**Mark:** [00:00:00] Welcome to the Endless Knot podcast

**Aven:** where the more we know

**Mark:** the more we want to find out

**Aven:** Tracing serendipitous connections through our lives

**Mark:** and across disciplines.

**Aven:** Hi, I'm Aven

**Mark:** and I'm Mark.

**Aven:** And today we're talking about widows and widowers and India and Pakistan. Indeed. A lot. We're talking about a lot today. To start off very quickly, we wanna say thank you to our newest Patreon supporter, Graham, and to remind everyone that we are always extremely grateful to everyone who supports us from month to month, even and especially those who've been around for the last six years or however long we've had a Patreon and to remind you that you can join them at patreon.com/theendlessknot.

Woohoo!

Now widows means our cocktails are widow themed. Which is more entertaining than one might think given the [00:01:00] topic. We've chosen two different cocktails because there were two that were equally appropriate. So mark is drinking the Merry Widow or Merry Widower. It is both.

**Mark:** And I have no idea what's in this.

Right. So taste it. Tell me what you think and then I'll tell you what's in it.

Well, I know you put extra dry vermouth in it, so.

**Aven:** Yeah. Cuz I asked you where it was. Yes.

**Mark:** Beyond that.

**Aven:** Ooh, I didn't know I was making this into a test. I like it.

**Mark:** is it gin? Yep. And.

Where's the what's the pink from

**Aven:** The pink is from Peychaud's, just a dash of Peychaud's. Okay. It's also got a dash of it's supposed to be absinthe, but I've put Pernod. Pernod oh. And then it has 10 mil of Benedictine Benedictine.

**Mark:** Oh, wow. Okay. There's a lot going on there.

**Aven:** it seemed like you're kind of drink mm-hmm is it good?

Yeah. It's nice. It's like a fancy up martini, basically. Mm-hmm but it's an equal parts, gin and vermouth. So it's quite vermouthy All right. So that's the Merry Widow.

And then. I am having a Black Widow

**Mark:** with a very fancy garnish[00:02:00]

**Aven:** So the Black Widow, mmm, that's tasty is a couple of blackberries muddled with a bit of basil leaves and then tequila, lime juice and agave nectar. And it's garnished with a basil leaf and a Blackberry, which I spiked on a little cocktail skewer thingy, and it's a lovely, deep red, almost blood red color, which happens to by complete coincidence match the dress I'm wearing today. So, mm. You wanna taste it? Yeah, it's very juicy and tequila. it's like a margarita really. Blackberry margarita.

**Mark:** Oh yeah. But the, basil is quite mm-hmm

**Aven:** it comes through.

Both nice cocktails actually, I would say. So I'll put links to both of those in the show notes as always, if you're interested and now that we are fortified with widow-themed cocktails, we can get going and you can talk about why we're talking about this.

So we're going with a video. This is a video. Yeah.

**Mark:** So this year, which is 2022, for those of you listening in the [00:03:00] future, is the 75th anniversary of the independence of India and Pakistan. As well as partition, which happened at the same time. And it is also at around very close to that time within just a few days, the six year anniversary of my father passing away and thus leaving my mother a widow, hence the, theme.

So my father of course was from India. And he had always wanted me to cover the expression "grass widow", specifically, on my channel. And he kept recommending it to me. He said, it's this interesting term. And it comes from India and it's connected to golf. And he was really an avid golfer.

and so, you know, he kept recommending this to me and I thought, oh yeah, maybe I'll do it. I don't know. And I never got around to doing it. And after he passed away, I thought, well, this, this would be a way of honoring him and doing a video that connected [00:04:00] to him in a lot of different ways, because it was both about the word widow as my mother was a widow after he had passed away and about this term grass widow that he, he was so interested in and about India and India's partition and independence. And so you know, it kind of reflected on him in a lot of different ways.

**Aven:** So you put this out the year after his

**Mark:** passing the year after his passing.

Yeah. So this is the five year anniversary of the video and of course he grew up, you know, being of the generation that he was, he grew up during this time of independence and partition So this was very much a part of his, his early life. And he was also very interested in the sort of political situation with the British Raj and, Gandhi, and this whole period, quite fascinated him.

so this is dedicated to him and to my mother. And I'd also like to thank my sister for some help and input on the script.

And so that being said, [00:05:00] let's listen to the audio of the video.

The word widow comes ultimately from a Proto-Indo-European root that means “to divide or separate”, the notion being that a widow is a woman who is divided from her husband by death. We get widow through the Germanic branch of languages from Old English wuduwe, but that Proto-Indo-European root also gives us the words divide, devise, and device, from the Latin verb dividere literally “to divide apart”. The word divide will become important again a little later. The sense of devise comes about through the notion of “to dispose in portions or arrange a division” and thus “arrange, plan, contrive”, and I guess there’s still an echo of the original sense in the expression “to devise a will”, which brings us back to widows.

In western cultures we typically think of widows wearing black to show they’re in mourning, but this colour association isn’t universal. For instance in India, according to Hindu tradition, a widow wears white, but the idea is similar: to avoid wearing colourful clothing and adornments. As we’ll see, this example of [00:06:00] Indian custom isn’t just a random digression.

By the 20th century the expression grass widow meant“a married woman whose husband is away often or for a prolonged period”, for instance on business trips, or because he’s away playing golf a lot. However, when the expression was first used by Sir Thomas More in the early 16th century it had quite a different meaning, referring to a “discarded mistress” or “unmarried woman who has cohabited with one or more men”. This original sense might have something to do with the discarded mistress being “put out to grass” as it were, or more likely it might suggest something of the same notion as does the etymology of the word bastard. Bastard comes from the Latin term bastum meaning “pack saddle” and the pejorative suffix -ard, and mirrors the Old French expression fils de bast, literally “packsaddle son”. The idea is that a bastard is the product of an impromptu sexual encounter with only a packsaddle as a make-shift pillow instead of the proper marital bed. So in a similar way, grass widow probably reflects the notion of a roll in the hay, a one-off sexual encounter out in the fields or in a [00:07:00] barn, the mistress afterwards being abandoned. That Latin word bastum, by the way, ultimately comes from the Greek word bastazein “to carry”, hence its use for packsaddle, and this root also gives us the word batman — no not the superhero Batman, but the term for a military officer’s servant. The term was originally applied to a cavalry officer’s servant who was in charge of the bat-horse, in other words the pack horse, and its load, before being broadened to refer to any officer’s servant. The term batman came to be replaced by the word orderly, but earlier in the British army, as in the days of the British Raj or British rule in India, batman was the usual term. And I bring up India again, because it’s there, during the British Raj, that grass widow, to get back to that expression again, may have gained its more modern sense of a married woman whose husband is away. You see the wives of the officers were sent off to the cooler [and greener] hill stations during the hot summer months while their husbands had to remain on duty in the hotter plains.

In addition to grass widow often referring to the wife [00:08:00] of a man who is engaged in obsessional activities such as golf, we have the more specific term golf widow, and as it turns out, the game of golf is also connected to our story. It’s often popularly assumed that the game of golf was invented in medieval Scotland, but as shown by the name’s probable origin in Dutch kolf meaning “club”, the game seems to have deeper roots. The Dutch game of kolven, played on an indoor court, involves hitting a ball back and forth to a post and being the first to return to the starting point. Some have tried to connect golf back further to various ancient Greek and Roman ball-and-stick games [though many sound more like field hockey than golf], and in particular the Roman paganica in which players used a bent wooden stick to strike a stuffed leather ball in an attempt to hit a target such as a rock or a tree. Another suggestion is that golf came from a Chinese ball-and-stick game called chuiwan in which players used a set of up to 10 different clubs to knock balls into holes, though how this Ming Dynasty game made it to Europe is a little uncertain. However a more likely suggestion arises from the [00:09:00] similarity between golf and an old French cross-country game called chicane in which a ball is to be driven in the fewest possible strokes to a church or garden door. Chicane is a variation of a game known variously as jeu de mail or chole, which is an ancestor of croquet. Due to the similarity in name, chicane may in turn be derived from the Persian game called chaugán, which is also the forerunner of polo. The word chaugán again refers to the bent mallet or stick the game is played with. If all this is true, this would make golf and polo distant relatives. And if the word chicane [or chicane] sounds familiar, it’s also used to refer to the barrier used to create sharp turns in motorsport, and in the form chicanery means “deception or trickery” by way of metaphor. Etymology is a tricky game! A deeper etymology of the name chaugán is suggested in the great 19th century Anglo-Indian dictionary Hobson-Jobson. It might come from the Indian Prakrit language with the sense “fourfold or four corners” in reference to the playing field. And this once [00:10:00] again brings us back to British India.

Because it’s in that Anglo-Indian dictionary that we first find the notion that grass widow gains its modern sense from those officers’ wives up in the hill stations. Hobson-Jobson notes of the earlier ‘discarded mistress’ sense that “no such opprobrious meanings attach to the Indian use” though “this slang phrase is applied in India, with a shade of malignity, to ladies living apart from their husbands, especially as recreating at the Hill stations, whilst the husbands are at their duties in the plains”. What that “shade of malignity” implies is not entirely clear, but may perhaps suggest some sort of extra-marital affairs going on in those hill stations.

And speaking of Hobson-Jobson, the dictionary is dedicated to collecting colloquial words and phrases that came into English duringBritish rule in India. Many of these words come from one of the numerous languages spoken in the Indian subcontinent, and the dictionary contains many detailed etymological discussions. You’d be forgiven for thinking the dictionary was written by lexicographers named Hobson and Jobson, but in fact the authors are Henry [00:11:00] Yule and Arthur Coke Burnell. The name comes about from an item in the dictionary itself. It’s the Anglicized form of the repeated cries of “Yā Hasan! Yā Husayn!” of Muslims as they beat their breasts in the Muharram procession, and from this referring to the festival itself or more broadly any festival. This phonological shift to Hosseen Gosseen, Hossy Gossy, Hossein Jossen and, ultimately, Hobson-Jobson, eventually also gives rise to the Law of Hobson-Jobson describing the process of adapting a foreign word to the sound-system of the adopting language. Yule and Burnell chose the title as emblematic of the dictionary as a whole, and in a sense we can see this adoption and adaption process as emblematic of the British Raj itself.

You see India, and the wealth it represented, was crucial to Britain’s imperialist project, and it’s not surprising that the country was referred to as the “jewel in the crown”. So it was important for Britain to hold on to India. Initially India was under the control of the the British East India Company, a trade monopoly set up for conducting business with the far east. But after the Indian Rebellion of [00:12:00] 1857, also known as the Sepoy Mutiny, the British government took direct control over the administration of India. The Sepoys were the Indian soldiers used by the East India Company to control their holdings. The causes of the mutiny are many and complex, but include the necessity of biting open paper gun cartridges to load their rifles — unfortunately these cartridges may have been greased with tallow or cow fat, thus offensive to Hindus, or pork fat, thus offensive to Muslims; another, particularly relevant to this story, was the abolition of the sati, the ritual in which a widow immolates herself on her dead husband’s funeral pyre; and in general Company policies that didn’t take into account problems related to the caste system in India, for instance soldiers sent overseas potentially losing their caste. These sorts of culturally insensitive policies lay behind the growing tensions in India at the time, and particularly among the Sepoy soldiers. After Britain took direct control over India new policies were put in place that instead manipulated Indian customs for the benefit of imperial control.

And when they took [00:13:00] control, Britain went back to another of those words from the PIE root for ‘to separate’ and adopted a policy of divide and rule during the Raj. This political strategy, often expressed with the Latin tag divide et impera--impera being the root of empire, by the way--goes back a long way. The idea is that a ruling power can maintain control better by breaking up larger groups within a population so that there are no large concentrations of power to challenge the ruler or rulers, and furthermore to foment rivalries and discord among the population to reduce the chances of unified opposition. This political philosophy has been linked with such figures as Philip of Macedon, Julius Caesar, Machiavelli, and Napoleon. Well this principle was explicitly adopted by the British authorities in India — as expressed in several official memos and letters: “Our endeavor should be to uphold in full force the [fortunate for us] separation which exists between different religions and races, and not to endeavor to amalgamate them. Divide et impera should be the principle [00:14:00] of Indian Government.” So in order to forestall any further army mutinies, regiments were organized along racial and religious lines, Hindu, Muslim, and so forth. And in elections, divisions were maintained along religious lines as well, with separate electorates. And all these groups were played off against each other. Religious groups became politicized categories.

However, after WWII, the incoming Labour government adopted a policy of an independent India. In part this was due to what they saw as a high probability of rebellion or civil war, not wanting it to happen on Britain’s watch. But in light of the growing Cold War, they also favoured the idea of a unified India with a unified army. However, the divisions they had sown during the Raj made the partition of India the final poisoned gift of a retreating colonial power. Lord Mountbatten, a naval officer, grandson of Queen Victoria, uncle of Prince Philip and second cousin once removed of Queen Elizabeth II, was appointed Viceroy of India to oversee independence. And though he and Indian leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi and [00:15:00] Jawaharlal Nehru favoured a unified India, Muslim leaders such as Muhammad Ali Jinnah, as well as Hindu fundamentalists, wanted a separate Muslim state of Pakistan. This was in keeping with the longstanding British mentality of divide and rule. Partition in 1947 became the largest peacetime movement in history: some 17 million people moved to be on the “right” side of the border. Perhaps 1 million were killed in the chaos and violence that resulted.

As for Mountbatten, as India was then still a dominion of the Commonwealth, he stayed on briefly as the new Dominion of India’s first Governor General, to Nehru’s first prime minister. He made a similar offer to stay on as Pakistan’s governor general but was turned down, with Jinnah filling that role. As it happens, Mountbatten was also an aficionado of polo, a sport he picked up in an earlier trip to India as part of a royal tour in the winter of 1921-1922. The sport became a passion for him and he went on to not only write a book on the subject, but also receive a patent for a polo stick. Along with [00:16:00] polo, the other thing Mountbatten picked up on that royal tour in 1921 was a wife, Edwina, née Ashley, remembered for her efforts at mitigating the post-partition violence and suffering. Their marriage was an open one, with each having acknowledged affairs. I suppose we could call her something of a grass widow [though I hesitate to use the term with any “shade of malignity”], as it was Louis Mountbatten’s devotion to the navy [though one wonders about the polo as well] which took him away from married life and led to Edwina’s affairs. Purportedly she had a very close relationship with India’s first prime minister Nehru.

The ironic coda to all of this is that Mountbatten was assassinated in 1979 by the IRA, the product of another example of British divide and rule colonial policies, who planted an explosive in his fishing boat, ironic because he worked against the partition in India [to no avail]. However, this didn’t leave Edwina Mountbatten a widow as she had predeceased him in 1960, leaving Lord Mountbatten a widower, in this case the masculine form of widow, not something that makes a woman into a widow, though there [00:17:00] is a rarely used word widower to mean widow-maker—which etymologically, I suppose, means “a division-maker”, just what the British Raj had been, and what Mountbatten tried, and failed, not to be.

**Aven:** So I just have one little thing to add before we come back to the India part, which I think is what we're gonna focus on. Mm-hmm for a fair amount of it. Right near the beginning you talk about widows wearing black and white as two cultural expressions of what are known as widows weeds, which you don't, talk about that particular term, but that's the, that's an old English word.

Yeah. For just clothing I clothing. Yeah. Yeah. So I thought as my, as a little contribution, my get in the ancient world contribution, I would look at what Roman widows wore. The only problem is they don't seem to have worn anything in particular or anything special. That is, they were naked. that would be impressive.

Not exactly, but there is some work has been done on it in particular, one [00:18:00] of my friends and colleagues, Kelly Olson at Western, has written about what widows wore. If you look in sort of general discussions of such things, they always mention in passing that widows wore a fringed shawl.

So I'll come back to that in a moment. Initially at a funeral or right. when in active morning, like the first few weeks after somebody a husband or a brother or somebody important died, widows would wear dark clothing. So would the men in the family, everyone would wear gray or black togas, tunics, clothing.

They would tear their garments. They would scratch their cheeks. Men wouldn't cut their hair or shave. They wouldn't bathe, they would actively throw dust on their hair and body and walk around looking dirty and probably women did as well though we actually very rarely hear about that.

Beyond the tearing at their cheeks with their fingernails, till they bleed and beating their breast till it's bruised and tearing [00:19:00] open their garments which they would do in the procession, like at the actual death and over the body and in the funeral procession. So that's very focused on the funeral.

After that, the only thing that people seem to mention as like something that would set aside a widow is this fringed shawl. But Kelly Olson takes issue with this because in fact, she says, there's very little discussion of this, it's sort of one or two mentions that have been turned into this.

It's something called a ricinium as a cloak of mourning for women. But it's mentioned very, very briefly and in unclear situations, it's unclear what its purpose was, how long they wore it, whether it was actually only worn by widows. A ricinium seems to be a four-sided mantle, sometimes worn, doubled. Modern authors suggest it was fringed and a marker of a widow, but Kelly hasn't found any evidence for that.

She doesn't actually think it's fringed. She has a whole article, a very interesting article about fringed garments in particular in the ancient world and says, there's really no evidence that it was a fringed garment. And [00:20:00] it comes from just a couple of sort of misread mentions. Do we

**Mark:** know what the etymology of ricinium is?

**Aven:** No.

Now, Kelly has also written an article called Insignia Lugentium, which is the marks of mourning. I can't get my hands on it because I no longer have access to, well, I have access to the Laurentian library, but it doesn't have the journal that this is in. However, I did ask Kelly briefly about it just on social media. And she said that really wasn't anything past the initial morning period, that first sort of six weeks months where they would wear dark colors, like everybody in the house would mm-hmm there was no, there doesn't seem to be any marker of widowhood.

And I think that's interesting as a lack, because I think it actually reflects the status of a widow in Roman life, which is that they were just now a marriageable woman right, I mean, they continue to be a matrona so they like, they continue to have the sort of markers of respectable woman, wifely, womanhood, so a stole and [00:21:00] palla and the things like that.

But they don't seem to have been set aside because there was no restrictions on marrying again. Which is the main purpose of widow's clothing if you think about in both Victorian black and the Hindu white, it's meant to mark a woman as, having been married and no longer married and not eligible for marriage again.

**Mark:** Yeah. So that was the question I was gonna ask is what kind of pressure was there on a woman to remarry because in the middle ages that was like a really good position for a woman to it's the only good position for a woman to be in is to be widowed. Yeah. Because she doesn't have to remarry

And at that point she has legal power that, that she wouldn't have had otherwise, that an unmarried

**Aven:** woman would never have. And to some extent that's true in the Roman period as well. It depends a lot on status. Of course, if you're poor. Legal, legal status means nothing because you have no property to own and no status to have.

So you'd have to remarry because otherwise you'd die on the street.

**Mark:** Yeah. Right. So [00:22:00] medieval women could own property. Oh

**Aven:** no, no. But as a widow. Yes. But if you're poor, there's no property to own, that's my point. Yeah. Is the lower classes, you know, women probably had, had to marry or find some other way of supporting themselves.

So the pressures on them would be the same as, at any other period in their life, really. In the upper classes, widows did have a little bit more legal autonomy than unmarried women, but in the upper classes, especially in late Republican and Imperial Rome, women in the upper classes actually had quite a lot of legal autonomy, even married now, not unmarried, not before they married, but that's because they weren't really considered adults.

Right. So if they did, in fact, stay unmarried, past marriageable age, They might have that autonomy as well, but definitely once they were married, even before they didn't have to be widowed or divorced, they had their own, they could own their own property. Their property was, their dowry was kept separate from their husbands.

You know, they had a lot of those things, so they didn't really need to be widows to have that power in the same way. They weren't as under their husband's [00:23:00] control as later. So widows do seem to have, had some status, but for those upper classes, there was a lot of pressure on women to marry because of course, in those upper classes, marriages were always political and economic.

So there'd be the pressure on them to marry that there had been on them to marry before. Now, if they were old, quite old and not able to have children again, then there might not be much pressure on them, but yeah, It's a murky area.

A quick note from the future: the day after we recorded this episode, I was sent Kelly's article about widow's clothing. It confirmed most of what I said here, except that I was wrong about the lack of restrictions on remarriage for widows. It seems that there were a few laws, some of which were passed or updated by Augustus, that restricted marriage for one year, or possibly 10 months, after a woman was widowed.

This seems to have been mainly aimed at ensuring that she wasn't pregnant by her deceased husband, and to ensure that any child born to her new husband was clearly his. So in some cases it seems to have been permitted for a woman to marry as soon as she'd borne her child, if she was pregnant when her [00:24:00] husband died. Just wanted to add that in, since it updates some of what I said earlier.

So anyway, I just thought that was kind of interesting because it is the sort of thing that we just assume. Now colorwise, dark colors were the colors of mourning, right? So from that perspective, the Romans were fairly similar to,

**Mark:** I wonder how much of this has to do with just the, simple ability of coloring textiles. Right. Like, how easy is it to produce black? Right. How were they in the, in the habit of bleaching. So if you don't bleach, then you know, you're not gonna have white to be able to go to. Well, and

**Aven:** the Romans wore white all the time, so the men wore white all the time, white and white wool.

Right. Mm-hmm , which is white. So their, white was already was already taken up. Yeah. It had a symbolic purpose on its own. And therefore couldn't stand in as a,

**Mark:** and I guess if, if the point is to be unadorned you do, whatever's the

**Aven:** opposite, the least work, that the cheapest garments and yeah.

Yeah. And also there seems to be [00:25:00] some religious elements of making the mourners, like a corpse, right. In some ways taking on a sort of death-like aspect for the period of active mourning. So that's all , you know, it's not very much, but I just thought I'd share that.

**Mark:** Well, I wanna pick up in a little more detail about the British Raj.

So that term Raj referring to British rule in India comes from the Hindi word, Raj, which meant rule, dominion, kingdom which is related to the term Raja which means a king or prince in India. So these words go back to the proto indo European route \*reg-, which means to move in a, a straight line with derivatives meaning to direct in straight lines and thus to lead or rule.

And so this root also leads to the Latin word regere to rule straighten guide and regula which means a straight stick bar or ruler and [00:26:00] figuratively, therefore, a pattern, a model and that comes, that becomes Old French riule and Norman reule. And that means rule custom religious order.

And that gives us the English word rule. Now, in the video, I quoted one British official about that specific divide and rule policy in India, but that was hardly a unique point of view. I just used one, good, yeah, representative, one good quote. But there's a whole bunch of discussion about this policy.

So it was a repeated refrain. so here's a few other nice quotations that demonstrate, well, I say nice demonstrative examples of this that, I think are worth reading out. "I am strongly of the opinion that Mussulmans should not be in the same company or troop with Hindus or Sikhs and that the two latter should not be mingled together.

I would maintain even in the same regiment, all differences of faith with [00:27:00] the greatest of care. There might be rivalry or even hatred between two companies or troops, the discipline of a native regiment instead of being impaired would gain by it as regards the greater question of obedience to the commanding officer. The motto of the regimental commander and therefore of the commander in chief must for the future be 'Divide et Impera'."

That was from a Minute written by Major General Sir W. R. Mansfield in the 19th century. I don't know the exact date. Here's another one by Lord -- and I love this name -- Lord Elphinstone.

Well he said "But suppose the whole native army to be formed into one grand army, the component parts of each regiment being as heterogeneous as possible, and suppose some cause of discontent to arise, which affects all castes alike, the danger would be undoubtedly far greater than that, which overtook us [00:28:00] last year." And I think this is in reference to the Sepoy mutiny. "I have long considered this subject and I am convinced that the exact converse of this policy of assimilation is our only safe military policy in India. ' Divide et Impera' was the old Roman motto and it should be ours. The safety of the great iron steamers, which are adding so much to our military power and which are probably destined to add still more to our commercial superiority is greatly increased by building them in compartments. I would ensure the safety of our Indian empire by constructing our native army on the same principle. For this part, I would avail myself of those diversities of language and race, which we find ready to hand."

**Aven:** What's so upsetting about it is how genuinely logical and sensible it is. Yeah. As long as you are a moral vacuum. Yeah. ,

**Mark:** you know, well, and it came to bite them in the butt. Oh yeah,

**Aven:** absolutely. Absolutely. But [00:29:00] only after a very long time, very long time. And, and, and who's it biting in the butt worst? Yeah, the British or the people of India.

I mean it, everyone living, who are living with absolutely disastrous consequences of that. inflamed hatred. Mm-hmm so,

**Mark:** and I have one more by Major General John Hearsay okay. And so I assume this comment is not hearsay, but is the words of Hearsay

"Keep the armies as separate as possible as to tribes and grades in them. The system and organization may be the same, but I would rather have them distinct. Divide et impera. Never let them assimilate if possible". Mm-hmm so it was clearly a very conscious policy of divide and rule, which laid the groundwork for the later divisiveness in India.

**Aven:** Mm-hmm and I think it, I mean, I don't know how much you're gonna talk about this, but an important point to, really hammer home is that while these divisions certainly did exist, there were Hindus and there were Sikhs and there were Muslims and they [00:30:00] did have different political aims and languages.

And, you know, mm-hmm , there were divisions in India. India was not a, homogenous or political whole, the important point is that they weren't just taking advantage of them. Mm-hmm they were fomenting them. Yeah. They were creating them. They were exacerbating them. They were taking people who were used to living side by side, under different religious rules, but within the same village and saying, oh, no, you hate him now.

Now you hate your neighbor because I'm gonna give these privileges to these people. And these privileges to these people. And in this state, I'm gonna make it Hindu majority. And we're gonna. give the privileges to the Hindus and in this other state, we're gonna give the privileges to Muslims, et cetera.

I think that that's really important for those who don't know that history. It's easy to look at India now and your other example of, Ireland is an important one as well. Yeah, mm-hmm right. The same way. Of course there were always, well, not always, but there were Catholics and Protestants in Ireland, it's easy to now look at it and say, well, those people have hated each other for thousands of years.

obviously, first of all, [00:31:00] no, they haven't. Cuz there hasn't been thousands of years of Protestants and Catholics. And second, there were very particular moments at which that hatred was stoked and created. Yeah. And it does not come naturally from the fact that two groups of people have different languages or political or religious backgrounds. I say this from as an outsider. So who am I to say? But I don't think it's talked about or understood well enough in India itself. And I certainly don't think it's understood well enough outside of India, by people who see it as being sort of fundamental natural divide that everybody is gonna hate everybody else from these other groups.

It wasn't true when the East India company arrived, not the same way.

**Mark:** So well, and one point that I'm gonna get into later is that this divisiveness served both for the British and for the Indians themselves to obscure other, perhaps more significant kinds of tensions and oppressions. Yeah. Well, and, divisions, mm-hmm, [00:32:00] specifically class divisions, right?

Caste and class, caste and class. Yeah. And so I'll get into it later, but you know, there were many both on the, Hindu side and the, and the Muslim side who benefited from maintaining those hierarchical mm-hmm divisions and sort of used

**Aven:** it's, it's like the history of race division in America.

Mm-hmm right. Yeah. By, focusing on the division between white and black mm-hmm you are able to obscure and divert attention from the important distinctions between rich and poor educated and uneducated, owners and renters, all the rest of it. So, yeah. So

**Mark:** it's basically, you know, don't rebel against us rich landlords, rebel against those guys.

**Aven:** Cause they're another religion so

**Mark:** that's an unfortunate, well,

**Aven:** it's, it's not unfortunate. It's well, it's very calculated. Yeah. It it's not a bug.

It's a feature. Yeah. That's the point. Yeah. And I think that's the really important, it's very intentional to say. Yeah.

**Mark:** But speaking of the [00:33:00] administration in India, in this British Raj period those two lexicographers that I mentioned, Henry Yule and Arthur Coke Burnell

**Aven:** hence forth to be known as Hobson and Jobson

**Mark:** yes, who wrote the Hobson and Jobson, they had both been involved in the government of the British Raj so they were employed there. Mm-hmm , that was their reason for being there. So just a little bit of detail on the two of them: after attending the East India military college, Yule joined the Bengal engineer group and worked on various infrastructure projects.

And both of his brothers also worked in India. One of them dying in the Sepoy mutiny. As for Burnell he had worked in Madras for the Indian civil service. Right. So they were both, obviously it's, there was some reason why they're there, career Indian men, they were career Indian men. The, lexicography was a sideline that was not their reason for being there.

**Aven:** Yeah, well, actually that brings me a little bit to the topic I wanted to discuss going back to some classical stuff and [00:34:00] the British presence in India, because you mentioned the East India company, military academy or college or whatever it was called, and the training. And also this idea of people who were there as civil servants or military officers, but who also were lexicographers or linguists or all these other things, that overlap is actually very common because of who was being sent out and how they were trained. And so what I wanna talk about a little bit is an article that I found, it's called "In the footsteps of the Macedonian conqueror: Alexander the Great and British India" by Christopher A. Hagerman, it's from 2009. And I will of course, link it in the show notes.

And this really, it focuses first of all, on the importance of a classical education in British governing and colonizing classes in the 17th to 19th century. So there were for instance, in the East India Company in the exams, so there were official exams for the officials in the east India company that they had to write and they were classical exams.

I mean, this was true of almost all education at the time, whatever your actual [00:35:00] ostensible topic was, you had to write Greek and Latin exams anyway. And so they had to write classical history and Greek and Latin exams to become officials in the East India Company. So, you know, there's a de facto level of classical knowledge and at least potential interest in that class. And then the article spends a fair amount of time explaining how and why Alexander was a particularly famous and important figure in, I mean, of course we know he's famous, but why he specifically was very important in the 18th and 19th centuries in particular, in English and European literature, history and political thought, and it goes into detail.

I don't need to talk about all of it, but we do have a lot of evidence of how British officials saw India through the eyes of Alexander. Or more accurately, since we have nothing from Alexander, of the ancients historians who wrote about him. So that's Plutarch, and Arrian and Lacus Curtius. And this is important because if you don't know this, Alexander, the great did go to India.

He went through Afghanistan and into India. And [00:36:00] not only do we have, good historical reason to believe that's actually true. And he did. There's also this huge medieval story, we talked about this where we talked about Alexander the Great, about his time in India.

Now this article anyway, was concentrating on the classical sources, even the late classical sources, not on that medieval wonders tradition. So we're talking more about the sort of historical Plutarch and Arrian in particular, and Lacus Curtius. And what we see is for instance, British officials who were posted to Afghanistan and India doing tourism to sites that were mentioned in the ancient sources.

So trying to find those places, either places that everyone knows where it was, or trying to find the sites of battles, for instance, and wandering up and down rivers, trying to figure out where Alexander crossed them, or if this is the right river or not. Because of course our sources for Alexander, especially for that part of its life are Hm, not always great.

And what's interesting is the article really gives a set of good examples of people who took the ancient and [00:37:00] Greek and Latin descriptions of India as A) more factual and B) more reliable than actual Indian sources and their own experience in India. Mm-hmm right. And this is not surprising to anyone who understands the sort of power of the classical model for this period of, European thought.

So they could go to India and they saw whatever they saw there, but whatever they saw was less real. Than what Plutarch said Alexander said, or

**Mark:** interpreted through the lens of Plutarch,

**Aven:** but also like even directly contradicted. Right? So for instance, so there's two different ways that they kind of reconciled what they actually saw.

One is they saw them as very similar. So they took the ancient descriptions and they looked at the current conditions and they saw them as being the same. So they interpreted them as being the same. And when they did that, this fed into the orientalist trope of the unchanging east. Mm. The timeless unchanging east.

Right. Which is a very important,

**Mark:** as opposed to Western progress,

**Aven:** Western progress. Exactly the "stagnant culture" that needed [00:38:00] English progress to get it kicked up and going, look, they've been the same for 3000 years. We need to come and get them moving. Others on the other hand, looked at what they saw and did not see the great kingdoms that Alexander had encountered, but instead villages and tribes or whatever, I mean, they're all seeing different parts of India at different times and different circumstances.

But when they, for others, they saw what they saw did not match the great sort of marvels that were talked about in the ancient sources. So now they thought there had been a golden age of culture that had been at the time of Alexander, but now there has been a degeneracy from that golden age in India. So now of course you need English help to regain past glory.

It doesn't matter which way, right? There's no winning. Either it's a stagnant east that needs to be kicked in the butt by the English progress. Or it has reverted to some barbarian state from the golden age of the past. So all of this is about [00:39:00] how their engagement with Alexander really framed the way they saw India and the English and British mission in India.

And this is during the East India Company and during the Raj, right. It crosses over really in many ways, there's not much difference in terms of the way people thought about things. They also framed Alexander himself as having had a civilizing Imperial mission. And of course that was, a way that even the Greeks themselves saw Alexander as civilizing the east . So, you know, the orientalist tropes that the Greeks themselves put onto Alexander mapped perfectly onto what Britain wanted to see. So Alexander was trying to civilize the east and turn it Greek. Now it is time for the British officials to become the heirs of Alexander, which they already thought of themselves as being anyway, and to come and civilize the east just as the Greeks had done before.

But the flip side of that is the other narrative that was often told about Alexander as he moved east, was that he declined in his morals and habits, as he took on the Eastern, you know, he started dressing like a Persian and eating like [00:40:00] Persians and, and becoming Easternized in his own. And he declined.

So that then becomes an exemplum of Asiatic corruption that could threaten British officials, which is something that the British officials in, in the Indian company and under the Raj were always very worried, about people going native, right. That terrible phrase. That they might be corrupted by contact with India.

So Alexander was both an example of the civilizing influence, but also the example of the dangers of Indian existence. There's a quote that I think is fairly good here. "It was partly a matter of identification with Alexander as conqueror, explorer, and civilizer. For those drawn to Imperial service by thoughts of grand military adventure and personal glory, there was no better point of identification or emulation than Alexander. Even those whose interests ran to matter scientific anthropology, linguistics, geography found much to identify within his career. Likewise, those who brought a sense of higher purpose or mission to their involvement in Britain's Indian empire." So really no matter what, one of those kinds of approaches you were taking, [00:41:00] Alexander could be that for you. The connections between Alexander and Afghanistan and India, and he of course, had had mythological precedence for his Greek conquest.

So he had Dionysus, right. Who had conquered the east, conquered India. So there's a mythological story of Dionysus going to the east conquering India and coming back to Greece. And of course the Trojan war was the Greek conquest of Persia. And so he had these mythological precedents.

Now the British people could look at Alexander and at his mythological precedents. And so now the British were retracing his footsteps and getting a "justification" for European "dominance" of Asia for Europe--a lot of quotation marks going on here, people--for "European" dominance of "Asia" that stretch back into the farthest reaches of antiquity past Alexander himself into the far past.

So his model and, and in particular, the article talks about some particular lives of Alexander that were published in this 18th and 19th century that, you know [00:42:00] set a lot of this in, in a particular form in English and English speaking world. But Alexander as a general rule had this really profound effect on people in India, even in the parts of India, he never reached.

Very specifically in Northern India and Afghanistan, where people were like trying to find, Greek spears on the riverside , but for anyone who was going, not even just India, of course, this was something for the whole British empire, but certainly for those going to India, they, they modeled themselves on and could see themselves in Alexander.

And that is, you know, one of these many legacies of my field and discipline that is not particularly wonderful

**Mark:** well, and that, that just reminded me of something. I suspect one of these British civil servants that your article may be talking about yeah.

**Aven:** They talked about lots of people by name and that I didn't

**Mark:** Warren Hastings is probably one of them. He was the defacto first governor general of India in a [00:43:00] sense.

But this is before the British Raj, this is during the East India, East India Company period. And he adopted this policy of trying to base the British law in India on local law. And so this is part of the "going native", people who were there did kind of gain a lot of respect for this culture that they were in, and they thought it was really cool and Hastings, some

**Aven:** of them, some of, there were very

**Mark:** different.

There were very different approaches. Yeah. But Hastings was one of them. And so he brought in Sir William Jones, he's the guy who came up with the whole proto Indo European theory and as a, linguistic expert who could then go and read the Sanskrit, interpret the Sanskrit because otherwise they would have to depend entirely on the interpretation of the locals, the pundits,

**Aven:** the educated class of the locals. And they didn't necessarily trust them.

**Mark:** Yeah. So they wanted to have their own guy in there who, but again, William Jones became, he thought the Sanskrit language was the most perfect language and it was better than [00:44:00] Greek and yeah.

**Aven:** Well, and this is part of the problem, right? I mean, I, I touched on that with the different ways of thinking about India, is that kind of veneration, it also has its problems.

It's orient its Orientalism in its own way. Yeah. And so, I mean, I think in general, one would rather be venerated than despised. Yeah. To some extent I do think it's less harmful, but it, it still, leads to not taking people as people. And so it, it still leads to problematic policies. Yeah. But you know, the individuals are not necessarily evil because he liked Sanskrit, right?

Yeah. Like that's but yeah. And, and that's the thing, you know, if you train a whole bunch of people in classics and then you set them loose in India, they are going to notice things like languages and laws and stuff like that because they've been trained to be philologists. So it's not really surprising that you have this odd, odd, what might seem like an odd overlap mm-hmm between these military and civil service people and, and a lot of linguistic stuff.

**Mark:** Yeah. Well they, and those two Hastings and Jones [00:45:00] started the Asiatic society, which was an academic society and had a journal and did all kinds of scholarly worked. It didn't end up very well for Hastings. Unfortunately, he was sort of blamed for the economic and administrative bungling of the situation.

And so, when the British government took direct control, he was accused of corruption and impeached. And I think he did eventually get acquitted, but it ended his career, ended his career.

So now I want to turn to partition itself. So as I mentioned, the British wanted to keep India whole because they wanted the whole Indian army as an important force during the cold war, having this big standing army block. Yeah. Right there would be useful.

And indeed there was some discussion even once they accepted that independence is gonna have to happen. But when they were, trying to decide what the terms of this would be, there was some discussion of, maybe giving some degree of autonomy for the Muslim [00:46:00] states within a unified, but independent India.

And so that was the initial kind of goal. But basically all sides. decided to accept, the sort of communalism of factions, the different breaking up into factions as the lesser evil in comparison, basically to social revolution and so, you know, the closer it got,

**Aven:** and again, there's what you're talking about.

Leaders who, are less interested in a complete rejection of capitalism and re revision of the hierarchies. and more interested in holding onto that power and yeah. I'll take a smaller kingdom if it means I get the kingdom.

**Mark:** And so the closer it got to power the INC, the Indian National Congress, which was the sort of big, force behind independence it became more conservative, whereas before it had, supported strikes and things, and, you know,

**Aven:** well, and you look at Gandhi, right?

I mean, he's an absolute radical in term, you know, in his originally, well, like, well, when he starts off yeah. he's a, [00:47:00] an economic and social radical. And then by the time they actually go for independence, things have become moderated in all sorts of interesting ways.

**Mark:** Yeah. So the no longer called for united mass protests because, don't let them.

**Aven:** start protesting, getting to getting together and realizing how much you have in common. Yeah. And how much you in fact have one very obvious, specific target. Yes.

**Mark:** So they, decided to protect capitalist interests and social hierarchy and thus embrace the two state theory.

As the, you know, it's two state solution. Yeah. Two state solution and even Gandhi who, you know, his, financing came from capitalists. Right. And he himself was trained as a lawyer. He was, you know, educated in, in Britain and he had, earlier, not even just, close to Partition.

He had earlier said "in India, we want no political strikes. We must gain control over all the unruly and disturbing elements. We seek not to destroy capital or capitalists, but to regulate the relations between capital [00:48:00] and labor, we want to harness capital to our side. It would be folly to encourage sympathetic strikes."

**Aven:** which he had earlier. Right. I mean, the Salt March and things like that, but they were about taking control of capital for Indians. I suppose.

**Mark:** That's the thing, the salt strikes were, you know, this is British owned, so it was, okay, fine. It's one thing to protest the British ownership.

**Aven:** It's another thing to say entirely to, to protest ownership say, yeah. Right.

**Mark:** And the other major political player at the time was the communist party of India. And you would think that they would push for, you know, communism more. Yeah.

**Aven:** Communism and I mean, it's, I feel like it's in the name there

**Mark:** and for more, to be a unifying force, but they failed to act as unifying force. As it sort of the party downplayed the national ideas in favor of Soviet interests. They were so dedicated to Soviet interests, right, that they failed to take the opportunity to, fight

**Aven:** against [00:49:00] class

**Mark:** divisions against class divisions. And so by the time of partition the CPI was also in favor of the two state theory.

They also totally were fully in favor of that, right, as the model to go with. So on Independence Day when it was declared and I think it was the 15th the details of partition had not been announced, so they knew there was gonna be partition, but the, where

**Aven:** the border, where the border was gonna be.

I know, I mean, it. It's so appalling to imagine living through that, like wondering, cause everyone knew approximately where it was gonna be. It's not like if you were in south India, you expected it to be down your street, but, those who were in the region just like wondering where do I live tomorrow

just, oh my goodness.

**Mark:** And so they were celebrating independence, but also deeply uncertain and anxious about partition. And so, there were killings in Bengal but they were, mostly quelled by Gandhi who threatened to [00:50:00] fast himself to death to stop the killings, but in other places, he didn't have

**Aven:** that same power, power.

And, you know, I know that he was remarkably supported even by non Hindus. Yeah. But, but he didn't have the same amount of sort of. Power over other peoples Yeah.

**Mark:** So in Punjab, there were mass killings and extermination campaigns, and that led to mass migrations in both directions. And so in, Eastern Punjab and so here's a quote from an article by Sam Ashman, "India, imperialism, partition, and resistance": " In the Eastern Punjab, exhausted Muslim migrants walked to their new Homeland of Pakistan laden down with everything they possessed, were massacred by bands of Sikhs. Refugee trains that crossed into the Punjab would sometimes arrive carrying only dead bodies. And horrible atrocities were committed.

In the Muslim [00:51:00] parts of Punjab the violence was, the other way. Yeah. And so as Ashman writes, "in other parts of the Punjab where Muslims were in a majority like Lahore it was Sikhs and Hindus that were driven out." In Delhi this kind of violence reached Delhi as well, even though it was further away from those provinces. So here's another quote from Ashman. "Then in September 1947, the killing spread back to Delhi where Sikhs and Hindus murdered Muslims."

Just as a reminder. So what all of this meant essentially is that with partition the provinces of what had been India under British rule, the provinces that were majority Muslim in the north, in the, in the northwest and the east.

And I'll talk about that in a minute, would be a separate nation independent nation, given its own independence, given its [00:52:00] own independence and referred to as Pakistan, and the rest of it would be

**Aven:** India and would be secular would, would be theoretically, but, defacto Hindu majority, but

**Mark:** defacto Hindu majority.

Yeah. Yeah. So this, new Pakistan was, in a sense at a disadvantage because they were, Pakistan was economically backwards since, because of the way that it broke down. They only inherited a tiny proportion of the industry that had developed across the sub continent before partition.

Right.

**Aven:** Just because of where those Muslim majority areas were. But also because of presumably some of the backroom dealing about which parts were given to which country. Yeah. It ended up being not, I mean, it's not an even division by space, but it's also wasn't by economic, by

**Mark:** economic power. And that, that reality has not changed, changed really.

And of course, as you say, the structure was untenable because Pakistan was made up of a separate Northwestern region. What is now known as [00:53:00] Pakistan and Eastern regions with India in between. So they were not contiguous, right? west Pakistan and east Pakistan were separate, separate apart quite far apart.

Yeah. A

**Aven:** lot of India in between, nothing like a little strip or something. Yeah. and, and somehow they were supposed to be one country. Yeah. And that didn't last. And

**Mark:** of course they then therefore immediately broke into factions for each part and eventually what is now Bangladesh broke away from Pakistan in 1971

**Aven:** and not terribly peacefully.

No. again, more violence created by these divisions.

**Mark:** And one of the things that I thought was kind of, interesting talking about this story now, in particular, is that in popular Western specifically I'd put that

**Aven:** in British and north America, British and American, let's just be straight forward,

**Mark:** Popular media. There has been an interest in the story of partition.

And so I'm specifically thinking about its presentation in the [00:54:00] Ms. Marvel series, the Disney plus MCU TV series which just finished airing, finished airing.

**Aven:** We won't give spoilers necessarily, other just than to say, we'll talk about the Pakistan part of it.

**Mark:** And a few years ago in 2018, there was a Doctor Who episode called demons of the Punjab, which again took place on during this period basically.

Yeah. And depicted people doing that migration

**Aven:** and people on the border specifically. that one was very much about that, we've lived together peacefully and suddenly we don't, suddenly we don't. Yeah. Suddenly we are enemies. And what does that mean? And do I live in Pakistan or India now?

Yeah. And it had a little Romeo and Juliet story about a Muslim Hindu marriage. Yeah.

**Mark:** And so I, just think that this recent interest. I mean, it's an untapped story. Because I don't think a lot of people in north America and Britain, north America in particular, north America in particular, know this story very much.

And so I guess the writers have, you know, [00:55:00] realized this. So

**Aven:** here's my theory about why, cuz you were talking about this when we watched Ms Marvel and I will just say, I mean, the Doctor Who story is a very good story, that one is a particularly good story. Even if you don't watch, frankly, even if you don't watch Doctor Who and don't really care much about Doctor Who, well, that one, you, it's a pretty standalone story. I mean, it's got some aliens and stuff, but you can watch it and not know anything else. And it's a good story. And the Ms Marvel series was very good. We enjoyed it very much. And in particular, the Pakistan element, I mean, there's a lot to say.

I think about that. I think maybe it would be better. I'm sure there are lots of people talking about the Pakistani and the diaspora stories and all the rest of it. But particularly the stuff set on partition, like right around the date of, and it's one whole episode that's very much around that. And it's extraordinarily moving and wrenching and the whole storyline like really digs into not the reasons for partition, but the effect it had on people, very early on in the first episode or something somebody says every, every [00:56:00] Pakistan America has a story about partition and none of them are good.

Yeah. So you, you said like, why, why is this suddenly such a big thing? And so my theory, it's not actually a very exciting theory or very surprising, but, as we are finally starting to see a number of writers in particular who are not white and not Anglo American, what did we see a million stories about when it was white, Anglo Americans writing? World War II, right, right.

World war I, world war II, the great traumas of the century, the great traumas, but also the times of heroism, the thing that every single family has a story that connects or did for a very long time, you know, some connection to world war II, some connection to world war I, and especially in north America, you know, in Britain because they lived through it in north America because of the immigrant experience.

Right. Of so many people displaced who came, because of world war I, or came because of world war II. So stories again and again, and again, and again, and again even sci-fi, was all world war stories.[00:57:00] And I think it's probably always, I, I wouldn't be surprised if it's always been true since 1947, that within an Indian or a Pakistani community, the big sort of almost too obvious to even mention touchstone story has always been partition.

And now finally that we're actually seeing some of those stories move out of those communities into mainstream media. It's gonna come up again and again and again, because it's the great trauma, it's the great shaping force of that, of that community. And it's gonna have, it has enough distance in the same way that the world wars have had for, you know, the last 20 years of storytelling enough distance that you can tell, whatever story you want really around it.

Like you can put any other story into it but also enough sort of commonality of experience. Everybody knows what you're talking about. We may not, you know, Ms. Marvel did a very clear job of explaining it. Yeah. Because they clearly did not expect their audience to know the details of it or what it meant or anything about it.

So they, set it up. But you could tell that the [00:58:00] people, I think you could tell the people writing, it were writing in part, at least for the community who did know, right. Like they were explaining it for the people who didn't know it, but there was a lot in there. I'm pretty sure, there's stuff I missed that was written for people who. Who have those common experiences and stories. So I think it's just, it's a wonderful example of what happens when you finally move who's telling the stories to a slightly wider group of people you find out that not everyone has the same touchstones. Like in India I know that there are people who fought in world war II and world war I. And I know of course those made their marks on people, but surely world war II can't have been nearly as world shattering as partition and independence. I mean, just, just no way it didn't affect nearly as many people and nearly as much.

So that story is going to be the story that, shaped generations.

**Mark:** I don't remember exactly the exact details of it, but I remember one quote that I read in which an Indian official, describing the, [00:59:00] migrations said that he didn't see even in, the battle of the Somme, I think was the example he used, it was, worse than that.

Right. That, even world War II paled by comparison to, the violence of,

**Aven:** and, and whether, you know, it doesn't matter whether that's literally true or not, that's irrelevant. And how do you compare destruction that way? What's important is for people

**Mark:** involved people involved, it was more way more

**Aven:** immediate and meaningful and, and disastrous than, than anything that could have been happening in Europe or , Japan or whatever.

and the other thing is, unfortunately in the same way that world war II keeps forcing itself into European and American consciousness because of the revisiting of the rise of fascism and antisemitism and the darknesses that, were involved in world war II are, you know, coming back to us with right wing nationalism and all the rest, unfortunately, exactly the same thing is happening in India and in [01:00:00] the, you know, wider Indian community as well with a re you know, not that it ever went away, but a, a resurgence of the factional and racial and religious tensions that, erupted during partition.

So it becomes newly relevant. You know, it's an old story that has modern relevance in very much the same way that world war II did. So as I said, I don't think this is. It's not some particularly brilliant insight, but that parallel seems to me to make a lot of sense as to why, you know, why is this coming up well, because this is a group of people who are finally getting a chance to tell their stories to a wider audience, and where are they going to most likely go with their stories, to the great formative trauma of their of their culture, you know?

And so I imagine we will see it again in, in other contexts and, you know, sci-fi is a place where, of course this sort of thing turns up because you can, in the same way that world war II turned up in Dr. Who again and again, and again, and again and again. Right. Like so yeah, [01:01:00] anyway, that was my thought when, when you asked that question and I think it, it sort of fits.

Yeah. Also, if you haven't watched Ms. Marvel, even if you're not into superhero stories, I really, really, really do recommend it. It's excellent. Yeah. Like genuinely, even if you don't really care about superhero stuff, The superhero stuff is surprisingly minimal frankly, you know, there's whole, episodes that barely have it.

And the rest of the story is just marvelous. Marvelous. didn't even mean

**Mark:** it.

Well to continue in a, a slightly lighter tone.

**Aven:** Yes. Let's move away from massacres. Shall we?

**Mark:** There's a few points that I wanted to sort of just expand on a little bit. So first of all, is this term grass widow. So just a little bit more lexicographical background to where this expression comes from.

We saw in the main video that it went from meaning a discarded mistress [01:02:00] to a married woman who is away from her husband. And we saw that there was speculation that the shift in meaning happened in Anglo India. Right? Well, one of the problems with this idea is that the earliest citations that the Oxford English dictionary has in that newer sense are not from India, right.

But from American and Australian English, interestingly enough first in a story published in 1845 by American humorist Johnson, H Hooper. And then in 1853 Ellen Clacy writes in "A lady's visit to the gold diggings of Australia", "the absence of so many of the lords of creation in pursuit of what they value more than all the women in the world: nuggets."

the wives. Gold. Gold. Yes. Yeah, not chicken, not chicken nuggets. gold nuggets. "The wives thus left [01:03:00] in town to deplore their husband's infatuation are termed grass, widows, a mining expression."

So she takes it as a mining term,

**Aven:** but she explains it. She explains it, which shows that it's not, it's either not very widespread or it's new.

Yeah. Yeah.

**Mark:** And it's not until 1859, so that's what, six years later, that we have an Anglo Indian example from John Lang's "Wanderings in India" in which he writes "grass widows in the Hills are always writing to their husbands when you drop in upon them " So all these citations they're from around the same time.

I mean, they're all, you know, 1840s, 1850s. They're not far apart. And so who knows, just, what happens to get written

**Aven:** down it's yeah. It's the kind of slang that doesn't necessarily get written down when yeah. Yeah.

**Mark:** And perhaps someone will, antedate the, term finding an [01:04:00] even earlier example in India.

Who knows. But that's one little problem with this theory that it is, that's where it comes from, that it's definitely where it comes from. We don't know for sure. Now another important widow expression is the phrase widows and orphans, which originally referred to the vulnerable members of society most in need of charitable help.

But also with a couple of important figurative senses. So there's the financial sense, "designating, a safe, low risk investment deemed suitable for those considered as vulnerable or having limited knowledge of investing such as originally widows or orphans".

**Aven:** Right. So a safe bet kind of investment yeah.

**Mark:** Then there's the typesetting term, widows and orphans, which refers to a paragraph ending line that falls at the beginning of a page, a widow, or a paragraph opening line that appears at [01:05:00] the bottom of a page, an orphan.

**Aven:** And Word, curse its little heart, hates them.

Yeah. And will not, unless you like uncheck a whole bunch of boxes and change, a whole bunch of settings will do its damnedest not to allow widows and orphans, meaning that you'll get like 12 lines of blank space on the bottom of a page because it's oh no, can't start a can't end a paragraph on the next page.

Gotta skip a whole paragraph down, which is like, occasionally matters. But most of the time, doesn't matter when you're say writing a, essay or something like that. It's such a ridiculous thing. Sorry. So thank you type setters. So if you wanna know why your word program does that. Yes. Go and look for widows and orphans in the dropdown menu.

That's the terminology you have to look for for the record.

**Mark:** I mean, the idea is that they look

**Aven:** messy in book. Oh no, the text. I, I understand that if you're doing, if you're doing a book yeah. Laying out a book or a, a newspaper but I mean, why does word think I'm writing a book or a newspaper I'm [01:06:00] never writing a book or a

**Mark:** newspaper.

If you follow the rule slavishly without thinking about it.

**Aven:** Well, and why default to it? Yeah. Why default to it? I, I understand having it as something I could add, because I might sometimes care about it, but like We're writing in digital space. Like it's ludicrous doesn't make any sense at all.

Anyway, you've now been treated to a tiny, tiny fraction of my rant about Microsoft word .

**Mark:** So I thought I might as well give the etymology of the term orphan since we've done widow over here.

**Aven:** So we've done that in some other video I'm sure, but

**Mark:** it's actually quite an interesting one.

It comes through Greek, orphanos and Latin orphanus meaning bereft from proto Indo European \*orbho- , meaning bereft of father, deprived of free status, from the root \*orbh- , meaning to turn with derivatives in a number of languages, referring to change of allegiance or the passage from one state to another.

**Aven:** So it's change of status.

Really? Is the key element

**Mark:** there. That's the key element there.[01:07:00] So etymologically speaking, an orphan has turned from the status of having parents to not having them. In other words, turning from one sphere of belonging to another.

**Aven:** And there's a real sense there probably of worsening.

Yes. in that sort of way you put it like turning from free to not free is another meaning of it, right?

**Mark:** Yes. and this would explain the various derivatives of this route that have to do with inheritance and slavery as in the Slavic languages. So as old church Slavonic rabota, servitude, and rabu, slave, and from those Slavic words, we get the word robot.

Right. So robot and orphan etymologically related

**Aven:** that one's gotta go in a tweet someday, Mark.

**Mark:** I think it already is. I'm not sure, I've written too many.

So robot originally meant slave before it was borrowed into [01:08:00] English from Czech, specifically, referring to a more mechanical kind of servant in his 1923 play R U R, which stands for Rossumovi Univerzální Roboti.

I'm sorry. I

**Aven:** don't, I do not believe that you just pronounced Czech correctly. I'm just gonna, I'm going on a limb there, but

**Mark:** which nicely translates into Rossum's universal robots also preserving the acronym, right, the Czech playwright Karel Čapek uses the word roboti to refer to artificially created servants, which eventually rebel.

And when translated into English, this play gives us the word robot. Another word that descends from this root in its base sense of turn is orbit, right? Of course Orb, orbit. Yeah. Yeah. Coming from Latin orbita meaning wheel track.

Okay. Like a wheel rut, basically with the original English sense of eye socket. So you think they were, yeah. Before being applied to other [01:09:00] round or spherical things such as the astronomical sense, which was first used in English, in the 1690s.

**Aven:** Okay.

**Mark:** And I will come back to this point in a minute, but I want to change directions, change our orbit

**Aven:** I just rolled my orbs

**Mark:** to golf and other sports, because that was another thing that I talked about.

Yeah. Yeah. And so to bring it all back to golf, my father's initial interest , you may have heard the claim that golf is an acronym.

**Aven:** Oh God. Yes. I'd forgotten that one.

**Mark:** for "Gentlemen Only Ladies Forbidden". As with all such claims of acronym etymologies before the 20th century this and

**Aven:** before simply not true before world war II, basically.

Yeah. Yeah.

**Mark:** So that is not where it comes from. I gave you the right etymology in, in the, and it never

**Aven:** has meant that it never has meant that, it's a backronym. Yeah.

**Mark:** But to bring in [01:10:00] the Gulf topic back to our discussion of orbits, in 2006, as a publicity, stunt, Russian, Cosmonaut Mikhail Tyurin hit a golf ball into orbit off the international space station.

**Aven:** Oh, there you go.

**Mark:** So there were different estimates as to how long that golf ball stayed in orbit before burning up in the atmosphere ranging from three days to three and a half years.

But for a time there was a golf ball period of time. There was a golf ball, in orbit around the earth. So there you go. Right.

So speaking of golf or rather its distant relative polo and the polo obsessed Lord Mountbatten This is all just a segue to get back to Mountbatten, I have to admit. His name is an Anglicization of the original German surname Battenberg, Berg of course meaning mountain or hill. The family adopted the English translation of their name around world war I due to well, obvious reasons, the anti-German [01:11:00] sentiment in Britain at the time. At first glance, the Batten element of the name, the, the first element of the German version Battenberg but the second element of Mountbatten, the Anglicized version, might seem to be a possible instance of that root in bastard.

Oh, yes. Right. From Greek bastazein meaning to carry as indeed the word Batten, as in Batten down the hatches as a kind of stick or staff is related to Baton, which comes ultimately from Baston meaning support from bastazein. So there is a word batten that is connected, that is connected to that.

And for a moment, I thought, oh my God, this is an excellent connection. Before I did a bit of digging into the name. But it's more likely to have come from a Germanic root, meaning to improve, related to the word better.

**Aven:** Okay. So like better

**Mark:** mountain. Yeah. So probably not, but I was [01:12:00] excited for a moment

**Aven:** there now, before you move on, I do have to bring in for those who are currently screaming at the podcast App that we have to mention this.

Do you know about the Battenberg cake? No. Okay. The Battenberg cake for the great British bake off fans among you is a very traditional well is a traditional British cake. Very traditional in that a lot of things aren't that traditional. The first time it appeared in print is 1903 as Battenberg cake, but it was first baked in 1884 purportedly in honor of Princess Victoria, her marriage to Prince Louis of Battenberg cause of course they're all married, you know, related, right? Yeah. In 1884 the name refers to the German town of Battenberg Hesse, there's a whole complicated story about why that name goes to the Battenberg and then the Mountbattens. It's a cake where you take two colors of cake, or apparently the early ones it was more, many more than two colors, but now it's two colors of cake, pink and yellow are very common, but other colors too, and you bake them and then you assemble [01:13:00] them in sort of two logs.

So like one long rectangle of pink beside one long rectangle of yellow joined with a bit of jam and then jam on top and one yellow and then one pink. So you've got four in a sort of checkerboard thing. If you look end on you see the checkboard, then you wrap that whole thing in Icing and, and fondant, I think.

And so then when you slice it, so you get this log, this square rectangular log, and that's all just encased in icing. And then when you slice it, you get the four, this little checkerboard pattern. And it's now manufactured as a mass market cake. But it also turns up unsurprisingly in these baking shows because it's quite finicky to do, you know, it's, you have to do quite perfectly to make it and it's all very pretty.

**Mark:** I think you have to make one now

**Aven:** I'll put it on the list. Presentation is not my strong suit when it comes to these things and you know, exact precision, but, well, I'll keep that in mind. Anyway, it is [01:14:00] connected because the Battenberg it's the same family, right?

**Mark:** Well, there's another interesting lawn sport connected with India. Sticking in the realm of sports, badminton is said to have developed in British India. Oh yeah. So though there were various racket and shuttle cock games around, badminton, as we know it now seems to have been developed in the city Poona where there was a British Garrison and the game used to be called poona.

It gained its current name from Badminton House, the name of the Gloucestershire estate of the Duke of Beaufort, where the game was first played in England mid 19th century, having been brought over from India by British officers. Again, I was, you know, briefly hoping that the bad in badminton might be related, related.

It's not. Badminton is a place name that appeared in the Domesday Book as Madmintune, with an M well, that's

**Aven:** much better. [01:15:00] what if we all played the game of Madmintune

**Mark:** Madminton. Yeah, but that M is probably a mistake. It is also mentioned earlier in during the Old English period as Badimyncgtun

which seems to mean "estate associated with a man called Baduhelm". So it would be Badim-ing-tun. So Badim, Baduhelm ing is relating to the people of, yeah. Yeah. The people of badim, and tune, town. Right. So the, town or settlement or estate associated with the people of baduhelm. Right.

But on a personal note, my father taught my sister and myself to play badminton. And he was quite quite fond of it. Yeah. Quite fond of the sport. And it was one that he wanted to do with his kids. And so we learned that. He was also a great fan of tennis. Speaking of rocket sports, an avid avid watcher of professional tennis.

**Aven:** Yes. Yes. Indeed. Always said you looked just like Roger Federer. Yes. And so he was a big fan of Roger Federer [01:16:00] because he looked like you, which was to be honest, one of the sweetest things about him, I've gotta say, I always loved that fact.

**Mark:** So yeah, so, so I think this connection to India would also have pleased him to know.

**Aven:** Yes, absolutely.

**Mark:** So therefore, I'm gonna talk a little bit about tennis.

Tennis the game and tennis the word both seem to date back to medieval France. So there was a 12th century game played in an enclosed court. So with walls inside and originally played without rockets. So you used your

**Aven:** hand, which is of course still a sport actually. Yeah.

**Mark:** Hence the original French name, jeu de palme, game of the palm

**Aven:** Not jeu de pomme, which would be apple game. Yeah. Yeah.

**Mark:** So the rackets came into use in the 16th century and the name tennis comes from the Norman exclamation " tenetz". Or tenez as it would be in modern French, but oh, okay.

in Norman you would've pronounced it tenetz, hence tennis. Which means "hold receive, take".

**Aven:** Oh, [01:17:00] okay. So tenir. So like when you're about to serve or something. Yeah. So like be ready, be ready to receive it. Okay.

**Mark:** So that would be shouted out by the server to the opponent.

So tenetz from Old French tenez, the imperative form of tenir, to hold, receive, take. This game still exists and is now known as real tennis.

**Aven:** Oh, by those who play it, clearly. Yes. By those

**Mark:** who play it. Yeah. What we now call tennis is a shortening of the name, lawn tennis,

**Aven:** right. Which

**Mark:** I have definitely heard that, lawn tennis. Yeah. It should be called. And it's an offshoot of the game, as well as an offshoot of other racket games, such as a Basque game. Really? You didn't think Basque was gonna come into this?

**Aven:** No, no. I'll, give you that.

**Mark:** A Basque game called pelota Okay. it is complicated. There's two separate developments and probably they merged or something.

But first between 1859 and 1865 in Birmingham, England, [01:18:00] Major Harry Gem, a solicitor and his friend Augurio Perera, a Spanish merchant, combined elements of the game of rackets and that Basque pelota and played it on a croquet lawn in Edgbaston. In 1872, both men moved to Leamington Spa and in 1874, I love that name, Leamington Spa. Great. I've come across this place before, and it's just, I love that name.

And in 1874, with two doctors from the Warneford Hospital founded the world's first tennis club, the Lemington tennis club. I'm sure they're very proud of this fact. Oh,

**Aven:** I bet they are. I bet there's blue plaques everywhere.

**Mark:** Then in the late 1860s Major Walter Clopton Wingfield who served in the First Dragoon Guards in India no less. There you go. Was one of the [01:19:00] persons experimenting with a lawn version of tennis. Vulcanized bouncing rubber balls offered an opportunity to develop from the indoor game of real tennis. And there were many who had the leisure time to pursue the sport and who owned croquet lawns that could be adapted for it.

**Aven:** Right. A whole bunch of upper class. Yeah. layabouts. Nothing else to do.

**Mark:** So Wingfield patented "a new and improved court for playing the ancient game of tennis". Okay. And began marketing his game in the spring of 1874, selling boxed sets that included rubber balls imported from Germany, as well as a net, poles, court markers, rackets, and an instruction manual.

Yeah.

**Aven:** So tennis in a box. Yeah.

**Mark:** Tennis in box. And so that is the, brief history of tennis.

**Aven:** Very good. Mark. I'm impressed with your brevity. not overall, you understand? But on that particular section [01:20:00]

**Mark:** well, I had lots of good names in it, so yeah,

**Aven:** no, it's true.

**Mark:** And that is all

**Aven:** I think we can leave it there for tonight. And I think in, you know, it is unfortunate that you never were able to do that video for your father, but I do think it is a very fitting tribute to him and this

**Mark:** podcast, which goes into even more yeah detail with all the tennis and stuff. Yeah.

**Aven:** I do think it is very appropriate and I'm glad you were able to do it.

So we've released this on the anniversary of your father's death.

And that means that if you're listening to it, when it just came out, it is the 75th anniversary of Indian independence and the creation of Pakistan in just a few days, five days in five days. Yeah. So we hope that this episode has been instructive in marking and commemorating both of those events.

Anyway, I guess, happy independence day though I do feel like it's a complicated anniversary for many people and of course one doesn't usually wish one, a happy anniversary of death [01:21:00] anniversary.

So yeah, commemoration of that, of

**Mark:** that, of that day, I'll be thinking about my dad

**Aven:** and thanks for listening.

**Mark:** Bye bye.

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**Mark:** Bye[01:22:00]