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Book Review

Hodgson, Thomas. *Journeys of Love: Kashmiris, Music, and the Poetics of Migration*. 298pp. The University of Chicago Press 2025.

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Published: March 2026

Journeys of Love is an ethnographic account of the musical lives of (male) Kashmiri migrants in Bradford, England, and of their interlocutors in Mirpur, in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir. The monograph focuses on poetic registers of everyday life to offer a meditation on migration—what Hodgson calls a "poetics of migration" (p. 8). He argues that music functions as a technology of memory and a means of moral reckoning. Musical-poetic practices, in this view, are not nostalgic fossilisations of a pristine past but generative responses to displacement.

Across poetic performances in Mirpur and Bradford—Pakistan and Britain—Kashmiris' collective memory of migration is enacted in narrative form. Hodgson suggests that these narratives carry traces of family, kinship, and honour, shaped by longer histories of Sufi poetic traditions. Within these poetic forms lies a certain unknowability: while this is a cornerstone of Sufi heritage, Hodgson argues that this unknowability also reflects the opacity of the migration experience itself. These poetic traditions, in turn, become central to the intergenerational transmission of memories of migration. The book develops these themes across chapters ranging from a close focus on the shehnai to discussions of state-led, music-forward assimilationist practices in Bradford, and to the mela ("South Asian festivals") as an example of a public poetics. Throughout the book, Hodgson notes that Kashmiri sung poetry and musical aesthetics are largely absent from public discourse and argues that they must be brought to the surface. This is the book's central intervention, and it also functions as a subtle rebuttal to reductionist claims that Muslim migrants in Britain are uniformly averse to public music-making, or that their musical practices are monolithic. Read this way, *Journeys of Love* intervenes in wider conversations about multiculturalism and the cultural invisibility of diasporic communities in anglophone media. It shows how paying attention to song—and to the metaphors people use when they sing—can reveal the moral logic of migration in ways that statistics and policy reports cannot. Rather than offer a chapter-by-chapter summary, I use this review to reflect on several authorial choices, the book's narrative arc, and its resonance, or lack thereof, within broader writings on Kashmir.

Hodgson is a white British man who grew up in Bradford, in close proximity to the Mirpuri community. Yet he notes that, despite this, he never once encountered Mirpuri cultural forms: sung poetry, music, and other expressive traditions. He remained largely unaware of the rich poetic and musical life of his neighbours. He suggests that he only came to recognise these traditions, and their intellectual merit, later, during visits to the region in Pakistan-administered Kashmir. This is revealing: proximity does not necessarily produce intimacy. Instead, it exposes the everyday contours of racial separation in the UK more broadly. Hodgson's intellectual outlook and the book's orientation emerge from this distance and cannot be read solely through the redemptive self-reflexive frame he offers. At the end of the day, he remains a beneficiary of the very racial hierarchies that structure what becomes visible, legible, and "discoverable" in Britain. It is this same epistemic technology that affords Hodgson the privilege of encountering Mirpuri poetic life as revelation—and then authoring it as ethnographic knowledge.

When Hodgson asks: why are these rich poetic traditions so absent from Britain's cultural outlook? The answer, bluntly, is racism and Islamophobia. Yet he does not sufficiently elaborate on these forces as central to that omission. Instead, he frames his encounter with Mirpuri musical traditions as a kind of "ethnographic discovery," a positioning that risks reproducing the very dynamics that have rendered these forms culturally invisible in the first place. At the same time, this invisibility cannot be

explained by racism alone. There is also the strategic refusal of British Mirpuris to readily offer their musical lives (and, one might assume, other cultural forms) to an external analytical gaze. As Hodgson notes, Mirpuri identity and social location in Britain have been persistently reduced to two narrow frames: Muslimness and a presumed lack of integration or assimilation. This reduction makes them a ready-made object for xenophobic public debates on migration—debates that do little to address, and often actively obscure, the lived racial tensions of everyday life in Bradford from the perspective of Mirpuris themselves.

This brings me to my next point. In the Introduction, Hodgson asks: if the majority of Mirpuris in Bradford are Muslim, is there another way to understand them (and, by extension, their migratory experiences)? (p. 16). He suggests that "knowing them musically" offers one such alternative. While adding more texture and tonal complexity to the lives of British Mirpuris is a welcome scholarly move, Hodgson's framing also risks reinscribing a familiar narrowing: British Mirpuris remain legible primarily as subjects of migration. Hodgson argues that discussions of multiculturalism in Bradford (and elsewhere) are unidimensional in their focus on assimilation and integration (or the perceived lack of both), and that they can be enriched through attention to Mirpuri cultural forms. In this respect, the book departs from standard migration studies that privilege labour and policy over expressive life. Yet it also clings to migration as the defining lens through which Mirpuri experience in Britain—and in the world—is ultimately understood.

The book is set against the backdrop of the Mangla Dam construction in Mirpur in the 1960s, which resulted in massive displacement, including outward migration to Britain's mill towns such as Bradford (a pattern already underway). However, Hodgson more or less situates Mirpur and wider Azad Kashmir within the political and historical genealogies of the Indian subcontinent and its partition into India and Pakistan, rather than within the political and intellectual debates within Kashmir itself—both historical and contemporary. While the book makes a few passing allusions to Mirpur's geopolitical placement, it remains largely disconnected from Kashmir's broader poetic worlds and Sufi histories, and from the disputed territory's political journey of which Mirpuris are a part. In this way, the book does not meaningfully engage contemporary Kashmir studies. This is, in my view, a missed opportunity, and it has the effect of normalising Azad Kashmir's placement within Pakistan. These are, of course, contentious questions—ones the author appears largely uninterested in pursuing.

Journeys of Love has an itinerant ethnographic structure, which oscillates between Mirpur and Bradford (with Doha introduced in a later chapter). This movement likely reflects the diasporic Mirpuri experience. Yet it does not always produce convincing situated ethnography. This also warrants attention to the mobile, passport-strong, able-bodied researcher, and to a form of privileged mobility that many of Hodgson's interlocutors do not share.

The monograph contains several beautiful photographs, though the way they are captioned risks amplifying an uncomfortable, orientalist ethnographic gaze. For example, Figure 12 (p. 54) is titled "two women in fine clothes and jewellery," a description that decontextualises the protagonists and renders them as aesthetic objects. This sits at curious odds with the book's wider ambitions to offer greater texture on Mirpuri lifeways and worldmaking in Britain. At the same time, the use of the Nasta'liq script adds an important aesthetic and material quality to the text, working alongside the photographs to create a distinctive sensory archive.

Overall, this accessible monograph sheds light on the cultural forms of British Mirpuris and on the ways music becomes a conduit to homeland, memory, and moral reflection. It is a welcome addition to writing on British Mirpuris, who are too often discussed through the language of policy, demographic studies, or stale arguments about multiculturalism and integration. In the current climate of the UK, these debates have taken on renewed salience and hostility. The book might have landed even more forcefully if it had situated itself more directly within today's toxic public discourse around migration, where Muslims and their perceived insularity are routinely targeted. It is unfortunate, though unsurprising, that UK policymakers and politicians are unlikely to read this important academic work as a corrective to their myopic visions of Muslim life. But perhaps Hodgson should send them copies anyway.