

Book Review: Colonisation: A Comparative Study of India and Korea by Vyjayanti Raghavan & R. Mahalakshmi

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Raghavan, Vyjayanti, and R. Mahalakshmi, eds. *Colonisation: A Comparative Study of India and Korea*. New Delhi: Academic Foundation, 2015. 393 pages. Hardcover, \$90.95.

Colonisation: A Comparative Study of India and Korea is an edited volume of comparative history, with twenty essays comparing colonial experiences in the two countries. Edited by Dr. Raghavan, a professor of Korean studies, and Dr. Mahalakshmi, who specializes in the history of India, the text presents the colonial processes and impacts of two completely different subject countries, India and Korea, colonised by two entirely different colonial powers, Britain and Japan, respectively.

The essays of the book are divided into three parts to describe the comparative colonisation of India and Korea. Part One focuses on the historiography in pre-colonial India and Korea, which is crucial to comprehending the nature of social formation before these regions were colonised. The discourses in the book scrutinize the nature of state formation from the early historical period to the late medieval period in India with a focus on diffusion, change, regionalisation, and continuation of the state across diverse regions. With respect to Korea, the discourses raise some pertinent questions about how the past is used to mediate and even justify the present. Japan's expansionist nationalism in the late nineteenth century is discussed along with its resemblance to imperialist and coercive powers in the west as well as the ideological instruments through which the state exerts its control.

Part Two describes the colonial process. In this section, the administrative, military, legal, educational, and religious characteristics of colonialism are dealt with along with the diverse aspects of science, communalism, and social change. The confidence of the colonial powers is demonstrated in its military power and use of force rather than on the consent of the native peoples. In India, the society is characterised by superstition, ignorance, abject poverty, growing communalism, and illiteracy/lack of education (especially of girls and women). Endorsing the cultural superiority of English culture and the Christian religion, the British colonial state effectively uses legislation and education to exercise control over Indian religious and social practices. Similarly, Japan plays an active role in the public education system of Korea, assimilating the Koreans into the Japanese culture. From the start of colonialism, the Japanese wanted the Koreans to view themselves as Japanese and espouse Japanese values. Without enjoying the rights, they prepared the Koreans to perform the duties of Japanese citizens.

Part Three of the text is titled 'Colonialism and its Impact.' It is suggested that colonialism is difficult to understand in isolation especially when it is presented as the triumph of colonisers and the inferior political and economic development of the colonies at the time of colonisation. Discourse on Asian colonialism rests its roots in the same narrative, describing it as the catalyst of positive change in static, pre-modern societies. In his book *Discourse on Colonialism* (2000), Aimé Césaire exposes the contradictions inherent in western notions of progress and civilization, and describes the cruel impact of colonialism on both the colonizer and colonized. One needs to question who is, in fact, defining the

colonisation as a triumph when one recognizes British motivation to find raw materials and new markets in India, and the Japanese goal to acquire land in Korea.

In addition, with respect to impact, the book states that the Japanese colonialism was more brutal and intense in comparison to the British, but this argument is not substantially analysed in the essays except for incorporating Gandhi's critique of colonialism in detail. Japan's colonial conquest of Korea was very rapid and militaristic, accomplished through major wars with China and Russia. The British colonial conquest of India was basically born out of mercantilist interest and achieved through a number of wars fought by the British on the Indian sub-continent. Unfortunately, the impact of these different dynamics was not discussed in this volume of study.

Lastly, India's 1920s peasant protests led by Sadar Patel, and the 1930-1932 Civil Disobedience Movement led by Gandhi, could in many ways be comparable with Korea's backlash against the banning of any public discourse in the Korean language in the late 1930s. Yun Ch'ihō, a leading Korean reformer, pleaded with the Japanese authorities that they should abandon their ill-conceived moves, including forcible conversion of Korean names into Japanese names, and argued cogently that different cultural identities can and should be allowed to coexist within the empire for the benefit of all of its members. A comparative study of these protests and the ideal of coexistence would also bestow justice to this field of study.

Overall, *Colonisation: A Comparative Study of India and Korea* is a very proficient, original, scholarly text. It is as readable as it is meticulous, and as profound as it is expedient. It is a "must-read" for researchers and students interested in the comparative history of Asia.

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