

Suri, Sanjay, *1984: The Anti-Sikh Violence and After* (Noida: Harper Collins, 2015) viii + 272 pp. ISBN 978-93-5177-070-1 (pb) INR 499.

In 1984, after the assassination of then Indian Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi, by her Sikh bodyguards, many Sikhs were killed by the Hindus in Delhi. At many places the state agencies like police connived with the rioters. In Delhi the fearful memory of that violence was such that in 1991, when Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated a thousand kilometers away in Sriperambadur in Tamil Nadu by a suicide bomber from the Liberation of Tamil Tigers Elam (LTTE), many Sikhs from Shahadra, in East Delhi, sought shelter in what were thought to be relatively safe areas in the city or ran away to Punjab. In this book Sanjay Suri gives a first-person account of the anti-Sikh riot in 1984 in Delhi. At that time he was a crime reporter working for the *Indian Express*.

As a set pattern in India during communal riots, most police officers either connive with the members of the majority community or stand by silently. A similar pattern was followed in Delhi during the 1984 violence. In an affidavit to the Justice (ret'd) Rangnath Misra Commission, it was maintained: There was no violence in Sultanpuri, in East Delhi, on 31 October 1984. 'However, in the morning of 1<sup>st</sup> November 1984, a local Member of Parliament addressed a meeting which was also attended by Station House Officer (SHO) Inspector Bhatti and other police officers of Sultanpuri, in East Delhi. In this meeting the gathering was instigated to take revenge on the Sikhs. Immediately, thereafter violence started with full fury.' That local Member of Parliament was Sajjan Kumar of the Congress Party (59). The Justice Kusum Lata Mittal report on the 1984 riots found that everyone in this area knew that the violence was Congress-led (60). Pointing towards the role of the police, the Mittal report says: 'It seems the pattern that was followed was that first the SHO Shri Bhatti (of Sultanpuri police station) and Head Constable Jai Chand ordered and threatened the Sikhs to go inside their houses otherwise they would shoot them. Once they went inside the houses, they were attacked by the mob with full connivance of the police' (59). Most of the Sikh officers were either relieved of their duty or were not allowed to carry out their duty to control the riots. But there were a few exceptional officers like Maxwell Pereira, Amod Kanth, SB Deol and Ved Marwah. The author has mentioned their role in managing the degree of violence in their area.

The communal tension had been simmering since the 'Operation Bluestar' which was carried out by the Indian Army to flush out Sikh militants from their holiest shrine-Golden temple in Amritsar. While in Amritsar, soon after the operation, Suri found that 'Operation Bluestar' did not happen just in Amritsar but rather was also conducted simultaneously around thirty or so gurdwaras in Punjab. He writes 'We heard that there had been particularly violent attacks at gurdwara in Tam Taran Sahib and Moga' (180). During his visit to those places Suri found that the reports of Army operations there had been exaggerated by people in Amritsar, though attacks were carried out, not of such a large scale (181).

At that tense time, Suri dared to visit Jarnail Singh Bhinderwale's village, Rode. Describing the village Suri writes: 'There was not a single non-Sikh in the village, I was the only Hindu, at that point of time' (183). In Bhinderwale's home

he was asked why he had come there. To this Suri said that he had heard there had been a lot of violence at that place, he was there to check it out. One of the men standing there told him that there had been no violence, and the outsiders too found no evidence of it. About his stay the author writes, 'This Hindu stranger that was me had faced no hostility. I was an alien Hindu when suspicions around alien Hindus around Punjab could have been at a peak. But I was offered rest, care and a meal. That dinner was to me the story. That, on that day, Bhinderwale's family did not forget the age-old traditions of Punjab of welcoming a stranger, looking after him, making him feel at home' (184). On reasons for not filing that story he writes 'I didn't suggest this as a story for the paper; in the face of collapse all around, who would think of suggesting a story about that dinner? I didn't think of this as a story for the newspaper not only because newspapers did not take a lot of such stories then. Naively, perhaps, I thought that the extraordinary circumstances of that warmth must remain untainted by any parade of public assertion arising from it. The thought of selling that experience for publication felt like it would be disrespectful of the moment' (185).

According to the Rangnath Misra Commission 3874 people were killed in that riot. To inquire the reasons for it and look into the perpetrators Commissions had been set up, but not a single serious offender had been punished. Sanjay Suri too presented his affidavit in front of the Misra Commission and Nanavati Commission of inquiries (210-242). Most of the victims from East Delhi still live in re-settled colonies in Delhi. In 2014 during his visit to one re-settlement colony in Tilak Vihar in West Delhi, he met Mohan Singh, a Sikh whom he saved in Trilokpuri during the 1984 riots. Mohan Singh and his family live in a small room with memories of 1984 riots and are still knocking on the doors of the police stations to get justice (243).

This book presents a real picture of how a politically motivated mob unleashed violence against the Sikhs in 1984. The revelation of how the people in Punjab reacted and behaved towards a Hindu is the most important part of this book. The interviews of the officers who were in charge in 1984 in Delhi substantiate Suri's arguments.

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Hussain Ahmad Khan, *Artisans, Sufis, Shrines: Colonial Architecture in Nineteenth-Century Punjab*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015). xviii +210 pp. ISBN 178453014X/ 13:9781784530143 (hb). No price given.

Historians in Pakistan have been late in offering a critique of British colonial history, barring a few exceptions like Dr Mubarak Ali and Sibte Hasan - the latter being an anthropologist - and they have been writing in a populist manner to reach the widest reading public. Among younger historians writing academically, this is an argument worth reckoning with as Hussain Ahmad Khan interrogates late nineteenth-century Punjab and the battle between the British and Muslim Sufis of

the Chisti order for cultural hegemony.

Puncturing the image of the mystical Sufis as being pacifist and pluralistic followers of non-doctrinaire Islam, the writer argues that, in the seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Sufis were instrumental in strengthening Muslim identity through the shrines they built and the public culture that they created. They were also fiercely anti-colonial and protective of marginalized classes which included village people and the artisanal classes. This started changing in the late nineteenth century when their followers or the *sajjada nashins*, the custodians of the shrine, engaged in battle with the British and the Sikhs, sometimes going to the extent of strategically colluding with the British to disarm and contain Sikh influence, although this part of the argument is not delineated in any detail and relies on hagiography. Khan holds that the shrines in nineteenth-century Punjab, particularly Multan, Lahore and Delhi, became a referent for a separate Muslim culture and identity that later led to the demand for a separate homeland. 'For these reasons, the construction and reception of Sufi shrines was a political act' (p. 34). It was this sense of identity that held out against British attempts to educate and reform the natives of the Punjab according to the positivism and utilitarianism that defined colonial modernity.

The Chisti Sufis of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century are known for having created a public culture through activities at the shrine such as the *khanqah* that offered food and lodging to the dispossessed villagers who were either escaping the caste system of the village or some legal authority. This coupled mystical initiation with festivity in the *urs* celebrating the death of a revered person where, along with musical sessions or *sama*, metaphysical poetry was sung and often performed with ecstatic dance or *dhammal*. The *urs* was accompanied by a *mela* where craftsmen brought pottery, textiles and articles of everyday use that were sold at low prices to the village people. The Chistis of the period were known for their opposition to the sultan, the Mughal and later the British rulers, to the *qazi* or judge, to religious *ulema* or scholars and to all differences based on caste, tribe and religion which made them popular among people from villages and small towns. The Sufis were also known for their vows of poverty and for the blessing or *baraka* they were capable of invoking for people who came to them.

Considering that this is an area of study that is least documented except for hagiographic accounts, Khan engages with cultural anthropology in reading folk tales of the time for what they have to say about the relationship between artisans and rulers and between artisans and the *jogi* or spiritual man in tales such as Puran Bhagat and Hir Waris Shah. The tales are interspersed with goldsmiths and weavers and ironsmiths who were higher placed artisans than the cobblers, carpenters and leather curers who accompany the hero on his journey but refuse to be part of the confrontation with the king or the ruler. In these folktales, there is much defiance of village elders, caste, religion and tribe which Khan reads back into the dismal conditions under which most villagers lived in medieval India, particularly craftsmen under Turkish Sultans. Their situation in the Punjab - notably Multan, Lahore and Delhi - improved under the Mughals who promoted material culture but again they were caught in the internecine wars between the Sikhs and the Mughals and were either taken captive for forced assignments or

forced to flee their home towns for safety. Under British Raj the suffering of artisans increased with the overwhelming taxation of village produce, houses, cattle and small landholdings. At such times, there is an appearance in Punjabi folktales of the *jogi* or fakir as their friend who could invoke supernatural power to help them. Khan reads this as part of the institutionalization of Sufism in the Punjab around the twelfth century when some Sufis were practicing calligraphers, musicians or carpenters or else spiritual patrons of craft guilds, but it was only by the early twentieth century that neo-Sufism, a more militant version, started asserting itself as a moral power of the Muslim peoples all over the colonized world.

He then examines how, post the 1857 rebellion, the British tried to reduce this influence over the artisans and enlist them in developing a capitalist market by re-educating them along “scientific” lines in craft schools and by organizing industrial exhibitions to engage local and European traders. They also put together museums to educate the natives about their own culture and history. The man who led this mission in Lahore in 1875 was J L Kipling, the first principal of the Mayo School of Industrial Arts, who devised and revised its curriculum to inculcate what the British considered scientific, rational, and theoretical education of artisans; familiarizing craftsmen for three years in theory and two years in practical application, drawing from life and not the imagination, and learning disciplines like geometry. It is in the failure of this “modernizing” project that Khan reads local resistance. Although the Mayo School was open to all and free of tuition fees, it had limited enrollment and a very high drop-out rate, so that Kipling had to revise the curriculum several times till he eventually gave up on teaching (European) theory and (European) drawing lessons and relented even on imparting an English form of literacy to students familiar with the oral forms of instruction. Craftsmen, not all of whom were Muslim, had their guilds and drew upon their own repertoire of knowledge with master craftsmen; they had several drawing disciplines too, that the British did not take the trouble to learn. To be fair, the guilds had rules of silence and secrecy and resisted a transmission to others, knowledge that was never transferred to the British who then relied on the Mayo School’s “illiterate artisans” (p.83) to quote Kipling for the Queen’s commissioned work.

Kipling also helped organize industrial exhibitions where craft was displayed to the elite likely to commission work and for purposes of promoting trade and export. The exhibitions were hastily curated, crowded and disorganized and drew a mixed response from the jurors who comprised local and European elite. Craftsmen resisted the collection of samples from villages because district officers were generally employed to assess and claim taxes; they also distrusted the intention of the exhibitors who wished to divine their trade secrets. Instead, they preferred the local *mela* at the shrines where they took less expensive items but displayed them with pride as the work of an individual family or clan producing it. For the industrial exhibition, they sent in items of piece work made especially for the exporters that were highly priced and were neither representative of village craft nor lucrative for European traders. In all, the industrial exhibitions were not as successful as the British had hoped and it took Baden-Powell four years to

compile a document of the first one, examining its problems.

As Khan reads it, the confrontation between native forms of knowledge and colonial modernity was made most explicit in the “stone book” or monumental architecture the British wished to leave behind as a legacy of Victorian India. The eclecticism that Kipling devised for the Punjab and called the Indo-Sarcenic style drew massive criticism from Raj officers for its impracticality and grotesqueness. The style was soon discontinued by the British and left no followers among native nawabs except for some buildings commissioned in Bahawalpur. The fate of the Lahore Museum was no better: the British had thought it would impress upon the locals the superior knowledge and aesthetics of the rulers but instead it was taken by the natives as an *ajab ghar* (museum) meant for entertainment. As for local artisans, they continued to consult the shrines for copying construction design and decorative embellishments.

The Mayo School appeared to have been ill conceived as a craft school because, despite the best efforts of educators like J. L. Kipling and others, the Raj gave up on the project and by the beginning of the twentieth century, in 1910, it was turned into a school of Fine Arts like the ones in Bombay and Calcutta. Khan thereby establishes that the British project of trying to change cultural practices with what they considered superior aesthetic sensibility failed dramatically, despite their political power, and they could not even garner the support of the local elites in this venture. The artisans remained tied to their personal *murshid* or spiritual teacher and to their master craftsman, the locus of their meaning and learning, while their work was far from a secular project to them meant solely for material exchange.

In this, Khan’s work is a bold and rare people’s history pieced together on the basis of oral accounts as well as documentary research instead of being a rehearsal of the political history of leaders and their intentions that we have been subjected to by way of reading the colonial period. Evidence to support such difficult positions is hard to come by, and there are some weak links in the construction of this generally compelling argument that is built on one case study and some folktales. One reason for why the argument appears syncopated is the removal of earlier chapters by the otherwise renowned academic publishing house which deprives the reader of the theoretical underpinning and methodological research of the author. The other reason may be that there is very little earlier scholarship to draw upon and the first part of the argument about the role of Sufis and shrines in the construction of Muslim identity is analyzed in broad sweeps and not looked at closely to substantiate claims or to explain the anomalies. For the fact remains that to date shrines remain open to people of all faiths and the Sikh holy book, Granth Sahib, contains the *kalām* of Sufi poets from an earlier period. The Chisti Sufis’ involvement in identitarian politics in the late nineteenth century and in the partition of India is a contentious subject worthy of further debate that Hussain Ahmad Khan’s work has hopefully opened.

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Claire Chambers, *Britain through Muslim Eyes: Literary Representations, 1780-1988*, (Palgrave Macmillan: Houndmills, Basingstoke, 2015) vii+267 pp. ISBN 978-0-230-25259-2 (hb) \$95.00, ISBN 978-1-137-31531-1 (ebk) \$69.99.

Muslims and Islam have been subject to the Orientalist gaze, objectified and stereotyped as the archetypical 'other' to modernity and progress. They have been subject to hostile and negative scrutiny and portrayed in exotic and erotic fantasies interlaced with racism. This book highlights Muslim literature that turns the gaze on Britain and how Muslim travellers through the ages saw and represented Britain in their literary imagination. Taking a long view of the Muslim presence in Britain is not necessarily novel but analysing its literary representation highlights a new area.

The book is in two parts: the first deals with travelling autobiographies from the eighteenth century to the twentieth century and the second deals with Muslim fiction from the nineteenth century up to the 1980s. Muslim authors are from an assorted background ranging from South and South East Asia, Arabia, Iran and North and East Africa, with divergent experiences. Their interests are not overdetermined by colonialism and the rise of the West but concerned with establishing connections and affiliations. The writers show the permeability of borders through their awareness of pre-colonial trading connections that connect different parts of the Muslim world and the Muslim world with the West as well as contestation within the category Muslim. However most of the authors are from the elites - either aristocrats (or they have such pretensions) or students from upper middle class families who return. It is only from the 1960s that we see authors who write about their experience of growing up in Britain as immigrants and provide a different take.

Collectively this literature has parallels with the literature of other nascent post-colonial societies. The themes of hybridity, intermingling and impurity, racism and miscegenation run through the book and the Muslim authors explored these issues with dexterity and wit with little respect for religious purity and absolutism. Chamber's continual reference to these themes through the book is to remind the reader that this kind of literature preceded Salman Rushdie who some insist was year zero for Muslim literary production.

For the *Journal's* readership it is Tariq Mehmood's novel *Hand on the Son* and Abdullah Hussein's *Waapsi ka safar (The Journey Back)* that focus on working class Pakistanis, nearly all Punjabis, in Birmingham and Bradford in the 1970s and 1980s that would be most germane. This is the period when Gurdip Singh Chaggar's racist murder triggered youth protests in Southall, which inspired the anti-racist movement in Bradford culminating in the cause celebre of the Bradford 12. The authors explore the common themes of the legality of immigration status, the 'myth of return', and shocking levels of racism and jingoism, which superficially united a diverse group of people who settled in post-war Britain, many from the Punjab, into Black and Asian resistance movements.

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