

British Colonization of India: An Exchange of Indelible Influences

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In the Age of Exploration, every major European power had only one ultimate destination in mind: Asia, and more specifically, India. The overland silk roads were too dangerous and too slow, unable to keep up with Europe's increasing demand for exotic goods and spices.

Portuguese merchant-sailors were the first to discover a sea route to India and establish direct trade relations with the Indian princes, but the British and Dutch were not far behind. Soon, the British usurped the Portuguese and added India to its growing global empire. Although British rule in India was often oppressive and violent, British colonization of India led to an exchange between both societies that greatly influenced the trade, politics, and culture of each.

Britain and India's shared history began on 31 January 1600, when Queen Elizabeth I authorized the charter of the English East India Company, a joint-stock company competing to monopolize the lucrative Asian spice trade.<sup>1</sup> During that same time period, the Mughal Empire in India was in a state of decline and began to splinter into regional kingdoms ruled by warring princes; the East India Company took advantage of the power vacuum left behind by the Mughals and expanded control until British forces occupied most of the Indian subcontinent.<sup>2</sup> The company's unifying rule brought political stability and peace, albeit temporary, to India.

The East India Company, partnering with the Dutch East India Company, found the spice trade to be as profitable as they had imagined. Wealthy elites in Europe could not get enough of the flavorful, exotic spices – in the early seventeenth century, “some 7 million pounds (about 3.2 million kilos) of pepper were shipped annually to Europe, with 5.6 million pounds (about 2.5

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<sup>1</sup> Gregory Fremont-Barnes, *Essential Histories: The Indian Mutiny 1857-58* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing Ltd., 2007), pp. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

million kilos) per year shared between London and Amsterdam.”<sup>3</sup> London became “the greatest spice market in the world.”<sup>4</sup>

The spice trade had lured the British to India, but they also discovered a new market for Indian textiles, which became the major export of the East India Company. Indian artisans had perfected the art of weaving over 5,000 years, much to the delight of European women in the eighteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Dresses made of chintz – high quality Indian cotton calico, hand-painted or hand-printed with brightly dyed floral patterns – became the latest fashion in British society.<sup>6</sup> High demand strengthened the Indian cotton industry and threatened the English domestic textile industry, but Parliament’s tariffs and restrictive legislation could not stem the flow of Indian fabrics into Great Britain.<sup>7</sup> Eventually, however, the tide turned. New machinery and manufacturing processes during the Industrial Revolution reinvigorated Britain’s textile industry.<sup>8</sup> Factories churned out masses of inexpensive cloth, copied the bright, intricate Indian designs, and easily outcompeted the Indian artisans.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, the East India Company was thriving. In a William Daniell painting of the company’s docks near London, scores of merchant ships as far as the eye can see sail up and down the Thames River, highlighting the immense power and trade interests of the company.<sup>10</sup> But the East India Company’s reign ended after British forces put down the Indian Mutiny, an

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<sup>3</sup> Linda Ali and John Siblon, “Influencing Britain,” *Black Presence: Asian and Black History in Britain*, accessed January 19, 2016, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/culture/influencing.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Denise Dersin, ed., *What Life Was Like In the Jewel In the Crown: British India, AD 1600-1905* (Richmond: Time Life Inc., 1999), pp. 91.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Holford, photographer, “18th-century European dress,” photograph (Essex: Loughton), in *What Life Was Like In the Jewel In the Crown: British India, AD 1600-1905*, Denise Dersin, ed. (Richmond: Time Life Inc., 1999), pp. 93.

<sup>7</sup> Denise Dersin, ed., *What Life Was Like In the Jewel In the Crown: British India, AD 1600-1905*, pp. 92.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Linda Ali and John Siblon, “Influencing Britain,” *Black Presence: Asian and Black History in Britain*.

<sup>10</sup> William Daniell, *View of East India Docks*, watercolor (1808), in *India Britannica*, Geoffrey Moorhouse (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), pp. 30-31.

1857 revolt of a portion of Indian troops (Sepoys) under British service.<sup>11</sup> No longer trusting the East India Company to govern India, Parliament passed the Act for the Better Government of India in 1858, officially transferring control to the British Crown.<sup>12</sup> Thus Great Britain expanded imperialism to India, “the brightest jewel in the British Crown.”<sup>13</sup>

The British Raj, officially the British Indian Empire, controlled most of the Indian coastline and was heavily concentrated in the regions of Bengal, Burma, and Punjab, with independent princely states interspersed throughout the interior.<sup>14</sup> But the British Raj held power for not even a century before India gained its independence on 15 August 1947.<sup>15</sup> The newly independent India, however, retained some of the political ideals of the British. In a draft statement dated 20 February 1947, the Secretary of State for India, Frederick Pethick-Lawrence, wrote about British influence in the birth of a democratic Indian government:

... Indians should themselves frame a new constitution for a fully autonomous India, and in the offer of 1942 they [the British government] invited them to set up a Constituent Assembly for this purpose as soon as the war [World War II] was over. His Majesty’s Government believe this policy to have been the right and in accordance with sound democratic principles ... the time had come for responsibility for government of India to pass into Indian hands.<sup>16</sup>

Besides laying the foundations for a new government, the Indian Independence Act also had another objective: the partition of India into “two independent nation states: Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan.”<sup>17</sup> The immediate consequences were devastating:

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<sup>11</sup> Gregory Fremont-Barnes, *Essential Histories: The Indian Mutiny 1857-58*, pp. 20.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 89.

<sup>13</sup> Denise Dersin, ed., *What Life Was Like In the Jewel In the Crown: British India, AD 1600-1905*, pp. 8.

<sup>14</sup> J.G. Bartholomew and The Edinburgh Geographical Institute, *Political Divisions of the Indian Empire*, map, (1909), in *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Atlas 1909 ed., vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908-1931), pp. 20, accessed December 22, 2015, [http://dsal.uchicago.edu/reference/gaz\\_atlas\\_1909/pager.html?object=26](http://dsal.uchicago.edu/reference/gaz_atlas_1909/pager.html?object=26).

<sup>15</sup> Judith E. Walsh, *A Brief History of India*, 2nd ed. (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2011), pp. 219.

<sup>16</sup> Frederick Pethick-Lawrence, “Indian Policy,” draft statement, Washington, 1947, accessed December 22, 2015, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/the-road-to-partition/britains-india-policy/>.

<sup>17</sup> William Dalrymple, “The Great Divide: The violent legacy of Indian Partition,” *The New Yorker*, June 29, 2015, accessed December 23, 2015, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/06/29/the-great-divide-books-dalrymple>.

Across the Indian subcontinent, communities that had coexisted for almost a millennium attacked each other in a terrifying outbreak of sectarian violence, with Hindus and Sikhs on one side and Muslims on the other—a mutual genocide as unexpected as it was unprecedented . . . the carnage was especially intense, with massacres, arson, forced conversions, mass abductions, and savage sexual violence. Some seventy-five thousand women were raped, and many of them were then disfigured or dismembered.<sup>18</sup>

Millions of refugees were forced to migrate from India to Pakistan and from Pakistan to India as tensions between different Indian parties prompted “passion, anarchy, and chaos.”<sup>19</sup> Britain’s hasty withdrawal and delegation of administration to the Indian people created a bitter political and religious divide – to this day, “the Indo-Pak conflict remains the dominant geopolitical reality of the region.”<sup>20</sup>

Because of the introduction of the English language, British imperialism also influenced the literature read and written in British India. Back when the East India Company still ruled over India, both British and Indian young men studied to become bilingual, learning both English and the native Indian languages.<sup>21</sup> This led to more cross-cultural interactions between the British and Indians, as more and more people became able to communicate directly with each other and read the literature of both cultures. Under the lenient rule of the East India Company, Bengali popular literature flourished; printing shops in Calcutta sold almanacs and dramas and exciting religious tales of Hindu mythology by the thousands.<sup>22</sup> But after the abolishment of the East India Company in 1858, the British Raj began monitoring print production in India,

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Terence Shone, letter to the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations (October 14, 1947), accessed December 22, 2015, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/the-road-to-partition/evaluating-partition/>.

<sup>20</sup> William Dalrymple, “The Great Divide: The violent legacy of Indian Partition.”

<sup>21</sup> *A European Gentleman with his Munshi or Native Professor of Languages*, illustration (1813), in *India Britannica*, Geoffrey Moorhouse (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), pp. 61.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Darnton, *Censors at Work: How States Shaped Literature* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014), pp. 92-95.

cataloguing every book produced and analyzing the contents for any seditious material.<sup>23</sup> If the officials suspected a piece of literature, British censorship cracked down on publishers, authors, and printers alike – conducting police raids on bookshops and prosecuting offenders.<sup>24</sup>

In contrast to the suppression of native Indian literature by the British Raj, the works of Anglo-Indian imperialistic writers such as Rudyard Kipling and George Orwell flourished because of their profound life experiences in India. Kipling’s honest portrayal of India in his various works belies his love for India and his respect for its people, although he regarded Indians to be inferior and less capable than the British.<sup>25</sup> In his controversial poem “The White Man’s Burden,” the imperial poet justifies imperialism because it is the duty of the richer and more civilized nations to better the lives of those who are not:

Take up the White Man's burden--  
Send forth the best ye breed--  
Go bind your sons to exile  
To serve your captives' need;  
To wait in heavy harness,  
On fluttered folk and wild--  
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,  
Half-devil and half-child.<sup>26</sup>

Orwell, on the other hand, clearly denounces the British colonial empire in his essay “Shooting an Elephant” by declaring that “imperialism was an evil thing.”<sup>27</sup> Imperialism is when the white man establishes tyranny over lesser peoples, and “when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys.”<sup>28</sup> Both Kipling and Orwell drew on personal experiences to write

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp. 103.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp. 123.

<sup>25</sup> David Gilmour, *The Long Recessional: The Imperial Life of Rudyard Kipling* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), pp. 68.

<sup>26</sup> Rudyard Kipling, “The White Man’s Burden,” (1899), accessed December 22, 2015, <http://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/kipling.asp>.

<sup>27</sup> George Orwell, *Shooting an Elephant* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1950), pp. 3.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 8.

about life in colonial India, and both the native Indian culture and oppression by the British are reflected in the Anglo-Indian writers' works.

A society can be defined by the food its people consume; for Britain and India, their long, shared history means they share culinary interests, too. Curry has become such a popular dish in the United Kingdom that the British now celebrate a National Curry Week.<sup>29</sup> The word "curry" actually comes from the Tamil word *kari*, a spiced sauce, but curry has evolved to denote many different kinds of savory and spiced dishes from around the world.<sup>30</sup> And the original *kari* has evolved too, now incorporating chilies from the Western Hemisphere introduced by the British.<sup>31</sup>

Tea also has a rich history in both Britain and India. The "most English of drinks," it was first grown in India by the British, who didn't want to pay the expensive prices charged by the Chinese.<sup>32</sup> The tea industry found a large consumer base in Great Britain and drinking tea quickly became a social ritual much like in India. Tea plantations also played a significant role in an Indian economy dominated by agriculture. Data from the 1891 and 1901 censuses show that the proportion of the total population in British India "directly engaged in agriculture" was 62 percent and 68 percent respectively.<sup>33</sup> Beyond that, it was estimated that "nine-tenths of the rural population live[d], directly or indirectly, by agriculture."<sup>34</sup> British investment in agriculture through cotton textiles and tea leaves fueled the Indian economy and established trade ties between the two countries. The Lipton tea company, for example, cultivated "RICH, PURE, & FRAGRANT" tea in India and sold over one million tea packets weekly in office branches

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<sup>29</sup> Anna-Louise Taylor, "Curry: Where did it come from?" *BBC*, October 11, 2013, accessed January 19, 2016, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/food/0/24432750>.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Simon Robinson, "How India 'Colonized' Britain," *TIME*, April 11, 2008, accessed December 23, 2015, <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1730172,00.html>.

<sup>33</sup> Sir William Stevenson Meyer, Sir Richard Burn, James Sutherland Cotton, and Sir Herbert Hope Risley, *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, New ed., 26 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908-1931), vol. 3 pp. 1, accessed December 22, 2015, <http://dsal.uchicago.edu/reference/gazetteer/>.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, vol.3 pp. 2.

throughout Great Britain and Ireland.<sup>35</sup> Today, tea still is a commonly favored drink among both Indians and Brits.

British colonization of India profoundly shaped both societies economically, politically, and culturally into the nations they are today. Of course, imperialism more often than not benefitted only the British and wronged the Indians; however, it is undeniable that each society left their mark on the other. Their shared history and relationship is indeed complicated and painful, but both countries have emerged inextricably connected.

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<sup>35</sup> “Lipton’s Teas,” newspaper advertisement, 1892, in *The Illustrated London News* (London: September 17, 1892), accessed December 23, 2015, <http://www.bl.uk/learning/images/asiansinbritain/large126069.html>.



## Annotated Bibliography

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Bartholomew, J. G. and The Edinburgh Geographical Institute. *Political Divisions of the Indian Empire*. Map. 1909. In *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Atlas 1909 ed., vol. 2. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908-1931, 20. Accessed December 22, 2015. [http://dsal.uchicago.edu/reference/gaz\\_atlas\\_1909/pager.html?object=26](http://dsal.uchicago.edu/reference/gaz_atlas_1909/pager.html?object=26).

This 1909 map of India depicts the fragmented but widespread reach of the British Empire. Most of the coastline is under British rule but further inland there are native Indian states that break up the continuity of British India.

Daniell, William. *View of East India Docks*. Watercolor. 1808. In *India Britannica*. Geoffrey Moorhouse. New York: Harper & Row, 1983.

The watercolor painting shows the expanse of the British East India Company's docks on the Thames near London. There are merchant ships up and down the river as far as the eye can see, all presumably laden with the merchandise of Europe and India. This depicts the British's thriving trade interests in India in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

*A European Gentleman with his Munshi or Native Professor of Languages*. Illustration. 1813. In *India Britannica*. Geoffrey Moorhouse. New York: Harper & Row, 1983.

This illustration depicts a young British man being taught the native Indian language by an old Indian man. It delineates the cross-cultural interaction between Britain and India as bilingual people became more and more common.

Holford, Michael, photographer. "18th-century European dress." Photograph. Essex: Loughton. In *What Life Was Like In the Jewel In the Crown: British India, AD 1600-1905*. Denise Dersin, ed. Richmond: Time Life Inc., 1999.

The picture of an 18th-century European dress shows the fine craftsmanship of Indian textiles. The high quality fabric and the brightly dyed floral patterns hint at the size and prosperity of the textile industry in India in order to supply the demand of European women.

Kipling, Rudyard. "The White Man's Burden." 1899. Accessed December 22, 2015. <http://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/kipling.asp>.

Rudyard Kipling wrote this poem in response to the American takeover of the Philippines after the Spanish-American war, but the poem also reflects the influence of British imperialism. The poem justifies colonization of undeveloped countries and the effects wrought on the indigenous peoples.

"Lipton's Teas." Newspaper advertisement. 1892. In *The Illustrated London News*. London: September 17, 1892. Accessed December 23, 2015. <http://www.bl.uk/learning/images/asiansinbritain/large126069.html>.

A 1892 advertisement for the Lipton tea company highlights the quality and price of Indian tea. It boasts about its high sales and also lists its plantations, warehouses, and branch offices throughout Great Britain and Ireland. This is evidence of the lucrative and expansive tea industry in British India.

Meyer, William Stevenson, Sir, Sir Richard Burn, James Sutherland Cotton, and Sir Herbert Hope Risley. *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, New ed., 26 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908-1931. Accessed December 22, 2015. <http://dsal.uchicago.edu/reference/gazetteer/>.

This book has 26 volumes detailing geographical, historical, economical, and political administration of India during British rule. The third volume provided specific information and data about the Indian agricultural economy and society.

Orwell, George. *Shooting an Elephant*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1950.

"Shooting an Elephant" is an essay about a British police officer in Burma who shoots an aggressive elephant at the behest of resentful locals. The story is a metaphor for British imperialism and has autobiographical elements since Orwell did work in Burma as a police officer, but whether or not it is true is disputed.

Pethick-Lawrence, Frederick. "Indian Policy." Draft statement, Washington, 1947. Accessed December 22, 2015. <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/the-road-to-partition/britains-india-policy/>.

This document is an actual draft statement about Britain's India policy and was written by the Secretary of State for India, Frederick Pethick-Lawrence, on February 20, 1947. It provides information about the planned transition of power from the British to the Indians, the birth of an Indian democracy, and tense relations between different Indian parties.

Shone, Terence. Letter to the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, 1947. Accessed December 22, 2015. <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/the-road-to-partition/evaluating-partition/>.

This document is a letter written by the UK High Commissioner Terence Shone on October 14, 1947 to the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, Philip Noel-Baker. It reveals the discord between Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs in the aftermath of the partition of India into two separate states, India and Pakistan.

### Secondary Sources

Ali, Linda and John Siblon. "Influencing Britain." *Black Presence: Asian and Black History in Britain*. Accessed January 19, 2016. <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/culture/influencing.htm>.

This webpage provides information about cultural influences on Britain from India as well as facts about the spice and textile trade monopolized by the English East India Company.

Dalrymple, William. "The Great Divide: The violent legacy of Indian Partition." *The New Yorker*, June 29, 2015. Accessed December 23, 2015. <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/06/29/the-great-divide-books-dalrymple>.

This article examines the history and resulting religious and cultural tension from the British partition of India into Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan. Thousands of people were displaced from their homes and the threat of violence still hangs over India-Pakistan relations.

Darnton, Robert. *Censors at Work: How States Shaped Literature*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014.

This book provides information about censorship of Indian literature deemed seditious by the British Raj. After the Sepoy uprising in 1857, the British imposed greater imperial surveillance and power, which only fueled discontent within India.

Dersin, Denise, ed. *What Life Was Like In the Jewel In the Crown: British India, AD 1600-1905*. Richmond: Time Life Inc., 1999.

This book provides information about society and culture in British India, especially details about the textile industry in India.

Fremont-Barnes, Gregory. *Essential Histories: The Indian Mutiny 1857-58*. Oxford: Osprey Publishing Ltd., 2007.

This book recounts the brief but violent Sepoy rebellion in India against the British East India Company. It also provided background information about the events leading up to the rebellion and the early history of British rule in India.

Gilmour, David. *The Long Recessional: The Imperial Life of Rudyard Kipling*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002.

A biography of Rudyard Kipling, this book chronicles not only the man's life but also the influence of imperialism on his works. Kipling was a staunch supporter of British imperialism in India and around the world. His views are reflected in his famous poems.

Robinson, Simon. "How India 'Colonized' Britain." *TIME*, April 11, 2008. Accessed December 23, 2015. <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1730172,00.html>.

In this article, Simon Robinson discusses the shared cultural interests of Britain and India that developed after a shared history of colonial rule. Now, as one of the fastest-developing countries in the world, India is still linked to Britain - most recently in the acquisition of British brands Jaguar and Land Rover by the Indian company Tata Motors.

Taylor, Anna-Louise. "Curry: Where did it come from?" *BBC*, October 11, 2013. Accessed January 19, 2016. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/food/0/24432750>.

This article is about the history of curry and its worldwide popularity today. It discusses the various denotations of the word "curry" and delineates the influence of India on British cuisine and culture.

Walsh, Judith E. *A Brief History of India*, 2nd ed. New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2011.

This book covers nearly the entire history of India but provides crucial information about colonial times and the impact of British influence on India. It also examines Ghandi and the nationalist movement during the period of transition to Indian independence.