



*The Ruling Caste: Imperial Lives in the Victorian Raj*, David Gilmour, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007, 1466830018, 9781466830011, 416 pages. A sparkling, provocative history of the English in South Asia during Queen Victoria's reign. Between 1837 and 1901, less than 100,000 Britons at any one time managed an empire of 300 million people spread over the vast area that now includes India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Burma. How was this possible, and what were these people like? The British administration in India took pride in its efficiency and broad-mindedness, its devotion to duty and its sense of imperial grandeur, but it has become fashionable to deprecate it for its arrogance and ignorance. In this balanced, witty, and multi-faceted history, David Gilmour goes far to explain the paradoxes of the "Anglo-Indians," showing us what they hoped to achieve and what sort of society they thought they were helping to build. *The Ruling Caste* principally concerns the officers of the legendary India Civil Service--each of whom to perform as magistrate, settlement officer, sanitation inspector, public-health officer, and more for the million or so people in his charge. Gilmour extends his study to every level of the administration and to the officers' women and children, so often ignored in previous works. *The Ruling Caste* is the best book yet on the real trials and triumphs of an imperial ruling class; on the dangerous temptations that an empire's power encourages; on relations between governor and governed, between European and Asian. No one interested in politics and social history can afford to miss this book..

*Plain tales from the Raj*, Charles Allen, Apr 25, 1985, , 224 pages. .

*Changing British attitudes towards the Indian states, 1823-35*, Urmila Walia, 1985, History, 191 pages. .

*Children of the Raj*, Vyvyen Brendon, Jul 15, 2006, , 368 pages. Over the span of British rule in India, the children of the Raj numbered in the millions; yet their dramatic, often traumatic, stories have never been fully told. Drawing on ....

*The Raj quartet, Volume 1*, Paul Scott, 1976, Fiction, 1922 pages. Four novels covering the period between the Quit India riots of 1942 and the massacres that accompanied independence and partition in 1947 provide insight into the closing ....

*The History and Culture of the Indian People*, Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, 1951, History, . .

*How boys see girls*, David Gilmour, Nov 26, 1991, Psychology, 161 pages. With a failed marriage, a faltering career, an alcohol and pill problem, and a tendency to womanize, middle-aged Bix is well on his way toward a midlife crisis, with a little ....

*Edge of Empire The British Political Officer and Tribal Administration on the North-West Frontier, 1877-1947*, Christian Tripodi, 2011, History, 253 pages. Created in the late eighteenth century by the East India Company to manage relations with the princely rulers of the Indian States, political officers developed into a ....

*The History and Culture of the Indian People: British paramountcy and Indian renaissance, pt. 2*, . .

Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, 1951, India, . .

India and Pakistan A General and Regional Geography, Oskar Hermann Khristian Spate, Andrew Thomas Amos Learmonth, Agnes Moffat Learmonth, 1972, India, 877 pages. .

History of India , Henry George Keene, 1906, , . .

Between 1837 and 1901, fewer than one thousand Britons at any one time managed an empire of 300 million people spread over the vast area that now includes India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Burma. How was this possible, and what were these people like? The British administration in India took pride in its efficiency and broad-mindedness, its devotion to duty and its sense of imperial grandeur, but it has become fashionable to deprecate it for its arrogance and ignorance. In *The Ruling Caste*, a balanced, witty, and multi-faceted history, David Gilmour goes far to explain the paradoxes of the "Anglo-Indians," showing us what they hoped to achieve and what sort of society they thought they were helping to build.

My book club chose to read Gilmour's "The Ruling Caste" and we all struggled to get through it. It's a fact-filled and interesting--but not entirely readable--work that has the unmistakable stamp of thorough scholarship which must be appreciated. Because he carefully tends to the minutiae of workaday life for a Victorian-era man in the Indian Civil Service, the book gives up both gravitas and sweep.

The reader may ask, "Shouldn't I be reading something more important?" Well, maybe so, but consider this: the British stamp upon India was so pervasive that, to this day, it informs the attitudes and ethics of millions of English-speaking, West-oriented Indians, from the call center clerk in Bangalore who helped you resolve that software problem last week to the cardiologist down the street in Anytown, USA.

"The Ruling Caste" by David Gilmour gives an excellent and evocative account of how British civilian officials lived their lives in the Raj (ie not the military, business people or missionaries). He covers how they were trained, their working routines, how they found wives, entertainment, sports and much else.

Many books on the history of British India focus on the big picture and the comings and goings of the senior officials in the Government and Military. Gilmour's book describes how the majority of officials lived and worked at the grassroots level of villages and districts: what exactly they did each day, how a magistrate did his job and so on.

Colonialism is often criticised because of our understandable repugnance of one country imposing its rule over the population of another. In principle this is fair, but criticism by historians is often taken to the extreme of refusing to accept that anything good ever came out of colonialism. This is especially unfair to the British, who did not behave with the rapacity and cruelty of other colonial powers of the day.

Gilmour's book and others like it redress the balance somewhat by describing lives of duty, sacrifice and affection for the people they ruled. Others became internationally respected for their work as historians, linguists and protectors of Indian cultural heritage. Another paid for the construction of a canal out of his own pocket - one of many similar, if less spectacular, examples of personal largesse.

District Officers were mostly young men in their twenties in charge of a District of up to a million people, with perhaps only a few other British officials - or even none at all. The opportunities for corruption, oppression or debauchery are obvious, but by and large these young men were incorruptible and behaved with great honour.

These decent lives deserve to be better known and Gilmour's book does them justice. Today, mere

"celebrity" is often applauded as heroism and talent, so it is good to read about true heroes and genuinely talented people who did not court publicity but just went about their unsung work in India, often for a lifetime.

I also recommend it as an antidote to contemporary celebrity worship, so we may compare the enduring, worthwhile qualities of the best of those who served the Raj, with the ephemeral appeal of many celebrities, whose fleeting reputations depend on media attention to create and sustain them. Read more &rsaquo;

David Gilmour has written an extremely well-researched history of the Indian Civil Service, that is of the British civil servants who administered India, the crown jewel of the British Empire, which then encompassed India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Myanmar. Anyone who has any doubts that it was not, on the whole, extremely capable and incorruptible, and, all in all, a huge force for the good will not harbor them at the end of the book.

This book is written in a sort of dry, plodding and scholarly style that makes it a dream come true for anyone who needs to write a paper or otherwise consult Gilmour's research for their own work. But the same matter-of-factness and lack of narrative mean that only very few will enjoy reading this book for pleasure.

Since a very small child I have been fascinated, and somewhat obsessive, as to the role the British played in India...the days of the Raj. This fascination stemmed from the fact that my mother was a Kipling fanatic and she was reading his work to my sister and me long before we entered school, much less possess the ability to read. Be that as it may, the subject has stuck with me over the years and continues to a part of my reading and study life even to this day.

On the other hand, despite my probably misguided propensity of being enamored with the "glamour" of those days of the Raj, I have a great repugnance for the concept of Colonialism and Imperialism, which includes, to no less extent, the practices used and the propensity of European "Christian Countries," and the United States of sending Christian missionaries to "save the savages." We do not have a pretty history here. This missionary zeal was a major influence at the time and very much mucked up the waters from both a British and an Indian perspective. Personal opinion here, I know, but I have a strong feeling that this horrid obsession to dink around with the religions of other people probably caused more grief than the actual acts of Colonialism, not only in India, but in the rest of the world. But hey, that is just me...what do I know?

A fascinating question, one that will probably never be fully answered to every individual's satisfaction, is that over the years, how were fewer than 100,000 British subjects at any one time, able to manage and control an empire of well over 300 million people? It certainly was not through force of arms (although, that was an aspect which needs to be considered), the numbers simply do not work out here, in particular when you consider that militarily the British were really not all that powerful militarily wise at that time. No, there had to be other reasons. David Gilmour, via this rather detailed and extensive study of the British Civil Service, attempts to answer that and other questions, as far as they can be answered.

Now readers take note at this time. This is NOT an ethnic study of the various indigenous peoples of the part of the world this historic epic took place. The author fully admits this (If you bother to read the preface to the book), for a book of this size and depth, very little is examined as to the religious customs, politics, social customs, etc. of the Indian people. The only time the author delves into these areas is when they had a direct influence on British decision making, and even then, the author tries to examine these issues through the eyes of the English and not the people they ruled for so many years. Studies such as this are left for others to ponder, research and write about. Goodness knows that since the 1970s there has been enough written in this area to satisfy most, if not all.

What I enjoyed and appreciated about this work was that the author did address, to great extent, the day by day lives of the British people living and working in India during the Imperialistic era. This not

only includes the men who did the ruling, but also their families. Social lives, private lives, means of coping and British traditions are examined at length. No fictionalized accounts such as we find in works such as *A Passage to India* are found here. This for me was quite refreshing as the author was quite frank in his assessments.

Much of this work is taken from private correspondence from many, many individuals who were there at the time; individuals who did the work, who ruled this vast and diversified area of the world. Times were quite different then, attitudes were different, social placing was different. The author attempts to pick through these differences and in most cases, tries to view the situation at hand through the eyes of those involved.

I like detailed books. Few bits of information no matter how mundane bore me. I will say though that I can see how some might find this work a bit tedious at times. The author does indeed, as has been pointed out, have a rather flat writing style and more or less goes over the top at times with his details. We have quite a lot of space devoted to such things as who begat who and who they begat when it comes to multi-generational families involved. This is about as dry as reading the book of Genesis. I found myself several times thinking "who cares."

How the machine of the Civil Service ran, how members of this service coped, the red tape, the harsh living and transportation conditions, family concerns...it is all here. It should be noted that as to the question as to whether or not the Colonial experience was good or bad for India, the author obviously comes down on the side that yes, there were evils about, but his sympathies most certainly are with the British, although it must be noted that the author is in many ways sympathetic to the plight of the Indian people too. Personally, I rather ignored this aspect and more or less considered the source. That questions, and questions of that sort have been argued back and forth for years and I suspect they will be for years into the future. A book such as this is unlikely to change any minds when it comes to that score.

In 1900 just over a thousand British civil servants ruled a population of nearly 300 million people spread over a territory now covered by India, Pakistan, Burma and Bangladesh. In its time, the Indian Civil Service was regarded as efficient, benevolent and incorruptible, but revisionist historians have recently questioned its competence and derided its altruism.

In this absorbing, extensively researched new book, David Gilmour traces the lives of its officials, from recruitment to retirement, from jungle to Government House, from a bungalow in Burma to a residency in Rajputana. He describes their work and their leisure, their intellectual and their private lives. The result is a portrait more varied and complicated than that painted by their old admirers, and yet fairer and subtler than those routinely produced by their post-colonial detractors.

"Based on stunningly exhaustive research in official archives and family papers, and written with tremendous wit, style and sense of pace, Gilmour's book is a masterful account of British life in India. If you have ever wondered what it would have been like to run the Raj, *The Ruling Caste* has all the answers." (Dominic Sandbrook Scotsman)

David Gilmour is a respected historian who wrote a massive and highly-regarded biography of Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India at the turn of the 20th Century, when the Raj perhaps reached its apogee. This book seems to be the by-product of the extensive research that Gilmour did for "Curzon" (see Amazon listing), but to call it merely that is to do it a grave injustice. Most people with an interest in India know that the civil administration of the Raj was undertaken by a tiny corps, little more than 1,000 strong, of British (and Indian) civil servants: indeed, the Indian Civil Service, or ICS. It was noted for its incorruptibility, and for the enormous responsibility given to young men fresh from training college or university. So profoundly influential was the ICS on the running of this enormous and diverse country that even today, with a population of 1 billion, India still has its successor, the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), that is little more than twice the size of the ICS under the Raj.

Now, you might think, and could be forgiven for thinking, that a book about any civil service would be mind-numbingly dull. Imagine reading a book about the Home Office. But with Gilmour's book

you would be wrong. This is a fascinating insight into an extraordinary world. There is a good deal of detail about how the ICS was structured, but only enough to illuminate the lives of the men who comprised it, their careers, their frustrations, their loneliness, their elating successes, their scholarship, and their enormous power on a local level that was the heart of the British administration of India. Equally interesting is Gilmour's examination of the relationship between the Raj, as personified by the ICS, and the 600+ "princes" who ruled vast swathes of the Sub-Continent up to 1947. One is left with the thought that there were, are, hundreds of millions of Indians who were far better off under the administration of the Raj than the extravagant, capricious, often vicious and cruel rule of many of the petty princes.

Gilmour's prose is far from pedestrian, and many of the stories he relates are fascinating, even bizarre. Sixty years after Indian independence, at the hands of the last Viceroy, an egomaniac to outstrip even the extraordinary Curzon, it is perhaps politically incorrect to focus on the imperial period, but the Raj remains a fact of history, and India today is and will remain for a long time to come a product of the Raj. It is not a topic that will appeal immediately to a wide audience, nor is it a racy story in the mode of "Freedom at Midnight". However, for anyone interested in India during the three centuries leading up to independence, this is a most interesting and rewarding book. Read more &rsaquo;

I much enjoyed this picture of Civil Service lives in the British Raj. I'm currently trying to reconstruct the life of one of my ancestors, and this book gave me the real flavour of British lives in India. 'The Ruling Caste' is extensively researched and explores the British Library's rich collection of manuscripts and government records to create a tapestry of stories from individual lives. Beautifully written, scholarly, entertaining and politically balanced, the book was only slightly marred for me by an irritatingly limited index.

Any book about the Indian Civil Service is not likely to invite great interest amongst peers and friends. The very title has unfashionable ring to it: Ruling Caste mixes the India of old with a statement of pure fact, and that fact is, from the East India Company to the British government, 300million people in India were governed by British institutions. Whether you think this was a positive or negative, this book gives a vivid and humanist vista of the lives of middle class Britons (including Irishmen) serving Queen and Empire during the late 18th and 19th centuries. It often seeks to persuade us of the generosity and benevolence of the men governing India, but does not dole it out in spades. It is an interesting and amusing tale of what happens to young, wealthy men when they are stuck in a foreign country without female companionship or varied social structures. Gilmour is critical of the "club" system operating in British India, and very sympathetic to young Griffins, seeking adventure and employment in India. Altogether, you will get a well painted picture of a country under Imperial rule, without gathering strong feelings either for or against Empire. A balanced book that merely seeks to tell the tale of (relatively) ordinary men (and occasionally women) away from home, trying to do their best for the people around them. If, like me, you have an interest in Imperial history, you will enjoy this tome.

This is an excellent book on how the men of the Indian Civil Service worked and lived from chota hazri to sundown; how a mere 100,000 men governed 300 million people in British India ; a story of how young men from Britain adapted to life in India as griffins , district officer, magistrates etc, of gymkhana , tiffin , punkah and pig-sticking.

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