Precolonial and Colonial Punjab: Society, Economy, Politics, and Culture: Essays for Indu Banga by Reeta Grewal; Sheena Pall

Review by: Neeti Nair


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with the *maidani log* (plains people). Understanding the conditions under which particular identities are chosen, and with what consequences, remains a great puzzle.

*Ecological Nationalisms* is beautifully produced, rich in content, and important; it is genuinely South Asian in scope and both international and interdisciplinary in execution. It could use maps and a concluding chapter. There is a bit much of the ideational and constructivist in the introduction—itself a “lived hybridity”—with echoes in some chapters. But in the main, the empirical and analytical contributions point toward a very exciting and unresolved question: the limits of discourses and the interpenetration of ideas and interests in nature. To what extent are ideological framings derivative of interests, and thus epiphenomenal, and to what extent do framings constitute the grounds for recognition of interests themselves? Under what conditions does the strategic fluidity of identities reach limits imposed by interests too compelling to ignore?

**Ronald J. Herring**

*Cornell University*


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The imminent retirement of historian Indu Banga was the catalyst for this set of essays on Punjab. The twenty-one essays in this volume are divided into two sections, titled simply “Pre-colonial” and “Colonial.” Although the individual contributions are rich in empirical detail on subjects as diverse as changing emphases in literature, techniques of agrarian production, law, administration, the treatment of epidemics, and the position of women, the introduction does a poor job of laying out the main themes and analyzing the points at which the essays intersect or differ and contribute to the history of the region. The range of subjects covered in each essay makes a thorough analysis quite impossible. These details struck me as particularly worthy of note.

The section on precolonial Punjab opens with an essay by B. D. Chattopadhyaya, who argues for an approach that co-relates literary with archaeological evidence in order to reconsider the dynamic relationship between the plains and hills of the Punjab and the habitations of the Ganga basin. In “Jatts in Medieval Punjab,” Irfan Habib suggests that the Jatts migrated from Sind into southern Punjab and thereafter into the region of Lahore between the eleventh and sixteenth centuries: Their adoption of the Persian wheel was central to their transformation from a pastoral to an agrarian people.

Chetan Singh contests Habib’s speculation that the Persian wheel was more efficient in deep well irrigation by showing that the distribution of *charas* (a rope and leather bucket system) was more wide ranging; it was cheaper and more efficiently utilized in areas where the subsoil water was at a distance. Moreover, stray
references to the use of the Persian wheel in medieval sources relate to areas where there was fairly abundant water—through rainfall, numerous channels, and in the subsoil. In line with Indu Banga’s own considerations on paying attention to the multiplicity of causes (see “Historical Causation,” in Causation in History, ed. Indu Banga [New Delhi: Manohar, 1992], 26), Singh concludes that the factors that caused the Jatts to sedentarize were “perhaps, more deep-rooted and wide-ranging than the availability of the Persian wheel in certain parts of the Punjab and Sindh” (p. 89).

Next, J. S. Grewal draws on a rich repertoire of sources to reconstruct the townscape of Batala from its foundations in the mid-fifteenth century to its life as an administrative unit under Mughal, Sikh, and British rule. Grewal moves almost seamlessly from a discussion of Batala’s prominent jurists, saints, and administrators to its endowments and places of worship. Evocative segments on the shifting contours of Punjab’s many river channels in both Habib’s and Singh’s essays, and the placement of numerous walled localities, fortresses, mosques, tombs, temples in Batala described by Grewal, would have been a more pleasurable to read if they were accompanied by maps. Shireen Moosvi’s findings on the contribution of the Punjab to the economy of Mughal India rely on typical sources such as Abul Fazl’s Ain-i-Akbari alongside histories produced by Hindus like Brij Narain and Sujan Rai.

This section concludes with three pieces on literature and culture. Naresh Jain reads the different attributes of the female protagonist Sahiban in many versions of the popular Punjabi legend Mirza Sahiban and concludes that the “Sita syndrome is very much alive” (p. 169). Daljinder Singh Johal claims to analyze specific pieces of var (heroic poetry) in medieval Punjab but makes the quite startling generalization that “feelings of insecurity and frustration among the Muslims on account of their lost glory and power can well be seen in the poets like Waris Shah and Bullhe Shah during the eighteenth century” (p. 178). His token note of a “common consciousness of Punjabi identity” (p. 190) sits uneasily beside his earlier pronouncements on communal polarization. Finally, Jean-Marie Lafont tracks the influence of the French in the court of Ranjit Singh. Although she is attentive to nuances in her treatment of the Sikhs, she is quite careless in condemning “eight centuries of Muslim domination in Punjab to their day-to-day ‘colonial policy and ‘dark’ side” (p. 197). This is glaring in a volume that includes the careful scholarship of J. S. Grewal and Shireen Moosvi, both of whom dwell on the multiple kinds of relationships that coexisted in medieval Punjab.

The next section on colonial Punjab opens with Surya Kant’s excellent essay on the organization of administrative space in British Punjab and the many partitions that checkered the life of the province from 1858 onward. In her critique of the British methods of fighting the natives rather than the bacilli that caused epidemics, Kant fills in many of the details for the Punjab that would fit the broader argument made elsewhere by David Arnold. Harish Sharma provides a deft summary of diverse and changing customary laws with regard to inheritance by daughters, wives, and widows, followed by the different agricultural communities in colonial Punjab.
Gender is also the main focus of John Webster's critique of recent scholarship on women's history. Webster faults historians for focusing on the "perceivers" and neglecting the "perceived." Webster analyzes four different literary forms—the generalization, the anecdote, the short biography, and the analytical description—produced by the Church of England's Zenana Missionary Society to raise funds for their work among Indian women. In these, Webster finds evidence not only of "benevolent material imperialism" (p. 272) but also of Indian women's independent thinking and resistance to change being imposed on their access to education by Indian men. In conclusion, Webster refers to the "choices" that historians make and points out that "what is going to emerge from this process of inquiry is not a precise photograph but something more like an impressionistic painting of only some of the heightened aspects of some of the lives of the late nineteenth century" (pp. 284–85).

In two essays on agrarian change, Sukhwant Singh details the innovative capabilities of the peasant proprietor in colonial Punjab, and Himadri Banerjee tracks the rise in the number of agricultural laborers and attributes the shift from payment in-kind to cash to causes as wide-ranging as the expansion of the railways, the Kabul campaign in the late 1870s, and the opening of new canal works. Harish Puri notes the consequences of famine and overpopulation in some districts by following the journey of pioneer migrants to North America between 1905 and 1914. He alludes to the play and role of history, noting that Sikh community organizations condemned the Ghadar revolutionaries as apostates and helped the British in tracking them down: however, a decade later, these very revolutionaries were revered as Ghadari Babas and sources of inspiration for the next generation of Punjab's anticolonial revolutionaries.

K. L. Tuteja grounds his study of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in a wide-angled view of economic and political change in late colonial Punjab. His references to an "emerging communitarian consciousness" are tempered with a keen awareness that this consciousness also had a "real potential for the evolution of a nationalist perspective" (p. 384). Mark Juergensmeyer's article on Ad Dharm summarizes his book on the untouchable movement; it relies on oral history. On partition, Sukhdev Singh Sohal provides an able assessment of historiographic trends and events in the summer of 1947. However, his dismissal of the Transfer of Power volumes as embodying only an "imperialist perspective" jars with his reliance on The Mountbatten Papers. His conclusion that British and Indian politicians "could not anticipate the eventualities" (p. 422) is belied by the evidence proffered in his paper.

Like Johal's piece on var in the previous section, Tejwant Singh Gill uses the benefit of hindsight to associate select pieces of Punjabi literature with a linear history that laments the fall of the Sikh empire, accepts the benefits of colonial rule, and finally, launches a critique of colonialism from the 1930s onward. His claim that kissakars of the late nineteenth century catered to the "tastes of their respective religious communities" (p. 433) has been refuted by other historians of qisse literature, such as Christopher Shackle ("Beyond Turk and Hindu: Crossing the Boundaries in Indo-Muslim Romance," in Beyond Turk and

In conclusion, this book has a mass of good empirical data that needs to be theorized and properly situated within the key debates that animate the historiography of the Punjab and, more broadly, South Asia. This reviewer would also have preferred an interview with Indu Banga or an article summarizing her reflections on historical method or the teaching profession to the wordy curriculum vita that appears in the volume.

Neeti Nair
University of Virginia

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Balthazar Solvyns (1760–1824) was a Flemish artist from Antwerp who lived in Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) from 1791 to 1803. During this period, he produced a wide variety of etchings depicting everyday life in Bengal. About 250 of his etchings were first published in a limited edition in Kolkata in 1796, followed by a second printing in 1799. But as author Robert L. Hardgrave points out in his introduction (p. 9), Solvyns’s project was a financial failure, and in 1803 he left India for France, where he redid his etchings for a four-volume French edition titled Les Hindous that consisted of 288 plates. This, too, was a financial catastrophe for Solvyns because of the high cost of production and the general lack of interest among the reading population. However, the artist finally received recognition in 1814, when he returned to Antwerp and was appointed captain of the port by William I.

In the first four chapters (pp. 12–126) of this lavishly illustrated book, Hardgrave explores the life and work of Solvyns. He deftly explores Solvyns’s journey from Antwerp to Kolkata in the first chapter, then follows the artist on his return journey to Europe in chapter 2. Chapter 3 looks at Solvyns’s aesthetic and academic achievements, while chapter 4 provides an overall evaluation of the work under investigation. Hardgrave’s scholarship is meticulous and his footnotes are extensive, but the real beauty of this volume is the prints themselves, which form the bulk of the book in part II.

The images are divided into thematic sections, beginning with “Castes and Occupations,” followed by “Dresses of Hindu Men and Hindu Women,” “Servants of the European Household in Calcutta (Kolkata),” “Fakirs and Religious Mendicants,” “Musical Instruments,” “Festivals and Ceremonies,” “Sati,” “Modes of Smoking,” “Modes of Conveyance,” “Boats of Bengal,” “Natural