

JOHANNES H. VOIGT: Indien im zweiten Weltkrieg. (Studien zur Zeitgeschichte, Bd.11)  
Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1978, 414 pages, DM 38. -

This book by Johannes H. Voigt closes a gap in the literature about India's role during World War II. As the author says in the introduction, he wants to connect the political, economic and military aspects of the critical years from 1939 to 1945 and examine the impact of the war on India and Indian politics. He has succeeded in doing this to a large extent.

The new approach clarifies some well-known but nevertheless puzzling aspects of British policy towards India during the war years, as well as the policy and decisions of the Indian nationalists in general and the Congress in particular.

The author first gives an outline of India's general importance to Great Britain and the Empire, India's strategic significance during World War I and the war's effects on India and England are discussed fully. This sets the tone for a detailed chronological description and analysis of events during World War II which takes all sides into consideration.

The author shows the Congress's dilemma at the outbreak of the war, as well as Great Britain's hesitant attitude towards India and her war-time demands. He introduces a new aspect in his exposure of previously unknown motives behind activities and tactical moves on both sides. He analyzes especially the differences of opinion between London and New Delhi on Indian policy, and shows the decisive role of Indian war-time production as well as its subsequent influence on the development of the Indian economy. In addition, the status and importance of the Indian army to England's military strategy and planning are discussed.

Afterwards, India's changing role in the strategy of the Allied forces is described extensively. The author precisely summarizes the recurring differences of opinion between Great Britain and the USA regarding policy towards India and related military activities. He traces those differences back to divergent war aims in the political and economic field. At the same time, this discussion clarifies the USA's role in Indian politics during World War II, until now a rather neglected area. Although the author does not state it explicitly, this discussion goes a long way in explaining why the USA so completely ruined its reputation in Asia and especially in India after the war: zigzagging wartime policies, which aimed to maintain good relations with both England and its colonies, particularly India, as well as a lack of explicit support for the colonies' aims led in Asia to a loss of confidence in the USA. Moreover, the author points out India's suspicions of American economic policy in Asia, which kept industry, at least, on the side of England.

The policy of the Congress in India is seen as the result of internal events and pressures as well as external forces. The author states that wartime events and England's attitude actually helped the Congress to hide or gloss over some of its major internal differences, particularly between Gandhi and Nehru. Important events in India itself, such as the Quit-India resolution, the August Rebellion in 1942, the Cripps Mission and the famine in 1943, are seen in the perspective of military development and England's policy. This new approach helps to clarify developments in India during the war years.

Unfortunately, the author does not discuss the policies and attitudes of the Muslim League as thoroughly as those of the Congress, although the League was the second most important political factor in India at this time, decisively more important than the movement of S. C. Bose, which is described in detail. Whether this omission is due to a lack of sources or to a pro-India and/or Pro-Congress bias is unclear, but it certainly diminishes the value of otherwise excellent research.

A great asset is the detailed discussion of the India policy of the Axis powers and the role India played in their military strategy. This discussion provides a new understanding of their war policy; the main stress is on Japan, but Germany and Italy are discussed as well. In connection with this, the movement of S. C. Bose, as well as the activities of the Indian National Army and the Indian Independence League and the Indian League in Germany, are presented as the attempts by a group of Indian nationalists to attain independence with the help of England's enemies, whoever they may have been. The ambiguous relationship between the I. I. L. and its main advocate, Bose, and Japan is explained in detail.

The author has certainly done pioneer work in dealing with such complex problems, especially the relationship between Bose and the German authorities. Furthermore, he assesses the influence Bose attained in India in the years immediately after the war.

The author concludes his research with a short survey of the events after the war which led to India's independence, showing how they were already determined during the war.

The author has travelled extensively in Europe, the USA and Asia to consult hitherto unpublished and unknown sources. The very exact and detailed footnotes, which are a result of this thorough research, are certainly an asset to the book.

An English summary concludes Johannes Voigt's book, which is extremely valuable not only to students of Indian history, but also to those interested in World War II.

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