

Book Review

Srinath Raghavan. *India's War: World War II and the Making of Modern South Asia*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 2016. 592 pp. (ISBN 978-0465030224)

Much has already been written about the role that India and the British Raj played in the United Kingdom's strategy during the Second World War. Scholars have delved into the importance of the various campaigns and efforts that the UK implemented during the war. A new historiographical pivot, however, is underway, questioning the impact these campaigns and political efforts had on the native population of India. Srinath Raghavan spearheads this historiographical trend in his monograph *India's War: World War II and the Making of Modern South Asia*. Raghavan attempts to demonstrate that the Second World War played a profound role in the development of India and ultimately paved the way for India's independence.

Raghavan sets the scope of his work from 1939 to 1948, distinguishing three sections: the military and economic development of India from 1939 to 1942; the political strides made towards independence from 1942 to 1944; and the end of the war and the implementation of independence from 1944 to 1948. Throughout the three sections, one of Raghavan's greatest strengths is his ability to incorporate compelling material from prominent figures such as Mahatma Gandhi as well as unknown soldiers or civilians cast into the frontlines or the home front. By relying on such a myriad of primary sources, Raghavan clearly reveals the war's profound effect on India and its national development.

The book's first section covers the period 1939 through 1942, detailing the outbreak of war and India's response. Raghavan's focuses on the military and political development of India from colonial status in 1939 to a reliable military ally of the British crown by 1942. The author demonstrates that British conservatives, and in particular Winston Churchill, were wary of mobilizing the Indian population too quickly for fear of encouraging the movement for independence. As a result, Indian soldiers were initially limited to garrison roles while other Commonwealth nations took more active combat positions. After the Axis Powers recorded a string of victories, however, the British responded by mobilizing Indian troops and increased Indian industrial output. For example, Raghavan discusses the creation of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI). As a result of this creation, many Indian companies emerged and received funding to fill the growing need for ships, planes and armaments for Indian soldiers. Raghavan notes that within a few years, India's industrial capabilities grew exponentially at the same time as Indian soldiers took part in a string of successful campaigns in Africa. Moreover, Raghavan notes that many of these wartime companies became the forerunners of many of India's largest companies in the twenty-first century. He then shifts focus to the political consequences of the war on a militarily and economically invigorated India.

Raghavan utilizes his second section to investigate the consequences of India's development and emerging questions surrounding Indian identity within the British Commonwealth. Because India had expanded industrially, and its army was performing effectively, political advocates of independence sensed a growing opportunity in the

formative period between 1942 and 1944. The author analyzes a multitude of political characters and their viewpoints on a future course for India. Some politicians, such as Gandhi, advocated for labor strikes against the war effort in hopes of securing promises of independence. Raghavan also examines radical alternatives by discussing the nationalist Subhas Chandras Bose, thereby providing the reader additional viewpoints from that particular time. Bose believed that the Indian people could never receive true independence unless they attained it themselves, and he sought allies in Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. He went so far as to create the Indian National Army (INA) with aid from Japan and recruited thousands of soldiers who fought against the British Raj. Raghavan aims to develop a new narrative in this section. According to Raghavan's research, India was not only part of the British strategy, but was a constant topic of discussion in both German and Japanese war plans. Axis-funded independence movements led the British to conclude that promises of independence would be necessary if the Indian populace were to aid in finishing the Second World War.

The book's final section focuses on the period between 1944 and 1948 during which politicians tried to establish independent entities in India and Pakistan. Raghavan notes that with the repelling of Japan's last military offensive launched in 1944 in India, an Allied victory seemed assured. Consequentially, Indian politicians debated how to attain international support for their independence. The author's contribution to the field is his analysis of India's role in the formation of the United Nations and the negotiations that followed. By utilizing conversational transcripts of their meetings and accounts from the Indian delegation, Raghavan showcases that the United States privately expressed its backing for Indian independence in exchange for India supporting the American proposal for the makeup of the Security Council. Publicly, the Americans promoted decolonization for the reasons they listed within the Atlantic Charter. Additionally, Raghavan asserts that United States diplomats wanted India to assist China by providing raw materials for rebuilding after the war, which the Indian delegation agreed to do. Facing diplomatic pressure from the United States in addition to calls for independence from Indian nationalists, the United Kingdom conceded that they would withdraw from India by 1948. Raghavan is especially critical of the British withdrawal and the failure to create a peaceful partition, which would ultimately result in more lives lost among Muslims and Hindus. As a result of the British withdrawal, however, Raghavan contends that other colonized nations saw the Indian example and sought their own self-determination in a growing wave of decolonization.

Ultimately, the author ties together his argument effectively by showcasing that indigenous wartime military and economic development paved the way for Indian politicians to secure their independence from the British. Raghavan concludes with a call to action. If the people of India are to understand their role in today's affairs, they must first understand how their independence came to be.

India's War: World War II and the Making of Modern South Asia is a well written account of India's transformative experience during the Second World War. One mild critique is that Raghavan's narrative style is sometimes challenging as he frequently shifts around chronologically. With so many key figures and movements it can be quite easy to

lose focus, but this is to be expected from such a broad analysis. Despite this issue, the author's effective use of evidence and his writing style allows him to explain the events as they transpired rather than relying on hindsight to convey his analysis. Raghavan aptly names his work *India's War: World War II and the Making of Modern South Asia* as he showcases the importance of the war in paving the way for India's later political, economic, and military development. Raghavan's work similarly reinforces the narrative that independence was not simply handed down from London but earned by the Indian people through years of fighting, toiling, and campaigning, which ultimately facilitated India's emergence on the international stage as an independent nation.

Reviewed by

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