

# BBC Bitesize GCSE History – The British Empire

## Episode 4 – The British Raj

**Announcer:** BBC Sounds, music, radio, podcasts.

**Katie:** I'm Katie Charlwood.

**Datshiane:** And I'm Datshiane Navanayagam.

**Katie:** And this is BBC Bitesize History.

**Datshiane:** This is the fourth episode in an eight-part series on the British Empire, in which there are some upsetting descriptions of a dark period in history, so do feel free to pause and reflect if you need to.

**Katie:** Throughout the series, we are looking at the key moments in the development of the British Empire. In the second episode, we looked at Britain's influence and eventual colonisation of India.

**Datshiane:** In this episode, we'll pick up after the First War of Indian Independence in 1857. We'll look at the nationalist movement that emerged and the events leading up to independence and the partition of India.

**Katie:** Along the way, we'll be sharing revision hints and tips on how to remember those key facts.

**Datshiane:** So get ready to take some notes to help you.

**Katie:** OK, so let's start with where we left off after Episode 2 in 1857 and the Indian Rebellion.

**Datshiane:** Now that rebellion was a turning point in British control in India. It was one that sowed the seeds of nationalism and it highlighted the need for self-governance. Let's continue with how events unfolded and the short- and long-term consequences.

**Katie:** The British response to the uprising led by the Indian Sepoys was violent and bloody. Sepoys, remember, were Indian soldiers originally serving the British, but who then rebelled. The punishment given to the Indian rebels by the British was very brutal. I have here a poem by British poet Martin Topper in 1857 about the massacres. He wrote: 'And England now avenge their wrongs by vengeance deep and dire. Cut out their cancer with the sword and burn it out with fire. Destroy their traitor regions, hang every pariah hound, and hunt them down to death in all hills and cities around.'

**Datshiane:** And an Indian civilian describes his experience of seeing the British attack on the Fort of Jhansi in April 1858. He says: 'The English began entering the city and shooting down every man they saw and setting fire to houses. They sought out males from the age of five to the age of eight and they killed them. Thousands of white soldiers entered the city from all sides and commenced massacring people. The terror in the city at this time was immeasurable. The screaming and crying was endless.'

**Katie:** Both sources from two different perspectives show the full scale of the violent vengeance that Britain took after the 1857 rebellion that was a very serious and dark event in history.

**Datshiane:** Now remember, whenever you use a source, you have to ask yourself how reliable it is, and would it be useful for a historian to use as evidence? So this means looking at who wrote it, when it was written, and what was the purpose of writing it.

**Katie:** Why not hit pause here and write a comparison of these sources yourself. The conflict continued for another year, ending in July 1858 with the rebellion crushed by the British. The rebellion in India is referred to as the First War of Independence, as it was the first major pushback against British rule. It marked a big change and ultimately led to the dissolution, or end, of the East India Company.

**Datshiane:** However, Britain still wanted India to be part of its empire, and so the British Crown took direct control with the Government of India Act in 1858, which set up a new government department called the India Office, and a viceroy was put in charge of India on behalf of Queen Victoria. Now, this is the beginning of what was called the British Raj.

**Katie:** The British went further with big social and administrative changes to strengthen and stabilise British control over the country. These reforms were motivated by the need to improve governance, maintain order and of course, prevent resistance among the Indian population.

**Datshiane:** Indians themselves were given jobs in local government. A new professional middle class of Indian citizen emerged. Now, this is important when we come to the emergence of the Indian Freedom Movement. English was also taught in schools and universities were created in key cities. But whilst all this was going on, the British also intensified racial discrimination, imposing discriminatory laws and policies that favoured British officials and settlers, whilst limiting opportunities for Indians. They also reorganised the Indian army, ensuring greater control and reducing the chances of future rebellions.

**Katie:** The educated Indian class pushed for change and created the Indian Nationalist Movement, and in 1885 the Indian National Congress or INC. Initially, the Indian National Congress was seeking moderate reforms, but other movements and people emerged later with bigger ideas of independence. OK, the resistance against British rule was growing and by the early 20th century, leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak advocated for Swaraj, a Sanskrit word meaning self-rule.

**Datshiane:** There were also other religious identity-based groups emerging. The Muslim League was founded in 1906, and it initially sought to protect Muslim interests, but later it demanded a separate Muslim state.

**Katie:** Mahatma Gandhi began and led mass movements emphasising non-violent resistance. His actions shook the British in India up with his non-violent protests like non-cooperation in 1920, followed by Civil Disobedience in 1933 and Quit India in 1942.

**Datshiane:** Gandhi is a key figure in Indian history. He said that Britain had no place in India. In 1938, he wrote in his book Indian Home Rule that: 'India has become impoverished by

Britain's government. They take away our money from year to year. The most important jobs are reserved for themselves. We are kept in a state of slavery. They behave insolently towards us and disregard our feelings.'

**Katie:** So, an exam question might ask you to consider the reasons why there was an increasing demand for independence. Have a go and write your answer to that question after this podcast. You might include that the social elite and middle classes who used their relative status and power to campaign against and question British rule, were teaching political ideas like democracy, freedom and nationalism.

**Datshiane:** But Katie, there's also the role of millions of Indian soldiers fighting for Britain in the two world wars, who felt that they were fighting to defend freedom, only to find that India was still not free. They thought it was wrong to stop the Nazis occupying other countries but not fight to stop Britain occupying theirs.

**Katie:** And so when the Second World War ended in 1945, Britain no longer had the resources to hold on to India when the nation was so determined to rule itself.

**Datshiane:** In 1946, Britain finally agreed to Indian independence. However, many Muslims did not want to live under a Hindu majority and the Muslim League demanded a second Muslim country to be created whilst the INC wanted one united independent India.

**Katie:** When the last viceroy of India, Lord Mountbatten, arrived in India with the task of creating an independent Indian state, he felt that the best decision was to partition India. This was because there were growing levels of violence between Hindus and Muslims.

**Datshiane:** However, Gandhi strongly believed that partition was not the way to resolve this issue, and he opposed it.

**Katie:** Despite Gandhi's opposition, partition happened on the 15th of August 1947. The Indian Independence Act divided British India into two countries, India with a Hindu majority and Pakistan with a Muslim majority.

**Datshiane:** Partition saw human suffering happen on a large scale overnight as 15 million people became religious minorities and had to cross borders. It led to violence within communities who had previously lived peacefully together, side by side, and also it led to the displacement of millions.

**Katie:** And one million people died in the violence that broke out, although some historians estimate that the death toll may be higher.

**Datshiane:** It saw seven million Muslims, who were living in India, flee to Pakistan and the same number of Hindus and Sikhs flee to India. As Katie says, at least one million people are thought to have died and sadly, the tensions from partition continue to this day, especially over regions like Kashmir.

**Katie:** Several months after partition, Gandhi was assassinated.

**Datshiane:** He was assassinated as he was going to afternoon prayers on the 30th of January 1948 by a member of a right-wing Hindu group who had accused him of having betrayed Hindus by being too pro-Muslim and soft on Pakistan. This episode has looked at some difficult and serious issues. You might want to reflect on them or discuss these within your class or friends after the podcast.

**Katie:** But for now, a quick test on your knowledge. As always, you'll have three questions and five seconds to write your answers down. Here goes. Datshiane, what was the title of the official appointed to represent British authority in India after 1858?

**Datshiane:** That would be the viceroy.

**Katie:** Which Indian nationalist organisation was formed in 1885 to seek greater Indian participation in government?

**Datshiane:** The Indian National Congress.

**Katie:** Right, what happened after the partition in 1947?

**Datshiane:** So, India was split into India and the newly created Pakistan.

**Katie:** Great, well done if you got them all right.

**Datshiane:** So, here's a quick summary to remind ourselves on the significance of 1857 for Britain and India.

**Katie:** For India, it was a turning point that sowed the seeds of nationalism, and highlighted the need for self-governance.

**Datshiane:** For Britain it marked a shift from company to Crown rule, leading to more direct and centralised control over India.

**Katie:** And the key reasons to remember on why Britain left India include the growing nationalist movements, which made British rule increasingly difficult.

**Datshiane:** Indian soldiers who had served Britain during the Second World War, who wanted their own freedom.

**Katie:** And Britain being economically weakened and unable to afford to maintain its empire.

**Datshiane:** We'll go into that more in a later episode.

**Katie:** Independence led to two new states, India and Pakistan, but the impact of partition led to more loss of many lives and mass migration.

**Datshiane:** And once again you have the interlink between colonialism, politics and migration. There's loads more on this and other history topics on the Bitesize website, as well as in other episodes in this series.

**Katie:** In the next episode, we'll be looking at another dark period in history, the slave trade and slavery in the Caribbean colonies.

**Datshiane:** That episode will include descriptions of violence, exploitation and the inhuman conditions endured by enslaved people. These subjects can be distressing, and they may be difficult to hear.

**Katie:** Thank you for listening.