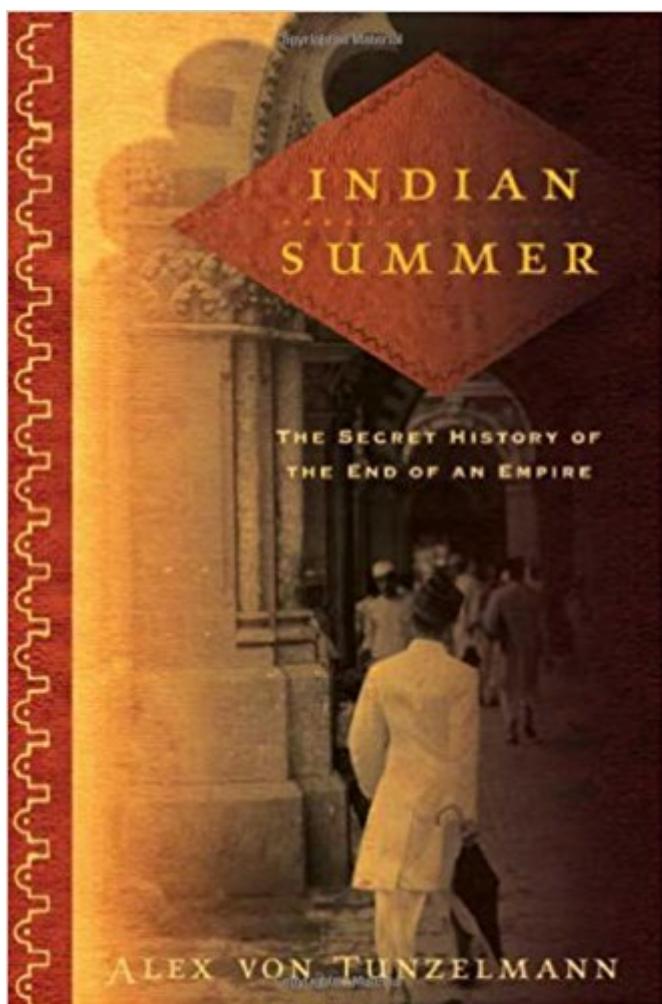


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Indian Summer: The Secret History Of The End Of An Empire



Synopsis

An extraordinary story of romance, history, and divided loyalties--set against the backdrop of one of the most dramatic events of the twentieth century. The stroke of midnight on August 15, 1947, liberated 400 million people from the British Empire. With the loss of India, its greatest colony, Britain ceased to be a superpower, and its king ceased to sign himself Rex Imperator. This defining moment of world history had been brought about by a handful of people. Among them were Jawaharlal Nehru, the fiery Indian prime minister; Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the leader of the new Islamic Republic of Pakistan; Mohandas Gandhi, the mystical figure who enthralled a nation; and Louis and Edwina Mountbatten, the glamorous but unlikely couple who had been dispatched to get Britain out of India. Within hours of the midnight chimes, their dreams of freedom and democracy would turn to chaos, bloodshed, and war. Behind the scenes, a secret personal drama was also unfolding, as Edwina Mountbatten and Jawaharlal Nehru began a passionate love affair. Their romance developed alongside Cold War conspiracies, the beginning of a terrible conflict in Kashmir, and an epic sweep of events that saw one million people killed and ten million dispossessed. Steeped in the private papers and reflections of the participants, *Indian Summer* reveals, in vivid, exhilarating detail, how the actions of a few extraordinary people changed the lives of millions and determined the fate of nations.

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review. The transfer of power from the British Empire to the new nations of India and

Pakistan in the summer of 1947 was one of history's great, and tragic, epics: 400 million people won independence, and perhaps as many as one million died in sectarian violence among Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. In her scintillating debut, British author von Tunzelmann keeps one eye on the big picture, but foregrounds the personalities and relationships of the main political leaders—larger-than-life figures whom she cuts down to size. She portrays Gandhi as both awe inspiring and, with his antisex campaigns and inflexible moralism, an exasperating eccentric. British viceroy Louis Mountbatten comes off as a clumsy diplomat dithering over flag designs while his partition plan teetered on the brink of disaster. Meanwhile, his glamorous, omnicompetent wife, Edwina, looks after refugees and carries on an affair with the handsome, stalwart Indian statesman Nehru. Von Tunzelmann's wit is cruel—Gandhi... wanted to spread the blessings of poverty and humility to all people—but fair in its depictions of complex, often charismatic people with feet of clay. The result is compelling narrative history, combining dramatic sweep with dishy detail. 8 pages of b&w photos. (Aug.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

The end of the British Raj remains a controversial topic among historians. Could partition have been avoided if British and Indian politicians were more prudent? Could the communal violence that cost up to a million lives have been avoided or at least mitigated? Although Von Tunzelmann touches on these questions, she does not attempt to answer them, but perhaps those answers are beyond the scope of this general history of the closing years of British control. Instead, she provides an interesting look at the key players in this tumultuous period. Despite the title, there are no startling revelations here. But Von Tunzelmann's portrayals of Nehru, Jinnah, Gandhi, and Louis Mountbatten are often provocative and at odds with more conventional views. Gandhi, for example, is seen as rather rigid, sometimes petty, and maddeningly indecisive. Nehru, the giant of Indian nationalist aspirations, seems more British than the British themselves and distinctly uncomfortable as a leader of a mass movement. This is not a particularly comprehensive account, but for general readers, this work will be very valuable. Freeman, Jay

Overall, Alex von Tunzelman's first book was a good retelling of the Nehru/Gandhi/Mountbatten/Jinnah axis in liberating and dividing colonial India. As she stated, in quoting Marx, a region already so riven by dynasties, race, religion, and class invited outside conquest. The British tried to impose a self-serving unity, which the Indian Congress Party attempted to turn to its advantage. The spoilers were, of course, Jinnah and Churchill, collaborating

to sabotage a united India; one for political advantage, the other out of old fogey imperial spite. The precedent for splitting India seems to have been Ireland in 1921, with the same bitter lessons following. Other period divisions arose out of the cold war: Korea and Vietnam also led to hot civil and international conflict; Germany almost so. India's partition was further proof that such divisions may lead to stability, but at great price in blood. Yugoslavia also testified such means do not justify the meager ends. That India has moved forward despite this birth pain is testimony to Nehru's legacy, not British foresight or goodwill. Which brings me to the main clinker in von Tunzelmann's narrative, that withheld my fifth star. Her opening paragraph is a self-congratulating paean to a statesmanship that British readers love to believe about themselves, but had no basis in reality and can be refuted point by point. "The largest empire the world has ever seen" is a title most assuredly belonging to the US/NATO axis, not colonial Britain. Britain did not just "give up," and therefore broke no new historical ground, because it did not "fall onto its own sword," neither proudly nor majestically. Its crushing of the constitutional independence movement in British Guiana, the counter-insurgency terror in Kenya, the "Malayan" emergency, the intervention in Cyprus and Greece, the covert actions of MI6 around the globe, showed a continuing imperial mindset that tried mightily to plow the ground of the postwar world in its favor before turning it over to new owners; and largely succeeded. Even the claimed victory "in the century's definitive war" was owed to the US and USSR, without whom the United Kingdom would have been a Vichy Britain. And though Britain's "culture" may have been "strong and vibrant," its economy was anything but. As to India proper, it was the Congress Party's "Quit India" movement of 1942-43, making India ungovernable, that - like terrorism in Palestine - dragged Britain most unwillingly into "the light of freedom." The very partition of India refutes von Tunzelmann's Jack-waving panegyric. Yet leaving aside her necessary bow to conventional wisdom to please the British reading public, she's provided a detailed and readably entertaining review of the so-called "shameful flight" from Britain's Jewel of Empire. A good prologue to her subsequent "Red Heat" Caribbean/cold war narrative.

I found this book very slow. For my taste there was too much unnecessary detail. I did find it well researched and I learned a lot about India's history, demographics and politics, but for me it was hard slogging at times. I actually had to take a couple of breaks and read a lighter novel in between, but I was glad I finished it. I recommend it for its thoroughness and accuracy for those who want to learn about India's independence movement, partition and the devastating after-effects - but this is not an easy read.

Heck of a book. While centered mostly around Edwina Mountbatten, the book gives an excellent perspective of the going-ons in British India during that time. strongly recommended read for someone interested in bits of quiet info on the royal family, Prince Philip, Nehru and a smattering of others as they muddled their way though the Raj and after India's independence.

tunzelman presents the little known facts about the end of india. indeed there were many things i did not know or imagine. like how lucky we are that india did not disintegrate into many little states after partition. how kashmir is something india got hold of unfairly, perhaps due to the emotional wishes of one man, nehru. the book sheds more light onto the greyer side of gandhi's role in the partition, or in fact in the independence struggle itself. tunzelmann is not kind on anyone, be it nehru, gandhi, jinnah or mountbatten. however, he does not sit judgement but presents things as he happened; or at least how he thinks they happened. it is indeed amazing that someone as incompetent as mountbatten got such a large role to play in india's independence; and also that unless you go close to the scene, you can't see him for who he was. teaches you that history is not to be trusted as accurate ; you probably have to get multiple perspectives. this one brings some balance into the picture !

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