

The Postcolonial Careers of Santha Rama Rau (Next Wave: New Directions in Women's Studies)

Antoinette Burton



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Santha Rama Rau was one of the best known South Asian writers in postwar America. Born into India's elite in 1923, Rama Rau has lived in the United States since the 1940s. Although she is no longer well known, she was for several decades a popular expert on India. She provided an insider's view of Indian cultures, traditions, and history to an American public increasingly aware of the expanded role of the United States on the world stage. Between 1945 and 1970, Rama Rau published half a dozen books, including travelogues, novels, a memoir, and a Time-Life cookbook; she was a regular contributor to periodicals such as the *New Yorker*, the *New York Times*, *McCall's*, and *Reader's Digest*.

Drawing on archival research and interviews with Rama Rau, historian Antoinette Burton opens Rama Rau's career into an examination of orientalism in the postwar United States, the changing idioms of cosmopolitanism in the postcolonial era, and the afterlife of British colonialism in the American public sphere. Burton describes how Rama Rau's career was shaped by gendered perceptions of India and "the East" as well as by the shifting relationships between the United States, India, Pakistan, and Great Britain during the Cold War. Exploring how Rama Rau positioned herself as an expert on both India and the British empire, Burton analyzes the correspondence between Rama Rau and her Time-Life editors over the contents of her book *The Cooking of India* (1969), and Rama Rau's theatrical adaptation of E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, which played on Broadway in 1961 and was the basis for David Lean's 1985 film. Burton assesses the critical reception of Rama Rau's play as well as her correspondence with Forster and Lean.

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