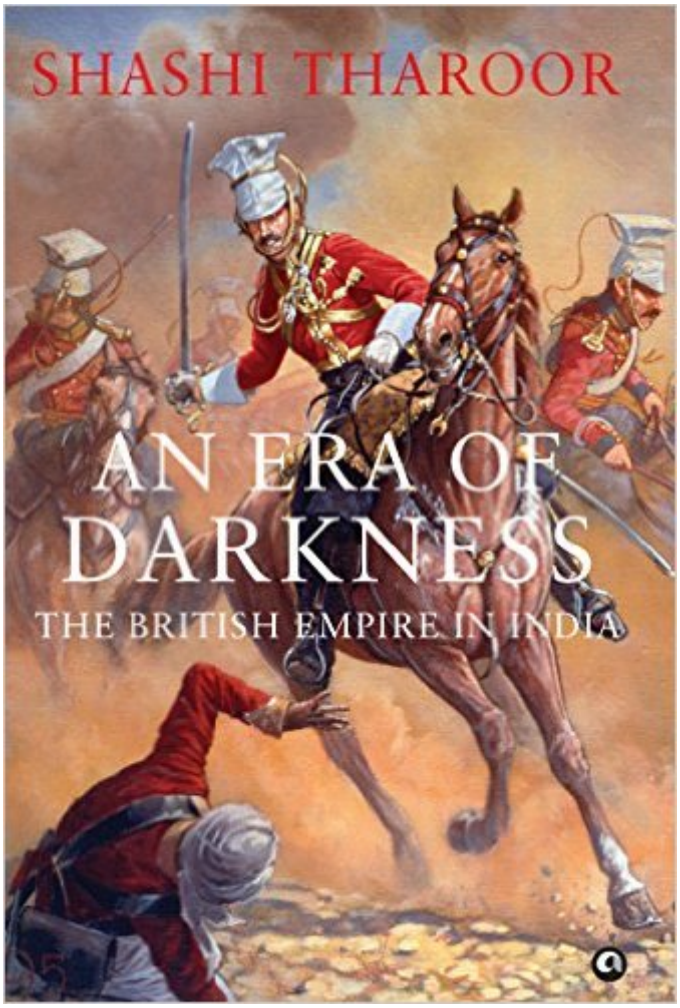
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An Era Of Darkness: The British Empire In India



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Synopsis

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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Customer Reviews

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 2016Shashi 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 2016Not 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

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.

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 Ãƒâ Â£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 monopolyTowards 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.

Great read. Most of Tharoor's writings here are indispensable to the indian american twice removed. I found it an eye-opening read. Although I was not a disillusionist or kool-aid drinking indian of the generation who thought American or British or European imperialism was ever beneficial. tolt could even be argued western ideas of religion, christianity namely is more of a merchant class division or creation to lead global imperialism.And from there we could as we all know , of the non-white races of Europe (with the exception of the Jews- who have enjoyed considerable status and wealth from Roman times).. that the Europeans to these races are Barbarians. The Europeans and consequently, the American all portray and hold this barbaric tenacity from the blood of their ancestors. Hinduism as a faith, India has a whole has always been repeatedly attacked for its institutions and the portrayal of a british empire that did not subjugate and pretty much annihilate a culture and its heterogenous population was on display for a long period of time that even highly

educated indians in the Americas, I am assured do not know much of the history presented here by Tharoor. I think his only dis-service is his lack of inclusion of the spiritual giants that have shaped India. While a somewhat admirer of Gandhi, many feel he was not the answer needed to the satanic onslaught spearheaded by the British for 400 years. I too believe that Gandhi himself was a part result of the British aristocracy in his upbringing and learning, and I think even Tharoor admits the high classes which British themselves constructed only were educated and that british education brings with it passivity. Swami vivekananda is a blazing exemplar of what they are not. Completely educated and founded in his great illustrious teacher, Ramakrishna Dev, and in India- he brings best forth the most uncompromising view of the grandeur, and nay superiority of the indian to the european- though he was broad minded- I am not- Europeans are the descendants of barbarians. Hence their course of action would not surprise people like me. But i think to the gentle gandhi, even the soft spoken Tharoor- there is still some skipping around for fear of insulting the other party. The truth, is this book really could of been longer and more detailed- as I would like to know even more of these gruesome details. It all plays to the real narrative, that these men from this draconian island, were no more than beasts, wild, untamed, immoral, as to the mothers that bred them... This what needs to be examined by the indian intelligentsia. What makes the American a beast, what makes his european counterpart a war monger, a deadly animal, a viral poison- and all the pacifist races, Indians, Africans, Asians- Latins - what makes them so the opposite? This is a good book no doubt. But the psychology of what is the anglo-saxon- the animal that he envelops and proceeded to act in such a way and have it covered up in dressed history is a sham we all need to expose and acknowledge in this current chapter of history.But bravo to Tharoor for this great read. It was fascinating and wonderful. The European and his idiot American progeny has been spouting nonsense in terms of Indic history from the gaping holes of white men for too long. No words can convey gratitude to Tharoor.

A well researched book on the destruction of india, the robbing and destruction of Indian wealth and industry ..British evil empire facts

Book is very well-written and is easy reading. Writers' opinions are based on facts. The book was also highly recommended by a leading financial publication. I enjoyed the book greatly.

A well-written book that offers a perspective of history from the side of the colonized people. Dr. Tharoor's arguments are not confined to that of history alone, but also reflects the cuurent

neo-imperial make up of the global economic order. Not making any excuses for the relative backwardness of India’s economy nor the weaknesses in its current political and social order, the book offers good context of the institutions that still exist after being established by the British to subjugate Indians. The lessons offered in the book extends beyond the British rule of India. It relates to the continued efforts of the Western powers to exploit the East and its people. Asians in particular would do well to learn from the lessons of history that have been taught to us over and over again.

Only through first chapter yet, but so far so good, albeit with a LOT of repetition of the same theme. Will write again after the full book is read. The cost of the book in USD is ridiculously high when compared to the Indian print edition (which is what is mailed out to US customers anyway !- Total rip off)

Illuminating and an eye opener. Shashi Tharoor writes without rancor and with just the right touch of outrage. The next time I watch one of these extravagant English dramas extolling their peers I will have some idea of where most of their ill gotten wealth came from.

Very informative of the time period that India was ruled by the British. Some stuff I never knew came to light.

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