

## **Book Reviews**



**The French Colonial Imagination: Writing the Indian Uprising, 1857-1858, from Second Empire to Third Republic.** *By Nicola Frith; (Lexington Books, London 2014); Pages: 220, Price: Rs 4162/-; ISBN: 978-0-7391-8000-2*

After decades of historical writings highlighting British and Indian perspectives on the 'Indian Revolt of 1857', historians in the recent years have turned their attention towards the alternate perspectives, i.e., the perspectives of other nations about this monumental Indian historical event. The main theme of the book under review, by Dr Nicola Frith from Bangor University, UK, is about how the Indian Revolt of 1857 was used by the French academia, media, and fiction writers as a tool to recall the history of French loss of the missed opportunity to colonise India way back in 1754, to undermine British colonial hegemony and to imagine a future in which French colonialism would replace the British.

The book is laid out in five parts. The first part highlights the drawbacks of the binary model (framework between the colonizer and the colonized), used in most post-colonial writings. The second brings out the differences between the British and the French writings in the nomenclature being used to describe the Indian Revolt of 1857 and the rationale behind it. The third chapter enumerates the contrasting manner in which the resistance by the revolters is described by the British and French writings. The subsequent chapter covers how the British and the French describe the brutal revenge exacted by the British East India Company forces against the Indians to quell the Revolt. The last part discusses how the French writings about the 'Indian Revolt of 1857' undermined the policies of British colonialism while at the same time imagining the scenario of a French-led India.

In the first chapter, the author notes that the binary model as well as the Anglophone post-colonial model may not be the best ways to examine the writings about the France's engagement with India, because of the difference between the basic natures of French versus British colonial thought. The author has highlighted the historical milestone of 1754, when France was on the verge of making significant progress towards colonisation of India, with Dupleix, the then Governor of Pondicherry having already provided a launch pad with his successful efforts during the preceding years, in enhancing the political influence of France along the

Coromandel coast including the Carnatic and Deccan regions. However, the Versailles Court, under Louis XV, disregarded these endeavours and instead recalled Dupleix back to France. This decision is seen as a historic moment of opportunity lost during the *Ancien Regime* (from the 15<sup>th</sup> Century till 1789), because at approximately the same time, Dupleix's principal opponent Robert Clive was given the necessary support by the British Crown, which facilitated the defeat of *Shuja-ud-Daula* in the Battle of Plassey in 1757 that heralded the commencement of the British rule in India. Notwithstanding the above and the fact that the French colonialism always remained eclipsed by the dominant colonial power, the continued presence of the French trading posts at Chandernagar, Karikal, Yanaon, Mahe and their administrative capital at Pondicherry remained a source of pride for the French.

The second chapter focuses on the 'war of words' between the two colonial powers in India, regarding the terminology of the Indian Revolt. The British press and academia attempted to limit the significance and potential of the Indian challenge; one of the greatest threats to the British Empire, by terming it as mutiny, thereby implying that the resistance was of a local nature. On the contrary, the French press disagreed with the British representation, by viewing the Indian Revolt as a mass movement and using the terms like insurrection, national revolt and revolution. Moreover, the French press speculated the possibility of the Revolt escalating into a large-scale rebellion all across India. Interestingly, Count Edouard de Warren wrote in '*L'Inde anglaise: Avant et après l'insurrection de 1857*' that the Indian Revolt marked the commencement of a national revolution, which would take perhaps another hundred years to throw the British out of India. As events unfolded, his prophecy was proved correct.

The third chapter has covered the responses of the two colonial powers to the threat posed by the revolt of 1857 against the colonial empire. The chapter is mainly devoted to Nana Sahib, who in the eyes of the British was the biggest as well as the most hated enemy of the human race. The British press created the myth about Nana Sahib, to be a monster, traitor and a conspirator, and linked him with the three massacres of the Europeans at Satichaura Ghat, Bibighar, Kanpur and of Fatehgarh escapees. In 1857, his story was also displayed at the Madame Tussaud's

museum. *Nana Sahib* was depicted as a symbol of Indian revolt, thus characterising all Indians as barbaric and uncivilised who needed to be dealt with firmly. This provided the British with justification for brutal revenge and mass executions against the Indians that took place subsequently. On the other hand, the French writings reversed the narrative and termed the British as traitors who had betrayed the civilising mission of Europe. The British were also seen as incapable of civilising their subjects, owing to their exploitative nature.

The fourth chapter talks about how a narrative was structured in the British academic landscape to justify the extremely brutal revenge targeted against the Indians and the French counter-narrative to the same. The events of the Bibighar massacre were so structured and articulated so as to propagate that the Indian men had brutally raped and murdered the British women and children. The story was further sensationalised by exaggerating the images of violence against their women. The author states that a sense of psychic powerlessness and fear of the Indians lay in the British minds behind such a narrative. Such a selective and biased representation of facts allowed the British to put the blame on the Indians; provide a justification for their own atrocities and hide their own inadequacies. The French press instead represented the events in a factual, non-emotive manner without advocating revenge against the Indians. French press also criticised the British brutality and termed the British colonialism as backward that had failed to graduate the Indians beyond slaves. Such writings were motivated with an aim to reveal the exploitative and predatory nature of British colonialism.

The last chapter focuses on the strategic possibilities that opened up to the French Second Empire (January 1852 till October 1870), under Napoleon III and subsequently, in the political and economic realm by the vulnerability and possible collapse of the British Empire in their largest colony in India as a result of the threat posed by the Indian revolt of 1857. Consequently, the revolt revived French interest in India with the likelihood of the downfall of British colonialism that would pave the way for revival of French imperialism in India and elsewhere. The French writings highlighted the oppressive, selfish and materialistic nature of British colonialism as against the moral and value-based civilising mission of France. The Indian revolt also led the French academia to imagine a

scenario where India would be liberated from the British rule and instead be ruled by a benevolent colonial power; France.

The book is an outcome of PhD research at the University of Liverpool by Dr Nicola Frith. It provides a detailed account of various aspects of French perspective on the Indian Revolt of 1857 in an interesting and holistic manner and is a valuable addition to the historiography of the Indian Revolt of 1857, by way of French sources. The central subject of the book, though pertaining to a milestone event in Indian history, is largely unknown to the Indian audience who are familiar with only the Indian and the British perspectives; herein lies the importance of the book. The author, with her domain expertise in French, has meticulously researched available primary and secondary sources and duly cited these at the end of every chapter.

Overall, this is a very well written book, which would be a reference material and a guide for the scholar warriors, academicians and others who are associated with the subject and who wish to have a deeper understanding of the international dimension of the Indian Revolt of 1857.

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**Rethinking Palkhiwala: Centenary Commemorative Volume.**

*Edited by Maj Gen Nilendra Kumar; (OakBridge Publishing Pvt Ltd, Gurugram, 2021); Pages 328; Price Rs 995/-; ISBN 9788194991151 (Hardbound).*

Nanabhoy ("Nani") Ardeshir Palkhiwala, an eminent constitutional lawyer and a vocal champion of human rights had an unusual career. At the age of 30, he wrote '*The Law and Practice of Income Tax*' alongside Sir Jamshedji Behramji Kanga, a senior lawyer of repute. More than seven decades later, the book is still a point of reference for tax professionals in India. He also served as ambassador to the United States in the late 1970s. Palkhiwala was a man who revered the Constitution of India and the principles it stood for. He once said, "The Constitution was meant to impart such a momentum to the living spirit of the rule of law that democracy and civil liberty may survive in India beyond our own times and in the days when our place will know us no more".

As the title of the publication suggests, the volume under review is a brief account of opinions expressed by the eminent jurists, academicians, political analysts, and senior military commanders during fourteen events related to Palkhiwala's birth centenary held at New Delhi and other places from 03 February 2019 to 02 February 2020. The prominent contributors are Shri Pravin H Parekh, Abhishek M Singhvi, Arun Shourie, Bibek Debroy, Justices DY Chadrachud, Ms Indu Malhotra, L Nageswar Rao, former diplomat Lalit Mansingh, and former Chief of the Army Staff General VP Malik, besides others. Few write ups relating to personal interaction with Palkhiwala have been contributed by Shri Iqbal M Chagla, Janak Dwarkadas, Pravin H Parekh, V Sudhish Pai, and Manish Arora.

The first 'Palkhiwala Lecture' was delivered by Justice Madan Lokur, the former Judge of the Supreme Court, at Indian Society of International Law on 13 February 2019. Justice Lokur in his talk on 'Rule of Law and Role of Free Citizens' highlighted that a citizen has a right to know the policies and plans in existence and also their implementation strategy so that his role in their success is meaningful (p. 21). This was followed by a series of lectures by eminent personalities and the text of their talk has been included in the publication. The text of these lectures provides a true understanding of the legal brilliance of Palkhiwala.

In September 2019, as part of Palkhiwala's Birth Centenary celebrations, a panel discussion was held at USI of India. Distinguished panellist at the event included Ambassador Lalit Mansingh, General VP Malik, Shri Sanjay Baru, and Major General Nilendra Kumar. This event focused on different facets of the life of Palkhiwala. The scripts of talk delivered by the panellists as well as their views on questions are included at pp 139 to 155 of the publication. General Malik in his talk said that Mr Palkhiwala was an eminent jurist and great admirer of the armed forces. On several occasions, Palkhiwala would say that India has survived due to valour and sacrifice of the armed forces personnel (p. 143).

Another important event which took place was at Hotel Taj Mahal on 31 October 2019, where panellists included Dr Vinay Sahastrabuddhe, Dr Salman Khursheed, Dr Yogendra Yadav, and Mr Peter Rimmele. It was moderated by Ms Mandira Nayar, senior

special correspondent of *The Week*. Dr Yadav eloquently expressed his views on the evils of dynasty in Indian politics. The text of speeches delivered by the distinguished panellists has been included in the publication.

A number of other prominent contributors have shared the anecdotes and their personal experiences with Palkhiwala. This volume also includes 64 photographs taken at various events, making it an illustrious publication. This publication will be of great value to legal professionals, judges and jurists, students, and law institutions in India and abroad.

*Wg Cdr UC Jha (Retd)*



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# USI

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### Library and Reading Room

The library holds over 68,000 books, and journals, including some books of 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, on an astonishing variety of subjects. While the principal emphasis is on strategy and defence, there are a large number of works on different vistas of Indian life. There are memoirs, biographies, recollections, diaries, journals, manuscripts for scholars and researchers. The reading room is air-conditioned, spacious and well stocked in terms of current reading material. Library was automated in 2002.

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The Centre was established in 2000 and functioned with USI till Aug 2014, when it moved out of USI premises and was delinked from USI. Its aims were organising workshops, seminars and training capsules for peacekeepers, observers and staff officers – both Indian and foreign. It also oversaw the practical training of Indian contingents. It functioned under a Board of Management headed by the Vice Chief of the Army Staff and worked in close coordination with the Service Headquarters and the Ministries of External Affairs and Defence. In August 2014, CUNPK moved out to the accommodation allotted by the Army HQ.

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For further particulars, please write to Director, USI of India, Rao Tula Ram Marg, (Opposite Signals Enclave) Post Bag No. 8, Vasant Vihar PO, New Delhi – 110 057

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