

Rajmohan Gandhi's

Punjab: A History from Aurangzeb to Mountbatten (New Delhi: Aleph, September 2013)

Excerpts from reviews

Amandeep Sandhu, *New Indian Express*, 29 September 2013

If history is to be relevant, it has to mirror and reflect and expand our consciousness. Rajmohan Gandhi's *Punjab: A History from Aurangzeb to Mountbatten* is the first book in 125 years to chronicle the undivided Punjab from Attock to Delhi.

Part of the book's charm lies in bringing places like Sirhind, Sarai Rohilla, Ferozepur, Multan, Kangara Hills and many more to life while portraying the intrigues in the power circles.

Rajmohan does not suggest a radical new way to understand and interpret Punjab's history. Yet, for its clear, easy-to-read, chronology of events, the book should be read by all who seek insights into the genesis of the modern, secular, independent, Indian state.

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Belu Maheshwari, *Sunday Tribune*, 29 September 2013

Fills a big gap in the writing of Punjabi history.

Delves deep into the political and social structure

Lucid, written in a simple language

The march of time is very well chronicled

Gandhi is a story teller who has kept the interest of the historian as well as the lay person in mind

The Punjabi psyche has been studied and analyzed deftly

The British rule has been dealt with dispassionately

Covers a wide spectrum and gives an insight into roughly thousand years of Punjab's history

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Bhupesh Bhandari, *Business Standard*, New Delhi, 19 September 2013

Now, the history of Punjab has been told and retold so many times, in short stories and in novels; so there is little that Rajmohan Gandhi could have uncovered. Even so, his book is a treasure trove of information. That's because Mr Gandhi has infused the narrative with fresh perspective.

For me, the biggest takeaway from Mr Gandhi's book is the games the British played in the hundred or so years leading up to Partition to ensure that the three large communities of Punjab - Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs, in order of their numerical strength - never got together: *divide et impera*.

In the final analysis, is Punjab a story of communal harmony or discord? Actually, it's both. Mahatma Gandhi had famously said that the people of Punjab - Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs - breathed the same air, drank the same water, spoke the same language and drew sustenance from the same soil; so where was the scope for any difference? In the villages of united Punjab, there was some sort of equilibrium among the various communities. There might have been differences, but nothing that could lead to mayhem. Yet, the communal discord that led to Partition is also a brutal fact that cannot be swept under the carpet. There was loss of life and property on both sides. Still, amid all the madness, there were stories of great humanity, or *insaniyat*, in the author's words. He has collected several such stories towards the end of the book, which will make you understand the wisdom of the author's grandfather.

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Rahul Singh in *Education World*

<http://educationworldonline.net/index.php/page-article-choice-more-id-3818>

“evocative, epic account”

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Atul K Thakur in *Sunday Post*, 13 October 2013

<http://www.millenniumpost.in/NewsContent.aspx?NID=40681>

Gandhi's love for history and research is exemplary...

[The book] reads well... etches in detail, throwing light on the history of undivided Punjab... brings out the untold story of the Punjabi Muslims...

Gandhi's truthful interpretation of history will open a new chapter of understanding—both India and Pakistan need it urgently.

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Udalak Mukherjee in *The Telegraph*, 18 Oct 2013

A historian, much like a sleuth, not only punctures myths but also pursues truth. Gandhi, too, embarks on addressing some crucial, but unanswered, questions. Why did Punjab's Muslim majority, for instance, fail to take up the mantle of political leadership after the exit of the Mughals, a phenomenon that helped the Sikhs carve out their own kingdom?...

The field of Gandhi's enquiry is vast and complicated. But what remains remarkable is his deft control on the narrative. He illuminates the chaotic developments in post-Mughal Punjab without ignoring a single strand that had a bearing on the times. Moreover, even though his account remains a political history of undivided Punjab, Gandhi remains alert to the need to view art and culture as useful resources in deciphering political developments...

Undivided Punjab and the ethos of *punjabiyaat* have been confined to the realm of memory. But Gandhi's plea to examine their legacies ought to be heeded for the sake of lasting peace.

Irfan Habib in *Indian Express*, 19 Oct 2013

Rajmohan Gandhi brings to this history... his usually competent scholarship and writing skill, as well as fairmindedness of a high order. He combines very wide reading with the capacity to use all kinds of minor but interesting details to draw the big picture, and by this device, keeps the reader's attention constantly engaged...

Gandhi's character sketches of the representatives of the British Raj after the annexation of the Punjab are obviously products of massive information well digested...

Gandhi tells, in a most convincing fashion, the story of how under the aegis of the Raj, three separate communal camps, Muslim, Hindu and Sikh, began to form in the Punjab in the late 19th century, and how this seemed to overwhelm or at least restrain the urge for freedom from foreign rule at so many crucial moments down to the denouement of 1947...

Gandhi describes with impeccable honesty what so rapidly led to the holocaust of 1947 on both sides of the divided Punjab...

Everyone should read the latter part of Chapter 9 to understand what inhumanity means. But we have also to read the subsequent chapter on *Insaniyat*, Urdu for 'humanity', where we read of acts by ordinary individuals performed to save others.

Robin Gupta in *The Hindu Business Line*, 24 October 2013

Wielding a powerfully sensitive pen, Rajmohan Gandhi leads us across the snow-capped mountain-kingdom of Afghanistan, through the Khyber Pass and Kandahar, to the Mughal palaces in the Red Fort at Delhi, covering, in the process, the vast province of Punjab — seven times larger than the present-day Indian Punjab. This study fills a gaping void...

Gandhi systematically leads the reader through the serpentine corridors of 18th- and 19th-century Punjab, with his dazzling pen portraits of hundreds of persons: Banda Bahadur, Adina Beg, Moglani Begum, Hayat Khan of Wah...

Rajmohan Gandhi's masterpiece is recommended as compulsory reading for students of history and civil servants, particularly those serving in Punjab and Haryana. The book rekindles memories of undivided Punjab and of my mother, who at 90 told me she was a Pakistani, as her home was in Lahore.

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Outlook, 28 Oct 2013

[This] history of Punjab hastens through the Mughals, ponders over its rich heritage and the Sikh empire, examines the colonials and lingers over its bloody division.

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Hartosh Singh Bal in *Open*, 7 September 2013

the book needs to be read... as an answer to the question that Gandhi poses at the beginning: why was Punjab's Muslim majority unable to fill the power vacuum when, post Aurangzeb, the Mughal Empire retreated from the province?

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