

MACMILLAN READERS

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**PRE-INTERMEDIATE LEVEL**

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# Gandhi

 **MACMILLAN**

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## *Life under the British Raj*

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born in Porbandar, in Gujarat, on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1869. At that time, India was part of the British Empire – a group of countries and lands around the world that were ruled<sup>1</sup> by Britain. The British made India's laws and the head of the Indian government<sup>2</sup> was the British Viceroy in Calcutta. This time of British rule was called the Raj, which means 'rule' in Hindustani, one of the many languages of India.

The British East India Company had first come to India at the beginning of the seventeenth century, when it was ruled by the Moghul Emperor<sup>3</sup> Jahangir. The British East India Company was a big, important organization that worked in Asia trading – buying and selling things like cotton, tea and silk<sup>4</sup>. The Portuguese and Dutch had arrived in India before the British and they had taken parts of it. But early in the seventeenth century the British fought against Portugal and the Dutch Republic – now the Netherlands – and won these parts of India for themselves. In 1670, King Charles II of England changed the rules of the British East India Company so that it could keep an army, fight wars and take new land. During the eighteenth century, the Moghul emperors began to lose power<sup>5</sup> in India. So the British East India Company fought many battles and began to take control<sup>6</sup> of larger areas.

By the 1850s, the British East India Company controlled most of India. But in 1857, Indian soldiers fought against their British commanders and there was a mutiny: the Indian soldiers refused to do what they were told<sup>p</sup>. The British had to send more soldiers to India to control the mutiny. When they

stopped the fighting in 1858, Britain took control of India. It became a colony<sup>7</sup> which was ruled by Queen Victoria of England.

Many people in India were very unhappy with British rule in the second half of the nineteenth century. Britain ruled large areas of the colony directly, but there were also more than five hundred princely states. These states were carefully controlled by the British, but ruled by Indian princes. After the mutiny of 1857, the British government took a lot of money and land from the rich people of India.

They also took a lot of money in taxes<sup>8</sup> from Indian peasant<sup>9</sup> farmers, who were already very poor. They used this money to try and make India more modern – they built schools, law courts<sup>10</sup>, roads, railways and bridges. Although Indians were pleased to use the things the British built, all the best jobs were given to the British. Many Indian people also felt that life was changing too fast. Some were worried that the British would make them change their religion and become Christians.

There were other problems for Indian people living under British rule too. There was a lot of illness and India also had some terrible famines – times when there was no food for people to eat. During the Great Famine of 1876 to 1878, up to ten million people died. Many Indian people believed these famines happened because of the way the British ruled India.

The areas of India that were ruled directly by Britain were very different from the princely states, which did not change and become modern so quickly. The princely states were very different from each other too. Some were richer and bigger than others, and the rulers had many different religions. There was often fighting between them.

India was also divided<sup>11</sup> by the caste system, which forced<sup>12</sup> society<sup>13</sup> into different groups. There were four main castes – the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas and the Shudras – with many smaller groups in each one. In the old Hindu



**Indians waiting on the British Raj**

caste system, people from each caste could only do certain jobs, so the Brahmins were teachers and religious leaders<sup>14</sup>, the Kshatriyas were rulers and soldiers, the Vaishyas were traders and farmers and the Shudras were poor workers. Only people from the higher castes had political<sup>15</sup> power and nobody usually married outside their caste. At the bottom of society there were the Untouchables, who did difficult, dirty or dangerous jobs and lived in terrible conditions<sup>16</sup>. They were kept away from people from the other castes.

The people of India also had different religions. Hinduism was the main religion, but about a quarter of Indians were Muslims. There were also people of many other religions, including Parsis, Christians, Buddhists and Sikhs. Indian Hindus and Muslims usually lived very different lives and there were sometimes bad feelings between the two religious groups. In the early days of British rule, some Muslims refused to learn

English and work with the English government, so Hindus had better jobs in the Raj and this often caused problems.

Indians also spoke different languages. Bombay – now called Mumbai – was western India’s biggest city and most people there spoke Marathi. The Viceroy ruled from Calcutta in the east, where Bengali was the main language. And in the old city of Delhi, hundreds of miles to the north, most people spoke Hindustani. Many other languages were also spoken in India.

So by the late nineteenth century, India was divided in many ways and many Indians were ready for change. In 1885, a group of lawyers<sup>17</sup>, doctors and other educated people from different parts of India started a new political party, the Indian National Congress. They wanted educated Indians to have a more important part in governing their country. At first, they were not asking for independence<sup>18</sup> for India. However, after a few years, when the British government did not give them what they had asked for, ‘The Congress’ began to change and turned against British rule.

## 2

### *Young Gandhi*

Porbandar, where Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born, was a quiet seaside town on the north-west coast of India, and the Gandhi family lived in a large old house on the edge of the town. They were a cultured Hindu family – they had books in their home and Mohandas played music when he was young. The Gandhis were part of the Vaishya caste. It was not a high caste, but the Gandhis had more money than a lot of Indian families. By the late nineteenth century, people’s jobs