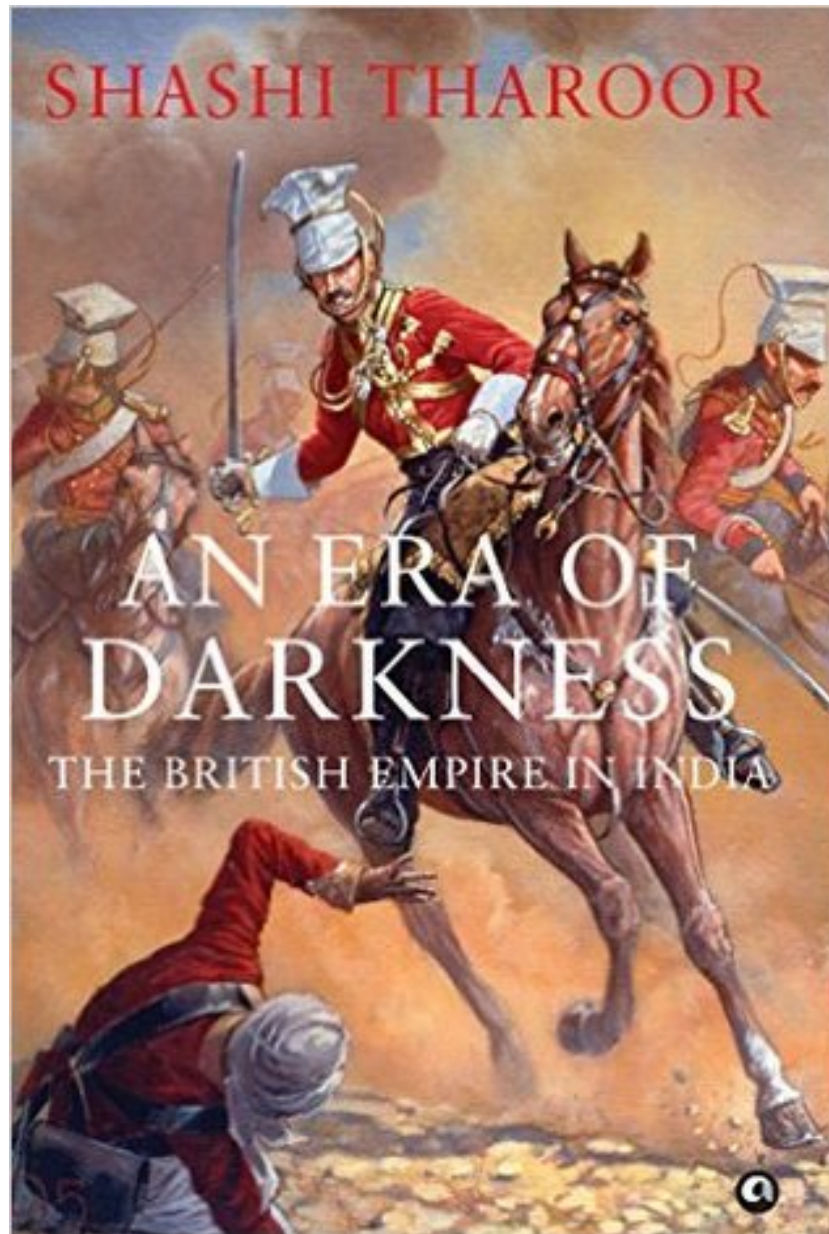


# An Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India Book PDF Download



**By:**  
**Shashi Tharoor**

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## What people Say:

### Raghu

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 wer

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.

## Vikalp Trivedi

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 damm 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

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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 .Â 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 .

## Arvind

There is a much-touted phrase "Truth lies somewhere in d 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 d British. Surely, Lawrence James, Niall Ferguson couldnt be that wrong. Surely, the British rule had a lot of benefits ?

I too believed in d "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

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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.

## Anil Swarup

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

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 of 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"

## Surabhi Sharma

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 Indi

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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 â€“ 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.