

British Rule in India: Two Perspectives

History can often be thought of as a tale told by the person who recorded it. For example, the rebellion of 1857 was called the “Sepoy Mutiny” by the British. However, it is known to Indian people as the “First war of Indian independence”. The word “mutiny” gives the sense that the Indians were traders to the British, but the term “independence” give the sense that the Indians were fighting for their freedom. This is true throughout all of history, which is why it is crucial to analyze historical events from every possible perspective.



Two Tales of British Imperialism

Below are two accounts of British rule in India; one told by a British school textbook and one told by an Indian school textbook. Compare the two versions of British rule in India and decide which were the most helpful and the most harmful to the Indian people.

A British textbook’s view of British rule in India	An Indian textbook’s view of British rule in India
A) The British restored order to India with new laws and the military enforcement. They cleared India of bandits. By the early 19th century, political and internal security was achieved.	B) British rule was against the interests of the majority of Indians. Natural resources were exploited to benefit only the British. Land-ownership and industrial policies favored the British.
C) The British enforced a single law for all Indians. Muslim and Hindu, upper and lower caste, rich and poor, all were subject to the same law. In addition, the British banned the Caste system and the practice of sati (Hindu custom of a widow burning herself alive on her husband’s funeral fire).	D) British missionaries and government officials threatened Indian religious and social customs. The Indian people had no say in the government of their country. The people employed in Indian civil service positions were mostly British. The exams for these high-paying, respected jobs were given only in England, and most Indians could not afford to travel all the way there.
E) In 1835, English became the official language of India. The British set up a school system and increased literacy. English education helped create a class of persons Indian in blood and color, but British in taste, values, and intellect,	F) After 1857, the British practiced racial discrimination against the Indians. Everything Indian was taught to be barbaric and inferior. Entry by Indians in many public places was prohibited. Indians were not allowed to have their own newspapers or own guns.
G) The laying of the world’s third largest railroad network was a major British achievement. The railroads enabled India to develop a modern economy and brought unity to the connected regions. A modern road network, telephone and telegraph lines, dams, bridges, and irrigation canals helped India modernize.	H) The British restricted Indian run industries. Instead of food the British forced Indians to plant only cash crops. Because of this many famines occurred in the late 1800’s

THE MOST HELPFUL EFFECT	THE MOST HARMFUL EFFECT

Take a side!

Did British imperialism in India help or hurt the Indian people?

Using at least three specific facts (evidence) from today’s lesson, you are to take a side and answer the question above. You must argue only one side for the purpose of this exercise. Your answer must be at least 5 sentences long and be written on loose leaf paper. Be ready to share your answer and hand in your work.