

Book Reviews

***History of India, 1707-1857* by Lakshmi Subramanian, Orient Blackswan Limited, New Delhi, 2010, ISBN 978-81250-4039-4, ₹ 225, pp. 252.**

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The period 1707-1857 was full of dramatic events. In this book, the author tries to justify the meaning of transition implied in 'Medieval' to 'Modern' and remarks this period as the 'Century of Change'. The book interprets the grand events like the death of Aurangzeb, the battle of Plassey and the Great Revolt of 1857. The Mughal Empire was the largest centralized state. The reality of Mughal decline made a beginning with the invasion of Nadir Shah in 1739. The passing away of the Mughal Empire and its replacement by the Company was a long-drawn process with significant consequences for Indian society and polity. Further, after the battle of Plassey (1757), the English East India Company took the first major step in building the Indian Empire. It was the period of transition from a trading body to a sovereign authority.

The book also examines the processes of social and political changes that took place in eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century. The author explains the grounds for colonial dominance as well as resistance to it. The author discusses vividly the theme - Consolidation and Governance: The Apparatus of the Company Raj. The book gives a vivid picture of colonial initiatives in education, legislation and social and religious reforms.

The economic enhancements of the British Government are also discussed by the author. The British followed the policy of Mercantilism to deploy its newly acquired political power after Plassey to control channels of production and distribution. Imperial rules were framed for revenue demand and land revenue settlements were introduced. As a result, the peasants suffered due to the high revenue demand and extortions by the moneylenders. This became the major cause for the resistance towards the British authority.

The emergence of regional states marked a major turning point in the political landscape of eighteenth century in India such as in Bengal, Hyderabad and Awadh. The author analyzes the relation of the East India Company with Mysore, Marathas and finally with the Sikhs. The analysis reveals how the regional politics was actually a by-product of the British diplomacy.

This book throws light on the domain of culture and the colonial practices in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The author evaluates the social evils and genesis of religious reform movements. We can cite the examples of the Orientalists and the Anglicists in which the contribution of Raja Rammohan Roy marks a great significance. There was the mixing up of European and indigenous influences. The two instruments of social change, namely law and education, worked through a network of Indian cooperation and helped in the formation of new social groups and elites, who subsequently assumed responsibility for political representation and home rule. The author discusses about the narratives on productions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (1707-1857). Therefore, we get an extensive survey of the cultural and social developments in the 'Century of Change'.

On the whole, starting from the decline of the Mughal Empire, the book throws light on the status of society, polity and economy in eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century. The consequences of Company intervention in social and political affairs were revealed by a growing distance between the rulers and their subjects, the full extent of which was revealed in the violence that accompanied the great revolt of 1857. Its failure, made India come under the full control of the British Crown in 1858.

Having made an extensive survey, I find this book offering a wholesome picture of the "History of India" beginning with the decline of Mughal Empire and culminating in the consolidation, status and governance of the subcontinent by the British Empire in the middle of nineteenth century following upon the upheaval of 1857. Indeed, this book does provide a deeper understanding of the era that would draw the attention of both the experts in the field as well as the students in critically analyzing Modern Indian History.