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**Chatterjee, Choi, Kirschenbaum, Lisa A. & Field, Deborah A., *Russia's Long Twentieth Century. Voices, Memories Contested Perspectives*. Abingdon & New York, NY: Routledge, 2016, xi + 277pp., £24.00 p/b.**

The volume is an unusual breed of a textbook that is not simply based on research but that has in-built research opportunities for the students of Russian history. By including a selection of primary sources, illustrations, images, witness accounts, mini-biographies, and linking them to the discussion questions, the authors create a laboratory for the historic exploration of Russia during the stretch of the 20th century. The choice of the whole century as an exploratory ground seems to be invaluable for explaining contemporary Russia. The book exposes the impact of the historic legacy of the country-specific features on creating distinctive national identity, ideologies and social structures and also explains the developmental paths chosen by the country and its leadership and their acceptance with and without reservations by its people.

The ethnography supports the chronologically organised narrative as it moves between important events of the Russian history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. From the education perspective, involving evidence such as the extracts from documents and personal accounts in presenting the scholarly assessment contributes to the critical thinking in readers, which is one of the main commitments made by the authors, who see their work as an enquiry-based textbook. While not always helping to achieve substantial depth in the analysis of the Russian history such evidence still has a power to intrigue and encourage curiosity.

The book is distinct by its thoughtful design. There is a clear developmental value in scattering facts with a view to encourage the students to venture into independent exploration and interpretation of history in the making. The textbook invites to participate in the building of the Russian historiography rather than reading it. Yet, the fast pace of movement within the book and between the chapters leave an impression that the digest-style narrative limits the appeal to an erudite readership.

Another distinctive feature of the book is that the material and its presentation are positioned in “world time” (p.3) that allows for a broader comparative framework, transnational outlook and incorporation of voices of the ordinary people.

Chapter 1 and 2 set the pre-revolutionary context. It was a brief but eventful period in the history of Russian empire when substantial modernisations were triggered by the advent of capitalism that affected the economic and political foundations of the Russian society and that was memorably reflected in its culture. The material introduces the new roles acquired by such factors as geography, industrialisation, social stratification and civil groups in Russia. The book notes the emerging social sentiment related to new hopes and fears about rapid changes; it exposed the stumbling blocks halting the needed transformations, specifically in respect of the position of peasants, workers, aristocratic elites, monarchy, intellectuals. An important

omission, however, is made here. The importance of the World War I and the related developments in aggravating the pre-revolutionary social strain on the Russian society is not duly marked.

Chapters 3 and 4 cover the period that witnessed most dramatic, profound and abrupt changes ever experienced by the entire countries and nations within an incredibly short period of time. That is the October Revolution and its immediate aftermath. The book scrupulously follows the events marking most important steps in formation of the foundations of the socialist order. It also lines up most important actors involved in the process featured against the background of the bloody civil war, establishing of the dictatorship of the proletariat and its oppressive machine, shifts in political powers, attempts to first revive and then rebuild the national economy through industrialisation (industry) and collectivisation (agricultural sector). Following brief references to the War Communism and New Economic Policy, some personal reflections offer a glimpse into the making of a new world and people, as well as into the scale of the task faced by the revolutionaries-practitioners turned social reorganisers. The book shows the process of thickening of the state presence and the diffusion of the state interest of in all aspects of life, including family. Important early steps in building of the Soviet empire were also noted. This period, known as the “revolution from above”, was critical, as shown in the book, in deciding the political landscape and power distribution for the decades to come.

A motivating feature of the story is its continuous connection with all sides of the societal life in its progression. The developments in literature and art reflect the societal transition but also the references to them show how they themselves have been reinforcing important shifts in perceptions, construction of mentality, social interactions.

Chapter 6 offers a rather detailed and elaborate account on the stealth and dark transformation of the thirties that coincides with the pronouncement of the completion of the first phase of socialist construction and the Stalin’s assertion that life is becoming better and more joyous. Hardly better examples of the revulsions of the process of moulding the soviet character and national conformity can be given than the examples from the stories and experiences of ordinary people. The book offers some interesting evidence in that respect.

Considering the importance of the Great Patriotic War and its legacy in the history of Russia, the accuracy and detail in its presentation (including naming it) would be of a particular value. Chapter 7 has assumed an immense and impossible task of telling this story in slightly more than 10 pages. To prove the impossibility of the task, the narrative wanders around different topics while not doing much in providing the wartime context from the Russian perspective.

Chapters 8-12 cover the post-war period with some presenting the context for exploring Russian history and others reflecting on the exact events and developments. Chapter 8 introduces the Cold War. It illustrates how it was enacted inside the country by counteracting and blocking the influences and threat of Western culture; and how it was executed outside of the country through international policies and propaganda and later through the temporary opening of the Russian society during the Thaw years (Chapter 9). The book concludes with the chapters on stagnation, perestroika and the demise of the Soviet Russia by presenting the masters of its history-makers. At the very end of the book, the reader is rapidly taken by the history flow into the 21<sup>st</sup> century riding the wave of historic continuity that creates new leaders, new heroes new peoples accounts, voices and memories. Possibly, this is the beginnings for the book on Russia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.