**Book Reviews**


The political boundary of the region given the name of Punjab has been changing with time. However, the geographical area precisely denoted by this Persian name is the triangular plain, bordered on the north by Himalayan foothills, on the west by the river Indus, and its south-eastern boundary marked roughly by an uneven line from a point near Karnal where the river Yamuna takes a southeast turn, up to the place where the Indus meets the confluence of the Punjab rivers.

Due to its geographical location on the only land entrance to the Indian sub-continent, this exceedingly fertile piece of land has been trampled again and again by the invaders and migrants from the northwest since pre-historic times. One consequence of the invasions was almost complete obliteration of its ancient material remains. But for some archaeological mounds (mostly unexcavated systematically so far and now vanishing), and Hindu Shahiya temples (8th-9th century) of the Salt Range, virtually no monument in this region, dating earlier than the thirteenth century, survives. A comprehensive history of the art and architecture of the region from the thirteenth century onwards too, is still to be written. One impediment in the way of the study of the arts of Punjab is its division into Indian Punjab (East Punjab) and Pakistani Punjab (West Punjab) in 1947. Due to the uneasy political relations of the governments of India and Pakistan, no unified study covering the arts of both parts, requiring actual field work, has materialized to date. For the time being, the readers have to remain satisfied with unconnected studies. The book under review is one of such recent works. It is a revised version of a PhD dissertation on the Sufi-artisan relationship and colonial art
institutions by the research scholar Hussain Ahmad Khan, under the supervision of the cultural historian Maurizio Peleggi, an expert on visual and material culture of Thailand, submitted at the National University of Singapore.

In Punjab, the nineteenth century commenced with an abrupt political change. Now the Sikhs became the new rulers, marking an end to the six centuries of Muslim Sultans and Emperors. It must have caused the Punjabi Muslims a psychological jolt. But it must also have given a respite to the Punjabis after decades of turmoil due to a power vacuum in the region. The next four decades, up to the death of Ranjit Singh were comparatively peaceful. After that there was a decade-long interregnum of disturbances till 1849, at the end of which the region was annexed by the British. As far as possible the British did not interfere in the religious or social life of the people of Punjab. The Punjabis too responded positively and consequently, during the Mutiny of 1857 they did not show any enthusiasm against their new sovereigns.

The present study is spread over four chapters, preceded by an “Introduction,” and ending with a “Conclusion.” Neither the “Introduction” nor the “Conclusion” bears chapter number.

In the very first paragraph of the “Introduction” the author describes his hypothesis as follows:

Both Sufis and colonial officials viewed local artisanal practices as a means to propagate their respective ideologies. Due to their historically developed relationship with Punjabi artisans, the Sufis were effectively able to engage the former in disseminating mystic ideas and promote a sense of ‘Muslim identity’ through 
\textit{khanqah} (hospices), shrine architecture and \textit{mela} (festivals). Colonial art institutions (such as art schools, exhibitions and museums), in contrast, struggled to attract the local artisans, and this failure significantly impaired the objectives of British administrators to localize new approaches to art and architecture based on ideas largely borrowed from England (p. 1).

The reviewer is unable to trace any common link between the activities of Sufis and colonial officials. These groups worked independently, and with entirely different aims and objectives in view. Placing the two as competitors is hardly justified.

In the “Introduction,” the author also sets down his basic assumptions about the most frequently used basic terms like ‘Sufism’, ‘Punjab’, ‘artisans’ etc.

The terms “Sufism” and “Sufis” are used very loosely by commoners as well as scholars. The present so-called Sufis have little to do with the classical
“Sufism.” The term “Sufi” covers towering personalities like Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (1207–73) as well as many swindlers, and sometimes even the imaginary personages who never existed at all. And such abysmal scenario is not just recent but as old as the Sufism itself. In the words of Dr. Riazul Islam, the author of Sufism in South Asia the decay of “Sufism has been wailed over since the tenth century, the period which marked its rise and growth.”

Sayyid ‘Ali Hujwiri, the author of Kashf al-Mahjûb, the eleventh century Persian treatise on Sufism, deplores that the darvishes (Muslim mystics) had made poverty “a means of enriching themselves.” About two centuries later, Mawlānā Rūmī, himself a renowned Sufi, observes: az hāzārān andkī zīn sūftand, bākiyân dar daulat-i au mi ziyand (But) of these Sufis there are (only) a few among thousands; the rest are living in (under the protection of) his (the perfect Sufi’s spiritual) empire.

The accounts about religious figures are usually hagiographical in nature, often exaggerated. So to consider the Sufis as agents to influence architecture does not appeal to reason.

From among the various Sufi silsilahs, Khan takes into account only the Chishtiyyah silsilah as if the artisans showed some special preference for the Sufis of this silsilah. In fact, the nineteenth century artisans of Punjab may not have been able to differentiate between various silsilahs. For common devotees a Sufi was just a religious figure to whichever silsilah he may belong. Mostly it was a matter of geographical proximity. In the words of Riazul Islam again, “The fervent commoner could understand neither ma’rifat (theosophy), nor wujudiyat (doctrine of Unity of Being), nor indeed the higher ideals of Sufism, but he saw in the sheikh someone whom he could revere, love, remember, and think about, and indeed appeal to for help and security.”

The reviewer wonders if even most of the Sufis themselves would have been able to tell how the Chishtiyyah silsilah differed from the Suhrawardiyyah or any other silsilah. Therefore the very postulation of “shrine-based communities” assumed by the author is ambiguous.

The author declares the geographical area covering western Punjab along with the Delhi division as his main focus He also takes into consideration the erstwhile princely state of Bahawalpur “because it shared the tradition of Sufism with the adjoining [sic.] Multan and Derajat areas of Punjab” (p. 4).

---

4. Islam, Sufism in South Asia, 424.
Regarding the term “artisans,” although the author claims to treat it “as a cultural category... involving hundreds of very low-status village artisans such as cobblers, leather workers, blacksmiths and also relatively privileged workers, such as goldsmiths, weavers and calligraphers” (p. 7), in the study he mainly deals with the artisans engaged in building or its decoration.

The main body of the study is divided into four parts, each the subject of a separate chapter.

The first chapter “Folktales and the Sufi-Artisan Relationship in Punjab (C. 1300–1800)” opens with explaining the significance of folktales which “express the artisans’ mentalité in relation to their historical experiences” (p. 13). Then he proceeds with briefly narrating the folktale of Raja Risalu, son of Sahalban, which in its early part bears resemblance to the folktale of Puran Bhagat. There is not much in the tale from which to deduce that specifically (marginal) artisans were afraid of the rājā and the others were not. Then, the author describes at length the condition of artisans in Punjab and their relationship to the Sufis during the fourteenth to eighteenth century.

Numerous statements made by the author in this chapter are erroneous. Here are some of these: He writes that one of the important trade routes in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries connected Delhi to Afghanistan through Multan and Lahore (p. 17). Actually during this period Delhi was connected to Afghanistan through Ajudhan (Pakpattan) and Multan only as during the thirteenth century Lahore had been devastated and its entire population slaughtered by the Mongol invaders. The Moroccan Muslim traveller Ibn Baṭṭūṭah in 1333–34, and the Turco-Mangol conqueror Tīmūr in 1398, both took this route.

Then, the author states that “The Mughal emperor Akbar introduced the musabdarī (sic.) system in the second half of the seventeenth century” (p. 17). As is known Akbar had introduced the system in 1574–75. During the second half of the seventeenth century, Shāhjahān (upto 1658) and Aurangzeb were the reigning emperors. The author adds that a munsābdār “had the power to expel local peasants or elites who had lived in villages for centuries.....” (p. 17) which is not correct. Ousting the peasants went against the interests of the state. The author ends the paragraph with the comment that the munsābdārī system “increased the exploitation of peasants and artisans” (p. 18). In fact the exploitation of peasants and artisans increased when there was a crisis in the munsābdārī/jāgīrdārī system during the latter part of the reign of Aurangzeb. Otherwise, normal exploitation of peasants and artisans has always been a part of the monarchical system the world over in pre-modern times.
The author writes further that “In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Punjabi artisans suffered because of constant wars between the Sikhs and the Mughals (p. 19).” I do not know of any war between the Sikhs and the Mughals in the nineteenth century.

At another place, the author declares that the artisans and traders “copied Persian designs in their crafts to revere the country [Persia] of their Sufi-master” [Mir Sayyid Ali Hamdani (b. 1314)] (p. 22). Actually, Persian culture was the fountainhead of Muslim arts in South Asia and was mostly the result of physical migration of Persian artists and artisans.

Writing about a calligrapher Sheikh Husain Ahmad Chishti (d. 1587/8), the author adds that he “was trained in mysticism by a Punjabi Sufi, Sheikh Aman, from Panipat. Husain either supervised or himself completed all the calligraphic work on the façade of the buland darwaza (high door) of a semi-octagonal structure at Fatehpur Sikri” (p. 23). The author mentions S.A.A. Rizvi and V.J.A. Flynn’s book *Fathpur-Sikri* [Bombay: Taraporevala, 1975, p. 86] as his source for the information. But Rizvi and Flynn give the name as “Husain bin Ahmad Chishti” and mention that he was an important disciple of Shaikh Salim [Chishti], and not that of Sheikh Aman of Panipat. Also the expression “the façade of the buland darwaza (high door) of a semi-octagonal structure at Fatehpur Sikri” is confusing. The *Buland Darwazah* is the southern gateway of the Jāmī’ Mosque at Fatehpur Sikri.

In the same chapter, the author writes that the Sufis gave protection to escaped convicts and “wanted persons” which usually annoyed the village elites. He states further that “Medieval kings did not intervene to recapture their prisoners from the khanqah for fear of the curse of the Sufis, which increased the reverence Sufis enjoyed among the local communities” (p. 26). If it had been so, the khānqāhs would have become the dens of “escaped convicts” and “wanted persons.” Medieval kings practiced *realpolitik* and did not hesitate even to punish the Sufis themselves, if found guilty. We have the example of the Sufi Siddi Maula of Delhi whom Sultan Jalāl al-Dīn Khaljī (r. 1290–96) doubted of treason. He got the Maula crushed under the feet of an elephant. Similarly, Emperor Jahāngīr on learning that Shaykh Nizām Thanesārī had encouraged the rebel prince Sultan Khusrau, ordered the Shaikh to get vanished from Hindustān and proceed on a pilgrimage to Mecca.

The author also states: “The Mughals patronized Sufis in a number of ways, which involved milk or *awqaf* (land grants), *inams* or *madad-i-mash"

---

(grant of revenue of particular villages) and wazifab or stipend in the form of cash from the treasury. [Gregory C.] Kozlowaski suggests that madad-i-maash enabled mediaeval kingdoms in India to encourage the settlement of Sufis from Khorasan, Central Asia and Arabia, who came to India because of Mongol invasions” (p. 29). The time difference between the last Mongol attack and the founding of the Mughal empire is that of two full centuries. How could the Mughals have encouraged the Sufis “who came to India because of Mongol invasions”?

The anecdote related to the artisans working on the Bâdshâhî Mosque of Lahore who according to the author, built four walls of a mosque in a single night and for the fear of the emperor Aurangzeb, left the dome unfinished at daylight (p. 30), is imaginary. There are innumerable incomplete or damaged historical buildings which people believe to have been built by ghosts in a single night.

The second chapter of the book delves upon the theme “Muslim Identity and the Sufi Shriners in Nineteenth Century Punjab.” In this chapter, the only building that the author takes up for discussion is the shrine of Khwâjah Sulaymân Taunsavî (died 1850) at Taunsa, about hundred kilometres northwest of Multan, in Dera Ghazi Khan district of West Punjab. According to the author, the construction of the shrine began in 1840s and was probably completed in the 1880s (p. 37). He gives no architectural detail of the shrine complex but for a picture of its façade and a few details of its decoration. The reader does not get any idea of like what the shrine is. Instead, the author states vaguely: “Being a Chishti Sufi, Taunsavi was supposed to select the late-Mughal style for his shrine by following the architecture of the shrines of prominent Chishti masters such as Moinuddin Chishti Ajmeri (Ajmer) and Nizamuddin Awliya (Delhi)… Taunsavi preferred a Multani style, however, which was borrowed from Central Asia, expressing his association with the Persian tradition” (p. 39).

Why was it incumbent upon Taunsvî as a Chishti Sufi, to follow the late-Mughal style? Did all other Chishti shrines stylistically follow the shrine of Mu‘in al-Dîn Chishti (d. 1236) at Ajmer or the shrine of Nizâm al-Dîn Awliyâ‘ (d. 1325) at Delhi. Moreover, these two shrines are not very old structures but like most of the other living shrines, rebuilt or at least in a much renovated condition. The Multani style preferred by the Taunsvî Sufi was a local development and not borrowed from Central Asia. The reviewer has not come a single building in Central Asia which bears even a remote resemblance to the Multan tombs. Even if the Multan style was borrowed from Central Asia, as the author would like us to believe, how did it express the association with the Persian tradition?
Nur Ahmad Chishti, the author of *Taḥqīqāt-i Chishti*, is introduced as belonging “to a prominent family of *ulema*, who tutored the nobles of Lahore such as Ranjeet Singh . . . (p. 47).” Neither was Ranjeet Singh a noble of Lahore nor was he ever tutored by anyone. He was illiterate.

The British did completely destroy the buildings within a radius of 448 yards outside the [Delhi] fort not aiming at the sacrilege of religious buildings but just to clear the periphery of the fort so that it would be easy to control the fort in case of any Mutiny-like urgency in future.

Writing about the caravansarai at Sultanpur Lodhi (East Punjab), the author quotes Alexander Cunningham, as follows: “the Badshahi *serai* is a large enclosure [...] a very unusual arrangement in a Muhammadan building. I have a strong suspicion, therefore, that the walls of the *serai* must have been built on the foundations of an old Buddhist monastery.” Here the author has omitted the main basis of Cunningham’s suspicion which was that “the walls are 15 ½° out of the meridian” which “was a common practice with both Buddhists and Brahmanists in ancient times to place their buildings about one nakshatra, or 13 ½° out of the meridian.”

The chapter ends with a description of festivals at Sufi shrines.

In contrast to the first two chapters, the author is on firmer grounds in the next two in which he deals with the colonial architecture and other arts. The third chapter “Artisans, Colonial Art Education and Architecture” opens with the definitions of the term “Culture.” The quintessence of the chapter is that the colonial officials tried to mold the local artisanal practices through art education but their theoretical assumptions emulated the British model which due to entirely different conditions of Punjab was doomed to fail.

The author proceeds systematically, first enumerating the individual attempts at reforming art education in India and then the establishment of the Mayo School of Arts [MSA] at Lahore, named after the Sixth Earl of Mayo, Richard Bourke, the governor-general of India, from 1869 to 1872. At home, in England, various architects favoured different styles, from neo-Gothic to purely industrial architecture. Historical eclecticism too was tried. Against these attempts J.L. Kipling, the Principal of the MSA planned to revive the decaying architectural tradition of Punjab, mainly through Bhai Ram Singh, a carpenter by caste, the most renowned product of the School. Ram Singh tried to evolve an architectural style borrowing elements from Hindu, Sikh and Islamic architecture. The outcome was an eclectic style which in an attempt to represent all local traditions and religious communities, in effect represented no historical tradition. Still the buildings he designed are not without charm.

---

Any change in existing order, whether for good or bad, is generally opposed. The colonial state’s new cultural policy in Punjab too did not go unchallenged. The fourth chapter “Discordant Voices: Colonial Exhibitions and the Lahore Museum” records the dissenting voices against the new cultural policy. But it is simplifying too much to think that the main aim of the new policy was “to train the individuals to think and conduct themselves in a particular way and foster a worldview that could ensure the collective obedience of the people in the colony, thus enabling them to perform their expected roles in the Empire” (p. 91).

Although Henry Cole, the brain behind the Great Exhibition of 1851 in the Hyde Park of London, in his report “laid emphasis on the involvement of local partners, especially societies for the promotion of local arts and manufacturing” the British concern behind organizing the exhibitions was purely commercial. The nineteenth century Europe showed great interest in the oriental arts, leading to a greater demand for its articles. The British authorities realized that “under British supervision artisans in Punjab could produce the best articles for exports” (p. 98). Even a cursory look at the two volume catalogue of the First Punjab Exhibition (1864) by B.H. Baden-Powell is enough to show the wide range of the economic products, manufactures and arts of the Punjab. Two decades later, in 1884, Journal of Indian Art (later renamed the Journal of Indian Art and Industry) too was launched with the same end in view.

Of course, some jurors of the First Punjab Exhibition did criticize the exhibits but the criticism was mainly due to their inability to “grasp a different world.” The jurors seldom agreed in their judgment of exhibits because they were brought up in a completely different art world in the visual arts of which the maximum fidelity to the reality had already been achieved. But in contrast the Indian artists in their works aimed at altogether different goals. It was conceptual in its approach. So it was not unnatural if the British jurors could not fully appreciate the Indian arts.

The author considers the Sufi melahs to be a local version of British exhibitions. His view that “the Sufi mela attracted the artisans as they invoked baraka, which reinforced the Sufi nomos; making, selling and purchasing specially-designed products were all motivated by a belief in baraka, which protected the economic interests of the artisans, cured their ailments and brought them closer to the Sufi communities” (p. 107) appears to be far-fetched. The artisans showed a preference for melabs, Sufi or secular, because there were not many alternate markets for their wares. Also it is doubtful if the high-class and expensive products included in the exhibitions would have found buyers in a melab. The author correctly observes that the Punjabi
The conclusion summarizes the results of the research elaborated in its four chapters.

Seven tables in the “Appendix” enumerate percentage of artisans in Punjab, number of Muslims Hindu, and Sikhs, among these groups, number of workers in different occupations, number of exhibits of each type in the 1881-82 Punjab exhibition, and the year-wise number of visitors to the Lahore Museum from the year 1869-70 up to the end of the century. The high percentage of Muslims among the artisan groups in Punjab, as high as 76.36% in 1931, indicates why even to this day the Hindus as well Sikhs in Punjab always credit high quality of craftsmanship in every field to Muslim artisans.

The detailed “Bibliography” adds to the value of the book. The “Index,” however, could have been more detailed.

Throughout the book, the author uses non-English words in singular even when he gives their equivalent English words in plural, like “khanqah (hospices)” (p. 1); “mela (festivals)” (p. 1); “the role of other Sufi silsila” (p. 2) etc. “Darbar” [darbār] is not a palace (p. 47) but can be translated as “court.”

The study is illustrated with two maps and twenty monochrome figures. A greater number and better quality illustrations would have made the study richer. The reproduction of maps is so small that nothing can be deciphered in them.

Subhash Parihar

*  *