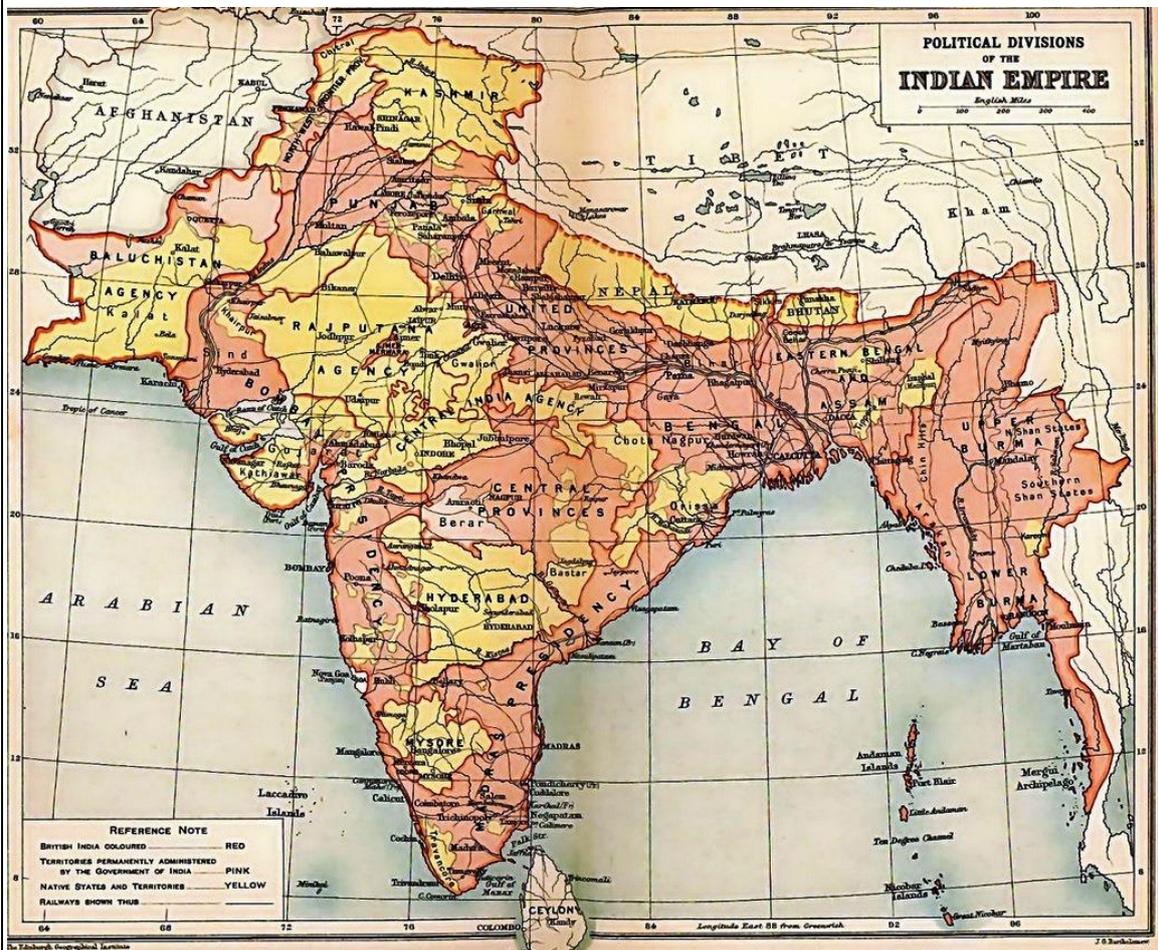


Week 5: Britain in India, India in Britain. Goodness, gracious me!



The Indian subcontinent was the jewel in the crown of British Empire, ruled from 1858 to 1947. British rule in India ran from 28 June 1858 when, after the Indian Rebellion of 1857, the land and properties of the British East India Company were transferred to the Crown in the person of Queen Victoria. In 1876, Queen Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India.

As a state, the British Empire in India functioned as the guardian of a system of interconnected markets maintained and controlled by military power, business legislation and monetary management. It lasted until 1947, when the British Indian Empire was partitioned into two sovereign dominion states: the Dominion of India (later the Republic of India) and the Dominion of Pakistan (later the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the eastern part of which, in the 1970s, became the People's Republic of Bangladesh).

The history of Britain's disengagement from India does little credit to the Empire. Britain left in a hurry, leaving India to manage the terrors of partition

as Muslim India split from India, becoming Pakistan.

With the partition of 1947, the Indo-Pakistan war of 1965, the Bangladeshi war of independence from Pakistan, there were in effect several waves of emigration to Britain from India, and many layers of subcontinental Asian settler in Britain.

By the sixties, Indian accents had become something of a national joke, as in the 1960 hit single “Goodness, Gracious Me!” with Peter Sellers (helped by Sophia Loren) as the British idea of India.

### **1972, The Ugandan Asians**

Former British colonies in Africa have populations of South Asian descent, brought there from British India to do clerical work or construction or farm



work. In the 1890s, 32,000 labourers from British India were brought to Southeast Africa under indentured labour contracts to work on the construction of the Uganda Railway. Most of the surviving Indians returned home, but around 7,000 decided to remain in the African Great Lakes after the line’s completion.

Many Indians in Southeast Africa and Uganda worked as tailors and bankers, in British-owned businesses. Indians constituted only 1% of the Ugandan population, but received 1/5<sup>th</sup> of the national income.

After Idi Amin came to power, he exploited pre-existing Indophobia and spread propaganda against Indians and scapegoated the Indian minority, in August 1972 expelling around 40,000 men, women and children from Uganda.

In total, around 5,500 companies and farms, homes and property were taken from the Ugandan Asians and reallocated to individuals and government bodies.

The 40,000 Ugandan Asians who came to Britain have been a success story in business, politics and the arts.



### **A 'love affair'...**

Britain is sometimes said to have had a “love affair” with India, born of their shared history and expressed in cultural terms – food, drink, games, language and class or caste. Tea, that most English of drinks, was first cultivated in India by British growers and has become a comforting ritual. Cricket, introduced to India by the British, polo, which began in northeast India and was later encoded by the British, and deeply embedded in the class system.

Then there is language. English is Britain’s legacy to India, which has the world’s largest English-speaking population, but Hindi has spiced English with



many words and terms codified in English dictionaries: chit, guru, jungle, pyjamas, pundit, sentry, shampoo, and thug, and many more.

Indian cuisine long ago surpassed fish-and-chips as Britain’s most popular restaurant food, or rather Anglo-Indian food since some dishes such as chicken tikka masala, are a British invention.

### **...with racist undertones**

When one nation colonizes another, assumptions both of superiority and of a concomitant inferiority are bred in the colonizing race - “We control them, therefore we are better than them”. From the British in India to the Japanese in Korea, the negative effects of colonialism are well known.

In the 1950s, racist sentiments were largely expressed against West Indian and Irish immigrants, but during the 1970s the National Front and other racist organisations gathered membership and political strength and attacked British Asians. Today, most racist attacks are spontaneous encounters in British cities, while the countryside is an unenforced whites-only zone.



Attacks on Asian people became more frequent in the 1980s and 90s. “Paki-bashing” became a phenomenon in the cities. Football matches attracted racist youths. Made to feel that they did not belong in Britain, Asian youth toughened up and sought their identity elsewhere, most recently

and tragically as jihadis in the Middle East.