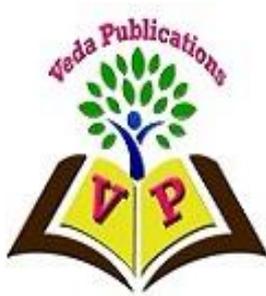


**PERCIVAL SPEAR: FOREIGNER AND HISTORIAN GAZING DELHI**

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*(Associate Professor, Department of English, Maharaja Agrasen College (University of Delhi))***ABSTRACT**

From times immemorial, the ancient city of Delhi has attracted travelers, itinerant raiders, fortune hunters, empire seekers and settlers who have left their imprints either on the physical landscape or recorded chronicles of Delhi. These 'outsiders' bring a unique gaze and perspective which is the product of their dynamic interface with the alien city where they feel objectified by the staring city. The "otherness" generated by the city compels the outsider to revisit the identity of the city as well as her/ his own identity. An early example is Percival Spear who engages with Delhi as "an Indian Englishman", "Dilliwallah" and "Historian". The present study examines how the career of Percival Spear for the first time brings home to Delhi the need for reading and writing itself with studied depth and latitude. Spear's perception of the complex processes afoot in Indian society, Delhi was a miniature of which, not only made him demonstrate how to document urban processes scientifically but also polysemically negotiating the inter-textuality of disciplines, theories and genres. Thus the outsider's gaze added a significant trope to reading and writing Delhi- an understanding of which is seminal and critical to Delhi enthusiasts as well as its later thinkers and writers.

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The city of Delhi has an existence that spans across mythology, proto-history, travel writing, history and narratives. From times immemorial, travelers, itinerant raiders, fortune hunters, empire seekers and settlers have been attracted by the lore of Delhi to leave their imprints either on the physical landscape or recorded chronicles of Delhi. As much as the 'native', their gaze and account has also

shaped posterity's impressions of this ancient city. In fact, the so-called "outsider" brings a unique gaze and perspective which is the product of her/ his dynamic interface with an alien city. Gazing at life, especially urban life, has been a favorite vocation of journalists, writers, researchers and academicians touring cities. Bernard Sharrat (1989) describes four frequently deployed ways of looking at the urban



experience: the glance, the gaze, the scan and the glimpse. A mutual glance in which there is prolonged and perfect exchange does not come naturally now to the blasé reserved urban individual but a rapid or fleeting glance is what we give to most things in the fast paced, multitasking urban scenario. The scan connects to our common experience of finding ourselves under surveillance at every step in contemporary societies. Law and order and legal systems apart, independent surveillance mechanisms are now installed in departmental stores, malls, highways, housing societies, educational institutions, offices and public places. Instructions in the form of dos and don'ts stare at us from every nook and corner. Threats like terror and civil strife are also responsible for extending this already ubiquitous network of surveillance. The glimpse is the fourth way of seeing or being seen in the urban social context which is a tantalizingly incomplete and mysterious revelation which is often associated with objects of desire, worship or awe like the beloved, god or hero or king. The '*darshan*' or the glimpse is a common concept in Indian culture in which power relations of the ruler and the ruled are implied when the revered one steps out of elusion momentarily for the devotee as a reward for prayers or passion. While glimpse was a privileged mode of visual communication in pre-modern setups where power operated through intrigue and awe, the scan has become the preferred instrument of power in modern societies

The third form- the gaze- is more relevant to outsiders, who find that they are both staring at and stared at by a perplexing culture. In a gaze, we devote more time and attention to the object. We may be gazing at life or its representations. We may be gazing for truth or for pleasure. In the psychoanalytical theory of Jacques Lacan, gaze is the apprehensive state that comes with the perception that one is being viewed. (Lacan, 1973, 1978) This concept is allied to his theory of the mirror stage, in which a child facing a mirror realizes that he or she has an exteriority. This gaze effect is produced not just by a mirror but by any conceivable object such as a chair or a television which can potentially behave like a mirror. This goes on to mean that

awareness of any object can also induce an awareness of *being* an object. The gaze is not just something which one has or uses; rather, it is a consummate relationship into which enters with any object. The gaze is a relationship where the gazed object does not remain mute or inanimate but speaks back to the subject or gazer so that she finds herself gazed back at in much the similar exposed manner. Gazing a city can have precisely this effect. Gazing a city by an 'outsider' is primarily a product of feeling objectified in an alien city. The "otherness" generated by the city also compels the outsider to revisit her/ his own identity. Social identities reflect the way individuals and groups internalize established social categories within their societies, such as their cultural (or ethnic) identities, gender identities, class identities, and so on. These social categories shape our ideas about who we think we are, how we want to be seen by others, and the groups to which we belong. George Herbert Mead's classic text, *Mind Self and Society* (1934), established that social identities are created through our ongoing social interaction with other people and our subsequent self-reflection about who we think we are according to these social exchanges. Mead's work shows that identities are produced through agreement, disagreement, and negotiation with other people. We adjust our behavior and our self-image based upon our interactions and our self-reflection about these interactions. Ideas of similarity and difference are central to the way in which we achieve a sense of identity and social belonging. Identities have some element of exclusivity. The feeling of 'otherness' is inbuilt in societies as hierarchical binaries are a part and parcel of the apparatus used to construct sense of belonging, identity and social status. If the notion of 'otherness' is used to construct social identities, it can also be used to contest them. The outsider uses this concept to break down the ideologies and resources that so-called insiders use to maintain and privilege their social identities. The gaze of the outsider is deployed to manage the objectified otherness. In the process, the city is confronted, handled and written with a compelling urgency and incision which the matter-of-factness of secure insiders might not summon.



An early example of a renewed gaze on Delhi and its environs is by Percival Spear (1901-1982) in his three books on Delhi titled *Delhi* (1937), *Delhi Its Monuments and History* (1943) and *The Twilight of the Mughals* (1951). Percival Spear was born in Bath, Somerset, in 1901. He was educated at Monkton Combe School and at St. Catharine's College, Cambridge, where he studied history. He came to India in 1924 and taught European and English history at St. Stephen's College for the next 16 years. He worked for the Information Department of the Government of India and then as Government Whip in Legislative Assembly during the war years, finally returning to England in 1946. He was appointed Fellow and Bursar of Selwyn College, Cambridge where he held a University lectureship in South Asian history. He died in 1982. Narayani Gupta introduces Spear in three tropes- as "an Indian Englishman", "Dilliwallah" and "Historian". (Gupta, 2002: ix) These three gazes intermix in his documentation of history.

To begin with his oxymoronic racial and political status, he certainly was not the first or the only one of his kind. He was one of the numerous European administrators or visitors who found India confronting their British selves. Freshly out of the European educational establishment, they found the political and intellectual ferment in India greatly challenging. While the earliest British entrants found India baffling and either caged up in an imperialist snobbery or broke free in a romantic, exotic abandon, many twentieth century Indophiles were detached enough to identify open mindedly with the ken and cause of the people of the emergent nation. In the Preface to *Sahibs Who Loved India*, Khushwant Singh categorises *Sahibs* in three categories. (Singh, 2008) The first comprises of those "who exploited India, kept their distance from Indians, and as soon as their tenures were over, went back to their homes in England and were happy to forget the time they spent in this country. ... They hated everything about India: its climate, mosquitoes, flies, the filth, dirt and smell. Above all, they hated Indians". (Singh, 2008: vii) The second category had those "who enjoyed the luxury of living in spacious bungalows with servants, shikar, riding, pig-sticking, drinking, dancing... but

even they kept themselves aloof from Indians with their 'Whites Only' clubs". (Singh, 2008: vii) The third variety was of the Sahibs who loved "everything about India, stayed away from the racist clubs, went out of their way to befriend Indians and maintained contacts with them after returning to England". (Singh, 2008: vii) The epithet 'Indian Englishman' befits this third category. Pran Nevile, in his book *Sahib's India*, also refers to "enlightened Englishmen, both officials and visitors, who looked beyond the poverty, the heat and dust, towards the spirit of people, proud of their ancient civilization, culture and literature". (Nevile, 2010: x) This variety evolved, as he writes in the chapter 'Splendid Sahibs', in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Percival Spear also acknowledges this branding by describing three types of British attitudes to India. The year Spear arrived in India, 1923, was also the year in which E M Forster's *A Passage to India* was published. Forster's central question of India being a "mystery or a muddle" seems to have guided Spear into seeing the India experience as an utterly unpredictable one- which falls into different patterns with different people for extra-human reasons. Some take an instant dislike to India and chafe under it till they remain in India. There are others who remain untouched by the India experience. They adjust well to the physical and socio-cultural change but it remains a soulless transition, "so that when the time comes to depart they will slough off the Indian experience as if it had never been". (Spear and Spear, 2010: 92) He belongs to neither of these two categories as he is neither hostile nor indifferent to India. He has towards India "some sort of an affinity in the soul, which once realized can never be discarded because it is a part of you". He calls this connect a "magic", a "kink", an "intuitive sympathy" and a "previous Mughal incarnation". (Spear and Spear, 2010: 93-94) The stage is set on his arrival in India for an empathetic identification with the environment around him with a spontaneous *déjà vu*, but he evolves into a thoroughbred Indian Englishman through a variety of contributing factors. A Muslim student from Punjab initiates him into Indian nationalism and Mughal age. He acknowledges this debt by stating that "It was my



first lesson in seeing India through Indian spectacles, and it was perhaps an advantage that I had at that time little background of formal knowledge. At the very beginning I was able to grasp the modernity of the young Indian mind ..." (Spear and Spear, 2010: 10) When he starts teaching an Honours batch, his friends from the student community include two Hindus, a Sikh and a Christian. He maintains that, "I taught them formal History and Political Science but it was they who graduated me in Indian knowledge." (Spear and Spear, 2010: 11) The hills, the Buddhas in Taxila, the monuments in Delhi, the sunsets by the river Yamuna, the musty odour of the monsoons, the searing touch of the "loo", the bustle of the bazaars- he mentions all these in his list of things which stirred the Indian magic. In whichever terms it may be described, Spear as an Indian Englishman immerses himself in the Indian experience and emerges the richer from it. His gaze as an Indian Englishman is inspired by India or is in spite of India remains a moot question but it definitely equips Spear to look differently at India. His tolerant, enthusiastic and expansive gaze penetrates to nooks and corners of Delhi which lie unexplored and undocumented, it permeates to levels of inquiry which seek "truth" on the principals of causality, plausibility and rationality in the manner the west thinks history, it accepts the challenge of linking the present to the immediate past by dwelling on a century and the tail end of a dynasty that are nobody's favorites. The Indian Englishman's gaze not only falls on historical subjects but on sociological as well. His three books on Delhi history are proof enough of his soul connect with India. His *India remembered* also turns out to be much more than a memoir. His unrestrained contact with Delhi society makes it a very thorough and comprehensive account of the "sociological museum" which it was. (Spear and Spear, 2002: 102) He summarizes his own contribution in the following terms:

And there has been the deep satisfaction of having, as I believe, helped in some degree in introducing the real values of the west to the Indian mind and seeing some small part of that process by which they may be incorporated into a new synthesis significant

for both east and west. Those values I would call chiefly the Christian personal and social ethic, the positive idea that spiritual values are properly expressed in material and social forms; and the scientific ethic of objective inquiry and weighing of results, of precision and patience and of devotion to the truth. (Spear and Spear, 2010: 103)

As an Indian Englishman, he accepts the white man's role in introducing the Christian ethic, the positivist idea as well as the superiority of reason. The saving grace is that as an intellectual and an educator, he has had no opportunity to cloak imperialism under this alibi and all the opportunity of actually enriching the Indian mind in the said manner. Thus, his identity of the Indian Englishman is constructed around the imperialist career of the English in India but by pursuing the alibi as the whole truth, he has been able to sift the honorable from the dishonorable in his endeavor. The cultivation and mobilization of this identity of the Indian Englishman has proved to be beneficial not only to the city, but it has also given Spear a wealth of "intangibles" which he carries back to England. (Spear and Spear, 2010: 103) This treasure contains the relationships he has forged with Indians, a sense of the spiritual he has developed here, the belief in the Oversoul and the sublime memories of the Gangetic plains which opens up cosmic questions.

His gaze as a historian can be located in his formal training in history in Britain. Recording and teaching history have both received a lot of attention in the imperialist strategy. After English education, history has been the chief collaborator in articulating imperialist pride and project. The colonized were perceived to lack many things by their vanquishers. One thing they were seen to be certainly bereft of was history. This, in turn, indicated, as James Mill and Thomas Macaulay proceeded in the first half of the nineteenth century to demonstrate, that Indians were not capable of rational thinking. Europeans opined that the only historical work produced by pre-Islamic India, was Kalhana's *Rajatarangini*, a 12th century chronicle of the Kings of Kashmir. They flaunted their own great historians like Gibbon, Hume, Macaulay and later Ranke to drive home their



own proficiency in this matter. Dipesh Chakrabarty underscores how since the earliest days of the British advent in India, they have “conquered and represented the diversity of ‘Indian’ pasts through a homogenizing narrative of transition from a ‘medieval’ period to ‘modernity’.” (Chakrabarty, 2000: 227) The dominant discourse of transition themed British historiography in India extended the binary terms of before and after British arrival to medieval-modern, feudal-capitalist, despotic rule-rule by law, arbitrary power-constitutional administration. Writes Chakrabarty

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, generation of elite nationalists found their subject positions, as nationalists, within this transition narrative ... Within this narrative shared between imperialist and nationalist imaginations, the Indian was always a figure of lack. There was always, in other words, room in this story for characters who embodied, on behalf of the native, the theme of ‘inadequacy’ or ‘failure’. (Chakrabarty, 2000: 228)

The ‘lack’ or ‘inadequacy’ of the imperial subject not only justified the imperial presence but also provided the rationale for its ineligibility for citizenship. The nationalist aspiration for citizenship itself came to be conceptualized in the subject’s mind in European terms with the state as the presiding power and history as the history of that state. To be a citizen, there had to be a state; to be a state, there had to be history. It was, therefore, imperative to the imperialist agenda to include first and foremost in the list of things the subject ‘lacks’ its lack of history or a sense of history and then start writing history on its behalf. Eric Wolf reiterates this ‘lack’ in his book, *Europe and the People without History*.

It is against this backdrop that Percival Spear’s *Delhi-A Historical Sketch* and *Delhi Its Monuments and History* appear. Spear theorizes that owing to the ebb and flow of the political powers, Delhi has seen frequent demographic shifts and because at most times it has been full of recent settlers, its history has never been properly documented. He also perceives a glaring gap in the knowledge about the city contained in the

guidebooks written by European authors as well. The guide books by F.Cooper; A.F.P. Harcourt, H.G.Keene, W.Hoey, H. C. Fanshawe and G Sanderson and J.A.Page and H.Sharp provided information for navigating around the city but hardly any history. (Frykenberg, 1986, 2002: 12) Spear’s *Delhi and Delhi and its Monuments* segregate the two tropes of the guide and handbook and formalized historiography. (Spear, 1937, 2002; Spear, 1943, 1994) In *Delhi: Past and Present*, H C Fanshawe voices his long held aspiration to write “an adequate Guide to Delhi, containing a brief General History of the city”. (Fanshawe, 1902, 2010: ix) As Commissioner of the Delhi Division, he has had the opportunity of collecting materials and witnessing archeological developments, based on which he meant to write his guide with history. He states three objectives behind writing this volume- one, adding to the tourists’ knowledge and pleasure, two, of securing a permanent place in their memories of the “gallant feat performed before Delhi in the summer of 1857, by a very small force under the most arduous and trying conditions” and three, of facilitating the protection of buildings and sites in and around Delhi. (Fanshawe, 1902, 2010: xii) The guide book might or might not have accomplished these stated objectives, but certainly it fell short of the historian’s approval of containing any serious history.

Spear’s *Delhi- a Historical Sketch* has a historical gaze which this antiquarian guide book does not because it poses in the manner of a methodical historical inquiry two questions which it attempts to answer by appropriate selection of source materials and consequent analysis of implications to arrive at a suitably illuminating answer. The first question is stated thus:

It may then be asked, Why was the particular situation of Delhi chosen and maintained throughout the centuries? Why not Agra at the southern end of the southward running stretch of the Jumna, or Karnal at the northern end? (Spear, 1937, 2002: 2)

The second question is:

A further question which must rise to the mind of any visitor to, or student of, Delhi concerns the numerous changes of site to



which the city has been subject. The reason is not principally physical ... The determining causes of the frequent changes have been strategy, prestige and health. (Spear, 1937, 2002: 2)

It is around these issues that the political-administrative and urban-architectural history of Delhi has been organized. Spear does not make the mistake of mixing the methods of a discipline based inquiry with the more informative and pedagogic style of a guide book. The latter comes in the form of his *Delhi and Its Monuments*. Unlike Fanshaw's audience, Spear's is an Indian audience. Since he deals with students of history, it is important for him to coach them in the historical method as well as content. He exemplifies the historical method in *Delhi*. In *Delhi and its Monuments* he delivers his lesson differently, but effectively, by stressing in its preface titled 'How to Read This Book' the need "to understand history and to enjoy the great and beautiful monuments which lie all around ... in Delhi". (Spear, 1943, 2002) Considering the fact that he is addressing this exhortation to Indians, he is complicit in all three things- the imperialist agenda of writing proxy history, assumption of the native's lack of interest and acumen in this regard and the west's perceived skill and superiority in handling the subject. His historian's gaze, therefore, is an imperialist's gaze in this fundamental sense. It "constructs" as much the history of the city as it constructs history as a discipline the way the west thinks and uses it.

Delhi and Its Monuments was "written for school boys and girls of Delhi". Writes Spear in the Foreword to the second edition:

Its purpose was to help them discover for themselves the glories of their city, that knowing it more fully they would value it more truly. For this reason it was written as simply as possible and the matter is divided into ordinary chapters with additional notes for more interested and advanced students. (Spear, 1943, 1994: Foreword To Second Edition)

The first edition (1943) was designed as a text book and used as such. Spear adapts the second edition

(1945) slightly to accommodate another readership- the guests and visitors in Delhi. He hopes that while the first edition was aimed at enlightening the Delhi students about their rich past and heritage, the second edition was augmented with illustrations and sketch maps to also function as a tourist guide for enthusiastic foreigners. He writes,

If this edition helps to kindle the imagination of any visitor with the magic of imperial centuries, it will have been worthwhile. In this hope it is offered by a lover of Delhi to her guests of war and peace. (Spear, Foreword)

Narayani Gupta in her Foreword to the annotated and updated edition (1994) rightly suggests that despite taking cognizance of an interested and alternative readership of the touristy admirers of oriental culture in the second edition, the primary target audience remain the impressionable young Delhi children. The book is also structurally organized around the most likely order in which students from Shahjahanabad are likely to visit the Delhi monuments. The book troops outwards from the obvious focal point of the monument which loomed the largest in Shahjahanabad- the Red Fort. Then it proceeds past Civil Lines, Feroze Shah Kotla, Purana Qila, Humayun's Tomb and Nizammuddin area, Sayyid and Lodi Delhi, and finally, the Qutb complex and Suraj Kund. It heads back not to Shahjahanabad but to the New Delhi which has been under feverish construction in the years preceding the book and here the author dwells on Jantar Mantar before signing off with a peek into Lutyen's and Baker's Delhi or, as it was then called, the "British New Delhi" under the caveat that "Your knowledge of Delhi will not be complete without a visit to New Delhi". (Spear, 1943, 1994: 94)

C. A. Bayly, in his essay 'Modern Indian Historiography', summarises how this so-called lack of history in India is based on oversight of indigenous tropes of recording the past. He writes

It is often said that India, and in particular Hindu India, lacked a strong tradition of historical writing. For Hindus, time is supposed to have been 'fuzzy' or even 'cyclical'. History in its modern form, according to this view, came with the modern state or in India with



the colonial state. These statements are dubious at best. Hindu India expressed its historical memory through legends and ballads, a true representation of popular constructions of the past. Yet even Hindu kingdoms had elaborate records, genealogies and annals which could be as precise as those found in other early modern societies (Tod [1819] 1982: I, 1-3). Likewise, an Indo-Muslim tradition of historical writing, drawing on the precision and concern for correct testimony of Arabic and Persian exemplars, developed under the patronage of Mogul and other Indian Muslim courts. This tradition continued to flourish during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Persian histories of dynasties and religious teachers, biographical dictionaries of writers and poets, local histories and landed clans and small towns were written in great numbers, often by Hindus of the scribal classes who had taken Mogul service (Bayly, 2002: 679)

Generally these histories chronicled the practices of the Islamic state but by the eighteenth century, greater stress came to be laid on the socio-economic impact of the decline of the Mogul power. The latter development also chronicled simultaneously the rise of the British power. He concludes that Indians were producing their own histories during the British conquest. However, because of the peculiar socio-political conditions of India which "fitted into no obvious paradigm of development, whether liberal or Marxist" and the presence of non-European themes and their unconventional articulation, Indian history and historians appeared a premature post-modern puzzle to the European academy. (Bayly, 2002: 663) Harbans Mukhia, in his *The Mughals of India*, explains that medieval India wrote its history primarily in Arab-Islamic and Mongol-Persian forms. (Mukhia, 2004) In historiographical terms, it meant

The twofold perspective of dynastic history with human volition or, at best human nature, as the driving force of chiefly 'political' events narrated in a strict chronological order constituted medieval India's normative historiographical structure. Human nature as

the explanatory force gave historians a double-edged framework: on one hand Islam, a major presence in the formation of every ruler's disposition, gave them substantial power in explaining the functioning of the state; on the other, the individuality of the nature or disposition of each ruler gave them a wide range of explanatory options. (Mukhia, 2004: 8)

This historiographical framework was essentially different from the Christian framework in its linear concept of time co-terminus with Islamic time, non-inclusion of the dialectics of progress in the dialectics of time and change, and a non-theological, non-eschatological and anti-determinism approach of causality and human agency. With the arrival of the civilising discourse in the 1830s, there was a studied attempt to undermine the local histories written from this unfamiliar, non-Christian standpoint.

The grand narrative of legitimacy of British presence in India unfolded through histories written from the British-Christian perspective and purpose by historians like Sir Henry Elliott and James Mill. With James Mill's division of Indian history into Hindu, Islamic and British phases, religion came to the forefront as the only reference point of describing the past. William Irvine, comments in the foreword to his *The Later Mughals*, "If this book cannot claim in the highest sense of the word the name of History, it is at least the result of some research and labour, things sadly required in Indian history as a preparatory ground for more ambitious work". (William Irvine, 1922, 2011: Foreword) Praising Irvine's priceless possession of rare manuscripts and dogged and meticulous approach of milking those precious resources, Jadunath Sarkar, in the Introduction to Irvine's *The Later Mughals*, seconds Irvine by averring that more meaningful negotiations cannot emerge in Indian history at that juncture because in India

We have yet to collect and edit our materials and to construct the necessary foundation-the bedrock of ascertained and unassailable facts- on which alone the superstructure of a philosophy of history can be raised by our happier successors. Premature philosophising,



based on unsifted facts and untrustworthy chronicles, will only yield a crop of wild theories and fanciful reconstructions of the past ... (Jadunath Sarkar, 1922, 2011: xxvi)

Thus, a revisionary revisiting of materials and narratives is seen to be an exercise of ground breaking importance if history in the positivist and utilitarian sense has to be written for, in or by India. Vinay Lal, in his *History of History: Politics and Scholarship in Modern India* (2003, 2005) emphasises that even postcolonial correctives applied to undo imperialist interventions fail to assert that Indians perhaps never saw their lack of interest in history as a 'lack'. "I suspect that our forefathers' generations ago would have been astounded by the idea that a sense of history should be construed as a sign of a people's capacity for rational thinking or the maturity of a civilization." (Lal, 2010) Romila Thapar, in her essay 'Was there Historical Writing in Early India', finds it inevitable to grapple with the canard of "India's alleged lack of History" before describing in the body of the essay how past was recorded and reclaimed in Ancient India in tropes and genres quite different from the normative tropes and genres of Judeo-Christian and Islamic historiography. (Romila Thapar, 2011: 282) As described above, apart from the changing playfield in the discourse on history in India, some interesting developments were also taking place in Europe which opened up the scope and nature of historiography to include aspects of human life which hitherto went undocumented in the political or, at best, economic thrust of historiography. A new pedagogic enthusiasm and academic practice, brought social history to the forefront. It concerned itself "with 'real life' rather than abstractions, with 'ordinary' people rather than privileged elites, with everyday things rather than sensational events." (Samuel, 1985) It dwelt on the human face of the past including in its ambit the material culture of peoples. The most famous exponent of the old school of social history (before the 1960s) was G.M. Trevelyan, who in the Introduction to his *English Social History* (1876) states that "social history might be negatively defined as the history of a people with politics left out". He paved way for the work of Eric Hobsbawm, E.P.

Thompson, Lawrence Stone, Le Roy Ladurie, Keith Thomas, H.J. Dyos and Peter Laslett. Along with insularity, it also opposed miscellany in historical research. E H Carr's *What is History* (1961) presciently expostulated at the beginning of the 1960s the revised methodology of new social history. New social history was willing to collaborate with other disciplines of the social sciences like social anthropology and sociology devolving the political meta-narrative in favor of newer areas of inquiry like 'sub-cultures', social mobility, crowd psychology and gender identities. More and more historians now attempted to describe society as a whole, being no longer concerned exclusively either with the haves or the have-nots, with copious consumption or with frugal subsistence. Cohesion now became as important as conflict. The Annales School in France, on the other hand, pushed for the study of structure and process rather than the analysis of individual events. In 1929, a new journal called *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale* began to be published in France containing the work of historians like Lucien Febvre, Marc Bloch, Fernand Braudel, and Ernst Labrousse. The *Annales* movement was also in search of "a larger and a more human history". (Marriott and Claus, 2012, 2013: 244) Banking on insights and methodologies from anthropology, geography, sociology, economics and psychology, *Annales* school concerned itself with longer timespans, documentation of everyday life, and "mentalites" (as defined by Le Goff, the impersonal content of thought that an individual shares with others in an epoch, such as everyday automatisms of behaviour). (Tucker, 2004: 172) Braudel became a seminal figure of the Annales movement. His celebrated work, *Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*, illustrated that beneath human history existed deeper unities and lengthy rhythms of material life relating to the geographical environment and the structures that shape societies such as technology, trading, sailing routes, and mentalities. He chooses long stretches of time for historical research, thus introducing into historiography the idea of *la longue durée*. He divided historical time into three movements, viz. geographical time, social time and



individual time. His objective was to demonstrate that time moves at different speeds. However, beneath these forms of movement, the past was really a unity. Braudel also demonstrated that history did not exist independently of the historian's gaze. All that existed were phenomena to be excavated from the graveyard of time. Thus, Braudel's main contribution lay in his emphasis on 'total' histories. A third generation was guided by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie (1929–) which included Jacques Revel and Philippe Ariès (1914–1984). The third generation stressed history from the point of view of mentalities, or *mentalités*. The fourth generation of Annales historians, with Roger Chartier (1945–) took what is called the cultural and linguistic turn, i.e., an analysis of the social history of cultural practices. In this way, the relationship of history with the past not only underwent transformation in terms of focus, methodology and analysis but the dominant theme of projecting modernity backwards, that is, finding anticipations of the present in the past, also came to be firmly established.

Spear's *Twilight of the Mughals* seems to have absorbed all these perspectives. Jadunath Sarkar's magnum opus *Fall of the Mughal Empire*, published in three volumes spread over 1932 to 1950, overlapped the area and time period of Spear's interest in *The Twilight of the Mughals* but Spear communicates his contents in a way very different from Sarkar. Spear gives what is called by Mukhia an "evocative" account of the hard days on which Delhi and its people fell during late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as well as of the unique and age old charm still extant in the city. (Mukhia, 2004: 190) He chooses to tread a path different from Jadunath Sarkar by adopting a style quite different from the source driven narrative. His academic interest in the eighteenth century, Mughal history and social history can also be seen as a product of his 16 eventful years at St. Stephens College. As mentioned earlier, the company of his young Indian students proved to be a great stimulant in this regard. Spear adopts an unassuming informal style, what Narayani Gupta calls "the throwaway fashion" of writing. (Gupta, 1994: Foreword, x) He fills his books with interesting people of those times. Writes Gupta

Since his feet were firmly on the ground in Delhi, he could, unlike Sarkar, locate his characters firmly in Delhi; his dramatic personae included not just those living in the Qila, but individuals like Colonel Skinner, Begum Samru and the Frasers, who were to become subjects of research some forty years later. He was also concerned with not just the politics of the court, but its repercussions on the people. (Gupta, 2002: Introduction, xiii)

The British division of history relegated the 18th century to a dubious darkness. Percival Spear, however, resurrected the century to its rightful importance by tracing the early encounters between the British and the Indians in his first book *The Nabobs* (1932). The Archeological Survey of India was also at its active best during these years. More than 100 monuments came under its protection. R E Frykenberg brought out *Delhi through the Ages* as a *festschrift* to commemorate Spear's fifty years of distinguished scholarship 1986. In the Preface to the book, he comments on Spear's historiographic practice thus:

Spear was eclectic and tolerant: inclusive rather than exclusive of styles and views other than his own. A modest person, he felt that historians needed to exercise 'humility in dealing with facts'; he did not try to set up a 'Spear School', of Indian historical thought. (Frykenberg, 1986: Preface, viii)

The most important belief upheld and propagated by Spear with regard to historiography in India was that the cultural interactions going on in India were far too complex to yield any straight forward or straitjacketed conclusions. He was as critical of the oversimplifications involved in the British imperialist approach as he was of the reductions incumbent in the communalist, nationalist or post-colonialist approach. Writes Frykenberg of the approach to historical scholarship endorsed by Spear and his students:

He held the view that multiple depths of complexity and diversity in the cultural interaction between Europe and India had led to something which might be described as 'Indo-European'



or even better perhaps as 'Anglo-Indian' synthesis. The British or the 'colonial' impact had never been as unidimensional nor unidirectional as many writers still seem to think. (Frykenberg, 1992, 2002: Preface to the Paperback Edition, ix)

His historical gaze, thus despite its fundamental imperialist premise, was a benign and balanced one as it managed not to be judgmental by softening the political gaze and sharpening the cultural one instead. As Ainslee T Ambree points out:

Over-arching all of Spear's writings, linking the detailed studies and general histories, is a concern for the meeting of cultures, the ways in which alien civilizations confront each other, and the adjustments, the compromises, and the changes that result. (Ambree, 1986, 2002: 328)

Arising from this defining interest in the historical processes on the Indian subcontinent, Spear roots the developments in cultural and geopolitical factors. He ascribes the frequent cultural shifts in Delhi to its nature as a stop-go capital and as the password to Hindustan. There has also been the age old concept of "Unity in Diversity" which has caused as much harmony and syncretism as it has caused acrimony and separatism. This is because this concept used politically to hold together the far flung and diverse terrains of India in an imperial sway of power has been accosted by rival concepts at various historical junctures. It is these fault lines which interest Spear. Eighteenth century is the particular fault line on which the British Empire is located in India. This is what makes him a dedicated scholar of this century and the twilight of the Mughals. Therefore, in *Twilight of the Mughals*, Spear evaluates a phenomenon which is a lived immediacy for the British in India as the political, didactic and cultural lessons contained therein have immense bearing on their stay and success in India. The British were political successors to the Mughals but the social and cultural ethos still held the imprint of this dynasty. Intractable forces like inner dissensions, human ambitions, rival powers, tenacity of the Indian society and religions, Islamic fundamentalism and moribund

Islamic culture which proved to be the nemesis of the Mughal dynasty could challenge the British power. The British had inherited this legacy along with the empire. Spear places the issue of the alien rulers' responsibility towards their subjects and their sagacity in remembering their precariousness in the fragile and transient world of political power at the very centre of his historical inquiry. In this sense, the inquiry into the collapse of the Mughal Empire becomes an investigation into the attitude of the British towards their Indian subjects. The tensions and rewards of intermixing of cultures were apparent from the career of the earlier dynasty and the same were now being replicated in the colonial context. Spear uses the cultural fabric of Delhi to carry out this interesting inquiry which has as much to do with the past as with the present and the future. It is this self reflexive quality of the historical gaze which sets it apart from the missionary-imperial gaze of many of the Raj historians.

As a Dilliwallah, his gaze is that of an outsider who strives to come to terms with a climate, city and community by overcoming the sense of "otherness" and developing a sense of belonging through interaction and understanding. His first impressions of Delhi as he recollects in *India Remembered* are visual and sensual of light and colour. (Spear and Spear, 2010: 4) He recollects, "I felt close to a world unseen and magical". (Spear and Spear, 2010: 6) The seasonal shrinking and swelling of the river Yamuna adds to the ineffable charm of the Delhi weather. The seasonal cycle of Delhi with its vagaries as well as variety is a common denominator in the experiences and observations of the uninitiated in Delhi. It has both an immediate as well as a lasting impact and it portends sensual delight as well as discomfort. The city is also a storehouse of many new impressions. The overflowing multitudes, vehicles, dirt and poverty are hard to miss. (Spear and Spear, 2010: 6) Spear finds the public space in the city to be a man's world because women are conspicuous by their absence. Teaching in St. Stephens College which was located near Kashmere Gate facing St. James' Church, he lived for the first eight years of his sojourn in Delhi in the shared college accommodation for unmarried



staff close to Kashmere Gate. Kashmere Gate in those days was an extremely cosmopolitan location in Delhi as it served as the shopping centre for Delhi Europeans. Spear saw the decline of this cosmopolitan hub when the shops located here shifted out to Connaught Place in New Delhi. He himself set up house with his wife near Qudsia Bagh, off what was then called Asmanpur Road (later Jumna Road)- a road which extended all the way down to the river. Opposite St. Stephens College which was located on the site of the Ghazi-ad-din madarsa (later, Delhi College) stood the Hindu College in Colonel Skinner's town mansion. The only open space in that area at that time was the Gracia Park (later, Azad Park). St. Stephens building was in the Victorian-Mughal style as designed by Sir Swinton Jacob. Proceeding from Kashmere Gate, he describes how "the centre of the city", that is, Chandni Chowk could be reached by crossing a footbridge and the Queen's Park (later, Gandhi Park). (Spear, 35) Chandni Chowk was the potpourri of Indian goods, communities, religions, traders and professions. Unimpressive shops and impressive mansions dotted the area. Chandni Chowk appeared to be two different places by day and by night. Observes Spear

By day the dust, the noise and the glare of the sun played havoc with one's notion of the romantic east. But at night the scene changed. ... The crowds had departed and the shoddy aspect of the ordinary buildings was veiled by a merciful darkness little relieved by dim lamps. The moonlight would emphasize the contours of the domes and minarets of the mosques and would even make the shops and booths look mysterious. You could wander down the galis and the kuchas to meet only an occasional passerby, or a stray street vendor sitting hopefully on his platform by the light of the primus gas lamp. Delhi then was tranquil, withdrawn and mysterious. (Spear and Spear, 2010: 36)

Spear comes very close to the archetypal figure of the European in search of the exotic orient. It exists nowhere except in his imagination. Thus, the European retreats into a world of fantasy under the cover of darkness snuffing out the disconcerting glare

of reality. The daylight world is unpeopled and dismantled to resemble the magical and mysterious notion of the romantic east. Spear escapes this charge of orientalisising the east only because at most other times, he lives in clear daylight. He gains the distinction of being a sensitive barometer of the pulls and pressures existing in the Delhi society. The city of Delhi is of consummate interest for a historian like Spear as herein the triple pillars of time- past, present and future- stand in a picturesque continuum. He sees Delhi's character change from a provincial city to a metropolis. With the building of the new capital, he had reason to believe that "Delhi is the natural centre of the new Indian Dominion, as Calcutta was of the Old British Empire". (Spear, 1937, 2002: 54) Spear's *India Remembered*, written in two parts- one by him and another by his wife Margaret Spear, is a telling document of the life of the Delhiwallas in the 1920s and '30s. Completed in 1981, it is a retrospective account of the Spears' life in Delhi. During this period, writes Spear, Delhi "was a spacious and pleasant place to live in". Much had changed by 1945 itself when the Spears retired to London and they were, on their visit to Delhi in 1970s, quite shocked to see how New Delhi had converted to a "bureaucratic slum" and the rest had change beyond recognition. (Narayani Gupta, 2010: Introduction, xi) *India Remembered*, or Delhi Remembered as it actually is, is a document significant both for India as well as the west because the physical and social landscape captured here is equally lost to both.

He calls Delhi a "stop-go" capital in a later essay, where empires have located their capital for purely functional, political and strategic reasons. In itself, he concludes, the city lacks the factors which drive the growth of a self-sustained urban centre in the South Asian context. Percival Spear notes that while for the British, shifting the capital to Delhi in 1912 was a political compulsion, free India has accepted Delhi as an artificial capital. He summarizes: Its last incarnation as a capital city had political motives behind it, motives which since 1947 have ceased to operate. In consequence Delhi is now an artificial capital in a sense it has never been before. Nearly a



frontier city, it continues- and grows- partly for reasons of prestige, partly for fear of the expense of removal, partly for lack of consensus on an alternative site, and partly by the dead weight of habit. These considerations are mainly negative; the city's continuance as a capital therefore depends on the lack of a strong case and will for another site. ... It is then, with no positive case for continuance, that we may find that the glory of Delhi will depart almost as suddenly as it was thrust upon her in 1912. (Spear, 1986, 2002: 323-324)

An ominous but logical inference, one which is odd for a person passionately involved and enamored with the city, but also natural from a person who applies principles of rationality and causality first and foremost to mass of empirical and factual evidence he has gained examining the city. While the city of Delhi gets its literary narrative Ahmad Ali onwards from 1940s, yet the career of Percival Spear compliments this narrative from across disciplines, power positions and racial identities. Its salient contribution is to underline the need for writing a city with greater depth and latitude. With porous boundaries today between history and literature, the infusion of the rationality of one with the fictionality of the other has proved mutually liberating. Spear's perception of the complex processes afoot in Indian society, Delhi was a miniature of which, not only made him document the processes but also document them in a polysemic intertextuality of disciplines, theories and genres. Thus the Outsider's gaze adds a significant trope to reading and writing Delhi. Spear's contribution is to have added history to narrative and narrative to history. While there are others who have authored narratives ranging from traveler's accounts, expatriate's accounts, peripatetic explorations in the city, and tales of flanerie, Spear was the first person who brought serious historic gaze to the city and taught it to document its culture and heritage scientifically and extensively.

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