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***Jadoowallahs, Jugglers and Jinns: A Magical History of India*, By John Zubrzycki, New Delhi, India: Picador India, 2018. ISBN: 978-93-86215-35-2. Pp. 457. Rs. 699.**

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“There has been very little scholarship on Indian magic in recent decades,” observes John Zubrzycki in the introductory chapter of his recent work (p. 11). Regrettably, this statement is all too true. To the dozen or so contemporary works cited by the author in the bibliography, one may add only one or two more with the utmost effort. Indeed, the only work which seems to have escaped Zubrzycki’s notice is Sumanta Banerjee’s article “The Mysterious Alien: Indian Street Jugglers in Victorian London”, published in the *Economic and Political Weekly* in 2011. When we contrast this with the vast number of nineteenth and early twentieth century writings on the topic, our lamentable lack of interest in it become apparent to us. Conversely, this gives us all the more reason for wholeheartedly commending Zubrzycki’s *Jadoowallahs, Jugglers and Jinns: A Magical History of India*. This work has been published under a different title *Empire of Enchantment: The Story of Indian Magic* in UK, USA and Australia. Zubrzycki’s original research and unostentatious language captivates the readers from the very beginning. By adopting an easy narrative style spiced up with liberal dose of anecdotes, he succeeds in reaching out even to the ordinary readers. Reading this work proves as entertaining an experience as observing an actual magic performance, and the reader emerges enlightened from his study in an additional benefit.

Zubrzycki’s book is ambitious in its scope. In fifteen chapters, supported with the “Introduction” and an “Epilogue”, the author seeks to narrate the entire history of Indian magic from the earliest times to the present. However, the word ‘magic’ is somewhat vaguely used in this text. There are times when Zubrzycki uses it interchangeably with witchcraft, religious rituals and miracles. In defence of such usage, he argues that the distinction between

magic and religion as proposed by James Frazer and others does not hold true because the boundary line between the two often collapses (p. 14 - 15). But it soon transpires that the author is more interested in stage magic and performers' tricks than in miracles, witchcraft and the supernatural. He does share some interesting anecdotes about jinns or djinns (p. 79-83), miracle workers (p. 137 - 140), yogis and fakirs indulging in severe self-mutilation as penance (p. 118 - 136), and even a forgotten magic book prescribing formulas to invoke Hindu Goddesses for sexual cohabitation (p. 77). But ultimately it is stage magic that occupies most of his attention. Moreover, Zubrzycki's book is more about the Indian magicians performing before a Western audience than about the magic tricks themselves. That is why that the subtitle of the book "A Magical History of India" appears misleading in its implication. The book is neither on Indian history nor on the history of Indian magic. The focus is almost entirely on Occidental encounter with Indian magic and magicians. For this reason, the alternate title of the book *Empire of Enchantment*, with its allusion to the British Empire in India, appears more appropriate. The very first chapter which examines ancient Greek, Chinese and Arab accounts of Indian (read Hindu) magic sets the tone for the text. Zubrzycki always sees Indian magic through Western lens. That is why the next three chapters, where he draws from a number of ancient and medieval Hindu, Jain, Buddhist and Muslim texts to construct a history of Indian magic, appear almost as digressions. In the fifth chapter, the author suddenly returns to his main topic which is Western reception of Indian magic. It was only after the British occupation of the Indian subcontinent that the Europeans came across authentic Indian magic as distinguished from marvellous stories based on hearsay. Numerous books, memoirs, and journals of the colonial period record the baffled reactions of the Western spectators who got carried away on observing such unfamiliar spectacles. With diligent archival research, Zubrzycki unearths volumes of such documents to construct the history of Western reception of Indian magic. While the early contact between Indian magicians and Western audience took place on Indian soil, Indian magicians, or 'jugglers' as they were called back then, soon travelled abroad to display their skills. The first Indian magician who became famous in Victorian England is Ramo Samee (? - 1850). The author narrates the story of his career in the West, which ended tragically with his fall from the pinnacle of fortune to penury, neglect and eventual death (p. 200 - 209). Accounts of others, both Indian magicians and Western magicians influenced by Indian magic, follow one after another. Various forgotten names pop up in the process - like that of Professor Ahmad, Professor Alvaro, Nathu Manchhachand, Ganapati Chakraborty, Amar Nath Dutt alias Linga Singh, Kuda Bux and others. Zubrzycki shuttles back and forth between India and the West

to show how magic fostered a cultural exchange between the Orient and the Occident. It was a two way communication where Western magicians learned from their Indian counterparts and vice versa. However, such exchange did not remain unaffected by unequal power relations; a fact which the author gives due attention to. By this time, he has steered away from his earlier concern with magic in its widest implication to concentrate only on stage magic. The book ends with the story of P. C. Sorcar (Sr.), 'the Maharajah of Magic', who had achieved tremendous success in India and abroad.

Apart from the obvious academic rigour, what charms the readers of this work is the author's humanitarian outlook. The book's true worth lies in showcasing the plight of the subalterns. Besides recounting the successes of Indian magicians on the Western stage, the book also highlights the sufferings of the ordinary performers who were cheated by corrupt Western impresarios and entrepreneurs and left destitute in foreign lands. The author relates several accounts of such hapless victims of (Western) roguery (p. 216 - 227). Zubrzycki's humanitarianism does not allow him to keep his sympathy confined to Indian magicians alone. He also narrates the sad plights of other class of entertainers like dancers, freaks, and jugglers. It would be a mistake to put the entire blame on the Western impresarios, because the colonial government was itself hostile to the Indian performers. Though laws were enacted to prevent their exploitation abroad (p. 240 - 256), the colonial government distrusted the itinerant performers who were difficult to administer and control. Zubrzycki draws our attention to the repressive measures adopted by the colonial government during the early stages of its rule to curtail their freedom (p. 141 - 155). The stories of Indian magicians therefore become stories of struggles against overwhelming odds to achieve recognition and success.

Western reception of Indian magic was also influenced by the prevailing racial prejudices of that period. Zubrzycki shows how magic became an ideological battlefield during the colonial era. Driven by both professional rivalry and feelings of racial superiority, European magicians like Hugh Simmons Lynn, Harry Kellar, and Howard Thurston tried to discredit Indian magic and magicians. The Indians responded by appropriating the techniques and gimmicks of their Western counterparts in order to beat them at their own game. Incidentally, magic has provided battlegrounds to rival ideologies from very ancient times. In Exodus 7:11, one finds the Egyptian sorcerers competing against Moses and Aaron to prove the superiority of their religion (*Bible*, p. 60). In India similar magic contests took place between Sufi masters and Hindu yogis, as Zubrzycki draws our attention to (p. 138 - 139).

However he makes a mistake when he interprets the magic duel between the Hindu yogi Gorakhnath and the *bhakti* saint Kabir as a confrontation between the representatives of Hinduism and Islam. Unaware of Kabir's actual religious affiliation, Zubrzycki describes him as "a convert to Islam" (p. 140). Though adopted by a Muslim couple in his infancy, Kabir was a heterodox thinker who "self-consciously rejected both Hinduism and Islam" to build "his own religion", as Wendy Doniger points out (Doniger, p 140 – 141). This is proven by his accepting the discipleship of the Hindu *bhakti* saint Ramananda (Neelotpal, p. 18 -19). In Zubrzycki's defence it may be said that such mistakes are not impossible for non-Indian authors to make.

Despite all its merits, the book suffers from occasional display of factual errors. The author should have taken more care to avoid these. For instance, Zubrzycki writes that the sacred diamond in Wilkie Collins' novel *The Moonstone* was ultimately retrieved from its English possessor by the three Indians and brought back to its original home in Seringapatam (p. 211). Actually, the diamond was not taken back to Seringapatam but to 'Somnauth' (Somnath in Gujarat) where it was reattached to the forehead of the image of the Moon God (Collins, p. 432 – 434). While this may just be a slip of pen, there are others that cannot be dismissed so easily. Lord Ganesh or Ganesha is an 'elephant headed God' and not "the elephant god" as Zubrzycki describes him throughout (p. 188 and 251). The author misquotes the Sanskrit drama *Ratnavali* where Hari or Vishnu is described as wielding a bow, sword, mace and disc in his four hands [*sadhanurasigadachakra*] (Chakravarti, p. 209) and not "the bow, the sword, the mace and *the shell* [emphasis mine]" as the author informs (p. 56). Two different spellings for the Hindu philosopher Shankaracharya are provided - Sankara (p. 55) and Samkara (p. 313). The author also suggests two different periods for him, sixth century (p. 55) and seventh century (p. 313). This reveals his lack of certainty. The famous Turco-Mongol conqueror Amir Timur or Taimur Lang is called Tamerlane in the book, which is a European corruption of the name (p. 103). Zubrzycki makes another mistake when he mentions that Abhoy Mitra played the role of Harun the juggler in the Bengali movie *Phatikchand* (p. 386). Actually, Harun was played by the veteran Bengali actor Kamu Mukherjee. The famous juggler Abhoy Mitra was only the stunt coordinator. Mistakes such as these diminish the beauty of this otherwise well researched book.

As a comprehensive account of the reception of Indian magic in the West, *Jadoowallahs, Jugglers and Jinns* stands unparalleled. But those chapters which focus exclusively on India appear weak. One feels that these chapters display a reductive

understanding of Indian history. Zubrzycki's neat compartmentalization of Indian history into Hindu, Muslim and British periods reflects the common European bias. The presentation of certain controversial topics also appears one-sided. One feels that he has been unjust to the Satnami rebels when he calls them "fanatics" following his prejudiced source Khafi Khan (p. 91). Zubrzycki's reliance on English translations of Sanskrit and Persian classics rather than the originals further reduces the credibility of his work.

It is unfortunate that such an interesting subject as the history of Indian magic has remained neglected for such a long time. By drawing the readers' attention to it, Zubrzycki has done the academic community a commendable service. One ends with the earnest hope that others will follow Zubrzycki's lead in the future to conduct further research and enhance our knowledge on the subject.

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