Durba Ghosh. *Gentlemanly Terrorists: Political Violence and the Colonial State in India, 1919–1947*. Critical Perspectives on Empire. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Pp. 275. $29.99 (paper).
doi: 10.1017/jbr.2018.154

As Durba Ghosh observes, while India has had many revolutionaries, it has never experienced a revolution. While Indian revolutionaries were often ineffective in their efforts to challenge colonial rule, this did not mean that colonial authorities regarded lightly revolutionary efforts to subvert and destabilize the Raj. In Bengal, the revolutionaries who opposed the colonial state for over three decades were predominantly upper-caste and socially elite Hindus, and thus from the perspective of both colonial authorities and Indian nationalists were "gentlemanly terrorists." In her well-researched and insightful analysis of political violence and the late colonial state in India, Ghosh demonstrates the importance of the Bengali revolutionary movement to both British efforts at political reform in colonial India and the postcolonial Indian state's turn to emergency legislation in order to suppress political dissent. "In both the colonial and postcolonial periods," Ghosh observes, "political leaders rationalized emergency laws as a way of protecting the process of democracy" (256).

Ghosh's main focus is the interwar era, which she rightly notes has received less attention than has the genesis of Indian revolutionary activity prior to the Great War. Revolutionary groups in Bengal reorganized following a royal amnesty in 1919 and achieved arguably their greatest success in the form of the Chittagong Armoury Raid of April 1930, an effort at insurrection staged in imitation of the 1916 Easter Rising. The revolutionaries' continuing activities led to the development of a series of antiterrorist laws in Bengal, beginning with the Bengal Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1925, which allowed for suspected revolutionaries to be tried in special courts and detained for extended periods without trial. These repressive laws were uniformly drafted as preventative measures, designed to prevent future terrorist attacks, rather than in response to events (17).

During the peak of revolutionary activity in the early 1930s, almost 10,000 men and a small number of women were detained in a network of jails and detention camps without ever having been tried in open court (12, 178). Despite colonial authorities' claims of the essential benevolence of these systems of detention—the government of Bengal opined in 1931 that allowances given to prisoners often made "detainees wealthier than they were before" (187)—Ghosh shows how a series of hunger strikes, suicides, and accidental deaths among prisoners brought the system to a state of crisis in the late 1930s. The widespread use of detention without trial and the issues of status and treatment of these detainees helped to embed the language of the "political prisoner" in Indian political discourse (180).

Ghosh's analysis of the ways that repressive colonial legislation was closely related to the process of political reform forms the core of her arguments, and is one of *Gentlemanly Terrorists*' greatest strengths. Legislation such as the Rowlatt Act, whose principal elements were incorporated into interwar antiterrorist legislation in Bengal, were passed alongside British efforts to devolve greater power to Indians in the interwar period, notably the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms of 1919 and the Government of India Act of 1935. Colonial authorities defined terrorism not simply as a threat to colonial rule, but as a menace to be eliminated so India could progress to constitutional government. The growth of revolutionary terrorism in interwar India was "a sign that Indians were unprepared for constitutional reforms towards liberal government" (13). The interlinked dynamic of political reform and repression in late colonial India reminds us how, in Ghosh's words, "a modern state apparatus was able to reconcile principles of liberal government with repressive colonial acts" (34).

Another notable feature of *Gentlemanly Terrorists* is Ghosh's twinned analysis of the perspectives of Bengali revolutionaries and colonial officials, both of whom constructed their own histories of the revolutionary movement. Intelligence officers compiled a voluminous archive on

https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2018.154 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the genesis, evolution, structure, and activities of the revolutionaries, which helped to create a vision of a unified revolutionary movement posing a potent threat to the colonial state and was used to justify the implementation of antiterrorist legislation. (As Ghosh notes in her conclusion, for decades after independence, many of these police intelligence reports continued to be considered confidential documents.) Former revolutionaries constructed their own histories of revolutionary terrorism from a radically different perspective. Written by both male and female revolutionaries, these cluster in two main periods: the 1920s and the period shortly after Indian independence in 1947. The first generation of autobiographies gave Bengali revolutionary terrorism "a storied past," and challenged narratives of both liberal political reform and non-violence as a dominant form of nationalism (24, 90). Memoirs composed after 1947 updated the lineages of revolutionary terrorists constructed by earlier authors and proposed "an alternative history that represented a more radical set of politics" for postcolonial India (219–220).

In spite of the impressive depth of analysis in Ghosh's book, the volume of material available to historians on the Bengali revolutionary movement means that *Gentlemanly Terrorists*, in her words, "offers a partial and selective account" (26). Her focus generally remains closely on the province of Bengal, and there remains scope to write a more global history of the Bengali revolutionaries and of Indian revolutionary activity more generally. While Ghosh's discussion of the often conflicting perspectives of British officials in London, New Delhi, and Kolkata helps to illuminate the assumptions that lay behind colonial antiterrorism legislation, the title and affiliations of some officials are listed incorrectly. Wedgwood (not "Wedgewood") Benn was a Labour rather than a Liberal MP when he served as secretary of state for India, for example, while at least one India Office official is identified as a member of the government of Bengal (165).

Overall, however, Ghosh succeeds admirably in producing a history of the engagement between the Bengali revolutionaries and the colonial state of value not only to historians of South Asia, but to historians of modern Britain seeking to better understand the relationship between ideals of liberal democracy and emergency legislation.

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Ian Hesketh. *Victorian Jesus: J. R. Seeley, Religion, and the Cultural Significance of Anonymity.* Studies in Book and Print Culture. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017. Pp. 272. $41.25 (cloth).
doi: 10.1017/jbr.2018.155

Despite the recent wave of revisionary work on secularization—both the historical process and the historiographic narrative—the past decades have not seen many reassessments of Victorian historical scholarship on Jesus and the Bible. (Notable exceptions include Jennifer Stevens's *The Historical Jesus and the Literary Imagination, 1860–1920* [2010] and Jefferson J. A. Gatrall's *The Real and the Sacred: Picturing Jesus in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* [2014].) This omission makes a certain sense, given that the story of how Victorian intellectuals had their religious faith undermined by the Higher Criticism lies at the heart of the old crisis-of-faith narrative that scholars like Alex Owen, Callum Brown, and Peter van der Veer have sought to complicate. Instead of deriving Victorian secularity from narrowly intellectual sources, such scholars have examined how broader processes of urbanization, imperialism, and technological change refigured how the Victorians understood the category of religion itself.

https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2018.154 Published online by Cambridge University Press