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# Review of: India in the Eyes of the British: Three Views, by Balkrishna Govind Gokhale

David Curley

Western Washington University, [david.curley@wwu.edu](mailto:david.curley@wwu.edu)

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Review

Author(s): David L. Curley

Review by: David L. Curley

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overwhelming evidence that such strategies have failed miserably all over and are being dismantled in most places where they were tried.

The value of this book lies not in the recommendations it offers, or the lessons of history it tries to learn. There is, for instance, a very dubious conclusion by Bipan Chandra that national capital will remain subordinate to transnational capital unless the structural links are snapped through a socialist revolution as in Cuba (p. 81). The Cuban experience, on the contrary, illustrates clearly the disastrous consequences of severing such links, links which it would like to reestablish if it could.

Nevertheless the book, *Class, State and Development in India*, is still useful to the students of Indian history and politics, particularly leftist politics. There is a chapter on the history of the Communist movement in India, an interview with a prominent Naxalite discussing the reasons for the failure of his movement. The piece on women's industrial employment is very illustrative of the opportunities and limitations that women face and the impact of their own organized activities on their conditions. The major value of this work, as is that of Marxist analyses in general, lies in identifying the problems that the society faces and the limitations of the market model in suitably coping with them. The stubborn poverty, the growing inequalities and the deteriorating conditions in the rural sector can become politically significant and find violent expression. Although it is certain that socialization of the means of production and distribution does not quite remedy these maladies, Berch Beroglu and his comrades do render a service by sobering our expectations from market-oriented strategies.

*Winona State University, Winona, Minnesota, U.S.A.*

YOGESH GROVER

INDIA IN THE EYES OF THE BRITISH: Three Views. *Balkrishna Govind Gokhale. (The West and the Wider World, Vol. 6, gen. ed. Cyriac K. Pullapilly.) Notre Dame (Indiana): Cross Cultural Publications. 1990. 231 pp. US\$34.85, cloth. ISBN 0-949121-14-X.*

THIS WORK explores the changing "inner world" of the English in India, by examining "images" of India in the fiction of three English authors. The three are Rudyard Kipling, E. M. Forster, and Paul Scott. Citing Allen J. Greenberger, *The British Image of India* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), Gokhale identifies these authors, respectively, with "the Age of Confidence (1860s to 1918), the Era of Anxiety (1919-1935) and the Years of Sunset (1936-1947)" (pp. 31-32). By an "inner world" he means to emphasize emotions and perceptions colored by emotions, rather than facts. For "images" he prefers to rely on realistic descriptions of landscapes and characters. This is a strategy that must be altered for Forster. Throughout, Gokhale provides historical backgrounds for the works of fiction he analyzes, but thinking of "history" as a known "background" for "literature" makes it difficult for him to discover anything new about history from literature.

Gokhale finds Kipling's landscapes oscillate between exotic beauty and inhuman bleakness, and his Indian characters also "suffer from the same polarity" (p. 81). In any case they rarely escape being stereotypes. Kipling's British characters are a different matter. Unfortunately in Gokhale's account we do not quite get to smell the pungency of Kipling's depictions of the lower orders of British society in India — those characters on whose account Oscar Wilde once said of Kipling that he "knew vulgarity better than anyone has ever known it" (p. 97). We do get to see the alienating self-constructions of the English as the ruling race; and in *Kim* we see Kipling's final, compensatory and nostalgic desire to cross the racial divide.

In *A Passage to India* Forster shows us, not heroism and self-sacrifice among the British ruling class in India, but their obverse: obtuseness, philistinism and arrogance. Forster's Indian characters also have a "pasteboard quality" (p. 136). Mrs. Moore's sentimental impulses present to British and Indian characters an invitation to social intercourse, and those who become involved with her are led, somewhat mysteriously, to their own undoing. To Gokhale the central figure of this action is "primeval India," symbolically represented in the Malabar Hills and caves (pp. 132–35). Hills, caves, and "primeval India" herself in turn symbolize an elemental nihilism in which "everything exists, nothing has value" (*A Passage to India*, p. 134). How European is this nihilism? In any case anxiety about it seems little related to British anxiety about Gandhi and Swarāj, despite Gokhale's historical background.

To Gokhale, Paul Scott's *Raj Quartet* examines four kinds of social divisions and their associated conflicts. Again the first is race, explored through the rape of Daphne Manners. The second is class conflict within British society in India. The third is conflict between the generations with regard to Independence, explored through the characters of the Layton and Kasim families. The last is the violent conflict between Hindus and Muslims antecedent to Partition. The pressure from home to "write [India] off as a wasted asset" is very clear. So, too, is the profound and associated change observed by Guy Perron: Abandoning India "will be like getting rid of what is no longer reflected in our mirror of ourselves" (*Division of the Spoils*, pp. 183, 184).

The best part of Gokhale's book is a chapter on "The World of Anglo-India," which describes in fine detail British life in stations, towns and cities. Elsewhere imprecise language, mixed metaphors and clichés mar his writing: must Gandhi again be called a "gentle colossus" (p. 23)? Editorial lapses also are frequent: Bangladesh is referred to as East Pakistan, for example (p. 104), and Kipling's "fluttered folk and wild" is changed incomprehensibly to "feathered folk" (p. 14).

Western Washington University, Bellingham, U.S.A.

DAVID L. CURLEY