* (p.33), a breathless calculation of Punjab's revenue potential even as Punjab's conquest was underway. Equally, the state initiated the process of appraising Punjabi peoples, tying human skills to particularized categories of people - Jat (Jatt), Rajput, Arain, Pathan, Sikh, Hindu, Mussulman and more. As Gill states, "culture saturated the economy" (p.52). While the revenue demand was apparently not rapacious, the bestowal of new proprietary rights in land, a novel meaning of property, were contingent upon monetized revenue payment on given rates and dates, and on regular cultivation of the land, with the threat of uncultivated land liable to confiscation. The peasant-proprietor was thus held to the land, not expropriated from it (as capitalism's progress is meant to do in socialist orthodoxy), caught in a production cycle based on perpetual growth and expansion.

Next, Gill trawls through the painstaking work of early officers and missionaries in publishing dictionaries of Punjabi language, collections of proverbs, and the nascent experiments with census collections (1855 and 1868) to show that there was no axiomatic equivalence between identity and occupation to begin with. Cultivators were referred through multiple terms like *kheti karn vale*, *kisan*, *kirsan*, *hali*, though also Jat; and that the terms used described the labors performed rather than caste. The fateful alignment of caste and occupation was made in the detailed 1881 Census by Denzil Ibbetson. Though dropping the agricultural/non-agricultural binary of earlier censuses, Ibbetson proceeded to accomplish the work of the ethnographic state in detailing castes and occupations.

The Land Alienation Act (LAA) of 1901 subsequently combined the agricultural/nonagricultural divide, now made pivotal to categorize Punjabis, and drew caste and occupation equivalence to conjure certain castes as agricultural and others not. Among the latter were urban moneylenders, but also those who labored on the land, among the other tasks they performed (now called "menial"). The LAA emerged from the anxieties of officers like Septimus Thorburn who feared that peasants were becoming indebted, and would alienate lands to moneylenders. However, the act was also exclusionary towards castes like the rural Chamar and Chuhra groups, who continued to work in fields that they could not now own. The agricultural castes were notified through paternal, patriarchal, and hereditary conditionalities, though who exactly was "agricultural" remained an arbitrary taxonomy. That some of the many excluded contested this discriminatory policy, including Mazhabi Sikhs from Lyallpur and Gujranwala, who had received land grants as tenants in exchange for military service, shows the privilege the new collective identity of agriculturist granted. It also underscored the power of the colonial state to recalibrate Punjabi lives, creating peasants as a modern category. Gill, however, does not get into the relationship between Punjabi peasants and their recruitment into the British Army in large numbers. Though a topic on which many scholars have written,

one wonders if Gill's specific perspective would have thrown up something new in this regard. Similarly, we do not get to know more about the different size of landholdings and what that variable metric meant for peasants. Nor of the distinctions between the smaller central and eastern Punjabi landholdings in relation to the much larger ones in the Canal Colonies; or why the Jat-Sikh peasant came to be valorized as an ideal type by the British?

How did indebtedness, and the need for juridical intervention to shore up the agriculturists, become the object of colonial states inquiry, Gill asks. Thorburn highlighted the growing indebtedness of Muslim peasants in areas west of Jhelum to a handful of Hindu moneylenders. Debts were incurred, according to the British, not because of fixed monetized revenue demands, or the volatility of economic markets for land, as also its produce, but for cultural reasons and the inherent irrationality of the agriculturist as an economic agent. Despite the objections raised by the many critics of the Land Alienation Bill, including by R.C. Dutt of the Congress who raised issues of restricting credit and decline in the value of land (p.149), and the Christian convert, Harnam Singh Ahluwalia, the scion of Kapurthala state, who pointed to the arbitrariness of the term agriculturalist, as also the likely creation of an agriculturalist moneylender (p.153), the Bill was cleared. Significantly, Gill cites a 1930s study by the Board of Economic Inquiry that tracked for several years the lives of families of peasants with substantial land holdings of approximately 28 acres to show the precariousness of agricultural undertaking. The families consistently recorded more expenses than incomes, with maximum expenditure on food; hardly suggesting a life of extravagance or profligacy as the officers implied. Thus, the colonial restructuring of agriculture brought immiseration and uncertainty for many people.

Although the particular configuration of caste and occupation congealed through colonial epistemology and governance may have occurred from the mid-nineteenth century onward, Gill shows that caste and its debilities, including the stigma of untouchability, were historically well-known in Punjab. Simultaneously salient, however, was a questioning of praxis that underlined the speciousness of caste discrimination, emphasizing humanity of all. Sikh scripture carried the radical voices of Kabir, Ravidas and Namdev, to which the Gurus added their own anti-caste ideology and egalitarian practice, recognizing the dignity of labor. Hence, much before Ambedkar advocated the annihilation of caste, or encouraged his acolytes to abandon Hinduism, many in Punjab had sought to convert to Islam, Sikhism and latterly Christianity, to escape the stain of caste. In the early decades of the twentieth century, Mangoo Ram's Ad Dharm movement also found a fertile soil in Punjab, with many Dalit castes recording themselves as adherents of Ad Dharmi (later Ravidasi) religion in the 1931 Census. Yet the processes of conversion did not change the nature of labor demanded of those who toiled on land or in jobs deemed demeaning. The colonial state, by disallowing Chamar and Chuhra castes from entering the land market, even as they often worked on land along with the Jat landowners, created newly oppressive forms of labor extraction. Gill, in one of the most

salient parts of the book, demonstrates the contractual obligations of the *siris*, who tilled the land along with landowners to make cultivation a viable activity, yet power relations were completely skewed in favor of the landowning Jats. Gill, then, exposes the selective and self-serving policies of the colonial regime.

It's a happy happenstance that more scholars are writing histories of Punjab's agrarian pasts and presents. Neeladri Bhattacharya's *The Great Agrarian Conquest* illustrated the wiping out of pastoralists under colonialism to set up sedimentary peasantry, even reconstructing villages.[1] Mubbashir Rizvi has highlighted the contemporary conflict in west Punjab over land grab by the military and the resilience of Punjabi peasantry in *The Ethics of Staying*.[2] Gill's book, on the modernity of Punjabi peasant as constructed by the colonial state under global capitalism to feed its predatory need for accumulation, is of a piece. While Kautsky and Lenin in the European context, as Gill illumines, theorized on when the archaic peasant would disappear under the onslaught of capitalism and be compelled into proletarianization, the peasant as a particular agrarian creature was being installed in Punjab. Gill is at his strongest when he parses the colonial archive and delves into debates on political-economy, whether showing the flaws of Adam Smith's theory of division of labor, or Marx's keen analysis on the difference between use-value and exchange-value. However, he could have told us more about issues he raises but doesn't quite discuss. What were women's rights that got trampled over in patriarchal peasant construction? What if urban moneylenders had been allowed to appropriate land, what sort of economic turn would that have created? Did the rhetoric of "urban" Hindu moneylenders and "rural" Muslim and Sikh peasants feed the violence of communalism by separating communities both economically and socially?

When Gill discusses social hierarchy in Punjab through secondary literature, he is less assured. The Gurus vociferously spoke against caste, yet caste praxis remained. The mid to late nineteenth century writings of local Punjabi reformers and Advaita advocating gurus spoke against *varnāśramadharma*, but the idiom of caste did not disappear. Ditt Singh, referenced by Gill, could simultaneously debunk caste or resurrect it, to draw a line between Hindu/Sikhs versus Muslims, despite his Ravidasi and Gulabdasi background.[3] Wazir Singh, also mentioned by Gill as an anti-caste guru, could use caste-laden language to humiliate, as when he commented on the conversions to Christianity (*kirānī*) among Dalits. Lured by the possibility of a full stomach (*ṭuk-ṭuk*/bread), they give up the distinction between pure/impure. He noted: *jhūṭhiāṅ khādiyāṅ je kar muktī hove, cūhṛe sānsī muktī sabh hoye jāṅvde nī* (if one was to be liberated by eating impure food, Chuhras and Sansis will be liberated).[4] How does one reconcile the socially marginal status of these figures with their disdain for "low" castes? Ad Dharm movement dissipated despite its strong presence in the 1930s. Though the Ravidasis have emerged as an important community in contemporary Punjab, the Dalits continue to not have a political organization in Punjab, even though the premier Dalit leader Kanshi Ram was a Punjabi. The conundrum of caste in Punjab, despite not seeing extremes of caste practice, continues to puzzle scholars.

However, these are minor distractions in a finely etched book about global capitalism and Punjab's place in it. Punjab's territory and demography has been so maneuvered in the last eighty years that we tend to forget the conjoined historical inheritance of eastern and western Punjabis. More than elsewhere, it is in Punjab's agrarian history and its social formation, wonderfully detailed by Gill, that we see the sleight of hand of Punjab's colonial past. Gill has whetted the appetite for more such scholarly endeavors from his pen in the future.

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Notes

[1] Neeladri Bhattacharya, *The Great Agrarian Conquest: The Colonial Reshaping of a Rural World*, Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2018.

[2] Mubbashir Rizvi, *The Ethics of Staying: Social Movements and Land Rights Politics in Pakistan*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019.

[3] Anshu Malhotra, *Piro and the Gulabdasis: Gender, Sect and Society in Punjab*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2017, Chapter 6, pp. 201-236.

[4] Shamsher Singh Ashok, *Siharfian Sadhu Wazir Singh Ji Kian*, Patiala: Publications Bureau Punjabi University, 1988, p. xxiv.

Dutt, Vinayak. *Punjab: from the perspective of a Punjabi Hindu.* (Chandigarh: White Falcon Press, 2023). 408pp.

Dutt is an alumnus of the Indian Institute of Mass Communication on the JNU campus in New Delhi. He describes himself as a journalist and political strategist. The book has a Prologue and fourteen chapters. It has a bibliography but no index. It is not a scholarly work but rather more reflective in nature. The Prologue begins by discussing the "nation-state." Dutt explains that "This organized governance structure always favors those who have control over the resources and economy of the relevant geographical region. The ruling class always plans and executes a predetermined formula that eventually marginalizes one and promotes the other section of the society to maintain its firm grip over the nation state" (p. i). The book is a compendium of characterizations of individuals and communities to fit this framework.

The first two chapters describe mostly non-Sikh individuals and their accomplishments from Maharajah Ranjit Singh's period to independent India. Chapter 3, "Punjabi Suba Movement and Hindu Perspective," describes it as separating Sikhs from Hindus: "The Punjabi Suba movement brought a paradigm shift in the narrative that dictated the politics, the historiography, and the recorded sociology of the state for a long time. The Punjabi Hindus became

an easy target for the Sikh hardliners and remained at the receiving end of their hate" (p. 57).

Chapter 4, **"**Anandpur Resolution and Politics Thereon", covers the period from the division into Punjab and Haryana through the Green Revolution to the army attack on the Golden Temple. This was the formative period for the present system of center-state relations. The description, however, does not capture the alternative ideas of religion, political organization, and development that were important at the time.

The Green Revolution was both agricultural and political. Green is the opposite of red. Green meant independent farmers operating their own farms as business firms, as in the West. Red meant collectivization and central control, as in the USSR. It was designed to promote prosperity by strengthening local democracy. To do this, new agricultural universities were organized on the American model to serve farmers, not to make farmers serve the Centre. Punjab did this more thoroughly than any other state. All Punjab Agricultural University faculty had equal obligations in teaching, research, and extension. Panchayat samitis were integrated into the district extension organization to plan and adjust the seasonal "package programs" university faculty developed. The Reserve Bank provided capital to support a new system of farmer-controlled village cooperatives. The state government undertook to assure that the cooperatives had the supplies that the "package programs" recommended.

Indira Gandhi's actions as Prime Minister, with the assistance of Zail Singh in various capacities, interfered with these activities. Dutt describes Mrs. Gandhi's involvement in the division of Punjab's river waters. He obscures their action to inflame the conflict between Nirankaris and the Sikhs associated with Bhindranwale. These Congress leaders' purpose was to break up the Sikh-Hindu cooperation behind the Akali-Jan Sangh coalitions that opposed them and provide a rationale to impose President's Rule. Between Mrs. Gandhi's first election as prime minister in 1966 and October 1973, when the Anandpur Sahib Resolution (ASR) was approved, she had done this three times for a total of 773 days. Under President's Rule, elected officials were removed from office, including in the system of agricultural consultation. Each time the system of consultation was disrupted, it subsequently became more difficult to restore.

In 1968, Punjab had its first bumper harvests of green revolution wheat. As a result, prices within the state dropped, but elsewhere they remained high. For this reason, farmers and brokers tried to sell the wheat in Delhi, but the Centre declared "food zones" and blocked the roads. This forced farmers to choose between selling at the depressed local prices or to the Centre at the minimum support price for distribution through government Fair Price Shops. This was the beginning of the present system of centrally controlled agricultural marketing. The ASR was the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee's (SGPC) response to all of this. It was not one resolution but a list of fourteen. The demand that India become "federal in a real sense" was the first and most important, and the others were logically subordinate.

Dutt's attributions of uniform attitudes and values to whichever groups he discusses make it impossible for him to describe the different policies under

consideration at the time. For example, on p.78, he can only opine that: "The problem with Sikhs, especially with the Akali leadership, was that there was no unanimous leader and the democratic sentiment of the party often resulted in its failure to arrive at a consensus." Similarly, on p.79, he states: "However, despite the political instability, the years under the new Akali Dal-led Punjab government were marked by a spurt in economic growth." In fact, the "democratic sentiment" initially resulted in very effective policies supported by very wide public consensus, but Punjab was pushed into increasingly authoritarian and unresponsive modes of governing at the state level by the concurrent increasingly authoritarian and unresponsive modes of governance adopted by the Centre.

Chapter 5, **"**Punjabi Cinema and Literature," mainly reviews films to make the point that Hindus have made major contributions in these cultural sectors. Chapter 6, **"**The Troubled Years**,"** catalogs murders of Hindus by Sikh "militants" in Punjab during the prime minister tenure of Rajiv Gandhi. Dutt writes as though it began only after the "genocide" of Sikhs following the assassination of Indira Gandhi. In fact, it continued what Mrs. Gandhi had set in motion earlier in June 1984 with Operation Bluestar. The chapter ends with the re-election of Prakash Singh Badal and the Akali Dal in 1997. The last sentence, on p. 157, is "by this time, the turbulence in Punjab had subsided, but only to be replaced by hypocritical and manipulative dole-driven vote-bank-centric politics." Chapter 7, "The Millennial Politics," ends on the same note.

Chapter 8, "The Kejriwal Factor," characterizes Kejriwal's campaign for the National Corruption Act, his subsequent establishment of the Aam Admi Party (AAP), and its electoral victories in New Delhi. Chapter 9, "The Modi Factor," begins by describing Modi and Indira Gandhi as similarly committed to one person rule and crushing the opposition. The rest of the chapter focuses on Modi alone, ignoring the many other continuities. The chapter ends with the first discussion of the farmers' agitation in response to the Modi government's farm laws passed by Parliament in September 2020.

Chapter 10, "The Twin Elections**,"** starts with a discussion of the AAP winning 92 of 117 seats in the Punjab Legislative Assembly in March 2022. It then reviews previous actions of the Congress and Akali Dal. It attributes the AAP's 2022 victory to young people seeking an alternative to the traditional parties, not as a response to any specific issues. The review does not discuss the Akali Dal's support for a 2016 amendment to the national Sikh Gurdwaras Act that made *sehajdari* Sikhs ineligible to vote in SGPC elections. This was profoundly inconsistent with the universality of Sikh philosophy and essentially disenfranchised at least two thirds of the usual voters. Captain Amarinder Singh of the Congress Party spoke strongly against it. The next election after this amendment to the SGPC voting rules was in March 2017 in which the Akalis went from 57 seats to 15, and Amarinder Singh's Congress gained 31 for a total of 77. The AAP won 20 in 2017. Dutt's "young activist thesis" does little to explain this progression in election results.

Chapter 11, “The Farmers Agitation,” again backs up in time. This chapter characterizes the Modi government's farm laws as part of an overriding effort to “impose a single national identity” on India's historic cultural diversity. The conclusion again invokes young activists as the main explanation by writing: “In fact, the biggest beneficiary of the farmers agitation was the Aam Admi Party in Punjab. The farmers agitation had given confidence to the people, especially the youth of the state, that people's unity is very powerful and can change the entire power structure” (p.323).

Chapter 12, “Mammoth Majority and Absconding Government,” concludes that the AAP government has failed, and Punjab is once again at a crossroads. This becomes the title of Chapter 13, which returns to the “nation-state” imagery of the Prologue and identifies the ruling class. On p. 358, Dutt writes: "The feudal landlords were the core and background of the traditional parties like the Akali Dal and the Congress. However, they continue to be key players even for the present viable options, i.e. both the Aam Admi Party and the BJP."

Chapter 14, Epilogue**,** begins**: “**The genesis of Punjab's problems arises from the perspective that most of us Punjabis have towards life, relationships and of course the state. The complication lies with the fact that people do not acknowledge and accept the truth” (p. 369). So, we see “two different types of Punjab” in coexistence simultaneously (p. 370). “This generation of urban middle class achievers most of them belong to the Hindu community have trusted their own caliber and learned from the world while improving their skills.” In contrast, he writes: “what we hear mostly ... is the outcry of the rural underachieving folks, while the achievement of the urban Hindu Punjabi mostly stands negated in the Punjab-originated narrative” (p. 370).

The Epilogue chapter ends with praise for the "peace march" of the actor Sunil Dutt, who “embodied the spirit of the Punjabiyat.” So, Jat Sikhs are feudal landlords, urban Hindus are effective, and rural “folks” are underachievers. Also, “people” do not acknowledge the perspective Dutt attributes to them, and it takes a Bombay actor to exemplify the true spirit of Punjab. This is not a good description for the complexity of Punjab.

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Singh, K.C. *The Indian President: An Insider’s Account of the Zail Singh Years* (Gurugram: HarperCollins Publishers, 2023), 312pp.

Written by a retired/former bureaucrat, this book provides a view of the inner workings of the Indian democracy and its institutions at the highest level of the union government. As the title suggests, it deals with the office of the Indian President, its constitutional status, and the manner in which its various occupants functioned in the office. Though some chapters of the book have been written as objective analytical commentaries, much of it is an “insider’s” account of the working of the Indian state system and the roles that individuals play through

their judgements, personal biases and the manner in which they are influenced by the coteries around them.

The author, K.C. Singh, joined the Indian Foreign Services (IFS) division and worked as a diplomat at a senior level in several countries. Although senior civil servants of the IFS cadre are mostly expected to serve abroad for the Indian state, they can also be deputed to work within the country if the need arises. The author spent a good number of years working on such a "deputation," as part of the personal staff of the President of India, Giani Zail Singh.

The only Sikh to have occupied this office, Giani Zail Singh served as President of India from 1982 to 1987, a time when Sikh militancy in Punjab was at its peak. This was also the time of Operation Bluestar (1984) and, a few months later, the assassination of the serving Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi, by her Sikh bodyguards. As is well known, the assassination was followed by large-scale violence against Sikhs in Delhi and in many other cities of India. The violence almost everywhere was organized with the tacit support of the ruling establishment. These were obviously trying times for the Sikhs and the country. The role that its Sikh head of the state played has obviously been a subject of great political and academic interest. Thus, a good part of the book engages directly with issues related to the Sikhs and Punjab during the difficult decade of the 1980s.

Given that India is a parliamentary system of democracy, the office of the President does not have any executive powers. However, this does not imply that the position is free from politics. Indeed, the offices of the President and the Vice-President have often been used to accommodate India's minorities, giving them a kind of symbolic representation in the system. For example, when it was in power, the Indian National Congress often selected Muslims for these positions. K.C. Singh tells us that one of the reasons for selecting Muslim faces for either of the two positions also helped in "India's outreach to the around fifty Muslim-majority countries" (p. 47) across the world. Likewise, the current regime of the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) chose a Dalit (a Scheduled Caste) for the post of President during its first term, and a tribal woman (a Scheduled Tribe) in its second term.

Though Giani Zail Singh had risen from the ranks and had even served as Chief Minister of Punjab, his selection for the top job was part of a familiar politics of symbolic representation. Punjab was already in turmoil, and having a Sikh at the highest office would have been to demonstrate that the union government was accommodative of Sikh aspirations.

Giani Zail Singh had been a loyal member of the party, and a confidant of Indira Gandhi. Though his political constituency was in Punjab, he came from a relatively marginal caste group of Ramgarhias rather than the agriculturally-dominant Jatts who have been in command of Punjab's politics. Thus, even though he would have been chosen for being a Sikh, symbolically representing the entire community, his caste identity was not irrelevant in the regional political context of Punjab.

The story of his presidency turned out to be far more complicated. How did Giani Zail Singh live through the turmoil? What did he do, or not do? How did he negotiate with the union government and its prime minister after the assassination of Indira Gandhi, when the entire Sikh community was seen in the corridors of power with a deep sense of suspicion?

In the popular accounts written mostly by journalists during the 1980s and later, Giani Zail Singh is portrayed as a villain. He is often blamed for propping-up the militant politics of the 1980s. He was seen to have done this on the directive of Indira Gandhi, with the intention of undermining the hold of Akalis on traditional Sikh institutions and in the regional politics of Punjab. Some leading journalists, such as Kuldeep Nayar and Mark Tully, had directly blamed Zail Singh for providing protection to the militant Sikh leader Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale by helping him evade arrest while he was travelling outside of Punjab, through Delhi and Haryana.

Giani Zail Singh has also been blamed for not effectively intervening when the decision was taken to send the armed forces into the *Darbar Sahib*, the Golden Temple in Amritsar, in June 1984. He was also blamed for his inaction when innocent Sikhs were being killed in Delhi and other cities of India in the aftermath of Indira Gandhi's assassination in November of 1984. The least he could have done, many expected, was to come out openly and criticize the government in power, or embarrass the ruling establishment by resigning from his post.

The author attempts a counter narrative, a kind of defense of President Zail Singh, based on his "insider's knowledge" of the situation. Since he worked with the President throughout his tenure of five years, he had the opportunity of following him very closely. His narrative is certainly very different from what has been popularly believed so far. His defense of Zail Singh is largely based on his own assessment of the person, and not on any kind of documentary evidence.

As the author shows through his accounts of the presidency, the challenges that Giani Zail Singh confronted during his term in the office were quite daunting. While common Sikhs and the larger civil society blamed President Zail Singh for not standing up for the community and not criticizing the union government for its anti-Sikh policies or its collusion with the perpetrators of violence against members of his community, he often encountered difficulties in just being in the office.

Giani Zail Singh had been personally loyal to Mrs. Gandhi, something which he never hesitated to admit in public. In return Prime Minister Indira Gandhi treated him with dignity and always followed the required protocols and conventions of periodically informing the President about the working of the government. However, there were influential individuals in the Prime Minister's office who did not like Giani Zail Singh occupying the highest office and often tried to feed a negative view of him to Mrs. Gandhi. The author identifies them as the "Kashmiri group" led by M.L. Fotedar. The President was often saved by the "Punjabi group" led by R. K. Dhawan.

The situation changed dramatically when Rajiv Gandhi assumed the office of the Prime Minister, following his mother's assassination. Though Giani Zail

Singh had helped bring him to power, the two could not develop a good working relationship. The new Prime Minister came with his own team of advisers. They had their own opinions and perspectives, including on how to engage with the office of the President. As the author tells us, Rajiv Gandhi soon developed a negative opinion of Giani Zail Singh and began to suspect his intentions. He suspected that Zail Singh was responsible for not allowing "the Punjab issue" to be resolved. He, and the coterie around him, believed that every time they negotiated a settlement with the prevailing Sikh leadership in Punjab, Zail Singh acted as the spoiler by telling the other side that if they held out longer, they could get a better deal. These suspicions also translated into concrete actions. The required protocols and conventions of regular communication between the head of the state and the chief executive were no longer honored. The obvious implication was the near-complete marginalization of Giani Zail Singh.

Sourness in their relationship persisted. After 1984, in K.C. Singh's account, the President was a man caught in an unenviable situation. The blame, according to K.C. Singh, lay entirely with Rajiv Gandhi and his coterie. Not only was the President pushed into a corner by the new regime, he was also aware of the fact that he had lost credibility with the Sikh community. Operation Bluestar had deeply hurt the Sikh community. He too was deeply pained by it and had very little authority or say in the matter. No one consulted him when it was being planned. Likewise, in Giani Zail Singh's understanding in the given situation, his resigning from the post of the President of India after the anti-Sikh violence would have created even bigger problems for the Sikh community.

As the author argues, most of the accusations made against him were speculative. For example, the Akali leaders who backtracked during negotiations on the "crisis" presumably on his advice, never came to see him or spoke to him. As a senior politician, the President had a perspective of his own with which he handled diverse and difficult situations consummately. Often working as his translator, the author found him remarkably cosmopolitan in his interactions with leaders from across the world. This is why the author questions the validity of the popular journalistic accounts that blame him for the crises of 1980s. Though he openly expressed his loyalty to Mrs. Gandhi, Giani Zail Singh was a "shrewd" and "sophisticated" politician. He had a finger on the pulse of Punjabi society and a deep understanding of the internal dynamics of Sikh religious politics. He had grown up in a village in the small princely state of Faridkot and could not speak English but, as a seasoned politician and a self-made person, he could not have likely indulged in the kind of politics he is accused of.

Finally, as mentioned in the opening lines of this review, K.C. Singh's book is not merely about the presidency of Giani Zail Singh, or about 1984. It also carries his reflections on the structure of Indian democracy as laid out in the Constitution and the modes of its practices. While institutional frames set limits, they also leave enough space for individuals to exercise agency. The interplay between structure and agency is also shaped by the given context and personalities of other relevant individuals. This book thus goes on to reflect upon

the functioning of Indian democracy, the challenges it encounters, and the uncertainties of the present time. In doing so, the author also weaves a range of writings on the subject into his analyses.

It must be emphasized, nevertheless, that most of the book is based on his personal observations as an insider in the corridors of power. Being an insider obviously implies having access to data, opinions and processes that are unlikely to be accessible to an outsider using only archival material. However, being an insider also has its limitations. An insider's observations are not only shaped by the position s/he occupies, but they are also fashioned by his/her perspective and personal opinions as an active player in the game. This is not to, in any way, subtract from what is an immensely readable book with enormously rich material.

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