

Book Review

Ranjan Chakrabarti, *A History of the Modern World – An Outline*, Primus Books, New Delhi, 2012, pp. xii + 416, Rs. 295.

In the times that we live the world is said to have become far more interconnected than it was ever before. This is in essence what many of us mean when we use the term globalization. The disjunctions, the alienations and the isolations are things of the past and a point of closure in ending all these seems to have come about. But, the closure sets a barrier to our imagination, and, we are rendered incapable of imagining the world as it was thought of many decades ago. This world was centered on Europe, the only living sphere in the globe that was totally connected to other spheres of human existence, and through these connections and interconnections it overmastered, totalized and hegemonized the world. Europe thus represented the totality of our civilized existence, the making of which is still of interest to students and teachers of history.

In fifteen chapters the history of the world has been narrated with principal focus on Europe, to which has been added the history geographical areas which have emerged as important in the development of modern global society. These areas are the Middle East with focus on Arab nationalism and emergence of Turkey; China since the entry of European powers in to that vast civilization; Japan which has emerged as a technological and economic superpower; and, America in the phase of its most egalitarian and democratic history. Europe, after all has lend to this tapestry of modernity all the richness and colours of civilization and other regions which had partaken of it forms the tassel. The chapters, the manner in which those have been arranged, seem to reflect this notion.

It is definitely a tremendous job for an author to incorporate the latest researches and insights within so wide a treatment of history. Prof. Chakrabarti has done this successfully. In very lucid and vivid prose he has presented this. A noticeable feature is that Prof. Chakrabarti has treated the history of Europe not only from the vantage point of ideas current in Europe itself, but also that of America. Thus the French Revolution and the

idea of the Republic have received as much attention as the ideological origins of the American Revolution. The history of the subsequent period, though discussed within the conventional idioms of historiography – for consumption by the students – has been treated as an emergence of both the currents.

It is very interesting to note that histories of nationalism in parts adjacent to Europe, like the erstwhile Ottoman Empire and Arabia have received fuller treatment in this book than in most textbooks on the subject. The history of nationalism in this part of the world exemplifies the alternative routes to modernity that some of the non-European countries resorted to and also the failure of conscious partnership between those countries and individual European nations. This can be contrasted to the development of modernity in more fully colonized regions like South Asia.

The book serves the important purpose of enhancing the understanding of the modern times.

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Caroline Holmqvist-Jonsater and Christopher Coker (eds.), *The Character of War in the 21st Century*, 2010, reprint, London/New York: Routledge, 2011, pp. xii+180, ISBN 978-0-415-69153-6, Price 20 sterling pounds.

When the Cold War ended, a minority of liberal scholars optimistically proclaimed the end of warfare. But, most of the cynical advocates of *realpolitik* approach claimed that the post Cold War era would turn out to be bloody. At the beginning of the new millennium it seems that the twenty-first century would indeed experience warfare just like the preceding centuries. However, the experts differ about the nature of warfare which will unfold in the near future. In the edited volume under review, a bunch of scholars (mostly from King's College and London School of Economics in Britain) in eight essays attempt to discern the future of warfare in planet earth.

The starting assumption of the volume is the nineteenth century Prussian military philosopher Carl Von Clausewitz's dictum that the nature of war remains constant throughout the centuries but the character of war changes with time and space. The nature of war is based on Clausewitz's trinity: enmity, chance and reason, and these three factors remain constant throughout the centuries. However, the character of war remains transitory, circumstantial and adaptive. The two editors Caroline Holmqvist-Jonsater and Christopher Coker firmly believe that Clausewitz remains highly relevant even for understanding the twenty-first century's dispersed stateless insurgencies. They write that the unchanging nature of war sets its grammar from which rules and regulations can be deduced and thus transcends space and time. In contrast, the changing character of war like a chameleon has a history which their contributors intend to study.

Rune Henrikson's essay asserts that the American way of war is instrumental in character. Its characteristics are as follows: governed by managerial ethos, dominance of technology (especially firepower through the use of airpower), etc. In contrast, the *Al Qaeda's* way of warfare is existential. The American way of warfare was effective against the German method of warfare during the Second World War. The American way of

war also had relevance against the Soviet military power during the height of Cold War. These two opponents of USA are products of the Western culture. However, against USA's opponents in Asia which are products of the non-Western cultures, the norms and values of US/Western way of warfare whittles away. The US managerial war model's metrics are just not operable in Asia. The US technowar ran into troubles already in Vietnam in the late 1960s. And the same thing happened in Afghanistan and Iraq in the first decade of the new millennium. Antonio Giustozzi's essay claims that a sort of de-modernization occurred among the neo-Taliban along the Af-Pak border. In fact, the *mujahideen* of Afghanistan in the late 1980s was somewhat better equipped than the neo-Taliban. Still, the high technology US warfare has no clear understanding of how to tackle the latter group.

Isabelle Duyvesteyn and Mario Fumerton note that the enemies of USA are following the twin strategies of terrorism and armed insurgency. Terrorist actions aim at psychological results. And for the insurgents, it is necessary that a large chunk of the populace actively supports those conducting insurgencies. Initially, the insurgents attempt to persuade the subject populace to obtain collaboration. And when this technique fails then they resort to violent oppression. Daniel R. Morris analyzing the 11 March 2004 Madrid Bombing writes that terrorism is an idea, a method of political violence. The ten explosions killed 191 people and injured over 1,800. The objective of terrorism is to force the enemy to surrender its political will and this succeeded because Spain pulled out troops from Iraq soon after the bombing.

A classic case of insurgency against US military appeared in April 2003 with the collapse of Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq. Jeffrey H. Michaels claims that the US civilian policy makers and the senior military officers attempted to avoid the use of the term insurgency to prevent political criticism at home. However, this discourse trap seriously harmed US counter-insurgency (COIN) in Iraq. In mid 2004, US Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld resisted the use of the term insurgency in Iraq. Even General Tommy Franks sided with Rumsfeld and believed that resistance will be crushed within two to three months. Paul Wolfowitz, Deputy Defence

Secretary was more candid. He accepted that to use the term insurgency will make clear that US rule in Iraq is unpopular and would also provide some legitimacy to those opposing the Americans. Hence, the reluctance to use the term insurgency in Iraq continued even in 2005. This in turn prevented the US Army from understanding the true nature of opposition and to craft a proper response to it. Rather, Rumsfeld is more comfortable in categorizing the opponents of US in Iraq as terrorists. Such a categorization actually encouraged high handed behavior and atrocities among the US security forces against all possible suspect Iraqis and the scandal at Abu Ghraib Prison. And this resulted in further alienation of the Iraqis from the US administration and also loss of international support for Washington DC. The US strategic managers deliberately overlooked the domestic origin of Sunni insurgency against the American troops but highlighted the presence of foreign mercenaries. Actually, writes Michaels, the role of foreign mercenaries was limited in sustaining the Iraqi insurgency. But, false categorization encouraged the US security forces to seal the international borders of Iraq to prevent entry of suspected *Al Qaeda* insurgents. Instead of searching for elusive foreign elements, the American security forces would have done better in winning the hearts and minds of the Iraqi populace.

Credit is due to the contributors of the edited anthology under review to break with the technological determinist view of future warfare as propagated by several scholars and military officers from USA. Instead of focusing merely on advanced technology and trying to portray future warfare through the heuristic device of Revolution in Military Affairs and Military Technical Revolution, the two editors and the contributors need to be praised for linking the role of ideology and social structure in shaping the dynamics of future organized violence. By contextualizing warfare with the human and social elements, the volume has brought back Clausewitz into circulation in the twenty-first century.

However, there is a defect. The collection suffers from a Eurocentric/Western bias. This volume portrays how USA and to a lesser extent NATO will have to fight wars in the future. USA and its ally NATO are militarily so strong that no power would challenge them in the battlefield. The only

way to challenge USA militarily is to go for asymmetric warfare in the *Al Qaeda*, Hamas style. So, the volume concentrates on the nature of insurgency and possible COIN strategies of USA and NATO. But, for the rising and medium powers like China, India, Pakistan, Israel etc conventional warfare with their neighbouring countries are possible. However, such types of possible future conflicts among the extra-European powers which ultimately might also draw USA into the fray, does not find space in the edited volume under review.

To conclude, discerning the nature of future warfare remains a matter of speculation; a sort of crystal gazing. After all, Clausewitz (and long before him the Classical Hindu theorist Kamandaka) has rightly said that war being a non-linear science is to a great extent chaotic (*anitya*) and hence can never be totally predictable. The only certainty of war is its recurring uncertainty.

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Lakshmi Subramanian, *History of India 1707-1857*, Orient Black Swan, New Delhi, 2010, pp.282, Rs. 250.00.

The period 1707-1857 saw the ascendancy of the British Colonial enterprise. The author claims that this is an authoritative text book for this period which identifies and examines the complexities of social, political, economic as well as cultural changes. It also goes more than the conventional understanding of the period and bears the influence of the scholarships from the nineteen eighties which according to her is a more nuanced understanding of the period.

Synthesising and analysing decades of research on this period, the book covers the following main themes:

- The disintegration of the Mughal Empire, the emergence of the successor states, and the establishment of the English East India Company's dominance in the subcontinent. It also examines the debate around the so-called eighteenth century transition to capitalism, and the consequences of the colonial intervention.
- The processes that aided the consolidation of the British Raj, its Methods of governance and the basis of this economic setup.
- Social and intellectual constructs which developed during this period, laying the grounds for colonial dominance as well as resistance to it culminating in the rebellion of 1857.
- A comprehensive overview of developments in the field of culture, art, literature, music and ideas during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The author claims that this book is the product of several decades of teaching undergraduate and post graduate students. It seems that she wanted to provide an easy reading for the undergraduate students, students who prefer to resort to Wikipedia rather than enjoy reading a textbook. She has succeeded to produce a lucid enough narrative of the period.

It should be remembered forever that introducing a text book that spans the period between the passing away of the Mughal empire and the culmination of the Company Raj is deceptively easy and daunting at the same time. Easy because it could appear to endorse a basic thematic unity that attended the making of the Company rule and the implication this had for India as a territorial unit and as a diverse social entity. Difficult because several decades of research has produced conflicting and contradictory impression on how the country felt the brunt of a colonial intrusion, and

how that attenuated its 'so called' (emphasis, author) impact on Indian society and economy.

For long the period 1707-1857 has commanded great deal of attention among historians. The author thinks that *it opened up a new phase of historical experience that historians came to associate with the idea of the 'modern'*. Scholars have identified those features of early colonial rule as the markers of a new order, of a new orientation that eventually prepared Indians to embark on an anti-colonial struggle and lay the foundations of a modern nation state.

However the author seems to have emphasized more on the period of the Company rule and has only prefaced it with a history of Mughal decline and assertion of regionalism as a dominant force in the early eighteenth century. The dialectic between the notions of change and continuity needed to be traced more emphatically and even if the book is meant for undergraduate students basic empirical researches on the period could have been introduced. The author has attempted to give a survey of what goes under the name of *revisionist* historiography of the period without any mention of the researches of the Aligarh School and their rejoinders that qualifies the stands of the *revisionist* school.

In retrospect, the book actually looks at the first century of colonial rule, though the heated debates about the limits of the colonial rule seem to be missing, with only a short mention in the epilogue. The author's view that the *colonial Indian States' modernity was largely fractured and incomplete* needed elaboration.

The most enjoyable part of the book is the discussion on culture and cultural practices in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. An attempt to explore possibilities of studying art and culture during a period of social dislocation is indeed commendable in the contextuality of 'early modern' and 'colonial modern' and changing perspectives of patronage. A discussion on the personalities of the artists and literati of the period would have been a refreshing addition

Each of the chapters in the book is accompanied by maps and comprehensive bibliography which is commendable. The glossary provided at the end of the book seems inadequate.

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S Z H Jafri (ed.), *Recording the Progress of Indian History: Symposia Papers of the Indian History Congress 1992-2010*, Primus Books (ISBN: 978-93-80607-28-3), New Delhi, 2012 (pp. i-xii+546), Rs.1495/-

The volume comprises of papers presented at the annual Symposia sessions organized by the Indian History Congress, the premier organization of the Indian Historians. The volume introduces ground-breaking researches from a number of top Indian scholars and, therefore makes a notable advancement in the fields of history and archeology in India. Arranged thematically under the sections- People and Environment; Language Change; Education and Transmission of Knowledge; Gender History; Caste, Class and social Justice; Frontiers of History; Facets of our Cultural Past; Money and Social Change; State in Indian History- the essays by some of the most prominent historians and archeologist in India traverse subjects that are central to the study of history in India.

In their examination of primary data from a variety of sources, the contributors of this volume have pioneered enquiry into various historical themes that have come to attract much scholarly attention. In turn, they have also provided new frameworks and offered fresh and original insights on various dimensions of Indian history.

The purpose for organizing Symposia Lectures by the Indian History Congress is to investigate emerging trends in historical studies and to explore the frontiers of debate, issues and interpretations in the study of history. Hence, the symposia themes were always chosen keeping all the periods of Indian history in mind. Therefore, one can have an idea how far an emerging trend can be investigated keeping in view the very varied nature of the data from Ancient, Medieval and Modern periods of Indian history.

Most of the contributors to the volume are practically who's who of India's scholarship in the field of History. These lectures were printed by the Indian History Congress. They were hugely influential in shaping contours and providing a solid framework for undertaking some of these global trends of historiography and its application in India's historical past. Though these publications were in the public domain but had extremely limited circulation.

Therefore, it was decided by the Indian History Congress to publish all these available lectures (twenty eight in all) were put together and arranged thematically and brought out by the Primus Books in an elegantly produced volume.

Anyone interested in examining the most recent trends in Indian historiography of the last two decades cannot possibly ignore this volume. Also, it provides required framework to the scholars (keeping in view the availability and the limitations of the data for the various facets of India's past) to undertake the emerging global trends in historical research and its application in the history of the Indian subcontinent.

A comprehensive index provided at the end (pp.527-546) is really a venture which is quite reader friendly. At the same time one wonders if a comprehensive bibliography could also have been provided which would have made the volume even more reader friendly, but it appears that it has been avoided not to make the volume too bulky.

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Articles and Book Reviews based on historical approaches are cordially invited for publication in Vidyasagar University Journal of History. Academicians or research scholars can submit their articles either written in English or Bengali. A declaration that they have not been published or submitted for publication elsewhere should be attached along with. These should be sent to the Executive Editor in duplicate in hard copy and soft copy with one and half space typing along with an abstract of not more than 100 words (in any word processing software). Softcopy should be sent in the mail id sujayasarkarvu@gmail.com. Articles are preferably not to exceed 8,000 words in length. Diagrams may be used only if absolutely essential.