Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh. *The First Sikh: The Life and Legacy of Guru Nanak* (New Delhi: Viking India, 2019), 256 pp.

In this festive monograph, Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh pays a glowing tribute to the founder of the Sikh tradition on his 550th birth anniversary by looking at his life and legacy. Right at the outset, she explains the purpose of this book: 'My goal here is a more personal one. I want to rediscover the First Sikh from my perspective of a Sikh woman academic located in a global twenty-first century world. I have been intrigued by him for decades, and especially during the last several years he percolates deep in my being as I translate his verse' (p. 21). Engaging with the available sources she skillfully constructs the story of Guru Nanak with an interdisciplinary focus on aesthetics, philosophy, history, and cultural memory. In the introduction, she underscores the examination of the 'medium' rather than the 'message' of textual verses from the perspective of aesthetics (p. 7), while contextualizing certain passages from Guru Nanak's celebrated works preserved in the Guru Granth Sahib (GGS). The introduction is followed by five major chapters, ending with a conclusion of Guru Nanak's enduring legacy in the areas of music, arts, and global impact.

In the first chapter, Nikky Singh boldly challenges the genetic approach followed by Western scholars like W.H. McLeod and W.C. Smith who refute 'Guru Nanak as the founder of the Sikh religion…his status as the *first*, and frame Guru Nanak as one who replicates, reproduces, reinterprets, refines and reforms elements from existing traditions' (p. 29). Shifting her focus away from the antecedents, Nikky Singh concentrates on Guru Nanak's vision, his words and early Sikh sources to highlight the *firstness* of the First Sikh. The reader immediately understands the rationale behind the unique title of her book. She cogently argues that Guru Nanak set in motion spiritual moods and ethical motivations to lay the foundation of a new religious tradition: 'The Sikh community came to be because of the visionary *first* Sikh. It was *his* aspiration to safeguard his revelation for future generations. He is unequivocally the founder of the Sikh religion, and his successors were essential in building upon the foundations set up by him' (pp. 43-44). The first chapter ends with author's assertion of the fundamental criterion to cultivate any kind of knowledge about the Sikh tradition: 'The *firstness* of the First Sikh is critical for understanding the philosophy, ethics, institutions, scriptures and doctrines, and historical development of the dynamic and ever-accumulating religion of the Sikhs' (p. 64). For her, those who do not accept the *firstness* of the First Sikh do not understand any aspect of the Sikh tradition at all.

The second chapter is devoted to the collective memory of the First Sikh recorded in the *Janamsakhis* ('life narratives'), examining the narratives and illustrations produced by scribes and painters at different times and in geographically distant regions. Following Mircea Eliade's phenomenological approach, Nikky Singh treats the Janamsakhis as 'sacred history, which is 'true history', because myths always deal with *realities*' and underlines 'the corporeal and pluralistic imaginary of the Janamsakhis' (p. 69). Her comparative approach

to construct the major life-cycle events of Guru Nanak's life – birth, schooling, growing up, wedding, last rites, and initiation – based on available paintings included in different Janamsakhis deserves our special attention. Her interpretation of the illustrations is so data-rich and substantive that there simply will not be another work like this for a long time. To illuminate Guru Nanak's pluralistic approach, Nikky Singh offers masterly analysis of B-40 Janamsakhi illustrations (pp. 88-98) to describe his encounter with people of different faiths such as 'Hindu, Muslim, yogi, sanyasi, brahmcari, ascetic, ascetic leader, sky-clad Jain, Vaishnava, celibate, householder, wandering mendicant, noble, chief, aristocrat, official, agriculturalist, proprietor.' She ends with a strong plea to global audiences to acknowledge the unique significance of the Janamsakhis: 'These simple, delightful stories open up possibilities to negotiate our complex selves in our complex times' (p. 98).

In the third chapter, Nikky Singh turns her attention to the discussion of Guru Nanak's philosophical worldview grounded in the experience of the One infinite reality, '*Ikk Oan Kar'*, described in the preamble (*Mul Mantra*) of the GGS. Focusing her analytical gaze on the five realms of mystical development in the Japji, she offers her novel readings of these realms through the philosophical framework of ontology, epistemology, aesthetics, ethics, and soteriology (pp. 107-136). Following the celebrated principle of 'interpretation of scripture by means of scripture' based on the ordinary philological principle that what is plain in one place can be used to clarify what is obscure at another, Nikky Singh elucidates certain keywords of these five realms by means of other scriptural passages from the GGS. She even employs modern scientific terminology to highlight the universal message of the First Sikh: 'Guru Nanak's basic principle that we are made up of the elements like everything else around us prefigures the Big Bang Theory' (pp. 109-110). Decolonizing the hegemonic interpretation of the Singh Sabha to establish homogenization and uniformity of the Sikh tradition, Nikky Singh underlines Guru Nanak's celebration of cosmic, cultural, linguistic, and political diversity: 'Unless we appreciate diversity, we cannot feel affinity with others. We cannot coexist harmoniously with other people and species which happen to be different from us' (p. 110). She maintains that the last stanza of Japji (#38) provides an applied model of the preceding five mystical realms, ending with an important reflection: 'The First Sikh, a philosopher mystic, indeed is the goldsmith himself who in medieval India set forth a powerful spiritual movement which only gets stronger with the passage of time' (p. 150).

The fourth chapter meticulously examines Guru Nanak's revolutionary spirit of speaking truth to power, defending human rights, employing gender-inclusive language, and advocating female-centered spirituality. The author claims that a turning point in her thinking came when she listened to Jewish and Christian feminists – Mary Daly, Judith Plaskow, Rosemary Ruether, Carol Christ, Rita Gross and Naomi Goldenberg – at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) in 1984. Since then, Nikky Singh has followed in their footsteps in offering feminist interpretation of Sikh scriptural verses, including their gender-inclusive translations. She provides superb exegesis of the

Babarvani verses relating to oppression on women of various backgrounds: 'The tragedy of Muslim and Hindu women is the same; the tragedy of an upper-caste and lower-caste Hindu women is the same' (p. 168). The underlying motif in Nikky Singh's feminist approach is to address modern challenges of sexism, classicism and racism confronting the global community in the twenty-first century: 'Prejudices and stereotypes are getting fiercer, the fear of immigrants is making us paranoid, public policies are getting harsher, governments are discriminating against religious groups more so than ever' (p. 185). She affirms that the only solution to rectify this situation comes from Guru Nanak's inclusive message that can substantially promote the work of social activists, human rights organizations, politicians, and legal advocates.

In the final chapter, 'The Environmentalist', Nikky Singh addresses the current issue of climate change, imploring us to listen to Guru Nanak's melodious verses of appreciation of nature's rhythms, Earth's abundant gifts and the cosmic beauty surrounding us: 'Earth is the matrix from which we were born, from which we are created, and from which we grow, evolve and thrive' (p. 192). Presenting her arguments in various subsections on ecological theology, non-anthropomorphism, aesthetic-ontology, and biophilia, Nikky Singh employs influential sermonic language to capture the attention of her readers about the reasons and roots of the current global ecological crises – namely, climate change, the biodiversity crisis, global waste and environmental pollution, social crisis, information explosion, overpopulation, and pandemics. These involve spiritual, motivational, attitudinal and cultural factors, besides natural and economic-political causes. Through an adroit analysis of Guru Nanak's most relevant lyrics in the GGS on environmental stewardship, Nikky Singh makes a strong case for 'creation protection' in the sense of the preservation of the values of the created world by seeking a practical way leading out of the crisis and developing the basic principles of operation of a global sustainable society.

Closing her discussion on the enduring legacy of Guru Nanak's universal message in the twenty-first century, Nikky Singh compellingly argues that social activism, humanitarian relief and innovative advocacy of various Sikh organizations worldwide are grounded in the concept of *seva* (selfless action) instituted by the First Sikh. She reiterates her thesis that the momentous Khalsa initiation at Anandpur on Baisakhi day in 1699 by discussing Guru Nanak's mystical experience of sipping of *amrit* (GGS 150) at Sultanpur Lodhi: 'In a very meaningful way, the Tenth Sikh Guru returns to this primal moment of Sikhism and opens it up into the future through his inauguration of the Khalsa' (p. 212-13). She urges the Sikh community to take note of the symbiosis of Guru Nanak's *bani* ('inspired utterances') and the Tenth Guru's *bana* ('Khalsa dress') by asserting that the five Ks ontologically draw upon the accoutrements introduced by Guru Nanak himself in his inspired utterances. Nikky Singh feels that Guru Nanak's musical influence remains untapped in the Sikh world, although concerted efforts are now being made by prominent individuals and academic institutions in India and abroad to revive the ancient styles of

performance used by the Guru himself along with his lifelong companion, Bhai Mardana. She then explicates the evolution of Sikh art from the Janamsakhi illustrations depicting the life of Guru Nanak and its modern expression in works of art produced by Sobha Singh, Arpana Kaur, Arpita Singh, Phoolan Rani, and Devinder Singh. Finally, Nikky Singh highlights Guru Nanak's global legacy, influencing countless poets who praise him for championing unity and harmony. In this regard she specifically mentions two celebrated poets, Firoz Din Sharaf (1898-1955) and Shiv Kumar Batalvi (1937-73), whose works admired the universality of Guru Nanak's voice that transcended all man-made boundaries.

Before I conclude my review of this very interesting book, I must point out some factual inaccuracies that will require reconsideration and possible correction in a new edition. First, the author maintains that 'Gurmukhi evolved from the *lahndi/mahajani* business shorthand the First Sikh used during his apprenticeship in storehouses' (p. 36). The actual phrase should be '*laṇḍe/mahājanī*' to refer to 'business shorthand' in this context, versus the term *lahndi*, which stands for the 'western dialect' of the Punjabi language spoken in Pakistan. Second, the attribution of the epilogue of Guru Nanak's Japji to Guru Angad is not accurate (p. 37). Before he passed away in 1539, Guru Nanak recited the concluding *salok* of Japji (GGS: 8) while giving final instructions to Guru Angad, who repeated it in the form of a *vāk* or commandment to the congregation. That is why it is written under his distinctive symbol in *Vār Mājh* with minor variations (*M2//pauṇu gurū pāṇī pitā mātā dharati mahatu…//*, GGS: 146), stressing the continuity and unity of the office of Guru. Third, the assumption of Satta and Balwand as 'two grandsons of Bhai Mardana' (p. 44) is questionable. There is no early evidence to confirm this familial relationship. If there is some new evidence, it should be discussed. Fourth, the reference (GGS: 967) is misplaced with Guru Amar Das's declaration – 'First *pangat* [the row in which all sit together to partake of the langar meal] and then meeting with the Guru' – on page 63. It should have rather been affixed four lines earlier where Mata Khivi's contribution to langar ends. On the same page, the scriptural reference about sangat's spiritual and moral inspiration belongs to Guru Ram Das (GGS: 1244), not to Guru Nanak as stated in the text. Fifth, the author states that 'Otto Rank's familiar phrase '*Mysterium tremendum et fascinans*' is effective in grasping Guru Nanak's intricate analogy' (p. 142). The popular phrase *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* is attributed to the German philosopher and theologian Rudolf Otto, not to the Austrian psychoanalyst and philosopher Otto Rank. Sixth, the author cites a verse on page 145: ''Whatever is the transcendent beyond, that itself is the body – *jo brahmandai soi pinde*,' said the First Sikh unambiguously (GGS: 695).' This verse is from the hymn of a medieval poet-saint Pipa recorded in the GGS, not by Guru Nanak as claimed by the author. Seventh, the author attributes Guru Ram Das's verse to Guru Nanak on page 148: 'For Guru Nanak 'the Word is the divine Itself – *hari ape sabad'* (GGS: 165).' Eighth, the contextual meaning of the term *sophian* in Guru Nanak's hymn (GGS: 15) stands for 'those who do not use intoxicants,' not for 'Sufis' as given on page 159. Finally, some scriptural references do not align with the intended meanings in the text on pages 122 (GGS: 1010) and 195 (GGS:

28). Since these inaccuracies were not addressed at an earlier stage during peer review and prior to publication, their presence in the book diminishes the integrity of an otherwise exceptional work. Although they may be unnoticeable to a lay reader, I hope these inaccuracies will be fully addressed in a revised new edition.

In conclusion, *The First Sikh* makes a seminal contribution to the field of Sikh studies. Written in lucid and accessible style, this study will be of general interest to students, scholars, and lay people alike. Following the second wave of feminism, Nikky Singh provides us with gender-inclusive language in the translations of texts, takes a bold stand against malestream scholarship, and competently addresses contemporary issues confronting our global situation. Her interdisciplinary and pluralistic approach reflects her erudition and comprehensive understanding of sources. Thus, her book deserves a place in the personal libraries of Sikh families in addition to public and academic institutions.

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Harold Coward. *Word, Chant, and Song: Spiritual Transformation in Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Sikhism* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2019), 194 pp.

While there exists an expansive literature in Western academe on the sacred texts of Indic faith traditions, much of this scholarship has had a textual approach that has ignored the critical role of the chief medium of its transmission - sound. In recent decades, however, there has been burgeoning interest in the sonic and musical aspects of the written word in these religions by scholars of music. Harold Coward's *Word, Song, and Chant: Spiritual Transformation in Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Sikhism* (2019), is a welcome contribution that explains the philosophy of chanting, singing, and listening in these faiths, along with describing practice.

The book contains four main chapters, one each on the religions covered, and an Introduction and Conclusion that tie up the theme of the book nicely. The discussion is accessible, making it especially suitable as an introductory text for those seeking to familiarize themselves with the subject. Each chapter does a good job of describing the theology regarding the importance of sounding sacred text, as well as the oral and aural practices of followers. The concluding chapter makes comparative remarks, laying out some similarities and differences across these traditions. Coward tries to point out the uniqueness in each of the traditions, and his voice is one of respect for each. There were times, however, when I felt that the repeated gesturing to Hinduism as the origin of concepts and beliefs tended to create a hierarchical picture. As words circulate, they change meaning over time and space and, in their practical and experiential sense

especially, can vary significantly across different contexts. In my view, in an introductory level text where fine-grained analysis cannot be offered, comparisons need to be extra careful about inadvertently creating cultural hierarchies.

As a Sikh Studies specialist, I read the chapter on Sikhism with particular interest. Here, a sentence caught my eye that stood out as incongruent to my understanding of the culture: 'For the gurbani or Sikh scripture to have transforming power, it is to be *enunciated exactly in the way of the Sikh Gurus* through chanting the divine name and singing.' (157; emphasis mine) To my knowledge, the Sikh Gurus did not express such restrictive views. Neither is it possible for us to know their exact enunciation of Gurbāni. As an example, the word *sabad* (lit. word, and the term for scriptural song), which occurs many times in Gurbāni, is variously pronounced by Sikhs as sabad and shabad. The Gurmukhi script does not have the letter 'sh,' only 's'. To my mind, for the transformative power of Gurbāni on a devotee, their choice of pronunciation as sabad/shabad is irrelevant. Indeed, if anything, strict restrictions on enunciation is contradictory to the Sikh Gurus' valorization of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility through their adoption of the vernacular mode and their rejection of Brahminical regulations and control. Numerous verses in the Sikh scripture acknowledge various paths to the divine, and even define divine space as one where numberless varieties of sounds play (see *Multiple Authenticities in Motion*, Inderjit Kaur 2016). In my view, the Sikh Gurus did not want to box in the divine or the multitudinous ways of trying to comprehend this capacious entity.

I did appreciate that Coward comes from a position of personally experiencing the power of the sonic in a deep way, and in more than one faith - Christianity and Hinduism. He rightly questions the rational analytical approach of engaging with scripture derived from Enlightenment thinking, in favor of the experiential and a balance between the intellectual and devotional. He does a good job of addressing both the theology and practice of musical worship, drawing from the works of significant scholars of each of the four religions covered. As an ethnomusicologist, I found his ethnographic accounts especially interesting and informative.

However, there is considerable scholarship, especially by scholars of music, that does not find mention in his book. In fact, Coward's claim that 'in academic religious studies and musicology we have given little attention to chanted word and hymns' (1) is not accurate and is symptomatic of knowledge gaps between academic disciplines. Here, I might also mention an issue with Coward's research method that he describes in his Acknowledgments. He writes that he has relied on his 'network of scholars,' contacting 'two or three of my colleagues who are scholars and cultural participants of that religion to advise me of the key primary and secondary sources of their tradition that I should consult on the issue.' Not conducting extensive transdisciplinary research, needless to say, is likely to miss a lot of relevant scholarship, which this book manages to do. Indeed, it relies rather heavily on Guy Beck's edited volume, *Sacred Sound:*

Experiencing Music in World Religions, published in 2006, while written over a decade after it.

Coward also claims: 'In this book, I begin to address this gap in knowledge through a thematic study of music as it functions in word, chant, and song for devotees in the Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic, and Sikh religious traditions,' (1). However, I would not consider this work a 'thematic study of music' but rather an exposition primarily of the theology regarding word, song, and chant in the four religions, along with description and ethnographic accounts of sonic practice. The book does not contain details about musical sound or musical analysis.

Doctoral dissertations on religious song and chant written by music scholars date back a few decades now. Edward O. Henry's *Chant the names of God: Musical Culture in Bhojpuri-speaking India* was published in 1979, and subsequently as a book in 1988. Stephen Slawek's *Kirtan: A Study Of The Sonic Manifestations Of The Divine In The Popular Hindu Culture Of Banaras* was published in 1986. Terry Ellingson's *The Mandala of Sound: Concepts and Sound Structures in Tibetan Ritual Music* was published in 1979, and subsequently as a book in 1985. Here I must also mention Selina Thielemann's extensive scholarship, published in the late 1990s and early 2000s, expounding on sacred sounds in the Hindu tradition and in South Asian religious traditions more broadly. None of these significant early works are referenced in Coward's book.

While it is well beyond the scope of this short book review to even list all the musicological scholarship on the subject, I will mention just a few, and direct interested readers to an open and crowd sourced bibliography that has recently been developed by the Religion, Music, and Sound Section of the Society for Ethnomusicology. The Religion, Music, and Sound Bibliography lists works from 2015 onwards, and is available on Zotero: https://www.zotero.org/groups/2662946/religion_music_and_sound/library. The topics covered are much broader than the focus of Coward's book on spiritual transformation in four specific religions, but the list is fully searchable by keywords.

Scholars of music in the last decade have paid special attention to the embodied aspects of sacred song and chant, with critical explorations through analytical lenses such as sound, voice, listening, senses, affect, media technology, and phenomenology. In these studies, one finds detailed discussions of *how* sounding the word effects transformation in worshippers. For example, Patrick Eisenlohr's book, *Sounding Islam: Voice, Media, and Sonic Atmospheres in an Indian Ocean World* (2018), provides an in-depth study of the sonic efficacy of Na't poetry as practiced in Mauritius. As another example, in Sukanya Sarbadhikary's monograph, *Place of Devotion: Siting and Experiencing Divinity in Bengal-Vaishnavism* (2015), the chapter 'Listening to Vrindavan: Chanting and Musical Experience as Embodying a Devotional Soundscape' describes how chanted and sung word affectively engenders the presence of the divine and sacred place for devotees. My own work on Sikh

sabad kīrtan has investigated the embodied mechanisms at play in a number of articles. In *When 'Unheard Sound' (Re)Sounds: Affective Listening, Ethical Affects, and Embodied Experience in Sikh Sabad Kīrtan* (2016), I offer detailed expositions of the combined role of word and music in the lived experiences of congregants, with musical analysis of the three main kīrtan styles - the 'classical', the 'light,' and the AKJ (*Akhand Kīrtani Jatha*).

As scholarship on the sonic aspects of religious worship grows, I expect Coward's book to continue to be of value in that it cogently brings together fundamental notions on the importance of chanted word in theology and practice. Thinking of the university classroom, Coward's book would be an excellent choice for courses on sound and religion, in South Asia or more broadly, as an introductory text before engaging with more in-depth scholarship that has become available in the last couple of decades from scholars studying religious musical cultures through a variety of analytical approaches.

I am definitely glad to have this book on my shelf, and enthusiastically recommend the same to the readers of this review, while reminding them that it does not include reference to a rich body of work on the subject prior to its publication.

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Louis E. Fenech. *The Cherished Five in Sikh History,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 280pp.

The Cherished Five in Sikh History offers an erudite historical exploration of the crucially important *Panj Piare*, or Five Beloved, important in both Sikh history and ritual. As Louis Fenech admits, few materials about them exist and scholarly studies on the *Panj Piare* are also scarce (xxiii). Yet the p*anj piare* are central to ritual life in Sikh communities for purposes of initiation, in leading religious processions like *nagar kirtan*, and more. [As note to readers, in this review I retain Fenech's use of upper-case for the historical *Panj Piare* and lower-case renderings of the name in its ritual context] It is primarily the story of the first *Panj Piares* that Fenech interrogates, tracing the details of the emerging narratives about the original five from the mid-eighteenth century to the modern era. Fenech offers a credible and rich analysis for why many of the details associated with the names, backgrounds, and natal places of the original beloveds were largely the work of later authors. His analysis reveals important debates about each author's wider engagements with ethical debates of their own time, particularly over issues of caste.

The complex set of narratives associated with the *Panj Piare* is explored through the thematic ordering of roughly the first half of the book. Here the focus is on how *dharma*, caste, and place evolved in successive narratives about the *Panj Piare*. Fenech sets up the larger background by discussing the association of the number five with the spiritually attuned adepts referenced in

Guru Nanak's *Japji* and in the later exegetical discourse. The number five was also associated with the elders of the village community (*panchayat*), the five sense, five elements, five passions, and five prayers - encompassing powerful, but also negative, even ambivalent associations in early Sikh thought (xviii). Thus, when Fenech turns to the actual accounts of the original *Panj Piare,* readers can also see why certain symbolic associations with the individual names of these beloveds in later texts, their castes, and their natal places would assume symbolic significance as well. The earlier framing of 'five' when applied to human beings, as Fenech rightly observes, is a synecdoche standing in for both the individual and the collective (xix).

These symbolic valances are also highly important to Fenech's reading of how texts written close to Guru Gobind Singh's lifetime situated *dharma*. Here, he refers not only to the Indic associations of this term, but also traces 'the mimetic embrace of sacred kingship and sainthood' present in Azfar Moin's excavation of these terms for Mughal, Safavid, and Timurid imaginaries, and the much earlier works of scholars theorizing *miri-piri* in the Sikh context (11). Fenech's approach aligns with many scholars who view the temporal actions and intents of the Tenth Guru through an expansive lens of sovereignty. Reading the poet Sainpati's *Sri Guru Sobha*, Fenech notes that Sainapati describes the inverse of the sacred kingship model, in which earthly kings express their sovereignty in the manner of holy men. In Sainapati's narrative the divine light from the Guru also emanates from the Khalsa, granting it a complete victory. Here, the Khalsa is heavily identified with the Guru, 'a logical extension of the doctrine of Guru Panth (17).' This is where the institution as synecdoche for both the *Panj Piare* and the Khalsa is highly relevant for political theory.

For Fenech, the different forms of *raj*/sovereignty also engender a somewhat tense relation with each other. In Sainpati's work, the *Bachitar Natak,* and the Guru's own *Zafarnama,* temporal kingship is also corruptible. (19-21) Fenech offers the conjecture that Guru Gobind Singh was aware of the possible injustice that could occur when *raj* was invested in a single human body, and thus 'was relieving himself of this rare temptation by divesting himself of sure rule and investing it into his Khalsa (24)'. But Fenech also steps back from this intriguing thought to explore instead the differences between claims made in these texts to a more nuanced and ultimately fresh understanding of Mughal-Sikh diplomacy—one significant new contribution of this work which also locates the Guru's actions in the shared worlds of Mughal *akhlaq* (moral and political wisdom) (26-30).

Fenech's approach thus resonates with a now decades-long turn in Sikh history visible in multiple recent works, all amply cited by him. These include: Anne Murphy, *The Materiality of the Past: History and Representation in the Sikh Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Jeevan Deol, *'Sikh Discourses of Community and Sovereignty in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,'* PhD Dissertation, Cambridge University, 2000; Hardip Singh Syan, *Sikh Militancy in the Seventeenth Century: Religious Violence in Mughal and Early Modern India* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013); Purnima Dhavan, *When*

Sparrows Became Hawks: The Making of Sikh Warrior Tradition, 1699-1799 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). Although these scholars have different methodologies, they share a greater emphasis on contextualizing the wider cultural milieu in which key debates, terms, and narrative framings of places, memories, and events emerged in Sikh works. This milieu was multi-lingual, multi-cultural, and one in which authors practiced engagement and polemics in a mutually constituted and shared world. The contextual reach of Fenech's framing is thus simultaneously global and expansive, as well as localized and minutely observed.

This approach is reflected in Fenech's tracing of references to the *Mahabharata* and *Ramyanan* in texts associated with the Tenth Guru's court (44). The traits and spatial connections of the five Pandava brothers echo those of the *Panj Piare* in later narratives (45-6). Similarly, in Fenech's reading, most later accounts of the *Panj Piare* came to associate the individual names of the *Panj Piare* with abstract virtues as well. These included: compassion, righteousness, steadfastness, courage, and mastery (48-49). By the mid-to-late eighteenth centuries, new narratives about the *Panj Piare* also sketched out their former lives and claim them as reincarnations of famous Vaishnav *bhagats* or devotees such as Namdev, Sain and Dhanna, reserving for the better-known Daya Singh a connection with Rama's son Lava (54-68). In Fenech's interpretation, these narratives see the *bhagats* superseded by the *Panj Piare* (68). Fenech also suggests that these idealized visions of righteousness served to curb the more selfish and worldly ambitions of Sikh *misaldars* who competed with each other politically during the eighteenth century. He leans on feminist readings of the Khalsa's origin story to also see such 'karmic alignments' emphasizing the idealized goal of the Khalsa to be not only of conquest, but also of spiritual mastery (73-74).

These mid-to-late eighteenth century *gurbilas* narratives, particularly that of Koer Singh which Fenech persuasively places in the mid-eighteenth century and Sukkha Singh (generally dated to 1797), also interest Fenech because they portray a shifting valence given to the castes associated with the *Panj Piare*. Koer Singh's work, as noted earlier by Anne Murphy among others, carefully notes the caste of each of the Beloveds, and is attuned to the issues of caste and discrimination in the Panth (76). That of Sukkha Singh, as Fenech illustrates in a close reading, eliminates these completely, focusing only on their natal places (82). By this time, the *Panj Piare* had emerged as a familiar grouping. Fenech's argument for the earlier dating of Koer Singh and cautious acceptance of Sukkha Singh's later composition is convincing.

By the nineteenth century, Fenech reveals, the now familiar story of the *Panj Piare* was largely in place. If works like Santokh Singh's voluminous *Gur Pratap Suraj Granth* increasingly focused on the caste issue only to emphasize the symbolic melding of each of the Beloveds into the one Khalsa (112-113), works like those of Ratan Singh Bhangu imbued the *Panj Piare* with the spiritual power to fulfill the wishes of devotees (105). Such works built of the large Braj-Punjabi corpus that had already proliferated through textual and oral forms. It is

only with Giani Gian Singh's *Tawarikh Guru Khalsa* in the late 1800s that we see a pivot away from a Braj-centered world into modern Punjabi and colonial modernity. Fenech also sees this last text as the first modern work of Sikh history. The further stripping away of the Braj imaginary, with its miracles, debates about caste, or avatar imagery was accomplished by more reform minded Tat Khalsa ideologues such as Kahn Singh Nabha (145-7). While Fenech is right to view these as significant re-framings, one could also argue the reform process was also uneven. As Anshu Malhotra's work with the intellectuals of this period like Ditt Singh reveals, a much messier transformation that invites scholars to reexamine this critical period. [See Anshu Malhotra, *Piro and the Gulabdasis: Gender, Sect, and Society in Punjab* (New Delhi: India: Oxford University Press, 2017), ch. 6].

Fenech's book has much to offer readers. It is engaging and accessible, but also has a wealth of scholarly details and close readings of primary sources in the text. It is guaranteed to open new debates not just about the *Panj Piare,* but also the scholarly networks and sources that created and circulated these accounts.

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K. L. Tuteja. *Religion, Community and Nation: Hindu Consciousness and Nationalism in Colonial Punjab* (New Delhi: Primus Books, 2021) 372 pp.

Religious identity questions and communal consciousness have attracted the attention of historians and scholars of Punjab history. The vivisection of Punjab in 1947 has attached teleological dimension to these concerns. Kenneth W. Jones in *Ayra Dharm* brought up the issue of how the Arya Dharm finally merged into Hindu consciousness. He situated it in the colonial experience. Professor K. L. Tuteja has again revived this question for better theoretical and empirical clarity. The present work attempts to unfold the complexities of interaction between Hindu communitarian/ communal elements and the nationalist forces represented by the Congress in Punjab. It hinges on the study of 'nationalist Hindus' not Hindu nationalists who wanted to make India Hindu Rashtra by dubbing Muslims as 'outsiders'.

The British considered the Hindu and Muslim communities in India as 'monolithic religious communities'. The British turned religious identity into communal identity in India which the nationalists by and large did not contest yet maintained 'peaceful and harmonious relationship' between the Hindus and Muslims. They emphasized the British policy of 'divide and rule'. Nevertheless, the Indian elite appropriated the term 'communal' for voicing their concerns and interests in the 1920s. The author makes distinction between communitarian and communal, the former serving the vital interests of a community while latter creating an enemy in other community. Communalism is rooted in the late 19th

colonial experience. The middle classes joined in this appropriation fully. The 'other' appeared with attendant fears and hatred. Within the Hindu community, a wedge appeared: one section as anti-colonial and national, and the other section as pro–British and anti-Muslim. Nevertheless, the path was embedded with ambiguities as reflected in the career of Lala Lajpat Rai. Benedict Anderson's idea of 'imagined communities' echoes, thus moving towards imagining of national communities. In pre-colonial India, 'community' referred to the social collectivities of local 'village and caste'. Colonial rule created trans-territorial communities in the 19th century on the basis of different religious traditions. The colonial elite grabbed such exclusive 'self identity' vis-à-vis the 'other'. Print media and census further consolidated such an exclusivity. Interestingly, the British abandoned religion as a category in census in England, but in India it was foregrounded. The race of counting human heads began and so did the fears of dominance of other community. Local, provincial, national and transnational emerged areas of contestation. Nationalism emerged as an anti-colonial ideology.

In the pre-colonial times, Hinduism was fluid in nature. The British constructed and redefined it. Nevertheless, Hindu reformers made 'serious attempts to rediscover the rational and human elements within the Hindu tradition. It was done to reinvestigate Hinduism' (p.32). The British annexation of Punjab in 1849 introduced an administrative apparatus and an ideology of superior in opposition to natives as racially inferior and backward (p. 47). Evangelicals propagated Christianity which alarmed natives. This led to social-religion reformation among the Hindus, the Sikhs and the Muslims. Among the Hindus, Swami Dayananda gained prominence. The emerging dynamics added bitterness among the urban middle classes of all religious groups. Moreover, the Arya Samaj was largely responsible for the 'Hindu resurgence', and hence eliminated the possibility of pluralistic model of Hinduism.

Hindus had demographic diversity - preponderance in South-East Punjab and paucity in the Western Punjab. However, they dominated in trade and education. Most of them came from intermediate castes like Khatris, Aroras and Banias. The Punjabi Hindus comprised 82% of the English-educated elite and 80% of the 'superior appointments' carrying salaries of Rs. 75 or more per month. They were careers of modernity and 'imitators of the West' (p. 94). The Arya Samaj attracted higher and middle castes. They were prominent in print and publication industry and educational institutions well. The Hunter Commission in1881 made educational standard among the communities clear: Hindus in the British territory could read and write as 1 in 23; Sikhs 1 in 31 and Muslims 1 in 108. Similar disproportion was in jobs (pp. 103-04). Language controversy created fissures among the Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. The competition for jobs and seats in municipal committees led to competitive politics. The cow protection movement became 'an important aspect of the Hindu resurgence' (p. 123). The Hindu Sabha formed in 1906 to protect, promote and represent the interests of Hindu community. Lajpat Rai brought in the idea of 'Hindu nationalism'. The next logical step was to create an all-India Hindu organization which came into fruition in April 1915 at Haridwar.

Nationalist consciousness first emerged in cities such as Lahore, the provincial capital. The English press like *The Tribune* played a major role. The economic critique of the colonial rule created anti-colonial consciousness. Political organizations such as the Indian Association and the Indian National Congress created platforms for the educated middle classes, particularly the Hindus. Debate on the Land Alienation Bill (1900) weakened the Congress as local issues around community and faction dominated. The Agrarian Unrest (1907) revived interests in anti-colonial struggle. Nevertheless, Lajpat Rai made a nuanced distinction between 'Hindu nationalism' and 'Indian nationalism'. Lajpat Rai argued that strengthening of both Hindus and Muslims as distinctive communities could be a more effective method for establishing Hindus and Muslims as 'equal partners' in the Indian nation (p. 167). However, separate representation for the Muslims created wedge between the Hindus and Muslims.

The rise of Mahatma Gandhi foregrounded the concerns of Swaraj and Hindu-Muslim unity. The year 1919 became a landmark with the Rowlett Satyagraha and the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre. The Punjab entered into national politics at this point. The Gandhian phase of politics nationalised every political activity embodied in Non-Cooperation movement. However, communal clashes in the 1920s resulted in consolidation of communitarian identities in North India (p. 239). It appeared as replay of the 1880s in the Punjab. Lajpat Rai resurrected Hindu 'minorityism' in Punjab. He was concerned more for safeguarding the interest of Hindus within the broad framework of inclusive nationalism. He differed with Mahatma Gandhi in this regard. Lajpat Rai argued that the Arya Samaj played a crucial role in strengthening 'aggressive' Hindu consciousness. He proposed that the Punjab should be partitioned into two provinces - Western Punjab with large Muslim majority and the Eastern Punjab with a large Hindu-Sikh majority as Hindus and Sikhs were under constant fear of 'Muslim domination' (p. 267). He rooted for the Hindu Mahasabha yet cautioned it lowering the prestige of Indian National Congress (p. 275). He was aware that the growth of communitarian or communal consciousness might cause harm to the larger national interests. He opined that the Hindus were compelled by circumstances to organize themselves on communitarian lines is Punjab where they felt threatened by 'Muslim domination' (p. 276). However, Lajpat Rai was highly critical of the Punjab Hindu Mahasabha's decision in favour of cooperating with the Simon Commission. In the 1920s, Lajpat Rai was very active as Hindu leader. He was 'responsible to a large extent in establishing Hindu majoritarian identity across the country. He visualised India as a 'united nation of communities' (p.318). In the 1920s, he tried to sail through communitarian and nationalist perspectives. In 1926, he favoured Hindi as national language eventually discarding his claim in favour of Hindustani (p.349). In 1928, his life was terminated under the onslaught of lathi charge.

K.L. Tuteja has advanced the communitarian mindset of Lajpat Rai. Nevertheless, he tacitly admits that Lajpat Rai contributed in building a strong pan-Hindu identity which led to strengthening of Hindu majoritarianism in the late 1930s. One wishes, Lajpat Rai had been alive in the 1940s. There appears

an attempt to dump the category of 'communal' for the group led by Bhai Parmaund (p. 259). A large number of middle-class Hindus in Punjab held nationalist and communitarian perspectives. These carried anti-colonial stances too. The present work is significant in the context that the spectre of Hindu Rashtra is haunting again. Nationalist Hindus faced tough challenges to bring forth and consolidate inclusive nationalism in India. Historical insights provided in the work are enriching and enlightening. Thus, it is an important work.

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Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. *The Last Queen: A Novel of Courage and Resistance* (New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2021) 384 pp.

This is the thing about historical fiction: we all know what happens. In the hands of a deft storyteller, however, the tale can be told anew. No other story can encapsulate the essence of Sikh sovereignty as accurately as the rise and fall of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, ruler of the only Sikh empire. And perhaps no account of marriage, revenge, and exile can narrate the sense of loss Sikhs feel, from the British annexation of the Punjab in 1849 to the Partition of India in 1947, as the bitter story of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's son's removal to England, and the ignominious exile of Ranjit's Singh's wife, Rani Jindan, to Burma.

It is no surprise then that Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's engrossing historical novel, *The Last Queen*, begins with the impending death of the *Sarkar*, Ranjit Singh. His wives and children mill around the sickbed donating their prized possessions and chanting verses from the Guru Granth Sahib while his courtiers and guards stand by worried as much for the loss of a revered king as for the instability to come. For this reviewer, these details are noteworthy not only for their evocative nature, but also because most novels from India and about India depict a picture of the majority religions and it is affirming to hear words and read scenes conveying the Sikh experience. Marginalization occurs both in the political and the imaginative and, in this case, that encompasses Sikhism and women. While the 'Lion of the Punjab' Maharaja Ranjit Singh is a well-known figure, his youngest and last wife, Rani Jindan, is relatively unknown. Unlike other queens from India's gloried past - from the inimitable Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi to Rani Ahilya Bai of Holkar or the Begum of Awadh, who all stood up to invaders - Rani Jindan did not enter the battlefield. However, she maneuvered, as best as she could, the affairs of state after the death of her husband and his heirs until her young son, Dilip Singh, ascended the throne only to have it treacherously annexed by the British with the help of the Dogra collaborators.

The Last Queen is both a history lesson and a love story. This reviewer was unprepared for that and, of course, there is much poetic license at work in the narrative. However, the novelist makes the reader care, and that is a skill. The first line of young Jindan's first-person narrative begins, 'I'm dreaming of

mountains, icy and terrifying, when a surreptitious sound wakes me' (9). The reader knows we are wading into history, but we are also accompanying a young, spirited girl on her journey through adolescence. It is this oscillation between the capital 'H' of history and the intimate, endearing details of a young woman's life that are the persuasive arc of this novel; it gives Jindan subjectivity, and it humanizes her aging husband and king. Their first attempt to consummate their marriage ends in failure as Ranjit Singh is unable to perform. However, this is not always the case and their relationship grows over conversations and outings. A companionate marriage, it is the last bright spot of Ranjit Singh's life as he is well aware of his heirs' shortcomings and the impending demise of his rule and kingdom.

The daughter of a menial servant in the king's service, Jindan apparently accidentally comes to Ranjit Singh's attention and is married to his sword, while he is away on a military campaign. These descriptions draw as much attention to the couple's love story as it does to the multilayered and often contradictory nature of the illustrious and celebrated Sikh king - a devout Sikh and yet someone who indulged his appetites for drink and more; a devoted family man but one with multiple wives; a shrewd king but also a naïve believer in people's loyalty. Divakaruni's gift lies in the conflicting visage, glorifying the past does it no advantage. The mutable, often gauzy aspect of our heroes and their history makes them relatable; more us and less the untouched mythic characters of a faraway time. Jindan's growing strength and Ranjit Singh's waning authority go hand in hand.

While history often purports to give us the factual account of the past, historical fiction gives us a sense of the past - a palpable experience of what it may have meant to live in a different time. However, this book does more. It gives us the voice of a woman who was long considered to have no voice at all. Of course, this may not restore Rani Jindan to her rightful place in Indian history, but in giving us a first-person narrative through Rani Jindan's eyes brings out the silences and omissions of the world we sometimes take for granted. If anything, her story is ever more salient in our religious, caste-based, class-riven world today - a girl without anything to her name rises to become a queen who is able to challenge the biggest empire of the world. So much so, that the British have to separate a child from his mother. The sun may never have set on the British empire in the nineteenth century, and they may have prided themselves on their rule of law, and yet, in exiling a queen, separating her child from her and converting him to Christianity, the British revealed the core their enterprise as cruel, exploitative, and oppressive from start to finish. *The Last Queen* is able to bring all that out through the story of Rani Jindan's life without having to spell it out. While critics may dismiss the book as popular and elevate the sentences of what passes for high literature, for this reviewer, *The Last Queen* is a welcome invitation to imagine a past where besides being simply representative of the past, kings and queens are also people who live, love, defy, and die.

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G.B.S. Sidhu. *The Khalistan Conspiracy: A Former R&AW Officer Unravels the Path to 1984* (New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2020), 261pp.

The Sikh agitation in Punjab that arose from 1978 to 1993 is widely viewed in the context of an agrarian crisis of Punjab's peasantry resulting from distortions caused by the Green Revolution, alongside Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's divisive ethnic politics. Her defiance of the spirit of federalism remained a key irritant for the Akali Dal which spearheaded the agitation in Punjab. The allegation of step-motherly treatment meted out to Punjab by the Congress under Indira Gandhi while in power at the Centre figured prominently in the Sikh leadership's mobilization rhetoric. The charge of discrimination had resonance among Sikhs in view of the economic hardships faced by small and marginal farmers who constituted the bulk of the Punjab peasantry. This plight of farmers was attributed to the policies of the central government, where the Congress ruled for most of the time. The issue of water distribution emerged as a key mobilizing factor. Punjab's farmers were perturbed with the idea of water flowing through the rivers of Punjab being diverted to neighboring states free of cost. Thus, the explanatory framework constructed around economic miseries of Punjab, territorial disputes with neighboring states, and water-related issues are widely invoked to explain the ethno-religious agenda that propelled militancy in the state for a large part of the 1980s and early 1990s.

The book under review, as its title suggests, attributes the Punjab tragedy to a conspiracy hatched by the Congress, the genesis of which traces back to 1978 when Giani Zail Singh advised Sanjay Gandhi that the Akali-Janata government in Punjab could be destabilized if a radical Sikh figure was propped up to challenge the Akali Dal. The moderate Akali leaders, on coming under attack from such a Sikh figure, 'would be forced to adopt an uncompromising stand on issues of Sikh interest to retain their following.' (p.xii) Their alliance partner, the Janata Party, which represented mainly urban Hindu interests, would not approve of this shift. Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, who learned Sikh theology in a religious seminary called the Damdami Taksal and eventually become its chief in 1977, was chosen to play this role. He was chosen for this task because he had earned a large degree of respect among Sikhs especially those who were baptized, and he had already come to the political limelight because of his doctrinal conflict with the Nirankaris. However, as the book brings out, after the Congress victory in the 1980 Lok Sabha elections, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi took a deliberate decision to win future general elections by using Bhindranwale 'to create a serious Hindu Sikh divide and plant the fear of Khalistan in the minds of the majority community' (p.6).

The book's author, a former IPS officer who worked in key positions within the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW), informs the reader that a new branch was created by his organization toward the end of 1980 to 'collect information

about the activities of the Sikh extremists abroad and their links with the ISI of Pakistan' (p.7). Within R&AW, the author had to confront the view that 'the Sikhs had never forgotten the prestige and eminence of Sikh empire (1709-1848) established by Maharaja Ranjit Singh and wanted to create that era in one form or the other' (p.8). The spurt in pro-Khalistan activities in the 1980s was attributed to this kind of mindset, whereas the author holds that the 'real reason was a conscious decision taken by some senior Congress leaders, soon after Indira Gandhi returned to power in January 1980, to win next general elections…by first creating and then solving the Khalistan issue through the use of Bhindranwale' (p.9).

The main argument of the book is that the 'Khalistan conspiracy', implemented through Bhindranwale and allied forces like Dal Khalsa, was hatched by the Congress for winning the 1985 Lok Sabha elections. The plan was to create communal mistrust between Hindus and Sikhs, first by encouraging and then by overlooking acts of violence and extremism attributed to Bhindranwale. The impression was to be created among Hindus that the Khalistan issue was catching the imagination of the Sikhs, which had the potential of endangering the integrity of the country. The prolonged discontent of the 'majority community was expected to generate emotional hysteria and the belief that the nation's integrity was in danger from proponents of Khalistan who were conspiring against the state with or without the support of foreign elements' (p.45). As such, Punjab was to be kept boiling until the situation was ripe for final action which was done by allowing Bhindranwale to operate freely and simultaneously initiating dialogue with moderate Akalis, thus giving the impression that the Indira Gandhi was keen to resolve the problem. However, the author emphatically points out that the talks with Akali leaders were purposely prolonged on one pretext or another because there was no intention by the central government to accept the demands which would bring normalcy to Punjab.

The author invokes facts which are fairly well-known to prove his argument that Bhindranwale was propped up by the Congress for implementing its 'Khalistan conspiracy'. He points out that Congress loyalists who controlled the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee actively supported Bhindranwale after his clash with Nirankaris in April 1978. The Congress also supposedly helped create the Dal Khalsa soon thereafter, which openly demanded Khalistan. Bhindranwale also backed Congress candidates in the 1980 Lok Sabha elections. After Nirankari chief Gurbachan Singh's murder in Delhi in April 1980, then Home Minister Zail Singh gave a clean chit to Bhindranwale by making a statement in Parliament that he had no role in the murder of the Nirankari chief. Furthermore, after the September 1981 assassination of the Hindu newspaper proprietor Lala Jagat Narain who had testified against Bhindranwale in the Nirankari case, Bhindranwale was supposedly allowed by Zail Singh to travel over 300 kilometers from Chando Kalan in Haryana to Chowk Mehta in Punjab to avoid arrest. After much publicity and intense negotiations with senior police officers, Bhindranwale surrendered to the Punjab Police in September 1982,

only to be released less than a month later after Home Minister Zail Singh made a statement in Parliament exonerating him of the crime.

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi coerced the Congress chief minister of Punjab, Darbara Singh, to sign a water sharing agreement with neighboring states in December 1981, and directed him to withdraw the case filed by the previous Akali government in the Supreme Court protecting Punjab's riparian interests. This proved to be turning point in history of the state. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi inaugurated the digging of Sutlej-Yamuna Link Canal in April 1982, which led the Akalis to launch their *Nehar Roko Morcha* (stop the canal agitation). The subsequent agitation launched in August 1982 from the Golden Temple in Amritsar was given the name of *Dharam Yudh Morcha* (righteous war agitation). Sant Bhindranwale, who had already launched his own agitation from the Golden Temple for the release of his loyalists arrested by the Punjab Police, merged his *morcha* with that of the Akali Dal. From October 1982 to the last week of May 1984 - that is, until a few days before the attack on the Golden Temple - around twenty-six rounds of negotiations took place between the central government and leaders of the moderate Akali Dal. According to the author, an agreement was purposely avoided by the government because the negotiations were simply a 'charade' for eventually creating a tragedy to be used for narrow political gains in the 1985 Lok Sabha elections.

In support of his 'Khalistan conspiracy' thesis, the author (being an insider to the working of R&AW) reveals that commando plans devised by the organization for detaining Bhindranwale earlier from Chowk Mehta and later from the Golden Temple were overruled by Indira Gandhi on one pretext or author. In particular, 'Bhindranwale alive and in detention…would have been a liability for the government. His arrest even under the most dramatic circumstances would have not ended militancy in Punjab' (p.147). Therefore, as per the plan, he was to go out fighting, with the state ultimately eliminating him and thus eradicating the threat to the integrity of the country. As Sidhu writes, 'The vengeance with which Bhindranwale and his men were eliminated had brought a sense of great relief and satisfaction among a majority of voters. Indira Gandhi's image as a strong leader was restored' (p.193). The conspiracy hatched for electoral dividends was coming to fruition. Indira Gandhi's assassination in October 1984 was obviously an unintended consequence of the 'Khalistan conspiracy' which leaves open the question whether, without her tragic death, the Congress would have achieved electoral victory in the 1985 Lok Sabha elections which, as the book argues, was the cardinal objective of the conspiracy.

This book adds to the literature which strengthens the 'Khalistan conspiracy' thesis about the Punjab tragedy. The contention that Congress 'created' Bhindranwale for marginalizing the moderate Akalis and, in the process, allowed him to attain larger-than-life political image is not entirely new as many other books by noted journalists of the time have argued the same. However, while working in key positions within India's premium intelligence agency and being son-in-law of the senior Congress leader Swaran Singh, the author was privy to many political maneuverings of the Congress around which author has constructed the 'Khalistan conspiracy' explanation more emphatically than

others, including describing how prolonged negotiations with Akalis were purposely allowed to fail. But the key question still remains, whether the Congress alone was responsible for Bhindranwale's rise or if he was able to marginalize the Akalis because of their failure to get Punjab's issues settled much earlier. With limitations of the study notwithstanding, it is a useful work for the researchers working on contemporary Punjab.

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Singh, Gurharpal & Giorgio Shani. *Sikh Nationalism: From a Dominant Minority to an Ethno-Religious Diaspora* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 262pp.

In this very timely and comprehensive work. Singh and Shani bring together in an 'integrated approach' an exploration of Sikh nationalism. This book challenges primary analyses of Sikh identity and nationalism, particularly post-colonial theories, while providing an engrossing empirical exploration of the historical trajectory of Sikhs as a minority community. In so doing, it fills a lacuna as a much-needed resource for specialists and students.

Sikhs, understood as a religious community, has provided both the subjective and objective basis of identity, and an important context for academic study. The authors argue in this ambitious work that there are equally useful lenses through which to explore Sikh nationalism and identity (p. 211) particularly since, as they stress, there has not been 'a comprehensive analytical appraisal' on this subject even 'decades after' the Sikh militant movement (p. 2). Disengaging to some extent from the narrative of religion and focusing on the narratives of Sikhs as a nation and as a minority generates fresh perspectives on what they view as the remarkable consistency of the identity of the community (p. 19) and the on-going 'pursuit of autonomy and statehood' (p. 4).

A major theme of the book is to argue for and illustrate the continuity of Sikh nationalism and the persistence of the ascendent role of the Khalsa in opposition to arguments positing dramatic disjunctures in Sikh identity, particularly in the late 19th century (p. 22). Drawing on the literature of ethnicity and nationalism, they construct a complex argument juxtaposed against modernist theories that attempt to posit a constructed identity, while remaining cognizant of avoiding essentialist or primordialist understandings of Sikh identity (p. 20). In so doing, they critique arguments stemming from critical theory, which they define as the current dominant paradigm in the academy, as well as other modernist theories, which view the emergence of 'nations' as a modern phenomenon structured by colonialism or industrialization, or new technologies of communication and the market economy. Critical theory, they argue, contributes to an understanding of developments during colonialism, but does not provide a full explanation of the

drive within the Sikh community to establish a unique identity and political autonomy.

Singh and Shani draw on the 'ethno-symbolic framework' developed by Anthony D. Smith in which he argues that modern nations are based on pre-existing *ethnie* or premodern ethnic communities embodying legacies of what he terms as the '*myth-symbol'* complex. Smith argues that the majority of modern nations draw on such a pre-existing 'myth-symbol' complex comprised of myths, memories, values and symbols which provide the basis of the subjective and possibly even objective standing as a nation. While nations are modern, they are rooted in a premodern polity that shapes what the nation can become. For Singh and Shani, this type of legacy is what 'resonates' with people and comprises the roots of Sikh identity. The ethno-symbolic approach suggests that identities cannot be constructed out of whole cloth, and that the masses and elites have a 'reciprocal relationship'- that is, that agency is not limited to elites as emphasized in the instrumentalist approach. This latter analytical perspective of nationality formation views elites as able to manipulate symbols which appeal to the larger community, giving unrealistic latitude, according to the authors, to elites' abilities to construct identity (p. 19).

However, for Singh and Shani, both the impacts of colonialism and the revivalist Tat Khalsa movement were necessary for the development of modern nationalism. The colonial support for the idea of Sikhs as a 'nation' and militarization of Sikhs during the colonial period elevated the centrality of the Khalsa identity (pp. 49-51) as did the 'erasure' of non-Khalsa identities in the late 19th century. They argue that the Khalsa increasingly embodied the community's 'hopes and aspirations'. Therefore, 'a highly distinctive pre-modern ethnie combined with modernization' produced modern Sikh nationalism (p. 57). In focusing on *why* the Khalsa emerged as the primary identity, their analysis avoids an essentialist understanding of Sikh identity (p. 28).

Subsequent chapters stress the theme of Sikhs as a minority community which is shaped by and shapes their environment - transitioning, for example, from a privileged and dominant minority under colonialism to a post-colonial environment of majoritarian politics. This historical narrative centers the struggle of Sikhs to maintain an identity and type of autonomy. The role of the Sikhs was crucial during the era of state building during the nationalist movement and Partition. This book emphasizes the choices made by minority groups in a very fluid and violent environment, particularly given the Sikhs' expectation that they would be accommodated in some way in the division of colonial India into two nation-states.

The Sikhs fit uneasily into the structure of post-colonial India as a religious minority whereby this very definition of Sikhs coded demands that were quite secular in nature as supposedly being illegitimate or communal (p. 28 and p. 131.) Sikhs were also a non-Hindu community occupying a peripheral state viewed as a potentially unstable borderland like that of Jammu and Kashmir and the northeastern states. Drawing on Singh's earlier work, Singh and Shani analyze the relationship of the Congress Party with peripheral states as

predicated on government control. This can take the form of either 'hegemonic control' - exercised through 'ideology, factional penetration, tactical accommodation and state power' - or as 'violent control' in situations such as the era of Sikh militancy (p. 115).

The era of Sikh militancy, during the time period of the late 1970s to 1993, is contextualized by what the authors term as a central argument of the book - that is, that the Indian state's ethnic conflict management policies structured militant Sikh nationalism (p. 161). Through the failure of the Sikhs to achieve a real measure of autonomy, in spite the circumscribed granting of a Punjabi-speaking state in 1966, an on-going struggle met up with the unwillingness and inability of the state, and most specifically then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, to make political concessions. 'Militancy' itself is described poignantly as 'the dying embers of Sikh resistance that sometimes threatened but had always been held in check after 1947' (p. 162).

The charismatic revivalist Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale became the spokesperson for a vision of the Sikh nation drawing on what could be termed a myth-symbol complex and the Anandpur Sahib Resolution. This resolution, which envisioned limiting the role of the Center to its bare minimum, became the 'manifesto of Sikh sovereignty'. According to this analysis, other posited causes of militancy - including activism in the diaspora, the role of Pakistan, Green Revolution changes in the economy and class structure, and changes in communication - were all proximate causes to the drive in the community for autonomy (p. 131). Further, the continuation of militancy after Operation Bluestar stemmed from the disastrous anti-terrorism strategy which led to 'a chaotic militant nationalist movement' (p. 161).

A third major theme explores the multifaceted changes in and challenges to Sikh identity in the contemporary era of Hindutva, fragmentation due to rapid social change and the rise of new socio-religious groups, the continuing presence of radical politics particularly in the diaspora, and the reframing of nationalism originating to some extent again within the diaspora. The challenge of Hindutva, which opens up rethinking how a minority religion interacts with a national level ideology that no longer can be seen as secular, raises fears of assimilation as an 'existential threat' to the community. That the 'competition' with Hindu nationalism is not only political, religious and legal, but also economic, is a particularly compelling aspect of their analysis (p. 183). They argue that the 'religious terms of trade' have changed and the 'momentum of economic development is with Hindu nationalism as the hegemonic ideology' (p. 187). Facing a legacy of 'poor governance' in the state of Punjab (p. 188), globalization has failed to integrate or fuel Punjab's economy in this once wealthiest state in India. Neglect by the Center could lead to either identity-based resistance (p. 182) or the evident trend of secularization among the young (pp. 187-8). This failure of economic development is associated with issues of drug addiction, gang activity, and a strong desire among the young to emigrate - the latter is an issue that might have received more attention in this work.

Singh and Shani focus on the diaspora as the locus of new theorizing about nationalism. They argue that the 'long-distance nationalism' of the Khalistan movement era (pp. 23-4) shifted to a focus on the 'politics of recognition,' or issues of concern to the community in the host country (pp. 202-4). Singh and Shani maintain that in the new millennial generation, there is again a shift as they are at home in their host country, while connected transnationally online as part of a ''post-national diasporic' Sikh identity' (pp. 208-9). Sovereignty may be envisioned as located in the community rather than a specific territory, and Sikhs may 'imagine a de-territorialized community in which a separate homeland is but one option' (p. 210).

In conclusion, this work will be noted for its theoretical breadth and dense historical narrative written in an engaging style. It will be essential reading for those studying the Sikhs and South Asia and provides a case study for those interested in comparative issues of ethnicity and nationalism.

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Kapany, Narinder Singh. *The Man Who Bent Light: Father of Fibre Optics* (Delhi: Roli Books, 2021), 290pp.

Narinder Kapany loved to tell stories, often very funny ones. When he did they were usually followed by a joyous guffaw, a laugh that rebounded from the walls and careened out the windows. For his final offering to us, finished only months before his death at the age of 94, he has given us a book full of stories, wondrous stories. There are accounts of a toddler in his ancestral home in Moga in India's Punjab crawling upstairs to the rooftop deck, to decades later arguments with his father over whether he and his mother should live in the house Narinder had built for them in the Punjab. I hear his voice telling them, followed often by that memorable guffaw.

In between Moga and his father's house are stories of remarkable achievements. This, after all, was the young man at Imperial College in London who discovered the properties of fibre optics in bending light. In fact, it was Narinder who coined the term 'fibre optics'. These scientific and technological breakthroughs were the achievements that garnered nominations for a Nobel Prize, and for which he was conferred India's coveted Padma Vibhushan Award. It also allowed him to launch a prosperous career of creating companies that specialized in medical instruments utilizing this remarkable technology. Thanks to him, cardiologists were able to peer into the human heart to find and repair what otherwise might be fatal flaws.

That would have been sufficient for the world to recognize him, and for which the *New York Times* could issue an extensive obituary about 'the father of fibre optics'. But there was more to Narinder's stories, and this book tells much of them. His pioneering entrepreneurship and his research and teaching in London, Rochester, and Santa Cruz provide fodder for many of the tales. Some

relate to another love - that is, farming. Others were about his family, whom he adored. Many were focused on his enduring devotion to his Sikh cultural tradition, which led to the creation of the Sikh Foundation International in 1967.

That is when my path first crossed with Narinder Kapany. I had just entered graduate school at Berkeley in 1967, having spent two years in India teaching at Punjab University. I was interested in the interaction of religion and politics, and the religious landscape of the Punjab provided plenty of material related to both. At Berkeley, I found an abundance of material about the early 20th century Indian independence movement created by expatriate Punjabis in California, the Ghadar Party, that had been deposited in the Berkeley library by the Indian author Khushwant Singh. Khushwant had utilized them in researching his two-volume *History of the Sikhs*. I was asked by the library to organize the material and to mine the Gurdwaras and homes in Stockton and Yuba City to track down all extant material related to the Ghadar movement.

This interested Narinder. His newly formed Sikh Foundation had just launched a magazine and he asked me to guest edit an issue devoted to the materials I had discovered regarding the Ghadar Party. As a graduate student, I was flattered. This launched a friendship between us that lasted for decades as I moved from being a graduate student to a professor, first at Berkeley and later at the Santa Barbara campus of the University of California.

In 1976 Narinder came to me with an idea. It was time to encourage Sikh studies throughout North American campuses, he said. So we conspired to create an international conference at Berkeley on Sikh studies that would bring together scholars from around the world to try create a new field of studies. It was the first such event on the continent, provided material for a book, and indeed did launch a new field. Later, when I shifted to Santa Barbara we established with the financial support of the Sikh Foundation one of the first endowed chairs in Sikh studies in the United States. It was named the Kundan Kaur Kapany Chair, in honor of Narinder's mother. Just months before his death he came to me with another idea - to convene again an international conference of Sikh studies, but to do it online as a series of conversations with leading figures in the field. Although he was not around to hear these chats, he would have been pleased with their diversity and dedication. You can watch the videos online at the website of the Sikh Foundation.

His autobiography recounts the stories of the creation of the Sikh Foundation and his endeavors to promote Sikh studies scholarship. It also provides abundant stories of his love of Sikh-related art, for which he created what is likely the world's largest and most impressive private collection. It is notable that some of the most distinguished art galleries from London to San Francisco have mounted exhibitions of his collection. A beautiful coffee-table book by Paul Taylor and Sonia Dhami, *Sikh Art from the Kapany Collection*, provides a pictorial display of some of the more noteworthy works in the collection.

So many stories abound in this rich autobiography. But I would like to conclude with a story of my own. It was 1984 and the world was rocked with the awful news from India that the widespread resentment from the Indian

government's invasion of the Golden Temple to kill or capture Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and his comrades had led to the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and, following that, the killing of innocent Sikhs. Unbeknown to each other, Narinder and I had both been invited to a local television studio in San Francisco to provide commentary on the tragic events.

The moderator first interviewed Narinder. He expressed sadness at the assassination, but quickly reminded the audience that despite the tragedy of that death the even greater tragedy was the slaughter of thousands of Sikhs in a bloody reprisal said to have been at time abetted by the police. The moderator, somewhat taken aback, turned to me and asked me for what she expected to be a contrary position. Please give your different perspective, she said. 'Oh no', I said, 'I quite agree with Narinder. In fact, I never disagree with him.' And then, on camera, he laughed. It was that magnificent guffaw that rebounded from the walls and careened out the windows. I can hear it still.

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