This reordering of events in the chronology I am arguing for is hugely significant from a political point of view. Putting the agitation for Khalistan before the 1984 Operation Bluestar, apart from being factually wrong, might suggest that Operation Bluestar was an action to stop the Khalistan movement and almost provides legitimacy to the army action. However, putting the agitation for Khalistan after 1984 is not only historically accurate; it also signifies that it is the Operation Bluestar itself that alienated the Sikhs so deeply from India that a section of them launched the movement for Khalistan to secede from India. Although clearly Jakobsh does not offer any justification for Operation Bluestar, her unintended placing of events in the order that I have questioned here provides support to a likely, and indeed, common misinterpretation of the order of events.

Her discussion on the Sikhs and the internet is absolutely fascinating and refreshing in raising challenging questions about the potentialities of the internet in not only opening new spaces for discussion on taboo subjects but also in creating new forms of authority in articulating what Sikhism is.

This book, a scholarly work of high quality, is written in the spirit of critical reverence for the Sikh tradition and deserves wide circulation and readership.

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This is a book about the annual festivals or pujas of the Hindu goddesses Durga, Jagaddhatri and Kali, which are the most important events in the Bengalis’ religious calendar. Rachel Fell McDermott, who previously studied the goddesses’ devotional poetry, started research on the pujas in 1995. Between then and 2001, she visited Calcutta and West Bengal several times to see the pujas, interview participants and work on archival materials; she also observed the pujas among Bengalis in the United States between 2002 and 2008. In addition, she examined huge quantities of newspaper reports and other published material. The outcome of all this research, combined with McDermott’s knowledge of the sacred texts, is both an excellent monograph on a subject that has long lacked a full-length study and a major, multi-disciplinary contribution to scholarship that deserves a wide readership beyond specialists in Bengal and Hinduism. Despite its sometimes esoteric content, the main text of 250 pages is written in a lively style and is easy to read.

Chapter 1 examines the Durga and Jagaddhatri pujas’ origins in the homes of the old landowning zamindars, for whom the goddess’s worship was integral to their claim to status and power. Some once lordly families have
survived to the present day and still try to celebrate the festivals in traditional style, but usually without enough money to do so. Chapter 2 investigates the pujas' history throughout the colonial and post-colonial period, looking at the effect of changing British attitudes and policy, and of Bengali reformism and the rise of nationalism. It also discusses the development of sarbajanin, “universal” pujas organized by local associations and open to all, unlike those inside elite homes.

Durga is the premier goddess for most Bengalis, although Jagaddhatri is popular in Chandannagar, north of Calcutta. Durga is most famously represented as slayer of the demon Mahisha but, for most Bengalis, it is Durga the daughter, the goddess in her form as Uma, Shiva's gentle wife who comes home to visit her parents during the festival, who matters most. The “primary meaning” of the pujas appears to be about martial strength and the destruction of obstacles, but “it is arguable that the real underlying feeling, or rasa, of the festival is one of tenderness for the returning beloved” (95); for this reviewer, who has no first-hand knowledge of the Bengali festivals, the argument in chapter 3 was both surprising and convincing.

Chapter 4 explores the changing iconography of Durga and Jagaddhatri. Initially, the goddess’s image itself was unimportant, but it was later anthropomorphized, first in the “traditional” static style that gives the goddess an unearthly face and then in the modern style in which she acquires a more lifelike appearance. The modern style, developed since the 1920s, is standard for images placed in pandals, shelters erected as temporary temples for sarbajanin tableaux. Durga and Jagaddhatri, too, have become steadily more sensual and beautiful, and the pandals, as chapter 5 shows, have become increasingly eclectic, as puja associations compete to be fashionably innovative in a carnival of consumerist display.

Chapters 6 and 7 turn to Kali. Kali’s changing iconography has also made her more lifelike over time, but McDermott convincingly argues that the implied meaning of her portrayal has also changed. Today’s Kali is rarely horrifying or sexually charged; “Sweetness and humanization are now preferred to the [traditional] static icon of awe” (180). To be sure, Kali, whose pujas are less popular than Durga’s, is still a more frightening goddess with Tantric origins and she is still associated with frightening people, from criminals to rapacious temple guides. Nonetheless, the homogenizing effects of latter-day devotion and urban religion have made Kali’s and Durga’s festivals look increasingly similar.

Chapter 8 is about controversies, particularly over animal sacrifice, which is still widespread in Bengal, mainly for Kali. McDermott writes frankly about her own distress when witnessing blood sacrifice, before discussing its ritual logic, the social and economic factors helping to sustain it, and above all the common belief that it must continue because the goddess demands blood, whatever the anti-sacrifice campaigners say.

The thriving pujas in New York and New Jersey, whose celebration is
shaped by ties of Bengali ethnicity and shared culture, are the topic of chapter 9, which is a useful contribution to the ethnography of South Asian Americans. A short conclusion reflects on why Durga is the most popular deity for Bengalis and why her festival outshines all others.

As McDermott acknowledges, her book does not cover every aspect of the pujas. In various places, too, space constraints perhaps forced her to omit material, and in others her arguments seem rather weak. One example pertains to the pujas’ modern history. It is important that control over the festivals was once confined to elite families, but after sarbajanin pujas developed it expanded “to the shared, more democratic, and more politicised patronage of the middle class” (149), and today’s “modern forms of competition … stand squarely upon those derived from the eighteenth-century zamindars” (150). But very little is said about who makes up local puja committees and who is excluded, and about how their membership has altered over time, particularly when (presumably) local fundraising increasingly gave way to business sponsorship, following economic liberalization. Nor does McDermott define what she means by “middle class,” either before or after liberalization. Hence the social characteristics of the rival puja committees and the middle-class communities they purportedly represent remain unclear. A second example concerns the discussion of sacrifice. Plainly, Bengali sacrifice has distinctive features. In theorizing the ritual within its comparative context, however, McDermott is curiously hesitant about insisting that animals are surrogates for the ideal human victim throughout Hinduism, if not universally; that the opposition between blood sacrifice and non-violent, vegetarian worship is also pan-Hindu, as is the buffalo’s special status as a victim, notably in royal Durga pujas; and, crucially, that devotion can indeed go together with sacrifice, whatever its vegetarian opponents may assert.

But the weaknesses in this book are vastly outweighed by its strengths. McDermott’s pioneering study is a scholarly achievement that is impressive, enlightening and enjoyable to read.

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Free markets do not arise spontaneously and when it comes to international trade, moves towards free trade—or trade liberalization—have come only as a result of complex and long-running processes of negotiation. Economic Diplomacy offers a great deal of information about these processes as they have