

An Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India

By Shashi Tharoor

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In 1930, the American historian and philosopher Will Durant wrote that Britain's conscious and deliberate bleeding of India... [was the] greatest crime in all history. He was not the only one to denounce the rapacity and cruelty of British rule, and his assessment was not exaggerated. Almost thirty-five million Indians died because of acts of commission and omission by the British in famines, epidemics, communal riots and wholesale slaughter like the reprisal killings after the 1857 War of Independence and the Amritsar massacre of 1919. Besides the deaths of Indians, British rule impoverished India in a manner that beggars belief. When the East India Company took control of the country, in the chaos that ensued after the collapse of the Mughal empire, India's share of world GDP was 23 per cent. When the British left it was just above 3 per cent. The British empire in India began with the East India Company, incorporated in 1600, by royal charter of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth I, to trade in silk, spices and other profitable Indian commodities. Within a century and a half, the Company had become a power to reckon with in India. In 1757, under the command of Robert Clive, Company forces defeated the ruling Nawab Siraj-ud-Daula of Bengal at Plassey, through a combination of superior artillery and even more superior chicanery. A few years later, the young and weakened Mughal emperor, Shah Alam II, was browbeaten into issuing an edict that replaced his own revenue officials with the Company's representatives. Over the next several decades, the East India Company, backed by the British government, extended its control over most of India, ruling with a combination of extortion, double-dealing, and outright corruption backed by violence and superior force. This state of affairs continued until 1857, when large numbers of the Company's Indian soldiers spearheaded the first major rebellion against colonial rule. After the rebels were defeated, the British Crown took over power and ruled the country ostensibly more benignly until 1947, when India won independence. In this explosive book, bestselling author Shashi Tharoor reveals with acuity, impeccable research, and trademark wit, just how disastrous British rule was for India. Besides examining the many ways in which the colonizers exploited India, ranging from the drain of national resources to Britain, the destruction of the Indian textile, steel-making and shipping industries, and the negative transformation of agriculture, he demolishes the arguments of Western and Indian apologists for Empire on the supposed benefits of British rule, including democracy and political freedom, the rule of law, and the railways. The few unarguable benefits the English language, tea, and cricket were never actually intended for the benefit of the colonized but

introduced to serve the interests of the colonizers. Brilliantly narrated and passionately argued, An Era of Darkness will serve to correct many misconceptions about one of the most contested periods of Indian history.

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Editorial Review

Review

Got my Kindle edition 2 days back & I'm so grateful that it cut short my wait by around 20 days. This is one book which falls in the unputdownable category (i had always thought that this term is absurd and exaggerated) but as i started reading An Era of Darkness ,I just couldn't Stop reading.This generation knows so little about history apart from what we mugup for our history exams.This book categorically dispels some wrong notions that some might have been holding to, also it awakens you to a painful realisation of facts that history books dont dwelve into and leaves you with many whatifs.It is a must read for each and every full blooded Indian.It strikes a patriotic chord and leaves you humbled and saddened at the same time.Id go to the extent of saying that this is his best book ever. --By deepali mohokar on 30 October 2016

Shashi Tharoor's 'An Era of Darkness' is brilliant. It is a solid extension of his Oxford Speech which had gone viral, so anyone who's interested in forming more knowledge about the British Empire in India, this book could very well be their handbook. It is enlightening, lucid and unbiased. --By SB on 8 November 2016

Not a conventional history textbook! An Era of Darkness wonderfully enlightens us about various facets of India s ignored glorious past and simultaneously argues how the scandalous Raj robbed us of it. Every young Indian must read. --By Ruhi on 9 November 2016

About the Author

Shashi Tharoor is the bestselling author of fifteen previous books, both fiction and non-fiction, besides being a noted critic and columnist. His books include the path-breaking satire The Great Indian Novel (1989), the classic India: From Midnight to the Millennium (1997), and most recently, India Shastra: Reflections on the Nation in Our Time (2015). He was a former Under Secretary-General of the United Nations and a former Minister of State for Human Resource Development and Minister of State for External Affairs in the Government of India. He is a two-time member of the Lok Sabha from Thiruvananthapuram and chairs Parliament s External Affairs Committee. He has won numerous literary awards, including a Commonwealth Writers Prize, and was honoured as New Age Politician of the Year (2010) by NDTV. He was awarded the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman, India s highest honour for overseas Indians.

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