



Inglorious Empire: What the British Did to India

Shashi Tharoor

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***Inglorious Empire* tells the real story of the British in India — from the arrival of the East India Company to the end of the Raj — and reveals how Britain's rise was built upon its plunder of India.**

In the eighteenth century, India's share of the world economy was as large as Europe's. By 1947, after two centuries of British rule, it had decreased six-fold. Beyond conquest and deception, the Empire blew rebels from cannon, massacred unarmed protesters, entrenched institutionalised racism, and caused millions to die from starvation.

British imperialism justified itself as enlightened despotism for the benefit of the governed, but Shashi Tharoor takes on and demolishes this position, demonstrating how every supposed imperial 'gift' — from the railways to the rule of law — was designed in Britain's interests alone. He goes on to show how Britain's Industrial Revolution was founded on India's deindustrialisation, and the destruction of its textile industry.

In this bold and incisive reassessment of colonialism, Tharoor exposes the devastating effect the inglorious reality of Britain's stained Indian legacy.

Inglorious Empire: What the British Did to India Details

Date : Published March 2nd 2017 by C Hurst & Co (first published October 26th 2016)

ISBN : 9781849048088

Author : Shashi Tharoor

Format : Hardcover 288 pages

Genre : History, Nonfiction, Cultural, India, Politics, Historical, Asian Literature, Indian Literature, European Literature, British Literature, Asia, Abandoned, Audiobook



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From Reader Review Inglorious Empire: What the British Did to India for online ebook

Sandeep Raturi says

If history interests you, you will simply love this book. If it doesn't, you may like it even more as the book may spark an interest in you for history. In today's age of social media, when nationalism and patriotism have become almost synonymous with chest thumping jingoism, this book which has been written with unbridled passion and utmost love for the country but without sacrificing rationality, is a must-read. It presents a harrowing account of the British raj in India and explains in detail about how the British shamelessly looted our resources treating Indians nothing more than slaves. There are no dearth of apologists of British raj who would credit Britishers for giving India its unity, the railways, the foundation of Parliamentary Democracy, The modern civil laws, The English language, the infrastructure and what not but here Tharoor demolishes each one of these notions with reason and logic. For sure, there are many things that were done by the Britishers that eventually benefitted India but the welfare of Indians was the last thing that they ever had in their mind while implementing their policies and this is what is presented in this book with anecdotes and facts. The book explains how Britishers came as foreigners in a prosperous country, ruled it oppressively as foreigners and left it as a poor country and how throughout their rule they made no effort whatsoever to assimilate with the indigenous population whom they always looked down upon as an inferior race. The book understates the fact how only a fraction of amount that the British earned from the repressive taxes was put back to the Indian economy and how Britain's economy flourished at the expense of India. It talks about the massive corruption and humongous wealth that the British officers amassed while the poor in India died even from starvation in several parts of the country.

"I have traveled across the length and breadth of India and I have not seen one person who is a beggar, who is a thief. Such wealth I have seen in this country, such high moral values, people of such calibre, that I do not think we would ever conquer this country, unless we break the very backbone of this nation, which is her spiritual and cultural heritage, and, therefore, I propose that we replace her old and ancient education system, her culture, for if the Indians think that all that is foreign and English is good and greater than their own, they will lose their self-esteem, their native self-culture and they will become what we want them, a truly dominated nation."

The above quote which we see floating in facebook/whatsapp and which has been attributed to Lord Macaulay is obviously fake and is a hoax and the book tells us what Macaulay actually thought of India and its culture and why he championed the cause for making English as the language for education in India. The book tells us about how the Britishers came to India as cunning traders and became the oppressive rulers. How they crushed Indian industries with huge taxes and no support, how the farmers were turned to beggars and how millions were left to die in several famines during their misrule in India, how the laws were made and how justice was almost always denied to Indians, how they never made any effort to bridge the caste differences but solidified them with their policies and how by pandering to Muslim league it created an atmosphere which finally led to the partition. It talks about the indentured labour that the British took from India to several islands and colonies and how they were treated there, how the Indian soldiers who fought for the British were subjected to racial discrimination... The book throws light on the mistakes committed by Congress which led to the abject failure of Quit India Movement. It talks about the racist attitude of even the renowned authors like Rudyard Kipling (Jungle book) and about the absolutely vile and wicked Winston Churchill, his obnoxious views about India and Indians and his abhorrent actions (or the lack of it) during the famine in Bengal. The book presented several anecdotes and incidents in a language that is as interesting as it can get. This is not a book that eulogizes India and its culture and demonizes western culture; the book

simply talks about how Britishers ruled India with the sole objective of draining its wealth. IThere are multiple references from renowned international scholars and historians which supported the points that Tharoor makes in this book.

The book does talk about a sad and depressing history of India and its subjugation and humiliation at the hands of British and yet the book doesn't leave you sad and depressed. Without any hyperbole or over-glorification, Tharoor ensures to give several positive references of present day India and how it has grown to become a successful democracy despite the long misrule of British.

By his own admission, this book is like an extension of the Speech that Tharoor had delivered during the debate at Oxford last year. The speech had gone viral in the social media. If you have liked that speech, there is no reason why you would not love this book as well. Go for it !

Surabhi Sharma says

The Author, Shashi Tharoor, is an Indian politician and a former diplomat who is currently serving as Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha.

The birth of the book is the speech made by the author at Oxford when author was invited as a speaker at Oxford Union. After praises, criticism, trolling over internet, the speech made its way in the heart of masses. The book is not his written speech; it is differ in many respects. This book is not about British Colonialism as a whole, but simply tells about India's experience of it. It does not tell a story of British Raj on India but makes an argument.

Starting from 1600 when British Charter forms East India Company, who once entered in the country as traders and then eventually ruled the country till 1947 – India gain independence on 15th august, partition of the country, Britain exits India. Brief history of the dark phase of Indian history and their impact on India and over Indians from the eye of author.

During the period, the India becomes mere exporter of raw material to Britain and its export market of manufacturing goods declined considerably. British Raj extracted the wealth in the name of taxation. Britain's Industrial Revolution was built on the destruction of India's thriving manufacturing industries. Factual figures are also stated in the book.

There is nothing new, which, one haven't read before about Indian history but book neither trashing British Raj. It evaluates the impact of Colonialism and how India made progress after independence to one of the world's fastest growing economy.

<https://thereviewauthor.wordpress.com/>

Veena says

Shashi Tharoor is a die hard nationalist, so are many of us. But one thing that keeps him at the edge is the deep recognition of facts and the courage to speak it out on a national and international platform. Tharoor begins with an stunning preface, putting the book into the context. He talks about the talk he gave at Oxford

which in turn prompted him to write this book. He explains the importance of history, that it is neither for excuses nor for revenge. It is to know our past better to learn from it.

The first part begins with 'The looting of India'. The conquest by the east India company is broadly spoken of. The conscious bleeding that led that went on for one hundred and seventy three years is accounted for. In the words of John Sullivan,

the little court disappears- trade languishes - the capital decays - the people are impoverished - the Englishman flourishes, and acts like a sponge, drawing up riches from the banks of the Ganges, and squeezing them down upon the banks of the Thames.

Before the Englishmen stepped on the Indian soil, India's share in world GDP was 27 and when the last of them left it was left just a little over 3 percent.

The second part of the Book talks about political disintegration of the Indian mass. The basic strategy of divide and rule was applied which saw its consequences in civil services and suppression of Indian talent. The likes of Tagore and Ghosh were discriminated against which again weakened the Indian structure. The further chapters only strengthen the case against the colonial regime. The encouragement of bribery to keep posts was an open sight. The imperial system of law that we still follow is which was not suited for the Indian scenario has forced these many backlog cases.

The British Raj weakened our social structure, the education system and imposed an economical destruction. However, division on the basis of caste, color and region is the sinful of them all. Tharoor gives a gradual account of the divide and rule policy and how eventually it led to the split of the country into two. The gradual success of the Muslim league into the state politics was a wind to the fire that eventually asked for the separate land. The mass migration and killing in the year 1947 is expressively talked about.

In addition to the slow degradation of the land and its people the Book openly condemns the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. India suffered famine, forced migration and brutality in the hands of the colonial rule. It was an era of darkness, truly.

The entire narrative of the book comes out to be very strong. The facts and reasoning pulls you in. There are some better made cases against the colonial rule which counter question 'But British empire did a lot of good for us!'.

The language is simple non-tharoorian. Far from being boring though. This book is meant for everyone. Those who read and those who don't.

Murtaza says

I'm generally sympathetic to the argument that colonialism is over and done with and there's no need to keep grievance mongering over past events. But a raft of recent nostalgic scholarship by Niall Ferguson and others has unfortunately brought the issue of British colonialism in India up for debate once again. Shashi Tharoor gave a well received speech on the impact of the colonial project on India at Oxford a few years back, and this book is an attempt to capture the spirit of that speech in written form.

Contrary to what some persist in arguing, colonialism was largely a catastrophe for Indians. Tharoor

documents this well here in with an avalanche of statistics and quotes, of which there are no shortage, proving the detrimental impact of rapacious colonial administrators on the Indian people. It's hard to pick his most damning argument but his comparison of the British engineered famines to the death tolls of Stalin and Mao during their mass collectivations really seemed to hit the mark. It really was a stark reminder of how much Churchill had in common with his other mid-20th century peers, Hitler included. Other than that there are lots of self-incriminating quotes from malicious colonial officials, anecdotes about how life was ordered in pre-colonial India and rebuttals to various arguments commonly proffered by apologists for the colonial enterprise. Tharoor writes with generosity of spirit and rarely lapses into polemic. He acknowledges the good that sometimes flowed from colonial power and is not a demagogue in any sense. He also has a broad-minded conception of India that is anathema to the chauvinism of Hindu nationalists and others.

To be honest though, however much I sympathize with his perspective, I was not thrilled by this book. It was disjointed and did not move according to any particular logic. It also seemed deeply repetitive and didn't always offer a lot to a reader who is already somewhat versed in the subject. It is definitely a textbook rather than a piece of prose, which is perhaps what it was aiming for anyways.

Nonetheless I value it for what it is, a contribution to the historical record on this subject and an attempt to prevent the memory of this period from being despoiled by cynical revisionists. It's a pity though that Tharoor is not as effective in writing as he is as an orator.

Anil Swarup says

The speech delivered at Oxford that led to writing of this book was a brilliant one but the book itself fades in comparison. However, it is still worth reading because of the inimitable style of Shashi Tharoor and his penchant for research before coming to conclusions. He is indeed critical of the empire for "cruelties unheard and devastation almost without name....crimes which have their rise in the wicked dispositions of men in avarice, rapacity, pride, cruelty, malignity, haughtiness, insolence". Tharoor is never short of adjectives. He goes on to nail every argument put forth by Niall Ferguson in "How Britain Made the World" in support of "evangelical imperialism". His objective is not to take "revenge upon history" but to place it in right perspective. And he does so pretty effectively, quoting copiously from a number contemporary stalwarts like William Howitt : " the scene of exaction, rapacity, and plunder which India became in our hands and that upon the whole body of the population, forms one of the most disgraceful portions of human history"

Vinita Thomas says

More than Indians or any other country colonised by the British, it's important every Brit reads. Something I doubt their history books covers!

Toshali Gupta says

While a lot of arguments and cases in discussions seemed (and very well could be) biased and hypocritical, there have been multiple statements and illustrations which I not only agree but thank the author for adding to my database of Indian History :

- Unlike any other foreign influence/immigrants (namely Portuguese, Mughals, Persian etc) , British were in

India with the sole purpose of making money and not to settle in. Makes quite sense with his illustrated examples.

- If not for anything else, British surely get the credit for Tea, Cricket and, to an extent, English language in India.
- The degree to which British abused India (economically, morally, psychologically and in 100 other ways), has definitely been downplayed in our school textbooks – good or bad decision? Up for another debate.
- While I was gathering sympathy for Churchill for all the German atrocities during the WW II, astonishingly in the same span of time, Churchill was infinitesimally more inhumane to my motherland. How I shall look at world history now would be entirely different!

Raghu says

In 1995, I was travelling in Tierra del Fuego where I chanced to meet a middle-aged Canadian in a coffee shop. He too, like me, was travelling in South America and we ended up chatting about colonialism. It was then that he made the following astounding statement: "...you know, of all the European countries that colonized the world - France, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands and Britain - it was only the English who did so with the aim to modernize and develop those backward nations. The rest were mostly out to exploit, plunder and conquer." I couldn't believe that in 1995, a Canadian man in his forties would seriously believe such a thing and even more so, articulate it to an Indian. But then, he wasn't the first man to say such a thing to me during my travels. There have been many others - often Australians and Brits - who generally believed that British colonialism was humane, fair and constructive compared to the rest. It is probably not all that surprising, because, even eminent modern-day British economists and historians like Niall Ferguson and Lawrence James have recently written books, extolling the 'good' of British colonialism and pronouncing that it was ultimately a positive force in the world. James sees the Raj as a period governed by essentially idealistic, if paternalistic, rulers who impacted India deeply. India's sustained adherence to Democracy, its Railways and the system of education are seen as among the positive legacies of British rule by Lawrence James. In the 1960s, as a schoolboy, I have heard even elderly Indians remark that 'everything has gone to the dogs after the British left India'. Can it all be really true? Or is it just post-truth?

For those of us Indians, who are tired of reading Englishmen telling us that they made us into a modern and unified nation, a democracy and law-bound society as well as that British rule was benign and considerate, author Tharoor's book will come as a welcome Indian contribution in striking back at the Empire with details of the actual lived truth of colonialism. After all, the judgement has to be made based on documents telling us what really happened in the 18th and 19th centuries in India. In recent months, there have been a spate of books by British authors as well, blowing the lid off the 'post-colonial melancholia' of Raj apologists. All of them echo the conclusions that Tharoor himself has reached through his own extensive research on the 200-year rule of India by Britain. Tharoor shows that the Raj was an era of darkness for India, where rapacious economic exploitation of India was committed on an unprecedented scale. It was a time when peasants were impoverished by punishing tax laws and driven out of their lands and forced into deportation as indentured labor to far-off lands and made to suffer and die in recurrent famines. In addition, racism, wars and bad administration was rife. Everything Britain did was for its own benefit and not for that of Indians. They broke treaties at will and looted the wealth of India with abandon. The rise of Britain during the two centuries between the 18th and 20th was financed by its depredations in India.

Tharoor has marshalled impressive arguments and facts to support his indictment of the Raj. This space is too small to outline and analyze all the arguments. But the facts tell a stunning tale of exploitation and destruction. Let us look at some of them:

- India was a prosperous nation in the 18th century as documented by even the East India company's own men like Robert Clive, Macaulay and others. India's share then of the world economy was 23%, as large as all of Europe put together. By the time the British left India in 1947, it was 3%.
- When Britain left India in 1947, India had a literacy of 16%, an average longevity of just 27 years and 90% of the population were in poverty.
- Between 1757 and 1900, the British per capita GDP increased in real terms by 347% while that of the Indian by a mere 14%.
- India experienced recurrent devastating famines due to the ruthless economic policies enforced by Britain. At least eleven major famines were recorded in different parts of India between 1770 and 1944. About 30 -35 million Indians died in these famines. To put it in perspective, Tharoor quotes author William Digby, who points out that in the entire 107 years between 1793 and 1900, only an estimated five million people had died in all the wars around the world combined, whereas in just ten years 1891-1900, 19 million had died in India in famines alone.
- Economist Paul Baran calculates that 8 percent of India's GNP was transferred to Britain each year.
- India exported to Britain £13m worth of goods each year from 1835 to 1872 with no corresponding return of money.
- The salary of the British Secy of State for India in 1901, paid for by Indian taxes, was equivalent of the average salary of 90000 Indians.

Tharoor deals with the known facts of Britain's 'divide and rule' policy, the destruction of India's textile industry and the ruin of its agriculture. But, India was also a great manufacturing nation before the British arrived. Its de-industrialization was systematically engineered by the British in order to capture the markets for its own producers. Tharoor shows how India's vibrant steel and ship-building industries were also destroyed by colonialism. In the early 17th century, 4000 to 5000 ships were built at 400 to 500 tonnes each in Bengal for the Bengal fleet. Between 1801 and 1839, a further 327 ships were built there, but all British-owned. Gradually, by late 19th century, both industries were only a memory.

So, how did Britain manage to bring about these horrible outcomes? It was done by employing the following methods:

- allowing tariff-free exports of British goods to India
- Fixing standards in such a way that would make Indian manufactured goods unattractive in global markets
- applying import barriers on Indian manufactured goods
- Increasing India's debt burden by manipulating the currency
- destroying competition, thereby preventing Indian businesses from challenging British ones and ensuring their monopoly

Towards the end of the book, the author looks at the question of reparations from the UK. He agrees that reparations are neither practical nor realistic or even possible. After all, if one actually computes the value of the wealth taken from India during the two centuries, it would run into trillions of dollars in today's money, much more than UK's GDP. But he says that Britain should at least atone for its devastation of India by tendering an apology. He cites the example of Chancellor Willy Brandt of Germany tendering apologies to Polish Jews and the Canadian PM Justine Trudeau for the Komagata Maru incident. Tharoor goes on to point out that British society, as a whole, has never examined its colonial past critically (except for individuals) and honestly in the way Germans have done about Nazism. He gives the example of how German children are shepherded to concentration camps to see the awful reality of what their forefathers did. Similarly, British schoolchildren must be taught what built their homeland instead of showing them just the pomp and splendour of the Raj.

The book is a little bit of a grim read even for an Indian. Certainly, it would be hard-going for a 'Raj

apologist'. It is written with passionate arguments, well-referenced facts, a sprinkling of wit and sarcasm and much logical reasoning. However, the book is published at a time which seems to be the season for Raj-era re-evaluation. There are more books critically analyzing the various aspects of those two centuries by Dr. Yasmin Khan, Walter Reid, Roy Moxham and Jon Wilson. I hope to read all of them so as to get a composite picture of India's recent history. This one by Shashi Tharoor is a perfect start.

David M says

Among other things, this book contains the most passionate defense of the game of cricket I've ever encountered. Here Tharoor grants there were some beneficial effects of empire, albeit with a dialectical twist. What started out as a pretty straightforward case of western cultural imperialism turned into the negation of the negation as Indians developed their own athletic mastery...

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The great Ukrainian famine of the late twenties and early thirties is usually seen as proof that communism is inherently evil, and Stalin is remembered as maybe worse than Hitler.

On the other hand, the Great Bengali famine of the forties is hardly remembered at all in the west, and Churchill is often seen as THE hero of the twentieth century.

Both were preventable, state-induced catastrophes, and a similar number of people perished in each.

Very curious discrepancy, then, in how the perpetrators are remembered.

Arun Divakar says

One quote in particular by a member of the British aristocracy sums up what Tharoor speaks eloquently in book length :

The Marquess of Salisbury, using a colourful metaphor as Secretary of State for India in the 1860s and 1870s, said: 'As India is to be bled, the lancet should be directed to those parts where the blood is congested... [rather than] to those which are already feeble for the want of it.'

As a child growing up in the late 80's and early 90's, I was told that the Britishers were the aliens who our national leaders drove out of the country in August of 1947. The little me watched Independence and Republic day parades held with pomp and pride in Delhi on the screen of a little monochrome television and slowly imbibed the message that I was part of something large called India. In hindsight there was no notion of nationalism or patriotism in my mind then, it was merely the sights and sounds that created a spectacle.

In school we were taught about the glory of the Indian independence movement and the sacrifices the men and women of the nation underwent to create an independent nation. Truth be told, a sleepy child learns of the Morley-Minto reforms or the Rowlatt act only out of pure coercion, they do not learn it for the purpose of knowledge but only to pass the history examination. The barbarous aftermaths of these acts passed by the British were not fully familiar to me and by me I refer again to a big group of children who were told that the

British empire was brutal but not in very absolute terms. Instead you are told in abstractions that they oppressed us (but not how and in what context) and that they destroyed us (here again the extent of damage is not clear). While the heroes of Indian independence are undoubtedly men and women who gave up almost everything in their lives for the nation, I believe it is equally important that everyone learns what kind of odds they were up against in the form of the British empire.

To the YouTube viewing public, Shashi Tharoor's speech at Oxford debating on whether Britain owes reparations to her former colonies was a literal eye opener. The simple reason behind this was : objectivity . Tharoor was able to annotate with facts and figures how much of looting the East India Company and later the British empire resorted to across the length and breadth of India. As I highlighted in the paragraph above, while most of us knew the British to have robbed us blind the full horror of this was lost on us. When the Britishers arrived in India, many an Indian was dressed in the finest clothes, wore good jewellery and was extremely self-reliant. When they finally left, the same Indian only had his loin cloth left to call his own. The acts passed by the empire created a lot of legacies for the Indians – a broken textile industry, the landless peasant, sycophantic Indian rulers, an overtaxed populace and the first seeds of a communal divide were only a few of them. While seven decades of autonomy has been able to bring about some changes in most of the other areas, the last one of these legacies has grown from a seed to a massive and well branched out tree now.

As Tharoor himself says, one cannot take revenge upon history for history is its own revenge. The contents of the book filled me with disbelief and indignation to a great extent and then again gave me a new perspective of the entire notion of India's struggle for independence. Britain perhaps cannot be expected to give India an apology like how Justin Trudeau apologized in the House of Commons for the Komagata Maru incident or a symbolic one reminiscent of Willy Brandt's gesture of penance at the Warsaw ghetto. Just one incident that occurred on the 13th of April 1919 at Jalian Wala Bagh in Amritsar and the subsequent way the British protected and made a hero of the infamous Reginald Dyer should be enough for anyone still unwilling to let go of the belief that the British were a loving kind of a ruler. Interestingly on October 20, 2017, Virendra Sharma who is an MP in the British Parliament has tabled a motion seeking an apology for the Jalian Wala Bagh massacre. It remains to be seen how this will play out in the parliament.

A point that Tharoor makes that the best form of reparation would be to teach undiluted colonial history to the children of Britain makes a lot of sense in a world which yearns to return to Empire 2.0 . To me it would be equally important to teach the children of India what their nation was before the British came and what kind of a mess they left in their wake in 1947 !

Tharoor is a member of the Congress party and is a member of parliament from my own home town. The debate of whether or not the Congress party could have brought in much more advancement to the nation from their years in power is certainly a valid one but is outside the scope of this book's contents.

Recommended if you are a lover or student of Indian history !

And here was another magnificent quote from yet another book :

Alex von Tunzelmann's clever start to her book Indian Summer made a point most tellingly: 'In the beginning, there were two nations. One was a vast, mighty and magnificent empire, brilliantly organized and culturally unified, which dominated a massive swath of the earth. The other was an undeveloped, semi feudal realm, riven by religious factionalism and barely able to feed its illiterate, diseased and stinking masses. The first nation was India. The second was England.'

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Inderjit Sanghera says

Tharoor is an excellent orator; well-spoken, warm and articulate, his Cambridge University speech inspired this book. What is surprising is—or, on reflection, perhaps not, is as greater a orator as Tharoor is, his writing style, although well-researched and engaging, is didactic and lacks the elegance of his vocal abilities; some of his puns lose their verve without the cadence of his voice, some of his homilies became slightly platitudinous but, with that being said, “Inglorious Empire” is one of the greatest rebuttals of empire I have read, a welcome rampant against the torrent of misplaced colonial nostalgia which seems to be washing over parts of England.

Tharoor systematically dissects many of the most fundamental arguments for the British empire. Firstly that they were a benign force out to liberalise India. As Tharoor points out, prior to colonialism India was one of the foremost world economies, a country of great craftsmen and culture, the birth-place of many great religions and philosophical theories, a land which, like all others had experienced its fair share of intolerance and oppression, but still a place where a multitude of communities had co-existed in relative peace and harmony. It is therefore one of the greatest-and most insidious-myths peddled by the British that India was a bucolic backwater, whose citizens were stuck in a stupor of stupidity and ignoble idiocy, waiting to be roused by the great British liberators. In reality greed, avarice, racism and the cold calculating laws of the market and realpolitik were the motivating factors behind colonialism, to drain India of its resource, both intellectual and economical; the idea that colonialism was driven by some sort of altruistic motive, or by the ideas of the enlightenment is ridiculous.

Tharoor utilises extensive both hard economic facts and historical accounts to slowly debunk the myths of colonialism, from the English language to the railway; Tharoor uses the example of the robber stabbing their toe whilst stealing from you as the kind of specious justifications apologists usually use to justify the colonialism-a more fitting analogy perhaps is if a robber steals all your jewels inadvertently leaves a few pieces inside your house this does not justify their actions. And this is perhaps the most dangerous thing about European colonialism; they painted subjugation as deliverance, domination as liberation, oppression as freedom-it takes a febrile and fervent imagination to insinuate that in pillaging a country of its resources for two and a half centuries it was somehow doing it a favour, but it is exactly the argument which has swayed the gullible and naive, but it now finding itself on shaky ground thanks to the recovery of Indian and other colonies from imperial shackles.

Arvind says

There is a much-touted phrase "Truth lies somewhere in the middle." Does it always ?

I was reading Savarkar's famous book on 1857 mutiny and gave it up after reading 50 pages as it felt one-sided bitter criticism of the British. Surely, Lawrence James, Niall Ferguson couldn't be that wrong. Surely, the British rule had a lot of benefits ?

I too believed in the "middle" 2-3 yrs ago until I read a few stats and Amitav Ghosh's description of Opium farming and trade in India.

Shashi Tharoor, building on his famous 2015 Oxford debate speech, thankfully tears apart this "British rule was good too" notion. I summarise his arguments as under :-

A) Racism - To me the one-word case against the British. Usually, People will throw up examples of exceptions, British who loved India and Indians and were fair-minded. They will throw up examples of Indians who enjoyed success. How then does one make a racism charge stick on a govt ? Simple, read the law. The laws differentiated between the British and Indians and denied the latter equality of opportunity, dignity, justice in every sense of the word. As an example, British almost never got punished (or got punished lightly) for murders of Indians on racist arguments.

Again, look at the law and you see 50+ countries following racism and differentiation among their citizens on basis of religion even today.

B) Economic drain - The British systematically and quite openly drained India's resources and destroyed India's economy. Our GDP growth was 1% for 200 yrs. Even at a modest growth rate of 3%, we would have been 50 times richer, much richer than Britain. As for the Railways, paid in taxes by India, with an 10 times inflated cost extracted by the British.

C) Famines - An estimated 35 million people died because of famines during the British rule. But, famines are a natural phenomena, right ? Not if the govt continues exporting food, refuses to organise relief and leaves its people to die. Limits of cruelty surpassed.

Vikalp Trivedi says

What is history for most of the Indians?

A subject which they have to mug up till tenth standard to get marks and if in future any person who is preparing for any public service examinations has to memorise certain events of history in order to pass out the general studies paper. Nobody gives a damn about studying history we just memorise it and then forget .

How do they teach us history ?

I was a student of a state board school (Madhya Pradesh Board) , we had a book from sixth standard to tenth standard , named as - "Social Studies" . The book consisted of three subjects - Geography , Civics and History . And in these books of Social Studies what we had on the name of history were short notes about certain people and events of history and even these events and people were repeated from sixth standard to tenth standard . For instance we studied about struggle of independence in eighth standard , yet again in the tenth standard we have to study about the struggle for independence .

The books in the CBSE schools are also no good they just have slightly more detailed things and some chapters about World Wars .

The teacher simply comes up with prepared questions and answers about the topic which is the most scoring in the exams and we the students just mug those answers up and forget them forever .

Actually we are the future of this nation who is locked in a room and what our system teaches us is looking at our past through a peephole . The fault is not completely of the system we are also not interested in our past . We are the generation who are creating a future without having any idea of our past .

In his latest book Shashi Tharoor dared to divide the grey zone clearly into black and white . With great research and the arguments which the author about how a country which was far behind us came to our nation and changed our nation forever . I don't think there is another book which clearly separates white and black so clearly . No history book never celebrates or even mentions the contribution of India in world wars , the great famines , the full story of Jallianwala Bagh massacre , and how the Britishers turned an already developed country into a developing country , how they confined a liberal thinking of a country that even today some religious fanatic fools think that those things are their traditions and they follow it blindly .

Mr. Tharoor teaches how history should be taught .

Just A Must Read .

5 Stars.

Trevor says

While I was reading this book, I kept thinking that one of the things people on the left could reasonably do is just make up stuff about the extent of murderousness that colonisation has involved. The reason being that it is highly unlikely anyone on the left would have the imagination to think up the horrors that were actually inflicted upon the world by the imperial ambitions of Britain or Spain – or the costs to indigenous peoples in the US or Australia. This book documents horrors upon horrors. But infinitely worse is the clear view that is left of the British who were not merely rapacious or thieving from those they pretended to be lifting out of darkness, but who did nothing to alleviate suffering when lifting the smallest finger would have saved many lives from the most horrible of deaths.

Winston Churchill does not come out of this at all well. As someone born in Ireland, he has never particularly been a hero of mine anyway – but in India his name ought to be a curse.

I'm not going to list the catalogue of crimes against humanity visited upon India by British rule – this book provides ample examples and ought to be read for that alone – however, I want to focus mostly on something that I believe still holds relevance for us today everywhere on the planet – the inhumanity of free market

economics when accepted as a moral philosophy.

Marx says somewhere that we should consider capitalism as simultaneously the best and the worse system that has ever existed. As the author here points out, those in charge of India from Britain were guided by ethical principles that had two great foundations – that the market is always right and a vision of Malthus where overpopulation inevitably leads to famine. This meant that when various imposed famines occurred in India those who might otherwise have been expected to do something to reduce the suffering experienced by the people saw any such action as misguided ‘charity’ that would, in fact, merely make matters worse. That the market had spoken and the death of those people (counted in millions) was ultimately the kindest thing. Rather than divert some of the food that was being transported out of these areas where people were starving, the food continued to be moved to Europe and the people dropped like flies.

The point isn’t that such actions were the cynical excesses of a hideous regime content to merely suck the wealth and life out of India – and, there is something to this as well, of course – but rather that free market economics, with its invisible hands and its dogmatic certainties, allows people to consider their actions (or inactions) as the height of morality while millions perish. This was done to Ireland with the same callous disregard as it was to India. That the monsters who committed the crimes remain heroes is difficult to understand other than from the perspective that we still live under the sway of an ideology that still believes the market will provide and any intervention in its free action will ultimately prove counter-productive – and thus are the greatest of human tragedies visited upon the poor while the wealthy can barely count their riches.
