

# Writing about Lahore of Pre-partition India

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*Lahore: A Sentimental Journey* (Pran Neville), 2006, Penguin, pp. 207

*Lahore in the Time of the Raj* (Ian Talbot, Tahir Kamran), 2016, Penguin, pp. 288

*Imagining Lahore: The city that is, the city that was* (Haroon Khalid), 2018, Penguin, pp. 304

Lahore was one of the most important cultural hubs in pre-partitioned India. It was so for various reasons, including its location at the meeting point of several cultures, languages and social influences. Sometime in the past, there was a proverb in Punjabi that says '*Jis Lahore Nai Dekhya O Jamiyai Nai*', meaning 'The one who has not seen Lahore is like not born.'

*Lahore: A Sentimental Journey* by Pran Neville is an early 20th-century biographical memoir of the city of Lahore. Pran Neville was born in Lahore and grew up there. Later he served in the Indian Foreign Service and the United Nations. He belongs to a pre-partitioned Punjabi generation that was forced to leave their homeland, which remained in their memories forever. With his nostalgic and sentimental heart, he has fondly written on multiple topics, like *shopping in Anarkali, on thandi sarak in Tonga, Bo-Kata, the splendors of Heera Mandi, going to the cinema, the changing world of women, food and drink, politics* and many more. Pran Neville writes his memories of the past when a chance meeting with a Lahori in Switzerland prompted him to visit back to Lahore, 40 years after the partition, which opened a floodgate of memories. Reading his narrative is a heartwarming and beautiful

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journey into the past. His writing has a powerful idiom that evokes long-forgotten cultural memories. Pran ends the book with 'I hope Lahore will continue calling me'

*Lahore in the Time of the Raj* by Ian Talbot and Tahir Kamran is a collection of essays on the history and culture of Lahore. Talbot, in the introduction to this book, starts with the popular expression '*Lahore is Lahore*', which sets the tone of the text. Writing around the sentiments of the partition of India, he tries to rebuild the true character of liberal and secular Lahore through his narratives. He believes that Lahore during the Raj was a prosperous and cosmopolitan place where many communities lived together. Ian Talbot is a professor of modern British history and formerly head of history at the University of Southampton and he has written numerous books on the Partition of India and the modern history of Pakistan. With such an academic background, he has created a picture of Punjab through a historical perspective, starting from Ghaznavid, Mughal, and Sikh Lahore to colonial Lahore. Through the literary presentation of the landscapes of the city, he rekindled the nostalgic memories of the colonial era. He writes about Darvazas and Mohallas, Poets, Wrestlers and Cricketers, on Foreign Goods, Pilgrims and Shrines in the colonial age, and most importantly about the Martyrs, Migrants, and Militants, in Lahore's Transnational Revolutionary Networks. It is an interesting reading of Lahore through the memoirs. One can find some valuable historical information otherwise ignored in formal historiographical narratives.

*Imagining Lahore: The city that is, the city that was* by Haroon Khalid is an anecdotal travelogue about Lahore. Haroon Khalid studied anthropology at the Lahore University of Management and Sciences. He has been

traveling extensively around Pakistan and documenting the country's historical and cultural heritage. He has written over 200 articles for newspapers and magazines. With the experience of such an elaborate academic career, he has painted a vivid picture of Lahore's past from the time of Mahmud Ghaznavi to the Mughal, the capital of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Khalsa Empire, to the British Raj. While looking back at the ancient past, he travels through time to the mythological origins of the city attributed to Ram's son, Lav. He writes about the city's present, its people, communities, monuments, parks, and institutions. Haroon Khalid has his own style of writing. Likewise, it reflects on his narratives as well. He has multiple perspectives on looking at Lahore, like, *A Contested City*, *A City of Dissent*, *To the Left, No Right*, *A City Forgotten*, *The Imperial Symbol*, *The City of Nostalgia*,

*The Mughal Capital*, *Humble Origins and A Mythological City*.

Thus, the three books, *Lahore: A Sentimental Journey* by Pran Neville, *Lahore in the Time of the Raj* by Ian Talbot, Tahir Kamran and *Imagining Lahore: The city that is, the city that was* by Haroon Khalid are three noteworthy narratives on the city of Lahore. The common point of these three is the sentimental and nostalgic representation of pre-partitioned Lahore. Frequently in the narrations, one feels a nostalgic idealization of the 'good old days', which is naturally coming from the writers of partition experiences. Lahore is alive in such books and one may find almost all the shades of the glorious past of the culturally rich Lahore city. It is primarily a sentimental journey, though at the same time glimpses of a cultural history can be an additional gain.