

The BRICS as a multilateral powerhouse is in the making and has been through some tough transitions.

potential in patterns of trade and cooperation characterized in the first half deliberates on why the global order must register the arrival of the BRICS grouping.

BRICS's rise also speculates the grouping's intra-bloc mural contestations. The rise of BRICS does not minimize the importance of bilateral and trilateral cooperation frameworks and contestations. The second section carefully picks up the transitional narratives of each country towards BRICS and each member-state. While domestic factors and comparative global factors influenced Brazil's role in BRICS, Russia's ambivalence transitioned to an overreliance on BRICS's potential as the denominator of future multilateralism. Chapters on India and South Africa and their positioning towards BRICS highlight the sensitivities regarding strategic autonomy and its role in promoting governance. While most of the chapters in these sections take a collective focus and stakeholder-view, a chapter on China and BRICS takes an 'antithetical' approach. China is an economic power, but the BRICS's existence is not 'centred on China' (p. 231), and actually poses a formidable challenge for Chinese diplomacy, as the following chapter argues well.

The final section provides a round-up of various formulations argued in the volume. The sections bring out other variables into the mainframe of discussion. BRICS's challenges have changed and multiplied since the grouping was formed. Global health security and management of disasters and threats to humanity have lately occupied all the nation-states across the globe. BRICS countries' response to the health catastrophe has emerged as one of the critical agenda points for subsequent deliberations at the BRICS meetings and are substantiated in the concluding sections.

Overall, this edited volume is an excellent attempt to cover the journey of BRICS as a formidable multipolar alternative to the existing world system. The agenda for future action for BRICS includes improving the economies of the member countries, contemplating food and energy security, handling a climate change crisis, achieving technological scaling up, and steering a forward course despite geopolitical uncertainties. This book is a valuable addition to the existing literature on BRICS in India and globally.

Aravind Balaji Yelery is Associate Professor, Centre for East Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

An Archive of the Banned

Aman Nawaz

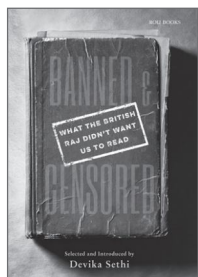
BANNED & CENSORED: WHAT THE BRITISH RAJ DIDN'T WANT US TO READ

Selected and Introduced by Devika Sethi
Roli Books, 2023, pp. 352, ₹ 1295.00

The Supreme Court of India put the sedition law on hold, suspending pending criminal trials under the section, and asked the Union to reconsider the British era law, which was a paranoid response to the 1857 rebellion, incriminating individuals for any political expression that was intended to spread 'disaffection' against the state. Devika Sethi's *Banned & Censored* provides an entry point into the publications that were branded as seditious by the British colonial administration and were used by the colonial state to restrict the Indian press and imprison important leaders of the anti-colonial movement. This includes a selection of 75 non-fiction works written by Indians and non-Indians during the first decade of the twentieth century and India's Independence. These writings catered to an aware public sphere both nationally and internationally, and contributed to forging connections that formed an affective community standing against colonial rule. The book gives us hindsight into both the written and writing bodies that affected the reading bodies, pulling them into the circuit of politics and moving them towards political action.

Banned & Censored gives readers access to these writers' words and worlds, as well as the colonial government's serious stance towards those ideas and imaginations due to their potential to generate 'unrest' in the country. As a result, innumerable pieces were banned, including close to 8,000-10,000 banned articles, 10,000 individual titles, and roughly 2000 periodicals that had some legal restraint throughout the last forty years of colonial control (p. 11).

The book is structured in five sections, each covering a decade and charting the trajectory of evolving politics during the anti-colonial struggle. The first section discusses the partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon, an event that marks an important shift in the way of doing politics on both the nationalist side and the British side. The period marked the rise of extremists who were not interested in engaging with the constitutional arrangements politely, and mobilized the public via secret societies and dramatic acts of violence. With growing dissent, a need to censor in order to mobilize public opinion on their sides was felt by the colonial administration. The author discusses how state censorship is a well-thought-out and debated policy rather than an



‘unthinking application’ of a repressive policy applied homogeneously (p.15). It demonstrates how the articles were discussed and carefully studied, scrutinized and subjected to various interpretive acts before getting banned.

The first book covers the writings of the first decade of the 20th century and marks the beginning of a political subjectivity that aims to establish a government by ousting the British. There is a questioning of both empire and capitalism in journals and newspapers like *Jugantar*, *Vihari*, and *The Bhala*, to name a few. As a result, there is a clear recognition of sedition by the people. An article titled ‘Explanation of Sedition’ published in *Vihari*, a Marathi language weekly, states that the idea of sedition in connection with ‘Indians is itself a mistake’, stating that it must be the English who should be accused of sedition as it is they who have ‘taken the kingdom of others and made them slaves’ (p. 59). The first part primarily has writings that critique the moderate politics of the previous decades, as exemplified in Aurobindo Ghose’s article titled ‘To My Countrymen’, which was published in *Karmayogin* in the year 1909 and critiques the politics of Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Pherozeshah Mehta. There are also debates on the idea of violence as a political means being put forward in the writings. ‘Assassination is not Murder,’ says an article in the *Indian Sociologist* that was published between 1905 and 1914 by Shyamji Krishnavarma, which was curbed using the Sea Customs Act in 1907.

Among the forfeited writings were also poems with religious images used for the nationalist cause. One such poem was titled ‘*Keeping Awake in the Dead of the Night! Suggested by the Memory of the Battle between the Gods and Asuras [Demons]*’. Published in Sonar Bangla, the poem by Swamadas Mukhopadhyaya discussed the idea of India being surrounded by demons and, therefore, the need to unite and slay them. The poem was confiscated by the Government of Bengal under the Newspapers (Incitements to Offences) Act of 1908. It read,

*The mother is very thirsty for blood.
A fight with Demons (is to take place) to-day after a long time,
That desire will be satisfied to-day with the blood of demons,
Hence, (her) terrific tongue is lolling (p.98).*

Part two begins with anti-colonial writings, mostly debating and advocating violence as a legitimate political means and covers the writings during the period of 1911 to 1920. The adversary is not hidden under symbols but clearly named. ‘The Englishman is a snake, and he must be thrashed and mauled and killed wherever he is found’, says an article published in the journal *Bande Mataram*,

whose editor was Madam Bhikaji Cama (p. 134). The writings exhibit a move from politics of boycotts to a glorification of the use of bombs. The opinion that ‘swarajya can never be attained except by the waging of a bloody and relentless war against the foreigner’ is mobilized through the writings (p. 137), and oaths to fight against the British became a common phenomenon. There is a critique of moderates’ politics of reform and how the bomb of December 23, 1912, made the revival of the revolutionary movement (p. 145).

Part three (1921-1930) begins with Gandhi’s return to India and the changed nature of the political climate, with masses from all sections showing their discontent with colonial rule. This was again a time when writings were published explaining the noncooperation movement to the masses, and literature rich in cultural idioms with local conditions that could be easily comprehensible to the masses began circulating. Ideas from the metropolis and abroad took on a very local hue as they started to disseminate among the masses, aimed at imparting nationalism. It was also a time of literature’s circulation to India from the Soviet Union. The period is an excellent example of Communist ideals that indigenized and found expression in literature. A blanket notification banning all literature by the Communist International was issued, General Communism Notification of 1932. The book discusses the two strands of nationalist activity in the 1930s: the nonviolent one led by Gandhi and the revolutionary movement by the HSRA—Hindustan Socialist Republican Association. The deaths of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru, and Sukhdev were a turning point for the entire movement, and there was a plethora of literature on the entire incident and their lives. Literature performed its best role amid changing circumstances.

Part four (1931-1940) and part five (1941-1947) cover the writings of a political atmosphere when the colonial state begins its constitutional reforms and had aligned with the moderate nationalists but was still facing difficulties owing to the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930. With the increase in the assassinations of government officials, the Government of India passed emergency ordinances, which gave the officials the power to impose bans and seizures. There is a flood of texts on Bhagat Singh and his comrades, his life, and ‘the Saunders murder’ (p. 257), which were banned.

Apart from archiving the writings that reflect on colonial law and restrictions on the political expressions of the nationalists, the book captures the evolving political subjectivities and debates between different strands of nationalists. It also, at times, tries to puncture clear-cut demarcations between various strands of politics and political ideologies by pointing at the overlaps that one encounters while reading the banned archive.

Aman Nawaz teaches English at Sri Venkateswara College, University of Delhi, Delhi.