face of the intricacies, complexities, and contradictions of clublife in South Asia. However, he has produced an invaluable institutional history. The volume will be a useful reference work for those wanting to know the specific mechanisms of how exactly clubs were founded and flourished, for those exploring associational life more broadly, and for those examining social life within India writ large.

The book is divided into seven chapters, each detailing a different element of clublife. The first chapters outline the basic structures, rules, and foundations of clubs in India, demonstrating the continuities between clublife in the colony and in the metropole. The third chapter, “The Business of Clubbing,” highlights how the context of place significantly shaped the formal structure of clubs, and their adaptability to local and imperial law. The chapter covers everything from the brief international trade in New England ice (93–94) to the varying uses of cash and chits within clubhouse walls (82). A chapter outlining club staff and servants (chap. 4) highlights the complications of domestic spaces, and the Raj paradox—namely, “that Anglo-Indian domestic space was ‘entrusted to Indians’” (119 n. 1, citing Mary A. Procida, Married to the Empire: Gender, Politics and Imperialism in India, 1883–1947 [2002], 82). Cohen ably highlights the ambiguous negotiations of class and race, of intimacy and privacy, of tradition and necessity that were inherent in mixed-race imperial domestic spaces.

The latter half of the book introduces broader thematic chapters that explicitly focus on the contexts of race, class, gender, and the postcolonial world. Given the brief length of the text, the author can only point toward all the complications such topics engender. However, rather than simplify issues, Cohen provides key examples to highlight how such complexities played out in certain cases. For example, on the issue of race in the clubs, Cohen very clearly that while there were definite trends, different clubs and different members made choices about what made a person clubbable. Sometimes they could choose to include a maharaja but deny a wealthy British noble. What made a person clubbable? Sometimes they could break out in poems and songs. Their exhilaration infects them with love, passion, and joy and inspires them to emanate from divine encounters of individuals; it engulfs them with love, passion, and joy and inspires them to break out in poems and songs. Their exhilaration infects others with effervescent enthusiasm, resulting in a “glorious disease of the collective heart” (2). Hence, while bhakti is acutely individual in the sense that it is what the bhakta (devotee) says it is, it is inherently collective, poised on sharing, communion, and adoration. Bhakti, moreover, is liberating in different senses from societal hierarchies, sectarian rivalries, and Sanskritic supremacy.

Beginning with this evocative articulation of the idea of...
bhakti, Hawley takes us on a long, leisurely crisscrossing tour of the variegated and intersecting pathways that resulted in the crystallization of the idea of the bhakti movement in the 1920s and 1930s. Reminiscent of a “khadi (homespun) garment partly woven of imported thread” (58), the bhakti movement wove together British orientalist and Indian nationalist sentiments. Although the term is of recent origin, the antiquity of the “bhakti movement” has become “historiographical common sense” (6). Standard accounts portray a “movement” that began in the south in the sixth or seventh century C.E., spread to the north, and eventually swept the entire subcontinent by the seventeenth century, imbuing the medieval with particular salience. Hawley meticulously dissests this idea to untie the threads and offer a tapestry of rough tracks, serrated surfaces, and jagged ends that constitute a “crazy quilt” (310). Six exhaustive chapters take us from Rabindranath Tagore and Shantiniketan, the university town established by him that housed Hazariprasad Dvivedi, the principal craftsman of “bhakti andolan” (11), through the Bhagavata Purana that constructed the edifice of the concept of bhakti (10), to the evolution and consolidation of the idea of four sampradayas—traditions of teaching and writing—that uphold the edifice of bhakti by being the principal channels of communication in the assumed transit of bhakti from the south to the north (10), and return to Bengal (Navadwipa) and Shantiniketan via Galtā (and Naraina), Brindavan, and Jaipur to comment on the mingled future of bhakti and India in the seventh, final chapter.

What does this richly textured circumambulation tell us? That the idea of the bhakti movement is contingent and not uncontested, even in the twentieth century; that the Mughal state and Mughal-Rajput (Kachvaha) alliance (sixteenth to seventeenth centuries) was crucial in the evolution and configuration of bhakti as an all-India movement in the early modern period instead of the medieval; and that bhakti poetry and songs, even while occasionally tied to regional courts and rulers (if we follow Sheldon Pollock), prompted a blossoming of the vernaculars as literary languages at the grassroots level (8–9).

Bhakti, therefore, has the potential of being truly liberating if its genealogy is excavated and understood properly.

The arguments are worked out step by step in the chapters. Chapter 1 covers the serious debates over perception and interpretation of bhakti among scholars of the twentieth century, including the relative importance of key figures such as Kabir and Surdas, and argues that the long shared history and oral intertextuality of the “living bhakti archive” (13) are partly responsible for such debates. The second chapter gives priority to the Bhagavata Māhātmya over the classical Bhagavata Purāṇa as a key text that proliferated and perpetuated the “born in Dravida” myth of bhakti (60). Composed somewhere between Brindavan and Haridvar during the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century by Brahmins, the text incorporates clues that indicate the critical presence of the Mughal state and Hindu-Muslim collaboration at the imperial level during Akbar’s reign (1556–1605). The three succeeding chapters explore articulations of bhakti in Rajasthan of the seventeenth century; the constitution of Braj and its spiritual center Brindavan as the “magnet and conduit” (149) of the later bhakti movement through contributions of Kachvaha rulers in the construction of temples, the political and economic advances made during the rule of the Afghan Suris and the Mughal Emperor Akbar (154), and the (collective) composition of important works by Gaudiya Vaishnavas and Vallabhites (218–223); and the critical presence of Jaisingh II of Amer in the consolidation of Brindavan as the nerve center of bhakti and of the four sampradayas of Vaishnava bhakti. Together, these multiple pasts turn the idea of bhakti’s transit from the south to the north upside down and uphold Hindu-Muslim confluence and cooperation in the creation of the commonwealth of bhakti, pasts that can hold out against particular appropriations of bhakti by aggressive Hindu nationalism and keep alive bhakti’s liberating, non-conformist, and democratic potential.

An elegantly crafted, multilayered text by an erudite scholar of great repute, A Storm of Songs: India and the Idea of the Bhakti Movement challenges us to think about history, nation, and nation’s history through religion that is political and processual, constructed and conditional. At times, however, the details and tales within tales tend to distract the reader; one also wishes that the unfortunate error of presenting Debendranath Tagore as Rabindranath’s father and grandfather had not occurred in the sixth chapter (260, 261). These minor snags notwithstanding, this text remains important and alluring, eminently worthy of being read.


Afghan Modern: The History of a Global Nation presents a well-researched and interesting history on the ways that the territories of the various states or empires that have been labeled “Afghan” or named “Afghanistan” and the various groups that have at one time or another been identified as “Afghans” integrated into international relationships. In the process, however, Robert D. Crews makes overblown claims about his work’s significance: “My approach … starts from the premise that how we conceptualize the country, in our journalism and public-policy debates and in much of our scholarly work, remains intractably mired in tropes that bear little resemblance to historical reality. Pervading all of these genres, the most enduring image of Afghanistan evokes a desolate, inward-looking, and isolated place” (3). The only work Crews cites to illustrate the universality of this discourse is a late-nineteenth-century French study of Afghan folk songs. Other scholars, including myself, have interrogated tropes such as “Islamic fundamentalists,” “ethnic nationalists,” “freedom fighters,” Afghanistan’s “return to the eleventh century,” “tribalism,” “feudalism,” “tradition,” and “modernity.” No doubt I am particularly biased on this point, as the first chapter of my