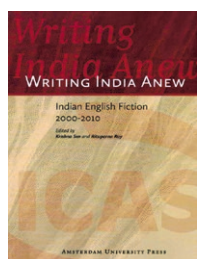


India: a watershed decade

This collection of fourteen critical essays is an eclectic mix of scholarship which addresses, in the editors' words, "the new corpus of writing" (9) in Indian English fiction (IEF). This 'new corpus' refers to contemporary IEF, that which emerged in the first decade of this millennium and can be distinguished from seminal novels such as Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) and the work of well-known authors like Vikram Seth, Anita Desai or Shashi Tharoor. The editors suggest in their introduction that contemporary IEF has freed itself from the shackles of traditional theoretical categorization including 'postcolonialism' or 'postmodernism', yet they acknowledge that it is evidently concerned with the issue of transculturalism and mobility as international borders, both real and imagined, become increasingly porous.

Louise Harrington



Reviewed title:
Sen, K. & R. Roy (eds.) 2013.
Writing India Anew: Indian English Fiction 2000-2010, Amsterdam University Press, ISBN 9789089645333

THE 'STUDY OF A DECADE' approach of this edited collection is an attractive one and will be of interest to those readers looking for a broad impression of IEF in the years 2000-2010. This book joins two other notable publications which employ the same approach and coincidentally were published in the same year (2013): E. Dawson Varughese's *Reading New India: Post-Millennial Indian Fiction and The Indian English Novel of the New Millennium* edited by Prabhat K. Singh. There is considerable overlap across these three publications with Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, the motivational writing of Chetan Bhagat, and graphic novels all emerging as common subject matter. Nonetheless, such exciting scholarship on new and emerging literary genres along with critical discussions of how IEF has changed in the last decade are most welcome in the ever-expanding field of critical writing on fiction from or about India in the English language.

Charting new territory

The introductory chapter from the editors of this book provides a review of criticism on IEF from 2000-2010, focusing on three categories of publications: broad overviews of literature, books on single authors or texts, and those on specific themes. After detailing a comprehensive list of the current critical field, the editors suggest that their publication adds to the extensive canon by revealing how critical material on IEF in the decade of 2000-2010, "a watershed in India's history", might write India anew (13).

This aim seems to be borne out of a desire to argue for the current, or lasting, importance of IEF with the goal of exposing the present trends and preoccupations in fiction writing from India as it evolves alongside the country itself. The reader gathers this intention because, on the first page, the Introduction asserts that IEF has been "dismissed as derivative or dispossessed" (9); it does not however provide a reference for such criticism, thus leaving it unclear to which scholars or publications this edited collection is responding. Despite this, those interested in Anglophone fiction will have no doubt that IEF continues to break new ground and that it offers inventive and varied creative readings of modern India.

Writing India Anew is also framed as charting new territory in IEF since, in the decade under review, fiction writers are suggested to have now moved on from the long-held obsession

with imperialism and nationalism. Indeed, empire and its effects are mentioned frequently throughout the Introduction as being irrelevant to contemporary IEF. This is an interesting observation that begs the question – what is the role of Empire in India or in Indian writing in English in the present period? IEF may have moved beyond a committed focus on the Raj, but clear connections to this historical period are apparent in many of the essays in this collection. For instance, among the themes discussed in the various chapters are India's relationship with Britain and America, the ever-shifting forms of Indian nationalism, crises in national identity, language politics, class and gender inequalities, and India in a global context. Significantly, Bill Ashcroft, in his opening essay 'Re-writing India', explores the idea of the nation in post-Independence India, engaging largely with matters of (anti-)nationalism and (post-)colonialism in novels including *Midnight's Children*. From the outset of this volume, then, it would seem that the legacy of imperialism continues to feature in critical material from this recent decade.

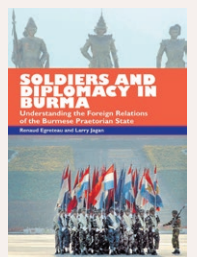
Identifying trends in the new canon

The edited collection is divided into four sections: Re-Imagining the Nation; Revisiting the Past; Reviewing the Present; Reinscribing Home. These sections are not all created equally since they contain four, two, six, and two essays respectively. 'Reviewing the Present' is the longest section with six essays,

Burma's foreign relations

In recent decades, few regimes have been as secretive and reclusive as Burma's. However, this pariah is hardly cut-off from the outside world, as the recent volume by Renaud Egretteau and Larry Jagan make clear.

Shane J. Barter and Yuko Nakajima



Reviewed title:
Egretteau, R. & L. Jagan. 2013.
Soldiers and Diplomacy in Burma: Understanding the Foreign Relations of the Burmese Praetorian State, Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, ISBN 9789971696733

Soldiers and Diplomacy in Burma provides a thorough examination of contemporary and historical foreign relations between Burma and a variety of global actors. This sometimes sprawling volume brings together an impressive range of materials while remaining accessible to a variety of readers, making this the definitive account of Burma's foreign relations.

The book's core argument is that, while the country's foreign policy has changed significantly between periods of openness in the immediate postcolonial era, isolation under Ne Win, and now something in between, a constant throughout Burma's postcolonial history has been the praetorian role of the military. The authors argue convincingly that Burma represents a praetorian state instead of a junta, militaristic, authoritarian, or pseudo-civilian state. The army pervades the state and society, serving as guardians of their national vision against various threats. The authors explain that praetorian regimes tend not to respond to international threats with military force, preferring instead to remain isolated; "praetorians are more concerned with political power and leadership than the systematic use of force, conflict and/or domestic repression – although they are ready to use them to achieve their goals" (29). This constant in Burmese politics suggests that, despite meaningful reforms, we should expect that the military retain a guardian rule for the foreseeable future.

Soldiers and Diplomacy in Burma unfolds through five chapters. Chapter one categorizes the regime while providing an extensive review of the related literature. Chapter two provides a historical survey of post-colonial foreign relations, moving from U Nu's early internationalism to Ne Win's isolation and recent openings. The U Nu era in particular provides a useful history lesson, as Burma was at one point an outspoken international actor and a leader of the Non-Aligned Movement. From here, the book examines Burma's relations with specific countries, especially China, India, the ASEAN nations, and the United States, as well as the United Nations, Japan, and several Western countries. The discussions of country dyads are fascinating, especially the unique ways that Japan and India approach Burmese issues in ways that are distinct from their allies.

While maintaining an international focus, Egretteau and Jagan never lose sight of domestic politics, noting the centrality of factionalism within the country's security forces and the ways that personal connections drive foreign policy. The authors are quick to point out that much of Burma's post-2010 opening must be explained by domestic factors. The book also delves into the ideational aspects of Burma's security apparatus, noting the extreme xenophobic nationalism that reinforces the country's isolationist tendencies. The book contains many policy insights. The authors suggest that the so-called great game between India and China, as well as the formidable Chinese influence in Burma, are exaggerated. Chinese investment in Burma is relatively limited, although it dwarfs that of other countries and provides Beijing with considerable influence. Burmese leaders recognize this and have worked to retain their autonomy, namely by purging pro-Beijing intelligence officers and pivoting towards the West. Burma does not appear to be divided between pro-China

and pro-Western camps, but instead pro-foreign and pro-isolation ones, meaning that those who favour expanding interactions with Beijing also favour doing so with Washington, Bangkok, Tokyo, and Brussels.

While mostly impressive, *Soldiers and Diplomacy in Burma* falls short in some respects. The book feels quite long due to impressive details, but also some poor organization and editing. The book's chapters run over 100 pages long with only a few section breaks per chapter and seemingly distinct topics lumped within each section. Several parts of the book could have been trimmed, as discussions of many events and concepts are repeated at several points, such as Burma leaving the non-aligned movement, Ne Win's anger towards North Korea after a 1983 attack on South Korean citizens, Russia's Rangoon Embassy, Israel's complex relations with Burma, and Khin Nyunt's 2004 purging. Next, while discussions of bilateral relations are interesting, it is not clear whether Burma's relations with the Ukraine, Canada, or New Zealand demand dedicated discussions, let alone repeated ones. Another area that could have probably been trimmed relates to the authors' tendency to incorporate literature reviews throughout the book, breaking from their own analyses to provide long, encyclopedic surveys. The authors also opt for a journalistic style, introducing writers in terms of their nationalities, professions, and sometimes home institution when making citations, despite already having footnotes. This is especially strange when authors are referred to repeatedly, such as Andrew Selth, described as an "Australian veteran watcher of Burmese affairs" (8), "a prominent *Tatmadaw* specialist" (38, 52, 138), and "Australian academic" (66, 155, 334). While Selth and others are indeed noted experts, the repeated in-text introductions become tiring. This and other editorial decisions add unnecessary length to an already long manuscript.

The major substantive quibble we found was with the book's treatment of history. The authors refer to colonial traumas to explain Burmese xenophobia. Pre-colonial history is absent, save for a brief mention in Thai-Burmese relations and in discussing the shift to the new capital of Nyapyidaw. It might have been interesting to have some discussion on precolonial Burmese politics, namely the role of the military, a dominant institution well before the arrival of Europeans. Some brief mention of previous historical eras would also help explain contemporary ethnic dynamics, which were exacerbated, but not caused, by colonial experiences. Even if one is critical of colonialism, starting history with it may exaggerate its effect, blurring efforts to discover the roots of this praetorian system.

These quibbles aside, *Soldiers and Diplomacy in Burma* remains an impressive achievement. This is essential reading for those seeking to comprehend not only Burma's politics and foreign relations. The product of a decade of research, the authors must be commended for unearthing a range of fascinating points and assembling such a detailed story of the foreign relations of this pariah.

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