



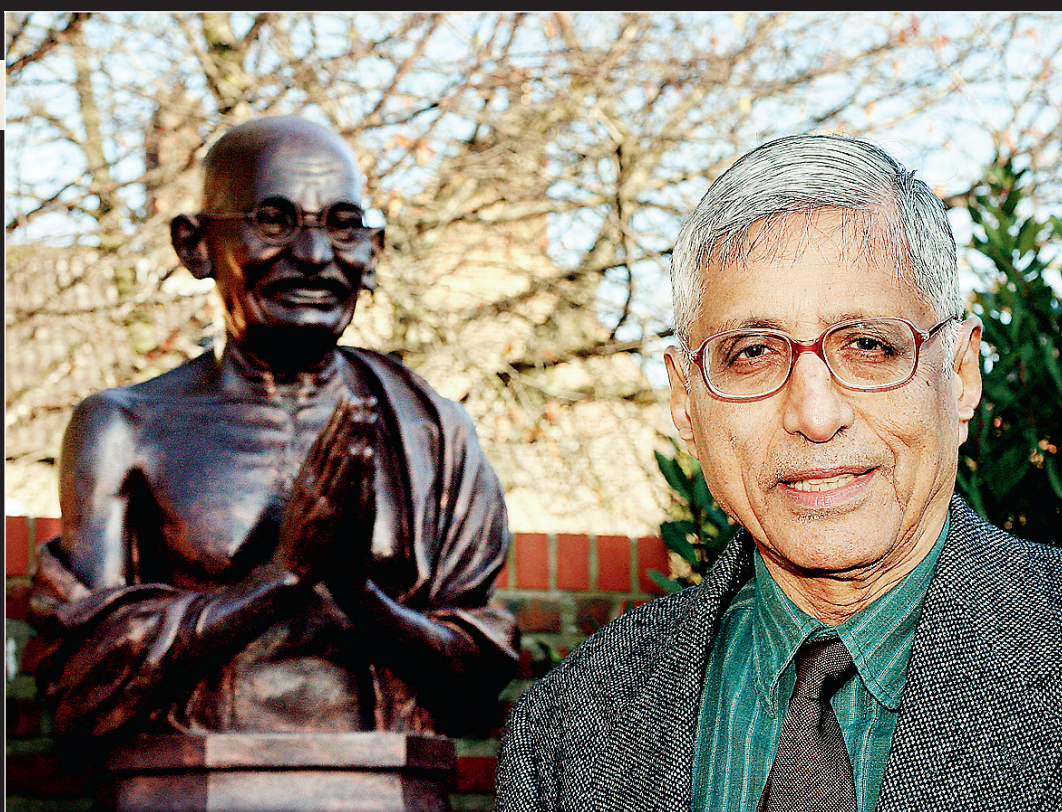
Lost pages of history

Rajmohan Gandhi in his latest book on Punjab's history highlights the culture of Punjabyat and the much-neglected story of Punjabi Muslims from the British era

In the Atelier

Rajmohan Gandhi

A research professor at the University of Urbana-Champaign, USA Gandhi is also a former member of the Rajya Sabha. Paternal grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, he is known for the biographies he has written on leaders of pre-independence India. He says he doesn't manage to read enough, but when reads Tolstoy, he loses himself while reading. Though belonging to the intellectual clique of the country, Gandhi says, "I don't mind what title people give me or if they ignore me altogether. But I am always most grateful to anyone who actually reads a book of mine."



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Punjab, known as the land of Sikhs in modern India, has a veiled past. Its people, who bore the brunt of the invaders, have been the least written about, and the history of Punjab Muslims is either residual or completely ignored. Author Rajmohan Gandhi's *Punjab — A History From Aurangzeb to Mountbatten* takes a look at this gap in the magnanimous history of the state.

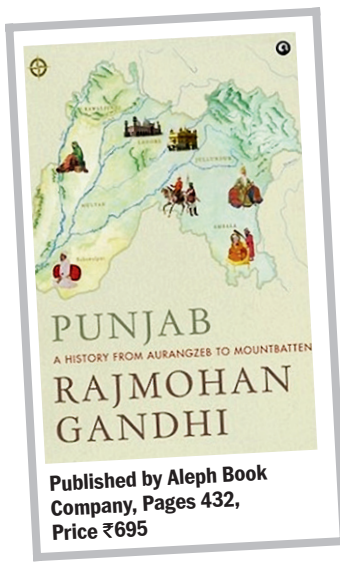
Why did you specifically choose to write about the era between Aurangzeb's death and the partition of Punjab?

Very few if any, histories of undivided Punjab have been written. Some splendid Sikh histories have been published, but these largely leave out Punjabi Muslims, who are three times the population of Punjabi Sikhs. Today's Pakistani Punjab has a population of 90 million, which exceeds the population of Iran or Turkey or Egypt. But even in Pakistan, no history of Punjab has been published recently. I address how when the Mughal Empire went in retreat (after Aurangzeb's death) it was the Sikh minority that gained control over Punjab, and not the Muslim majority. This question was

missing in existing literature, and I wanted to fill the gap.

Why is this aspect of Punjab's history essential now?

We cannot understand today's India or Pakistan without understanding the partition of Punjab and Bengal, and that we cannot understand without discovering earlier histories. I was conscious that the 1947 Partition, which has powerfully influenced the courses that India, Pakistan and Bangladesh have taken, was, above all, the partition of Punjab and Bengal. The



rest of the subcontinent was not cut up. Now, the task of recapturing Bengal's history is an essential one and I hope someone will take it up. I was fortunate enough to make an attempt in relation to Punjab.

You have mentioned how Urdu was the language spoken by Muslims and numerous Hindus before partition, but after it was accorded the status of a national language in Pakistan, many considered it Islamic.

Controversies regarding Urdu and Hindi had begun in northern India decades before Partition. To think that Urdu is an Islamic language is silly. India will lose nothing by giving enough space to one of the world's richest and sweetest languages. Incidentally, my book shows how in Punjab champions and opponents of Pakistan conducted their debate in vigorous Urdu.

During your research, how did you deal with contradicting accounts of history?

I worked on it for three years. I visited Lahore twice and spent time in its archives; interviewed Punjabis in India and Pakistan; I consulted gazetteers and other books (19th and 20th century books) in the library of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. I had to arrive at the likely-re-

ality. Apparent contradictions only show up the complexity in human interactions. There is richness in complexity. A history that separates people into the good and the bad is not history, it is a way of confirming our biases.

Iqbal, Amrita Pritam, Saadat Hasan Manto, Mohd Rafi and other talents emerged from Punjab. Have they got their due?

One of the great joys of writing this book was to discover the poetic, cultural and artistic richness of Punjab. Those people and others including Bulleh Shah and Waris Shah emerge from the book's pages with a realisation that people in different parts of the subcontinent will get to know more about such talented beacons. We deny precious things to ourselves when we remain ignorant about them.

Is it possible to revive Punjabyat in contemporary times?

Punjabi language, Punjabi poets (past and present), Punjabi food, trade and travel between the two Punjabs, events in third countries that bring together Indian and Pakistani Punjabis, exchange of school students and teachers will raise the structure of Punjabyat. Some politicians and others who want to retain bitter memories may wish to prevent or weaken or destroy the edifice.

Three Reads

BOOK: *The Mute Anklet*
AUTHOR: Radhika Nathan

Romance is not always a happy emotion. When an Englishman's daughter Uma Brooke, who is vociferous about her attachment to India is persuaded into a relationship with Captain Ashton Trevelyan of the British army, it isn't a fairy tale love-story. Set in 1790s India, against the backdrop of the Anglo-Mysore Wars, this captivating story is about relationships of love and the politics involved in it.

Published by Westland Ltd, Price ₹295, Pages 285



BOOK: *The Ekkos Clan*
AUTHOR: Sudipto Das

A tale of discovery and unraveling mystery. It's the story of grandmother Kubha and her grandson Kratu who belong to one of the traditional clans. Unaware of his grandmother's origins, Kratu goes in search to find the missing link with his two best friends Tista and Afsar across continents and discovers his an-

cestry. An interesting read for an afternoon.

Published by Niyogi Books, Price ₹350 Pages

BOOK: *Colours in the Spectrum*
AUTHOR: Jayant Swamy

What happens when an achiever, an eccentrically happy person confronts the biggest of failures in his life? Is there a chance for Karan to take a U-turn and reclaim his wonderful life? A story that is marred with emotions of our contemporary times, *Colours in the Spectrum* could be a close replica of the life of any young person living in a city like Bangalore.

Published by Leadstart Publishing Pvt Ltd, Price ₹245, Pages 320

