THE MAGIC OF INDIAN CRICKET

Cricket and society in India

Revised edition

MIHIR BOSE

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

Sport in the Global Society

Series Editors: J. A. Mangan and Boria Majumdar

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The Magic of Indian Cricket

In the last twenty years, Indian cricket – like India itself – has been transformed. With the arrival of global television networks, mass-media coverage and multinational sponsors, cricket has become big business and India has become the economic driving force in the world game. For the first time, a developing country has become a major player in the international sports arena.

This fully updated and revised edition of Mihir Bose's classic study of Indian cricket is a unique and involving account of the Indian cricket phenomenon. Drawing on a combination of extensive research and personal experience, Bose traces the development of the Indian game from its beginnings as a colonial pastime to its coming of age as a national passion and now a global powerhouse. This illuminating study reveals Indian cricket's central place in modern India's identity, culture and society.

Insightful, honest and challenging, Bose tackles the myths and controversies of Indian cricket. He considers the game in terms of race, caste, politics, national consciousness and ambition, money, celebrity and the media, evoking all the unpredictability, frustration and glory that is the magic of Indian cricket.

Mihir Bose is an award-winning cricket and sports news correspondent for *The Daily Telegraph*. He is also the author of a number of books, including *A History of Indian Cricket* and *Raj, Secrets, Revolution: A Life of Subhas Chandra Bose*. He lives in London.

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To the memory of Ramesh, who knew nothing about cricket but taught me so much about life and who I miss greatly,

And to Munir, Gulu and Vidya, with whom I have shared so many wonderful cricketing moments.

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Contents

Acknowledgements

Twenty years ago when I first wrote this book, books of this nature on Indian cricket were totally unknown. It resulted, like so many things in life, through a happy accident. I was originally meant to write a biography of a great Indian cricketer, but I was diverted into looking at what made cricket take root in India.

It came about this way.

Some years ago I had written a biography of Keith Miller for George Allen & Unwin. It did not, as I had fantasised, make my fortune – none of my books have – but my publishers were pleased and suggested that I write another book. We eventually settled on a biography of Ranji. I was half way through the book when we learned that Alan Ross was about to publish his biography of Ranji. The project was abandoned and it was then that an idea of a book on Indian cricket, which would look beyond the hype and the mystique, suggested itself. John Newth encouraged the idea but above all Derek Wyatt mixed the carrots and sticks in the right proportion to induce me to come up with the goods.

Much has changed in Indian cricket and society in the last twenty years and I have had to completely revise and update the book including adding new chapters to reflect the emergence of Indian as the economic powerhouse of world cricket.

I am grateful to Boria Majumdar for encouraging me to look again at Indian cricket and society and to produce this revised edition, more accurately reflecting both contemporary Indian cricket and its social mores.

Over the years I have, of course, incurred many other debts.

I am grateful to John Lovesey, David Robson and Chris Navarat, successive Sports Editors of the *Sunday Times*, for their help and encouragement. John, in particular, was brave enough to hire me in the first place. I also learnt much from Nick Mason and Jim Pegg, both about journalism and cricket.

I cannot adequately express my thanks to David Welch, former Sports Editor of the *Daily Telegraph* and Keith Perry, present Sports Editor, a paper for whom I now work. They have given me scope to not only write about cricket but various other sports business and political issues. This has considerably widened my range and allowed me to learn a great deal more about cricket and society. Keith, of course, is more than an editor but a

friend and, like me, as a Tottenham supporter, aware of the anguish of loving a sporting team that often fails to deliver. I would also like to thank the superb backbench team of the *Daily Telegraph* Sports Desk, and the sub-editors they marshal, who have often rescued me from my own inadequacies and made me appear more knowledgeable and authoritative than I really am. If Daniel Evans, the Deputy Sports Editor, did send me into the jaws of Robert Mugabe by asking me to cover the Zimbabwe versus Sri Lanka series, it did provide me with an experience I shall always cherish.

Paul Barker, then editor of *New Society*, accepted my very first article analysing the impact on Indian society made by Tony Greig during England's 1976–7 Tour of India. That article started me on this journey and I cannot thank him enough. Since then many others have encouraged me by publishing my ideas and views on Indian cricket, which form the basis of this book. They include Jerome Burne and Don Atyeo, then Editors of *Time Out*, Gillian Greenwood, former Editor of the *Literary Review*, and the late Sharad Kotnis of *Sportsweek*. Vinod Mehta, the doyen of Indian editors, now editing *Outlook Magazine*, has always been a great supporter and friend.

Many friends in India and England have, over the years, sustained – or suffered – my constant discourses on cricket, and particularly Indian cricket. Some, like Edwin, Bala and Hubert, feature in this book; others, like Munir, remain good friends proving distance need not always sever childhood ties. English friends, even those indifferent to cricket, have indulged my favourite preoccupation. Cricket, particularly club cricket, has introduced me to a circle of friends I would never have otherwise met and I am grateful to all of them.

David Smith, Nigel Dudley, Richard Heller, Peter Oborne and Garth Hewitt have all encouraged my fantasies of being a good cricketer and even better cricket writer. Mark and Rose Streatfeild, in their very different ways, have been marvellously helpful over the years.

My parents and their friends indulged my love for the game and without the large retinue of servants and staff that my father employed, I would certainly not have been introduced to maidan cricket the way I was. I thank them and my sisters Tripti and Panna, for their patience and understanding, and to my father's staff for their cooperation. In particular, Shankar, Arjun and Mr Kandalgoakar, who was given time off by my father to escort me to Test matches.

My wife Caroline has had to bridge a huge cultural divide in getting to know Sachin Tendulkar and reconcile herself to accommodating my yellow bound *Wisdens* in a sitting room which she feels is more suitable for the red of *Debrett's*. She has even begun to appreciate that Tendulkar is not diminished by being in *Wisden* rather in *Debrett's*.

Above all I owe the greatest debt of gratitude to Indian cricket and its cricketers. My earliest memory of Test cricket is being taken to the house of a friend of my mother's whose verandah conveniently overlooked the Brabourne Stadium. Checking through *Wisden* I can now actually place the date. It was 15 December 1951, the second day of the second Test match between India and England. As I recall, we were meant to watch Hazare grind England to dust. But in trying to hook a short pitched ball from Ridgeway he played it onto his forehead, cutting it badly. *Wisden* says that 'not only did that affect his batting in the match, but he seemed to lose all confidence and was never the same player in the three remaining Tests'. All that history has come later. I was four then, but I can still recall the surprise and anguish felt on the balcony as Hazare retired. Since then, Indian cricket has often surprised me, caused me a great deal of anguish but also provided moments of great joy. This book, although it may not read like that, is meant to repay some of the enjoyment I have had from Indian cricket.

Mihir Bose, London
Autumn 2005

Series editors' foreword

'Anatomical dissection gives the human mind an opportunity to compare the dead with the living, things severed with things intact, things destroyed with things evolving and opens up the profoundness of nature to us more than any other endeavour or consideration.'[1]

The Magic of Indian Cricket dissects India's national obsession to understand the Indian state in all its myriad contradictions and complexities.

'It was and remains self-evident that sport has been a core cultural marker, East and West, since the mid-nineteenth century, yet it has taken several academic generations for this to become widely accepted within the historical mainstream.'[2]

This truism is best exemplified in the case of the subcontinent. In that context, *The Magic of Indian Cricket* is a singular contribution; not only to an understanding of Indian cricket, but also to the wider acceptance of work on sport as mainstream historical literature.

Just as a sculptor tries to carve out each part of his statuette with scrupulous assiduousness attempting to breathe life into every minute detail and attain perfection in the process, *The Magic of Indian Cricket*, revised and updated, attempts to enable cricket devotees and intellectuals alike to relive the magic moments from India's centuries-old tryst with this once-alien game; the joy and the agony, excitement and ecstasy, ruse and intrigue, spread over a 200-year-old cricketing eon with few parallels in the history of modern global sport.

'If you ask any Dominican what he is proudest of, he will read you a list of ballplayers. This country doesn't have much, but we know we are the best in the world at one thing (baseball). That's not bragging, because it's true. And we plan to continue being the best in the world at it.'[3]

India is not yet the best in world cricket, that accolade is reserved for the Australians. Yet, if you ask an average Indian what he is most proud of, he will rattle off the names of the nation's leading cricketers. Not without reason is it said that captaining India is the second most difficult job in the country after the Prime Minister. The richness of Indian cricket is such that Ashis Nandy's aphorism, 'Cricket is an Indian game accidentally discovered by the English'[4] often rings true.

As has been suggested in *Twenty-Two Yards to Freedom: A Social History of Indian Cricket*, 'when we turn our attention to a very particular

arena of Indian sport – cricket – the narrative of "backwardness," "catching up" and "gloom," commonly associated with India, ceases. Cricket is the only realm where the Indians can flex their muscles on the world stage; it is her only instrument to have a crack at world domination. It is, to put it simply, much more than a "game" for Indians.'[5]

Berry Sarbadhikary, India's greatly respected cricket writer, was correct when he argued, 'Cricket is a fascinating subject but Indian cricket is more so because of the peculiar traits of the Indians who play it . . . To point this out is not to extol the Indian at cricket as against others, just as Gandhiji's loin cloth does not necessarily constitute the ideal in the Indian national dress nor an example to the rest of the world. Yet, both are significant; they reveal the nation through the game or through the kit – for the better or for the worse.'[6]

The Magic of Indian Cricket advances this argument to the hilt.

J. A. Mangan
Boria Majumdar

Series editors
Sport in the Global Society

Notes

1 Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe (1749–1832); We were reminded of this immortal saying while visiting the exhibition 'Body Worlds', at the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago. 'Body Worlds' was the museum's special exhibit for the summer of 2005.
2 Brian Stoddart, 'Sport, Cultural Imperialism and Colonial Response in the British Empire: A Framework for Analysis', *Comparative Studies In Society And History*, 14, 3 (1987), p. 649.
3 Manuel Mota of the Dominican Republic, playing for the Los Angeles Dodgers; quoted in Alan Klein, *Sugarball: The American Game, the Dominican Dream* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 1.
4 Ashis Nandy, *The Tao of Cricket* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 1.
5 Boria Majumdar, *Twenty-Two Yards to Freedom: A Social History of Indian Cricket*, (New Delhi: Penguin-Viking, 2004), p. 5.
6 Berry Sarbadhikary, *Indian Cricket Uncovered* (Calcutta: Illustrated News, 1945), p. 1.

1

India – whose India?

Sometime in the 1930s Jawaharlal Nehru, independent India's first Prime Minister was addressing a large political gathering. He was then leading the Indians in their epic fight for freedom from British colonial rule and as he spoke that day, like so often before, the crowd shouted 'Bharat Mata ki jai' (Long Live Mother India). It was the common political greeting of Indian crowds and Nehru had heard it often. But that day, as the cry was raised, he stopped speaking and, pointing to the crowd, asked 'What is Mother India? What does it mean to you?'

The crowd were mystified. They were not used to their political leaders asking them questions but Nehru insisted on a reply and, slowly, some of them pointed to the ground to indicate that was Mother India. Nehru interrupted them with that mixture of impatience and haughtiness that so characterised him and told his audience that if Mother India, to whom they were wishing a long life meant anything, it meant them, not the earth on which they stood. 'It is you, all of you together, you are India.' The crowd cheered ever more lustily and the incident was to become famous – almost every Nehru biographer has narrated it. In later years Nehru, himself, would make that impromptu question and answer session part of his unique method of arousing and educating an Indian crowd.

But if Nehru scored an important, populist point, the question: 'What is India, what does it represent?' is not easily answered. India is as confusing to Indians themselves as it is to foreigners. Even the name India is not something given by Indians. The Persians and the Greeks, trying to define the people who lived along the river Sindhu, tumbled on the words Indian and Hindu. Sindhu, a Sanskrit word, seemed too much for the ancient Persians and Greeks. They corrupted it to Indus – which is what the great river of the Punjab is called – and then in trying to define the inhabitants of the region around the river Indus the Persian and Greek tongues diverged. The Persian word was aspirated and came out as Hindu, the Greek one was softly breathed and came out as India. In this curious, convoluted, way Indian history was made, India came to stand for the subcontinent beyond the Indus bounded by the Himalayas, while Hindu became the word used to define the religion of the people who inhabited the region. Sixteenth-century European travellers arriving in India had called the Hindus by various names, the Portuguese for instance called

them Gentio, meaning heathen, which was corrupted to gentoos to distinguish them from the Moors, the name these southern Europeans had long used for Muslims.

Many centuries later the Orientalists discovering India added another twist. They realised the Hindus had no name for their religion. The Hindus knew it – and still know it – as Sanatan Dharma: The Eternal Way. But Orientalists now coined the term Hinduism to describe the complex beliefs that underpinned the religion. As Nirad Chaudhuri has pointed out, on that analogy, the Greek religion might be called Hellenism or even Graecism. The Orientalists could hardly have realised the consequences of their actions. In modern India the word Indian represents all Indians of whatever religion. The country is secular, every religious group has full religious and political rights, and Indian cricketers like Irfan Pathan and Mohammed Kaif would be most upset if you called them Hindus. They are Muslims and call themselves Indians without realising that they might as well call themselves Hindus since the two words are the same.

The modern name of India could very well have been Hindusthan, land of the Hindus. In 1947 when free India emerged many of the departing British, who made no secret of their loathing for the Hindus and their preference for the Muslims, called it by that name. Indeed on 1 July 1947, six weeks before Indian independence, a meeting took place in the India Office in London when opposition leaders from both the Conservative and Liberal parties met Labour ministers to discuss the Independence Bill that Parliament was about to consider. It was this bill that led to the granting of freedom for India and the creation of the new dominion of Pakistan. The note of the meeting reads:

> Use of the title India for Hindusthan. There was a certain uneasiness about this based on a feeling that that it would antagonise the Muslims and was not justified on merits. There was moreover a feeling that the 'Union of India' should be kept for any organisation wider than either Dominion which may develop.

The documents of that period disclosed in the 12-volume British government's Transfer of Power series – indicate that had Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the creator of Pakistan, objected strongly to the term India, the British may have baulked at its use. In that case there would certainly have been problems in the independent country being called India. But Jinnah did not care. He was more concerned with the design of the flag the governors-general of the new dominions would have. And so on 15 August 1947 the new dominion got the name India without any visible fuss.

What independent India did with its foreign acquired name was not change it but have two names, one for external consumption, one for internal purposes. In Indian languages the country is called not India but Bharat and the Indian government is called the Bharat Sarkar, Bharat government. Bharatvarsha, the land of Bharat, was, after all the ancient name by which the landmass we call the Indian subcontinent was known and, as the historian D. P. Singhal has put it, 'the concept of Bharatvarsha was one of the country which lay north of the ocean and south of the snowy mountains. Kings and emperors attempted to bring all Bharatvarsha ranging from the Himalayas to Kanya Kumari (Cape Comorin) under one authority and call themselves chakravartin'. Indeed it is significant that the highest honour in independent India is called the Bharat Ratna, The Jewel of Bharat, an honour that many Indians feel should be bestowed on Sachin Tendulkar (so far he has the Khel Ratna, the Game Jewel). The modern Indian cricket fans copying English cricket's Barmy army call themselves the Bharat army. However, when it comes to singing at cricket matches they sing not Bharat but India's name. So in November 2004, as India won a thrilling victory over Australia by just 13 runs in Mumbai, in the last Test of a losing series the chant was India jitaga, India will win, not Bharat jitaga, Bharat will win, which would have been more logical. It would also been in tune with the shouts of the crowd at Nehru's meeting: Bharat Mata Ki Jai.

In this the Indians are different to the Greeks. The name Greece, too, is foreign in origin deriving from Grekos which came into use during the Turkish occupation. The original name for the country is Hellas and during the Athens Olympics in 2004. Greek fans watching the Olympics did not chant Greece, Greece, as Indians did in Mumbai but Hellas, Hellas. This chanting was particularly ferocious during the athletic events in the Olympic stadiums. Before the Olympics the Greeks had hoped to see their two stars in these events, Kostas Kenteris and Ekatherina Thanou, take the honours but a failure to provide a drug test led to their withdrawing from the Olympics amidst much controversy and the Greek crowds used the chants of Hellas to vent their feelings and reinforce their nationalist credentials. But then unlike the Greeks the Indian use of the word Bharat is somewhat selective. In Greece the Olympic Association, is called the Hellenic Olympic Association but the Board of Control for Cricket in India did not substitute Bharat for India after independence. Indeed in the Board there was no debate on this issue at all.

The problem for India is that, unlike Greece, while its history has had many glorious phases it has also been more torturous and, what is more, many aspects of its past are so controversial that even now there is no agreement about what happened. So much so that history in India can be

literally lethal. This was gruesomely illustrated in December 1992 when a Hindu mob pulled down the Babri mosque in Ayodhya claiming that it was built by medieval Muslim rulers who had first destroyed a more ancient temple dedicated to the Hindu god Ram. The religious Hindus believe Ayodhya to be the birthplace of Ram. This dispute, known popularly as the politics of the Ram temple, has shaped Indian politics since the 1990s, with no agreement as to whether the Hindu claim is justified.

More recently, there was such rage generated by a scholarly biography of the sixteenth-century Maratha King Shivaji that the Bhandarkar institution in Pune, where the American scholar had done his research, was vandalised and the Oxford University Press forced to withdraw the book from India. And almost every year the Indian History Congress, composed of some of the most eminent Indian historians, meet and pass anxious resolutions deploring the tendency of politicians and pressure groups to constantly rewrite and distort history.

Indians cannot agree on their history because in Indian history there are very few straight lines. Most of them are so jagged and curved that at times it is impossible to see round the corners. What makes it worse is that through much of its long existence the history of India has largely been written not by Indians but by foreigners. India, along with China, has the oldest continuous cultural traditions in the world, much older than the Egyptians, the Greeks or the Iraqis, heirs to the Babylonian civilisation. But India has nothing like China's ancient historical records. The Indian historian R. C. Majumdar introducing *The Classical Accounts of India* – itself a collection of writings about India by foreigners such as Herodotus, Megasthenes, Arrian, Plutarch, Pliny and Ptolemy (nothing comparable from Indian sources is available) – wrote, 'there was no history of pre-Muslim India written by the ancient Indians themselves, and consequently very little was known of its political history'. Before the Muslim arrival in the twelfth century, says Majumdar, 'we possess no historical text of any kind, much less such a detailed narrative as we possess in the case of Greece, Rome or China'. Given that India can claim a history of 5,000 years this means that for 75 per cent of Indian history there are no known histories left to us by Indians. Myths and fables there are in plenty but nothing that would be considered historically authentic.

D. D. Kosambi, probably the most original, certainly the most innovative, Indian historian, responded to this lack of written knowledge by walking to Indian sites round his base of Pune to discover history, starting a new trend in Indian historical research. Since Majumdar wrote his lament in the 1950s others have followed the trail blazed by Kosambi and similar field work has been done all over India in ruins, rocks, bricks and other physical evidence left behind by the past to help reconstruct it.

Foreigners can often provide a historical view of a county that is both valid and instructive. The classic example of this is the French writer Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. First published in French in Paris in 1835 it remains a classic, much reprinted in America to this day. More recently, Bill Bryson, an American, has written very amusingly about Britain in *Notes From A Small Island*. Bryson would not compare himself to Tocqueville, but his book has much useful information on modern-day Britain and has been very popular with the British. However, if the only written works on America and Britain were written by a Frenchman and an American then we would get a picture of the country that is not quite complete. That is the problem we have when judging Indian history. In our times there has been no dearth of history books written by Indians but there still seems a very intriguing lack of appetite for the broad-canvas historical writing that is so common in the west. Indians are still content to let foreigners tell their story. So the one truly popular history dealing with how India got freedom, a bestseller in India, was written by two journalists: one French, the other American. And the film on Gandhi, India's greatest son, was made by an Englishman.

The Muslim period did bring great historical writers to compare with anything the rest of the world, including the Greeks or the British, have produced. The first of them shows the remarkable way Indian history has come down to us. The first truly great history book on India, and one of the classics of world history, was written by Abu Raihan, popularly known as Alberuni. His book is called simply *Alberuni's India*. A Muslim scholar, he came to India with the Mahmud of Ghazni's forces in the eleventh century and wrote this classic while the master he served was either killing the infidel Hindus or making them slaves, looting their wealth by destroying their wonderfully rich temples in places such as Mathura, Kangra, Kanauj and Somnath and taking the treasures back to Ghazni, now in modern-day Afghanistan. Every winter for 16 years Mahmud raided India gathering vast wealth and many slaves which helped him build a rich kingdom in Ghazni. Yet amidst this carnage Alberuni calmly observed the world of the Hindus, so different from his own. There is merit in the comments of the editor Edward Sachau, who in his 1888 foreword to the English edition, wrote, 'the history is like a magic island of quiet, impartial research in the midst of clashing swords, burning towns, and plundered temples'. Alberuni, in turn, profited from his work and his later status as a scientific celebrity in the Muslim world owed much to the Indian scientific and mathematical discoveries he had learnt from the Hindus and his mastery of Sanskrit.

India gives and India takes. If India took the art of writing history from Alberuni it also made him famous.

The Indians are, of course, not the only people who wrestle with their history, and make a hard work of coming to terms with their past, but they must be unique in having to wrestle with historical narratives bequeathed to them not by their ancestors but by foreigners visiting India, each of whom have had their own agendas.

No group of foreigners have had a more loaded agenda than the British and the legacy they have left behind, of which cricket is only a part, is a historical minefield as much for the British as for the Indians. Today, some sixty years after Indian freedom, there are many interpretations of British rule but very few conclusions to which both the British and the Indians can subscribe. Every now and again in the most unexpected of situations history can jar. In 2002, when the Queen Mother died, the British media made much of the fact that she was the Last Empress of India and during the mourning period her jewels, such as the Star of India, were much on display, leading to a certain amount of nostalgia about India, the Jewel in the Crown. This provoked a very pained response from Kuldip Nayar, a journalist and former Indian High Commissioner to the UK who came on BBC radio's prestigious *Today* programme to complain that such British wallowing in imperial nostalgia was meant to remind the Indians that they were once a conquered people.

Contrast this with how the British and the Americans react to their shared past.

A few months after the Queen Mother's death, Tony Blair, the British Prime Minister, addressed a joint session of the US Congress – the first British Prime Minister to do so since Winston Churchill – and a reward for having supported George Bush's policy on Iraq. During his speech he made a reference to the war of 1812 when British troops invaded the then young republic of the USA and burned down Washington. Blair apologised for that British action making a joke of it and the Americans joined in the general laughter. But that was an event in the midst of a war that the Americans had started. The British action could be said to be retaliation for the American destruction of public buildings in York (present-day Toronto).

I, personally, think such historical apologies are ridiculous and unjustified. How far back are we meant to go to apologise for what our ancestors did? But if ever an apology was needed it was for the Amritsar massacre of 1919 when the British general Reginald Dyer ordered his troops to fire at an unarmed, peaceful, Indian crowd killing or wounding more than 1,500 men, women and children. This, as opposed to killing during wars, was an unclean killing. However, when in 1997 the Queen and Prince Philip visited the site, the Queen did not apologise, merely signed the visitors book at the memorial. Philip, for good measure, questioned the figures for the

dead listed on the memorial. As he passed the memorial which spoke of 2,000 being martyred he said, 'That's wrong. I was in the navy with Dyer's son.' Philip's remarks angered the Indians and coming on top of other gaffes by the British turned this royal visit, meant to mark the 50th anniversary of Indian independence, into a disaster with much bad blood between the two countries. The then Indian Prime Minister described the British as 'a third rate power' and Indians cancelled a speech the Queen was supposed to make, which angered the British. A spokesman for the Indian Foreign Ministry Talmiz Ahmed, who had been press secretary in London some years earlier, reacted strongly to the British criticism, saying:

> This is British ineptitude. I think they scheduled a speech for her in the programme assuming they would be able to bully Indians into acceptance of something completely without precedence. When they did not succeed, the thought they could find a way out by blaming bungling Indian officials.

British newspapers like the *Times* condemned the Indians saying 'the government in Delhi had let down its people'. India, said the Thunderer, had abandoned its own deeply rooted cultural and religious traditions of how to treat a guest and 'slipped back into the habits of awkwardness that Indians and the world believed that it had outgrown'.

The whole affair illustrated how very differently the British view their relationship with its two former colonies. With one it has a special, we are all one family relationship, with the other it is still, three hundred years after the initial contact, more often a case of strangers tiptoeing around each other.

One reason for this may be that the British interaction with India was unique for both the British and the Indians from the very moment it began. To say India is a land made for conquest is a truism and even the Aryans, from whom the Hindus claimed descent, invaded the country at some time in the distant past. But the British were unlike any previous foreign ruler of India. All of them, starting with Alexander, the first one for whom we have reliable historical records, came with the sword or as with the Muslims with the sword, the cannon and Koran. But in the end these foreigners stayed in India and became part of the land, even Alexander left behind Greeks who eventually became Indians. But the first British arrived with trading books, a begging letter from their Queen, and always made it clear that they were mere sojourners in India, never going to make India their home. And lest India trap the Britons, the rule in many British families in India was that every third generation should go back to

England. This rule, arguably, prevented Douglas Jardine, that most English of cricket captains, who was the third generation of his family in India to come back to England and miss out on captaining India.

Let us go back to that begging letter written in February 1583 by Elizabeth I to Jalaludin Akbar, the Mughal Emperor. The letter was given to John Newbery, one of the first Englishman to visit India, and begins thus:

> Elizabeth by the grace of God etc. To the most invincible and mighty Prince Lord Zelabdim Echebar, King of Camabaia, Invincible Emperor etc

The letter goes on to speak of Akbar's 'humanity' and says the English Queen would be 'beholden' to Akbar if he would look after her English subjects. Elizabeth misspelled Akbar's name and spoke of him being the King of Camabaia, Cambay, along whose waterfront a hundred and thirty years later British sailors first played cricket introducing the game to the Indians. But what is significant is the tone of the letter. Elizabeth comes across as the ruler of a small kingdom well aware that the greatest powers on her continent were Spain and Portugal with Spain trying to bring her kingdom back to the Catholic mainstream which Elizabeth's father had abandoned.

But then this was no more than a recognition of the reality of world politics then. As the historian Paul Kenney has written in 1500, a betting man, asked to predict which power would became the truly global power in the world, would have said that the Mughals, then at the height of their influence in India, stood a very good chance. No European country, not even Spain would have merited a bet. England were not even at the races.

This remained the position for the next century and half of British involvement with India. Britain eagerly increased its trade links with India because India was an economic superpower. It has been estimated by the economist Paul Bairoch that in 1750, seven years before Robert Clive's victory in Plassey started the British Empire in India, India had 24.5 per cent of the share of the world manufacturing output. China led the field with 32.8 per cent, whereas the United Kingdom had only 1.9 per cent. By 1860, just a century after British rule had begun, the picture had been completely transformed. Now the United Kingdom had 19.9 per cent of the world's manufacturing output and India 8.6 per cent. In 1900, at the height of the Victorian Empire, the United Kingdom had 18.5 per cent of the world's manufacturing output. India was down to 1.7 per cent, lower than the share of the UK in 1750.

It would be easy to laugh at the word manufacturing in relation to the pre-industrial age. The fact is the world did produce goods even before the machines came and that world was dominated by the luxury goods of the east such as textiles, silks, ceramics and spices. India's pre-industrial age manufacturing of handloom textiles and handicrafts was well supported by an indigenous credit and banking system. As Bairoch has said, 'More important, there was a large commercialised sector with a highly sophisticated market and credit structure manned by skilful and in many instances a very wealth commercial class.' It was their riches that lured the west to the east and the east was so superior that when the Portuguese Vasco da Gama turned up in India courts with what he thought were valuable gifts the Indians scorned at the trinkets, so inferior were they to the gold, silver and diamonds their rulers could boast.

Not that India's economic might in the pre-industrial age meant that the people of India were rich. The wealth in India was in the hands of the very few and society as a whole was very poor. As economists have pointed out, a society which has agriculture as the main component of its national product does not produce a surplus much more than what it needs for sustenance. But in the eighteenth century the disparity between the poor of what we now call the third world and the first world was not as great as in our times. India in the pre-industrial age had many traders, textile producers, and craftsmen and an Indian handloom weaver, for example, may have earned perhaps as much as half of his European equivalent. The arrival of the steam engine and the power loom that transformed the world also meant India became progressively poorer while Britain, lured to India by its wealth, grew progressively richer. It helped Britain become the world's first industrial power. In effect, Britain denuded India of its pre-industrial manufacturing dominance converting it almost wholly into a primary producing country providing raw materials for industrial Britain.

By this time the obsequious tone of Elizabeth's letter had long vanished and the British were on their way to becoming the Lords of humankind. But in another great irony, when the British were at their most rapacious in India, they had the best contacts with Indians, when they presented themselves as civilising the Indians then shunned them most. It was as the East India Company and its officials were looting India – their activities introduced the word loot, an Indian word, into the English language – that the British were most responsive and open to Indian ideas. They married Indian wives, had Indian families and took to Indian ways. The historian Percival Spear has written, 'the days of the corrupt Company officials of ill-gotten fortunes, of oppression' were also 'the days when Englishmen were interested in Indian culture, wrote Persian verses and forgathered

with Pandits and Maulvis and Nawabs on terms of social equality and personal friendship'.

This was the time for William Jones and Warren Hastings, one a scholar, the other a ruler, who did much to both learn about India and indeed unearth ancient Indian learning, teaching them to an astonished generation of Indians who had forgotten what their forefathers had achieved. It was Jones, known as Oriental Jones, who set up the Asiatic Society of India and started a whole British tradition of scholarship on India which so benefited Indians. Yet even here there was a very British, we know best, attitude to India. For many years no Indian was allowed to became a member of the Asiatic Society, or attend its meetings.

This early sign of arrogance was transformed into the much more pernicious belief that the British were the master race destined to rule India after 1857 when India came under direct Crown rule. It was the high tide of the new western imperialism when everything non-western was suspect and Britons, presenting themselves as Europeans, imposed their superior civilisation. This meant, as George Orwell put it, 'You turn a Gatling gun on a mob of unarmed natives and then you establish "The law" which includes roads, railways and court-house.' It was, of course, during the period of 'a sort of forcible evangelising' that cricket took root in India.

However, despite this, the British, starting with Hastings and Oriental Jones, were the catalysts of change in India. They brought new ideas, new ways of looking and reconnected India to the world. Its effect on the Indian, particularly the Hindu mind, was immense. The most significant reforms of Hinduism, removing some of its barbaric customs, for instance, were not carried out by the British but by Indians who looked at their own society with the help of British ideas and, finding it wanting, sought to change it.

But having helped open the Indian mind the British also chained it, put a ceiling on what Indians could aspire to. The classic illustration of this is the way Everest was named. It was named after George Everest, a British colonel who, along with William Lambton, helped map India, something that had not been done before. It was an awesome achievement and it also resulted in the first accurate measurements of the Himalayas, including the world's highest peak which bears Everest's name.

But who actually calculated that the mountain we call Everest was the highest in the world? It was certainly not Everest. In the early stages of the mapping it was denoted as Peak XV as efforts were made to measure it. In Calcutta worked a Bengali called Radhanath Sikdar, a young mathematical genius whose skills had been much admired by Everest. He was the Chief Computer and he was asked by Andrew Waugh, Everest's

successor as Surveyor-General of India, to provide the mathematical formula. This he did working out that Peak XV was 29,002 feet above sea level, making it the highest in the world. However, when it came to the name Waugh insisted it should be named Everest. He had already dismissed the names the Nepalis had for the mountain, saying Everest was a 'household word among civilised, nations', so for him to consider an Indian subordinate's name for the peak was impossible. This incident illustrates British rule rather well. It allowed someone like Sikdar to rise, even become the Chief Computer, but his Indian name could not possibly be given to the highest peak in the world.

The other great feature of the British connection with India was that from the very beginning the British behaved as if they always occupied the moral high ground.

You can get some idea of how deeply the British held to this notion during the Raj if you visit the third floor of the British Library in Euston. This is where the India Office Library is now located and a truly magnificent library it is, essential to anyone researching into the India of the last two hundred years. Here the British have not only carefully preserved the records of their rule but much of value relating to India. There is nothing like this available anywhere else. However, among the many wonderful things here, one set of publications is not much in demand, although in many ways it is the most revealing.

These are the annual reports presented to the British Parliament by the Secretary of State for India, summarising the activities of the government in India during the preceding year. The report underlined that the ultimate ruler of India was the British House of Commons and through this report the representatives of the British people, who owned India, could judge what had been done in their name.

Such government reports are not uncommon and the red-bound books are full of the sort of dry government facts and figures you would expect. But what is really remarkable is the title the British gave these reports. They were not called the Annual Report on British India or anything like that. Their title was: *Moral and Material Progress in India*. The message was clear. The British in India were not only improving the economic condition of the Indians – a claim some British historians still maintain is valid – but they were also improving the morals of this barbaric, decadent, people.

Such a view became the orthodoxy in the middle of the nineteenth century. But even when the British were mere traders in India, and had no expectations of ruling the country, they projected themselves as people who were always in the right and considered all those who opposed them as usurpers. In the beginning of the eighteenth century, almost half a

century before Clive laid the foundations of the empire in India, the British who had trading facilities on the west coast of India had to fight a series of wars with local Indian rulers. Some of these wars involved sea battles with navies the Indian rulers had, in particular the Marathas, then a major power in India. The Maratha navy was led by the redoubtable Kanoji Angre and the British suffered many defeats at his hands. It would be entirely understandable if British histories painted him in a bad light. But the British did more than that. Although he was the Grand Admiral of what was a powerful Maratha fleet, the British refused to recognise his titles, called him a 'pirate' and the British history of that period is called the Pirates of Malabar. As John Keay puts it in *The Honourable Company* – a history of the East India Company – 'One man's pirate is another man's patriot' but the description of Angre and other Indian naval commanders as pirates was 'a peculiarly English conceit'. Angre was fighting for a legitimate sovereign seeking to police the merchant fleets along his coast-line, yet the British intruders in his native waters were not content to make money but also wanted to present themselves as the legitimate owners of the waters.

Once the British converted themselves from traders to rulers in India then this desire to portray all their actions as being on a higher moral plane to that of the Indians became an almost obsessive British concern. The British were the conquerors, yet it was British heroes who always sought to occupy the moral high ground. This started right from the moment when Clive fought Siraj-ud-daulah at Plassey in June 1757 to launch the British Empire in India.

That victory on that rainy Thursday was more like the sort of one-day cricket international that the South African Hanje Cronje might have organised with the result fixed by judicious bribing before the match (battle) begun. It rained, which affected Siraj's powder, there was some dare-devilry from Clive's cavalry but the outcome was not in doubt because Clive had bribed Mir Jaffar, Siraj's ambitious Commander-in-Chief, promising him the kingship of Bengal in exchange for remaining neutral. The result of the battle was Mir Jaffar replacing Siraj on the throne of Bengal and Clive and his men earning fortunes they could never have dreamt of. When Clive and his men entered Murshidabad, Siraj's capital, he described it as 'as extensive, populous and rich as the city of London, with the difference that there are individuals in the first possessing infinitely greater property than in the last'.

As it happens, the crucial battle of Plassey was preceded by not one deception but two, one of which involved a banker called Omichand who was the middle man between Clive and Mir Jaffar. At one stage he threat-ened to blow the whistle on the whole enterprise and tell Siraj unless he

was paid very large sums of money. Clive and the English in Calcutta were convinced that Omichand was a crook. However, for their plan to work they knew they had to associate with him and, since everybody else was crooked, perhaps more so, they decided that the only way to deal with Omichand was to be as deceitful. They produced two versions of the treaty with Mir Jaffar. The true one, coloured blue, had no clause about any payment to Omichand, the false one, coloured red, with forged signatures had. Clive justified it on the grounds that Omichand was the 'greatest villain upon earth' and that it was necessary to deceive him in order to achieve the greater prize of securing these possessions for England. Many years later Clive's action was the subject of a censure motion in the British House of Commons. The proposer, Colonel Burgoyne (who was later to suffer defeat at the hands of the Americans during their war of independence), denounced Clive for his looting of Bengal and his deception of Omichand. Clive defended himself in much the same style as Napolean justifying the shooting of Duc d'Enghein. The debate showed the English at their sanctimonious worst. Part of Burgoyne's resolution was accepted, that Clive had made money, but he was also praised for 'great and meritorious service to the country'. As Nirad Chaudhuri, Clive's biographer, says, the Commons had ducked the question: how could they condemn Clive without condemning the very establishment of British power in India? 'England could not retain the stolen goods if they called Clive a thief.'

It is very interesting to see how popular British histories deal with this seminal period. Little or no mention is made of the bribery of Mir Jaffar or Clive's deception of Omichand, but much emphasis is laid on an event that preceded Plassey.

This was the notorious Black Hole of Calcutta. It came about when the wretched Siraj deciding to take on the English and teach them a lesson, captured Calcutta. In total, 146 of them were imprisoned in a dungeon in the fort which was known as the Black Hole, that being the English term for the local lock-up or a temporary jail. On a hot sultry night, one of the hottest of the year, the British prisoners suffered terribly from thirst and want of air and as the night wore on many of them just sank and died. When in the morning the door to the Black Hole was opened only 23 emerged alive. As it happens, Siraj did not know about it, was said to be affected when he heard, and it was the skill with words of J. Z. Holwell, one of the survivors, that made the story famous. Vincent Smith, author of the *Oxford History of India*, considers Holwell to be a 'plausible and none too reliable man' and while he believes the incident happened, 'the numbers involved and the details are not certain' and the whole thing, he concludes, 'should be regarded as a deplorable incident rather than as a deliberate

atrocity'. For him the Black Hole is of such little historical importance that the incident is dealt with not in the main text but in a note attached to the end of the chapter describing the start of British rule in India.

Indeed for fifty years after the incident little notice was taken of it but then, as Smith observes, it 'became convenient material for the compliers of an imperialist hagiology'. Black Hole passed into the language as standing for Indian iniquity and starting in the nineteenth century it was the one thing about India every English schoolboy knew. Even today popular British writing about the start of their rule never fails to mention it. Thus Williams Pennington in *Pick Up Your Parrots and Monkeys*, a memoir of his soldiering in India during the Second World War, published in 2003, has an appendix on Clive's India. It does not mention his bribery of Mir Jaffar, let alone the deception of Omichand, but has a few paragraphs devoted to the Black Hole. As Chaudhuri puts it, 'Retrospectively, the Black Hole incident served to throw a moral halo over the British conquest of India, as it was God's punishment for iniquity.'

The fact is even if the Black Hole had not taken place Clive would have fought Siraj as vital economic interests were involved. The British attitude, as Chaudhuri notes, derives not from authentic history but is more a psychological product of history.

British rule in India was marked by such psychological moments, never more so than when the British crushed the Indian Revolt of 1857 which came within an ace of uprooting their empire. I have used the word revolt deliberately, because it was much more than a mutiny as the British termed it, and as British historians still do, but much less than a war of independence as Indian nationalists like to portray it. For a start, the rebellion was confined to a small part of India and most Indians either did not take part or wanted the British to win. But whatever term is used what cannot be denied is that it was the bloodiest revolt in the history of the British Empire and put down by the British with a severity that is quite beyond belief. There were, of course, dreadful atrocities committed by the Indian rebels, but the British responded to cruelty with redoubled cruelty, terror with even more terror, blood with even more blood. The *Times* newspaper bayed for Indian blood saying 'every tree and gable end in the place should have its burden in the shape of a mutineer's carcass'. The Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon, addressing a congregation of 25,000 at Crystal Palace during the revolt, called for the extermination of the entire Hindu people:

> The religion of the Hindoos is no more than a mass of the rankest filth that imagination ever conceived. The Gods they worship are not entitled to the least atom of respect. Their worship necessitates everything that

> is evil and morality must be put down. The sword must be taken out of its sheath, to cut off our fellow subjects by their thousands.

The historian Michael Edwards has written that even after the British retook Delhi – having stripped and then shot out of hand the sons of the Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah – there was no stoppage 'in the amount of innocent blood ruthlessly shed, for the city of Delhi was put to the sword, looted and sacked with the ferocity of a Nazi extermination squad in occupied Poland'.

Many of the English officers delighted in dreaming up ways they could degrade the Indian rebels before killing them. Muslims, forbidden pork by their religion, would be sewn into pork skins or smeared with pork fat before being executed, high-caste Hindus, forbidden to eat beef, had beef stuffed down their throats before they were hanged. It was common for Indians to be lashed to the mouth of a cannon and then blown apart by grapeshot. British officers encouraged rape and pillage before whole villages including old women and children were burnt and the dead were often strung up on trees, some of them resembling figures of eight. One huge banyan tree which still stands in Kanpur had no less than 150 corpses. It was in Kanpur that there had been a horrific massacre of British men, women and children, and Colonel James Neil exacted terrible revenge for this. He forced the rebels he had apprehended to lick with their tongues a square foot of the floor which contained the congealed blood, all the while being lashed by an English soldier before they were hanged.

In British eyes such things were justified because of the way the Indian rebels had behaved, but as A. N. Wilson has pointed out in *The Victorians* this is trying to establish a moral equivalence where there can be none:

> The ruthlessness of British reprisals, the preparedness to punish Indians of any age, sex, regardless of whether they had any part in the rebellion is a perpetual moral stain on the Raj and it is no wonder that in most popular British histories these atrocities are suppressed altogether or glossed over with such a distasteful anodyne phrase as 'dark deeds were done on both sides'. It is not to defend the murders of European women and children that one points out such remarks suggest an equivalence where none can exist . . . There can be no moral equivalence between a people, by whatever means of atrocity, trying to fight for their freedom to live as they choose, without the interference of an invading power, and that power itself using the utmost brutality to enforce not merely a physical but a political dominance over the people.

Yet even now, Wilson apart, when British historians deal with this period they cannot help trying to prove the moral superiority of the British over other people. Thus Niall Ferguson in *Empire* published in 2003, which seeks to show how Britain made the modern world and was a force for good, describes a scene from the revolt just after the British had lifted the siege of Lucknow. A young boy supporting a tottering old man approaches the gate of the city. But the British officer convinced all Indians whatever their age must be rebels brushes aside his plea for mercy and shoots the boy. Three times his revolver jams, the fourth times he succeeds and then the boy falls. Ferguson writes:

> To read this story is to be reminded of the way SS officers behaved towards Jews during the Second World War. Yet there is one difference. The British soldiers who witnessed this murder loudly condemned the officer's actions, at first crying 'shame' and giving vent to 'indignation and outcries' when the gun went off. It was seldom, if ever, that German soldiers in a similar situation openly criticised a superior.

So it's all right then. Even when the British behave as badly as the SS, they are still morally superior to the Germans because there are always a few dissenting British voices.

The Indians have always found it difficult to cope with such British certainty about their moral superiority. Their answer has been to consistently play down their own dark side and pretend the atrocities they committed were a mistake or did not happen. Mention of incidents such as the Black Hole or the massacre of British men, women and children in the Bibighar in Kanpur is either ignored or glossed over.

When I was a child growing up in Bombay one of the things we looked forward to was the great Bengali feast of Durga Puja, a religious-cum-cultural occasion which marked the end of the rains and the start of the cold weather. At every Puja there was always a play about Clive and the emergence of British rule in India. Much was made about of the bribery of Mir Jaffar and the deception of Omichand but my fellow Bengalis never spoke about the Black Hole incident. They clearly felt that by denying the incident ever took place they could remove the moral justification for British rule.

The Indians are, of course, faced with a very awkward problem. This is, that without the active collaboration of the Indians the British could never have conquered India, let alone ruled it. At the height of the empire there was never more than 900 British civil servants and about 70,000 white troops in a country of over 250 million Indians. Even at Plassey more

Indians died fighting for Clive than British. For the record the English had 4 killed, 9 wounded, 2 missing, while 16 of the Indian sepoys fighting for Clive were killed and 36 wounded. And in 1857 the British would never have survived in India but for the help they received from the locals – in particular the Sikhs and the Gurkhas. Some of the Sikhs are still very proud of this. This was brought home to me when recently I attended a function at the Imperial War Museum in London organised by the Maharajah Duleep Singh Centenary Trust to listen to a speech about a Sikh regiment in the British Indian Army. One of the publications that was distributed was called Gurubaani (Universal Truth). It had messages from Tony Blair, Ken Livingstone, Mayor of London, Sir John Stephens, then Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police and recruitment advertisements from the British Army, Royal Air Force and Royal Navy. One chapter called 'Key Events in Sikh History' described how the Sikhs saved the Raj:

> The Sikhs helped the British to crush the Indian Mutiny uprising to prevent the return to the cruel Mughal regime aided by Hindu ministers and minor Hindu princedoms. Also, the Sikhs had not forgotten the traitorous assault on Khalsa Raj by the Indians in league with the British in 1849.

The logic here is interesting. The Sikhs were angry with their fellow Indians for attacking them but not with the foreign English for defeating their Khalsa Raj, suggesting that at that time a sense of Indian nationalism was still to be born. Perhaps, not surprisingly, what the section on key events does not mention is that the Sikhs matched and even outdid the British in the plunder, loot and killings that marked 1857. It is also worth stressing that while Dyer, the Englishman, ordered the firing into the unarmed Indian crowd in Amritsar, the troops who did the actual firing were their fellow Hindus, the Gurkhas. As he lined his troops in front of the crowd Dyer's orders on that fateful day were, 'Gurkhas right, 59th left. Fire.'

The fact that the British could recruit Indians to fight for them and even wage war against other Indians was the most remarkable achievement of the Raj. It showed the British genius at work, establishing an empire where the fighting was done by Indian soldiers guided by an Officer Corps wholly British with the money, including the money to train British officers known as 'capitation charges', coming from Indian revenues.

During the Raj the British were very proud of this achievement, and in 1911 Major G. F. MacMunn exulted in *The Armies of India* how 'the tramping disciplined legions are not the beef and porridge and potato-reared youngsters of the Isles, but of the most part men of the ancient races of Hindustan, ruled and trained and led after the manner of the English'.

In Michael Ondaatje's novel *The English Patient*, a character says of the Indian soldier Kip, 'What's he doing fighting English wars?' In all except the Boer War, which being a war between white tribes it was considered not advisable to have brown soldiers, Indians fought for the British, extending their dominions and preserving their rule. During the half century before 1914 Indian troops served in more than dozen imperial campaigns from China to Uganda, helping the spread of the pink blobs round the world. The Liberal politician W. E. Ford complained in 1878 that the government was relying 'not upon the patriotism and sprit of our own people but on getting Sikhs, Gurkhas and the Mussalman to fight for us'.

A popular music hall jingo of the time went:

> We don't want to fight
> But by Jove if we do
> We won't go to the front ourselves
> We'll send the mild Hindoo

During the First World War 1.2 million Indians were part of the war effort, 800,000 as fighters. Indian money paid for the war with £100 million given outright to Britain for the war. Between £20 million and £30 million was given annually for each of the war years. Indian troops fought on the western front, in Gallipoli – indeed they did better there than the Australians and the New Zealanders – in East Africa, Egypt and the Persian Gulf. In the Middle East, the Allenby victories owed much to Indian soldiers. If, in the taking of Jerusalem, the Indian units were not the largest part of his forces, by the time Allenby came to take Damascus they were in the majority. His third front in Mesopotamia was wholly Indian. The creation of modern-day Iraq owes much to Indian soldiers and for a time during the British occupation in the 1920s the rupee was the currency of that country. In the Second World War the Indian contribution on behalf of the British was even more extensive with a total of 2.8 million Indians fighting for the Allies in various sectors.

Both wars caused enormous collateral damage to India. Towards the end of the First World War influenza broke out in the trenches. The Indian troops fighting there caught the disease and carried it back to India. But in India the war had made the British denude India of doctors and as the returning Indian soldiers spread the disease, there was little or no medical care available. Sixteen million Indians died, almost double the numbers killed in the battlefields of the war.

The Second World War saw the dreadful Bengal famine of 1943. In a fertile land, which produced two rice crops a year, this was a man-made famine created by the wretched Bengal administration and not helped by

the war cabinet in London. Recent British histories of this period accept that the anti-Indian attitude of Churchill, who believed Indians were the worst people in the world after the Germans, played a major part in the famine. The war cabinet refused to divert food to Bengal encouraged by the British government's scientific adviser Frederick Lindemann, who according to historians Christoper Bayly and Tim Harper, 'seems to have thought that the Bengalis were a weak race and that overbreeding and eugenic unfitness were the basic reasons for the scarcity'. Three million Bengalis died – the worst famine to hit south Asia in the twentieth century.

Amazingly, one group of soldiers from the subcontinent fought for the British in their wars although they were not even British subjects, or even Indians. They come from a country whose last war was actually fought against the British, nearly two hundred years ago. For the last 180 years this country has been neutral in all the wars the world has witnessed, yet its citizens under the British flag have fought all over the world including the two world wars. They are the Gorkhas from Nepal.

Nepal is the only Hindu country in the world. Between 1814 and 1816 it fought a series of wars against the British in India. In the very first conflict at the end of 1814 when 34,000 British troops, the overwhelming majority, of course, being Indian sepoys fought 12,000 Gorkhas the result was sensational. Despite being outnumbered, on three of the four fronts the Gorkhas beat the British with heavy losses. The British did recover and even marched to Khatmandu but they had seen how valiantly the Gorkhas could fight. Both sides decided it made sense to have a treaty. This saw the British making gains: Simla came to the Raj starting the whole Raj phenomenon of the hill station, but the Gorkhas preserved their freedom as a people. Under the treaty of Sargauli, Nepal was allowed to carry on as an independent state. The British promised not to interfere in its internal workings as long as Nepal allowed the British to recruit Gorkhas to fight for them.

The result was Britain got some of the most feared fighters the world has known and Nepal became a closed country, so closed that it would not even allow access to its side of Mount Everest. During the Raj every expedition to the peak of the highest mountain in the world was through the more difficult Tibet side, none of which was successful. The British had nothing to say when in 1846 a despotic Rajput Rana family seized power and made the Nepalese King their captive. Nepal was effectively put in a deep freeze for the next century with no internal development. It only came out of the deep freeze in 1949, two years after Indian independence, largely through the efforts of Nehru and despite the opposition of the British ambassador in Nepal. This also opened the southern route to Everest in good time for the first successful ascent by a British expedition

coinciding with the Queen's coronation in 1953. However, the Gorkha soldiers who fought for Britain were never made British citizens and it is only now that the British are even thinking of giving their Gorkhas citizenship, finally turning the world's greatest mercenary soldiers into British subjects. (I have used the spelling Gorkha as this is the one the Gorkhas themselves use. The British trying to cope with the Gorkali language went through many variations from Goorkah, to Goorka, to Goorkha before settling on Gurkha, which is still the term used in the British army, sometimes shortened to Gurks.)

To an extent Nepal was a more extreme case of how the Raj governed India. There is no more widely held belief than that the British ruled the whole of India and when they left India they partitioned the land. Both are myths. In 1947 more than a third of the Indian landmass and two-thirds of the Indian population were not subject to British rule. They were ruled by native Indian princes who were not part of British India. They had a treaty with the Raj governing external relations. The Raj appointed a resident in each state but within his boundaries a prince could do what he liked, as long as he did not do anything to threaten overall British control. Often their most important engagement as far as the British were concerned was to make sure the Viceroy on his visit bagged a tiger. They even had their own armies, some of whom fought as part of the Allied effort in both the world wars. Neither the British courts nor the famed Indian Civil Service, which administrated India, could intervene to help any of the prince's subjects. In 1947 each of the 565 princely states on the subcontinent had the option of joining either India or Pakistan or going independent.

The integration of these states into the modern republic of India was not the work of an Englishman but of an Indian, Sardar Vallabhai Patel, the tough, no-nonsense Gujarati politician who ran Gandhi's political machine and became deputy Prime Minister in Nehru's first Indian cabinet. He bullied these princes into becoming part of India, giving up their princely states in return for a privy purse. The story goes he gathered them round him, held out the palm of his hand and said, 'You are like little insects in the middle of my palm. Anytime I want I can make a fist crushing you. Best you come in quietly.' The story may be apocryphal but whatever he said worked like a charm. Kingdoms that had existed for centuries, and even kept out of the British embrace, joined the new Indian Union in weeks. The odd ruler created problems and the new India solved the situation with the sort of show of force, as in Hyderabad, which the old Raj warriors would have approved of as it copied their methods.

The only princely state that escaped Patel was Kashmir which the British had sold to Gulab Singh for £750,000 back in 1846. A hundred and one years later the ruler, Sir Hari Singh, dithered so long he allowed

Jinnah to unleash his irregular forces of tribesmen, efficiently controlled by Pakistan. A panic-stricken Hari Singh acceded to India just in time for Indian forces to save him from defeat. But the subsequent war proved messy, the state remains divided and a flashpoint between India and Pakistan.

However, the problem in Kashmir, and the continuing insurrections in certain parts of its northwest frontier which has required the continued heavy presence of the Indian army, should not obscure the fact that in the nearly sixty years since India got freedom the country has restructured itself quite dramatically. The British had left behind provinces that were convenient administrative units for an alien, foreign, rule but made little concession to Indian realities. Even before independence the Congress had decided that India, reflecting its diversity and the fact that its people speak many languages, would be reorganised along linguistic states. It is by no means complete and new states are always being created. In 1947 India inherited six provinces from British India. This has now grown to 31 states and 4 union territories such as Delhi, the capital. Indians are constantly creating new states and since I wrote the first edition of this book, twenty years ago, four new states have been created.

This can best be judged if you pick up *Wisden* and look at the sides that now play in the Ranji trophy, the Indian national cricket championships and compare them to the ones playing in 1947. Many of the teams such as Holkar, Gwalior, Patiala, Rajputhana, Travancore-Cochin, Central Provinces and Berar, Nawanagar and Western India have disappeared. The list includes some Ranji Trophy winners like the mighty Holkar for whom Denis Compton played in an epic, losing Ranji final. They have been replaced by many new names and more can be expected as states continue to be created. The contrast with Australia is interesting. The number of states that take part in the Sheffield Shield competition have increased since Victoria first won the Shield in 1892–3 but none of the original states have disappeared. The Indian reorganisation has not been without violence. My own personal memory is of a boy, no more than 12, being killed outside our flat in the centre of Bombay during an agitation that led to the creation of the state of Maharashtra out of the old British province of Bombay Presidency. But given the wars, including a civil war, and the millions of native Americans killed during the first century of the American republic, as it went from the 13 colonies that had won freedom from Britain to a continental power, the Indians have done their internal reorganisation with much less violence and in a much more peaceful, democratic fashion. To make new countries without violence is like saying you can make omelettes without breaking eggs. Israel, created a year after India, illustrates this perfectly. But India has some distinction which is

often overlooked. One of its three wars with Pakistan helped create a new state (Bangladesh) after a short, successful war when it beat Pakistan and despite opposition from the United States which, for all its commitment to freedom and democracy, did not want the people of then east Pakistan freed from the tyranny of the west Pakistani army.

There is one other feature of British India that is quite amazing. While it had the appearance of a state, it failed to meet many of the essential requirements of a state. One of these must be a commonly accepted legal system. The British India did not have such a legal system.

For the first hundred years of British rule it was the East India Company, not the Crown that ruled in India. So curious had been the nature of the British conquest that even in May 1857 – just a month before the centenary of the Battle of Plassey – a Mughal Emperor still ruled in Delhi and the British still paid homage to him. It was a piece of elaborate fiction, but instructive at that. As the British had mopped up the Indian feudal powers, banishing some, pensioning others, they did so almost as agents of the 'great Mughal' in Delhi. It was the most curious form of political leasehold tenancy. After every battle the Mughal Emperor would grant the British 'firmans' – rights – to levy taxes and control a territory and, in theory, the British still accepted the Mughal Emperor as ruler of India – and the ultimate freeholder of the country. Four times a year they presented themselves to the Emperor and offered him *nazar* – tribute.

When it came to law British India basically followed the Muslim, Mughal, law the British had inherited. In the various courts of British India a Muslim Law Officer delivered a fatwa saying whether the accused was guilty and what the crime should be. The Englishman sitting next to him then passed sentence. If they disagreed then disputes were resolved by the Sudder Court, the court of appeal. As Sir George Campbell wrote in 1852, the foundation was Mahommedan (Muslim) code, altered and added to but 'the hidden substructure on which this whole building rests is this Mahommedan law; take which away, and we should have no definition of, or authority, for punishing many of the most common crimes'.

So closely did the British follow Muslim law that in this period, long after British rule had been established, it was common for robbers in Bengal to have a foot lopped off.

Even after 1857, when India came under the Crown, the British hesitated to bring their legal system into India. There was never a complete change to the criminal, civil and domestic law the British had inherited. Indeed the Law Commission set up after the revolt of 1857 recommended that it was best to leave Hindu and Muslim law outside the legislative scope of the government of India. A common criminal law was introduced in 1860 and there were other changes including the setting up of High Courts. But

throughout their rule the British never made any moves to change, let alone modernise, the personal law of the Hindus and Muslims or the other Indian communities. They remained what they had for centuries, long before the Indians had even heard about the British. Indeed the British went out of their way to reinforce such ancient customs and laws. As Michael Edwards says:

> Virtually no changes took place in Islamic personal law during the period of Crown government, because of the Muslim belief that legislation is the prerogative of God. The British interfered little in matters of Hindu personal law, partly for the usual reasons of security, and partly because of the formidable problems involved in any attempt at codification… In general the British sought to protect customary law – even, in some cases, to extend its application. In 1935, for instance an Act was passed in the North West Frontier Province which was designed to impose orthodox Muslim law on customary law, and in 1937 the Act was extended to cover the rest of British India. Various laws were also passed to give statutory definition to the customary laws of other Indian communities such as the Parsees.

Like the law, so the currency. India is the only country in the world where words like millions and billions have no meaning. Indians have their own terms. These are lakhs which stands for 100,000, and crores which stands for 100 lakhs equal to 10 million in western terms. When I was growing up in India a lakh was a lot of money and to say somebody was a lakhopati was to denote he was fabulously rich. Now it is crorepati and the Indian equivalent of *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire*, hosted by its greatest film star, Amitabh Bachchan, is called *Who Wants To Be A Crorepati*? Both lakhs and crores are ancient Indian terms and, reflecting the fact that both Hinduism and Buddhism spread out from India to south-east Asia and beyond, these terms are also used there. Just as the British anglicised the ancient Sanskrit word rupya into rupee so they just adopted the old Indian ways of denoting money. It meant that despite nearly two hundred years of British rule India has remained outside the world's commonly accepted monetary terms. Terms like millions and billions used in the rest of the world are never used in India and visitors to the country have to do quick mental calculations to work out what lakhs and crores mean.

But what about railways and the armed forces? These were two great institutions created by the British and bequeathed to a free India. Surely through these institutions the British united India? Not quite.

The railways remain a great achievement of the Raj. It opened up India in a way it had never opened up before and in 1947 the British left India

a vast railway network comparable to an industrialised country, despite the fact that India had little or no industry. But as the Raj did not rule all of India railways lines did not reach all parts of India. British India was well served by railways: in princely India the reach of the railways depended on the whim of the individual ruler. In 1949, two years after Indian independence, when the railways were finally integrated into the modern Indian Railway system, the Railway Board had to combine 21 railways, some operated by the government of India, the others by the princely states. Visitors to India can quickly see what a patchwork quilt of lines this has left India. Kashmir for instance has very little by way of railways, with no train to Srinagar, the capital. Rajasthan, the modern Indian state, created by merging the many princely states that existed until 1947, has a very poorly developed railway system. Travel operators still suggest visitors take the car if they really want to see this vast and fascinating state.

The Army is even an even more revealing example of a Raj institution which, while it suited the occupying power's purpose admirably, had to be recast out of all recognition to became the army of a free country. The biggest challenge facing the new Indian nation was that the British had insulated the army from the people and the recruitment was based on a certain racial philosophy. Following the revolt of 1857 the British had completely reorganised the Indian Army developing what was called the 'martial race' theory. The western world was then in the middle of its quest to find scientific evidence that would prove that certain races were genetically superior to other races, the white races being at the top of the tree. In India this meant dividing India into races which could fight and others who could not. This was spelled out very clearly by MacMunn in *The Armies of India* – a book that had a very warm foreword by Field-Marshall Earl Roberts, the commander-in-chief of the British armies in India.

> It is one of the essential differences between the East and West that in the East, with few exceptions, only certain clan and classes can bear arms; the others have not the physical courage necessary for the warrior. In Europe, as we know, every able-bodied man, given food and arms, is a fighting man of some sort, some better, some worse but still as capable of bearing arms as any other of his nationality. In the East, or certainly in India, this is not so.

MacMunn then went on to divide Indians into martial races such as Sikhs, the Jats, the Muslims, and from outside India the Pathans and the Gorkhas. These were the only Indians recruited to the British Indian army. Other Indians like the Bengalis and the Kashmiris, being considered racially incapable of fighting, were kept out of the army.

The martial race theory remained a feature of British recruitment until it broke down during the Second World War. But even when the war forced the British to cast their net wider, Churchill was appalled the martial race theory had been abandoned. In 1943 he wrote to Field-Marshall Claude Auckinleck, commander-in-chief in India, that he should 'rely as much as possible on the martial races'. Auckinleck had to inform him that war-time 'maintenance problems' problems meant six battalions of martial regiments had already been disbanded.

But the British did not just divide the Indians into martial and non-martial races. In their army they made sure Indians did not mix and the different units were kept in watertight religious and caste units. The British did not, as the nationalists allege, create these differences amongst the Indians. They had existed long before the British arrived. But they did nothing to discourage them, made sure the divisions were maintained, indeed they nurtured them as it proved their theory that India had never been a united nation. So in the British Indian Army every platoon had a Muslim, a Hindu and Sikh section. They had separate messes, never ate together and even had their own greetings. It was only in January 1949 after General K. M. Cariappa became the first Indian commander-in-chief of the army that these divisions began to be dismantled, with Cariappa taking a decision that was both symbolic and ironic.

During the Second World War Subhas Bose, the Indian nationalist, had fled British India first to Germany and then Japan raising an army from the Indians captured by the Axis powers to fight for Indian freedom. In creating his national army Bose spent much time trying to weld the disparate Indian mercenaries who had volunteered to fight for the British into a nationalist army. He had to devise a common Indian slogan and came up with 'Jai Hind' (Hail India), replacing the many caste and communal slogans of the British Indian Army. The Raj, which did everything possible to denigrate Bose's army, banned the term in the Indian Army. But Indians outside the army began to use it and it is now the common greeting among Indians. When Cariappa, who as part of the British Indian Army, had fought against Bose's army helping defeat it, became commander-in-chief, he too started ending his speeches with Jai Hind. It was soon adopted as the greeting between the officers and men of the army.

This, along with the abandonment of the martial race theory and recruitment from all classes of Indians to the army, the establishment of the National Cadet Corps and the Territorial Army – both of which the British had discouraged – converted an army of occupation into one more in tune with the Indian people.

It is a measure of the Indian achievement in recasting its British created army that today, some sixty years after independence, the army remains

out of politics. There has never been any hint that it would ever enter politics. Contrast this with most other former colonies and in particular neighbouring Pakistan. It inherited the same Raj army from the British. But the failure by the Pakistanis to change an army created for occupation into one for national needs has meant that the Pakistani armed forces soon entered politics and the history of Pakistan is a sorry story of military rule punctuated by brief periods of unsatisfactory civilian rule.

There is only one institution the British left behind that was both truly Indian in scope and which did not change after independence. That was cricket. Why and how Indians took to and have shaped it since the British left is the subject of this book. However, what is fascinating is that cricket's development in India was completely out of step with what the British were doing in other areas of Indian life.

We can best see this if we look at what was happening in the 1920s. This shaped the India that emerged in 1947.

There is much debate among British historians as to whether the British left India too quickly. The historian Lawrence James in his book *The Raj* has a chapter called 'Was It Too Quick?' This, while trying to be fair to Lord Mountbatten, the last British Viceroy, ends up blaming him, for leaving India too quickly. Andrew Roberts, the right-wing historian, goes further and alleges in *Eminent Churchillians* that Mountbatten was biased in favour of the Hindu Nehru and cheated the Muslim Jinnah. Since neither historian says when the British should have left, and Roberts's grasp of Indian history is so poor that he often comes over as a pamphleteer, these opinions sound like a long sigh disguising a certain British lament that they ever had to leave India. The fact is for all the criticisms of Mountbatten, by August 1947 the British in India were on the ropes and had little room for manoeuvre. The preceding five years had seen sustained resistance to British rule and a great deal of violence. The British could only rule India with the help of Indian collaborators and by 1947 it had run out of collaborators.

In March 1943, seven months after Gandhi had asked the British to quit India provoking a general movement against the British, General Lockhart had concluded that India would have to be regarded as 'an occupied and hostile country'. Then that year the Bengal famine killed 3 million Indians, more than three times the number that died in the killings of 1947. Following the end of the war an upsurge in both nationalist demands for freedom and violence between Indian communities had seen many killings, with the British unable to control the situation. What made it worse for the British was that they could no longer rely on their Indian soldiers as they had for centuries. The end of the war saw mutinies by Indian soldiers and sailors of the British Indian Armed Forces. At times, as in Bombay, virtually the entire Indian navy mutinied. And even the British

soldiers, demob happy after such a long war, were wondering what they were doing in India when the Indians clearly did not want them. A popular song among British troops in India went as follows:

> Land of shit and filth and wogs.
> Gonorrhoea, syphilis, clap and pox.
> Memsahib's paradise, soldiers hell.
> India fare thee fucking well.

But the 1920s was different. Britain was still in control and I agree with Nirad Chaudhuri that was when Britain missed the boat in India. The decade had started with India, after its great war effort in support of Britain, expecting some reward. But instead of presents it got a kicking, and quite literally as well, in the form of the Amritsar massacre. This, aside from innocent men, women and children being gunned down, also saw Dyer forcing Indians to crawl on their hands and knees through a street where a British missionary woman had been assaulted. Gandhi launched the first of his non-violent campaigns calling for swraj, self-rule. However even at this stage Indians were not asking for independence, let alone withdrawal from the Empire. Gandhi never said swraj would mean India would have to leave the Empire. In the early 1920s that idea had not entered the heads of Indian politicians. All they wanted was to be treated like the white dominions of the Empire who had all been allowed to form their own independent governments within the Empire. It was only on the very last day of the decade, on 31 December 1929, after repeated British refusals to consider any Indian requests, that Gandhi was forced by younger radicals like Nehru and Subhas Bose to became, as he put it an 'independence wallah'. That was the day when for the first time in its history Congress called for complete independence.

While all this was going on in India there was a parallel debate in high government circles in Britain about what was called Indianisation of the British services in India such as the army and the medical services. In other words could more Indians be allowed to become officers in the Indian Army, could more Indians be allowed to become doctors in the medical service?

As far as doctors were concerned, the British accepted that more Indians had to be recruited to the Indian Medical Service, but made it clear that steps should be taken to ensure that British officers and their wives should be treated by people of their own race and not by Indian doctors.

The debate on whether to increase the number of Indian officers in the British Indian Army revealed all the old fears the British had had about granting equal status to the Indians. At this stage there were only a token