

[Days of the Raj](#)

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Published by Anonymous on Nov. 02, 1990

Days of the Raj

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The days of the British "raj" (ruler) are a time many Indians like to forget and Britishers love to remember. But since October 18th, in London's National Portrait Gallery, this time of British colonial rule in India (1600-1947) is being exhibited so spectacularly that few are offended and many are enthralled.

Commemorating this period, a unique selection of paintings, photographs, objects d'art and memorabilia are on display. Lectures and films educate, while tea-tasting and dance performances satisfy cultural appetites. Interestingly, a special feminist dance expression of Mallika Sarabhai called "Shakti, the power of Women" has been especially successful.

The exhibition is a real playland for kids. Special workshops for them in painting and dance allow fun exploration of India's classical arts. Getting their feet "wet" and fingers dirty is a child's way of acquiring culture.

The exhibit has worked hard to hold a neutral bias, neither glorifying nor disparaging British rule. The approach is sensitive and sober. "What we have tried to do is to provide a historical narrative of Indian history during the British period," explains Dr. Bayly of Cambridge University and principle academic consultant to the exhibition. "To define it widely, it is especially essential to show to the British audience, in particular, that before the British rule India was a great center of trade and production. Therefore, we put in very fine Mughal miniatures, weapons and textiles. Then we show the works of the very fine British portrait artists that went there in the 18th century. Later on, after the 1890's, of course the exhibition puts lots of emphasis on the emergence of Indian nationalism and the freedom struggle, with works by Indian artists, photographers and political cartoonists.

Indian philosopher Rajnarayan Chandavarkar stated in the exhibit's official catalogue: "In 1990, British travelers [to India] expecting to encounter the familiar as a residue of colonial rule are liable to be bemused. Two centuries of rule failed to fashion India in Britain's image." Another is Francis Robinson's insight: "In 1911 India bought more British exports than any other country. She ranged from the fifth to the second most favoured destination for British capital investment. Most important of all, her taxes paid for a highly trained army of 250,000 men which promoted the British Imperial enterprise from China to Africa. She was the crowning jewel."

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