



Below the Peacock Fan: First Ladies of the Raj

By Marian Fowler

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Below the Peacock Fan: First Ladies of the Raj By Marian Fowler

The lives of four Victorian gentlewomen are transformed when they leave the cozy confines of England for India to accompany their husbands or a brother who were appointed Viceroys of India, the crown jewel of the British Empire. Emily Eden, Charlotte Canning, Edith Lytton and Mary Curzon were well-born, cultivated women who experienced the extremes of decadence in a country gripped by poverty.

Emily Eden imagined an India of dazzling splendor but found a land of dark secrets. Charlotte Canning painted delicate watercolors while the carnage of the Great Mutiny raged. Edith Lytton feared the moral laxity and adultery of India but indulged her husband rather than restraining him. Mary Curzon, an insecure American heiress in thrall to her husband unwittingly was almost crushed by him.

Marian Fowler, “both scholarly and tart,” recounts their adventures in this classic work of colonial and women’s history.

“A marvelous work of evocation, narrative and research... I read Below the Peacock fan with great pleasure and interest.” –Nigel Nicolson

“Fowler has skilfully woven the experiences of these women into the story of the history, social life and rampant excesses of British India. It makes for captivating reading.” –The Montreal Gazette

“Wickedly witty... in short, thoroughly enjoyable.” –The Ottawa Citizen

“Highly entertaining...” –House and Garden

“Witty, pungent and boldly irreverent and totally absorbing, Below the Peacock Fan is a book to be savoured. It is a gem.” –The London Free Press

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Below the Peacock Fan: First Ladies of the Raj By Marian Fowler Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #406239 in eBooks
- Published on: 2013-05-21
- Released on: 2013-05-21
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

Combining women's studies and British Indian history, Fowler perceives great social skill and personal strength in the lives of four vicereines Emily Eden, Charlotte Canning, Edith Lytton, and Mary Curzon. Their husbands are stereotypically portrayed as arrogant, egotistical brutes. As history, Fowler's account is acceptably accurate. The incorporation of women's issues, however, gives an unbalanced preoccupation with roles and impresses current social values on the interpretation of 19th-century British India. The questionable validity of this application, inadequate documentation, and highly generalized assertions seriously undermine the work. John F. Riddick, Central Michigan Univ. Lib., Mt. Pleasant

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Katherine Belcher:

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