

Namibia. In the late 1970s leading policy-makers in the West expected Namibia to become independent at roughly the same time as Zimbabwe, though in the event Namibia's independence only followed a decade later. The regional context, including the impact on Rhodesia of the independence of Mozambique, is largely missing from White's account. Wondering how things might have been different, she plays with the idea of "Rhonesia", the name a white Rhodesian suggested for an independent Central African Federation in 1961 after Britain had led its major West African colonies to independence, but she has to concede that "Rhonesia" vanished without a trace.

Not a book for non-specialists, *Unpopular Sovereignty* includes much of value, drawing as it does a lot of original research. But there are also many highly questionable assertions and claims. Few, if any, specialists on Zimbabwe are likely to agree entirely with White's account of how the negotiations at Lancaster House played out in the last months of 1979 or, say, with her suggestion that in the last days of Rhodesia/Zimbabwe the army took over the state. I doubt that anyone will ever make the details of constitutional proposals that went nowhere more interesting, but readers are likely to remain puzzled about the significance of much of what she writes about. Her book ends with little more than a series of rhetorical questions, without an attempt to show how and to what extent, the culture and institutions of the UDI years do still influence contemporary Zimbabwe, as she claims they do. White's scholarly provocations are likely to remain controversial. It is to be hoped that they will stimulate ongoing debate.

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## ASIA & THE PACIFIC

Rajeev Kinra. *Writing Self, Writing Empire: Chandar Bhan Brahman and the Cultural World of the Indo-Persian State Secretary*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015. 394 pp. ISBN: 9780520286467. \$34.95.

Chandar Bhan Brahman belongs, alongside his fellow state secretaries Samuel Pepys, Jean-Baptiste Colbert and François-Paul de Lisola, among the great literary-bureaucratic figures of the early modern period. Yet one could be forgiven for failing to recognize Chandar Bhan, a Hindu *munshi* or state secretary serving in the upper echelons of Mughal bureaucracy in the seventeenth century. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* contains a single, and passing reference to Chandar Bhan. An entry on "Islamic Arts" positions him as a prose-writing Hindu associate of Dara Shukoh, the Mughal prince accused of apostasy and executed on the orders of his brother and the emperor, the much vilified Aurangzeb. Historians of the English East India Company and British expansionism in India are likely to have encountered extracts from Chandar Bhan's writings in Francis Gladwin's compendium *The Persian Moonshee*. A widely circulated text among British administrators in India in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, *The Persian Moonshee* does not, however, name Chandar Bhan as a source. Kinra's close textual analysis of the cultural and intellectual worlds occupied and produced by Chandar Bhan is thus much more than an effort to expand the still fledgling field of Mughal cultural studies. It is an act of recovery and exercise in postcolonial scholarship. Kinra peels back layers of accumulated memory and myth to question the identification

of a Hindu bureaucrat-scribe with a Mughal prince primarily regarded as a paragon of Hindu-Muslim harmony. Equally, Kinra contests colonial era dismissals of Chandar Bhan's prose as mere ornamentation not deserving of the historian's attention. The Chandar Bhan that emerges is a powerful figure in his own right, one who participated in and shaped Perso-Islamic textual and political cultures without abrogating his identity as a Hindu across the reigns of two emperors, Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb.

Kinra's study of the fashioning of a Mughal self, and by extension, the Mughal empire in the writings of Chandar Bhan is undeniably a history of elite high culture. Nevertheless, it is also partly an argument for why Mughal historiography must transcend the figure of the emperor and by extension, the royal household. Though recent scholarship has innovatively reinterpreted how Mughal royals and nobility fashioned themselves, and the empires under their command; Kinra's emphatic focus on a bureaucrat scribe's self-aware articulation of his autobiography, particularly his role as a *munshī* in the making and projection of the Mughal imperium, constitutes a delightful subversion of historical hierarchies often reproduced by historians. Rather than being entirely de-centred, the emperor is re-centred as a "super *munshī*" (293) through Chandar Bhan's gaze. Chandar Bhan's presentation of the Emperor Shah Jahan as an able administrator in possession of many of the essential qualities of a *munshī*, points to the breadth of the skill set and repertoire of cultural knowledge, from diplomacy and political awareness to literary sophistication to mysticism, that kings and *munshīs* alike, irrespective of their religious identity, were expected to master. The centrality of the *munshī* to the Mughal imperial enterprise is expressed not only in terms of Chandar Bhan's presence at the imperial court and provincial centres but also through his participation in military endeavours at the margins of the empire – notably the Mughal expedition to Balkh and Badakhshan.

In the process of rescuing Chandar Bhan's writings (which have never been translated in their entirety) from the damning indictment of earlier generations of historians such as Sir H.M. Elliot and Sir Jadunath Sarkar, Kinra situates Chandar Bhan in a broader, global context of bureaucratic expansion and politico-cultural early modernity. Kinra sets up a tantalizing, if not fully-realized, comparison between Chandar Bhan and his contemporary, the diarist Samuel Pepys, arguing that both performed complex acts of self-fashioning in not dissimilar institutional contexts. The further claim that Chandar Bhan, despite the absence of print capitalism, probably commanded a "much broader imagined community of readers" (9) than Pepys bolsters Kinra's argument for the continuing intellectual vitality and early modernity of the Mughal empire past the reign of Akbar, the quintessential "good" Mughal of modern memory. The emphasis on literary innovation in a cosmopolitan milieu builds upon recent historiographical focus on Mughal participation in early modernity, and the existence of self-reflexive conceptions of the "self" in literary productions. It also contests the closely intertwined arguments for Mughal cultural decline, and increasing religious intolerance post-Akbar in both older historiography, and beyond the historiographical, in public discourse in South Asia and among South Asian diasporas. Chandar Bhan's simultaneous pride in his religious identity, evident in his explicit adoption of the poetic name "Brahman", and long-service and alignment with Mughal intellectual and political culture is deployed as proof of Mughal pluralism, and the perils of presuming politico-cultural affiliation on the basis of religious identity.

Kinra's eagerness to deflect charges of Mughal bigotry and intolerance is certainly timely, given recent right-wing calls for the elimination of the Mughals from Indian textbooks. Yet this instinct exposes one of the primary weaknesses of this work: the unclear delineation and at times, elision of the relationship between textual expression and historical experience.

That Chandar Bhan's writings offer no hint of growing sectarianism is uncritically presented as evidence of Mughal pluralism. Chandar Bhan's continued service to the Mughals is cast as proof of the pluralistic ethos of the empire. As Kinra writes, "At no point during the entire sequence of events in 1654 [Mughal conflagration with the Hindu kingdom of Mewar] did Chandar Bhan's loyalty to the Mughal cause to waver, something we would surely have expected if Shah Jahan had been even half as sectarian and 'orthodox' as has been made out to be in modern historiography" (94). Elsewhere, Kinra notes that Chandar Bhan "continued to serve Aurangzeb's court himself but also guided his son to do so—something he surely would not have done if he thought Aurangzeb and his advisors were the agents of a tyrannical Muslim orthodoxy" (57). Such speculative conclusions fail to take into account the complex range of factors that may have predisposed Chandar Bhan towards continued service and expressions of loyalty irrespective of his actual sentiments, or the rise of orthodoxy. This criticism is not to suggest that Kinra's portrayal of the Mughals as pluralistic is incorrect but rather, that reading Chandar Bhan's words in such a light constitutes a disservice to the very idea of textual self-fashioning.

Though couched in biographical terms, this is a wide-ranging work that combines textured readings of diverse Persian genres with fascinating insights into medical science in the Mughal court, the conscious production of new or "fresh" poetic modes and the mechanisms underlying memorialization and myth-making. *Writing Self, Writing Empire* will be of special value to Mughal specialists, who will be interested in Kinra's frequent transcription and translation of Persian primary sources. Equally, non-specialists will find this work a worthy point of departure for more sustained comparative studies of early modernity, as well as studies of the colonial encounter with Persian textual cultures.

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Henrietta Harrison. *The Missionary's Curse and Other Tales from a Chinese Catholic Village*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013. 276 pp. ISBN: 9780520273122. \$34.95.

What does it mean to be a Chinese Christian? This question has been central to academic discussions about the history of East and West since the time of Matteo Ricci, and as the religion continues its recent surge in China it is only becoming more relevant. To answer this question, scholars traditionally define both what it means to be Chinese and what it means to be Christian and then find some blended middle ground (an approach based on acculturation theory). In *The Missionary's Curse*, Henrietta Harrison boldly and directly challenges this approach by focusing on the history of Cave Gully, a Catholic village in Shanxi, over a three-hundred-year span. She starts with Cave Gully's Catholic tales about its own past and then investigates the origins and meanings of those stories. The result is an engaging and revolutionary reinterpretation of what it has meant over the centuries to be a Chinese Christian.

The book is divided into seven chapters, each addressing a distinct era in Chinese Catholic history. Harrison begins by repudiating the most basic tenet of acculturation theory: that there is some inherent division between Catholic and Chinese culture. She shows that, at its origins, Catholicism in China was already very Chinese. Cave Gully's early converts, having little direct contact with missionaries, practiced and spread their new religion according to local spiritual