

Comintern Eastern Policy and Iran

With the fall of the Soviet Union and the accessibility of former Soviet archives, rewriting the history of the Soviet Union continues to be of scholarly interest. Of the different political institutions facilitating Soviet expansionism, as well as enlarging its domain of political influence in the international arena, the Communist International (Comintern) was undoubtedly the most influential. Originally set up as a 'universal world revolutionary party' in 1919, both its strategy and its tactics were guided by the principle of 'world socialist revolution'. However, not long following its formation the Comintern metamorphosed into an institution defending the Stalinist policy of socialism in one country, only protecting the interests of the Soviet Union.

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By Touraj Atabaki

In *Comintern Eastern Policy and Iran (1919-1943)* Solmaz Rustamova-Tohidi successfully endeavours to shed light on the more general issue of the organization's Eastern policy, by focusing on its policy towards Iran during 1920s and 1930s. During the twenty-four years of its life, the Comintern went through different political phases, adopting some zigzag type policies. From a radical stance promoting a proletarian socialist revolution, even for

agrarian, nomadic societies in Asia, it developed into a more retained policy of cooperation and collaboration with other social classes and groups within these same societies. Rustamova-Tohidi not only examines these phases and changing policies in detail, but also considers their political implications for Soviet internal and external affairs.

The *Comintern Eastern Policy and Iran (1919-1943)* is a well-written and thoroughly researched work. It is based on original materials obtained from archives in Russia, Georgia, and Azer-

baijan. Moreover, the author's acquaintance with a variety of languages enables her to utilize the pertinent sources in Persian, Turkish, and Russian as well as those in some Western European languages. This book can be highly recommended for students of Soviet history and those seeking a broader understanding of the complexities that burdened the Bolsheviks in sustaining the first socialist state in history.

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history at the Institute of Oriental Studies at the Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences. Her interests include the comparative analysis of twentieth-century political and social movements in Turkey and Iran as well the former Soviet republics of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. <

- Rustamova-Tohidi, Solmaz, *Comintern Eastern Policy and Iran (1919-1943)*, Baku: Khazar University Press (2002), pp. 507, ISBN 9952-20-010-2

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Women's Images, Men's Imagination

Review >
South Asia

The world of Indian women witnessed significant changes in the course of the nineteenth century. Patriarchal notions about lifelong protection and seclusion of women came under fire then and abolition of suttee, the pleas for widow remarriage, and the demands for female education were major issues that engaged public opinion. The position of Indian women also prominently figured in the novels of the period. In her study, Banani Mukhia explores the construction of female characters in fiction written by males.

By Victor A. van Bijlert

This perspective offers interesting new insights in different gender relations, such as between: father and daughter, husband and wife, young wife and male in-laws, and the relations between women themselves: mother and daughter, wife and mother-in-law, and female friends. Banani does this by analysing various social roles played by the heroines in the novels of three great Bengali writers whose careers span more than half a century: Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Rabindranath Tagore, and Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay.

Among the earliest novels analysed in this study are Bankim's *Indira* and *Bishabriksha*, both from 1873; the latest ones are Rabindranath's *Jogajog* (1929) and Sarat Chandra's *Shrikanta* (1917-1933). This broad time-span enables Banani to sketch developments and important changes.

As these novels reflect only to some extent the social realities of their times, Banani adds observations derived from her own historical and sociological research on the period. Yet the novels themselves remain the central focus of this study, as 'these were essentially women-centred stories in which women had been imagined from a great diversity of

backgrounds, characters, moods as well as patterns of behaviour, so as to defy the stereotypical woman' (p.9). The main theme is approached from different disciplines. For this reason the study offers interesting insights for disciplines such as women's studies, history of private life, sociology, pedagogy, and psychology. It may also serve as a model for similar ventures in the novels of the same period written in other Indian languages. The book has an appendix with summaries of all the novels discussed in the main text, an extensive bibliography, and an index. <

- Mukhia, Banani, *Women's Images Men's Imagination: Female characters in Bengali fiction in late nineteenth and early twentieth century*, New Delhi: Manohar (2002), pp.167, ISBN 81-7304-410-4

Victor A. van Bijlert

The Prelude to Empire

The Prelude to Empire: Plassey Revolution of 1757 is a follow up of *From Prosperity to Decline: Eighteenth-Century Bengal* (1995), in which Chaudhury challenged the 'conventional wisdom' that the conquest of Bengal by the English was almost 'accidental' and that there were no 'calculated plottings' on behalf of the English behind the conquest. In this respect the author criticizes the position of scholars like S.C. Hill, B.K. Gupta, C.A. Bayly, and R.K. Roy, who all argued that the Plassey conspiracy was the handiwork of Indians and that political and economic crisis clouding over Bengal in the mid-eighteenth century brought in the British interference.

Review >
South Asia

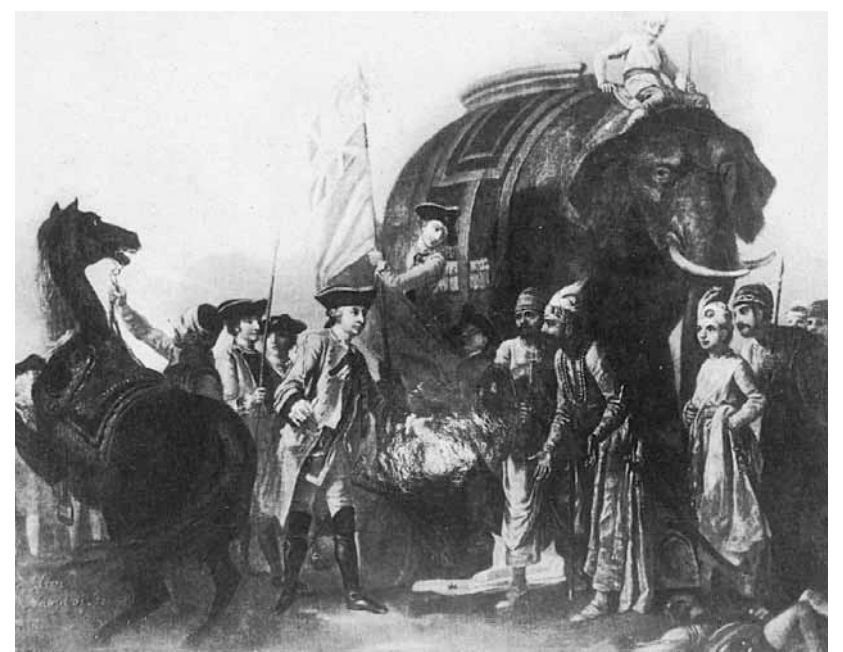
By Bhaswati Bhattacharya

This book, the second by Chaudhury to explore the Plassey conspiracy, presents more evidence in support of his thesis that it was engineered and encouraged by the British, who were able to persuade the discontented courtiers of the Bengal nawab to stick to their 'project' of revolution (p.9).

As a result of the successive strong and stable regimes in the region, Bengal in the early eighteenth century was a land of plenty. While Bengal became the dominant partner in the European companies' Asiatic and European trade,

the major share in the export from the region and the import of bullion still belonged to Asian merchants (p.23-25). The author dismisses the claim that it was Siraj's antagonism towards the English and his intention to drive them out of Bengal that were responsible for the commencement of hostilities between the nawab and the English. It was the attitude of the English, especially the rigidity and belligerence of Drake, the English governor of Calcutta, which caused of the outbreak of war against Siraj. Chaudhury asserts that there had not been an internal crisis – neither in the form of schism in the society nor in terms of economic decline – which would have caused and arguably legitimized British interference.

'Given the rivalry between the Asian merchants and their European counterpart, and the privileged position enjoyed by the former, there could be no question of collaboration between the two.' The English wanted to replace Siraj in the interest of their private trade.



There was a long but calculated transition period between the late 1660s and 1670s when, for the first time, the necessity of a shift from peaceful trade to armed trade in India was first suggested, and the 1750s, when the servants of the English East India Company became set on conquering territories in India. Indeed, the Plassey Revolution was not a mere coincidence (chapter 5). The role of the Indian conspirators in the 'drama' of Plassey was passive; they only joined the British when the latter took the initiative and provided leadership (p.113-114).

The book is interesting not only because it offers 'a completely new expla-

nation' for the Plassey revolution, but also because it shows that the historian does not necessarily have to play the role of judge when approaching sources. It is possible for the historian to assume, instead, the role of advocate of the cause of one of the partisans, in this case, the rulers and merchants of Bengal. <

- Chaudhury, Sushil, *The Prelude to Empire: Plassey Revolution of 1757*, Delhi: Manohar (2000), pp. 192, ISBN 81-7304-301-9.

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Bengal Studies >

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