



THE BRITISH RAJ



HISTORY

NOBODY TOLD YOU

THE BRITISH RAJ

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 juggernaut

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For Avyan and Yuri



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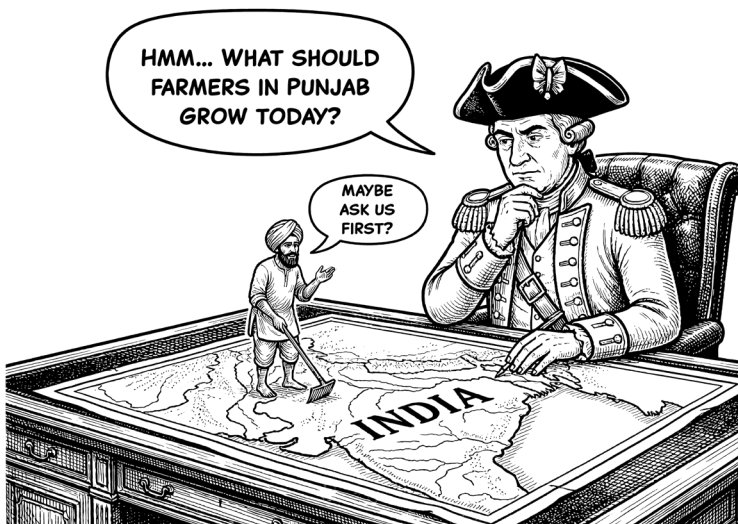
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SETTING THE STAGE

Not very long ago, in fact, probably when your great-grandparents were children, India was ruled by a distant island kingdom called Britain. This period was called the British Raj, and the word *raj* means rule.

Imagine this: important decisions about farmers in Punjab, students in Calcutta or traders in Bombay were being made in London, a city so far away that travelling



there by ship took weeks and weeks. Letters crossed oceans and orders travelled by telegram, and millions of Indians had to live by laws they barely understood, written by people they had never met.

How did this happen? It did not begin with a king marching in with a crown and a trumpet. No, it began with a trading company, the English East India Company, that came looking for spices and profits. But trade slowly turned into control, and control turned into conquest. After a massive revolt in 1857, the British Crown took direct charge. From 1858 to 1947, India officially became part of the British Empire.

Now you might ask me, 'Why should I care about something that ended almost 80 years ago?' Well, one day, someone might send you a message that begins with: 'TRUE HISTORY THEY DON'T TEACH YOU IN SCHOOL ...' It will include a blurry photo, three exclamation marks and a fact so ridiculous that even your pet goldfish would raise an eyebrow. Or maybe, one day, you'll be stuck in a lift with neighbours with nothing to talk about, attending a wedding with grown-ups discussing the barmy Brits or your teacher will suddenly ask, 'Does anyone know why India has so many trains everywhere?' Instead of staring at the ceiling fan, you will calmly say, 'Actually ...'

Setting the Stage



But more seriously, you should care because the India we live in today did not begin with a blank page. It inherited the ways of running the country that had taken shape during the Raj. It also inherited inequalities and difficult problems. Our democracy grew from this knotty past. Our leaders had to decide what to keep, what to change and what to rebuild entirely.

The story of the Raj helps us understand that journey. It helps us see how power works, how resistance grows,

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how ordinary people live through extraordinary times and how freedom is never simple.

Some pages in this book will make you laugh. Some may make you frown. And a few might even make you gasp. But most of all, I hope you will find them terribly interesting.

Let's step back in time and find out.

A NOT-SO-GOLDEN TIMELINE

Did the British simply sail in for spices and somehow ended up ruling India? Not quite. Here is a timeline of the moments that helped the British tighten their grip on India, and how that grip finally loosened.

- 1600: The East India Company is created to trade in parts of the East.



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- 1608: Company ships arrive at Surat. The Mughals allow them to set up trading posts.
- 1757 – Battle of Plassey: Robert Clive defeats the nawab of Bengal, Siraj-ud-Daulah. With one battle, the Company shifts the scales of power. Bengal, one of the richest provinces in the world, begins funding British expansion.
- 1765: After the Battle of Buxar, where the Company defeats the Mughal emperor and two powerful nawabs of Awadh and Bengal, the Company wins the right to collect revenue in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa.



A Not-So-Golden Timeline

- 1790s–1840s: Expansion gathers pace. Mysore falls after fierce wars. The Marathas are defeated. Punjab is annexed, meaning it is taken over by the British. Indian states are absorbed through treaties, warfare and the Doctrine of Lapse, which allowed the British to annex kingdoms without a biological male heir.
- 1857: Indian soldiers rebel against the conditions in the army. The revolt spreads to Delhi, Kanpur, Lucknow and beyond. There are sieges, reprisals and executions. Both sides commit brutalities, but the punishments that follow are huge and carefully planned. The rebellion fails, but it shatters British confidence in the East India Company.
- 1858: The East India Company is dissolved. India comes directly under the British Crown. The British Raj formally begins.
- 1876: Queen Victoria is declared Empress of India. Meanwhile, severe famines in the late 1870s claim millions of lives across parts of India.
- 1885: The Indian National Congress (INC) is founded. Early leaders ask for reforms and greater Indian participation in government. They believe change can come through petitions and debate.
- 1905 – Partition of Bengal: Bengal is divided, but the public reacts with fury. Boycotts of British

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goods spread. Swadeshi becomes a movement. The partition is reversed in 1911, but distrust deepens.

- 1919 – Jallianwala Bagh Massacre: British troops fire on an unarmed gathering in Amritsar. Hundreds are killed.
- 1930 – Salt March: Gandhi walks to the sea and makes salt in defiance of British law. Thousands are arrested.



A Not-So-Golden Timeline

- 1939–1945 – Second World War: Britain declares India at war without consulting Indian leaders. The War drains British resources and weakens the Empire.
- 1942 – Quit India Movement: The demand is direct: leave India. Growing unrest after leaders are jailed and protests erupt across the country.
- 1947 – Independence and Partition: On 15 August, British rule comes to an end. India becomes independent. The subcontinent is partitioned into India and Pakistan. Freedom arrives, but at a terrible human cost.

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THE GREAT INDIAN JIGSAW – EMPIRE EDITION

When English ships first started popping up on Indian shores, they did not find one neat, ready-made 'India'



waiting for them. They sailed into one of the richest and busiest parts of the world, ruled by many different powers – old and new, big and small.

By the early 1700s, the Mughal Empire, which had once controlled most of northern India and large parts of central and southern India, was losing its grip. The emperor in Delhi was still there, but he didn't have as much power as before. Provincial governors and powerful nobles began saying, 'Thanks, but we'll take it from here.' As the Mughals could no longer hold things together, many regions started to act almost like independent kingdoms. This was the world the British traders were slowly slipping into.



In eastern India, Bengal was one of the first regions to break away in practice. Under Murshid Quli Khan (the first nawab of Bengal), and later Alivardi Khan (the fourth nawab of Bengal), the region became almost fully independent, even though it still claimed to respect the Mughal emperor. Bengal grew very rich through farming taxes and busy trade. Merchants from many countries came to buy its silk, cotton and other goods. In the Deccan, Nizam-ul-Mulk, Asaf Jah I founded the state of Hyderabad. He ruled it as his own kingdom, though he kept up the polite formality of being linked to the Mughal emperor. In North India, Awadh followed a similar path. Under Saadat Khan and Safdar Jang, it became a strong regional kingdom with its own army, officials and court.

💡 Some Englishmen arrived way ahead of their friends in the East India Company. One of them was Ralph Fitch, who travelled to places like Goa and Agra in 1583. He wrote about the wealth, markets and busy trade he saw. His stories travelled back to London, making many merchants curious about this rich land in the East.

