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Percival spear a history of india pdf

Between 1744 and 1767, the eldest son of a small Shropshire squire laid the foundations of what was to become the British Indian Empire. By Percival Spear. Holden Furber, The Oxford History of India. By Vincent A. Smith. Edited by Percival Spear. Part I revised by Sir Mortimer Wheeler and A. L. Basham; Part II revised by J. B. Harrison; Part III rewritten by Percival Spear. (3d ed.; New York: Oxford University Press, 1958. Pp. xiii, 898. \$6.75.), The American Historical Review, Volume 65, Issue 1, October 1959, Pages 113-114, Lockdown has been frustrating to many and gratifying to some. Irritating to the vast multitude and productive to a tiny segment. In my case, it was a mix of the two. Navigating my way through the stultifying early stages of this unprecedented crisis, I gradually grew more at ease with staying indoors. And what better way to spend your time at home than indulging your love for history? Flipping through my musty bookshelf, I chanced upon a slender and rather fusty cover that immediately caught my attention. A History of India Volume Two by Percival Spear, it read. At first, the title of the book and the author's name seemed like a mismatch. Particularly so when we consider the fact that the first volume in the series was written by the immensely distinguished Indian historian Romila Thapar. Who was this Spear to write a history of a land he didn't belong to? I thought. However, my prejudice was shattered as I read the book, for I realised Percival Spear knew this subcontinent far, far better than its inhabitants know themselves. Few authors can deal with the colossal history of the Indian subcontinent right from the arrival in its land of the central Asian adventurer Babur in the early 16th century all the way through its dominion by the British, established effectively in the mid 18th century and consecrated by the recognition of the crown's suzerainty in mid 19th century and their subsequent exit in the mid 20th century, and down to the trajectory the newly independent India took in the political, economic and social spheres over the next thirty years, in a single volume other than Percival Spear. A History of India Volume 2 is an account of almost all significant events that transpired in the subcontinent over four and a half centuries. The author must be commended for his temerity to take upon himself such a monumental task. Let us consider in detail how well he has fared in accomplishing it. The book begins in the early 16th century, when much of North India was in a turmoil, with feeble rulers occupying the seat of power Delhi. The city and the surrounding territory had yet to fully recover from the depredations of the limping marauder Timur in the late 14th century. The Rajput chiefs were fighting against one another very frequently. This moment proved opportune for Babur, a scion of a prestigious ruling clan in Central Asia, who was on the run from his home in Ferghana and looking for territory to build a kingdom in order to satiate the appetite of his followers for riches and glory. Driven by his iron will and a ferociously efficient army, Babur defeated Ibrahim Lodi, the Sultan of Delhi, in 1526 in the battle of Panipat, thus becoming the first emperor of a dynasty that would rule India for the next 200 years and become renowned in history for its opulence and invincibility; the Mughal Empire. The administrative ingenuity of Akbar, the greatest Mughal sovereign, the aesthetic sensibility of Shah Jahan, the routine of Aurangzeb's fratricidal savagery in the Mughal realm, all receive the attention they require and no important detail is omitted or glossed over. The case Spear makes for Aurangzeb is unassailable. Succession wars were the norm, not the exception, in medieval India, not least in the Mughal Empire. Jahangir had to put down a rebellion by his own son and Shah Jahan had the blood of his brothers and step-brothers all over his hands before he ascended the throne. The reason Aurangzeb is so widely reviled today is because the dispute ended in his favour, thanks to his cruelty. Paradoxically, his critics in the present fail to castigate other emperors in the dynasty who had committed atrocities that were as cold-blooded as those by Aurangzeb or perhaps even more. Another bone of contention is Aurangzeb's religious bigotry and intolerance toward Hindus. It's true that he demolished temples and reimposed Jiziya, the religious tax. But there is no evidence to prove that he treated communal hatred as a matter of policy. His criticsasters today conveniently choose to ignore the spartan existence he lived inside the palace which was certainly unusual compared to the extravagant lifestyles his predecessors had led. To be clear, what Spear offers in the book is not a vindication or justification of Aurangzeb's acts. But he merely wants the readers to recognize the fact that Aurangzeb's behaviour was in accord with the ways of the rulers prevalent at that time and he was no historical aberration. The decline in fortune of the Mughals was set in motion with the passing of Aurangzeb when the commercial activities of the British East India Company (EIC) in Bengal gathered momentum and the Marathas of central India grew more vigorous. The invasion of Delhi by the Persian Nadir Shah dealt a body blow to the already ailing kingdom. Shah not only plundered the city but also made off with everything he could get his hands on including the prized peacock throne and the Koh-i-Noor. The frailty of the kingdom gave impetus to regional chiefs who had owed allegiance to Delhi to declare autonomy. The Nizam of Hyderabad and the Nawab of Oudh were only two examples of kingdoms that became more powerful than the Mughal kingdom itself over the course of the second half of the 18th century. The Mughal ruler was relegated to a pensionary of the Marathas, and later of the British. With the end of Battle of Buxar in 1764, the Mughal ruler Shah Alam II was forced to grant the diwani rights of Bengal to the Company in the treaty of Allahabad. The buccaneering trade and military instincts of Robert Clive was thus rewarded. The cultural and social changes that British overlordship of India gave rise to is also recorded. The decline of Persian as the language of the royalty was engendered in large measure due to the decision to disseminate English education and set up an English judicial system. The goal of Thomas Macaulay to create a class of people Indian in blood but British in thought and action was given fillip with the introduction of English education. This decision spawned a division in Indian society that would prove later to be very difficult to bridge. The caste Hindus who had already had experience learning an alien language (Persian) in order to attain positions in government swiftly switched to English. However, the Indian Muslims faced great difficulty in taking up English as most of them were too orthodox and their hidebound traditions wouldn't allow them to do so. As a consequence, most of the jobs in government were monopolised by caste Hindus while most Muslims found themselves left behind. It was not until the ideas of the Muslim-moderniser Sheikh Syed Ahmed Khan became popular in the second half of the 19th century that Muslims actively realised that acquiring Western education and learning a Western language was not inimical to their faith. The abolition of Sati (burning of widows in their husbands' funeral pyre) and the widows remarriage act were unprecedented reforms in the social sphere. Modernisers like Ram Mohun Roy welcomed these reforms enthusiastically, while many conservatives were chafing at what they saw as alien interventions in their way of life. The hallmark of Spear's book is that the transition from one timeline of history to another takes place in a smooth and seamless fashion. The study of the movement for independence in the 20th century flows neatly from the relatively tranquil years of the second half of the 19th century (the time period which Spear calls 'the heyday of empire') which in turn is traced from its roots in the crumbling of the Mughal empire and the initial formidability and later decline of the Maratha kingdom. The travails of British India during the two world wars, the protracted advances made in the field of self-government, the indispensability of Gandhi during those years all make for interesting reading. The book also examines Jawaharlal Nehru's reign as Prime Minister and delivers a judgement on his efficiency. Indira Gandhi's term as PM also receives attention but inevitably, as the author himself acknowledges in the book, it could not qualify as anything more than contemporary observation since it was written in 1977. A great deal of information on, say the emergency has been made available to present-day historians that Spear in 1977 could not have referred to. The book ends with the victory of the Janata Party in the 1977 general elections and the author makes a prescient conjecture that the ramshackle coalition was likely to disintegrate. Something that galled me about this book is the precious little consideration that South India receives in it. A few lines about Vijayanagara kingdom, the Bahini empire and the arrival of Vasco da Gama in the shores of Malabar is all the attention that this immense swath of territory gets in this volume. This is a bias that plagues the minds of most scholars who claim to be historians of 'India' and write volumes on 'Indian history'. Ram Mohun Roy is studied at the expense of Periyar and Rabindranath Tagore is glorified while Subramania Bharati is ignored. Even the great anti-Hindi agitations of 1965 are dubbed 'disturbances' and are papered over. No volume of Indian history is complete unless the huge role the southern part of the country played in shaping it is adequately dealt with. Now, let's come to the positive features. It is striking that in such a short volume, Spear does not just chronicle the major events of Indian history but analyses them and offers explanations. It is easy for a book that sets out to examine such a long period of history to come across as a humdrum catalogue of events with little by way of analysis. But Spear devotes adequate concentration to every important episode of history in tracing its roots and origins and considering its implications. This makes the book highly enjoyable. But make no mistake; Spear's volume is no substitute for a detailed and analytical study of particular themes in Indian history. There are a plethora of books that deal with specific timelines and phases. Spear himself provides a comprehensive bibliography divided according to subject as well as time period that is sure to delight history anoraks and aficionados. A serious reader should consult those books for further knowledge. But Spear's book will be beneficial to both neophytes and experts. For newcomers, reading Indian history for the first time or little background knowledge of it, this book will teach you all that you need to know about Indian history upon which you can research further and use as a basis to deepen your understanding. If you are a maven of Indian history, Spear's volume would be a quick and readable summary you could use for recapitulation. 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