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Girija Joshi

Defining 'Legitimate' Dependency in Colonial Panjab: Colonial and Local Perspectives

Abstract:

This paper considers the effects of colonization on the asymmetrical relationships that underpinned the polities of north-western India in the eighteenth century. It has two aims: first, to consider some of the ambiguities of dependency in precolonial regimes; second, to trace the erosion of these ambiguities within the framework of colonial law. Focusing upon the chiefly household of the Sikh chieftaincy of Kalsia, it builds on the wider scholarship on dependencies in South Asia to emphasise the overlaps between 'servitude', 'kinship', 'slavery', and 'patronage' within this lineage and its administration. It furthermore argues that British rule sought to reconfigure, and in some cases, override these politically key dependencies to achieve what it euphemistically described as the 'pacification' of Panjab's politically-fragmented landscape. Though this programme proceeded in tandem with the creation of new legal categories, its success was contingent upon the cooperation of local parties as well. This cooperation was often forthcoming, exposing the fault lines in the patron-client, and kinship networks upon which chiefly authority was built.

Bio:

Girija Joshi (PhD Leiden University, 2021) is a historian interested in the environmental, social, and intellectual history of the Indian subcontinent. Her dissertation, entitled *Resilient Communities: Household, State, and Ecology in South-Eastern Panjab, c.1750-1880*, focused upon the politics of sedentarization practiced by the British colonial state, and how these impacted upon pre-existing social and political networks.