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Florence D’SOUZA

REFERENCES

The author is an eminent historian of the British Empire, having edited the 18th-century volume of the *Oxford History of the British Empire*, Vol.II (Oxford University Press 1998), and the *Cambridge Illustrated History of the British Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), in addition to having published several monographs on the British in India (among which are *East Indian Fortunes: the British in Bengal in the Eighteenth century*, Oxford University Press, 1976; and *Bengal: the British Bridgehead: Eastern India 1740-1828*, Cambridge University Press, 1988). He is thus well-equipped to undertake the task he has set himself in *The Making & Unmaking of Empires: Britain, India and America, c.1750-1783*, namely, to undo the misleading concepts of a “first” British Empire in North America, chronologically followed by a “second” British Empire in India. As Marshall shows, already in the early 18th century, Britain was simultaneously employing men and resources both in North America and in India with the double purpose of expanding British trade, facilitating British emigration, and diffusing British culture (Protestantism and a respect for civil liberties) on the one hand, while also establishing British imperial dominion in overseas territories under the sovereign control of the British Parliament in London, on the other hand.

The book contains an introduction and eleven chapters. In the Introduction and chapters 1 and 2, the author situates Britain in the world around 1750, with her constant anxiety about attacks and subjugation by the French and the Spanish in matters of trade as well as of overseas territorial dominion. Chapters 3 & 4 present the transformations wrought by the Seven Years’ War (1754-1763) in North America and in India. This necessitated adjustments in metropolitan Britain’s imperial objectives and dealings with her imperial domains in the period between the Seven Years’ War and the American War of Independence, resulting from the new territories she acquired in both hemispheres at the peace of 1763, (chapters 5 and 6). Importance is given to the discursive justifications and the rhetoric used by Britain’s leaders to explain these changes in Britain’s imperial policies.

Chapters 7 and 8 study in detail various crises confronted in India by the East India Company Administration which called for new imperial structures in Bengal from 1765 (for the collection of land taxes and the neutralisation of potential attacks by neighbouring Indian powers). This imperial reorganisation in Bengal was followed by British territorial expansion in the Bengal, Madras and Bombay Presidencies between 1765 and 1783. By 1783, Britain had made a whole new empire in India, in close collaboration with local Indian elites.

Chapters 9 and 10 trace the many problems that arose in Britain’s North American colonies between 1763 and 1775, due to certain authoritarian attempts by the British government to impose new taxes under the sovereignty of Parliament in London. This led
up to violent confrontation between the North American colonists and the royal armed forces of Britain from 1776, thereby unmaking Britain’s North American Empire.

In the final chapter 11, Marshall analyses side by side Britain’s disillusionment with and disengagement from her 13 Atlantic colonies, together with the survival of the British imperial presence after 1783 in India. He attributes this divergence in Britain’s imperial trajectory in North America (decolonisation), and in India (consolidation of empire), to the different expectations and reactions of the colonial elites in these two parts of the globe. If the British authorities tried to negotiate solutions with both the North American and the Indian elites, the North Americans perceived empire as a partnership between equals, and rejected coercive British domination, while the Indians in contact with the British, probably due to their hierarchical world view, and their earlier experience of the Mughal Empire, accepted the conditions imposed by British imperial rule as compatible with their own, immediate interests. Thus Marshall illustrates magisterially what he set out to illustrate in this book: that the unmaking of empire in America, and the making of empire in India belong to the same, parallel phase of British imperial history, the latter being in no way a compensation following upon the loss of the first.

The author’s mastery of the different arenas of 18th-century British imperial history enables him to establish connections, underline similarities and point to differences in two fields that are most often studied separately, in isolation from each other. The two maps and the alphabetical index in the book further aid the reading of this dense and thorough study.

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