



Out of India: a Raj Childhood

Michael Foss

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Born in India in 1937, Michael Foss's childhood was spent between the cold, grey austerity of Britain under threat, and the brightly lit and teeming vitality of wartime India. Here, beautifully evoked, is a childhood spent amongst grudging and unloving English relations; a sufferance of cruelly harsh schooling, a bleak, dank landscape; and a sense of permanent cold and a savage hunger even for dreadful food. All of this was suddenly changed for the sub-continent's jumble of conflicting sights and sounds and smells: the vital, stinking, hot, noisy, crowded streets; the calm, quiet grace of moghul architecture; the ancient Hindu kingdoms reduced to stones amid the roots of trees; the monumental Victorian buildings that echoed British power; the attitudes of the Raj; the self-conscious majesty and pomp. The British, the author notes, lived on but not in India. 'Our rules for living were not their rules,' he writes in this wry, affectionate reflection on a childhood spent between two continents, two civilizations, two versions of history.

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