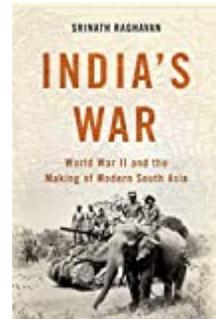




Srinath Raghavan. *India's War: World War II and the Making of Modern South Asia.* New York: Basic Books, 2016. 576 pp. \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-465-03022-4.



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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air War College)

Srinath Raghavan's *India's War* is an ambitious one-volume attempt to cover the vast swathe of military, political, economic, and diplomatic aspects of India's role in the Second World War. To tackle this complex task, Raghavan has built the manuscript around five major themes. The first addresses India's peculiar status within the British Empire, wherein India even though it was a colony was also a regional power with remarkable flexibility regarding its external relations. The second theme deals with the impact of East Asian and European threats to the Raj's security commitments. The third topic tackles domestic politics and the war effort. The fourth deals with socioeconomic issues that saw the Raj empower marginalized social groups to secure popular support for the war. The final theme relates to the war front; the author seeks to show how the war transformed the Indian Army.

Indeed a considerable portion of the book is less than seven chapters devoted to an extensive operational narrative of the Indian Army's war effort. This is a welcome change from current military history that eschews any coverage of operational aspects of warfare. However, Raghavan's approach to this important issue is problematic. A major flaw is the arbitrary coverage of the campaigns. The North African and Burma campaigns

receive the bulk of the coverage with the Italian theater meriting only two pages. The author also makes no mention of the Royal Indian Air Force and the Royal Indian Navy in his coverage of India's war effort. The operational narrative itself lacks coherence and is built around the experiences of personalities. It is devoid of any in-depth analysis of the larger strategic, tactical and doctrinal issues that dominated British-Indian military thinking during the war years. The complex issues of tank warfare and artillery doctrine that bedeviled the British Indian General Staff in the North African desert are absent from the book. Similarly the transformations within the Indian Army brought about by the early campaigns against the Japanese in the jungles of Assam and Burma receive little discussion in the narratives dealing with the Far East campaigns. Significant advances in the utilization of air power, tanks, artillery, and amphibious assets in this conflict are largely ignored. Profound institutional changes, such as the emergence of the Indian Officer Corps, are also ignored.

Raghavan is more successful in tackling the interplay between domestic issues, diplomacy, and the economy with relation to the war effort. In his chapter on foreign relations, he successfully demonstrates how important American financial aid was for India's war effort, and

how the Americans were willing to use this leverage to influence political and economic affairs between Britain and India. Another strong chapter is the one that focuses on the war economy. Here Raghavan reveals how India's industrial capacity and transportation infrastructure were transformed to adapt to the war effort. Raghavan also explains how India's longstanding relationship as a debtor nation to Britain had flipped to a creditor status by 1943. By war's end Britain was in debt to India for a sum of 1,321 million pounds. The remaining chapters cover well-worn topics, such as India's domestic politics,

mobilization for war, and the Indian National Army.

The book makes use of a smattering of archival sources, used primarily for the chapters on politics and the mobilization effort. Overall the manuscript is heavily reliant on secondary sources. Raghavan's main strength lies in his ability to blend together the many strands that make up the complex puzzle that is India during the Second World War. Academics and professional researchers will find little new in this work. The book's primary target is a popular audience who can find a convenient one stop coverage of India and the Second World War.

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