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**India and Britannia - An Abiding Affair**

by

**Subash Chopra**

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**J. L. Raina**

In spite of the bitter memories of the past, the scars of the partition, that was the parting gift of the there is a sort of relationship between India and Britain- though of a mixed kind - a kind of mixed relationship - with likes as well as dislikes. Mr. Subash Chopra calls it an 'abiding affair'. In fact, the book is an attempt to explore and interpret this relationship, with a genesis of the contact, the development of the link, with bits of history thrown in between to make it look more authentic. The writer, having spent many years of his life in Britain, as a journalist, has attempted an in-depth analysis of British character, attitudes, proclivities, prejudices (in whatever form) beliefs and political inclinations. It would be worthwhile to give a brief resume of his dissertation, even if you may not agree with some of the points made by him. The author rightly points out that the adoption of English language as a second language next only to Hindi, has served the purpose of a 'link' or uniting language between Hindi heartland and rest of India, it is the medium of our democracy and civil administration, courts of law, scientific establishments, business and trade. It is also a fact that a new class of Indian writers in English has come up, who have not only won laurels in the literary world, but also given a new flavour to the language. It has given us dividends too, because its working knowledge has helped Indian technocrats to make a dent in computer software market. I wouldn't feel shy to say that Indian English is no longer Hinglish or pidgin, but a genre by itself and has made the language richer, sweeter and simpler and more rational.

The author then discusses the problem of immigrants. He says the first generation of immigrants had to submit to discrimination in the country and had resigned themselves to their fate. However, the second generation of young black or Asian Britain have adopted themselves to the environment, but are not prepared to accept, any kind of second class citizenship, though they may have to wait for substantial equality. Mr. Chopra gives credit to Indian-origin community for beginning to win that recognition, because of the 'information technology prowess' of India. The writer says the primary cause of anti-immigration feeling in Britain continues to be bitterness born out of the loss of empire. Perhaps, this is too simplistic an explanation. The author goes to say, "the phenomenon of coloured man's equality seems to have become the greatest irritant to vast sections of British public." The author should have been more outspoken should have said that it was because of the feeling of 'superiority' that whites had, and even now are veering to the new order or accepting the concept of equality with hesitation and at a slow pace. It had become almost a congenital trait of whites.

The author regrets that the image of India, is still that of a poverty-ridden land of snake-charmers, a land where sati was common and which British Raj abolished and a land of mutually

hostile people, who were given peace and unity by British empire. A full chapter has been devoted to the 'contribution' made by the writer Rudyard Kipling, the inventor of the phrase 'White Man's burden' in giving this wrong or 'derogatory' portrayal of Indian people through his works. This writer, who has been much praised for being the most perceptive interpreter of India, never found anything of worth about music, literature or art and history of India. It was Kipling who wrote, "East is East and West is West. Never the twain shall meet." Kipling even ridiculed those who believed in a meeting of East and West. Mr. Chopra rightly concludes that 'Kipling's mind remained closed, because he firmly believed that his 'own side could do no wrong'.

The writer has devoted a full chapter to Commonwealth, and the benefits that accrue out of this. But the writer regrets that among the majority of Britons, the 'image of aid-hungry countries, survives and even thrives'. He aptly describes the attitude of the British people towards erstwhile colonies, and says, "For too long the benefits of Pax Britannia, democracy and modernization have been paraded as the legacy of the British Raj. Not enough has been said of the permanent seeds of dissension sown and partitioning of countries by the imperial process, nor has enough been said of blocking development and progress or denial of basic human right of self-rule." The author feels that the survival and expansion of Commonwealth in such circumstances 'is a minor miracle of its member nations' ability and desire to forget the past and get on with the future." Only recently has some sort of a realization emerged among the British people. He refers to Foreign Minister Jack Straw's admission of 'historical errors' in an interview and Prime Minister Tony Blair's assertion that, "...there are very strong geo-political reasons why we should be close with India and use our historical links to forge future together".

The writer has devoted some space to the Irish question, Britain's ambivalence towards European Union, the development of a welfare state in Britain, the print media in Britain and also to the speakers corner in London's Hyde Park, where everybody has a chance to have his own say, without fear. With rich personal experience, having lived and worked in Britain, an incisive mind, and analytical skill, Mr. Chopra has been able to provide the readers with an insight into the mind of the British people, that will surely help us to have a better understanding of the kind of relationship, somewhat ambivalent, that India has with Britain. As he himself writes, "the present volume is aimed at furthering the mutual understanding between the two countries". It makes a good read, and the style is his own, descriptive as well as analytical and the language impressive if not racy.