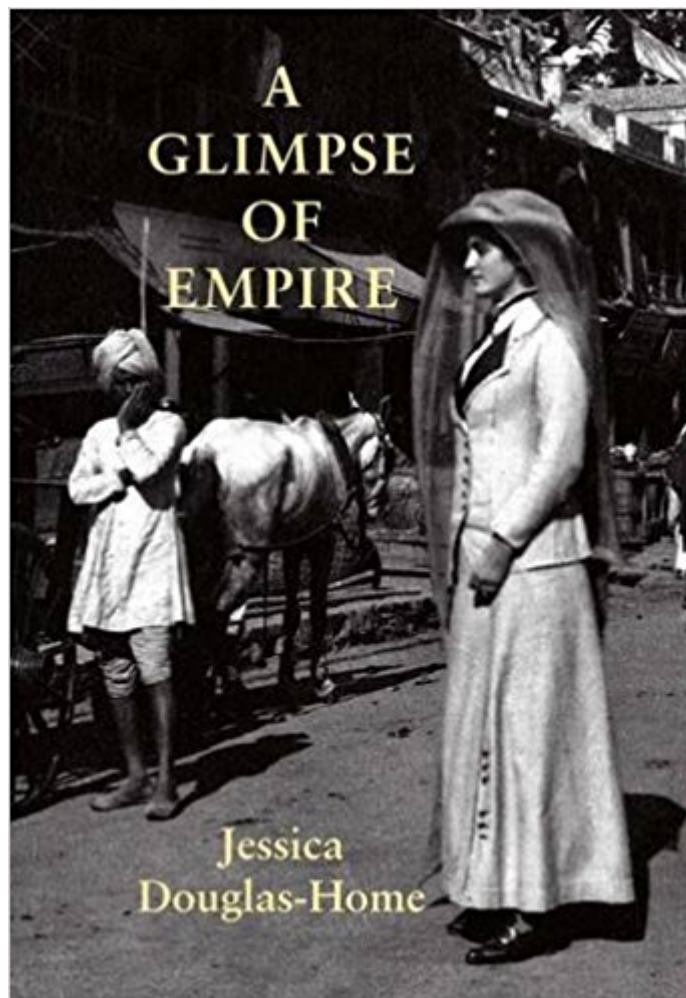


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A Glimpse Of Empire



Synopsis

Scarce, important account of an Edwardian woman's impressions of India.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Scarce, important account of an Edwardian woman's impressions of India.

I picked this up several years ago in a London Bookshop and just now got around to reading it. It is a very engaging little book detailing the author's Grandmother's journey to India in 1911 to witness the Delhi Durbar Of King George V. Based largely on her diaries and with an excellent collection of photographs, the book provides a fascinating account of a young woman's impressions of a trip through an exotic (for her) landscape peopled with interesting characters. Appropriately titled as a "Glimpse" into the British Raj in India it is also a view into a way of life and modes of travel that are pretty much vanished. I found it to be a small gem of a book and really enjoyed it.

British historian Jessica Douglas-Home has written a book about her grandmother's trip to India as a young woman in 1911. Her book is short and is a compilation of her grandmother - Lilah Wingfield's - diary of her journey and the photographs she took along the way. "A Glimpse of Empire" is a glimpse, a small peek, at the British Raj and a candid look at some of the players - both native and British - who were important at the time. Lilah Wingfield was the daughter of two wealthy families and grew up on the Irish estate - Powerscourt - of her father's family outside Dublin. Her mother's family owned Holkham Hall, in Norfolk. (Although she doesn't write about them, Lilah's

mother's family was part of the Digby family, which produced such intrepid and fascinating women as Jane Digby, in the early 1800's, and Pamela Digby Churchill Hayward Harriman, in the 20th. Both are worth reading about and have been the subjects of excellent biographies.) In 1911, the year after succeeding to the British throne upon the death of his father, Edward VIII, King George V and his wife set off for India to be crowned Emperor and Empress of India. They were to be honored for a week of celebration in Delhi, called the Royal Durbar. Lilah, at the age of 23, decided to go to India with friends and attend the Durbar and then travel around the country. She was looking for an adventure and a two month trip to India fit the bill. She and a friend and two chaperones left London in November of 1911 - and Douglas-Home includes an excellent map of the entire journey - by ship, carrying a notebook and a camera. She returned to England a few months later, both the diary and camera filled with evidence of the wonders she saw and the people she met. The diary was discovered by Jessica Douglas-Home and her siblings many years later and, combined with the photos, tell an intriguing story of India. The Royal Durbar was a week of parties and ceremonies, set in a field and covered with the ornate tents of those local rulers who had come to Delhi to attend the coronation of the royal couple. Lilah and her friends were invited to many of the parties of the Indian royalty but also observed life among the common people in the weeks after the Durbar, when she traveled thousands of miles around the country by train, car, and horse cart. She saw and was awestruck by the Taj Mahal, as well as many other sites she visited. She was entertained and cared for by members of the British-Indian community - soldiers, government officials, merchants - who were an important part of the Raj. But she also made a point of looking at the Indians - from the crowds in the streets to the Begum of Bhopal, one of the few Indian women rulers. Jessica Douglas-Home's book about her grandmother and her journey should not be read as a macro view of India at the time, but rather a micro view. A view, by a single woman, armed with camera and pen, who captured a small, but interesting piece, of Raj India.

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