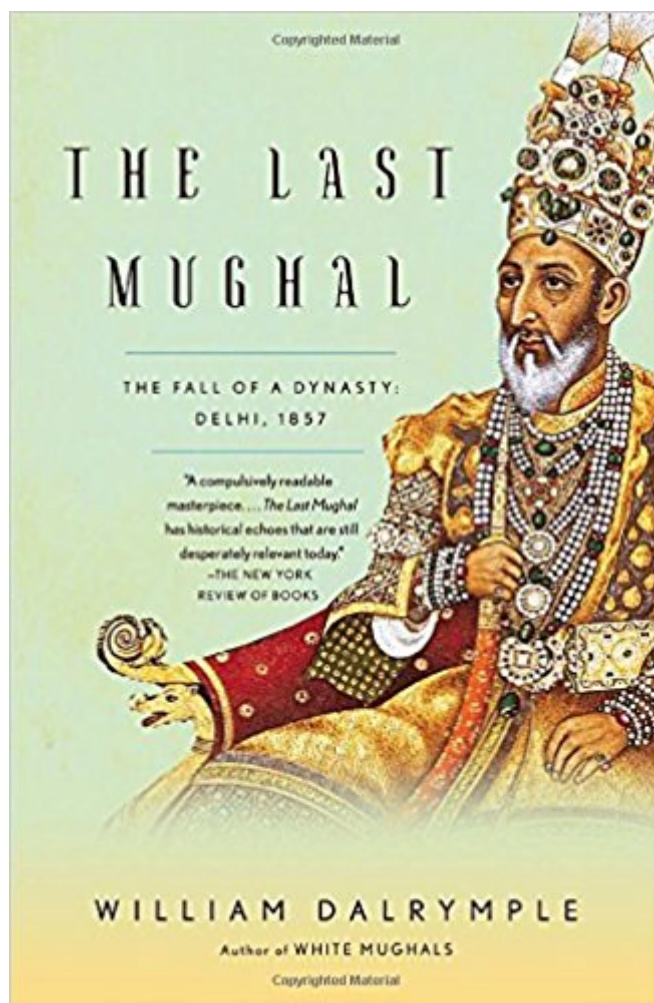


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# The Last Mughal: The Fall Of A Dynasty: Delhi, 1857



## Synopsis

In this evocative study of the fall of the Mughal Empire and the beginning of the Raj, award-winning historian William Dalrymple uses previously undiscovered sources to investigate a pivotal moment in history. The last Mughal emperor, Zafar, came to the throne when the political power of the Mughals was already in steep decline. Nonetheless, Zafar—a mystic, poet, and calligrapher of great accomplishment—created a court of unparalleled brilliance, and gave rise to perhaps the greatest literary renaissance in modern Indian history. All the while, the British were progressively taking over the Emperor's power. When, in May 1857, Zafar was declared the leader of an uprising against the British, he was powerless to resist though he strongly suspected that the action was doomed. Four months later, the British took Delhi, the capital, with catastrophic results. With an unsurpassed understanding of British and Indian history, Dalrymple crafts a provocative, revelatory account of one of the bloodiest upheavals in history.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In time for the 150th anniversary of the Great Mutiny, the uprising that came close to toppling British rule in India, Dalrymple presents a brilliant, evocative exploration of a doomed world and its final emperor, Bahadur Shah II, descendant of Genghis Khan and Tamerlane. Bahadur, more familiarly known as Zafar, was a reluctant revolutionary: the mutinous sepoys who had murdered every Christian in Delhi proclaimed him their commander, an honor he hadn't sought. British besiegers took the capital in September 1857, followed by massacre, purges and destruction. Zafar died five years later in penury and exile. Dalrymple (*White Mughals*), however, is primarily concerned with

compiling "a portrait of the Delhi he [Zafar] personified, a narrative of the last days of the Mughal capital and its final destruction." In this task, he has been immeasurably aided by his discovery of a colossal trove of documents in Indian national archives in Delhi and elsewhere. Thanks to them Dalrymple can vividly recreate, virtually at street level, the life and death of one of the most glorious and progressive empires ever seen. That the rebels fatefully raised the flag of jihad and dubbed themselves "mujahedin" only adds to the mutiny's contemporary relevance. 24 pages of illus., 16 in color; 2 maps. History Book Club featured selection. (Apr. 1) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The year 1857 in India, referred to as the Mutiny or the Uprising by historians, is at least agreed to have been a pitiless war. From that point of consensus, Dalrymple expands on the implacable violence that destroyed Delhi and uncoupled thousands of people in the course of fighting between the British and their Indian allies, and the complex cast of insurrectionists. Dalrymple's account is an original, important contribution to the controversies of 1857, for it draws on an archive "virtually unused" by historians; it includes papers generated by the anti-British forces during their temporary control of the city. After killing most of the Europeans and Christians in reach, they rallied around Delhi's figurehead Mughal ruler, the octogenarian Bahadur Shah Zafar II. Dalrymple presents Zafar as a kindly but indecisive soul who was flummoxed by the surrounding atrocities. Surviving the bloodbath the vengeful British inflicted, Zafar, exiled to Burma with his dynasty extinguished, earns Dalrymple's sympathy. His riveting narrative will engross readers of the annals of British imperialism. Gilbert Taylor Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

For nearly 300 years the Mughals ruled India in addition to what is now Pakistan and Bangladesh but by the 1850s their rule was in a terminal decline. The British East India Company and other colonial forces had eaten away at their power and local governors were virtually independent. The increasingly ambitious British were making plans for remake India in their image and the Mughals were not a part of the plan. In this book William Dalrymple tells the story of Zafar, the last Mughal Emperor as he finds himself thrust into the largest anti-colonial war of the 19th Century the Indian Mutiny/Uprising of 1857. It's a grim story with atrocities and stupidity on both sides. This is not a light read. It is probably the definitive account of the war drawing on British, Indian and Pakistani records, some never translated before. Diaries, letters and other personal accounts provide a vivid

first-hand account. Dalrymple's writing also does not make things easy for the reader, he never says washerman when he can say 'dhobi', never says police station if he can say 'thana'. He's usually good at defining the Urdu words in context and the Kindle dictionary or his glossary cover most of the rest but the use of Indian terms plus the Victorian terms from many of the accounts make this a bit of a chore to read sometimes. The publisher also put no effort into creating the ebook. For example photos in the print version are, of necessity, in their own section on special paper. But in an ebook there's no reason they can't be placed among the text where they belong in context. Instead they just suddenly appear as a block in the middle of a chapter interrupting the text. I also find it hard to flip to the maps and glossary on an ebook, I might have enjoyed this more on paper. Finally I found the conclusion a bit abrupt. Yes, ending 'The Last Mughal' with the death of the last Mughal makes sense, but another chapter covering the transition from the British East India Company to the British Raj would help finish the story. Instead there's some overly simplified conclusions mourning the loss of the Mughal's cosmopolitan rule and trying to link the uprising to the rise of Al Qaeda and the September 11th attacks 150 years later. All that being said, this was a great read, an incredible work of scholarship and storytelling and anyone with an interest in India will enjoy it.

This book combines two of my favorite subjects - British Imperialism and Muslim Extremism. I'm fascinated by how a non-descript little country like Great Britain managed to create and hold a world-spanning empire for so long. I also find it interesting how a rag-tag, disorganized band of fanatics could deal such a death blow to such a militarily superior power. I read Dalrymple's 'Return of a King' and loved it so much I went looking for more. He's such an engaging writer you forget it isn't a novel. The material in this book is far better than anything you could make up - although keeping all those names straight tricky sometimes, so many Begums and Mizras. One thing I love about the Kindle Fire is the onboard dictionary which does a good job of explaining most of the Indian words. Who's to blame? Well the Brits were offensive when strong and insipid when weak. The Muslims and Hindus were barbaric when strong and cowardly when weak. In the end their respective extremist components tore them apart and the Brits 'won' eventually because they were more disciplined. However, as in any war there were no winners. Read it for yourself; even if you have no interest in 150 year old wars you cannot fail to see how little things have changed around the world.

William Dalrymple has the extraordinary ability to take a historical event of great complexity and produce a text that is utterly readable, yet without oversimplifying the issues. He examines the

Indian Mutiny from the point of view of both sides. There are no heroes in this story. A warning, however - buy a hard copy of this book. The Kindle edition is a disgraceful mess of faulty computer scanning. It may seem inexpensive, but it's not worth the money.

Seldom have I read a book so intriguing. For the first time the story of the 1857 Sepoy Rebellion is told from both sides. Dalrymple has consulted the archives in all the languages, not just English, and so one begins to understand the tottering nature of the Mughal dynasty in the decades before 1857 and its end after 1857. The case for labeling the mutton-headedness of the East India Company has rarely been so well documented. As I've remarked about Dalrymple's history of the 1839 - 1842 Afghan wars, I expected to find racial prejudice among the company's officers and army. I hadn't expected it to be so crude, but most of all I never expected the Company to be so incompetent. Dalrymple shows. It's a book that both non-specialists like myself and professional historians will profit from.

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