Title
California's Punjabi Pioneers: Remembering/Claiming Homelands

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/48m752qj

Journal
Amerasia Journal, 28(3)

ISSN
0044-7471

Author
Leonard, Karen

Publication Date
2002

DOI
10.17953/amer.28.3.24804127gv736801

Copyright Information
This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution License, available at https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

Peer reviewed
argue, along with Linz, that parliamen-
tarism is more conducive to stable democ-
racy than presidentialism, due to the
greater propensity of parliamentarism to
have majorities that allow the implement-
tation of programs and the flexibility to
remove an unpopular executive.

The analysts of country cases differ as
well in their assessment of presidential-
ism. Suleiman highlights the positive
contributions of presidentialism to the
stabilization of the French political sys-
tem. For Chile, Valenzuela sees in presi-
dentialism one of the major sources of
democratic instability, given Chile’s po-
larized party system. Thus he strongly
recommends parliamentarism. For Ur-
uguay, Gonzalez and Gillespie claim that
while presidentialism alone has not been
the cause of democratic breakdown, it has
contributed to it by freezing governments
that were unable to deal with crisis situ-
ations and by hindering the formation of
interparty coalitions to obtain governing
majorities.

The constitutional debate in Brazil is
examined by Lemounier, who shows the
perils of presidentialism in Brazilian po-
itical history and the emergence of the
parliamentarist demand, which grew
prior to the plebiscite of 21 April 1993 but
was ultimately defeated. In the case of
Colombia, Hartlyn shows the problems of
excessive presidentialism and argues
that the new constitution of 1991 seeks to
restrict presidential powers in an at-
temt to further democratize the political
system by moving away from a restrictive
bipartisanship.

For Ecuador, Conaghan discusses the
perils of presidentialism, yet she clearly
expresses her disagreement with Linz’s
parliamentary solution, claiming that in
the Ecuadorian context of a loose multi-
party system, parliamentarism could
simply engender new destabilizing ten-
dencies. McClintock’s analysis of Peru
follows similar lines: presidentialism as
such is not the problem, but the political
context in which presidentialism exists
is. In the case of Peru, a major cause of
breakdown has been the intense conflict
between the oligarchy, the military, and
the American Popular Revolutionary Ali-
ance (APRA). Finally, for Venezuela,
Coppedge presents a sweeping critique of
presidentialism and sees the current po-
litical crisis as fundamentally a product
of it.

This book clearly succeeds in showing
the problems of presidentialism for
democratic stability. It offers rich theo-
retical reflections and empirical ac-
counts. It is less successful, however, in
advancing the notion that parliamenta-
rism is a better alternative for securing
democratic stability.

ROSARIO ESPINAL
Temple University
Philadelphia
Pennsylvania

AFRICA, ASIA, AND
LATIN AMERICA

CHAKRAVERTY, SUMITA S. National
Identity in Indian Popular Cinema,
versity of Texas Press, 1994. $50.00. Pa-
erbound, $19.95.

This fine study sweeps through forty
years of India’s Hindi films, choosing
those that illustrate the author’s thesis
that India’s “national cinema” has a “con-
taminating, masquerading, impersonat-
ing impulse at its very heart.” Sumita
Chakraverty shows beautifully the ten-
sions and contradictions of India’s na-
tional project through deft analysis of
many films, contextualizing the films in
successive periods of government-Bolly-
wood (the Bombay film industry) eco-
nomic and political relationships. Given
the number of Hindi talkies produced—
5074 from 1947 to 1987, she tells us—her
choice of films is bound to be idiosyn-
cratic, but she does comment on three of the four biggest hits in her time period, according to a 1993 Pune-based research group: *Mother India*, *Mughal-e-Azam*, and *Sholay*; she omits *Jai Santoshi Maa*, a mythological film.

The most appreciative readers will be those based in cultural studies and literary criticism. A quote gives the flavor of her writing: "As an orienting principle, impersonation allows us not only to identify strategies of representation and terms of cinematic address but also to conceive impersonation itself as a metaphor of site of struggle between different conceptions of a national-popular culture." Yet the discussions of the films themselves are very accessible, and those I have seen were recalled vividly by her readings.

Her analysis of the Hindu-Muslim theme is perhaps muted (as is the Bombay cinema's handling of the theme, she points out), given its contemporary relevance, but her analysis of the national heroic image is masterful. Her own language best shows her insights:

This distinct tendency . . . to both identify and nullify marks of [intercultural] difference in a wide variety of textual situations allows national identity to surface as so many styles of the flesh. . . . Woman, . . . unlike man, cannot change herself at will, cannot adopt and discard identities to signify a wider social embrace. . . . it is her fixity that allows the hero to narcissistically [display] his body. . . . Forms of masquerade ironically provide the connective tissue, as it were, across the social body so that difference, like beauty, is presented as only skin deep (pp. 200, 215, 234).

The two final chapters, on the "new wave" or "regional cinemas" from the late 1960s and on the courtesan film as the site for exploration and renegotiation of national assumptions about sexuality, social mores, and a certain repression of possibilities for women, are particularly fascinating.

This wonderful book stretches and stimulates the reader's mind and will send many of us to our local rental outlet for Hindi films!

KAREN LEONARD
University of California
Irvine


There are already a fair number of biographies of Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping: a 1988 study by Uli Franz, a somewhat premature retrospective issue of the *China Quarterly* in 1993, and, that same year, a story of his life by his daughter. In the book under review, Richard Evans, a British diplomat with extensive experience in China, including a tour as ambassador from 1984 to 1988, writes clearly, accurately, and often insightfully but does not add much to what others have done.

Evans relies upon a small number of secondary sources, official works, and interviews with a number of Party historians who "entertained" him on a visit to Peking after his retirement. Harrison Salisbury, in *The New Emperors*, used similar sources, but Evans seems to lack Salisbury's nose for the salacious detail that inquiring minds want to know. Deng's life was probably more staid than that of many of his colleagues, but most readers will probably be more curious than Evans shows himself to be about the episode in the 1930s when Deng was disgraced and his Party superior, who conducted the purge, then took to himself Deng's wife.

The most disappointing thing about the book is the paucity of personal detail. Evans is not a professional scholar, and it may not be to the point to fault his book for lacking pedantry. But he makes little use of his on-the-spot experience. There