

# The British Empire



The British Empire was the largest in the world and during the Victorian period a quarter of the world belonged to the Empire. The British believed that their moral, cultural and intellectual superiority gave them the right to rule over other peoples because:

- they felt it was their religious duty to spread Christianity;
- they wanted to educate people in science and technology and to improve their quality of life;
- they considered that their own form of government was the best.

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- They modernised India with the telegraph, railway and sanitation reforms and they fought against the 'sati'. This was when a widow was burnt alive at her husband's funeral.



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- The Empire gave the British access to all kinds of raw materials: gold from New Zealand, diamonds from South Africa and sugar from the West Indies. The Empire opened up markets for British goods, but the costs of building and maintaining it were large. In India they built kilometres of railway track.



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- India was called the “Jewel in the Crown” , because the British people thought it was the best colony. The argument they used to justify British rule was the fear of violence between the different groups. In fact when India gained independence in 1947 a lot of people died and a fellow Hindu, who opposed cooperation with the Muslim, assassinated Gandhi.



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