

## **Good Nazis and Just Scholars:**

### **Much Ado About the British Empire**

a review-article by Vinay Lal\*

**Originally published as "Good Nazis and just scholars: much ado about the British Empire", review of P. J. Marshall, ed., Cambridge Illustrated History of the British Empire, *Race and Class* 38, no. 4 (April-June 1997):89-101.**

During his second stint as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Winston Churchill, after an extended meeting with Jawaharlal Nehru, his Indian counterpart, is said to have remarked that he had no idea that Indians could be so pleasant and civilized. He had rather been inclined to view the Indians as "the beastliest people in the world next to the Germans" (p. 85), and declared intolerable "the humiliation of being kicked out of India" by a people whom his ancestors had unequivocally described as effeminate. This very Churchill, in words that Indians are not likely to forget soon, had found it "alarming and also nauseating to see Mr Gandhi, a seditious Middle Temple lawyer, now posing as a fakir of a type well known in the East, striding half-naked up the steps of the Viceregal palace, while he is still organizing and conducting a defiant campaign of civil disobedience, to parley on equal terms with the representative of the King-Emperor." It is scarcely conceivable that Churchill would have been more amenable to the idea of Indian independence if Nehru rather than Gandhi had been at the helm of the freedom struggle, but nonetheless one can hazard the seemingly bold proposition that Gandhi's 'disciple' and Gandhi's 'foe' understood each other more than either of them understood Gandhi. In a peculiar sort of way, the fervent monarchist Churchill and the secular democrat Nehru were collaborators and partners in a common enterprise, admirers of the modern nation-state system, and the marginalization of Gandhi that Churchill sought but could not attain was achieved, though not by Nehru, certainly by those modernizing elements that began to flourish in India under Nehru's dispensation.

Collaboration has long been one of the principal motifs of imperialist historiography, and it occupies a substantial place in the most recent, yet exceedingly worn-out, interpretation of the British empire by P. J. Marshall, Emeritus Professor of History at King's College, and other contributors to the volume in question. There has long been a tradition of 'Cambridge' histories, and among the most formidable of these gargantuan scholarly exercises, once described by the historian H.A.L. Fisher as "written by an army of specialists concentrating the latest results of special study", were the multi-volume histories of the British Empire and India. These histories bore

the stamp of authority before the interpretations of more recent years, whether propelled by post-structuralism, colonial discourse analysis, or more generally by the various theoretical inspirations collected under the rubric 'cultural studies', effectively put into question the epistemological and cultural politics of the Cambridge histories. Though histories of the British empire continue to be written from time to time, the scholarly enterprise of studying the British empire has suffered a precipitous decline, except perhaps in Britain which has little else to live on these days except the memory of more felicitous times, and many American universities have not cared to fill positions in the history of the British empire. The spiralling growth of literature on colonialism has made mastery of anything more than a narrow band of the literature insuperably difficult, but this is not the most compelling reason why the study of the Empire has been largely abandoned.

Until quite recently, historians and political commentators were inclined to take a largely benign view of the empire, and though it was acknowledged that British administrators had been somewhat remiss in the performance of their duties on occasion, or even taken recourse to unnecessarily repressive measures at even rarer moments (goaded to fury by the actions of rebellious and ungrateful natives), it was reasoned that no person attempting a balance sheet could but think that the empire had brought progress, development, moral sense, and the other good things of life to savage, semi-barbarous, or otherwise backward people trapped in an arrested state of development. The military fiasco at Gallipoli, the brutalization of the Boers in South Africa, the massacre of Indians at Amritsar: all these stood as blots upon the 'fair name' of England, but this was as a speck in the ocean alongside the achievements, from the building of the railroads to the establishment of universities, that could be trumpeted by empire-mongers. At this time, the study of the empire was thought to belong properly with the study of European history and the history of European expansion, the colonies being seen as the arena of European activity, the fulfillment of Europe's ordained role to civilize the world, at once *terra nullis* and *tabula rasa* awaiting the penetrating presence of the European gentleman. When, however, attention began to be riveted, not upon the colonial office in London, or upon the great proconsuls -- Rhodes, Lugard, Cromer, Curzon, Kitchener -- of the empire, but rather upon resistance to colonialism, the activities of subalterns, the intrusion of colonialism into the everyday lives of people, and the oppressiveness of colonial structures, then colonial history began to be seen as something quite distinct from the concern of Europeanists. What was to be done with a field of inquiry that European scholars could no longer command? The study of colonialism, at least in history departments, was now seen as belonging within the purview of historians of Asia and Africa, and the attendant ramifications, such as the loss of funding, were soon experienced. Since the study of colonialism now appeared to have fallen largely into the hands of its detractors, who saw the whole business of empire as an unmitigated evil, it was and

continues to be erroneously assumed that historians of the British Empire (and likewise of the imperial conquests of other European powers) belong to the 'left'. From these historians, it was said, 'objectivity' could scarcely be expected.

As the *Cambridge Illustrated History of the British Empire* so amply demonstrates, the study of the Empire remains, as it has always been, a conservative and cautious if not retrograde affair; it suggests also the hazardousness of the quest for 'objectivity' (p. 13), and renders dubious the moral integrity of any such enterprise. This volume begins with the Britain's almost simultaneous loss of its American colonies and its acquisitions of territories in India; and in four chapters, all by Marshall, a chronological account of the Empire is skillfully sketched out. Before the end of the eighteenth century, as Marshall says, the British had consolidated their territories in the Caribbean and what was to become Canada, and very substantial parts of India had fallen under their rule. The nineteenth century was to be the great era of British expansion: if for some imperialists the economic imperative was paramount, the militarists were eager to secure Britain's primacy among European nations and provide Britain with a reserve of men whose lives could be sacrificed without much compunction, while the missionaries were desirous of finding terrain where the heathens, not having to contend with the formidable attractions of the pub, could perhaps more reliably be expected to receive the teachings of the Lord. This empire constituted the colonies of white settlement -- Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and South Africa -- with which Britain would have a special relationship, and other colonies in Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean where the impress of British rule was experienced rather differently; it also, in a manner of speaking, extended to those countries, such as China, where the British exercised a form of indirect rule, or where in any case they were able to gain, usually by the display of military force, extraordinary trading privileges. By the latter half of the century, the Empire was showing signs of stress, and rebellions in both India (1857-58) and Jamaica (1865) had to be suppressed with brutal ferocity. India was then brought directly under the Crown, and shortly thereafter the scramble for Africa commenced among the European powers, Britain gaining a large share of the spoils. The Boer War at the turn of the century, and unrest in India, first during the partition of Bengal in 1905 and subsequently in the Punjab after the termination of the Great War, considerably rattled the British. Resistance would only grow over the years. The emergence of Gandhi and his great non-cooperation movement against British rule in the early 1920s are sometimes seen as signalling the end of the empire. But Marshall is at pains to note that "the British empire [only] came to an effective end in the 1960s" (p. 105), and indeed the inestimable contribution of the Dominions, as well as India and the African colonies, to the war effort, both in 1914-18 and 1939-45, conveys the impression that Britain could rightfully expect the loyalty of its possessions.

How, then, do Marshall and his associates write the history of the Empire, and what are the principal features of this history? A great many admissions are made which previous histories of the empire, whose authors were moved by jejune emotions of patriotism and foolish considerations of Christian pride, would perhaps not have allowed. It is asserted that though the British "liked to assume that their role in the world was an essentially peaceful one", the "reality" was "a record of almost continuous conquest or violence overseas between 1783 and 1870" (p. 30). It is similarly conceded that though Britain is thought to have aided greatly in the 'development' of the colonies, "the British invested overwhelmingly in countries of recent white settlement, whether they were British colonies or not" (p. 57). Apparently only white-skinned subjects were fit for development. While Britain vigorously defended free trade, it "retained a disproportionately large share of the trade and investment in its own colonies" (p. 110), on the principle of course that while its own privileges were not to be jeopardized, the rest of the world was not to be allowed to pursue protectionist policies. A. J. Stockwell, in his essay on "Power, Authority, and Freedom", even makes bold to suggest, after contrasting the simplicity of 10 Downing Street with the "grandeur of almost any of the government houses decorating British dependencies from India to the West Indies" (p. 166), that democracy at home went hand in hand with authoritarianism overseas.

These admissions (mild as they are) of hypocrisy, which E. M. Forster had characterized as an indelible British trait, might almost fill one with the hope that the authors are prepared to ask some searching questions about the nature of the British empire and offer a sustained critique of imperialist enterprises. But even a cursory reading would belie such a hope. The endeavor, present almost throughout the volume (with the exception of Tapan Raychaudhuri's article on India), but perhaps more marked in Marshall's contributions, is to offer a 'balanced' account, lest it be supposed by innocent readers that the business of empire may well be evil, that the history of Britain, and likewise of other European powers, is marked by ruthless and single-minded self-aggrandizement, or that the British were callous in their treatment of colonized people. Consider briefly, for example, the manner in which the suppression of the Indian Rebellion of 1857-58 is represented. "Mutineers and their supposed supporters were often killed out of hand" (p. 50), Marshall acknowledges of the British reaction to the mutiny, but it is at once added that "British civilians, including women and children, were murdered as well as the British officers of the sepoy regiments" (p. 50). As far back as 1925, Edward Thompson, eager to defend the British as the world's noblest race, and contemptuous of Indians as a people so poorly skilled in scholarly matters as to be unable to defend themselves before the wilting fury of the Englishman's pen, was nonetheless constrained to admit that the Indians almost invariably resorted to brutalities *after* having been brutally victimized by the British; it is also noteworthy that though the British widely believed that their women

had been molested and raped, this scurrilous rumor being used to terrorize the entire population, an inquiry conducted by order of the Governor-General, Lord Canning, was unable to point to a single instance of the molestation of British women. Moreover, if Marshall's interpretation has nothing more to say for it than the simple expedient of *quid pro quo*, he must ask how it is that the British were able to characterize themselves as an overwhelmingly superior people, a people whose Christian virtues stood in sharp contradistinction to the immorality of the heathenish Hindus. That was, after all, the justification for British rule, but all these considerations are elided. The more pressing problem, of asking how it is that the Indians came to be characterized as the mutineers, when the British were legally no more than the subjects of the Mughal emperor, is never raised.

The treatment of the Punjab disturbances of 1919 is likewise unsatisfactory if not deceptive. A chilling photograph of an Indian being compelled to crawl at the point of a bayonet, pursuant to General Dyer's issuance of the notorious 'crawling order' (p. 98), is accompanied by the caption that "counter measures of a most ruthless kind were taken by the British commander, General Dyer." But this caption obscures more than it reveals. It was, as historians of India are only too well aware, a regime of 'frightfulness' which the British inaugurated in the Punjab, and Dyer was only one of many martial law commanders who took it upon themselves to inflict 'fanciful' punishments upon Indians. Yet clearly the suggestion, an altogether misleading one, is that Dyer stood in sinister isolation, for this strategy allows the larger enterprise of imperialism to remain unscathed: excesses can always be put down to the madness and barbarism of one man. It is also at this time that the bombing by air of entire villages was introduced, and air power, though it receives no mention in the history of Marshall and company, was henceforth to be critical in the maintenance of the British empire, as relentless 'air terrorism' in Mesopotamia and the North West Frontier Province over the next decade showed. Orwell registered this fact, when he made the observation that words like 'pacification' had slipped into the English language with disturbing ease, it being considered no remarkable matter to bomb entire areas from the air. Though Marshall's work is set up as a paean to the British commitment to 'fair play', nowhere is it mentioned that Dyer, upon receiving a mild censure from the House and being relieved of his services, was congratulated by the House of Lords for having saved India from ruin, while the British public feted him with a private purse to the staggering amount of 26,317. In a similar vein, though it is noted that Governor Eyre's brutal repression of the Morant Bay uprising in 1865 was "much criticized in Britain and produced a vigorous altercation between those who held the Governor responsible and his defenders" (p. 158), the crucial detail, of Eyre's vindication by the House of Commons, is suppressed. The leading men of the day -- Carlyle, Ruskin, Tennyson, Dickens, and Kingsley, among others -- supported Eyre, and those who did not, such as John Stuart Mill, were nonetheless ardent believers in inequality. Only a

few public men were moved by the plight of the natives, but a great many more were concerned that England, having behaved badly, had tarnished her name. What is rather surprising about the enterprise of empire is the overwhelming support it received from all classes of English society (p. 321), and radicals who mouth platitudes about the revolutionary potential if not ardor of the working class might be reminded that over 100,000 working men presented a petition to the Queen in 1870, declaring their "alarm that Your Majesty has been advised to give up the colonies, containing millions of acres which might be employed profitably both to the colonies and to ourselves as fields of emigration" (cf. p. 329). Even the 'Little Englanders', who again receive no mention, were no keen proponents of emancipation for the non-white colonies, claiming that India (and the Caribbean colonies) could not be abandoned to anarchy.

If an annoying kind of book-keeping informs much of the analysis, the obfuscation, and more frequently omission, of crucial parts of the social, political, and intellectual history of the empire is no less disturbing. It is in the colonies, rather than Britain, that many elements of the modern nation-state were first put into place. The disciplinary mechanisms of the colonial state, from police services to fingerprinting, inspired like developments in England. It is in India that fingerprinting, which rapidly became accepted all over the world, was developed by members of the Bengal police, and E. R. Henry, who played a large (but perhaps not indispensable) part in this venture, went on to become Commissioner of Metropolitan Police in London. The police services, as a whole, were more well-developed in India than England, not surprising when we consider the active role of the colonial state in not only putting down crime (as might be expected), but in repressing revolutionary activity and instituting a regime of surveillance. Scotland Yard was preceded by the Thuggee and Dacoity department which, when it disbanded around 100 years ago, gave way to the Central Intelligence Department. If the so-called 'rubber bullet' was to be used by British troops in Ireland in the 1970s, it was in India in the nineteenth century that the British pioneered the use of the fatal Dum-Dum or expanding bullet, subsequently used in the Boer War. The same war saw the British imprison Boer women and children in what were in effect concentration camps, and though Britain, the island civilization, prided itself on its unquestionable moral superiority to the militaristic Germans, it undoubtedly had a thing or two to teach to the Huns, as they were then called. It is India, Ireland, and later the African colonies that served as Britain's laboratory, and where methods of riot control and police action were mastered before being deployed against the working class and communists in Britain. This history has not yet been written, and the present work makes no effort in that direction: if it did, we might learn something of how Britain, howsoever inadvertently, was shaped by its possessions.

Marshall is, of course, not unaware that the experience of empire may have determined the contours of Britain. One fifth of the graduates of just three Oxford colleges found employment in the empire (p. 330); the monarchy became "very much identified with empire" (p. 325). As he notes, by far the greater part of Britain's ethnic mix today is on account of the empire; and he could have added that a select portion of Indian cuisine has actually made it possible to eat well in Britain. But these all are self-evident propositions, and it requires no detective work to deduce this manner of impact of the empire on Britain. About as far as Marshall can go is to ask: "Did Britain develop institutions appropriate to an imperial state, but ill-equipped for the modern world?" Did the British economy lean too heavily on its markets in the colonies and thus become "ill-fitted to compete with advanced economies in Europe, North America, and Japan" (p. 318)? Marshall warns that the empire can be no "alibi" for Britain's "present discontents" (p. 337), but secretly, I suspect, he would have us commiserate with Britain, now reduced to a third-rate power. Never mind that much worse happened to the colonies, Britain alone matters. Even then, the more interesting questions are not asked: does the empire explain why Britain never learned to live with 'difference'? What did the British, particularly the English, learn of themselves, and how were notions of Englishness shaped in the belly of the empire? Did the empire appreciably alter the Englishman's virulent hatred of the Irish, or did anti-Irish sentiment, notwithstanding the Irish contribution to the empire, receive added impetus? How were discourses of sexuality central to empire-building, and what relation did these discourses, such as the construction of the Hindu as an effeminate being, have to English conceptions of feminized Hebraism and feminized Celtism? Can the ease with which disgruntled elements were despatched to the far-flung parts of the empire help explain, in part, why a radical culture of dissent has not developed in Britain? We have to recall only Rhodes' "solution for the social problem, i.e., in order to save the 40,000,000 inhabitants of the United Kingdom from a bloody civil war, we colonial statesmen must acquire new lands to settle the surplus population, to provide new markets for the goods produced in the factories and mines. The Empire . . . is a bread and butter question. If you want to avoid civil war, you must become imperialists."

It is perhaps in the realm of literature, the arts, and 'cultural' encounters in an arena such as sport, that the most insightful connections between Britain and its former empire could have been drawn, but here too conventionality and timidity reign supreme. Cricket was taken to all parts of the empire, and Stockwell states that "sport was one of the means by which British values were instilled into the peoples of the empire" (p. 160). What values were these that, as Stockwell would so matter-of-factly have it, the British alone had? There was the supposed ethic of sportsmanship and 'fair play', but Stockwell would be well-advised to consider the infamous episode of Bodyline, in which the British, upon finding that the Australian Bradman was tearing

the English bowling to shreds, resorted to such intimidatory tactics that Australia almost threatened to sever ties with Britain. 'Fair play' meant nothing more than that Britain, as the mature guardian, was entitled to change the rules whenever it pleased, and that its recalcitrant wards were to render submission without complaint. The colonized saw easily through this deception, and were to learn no other British value than that, for the most power, the power of the gun prevails over 'fair play', whatever may be the forces of ultimate compensation at work in this universe. This brute fact was enunciated by Hilaire Belloc, as he joined in the celebration of British victories over Africans:

Thank God that we have got

The Maxim gun, and they have not. Fair play aside, was cricket the same game in India or the West Indies as it was in England, and must we continue to see it merely as an English transplant in the colonies? What was the nature of the encounter over cricket, and what other stories can we weave into that narrative?

Like much of everything else, cricket is not really discussed, and it is seen as having no relationship to politics, or to the lofty matters of the mind. It could have served as a point of departure for an excursion into English amateurism, and perhaps we might have learned something of how cricket, Sherlock Holmes, and P. G. Wodehouse have been conjoined inextricably as a indelible mark of Englishness in the story-telling common among the colonized. But this requires imagination, and Andrew Porter dares not. His ideas are far more pedestrian, and he concludes, in his chapter on "Empires of the Mind", that one of the most enduring elements of the empire is the diffusion of English and its ascendancy as the premier international language. Many writers around the world have embraced English as their very own tongue, but it is rightly noted that they have given English a new life. Judging from the list of recipients of the Booker Prize over the last two decades, the main shapers of the English novel are no longer English or even British; and as Porter recognizes, some writers, who have never received the Booker, and whose career indeed started before the Booker was even instituted, have done at least as much to enrich English. Porter is, however, clearly unaware of G. V. Desani's *All About H. Hatterr*, of which T. S. Eliot, upon its publication in 1948, was to say: "In all my experience, I have not met with anything quite like it." This is no insignificant matter, for forty years before Salman Rushdie came along, Desani had already given shape to the post-modern novel. Predictably, it is V. S. Naipual, whose platitudinous remarks on India and the rest of the Third World have earned him the undying gratitude of the West, who receives the most attention, as an enduring example of the the great intellectual good that the British did in their colonies. From literature Porter moves rapidly to education, as another area where the British purportedly left behind a lasting impression, and it is at once asserted that the empire was the "world's greatest-ever

educational enterprise" (p. 194). This leaves no room for doubt, though this claim is easily contested, if it isn't somewhat unintelligible. Primary education suffered greatly in India, and scholars such as Dharampal have sought to argue that India did not fare badly in the least in comparison to England in providing some form of education to children. In India, during the entire period of British rule, literacy rates were to remain appallingly poor, and it is only in the post-independence period that literacy rates have seen some marked, though scarcely satisfactory, improvement. But Porter puts the onus of the poor showing of colonial governments on the natives, for there is, he says, "no disguising the fact that the spread of education and ideas was fundamentally affected by what colonial peoples wished to take" (p. 200). It is true that some people were hesitant to send their children to school out of the fear that they would be open to Christian influence, much as some people in many formerly colonized countries still do not avail of free schooling for their children when they can be employed on the farm or in the city, but such schooling as has been offered does not speak to the condition of communities grounded in local knowledge systems. In the arena of higher education, universities were established, first in 1858 (following the mutiny), but whether this was done out of charity and goodwill, or with an eye to producing a class of trustworthy natives, who would stand by the British and dutifully serve as clerks, is another question. Since the politics of knowledge evidently does not matter, only certain facts must be registered. Porter's way of dealing with Said's argument, about the manner in which the institutional apparatus of Orientalism serviced imperialism, is to state that "academic research is done for its own sake and that the knowledge acquired can be used for all sorts of purposes" (p. 197). Though Said is scarcely immune from criticism, and his argument has been described as totalizing, much like the Orientalist views he scathingly attacked, one expects the poor rejoinder that Porter offers from college students.

It would be idle to pretend that a single-volume history of the British empire can be comprehensive, and Marshall and his fellow contributors rightfully have no such ambition. But there are innumerable hazards in enterprises of this sort, and the fine grain of scholarly detail cannot be accommodated when the endeavor is to paint in broad brush-strokes the larger picture. For precisely this reason, a less cavalier approach would have been more desirable, but so eager are most of the contributors to delineate supposed achievements of the empire that the most ill-advised judgments are offered, partly in the supposition that information to the contrary being available only to specialists, some recklessly bold pronouncements can be made. The brief discussion on irrigation is a case in point (p. 124). It is in India that great works of irrigation were inaugurated, and David Fieldhouse, in his endeavor to draw up a balance-sheet, states that "limited though it might be, irrigation in India was one of the greatest achievements of the British empire." However, as he must be aware, one of the foremost scholars of Indian peasant studies, Elizabeth Whitcombe, came to the

conclusion in her study that canal irrigation did not lead to increased productivity, being detrimental to interests of farmers and harmful to the environment. Fieldhouse's eagerness to find good in empire-building leads him unwittingly into another problem: as he recognizes, there were already in India large-scale works of irrigation, but what the "British added was above all the power of a unified and authoritarian state" (p. 124). Karl Wittfogel, in his infamous study of Oriental despotism, had described Oriental states as hydraulic agro-managerial despotisms, where the despot derived his power from the need to furnish large works of irrigation. But if the British "added" their centralized authoritarianism to the mechanisms of governance that already existed, clearly Oriental despotism could not be as far-reaching as is commonly argued in Orientalist works. Were Fieldhouse to pursue his argument to its logical conclusion, no despotism was as effective as that of the British, while the authority of the Oriental despot never extended to the furthest ends of his kingdom.

*The Cambridge Illustrated History of the British Empire* is ultimately a defense of an indefensible enterprise, though this impulse is masked by the old, discredited, and nearly worthless strategy of attempting to be balanced, objective, and even-minded. The more serious task of interpretation is abandoned, and everywhere one detects the mentality of the shopkeeper. Was the empire "For Richer, for Poorer" of the colonies, asks Fieldhouse, who then proceeds to resolve the question at the very end of his piece by stating: "On balance, most of the dependencies probably developed faster and more soundly than they might have done had they remained independent or had they belonged to any other European power" (p. 146). Better to be bled by Britain than raped by Germany: this proposition appears to animate Marshall's view, and he concurs with Fieldhouse that given "the likely alternatives, to have drawn the British ticket in the nineteenth-century lottery of empires may not, on balance, have been an altogether unhappy accident" (p. 380). The British were motivated, as any imperial power must be, by self-interest, but such a situation is deemed unworthy of comment, for before the twentieth century hardly any regimes were "accountable to the wishes of those they ruled" (p. 370). Moreover, the ruled made the empire as much as the rulers, a proposition Marshall describes as having been "demonstrated at every stage in this book" (p. 373). Britain desired to do good, but it could not compel its colonized subjects to do likewise or to be good. The colonial government could ban sati, and it could even legislate morality, but its commandments were largely prohibitive, its power "often more negative than positive" (p. 376). It may indeed be the case, as Toyin Falola states in his short chapter on Africa, that "in parts of colonial English-speaking Africa, where schools were well run and where there was a peaceful political order, people now talk of the period as the golden age of this century" (p. 356). Modern scholarship, in particular, beseeches us to listen to the subaltern voice, but surely we must probe the conception of the "golden age", and ask some unpleasant questions about the nature of that illusion. We are now in the era of total war, living in

a time when identitarian particularism has achieved a cancerous growth, and African dictators have profited from these developments as much as the leaders of the so-called 'free world'. Before long, if we urgently attend to the voices of those hankering for the ever-present 'golden age', when war is made and called peace, we will be seeking the return of colonialism. This is by no means a far-fetched suggestion, when we consider that not long ago, Paul Johnson proclaimed that African countries, being demonstrably unable to govern themselves, were to be put back into the hands of colonial powers. By the same reasoning, the astounding rates of murder and incarceration of black men in the United States should be grounds enough for any country to intervene in American affairs to prevent the degradation and decimation of an entire race.

Tapan Raychaudhuri's unequivocal condemnation of British rule in India thus comes as a welcome intervention in what is otherwise, for the most part, a lifeless and sanitized work. One can be cynical about this too, and speak of the inclusion of his article as an obvious demonstration of the British belief in 'justice' and 'fair play'. This is what democracy has, in any case, been reduced to in the post-industrial West. Marshall's book is something like a fashion pageant: everything is dressed up, as it was for readers of the *Illustrated London News* in the heyday of the empire, and beautiful photographs and reproductions are placed to enable the reader to exercise the faculty of choice: "For Richer, for Poorer?" Raychaudhuri, to his great credit, sticks to his job, and in his brief "assessment" makes short work of arguments attempting to highlight the achievements of the Raj. Under British rule in India, peasants lived in "abject misery", the "forces of law and order were almost invariably deployed in favour of their oppressors", agricultural productivity in most of the country was "dismal", famine was recurrent, industries declined, and the population of the country until 1921 showed almost no increase (pp. 360-63). Few "serious thinkers and historians" will be found in India "who see anything good in the imperial record" (p. 358). He notes that even the indefatigable Anglophile, Nirad Chaudhuri, much admired in the West like Naipaul, "described the British in India in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as 'the Nazis of their times'" (p. 358). No doubt the British were gentler Nazis, but that is why their empire has a rather more ominous quality to it. The 'responsibilities' once exercised by the British have now devolved upon the Americans. In that most cliched formulation, the sun never set on the British empire, and now the Americans are asking us to behold the thousand points of light. They live in darkness and call it light.