



The Calling of History: Sir Jadunath Sarkar and His Empire of Truth, by Dipesh Chakrabarty

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with the previous pieces by not looking through Ahalya's eyes at Ram's treatment of Sita. Instead, Madhavan concentrates on the male characters, his females unemployed and uninspiring, at odds with the unsurprisingly feminist slant of a large part of the anthology.

Part three for the most part sympathetically portrays the characters of Shurpanakha and Ravana. C. Subramania Bharati's Tamil 'The Horns of the Horse' humorously portrays a naughty Ram and Lakshmana abducting Sita, and Ravana's response. In Kavanasarma's Telugu 'Shurpanakha's Sorrow', Ram and Ravana are modern-day business rivals who take out their spite towards each other on Sita and Shurpanakha. Hassankutty's pre-WWII, Malayalam 'Mappila Ramayana' puts a Muslim slant on Ramkatha. H.S. Venkatesha Murthy's *Portrait Ramayana* is a contemporary Kannada play in which Sita draws Ravana from imagination, and the picture comes to life. K. Satchidanandan's lovely Malayalam poem 'Come Unto Me, Janaki' is in the form of a letter from Ravana in heaven. His compassion for Sita's suffering, and his longing for her and for his beautiful Lanka, are stirring.

The anthology concludes with an Epilogue, a Telugu women's folksong, 'Lakshmana's Laugh'. This piece concludes as if an alternative may also have been sung. Urmila awakes and is ready for amorous dalliance, but a tired Lakshman sends her away. After he has slept, Ram wakes him with a foot massage, and not Urmila.

The selections in this anthology are all based on Ramkatha, yet employ varied literary forms and approaches. Modern South Indian literary engagement with the Ramayana and with the fates of certain characters appears from this selection to be vibrant.

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The Calling of History: Sir Jadunath Sarkar and His Empire of Truth, by Dipesh Chakrabarty, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2015, 320 pp., US\$30.00 (paperback), ISBN 9780226240244

Nearly six decades after his death, Sir Jadunath Sarkar (1870–1958) remains a towering figure in Mughal historiography. Subsequent generations of historians, it is true, have picked apart his analytical methods and frowned upon his pro-British political views. Nevertheless, in this elegantly written book, Dipesh Chakrabarty has given us reason to refocus scholarly attention on Sarkar. Many Mughal historians, he notes, have of late acknowledged their debt to Sarkar for locating, editing, and publishing a vast range of sources. But Sarkar's life and works have greater relevance. Chakrabarty argues for Sarkar's importance in forging the academic discipline of history as it exists today in Indian universities. This is not a biography; instead, Chakrabarty plots Sarkar's relations with his friends and enemies to document 'the "birth" of academic historical writing in colonial India' (p. 12).

Much of this book is animated by the bitter rivalry between, on the one hand, Sarkar and the Maharashtrian historian Govindrao Sakharam Sardesai (1865–1959) and, on the other, historians affiliated with the Poona-based Bharat Itihas Samshodhak Mandal. Clashing over methodology, approaches, categorisation of sources, and the treatment of particular historical characters, these men ultimately determined how the academic field of history emerged from its popular roots. They did so against incredible odds. In Chapters 1 and 7, Chakrabarty details

the byzantine restrictions placed upon Indian researchers' access to officially-held records by the late colonial government. But 'scientific history', which Sarkar championed, demanded original sources, and the colonial state's intransigence prompted him, Sardesai, and the Poona historians to open up other avenues of research.

Chapters 2 and 3 pick up on this theme: Chakrabarty discusses Sarkar's almost fanatical zeal for research and source-hunting: 'You must take research as one takes religion', Sarkar informed one of his students (p. 83). Indeed research, in Sarkar's mind, was a test of physical endurance: 'One of the most remarkable aspects of the Sarkar-Sardesai correspondence is a particular strand of their lament over old age', Chakrabarty tells us. 'Getting old actually prevented them from stomping around the countryside looking for original historical sources' (p. 69). These research treks had their share of adventure and intrigue. Remembering that their Poona rivals once attempted to frustrate an expedition by distributing ahead of them 'a hostile printed handbill', Sarkar instructed Sardesai to 'mislead the Poona rascals' about their next intended destinations (p. 115). In the quest to secure 'original' and 'authentic' sources from their often-recalcitrant owners, Chakrabarty shows us Sarkar disguising himself as an orthodox Brahmin in one instance (p. 117) and, in another, hatching a plan to pilfer a closely-guarded volume by paying off a printing press employee (p. 119).

Sarkar's passion for research was inextricably linked with his search for historical truth and 'unquestionable' facts, explored in Chapter 4. He disdained the 'false patriotism' of certain nationalist writers who, he judged, used dubious sources to create mythical heroes out of particular historical figures. This was one reason for his unpopularity with the Poona historians: Sarkar assailed popular representations of Shivaji. His enemies never forgot this unpardonable act.

But Sarkar was not against heroes. As Chapter 5 demonstrates, history for him was 'a human drama driven by the passions, strengths and weaknesses of human character' (p. 182). And the character of a historical protagonist, such as Aurangzeb, had important implications for broader societal and national development. Here, Chakrabarty attempts to rescue Sarkar from being tarred as pro-British and anti-nationalist. He was 'a patriot and not an anti-colonial nationalist' (p. 93), Chakrabarty insists, and this is shown in his lament that the Mughals were unable to forge a modern nation-state in India—thereby placing this task upon British shoulders. Providence (the subject of Chapter 6) decreed that Britain would help make India a modern nation, and it was for this reason that Sarkar extolled particular British values—values that he hoped India would imbibe. In this sense, Sarkar becomes a political commentator of sorts. Chakrabarty believes that Sarkar saw a distinct 'moral place for the historian' in society (p. 236). Relying upon 'authentic' sources, seeking out 'unquestionable' facts, and probing the character of leaders, he or she had a duty to point out the flaws in the character of the nation. The historian, therefore, played no small role in national development.

Sarkar brought these lofty ideals to the Indian Historical Records Commission (IHRC), the setting of Chapter 7 as well as the denouement of the Mughal historian's career. Chakrabarty guides us through how the long-simmering rivalry between Sarkar-Sardesai and the Poona historians ultimately determined the shape and structure of public archives in India. All of these individuals spoke powerfully in favour of open access and the proper development of research-centric institutions. But, in determining the fate of the Imperial Record Department—soon renamed as the National Archives of India—the two parties could not see eye to eye. Sarkar envisioned the IHRC as 'a pedagogical and intellectual platform from which to propagate a particular vision of historical research' premised on archival sources (p. 258). In contrast his principal rivals, Datto Vaman Potdar (1890–1979) of Poona and Surendra Nath Sen (1890–1962), represented a 'generational shift'. Their stated priorities were unfettered access to documents and better preservation of records, priorities that Chakrabarty classifies

as being 'both national and democratic' (p. 256). Ultimately, Sen won appointment as the first director of the National Archives, while Sarkar suffered the humiliating fate of being kicked off the IHRC.

The politics of the archives raises a larger question, one that is beyond the scope of Chakrabarty's book. In spite of their bitter rivalries, Sarkar, Sardesai, and the Poona historians were all deeply committed to creating and maintaining a sound archival infrastructure for India. Potdar and Sen went so far as to debate the particular preservation methods to be adopted in the future National Archives. How have matters changed so dramatically? Many of us—especially those of us based outside India—cynically bemoan the archaic regulations and the poor state of preservation we encounter in Indian archives today. But we do little to engage with—and change—the system. Perhaps Chakrabarty's work can help enthuse the current generation of historians with some of Jadunath Sarkar's concern for the sources and documents upon which we all rely.

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Steamboats on the Indus: The Limits of Western Technological Superiority in South Asia, by Clive Dewey, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2014, xvii + 296 pp. (including maps, figures, 59 coloured and black and white plates, appendix and glossary), Rs2,395 (hardback), ISBN 9780198092193

Scholars have long debated the issue of British colonial technological superiority and the supposedly backward or even primitive ways of using tools and techniques in South Asia. Such discussions also include themes lumped into the categories of tradition versus modernity. Construed as binary opposites, traditional becomes the hallmark of stagnation or even regress, while modern signifies progress. However, of late these categories have been called into question. The book by Clive Dewey is a fresh attempt to look at the layered past of South Asia through the prism of steamboat technology.

The eleven chapters of the book are arranged into four thematic divisions: 'Constraints', 'Activities', 'Competitors', and 'Rationale'. Chapter 1 opens with some deep structural aspects of the Indus river's physiography and the river basin. It further describes the frequent changes in the river's course, silt deposition and shoal formation, and the fickle nature of the river. All these natural geographic elements provide a rich context for discussion of the problems associated with river navigation. Chapter 2 then calls into question the adaptability of Victorian England's newly-minted technological marvels—steamboats—in the radically different ecological and environmental settings of the Indus basin. Through discussion of the limited success of steamship technology on the Indus, Dewey offers a succinct analysis of the chasm that separated the British colonial rulers' boardroom decision-making, often embroiled in the local politics of London, and the ground realities in the colony where such decisions were put into practice. Chapter 3 sheds more light on this disjuncture by discussing the astronomical costs involved in running the loss-making steam flotilla companies which received massive subsidies of public money.