



Chandrika Kaul. *Communications, Media and the Imperial Experience: Britain and India in the Twentieth Century.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. 296 S. (hardcover), ISBN 978-0-230-57258-4.



Reviewed by Michael Mann

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C. Kaul: Communications, Media and the Imperial Experience

After her seminal book on Reporting the Raj published in 2003 and a couple of edited volumes on press reporting in the British Empire Chandrika Kaul, Reporting the Raj. The British press and India, c. 1880-1922. Manchester 2003; idem (ed.), Media and the British Empire, Basingstoke 2003, 2006; idem (ed.), Explorations in Modern Indian History and the Media, Media History 15 (2004) 4 (special issue). , Chandrika Kaul's second monograph on reporting on British India enlarges the temporal, territorial and technical scope of investigation now including US coverage as well as the latest media, namely the radio and its impact on communication and media in British India between 1911 until its independence in 1947.

The book is organized in five major chapters in which the author investigates the press reportage by telegram and telephone of the Coronation Darbar in Delhi in 1911, the perception of British India in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* through the lens of reporter William Shirer, the 'invisible Empire' introducing broadcasting between the two World Wars, and finally Lord Mountbatten's, last Viceroy of British India, professional media staging.

According to Kaul the book aims to explore the

minds of those who utilised the media and those who controlled it, as well as to examine its output and impact, within the context of Britain and its Indian Raj (p. 2). The analysis is based on the British national press and Reuters's international press service, the BBC, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* and US news agencies, and a few English newspapers owned by Indians. It is against this background that the media and journalists become agents of what present day observers regard as 'modernity'. Of particular interest is the transnational communication between Indian communities abroad and at home. During the period of investigation various media become a soft tool regarding the transformation of British India's public sphere. As the author states: 'In sum, these case studies serve to demonstrate the extent of the media's impact upon Indian affairs, assess its influence and limitations, and evaluate the success of imperialists and nationalists alike' (p. 7)

The historical background of the Delhi Darbar's conception which the British monarch George V and his wife attended *in personam*, as well as its political preparations are narrated in detail, followed by an analysis of the event

by 'The Times' reportage. Similar to the author's first monograph, British India is turned into the template for imperial self-representation. As 'The Times' belongs to the rather conservative British newspapers it would have been interesting to have at least a few other, more critical British/English newspapers included in the analysis to get a more nuanced picture of the imperial event. The few critical voices mentioned in the Concluding Remarks of the chapter indicate the potential of a more comprehensive analysis.

'India as Viewed by the American Media: Chicago Daily Tribune, William Shirer and Gandhian Nationalism, 1930-31' is probably the book's most interesting chapter as it demonstrates the interconnectivity of the meanwhile globally organised media market consisting of professional news agencies, internationally reporting newspapers, personal communication between politicians and journalists and reciprocal 'national' reporting of the same events regarded of international importance. According to the author's meticulous analysis one can draw the conclusion that it seems very likely, for example, that the US-reportage on Mahatma Gandhi's Salt March in 1930, and in particular that of William Shirer, decisively contributed to the present-day national global image of Gandhi as a 'saint' and 'holy man' eventually culminating in Richard Attenborough's Gandhi-Film of 1982.

Chapter 4 on wireless broadcasting is a telling episode of British colonial rule in South Asia. It is well known that the press in British India was curbed by severe censorship restrictions. Through a series of laws, ordinances and regulations from the end of the eighteenth century, that is with the onset of British rule in Bengal, the colonial regime tried to control and if necessary to completely suppress press reportage. Similar to the telephone introduced in British India in 1883 which basically remained an intra-house and urban inter-house means of communication rather than a modern device of trans-local, national communication Michael Mann, *The deep digital divide. The telephone in British India, 1883-1933*, in: *Historical Social Research/ Historische Sozialforschung* 35 (2010) 1 (= special issue: Roland Wenzelhuemer (ed.), *Global Communication: Telecommunication and Global Flows of Information in the Late 19th and Early 20th Century*), pp. 188-208. , the wireless

(radio) remained a means of communication completely controlled by the colonial state, a fact which the author rightly subtitles: 'Radio in India: A potted history.' (p. 124) No wonder then that broadcasting, television and the telephone became big undertakings in independent India and Pakistan, although colonial legacy and post-colonial state control prevented liberalisation of the media market until the late 1980s.

The last Chapter on the media staging of British India's independence in August 1947 reveals the potential modern media can unfold if applied consciously and appropriately. It is Lord Mountbatten who not only staged himself as an imperial dignitary in a rather self-confident if not vain light, but massively contributed to the colonial-imperial figurative and symbolical legacy of the British Empire in India and beyond. As the author states, 'Mountbatten deserves credit for helping establish the template for such an approach to 'independence' ceremonies, in their conceptualisation if not in every detail, for the majority of British colonies and dependencies in the decades that followed 1947' (p. 173). And the British media played a key role in establishing and perpetuating such perceptions. The chapter is a nice example of the interplay of various media like newspapers, telephone, telegram, radio, photo and film raising the British Empire's last and lasting image.

The book is a nice piece of media history of the British Empire's 'peripetia' starting at the Empire's heyday shortly before the First World or Great War and ending with British India's independence shortly after the Second World War. With its meticulous source analysis and the variety of sources on British India's and the Empire's perception in Britain and the US, the monograph hints at a desideratum, namely the perception of British rule in South Asia according to English newspapers owned by Indians and local language newspapers. This would turn the people of India into historical actors rather than subjects on imperial templates. Chapter 2 points towards the right direction for it highlights the interplay of Gandhi as a journalist and politician communicating with 'the world' and the other way round. Yet there is definitely more potential, as the book points at a buried treasure which still has to be detected and presented to the public.

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