When Sparrows Became Hawks: The Making of the Sikh Warrior Tradition, 1699-1799


Challenging the commonly accepted belief that the distinctive rituals, ceremonies, and cultural practices associated with the Khalsa were formed during the lifetime of the Tenth and last Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh, Purnima Dhavan reveals how such markers of Khalsa identity evolved slowly over the course of the eighteenth century. By focusing on the long-overlooked experiences of peasant communities, she traces the multiple perspectives and debates that eventually coalesced to create a composite Khalsa culture by 1799.

When Sparrows Became Hawks incorporates and analyzes Sikh normative religious literature created during this period by reading it in the larger context of sources such as news reports, court histories, and other primary sources that show how actual practices were shaped in response to religious reforms. Recovering the agency of the peasants who dominated this community, Dhavan demonstrates how a dynamic process of debates, collaboration, and conflict among Sikh peasants, scholars, and chiefs transformed Sikh practices and shaped a new martial community.

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When Sparrows Became Hawks: Oxford University Press
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